

Committee Members: Commissioner Wise (Chair),
Commissioner Barnes, Commissioner Caviglia,
Commissioner Booth, Tom Cassinelli, Fauna Tomlinson

Staff to the Committee: Pat Jackson

**Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners
Wildlife Damage Management Committee
Nevada Department of Wildlife
3373 Pepper Lane
Las Vegas, Nevada 89120**

Thursday, March 9, 2023 / 5:00 PM

Meeting held in person and via www.zoom.us

DRAFT Minutes

1. Call to Order – Chairman Wise

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 pm.

In attendance:

Commissioner Wise, Chair
Commissioner Caviglia
Commissioner Barnes
Commissioner Booth
Fauna Tomlinson, Committee Member
Pat Jackson, Nevada Department of Wildlife
Alan Jenne, Nevada Department of Wildlife
Mike Scott, Nevada Department of Wildlife
Joe Bennett, Nevada Department of Wildlife
Mark Ono, APHIS-WS Nevada State Director

Absent:

Tom Cassinelli, Committee Member

2. Approval of Agenda – For Possible Action

Commissioner Caviglia motioned to approve the agenda.

Commissioner Booth seconded the motion.

The motion passed. Member Cassinelli absent.

3. Approval of Minutes (March 24, 2022) – Chairman Wise– For Possible Action

Commissioner Caviglia motioned to approve the March 24, 2022, Minutes.

Commissioner Booth seconded the motion.

The motion passed. Member Cassinelli absent.

4. Report on DRAFT FY 2024 Predator Management Plan – Predator Management Staff Specialist Pat Jackson – For Possible Action

The Committee discussed the DRAFT FY 2024 Predator Management Plan. Staff Specialist Jackson presented a slide show explaining the Predator Management Plan, continuing projects, and new projects. Mr. Jackson referred to the finite amount of money generated by the Predator Fee and introduced APHIS-WS Nevada State Director Ono. Mr. Ono spoke of his commitment to cost-effective predator projects and how he continually looked for savings and making sportsmen's dollars go further yet still accomplishing the task of predator control. Mr. Ono commented he was continually working on meeting staffing challenges and that he appreciated being a partner with the Department. Mr. Jackson referred to Project 47, which relates to

the Mule Deer Enhancement Program, commenting he was looking for buy-in on the direction of management of predators from sportsmen and sportswomen, as well as the Committee and the Commission. Mr. Jackson ended his presentation announcing a Mule Deer Summit was planned to be held in Winnemucca, Nevada, August 17-19, 2023, where experts in the field would be invited to attend.

Commissioner Booth asked if turkeys were part of the Predator Plan and if so, why. Staff Specialist Jackson confirmed that a Predator Fee was collected on turkey tags and stated perhaps turkeys were included in the fee structure because turkey tags are applied for and so were lumped in with the rest of the game tags when the Predator Plan was created. Commissioner Booth asked if extreme winters would have the opposite effect that drought had had on a wildlife population. Mr. Jackson answered that his presentation merely showed some types of things he would like to look at as to their impact on wildlife populations. Mr. Jackson stated profound winters in a mega-drought would have their own impact and he thought there was a lot of compensatory mortality occurring, more so than in a mild winter. Mr. Jackson stated there was a term used: "dead deer walking" to describe a herd's status in that situation and that weather in the current situation was greatly eclipsing the impact of predation.

Commissioner Caviglia stated that he was still unsure what the Committee was obligated to do regarding Project 47. Staff Specialist Jackson stated he had until May 2023 to make his final recommendation on Project 47. Mr. Jackson stated he wanted to learn how to spend the finite amount of money lethally or in some other capacity solving the problems that mountain lions, coyotes, and common ravens cause. Mr. Jackson stated that if Project 47 did not have a lethal component in this year's plan, the Department might be able to match it with Pittman-Robinson funds. Mr. Jackson explained he had a more polished, but not finished, policy he used to identify when the Department should or should not use lethal removal of either mountain lions or coyotes for the protection of mule deer.

Commissioner Caviglia asked what the process was for selecting a project submitted by the Mule Deer Enhancement Program (MDEP) Subcommittees since each subcommittee would want their project at the top. Mr. Caviglia asked Mr. Jackson what the process was to sort through the different projects and how was the Committee going to apply that process to all the different subcommittees? Staff Specialist Jackson answered that the Committee was going to have to say no. Mr. Caviglia asked what the determining factors were. Mr. Jackson answered it was a public process and the public gave its input, plus input from proven research, and academic findings. Mr. Jackson offered that some determining factors may be to categorize the projects as arid, semi-arid, high alpine, or to look at a herd of deer that migrates elevationally instead of longitudinally.

