

Notes – Meeting 3
Lander/Green Mountain Mule Deer Working Group
September 2, 2014
6:15 PM – 9:15 PM
Lander, WY

Working group attendees: Stan Harter, Joe Hutto, Brad Hovinga, Travis Stevenson, Rowdy Anderson, Marla Lemm, Katie Erickson, Ember Oakley, Jared Oakleaf, Harold Schultz, David Killebrew

Absent: Ken Metzler

Public attendance: Bruce Campbell, Steve Agueda, Casey Dickinson, June Dickinson, Dave Vaughan, Jennifer Lamb

Game and Fish personnel: Brady Frude, Brad Gibb, Daryl Lutz, Amy Anderson, Rene Schell

Facilitator: Rene Schell

6:15 Welcome

6:30 Review and Approve minutes from last meeting and agenda for this meeting
Approved; no comments

6:35 Mule Deer Herd Unit Historical presentation by Stan Harter
Changed to South Wind River (SWR) herd discussion and combined with hunting season history presentation.

Hunt areas 92, 94, 160. Current herd unit basically created in 1971 and ratios implemented as main mgmt tools. SWR anomaly of fawn ration above 66:100 threshold but still experiencing decline. 1970s and 80s surveys counted roughly 100 deer total. Now we're counting upwards of 4000 deer in our surveys. Small sample size issues may be present in 70's and 80's. Sharp decline away from population objective in 2012. Current objective ~13,000. Spreadsheet model estimates ~6000. Deer harvest tends to correlate with population trends. Corresponding changes in hunter numbers also trends with population. Strong correlation in fawn ratios vs palmer drought severity index. Mtn lion stats: consistently raising quotas, not being met.

7:20 Questions

Have you seen displacements of deer in certain areas due to recent development, etc (Harold)? Yes to some extent.

Are hunter number data taken from licenses sold or field checks (David)? Mostly it is via harvest survey responses which is why it is so important to return those to us.

What was the reason behind raising objective in mid 90s (public)? Didn't want to speculate, has not been researched.

It appears recoveries/ responses have taken longer in recent times compared to early 70s data presented (Harold).

7:30 Break

7:45 Mule Deer Hunting Season History presented by Stan Harter/Brad Hovinga Changed to Sweetwater (SW) herd discussion and combined with herd history. Fawn ratios hanging tight to threshold of 66:100, significantly below recently. Been in a drought since ~1948 with a few better years intermittently. Recent antler point restrictions not helping due to lack of fawns/yearlings to protect. No model/estimate prior to 1985. ~5000 deer late 80s early 90s, raised objective mid-90s due to public requests. Population modeling errors in early 2000s combined with habitat stressors/competition equaled sharp drop in late 2000s.

8:10 Questions

Why did area 90 go limited quota (Rowdy)? Haven't researched all reasons, but most of those changes were due to habitat issues and population declines that managers thought would not be able to recover with a general strategy.

What do their populations look like (Travis)? Declining as fast or faster as these (SWR and SW). Reminder that limited quota will not solve the decline

If we had a limited quota season at least we could control hunter #s (Travis).

Is it wise that BLM is clear-cutting on roads (public)? May be helping loss of large amount of habitat due to erosion, fires etc. Hopefully we can have some travel management discussions with BLM as they reach that portion of their RMP.

Are there any radio-collared deer in any of these two herds (David)? Not that we've collared. A couple of deer from adjacent herds have come through.

Are there any plans/ funds to collar deer in the future (David)? We would love to. Muley Fanatics raising \$1.3 million to collar deer south of Rock Springs. We are lucky enough not to have so much energy development creating mitigation needs to fund these large studies.

Getting good solid #s is difficult for various reasons – is there a possibility of issuing hunter survey to gauge population trends (Harold)? We do that with other species and have discovered skewed data and unpredictable data. Our classification data are based on getting a quota to attain ratios and don't attempt to count total #s and we've been able to exceed those quotas so we are confident in those ratios. Differences in sampling timing may influence ratios slightly. Also reason for sightability study upcoming. However, if the working group wants to pursue this as one of their recommendation's, they could.

8:20 Habitat Project Summary by Amy Anderson

Been focusing efforts on winter ranges especially last 10 years. Habitat types and importance extensively mapped in early 2000s. Several treatments taken place since – chemical, mechanical, easements on those identified areas to open canopy cover and improve leader growth/ vigor, release water and available nutrients/resources.

Focus has shifted to transitional ranges. WGFD strategic habitat plan outlines crucial/transitional ranges. Aspen & mixed mountain shrub communities will be the

focus for treatments. Aspen stands need fire regime to withstand conifer encroachment and keep diversity.

How do you feel summer habitat conditions are (Harold)? Drought's an issue, especially on aspen stands, combined with conifer encroachment. Any potential for habitat treatment needs to be identified. Around here (Lander) we don't have as much of a distinct summer range where deer are excluded during certain times of the year. Most summer ranges around here are more year-round ranges where many/most of the deer leave but not all.

With current habitat status, what is the carrying capacity for deer (Rowdy)? ~9000 in SWR and ~2000 in SW based on recent spreadsheet monitoring. May be more of a nutritional carrying capacity going on in deer than habitat related as per Kevin Monteith's research in Wyo Range. We probably see artificially high body conditions in harvest due to selection bias with hunters. We're there based on our current season structure – we've not done anything to manage for carrying capacity.

8:40 Discussion/Questions on presentations or Mule deer biology (reading in book between meetings)

Looking at trend data, when you start to approach carrying capacity you see large drop crashes – is that what was going in some of those graphs and would that dictate more liberal seasons (Jared)? Carrying capacities appear to have been exceeded and combined with hard winters/late winters corresponding to fawning periods have greatly impacted survival. When we see density dependant response coupled with decreasing fawn ratios, it may be wise to have more liberal seasons to stimulate fawn production. Challenge is knowing when that's happening and how can we capture that more quickly than currently – classification data may be the parameter we need to look at. Carrying capacity is a moving target but setting an objective that doesn't allow pop's to reach that point where large declines occur.

9:05 Next Meeting **topics of interest: Consider short term & long term actions consensus vote = 10 fives 1 four**

- o Date **Oct 20th may work for everyone MONDAY**
- o Homework **need replacement for Ilana for NGO designation per the charter; Sept 17 @ 6 pm "Red Desert to Hoback" presentation at Middle Fork; extend an invite to BLM and USFS**
- o Topics for next meeting agenda-**let Rene know within the week if there is information you would like to see presented at the next meeting.**
- o Feedback

9:15 Adjourn **9:17**