

Area 66 Mule Deer Initiative Working Group July 22, 2014 Meeting – Sportsmen’s Warehouse

Members Present: Paul Threlkeld, Miles Bundy, Rhen Etzelmiller, Dusty Porter, Pete Garrett, Jim Wetzel, Randy Morrison and Chris Mikels

Other Publics Present: Steven James, Jeff Gordon and Steve Garrett

WGFD Personnel Present: Justin Binfet, Matt Withroder, Heather O’Brien and Brian Olsen

Not Present: Phil Marton and Brian Scott

The first meeting of the Area 66 Mule Deer Working Group was on July 22, 2014 at Sportsman’s Warehouse. Justin Binfet began the working group meeting with a roundtable introduction, outlined the purpose of the Mule Deer Initiative (MDI), described the process framework and timeline, and then discussed sideboards to the MDI process. Discussion was also had regarding the deliverables including the management plan. A working group charter and meeting agenda were distributed. Dusty Porter was selected as the Chair of the working group.

Heather O’Brien gave a presentation of the history of mule deer management in hunt area 66, outlining historical population trends/estimates, harvest, sex/age ratios and various management challenges and issues. Justin and other Department personnel offered a “field trip” to tour the area, discussing habitat and management activities. Justin then presented the

The remainder of the meeting focused on developing ideas about how to best foster public participation and comment regarding this initiative. The use of social media and the Department’s website to gather public participation were discussed thoroughly. The group unanimously supported the option of creating a working group Facebook page to initiate public involvement and obtain feedback on a suite of questions. Some concerns were voiced about the working group’s Facebook page degenerating to the point where it becomes argumentative and combative, making it unproductive. The group discussed establishing some ground rules and removing participants from the Facebook page if this became a problem. An idea was suggested about posting a “Question of the Week” on the Facebook page to survey our constituents. We also discussed creating a handout survey to give out in person, post on Facebook, have a booth at Sportsmen’s Warehouse, and attend RMEF and other NGO sportsmen banquets. The group also discussed developing a name for the Facebook page, and ultimately decided on “Area 66 Mule Deer Initiative”. Finally, the group decided to convene another working group meeting in late August specifically to discuss pros and cons with various hunting season structures.

Action Items to be completed by August meeting

- Each member will develop a list of pros and cons for both Limited Quota and General Season license structures.
- Each member will develop their own definition of their idea of a quality hunting experience.
- Each member will develop 2 – 4 survey questions to solicit public feedback for the Facebook page or other Social Media.

- Each member will develop ideas regarding a working group mission statement.
- Each member will obtain a Google gmail account to allow access to shared folders on Google Drive for the posting of meeting minutes, science/pertinent literature, and other electronic documents. WGFD will provide assistance in developing gmail accounts if necessary.
- Binfet will email electronic copies of the herd history presentation, the working group charter, and meeting minutes.

Discussion Items for the August 2014 Working Group meeting

- A roundtable discussion will be had on pros and cons with various hunting season structures.
- The group will develop and finalize a mission statement.
- WGFD personnel will disseminate and discuss the Department's recently completed mule deer talking points.
- The group will discuss the charter in more detail and formal adoption.
- The group will finalize a date for our first public meeting to be held in November or early December.
- The group will finalize plans for developing our Facebook page and will approve a final list of questions to post to solicit public feedback regarding mule deer issues in Area 66.
- The group will develop recommendations for media outreach to advertise the Facebook page and public meetings throughout this initiative.

Area 66 Mule Deer Working Group Meeting
WGFD Casper Regional Office
August 18, 2014 - 6:00pm

Members Present: Paul Threlkeld, Rhen Etzelmiller, Dusty Porter, Pete Garrett, Jim Wetzel, Randy Morrison, Jeff Muratore

Other Publics Present: Steve Garrett

WGFD Personnel Present: Justin Binfet, Matt Withroder, Janet Milek, Heather O'Brien

Not Present: Brian Scott, Miles Bundy, Chris Mikels

The second meeting of the Area 66 Mule Deer Working Group was held on August 18th, 2014 at the WGFD Casper Regional Office. Justin Binfet began the meeting with a review of meeting minutes from the last meeting; no additions or changes were made by the team.

Justin Binfet then played a brief video for the group that outlined the North American Model of wildlife management. There were no questions or comments from the team.

An exercise was then conducted to solicit the advantages and disadvantages of general license versus limited quota season structures for mule deer. Each team member was asked to contribute three "pros" and three "cons" for general license and limited quota seasons. All comments were collected on post-it notes and tallied. A summary is attached, which illustrates common themes and perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the different season structures.

The remainder of the meeting focused on a discussion of the Facebook discussion group, to be used to solicit comments and opinions from the hunting public regarding Area 66 mule deer. The idea of posting Area 66 questions in a hunting discussion group already set up by Jeff Muratore and Paul Threlkeld was considered by the group. Ultimately, the group decided that it was best to initiate a separate discussion group specific to Area 66 issues and administered by the team. Paul Threlkeld, Randy Morrison, and Jeff Muratore agreed to set up the discussion group but will wait to make it "live" so that its purpose, structure and format can be agreed upon and approved by the team. In the mean time, members were asked to come up with at least one question to pose to the public for comment and discussion on the board. *All questions are due via email to Heather O'Brien by Friday August 22nd.*

Jeff Muratore mentioned that our group is "putting the cart before the horse" since the group has not yet constructed a mission statement. This should be a main item of discussion for our next meeting.

It was agreed that the group will need to meet again before rifle seasons in the Casper area begin to open in mid-September. Justin Binfet will put out a doodle poll to all members to figure out a meeting date, likely to be during the first week of September. Meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm.

Potential Mission Statement: It is the mission of the Area 66 Mule Deer Working Group to provide recommendations through discussion, public forum, and science-based information, to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for the management of mule deer in Areas 66 and 67. (written by Jeff Muratore– need to have the group modify this and all agree upon it.)

