

Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners

Mule Deer Restoration Sub-Committee's
Mule Deer Restoration Plan

Committee Members
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Findings of the Mule Deer Restoration Committee of the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners

Passed unanimously on 18 November 2010

Nevada's Failing Mule Deer Population

Preface:

Nevada statutes mandate that the Board of Wildlife Commissioners establish policies and adopt regulations necessary to the preservation, protection, management, and restoration of deer in Nevada.

The Mule Deer Restoration Committee has reviewed at length the relevant scientific documentation on mule deer populations in Nevada and the west, including all publications it could find produced by the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The committee has reviewed at length all input on mule deer management provided by CABMWs to the Wildlife Commission and this committee, and has included the input in these findings where appropriate. After much consideration this Committee is presenting the following recommendations based on the best science available. If followed, these recommendations will go far in restoring the deer population and the range to prime conditions throughout the State of Nevada.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The mule deer population in Nevada is at or near its lowest point in the past century and is far below the stable population level that the habitat is clearly capable of maintaining. This dramatic decline in mule deer population is largely due to factors that can to a large degree be controlled by proper game and land management practices. Mule deer is a species that is dependent on disturbance for maintenance of its habitat and food sources. In areas where landscape-scale disturbance and extensive predation management has occurred in the preceding decades, mule deer are found in abundance. In areas where disturbance and predation control have been absent for extended periods, mule deer populations are suffering.

While the game managers at the Nevada Department of Wildlife cannot directly control many of the factors affecting mule deer populations, there are many factors they can directly control, and there is much that can be done to mitigate the effects of many of the factors they can not directly control.

Problems within NDOW Structure

Observational Biology vs. Biology of Game Production

FINDINGS OF FACT:

NDOW is not currently in the business of wide-scale game production and has not been for decades.

Current NDOW organization focuses on observational biology and research. Current bureaucratic practices within NDOW make it increasingly difficult to get any production-oriented project into practice. The same unnecessary bureaucratic quagmire creates an environment in which it is far easier for personnel to study a situation than it is for them to act to correct a biological problem. Political incentives exist to study, and not act upon the results of those studies. Federal monetary incentives reinforce this situation.

While many may expect government agencies such as Nevada Department of Wildlife to produce big game herds in the state of Nevada, those expectations are likely unrealistic due to

the current bureaucratic quagmire and the fact that governmental agencies are generally not designed to produce.

Recommendations:

SOLUTIONS:

The entire NDOW organizational structure, operational priorities, budget, and internal guidelines need to be restructured to re-focus all NDOW personnel and funding on the biology of game production.

1. Set game production goals.
2. Create a Commission committee to study NDOW structure and completely overhaul the NDOW organizational chart with the goal of meeting game production goals.
3. Eliminate positions funded by game dollars that are not focused on game production goals.
4. Rewrite job descriptions within NDOW to focus those jobs on enhancing game populations and reaching game production goals.
5. Retrain NDOW personnel to meet new job requirements.
6. If biologists cannot improve game numbers and maintain them at 'high' remove biologists from their positions.
7. Existence of positions must be governed by what those positions do to sustain and enhance the population of animals that is their funding source.
8. More focus should be given to game production and studies involved in areas where predation projects are ongoing.

If maximum efficiency in production of large sustainable big game herds is desired we must develop a comprehensive system whereby private enterprise is tasked with production of big game in the State of Nevada.

Interagency Coordination and Interaction - "Bureaucracy"

Because most of the lands in Nevada are federally managed, there is a constant and underlying issue with regard to implementing rangeland projects and practices, habitat improvement projects, and other beneficial wildlife treatments.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop and maintain cooperative, structured, and positive communication between local interests, (private and public), state agencies, (NDOW), and the federal managing agencies, (BLM, USFS, USFW) in regard to Mule Deer-related issues. Much of the agency interaction must start at the public level and should be channeled through the Wildlife Commission / CABMW process.

