



**WAFWA Mule Deer Working Group  
Directors Report  
Tucson, AZ  
January 9, 2011  
Chair, Jim Heffelfinger, Arizona**



### **Deer/Elk Workshop**

The next Deer/Elk Workshop will be held May 16-19, 2011 at the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort (Santa Ana Pueblo) just north of Albuquerque, NM. A shuttle will be available for the 15-20 minute drive from the Albuquerque airport. Monday, May 16<sup>th</sup> will be a Mule Deer Working Group Meeting 1-5pm followed by the evening social. Tuesday and Wednesday will be the main days of papers with a BBQ one night and an awards banquet the other night. Thursday morning (May 19<sup>th</sup>) will be the business meeting and departure. Jim deVos is Wallmo Award Chair for this workshop.

The MDWG developed a document to provide guidance to all workshop sponsor agencies. We started with a document to guide the transition of the Deer/Elk Workshop from one host to the next, but then decided that this would be valuable to WAFWA if it were written to help all workshop transitions. Heffelfinger distributed a final draft that all WAFWA agencies have had the opportunity to review. Additionally, we asked for, and received, comments from many past workshop chairs to refine it further. The intent is that this will be posted on WWW.WAFWA.ORG in place of the current guidelines.

This document would replace the first 3 links under the WAFWA workshops webpage:

<http://wafwa.org/html/workshops.shtml>

The current guidelines (not this revised version) contain some information about how to apply for a new WAFWA-sanctioned workshop so I would suggest adding this language to the beginning of the actual application as an introduction. I would envision 3 links under the WAFWA Workshop webpage:

- 1) Workshops (list of all 10 sanctioned workshops with a link for each to subpages or to a species-specific external site like [www.muledeerworkinggroup.com](http://www.muledeerworkinggroup.com))
- 2) New Workshop Application (current document with additional intro mentioned above)
- 3) Workshop Guidelines (our proposed document)

*Action Requested: With the approval of this report I am requesting this transition document be approved and institutionalized.*

### **Document on Energy and Mule Deer**

Heffelfinger distributed copies of the revised "Energy Guidelines for Mule Deer." He took comments from the last version shared at the last WAFWA mid-winter meeting and reorganized and updated the draft. Specifically he:

- Added all of Tom Keegan's technical edits,
- Consolidated all individual guidelines from each type of energy development into one combined set of guidelines to cover energy development in general. The guidelines

common to all types of energy were placed under “General” guidelines unless there was enough that was specific to a certain type and then it was collected under a subheading.

- Removed redundancy within and among sections,
- Made sure the document is consistent with the TWS position statements on oil/gas and wind, TX magazine article on wind energy, TRCP Sportsmen for responsible energy development document, final copy of Arizona wind and solar guidelines, WAFWA resolution on Renewable Energy, WAFWA sage grouse assessment, BLM programmatic EIS for wind (BMP), several other sources.
- Daryl Lutz compared this document to the new Wyoming wind guidelines and added a few parts to make sure they are consistent.

Steve Siegel (NV DOW) has volunteered to write the Background, Issues/Concerns, and add pertinent guidelines for Geothermal Energy development section for us because of his experience in this realm. He submitted a draft via email during the current summer WAFWA meeting and it will be reviewed and incorporated. We also still need to adequately compare or incorporate:

- more info on the impact of transmission lines (as a separate section or under “Ancillary Facilities”),
- USFS wind energy directives (to be finalized this summer),
- Hebblewhite et al. review of energy development and ungulates,
- TX wind energy guidelines,
- NV sage grouse energy development guidelines, and
- Any other activities/documents from other states and provinces that have not commented on the earlier drafts.
- Add “Preface” that describes these guidelines as those actions the MDWG of WAFWA believe are appropriate as related to energy development.

These are “Best Management Practices” and not meant to be regulations. We also want to stress that decision makers should use the most recently available scientific information and not only what is published in the guidelines. There will be additional good information from subsequent research made available after the publication of these guidelines and decision-makers should not be held only to the information available at the time we published these. We will revisit and revise these as appropriate.