Potential questions for hunters already turned in by team members:

- 1) What defines a quality hunting experience?
- 2) Why do you hunt?
- 3) What do you believe is better to maintain and protect the future of our hunting heritage: limited quota hunting management, or general license hunting management, and why?
- 4) What do you think of the mule deer hunting in Area 66?
- 5) How important is it to you to hunt buck mule deer every year?
- 6) What size buck mule deer do you hunt for?
- 7) Should Deer Area 66 be a limited quota or general license area?
- 8) Should "Any Deer" seasons be allowed during the Special Archery Season?
- 9) What is more important to you when hunting: the meat or the horns/antlers?
- 10) What factor or factors do you think influence mule deer numbers the most?
- 11) How would you feel about discontinuing the Doe Mule deer hunting for archery season, temporarily until the deer numbers are higher?
- 12) How would you feel about discontinuing the "any Mule deer" hunting for youth, temporarily until the deer numbers are higher?
- 13) In your opinion, what is the number one thing the G&F should do to manage area 66 for Mule Deer?
- 14) What should be done or tried to help the deer population in area 66?
- 15) What are your thoughts on the habitat conditions in area 66?
- 16) Does 5 weeks of hunting season put too much stress on the deer in Area 66?

Bates Hole Mule Deer Working Group Meeting

September 4, 2014, 6:00pm

Members Present: Paul Threlkeld, Jeff Muratore, Pete Garrett, Steve Garrett, Brian Scott, Miles Bundy, Dusty Porter, Rhen Etzelmiller, Ryan Kaiser

WGFD Staff: Matt Withroder, Justin Binfet, Heather O'Brien

Not Present: Randy Morrison, Jim Wetzell, Chris Mikels

- 1) Justin Binfet: Update/overview of past meeting's minutes and general background for new members present (Brian Scott, Ryan Kaiser).
- 2) Review and approval of mission statement
 - a. Jeff Muratore came up with a mission statement last meeting; Justin Binfet added some language to that statement and two different mission statements were posed for the group to look at, add to, discuss and approve.
 - b. Group discussed a couple of language options and agreed upon the following mission statement:

"It is the mission of Area 66 Mule Deer Working Group to provide recommendations through discussion, public forum, and science-based information, to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to manage and improve mule deer populations and habitat in Area 66 for sustainable hunting opportunity into the future."

- 3) Discussion of why the group exists, if the group will truly provide input that is meaningful and not a waste of time.
- 4) Dusty Porter: presented the goals of the group and put them up for discussion. Discussed the potential for three or more public meetings with topics of education, problems/solutions, and group recommendations.

Finalized Goals of the Group:

- Understand critical issues that mule deer are facing
- Use various avenues to gather input from the public
- Develop recommendations to WGFD on the future management of the herd
- Develop recommendations to address factors influencing mule deer to ultimately improve habitats and the population
- Maintain an engaged group of stakeholders to continue future support of mule deer

Looking at the first public meeting & possible topics to cover: What do we hope to accomplish and relay to the public with the first meeting?

- Do we educate the public and provide history, data, survey info first?

- Do we have an open forum discussion first to gauge public mindsets and follow up after that with the appropriate information to fill in gaps?
- Agreement from the group: half a meeting with background/educational material, and half a meeting with an open forum discussion facilitating public input
- Will plan to have the first public meeting the first week of December – exact date to be determined via doodle poll . Location to be determined – possibly off-site from the game and fish office (e.g. library meeting room).
- Make a direct effort to invite our local Game and Fish commissioners to attend meetings; especially public ones (Richard Klouda and/or Keith Culver)

Disseminating information to Area 66 Hunters to advertise the first meeting

- Fliers or business cards with the name of the group, hand out fliers/cards during hunting season (WGFD field staff), the Facebook group website, elsewhere? Sportsman's Warehouse? Front counter at WGFD Office?
- Brian may be able to advertise the first meeting on K2 Radio
- Janet will talk to news channels and put releases out to newspapers and listing in the "Open Spaces" section of the Tribune.

Facebook Page

- Jeff et al set it up already – group page is currently closed until we agree upon some items during this meeting
- Logo that Janet had done was presented and approved by all – need to make this the banner image for the discussion group. Group also wanted to integrate the WGFD logo. Heather will relay this to Janet and get the new logo up as soon as it is finished (within a few days to a week).
- Group agreed that when we post our poll questions on the group that it helps to have an interesting photo/graphic, a background sentence or two, and then the question for the public to respond to.
- Mission statement will be pinned to the top of the group as well

Review of Questions posed by the group:

- Ask a general questions first to pique interest and generate input and discussion
- Ask questions next on specific topics that have been pinpointed by the group as important to mule deer management in Area 66.
- Pose some background information and/or context along with a question to set the stage
- Ask questions on a set schedule, asked by a set person (every 3-4 days)
 - Brian Scott will take charge of posting questions
 - Page has been made live as of the end of our meeting

One more meeting for the group before we meet with the public?

- Yes - group agreed on one short meeting before our December public meeting
- Get back at end of November/Beginning of December and then have a public meeting
- Set up a doodle poll for the dates of both meetings (O'Brien/Binfet)

Rhen's modified question to add to the bunch: *What do you believe is better to maintain and protect the future of our hunting heritage, limited quota hunting management, or general license hunting management, and why?*

- Group members should continue to consider and submit new questions to be posted on the facebook discussion page.

Meeting Adjourned 8:15pm.

Mule Deer Initiative Working Group Meeting December 9, 2014 6pm

Attendees: Binfet, Bish, Withroder, Milek, O'Brien, Randy Morrison, Paul Threlkeld, Steve Garrett, Pete Garret, Dusty Porter, Miles Bundy, Chris Mikels, Jeff Muratore, Rhen Etzelmiller, Phil Marton, Brian Olsen

