

# Deer Management Plan Advisory Committee Minutes

March 28, 2017

## Opening

- Katie Clower, policy and planning consultant, opened the meeting and explained the goal for this meeting: provide basic information about DNR's current work related to communication, education, public involvement and related activities; and collect committee member feedback and ideas about DNR's draft goal, objectives and strategies related to these topics.
- Check-in: name, affiliation, and any reflections you'd like to share from the public meetings/public comment period:
  - People glad DNR is reaching out to get information; people want to provide regular input, not just special meetings or times.
  - The public comment period mostly engaged hunters, especially older white males; other large segments of "the public" were not well represented.
  - Concern about animal health and adequate funding to support that.
  - Hunting is an important aspect of deer management.
  - Deer have value; need to recognize that and make funding available to manage the resource.
  - Concern about predators and habitat, particularly on public land.
  - Concerns about CWD were most pronounced where the disease has been discovered in southeast MN; there was less discussion in other parts of the state.
  - People wanted to see more deer license dollars going to directly benefit deer. It's hard to understand the way funds are allocated currently, even though more money than what's apparent goes to benefit deer.
  - Wanted to see older, larger bucks.
  - Questions about how much forestry and agriculture do/can/should influence management decisions.
  - Skepticism that participation in the planning process will make any difference.
  - Comments and concerns about impact of predators.
  - Concerns about deer abundance being too low.
  - DNR should be more transparent about deer information.

## Presentation on summary of 2017 public comment: Adam Murkowski, DNR

- Adam Murkowski presented findings from this winter's public comment period (full presentation available by request):
  - Over 1,400 comments were received via mail, email, and the online questionnaire; approximately 500 people attended one of 12 public meetings around the state.
  - Questionnaire respondents (approximately 1,270) were 94% white, 94% male, and 94% hunters. Nearly 50% were aged 45-64, and approximately 35% were aged 25-44. Zip codes indicated that respondents were well distributed around the state. Nearly all deer permit areas were represented as well, with clusters around population centers in the north-central, east-central and south-east portions of the state.

- In general, questionnaire respondents supported all of the goal statements associated with each topic area. The strongest levels of agreement were associated with the goals for Healthy Habitat and Healthy Deer.
- A full summary of public comments is available by request. Highlights include:
  - Comments about healthy deer centered on disease management, population management, and monitoring and research.
  - Comments about deer population management, monitoring and research focused on predation, population management (including decision-making processes), monitoring and research, and regional variation.
  - Comments about communications, information dissemination, public involvement, and accountability focused on public engagement, information dissemination (including technical assistance to private landowners), and transparency.
  - Comments about hunter and non-hunter satisfaction focused on specific hunting regulations, deer population age structure, R3 (hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation), and the need to reduce regulatory complexity.
  - Comments about healthy habitat focused on enhancing habitat for deer, emphasizing the importance of public access to hunting lands, biodiversity and other ecological considerations.
  - Comments about impacts of deer on other resources focused on impacts to other wildlife (especially moose), forest regeneration and timber management, agricultural depredation, deer-vehicle collisions and public health.
  - Comments about funding focused on funding sources (e.g. license fees) and funding allocation (e.g. dedicated funding for deer management, and funding for habitat, enforcement and other priorities).
  - Other comments focused on topics including: enforcement; the Deer Plan planning process; climate change; interagency coordination; and Federal, State and Tribal regulations.
- DNR will publish a summary and response to comments on the Deer Plan webpage later this spring.
- Public input will be used to inform discussion and decisions about each topic area as the committee continues its work for the remainder of the year.

