

### Attendance

- Paul Dennert, Commissioner
- Chris Hesla, South Dakota Wildlife Federation
- Spencer Vaa, South Dakota Waterfowl Association
- Rolf Kraft, Western Regional Advisory Panel Member
- Jack Broome, Central Regional Advisory Panel Member
- John Johnson, Northeast Regional Advisory Panel Member
- Mike Elsen, South Dakota Farmer Bureau
- Mark DeVries, South Dakota Stockgrowers
- Brad Johnson, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Brad Merrill, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Chad Switzer, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Keith Fisk, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Nathan Baker, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- John Kanta, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Rocco Murano, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Paul Mammenga, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Mark Grovijahn, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Josh Delger, SD Game, Fish and Parks (via conference phone)
- Emmett Keyser, SD Game, Fish and Parks (via conference phone)
- Mark Norton, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Tim Olson, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Cindy Longmire, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Jacquie Ermer, SD Game, Fish and Parks

### Canada Goose Survey and Monitoring Presentation – Rocco Murano

- The US Fish and Wildlife Survey conducts the Waterfowl Breeding Pair survey during the 1<sup>st</sup> week in May
- Refer to Strata map found in presentation
  - Red transect lines are flown every year
  - Count geese and ducks as well as wetlands
  - Strata and transect lines do not match up with GFP administrative regions
  - Strata were created in 1955, most likely delineated from roads
- Highland (SW corner of state) population of birds are not part of the May survey
- Survey plan flies at 100 mph, 100-150 feet off the ground
  - Observer on each side of plane
    - Look within 1/8 mile on each side of aircraft
      - Only count birds within this distance

- Georeferenced (GPS locations) for the last 10 years
- Transect line sections are 18 miles long
- Survey is targeting breeding Canada geese, not migrants
  - If observer sees one Canada goose in early May, it gets counted as a pair
  - If observer sees 2 geese close by, they are counted as a pair
  - If observers sees 3-45 geese, count individual birds
  - If observer sees over 45 geese, these are not counted; considered migrating geese and not breeders
- Example
  - 3 lone geese = 6 total geese
  - 4 pairs of geese = 8 total geese
  - Group of 7 geese = 7 total geese
- BPOP (breeding population) is index for the whole stratum and need to incorporate expansion factor (area) and the visibility correction factor (compare what observers from plane saw vs ground crew counts)
  - $BPOP = TIB \text{ (total birds counted)} \times VCF \text{ (Visibility Correction)} \times EF \text{ (Area)}$
- Assume that things haven't changed between survey days for a given year, and areas surveyed are representative of entire strata
- Same sampling and calculation process has been used since 1998
- Refer to PowerPoint slides 9-11:
  - Blue line is midpoint (actual goose population index value)
  - Green and red lines are 95% confidence values above and below midpoint
  - Average 95% confidence interval range is approximately 82,000 birds
  - Largest confidence interval range was 140,000 in 2012
  - Yellow line is the current population goal objective
  - Lower limits are usually well below the population goal
  - Midpoint (blue line) has not gone below population goal of 80,000-90,000, but came close in 2002
  - 2015 midpoint index was 153,00 Canada geese
- A 3-year average of the population index is used to even out the variation between years

#### Discussion

- How do we incorporate High Plains breeding geese into statewide estimate because the SW corner of the state is not part of USFWS geographic survey area or statewide population index?
  - These geese are not being factored by anyone across the country
- If we are going to be making management decisions based on statewide trends, we should consider including the High Plains flocks
  - These goose numbers would not likely impact population management strategies
- Depredation in High Plains area are usually during migration periods, not by breeding birds that are part of the population monitoring survey

- Monitoring survey is not a GFP survey, but administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
  - It is a good barometer of trends
  - Maybe not best way to get a true population estimate because of the high confidence interval ranges
- Lots of goose restoration efforts in the High Plains area, can we square off the 44 unit?
  - This survey is a duck survey and the USFWS counts geese only for SD Game, Fish and Parks
  - USFWS not likely to change their methods because it would change their duck survey and long-term trends
  - USFWS likes long-term standardized protocols, otherwise you would have to throw out all of the old data