STRATEGIES:

- Support NEPA education for all interested parties in dealing with federal agencies. Because all projects and/or land use policies are required to perform NEPA analysis, it is imperative that proponents become enlightened as to the process that agencies must adhere to.
- Actively promote education relating to land use plans and guidelines. Depending on the agency, the appropriate land use plan "spells out" management objectives that agencies utilize for all aspects of land use policy and practice.
- Actively engage federal agency staff regarding beneficial range and habitat practices that will benefit Mule Deer.

2. Support the Nevada Partners in Conservation and Development as a driving force in agency coordination, funding acquisition, and landscape scale treatments.

Carrying capacity

FINDINGS OF FACT:

We live in an era in which some wildlife managers have come to utilize unscientific arbitrary suppositions claiming we are at carrying capacity as justification for their inaction in restoring our mule deer herds

NDOW has no factual scientific information measuring ungulate carrying capacity. Utilizing as many scientific studies as possible, NDOW needs to provide evidence to justify carrying capacity limitations.

Studies done in other states clearly show that carrying capacity is likely far larger than most methods of calculation demonstrate. Other scientific studies show that carrying capacity is very difficult, if not impossible, to accurately measure on a large scale.

The concept of deer being at carrying capacity, as has been utilized by NDOW in the past, is not scientifically based and should be considered as being politically or socially motivated.

Body condition measurements are specific to exact location / conditions and are likely not indicative of unit-sized areas. Body conditions may be influenced by many non-vegetative components such as stress from predation, distances traveled to water, hunting season pressures (especially with multiple sequential seasons of excessive duration), variances in heat and cold, lack of mineral supplementation in mineral poor areas, and other conditions.

Recommendations:

Lacking adequate scientific carrying capacity data, and due to the evidence that carrying capacity is likely far higher than official speculation, this committee recommends consideration of closing or severely limiting deer seasons in areas where populations are far below historical high deer numbers unless a specific reason can be clearly identified for the declines in population.

Currently there are no areas that this committee could identify where a doe hunt is justified, therefore, all doe harvest should cease until sufficient scientific data to justify them should be presented.

NDOW and the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners should only rely upon solid scientific methods when considering range carrying capacity and must not rely upon arbitrary or politically or socially motivated estimates of carrying capacity when making management decisions or to determine quotas and / or make season or regulatory decisions. To avoid future confusion, all data, including all forms of raw data, concerning carrying capacity should be made publicly available on the NDOW website.

Due to inherent weaknesses as shown in 'findings of fact', NDOW and the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners should severely limit the utilization of body condition measurements as a 'scientific' tool to determine quotas and / or make season or regulatory decisions.

HABITAT

Many biologists and groups cite lack of habitat as the largest problem with game populations. Proper land management can mitigate a number of existing habitat problems.

Forage Production

In order to bring back the mule deer numbers that were seen in the 1960s and 1980s, the same or similar conditions that were extant then need to be recreated. Disturbance by human factors took place in the late 1800s through the mid 1900s, including widespread domestic grazing, harvest of piñon / juniper forests, predation control (paid for principally by ranchers), USFW Animal Damage Control, high fur prices, and controlled feral animal populations were the principal causes that brought about high mule deer numbers. Subsequent changes in land management practices have decreased the utilization of resources, thereby dramatically reducing water development / diversions and providing inadequate disturbance to forage on a landscape-wide scale.

