



MULE DEER WORKING GROUP DIRECTORS REPORT



January 5, 2019 ~ Tucson, AZ
Chair – Jim Heffelfinger, Arizona Game and Fish Department

Mule Deer Fact Sheet Status

We now have 28 Fact Sheets completed and available on our website as PDFs that can be downloaded and shared. We have 3 Final Draft Fact Sheets that we are asking for approval to publish with the approval of this report. These Fact Sheets were distributed to directors at the summer meeting in Eugene for preliminary review. An additional first draft Fact Sheet on “Historical and Current Mule Deer Abundance” is also provided here for a “first look” and is in the first round of MDWG review. 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.

Final Fact Sheets for approval at this meeting (distributed in color)

- Assessing Mule Deer Harvest
- White-tailed x Mule Deer Hybridization
- Mule Deer and Wild/Feral Horses and Burros

Draft Fact Sheets undergoing internal review

- Economic Contributions of Mule Deer
- Historical and Current Mule Deer Abundance (distributed here in black & white)

Short videos for social media

Plans are being made to film short (60 sec) videos at our next meeting in Salt Lake City to cover important topics from our publications, especially the fact sheets. UTDWR will have their A/V people at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo in February to discuss video messaging with the MDWG and to record some videos to start this project off.

Reseeding Guidance Document Update

The MDWG continues to work with Ashley Green and his staff to compile a document to give practitioners some guidance on habitat improvement and restoration. Personnel changes have slowed forward progress (all 5 people that started to work on it are in different positions now), but we are committed to see this through. All chapters have authors assigned and half have first drafts. At the last meeting we decided to add a chapter on building restoration partnerships. Covy Jones (UT) is working on this chapter and will be reaching out to other agencies for partnership examples to include. When we have a draft it will be reviewed by the WAFWA Habitat and Invasive Species committees and external groups involved in habitat restoration.

Rangewide Survival Analysis Update

Our ongoing rangewide mule deer survival analysis collaboration with Paul Lukacs and Josh Nowak (UofMT) is still in the data gathering phase. This effort will pull together radiotelemetry information into a rangewide black-tailed and mule deer survival analysis. Paul Lukacs has done preliminary analyses examining implications of sample size and process variation on model selection. Colorado has millions of dollars invested in the collar data they collected and would like to analyze their data and publish some of it before they participate in the range-wide survival analysis. Oregon is in a similar situation so the full analysis will have to wait for those important datasets.

Wildlife Movement and Migration Workshops

As presented in the Director's Forum, these workshops were hosted to provide guidance, resources, analysis tools and examples to states in an effort to better identify and document movement and migration corridors. The workshops consisted of a morning of presentations and discussion about migration research being done (Matt Kauffman), tools available for analyses (Hall Sawyer), migration policies that exist (Federal partners), and an interactive Skype session with Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Scott Smith and Doug Brimeyer). The afternoon was spent with some attendees working with their own datasets and the new "Migration Mapper" software and others taking part in a focus group discussion on policy. On the morning of Day 2, all attendees reconvened to discuss how to maximize the value of CHAT (Critical Habitat Assessment Tool) to all users and how to best use the growing mass of ungulate movement data to inform policy at the state and federal level. This close collaboration between WAFWA CHAT and the MDWG furthers the goals of WAFWA and supports the Western Governors resolution for an increased use of state-gathered data in federal land management decisions. The 4 Wildlife Movement and Migration Workshops were held in:

- Eugene, OR (Oregon, Washington, California)
- Laramie, WY (Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, West Texas)
- Mesquite, NV (Utah, Arizona, Nevada)
- Bozeman, MT (Alaska, Idaho, Montana)

The 4 workshops were attended by 262 attendees (110 of whom completed the migration mapper training) from 13 states, including all 11 mentioned in the SO3362.

Implementation of Secretarial Order 3362

Using the information received from each of the individual states and any relevant DOI/USDA information, regional liaisons working with Casey Stemler and state representatives developed individual state action plans. These plans were approved by all respective state directors in October. The original idea behind the state plans was to have a document that would create focus, allow partnership development, and ultimately serve as the tool to accomplish conservation.

