



MULE DEER MANAGEMENT AND THE PUBLIC PROCESS

Fact Sheet #20

OVERVIEW

State and provincial wildlife management agencies serve as the guardians and trustees for wildlife found within their respective borders. Wildlife management agencies strive to use the best available science in making hunt recommendations and other management-related decisions. These decisions are usually based on management plans developed through a public input process. An important role of wildlife agencies is to actively seek, and be receptive to, public input. Because wildlife are held in public trust and managed on behalf of all citizens, it is important and necessary that the public have a voice in how wildlife, such as mule deer, are managed. Thus, hunters and the general public are encouraged to become involved in the unique public processes provided by each wildlife agency.



THE ROLE OF STATE AND PROVINCIAL WILDLIFE AGENCIES

State and provincial wildlife management agencies have statutory authority to manage wildlife species within their jurisdictions. By law, their role is to protect, conserve, and manage wildlife populations for sustainable uses. Wildlife management agencies also have a responsibility to balance the social desires of the public, while still managing wildlife populations according to their biological requirements.

The roles of wildlife management agencies are sometimes confused with those of land management agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and their Canadian counterparts. At a basic level, wildlife management agencies manage wildlife populations, whereas land management agencies manage public land and other resources for multiple uses. These agencies regularly coordinate wildlife and habitat-related activities.



MANAGEMENT PLANNING AND THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC

Wildlife managers strive to use the best available science when making decisions and often develop management plans or guidelines to manage a given species, such as mule deer. Management plans may define population objectives, habitat conditions, harvest strategies, and management challenges. Once a management plan is approved, biologists may recommend hunt boundaries, season dates, and buck and doe permits to achieve the objectives of the management plan.

Human dimension surveys are scientifically designed to gather data in a way that can be generalized to a larger human population, whereas information from a small public meetings may not be representative. Public meetings are often valuable for providing more details about why certain recommendations are made by agencies and the public. Past surveys reveal that hunters, landowners, and the general public are usually very interested in proposed changes to management plans

and hunting regulations, and they understandably want the opportunity to voice their opinions on recommendations before final decisions are made. Wildlife agencies solicit public input while drafting management plans and hunt regulations via human dimension surveys, open houses, public meetings, or other processes. Some state and provincial wildlife agencies form committees comprised of hunters, federal agencies, agricultural interests, landowners, and other members of the public to help shape mule deer management plans and hunting regulations.

Wildlife management is defined as the art and science of managing wildlife to achieve human desires. As such, wildlife agencies place special emphasis on soliciting and incorporating public input into the development of management plans. Obtaining public input from a diverse group of stakeholders can strengthen a management plan by providing social and political support when components of mule deer management are challenged.

THE ROLE OF DECISION MAKERS

Wildlife biologists regularly make recommendations for management plans, hunting permit numbers, season dates, and hunting regulations that require approval from decision makers. In most western states, decision makers consist of a governor-appointed wildlife commission or board. In western Canada, decision makers are the provincial ministers. When recommendations are being presented, public input is encouraged to help decision makers better understand the support and concerns the public may have for each proposed action. Decision makers have the difficult task of balancing the biological input received from wildlife professionals and social input received from the public.

DECISION MAKING

When decision makers are presented with recommendations, there are many factors to be considered:

- Biological – is the best available science being used to benefit mule deer or their habitats?
- Social – are decisions transparent and in balance with public desires?
- Ethical – are actions being taken for the right reasons?
- Legal – will decisions violate state, provincial, or federal laws?
- Financial – will benefits of a proposed action outweigh the costs?
- Technical – does the wildlife agency have the technical capability to carry out an action?



All these factors can provide guidance for wildlife management decisions and lend confidence that management strategies are sound and defensible. These factors can also provide a framework for how to implement public desires, especially in the face of diverse and often-contradictory input.

SUMMARY

Wildlife agencies are science-based organizations that manage wildlife appropriately for the benefit of the public. They play an important role in conserving mule deer and their habitat to ensure that populations are sustainable, and hunting and viewing opportunities persist for future generations. Wildlife agencies have transparent processes, where the public is encouraged to provide input on management plans, harvest recommendations, and other proposed management actions. This public input is valuable to wildlife agencies and decision makers, as it provides a balance of biological information and social views. Hearing from the public allows agencies to know if current and future management strategies are aligned with public desires, and helps facilitate better management decisions. The public are partners in conservation and their participation is vital for this process to be successful.

More information on mule deer can be found at: www.muledeerworkinggroup.com

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