



# WAFWA

## MULE DEER WORKING GROUP DIRECTORS REPORT

Hilton Waikoloa, Hawaii  
July 23 & 24, 2012, 1-5pm

Chair – Jim Heffelfinger, Regional Game Specialist,  
Arizona Game and Fish Department

### **Attendees**

Jim Heffelfinger, Chair (AZ), Jim Karpowitz, Director Sponsor (UT), Tony Wasley (NV), Jim Rammakka (BLM), Jack Robb (NV), Miles Moretti (MDF), Daniel Olson (UT State), Shane DeMattos (HI), Lindsey Ibara (HI), Tim McCoy (NE), Kevin Bunnell (UT), Neil Thagard (TRCP).

### **Welcome and Introductions**

The current group member list was distributed and updated with current contact information.

### **Managing Deer-Vehicle Collisions**

The Mule Deer Working Group (MDWG) was given a presentation by Daniel Olson to help kick-start the latest document we will be working on. Daniel Olson, a Ph.D. student at Utah State University, has been working on project to examine how roads are affecting mule deer in Utah. Roads are becoming an increasing important issue in Utah and elsewhere because traffic volumes have almost doubled in the past twenty years. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources identified vehicle-related mortality as one of the biggest unknown factors affecting deer populations in the state. The objective of Dan's study was to put into perspective the overall impact that roads are having on deer. With the use of GPS collars and traditional VHS collars they gathered a tremendous amount of information to help determine the impact of roads on deer mortality and movements.

One of the most interesting outcomes of this research is the development of a smartphone application that will allow individuals to report mule deer or other wildlife carcasses that are observed on the roads. The app automatically generates spatial coordinates using the smartphone's GPS and users can enter information on species, sex, and age class through dropdown menus. The data are transferred via a 3G connection to a geo-database, where the locations are mapped on the reporting system website. On the website, carcass locations are overlaid on high-resolution satellite imagery depicting road networks, topography, wildlife fencing, wildlife crossing, and other relevant information. The reporting system is revolutionizing the way wildlife-vehicle collision data are collected and used in Utah and is making the task of addressing the issue of deer-vehicle collisions much more convenient and easy for mule deer managers.

### **Mule Deer & Highways Handbook**

The MDWG is working on a document that will inform practitioners about this increasingly important issue, give an overview of the research that's been done, and provide suggested

solutions. There is a lot of new information available in widely scattered documents that are hard for those working on the issue to know about and understand it all. Our handbook will focus on pre-planning, implementation of solutions, and important post-project monitoring. We have an outline that has been vetted among the leading professionals in the country who are working on this issue and the MDWG currently finalizing the outline based on their input. Before the mid-winter meeting we will start assigning coauthors to various sections. We will be enlisting the leading experts to help us write this.

### **2013 Workshop and Wallmo Award Committee**

The 2013 workshop will be hosted by the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks in Missoula May 7-10, 2013. Heffelfinger has been in contact with Justin and he was provided the transition document the MDWG developed last year. Darrel Weybright (NM) will serve as the Wallmo Award Chair for 2013 and already has the Wallmo Award files in his possession. The MDWG discussed and developed suggestions for special session topics at the 2013 workshop. The proceedings for the 2009 (WA) and the 2011 (NM) deer/elk workshops have just been received from the printer in the last few weeks and are now being mailed to all participants of those 2 workshops.

### **Website Update**

Jim Heffelfinger has updated the website ([www.muledeerworkinggroup.com](http://www.muledeerworkinggroup.com)) with the latest 2 publications and the new Deer/Elk Proceedings (2009 & 2011) that just became available in recent weeks. Also, the member list and status of various products has been updated. A new webpage was added for the Deer/Elk Workshop since that is not always easy to locate because the sponsorship moves from host agency to agency. Our website will provide a portal for interested people to go to and find the latest information. The MDWG website simply links to the current host agency website so that when updates are made to the workshop information, our access point will always be updated.

### **Rangewide Status of Mule Deer**

Gerald Kuzyk (BC) assembled a current and updated status report for mule and black-tailed deer in each WAFWA state and province to give people a good overview of how this species is faring throughout its range. This update was shared with the MDWG at the meeting and is available to directors and others at the business meeting. Additionally, this document in PDF form will be posted in the MDWG website to help inform the public and should be a very useful document to refer people to when we get these questions about the bigger picture of mule deer status.

