



MULE DEER WORKING GROUP DIRECTORS REPORT



July 9, 2017 (1-5pm) Vail, CO
Chair – Jim Heffelfinger, Arizona Game and Fish Department

Attendees

46 attendees

- 21 from WAFWA member agencies (5 actual MDWG reps & 4 Commissioners)
- Others: USFWS, BLM, USFS, Tribal, WMI, MDF, BCHA, USDA, NWF, Legal and Academia

Miscellaneous and Membership

- We met at the recent Deer/Elk Workshop in Sun Valley, ID in May. There was consensus among participants that Idaho hosted one of the best workshops in recent memory.
- We thank Greg Sheehan for his director sponsorship, and with his departure the MDWG is in need of a Director Sponsor.
- An updated MDWG member contact list was distributed. The MDWG welcomes new members Dean Waltee (MT) and Levi Jasper (KS). We thank Erik Bartholomew for his representation on behalf of OK and wish him luck on his new job in ID. The OK rep position will be filled when they replace Erik.
- Miles Moretti gave the MDWG an update on the stewardship initiative – they are making good progress. They are now filling a regional director vacancy. MDF raised around \$2 million with special tags and 93% of those funds went back to the states. 2018 Expo will be Feb 8-11, 2018 and the MDWG meeting is Wednesday Feb 7th. All participating states/provinces will have one booth to give hunters a single place to talk to agencies because that worked well last year.
- The MDWG discussed the need for a full day meeting next year so we can be more productive while we are gathered together. We have too many things to discuss to fit in a 4-hour time slot.
- The MDWG website was updated with new members, past members and collaborators, accomplishments page, 2017 Wallmo Award recipient (Mark Hurley), new 2019 Wallmo Award Chairman (Orrin Duvuvuei, NM), and the last Deer/Elk Workshop Proceedings. The WAFWA staff are doing a great job getting the website updated fast when asked.
- Orrin Duvuvuei (NM) wrote a chapter for an upcoming Boone and Crockett Book on the purpose and history of the MDWG and also the factors affecting mule deer conservation.
- Craig White and Jim Heffelfinger led the compilation of state and provincial black-tailed and mule deer status updates. This document has been done annually for 6 years and has been very useful in concisely communicating the status of our herds rangewide. This document is on the website.

- The MDWG approved the 2016 meeting minutes (motion made by Daryl L and seconded by Andy H. Passed unanimously.)
- The 2019 Deer/Elk Workshop will be in Alpine Texas in late May.

Rangewide Survival Analysis Update

Paul Lukacs (UofMT) reported on the status of our collaborative effort to pull together radiotelemetry information into a rangewide black-tailed and mule deer survival analysis. Paul Lukacs and Josh Nowak are still in the process of collecting and sorting through data from agencies. Preliminary results will be presented at the next MDWG meeting in February. They are hoping to have all data collected by October 2017. Josh has been building some models to help with the analyses.

Reseeding Guidance Document Update

Ashley Green (UT) is leading a collaborative effort to assemble a document to serve as a guideline to reseeding habitat that is beneficial to mule deer and blacktails. This document is being written by subject experts to guide practitioners on the ground in cases of habitat restoration after disturbance and habitat improvement projects. This project was delayed in the past because of personnel turnover in the Habitat Section, but he has recommitted his staff and is in contact with external coauthors to get the rest of the chapters in and start editing. Ashley expects to have a first draft by the end of September. This would be a good product to provide agencies when dealing with fires. We may create a Fact Sheet on this topic when we have the basic message solidified. When we have a draft, we will touch base with other WAFWA committees such as the Habitat Committee and Invasive species as well as external groups involved in habitat restoration and invasive species.

Miles Moretti said that he is getting a lot of questions from the public about what to plant for mule deer in food plots. Miles asked that the MDWG discuss this at the next meeting to see what agencies are doing now in their plantings and whether this should be part of this document.

