

Deer Management Plan Advisory Committee Minutes

April 19, 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 something you're looking forward to doing outdoors this spring
- Review of today's feedback process:
 - Draft objectives and strategies are just that – draft. They were developed using staff and stakeholder/public input gathered thus far, but are intentionally not comprehensive. DNR is seeking DMPAC members' feedback and is open to substantial revisions.
 - Focus on meaning/intent more than specific wording at this point.
 - Focus on clarifying objectives before refining the strategies to accomplish those objectives.
 - Process will be iterative: DNR staff will refine the document further following this DMPAC meeting; changes will be reported back to DMPAC; details can be adjusted as discussion goes forward on other topics and overall Deer Plan; finalization will occur in December prior to a second round of public input in winter 2018.
 - Some concern expressed that DMPAC members' input won't be used and that this process won't create real change. Staff acknowledge the committee's advisory role, but expressed that collaboration is important. Draft plan at end of process should reflect discussions that occur here.
 - Reiteration that this is a strategic plan not a work plan. Need to determine what correct level of detail is to keep it high level yet meaningful. Committee input can help determine appropriate level of detail.

Adam Murkowski, DNR

- Adam presented on DNR's current work related to communications, public involvement and education, including press releases, social media, electronic communications (e.g. Deer Notes), DNR website, DNR Information Center, in-person public engagement (e.g. public meetings, deer population goal-setting, State Fair, other), statistically-representative surveys of public attitudes and preferences, and other topics (full presentation available by request).
- Committee questions:
 - When surveys are conducted, how is that information used in decision making? In past, seemed like surveys indicated public interest in certain initiatives that were never carried forward (for example, surveys indicating majority of hunters favor managing for more mature bucks).
 - Staff responds that would be good to have clarity on this issue and explore how DNR can improve its responsiveness to survey data. Results are often complex; for example, a recent survey did indicate general support from hunters for a

regulation that would increase antlered bucks, but support was mixed (e.g. no clear majority) for specific regulatory alternatives to achieve that outcome.

Initial responses to draft: small group discussion/report back

- Group 1:
 - Overall, supportive of objectives with no major changes.
 - Objective 1 is important, particularly Strategy 1.2 (ongoing citizen advisory teams for deer management); this strategy is essential to achieving the objective of DNR understanding public interests.
 - Objective 2 and 3 seem to suggest one-way communication. How does it go both ways? More dialog and engagement, less education and information “passing”.
 - Need accountability to public input, specifically statistically-representative surveys.
 - Increase public input opportunities at events like State Fair, Deer Classic. Have biologists present, not just enforcement staff.
 - Input from hunters and those most invested in deer/deer management should carry the greatest weight; separate invested/affected stakeholders from general public.
 -
- Group 2:
 - Laudable goals but no metrics. How will strategies be measured? Does measuring numbers really work? Can a metric that shows a valid measurement be defined? Need metrics/accountability to ensure progress toward real change.
 - Strategy 1.2, ongoing advisory teams, is very important. Suggest 5 regional teams, each with one chairperson who could represent their regional group to DNR at the state level.
 - Discussion about the accuracy of deer population estimates and how this relates to transparency, communication/education and public involvement (e.g. goal setting).
 - Strategy 2.1, reporting back to the public with clear information about population goals and annual harvest decisions, is important.
 - Objectives seem to suggest one-way communication (from DNR to public, or from public to DNR), but that’s ok.
- Group 3:
 - Objectives are very good, concise and relevant.
 - Objective 2: add the word “timely”.
 - Strategy 1.2, ongoing regional advisory teams, very important. Are 4 teams enough, or would 8-12 be better to address the diversity of Minnesota’s landscapes? Make sure teams are holistic, not just focused on hunters/hunting.
 - Public perception that DNR makes decisions unilaterally; need more shared responsibility for decisions.
 - Establishing metrics will be key for accountability.
 - Strategy 1.3, “continue the public goal-setting process” – does public goal-setting achieve the objective of enhancing DNR’s understanding of public interests and incorporating this information into decisions? May need to revisit how goal-setting is done.