Not in Attendance: Jim Wetzell, Ryan Kaiser, Brian Scott

- 1) Roundtable introductions
- 2) Bestowing of Deputy status on Pete Garrett – Jeff Muratore and Heather O'Brien
- 3) Collaborative Learning Process Presentation – Janet Milek
 - a. Collaborative learning – process by which interdependent parties work together towards a common interest –in this case, mule deer
 - b. Membership in the working group- wanted representation from interested parties – hunters, landowners, outfitters, businessmen, NGO reps, BLM reps, WGFD reps
 - c. Roundtable of members describing their background, careers, experiences, why they feel they are a member of the team, what they bring to the team, what they want to get out of the team
 - d. **ACTION:** Create a template for each member to fill in as their bio. Email out template, get back from members, compile and give to Commissioners at winter meeting (O'Brien)
 - e. More explanation of collaborative learning – the process
 - f. Education first: need to provide the group with as much information on variables affecting mule deer – habitat info, management info, disease, predation, etc. Working group needs to receive a wider variety of information on all the variables before beginning work on problem-solving and involving the public
 - g. **ACTION:** 3-year data for Chris Mikels of classification data (O'Brien)
 - h. Goal: Set two educational meetings to cover information that needs to be shared on topics that affect mule deer
 - i. Meeting dates – January – two meetings – 7th and 14th. Might need more or less depending on what the group decides they want. Can decide as we go.
 - j. **ACTION:** get demographic data on hunter retention from Cheyenne survey (Binfet)
 - k. **ACTION:** get FB questions to Jeff Muratore (O'Brien)
 - l. **ACTION:** put MDI card handout graphic in the Wyoming Livestock Roundup (Garretts?)
 - m. **Other papers:** Casper Journal, Our Town, others?
 - n. **ACTION:** write an article in OUR TOWN for January (Milek)
 - o. **ACTION:** contact Brian Scott to talk about MDI on K2 Radio (Porter)

Meeting adjourned at 8:20pm. Notes submitted by Heather O'Brien

NEXT MEETINGS: January 7th and January 14th – 6:00PM – WGFD Casper Office

Mule Deer Initiative Working Group Meeting
January 7, 2015

Attendees: Binfet, Withroder, Milek, O'Brien, Randy Morrison, Paul Threlkeld, Steve Garrett, Pete Garrett, Dusty Porter, Jim Wetzal, Jeff Muratore, Rhen Etzelmiller, Keith Schoup

Not in Attendance: Chris Mikels, Miles Bundy, Ryan Kaiser, Brian Scott, Phil Marton

- O'Brien, Binfet and Schoup gave an extensive presentation regarding factors affecting mule deer

Meeting adjourned at 8:20pm. Notes submitted by Justin Binfet

NEXT MEETING: January 14th – 6:00PM – WGFD Casper Office

Area 66 MDI Meeting Minutes
14 January 2015 @ 6:00pm
Casper Regional Office

Attendees: Not captured for this meeting – no official note-taker present.

- 1) O'Brien, Binfet and Schoup gave an extensive presentation regarding factors affecting mule deer
 - a. Some Q&A afterwards
- 2) Set date/time for next meeting – topic will be planning content & format for the upcoming public meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00pm. Notes submitted by Heather O'Brien

NEXT MEETING: February 26 – 6:00PM – WGFD Casper Office

Meeting Minutes
Bates Hole Mule Deer Initiative
26 February 2015 1800 hrs

Attendees: Randy Morrison, Dusty Porter, Pete Garrett, Steve Garrett, Paul Threlkeld, Jeff Muratore, Rhen Etzelmiller, Chris Mikels

WGFD Staff: Janet Milek, Cody Bish, Brian Olsen, Justin Binfet, Heather O'Brien

1. Purpose tonight is to plan the meeting for the public.

- a. When: **Thursday March 19th @ 6 pm – Pronghorn Room WGFD Casper Office**
 - i. MDI members meet **@ 5pm** to set up (or as early as everyone can get there)
- b. Agreed to have one public meeting.
 - i. If there seems to be a need a second public meeting can be scheduled to provide more information/discussion.

Sidenote: **Mikels** - Muley Fanatics – all banquet money raised goes to the Bates Hole Mule Deer Initiative for projects
Kaiser – RMEF – donating \$10K to the Bates Hole Mule Deer Initiative for projects

2. Public meeting: Content

- a. WGFD/Binfet introduction of what the group was set up for, what our goal is (mission statement), who are members are
- b. Information handouts, MDI member list, mission statement. Also, SNACKS.
- c. 1-1 ½ hour of intro / background for the public followed by 1-1 ½ hour of Q&A and input from the public
- d. Education is an important part to provide info to the public. What was the most important parts of the MDI info stuff?
 - i. Fawn ratios, Drought, Habitat, Trends, other LQ areas and what's happening there, versus general areas (condensed powerpoint presentation – O'Brien).
- e. **Breakout Groups** to collect information, reconvene whole group afterwards and have a member of each breakout group summarize
 - i. Size of breakout groups will depend on how many show up
 - ii. All groups in different parts of the Pronghorn Room so that Game & Fish folks can bounce between groups to answer questions
 - iii. MDI member's job in breakout groups is to be a facilitator – can't contribute personal opinions – just keep the conversation going, collect input, answer questions without bias

iv. Public comments from each group collected on easels

3. Collecting comments from the public – Methods? What question(s) do we ask?

- a. Need to keep it to 1-2 key questions in order to have time/not run long
- b. One question on **quality** / one question on **quantity**

Question 1: What do you want from your Area 66 mule deer herd?

Question 2: How do we increase mule deer numbers in Area 66?

4. Places to Advertise the Meeting

- a. Individual members – send emails to friends
- b. Wildlife/Hunting Banquets
- c. GF Website, MDI Facebook Page, Twitter
- d. News, Radio, TV, (K2, News 13, Oil City News)
- e. Flyers : Sportsman's, Rocky Mt, Gun Ranges, and banquets

5. Ground Rules and Objectives

- a. Gather as much public comment as possible.
- b. Identify major themes between breakout groups, stand-out ideas
- c. Comments will be used to help develop recommendations to GF, to manage and improve habitat and deer population.

March 26th @ 6pm – Next MDI meeting for members

- reconvene to discuss public meeting comments and get things rolling.

Adjourned @ 2020hrs.