Committee Member Tomlinson asked APHIS-WS Nevada State Director Ono how he profiled and located the right lion. Mr. Ono answered that with lions, staff specialists capitalized on a lion's own behavior and cash kills. If specialists are looking for a lion in the first 24-48 hours, it is highly probable they are on the right lion. Mr. Ono stated that his department also completed necropsies. Staff Specialist Jackson added that staff specialists understood big game and know that when a lion eats a GPS-marked animal because all collars have a mortality signal. Mr. Jackson stated the process is not perfect, but a lion can feed on a bighorn sheep for up to a week, moving the animal in the process, so a mortality signal is not sent until the lion is done feeding. Mr. Jackson stated that better research is allowing a prompter response, so there is more surety the correct lion is killed. Ms. Tomlinson asked how many lions were removed lethally last year with Project 44, using the \$3 Predator Fee. Mr. Jackson stated he would have to check to be sure, but he would say just one or two lions. Ms. Tomlinson asked if those lions were necropsied. Mr. Jackson replied they were not. Ms. Tomlinson asked if any lions were showing distress or if they were all young toms eating the sheep. Mr. Ono answered that as many animals as possible were necropsied but that it was not a perfect science. Mr. Ono stated that necropsies were done with livestock protection as well in an attempt to better understand what had happened. Mr. Ono stated that more times than not staff specialists knew just by an animal's tracks that they had the right lion. Commissioner Booth asked if the quota or harvest limit had ever been met for lions. Staff Specialist Jackson stated that a statewide harvest limit for lions was implemented five years ago and that it had not yet ever been met. Chair Commissioner Wise asked if it would be fair to say Project 47 laid the groundwork so the Committee could understand where the best management efforts in terms of lethal removal were going to be effective or have the best impact. Staff Specialist Jackson answered yes.

Chair Commissioner Wise opened the agenda item up for public comment.

Member of the public Jana Wright commented regarding Policy 23, stating that if the Wildlife Commission adopted it tomorrow, it is not the same document that the policy committee discussed and passed in October 2022. Ms. Wright stated Policy 23, Section U requires the predation management plan to provide a lot more information so a more thorough conversation about the plan needs to be had. Ms. Wright stated she intended

to bring this issue up at the Wildlife Commission meeting the following day.

Commissioner Caviglia stated that he noticed the same issue as Ms. Wright and that Policy 23 on the agenda is not the same Policy 23 the Committee looked at before. Mr. Caviglia stated that can be a discussion for the Wildlife Commission meeting the next day and that if the Commission approves that policy, there would be additional information that would have to be added to the Predator Plan.

Commissioner Caviglia motioned to forward the DRAFT FY24 Predator Management Plan to the Wildlife Commission as presented.

Commissioner Barnes seconded the motion.

The motion passed. Member Cassinelli absent.

5. Mule Deer Enhancement Program Predator Project Proposals – Predator Management Staff Specialist Pat Jackson – For Possible Action

The Committee discussed the Mule Deer Enhancement Program (MDEP) and the 4 project proposals pertinent to the Committee.