Therefore, we recommend the following things be done to re-create the conditions that encourage higher mule deer numbers:

Eliminate Forage Decadency

ISSUE- Forage Decadence-Sagebrush Habitat

Sagebrush habitat should include sagebrush and many other browse species such as cliff rose and bitterbrush. Along with these would be the host of grasses and forbs that grow in and around the browse. Another significant limitation of habitat quality is the senescent state of much of the current sagebrush habitat in many area of Nevada. Mule Deer are a very selective browser and prefer the tender “leaders” from most plant or browse species. It can be said that the older a plant becomes, the less digestible and beneficial it becomes, primarily due to the amount of cell wall material and other components that increase with plant age. These increases lead to the decrease of “leader” growth, plant vigor, nutritional value, seed production, and digestibility. Many browse species age to the point that they have no real benefit for Mule Deer. Many riparian areas have been found to be over-protected from grazing and a lack of grazing (by any ungulate species, wild or domestic) has created far worse range condition than any amount of grazing previously did.

Many effective methods of reducing forage decadence such as mechanical, chemical, and prescribed treatments are very expensive, and are only practical on a small scale. Of tax-funded methods of forage decadence reduction, prescribed fire is generally the most cost efficient. Reduction in wildfire suppression is also an efficient method of disturbance if well planned and selective.

Forage disturbance must be on a landscape-wide scale, and the only historically proven effective method for such landscape-wide forage disturbance - grazing - is unlike all other methods in that it is free to NDOW and is a tax producer for Federal, State, County, and local government. Grazing by different species (cattle and domestic sheep) has been found to have differing effects in disturbing forage and reducing decadence depending on the time of year, species, intensity / duration, and other variables. The most effective grazing methodology in enhancing range conditions for mule deer has been found to be well managed high intensity, highly rotational, short duration grazing by multiple species.

Recommendations:

We recommend increases in high intensity, highly rotational, short duration grazing to be utilized as the best tool to disturb forage on a landscape-wide scale. Other approved mechanical, chemical, or prescribed treatments are useful in appropriate areas where small scale localized intensive treatments are desired. Well-planned and selective reductions in wildfire suppression should be implemented in appropriate areas.

- 1 Dramatic increases in upland AUMs for both cattle and domestic sheep.
- 2 Dramatic increases in intensive, managed, rotational grazing of riparian areas
- 3 Dramatic increases in intensive, managed, rotational grazing of all fire prone areas, to include grazing of ‘green striping’ to protect human developments
- 4 Dramatic increases in managed grazing on recently burned areas
- 5 Graze cheat grass infested areas intensively statewide when green (spring grazing) before it goes to seed (cheat grass can also be effectively grazed when dry). Graze other non-desirable invasive plants intensively when most palatable
- 6 Rest all grazing areas as needed between uses (managed rotational grazing)

Support and encourage efforts to implement sagebrush habitat treatments to meet appropriate agency land use plan objectives.

STRATEGIES:

- Promote approved mechanical or chemical treatments, or prescribed burning in appropriate

areas.

- Promote areas for treatment that would directly benefit Mule Deer.
- Place high priority upon seeding the newly treated areas.
- Promote treatments as positive forms of vegetative disturbance, which contributes to a balance of plant community senescence.
- Support the Nevada Partners in Conservation and Development as a driving force in agency coordination, funding acquisition, and landscape scale treatments.

GRAZING -Compatibility of Mule Deer with Livestock

FINDINGS OF FACT:

It is the finding of this committee that the positive benefits to mule deer created by well managed grazing of cattle and domestic sheep far outweigh any detrimental impacts. The high level of grazing and associated activities that created widespread disturbance, water development, and control of predation throughout much of Nevada is the primary factor that created the habitat that allowed for very large numbers of Mule Deer to exist in Nevada in the mid to late 1900s.

Benefits of domestic livestock grazing to mule deer include:

- 1 Disturbance of primary mule deer forage that directly leads to substantial increases in forage production, increased nutritional quality of vegetation, and prevents decadence of forage.
- 2 Vegetative disturbance by livestock and big game animals has been found to be a principle cause of the large deer populations in the late 1980s.
- 3 Grazing by livestock causes new growth on woody plants, such as bitterbrush and sagebrush, which are at the present decadent and producing very little of the new growth vital to the health of mule deer.
- 4 Reduction in wildfire frequency and intensity due to lower fuel loading and reduction in 'flashy fuels'.
- 5 Livestock predation control programs are a cost effective bonus in that they indirectly reduce predation on mule deer.
- 6 Increases in stream flow due to reduction in drainage overgrowth.
- 7 Water development by ranchers for cattle and domestic sheep, which are consequently used by deer and other wildlife.
- 8 Creation and maintenance of 'native hay meadows' that occurs as a direct result of water diversion and land development
- 9 Domestic livestock has served as a buffer species between mule deer and predators.