Area 66 Mule Deer Initiative Working Group Meeting
WGFD Casper Regional Office
26 March 2015 @ 6:00pm

Attendees: Rhen Etzelmiller, Chris Mikels, Randy Morrison, Dusty Porter, Paul Threlkeld, Steve Garrett, Pete Garrett, Jeff Muratore, Ryan Kaiser

WGFD: Heather O'Brien, Cody Bish

1. Recap of the Public Meeting: lack of attendance was disappointing, but landowner attendance was good.
2. Other input from the public that people have heard – roundtable:
 - a. S. Garrett: Mike McCleary suggested distribution of mineral licks for mule deer, is happy with the APR, hunting antlers in spring stresses deer on winter range. Travel management might further reduce hunters (those who do not want to walk into areas).
 - b. R. Kaiser: increase point restriction to 4 or better.
 - c. P. Threlkeld: limited quota, 4pt APR, close season for a couple years.
 - d. P. Garrett: limited quota, 3pt APR stay for another year or two, reduce hunter density, habitat improvements.
 - e. D. Porter: reduce elk numbers, increase bounty on coyotes, too many hunters – deer overhunted.
 - f. R. Morrison: no new suggestions from the public; no complaints about the APR.
 - g. C. Mikels: LQ and 3 or 4pt APR, concern with elk.
 - h. J. Muratore: Rather than closing season, LQ plus an APR, archery harvest of does must be addressed.
 - i. **ACTION ITEM:** R. Kaiser requests APR white paper (O'Brien to get).
 - j. R. Etzelmiller: Mountain shrub community work, harvest even split between LQ and Gen, harvest more elk, no one wanted to reduce opportunity for kids.
 - k. R. Kaiser: public needs the information the MDI has had from WGFD to come up with more suggestions, favors habitat projects & has seen them succeed.
3. Discussion of mountain lion harvest – to increase harvest of females – incentivizing harvest of females, RMEF/Muley Fanatic price for heaviest female cat, etc. Need to be careful and think of all interest groups involved, ethics, other hunters' freedom of choice, etc.
4. More LQ vs. General season discussion
 - a. J. Muratore: Many LQ proponents change their mind after they learn what the MDI has learned

- b. R. Kaiser? Where else in the state will be left where general hunters can go?
Opportunity is still wanted.
5. Roundtable discussion of MDI Members – Areas to focus MDI recommendations
- a. R. Etzelmiller: CWD – genetics and resistance- further research on reducing the potential for spread. BLM acres to treat junipers 1200 acres. Mechanical and chemical treatment, or burn.
 - b. P. Garrett: limited quota would reduce numbers of hunters.
 - c. J. Muratore: habitat grows more deer, LQ grows more bucks. Which accomplishment/goal are we going for? Do we want more deer or do we want more bucks?
 - d. S. Garrett: favors the habitat treatments/projects
 - e. R. Kaiser: more habitat work, adequate escape areas and cover, more \$ for predator control on the county level. WTD not as bad of competition compared to elk, focus on increasing elk harvest. Prepaid donation program to pay for meat processing would encourage more people to harvest/donate cows.
 - f. J. Muratore: include Area 19 Elk T4 and T5 licenses as extra for-purchase tags (along with reduced price cow/calf licenses)
6. **BIG POINTS:** CWD/disease concerns, habitat issues, predator control, elk harvest, travel management and roads, APRs, and LQ vs GEN.
7. Meeting schedule for the future
- a. 1-2 topics per meeting- Tuesdays work best for most.
 - b. Recommendations will be by group majority. Input from absent members via email if necessary.
8. Next meeting: April 7th. 6:00pm.
- a. Reorganize the outline based on topics brought up this evening before then. Points to cover next time: **predator control, travel management plan, & diseases.**
 - b. R. Etzelmiller: will put together a sheet with perceptions of LQ vs GEN in the West for discussion and consideration within the group.
 - c. Presentation of before/after habitat stuff from Keith on his projects at a later meeting (will not be ready by April 7 meeting). Should be ready by late April/Early May.

Adjourned at 8:20pm.

Area 66 Mule Deer Initiative

April 7, 2015 @ 6:00pm

Attendees: Jeff Muratore, Steve Garrett, Pete Garrett, Paul Threlkeld, Dusty Porter, Randy Morrison, Glen Taylor (Natrona Co Predator Board)

WGFD: Binfet, O'Brien

- 1) Overview of Recommendations Outline
 - a. Dusty cut down the outline provided at the last meeting, added mission statement and purpose for the MDI (handout)
- 2) Predation Issues – Guest Glen Taylor from Natrona County Predator Board
 - a. State of WY provides annual funds for predator management via the ADMB (Animal Damage management Board) – allocates funds to each individual county; each county proposes annual requests for funding
 - b. 12 members of ADMB from various ag, wildlife, and sportsmen groups / agencies
 - c. County predator board has 10 members – 5 landowners, 4 sportsmen, president.
 - d. Funding – \$293K from ADMB board, the rest comes from lost livestock
 - e. Some funding money can only be used for certain activities (i.e. bounty program \$ comes only from lost livestock funds)
 - f. This year asking \$500 more for raven control in 2015 from feds
 - g. Historically – extra \$ was used to hire an additional trapper in Bates Hole to keep coyote numbers down - specifically intention was to benefit big game
 - h. 13,420 coyotes removed from Natrona County since 2008 by trappers and from the bounty program
 - i. Threlkeld: includes unborn pups? - only if trapper takes the time to cut open and count them.
 - i. Bounty Program – board is reviewing whether to keep it or get rid of it. Improved landowners access would help to expand and provide more places for hunters.
 - j. S. Garrett – suggests expanding available time/places for people to check in ears for the bounty program to increase its success.
 - k. Porter – what's the most efficient component of the predator control program?
 - i. 700 coyotes taken from the ground (trapping, snares, poison) annually
 - ii. 160 from the air (helicopter & fixed-wing) quicker but more expensive per hour of flight time
 - l. Morrison – would there be anything the MDI could fund should the group have \$ to allocate? Or does the county predator board already have enough funding? Could the MDI help create additional places/people to turn bounty ears into?
 - i. Expanding the bounty program might be a tough sell to other members of the predator board. Have to also sell the program to the ADMB. Glen thinks it's good public relations. He recommends coming up with a proposal and presenting to the predator board. The board *can* spend MDI dollars on the

bounty program or for other predator programs (state dollars cannot be spent on bounty program).

