

BOARD OF WILDLIFE COMMISSIONERS
Mule Deer Restoration Committee
Meeting
Nevada Department of Wildlife - Elko
60 Youth Center Road
Elko, Nevada 89801
April 29, 2010 , 12:00 PM
MINUTES

Committee members in attendance were:

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

Staff and interested public in attendance:

Larry Gilbertson – NDOW
Joe Doucette – NDOW
Ken Gray – NDOW
Caleb MacAdoo – NDOW
Kari Huebner – NDOW
Russell Woolstenhulme - NDOW
Ken Wellington – ECWAB
Don Molde - Self
Craig Walsh - Self
Michael Pappas - Self
Joe Bennett – USDA WS
Sam Sanders – USDA WS
Jerred Taylor – USDA WS
Mike Riordan - Self
Candido Mendive- Self
Wade Fordin- Self
Brandon Fordin – Nevada Big Game Hunters
Mike Laughlin- Self
Megan Brown – Nevada Cattleman’s Association

Via Phone in Lincoln County – Committee member Cory Lytle

Via Phone in Reno - Rex Flowers – WCWAB, and Chris McKenzie – Self

AT&T long distance unexpectedly lost service shortly after the meeting was called to order and was not restored until sometime after adjournment.

Agenda Item #1– Call to Order – Chairman Raine

Chairman Raine called the meeting to order at 12:09 p.m.

Agenda Item #2 – Approval of Meeting Minutes from March 25, 2010 – Chairman Raine - ACTION

John Carpenter moved that the committee approve the minutes of March 25, 2010 and the motion was seconded by Pat Laughlin. Motion unanimously passed and minutes approved.

Agenda Item #3– Committee Member Items – Chairman Raine - INFORMATIONAL

John Carpenter expressed his desire to discuss the Ruby Mountains and lack of deer there. Mr. Carpenter related his personal experience running sheep and cattle in the Ruby Mountains. Mr. Carpenter stated that he believed more livestock would improve the conditions for deer. Mr. Carpenter spent time discussing how many sheep and cattle historically grazed the East Humboldt and Ruby Ranges and concluded that only two things have changed since then; the predator control and the lack of livestock. Mr. Carpenter felt that we could put real predator control back in the Ruby's if NDOW would fetch up to the fact that there isn't much control there now and shooting does doesn't make much sense.

AT&T LONG DISTANCE LOST AT APPROXIMATELY THIS POINT

Agenda Item #4 – Public Comment – Chairman Raine – INFORMATIONAL

Megan Brown expressed an interest in expanding meeting notifications to include land management agencies and industry reps. Chairman Raine stated that anyone wishing to add an email address to the current list of recipients should provide that email address to NDOW staff for inclusion.

Agenda Item #5 – Review, Possible Adoption of Items Listed in Attached ‘Committee Summary of Topics’ to be Considered by Committee, Discussion of Format for Presentation of Each Item to Commission – Chairman Raine – ACTION

Chairman Raine discussed the general list of topic headings to see if topic is worthy of further committee consideration or dismissal. Chairman Raine asked the committee whether they thought wildfire was an issue worthy of further consideration. Pat Laughlin responded that wildfire could easily be placed under the next topic on the list, agency bureaucracy. Mr. Laughlin noted that no BLM or Forest Service representatives were present and that was really sad. Chairman Raine indicated that the agencies might not know about the meetings. Discussion ensued regarding how to increase participation and how to issue agency specific invitations. Megan Brown offered to act as an unofficial agency liaison in inviting the relevant land management partners and industry representatives.

Chairman Raine stated that habitat intrusion, development, mining, and energy are also areas of interest. He then asked how the committee should address them

Wilde Brough indicated that if a topic has an effect on mule deer, that it should be discussed. Mr. Brough followed that the recommendations to the commission should reflect the committee's position on how important the issue is thought to be and how it should be dealt with.

Chairman Raine then asked the committee about wilderness as a form of habitat intrusion, noxious weeds, PJ encroachment, road crossings, and shed antler hunting and stated that those issues should also be addressed. Chairman Raine continued by addressing forage decadency and mineral supplementation, carrying capacity and doe hunting.

Mr. Brough indicated that all of these issues are well documented and all have an effect on mule deer.

Chairman Raine agreed and asked the committee to consider if additional issues should be added and how the committee should address each issue in making recommendations to the commission.

Chairman Raine continued mentioning issues from the topic list encouraging the committee to consider how each should be addressed and subsequently presented to the Commission. Discussion ensued.

Sam Sanders suggested that committee consider hunting season timing and length as a factor affecting mule deer.

Don Molde encouraged the committee to consider overhunting as a factor affecting population levels.

Chairman Raine asked the committee about the format of the issue specific recommendations to the commission.

After some discussion regarding migration behaviors of mule deer in Nevada, it was requested that at the next meeting, the Department provide a presentation on deer movement data as obtained from recently collared deer.