Recommendations

Large increases in well-managed, high-intensity, short-duration rotational grazing by multiple species utilizing maximum variation in timing of grazing cycles throughout mule deer habitats Statewide are recommended in conjunction with dramatically relaxing regulation on water developments and spring maintenance.

Mineral Supplementation / Supplementary Feeding

Findings of fact

Salt and mineral blocks are necessary nutrients for livestock and wildlife, particularly in areas, found Statewide, that are mineral deficient.

Mule deer have been found to show preference to areas where salt blocks are found.

While scientific evidence specifically showing benefits to wildlife native to Nevada in a natural environment is lacking, such scientific evidence exists in abundance for many other ungulates and captive native ungulates. Clearly there are many benefits to mineral supplementation, the question is exactly how beneficial supplementation will be, the degree of

which will be highly dependent upon existing ground mineralization in each geographical area.

While unproven scientifically, and likely highly geographically dependent, one theory worthy of consideration is to determine if lack of mineral supplementation is a root cause of lack of deer in areas where habitat appears to be in prime condition and no other cause can be determined.

Mineral block supplementation formulated for wildlife can be readily obtained from vendors to farms that raise deer and elk.

Distribution of mineral supplements could be relatively simple and inexpensive if done over time by department personnel in the regular course of their activities.

Recommendations

- There is sufficient justification due to the potential benefits of mineral supplementation and the relative low cost of implementation to justify a significant mineral supplementation program.
- Currently ranchers provide the only source of vital salt and mineral supplementation for deer on the range wherever grazing occurs. In areas where grazing is reduced or absent NDOW should provide salt and mineral supplementation for wildlife in areas where higher wildlife numbers and / or healthier wildlife populations are desired.
- Salt supplementation can be an effective tool in keeping wildlife in desired locations (example - distribute before transplanted to entice animals to remain where desired) or utilized as an inexpensive tool, or attractant, to more widely distribute concentrated wildlife populations by supplementing appropriate areas.
- Further research and large scale experimentation is justified on the effects of salt / mineral supplementation.

Piñon Juniper Encroachment

FINDINGS OF FACT:

In many areas of Nevada the primary limitation of habitat quality and quantity is piñon and juniper, (PJ) woodlands expansion. Summer range for Mule Deer primarily consists of the higher mountain elevations with other limited areas around free waters or agricultural fields. Thick bands of piñon and juniper forest tend to surround these summer ranges generally from 6000' – 7500' feet in elevation. Depending upon the local topography, these areas may be several miles in width. A dense canopy of piñon and juniper dominates a good percentage of the mountain ranges in Nevada. The exceptions to this are the highest elevations and recently burned areas. While woodlands provide an important component of habitat for Mule Deer, there is a point at which tree density causes the loss of beneficial understory, forage becomes limited, and in turn, benefits to Mule Deer are severely limited.

Recommendations:

BLM shall be requested to do the following:

1. Create huge free woodcutting areas for Piñon Juniper
Designate such areas by exclusion – example: “May cut Piñon Juniper Statewide with no permit except in specified zones.”
2. Designate ‘No control zones’ for wildfire control. Do not fight fires in appropriate areas far from dwellings that are piñon/Juniper dominated. Benefits of this include better concentration of fire fighting efforts where it is needed, not wasting efforts on areas where fire will benefit wildlife habitat.
3. News releases to public on damage done to wildlife habitat by closed-canopy Piñon Juniper forests. The dominant public perception at this time is that ‘all forests are good for wildlife’.