3) Mountain Lions

- a. How to focus or increase harvest on Mountain Lions?
- b. Binfet: Lion Reg opens next summer (2016). Is currently unlimited quota in area 27 with year round season, and hunters can kill a second lion
- c. Morrison – for two-license hunters – “earn a buck” type program where first cat killed must be a female for a hunter to purchase/use a second lion license
- d. What ways do you increase the lion harvest in Area 27? Mortality limit (quota) versus unlimited season has an effect on lion hunters’ selectivity
- e. Muratore- mentality of lion hunters has changed to wanting toms/big cats
- f. Morrison – encourage non-resident lion hunting – are they less selective?
- g. Promotion of “big lion” contest, depredation hunt, shoot on sight? Contest sponsored through Sportsman’s Warehouse? Biggest Male / Biggest Female lion contest?
- h. S. Garrett- Are there any states in the west where lions are considered a predator?
- i. Limited quota licenses for Area 27 mountain lions? Force hunters to hunt in Area 27. Would it work or would hunters select other areas instead and skip Area 27?
- j. Weather/wind/road access is a limiting factor to hunting access for lions in Area 27 compared to other units.
- k. Morrison - provide incentives to HMA landowners and/or landowners overall in Area 66 to increase access for lion hunting.
- l. S. Garrett – allowing trapping lions rather than just running dogs? Is that possible?
 - i. WGFD/MDI can look into it, but be aware that the topic is probably sensitive for other user groups (houndsmen, lion hunters, animal rights groups, cougar fund..)
 - ii. Binfet - Trapping Reg opens up this spring – public meeting May 14th
 - iii. **ACTION:** Binfet – will look into if it’s in statute versus regulation, can lions be trapped just in Area 27 versus a statewide change?
 - iv. Binfet – on May 7th when the county boards all meet with the ADMB, would the MDI like to participate in that meeting to support additional ADMB funds in Natrona County specific to Bates Hole Mule Deer?

4) Travel Management – Skipping for now since Ren is not here

- a. Binfet – might want to bring up to the BLM the road closure on Muddy Mountain
- b. Binfet - FACA (Federal Advisory Committee Act) – does the MDI want to have public member representatives to the BLM to support ideas for travel management that benefit mule deer?

5) Disease – CWD, Bluetongue/ EHD, Adenovirus

- a. Is there really anything the MDI can do?
- b. Salt licks congregate deer and potentially spread disease – discourage these?
- c. Have not pursued depredation hunts for CWD – did not work in other states when they tried it and were very poorly received by the public (e.g. Wisconsin)

- d. Commit to more intensive surveillance of hunter harvested deer to better track disease prevalence?
- e. MDI members present agree that there are no direct projects/ideas to recommend or fund related to disease

Potential dates for next meetings –week of the 20th – Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday – O’Brien will put up a doodle poll and email members.

Next meetings topics:

1. Habitat issues: Keith Schoup presentation
2. Travel management: if time allows

Meeting adjourned at 8:00pm.

Area 66 Mule Deer Initiative Working Group Meeting Minutes: 21 April 2015

Attendees: Jim Wetzel, Randy Morrison, Dusty Porter, Pete Garrett, Steve Garrett, Paul Threlkeld, Rhen Etzelmiller

WGFD: Keith Schoup, Justin Binfet, Heather O'Brien

Keith's Presentation on Habitat

1) Aspen Treatments

a. Miles Land and Livestock – Bell Draw/Horse Trap Area

- i. Cutting/Burning to increase abundance of younger stands (setting back succession), otherwise older aspen stands are replaced by pine trees
- ii. Treatments from 2004-2011
- iii. Additional acres to the east treated mechanically – mulched trees with a brush hog- mulch was left to lie and possibly slowed regrowth of young aspen clones
- iv. Next step will be to clean up some of the mulch and then treat Jackson Canyon, towards Forest Service Lands, etc.
- v. Mapped areas for potential treatment – 5,000+ acres – much of it is eastern portion of hunt area – Soldier Creek area, etc
- vi. Wetzel – Why is elk use a concern on aspen treatments?
 1. Elk are numerous enough to overuse new growth of aspen – need to do enough acres of treatment so that the elk don't eat it all. Small treatment plots become "ice cream patch" to elk.
- vii. Porter – why does aspen need to be cut before burned?
 1. Liability – more expensive to cut and then burn, but no burn contractor will do a burn of standing aspen due to liability (fire more likely to escape control, safety issue of standing trees burning). Timber burn on the ground however is more dangerous in terms of soil sterilization (too much heat – scorches and can kill an aspen clone)
- viii. P. Garrett - Timber sale? Can we contract a timber guy to come in and cut/sell trees? Might be more likely to sell if a timber contractor comes in and does all the cutting – just sells the product direct to the public.
- ix. Porter – who decides what wildfire gets let go and what is suppressed?
 1. Etzelmiller – for BLM: have to have NEPA/Fire management plan in place to let fire go. Depends also on resource values that might be in danger. Planning steps have to happen first. Forest Service is generally "gun shy" about letting fires go.

- x. Binfet – the segment of mule deer that summer at higher elevation are very dependent upon aspen. Laramie Range collared deer heavily use aspen in the summer months.
- xi. Morrison – how much do these treatments cost?
 - 1. \$5200 a month to lease equipment, can treat 10 acres/day. Keith runs the machine himself to minimize contractor costs.
 - 2. Can two machines be rented to speed things? Volunteers to run the second one? Keith would be willing to ask a WGFD member to work it. Landowners/volunteers can haul the product away.
- xii. Treatment also frees up water in the system that was otherwise soaked up by mature conifers, sagebrush, etc.
- xiii. Weed and Pest comes in annually to spray for noxious weeds (thistle, knapweed, etc).

2) Cheatgrass Treatment

- a. Cheatgrass can out-compete native grasses, has invaded some sagebrush grasslands, especially following disturbances (Casper Mt Fire, Coal Mt. Fire, etc), changes native plant communities
- b. Cheatgrass is productive/good forage for a week; then it's worthless in terms of nutrition for wildlife and livestock.
- c. Garrett Ranch treatment – chemical treatment from helicopter and ground –
 - i. Came back with native needle and thread grass (in this case)
 - ii. Porter – is it worthwhile to treat smaller patches? Is it worth it for hunters to report it when you see it?
 - 1. Schoup – yes. Can treat those on the ground and aggressively. Can be dense patches, so treatment can be very worthwhile.
 - iii. Etzelmiller – will deer use it?
 - 1. P. Garrett – Yes – the deer are using it right now at this time of the year.

