

Deer Stakeholder Meeting 2/5/16

(SDGFP abbreviated meeting notes and summary information)

General History:

External review of big game program suggested that GFP needed to implement management plans and involve the public in their development in order to keep GFP staff, GFP commission, and public all on the same page and have the plan serve as a reference for everyone regarding management strategies and practices.

Currently no management plan for deer (outdated Black Hills deer management plan) – GFP ultimately decided to do a statewide plan that encompasses both white-tailed and mule deer.

Purpose of this meeting is to provide background on deer management in the state along with other deer related information including season setting process, biological data, and group activity on what topics are most important to stakeholders.

To complete the deer planning process, 4-5 meetings over the next 16 months will occur with the last meeting discussing the final draft plan before it goes out for full public input.

Deer plan will be finalized and presented to GFP commission by May 2017.

Stakeholder Introductions:

- Andy Wookey: Clark county, landowner/farmer
- Josh Ketwig: Codington county, landowner
- Dale Johnson: Meade county, SD Hunting Adventures, Mule Deer Foundation
- Cody Hodson: Rapid City, Sportsmens Club
- Mark DeVries: Belvidere rancher, SD Stockgrowers Association
- David Niemi: Harding county, sheep producer, SD Stockgrowers Association, landowner and guide hunting operation
- Andy Vandel: High Plains Sportsmen Club
- Chris Hesla: Executive Director of SD Wildlife Federation
- Dan Svingen: US Forest Service Ft Pierre National Grasslands
- David Eichstadt: Huron, Beadle County Sportsmens Club
- Mike McNight: Sioux Falls, SD Bowhunters
- Jaimie Larson: Day county, landowner/farmer
- Boyd Schultz: US Fish & Wildlife Service, Private Lands Program
- Rebecca Newton: Belle Fourche, BLM
- Kyle Holt: SD Department of Agriculture
- Scott Phillips: landowner, GFP Commission member, rancher, small guide service in Meade county
- Russ Roberts: Lawrence county, landowner, guide service, sportsman (via phone)
- Ceci Steen: Pennington county rancher (via phone)

GFP Introductions

- Tom Kirschenmann: Deputy Director of Wildlife
- Paul Coughlin: Habitat Program Administrator, private lands and public lands programs
- Cindy Longmire: Human Dimensions specialist, oversee harvest and public opinion surveys
- Keith Fisk: Wildlife Damage Program Administrator, depredation and predator control
- Jacque Ermer: northeast SD Regional Wildlife Manager

- John Kanta: western SD Regional Wildlife Manager
- Josh Delger: southeast SD Regional Wildlife Manager
- Nathan Baker: central SD Regional Wildlife Manager
- Kevin Robling: Big Game Biologist
- Cliff Stone: central SD Regional Supervisor
- Chad Switzer: Wildlife Program Administrator
- Andy Lindbloom: Senior Big Game Biologist
- Mike Kintigh: western SD Regional Supervisor
- Heather Berg – note taker, GIS mapping team
- Kelly Hepler: Secretary of GFP

Chad Switzer Presentation: Overview of Seasons and Regulations

refer to presentation handout for additional reference

Discussion 1: License restriction changes in the Black Hills

Hunters at first were unhappy about the restricted licenses in Black Hills (used to be unlimited with over-the-counter licenses), however; hunter densities decreased and buck quality has improved and most hunters now support this season structure.

Change license types from all “any” type licenses to a combination of “any” type license and whitetail licenses in the Black Hills, also positively received to better manage mule deer population.

Two-point antler restriction was lifted because licenses were no longer unlimited and this restriction was no longer necessary.

Discussion 2: Unlimited Non-resident archery licenses

Non-resident archery licenses are unlimited, concern from sportsmen’s clubs

Prices are different between resident (\$40.00) and non-resident (\$286.00) archery licenses

- GFP commission increased non-resident archery fee and since then, non-resident license sales have stabilized for any deer licenses (could be because of license fees, deer population densities, etc.

Currently non-resident prices are pretty similar to other surrounding states.

In 2015, 3,180 non-resident and 23,507 resident archery licenses were sold.

In 2015, 2,061 archery hunters had purchased both an ER and WR archery “any deer” license.

- Tag success for archery is approximately 25%

Unlimited non-resident licenses is a social issue, not a revenue or biological issue

Discussion 2a: Archery season

- How many archery hunters are hunting in multiple areas? East/West River license vs Statewide– Stakeholders explained that the people they interact with on their land hunt both east and west river but generally hunt one area for firearm season

- Archery deer hunters hunt all over the state, not sure if this is tied to statewide license vs east/west river license system

Discussion 3: Antlerless Statewide Restrictions

Current system of area restrictions where archery and muzzleloader antlerless tags are valid is a little confusing.

Confusion of where it is legal to harvest an antlerless white-tailed deer across the state via archery or muzzleloader. Also, a recent change making all antlerless tags for archery and muzzleloader “white-tail antlerless” only.