Support and encourage agencies to implement piñon and juniper woodland treatments to meet appropriate Land Use Plan objectives.

STRATEGIES:

- A. Promote approved mechanical or chemical treatments, or prescribed burning in appropriate areas.
- B. Promote areas for treatment that would directly benefit Mule Deer.
- C. Place high priority upon seeding the newly treated areas.
- D. Maintenance on existing or previously treated areas. (Chained areas reinvaded by PJ)
- E. Promote treatments as positive forms of vegetative disturbance, which contributes to a balance of plant community senescence.
- F. The potential exists in which development of regenerative (renewable) organic material sources like piñon and juniper in the form of biomass that can be used to produce energy would lead to beneficial habitat for Mule Deer. This would compatibly lend itself to Mule Deer management. PJ biomass project developments could capitalize on the resource that agencies are currently paying large sums of money to reduce.
- G. Support the Nevada Partners in Conservation and Development as a driving force in agency coordination, funding acquisition, and landscape scale treatments.

Wildfire-

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Wildfires have grown increasingly large and hot over the past decades, providing challenges to mule deer populations in finding sufficient forage, especially on critical winter range.

While there is little that can be done to influence the number of lightning strikes in Nevada, it has been found that land management practices have been a significant cause in the increased intensity and size of wildfires. Changes to grazing management has contributed significantly to the problem in the following ways:

- Lack of grazing in many areas has allowed overgrowth of fuels, which contributes to rate of fire spread. This is caused by the uncontrolled proliferation of a continuous terrain covering of fine flashy fuels, including matted and uneaten materials in many areas, particularly in prime habitat.
- Cheat grass has been found to be palatable to cattle at nearly all times of the year, when it is green or dry, however grazing has not been effectively used to remove or reduce cheat grass infestations in vast areas of the State.
- There has been a vast reduction in meadow, and other spring / stream irrigated areas due to overgrowth that was previously removed by grazing, woodcutting, and of maintenance of public land that was previously done by ranchers. Water diversions have been reduced that were previously maintained by ranchers. These diversions previously created larger healthier meadows. These meadow / spring / stream / water diversion changes have resulted in smaller green fire-resistant areas.
- Overgrowth of streambeds and banks has increased which dramatically increases fuel overloading in those previously fire resistant areas; this overgrowth was previously controlled to a large degree by grazing and land management by ranchers.
- There has been excessive fire suppression in areas where fires would be beneficial to wildlife by creating successional changes. Reducing decadent forage and thinning Pinion / Juniper (PJ) also create desirable successional change.
- Ranchers can be resistant to changes to existing grazing practices.
- Grazing has been found to have very positive effects on reducing fire danger in most areas, including recently burned areas, while having minimal negative effects on vegetation if it is well managed and highly rotational.
- In most cases in Nevada, under-utilization of feed has resulted in worse habitat conditions than over-utilization
- Rapid initial fire suppression is one of the most effective methods of preventing damage to

SOLUTIONS: PREVENTION VERSUS SUPPRESSION

- Dramatically increase intensive, managed rotational grazing in fire prone areas, and recently burned areas.
- Graze cheat grass intensively when green (spring grazing) before it goes to seed and before it becomes a wildfire threat. Cheat grass can also be effectively grazed when dry in areas where it is not practical to graze it when green. Graze other highly combustible non-desirable invasive plants intensively when most palatable.
- Resistance to changes in existing grazing practices by ranchers can be greatly overcome by modifying/increasing existing grazing permits to allow for additional grazing for fire prevention.

