

MULE DEER WORKING GROUP DIRECTORS REPORT

2021 Summer WAFWA Virtual Meeting

July 16 and 19, 2021, 1-4pm Mountain Time



Chair – Jim Heffelfinger, Arizona Game and Fish Department

Notetaker – Lucas Olson, MDF/AZGFD/USGS

Attendees: July 16 = 72, July 19 = 50

New News

- Welcome to new member Kyle Garrison who is representing Washington
- Our next MDWG meeting will be at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo in February 2022.
- Personnel Changes
 - Frank Qualman (BLM) is taking a detail working out of National Operations Center. Linda Cardenas will be taking over in Frank's absence as wildlife lead for next 3-4 Months.
 - BLM: Matt Preston will be Division Chief for next 13 months given temporary promotion and Stephanie Miller will be heading wildlife portion of things.
 - Tracy Grazia (USFS) – taking over for Brian Logan, Tracy is Brian's replacement for next two weeks.
 - Greg Hayword – Acting Wildlife Ecologist for USFS Washington Office.

Mule Deer Foundation Update

MDWG welcomed Joel Pedersen, the new President/CEO of MDF. He is a wildlife biologist by training, worked for NWTf for 22 years with roles in the conservation department and Director of Government Affairs. MDF has been a longtime supporter of WAFWA and MDWG. Partnerships with state agencies are of utmost importance to MDF. Most important partners are those with state/provincial wildlife agencies. Joel thanked MDWG for the science and information for MDF to help understand where we can be most beneficial as a partner. Value of having experts for deer in the room is fundamental to guiding work of MDF. Cooperative positions are very useful (currently have 6). They bring partners together in field so we can deliver conservation on the ground. Migration corridors and winter range initiative has been key focus for MDF. In terms of conservation delivery, MDF doesn't predict a lot of change, they will continue to focus on larger projects, landscape scale work, and stewardship agreements. MDF is planning to pull together a deer summit in conjunction with the Expo in February 2022.

Secretarial Order 3362 Status

Casey Stemler gave an update of the implementation of SO 3362 including:

- During first 2 years, FWS contributed \$6 million to support 40 research projects
- Followed up by USGS on the mapping end, providing over \$1 million to support data analysis and mapping; now all 11 states have taken advantage of this.
- On the habitat front over \$15 million spent on 166 habitat projects over 3 years.
- Over 500,000 acres and 686 miles of fencing treated/completed.
- Many agencies have good work going on with these things outside of SO3362
- Casey has 3 letters in support for the expansion, and requested improvements, to Order.
- No conclusive word where this effort is heading with the new administration but he has heard of a lot of support - countless statements that this topic is a priority.
- Casey will continue to stress that we continue to implement with states leading the way.
- There will be another NFWF grant program this year with more than \$2 million.

- August 5th the annual Request for Proposals will be announced. October 21st the full proposals are due.
- On BLM front, BLM provided \$90k to each state to support big game corridors this year. BLM is the only DOI bureau that requested big game funding in their budget.
- WAFWA Wildlife Movement and Migration Working Group web page has a site to find information on this subject <https://wafwa.org/so3362/>

Fact Sheet Status

The 4 fact sheets approved at mid-winter January 2021 are posted on the WAFWA website. MDF is doing new layouts and working with new publisher. MDF has covered the bill to do layout of fact sheets free. MDWG is currently preparing a fact sheet on the use of trail cameras, with upcoming plans to produce fact sheets on: Role of Hunters in Managing CWD, Economic Contributions of Mule Deer, Buck Hunting and Deer Abundance, and Technology and Management.

Re seeding Guidance Document Review

This document is nearing completion and will be finalized for hopeful approval at the mid-winter WAFWA meeting in January 2022. It has been reviewed by MDWG and some other experts and will next go to external review among federal land management agencies. This is going to be a great resource for on-the-ground managers to give the best science on re seeding with mule deer in mind. There will be an appendix with lists of preferred forage plants in each of the 7 ecoregions of North America. This will be published as a PDF with lots of links to other useful resources.

2021 Deer/Elk Workshop

Will be held Aug 3-4, 2021. Great line-up of talks and there will be published proceedings. A business meeting at the Workshop will select the next host agency and make sure the current host (CA) knows the reporting requirements to WAFWA. California has done a great job organizing this one.

Wallmo Award Update

Will be awarded at the Deer and Elk Workshop August 4th. We had very good candidates for the Award which made for a hard decision among committee members to select a winner.

ESRI Applications demonstration

Mike Bialousz, from the ESRI state government team is focused on environment and natural resources. ESRI has been working with NDOW for an app to use on aerial wildlife surveys. It is ready to be launched within the next month or so and will improve data collection processes. Historically data collection required a lot of post-processing for biologists and staff and data was not structured for centralized storage, resulting in many different spreadsheets. Comparisons among years or between areas required substantial data massaging. The goal of this effort was to continue to use a device/technology that was as easy as, or easier, to use than the current process during data collection. Solution was to use mobile and cloud technology to reduce or eliminate post processing, improve data storage, and streamline summaries, while maintaining ease-of-use.

Agency and Public Apps with CWD information

Matt Dunfee (WMI) has been working on a project for 3 years to map CWD regulation and policy information in a way that the public and/or agencies can use. It has been difficult to get accurate, timely, updated information. There are a handful of public-facing

apps and agency-only apps. Matt highlighted: CWD Location Map, Transport regulations maps, and CWD Hunting Regulations. Everything in this system was driven by agencies – will be reviewed by agencies before release to the public. Behind all of this is a data editing app. State leads can at any time access data and update in real time. State has total control of editing capability. Members of MDWG can take a look at it and provide feedback before launch.

CWD Round Robin Updates

Members and guests presented a brief (5min) update on CWD activities in their jurisdiction (prevalence rates, testing plans, research, etc.). We were fortunate to have in attendance Bryan Richards (Emerging Disease Coordinator, DOI Liaison to DHS/CWMD/NBIC, USGS National Wildlife Health Center) to answer questions and give an update.

General Policy Update by Ed Arnett (TRCP)

- Wildlife Crossings: This has been moving throughout different bills since our ungulates and highways workshop. Trying to get dedicated funding into the next highway bill and the next bill has this language. Good news is Senate has moved out of committee for \$350 million for a 5-year project, the House through the INVEST in America Act has bumped it up to \$450 million. House bill in previous iterations had opt out clause which has been removed. Looking at pilot grant program but house and senate versions need to be resolved.
- INVEST in America Act has number of things, including funding, and has passed and now goes on to senate, most likely going to land on infrastructure package. The senate is now in discussion on this, and there are thoughts that Schumer might move to vote on Wednesday on a bipartisan package.
- Wildlife Corridors Act: language is still embedded in INVEST in America Act on the House side. They don't see a path in senate for that exact language. Big sticking point is the federal designation process of corridors.
- SO 3362: New administration definitely interested in incorporating new species. TRCP supports keeping as is to not dilute money/efforts.
- DOI rescinded old policy: compensatory mitigation. It's up in the air whether they can require compensatory mitigation.
- CWD: community has been pushing on CWD. Representative Kind and Thompson close to a piece of CWD legislation for funding and research.

2021 Rangewide Status of Black-tailed and Mule deer

Now available on the WAFWA website