

Sheep Mountain Mule Deer Initiative meeting
University of Wyoming Berry Biodiversity Center
May 13, 2015

Attendance:

WGFD: Rick King, Corey Class, Lee Knox, Bill Brinegar, Dan Thompson, Robin Kepple, Katie Cheesbrough

21 people in audience, including Eve Newman with the Laramie Boomerang.

Accomplishments to Date

- Collaborative identification of issues and possible solutions
- Developed and analyzed deer hunter survey
- Working with USFS on seasonal closures in winter and transitional ranges (Muley Fanatics, BCA)
- Working with WYDOT to identify highway mortality hotspots (see plan)
- Working with USFS and BLM to identify habitat projects
- Working with Albany County Predator Board on 3-year coyote removal project focusing on parturition ranges (now in 3rd year)
- Managing Snowy Range elk populations towards management objective
- Separated deer and elk seasons to reduce crowding
- Developed draft research prospective proposal (COOP, MFF)
- Increased bear and lion quotas

USFS Seasonal Closures

Frank Romero and Alex Grant with USFS gave an update on the signing process to let people know about seasonal habitat closures. The gates are there to let people know it is to protect winter ranges for mule deer. Muley Fanatics and Bow hunters of Wyoming helped pay for the signs. There will be volunteer days to install them. Frank shared a motor vehicle use map that shows the routes people can legally drive on. There are seasonal closures indicated on the map. There will be some changes on the map concerning dates of closures. There will be announcements in the newspaper and people will have an opportunity to comment changes.

- **Comment:** the amount of 4-wheeler traffic near Brush Creek that affects the mule deer population. He said there is a lot of devastation to the game populations since these roads opened.

Draft Management Plan

Draft of the management plan is available online at <https://wgfd/wyo.gov/web2011/wildlife-1002439.aspx#>

We are developing the plan based on prior meetings, etc. We need your comments. If we missed something, please tell us. **There was a suggested due date for June 15. Corey asked for audience approval, and the majority gave a thumbs-up for June 15.**

Herd Objective Review – Lee Knox

We are presenting the final proposal to the public. It will then go to the Commission in July. A herd objective must be achievable within 5 years. Lee used examples of Snowy Range elk, Iron Mountain pronghorn, and Laramie Mountain mule deer. Lee discussed carrying capacity and how game populations are affected by amount of available habitat. We are proposing to reduce the management population objective from 15,000 to 10,000 mule deer postseason. Maintain recreational management of 20-29 bucks per 100 does.

Sheep Mountain hunting seasons

There has been a lot of discussion in favor of limited quota. We did not go to limited quota this year so we could do an evaluation of the limited quota outcomes in the Platte Valley. Right now we are at 40 percent limited quota in the region already. This doesn't leave many options for general seasons in this part of the state. We separated deer and elk seasons to reduce deer hunter crowding and harvest, and to simplify elk regulations. Antler shed regulations are in discussion at TRW for this area.

- **Question:** Why are doe seasons being discussed at a statewide level?
- **Comment:** from the audience against doe harvest when the fawn ratios are down.
- **Question:** why do you have to do what the other regions do concerning doe harvest through archery tags? Corey said our doe harvest is insignificant in this herd.
- **Comment:** at least 40 does are killed on the highways or in fences each year. Without a doe harvest, these 40 does could be replaced.

Bear and mountain lion populations – Dan Thompson

We try to work toward regional directives for predators. We have attempted to increase lion harvest in this area. Our data indicate that we are having some progress toward stabilizing this population. Predation can work in tandem with resource limitation to slow deer population recovery.

We have seen an increase in black bear harvest in the past several years. Black bears appear to have little effect on mule deer populations.

- **Question:** Is there any way to determine how many fawns are being eaten by predators? Yes, we are doing a study on this now in another area of the state.
- **Comment:** We are seeing more bears than in the past. I think there are more bears out there.

Group discussion on voting methods

Corey discussed consensus, consent, simple majority and super majority, and the various ways for the group to vote on important issues. One recommendation for simple majority, there seemed to be agreement on this. 60 percent was the favored. It was decided to use the thumbs-up method and the 60 percent got mostly all thumbs up.

Annual Habitat Project meeting

We are working on getting funding for the Sheep Mountain MDI. We do not know the amount yet, but when we do get funding this group will need to decide how to spend the money. Game and Fish would like to submit proposed projects to the group for endorsement. Does this process work for the group? Would the last 2 weeks of July work to hear some proposals?

- **Vote- Adapt PVHP habitat plan for our use – thumbs up (approved)**
- **Vote - Last 2 weeks of July to hear proposals – thumbs up (approved)**

Annual report format

Platte Valley has been using a tri-fold brochure. It is nice, but a bit expensive. Corey suggested a simple “fact sheet” that could be distributed electronically. Suggested information to include on the annual report: classification data, harvest report data, hunter effort and success, harvest, hunter satisfaction, habitat project updates, predator management, other related news. Timing (all data is available by the end of February.)

Other suggestions from the public:

- Add info on PLPW lands.
- Include the progress of some of the habitat projects.
- Fawn counts (spring)

The group was OK with the format and the content.

Annual meeting discussion

The group agreed to timing of annual meetings to keep up on the progress

Field Trip

Lee suggested some potential sites to visit on the field trip. Suggestion from the audience to look at food and vegetation plots. Lee said we could look at winter range use and shrub utilization. Maybe look at a good site and a poor site. At the stopover for the easements, there is concern about privacy so need to make sure these are complete.

Corey suggested July or August. July seemed OK with most of the audience. Corey said he will send an email Doodle poll to participants to select the date that works best for everyone.

Meeting to review the final draft

Corey will send out a Doodle poll for the last 2 weeks of June

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.