BAGGS MULE DEER WORKING GROUP FIRST MEETING

BAGGS, WY AUGUST 21, 2014

The first organizational meeting of the Baggs Mule Deer Herd Working Group (BMDHWG) took place on August 21, 2014 at the Baggs Community Center. The following people attended representing their conservation group:

Andy Warren, BLM
Sandy Taylor, BLM for Frank Blomquist
Jim Espy, landowner public representative
Holly Copeland and Jen Lamb, the Nature Conservancy (TNC) *There will be one representative for the TNC
Larry Hicks, Little Snake Conservation District
Mike Bauman, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Joshua Coursey and Joey Faigle from Muley Fanatic Foundation (MFF) *There will be one representative for the MFF
Wendy Haas, USDA Forest Service
Chris Herold, Warren Resources, industry representative
Kim Olson, WGFD
Tony Mong, WGFD
Lucy Diggins-Wold, facilitator and chief note taker

*Missing, but still interested in participating: Patty Waldron, Bo Stocks, Dennis Hughes or Ryan Kaiser from RMEF, Ed Arnett Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), Miles Moretti Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) Tony will call these people and determine if they are going to participate in future meetings and the process.

The group introduced themselves, discussed the meeting structure, were given the group charter to read before the next meeting, and were given a copy of the meeting minutes from the two meetings held in August at Rawlins and Baggs. The main portion of the meeting was a group session to identify the priority issues, what kinds of information they need and will be asking for, and thoughts on the group direction and function. **The group lumped all of the issues into three main categories, habitat management (loss, connectivity, and condition), hunter management, and mule deer population management.** Some of the statements require ACTION requiring information be gathered for the next meeting and some statements will require the group doing more research at future meetings. The following is the comments from the group:

(1) <u>HABITAT MANAGEMENT</u> (habitat loss, habitat connectivity, habitat condition)

- Consider the habitat loss for the area (hunt areas 82, 82 and 100) and work towards determining how much habitat loss there is.
- Transitional Range: make sure habitat projects are specific to target areas in need; identify what the habitat types are and what their condition is.
- Consider short-term and long-term losses to habitat

- Research and determine what the zoning changes have been for the area; examine the county land use plan (ACTION: information need)
- More specific information on local mule deer ecology and biology ACTION: Tony prepare for next meeting)
- Need to define what constitutes permanent loss of habitat. ACTION: At what point do animals just stop using the habitat completely? Is there any data for a mule deer herd(s) in similar habitat/elevation soil type, etc. that don't use the habitat at all?
- The group needs to look at all habitat types, including the forest, and should address the beetle killed forest habitat
- What will be the habitat loss from oil, gas, wind and other energy developments ACTION: What data is available now to answer this for the Baggs area? Review data from Sawyer and other projects, i.e., Atlantic Rim data.
- There needs to be more data sharing between agencies and groups. Combine data and make decisions that are more precise and encompassing through focused data sharing.
- Connectivity is HUGE. Study how this deer herd is affected by habitat fragmentation, specifics on mule deer migration corridors, what the barriers, fences, highways, etc. and how are these barriers influencing mule deer utilization patterns.
- There is increase ORV activity in the fall with hunters doing their scouting for deer. Take a look at mule deer habitat utilization as influenced by ORV use. Mule deer move to habitats early because of the ORV use and quality habitat goes unutilized.
- How is the Smith/Ranchero influencing habitat?
- Take a close look at the mule deer migrating to the Baggs area from Colorado. Continue data sharing with CO.
- Do more research and determine (data base) what is the ORV use in this area? Map these areas and specify what the abuses and or use patterns are and map them. Travel management plan completion by BLM needs completion.
- What is the climate and weather trend data for this region? ACTION: research the National Weather Service SNOW-TEL data, date from the TNC that they have on climate resilience and climate data.
- Take a closer look at the invasive plant species. ACTION: What vegetation mapping is already available the group can study? BLM has information on habitat treatments and the results from the Baggs area. What monitoring efforts are in place and what were the results? What is working and what is not working? Also on the Forest.
- The group should focus efforts on shrub communities as that is what mule deer eat; don't go after cheatgrass eradication and waste efforts. *Correlate weather data with presence of invasive plant species.

(2) HUNTER MANAGEMENT

- Do more education to young people earlier in their schooling about hunting ethics.
- Change the hunting season structure; maybe four points or better or similar.
- Study and determine how the late season elk hunts are affecting mule deer populations in the area. Determine the level and types of disturbances and what the consequences to mule deer are.

- Take a close look at the hunting data and determine when elk are actually being harvested by hunters.
- Consider that the complaints of hunting crowding and or pressure could be perception and or reality. What are the tradeoffs with moving hunting season opening dates, length of seasons, general vs. limited quota hunting seasons?
- Consider that hunting techniques and technology has changed over the years.
- Research and discuss what would happen if hunters were made to choose their method (rifle, bow or muzzleloader) and or hunting in either a general season or limited quota season, not both. ACTION: Develop a survey for deer hunters that hunt in the BMDH and get more information from deer hunters what they want and what they are seeing.
- Consider delineating "trophy" areas within the BMDH, for example, maybe make Battle Mountain or the Dad juniper area a limited quota hunt area.
- Consider and determine if maybe the mule deer migration has been "artificially created" because of historical big game management practices over the past 40 years. "Maybe those mule deer migrate out of here early because there is a whole bunch of hunters out there with guns." Larry Hicks referring to the elk hunters.

(3) <u>POPULATION MANAGEMENT</u>

- Research and determine what the mule deer populations were before the multiple severe winters; i.e. winter of 1993. Where was the mule deer population objective when those severe winters occurred? ACTION: find out what the population objective was and also what the pronghorn antelope population objective was for those same severe winter time frames.
- Study and compare data collected from Colorado Parks and Wildlife for their mule deer and pronghorn for the same severe winter time frames.
- Need more specific classification data-more than just bucks per 100 does-be more specific with age and quality data. Larry Hicks: more than just trends you see from the helicopter. Be more specific.
- Take a closer look at the population objective for the BMDA. Is it reasonable?
- Consider what CO does for predator management.
- ACTION: presentation on local predator ecology and predator management.

Tony clarified the impetus for this working group one more time and thanked everyone for their time. The group will appoint a chairperson at their next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30. The next meeting will take place at the BLM Office in Rawlins, 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 9.

Respectfully submitted,

Lucy Diggins-Wold