Mule Deer Fact Sheet Status

We now have 22 Fact Sheets completed and available on our website as PDFs that can be downloaded and shared. We have 3 first-draft Fact Sheets available at this meeting for review and a fourth in outline form. These 4 have not been reviewed by the MDWG yet (they are reviewing them now), but as always, we like to provide our products at the earliest opportunity to give directors and others a chance to guide the development of the document from the start. Comments by July 30 would be most useful – send edits/suggestions to Jim Heffelfinger (jheffelfinger@azgfd.gov) and he will distribute to the lead authors.

Draft Fact Sheets undergoing internal review

- **WT x MD Ecological Interactions (Andy Lindbloom)**
- **Trophy vs. Opportunity (Lutz/Holland)**
- **Encountering Mule Deer Fawns (Brock McMillian/Justin Shannon)**

In outline form

- **Water Development (Shannon/Larsen/Rosenstock)**
- Harvest data reporting (Don Whittaker)
- WT x MD Hybridization (Jim Heffelfinger)

Future Fact Sheets (First Draft by February meeting)

- Economic Contributions (Toby Boudreau)
- Antler Development (Jim Heffelfinger)
- Population Management & Objectives (Lutz, Orrin, Holland)
- Aerial Inventory: a necessary Management Tool (Shannon/Holland/White)
- Feral Horses and Burros (Daryl Lutz/Mike Cox)

New Mule Deer Book

The MDWG discussed the draft outline for a new comprehensive book on mule deer ecology and conservation. The “Wallmo” book was published 37 years ago and there is a need for an updated reference book on this species. We discussed adding a chapter that captures policy, management authority, and funding for mule deer management and conservation with an emphasis on the foundational North American Model. The outline will be finalized in the next month and a proposal submitted to Johns Hopkins University Press by the end of September.

Forum Series on Wildlife Migration Science, Policy, & Management

The purpose is to provide guidance, resources, analysis tools and examples to states in an effort to better identify and document migration and movement corridors. One goal is to use the data to better inform policy at a landscape level. We are planning a series of forums to understand the best way to collect and analyze movement data to maximize its usefulness. However, we also need to develop the best way to use these data to inform policy for the conservation of mule deer and other big game. Oregon, Washington, and California will take part in the first forum in October 2017 to work through the details of collecting, analyzing and storing movement data. After this forum, we will see if changes to the forum concept are needed and plan others to reach out to other interested states and provinces. The North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference may be a good forum to have the policy discussion with decision makers from state, provincial, and federal agencies. The MDWG discussion highlighted the need to include the Dept of Transportations, tribal, private landowners, energy development companies, and other entities. Western Governors recent resolution also supports an increased use of state-gathered data in federal land management decisions. The planning for the 2018 North American may be too far along, so the next one in Denver in 2019 might be the right timing and a central location. If many states have their data analyzed, visualized, and stored in a consistent format this would be extremely useful for the next step to work with policy makers. PEW Charitable Trust will be able to supplement funding for travel to forums if that is a barrier to participation.

Potential groupings of states for future forums:

- Wyoming, Colorado* (Fort Collins), New Mexico, Texas
- Utah, Arizona, Nevada* (Mesquite)
- Idaho, Montana
- Great Plains States

Department of Transportation Summits

Colorado held a summit to discuss partnering and corridor protection. This was an important summit that was a culmination of years of planning. CDOT is supportive of building crossing structures as roads are improved, widened or built. When you can address public safety and saving animals everyone sees it as a win-win. Wyoming did something similar in April and identified the top 5 priority projects. The federal government is pushing for more infrastructure, so timing for these discussions is good. If possible, agencies should plan to collect ample movement data with GPS-collared deer prior, during, and after the under/overpasses to learn as much as we can about their effectiveness. Agencies are encouraged to develop relationships with their DOTs so habitat connectivity is part of the transportation planning process.