More issues were briefly discussed. Mr. Brough suggested taking a subset of the issues and discussing only certain issues at each of several future meetings with significant public input at each meeting. Chairman Raine agreed and noted that with 24 or 25 total items the committee should be able to review approximately 8 items per meeting at the next three meetings. The next meeting should consider migration, mineral supplementation, wildfire, helicopter (stressing of game), road crossing, and genetics.

John Carpenter moved to approve the list of topics for discussion including the day's additions, motion seconded by Mr. Brough. The topic list was passed unanimously.

Agenda Item #6 – Review and Possible Adoption of Charter – Chairman Raine - ACTION.

John Carpenter moved to table charter adoption to next meeting.

Agenda Item #7 – Discussion of Predation Control and Alternative Methods of Mule Deer Population Enhancement – Don Molde– INFORMATIONAL

Don Molde expressed gratitude for the opportunity to speak to the committee and proposed the committee consider some research projects. In particular Dr. Molde encouraged the committee to consider ways to measure carrying capacity. Dr. Molde also stated that more than just grazing levels and predator control efforts have changed in the last 20 years. In particular, Dr. Molde noted that the state has been in a significant drought for much of the last 20 years and that there have also been significant wildfires. Dr. Molde followed that there may be other explanative factors as well.

Dr. Molde explored the history of ungulate population estimates in Nevada, suggesting that while much smaller populations initially, all other ungulates in the state are experiencing significant population growth. Dr. Molde pointed to an inconsistency in logic in asking how predators could be limiting the state's largest ungulate population, deer, while having seemingly no effect on all other species; pronghorn, bighorn, elk, and mountain goats.

Dr. Molde spent time reviewing the reported kill numbers from Wildlife Services and Nevada trappers and hunters. Dr. Molde showed that approximately 7500 – 8000 coyotes per year have been harvested over the last 10 years and approximately 1600 lions in total over the last 10 years.

Dr. Molde did a cost benefit analysis of the first four years of NDOW predator management program. According to previous project reports, Dr. Molde was able to determine that killing ravens to protect sage grouse, cost NDOW approximately \$158 per/raven. Dr. Molde was also able to determine that killing ravens to protect sharp-tail grouse, cost NDOW approximately \$95 per/raven. Despite those costs, only nest success was improved, not chick recruitment, and those additional chicks resulting from improved nesting success, did not make it to adulthood. Pronghorn protection in Northern Washoe County cost \$397 per coyote removed. Protection of bighorn sheep in the Delamar Range cost \$35,000 per lion. An additional bighorn protection project cost \$2,700 per lion. A waterfowl nest protection project cost \$64 per raven. Dr. Molde

stated that his intent is to demonstrate the value of a cost benefit analysis to the committee and the general public. Dr. Molde continued that he would have shown the benefits of these projects had there been any. However, there was no know benefit to these expenditures.

Chairman Raine asked Dr. Molde what else he had to present to the committee.

Dr. Molde continued with a paper by Guy Connolly in which the retired Wildlife Service's predator management specialist stated, "Predator control is expensive and should be done carefully with a cost-benefit analysis." Dr. Molde continued with more references documenting the high costs of predator control, cautioning against overwhelming complexities, low potential for success, and need for monitoring and cost-benefit analysis. Idaho Fish and Game published one report in particular that concluded, "Analysis indicated no relationship between mule deer population rate of change and either coyote or mountain lion removal."

Further similar discussion ensued.

Dr. Molde also shared with the committee historic use levels of the toxicant 1080. Dr. Molde demonstrated that during the mid 1960s, Nevada had the highest use of 1080 of any state in the country. Despite exceedingly high toxicant use for 3 consecutive years in the 1960s, Nevada's mule deer numbers experienced a simultaneous collapse. Dr. Molde concluded that if predators were a significant factor affecting mule deer populations, this would not have occurred.

Dr. Molde presented the NRS pertaining to use of the \$3 fee and made a case for increasing its use for predator research related projects.

Chairman Raine complemented Dr. Molde on the information he presented and asked him, if not predators then what is causing the mule deer decline? Chairman Raine followed that he believed about every research project that could ever be done has been done, there has been many thousands of studies. What could we do?

Dr. Molde provided an example of a research project from Colorado and encouraged Nevada to try something similar.

Additional questions and limited exchange between Dr. Molde and the committee continued.

Mr. Brough noted that the Wilderness designation for the Ruby Mountains and East Humboldt Range occurred in 1991 and that the 2 years following that designation were the two largest drops in mule deer populations. Mr. Brough suggested that perhaps the designation of Wilderness in the area had some type of cause and effect relationship with subsequent deer declines.

Agenda Item #8 – Discussion of Predation Control Projects, Area 10 – Tony Wasley – INFORMATIONAL

Tony Wasley presented the rationale behind project 17 (area 10) predator control project along with deer and elk data from the area in which the predator control project occurred. Data presented included; predators removed, locations of removal, type of animals removed, project limitations, spring deer survey sample size, spring fawn ratio, rifle quotas, buck harvest, hunter success, % 4-point or better, proportion of harvest in area 10 occurring in predator removal area, and elk population estimate. General findings were inconsistent and inconclusive.

