

Subcommittee Members: Arnie Pitts, Dan Ryan,
Joe Zweifel, Larry Johnson, Steve Robinson

Staff to the Subcommittee: Jon Ewanyk
Tori Cernoch

**Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners
Mule Deer Enhancement Oversight Committee
Mule Deer Enhancement Program Subcommittee
Washoe County; Management Area 1, 2
Nevada Department of Wildlife
1100 Valley Road
Reno, Nevada 89511**

Wednesday, April 20, 2022 / 6:00 p.m.

DRAFT Minutes

1. Call to Order – Department Representative

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 PM.

In attendance:

Subcommittee Member Arnie Pitt
Subcommittee Member Dan Ryan
Subcommittee Member Joe Zweifel
Subcommittee Member Larry Johnson
Subcommittee Member Steve Robinson
Department Representative Jon Ewanyk
Department Representative Tori Cernoch
Department Representative Mike Scott
Department Representative Nate LaHue
Department Representative Pat Jackson
Department Representative Cooper Munson
Senior Deputy Attorney General Craig Burkett

2. Approval of Agenda – Department Representative – For Possible Action

Subcommittee Member Johnson motioned to approve the agenda.

Subcommittee Member Pitts seconded the motion.

The motion passed.

3. Member Announcements and Correspondence – Informational

Department Representative Ewanyk gave an overview of email exchanges prior to the meeting. Subcommittee Member Ryan gave a synopsis of his correspondence, which was that the Subcommittee wants to have greater clarification on how predator projects move through an approval process. Mr. Ryan emphasized that the Department has an obligation to spend predator fees on predator projects and that he would like to see an attempt to approve a new predator project early than the next Heritage Program approval cycle.

Subcommittee Member Zweifel summarized his correspondence, stating he requests the ability to defend the Subcommittee's predator projects if the Wildlife Damage Management Committee is considering their rejection. Mr. Zweifel would like clarification on why the Department chose not to use volunteers at the Upper Indian Spring protection project.

Subcommittee Member Johnson gave a synopsis of his correspondence, stating his correspondence voiced disappointment with the process, concern that the Department's predator staff specialist did not give clear criteria for the requirements of a predator project. Mr. Johnson stated he has requested a meeting prior to the Board of Commissioner's meeting in order to demand a tremendous reduction in mule deer tags, state-wide.

Subcommittee Member Pitts stated that the Subcommittee was given a predator project that would have likely been approved by the Department, but when the Subcommittee made changes to the project, the project was rejected.

Subcommittee Member Ryan expressed an interest in hearing the Department's reasoning for rejecting the Subcommittee's project and how these decisions are made.

Department Representative Ewanyk apologized for the Subcommittee's disappointment in the process and gave greater explanation about the habitat and collaring projects. Mr. Ewanyk stated that if the Subcommittee had not chosen to support those projects, they would not have gone to the Wildlife Damage Management Committee. Mr. Ewanyk shared printouts of the Wildlife Damage Management Committee's draft meeting minutes which gave greater detail on the expectations for predator projects. He also shared with the team that the Wildlife Damage Management Committee and the NDOW are in the process of creating a better and more streamlined process for predator projects as well as a grading rubric. Mr. Ewanyk stated the reason the Department is cautious about predator projects is because they must be defensible in the possibly eventuality of a lawsuit brought against the Department.

Department Representative Scott shared that the Department is spending more money on predator studies in Washoe County than anywhere else in the State. The reason the Department does this is because any predator removal project must be legally defensible, therefore the Department conducts predator removal studies in order to determine if predator removal projects are actually effective. If effectiveness is not measured, there is no way for the Department to defend its choice to spend sportsmen dollars on predator removal projects.

Subcommittee Member Zweifel stated that the Subcommittee is not proposing to kill predators just to kill predators, that instead the Subcommittee is interested in continuing Project 18.

Department Representative Scott stated that there are many more variables and factors in play that may affect a mule deer population beyond predator control. Mr. Scott shared that Project 18 coincided with the area's transfer to a new game biologist who disagreed with the population estimates of the prior game biologist and dropped the population numbers, subsequently bringing them back up in the models.

Subcommittee Member Ryan stated he agreed there are multiple factors that affect a deer population, but he would like to see the Department consider predator removal projects equally as habitat or collaring projects. He shared that the Subcommittee wanted to see each tool used by the Department equally.

Senior Deputy Attorney General Burkett interjected that the Subcommittee must continue to follow the published agenda per Open Meeting Law.

4. ***Management Area 1 and 2 Project Proposals – For Possible Action**

Department Representative Ewanyk gave an overview of the Subcommittee's collaring project, stating in the process of capturing deer in November and February for collaring, the Department was able to collect data on the body condition of the herds. Mr. Ewanyk stated mule deer in Area 1 and 2 were in poor body condition in November 2021 and in even worse body condition in February 2022. The Subcommittee was given additional funds from a federal aid grant for the area of the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge, resulting in an increase the amount of collars that the Department will be able to spend in fall 2022.

Subcommittee Member Johnson shared that friends of his had shot deer near agricultural fields in Washoe County this past season and that those deer were in great body condition. He asked why that would be. Department Representative Nate LaHue, the Department's Wildlife Health Specialist, answered that mule deer does are going through repeated pregnancies which makes it difficult for them to recover greater body condition, whereas a buck does not have an equal energy drain.

