

Deer Winter Complex Meeting
September 1, 2015
Red Rock Lanes and Banquet Center, Ishpeming

Committee members:

J.R. Richardson, Randy Charles, Bernie Hubbard, Warren Suchovsky, Tony Demboski, George Lindquist, Dennis Nezich, Steve Carson, Matt Watkeys, Terry Minzey, Tim Baker, and Jim Hammill

Guests:

John Pepin, Don Mankee, Jeff Stampfly, Craig Albright, Alan Ettenhofer, G. Dale McNamee, Stacy Haughey, Bryan Reynolds, Bob Doepker, and Ashley Autenrieth

Mr. Hammill sent a letter on behalf of the workgroup to Sen. Casperson to extend the time frame on moving lands from CFA to QFP without penalty and to have the option permanently. Mr. Demboski also sent a letter. **Mr. MacNamee** said that it might not be possible if the land is uncapped. The law would need a legislative amendment. For now, the workgroup is on record to support an extension without penalty.

Mr. Richardson let the committee know that Michigan Outdoors will do another segment on the workgroup; Jimmy Gretzinger may contact some of the members. It would be good to discuss with other members prior to being on camera in order to have consistency in our message. Perhaps we need to create a FAQ?

In December the group will discuss the frequency of our meetings – move toward quarterly meetings.

Mr. Richardson asked for a timeline or charter with each project and a status of where we are.

Lake Gogebic Update

Recommended changes have been incorporated and an executive summary has been added. On the DNR website under managing UP Deer Winter Ranges each management plan will be listed eventually with a page just for the plans

. We will need an interactive map with more information such as cover data.

With the help of the forest planners and the Gogebic Conservation District, **Mr. Carson** compiled a database and emailed the workgroup and website information and the Lake Gogebic DWC Plan.

How to best contact the 120 people listed on the database, by county, every time a new plan is created, east or west UP interest? It was agreed that the east or west interest would be best, some of the planners and District foresters work across different counties. It was thought that some information may be overarching from one county which would provide beneficial to their area of work.

Sturgeon River DWC

In 1927 there were ten detailed complexes, today we are working on eight of them. This shows that the DWC has been used for over 90 years. This DWC is very similar to the Lake Gogebic DWC in distribution, landownership, shelter, food, and cover type. This area has the highest snow intensity of all the DWCs (95 days with 12" or more snow). The summary of recommendations: maintain primary shelter – cedar and hemlock; increase the secondary shelter – white spruce, balsam fir, and white pine; and enhance the food source. The strategies include working with the Ottawa NF and contact the forestry consultants.

The partnership between the Indian community and Ottawa is very positive. **Mr. Charles** reported that the tribes view the DWC from a holistic point of view. At the North Perkins DWC meeting, **Mr. Carson** agreed and said people tend to look beyond ownerships and saw the landscape as a whole.

Of the 45% private non-corporate land ownership, how are we going to reach these people? Part of the duties at the District involve outreach said **Mr. Watkeys**. Mailings could invite these people to attend workshops on management plans. Roger Jaworski is the District forester in both Baraga and Iron counties. **Mr. Lindquist** asked how much of the area outside of the DWC can we get summer range tagging information. We could then contact those owners outside the DWC boundaries to find if they are interested in following a management plan.

Mr. Minzey had a few recommendations for this DWC – since this is a high snow zone, we could more aggressively put a priority on the high quality shelter. It is shown that this DWC can regenerate cedar and hemlock in these areas. For aspen management we could retain all conifers with 4" dbh or less which would also benefit grouse and woodcock. He also recommends taking out the phrase "all nutrition" (page 14) in regards to the cedar. Cedar does not provide all the necessary nutrients for deer.

Mr. Nezhich pointed out that all the plans should have reference to include a mention on all work constraints of the CFA. This will prompt the question what does this mean to me. It would be helpful for smaller landowners to not violate the policy. A generic statement under the workgroup strategies might be the place for this information.

Mr. Minzey – ~~n~~Noted ~~it is it is~~that it was his-my impression that the west side of the north finger is mainly agricultural. If that is true, then the open land value is provided immediately outside the polygon, therefore we can concentrate of cover value within the polygon. **Mr. Hammill** suggested we can make a recommendation that the openings may be a lower priority which would give greater flexibility in operational considerations unique to this DWC and management plan.