### External Reviewers

Because these guidelines are intended to be the BMPs recommended by the MDWG, it would not make sense to ask for an external review from industry because the review/response will come in volume from company lawyers and not be useful in developing what mule deer experts think is best for mule deer and their habitat. These guidelines will be used by decision-makers as one source of several sources of input to guide decisions. We will benefit from getting an external review from those biologists and other agency people working with energy development.

Suggestions for external reviewers: Steve Belinda can help put us in touch with those that have worked in this arena and can provide a solid review. Other state/provincial agency research/staff, those involved in BLM/FS wind solar EIS, Dave Naugle (U of MT), Matt Kauffman (WY coop), Len Carpenter, Rollie Sparrow, Chuck Anderson, TWS people involved with their position statements, American Wind and Wildlife Institute, and others. Please send other suggestions to Heffelfinger by August 30th.

### Publication and distribution

This document is meant for distribution and use by many working agency personnel and will be published the same way we did the habitat guidelines (Lithotech, Inc.).

### **NAMDCP Implementation Matrix**

MDWG has been tracking state/provincial activities that support the implementing the North American Mule Deer Conservation Plan (NAMDCP). There was agreement that it would be interesting to have all BLM and USFS field offices enter that kind of habitat-related information and then summarize it. Crown Land and NRCS activities could be included in State/Provincial input. At the last meeting we reviewed an on-line survey developed by Bill Otani and George Buckner to gather USFS information at the Forest level and BLM information at the Resource Area level and then roll this information up to a summary that can be added to this implementation matrix. The latest version of this survey was distributed and edits discussed by the MDWG and several regional representatives from BLM and USFS who joined us for this topic. The intent is to have the federal agencies complete this survey every 2 years in conjunction with the biennial Deer/Elk Workshop so the results can be reported at the workshop along with the population information that is currently collected from states and provinces on the same cycle. This latest (near final) survey version will be sent to the entire MDWG for comments and so it can be used before the 2011 Deer/Elk Workshop in NM. George Buckner will test the mechanics of the on-line survey to make sure all the technical bugs are worked out to allow interagency functionality. Before we ask for input preceding the Deer/Elk Workshop, we will want to make a pilot run to fine tune the questions and make sure we are asking questions that can be answered clearly. This effort will generate a lot of questions and help us construct some guidance for those answering questions so we have people answering them consistently. A summary of this effort will be available at next year's summer meeting.

### **Standardized Mule Deer Population Monitoring Guidelines**

Tom Keegan (ID) has review comments from our internal review and is getting those incorporated. He has worked on this document to not only incorporate edits and comments but has also rearranged some verbiage to improve readability and consistency. We may need to strengthen a couple sections and work with some authors to make sure modifications are acceptable to them. Keegan will have this document ready for external review by August 30<sup>th</sup>. We will be contacting external reviewers now to get a list of people who have agreed to review it when it is ready.

### **Mule Deer Video Production**

We have been discussing the production of a mule deer video which would capitalize on all the work the MDWG has done. It would be a great way to get our information out in a different format and Eric Keszler (WY) has been leading this effort. Funding is a big challenge for this project given the current state of affairs (\$100,000). We realize the agencies are having their own financial problems at this time so we are continuing to work to find external sources (mostly industry sources) of funding for the documentary. Chris Dorsey of Orion Media has committed to help on the project and may contribute some of their own money to make it happen. Wyoming Game and Fish can contribute \$10,000 and the Mule Deer Foundation has already stepped up with an offer of \$15,000. Also, Miles Moretti is talking to some potential sources of funding and has 2 promising requests for \$25,000 each.

### **MD Mapping Project: Integrating updates**

Some states/provinces have updated their maps based on the MDWG layers. We need to find someone to do the actual mechanics of updating the range wide GIS layers whenever agencies

update their jurisdiction. It would be useful to add migration corridors and transition range in all updates. NV and UT have updated their states so we need to incorporate these changes rather than try a whole range wide update effort which originally cost \$30,000+. Steve Belinda can suggest people involved in various GIS projects that may be able to help. Ken Wall at USGS may be able to help us.

