

## Deer Winter Complex/UP Habitat Workgroup Meeting

Friday, December 7, 2018

River Rocks Banquette Center – Ishpeming

Meeting Notes

Attendees: J.R. Richardson, Jim Hammill, Stu Boren, Terry Minzey, Matt Watkeys, Jeff Joseph, Pam Nankervis, Don Mankee, Bryan Reynolds, Chauncey Moran, Gary Willis, Alan Ettenhofer, Jeff Stampfly, Bob Doepker, Warren Suchovsky, Eric Stier, Bernie Hubbard, Tony Demboski, Rick Ligman, Dennis Nezich, Stacy Welling-Haughey, and William Commenaton

### Updates – *Hammill*

We were successful in our 2018-20 grant request for \$71k

Mr. Dave Nyberg will be the new UP NRC representative

Since CWD was discovered in the UP, there will be a strong light on winter deer ranges

A new initiative under the Safari Club Foundation allows us now to accept grant monies

The Michigan Natural Resources Commission has honored longtime conservationist

and Upper Peninsula native Mr. Tony Demboski with the Thomas L. Washington Lifetime Commitment to Conservation Award.

### Overview of 2018 Firearm Season – *Minzey*

Harvest appears to be up 10% over 2017 uncertain if the numbers are due to an increase of people testing their deer for CWD.

There is a strong showing of 2.5-3.5-year-old cohorts, and a weak 1.5-year-old cohort, at about 17%. In the southcentral portion of the Peninsula, this may be due hunter selection. In other portions of the Peninsula, the year and a half old deer simply might not be there.

We suspect the late April storm impacted the herd with a higher mortality of fawns than we initially recognized. The early data from the deer camp survey suggest a low fawn to doe ratio. This coincides with the predator/prey study which showed a high level of neonatal mortality.

The outlook for next year is questionable due to the low number of yearlings and the fawn-to-doe ratio.

Mr. Rick Ligman asked about the UP-wide acorn production, it is spotty and low producing. About 1% cover type on state land is an oak component.

Mr. Demboski talked about the efficiencies in lymph node collection process.

Mr. Bryan Reynolds asked if bow-hunters would have the opportunity to hunt does after the next regulation cycle is discussed. Mr. Minzey said we are trying to recognize the

regional differences in the UP antlerless population. We will address the concerns during the 2020 cycle and evaluate our decisions based on conditions and circumstances.

Mr. Ligman asked how the age or number component of the doe segment affected the recommendations? Mr. Minzey said we used different indices – fawn: doe, buck: doe, deer sighting, camp survey cards, and hunter success survey. The SAK method is not functional for the UP. Mr. Ligman said we need an idea of the number of deer to make any type of regulation change recommendations. Mr. Minzey asked what is better, a trajectory of the deer population on the landscape or knowing the number of deer? Mr. Eric Stier wanted to know if the regulation cycle could be changed from every three to one year with regards to the DMAP issues. Mr. Minzey said a conscious decision was made not to approach the NRC every year as effects from changes made cannot be tracked and special interests would be involved in the process. Mr. Hammill stated that the NRC became increasingly involved in how many deer could be taken in each unit. The change to every three years would hopefully lift political pressure on the NRC. One of the drawbacks is less flexibility in the field to adjust the regulations. If there is a strong case and it stands on good ground, changes can be made during the cycle as in the case with CWD.

#### *CWD Monitoring Efforts/Migration Study - Minzey*

A positive confirmation of CWD from a crop damage harvested deer was confirmed in southeast Dickinson County on October 18<sup>th</sup>.

The Core CWD Area is an approximate 10-mile irregular radius. It was set up this way to ensure there were recognizable boundaries.

The Expanded CWD Zone was based on data from the ear tag study results.

As of December 1<sup>st</sup>, we had 721 samples collected from the Core Area and more than 500 in the Expanded Zone. From the square mile around the farm, we received 25 samples.

Just because we haven't found another positive deer, don't assume it was a one and done. The chances that we found the first and only infected animal are very slim. NRC Chairwoman Vicki Pontz complimented the UP field efforts and suggested for more field staff may be trained, across the state, in the lymph node removal process. What are the criteria to receive disease control permits? The requirements are ownership of five or more acres within 2 miles of the farm. One hundred and fifty landowners met the criteria. We mailed letter to each and have been contacted 115. We issued tags in blocks of five. So far, the rate of use appears to be fairly low. Ms. Stacy Haughey said there is only so much we can do with outreach, directly contacting the private landowners, and working with our cooperators. Mr. Warren Suchovsky observed there is a decline in the number of hunting days due in part to age, job, and other obligations. Out of the 16 hunting days, many folks only hunt five of them, this year

Thanksgiving came early. Mr. Ligman asked why eminent domain is not addressed to have government permission to go on private property. It was stated there is not probable cause to enter property. Ms. Haughey again stressed what can and should be done is being addressed with the agricultural community, private landowners, and contacting our political leaders. Mr. Stier has disease permits and suggestion everyone obtains one to make a difference. Due to the efforts of WLD and the pre-work that was done with meetings and outreach, the level of chaos was much less than in the LP.

