

## **Southeast Region Mule Deer Advisory Committee**

### **Meeting Notes**

**1 July 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:** Zach Lockyer (Regional Wildlife Manager), Eric Freeman (Regional Wildlife Biologist), David Dressel (Regional Wildlife Biologist), Erik Bartholomew (Regional Wildlife Biologist), Jess Jaeckel (Senior Wildlife Technician), Jennifer Jackson (Regional Communications Manager), Commissioner Jordan Cheirrett

**Meeting started at 6:00 p.m.** Notes prepared by Jennifer Jackson.

#### **Zach Locker:**

- Welcome and general housekeeping.
- Discussed purpose of committee, meeting guidelines, objectives for committee.
- Our intent for the group composition: All residents of the Southeast Region, desire to have diverse group with varying backgrounds, dedicated passionate mule deer hunters.
- Open meeting law rules discussion.

**Ice Breaker/Introductions:** Who are you, where you from, how long you have lived here, why are you interested in being here, what perspectives and knowledge do you bring?

- Each committee member provided information on their background, why they wanted to be part of the committee and unique perspectives/knowledge they bring to the group.

**Menti.com Exercise:** Series of questions anonymously answered to gain insight into perspectives and opinions with this committee at this time.

**As this exercise progressed, opportunities to ask questions and discuss answers came up.**

- Discussion helped all recognize where there was common ground, where differences in opinions/ideas existed, and where additional information or discussion is warranted for future meetings.

#### **Zach presentation: Why are we Here?**

- Significant changes to antlered deer harvest opportunities last changed in 2008.
- Idaho population, however, has increased markedly in the last 20+ years. Hunter numbers largely haven't changed and are slightly below 2010 levels, yet we hear about crowding. Outdoor recreation across the country has increased dramatically! Even though hunter numbers have been stable, more people are recreating outside.

- Time to revisit... In past 15 years, opportunities haven't changed much but Idaho has. Pop growth, landscape changes, increased outdoor recreation, changes in perspectives, access has changed, etc.
- Can we make small changes now to prevent large dramatic regulation changes later? What else do we need to consider.

## **BREAK**

### **David Dressel - Mule Deer and SE Idaho**

- History of mule deer.
- Fluctuate through time. Declined leading up to 1900s. Then settlement occurred, bringing a change in landscape and habitat which actually made conditions favorable. Saw changes in conservation of wildlife starting as early as 1899, wildlife agencies were created, new conservation measures, regulated hunting, creation of PR and DJ funds—this all set the stage for a mule deer irruption in the 70s and 80s!
- Where are we now? Some great habitat. Some that is not. Most have older stage habitat types, growth, etc. that are less productive for mule deer.
- We have a suppressed deer herd in Idaho. We can do better.
- Many factors contribute to mule deer population—
  - Severe winters (winter driven system)
  - Had tough winters before... but habitat and landscape looked different in 60s, 70s, and 80s. Tougher for rebound to happen today.
  - Roadkill increases on busy roadways
  - Winter severity/drought swings
  - Elk population growth in SE IDAHO! (competition)
  - More technology today which helps with higher harvest success.
- Nutrition—specialized, selective diets, diets vary seasonally  
David showed map showing drastic changes in habitat from conifers to ag land to aspen.
- Limited reproduction
  - 1.8 fawns per female (slow and low compared to whitetail)
  - When captured in Dec, 95% of does are pregnant—will never be 100% and not all of those pregnant does will survive or have their young that spring.
- What do we need?
  - Intact, open, winter ranges and summer ranges.
  - Uninterrupted paths for migrations.

- Enough bucks to breed does. Research shows 10 bucks to 100 does is sufficient.
- 60 -70 fawns per 100 does minimum in December.
- What can we do?
  - Habitat team (Habitat biologists, WMAs, joint efforts with other agencies and groups, land trusts, etc.)
  - Migration team (staff that works collaboratively to map migration routes in Idaho and other states with collaring data, crossing points on highways, etc.)
  - Biologists collect data—get a pulse of what the population is doing! Collaring data, survival, abundance counts, etc.
- How do we mesh social expectations and desires with data and biology? That's a question we have to address.