Staff Specialist Jackson presented the 4 proposals from the MDEP Subcommittees, stating he attended the MDEP Oversight Committee meeting and listened to the presentations. The MDEP Oversight Committee requested the removal efforts be run through Project 37, mountain lion removal, and Project 38, coyote removal. Mr. Jackson stated that at the MDEP Oversight Committee meeting he stated it was a possibility to have the projects run through Project 37 and Project 38 and that it would be put on the agenda for the Wildlife Damage Management Committee meeting. Mr. Jackson stated that predator projects are developed for several reasons and there was the public process and a biological process. Mr. Jackson stated he did not have a strong direction on where to go with the 4 proposals, that he respected the public process, and he did not wish the public to be upset with him. Mr. Jackson stated he thought these different areas were great places to consider conducting predator work but if the projects proceeded as written, they would be 'ready, fire, aim' and that there was no data to say what the outcome would be. Chair Commissioner Wise asked Mr. Jackson if approving the 4 projects as written was putting the cart before the horse and if it was in part because staff would be limited to the very specific criteria that was written in the plans, or was it more a matter of not having the habitat framework and groundwork done to know exactly what was being looked at before predators were removed off the landscape? Mr. Jackson answered perhaps both. Mr. Jackson did not want the public process to be disrespected and he did not want sportsmen to feel unheard. Mr. Jackson stated that last year similar proposals were discussed at length, and he felt then that the plane was being built as it was taking off and this concerned him. Mr. Jackson stated that in a year or two, he hoped to have a definitive direction on where he wants Project 47 to go, and that something he did not elaborate on in Project 47 were timelines. Mr. Jackson stated that he had noticed that there was an appetite from sportsmen that if the Department does not do everything that can be conceived of right now, then it is going to be too late. Mr. Jackson stated that sense of urgency is something he wanted to dive into at the Mule Deer Summit that will be held in Winnemucca, Nevada, in August 2023. Mr. Jackson stated he did not think that calendar years were as impactful as biological years. Mr. Jackson stated that it was not that he did not share a sense of urgency, but instead wanted to learn from the management conducted so the Department can continue to do better work. Mr. Jackson stated he wanted everyone involved in the process to get along better than they had been regarding predator management in the state, but he refused to embrace the 4 proposed predator projects as a scientist because he could not expect to understand the process as presented.

Commissioner Barnes stated he felt the MDEP Subcommittees had knowledgeable individuals participating and that the projects have a lot of thought put into them. Mr. Barnes stated he would like to fund some of the projects because it was part of the public process, was something the Department asked the working groups to put together, and he did not see anything out of line.

Chair Commissioner Wise asked how much autonomy the Department had over the timing of the projects. Ms. Wise wanted to know, for example, if a predator project was going to overlap a habitat program, or if approving these plans for the next 3 years, they would happen regardless of whatever else is happening in the area. Staff Specialist Jackson stated that the answer would depend on which staff member was asked. Mr. Jackson stated that the Department can be dynamic in almost every situation, however, there are limitations on how the Department conducts its work with regard to its collaborators, be that a contractor or Wildlife Services. Mr. Jackson stated an example of these limitations would be Mr. Ono speaking to the availability of aircraft to conduct an aerial gutting of coyotes in that there is not a plane or helicopter every day of every month to do that work.

Committee Member Tomlinson stated she appreciated the public process and appreciated not wanting to hurt those who put a lot of time into the process, but to her it sounded like more thoughts and perceptions instead of scientifically, strategically, and surgically removing problem animals. Ms. Tomlinson stated it was not fair to the landscape to eradicate every predator because a small group who are not fans of biodiversity predators. Ms. Tomlinson stated she appreciated that the Department follows the science first before going out and killing native wildlife because a MDEP Subcommittee thought that would be the best thing. Ms. Tomlinson stated it also sounded like the Department does not have the funding for all of the projects so the Committee needs to pick what can be funded. Ms. Tomlinson stated that sportsmen are all about science and that she hoped the Committee followed the science instead of thoughts and perceptions. Ms. Tomlinson stated that it sounded like the Department thought some of the issues related to habitat and not predators.

Chair Commissioner Wise wanted clarification on if the projects were approved, if the fees would come from the Predator Fund, and would the projects be incorporated as new projects in the Predator Plan or rolled into current predator projects? Ms. Wise asked if it depended on what was decided in the Committee meeting. Staff Specialist Jackson answered the coyote work would be billed to Project 38 and the lion removal work would be billed to Project 37. Ms. Wise asked if that would add budget or roll into what is already existing. Mr. Jackson answered it would largely direct those efforts in those projects. Commissioner Barnes stated the Department already kind of had some of these projects in place targeting coyotes on a statewide basis and that the MDEP projects would fit right in, stating if the Department can incorporate the two projects, it should try to do that. Committee Member Tomlinson asked if the Department had funding for Projects 38 and 37, with the added cost of the MDEP proposed projects. Mr. Jackson replied that yes, the budgeted \$3 dollar fee was fluid and as proposed there were \$100,000 tied to Projects 37 and 38. Mr. Jackson stated the numbers put in with these proposals were probably the ceiling that had to be spent, not exactly that amount of money, however the MDEP projects would take up a notable amount of the proposed budget. Commissioner Caviglia asked if in the past, when the Department targeted coyote control on, for example, a fawning ground, was there a ballpark average cost. Mr. Jackson answered that he would not be able to give an approximation because the price per body is not the best metric, but he would say that 10 percent of predators cause 90 percent of the problems.