- Ensure there is a clear process in place so that people know how to elevate deer management concerns to DNR.
- Group 4:
 - Overall content with draft; no major changes.
 - Like that Objective 1 includes the phrase “meaningfully incorporate” information about public interests into decision-making. Important to explain how input was used or why it wasn’t; transparency.
 - Supportive of Strategy 1.2, establishing regional advisory teams. Not sure what the appropriate number of teams should be. Important to involve local Regional or Area Wildlife staff.
 - Strategy 1.4, regarding statistically-representative surveys of hunters and other stakeholders – glad that information about these is now shared on the website; it was difficult to find this information in the past. Continue making information easily available.
 - Objective 2, regarding the DNR website: consider adding a comments section to public can submit input easily and quickly.
- Potential new strategies:
 - Emphasize use of web/email for sharing information; engage the next generation; proactively reach out to audiences
 - Consider a strategy related to hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation
 - Consider an objective or strategy related to citizen science, or methods for gathering data from hunters and others “in the woods”; this would be more than 2-way communication, more interactive. Might fall under a future topic, such as population management, monitoring and research.

Prioritization exercise

- Committee members and DNR co-chairs used a dot exercise to indicate which objectives and strategies should be prioritized for discussion today, given limited meeting time. Top-ranking items included:
 - Objectives 1, 2 & 3, including potential of a new objective to better address 2-way communication/learning
 - Potential addition of objective/strategy outlining clear process for public to elevate concerns to DNR and understand how their input was used in decision-making.
 - Strategy 1.2 – ongoing regional advisory committees (11)
 - Strategy 1.1 – ensure citizens have multiple opportunities/methods to engage in deer management, and that DNR demonstrates how public input informs decisions. (5)
 - Strategy 1.4 – Regularly assess hunter and other stakeholder values, attitudes and preferences using social science survey methods.
 - Potential addition of objective/strategy related to citizen science
 - Strategy 3.3 – Work with partners to develop technical and educational materials/programs on habitat management for deer and other wildlife

Large group discussion of prioritized topics

- 2-way communication does not necessarily need to be a new objective, could be just a rewording. Connects to transparency, and articulating a clear process for submitting input and understanding how decisions are made. Already mentioned in goal statement, so perhaps make more prominent.
- Discussion about Objective 3, which includes “Affirm the economic and population management importance of regulated hunting.”
 - Need to better define/explain this phrase.
 - Educate people about how their actions impact deer and deer management.
 - Provide the public with information about how much money is generated from hunting in Minnesota, and specifically where deer hunting license dollars go within DNR’s budget.
 - Consider pulling economics out as a separate objective or strategy. Economic considerations need to affect decisions about deer (e.g. goal-setting).
 - Important to affirm the positive economic impact of hunting, but what about the negative economic costs of deer (crop depredation, deer-vehicle collisions, etc.)? Remember the audience is all citizens.
 - Consider a strategy to “increase public understanding of importance of positive economic impact of hunting to Minnesota, as well as understanding of economic impact of depredation and impact on deer-vehicle collisions”?
 - Full economic impacts of deer are relatively unknown. Recent study done by UW Madison is one example. Is similar research needed in Minnesota?
- Tie Objectives 1 & 2 together. The public needs to be informed enough to provide meaningful input/feedback.
- Objective 1: Make it as easy as possible for the public to give input. Not everything needs to be a four-page survey.
- Discussion on how to articulate a clear process by which the public can elevate concerns to DNR and track how their input informed decision-making:
 - Need to make people more aware of existing processes and information; consider whether this should be its own strategy.
 - DNR has changed and is listening more, but there is a continued need for more transparency (e.g. clarity about how DNR’s internal deer committee functions).
 - Only the “concerned few” are involved and show up to public meetings; how do we educate and engage the rest?
 - Need to make information so easily and readily available that no one needs to work for it; one idea is email or text alerts sent to a subscription list several times a week.
 - This idea seems related to Strategy 2.1, only broader.
 - There may be a need to look at existing processes and assess areas for improvement. Should DNR outline a step-by-step process for responding to public questions/suggestions? Perhaps create an FAQ for common topics.
 - Suggestion for Steve Merchant to draft a paragraph explaining existing process(es); make this available to the public and update it as needed.
- Discussion on Strategy 1.2 – Regional deer advisory teams:

- DNR’s draft proposal is to have 4 regional teams with fewer than 20 members who meet approximately twice per year to discuss issues related to deer and deer management. This could be a range of topics, but public input indicates that many hunters are interested in a forum specifically for discussing hunting regulations, and a way to bring public proposals to the attention of DNR staff.
- Discussion about appropriate number of groups; suggestions include 1 statewide group, 4-5 regional groups (e.g. use the 4 DNR administrative regions, or 4 eco-regions plus a Metro Area group), or 8-12 groups for more localized input.
 - Regional groups could work specifically on issues relevant to their geographic area.
 - Eco-regions could be Metro, Northeast, West, Central and Southeast.
- Discussion about representation; each group should have geographical representation from throughout the area it is located in; ensure diverse representation (not just hunters). Suggest an odd number of members, perhaps 5-9. Need to determine how members would be selected.
- For multiple groups to coordinate at statewide level, each group could have a chairperson that represents their group to DNR’s Central Office. Or, members of all groups could meet together annually.
- Regional or Area Wildlife staff should be involved, to provide local information, answer questions, and build relationships with the public in their area. Consider whether staff from other Divisions, especially Enforcement, should also participate.
- Teams could also help find ways to support broader public engagement. A recent survey (McInenly et al., 2017) assessed Minnesota deer hunters’ preferred methods to provide input to DNR and found that online and written questionnaires were the most preferred method, followed by written questionnaires and public meetings.
- DNR staff suggested the possibility of creating a task force to design these teams and determine their number, membership, purpose, scope, etc.

Preview of next month’s topic: Healthy Deer

Members participated in a “Walking Brainstorm” activity, with the prompt to brainstorm topics that the Deer Plan could address for each proposed Healthy Deer sub-topic. Raw notes from the brainstorm are included below. Members were asked to place a star next to any ideas others wrote which they also agreed with.

Potential objectives/strategies related to herd health and monitoring	# stars
More monitoring of deer farms	1
Objective measures of deer herd health	1
Reality of collecting sex age kill data; data easily understood by public; count deer as male/female not antlered/antlerless	2
Deer farm artificial insemination and transporting	0
Faster reporting of sick deer	0
Live testing	0
Collect car kills and test when available	1

Potential objectives/strategies related to herd health and monitoring	# stars
Combine with population monitoring and research – with complementary on-the-ground surveys (in addition to aerial surveys)	0
Reproductive rate (# fawns/doe)	0
Review other states' deer health measures	0
Annual deer hunter survey; ask how many deer seen, any sick-looking deer, etc.	1

Potential objectives/strategies related to disease prevention and management (including novel approaches)	# stars
Reduce feeding	1
Continued TB monitoring	0
Establish working relationship with Board of Animal Health, cervid farms	4
Stop leaving deer carcasses on the surface; bury or incinerate. Stop protecting crows or other carriers.	0
Carcass disposal – need clearer info on what proper disposal is for diseased deer	0
Information to public on CWD and how to prevent (no feeding)	0
Investigate live CWD test; test at deer farms	0
Deer → Moose (in addition to transmission between deer)	0

Potential objectives/strategies related to abundance of deer	# stars
Population is the main driver of deer health!	0
Not too many, not too few	0
Has to match the available habitat	6
Manage for balanced herd – more mature bucks/effective population control. (No farmer ever complained about too many mature bucks eating crops.)	3
Manage for deer health metrics and not concerned as much about deer per square mile. (In further discussion, members identified a need to discuss what these metrics should be; look at examples in other states' deer plans such as yearling doe pregnancy rate; tie this information back to population abundance decisions, e.g. during goal-setting.)	1
Habitat	0
Buck to doe ratio	1
Consider and manage below social, in addition to biological, carrying capacity.	0

Potential objectives/strategies related to "Other" healthy deer topics	# stars
Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) and drought	0
Moose brain	0
Get rid of game farms; threat to deer health, insult to hunters	1
Feeding	3
Natural food supply	2
More monitoring of deer farms	1
Ban all recreational feeding	1
Awareness of other states' herd health	1
Healthy ecosystems/habitat	4

Potential objectives/strategies related to "Other" healthy deer topics	# stars
Population structure (demographics)	1
BAH and DNR work closer on game farms	2

Closing

- Members may submit any additional feedback via email to Adam Murkowski by noon on Tuesday, April 25.
- Next DMPAC meeting will be May 17, 10am-3:30pm, at the Sauk Rapids Government Center.