Our testing in the CWD core area was designed to detect the disease at the 0.5% prevalence rate.

Mr. Demboski said the UPSA formed their a CWD Subcommittee to address CWD concerns.

Mr. Minzey said of the 100 collars dedicated for this winter's deployment to the West UP Deer Movement Study, 30 collars will be redirected to the area around the index case area. This work will likely occur in February.

#### *Formation of SCIF/Michigan Wildlife Habitat Initiative – Hammill*

The SCI Hunter advocacy group is involved with worldwide wildlife management. In the UP \$1m was used for the Ontario-Michigan moose repopulation and over 500k given to the Predator/Prey study in the last 10 years. We approached SCIF to set up a specific account for monies to be used for Michigan wildlife habitat projects funding only boots on the ground. As grant writers, money from this fund can be used for the work we promote. If we have clearly defined goals, we can reach people who are interested in wildlife habitat make significant donations to the Foundation.

#### *UPHWG structure going forward/NRC Representation – JR Richardson*

It was asked if the workgroup would continue and Mr. Richardson will send a recommendation letter to the NRC. Mr. Hammill said members of this group would be on the Foundation board. He also wishes the NRC would continue to support and keep the Workgroup moving forward to coincide with the Foundation goals of rehabilitation of deer winter habitat and upland game habitat.

#### *Overview of USFS Landscape Habitat Improvement Project Process – Nankervis*

Ms. Pam Nankervis was asked to streamline and create a better process to collaborate with 'off-Forest' interests for landscape habitat projects. How do we accomplish these projects, what is the process – identification of project areas, secure funding, NEPA approval, and implementation. The Forest has been tasked to double timber harvests and to meet these goals every project needs to be reviewed by NEPA and FWS then the timber sales can be marked and harvested. This process can take years and instead of ear-marked money going toward Forest wildlife projects, that money goes back to Washington.

The focus is to eliminate obstacles in the process and keep the money to fund our projects. For example, we are analyzing activities rather than individual projects by prioritizing restorations in CWD areas anywhere in the Forest where it makes sense. We are limited in our focus when creating maps for Forest-wide planting for health and diversity, instead we can create a wildlife habitat improvement map that would encompass more activities than just planting.

We have money to spend on projects and help 'off-Forest' partnerships and other organizations with their projects through the collaboration the ONF has with groups such as this Workgroup. When we collaborate on projects and have an agreement in place, we must obligate the money within two years. Ms. Nankervis will provide an agreement to the Workgroup, so we can enter into a partnership with the Forest. It was asked with the presence of CWD in the UP and the importance of Deer Winter Complexes on the ONF, would it be better to spread deer out and improve inactive deer yards and entice deer from the over-used areas? We would like to spread out the herd. The suggestion was to find where the deer are now and expand outwardly through habitat improvement along corridors as migratory behavior is a learned behavior. Make linkages outward to other areas to encourage movement along the corridors. It was asked if Hiawatha NF was doing the same sort of process, landscape-wide projects? If we were to have UP-wide projects approved through NEPA, we would be able to get boots on the ground sooner over a broader area rather than wait for approvals on each individual project. Mr. Nankervis will forward a letter of recommendation to Mr. Richardson supporting the landscape conservation projects conducted with GLRI funding.

#### *New State Administration – JR Richardson*

This is Mr. Richardson's last meeting as co-Chair. Mr. Nyberg is the new UP NRC Commissioner. Ms. Haughey and Mr. Hammill will craft a letter to the NRC recommending this Workgroup continue and receive the necessary support from the NRC.

#### *Good Neighbor Authority - Forest Resources Division*

Mr. Dennis Nezich discussed the 2014 Farm Bill which allows the DNR to act as an agent with the USFS to focus on increasing timber sales on federal land. This allows the DNR to hire more staff and obtain reimbursement for setting up sales, marking, administration of the contract, and revenue collection. In the 2019 Bill there is funding for inventory, survey line work, site prep, and prescribed burns. Fiscal years 2020 shows an increase to approximately 9,500 acres to prescribe for timber sales. Each year we have seen an increase in funding with about \$400-500k this year. We are able to contract out some of the timber prep work with the money coming from the USFS through the DNR.

