

Minutes – Meeting 8
Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group
February 24, 2015
6:15 PM – 9:20 PM
Lander, WY

Members In Attendance: Ken Metzler, Katie Erickson, Rowdy Anderson, Stan Harter, Marla Lemm, Brad Hovinga, Joe Hutto, Ember Oakley

Absent: Jared Oakleaf, Harold Schultz, David Killebrew,

Public attendance: Colby Erickson, Steve Agueda, Ron Smith, John Coffman, Reid Schell, Bruce Campbell, Tom Sweet

Game and Fish personnel: Brad Gibb, Linnea Sailor, Daryl Lutz, Amy Anderson,

Facilitator: Rene Schell

6:15 Welcome- agenda and minutes approval

6:20 Guidance from Game and Fish moving forward - *Rene Schell*

- PowerPoint presentation
 - o “To help you help us”
 - o Move forward with the group forming the larger objectives and the game and fish responding with strategies to get at their objective. Then the working group needs to edit and own those objectives and strategies.
- Comments:
 - o Put a timeline for completion and for reporting back to the group on progress towards the different strategies (Ken)
 - o Some concern about just copying the mule deer initiative objectives and recommendations. (Marla) Maybe we can use some parts of it and tailor to fit?
 - o Game and Fish should research as broad a topic base as possible including migration patterns and habitat and forage availability (Katie)
 - o Ultrasound might be expensive. Is it the best return for the investment? Joe
 - o Strategies would be only those things that are feasible by the department and strategies and objectives will be reviewed by the group open to edits from the group.
- Vote on format of objectives and strategies
 - o 5 fingers – 8 votes
 - o 1 through 4 fingers– no votes

6:40 Continue work on research recommendations - *led by Rene Schell*

- o **ACTION: Group agreed to adopt the objective and strategies as written, to review them before the next meeting, send edits to Daryl and Rene, and review at next meeting for consensus.**

7:20 Presentation on Habitat projects - *Amy Anderson, Sue Oberlie (BLM), and Brandon Houck (USFS)*

- Project planning
 - Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is multiple use agency and has to consider every possible use when making decisions. Projects on federal lands must go through an environmental analysis to determine the different impacts on the environment. The mule deer projects can't exist in a vacuum and they generally have to support multiple species and uses.
 - Forest Service (FS) generally tries to receive input on how different projects will impact species and usages. Funding is an important consideration, so efficiency with the right places, techniques, and timing is best. Projects for FS are also multiple use and must go through a similar process as the BLM. Having a solid objective gives traction when trying to gain both inside and outside funding.
 - Game & Fish looks on the ground for areas that might benefit from a project and consults the agencies that oversee the lands.
 - The different agencies have to work together to create plans on what the goal is and what is wanted to be achieved. Have an objective, complete inventory, funding considerations, and plans for monitoring results.
- Comments
 - Have there been studies on the success of juniper removal projects? (Public)
 - BLM looks at how fast the juniper comes back and how effective the removal remains. No way to equate the removals with specific wildlife improvements. Targeted at improving mule deer winter range. No current cross agency habitat management plans. (Sue)
 - Some of the crucial winter range habitat management projects identified specific areas where habitat work could be done. (Stan)
 - Doesn't have to be a large plan; it could be specific to smaller areas.
 - What was the time between the plan and the implementation? (Rowdy)
 - The pre-work was the most time consuming. Habitat inventory of the juniper removal took two years. Once the work started, it moved much more quickly.
 - So what are we looking at? 2 years? 5 Years? (Ken)
 - Funding is the limiting factor. If it falls into place, the project will progress more quickly- a couple years.
 - Have these projects been addressing a specific type of juniper? (Joe)
 - Rocky mountain juniper and limber pine have been the focus because they are moving into those transitional ranges.
 - Do we have a habitat management plan that exists in these herd units? (Rene)
 - We do not.

