

Southeast Region Mule Deer Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

9 September 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), Toby Boudreau (Deer & Elk Coordinator), Eric Freeman (Regional Wildlife Biologist), David Dressel (Regional Wildlife Biologist), Erik Bartholomew (Regional Wildlife Biologist), Commissioner Jordan Cheirrett

Meeting started at 6:00 p.m. Notes prepared by Zach Lockyer, Eric Freeman, David Dressel, and Dan Garren.

Zach Lockyer:

- Welcome, introductions, and general housekeeping.
- Reviewed advisory committee goals and timeline.
- Discussed “What is consensus?” - Group didn’t have many thoughts here. Members asked if they could try/propose several different things in several different units. We talked about the longer the list the more watered down any individual item becomes. Probably a couple season setting ideas and a couple rules ideas would be max.
- Members asked how long the Department would need to leave a change in place. Toby answered and indicated a minimum of 4 years to assess effects. Some commented that the general public might be alarmed initially depending on the change, but if one of these ideas “works”, then the alarm likely diminishes rapidly.
- Member asked how social vs biological results might be weighted in the evaluation of any change. Dan emphasized that both held weight and that it was ok if something didn’t make a difference biologically, but the public loves it, then we are likely winning.
- Group suggested and agreed that a 75% vote would be good enough for consensus.

Erik Bartholomew: Habitat Presentation

- Talked about the number of dedicated habitat staff in the Department.
- The importance of Collaboration and Partnerships for habitat management.
- Federal, State, and Private land all require different approaches.
- Group discussed the amount of money available for habitat management and that buying properties or conservation easements is extremely expensive.
- Group asked if a habitat stamp would allow for additional match.
- Talked about how the Department is not funded through general tax dollars.
- Talked about the legislature having the final say in a lot of prices and spending authority.

Zach Lockyer:

- Zach talked about ideas that had come from the group that they shouldn't necessarily be focused on because either it's not IDFGs place or within the scope of this advisory committee.
 - Motorized hunt rule, doe hunting, habitat, winter feeding, livestock grazing, elk harvest
- Significant discussion about winter feeding occurred and how important that is to this group. Members felt it was unfair to not allow winter feeding to be a topic for their consideration. Staff committed to going further in depth on winter feeding in the future.
- Committee members were broken into 3 groups for a breakout session to evaluate all their submitted ideas related to potential rules and season changes. Groups ranked ideas from 1 – 5 (1 – strongly oppose, 5 – strongly support). Goal was to identify concepts that had support across the committee and remove concepts that were not well supported so the group can begin to hone in on a short list of ideas and concepts and eventually formulate proposals for season setting or rule change.

General Results and Comments from each group:

- Group 1:
 - Supported the concept of shifting season dates as well as longer seasons to spread out congestion and opportunity. Caveat is that dates need to be consistent across all GMUs to avoid hunters bouncing around
 - Support restrictions to technology (rangefinders, scopes, etc.) as well as weapon restrictions to reduce success rates.
 - Group suggested modifications to GMUs with current controlled hunts. They feel the controlled hunts and diminished the experience and abundance/quality of deer in adjacent general units. Their idea was to add general muzzleloader opportunities to those units either concurrently with the controlled hunt or shift controlled hunt to a different time outside of the limited weapon general season.
 - Group supported all ideas related to increased revenue for the Department that could be used for habitat improvements, conservation, etc. (e.g. habitat stamp).
 - Group supported actions that would open access to private lands for those participating in LAP or other Department related compensation programs.
 - Group did not support the concepts of shorter season lengths, implementation of antler point restrictions, or increased waiting periods for controlled hunts as they did not feel these would address goals for the committee.
 - Group did not support tag structure changes (e.g. A & B tags) or forcing hunters to choose a weapon (too small of a percentage only archery hunt was an example).
- Group 2:
 - Supported the concept of shifting season dates as well as longer seasons to spread out congestion and opportunity.
 - Support restrictions to technology (rangefinders, scopes, etc.) as well as weapon restrictions to reduce success rates. Group suggested making a few units primitive weapons during general season to test outcomes. Group does question how, when, where technology restrictions would be implemented. They would like to be part of those decisions if rule change happens 2-4 years down the road.

- Group supported all ideas related to increased revenue for the Department that could be used for habitat improvements, conservation, etc. (e.g. habitat stamp).
- Group supports any efforts to improve rules language related to baiting.
- Group supports concepts to increase predator harvest (e.g. bounties).
- Group was split on ideas related to changes to tag structure (e.g. A & B tag) as well as split on longer waiting periods for controlled hunts.
- Group did not strongly support antler point restrictions.
- Group 3:
 - Group supported all ideas related to increased revenue for the Department, particularly the habitat stamp as money could be directed specifically to deer.
 - Group supports concepts related to increased predator harvest (e.g. incentive program). Suggested extending lion seasons for non-houndsmen.
 - Group supports the concept of a new tag structure with an A (spike/two point only) & B (mature buck) tag.
 - Group supports concept of developing rules for more restrictive/primitive weapon types.
 - Overall, group doesn't feel like significant changes to harvest management are needed and offered 'no change' might be most appropriate.
 - Group supported actions that would open access to private lands for those participating in LAP or other Department related compensation programs. They don't support the idea of landowners being able to sell tags.
- Group 4:
 - Group didn't like the initial idea of dissolving controlled hunts offered by Group 1, particularly in GMU 78. This group had an animated discussion with Group 1 about controlled hunts and their pros and cons. Group 1 suggested maintaining the controlled hunts but allow a general muzzleloader opportunity during the same timeframe which had some support but still was split. Controlled hunts and tag structure will need to be further discussed and investigated by this committee.
 - Overall, group doesn't feel like significant changes to harvest management are needed and offered 'no change' might be most appropriate. However, they would support testing a few GMUs with more traditional weapons.
 - Group does not support the concept of antler point restrictions, extended waiting periods for controlled hunts, or waiting periods for successful hunters.
 - Group supported all ideas related to increased revenue for the Department that could be used for habitat improvements, conservation, etc. (e.g. habitat stamp).
 - Group supported actions that would open access to private lands for those participating in LAP or other Department related compensation programs.
 - Group supports concepts related to increased predator harvest (e.g. incentive program).
 - They're ok with people having to pick a GMU, but unsure if it will make that much difference.
 - Group supports restrictions to technology, but not choose your weapon. They do not support making a unit primitive weapons only.

Discussion amongst all members:

- Conversations afterwards about how killing coyotes doesn't do anything, but that killing lions has a potential to make a difference. Staff committed to a more thorough review of cause specific mortality, predator management, etc.
- Committee asked for data/statistics on deer vehicle collisions.

Summary

- ALL GROUPS
- **In Favor**
 - **Misc**
 - Habitat Stamps
 - Access to private land in exchange for LAP tags OR LAP tags only valid for immediate lands
 - Clean up language on baiting
 - Increase Fees
 - Predator management/bounties
 - Address Technology/limit technology
 - **Season Changes**
 - Concept of testing limited or primitive weapon types in a few GMUs
- **Mixed support/lack of support**
 - **Season Changes**
 - Modifying controlled hunt structures (merits more discussion)
 - Season length

Meeting concluded – 9 pm.