APHIS-WS Nevada State Director Ono stated in his experience the ultimate question that sportsmen want to get to is what does it cost to kill a coyote or what does it cost to kill a lion and the answer is there is no definitive answer because every project is different. Mr. Ono stated that he looks at it in the form of effort and that if he is given a set of polygons that is high priority fawning ground, he can figure out, based on spatial orientation, how many hours of aerial gunning will occur in specified areas. Mr. Ono stated that Wildlife Services is using GIS to track information better so it can go back and analyze the data, but even at that point, Wildlife Services will not have a definitive answer to cost. Mr. Ono stated that just using the aircraft, \$1200 for a helicopter, \$350 for fixed wing, shows that different tools are needed for different areas when talking about ground-based work. Mr. Ono stated when doing groundwork, the cost gets pretty expensive because are talking about FTE's (full-time equivalent staff) doing the work very slowly, although it is sometimes necessary. Mr. Ono stated that Wildlife Services normally has cooperators say what they need to have done and a cost estimate is given, however, with the MDEP projects it is in reverse: the Department is coming to Wildlife Services saying what can be done with the money available. Mr. Ono stated it was challenging, but do-able, and perhaps in the future he could say a project was too much money, but another project is underfunded. Mr. Ono stated that given the finite resources that the Department has, he believed there needed to be decision matrix for the Department and for the Commission to make yes-no decisions on all the projects. Commissioner Caviglia stated the MDEP projects alone consumed almost the entire coyote budget and half of the lion budget; concluding it was expensive. Mr. Ono stated that was why he was always looking for the most effective tools for the job in hand and that he was sensitive that the cost was being borne by sportsmen. Commissioner Barnes stated while serving on the MDEP Oversight Committee the costs of the habitat projects were all over the board during the first round and during the second review, it was easier because Mike Scott and Alan Jenne had used a matrix to prioritize projects. Mr. Barnes stated a matrix was not used for the MDEP predator projects and it was up to the Committee to evaluate the best project to spend sportsmen's money on.

Chair Commissioner Wise agreed with Commissioner Barnes and was concerned that it was difficult to look at existing projects and take money away from those in order to target animals in another environment and where the Committee might not be able to glean information as to if it was even an effective tool. Ms. Wise liked the idea the Committee could prioritize projects or set some standards so the Department would have the autonomy it needed to move forward. Ms. Wise felt that it would be terrible to spend a few years doing the projects and then not being able to tell whether or not they had a positive effect on the mule deer population.

Commissioner Barnes stated the Eureka project in the Diamonds focused on coyote removal and that he had heard from sportsman that the population of mule deer had exploded. Mr. Barnes stated sportsmen were saying that predator control really helped that population. Committee Member Tomlinson asked Staff Specialist Jackson to confirm the science behind that program in Eureka. Mr. Jackson stated that the Eureka project had gone on for quite some time and he would not confirm or deny as a scientist if predator control played a role in the population of mule deer. Mr. Jackson stated he was not saying predator removal did not help, but he could not say predator removal was completely responsible for the population growth. Mr. Jackson stated that in the annual Predator Plan, the Eureka project was identified as an implementation style project where the primary objective was to implement management of predators through lethal or non-lethal means. Project 40 states that 3 consecutive years of observed spring fawn to adult ratios averaging 50:100 or higher is wanted. Mr. Jackson stated that it was a project conducted as implementation. APHIS-WS Nevada State Director Ono explained the impact of the drought cycle on wildlife in combination with predator behavior, stating the primary and secondary impacts of drought are still being researched. Mr. Ono stated some scientists think there are impacts that are not even being measured and that the monitoring methodologies currently in use to measure success and failure of a project needed to be reexamined.

Deputy Director Scott stated the dollar amounts the MDEP Subcommittees asked for did not have be approved in their entirety. Mr. Scott stated the MDEP Subcommittees asked for \$2.8 million for habitat projects, but those projects were not funded at 100 percent. Mr. Scott stated biologists had agreed that the proposed habitat projects could be done, but those biologists also could not guarantee the benefits of the habitat projects before approving them; although the Department hoped the outcomes would be positive. Mr. Scott stated the Department is never sure that a habitat project is going to result in more animals, but science shows that the wildlife population should benefit, particularly mule deer. Mr. Scott stated that his thought was to measure what the effects are, look at the projects, see where the fawn ratios are, and if in 3 years there is no benefit, then discuss spending the money elsewhere. Commissioner Barnes and Commissioner Caviglia agreed with Mr. Scott.