Focus fire suppression efforts:

1. Aggressively pursue the development of 'no-control zones' for fire suppression in areas where burning may be beneficial to wildlife habitat.
2. Create a map for fire fighting agencies of the most critical habitat areas that should receive maximum fire suppression effort. Areas so designated should be as small in area as possible because large areas so designated would eliminate focus
3. Support and encourage agencies to allow natural wild land fires to burn areas of dense piñon juniper where appropriate.
4. Rapid initial fire suppression should be initiated in designated crucial mule deer habitat.

STRATEGIES:

- A. Natural fire cycles should be a basic component of habitat management that provide disturbance to vegetative communities and promote multiple stages of plant senescence.
- B. Unless property, life safety, or other pertinent issues are present, these natural occurring fires should be allowed to burn in areas of dense PJ.
- C. Place high priority upon seeding newly burned areas with fire resistant plants palatable to wildlife.

Weather/ Drought- Beneficial Use of Water Concerning Mule Deer **FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Nevada is the driest state in the Union and has gone through many periods of drought over the years. While there is nothing that can be done to change the weather, many things can be done to minimize the effects of low rainfall on deer and other wildlife.

Governmental practices that have reduced livestock numbers and restricted water development through increased regulation have thereby vastly reduced the amount of water developed for livestock - including water pumped from wells, spring and stream developments, spring exclusions, and piping of water- that was previously available to wildlife in the critical summer months. Along with elimination of thousands of jobs directly related to water development and maintenance, reductions in grazing have eliminated meadows, springs, and other green areas and water sources on a landscape-wide scale.

Across most of Nevada, water is a privately owned property that is only developed and available to wildlife if there is a beneficial use for that water to the owner of the water. In most non-urban situations that beneficial use is grazing or agriculture. Where neither of those industries exists, the associated water availability to wildlife correspondingly does not exist, resulting in vast areas of the State being devoid of wildlife. Grazing of domestic livestock cannot (by practicality) be utilized without water development that will also be available to wildlife.

Lack of "hot season" grazing eliminates much of the need for water development by ranchers, which demonstrates that hot season grazing (on a minimum of a rotational basis) is

vital to encouraging private water development.

Management direction, with respect to tag quotas, predator management, and season structure, should not be determined without consideration of climatic conditions.

Recommendations:

SOLUTIONS:

- Utilize all possible methods to encourage private landowners / public-land leaseholders to develop all water sources and develop meadows.
- With the goal of increasing water available to wildlife, increase available summer grazing AUMs in all areas of the State where water development is necessary for wildlife.
- Remove overgrowth in mountain streams to enhance streams flow. Utilize holistic methods such as grazing wherever possible due to their low (free) cost / low impact. Where appropriate, fire can be a vital tool in overgrowth reduction.
- Remove piñon/juniper from the area of all streams and springs.
- Work with appropriate agencies to eliminate red tape preventing water developments that benefit wildlife
- The Wildlife Commission needs to be more involved in reducing red tape that prevents water developments that benefit wildlife

Habitat intrusion by development

Recommendations:

NDOW get more involved in all development planning at the beginning of the planning process with the goal of preserving and enhancing mule deer habitat.

ISSUE-Energy Development

With the increasing demand for energy throughout much of the nation and the pressure to provide for that increased demand, energy development, primarily in the form of renewable projects and transmission, are being planned throughout the state in the future. Energy production and transmission is vital to the wellbeing and stability of our local, State, and national economy. Energy development, although supported and encouraged in appropriate areas, has the potential to harm some Mule Deer herds.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: Cooperate and coordinate with federal land management agencies in energy development lease plans, and other planning efforts to avoid or mitigate potentially harmful impacts on Mule Deer and Mule Deer habitat.

STRATEGIES:

- A. Focus and coordinate planning at the scoping level to address all potential impacts from energy development. Federal, state, and local representation should be considered and representation from each should be required.
- B. Oppose energy development projects that negatively impact Mule Deer in areas of critical habitat.
- C. Support and encourage renewable energy projects that have far less impacts, or even beneficial impacts to Mule Deer. (e.g. biomass- piñon and juniper projects)
- D. When areas of Mule Deer habitat are sacrificed for development, appropriate mitigation measures should be implemented.