Heffelfinger talked with Madeline West who is working for the Western Governor's Wildlife Council (WGWC) established by the Western Governor's Association. The WGWC is proceeding with an extensive effort to assemble a multitude of geospatial data to be used in evaluating and planning large landscape-scale projects, specifically energy development. This effort can use the geospatial data we have on mule deer habitat attributes, but the WGWC effort will not aid us in getting our map layers updated. All agencies should take a look at their maps and make sure they are still accurate.

### **Remaining Wallmo Bronzes**

Joe Wallmo has completed the last 4 Wallmo bronzes and has them in his shop. He is holding on to them for now and will send them when he catches up with the other projects he is working on now.

### **SUNAMI Project Update**

At this time, there is considerable interest in the rehabilitation of habitat on the Kaibab Plateau and the Arizona Strip. Under the leadership of Jim deVos, the Arizona Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife Conservation (AZSFWC) has obtained two grants as part of the overall Southern Utah-Northern Arizona Mule Deer Initiative (SUNAMI) project. This project is using the products of the MDWG to apply that information on the ground.

The first project was obtained from the Arizona Game and Fish Department's (AZGFD) Habitat Partnership Committee, with a grant value of \$100,000. At this time, AZSFWC are working with the AZGFD and the BLM to treat another 1,000 acres in the Buckskin Mountains in proximity to the Utah/Arizona boundary. Previously, approximately 2,000 acres have been treated for wildlife purposes. The first was designed to improve an area where wildfire had occurred and the second a treatment designed to improve conditions for mule deer. AZSFWC is currently working on the archeology contract to identify important sites where treatments will be avoided. On this site, they anticipate using two-way chaining as the treatment to reduce conifer density. They will flag all important archeology sites and important cover sites for mule deer with the remainder of the area being treated. AZSFWC anticipates using a split-plot treatment with half being burned and the other not burned to compare vegetative response to the treatment.

They are also working with a local permittee in the Buckskins with seven sections of state land because they are interested in an array of habitat treatments including conifer thinning and water developments.

The second grant is funding obtained from the National Forest Foundation in the amount of \$60,000. This will be used for select thinning on ten 30-acre plots where there are remnant stands of browse used by mule deer. The approach will be to identify 15 plots that have low-density P-J using aerial photos. Ground truthing will be used to select the 10 that have greatest potential to benefit mule deer. They also plan to use grinding to reduce conifer densities and use browse seeds to rehabilitate these sites for mule deer.

### **Research Priorities for Mule Deer**

One of the original goals of the MDWG was to provide ideas and information needs for researchers to help them prioritize their research. The MDWG members in attendance and guests brainstormed a list of ideas that we felt were important. They are not in priority order, but represent ideas of what meeting attendees felt were the most important issues facing mule deer managers today.

- Impacts of Energy Development.
- Adenovirus and lice in deer.
- Evaluation of habitat mitigation effectiveness.
- Evaluation of success of habitat treatment (possibility of looking at digestible energy for deer and work at the nutritional level).
- Deforestation due to insect infestation.
- Ecological relationships between mule deer and their habitat (nutritional condition and reproductive success).
- Source-sink dynamics between irrigated agricultural fields and adjacent native uplands.
- Better understanding of migratory strategies, energetic consequences, and population level effect.
- Better knowledge of specific migratory corridors.
- Better knowledge of health status and disease incidence.

### **Miscellaneous**

- [www.muledeerworkinggroup.com](http://www.muledeerworkinggroup.com) is updated and has information about the Mule Deer Working Group as well as all products we have produced.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

The MDWG will meet in conjunction with the Mule Deer Foundation convention in Salt Lake City February 2-6, 2011. We will also meet in conjunction with the Deer/Elk Workshop at Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort (Santa Ana Pueblo) just north of Albuquerque, NM on May 16, 2011, 1-5pm).

*“Mule Deer Working Group Purpose: “To find solutions to our common mule deer management problems and to optimize cooperative research and management in the Western states and provinces.”*