

Deer Goal-Setting Workshop Summary – 2020

The DNR sets deer population goals – how much of an increase or decrease is desired in a deer population in a particular deer permit area – as part of managing the state’s wild deer herd. The DNR began its statewide goal-setting process again in 2020. The process will take four years, with a separate group of blocks addressed annually.

Overview of 2020 process

The first year (2020) focused on the following blocks in the northwestern and western parts of the state, which include the following deer permit areas:



Goal block	DPAs	Workshop location	Workshop 1: ideas	Workshop 2: goals	Total attendance
Agassiz-Littlefork	101, 103, 105, 108, 110, 111, 114	International Falls	Jan. 29	Feb. 27	43
Northwest Parkland-Prairie	201, 203, 208, 209, 256, 257, 260, 261, 263, 264, 267, 268	Thief River Falls	Jan. 30	Feb. 26	45
West Central Prairie	262, 265, 266, 269, 270, 271, 272, 297	Moorhead	Jan. 21	Feb. 24	5
Central Hills Prairie	213, 214, 215, 218, 239, 240, 273, 276, 277	Alexandria	Jan. 22	Feb. 25	81

Notes from Workshop 1

The following is a summary of the key issues of interest and priorities to guide management of the deer population discussed during the deer goal-setting workshops listed above. During workshop 1, members of the public had an opportunity to discuss the following topics in small groups, with DNR staff present to answer questions and take notes.



Fig. 1 Roundtable discussions held during workshops

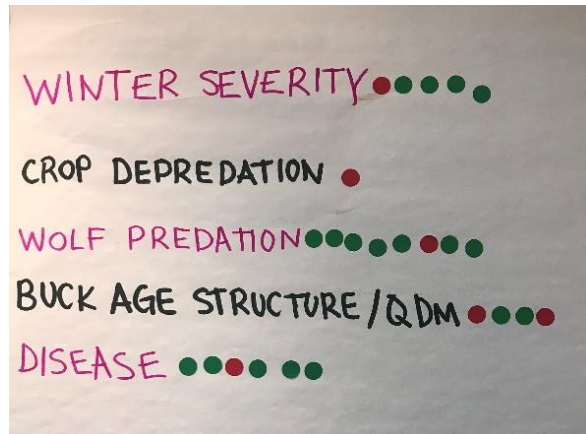


Fig. 2 Attendees identified priority topics to discuss

Chronic wasting disease (CWD)

The spread of chronic wasting disease was a concern for many meeting participants. People expressed concerns about the risk of farmed deer having CWD and spreading it to wild herds, putting the wild deer population, and potentially human, health at risk. Some felt that the DNR or Board of Animal Health should be consistently enforcing all farmed animal/carcass movement restrictions as well as making sure deer farmers keep their facilities in proper condition. Hunters expressed frustration with the spread of CWD and want Minnesota to do a better job addressing it than other states have to-date. Participants are concerned that as deer populations increase, CWD becomes a greater concern.

Crop damage

In agricultural areas and forest/agricultural transition zones, crop damage was a significant topic of discussion. Many participants cited the need to increase overall deer harvest (in particular, antlerless deer harvest), in order to reduce damage they identified as severe. Depredation permits would be helpful for mitigating crop damage; however, participants cited the need for the DNR to improve the consistency and speed for issuing these permits. Some participants expressed concern that absentee landowners may only hunt for bucks, perpetuating high doe populations. Participants also wanted landowners to work and interact with one another to find a better solution for managing deer numbers to reduce crop damage. However, a few participants stated crop depredation is minimal.

Habitat

Participants were interested in habitat enhancement that could relieve depredation pressure on agriculture, suggestions included: woodlot management to improve browse generation, reduction of invasive species, and management to provide better winter cover. People also discussed using buffer crops to protect yields. Participants felt the DNR should work to remove barriers (such as the state's insurance minimum for contractors) for participating in habitat management projects, like shearing, on wildlife management areas or other state lands. In northern Minnesota, local deer organizations reported success in working with the timber industry on creating and seeding wildlife openings that provide feeding/and thermal refuges. Meeting participants emphasized managing the forest for a mixture of tree species and ages. Some participants said that insufficient wintering habitat results in deer clustering where they can find food (e.g., agricultural fields, residential areas), which participants also suggested could increase their vulnerability to wolves. It was also suggested that the rise in timber harvest has destroyed deer habitat and has contributed deer population declines in certain areas. Some participants explained that their permit areas simply do not have enough habitat to sustain sufficient populations. Lastly, participants stated that hunter walking trails need increased maintenance.