Predation

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Mule deer population in Nevada has been found to be very vulnerable to predation throughout its range. Mule deer are a primary prey species for mountain lions and coyotes, as well as a secondary prey species for eagles and bobcat. There is no evidence to show that

predation is not a population-limiting factor.

Predation control is the one primary influence on mule deer populations that is the most easily implemented, and is the most effective in the short term.

Recommendations:

- Practice intensive predation control in areas where deer populations are low
- A large portion of tag and license fees should be utilized to decrease predation on mule deer
- NDOW should apply for heritage funding to implement predation management on a yearly basis
- Increase use of helicopter hunting in high-altitude mountains where coyotes are found to be preying upon mule deer during February and March
- Continue predation control while growing deer population
- Consider reductions in government-paid predation control in units when deer population has 5 years continual growth and a decreasing predator harvest.
- Additional lion tags for problem units
- NDOW notify sportsman lion hunters of problem units / specific areas on a timely basis (internet).
- Utilize the best objective science available when determining lion quotas
- A proactive approach to predation management should be practiced.
- NDOW biologists should work with Wildlife Services in making decisions as to where predation is a factor in mule deer population growth

Doe Hunting

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Doe hunting can be devastating to a deer population, particularly when the population is low. Doe removal is a primary tool to be utilized in populations considered to be too high.

Recommendations:

Doe hunts may be considered in any area where the recruitment threshold of 40 fawns per hundred doe is exceeded at both the fall and spring counts for a minimum of 3 consecutive years providing that the overall population is either growing rapidly, or growing and within 20% of historical high numbers for that unit/area.

- In areas within 5% of historical high numbers doe hunts should likely be considered utilizing recruitment as a basis for quotas.
- In Areas where deer numbers are not within 20% of historically high numbers and below recruitment threshold of 30 fawns per hundred doe at either fall or spring count, doe hunts should not be considered except in areas where the deer population is considered to be sufficiently high to warrant a doe hunt, and where clear evidence exists that deer are causing substantial damage to habitat, and where clear evidence exists showing that the population is not sustainable, and where a strong public perception from residents within unit boundaries as measured by local and CABMW input is that deer population is too large.
- Where damage exists on private lands, doe tags should be issued in tightly controlled areas designed to reduce only the specific local deer population causing the damage with the goal of mitigating the effects of damage done by that specific local population.

Hunting Season Structure / Dates

FINDINGS OF FACT:

In the past adequate scientific data has appeared to be flawed and / or lacking to justify some seasons, season lengths, and recommended quotas

Hunting during Breeding Season obstructs breeding.

Pressure on game for multiple seasons causes stress on game.

Recommendations:

The Wildlife Commission must require sound scientific data when setting seasons and quotas.

The total days hunted for a species population that the Commission determines to be desired to grow should not exceed 60 days in any year. Season lengths for deer should be limited to a maximum of 60 days unless the population exhibits strong growth for a minimum of three consecutive years and/ or is within 20% of all time historical numbers for the specific unit / area.

- Eliminate the first week of the mule deer archery hunt
- If fawn/ doe ratios in a unit fall below 20 fawns per hundred doe, the department must take immediate action to determine the cause and within 45 days must submit a report to the Board of Wildlife Commissioners that includes their findings and all data gathered. The Wildlife Commission will trigger an intensive management plan to correct the problem. If no cause can be readily scientifically determined, this plan will include, but is not limited to:
 1. Reducing season lengths
 2. Eliminating some hunts in the unit (archery, or muzzleloader, or any legal weapon)
 3. Reducing or eliminating non-resident hunting
 4. Reducing or eliminating resident hunting
 5. Closing seasons
 6. Implementing habitat improvement projects
- If these actions do not, or appear to the Commission to be unlikely to result in, higher deer population levels, the Commission may consider predation control measures that must be proposed by NDOW or the public at that time. If adopted by the Commission, programs must be designed and administered by NDOW and their contractors. To the extent possible, all decisions must be made based on the best available scientific data.