Funds were made available to the states in a noncompetitive process so that each state listed in the SO3362 received an average of \$300,000 to implement their highest priority research needs. Through the implementation of this Order, DOI has provided almost \$3

million to the states in this process. Of these funds, \$2.4 million are from the FWS and \$525K from the BLM. In addition, Casey worked with USGS to shift some \$300,000 of funding toward supporting the states in their mapping needs (supporting positions to do the work). Further, Matt Kauffman from USGS (WY Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and WY Migration Initiative) is coordinating a Corridor Mapping Team that will be made up of state agency staff or positions that will work directly with state agencies to help identify and analyze migration and winter habitats.

On the habitat side of the equation, Casey worked with NFWF to develop a migration corridor and winter range grant program. Funding for the first year of this program came from BLM, FWS, and ConocoPhillips. They plan to have another RFP late in 2019, so they are looking to expand and grow the amount of funding for the next round. The RFP for this first opportunity for grants is Jan 10, 2019. The Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has set aside \$1.5 million annually to support private land habitat conservation activities within state wildlife agency defined priority corridors or winter range areas. There are federal programmatic funding available for implementation of this Order as well. For example, BLM state offices are very interested in understanding how they can focus BLM habitat funding and efforts to benefit the priority areas. Finally, each of the 11 state wildlife agencies was provided the opportunity to either update or develop state-BLM MOUs.

Responses from the 11 western states clearly showed that highways are a risk/threat across the west. The transportation issue caught the attention of DOI and so conversations among DOI and Department of Transportation are underway. These will continue and strengthen. In late January there is a Transportation-Wildlife Workshop scheduled in Salt Lake City. Each state received an invitation. We expect the Deputy Secretary of the Interior and Deputy Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration to kick off the workshop.

Given each state received their requested research funding in FY18, DOI would like to see those projects get underway and collecting data before they consider another round of research funding. Therefore, we anticipate in FY20 DOI will entertain another round of research funding requests.

Proposal to establish a WAFWA Migration Committee or Working Group

MDWG has been the lead and liaison to keep WAFWA in the driver's seat of this issue, but movement and migration conservation is bigger than just mule deer – it's bigger than SO3362. We need to talk about establishing some kind of infrastructure to keep all this good work moving forward. At the directors meeting we discussed whether it was time for a WAFWA Migration Committee or Working Group. This idea will be further discussed at the business meeting.

Mule Deer Foundation Podcast

MDF has been airing podcast episodes since February 2018. MDF wants to mix biologists' and managers' perspective with celebrities in these podcasts. We would like to use the authors and co-authors of Fact Sheets for these podcasts and will record some of these at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo in February.

Update MDWG Energy Development Guidelines

MDWG is working on pulling together the right people and information to revise our Energy Development Guidelines published in 2011. So much new science is now available making the 2011 version outdated for making recommendations in this arena. https://www.wafwa.org/Documents%20and%20Settings/37/Site%20Documents/Working%20Groups/Mule%20Deer/Publications2/Energy_Development_Guidelines_for_Mule_Deer_2013.pdf

Summary of good and bad GPS collar experiences

The MDWG and the Wild Sheep Working Group have been discussing whether there is a need for a summary table to document recent success and failure of GPS collars in our projects. Companies don't seem to realize how problematic it is for us to have a high proportion of collars fail. Although technology is getting better, there are still high failure rates. Sometimes takes 2 or 3 iterations of technology for the companies to sort out the bugs. It would be useful to have a place that shows failure rates for various collars, but also what is working. We may all benefit from a compilation of good information in a central place. We need to highlight with the collar companies that we want quality and not quantity because the cost of the collar is not the main expense in these projects. We are drafting a short query to the states to summarize successes and failures of GPS collars to share with agency personnel.

Digital Collection of Aerial Survey Data

NV is trying to improve methods by which to conduct and record data on surveys. They would like to develop something that will give them the ability to see if they have enough data to be statistically valid while in the air without flying more than is necessary. ESRI is interested in helping develop a solution that can be used across states if the states' needs are closely aligned. Oregon, Colorado, Arizona, and a few others have moved to electronic survey recording and so the MDWG will be discussing this more at their upcoming meeting in February.

Miscellaneous

- Our next MDWG meeting is in conjunction with the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo in Salt Lake City, UT, February 13, 2019, 9a-5p.
- Big Game and Highways Workshop will be held in Salt Lake City, January 29-31, 2019. <https://sites.google.com/view/big-game-and-highways-workshop/home>
- The 2019 WAFWA Deer/Elk Workshop will be in Alpine Texas May 28-31, 2019.