Regulations/licenses

Meeting participants were interested in lengthening the deer-hunting season, expanding rifle and crossbow opportunities, and providing the opportunity to hunt over multiple seasons with one license. Some people expressed concern that license-processing costs are too high. There were also concerns about firearm season being set around the same time as rutting season. Some participants want the DNR to consider "earn a buck" (which would require antlerless harvest before antlered harvest) or similar regulations in agricultural areas of western and west central Minnesota. Participants also recommended to earn a buck on private land to reduce the high number of deer. Support for party hunting (i.e., using another hunter's tag on your deer) was mixed, some asked to eliminate buck cross-tagging and other participants encouraged party hunting to increase deer harvest. Some participants want the DNR to collect information on buck age structure at harvest and to make that information available. Some participants requested cheaper licenses and bonus tags.

Winter severity

In the western and west-central goal blocks, participants shared that winter severity rarely adversely affects populations. In the northern goal blocks, participants said that colder winters and deep/ice-crusted snow keeps deer populations from rebounding adequately from predation and other pressures. Managing for adequate winter cover, explained above, was also a concern; participants from some areas said that inadequate cover combined with a severe winter can devastate a local population. Some participants are asking to what extent winter severity affects agricultural deer populations compared to forested deer populations.

Wolves

Meeting participants reported increasing wolf populations, especially since 2014. Many feel the wolf population is higher than reported by the DNR and needs to be managed for a stable or downward population trend. Participants stated that wolves predate heavily on deer populations, especially on fawns, as well as on cattle and

sheep. Some people said they enjoy seeing the occasional wolf and value them as part of the ecosystem, but feel they are having too negative an impact on deer. Participants said that food plots and other habitat management that attracts deer in turn attracts wolves, increasing predation and safety concerns for some hunters and landowners.

Other issues

Meeting participants said that encouraging youth to hunt deer is an important aspect of deer management, and that lack of interest among young people, and among hunters who drop out, can contribute to deer overpopulation. Some participants discussed boundary changes to their deer permit area.

Notes from Workshop 2

During workshop 2 participants had the opportunity to provide input on the desired direction and magnitude of change in deer populations in specific DPAs in each goal block. Big Game Program Leader Barb Keller presented a decision tool table, which included the various types of input and context for each DPA in the goal block.

The table included information from the following sources:

- Deer Population Trends (e.g., estimated densities)
- Local Manager Context (brief summary of landscape and management)
- Results from the 2014 Hunter and Landowner Surveys
- Results from the 2020 online deer population survey
- The DNR's draft recommendation at the time of the workshops



Figure 3. Participants provided feedback by placing post-it notes by DPA under different magnitudes of recommended changes.



Figure 4. (Left) Participants discuss results of the input activity in a small group.

Figure 5. (Right) Small group discussions at a goal-setting workshop.

Results

Agassiz-Littlefork Goal Block (International Falls)