### **Depredation Tools – Keith Fisk & Group Discussion**

- The Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) program has evolved over time
  - GFP got a lot of kick back in the 1990s to ramp up efforts to tackle goose complaints
- GFP has a lot of new tools that are helping to address landowner needs; they are working and effective
- Never going to make everyone happy but social tolerance is increasing because we have so many tools to provide and use with private landowners
- 1,100 geese taken from kill permits in 2014
- Last year added 1,366 nests under USFWS permit and 1,034 in 2015
- GFP needs to educate landowners about available WDM tools, who to contact, how the process works
  - Last year Region 4 (NE part of state) sent letters out in March to anyone that received some kind of goose depredation service within the past 2 years. The letter included several available tools and included an application for a kill permit, which was available before crops got planted. This was done so landowners didn't have to wait to receive a permit and could utilize as soon as geese were present.
    - Wouldn't take more than a couple days to get kill permit to landowner, dependent on if mailing or if landowner came to office
- GFP did not use Spring Canada Goose program in 2015, but did use at some level in 2013 and 2014
- What are top 3 most effective tools:
  - Region 3 (SE part of state)
    - 1. Kill permits used sparingly (not as effective at reducing geese but satisfies landowners to manage depredation as they see geese doing damage)
    - 2. Nest work is situation specific to islands and over-crowding (may not have to use this much in the future)
    - 3. Fencing is labor intensive and has high expenditures, but it is effective
    - 4. Use of hunting season most effective

- 5. August Management Take (AMT) and September seasons are not as effective as they once were
  - Region 4 (NE part of state):
    - 1. Hunting
    - 2. Fencing works great when the geese are not flying
    - 3. Hazing and kill permits work great early in the season
    - 4. Would like to use wheat or permanent buffer strips more but not competitive pricing yet
  - What WDM tools are you using most?
    - Fencing is used the most
    - Use of kill permits issued to landowners has been high for the last 2 years
    - In northeast part of state, use wheat buffer strips around wetlands with molting geese
    - Best to have a variety of tools to use because each area can have a different problem or situation
- Got lots of negative feedback when staff where able to use kill permits but landowners weren't
  - Now landowners can be sub-permitted under GFP to lethally take geese causing damage on their land via approved kill permits
- Does the department have fencing supplies stock piled?
  - GFP has a lot of equipment but some of it can last only 2-3 years
  - Almost everything goes out into the field each summer and wipes out GFP stockpiles
  - Hundreds of miles of fencing going on each year
  - GFP is utilizing everything we have for all WDM species
  - WDM budget is being spent every year (2.5 – 3 million dollars in WDM budget)
    - Department as a whole is willing to help out WDM when necessary to cover extra costs
- Spring Canada Goose Program is requested to come back by Mike Elsen of South Dakota Farm Bureau
  - Tried it for 2 years
  - One year had bad weather with little hunter participation
  - GFP did not get the desired result
  - It was a lot harder to kill geese than expected
  - Instead of spring take, had kill permits available earlier in the year for 2015
  - In 2013, volunteers killed 800 birds; in 2014 volunteers killed 600 birds
  - Hunters didn't have time to go out and hunt Canada geese when they could also hunt turkeys or go fishing during the same time frame
  - Had lots of hunters asking about it in 2015
    - GFP had to issue a statewide news release to indicate program was closed
- Spencer Vaa, South Dakota Waterfowl Association
  - 100% of comments from SD Waterfowl Association hunters did not like Spring program

