

Southeast Region Mule Deer Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

5 August 2024

6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Committee Attendees: Rick Berg, David Vedder, Justin Bergholm, Daniel McGregor, Jon Meyers, Bracken Anderson, Travis Hobbs, Brock Maynard, Gary Peck, Max Winward, Chris Burger, Dustin Rowe.

IDFG Staff: Dan Garren (Regional Supervisor), Zach Lockyer (Regional Wildlife Manager), Eric Freeman (Regional Wildlife Biologist), David Dressel (Regional Wildlife Biologist), Jess Jaeckel (Senior Wildlife Technician), Quinn Kropp (Conservation Officer), Commissioner Jordan Cheirrett

Meeting started at 6:00 p.m. Notes prepared by Zach Lockyer.

Zach Locker:

- Welcome, introductions, and general housekeeping.
- July 1st meeting minutes approved – Dan McGregor motioned and Rick Berg seconded.
- Discussed approving meeting minutes 1 week following meeting via conference call to expedite publishing to the broader public. Committee agreed and will work to approve prior meeting minutes 1 week following meetings.

Presentations covering topics requested by the committee during the July 1st meeting:

Zach Lockyer presentation:

- Overview of previous and current mule deer management plans
- Last plan focused on providing more diversity of opportunity and increased monitoring
- Current plan focuses on hunter crowding issues, IPM development and adds the idea of developing high productivity ranges
- Slide showing intermixing of collars in the Caribou DAU and how we defined DAUs
- Overview of access programs in the state that are supported by IDFG
- Access Yes! properties are when IDFG pays individual landowners for allowing public access
- Endowment Partnership ensures public access to 2.3 million acres of state endowment lands
- Large tracts program – agreements to ensure hunting and fishing access to over 900,000 acres of corporate timber lands
- Managed Hunt Program- IDFG staff manage access and interface with hunters on enrolled properties to remove that burden from landowners. Owners are not compensated.

Eric Freeman presentation:

- Review of historic elk hunting opportunities within the Southeast region and how those changed over time.
- From the mid-40s through current the number of elk harvested, where elk are found, and opportunities to hunt elk have increased. Simply put, there are likely more elk today in southeast Idaho than ever in the past.
- Group discussed correlations between elevated elk numbers and reduced deer numbers and how elk may or may not be influencing mule deer populations.
- IDFG staff informed the committee that seasons and harvest structure for elk was not the charge of this committee, but the topic could be discussed.

Eric Freeman presentation:

- An overview of factors that influence antler characteristics was provided and how genetic makeup, environmental conditions, and maternal traits can impact antler growth.
- Take home – harvest strategies likely would do little to influence genetic makeup of a population largely because of maternal and environmental contributions. Female condition, habitat/forage capacity, and environmental factors are more influential to antler configurations.

BREAK

David Dressel – Historical harvest management, metrics, and differences between various weapon types, season dates, and timing on harvest.

- Provided data on statewide and southeast region mule deer populations, harvest, and hunter participation. Slide demonstrated these metrics in contrast to other western states.
- Discussed and showed non-resident and resident participation and success rates. Non-residents on average are 10% more successful and hunt 1 more day (6 days) than residents (5 days).
- On average ~40% of the harvested bucks are 4 points.
- Delved into the number of hunters afield and bucks harvested in each GMU and controlled hunt in SE Idaho.
- Controlled hunts in other states give some insight into the impact of season timing and weapons. Showed success rates with muzzleloader, archery, and rifle seasons in Utah and Colorado and how those season dates and harvest metrics compared to Idaho.
- Closed with illustration showing that weapon type, timing of season, and length of season will influence harvest metrics (success rates, percent 4+ points, etc.). However, how harvest unfolds will always be nuanced and complex with varying hunter expectations, hunter behavior, weather conditions during a hunt, and status/condition of the wildlife populations in question.

Zach – solicited goals and ideas for change from the committee

- Overarching Goals
 - **Increase deer abundance, numbers/ages of bucks, and hunter experiences**
 - Reduce hunter density
 - Reduce hunter success rates to improve abundance and quality of deer

- Add opportunity to spread hunters out
- Reduce wounding loss
- Improve education to hunters on how deer populations function and how hunting impacts populations
- Group Strategies to achieve one or multiple above goals:
 - Choose your weapon
 - Restructure controlled/draw hunts with some form of general season format
 - Determine the expectations from the public – what is a “quality” deer? What is a “quality” hunt?
 - Implement traditional weapon season in a few GMUs (e.g. traditional archery, muzzleloader, no scopes)
 - Restrict technology that increases success rates
 - Implement waiting period for successful hunters in general units – implement longer wait periods for controlled hunts
 - Address baiting better where it is occurring and changing deer behavior
 - Increase adult female and fawn survival
 - Habitat enhancements
 - Predator control (e.g. non-resident participation, bounties)
 - Winter feeding
 - Engage with industry, specifically mining companies, to mitigate damage/loss of summer range habitat
 - Aggressively reduce elk abundance
 - Assess timing and impacts of livestock grazing on deer population performance and migration
 - Create a habitat stamp to generate revenue for habitat conservation, research, and management
 - Increase resident fees except for youth – generate revenue
 - Motorized Hunting Rule – assess and make more enforceable or get rid of
 - Provide residents the opportunity to hunt before non-residents
 - Move season dates earlier and take days off the later part of October
 - Implement antler point restrictions – suggestion to rotate across GMUs over time

Topics the Committee would like staff to discuss at future meetings:

- Chronic Wasting Disease
- Mule deer weight gain (when, how, etc.)
- Antler Point Restrictions
- Antlerless Harvest – is it ever a good idea. What determines when antlerless harvest is offered?
- Winter Feeding – can it be effective and is there a good plan in place?

Questions from the Committee:

- Is hunting mortality compensatory or additive?
- What would happen if we stopped harvesting bucks?

- What are the mortality rates and causes for mule deer in southern Idaho?

Final Comments from Zach Lockyer:

- Get other ideas to Zach via email. zach.lockyer@idfg.idaho.gov
- Reminded committee members that their emails and names were published for the public to engage with them.
- Presentations and notes will be sent to the committee.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.