People are not always aware of rule changes so likely some level of improper hunting taking place.

Conservation Officers may write tickets for these offenses even if hunters are pleading unawareness of regulations.

Should GFP continue with statewide antlerless allocation method or go back to unit by unit antlerless allocation or something else entirely?

- Current method is liked by some instead of a unit by unit method because it gives the hunter more hunting opportunity and flexibility to hunt multiple units on a single tag.

Confusion has come up because the unit restrictions have changed frequently over the years but the “statewide” concept is accepted.

Stakeholder question: How efficiently can we manage antlerless populations with a large statewide unit?

- GFP staff continues discussions on this topic as well. Only managing WT deer this way, how do we mix in future antlerless mule deer harvest?

Discussion 4: Manage mule deer and white tail deer as separate species

Stakeholder emphasized the need to manage mule deer and white-tailed deer separately.

- White-tail and mule deer have different life histories and would benefit from different management strategies.

Stakeholder request was to consider splitting out licenses between the two species.

- GFP is strongly focused on managing the species separately

Clarification 1: Landowner-Own Land

If you have a landowner-own land tag, it is either East River or West River not a statewide tag as long as hunting on the property they own or operate.

Clarification 2: Sand Lake Refuge

The season is structured to spread hunters out and reduce hunter densities, not a unit break-up.

Discussion 5: Bill introduced to start the Archery season no later than September 1

SD Bowhunters notified the group that they do not support this bill.

Discussion 6: Public Opinion Survey – don't get rid of multiple harvest opportunities
People like to have opportunity for harvesting multiple deer through multiple seasons.

Respondents asserted they were not in favor of guaranteeing every hunter a license for 1 deer only.

Stakeholder Group Input Exercise: What topics are of interest and should be included in Deer Management Plan?

The members were asked to provide topics or issues to put on the board which they believe should be discussed and addressed in the plan as related to deer management. After a comprehensive list was generated, each member was asked to place a tally mark by their top 3 topics/issues.

****Number in parentheses indicates the number of tallies each topic received****

Topic 1: Depredation management (1)

Discussion:

- Belle Fourche River valley; grow row crop and alfalfa, high deer depredation, landowners would like some kind of depredation hunts to target antlerless deer

Topic 2: Landowner preference

- What percent should go to landowner?

Topic 3: Fair distribution of license allocation (3)

Topic 4: Habitat loss (6)

Topic 5: Role of disease (2)

Topic 6: Increase ratio/number of mule deer (4)

Topic 7: Integrating deer management with other land uses/practices [what management practices are landowners doing on land (e.g., wood timber harvest, stock production, etc.)]

Topic 8: holistic management of animals moving between private and public lands

- Question: Is deer herd meeting demand? Is the quality of deer meeting public expectations?
 - Not enough deer on the landscape to meet hunter demand
 - Quality of deer is going to get answered in most recent public opinion survey

Topic 9: Requirement to get better survey data

- Survey response rate is close to 80%
- Suggestion to link preference point eligibility to survey response rate, causing a direct impact on getting tags in the future
- GFP use to require hunters to send in tooth from harvested animal, removed because no way to enforce

- Every hunter does not receive a survey every year, it is a random sample and larger units need fewer hunters to be selected for survey

Topic 10: Antlerless deer harvest management (4)

Topic 11: Managing mule deer and white-tailed deer as separate species (2)

Topic 12: Hunter access to public & private lands (3)

Topic 13: Difficulty to get access on private lands (2)

- Concern expressed that there are some landowners which complain about deer issues, but may not be granting access to the public because offer a guide service or for other reasons
- Offer more tailored approach to limited access → Controlled Hunter Access Program concept/approach

Topic 14: Achieving management goals/deer access

Topic 15: Public land – hunting management and balance of users (1)

- Create “refuge” on public land to limit pheasants hunters and grant access to deer hunters
- Stakeholder recommended an area of public land that acts as a refuge for all game species to get pushed to and get some rest from hunting pressure

Topic 16: Number and length of season and hunting pressure (2)

- Hunting seasons can stretch for 3 full months for different game species
- Even if out hunting pheasants, you are still chasing deer
- Sign up for antlerless deer and landowner can contact these hunters – this is the Volunteer Hunter program
- Not a lot of connection between hunters and landowners

Topic 17: Landowner burnout

- Deer seasons are too long and as a result landowners get tired of all the extra activity/disturbance

Topic 18: Nonresident deer licenses (7)

- Limit non-resident archery licenses?

Topic 19: Unit reciprocity between county lines for Landowners (3)

- Landowner cannot hunt on own land if you have a regular license
- LOL can hunt across county lines
- Apply unit reciprocity to landowners and all of their guests?
- If you have a unit firearm tag for one unit, but have additional land in other counties, landowner should be able to hunt on their own land regardless of unit tag assigned to, not to include public land

Topic 20: WR deer start dates (1)
Coincide with the rut

Topic 21: Antlerless season too early

- Impact of fawn survival when does are being hunted early in the season
- Comes down to when fawn was born, if a fawn is born later (July 1st or later), weaning date most likely will be later and may casue a potential fawn survival impact
- Fawns born in July are more likely to be impacted by does harvested in September
- GFP's opinion is that early doe harvest impact on fawn survival is not a significant issue. Few exceptions may exist if fawns are born late. May become an issue if seasons are opened earlier than they are currently.