### **Research Priorities**

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 reviewed a new prioritized list of research priorities. This is a list of overall priority ranking of what the leading mule deer biologists in the West feel are the most pressing research needs. Tony Wasley (NV) and Lloyd Fox (KS) used an on-line application to query MDWG members and others in a way that can be reported by ecoregion. This list will be posted on the MDWG website so researchers can find it and so it can be referenced.

Overall, the 3 most pressing research needs were: 1) Impacts of Energy Development, 2) Ecological relationships between mule deer and their habitat (nutritional condition and reproductive success), and 3) Evaluation of success of habitat treatment (possibility of looking at digestible energy for deer and work at the nutritional level).

## **Mule Deer Fact Sheets**

At the last MDWG meeting we reviewed, edited, and expanded the list of potential topics to write about as “Fact Sheets.” These will be single page documents that are easy to read, free of jargon, and pleasing to the eye. Our idea is to have a concise nugget of information that can be used and distributed at sportsman’s expos or public meetings that help get our science-based message to the public on complex issues we seem to always field questions about. We agreed to start with what we thought were the highest priority issues and we have 4 drafts available at this meeting. These drafts are very preliminary, but the MDWG has always shared their products with the directors at early stages to allow for comments and direction from the ground up as we develop these written products. These drafts are not for distribution, and are currently being reviewed by the state/provincial representatives to the MDWG to assure each agency has the opportunity to provide pertinent technical information and review. The 4 Fact Sheets we now have in draft form are: 1) Winter feeding, 2) Antler restrictions, 3) Predation, and 4) Highway mortality, crossing, and movement. A 5th draft Fact Sheet on “Carrying Capacity” is nearly complete as well. These 5 will be finalized and ready for final approval and publication at the mid-winter meeting.

## **TWS Wildlife Professional article**

The MDWG decided to produce an article for the Wildlife Professional (TWS) highlighting the collaborative work done by the MDWG and the products that are available. The TWS staff was interested and Anis Aoude (UT) produced a first draft that the MDWG is reviewing now. This will be one more way we can highlight the information that is available to mule deer and habitat managers.

## **Tracking use of our publications**

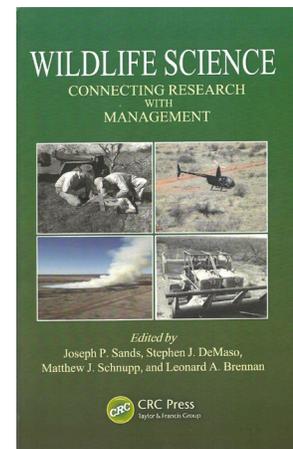
We have talked in the past about how to track the use of our MDWG documents by other people. We discovered software “Google Scholar” that tracks how many times our publications are cited in other works. When you click on the number of cites it will also show you where it is being cited. We will report this trend of usage at the summer WAFWA meetings to document use of this information. The number of citations should continue to increase if we are keeping these in front of academia and federal agencies.

## **MDWG Highlighted**

The MDWG was showcased in a book Chapter on bridging the gap between research and management published this summer by CRC Press. The chapter in “*Wildlife Science: connecting research with management*” highlights the continuing work of the MDWG as an example of bringing the latest research into everyday management by summarizing it and presenting it in a form that is easily used.

## **Reseeding Guidance**

Another project the MDWG is starting is a guide to seeding mixes by ecoregion. Seed mixes are sometimes selected more for emergency soil stabilization than for wildlife benefit. There are probably opportunities to increase the value of these mixes for mule deer and other wildlife without jeopardizing the ability to stabilize the soil. This may help suppliers of native seed decide what they should be growing and supplying to agencies.



### **FY2014 Federal Budget Priorities**

- Maintain Federal Agency budgets so they can implement the North American Mule Deer Conservation Plan to include the use of prescribed and wildland fire, restoring aspen communities throughout the West, and adapting to climate change and energy development.
- Maintain funding in the Farm Bill to the NRCS and Farm Services Administration to provide landowner incentives to implement the strategies of the North American Mule Deer Conservation Plan.
- Maintain funding for wildlife crossings included in the Transportation Bill.

*“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.”*