If we could gather more data through trapping and tagging by cooperating with Tribes, sportsman's clubs, and schools, we could get information on the two-thirds of the UP that is not in a DWC. **Mr. Minzey** said that there was a call for research projects migratory in nature in the UP; this might fall into that category. Deer could be collared and monitored in higher priority DWC areas. **Mr. Charles** stated that we need to involve hunters and the hunting groups to get the mainstream involved. If we can get our message to hunters they can reach the individual landowners. Perhaps **Mr. Carson** can tie-in with the groups or various committee members can meet with their local coalitions. **Mr. Doepker** pointed out that past tagging projects had high turn out from the public which fostered a trust between the hunters and the Department. These types of trap/tag projects would supplement our information that we have now. **Mr. Hammill** said there might be funding available from the SFI for satellite tracking collars for real-time data.

This would help in placement of openings on the landscape. He suggested that there is a paper written from the workgroup for direction on marking deer and where we would like this to occur and what we want to happen.

The UPWTA purchased gps collars to collect days – schools went out and trapped and tagged deer. All three collars came back with one deer drowning, one hit by a car, and unsure about the third deer. The cost per collar is between 4 and 6K. We can include universities to give students hands on experience and work with school forests. Superior Central had a project to rehabilitate five acres of agricultural land to wildlife habitat. We could put a student pursuing their masters on these types of projects.

Deadhorse North Perkins DWC

This is a high browse area with a tremendous snow depth gradient north to south. Land is primarily in private non-corporate holdings (53%) these people are our target audience. There is a lot more shelter with cedar being the dominant functional shelter. We have the opportunity to increase the conifer component in the red maple to provide both food and shelter. Workgroup recommendations include: maintaining the primary cedar hemlock shelter and increasing the secondary shelter of white spruce, balsam fir, and white pine. The workgroup strategies would include focusing on small landowners, encouraging them to plant white pine by working with their conservation district. Also work cooperatively with Plum Creek and the DNR on management. The red maple stands in this area are a mix of red maple and lowland hardwood; we could increase the conifer component in these stands for both food and shelter. **Mr. Minzey** said we are not trying to convert these stands; we are trying to encourage diversification. The transitional zone stands will be a challenge to manage, especially if we have a spruce budworm or emerald ash borer outbreak. We will have to work operationally with Plum Creek and the DNR regarding the harvest of these areas now before the budworm comes through the area. We need to get spruce budworm information into the plan, especially for the non-industrial landowners in the Delta county conservation district area.

Gulliver-Hiawatha DWC

Two historic winter yards were merged into this DWC. There is moderate browse pressure; there is quite a variable some areas being higher than others in the complex. This complex sees the lowest snow average. 49% is State land, 40% private non-corporate, and 5% in Hiawatha sportsman's Club. 46% of the cover type is in shelter (hemlock and cedar) and 32% in food (aspen and northern hardwood). Of the 22% other cover types, 20% is "wetlands" non-forested areas. How much of the food component in these areas is utilized as a food source? **Mr. Minzey** said that these inter-dunal 'wetlands' are fairly acidic – is the browse value as high as we think? Should the estimate of food/shelter of non-productive stands be dropped or should we concentrate on the productive stands inside the complex? There is uncertainty in the mapping. We need to identify the varied 'wetlands'. In these areas could alder be cut? **Mr. Watkeys** said there might be opportunities with the Bird Conservancy projects – small tracts of land with private owners obtaining grants to brush/grind alder to prevent crowding. The workgroup recommends maintaining primary shelter and maintaining the secondary shelter. Strategies include: engaging the DNR, Plum Creek and Great Lakes Rural Forestlands. Can we experiment with partial cedar cuts with Plum Creek and Great Lakes to encourage cedar regeneration? **Mr. Minzey** said there may be an opportunity on State land to do incremental cuttings. In the Batty Doe area, we had planned for cedar cuttings with the intent of moving deer

away from regeneration. Unfortunately, the plan was never implemented. It would be more of a shelterwood cut to maintain the seed source and not leave cover for the deer. We would be careful to not encourage them back into the regenerated areas. We need to either have bigger cuts and anticipate losing edges by leaving no cover or we would have to have smaller scale cuts.