Coordinating Shed Antler Hunting Restrictions

We took the opportunity to discuss shed antler hunting restrictions to get an update on what agencies are doing and what challenges and solutions are emerging. UT closed some areas but when they saw that shifted shed hunting to the open areas they closed it statewide. Idaho saw a lot of Utah shed hunters coming into their state to shed hunt. One of Idaho's commissioners discussed the difficulties of having Utah sportsmen pour into Idaho. Colorado had an influx of Utah trucks as well, and they had emergency closures. Colorado has closures on many parts in their state and this will likely expand in the future. Wyoming has a season date closure until May 1 west of the Continental Divide on public lands - part of the language says "search for or locate" sheds which means they cannot go out in the closed season and GPS-mark sheds or pile-n-hide. It is a very heavy workload for these states to enforce. Shed hunting dogs and contests are expanding. NM, AZ, and NV don't have any regulations on shed antler gathering. We already have wildlife harassment laws on the books that could be used in many circumstances. Some states are discussing a license to collect sheds.

BLM Webinar for Mule Deer

We are also continuing to plan for a BLM mule deer webinar to describe mule deer issues and showcase the MDWG products that are available to biologists. USFS will take part and the webcast would reside on the internet for anyone to watch at any time. The webinar would be 45 minutes of presentation and 15 minutes of questions. We still need to plan out details for this and will continue to work with Linda Cardenas (BLM) and Steve Belinda (MDF). On a related note, MDF is planning a series of podcasts that will be short (~10 minutes) and each would highlight a fact sheet. This would deliver our Fact Sheet information in a short audio format.

Conducting Aerial Surveys

Brian Wakeling (NV) asked for a short discussion of how agencies are physically collecting their survey information during surveys. Some states have moved to tablets or pads to collect data electronically and then download the data directly into a database. Different agencies are using different methods:

- Online – NM (elk)
- Paper – NM (deer), UT (looking to update this), ID.

- Digital Voice Recorder and GPS transcribed later – CO,
- Cybertracker and voice recording – TX, WY
- Ipads – AZ

Joint meeting with Wildlife Health Committee to discuss CWD management in free-ranging populations

We joined our concurrent meetings to discuss CWD management at the population level.

Recent trends (Mary Wood, Mike Miller)

- It is suspected that CWD can influence age structure of bucks if mature bucks are more susceptible and also that CWD is impacting population abundance in Wyoming. There is not a captive cervid industry in Wyoming. Elk prevalence rates are much lower than deer (25% deer and 6% elk in the same area).
- In Colorado, >50% of deer units and 33% of elk units have CWD. Only 2% of harvested animals are submitted for testing. High B:D ratios and older age structure may exacerbate CWD problems.

Potential management experiment approaches

- A group of people working with CWD in the US and Canada crafted a document of suggested protocols for management experiments to determine the effects of different harvest management scenarios on prevalence and spread of CWD. Mary Wood (WY) was lead author. This draft document was shared with the MDWG and we discussed it. We will give the MDWG and the Wildlife Health Committee a chance to review it over the next few months and may bring it back to the directors at the mid-winter for support.
- Management actions that may be taken to reduce CWD:
 - Reduce artificial points of host congregation (food, mineral, water points)
 - Increase male harvest, and shift harvest to post rut
 - Target late fall or winter harvest on disease foci to maximize removal of infected animals

Summary document about CWD management strategies

- The MDWG was planning to put together some sort of summary document to help agency decision makers by informing them what has been tried and what has and has not worked. We discussed this with the Wildlife Health Committee and learned that there are several very good summary documents recently published that do a good job documenting the history of CWD, current status, and what management practices have been tried. We also learned that AFWA is developing a document of best management practices, and that seems to be exactly what we were thinking of. Instead of duplicate their efforts, the MDWG will contribute to that collaboratively.
- If you are interested in the latest information on CWD, Steve Rinella recently posted an episode of the MeatEater podcast that provided a great overview (with details) of the CWD issue currently. It is an interview with Bryan Richards (the CWD Project Leader at the USGS National Wildlife Health Center) and he covers all facets of the issue. It is definitely worth the listen to get up to speed on the latest.
<http://www.stitcher.com/podcast/meateater-podcast-with-steven-rinella-hunting-fishing-wildlife/e/50633578>