3) Big Sagebrush Treatment

- a. Most sagebrush stands are older aged brush – less productive than younger plants and can crowd out grasses/forbs.
- b. Also treated cactus – have to treat when blooming (7-10 day window)
 - i. Etzelmiller: can you mow it low and then treat it? It's a possibility. Mowing that low may be difficult
- c. Release resources that cheatgrass/cactus takes away from other native plants that are more palatable to mule deer.
- d. Mechanical treatment of sagebrush: removing sagebrush in the bottom of creeks/drainages – Keith feels these areas should be occupied by other species (willow, grasses, other shrubs) but have been inundated with sagebrush. Treatment has involved mulching with a skid-steer. Took brush out of the bottom flood plain. Left second higher flood plain shrubs to maintain some thermal/hiding cover for deer. 600+

acres total treated on Stinking Creek/Bates Creek. Pete has also seen a change in grouse habitat use after the treatment – more spread out use.

- e. Mechanical treatments of sagebrush in higher elevation treatments in the bottom of drainages. Mow the drainage but leave the sides for snow accumulation and some cover. Steve Garrett saw rutting deer in the mowed areas this last fall. Looked like a late green-up of grasses and forbs already in the mowed strips.
 - f. Porter – expense on this treatment? \$90 an acre, but should be cheaper with new equipment: \$40-60 an acre.
- 4) Mountain Shrub Treatments
- a. Mainly talking about true mountain mahogany
 - b. Many of these stands are mature to decadent (dying) and less productive than younger plants.
 - c. Treated with chemical (Plateau) – kills the above-ground part of the plant simulating fire. Skeleton of dead plant protects the new growth from being over-browsed by herbivores. Deer/elk can eat some of the new growth but not all of it.
 - d. Cost of chemical treatment vs. prescribed fire: \$35/acre versus \$150/acre
 - e. Mule deer were using treated area the next growing season
- 5) Riparian (stream) Area treatments
- a. To reduce stream bank erosion, stabilize banks, hold water higher in the system, grow willows etc.
 - b. Introducing beaver to dam/hold/slow stream flow and create wet meadow/willow/aspen habitats
 - c. Filling cut banks (gullies), filling with “instadams” to slow flow (man-made dams) using wood debris from the City of Casper 2013 winter storm.
- 6) Juniper Treatments
- a. Reduces water availability in the system, outcompetes more nutritious shrubs and herbaceous plants, invades into wet areas/creek bottoms, reduces plant diversity
 - b. Chemical treatment, mechanical treatment; experimenting with what will work best.
 - c. Porter – do we wipe out all the juniper? What should it look like? Juniper trees should be scattered on upland hills, but not juniper in the draws, not dense, and not everywhere.
- 7) Challenges to getting habitat treatments done:
- a. Expense, Invasive plants, Elk, NEPA process (slow federal approval), post-treatment management, timing of treatments.
 - i. No treatments before or during hunting seasons
 - ii. Sage grouse core area management stipulations limit some of the treatments that can be done

- 8) What would be the top priority for habitat for deer population expansion?
 - a. Summer transitional, high-elevation, more productive, higher precipitation (sagebrush thinning, aspen regeneration, wet meadow/riparian restoration)
 - b. Winter ranges when opportunity arises (juniper)

- 9) How does the MDI help make it happen? Can people volunteer to help with treatments?
 - a. Would need to check the liability part of it, would depend on the task and how potentially dangerous different jobs are
 - b. WGFD staff will need to look into volunteer ability/opportunity
 - c. Porter – likes the treatment ideas, MDI just needs to find a way to speed up the process/maximize time, \$, volunteers, etc. First year getting started can be slow/tedious but can be built upon more efficiently in subsequent years. Get volunteers via sportsmen's clubs, boy scouts, etc.

Recommendations from the group:

P. Garrett: focus on summer transitional treatments to benefit does with fawns.

S. Garrett: Wants to see juniper go – increase mountain mahogany. Get deer fat in the summer, keep them fat on winter ranges

R. Morrison: Treatments to keep water in the system. Temp employees to help with Keith with habitat projects? Can WGFD get summer temp employees working with Keith on habitat projects – more man power? Can it be funded by sportsmen's groups?

D. Porter: Guzzlers? Keith is not a proponent. Artificial source that concentrates deer, require maintenance. There's enough natural water sources that Keith does not think it's an issue. If habitat treatments free up more water then guzzlers won't be necessary. Deer and other wildlife can degrade habitat around guzzler due to concentrating.

R. Etzelmiller: deer winter ranges – 90% of the time deer are in a slow starvation when they are on their winter range. Anything you can do to get younger, more palatable plants, more protein. The biggest factor to help deer fawns, productivity, etc. is to get them fat before winter. Juniper treatment is also important to free up moisture, open areas for other, more important plant species to deer. BLM can also contribute people on the ground on BLM projects/funds for projects on BLM lands in the herd unit. BLM hires seasonal employees, also does some work with contractors, and has some permanent in-house people.

J. Wetzel: Do you try to “checkerboard” treatment types and areas to minimize the effect of elk over-browsing individual treatments? Look into a summer intern program to get wildlife conservation students experience and paying them at the same time. Also wants to look at recommendations from other MDI groups in the state – help to focus on what has been working for other groups. Help educate some of the landowners about habitat and how important it is, get them more interested in habitat

projects. Figure out how best to approach landowners to try and encourage more buy-in from landowners.

J. Binfet: MDI could ask the commission for \$ to fund internships. Could be worth asking – commission has funded other MDI projects. Can talk to Commissioner Klouda and run things past him before the MDI takes a proposal to the whole commission. Strategically some parts of the MDI recommendations will be best presented by members of the MDI while others would more likely be the responsibility of WGFD.

P. Threlkeld: Nothing additional to add

D. Porter: Is urban sprawl a habitat issue? Not so much in this unit except a few places (Casper Mt., Hat Six, Bates Creek/Clarks Corners). Conservation easements of private lands would be the only way to control land use/suburban growth if that were a potential issue.

Next meetings? Probably can discuss the remaining issues in 2-3 meetings. Meet in another two weeks?

Doodle poll for next meetings: Tues/Weds/Thurs for both next week and the week after that.