Pat Laughlin indicated that, us predator people really know what the fault was. Mr. Laughlin stated that you could go around that mountain and kill mouse eaters (coyotes) and rabbit eaters (coyotes) until you are blue in the face, but until you get up on that mountain, you aren't going to make any difference for deer. The fact is, that the core of the mountain wasn't touched and that's an extremely flawed predator project right there.

Mr. Wasley stated that according to Ballard et al, predator control should be focused on predetermined areas and that NDOW had developed maps reflecting specific areas of focus. The areas included fawning areas and winter grounds.

Further discussion ensued regarding project logistics along with life history characteristics of populations that are top down controlled versus those populations that are bottom up regulated.

Mr. Wasley then presented a cursory overview of project 18 in area 014. Data presented included; spring survey sample size, spring fawn ratios, tag quotas, harvest level, %4 point of better in harvest, and predators removed. No formal analysis of the data has, as yet, been performed.

Mr. Wasley then discussed some of the differences between project 17 and 18 and how those differences can affect the projects' potential for success.

Chairman Raine stated his understanding that control areas in predator removal projects should not be used. Chairman Raine stated that when conducting predator control work, due to the variability between areas, an area should not be compared to a similar adjacent area; rather it should be compared to itself. Chairman Raine followed that despite the inability of the data from project 17 to demonstrate a statistically significant result, the project was still successful. Chairman Raine stated that the question is not whether the project was successful, just how successful the project was.

Don Molde noted that the total expenditures on projects 17 and 18 were approximately \$750,000. Dr. Molde asked if perhaps there could have been something else to spend that money on that could have had a better result for mule deer.

Wilde Brough added that he could spend the money killing predators much more efficiently than the government.

Agenda Item #9 - Discussion of Elko County Antlerless Deer Hunts - Tony Wasley - INFORMATIONAL

Tony Wasley explained the two main reasons behind the antlerless hunt in area 10. The first reason centered around carrying capacity limitations. Mr. Wasley stated that if the removal of 2500+ coyotes from area 101 did not result in a measurable benefit to mule deer then perhaps that population is limited by something other than predators. If the population is limited by habitat, by removing females from the population, although counter intuitive to many, the result can be increased fawn production, increased buck quality, and increased levels of harvest. In the absence of body condition data, direct removal of females from the population is the best way to directly test whether a population is habitat limited. The second reason for the antlerless harvest is to obtain body condition data in order to directly measure the primary indicator of carrying capacity. As a result of the antlerless hunt in area 10, significant population data was obtained on age structure, body condition, reproductive success, genetics, and diet.

Discussion ensued regarding opportunities for additional data collection.

Agenda Item #10 - Discussion and History of Mule Deer Predation Control by Wildlife Services - Joe Bennett - INFORMATIONAL

Joe Bennett addressed project 17. He admitted the project was flawed from the beginning. Mr. Bennett believes there is much better communication between NDOW and Wildlife Services now than previously experienced. Predator control activities have been much more targeted in more recent projects. Mr. Bennett believes the program to be much improved from initial efforts. Several specific examples of improved communications and improved protection were discussed.

Mr. Bennett addressed some of the problems of trying to express project efficiencies through cost per animal killed.

Mr. Bennett also discussed ways that predator removal has been improved; use of helicopters to access high elevation areas and improved communication with NDOW were mentioned in particular.

Mr. Bennett then discussed the pro and cons of bounties, concluding that bounties are not a good solution.

Mr. Bennett concluded with a brief slide show regarding the history of Wildlife Services and their predator management activities including; coyote, lion, bobcat, and raven removals with specific examples in Nevada.

Some discussions ensued regarding cost saving measures and potential program improvements.

Agenda Item #11 – Committee Members Will Report Findings on Assigned Mule Deer Related Topics – Chairman Raine – INFORMATIONAL

Wilde Brough indicated that he did not have anything to report.

John Carpenter reported that he had spoke with NDOT about deer crossings and that they were currently placing one deer over pass on HWY 93 and two deer under crossings in the same area.

Discussion ensued regarding deer crossing research and deer crossing structures in Nevada and other states.

Area 7 game biologist Kari Huebner provided more information and a brief overview of ongoing deer crossing efforts.

Pat Laughlin had nothing to report.

Chairman Raine reported that he had completed the list of mule deer related issues for consideration by the committee.

Agenda Item #12- Establish Date, Time and Location of the Next Meeting – Chairman Raine – ACTION

Next meeting was determined to be a field tour in and around area 10 in Elko and White Pine Counties on June 10, 2010, departing from NDOW's Elko office at 9:00 am. Mule deer habitat sites to be visited include; chemically treated sites, mechanically treated sites, control burns, and wildfire burns.

Agenda Item #13-Adjourn – Chairman Raine

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:53 p.m.

Submitted
Tony Wasley
May 26, 2010