Topic 22: Better population estimate

- How can you manage a population if you don't know how many are out there?

Topic 23: Predation rates between White-tail vs Mule deer and its impacts

Topic 24: Too many hunters hunting on multiple seasons (2)

Topic 25: Urban Deer Management

Upon the completion of the exercise, GFP shared with the members the results of a similar activity conducted as an internal exercise. Several of the same topics chosen by the members were also chosen by GFP staff.

Top Items from Stakeholder Group exercise

1. Nonresident Deer Licenses
2. Habitat Loss
3. Antlerless Deer Harvest Management
4. Increase Ratio/Number of Mule Deer
5. Fair Distribution of License Allocations
6. Hunter Access to Public and Private Lands
7. Unit Reciprocity between County Lines for Landowners
8. Too Many Hunters Hunting in Multiple Seasons
9. Number and Length of Seasons and Hunting Pressure
10. Difficulty to get Access to Private Property
11. Role of Disease

GFP Staff List (ranked in order through the same process as stakeholder group exercise)

1. Habitat loss and conversion
2. Public land management
3. Hunting regulations (unit boundaries, season structure, dates, etc.)
4. Antlerless harvest strategies
5. License allocation
6. Hunter access
7. Deer population density

8. Social tolerance of deer hunters
9. Trophy vs opportunity management
10. Predation
11. Depredation
12. Commercialization
13. Urban deer management
14. Disease and implications of chronic wasting disease

Andy Lindbloom Presentation: Biological Information

refer to presentation handout for additional reference

Discussion: Does GFP have an established goal for age/sex ratio?

- Age/sex ratio data is currently used for population modeling but currently does not have a management goal

Discussion: What are hunter success rate expectations?

Discussion: Unrestricted Harvest (e.g., archery, muzzleloader, youth seasons)

How does GFP better manage unregulated harvest on antlerless populations?

Discussion: Aerial Methods

- Drones – up and coming but no good scientific background for estimating deer populations
- Aerial imagery is used for habitat data but not for counting deer

Discussion: Fawn Survival

- Currently, fawn survival is very similar across South Dakota, and is also similar to data quantified in other states.
- In general, if fawn survives the first few months, it is likely to survive the rest of the year.
- GFP only looking for survival and not a cause of death, GFP only collects evidence that fawn did die and not just lost its collar.
- Population model only needs survival rate, knowing what caused the death is important but very difficult to quantify because rigorous monitoring is required..
- Need more years of data to get a better estimate of over-winter survival, GFP doesn't know if winter survival is variable from year to year.
- Difficult to determine the difference between direct predation or scavenging from predators.
- GFP staff believes there is lower fawn recruitment in central part of state, which could be caused by higher predation rates, landscape changes, habitat conversion etc. ,
- Fawn survival in central part of the state consistently remains lower compared to the rest of the state.

Discussion: Does GFP have contingency plans for disease outbreaks?

No, but GFP can provide the opportunity to hunters to voluntarily return licenses. The Department can also take action, upon consultation of the Commission Chair, to remove leftover licenses after the second drawing.

- 25% return of tags in Sully County in 2015

Tom Kirschenmann and John Kanta Presentation: Commission Recommendation Development (CRD) Process – What GFP recommends for seasons to GFP Commission

refer to presentation handout for additional reference

Discussion: Lengthy process to change administrative rules (e.g., West River Deer season dates)

- Season date, structure, license allocation, rules are all set by the GFP commission and are considered administrative rules that have to go through this lengthy process
- GFP commission considers public comments very important

Discussion: How does information fit into timeline of setting season regulations?

- Harvest data is collected from the public in winter and is distributed to GFP staff in the spring
- Biological data is also shared during spring and population models are reviewed and updated
- During spring months, the wildlife manager will meet with field staff in to discuss all data in order to prep for May when recommendations are presented to GFP Commission
- Upon completing the Commission process, enough time must be allocated to finish the rule process outlined in state statute, print applications and make them available on-line, and conduct the drawings
- How does disease or other unforeseen factors getting included?
- GFP cannot respond that same year due to administrative rule in most cases
- There is an administrative rule that GFP can pull licenses after the first draw and request voluntary refunds if diseases outbreak occurs
- Usually a year behind when responding to severe weather events
- Administrative rule that GFP Secretary can allocate some licenses for depredation hunts
- Depredation hunt can be responded to within a few days, not limited by legislative issues

Andy Lindbloom: Plan and Time Schedule & Table of Contents

refer to presentation handout for additional reference