

BOARD OF WILDLIFE COMMISSIONERS
Mule Deer Restoration Committee
Meeting
Nevada Department of Wildlife - Elko
60 Youth Center Road
Elko, Nevada 89801
March 25, 2010 , 1:00 PM
MINUTES

Committee members in attendance were:

Scott Raine, Chairman – Commissioner
Wilde Brough – Committee Member
John Carpenter – Committee Member
Pat Laughlin – Committee Member
Cory Lytle – Committee Member

Staff and interested public in attendance:

Larry Gilbertson – NDOW, Regional Game Supervisor
Joe Doucette – NDOW
Ken Gray – NDOW
Chris Drake – NDOW
Jeff Peterson - NDOW
Ken Wellington – ECWAB
Tom Barnes - ECWAB
Don Molde - Public
Mitch Buzzetti - Public
Chad August – UNR
Via Phone in Reno - Kim Jolly – NDOW, Rex Flowers – WCWAB, and Judy Caron - Public

Agenda Item #1– Call to Order – Chairman Raine

Chairman Raine called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m.

Agenda Item #2 – Committee Member Items – Chairman Raine - INFORMATIONAL

Wilde Brough suggested each committee member introduce themselves and discuss why they think they are on the committee.

Each member of the committee spent time stating their history, background, and experience relative to their participation of the committee.

Chairman Raine indicated that the Chairman of the Commission, Gerald Lent, has given him responsibility to determine the makeup of the committee and that he has selected a diverse group of representatives with extensive background and historical knowledge.

Agenda Item #3– Public Comment – Chairman Raine - INFORMATIONAL

Mitch Buzzetti commented that he thought the committee was a good idea, stated that the “system is broken.” Mr. Buzzetti indicated that the area he knows with the most sheep have the most deer and thought we needed

more grazing and more predator control.

Chairman Raine asked Mr. Buzzetti to put something in writing regarding the system being broken.

Mr. Buzzetti continued his discussion promoting additional grazing and noted a need to get more people involved. Mr. Buzzetti suggested providing bonus points to people volunteering for 50 to 100 hours.

Don Molde commented that the NDOW has not done a “bad” job and promoted the mule deer bulletin, encouraging the committee to review the contents. Dr. Molde suggested that if the committee has any hope of succeeding they are going to need to address something other than just killing more predators.

Agenda Item #4 – Formation and Possible Adoption of Charter – Chairman Raine – ACTION

Chairman Raine asked the committee about a charter. Chairman Raine indicated that a charter was “the basic direction”, stating that he felt the committee should, “examine, as best we can, all known scientific data we can get our hands on.” Then the committee will “come up with suggestions”. The committee will put those suggestions in writing and provide them to “any entity that we think is necessary.”

Chairman Raine then asked for charter ideas from other committee members.

Wilde Brough stated that they should come up with a plan to restore mule deer but expressed concerns that politics might hinder implementation and success. Mr. Brough began to elaborate on his concerns specific to NDOW and Chairman Raine encouraged Mr. Brough to hold on to those concerns until agenda items 7 and 8 are addressed.

Pat Laughlin expressed his concern regarding lack participation by BLM, USFS, and NDOW in planning processes and meetings. Chairman Raine stated that perhaps those issues could be addressed as possible outcomes and refocused the group on constructing a charter statement.

Wilde Brough added that the charter should remain “science-based and goal-oriented.”

Cory Lytle encouraged the group to draft something simple and straight forward. Mr. Lytle acknowledged that the science already exists and that a simple approach should be followed while building relationships with agencies, NDOW private landowners, sportsmen, with a lot of input and collaboration from these people while trying to “keep it simple.”

Chairman Raine concluded that based on those comments he will draft a brief charter essentially stating that the committee should review available scientific data, produce plan and suggestions for forward to appropriate agencies.

Agenda Item #5 – Formation and Possible Adoption of Guidelines for Format of Eventual Committee Recommendations – Chairman Raine – ACTION

Chairman Raine stated that before coming up with recommendations, he thought it would be good to identify the format into which recommendations should be organized. Chairman Raine asked, “How should it be presented?”

John Carpenter didn’t want things “too involved,” but wanted a comprehensive a document as possible with a wide distribution.

Wild Brough suggested creation of a list of objectives or changes and then a majority vote by committee on those items on the list.

Chairman Raine led short discussion regarding what issues warrant consideration.

Cory Lytle suggests looking at historical angle of each issue.

John Carpenter would like to present list to sportsmen, Cattlemen, Farm Bureau, and State Legislature.

Discussion ensued with respect to the committee's authority to present its findings to various agencies and organizations. It was determined by Chairman Raine permission should be granted by the Commission for presentation of findings to outside entities. Chairman Raine indicated that "we will ask the commission if we can go ahead and dole these suggestions out to all these other bodies." Chairman Raine assembled a list of intended recipients.