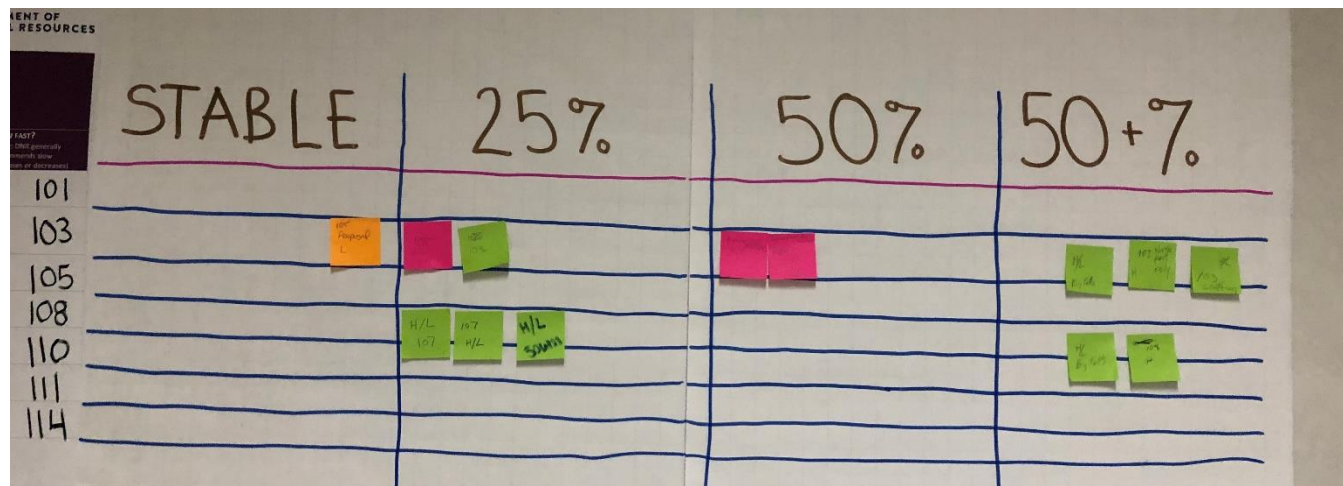


Figure 6. Participants indicated preferred levels of population change for DPAs. Green = increase, orange = stable, and red = decrease. For example, 2 individuals suggested a 50% population decrease in 103 whereas 3 individuals suggested >50% increase for DPA 103 in this example.

Public Input Results

DPA	PUBLIC INPUT FROM WORKSHOPS	SHOULD DEER POPULATIONS INCREASE OR DECREASE? (DNR recommendation presented at Workshop 2)
101	↗ increase slightly overall	↗ increase slightly or significantly
103	↗ increase slightly overall ↓ decrease significantly in agricultural areas	↗ increase slightly overall ↓ decrease significantly in agricultural areas
105	→ stable	→ stable
108	↑ increase significantly in forest	↗ increase slightly overall ↑ increase significantly in forest
110	No comments	↗ stable or increase slightly
111	↑ increase significantly	↑ increase significantly
114	No comments	↑ increase significantly

Northwest Parkland-Prairie Goal Block (Thief River Falls)

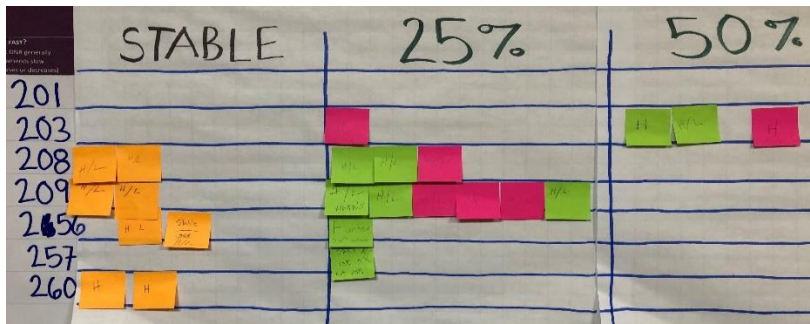


Figure 7. Flipchart input on Northwest Parkland-Prairie Goal Block

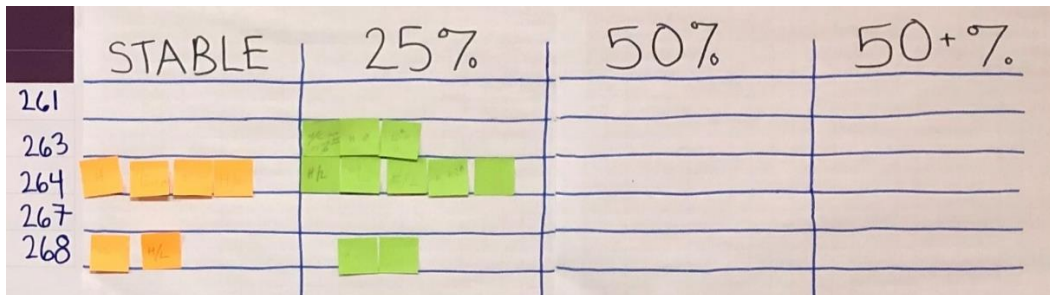


Figure 8. Flipchart input on additional DPAs in the Northwest Parkland-Prairie Goal Block