### **Presentation on DNR's deer management program: Steve Merchant, DNR**

- Steve Merchant presented information about DNR's current deer management program (full presentation available by request).
  - Presentation included review of DNR's mission statement, description of the Public Trust Doctrine, historic and current ranges of white-tailed deer in Minnesota, historic data on deer harvest and firearm license sales, description of DNR's deer management decision-making processes, and Minnesota traditions related to deer hunting.
- Committee member questions/comments:

- Question on statewide deer population estimate. Steve clarified that deer population estimates are made at the deer permit area level, not statewide.
- Difficult to get people to understand that deer, while present everywhere in Minnesota, are really a local/regional resource. Their numbers, habits, habitats and impacts can't be adequately looked at statewide.
- Plan should be objective based, not operational based.
- Question about DNR's deer population model. Adam responded that DNR's population modeling is under review. Have new person on staff analyzing and considering methods.
- Questions about committee getting data for DPAs. Data is available, but would take time to gather for all 128 areas. Approach might be to focus more to define data needs.

## Deer Management Plan Approach (discussion)

- DNR proposes to address one topic each month, starting with Topic 3: Communications, information dissemination, public involvement and accountability.
  - Each meeting would include a brief review of the previous month's topic, presentations and discussions on the current topic, and a brief preview of the next month's topic.
  - November and December meetings would be used for finalization, any additional topics as needed.
- Discussion:
  - Do some summary of previous month via email leading up to each meeting, to reduce time needed at meeting to discuss this; allow more time for discussion of current topic each month.
  - Preview time at end of meeting is important, but be efficient.
  - Process may require email, conference calls, other ways of meeting if additional discussion is needed between meetings.
  - Will be time at end to assess entire plan and topics as a whole.
  - Some discussion about the order of topics; ultimately agreed to the following:
    - April: Communications, information sharing, public involvement and accountability
    - May: Healthy deer
    - June: Healthy habitat
    - July: Impacts on other resources
    - August: Hunter and non-hunter satisfaction
    - September: Deer population management, monitoring and research
    - October: Funding
    - November: TBD/Remaining topics as needed
    - December: Finalization
  - Important to keep in mind that plan is strategic and has goals, objectives and strategies for each topic. Focus first on goals, then objectives, then strategies.

## Brainstorm: Communications, information sharing, public involvement and accountability

Committee members were asked to brainstorm their objectives related to the topic of communication, information sharing, public involvement and accountability, which was broken into six sub-topics: DNR understanding of public interests; transparency; quality of DNR decision-making; ongoing public and stakeholder involvement in deer management; outreach and communication; and “other”.

For each sub-topic, objectives were listed, discussed, and prioritized. The items receiving the highest priority ratings were:

- 1. Form ongoing deer management teams**
- 2. Provide accessible, easy-to-understand, timely data**
- 3. Continue/improve hunter Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3)**
- 4. Make science-based, non-biased, number-based decisions**
- 5. Survey and/or seek input from the general public (not just hunters) regarding deer awareness, understanding and perceptions**
- 6. Conduct annual surveys of hunters**
- 7. Continue hosting public meetings and other opportunities for public input**

Many of these items focused on desires to increase transparency, build the agency’s credibility, improve the quality of agency decisions, increase public trust and support for agency decisions, make deer management more accessible and inclusive for the public, allow the public to hold the agency accountable to its goals and responsibilities, and increase engagement to sustain hunting and wildlife conservation into the future.

Other priority items included:

- Stressing the importance of localized input/information in decision-making
- Addressing racial tensions/disparities in deer management and hunting
- Connecting the dots between different perspectives (e.g. forest management and hunting)
- Providing the public with information about what they can do on their own to positively impact wildlife
- Exploring opportunities for citizen-science and hunter-reported data
- Communicating with the public via multiple media types (e.g. print, web, social media, etc.) and in a variety of accessible formats (e.g. narrative explanations of graphs/charts)
- Identifying community liaisons/leaders to help communicate between DNR and various communities

Detailed raw notes from the brainstorming exercise are available by request.

## Closing

- Homework questions related to communications, information sharing, public involvement and accountability; please email responses to Adam at earliest convenience.
- Next DMPAC meeting will be April 19, 10am-3:30pm, at the Watab Town Hall.