### **Eric Freeman: Deer Harvest Management**

- Biological outcomes. Management for habitat outcomes, maximum productivity, or disease as examples.
- Social outcomes—management for opportunity, management for mature bucks. Knowing how to achieve each of these options is easy... knowing how to do it simultaneously is more difficult.
- Went over what a management plan is... showed excerpts from current plan. Talked about public survey work.
- What are public surveys? Most recent was in 2017. 30,000 individuals contacted. 6800 responded (which was actually quite a good response). This was sent out in Dec 2016 after deer hunting was getting good but before the bad winter.
- Point is... we really rely on this survey info... Discussion of the 2017 survey.
- Costs and Benefits—cost of reduced opportunity or maintaining opportunities. How do we maintain opportunity but still improve experiences hunters are having?
- Bottomline: execute mission and consider public preferences (experiences matter).

### **Zach: Why an Advisory Committee?**

- Allow for better dialogue, more thorough investigations, better at finding palatable solutions, citizen-driven management, committees are better for discussing/understanding complex topics and issues.
- For this committee: over 70 expressed interest, over 40 applications, we picked 13, one dropped. Looked for SE Idaho residents, good geographic representations of the region, diverse backgrounds.

- Objectives: maintain Idaho's general OTC deer hunting opportunity, improve hunter experience and satisfactions during mule deer seasons, increase buck abundance and age structure.
- Other objectives? This is where the committee comes in! Keep in mind, what we do here could have impact on a larger statewide scale.
- What we need from each other for success:
  - Open mind
  - Engage
  - Participate
  - Embrace differing thoughts, ideas, and opinions
  - Foster respectful space to problem solve
- Authority: Committee is a recommending body only. Decisions are made by the 7-member Commission.
- Two types of rules processes
  - Biological (season dates, bag limits) Public, staff, commission decision.
  - Non-biological (muzzleloader ammo, wait periods for CH applicants, shed antler season). Legislature approval.
  - Committee to work on Harvest Regulations. Examples of ideas that would not be an option-- shutting seasons down for a year or making all hunts controlled hunts. Also, caution about watching out for complex rules.
- IDFG will submit products from this committee to the Directors office.
- During the course of this process, IDFG staff will send out meeting notes, provide background info and presentations as needed or as requested.
- Discussed and reviewed Mule Deer Advisory Committee Charter. Committee members read, agreed, and signed the Charter before leaving.

**Timeline/Meeting Dates:**

- Suggested to meet the first Monday of every month through December.
- 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Can rotate locations. Next meeting to be in Soda Springs (location TBD). Dinner will be provided.
- Zach to send out proposed schedule for committee's review along with meeting notes.

**Question to Committee:** We have been talking to you all night. Future meetings will be about what you wish to discuss. Bring your ideas and creativity. What do you need from us to be successful? Do you have ideas or topics you would like us to research, present, and/or consider?

**Ideas/Comments/Requests from Committee:**

- Controlled Hunts – can the group explore changes to existing or additions of new controlled hunts?
- Committee requested information on muzzleloader success rates, a break down compared to rifle and archery across various units. Include season timing as well.
- Committee requested Historical data: the old controlled hunt in unit 78 success rates, etc. Can we get it? Eric F. showed committee how they can look up this historical information under the science menu option of our website. Link provided here:  
<https://collaboration.idfg.idaho.gov/WildlifeTechnicalReports/Forms/AllItems.aspx>
- Trends with technology.
- Committee requested historical season/regs info.
- Summary of mule deer management plans--- things that have worked and not have worked.
- Access Yes and managed hunts info—what programs are out there?
- Elk populations trends
- Elk management suggestions discussion? Possible to make suggestions? Ex. High elk in unit 76 with low deer and above-objective with elk. Yes, we are open to elk discussions.
- Weapon restrictions a possibility?
- Get other ideas to Zach via email. zach.lockyer@idfg.idaho.gov

**Final Comments from Zach Lockyer:**

- Requested bios from each of the committee members.
- Reminded committee members that their emails will be public.
- Please sign the charter and get it back to Zach.

- Showed committee where to get good background info on deer-related topics on our State of the Deer and Elk video series. Link provided here:  
<https://idfg.idaho.gov/stateofdeerandelk>
- Thanks for listening to us. We are ready to listen to you!

**Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.**