- Responders say that fall goose populations are in decline and AMT is the root of all evil
    - Sent out 4 questions to SD Waterfowl Association members (500 members)
      - Of the 21 respondents, they don't like what is going on
        1. Population objective 150,000 with brackets on each side
        2. No to August Management Take
        3. 50% support for September season but make it only 2 weeks with 5-8 bag limit
        4. Non-lethal and lethal methods
          - a. Don't like lethal methods at all, instead prefer fencing & buffer strips
          - b. If you have to use lethal force, use it sparingly
- Farm Bureau (16,000) members
  - They want a Spring Canada Goose hunt
  - Indifferent to AMT
  - Depredation is expensive
    - Fencing is labor and time expensive for landowner
    - GFP will supply materials for corn depredation because corn can come back from grazing geese
      - Soybeans cannot, by the time you get fencing up, lots of damage has already been done in some cases
        - In 2012, GFP was running 2 weeks behind because of the high number of goose complaints
    - 100% sportsman dollars are covering depredation tools, not coming from tax payer dollars
  - South Dakota Farmer Bureau wants to see a population goal of 120,000
- Last 15 years the population was slightly increase for 3-year average
  - Over the last 3 years, however, goose population is declining
  - If you look at trend of last 6 years – level population
- No confidence from the public on the goose population objective, because it has never been met
  - Set the objective and respective tools for management goals; once goals are met, re-evaluate tools used to manage population goal
  - Need to get to goal, see how it feels for a while and look at management tools
- South Dakota Wildlife Federation is against kill permits and egg addling; would rather have hunters go out and take care of geese
- Mark DeVries of SD Stockgrowers - Can we get a rough estimate of SW population of geese to include in statewide SD population objective of geese?
  - There has been a lot of restoration work into increasing goose populations in this area
  - Likely not going to happen with the current USFWS survey
- Gregory, Winner, Tripp areas do not have goose numbers to cause complaints or draw in hunters
  - Residents never used to see geese nesting in the lower stretches of the Missouri River

- They can now hear geese year round and its exciting for people in this area
  - No depredation issues in this area but feel the population is increasing
- Rolf Kraft, Western Regional Advisory Panel Member – why is there so much depredation in NE part of the state?
  - Because this area has ideal breeding habitat intermixed with food supply in close proximity
- Do buffer strips really work?
  - Work some places but not others, depends on if water goes dry near the strip
  - Permanent water works better with permanent buffer strips
- Being a good steward of the land and conservationist is a lot more than just growing crops
- Rolf Kraft, Western Regional Advisory Panel Member—View geese as a business – if you leave your desirable product out in an open lot with free access, it’s going to get stolen. Put the less desirable stuff out for easy access and protect the more valuable merchandise. To clarify, suggesting that producers plant high value crops that are not ver suseptable to depredation in areas of high goose concentrations and plant the vulnerable crops further away. Incovenient I know, but may reduce crop losses.
- There is a change in the mind-set of landowners
  - Geese and turkeys were not here historically, new generation taking over that has always had goose and turkey present on the land and expects to have to deal with them
- Leave tools in the toolbox and use as necessary to get at population objective
- GFP has only been managing goose numbers for the last 15 years
  - GFP is learning as it goes on how to manage populations in line with public opinion
- Even if we reach the population objective for 5-10 years, we may not end up satisfying producers and hunters

### **Population Objective Discussion**

- 80,000-90,000 is too low and unrealistic as a population objective – unanimous agreement
- Let’s get a number, try to get there and see how it feels for awhile
- Going to have hotspots of depredation, may have to have special tools to target these hotspots
- By having lethal tools available to landowners, this can really increase landowner tolerance
  - Need to have the depredation tools for people to react to growing goose numbers if we are going to increase the goose population goal
  - Landowner kill permits are not taking a biologically significant amount of birds
    - GFP and landowners killed just over 1,000 birds in one year with kill permits
      - Landowner takes 2-3 birds per permit, up to 350 permites a year
- Brad Merrill, USFWS Law Enforcement – You can haze a migratory bird legally, just can’t shoot them
- We should set goals that are achievable, set a wider population objective range to offset weather impacts and match range to precision of our population confidence interval ranges
- Think about the population objective as the midpoint and then put range around that number to account for confidence interval

- Shoot for the midpoint and know that top and lower limit will trigger management actions

### Decision-Making Matrix Discussion

- GFP is trying to manage a species that was a huge conservation success story, we do not know what the biological carrying capacity is for geese in South Dakota
- GFP is trying to establish the social tolerance carrying capacity
- Decision matrix has not been in goose plan before but is becoming a common component to other wildlife management plans
- Justification is the outline of what you expect the social tolerance is and how GFP will be reacting

### Restrictive Management (Increase Population) – refer to “draft” decision matrix handout

- If population level is below objective, GFP would like to see more geese so take action to make this possible, depredation is limited and manageable, non-lethal techniques are primarily used, lethal take is very limited for special use
- Table primarily applies to Unit 1
  - Unit 2 is driven by staging and migrating birds, not local breeders
  - Unit 3 is primarily staging and migrating birds, not local breeders
- If you get increased breeding goose depredation in Unit 2, consider moving that county into Unit 1
  - Goose units are much easier to change than duck flyway units
    - Goose units can be set by GFP commission, duck units require USFWS involvement