Wilde Brough requested 2 meetings on history and Chairman Raine encouraged him to readdress that under the next agenda topic.

Chairman Raine asked Mr. Laughlin if he had any recommendations specifically regarding the format of guidelines or recommendations.

Mr. Laughlin reemphasized his desire to examine land management practices of the era in which mule deer were most abundant and added his wishes to see more participation by land management agency personnel.

John Carpenter stated that he thought the committee needed to emphasize getting the agenda out to newspapers so people know what is going on if they want to participate.

Chairman Raine indicated that people can participate via phone from Reno and that any recommendations brought forth by the committee will certainly be discussed at the State Wildlife Commission meetings will undoubtedly be held elsewhere. Chairman Raine continued that he knows the commission has asked for mule deer recommendations from other county advisory boards and to this date has only seen one recommendation from one county advisory board and that was Lincoln County.

Pat Laughlin indicated that ECWAB chairman Ken Wellington has appointed a committee and they will be meeting and working on that.

Chairman Raine reviewed committee member suggestions for format and asked for further input.

Cory Lytle encouraged the committee to make sure that whatever recommendations are provided that they contain a strategy for getting from point A to point B.

Judy Caron suggested that findings from this committee go to the county advisory board's for an opportunity for the public to provide input to the recommendations before making the final recommendation to the commission.

Chairman Raine expressed concerns over the additional time it could take involving county advisory boards and stated that this committee doesn't want to present anything to anybody without the commission. He further explained, that this committee is just making suggestions and if they (commission) wants to bring it forward, they can. Chairman Raine continued, we don't want to be making suggestions to land management agencies because we don't have that power.

Wilde Brough suggested having specific invitations to agencies/organizations that they want to attend these meetings. He followed that invitations should be sent to not just the government agencies but the cattlemen, woolgrowers, farm bureau, and outfitters.

Chairman Raine suggested that NDOW staff send out invitations and asked each committee member to create

a list for invitations and supply it to him so he can provide it to NDOW staff.

John Carpenter suggested that Chairman Raine summarize all the input received on agenda item #5 in a concise format, get it out to the other committee members for changes, and submit it as support material for the next meeting. Motion seconded by Mr. Brough. Approved unanimously.

Agenda Item #6 – Formation and Possible Adoption of Tentative Timeline for Committee – Chairman Raine - ACTION.

Chairman Raine indicated that commission Chairman Gerald Lent has provided direction that he would like to see feedback from this group in six months or less. Chairman Raine noted that “the commission will have its current makeup through the end of June and if we could present our findings by then, is that enough time?” Discussion followed regarding meeting content and frequency.

John Carpenter suggested that the committee meet once a month and try to present something in October because 2 to 3 months is not enough time to it as comprehensive as we need to.

Chairman Raine indicated that he is available as frequent as we can to get this hammered out and then presented future commission meeting dates and locations for presentation of findings.

Wilde Brough expressed concern that meeting monthly is too infrequent causing people to lose track of where previous meeting left off.

Chairman Raine suggested maybe meeting every other week, splitting the meetings between teleconference and in person.

Pat Laughlin agreed that frequent meetings were necessary to move this thing along and push it as fast as we can.

Cory Lytle agreed that splitting the meetings is a good way to approach it using email etc to streamline efforts.

Chairman Raine reminded the committee members to send pertinent emails for the rest of the committee through staff to avoid any violations of open meeting laws.

John Carpenter suggested having 1 or 2 of these meetings in Ely and encouraged the committee to meet face to face rather than teleconference as much as possible.

Wilde Brough suggested 6 meetings, a couple meetings for history, one meeting for agency presentations...

Chairman Raine added 2 or 3 for the write-up with a field trip mixed in. Might try to complete the process by June but if a little bit late, will shoot for August.

In response to earlier request by Judy Caron to provide opportunity for advisory board input, Chairman Raine suggested that whenever the committee gets something written up, have NDOW staff send an email sent out to all of them (CABs) and they'll have a week or two to look at it and have a meeting if they so chose, and send in their recommendations.

Wilde Brough moved that the committee have 6 or 7 meetings; 2 meetings with history, another meeting where we invite government agencies to give presentations, a field trip, and 2 to 3 additional meetings to wrap up the final product. Seconded by John Carpenter. Unanimously passed.

Agenda Item #7 – Discussion of Mule Deer Status – Chairman Raine – INFORMATIONAL

Chairman Raine supplied the committee members with additional support material for their consideration. The material included “an article written by staff and signed by the committee” and NDOW’s mountain lion management plan.