Competition Deer vs. Elk

FINDINGS OF FACT:

In every western scientific study, elk are found to out-compete mule deer.

Population estimates for elk in many areas of Nevada are in question.

Recommendations:

- 1 Keep elk numbers within numbers set in current guidelines. Do not allow upward revision of Elk plan numbers.
- 2 As elk seasons put stress on deer, the seasons for cow elk and non-trophy elk should run concurrently in areas with low deer numbers.
- 3 Maintaining elk numbers at management objectives is priority over decreased overall season lengths.
- 4 An accurate count on elk numbers statewide is needed.
- 5 In adjacent elk areas, elk season dates should run concurrently due to propensity of elk to move vast distances when under pressure.

Genetics

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Genetic variation due to migration loss is a factor in genetic health

There is a population threshold for reduced genetic health

Recommendations:

Manage many hunt units for trophy mule deer.

Increase deer populations to the level where they migrate more.

Road Crossings – Migration routes being blocked.

Recommendations:

- 1 Do not fence migration routes before highway overpass/ underpass is completed. Fencing is last phase of all overpass/ underpass projects.
- 2 Support continuation of on-going highway bypass overpass/ underpass projects

ISSUE-Noxious and Invasive Weeds

The introduction and possible infestation of noxious and invasive species can have a significant and detrimental effect upon beneficial and balanced plant communities. This is especially true in cases of landscape scale monocultures of certain species. In addition, many infestations go relatively unnoticed to the point that damage to the plant communities is quite severe and difficult to address effectively.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: Support efforts of appropriate control practices of noxious and invasive weeds.

STRATEGIES:

- Support livestock grazing practices that mitigate the spread of noxious or invasive weeds.
- Support education programs that inform the public on the negative impacts of noxious and invasive weeds.
- Incorporate noxious and invasive weed management into cooperative agreements among agency programs and projects.

Helicopter

-Monetary efficiency: air vs. ground surveys is a geographically dependant management consideration

-Secondary effects on deer being surveyed may be significant

-Stress on deer being run by helicopter is significant.

Recommendations

All helicopter activities must be timed to not disturb hunters in hunting areas during hunting seasons

Continue current NDOW practices in regards to limiting stress on deer while using aircraft

Feral Horses

Recommendations:

- Feral Horses will be examined as a "stand-alone" issue that will be addressed by the NBWC.
- Create committee to develop position statements on habitat destruction by feral horses.
- Issue continual position statements on habitat destruction by feral horses impacting wildlife.
- Support helicopter wild horse gathers by BLM and USFS where needed in the State.
- Request that BLM and USFS helicopter gathers and all other aerial activities be timed to not disturb deer in hunting areas during hunting seasons, and to avoid the rut.
- Support proposal for creation of a maximum of two (2) horse ranches in Nevada to have a maximum of 1,000 'wild' horses where horses can run free, upon creation, all 'wild' or feral horses must be removed from all other Horse Management Areas statewide.

ISSUE- Shed Antler Collection

Findings of Fact:

Shed antler collection is a problem in many areas, particularly areas where elk antlers are being collected. Aggressive antler collection can affect herd health and antler size.

Antler collecting is a popular recreational activity, it is a great way to enjoy our wildlife and can be done with minimal or no impact to the deer population

An extensive list of problems and abuses associated with antler collection can be readily identified.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The implications of shed antler hunting are beyond the scope and specific focus of this Committee. Shed Antler Hunting and Collecting should be examined and solutions developed as a “stand-alone” issue to be addressed by the NBWC. Input should be sought from the local level, (CABMWs) and brought to the Board of Wildlife Commissioners. A Shed Antler Committee, or another Commission Committee should be utilized for vetting the issue.