Public Input Results

DPA	PUBLIC INPUT FROM WORKSHOPS	SHOULD DEER POPULATIONS INCREASE OR DECREASE? (DNR recommendation presented at Workshop 2)
201	No comments	→ stable
203	Mixture of increase and decrease	↗ increase slightly
208	→ stable	→ stable
209	→ stable and ↗ increase slightly	→ stable
256	→ stable	→ stable
257	↗ increase slightly	→ stable
260	→ stable	→ stable
261	No comments	→ stable
263	↗ increase slightly	→ stable
264	→ stable and ↗ increase slightly	→ stable
267	No comments	→ stable
268	→ stable and ↗ increase slightly	→ stable

West Central Prairie Goal Block (Moorhead)

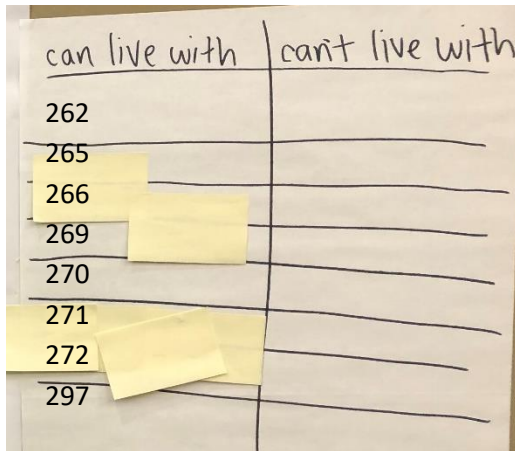


Figure 9. Flip chart input on West Central Prairie goal block. The Moorhead meeting had the fewest attendees, and simply provided input on whether or not they supported or disagreed with the DNR recommendations.

Public Input Results

DPA	PUBLIC INPUT FROM WORKSHOPS	SHOULD DEER POPULATIONS INCREASE OR DECREASE? (DNR recommendation presented at Workshop 2)
262	No comments	→ stable or slight increase
265	→ stable or slight decrease	→ stable or slight decrease
266	→ stable	→ stable
269	No comments	→ stable or slight increase
270	No comments	→ stable or slight increase
271	→ stable or slight decrease	→ stable or slight decrease
272	No comments	↗ increase slightly
297	No comments	↑ increase significantly

Central Hills Prairie Goal Block (Alexandria)

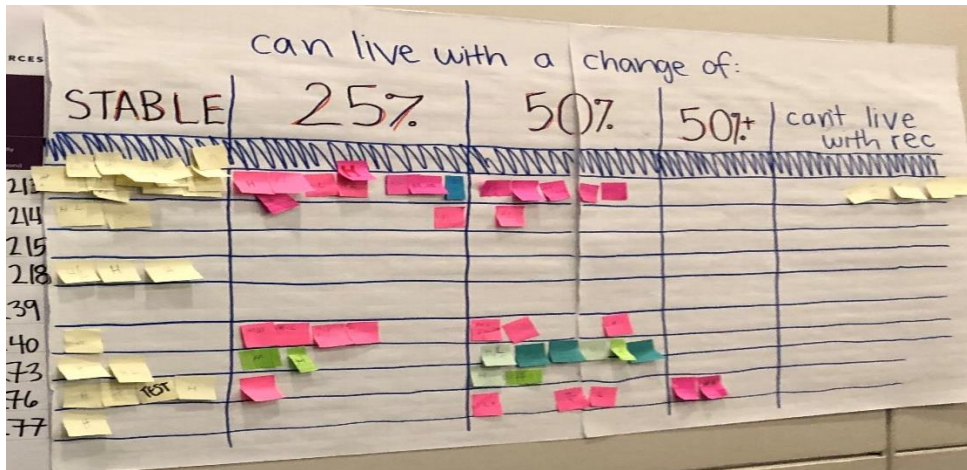


Figure 10. Flip chart input on Central Hills Prairie goal block

Public Input Results

DPA	PUBLIC INPUT FROM WORKSHOP	SHOULD DEER POPULATIONS INCREASE OR DECREASE? (DNR recommendation presented at Workshop 2)
213	→ stable or ↓ decrease	↓ decrease significantly
214	→ stable or ↓ decrease	↓ decrease significantly
215	No comments	↓ decrease significantly
218	→ stable	↘ decrease slightly
239	No comments	→ stable
240	↘ decrease slightly	↘ decrease slightly
273	↑ Increase significantly	↘ decrease slightly
276	→ stable	↓ decrease significantly
277	↓ decrease significantly	↓ decrease significantly