Subcommittee Member Zweifel asked if the deer in Unit 014 are at carrying capacity and if the Department has conducted any vegetation monitoring specifically for deer. Department Representative Scott stated that winter range in Unit 014 is in poor condition, however upper elevation summer range is in better condition.

Subcommittee Member Ryan stated that the Subcommittee had created great habitat and collaring projects, and that adding a predator control effort at this time would be a great opportunity for the Subcommittee to be doing everything they possibly could for mule deer in Washoe County.

Department Representative Ewanyk requested that Pat Jackson, the Department's predator management Staff Specialist, provide the team with greater clarity on why the predator project did not receive support from the Wildlife Damage Management Committee.

Staff Specialist Jackson asked if anyone on the Subcommittee had listened to the recording of the Wildlife Damage Management Committee Meeting, reiterating that the MDEP is still being developed and that predator projects go through many public meetings and committees. This is because of Commission policy and Nevada State Law.

Subcommittee Member Robinson asked for clarity about the Department stating in the Wildlife Damage Management Committee meeting that there is not much scientific evidence for there ever being a successful predator project. Subcommittee Member Johnson stated that there are many more cows and feral horses in that unit, and that there is no way one can assume deer in are at carrying capacity.

Department Representative Ewanyk asked Staff Specialist Jackson to provide greater clarity on what the expected requirements for a predator project are. Staff Specialist Jackson stated that the criteria are currently under development, however one main metric is evidence that deer mortality is greatly caused by predators. Subcommittee Member Zweifel stated that 65% of marked deer in Unit 014 were killed by predators. Mr. Jackson stated that he has not seen data showing that 65% of marked deer in Unit 014 are killed by predators.

Subcommittee Member Ryan stated that a Commissioner in the Wildlife Damage Management Committee meeting was asking to see evidence that a predator project will improve the deer population. Mr. Ryan stated that this is an unfair measurement of success, and that predator removal should be seen as part of a greater whole. Subcommittee Member Johnson stated that it is unfair that habitat and collaring projects are not reviewed under the same scrutiny as predator projects. He stated that the Subcommittee is charged with the responsibility of finding ways to improve mule deer populations in Washoe County, and the Subcommittee is proposing predator control projects as part of that charge. Subcommittee Member Ryan stated that the Department has data to support the efficacy of predator control projects if a lawsuit regarding the predator control project is ever brought against the Department. Mr. Ryan stated that he would like to see the Subcommittee have more in-depth conversations with Staff Specialist Jackson in order to determine what is required to develop a successful predator project. Mr. Ryan requested a path forward to bring this predator removal project back before the Wildlife Damage Management Committee over the next 3 months.

Subcommittee Member Zweifel affirmed that the Subcommittee needed to be creative to find ways to make the proposed projects happen. Subcommittee Member Johnson requested that the Subcommittee have a workshop with Department staff in the next month to rework the predator proposal. Department Representative Scott stated that a workshop is certainly possible, however the Department needed to get through the quota process first. Subcommittee Member Robinson asked Staff Specialist Jackson what was needed to make a successful predator project. Mr. Jackson stated (1) a demonstration that predation is limiting and (2) a defined metric of success. Mr. Jackson stated that he wants everyone to be on the same page and understand the same data and be able to move forward together. Mr. Jackson did not want to have another situation like Project 18 where the Department was stating that Project 18 was not working, and sportsmen were saying the opposite. Subcommittee Member Zweifel stated that there is no denying that at the end of Project 18 deer numbers were higher.

5. Public Comment

Member of the public Mel Belding requested that the mapped materials shared during the meeting display data from 2005 to 2014, that Project 14 was all about fawn-to-doe ratios, and that of all the volunteers in the room, no one has ever done a habitat project in the Granites. Mr. Belding expressed concern about a lack of understanding about EHD and expressed that the Department should collect more data on this. Mr. Belding supported projects in Unit 014.

Member of the public Joe Corrola stated he is an avid chukar hunter since the 1960s and spends 40-60 days hunting. Mr. Corrola stated forty years ago he never saw a mountain lion and now he regularly sees mountain lions when out hunting. Mr. Corrola continued stating this year he hunted for 12 days in Area 5 and saw pristine habitat, but never saw any deer. Mr. Corrola stated in the 1970s he did not see any deer in Area 5, and then in the late 1980s he saw deer everywhere. Mr Corrola stated now there are no deer and there is lion sign everywhere.

Member of the public Randy Venturacci stated that he has been involved with leading NBU for 40 years. Mr. Venturacci expressed concern that NBU has provided NDOW with countless collars over the years

and stated that the NDOW needed to share the data the NBU helped it to obtain. Mr. Venturacci stated that there was plenty of available water on Winnemucca Ranch and that there are less deer than there has ever been.

Member of the public Rex Flowers stated that Project 18 was shut down because of a vote by the Washoe County CAB. Mr. Flowers stated that the Subcommittee needed to look at Project 40, a multifaceted project in Eureka County, which includes removal. Mr. Flowers stated that the project contained the same things that the Subcommittee was proposing, and that project gets approved every year.

6. Future Subcommittee Meetings – For possible Action

Meeting adjourned at 8:33pm