7:40 Break

7:50 Habitat recommendation work – led by Rene Schell

Group was shown a PowerPoint on how to pull objectives out of the recommendations they may have come with. Then given time to do that on their own. As a group they then came up with the following objectives:

- Objective: Provide habitat improvement in the crucial areas as determined by movement research (Marla and Harold)
 - Objective: Reducing the spread of noxious and invasive species to improve habitat. (Ken and Jared)
 - Objective: Improve knowledge of how vegetative management affects mule deer along with other species. (Rowdy)
 - Objective: (Pg 15 in MDI) (Ken)
 - Objective: How other species such as livestock and horses on the landscape affect mule deer and their habitats. (Stan)
 - Objective: Game and Fish form a habitat partnership with BLM, FS, State, and private landowners.
 - **ACTION: Look at and review previous meeting minutes and sticky notes to see if there is anything we missed that the group thinks needs to be an objective.**
- Vote on objectives
- 5 fingers– 8 votes
 - 1-4 fingers– no votes

8:30 Mule Deer ecology and behavior – Joe Hutto

- Living in the same place for 20 years and for the past 8 years he's been living on the ground with the mule deer. In winter there are about 50 deer on his property and about 10-15 in the summer.
- The African Serengeti feeling he used to get in Red Canyon is no longer there. The deer are gone from the winter range.
- We are not going to hunt our way out of the mule deer problem
- It comes down to herd dynamics
 - Migratory deer move in and combine with resident deer to form a winter herd.
 - Winter ranges for each herd are very small and each deer is hardwired to its winter range. They are obligated to their winter range. If the habitat is destroyed down to dirt and they can see green in the distance, they will not move there and stay where they are and die.
 - The deer come off the mountain every night onto the ranch lands and urban sprawl. First thing in the morning they all head back up the mountain. All the hunters on the roads in the early morning
 - 1 shot is a 90% probability. A second shot shortly after is a 95% probability. Desperation unloads is crippling losses and running away - 25% probability. The long range slow shots – low probability. After hearing shots and percentages he can figure locations. 90% of kills were at people's houses in

their yards. They disappear into the garages and houses and are not accounted for. So more deer are being killed than we know. Even starting in bow season with does and fawns. We shouldn't allow bow seasons to hunt does and fawns.

- If a winter herd is hunted into extinction there will be no deer in that area in subsequent years.
- The herds are maternal clans held together by older does. If you kill an older doe, the next oldest will take charge if old enough. They have to have experience, wisdom, and inclination to take over the clan. If there is no older doe to take charge, the clan falls apart and loses migration knowledge.
- In spring, mothers run off their buck fawns, chasing them miles away from the clan. The buck fawns from other herds come in and gradually assimilate into the winter herd. Once that happens, they become a lifetime obligated winter herd members.
- Any buck with antlers will breed a doe but they're not very aggressive. A 4.5 year old deer becomes very aggressive and self-assured. Without those older and aggressive deer you don't get a competitive rut and the quality goes down when younger bucks are breeding.
- A mature mule deer will dominate and outcompete whitetail bucks. Without a dominant mule deer buck, a whitetail buck will breed the undefended mule deer does.
- Mule deer are incredibly aggressive toward predators like coyotes. Predators are the least of the problems. They are not killing with any kind of level to affect populations.
- **We should prioritize limiting factors. To determine what is really killing the deer.**
- Questions and comments
 - Should we close the highways? What's the solution to roadkills? (Ken)
 - The nighttime speed limit change decreased mortalities by 90% by Moran Junction.
 - Will there be opportunity to participate in a review or something? The maternal clan structure especially is relatively unaddressed topic. (Daryl)
 - Maybe I'll write it up.
 - When you kill the doe, you are also losing the fawns? (Rene)
 - Archery season fawns do not survive without their mothers and they do not know to migrate and become resident deer.
 - When the maternal clan structure falls about, do all the fawns die?
 - I matters when it happens. The family disperses and the migration information and habitat knowledge is taught by older deer.
 - In this urban sprawl landscape of today there is limited ability to manage deer. (Ember)
 - 200 yards from a residence limit or limited quota could help.
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9:00 Wrap Up

- Next meeting dates
 - Monday March 16
 - Monday April 6
- Topics for next meeting agenda
 - Hunting Season Structure
 - ATVs
 - Update on population objectives of the South Wind River and Sweetwater Herd Units
 - **Group ACTION: Provide edits, additions, and changes by email before the next meeting to any of the research and habitat objectives you have established.**
 - **Group ACTION: Review the previous meeting minutes for edits to research and habitat objectives and strategies.**
 - **Group Action: review Mule Deer Initiative objectives on management and ATV's.**
 - **Rene ACTION: send the hunter survey as soon as it is done and before the next meeting. Send the research and habitat objectives electronically for edits.**
- Public/ Other
 - Update on getting migration corridors through mountain timber above Sinks Canyon. There is interest in helping with the bighorn sheep and habitat work as long as Game and Fish takes the lead. –Ron Smith
 - Book “Mountains and Plains” about all the different ecologies and landscapes of Wyoming and how it's all related. – Joe Hutto

9:20 Adjourn