Chair Commissioner Wise opened public comment.

Member of the public Jana Wright commented the effects of the snowfall on the mule deer population should be allowed to play out before instituting predator control.

Chair Commissioner Wise asked what year the projects would start. Staff Specialist Jackson stated the start dates were within the autonomy of the Department. Ms. Wise asked where the proposals would go next once they were passed. Mr. Jackson answered he assumed the projects would go to the Commission, although he did not know for certain. Committee Member Tomlinson asked if, after 3 years, the projects were not successful, would the projects end. Mr. Jackson answered ending the projects would be an option. Ms. Tomlinson asked if the Department had other projects over the years where killing predators did not increase the mule deer population. Mr. Jackson answered the only ongoing project was in Unit 14 and the estimate had gone up; however the Department has not hit the desired response ratio of 3 consecutive years of 50:100 ratio.

The Committee discussed the proposed 4 predator projects, how the projects would integrate with Projects 37 and 38, when the projects would begin being part of the Predator Plan, and how to measure the success of the projects. Deputy Director Scott reminded the Committee that the MDEP Oversight Committee used a decision matrix to determine the priority of predator projects and suggested that Project 47 could be the nexus of that. Ms. Wise agreed with Mr. Scott, stating the autonomy of the Department to make decisions for the project during the implementation of the project was important. Mr. Scott suggested the Committee's job might be easier if the Department provided a matrix with predator projects already scored. Mr. Scott concluded it would be the Department's goal to bring such a matrix next year. The Committee discussed the goals of Project 47, how to determine if a project was necessary, and if it were backed in science. APHIS-WS Nevada State Director Ono stated that Wildlife Services was also at a point where it could determine the projects where it could be most efficient with the funds available. Mr. Jackson stated the use of Pittman-Robinson funds would be better and asked for the Committee's patience in terms of years. Mr. Jackson urged against muddying the waters by instituting a predator removal project before habitat has been improved.

Committee Member Tomlinson stated it was a crime to go out and kill predators when no one knew what the problem was, yet the science exists that says it is the habitat. Ms. Tomlinson would like to be able to use the availability of Pittman-Robinson funds, getting \$400,000 instead of using \$100,000.

Chair Commissioner Wise opened public comment.

Member of the public Joe Zwiefel, who is also a member of the Area 1 and 2 Mule Deer Subcommittee, commented there were 3 long term predator projects all of which had major population increases and yet the biologists said they are not sure what the reasons were. Mr. Zwiefel asked if anyone could name a habitat project that produced a major increase in population where a predator project was not also going on.

Chair Commissioner Wise asked Staff Specialist Jackson if he had any comments regarding the habitat projects and if he had seen an increase in population in those areas. Mr. Jackson answered that was a question for Staff Specialist Cody Schroder, the mule deer staff specialist. Mr. Jackson stated that a population estimate is not the best way to judge success or failure and there are a lot of ways for a predator study to measure success, for example, fawn survival, or overwinter adult female survival. Mr. Jackson stated that if he had written a paper and submitted it for a peer reviewed publication and said the Department had conducted predator control and its estimated model went up, the paper would not be accepted.

Committee Member Tomlinson asked if there had been major deer population increases in Unit 231 and the unit in the Diamonds as suggested earlier. Staff Specialist Jackson answered that he was not a department employee when the larger efforts in Unit 014 and Unit 231 were conducted and so he could not say. Mr. Jackson stated the Diamonds was an implementation style project where fawn ratios were being examined, and so the population increased but he did not view a population increase as a measure of success. Mr. Jackson concluded that he did not know the answer to the question.

Commissioner Barnes asked how the 4 predator projects made it onto the MDEP agenda. Staff Specialist Jackson answered the projects had come from the recent rounds of MDEP Subcommittee meetings, were filtered through the Oversight Committee, who requested they be added to the Committee's agenda for consideration and approval. Mr. Barnes asked if the MDEP Oversight Committee had reviewed the 4 predator projects. Mr. Jackson confirmed they had. Mr. Barnes stated that if the Committee can incorporate the 4 predator projects into the Predator Management Plan, it should do so, commenting that, "These are sportsman's dollars and these are sportsman's suggestions".

Commissioner Barnes motioned to include the 4 proposed predator projects into the Predator Management Plan.

Commissioner Booth seconded the motion.

The motion passed. Member Cassinelli absent.

6. Public Comment

Joe Zwiefel and Joel Blaksley provided public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 pm.