Topics left to be covered: Travel Management, Competition, Hunting Season Structure, Population Objective Review

Meeting Adjourned @ 8:45pm

Mule Deer Initiative Meeting Minutes

28 April 2015 – 6:00PM

Attendees: Ryan Kaiser, Jim Wetzel, Randy Morrison, Dusty Porter, Pete Garrett, Steve Garrett, Paul Threlkeld, Jeff Muratore, Chris Mikels, Rhen Etzelmiller

WGFD: Janet Milek, Justin Binfet, Heather O'Brien

Preamble: Binfet spoke to Nesvik (Chief Game Warden) – regarding funding a habitat technician via the MDI. In the past, appropriations were used as seed money to fund such positions in other areas (i.e. Platte Valley). Thus, funding a technician to do habitat work in Area 66 is a possibility.

Topics to cover this evening: Competition & Travel Management

1) Competition - Elk Population Size

- a. Presence of elk on the stock trail in mule deer habitat
- b. P. Garrett – need hunters in “refuge” ranches to break up the elk
- c. Lone Tree Creek – elk are in mule deer habitat in this drainage. Elk are coming down lower in the winter than previously – overlapping mule deer winter habitat.
- d. Binfet – until something changes with access – elk are will continue to encroach into mule deer habitat, particularly in the winter when hunting pressure ceases.
- e. Wetzel – make late season for cows longer (WGFD did this for 2015).
- f. P. Garrett – have PLPW talk to Price family – get parking access at Bates Cr/Kerrfoot Cr to get better hunter access to BLM/State West/NW of Horse Trap (currently have to walk a long way from current parking area through the Horse Trap)
- g. Muratore – Burn in 2007-2008 - accidentally attracted elk away from the accessible public and HMA.
- h. Morrison – The elk are a separate issue that warrants deeper discussion /separate recommendations
- i. P. Garrett – only other way to lengthen the season would be to add season on early for cows (August).
- j. Kaiser – The area is a trophy bull area – “earn a bull” similar to “earn a buck” – have to harvest a cow before killing a bull?
- k. Or a combo tag – free cow tag included with a bull tag.**
- l. Porter – what if hunters with extra meat want to donate but don't want to pay? Can the MDI use funding to pay for processing to encourage hunters to harvest cows? - Yes; it's easier to do outside of WGFD to avoid having to test for CWD etc. Wetzel - Like “hunters for the hungry” in Texas.
- m. Kaiser – does WGFD haze elk? In some areas in the west but only on small parcels where damage is occurring.
- n. Kill Permits? It's been done but it's a last resort for WGFD, as the public does not like it.

2) Travel Management (road access in the hunt area)

- a. BLM has been reviewing roads in the area, they gather feedback from different interested parties, define open roads & closed roads.
- b. Keep moving forward on BLM's travel management – encourage BLM to finish and put out the new travel management plan.
- c. How it pertains to mule deer: currently there are some areas in the herd where there are so many access roads, to the point where deer have no place to escape hunter pressure.
 - i. Lone tree Creek, Lawn Creek, Sand Draw are specific areas of concern in mule deer habitat where road networks are dense
- d. Wetzel – could the BLM give HuntingGPSMaps.com the road updates after the travel management plan is updated, so hunters would have those road closures/changes on their GPS? --would depend on if the company wants to include those updates on their maps. Can't force them to take it but they might like it – would benefit hunters, BLM, deer. It will be public information so the company could add it at no charge to them.
- e. Morrison – can the MDI help speed the completion of the BLM's Travel Management Plan?
 - i. Etzelmiller - Just need field data compiled, create maps into potential management alternatives, and then put it out for final public comment.
- f. Muratore- Have any areas been proposed for added roads?
 - i. Etzelmiller - Yes, there are a few places. Nothing is final, everything is at a “management alternative” phase awaiting release for further public comment.
- g. Kaiser – does the state land have similar management plans? Should we look at roads on state lands at the same time to roll out changes on BLM and State land at the same time?
 - i. Binfet – Yes, could look at them at the same time – State lands have not recently been reviewed with regards to road/travel management.
- h. Muratore – the MDI should look at the current travel management plan from the BLM and provide comments as a group.
- i. Morrison – what about the road up Muddy Mountain to the camp ground?
 - i. Etzelmiller- BLM got grant money to improve the road. Seasonal closure would depend upon what the end product and how much safer it is after it's updated.
 - ii. MDI was discussing improved access on that side of Muddy Mountain for mountain lion hunting and/or more cow hunting.
 - iii. Etzelmiller – mostly the closure is for safety of users.
- j. Scope of the current travel management plan: why is the boundary where it is? Why not make it larger?
- k. Etzelmiller – expanding it was expected to take an amendment and delay the completion of an end product. BLM has since found otherwise from BLM administration – it is possible to expand without an amendment.

- I. What about the single-track dirt bike road in the Twin Buttes Area?
 - i. There's been comments from some groups wanting to keep it and other comments to close those roads since it's in mule deer winter range. In the interim, bikes are allowed to ride in those areas.
 - ii. P. & S. Garrett - Winter stipulations are in place to minimize disturbance of deer for Twin Buttes (no livestock, no drilling activity, etc), but casual use (dirt biking) is allowed in the area. Should be closed to all use.
 - iii. Muratore - what is BLM's procedure regarding public comment?
 - 1. BLM formulates what they think the plan should be, puts it out for public comment, makes modifications, and puts out final plan.
 - iv. Threlkeld – is the definition of resource damage up to interpretation depending on the LEO (law enforcement officer)?
 - 1. Some portions of resource damage are defined, but it is up to the individual officer to decide what they think is or is not damage, and up to the courts to make the final call if someone receives a citation for damage.
 - v. Binfet – The MDI should decide if it's important enough to reconvene or have a smaller subcommittee involved in the commenting process when the Travel Management Plan is released later for public comment.
 - vi. Etzelmiller – how many deer are killed on the highways/roads in the hunt area? Might be worthwhile to consider higher fencing, underpasses, etc if there are sections of highway with high deer collisions.
 - 1. Binfet - Area 66 deer aren't exactly migratory, but deer move between hay fields, bedding areas, etc where they cross the highway.
 - 2. Threlkeld – does WYDOT have any reports on their sensory system to detect deer and set off alert signs on the highway? (near Pinedale) - group would have to look into it/request info from WYDOT
 - m. **ACTION** - Etzelmiller will send out link to BLM Travel Management Plan – everyone should look at it on their own time in the next week, and group will quickly discuss at the next meeting. Can also directly submit comments online to the BLM.