Ken Wellington inquired as to the availability of the support material being circulated. Chairman Raine indicated that it was just reading material for the committee and most of it is available on the NDOW’s website and further encouraged Mr. Wellington to ask NDOW Staff to the committee.

Chairman Raine asked Eastern Region Game Supervisor Larry Gilbertson for a current update on Nevada’s mule deer status. Mr. Gilbertson indicated that spring surveys were ongoing and the current year’s assessment was not complete. Discussion followed regarding more long-term trends and Mr. Gilbertson concluded that deer were below the long-term average but in the absence of certain catastrophic events (e.g. fires on area 6 winter range), would likely be much closer to the long-term average.

Wilde Brough asked Mr. Gilbertson about the long-term average to which Mr. Gilbertson provided an approximate value of 132,000.

Mr. Laughlin asked Mr. Gilbertson about population estimate history and Mr. Gilbertson provided a brief history of past methodologies.

Chairman Raine asked for public comment regarding mule deer status and none was received. He then followed with a summary of his view that there is a widely held understanding that mule deer numbers have gone straight down to unacceptably low numbers. Chairman Raine continued that Nevada has areas with very limited deer numbers within relatively good habitat. Other scenarios regarding population and habitat relationships were also mentioned. Chairman Raine concluded that mule deer numbers are down across the spectrum relatively regardless of habitat condition.

John Carpenter expressed an interest in evaluating historic population estimates for the Ruby Mountains. Mr. Carpenter stated that deer are down and especially in the Ruby Mountains and believes that predators are the #1 cause.

Wilde Brough voiced concerns that with only 106,000 deer we almost don’t have enough deer to reproduce. Mr. Brough stated that once predator death loss, over-winter death loss, number of tags, and the number of deer that are taken are removed from the population, the remaining males and females left, is almost below that figure of females coming back into the herd to make that herd reproduce itself.

Chairman Raine questioned Mr. Gilbertson regarding the accuracy of deer population estimates and discussion ensued.

Mr. Laughlin commented that our habitats can certainly sustain more deer than we have now. He followed with the observation that deer population dynamics west-wide have followed the same pattern and he believes the two major changes are with respect to grazing and predator control. Mr. Laughlin concluded that decreases in grazing and predator control coincide with declines in mule deer and he thinks that something the committee should look at.

Cory Lytle elucidated numerous impacts to southeastern Nevada including; energy development, habitat issues, wild horses, pipelines, transmission lines through winter range, and testing sites for wind and solar power.

Chairman Raine noted his personal observation that deer used to migrate through Harrison Pass like caribou and now they are gone. Chairman Raine followed with more anecdotal personal observations. Chairman

Raine pointed out that in some instances the NDOW has suggested certain populations of mule deer are at carrying capacity, while others (in NDOW) have implicated grazing, while the facts of the matter seem to state that grazing is at an all-time low which doesn't lend a whole lot of credence to the theory that is espoused within the Nevada Wildlife Action Plan that basically states, reduce grazing and mule deer will come back. Chairman Raine asked if that is a correct statement and that it might be something to look at, whether some of the statements and recommended actions in NDOW's publications are correct. Chairman Raine stated that this committee may want to consider a yah or nah vote on whether or not they are right.

Agenda Item #8 – Discussion of Methods for Mule Deer Restoration – Chairman Raine – INFORMATIONAL

Tom Barnes provided Elko County Wildlife Advisory Board's recommendations for mule deer restoration which included; more predator control, habitat restoration of burned areas, habitat conservation, flexibility in grazing permits for fuel reduction, green-stripping, sagebrush restoration (chemical, mechanical), pinyon juniper thinning, and reducing hunter pressure on deer including shed hunters.

Chairman Raine asked Mr. Barnes if he had any particular plans or projects in mind for predator control to which Mr. Barnes indicated a desire to have focused predator control and make sure it's done right.

Chairman Raine then made the statement to Mr. Barnes that as a rancher it is his job to increase the size of his herd and since NDOW is in charge of the mule deer herd, what in his opinion is NDOW not doing right. Chairman Raine followed that his perception of NDOW's job is to enhance the size of our deer herd therefore what is it that you (Mr. Barnes) do in your line of work that NDOW does not Mr. Barnes answered that he is not trying to increase his herd, just maintain it, and that he has not been reduced in his grazing allotment although occasionally he will have to bring cows home a little early. Mr. Barnes explained that they use an innovative rotational grazing system that has improved productivity.

Pat Laughlin recognized the long ranching tenure of Mr. Barnes family in the Jiggs areas and asked Mr. Barnes what he has noticed about coyotes in the area to which Mr. Barnes replied that there does seem to be a lot more coyotes around. Discussion ensued and Mr. Barnes also indicated an increase of lions in the area.

