

BAGGS MULE DEER WORKING GROUP SECOND MEETING

BAGGS, WY November 3, 2014

The second organizational meeting of the Baggs Mule Deer Herd Working Group (BMDHWG) took place on November 3, 2014. The following people attended:

Bo Stocks, Outfitter and Guide
Patty Waldron, Baggs resident and hunter
Andy Warren, BLM
Frank Blomquist, BLM
Jim Espy, landowner public representative
Jennifer Lamb, the Nature Conservancy (TNC)
Larry Hicks, Little Snake Conservation District
Chris Herold, Warren Resources, industry representative
Keith Uraski, GRMR oil and gas
Tony Mong, WGFD
Lucy Diggins-Wold, facilitator and chief note taker

Previous meeting and minutes review:

The group participated in an ice breaker. There were a couple corrections or additions to October meeting minutes. Lucy will make those changes.

- TRCP and USFS suggested participating via phone and the group will work to make sure there is a conference phone set up so these working group partners may participate.

Tony clarified the winter range private ownership federal mineral breakdown, percentage high-use stopover sites within wild horse migration route, high-use stopover site private ownership federal mineral breakdown, Palmer drought index versus fawn ratios (no real relationships), percent of harvest versus population size (no real relationships) Larry asked if maybe we over harvested the population in some years and need to keep an eye on that.

- Chris wanted more information about how our season setting process works. You are setting the harvest which might not be good when we have a bad spring (weather). Difficult to predict weather, but there are some emergency protocols in place through the G&F Commission.
- Larry suggested you want to vary the % of deer harvested according to the herd objective when it is over objective, also when the herd population is below objective or at objective.

Field Surveys:

- Tony gave out 200-300 and so far only 39 returned
- 21 nonresidents, 17 residents, 1 unknown
- **Question #12 deer numbers:** %62 said acceptable or very acceptable: 28 unacceptable or very unacceptable
510 don't know,
Residents: %35 acceptable, %59 unacceptable or very unacceptable, %6 neither

Nonresidents: %81 accept or very acc %5 unacceptable %14 neither or don't know
Does the group want to get more information from the survey?

- Larry thinks we have a random sample and unless you think there is going to be a big difference if more data mining is done on the survey is it worth the extra work to mine the random sample? I don't want you to spend a lot of time on this if there isn't going to be any big changes.
- Bo asked what the G&F is considering for hunting seasons next year. *Tony is seeing a lot of smaller bucks left, but more accurate observations will be made when he begins his winter flights.
- Patty is interested in doing another survey later on down the road.
- Andy pointed out that there was not a lot of public participation at the beginning.
- This group is also going to be spending time on habitat quality management. The population management is not the only part the working group will be addressing they will be addressing habitat! *Tony reemphasized the group will be working on the habitat piece.
- We focus on deer numbers but we really need to be focusing on quality habitat during the winters. No point to building the herd up only for it to crash.

Management by Objective Baggs Mule Deer Herd: Population number (objective) along with a buck: doe ratio range

18,600 post hunt population (winter)

Buck ratios: 20-29 per 100 does

It gives us a bench mark to manage populations towards: over objective you need to decrease deer numbers if you are below objective you increase deer numbers

- We are still below objective. The population estimate I presented should be considered a range around the actual estimate not a specific number.
- Our really bad, brutal winters hammer our mule deer. Droughts are bad but not as bad or impacting as the brutal winters.
- Is 18,000 mule deer a reasonable number of deer to manage for?
- Larry: That line of 18,000 mule deer is subjective without 20 years of effort to get that line to move. Larry
- Jim says as a landowner he is okay with that line at 18,000.
- Chris: We need to address the habitat conditions and what is driving the objective.
- Tony: We are going to be taking the objective review out to public for their review or we could say we are not making a change and look at the objective again for another three years.
- Andy: Needs to be a balance in reference to habitat quality and numbers of mule deer. There are a lot of local hunters who remember years past when there used to be a lot of mule deer.
- Are the white-tailed deer having any effect on the mule deer? Anecdotal information that the white-tailed deer are hit hard by winters and they are cyclic. Patty says she sees more down along the river bottom.

Seasons for Next Year?

a. Short term (next season or the very next): Larry

- increasing herd numbers back to objective 18,600
- maintain buck to doe ratio to 35-50 buck per 100 does: Tony said he would have some difficulty maintaining that ratio and not changing the classification to a trophy management herd. Hard to maintain buck ratios that high. *Need to see what the impact of harvest was to that ratio.
- manage for an average of a four old buck we pull enough teeth to get this information on age of bucks harvested-set an age objective on the bucks like Montana and Utah does.
- Season length be set to meet the by buck ratios and buck age ratios
- Hunter crowding: maybe institute an either/or season-bow or firearms.
- Larry suggested a 7 day season and not 9 *will need some justification

b. Long Term:

- Chris asked about splitting the seasons throughout the hunt area? Deer hunt area 82 split into two hunt areas this would address hunter crowding and give them a longer season
- Patty's concerned about affecting the elk hunting seasons; moving deer hunters up into the forest will impact elk hunters.
- Andy asked if you can run the elk and deer seasons concurrently. Deer hunting in the foothills totally changes the elk hunting.
- Larry thinks something can be done with splitting hunt area 82. Or adjust the hunt area boundary in 82.
- Larry also wanted to see more mature buck deer into the population. Nice to have some quantitative data on bucks and age class to go along with the qualitative data base that will help monitor the herd and gives you more data to manage towards objective. Goal to be more objective and less subjective. What constitutes a BIG buck is different for everyone. Wait and see what the survey response is.
- Tony said we need to look at the wintering herd and the populations that are here during hunting season. We need to look closely at movement data and see how and where the deer are moving.
- Larry and Patty both mentioned that the Department should stay with the point restriction for at least three years or rotate the point restriction. Larry says two years is the way to go and not three years rotation because there is too much pressure on the bigger bucks.
- Tony said hold out until I fly so I can get some numbers and trends.
- Tony said there are budget constraints on the teeth extraction on a huge scale. *Tony said he is going to check on the money for doing the teeth extraction.
- Tony said he only checked four or five youth hunters during the season. Patty also said she did not see a lot of youth hunters.
- Tony advised the group that hunt area boundary changes or the splitting of the hunt area could possibly be made by 2016 IF everything were done by November 2015. (the whole public process for packet changes)

- Open cow elk hunting seasons when the deer hunters are out-put less pressure on wintering mule deer when people are hunting elk earlier. i.e. type 6 run concurrently with the last two days of the deer season.
- Larry said the group should talk about the discussion of limited quota because he does not want Baggs area to be the “dumping ground” for every general deer hunter in the state.
- Tony reminded the group the working group process does not "supersede" the WGFD formal season setting process. The group can bring forward "recommendations", but these have to be vetted through the entire process just as any other recommendation would.

ACTION TONY: Check to see if the Platte Valley mule deer herd looked at nonresidents in their field survey?

ACTION TONY: Have they Platte Valley mule deer working group: did they change to trophy management or maintain recreation management?

ACTION Tony: check on some of the elk area boundaries that have been changed or their hunting seasons changed.

ACTION Tony: get the group more information about general hunt areas in the state to give the group a snapshot

Next meeting: Focus on one or two issues that we need to talk about, such as split the area into different hunt areas moving hunt area 82 into limited quota, point restriction possibility, some discussion about deer hunt area 100

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m. The next meeting will take place Tuesday, January 6, 2015 at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lucy Diggins-Wold