Mr. Suchovsky asked if forest certification is an issue with the GNA and Mr. Nezich said it does not have any bearing.

The GNA is a 10-year agreement with the monies used for projects identified on the Forest. Stewardship contracting on federal lands is administered through the DNR. Our additional staff are not counted in the state employee cap nor do they affect the current staffing levels.

The GNA will go beyond timber sales and we will find ways to meet our obligations. The ONF is way ahead of other Forests as they have their projects NEPA approved and have more acres on the ground. Each Forest is different. Mr. Jeff Stampfly said the HNF is slow in coming to the table as the east side of the Forest has road work restrictions set in place by the Farm Bill and the west side of the Forest has had a high turn-over rate of staff.

#### Review of Meetings Attended on Behalf of UPHWG - *Boren*

Mr. Boren said hunting seems less important to people, but not to our Workgroup. He was pleased to see the Workgroup information on the camp survey cards and noted people are contacting him based on receiving the cards.

We have attended the quarterly UPSA meetings, the Quarterly Iron/Dickinson Sports Coalition meeting, the CFA meeting in Houghton County, we were on the Wi-chigan outdoor radio talk show, Mr. Demboski was on the Mike Avery show, and on TV6. We can get information on our larger landscape level efforts to the public.

#### Wildlife Habitat Grant 2018-2020 - *Boren*

We received \$71k and allotted monies to the following: Hiawatha Sportsman Club in Mackinaw County for hard and soft mast production; Keweenaw Bay Land Trust for conifer plantings; and in Ontonagon, projects for wildlife openings.

The application period this July will be for the 2019 cycle. Moving forward for a ten-year window is to receive \$100k in funding for projects involving a monitoring program. We want to refine our proposals to get more detailed information from those seeking grant funding. We also want to be more consistent with our rates for equipment, foresters, and biologists. The 11% match will remain, and we are seeking to develop seed recommendations to get information that is user friendly and remain consistent for the grant review team.

It was asked if there is an evaluation of the effectiveness of measures put in place as the grant was written to provide results for the monitoring program, be aware that someone would have to pay for the evaluations and that money would not be coming from the grant.

Mr. Minzey said three of the approved grants this year were to individuals that are similar in scope and tie-in with the efforts of this Workgroup. We need to work with others on how we can collaborate and not duplicate efforts.

Mr. Alan Ettenhofer builds in extra costs by collecting more than the 11% match required by the grant to be used for maintenance, re-planting, and fertilizer.

Mr. Hammill said the Workgroup is not bogged down in projects that require maintenance, we are seeking large areas where we can quickly finish projects and then seek other large projects. Mr. Ettenhofer's group is better suited for smaller projects that require maintenance.

Mr. Boren said in working with large ownerships to complete projects in areas adjacent to the DWC it seems conifer and oak will end up being our niche. After we work on DWC for a few years, we can move on to red oak and then to early succession. The goal for the next grant cycle is to seek larger landowners who can make a bigger impact on a larger scale, about 100 or more acres. Corporate timber groups are an important component in these projects.

How do we reach the landowners? We use the mapping information from current and historic deer yards along with larger forestry plans. Mr. Richardson advised we use that information to narrow down and focus on those landowners. The conservation district outreach can be an avenue along with the consulting foresters to identify landowners and locations. Also, peer-to-peer contacts. A multi-pronged communication effort is key. Mr. Stier would like to see more efforts to help individuals with their grants, so they can do the work on their own lands. Mr. Matt Watkeys said people contact him and say they do not want to be involved with a government program and he is able to spin the message a little differently especially if he reviews the DWC map layer with the interested party.

Mr. Demobski asked if a DNR issued press release might help spread the word. Mr. Suchovsky relayed a story about peer-to-peer cooperation amongst several landowners. The prime motivation to improve habitat is for deer with big racks and multi-points in addition to overall deer habitat management. This is a success story – leading by example. The neighbors came together across property lines and joined in plantings and other improvement projects which covered over 8k acres. Mr. Minzey said we need to have positive press for those who are making improvements and succeeding in their efforts, KLT in particular with the additional GEMS on their property.

Mr. Ligman asked since CWD was found in the UP, will baiting be banned? From the recommendation of the NRC UP CWD Taskforce, a ban should be in place 10 miles around the location where the deer tested positive. That decision should be made at a later date by the NRC.

Mr. Demboski notified everyone of openings on the east and west CAC.