Cory Lytle reiterated Mr. Barnes concerns of shed hunters and added his concerns regarding ATVs being used by shed hunters.

Ken Wellington spoke regarding the Elko County Wildlife Advisory Board mule deer restoration sub-committee and some additional ideas to consider for mule deer.

Rex Flowers encouraged Chairman Raine to consider recruitment and winter carryover of mule deer. Additionally Mr. Flowers noted that most big game species are increasing at about 2% a year while deer are decreasing at about 2% per year and Mr. Flowers encouraged the committee to consider the effect of completion of other big game species on deer.

John Carpenter reiterated Mr. Flowers' concerns on competition of mule deer with other big game animals.

Chairman Raine asked the committee for potential items for consideration for inclusion in the final product. Chairman Raine listed; competition between elk and mule deer, mule deer and other species, shed horn hunting, predation, feral horses, doe hunting.

Chairman Raine discussed doe hunting and in particular the area 10 antlerless hunt from the 2009 season mentioning that it was approved by a split vote (7-1), was "pushed" by the local biologist, and quoted the biologist as saying the only reason it might not work is because we might need to kill 2 to 3 times the numbers of does in order to reduce the pressure on the herd. Chairman Raine concluded that there is a pretty good write-up on the discussion from last May's commission meeting minutes and suggested the committee

get those minutes and read that discussion. Chairman Raine acknowledged his bias on the subject and likened a doe harvest to encouraging every rancher out there to go out and shoot every third heifer and that'll increase your cow population. Chairman Raine admitted to an inability to discern the logic behind antlerless harvest.

Cory Lytle offered an addition to the list of potential items for consideration; Pinyon juniper encroachment.

Chairman Raine referenced early comment regarding the "system is broken" and suggested the committee delve further into NDOW's general system and look at organizational charts and job descriptions to see if there is anything the committee wants to deal with in that area.

John Carpenter encouraged the committee to consider looking at long-term plans for road crossing for mule deer on the Pequops and hwy 93.

Wilde Brough made the recommendation that no non-migratory deer should be transplanted into areas with migrating deer because the non-migrators will teach the migrating deer to not migrate. Mr. Brough also encouraged the committee to consider deer genetics and sustainability and just how many deer do we need to have a sustainable deer herd. Mr. Brough also stated that the helicopter is one of the biggest problems we have in that biologists don't spend any time on the ground anymore.

John carpenter concurred with Mr. Brough and added that stress from over-flights should be considered too.

Judy Caron requested that the UNR graduate project looking at ungulate competition in White Pine County be viewed and considered by the committee.

Tom Barnes suggested increased utilization of uplands by cattle and control of cheatgrass.

Wilde Brough expressed a desire to see meeting minutes from May commission meeting in regards to area 10 antlerless hunt. Mr. Brough also expressed concerns that big game management actually competes with the things the NDOW does. NDOW biologists need to be more production oriented. Mr. Brough stated that the things NDOW talks about are habitat, and predators are a part of habitat, if there are too many predators, then habitat doesn't matter. NDOW's duties are wildlife which includes predators and mule deer should be looked at as something to produce, something that man has all the tools to produce and that is not how NDOW looks at it.

Chairman Raine gave Mr. Brough the assignment to write-up his thoughts for committee review at a subsequent meeting.

Cory Lytle added energy development to the list of items for consideration.

Further discussion regarding shed hunting with some disagreement as to whether this committee should deal with the issue but determined to be better dealt with by additional committee.

Agenda Item #9-Discussion of Materials and Information to be Requested by the Committee for Study - Chairman Raine -INFORMATIONAL

Hunter harvest data as far back as possible
Historic mule deer population estimates statewide
Historic mule deer population estimates area 10
NDOW organizational chart
Mountain lion population estimates
Presentation on project 17

Agenda Item #10 – Assignments – Chairman Raine – ACTION

Chairman Raine will prepare Draft Charter for committee review and approval
Chairman Raine will prepare Draft format for recommendations for committee review and approval
Mr. Carpenter will be liaison for Cattlemen and Farm Bureau
Mr. Laughlin will be liaison for Wildlife services

Items for research by committee members include;
Cory Lytle – energy development, shed horns, wild horses, pinyon juniper encroachment
John Carpenter – ungulate competition, road crossings
Pat Laughlin – predation
Chairman Raine – doe hunts
Wilde Brough – genetics, secondary effects of helicopters
Tom Barnes – Grazing

Agenda Item #11- Establish Date, Time and Location of the Next Meeting – Chairman Raine – ACTION

The next meeting will be held at 12 noon on April 15, 2010, at the NDOW office in Elko

Agenda Item #12-Adjourn.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted
Tony Wasley
April 8, 2010