Summer Range Distribution 1950- 2005

We have looked at complexes and distribution of deer in their summer range. There is enough data collected from the trapped/tagged deer in the Gulliver and North Perkins DWCs to include summer range information. If the data is available, we will include it in all the other DWC management plans. Deer observations are high in Marquette, north Luce and Chippewa counties. Cusino and Grand Marais show gaps in the distribution with newer tagging data but the historic 1950-1960's data fills in this gap. Other gap areas could be target areas for our tagging efforts to get an overall sense of distribution. In the eastern end, the distribution of the population is well known, but we also have questions on tagging. It is also recommended that we try to fill in the gaps in this area. If we collected more data we would be able to use the information to drive our management recommendations.

Tagging information helps in determining the polygons – do we keep them separate or lump them together as in the case of the Gulliver DWC. The Deadhorse DWC summer range shows clusters in the south and observations both in the north and south of the DWC. The summer range is five times greater than the winter range in this area. In Gulliver it was shown that some deer summered in a different DWC. Their summer range is seven times the winter range. Most observations are close to the tagging sites, near shelter. The average movement in the north is 17 miles with these deer being the most migratory. In the south where moderate snowfall occurs, movement is an average of 12 miles. Further south in the lower snowfall zone, deer are less migratory and move about 6 miles.

Under counted areas may not be so under represented due to where the tagging sites are on the map. There are no mapped tagging sites in south Dickinson County but there is data on observations showing a percentage migrate and move toward Menominee County.

Next DWC Plans

We propose to complete the final DWCs in the Gogebic area. This will also help with the operational plans of the large corporate land holder, Keweenaw Lands and be able to work with them all at one time. Also the DWC will be completed in Baraga County, picking up an area of spruce/fir mix type. We will then have recommendations for that type in the template. Four of these western DWC have a similar cover type. The Iron county DWC has the potential for spruce budworm issues and there is high hunting activity. This DWC is the most contentious regarding CFA land owners.

Update from the Prioritizing of Winter Range Purchased Lands Subcommittee

We have created a land parcel scoring process that is general in scope. We have pulled information from other DNR examples and used the winter range information to create the form. One of the bases for the UP winter range landscape is the parcel characteristic related to winter range value rather than funding, cost, or access.

The ranking system has been changed from 1 through 57, down to A, B, and C priorities. We also updated ranking with relative deer numbers and replaced the percent in private ownership

with percent of high shelter in the private ownership. The conditional range information was also included.

The scoring form for the groups to complete has a maximum of 40 points from the following criteria:

20 points for land in a DWC, 5 points for parcel size, 5 points for winter shelter composition, 5 points for connectivity to low risk winter range, and 5 points for risk to shelter loss without conservation action. This scoring system was tested against State purchase proposals to get an overall sense of placement and to find a 'threshold'. Greater than a score of 20 is the breakpoint for candidates with higher winter range values. Since this only ranks winter range values, the top scorer is not necessarily the best. We would then rank the higher placing scores against funding and logistical values. This will help categorize parcels we intend to acquire.

Mr. Minzey stated the migratory habit is learned. The historic DWCs showed that winter was tough and the herd died off. That sub-population in the historic DWC expanded based on things happening across the landscape, we cannot recreate the conditions of what the yard was like in the first place. We should focus more on current DWCs and areas surrounding them. **Mr. Lindquist** said that these smaller historic areas are important. If we lose these smaller areas and the small populations in them, it would be hard to re-build these areas and increase the population.

Mr. Nezych said this is a very neutral way to look at land purchases and will help us understand the value across the agencies.

General discussion

We should invite Dr. Bob Heyd to our next meeting to give a presentation on forest pests, especially the spruce budworm. We will be looking to include Chris Hoving, DNR specialist and Steven Handler, Forest Service climate biologist to give presentations on climate changes. Deadline for changes to the three DWC discussed during the meeting will be September 11th and the plans will be posted online October 1st. Mr. Carson will email drafts of the DWCs in the Gogebic area and will include the deadline for input.

Mr. Richardson suggested we have more involvement with the media to get our message out. John Pepin, DNR Deputy Public Information Officer agreed to help with this issue. We should get something out now, prior to hunting season when people are more receptive to the message as opposed to after the season where it might be interpreted as the DNR being reactive to what is occurring.

Next meeting scheduled for mid-December: 10th, 12th, or 14th. Keep your calendar open for these dates.