- 3) Binfet – Season structure has taken a lot of time for other MDI groups in the state – make sure everyone gets their comments in and don't rush this topic in the interest of time.

- 4) Binfet – Facebook page – goal was to gather public comment, and the group has moved past that point by now. Do we remove the page?
 - a. Muratore – we might want to keep it up until the group publishes their recommendations. Group agrees to leave the page up for the time being.
 - b. Morrison – can the BLM post a link to the travel management plan on the MDI Facebook page? – Yes.

- 5) Binfet – Resident Deer Regions – something WGF D has been throwing around – members given a handout to look at and consider for discussion next time.

Next meeting is Tuesday May 5th @ 6:00pm. Be prepared to run late.

Meeting Adjourned 8:30pm.

Area 66 Mule Deer Initiative - Meeting Minutes
5 May 2015 @ 6:00pm

Attendees: Chris Mikels, Rhen Etzelmiller, Dusty Porter, Pete Garrett, Steve Garrett, Paul Threlkeld, Jeff Muratore,

WGFD: Bish, Milek, Binfet, O'Brien

- 1) Ideas/suggestions from other MDI's & WGFD regarding extra options somewhat in between Limited Quota versus General License Seasons
 - a. Resident Regions for General Licenses - Similar to Non-Resident Deer Regions – makes residents select an area of the state rather than being able to hunt general license hunt areas statewide over the course of a season
 - b. Negative aspects: people don't want the change/limitations, later hunting seasons like in the Black Hills may have not get enough hunters if residents are forced to select and pick a different area of the state.
 - c. Standardizing seasons statewide - is a problem for the western part of the state running seasons in October: earlier winter weather, access issues, vulnerability of migratory mule deer.
 - d. Resident Regions – would it pass through WGFD commission if the MDI supported it? Binfet - Not sure, depends on how it is received on a state-wide level.
 - e. Any deer hunting during archery season - Does the MDI group support or oppose? Should archery season have the same limitations as rifle season?
 - i. Etzelmiller - is it biologically significant if there are no does harvested versus the small number that which are harvested by youth and/or archery hunters? Majority rule is in favor of recommending **no doe harvest during archery season.**
- 2) Limited Quota Seasons
 - a. Roundtable for people to speak their opinions.
 - i. Threlkeld – used to support LQ, but after background info provided through the MDI meetings feels differently - would like to keep the season GEN
 - ii. Porter – What about landowner licenses? How many would there be if Area 66 went LQ?
 1. Handout from O'Brien with a scenario of how many LQ licenses might initially be issued in Area 66, how many landowner licenses would come out of that, etc. to compare to current GEN seasons
 - iii. P. Garrett – there is getting to be more hunters than deer – if we don't get the number of deer up, then number of hunters needs to go down. Would like the season to stay GEN , with Resident Regions and a cap on the total number of hunters per region. Similar to non-resident regions. Hunter density is too much right now.

- iv. S. Garrett – doesn't want to see the opportunity to go away. Is in favor of GEN seasons
- v. Etzelmler – looked up data from neighboring states that have moved to all LQ areas – in Utah a resident has on average a 1 in 28 chance of drawing a deer license. Does not want to see Wyoming move in that direction. Is there a way to keep the season General but put something in the limitations to split up the hunt area over time to "rest" certain areas? Would overcrowd
- vi. Muratore – a lot of the information through the MDI process – season structure is probably not going to change population growth or lack of since Area 66 has had virtually no doe harvest in years.
- vii. Morrison – in favor of LQ but only if the whole state went LQ – otherwise hunters would redistribute and overcrowd the remaining GEN areas in the state
- viii. Bundy – in favor of staying GEN – has kids/grandkids and wants to keep opportunity available for hunting
- ix. Kaiser – in favor of staying GEN – comes from CO where every place is LQ, does not like the lack of opportunity.
- x. Porter – in favor of staying GEN for the sake of opportunity but would like to have some way to control hunter density/crowding.
- xi. Chris – in favor of staying GEN – there's no proof that the season structure is the reason deer populations are suffering. If changing the season structure doesn't improve deer numbers, then it shouldn't be changed at the expense of hunting opportunity.
- xii. **Unanimous decision – Keep Area 66 General License Season Structure**

3) How do we improve General License seasons and make them better?

- a. APRs – when to leave them off/when to take them off
- b. Use buck ratios as a trigger for APR seasons
- c. P. Garrett – keep the APR on until the buck ratio hits 35 per 100 does. Put it back on if the low end hits 25 bucks per 100 does
- d. O'Brien – might be hard to attain 35 – only had a buck ratio above 30 one time since 1976 (in 2006), but that is without using APRs in season limitations until recently.
- e. If the buck ratio grows above 35 do you trigger a longer season?
- f. What triggers do you use to trigger more liberal seasons (7 days to 10 days)?
 - i. Use population objective as a trigger
 - ii. MDI is ok with objective change from 12,000 to 8,000
 - iii. Use upper end of objective (20% above or 9,600) as a trigger for doe seasons

4) Revisions to the plan: MDI group or subgroup – does some or part of the group reconvene annually? Or the entire group? Should do so to discuss the status of different components of the MDI recommendations. Milek – highly recommends a plan to reconvene periodically and discuss the status of different components of the MDI recommendations.

- 5) Is there a way to put things meeting notes, powerpoint presentations, etc in a centralized place online for the MDI Report to reference with quicklinks? Get meeting minutes all combined into one PDF file. **ACTION: O'Brien/Binfet/Milek find out if WGFD has server space we can use.**

Miscellaneous – P. Garrett would like antler shed hunting be controlled on public lands the same as west of the Continental Divide. Muratore – thinks the law should be vehicle closures into crucial winter range statewide rather than focusing on antler hunters. Other activities are allowed on public lands that disturb wildlife – should not focus restriction on antler hunters only.

Continued follow-up – does the MDI want a formal written response from WGFD? Milek advises that is a good idea.

Meeting Adjourned @ 9:35pm