### Moderate Management (Maintain Population) – refer to “draft” decision matrix handout

- Hunters are happy and depredation is manageable, non-lethal techniques are primary but likely some lethal take is expected

### Liberal Management (Decrease Population) – refer to Matrix handout

- Major crop depredation, more lethal will likely be used

### Decision Matrix Discussion

- 3-year average straightens out the bumps but can cause a problem of not being reactive enough
  - This gets addressed with larger objective range
- Choosing to keep a 3-year average so we might be slower to react; better than reacting on roller coaster
- For each management category, use full federal framework for regular season
- For Units 2 & 3, bag limits are set at 4 for all categories because these are not the birds the state is managing for and not likely geese causing crop depredation
- August Management Take: GFP would determine what unacceptable levels of damage are

- If no county experiences unacceptable damage, then no need for AMT season
- Unit 2 & 3 do not have a September season
- Sportsmen Against Hunger (SAH) donations have been used to try to increase harvest of animals
  - Department pays for full processing of Canada goose to SAH (\$4.00/goose)
  - GFP pays for part of the big game processing fees for certain species
- Kill permits were not part of matrix
  - Nests were listed in matrix to demonstrate the number of nests that can be taken in each category
  - GFP doesn't have enough history with use of kill permits so more difficult to set a maximum number (really only been used the last 2 years)
- Kill permit is correctly called Special Canada Goose permit from USFWS
  - State calls it a kill permit
    - Was suggested we should call it a Depredation permit or something besides kill permit
- Suggestion to include both kill permit and nest work in Matrix or leave them both out and put in Depredation section of the plan
  - Not saying that you can't use kill permits, but maybe shouldn't be listed as part of matrix, rather put explanation in the Depredation section of the management plan
- Consider taking out SAH from matrix and include comment in different section of plan
  - GFP doesn't know if SAH donations actually increases harvest of birds
  - SAH for geese requires a special permit from USFWS for processing locations
- AMT bag limit should be changed to "maximum" bag limit of 15, don't lock us into 15 bag limit
- AMT and early fall seasons are not well received from some hunters
  - Consider leaving both out of Maintain category
  - AMT and early fall seasons were introduced to try to combat high goose populations
  - AMT is a tool for chronic depredation areas and not an actual hunting season
  - AMT does not count against hunting days but early fall season does, this is why the early fall is not in Unit 2
- Mike Elsen, South Dakota Farm Bureau – Any chances of putting spring season in liberal category?
  - Probably not completely taken off of the shelf but unlikely to be used in near future
  - As a compromise, instead of Spring Program kill permits were made available earlier (April 1)
  - Spring Program requires a lot of staff time to develop (landowner permission, maps) with little gain on reducing goose populations → add narrative to Depredation section of management plan
  - Spring kill not very ethical, should not be used unless absolutely necessary
- Need more descriptors into matrix table for increase and maintain population on how/when/why decisions are made
- Are we moving in the right direction by using a matrix table approach to justify management?
  - Yes from stakeholders present at meeting

- GFP can take plan revisions to Commission to get adopted into plan as changes are needed
  - Commission could approve different actions based on emergency events or unforeseen catastrophic event
- Any point in making 4 units instead of 3?
  - Add a new unit out west?
  - You are managing west river the same as east river counties
  - Unit 1 is configured for simplicity, west river is in there to reduce complexity of regulation
  - How would we handle wanting to manage an increased population west river and decrease populations east river?
  - Goose population west river has been very stable
  - If you have a unit 4, you would consider changing the bag limit
  - Habitat base is the limiting factor out west; hunting pressure is likely the same from year to year
  - Perkins County has later opening season because the birds aren't there until later on the Shadehill Reservoir; no point having an early season
- In looking at the 3-year averages from 1998 (16 averages), 155,000 was the average 3-year average
  - The BPOP index estimate in 2015 was 153,000
- In 1<sup>st</sup> plan, didn't know what numbers were, best guess of BPOP was 100,000
- SD Waterfowl group wants midpoint of 150,000 with range of 125,000 to 175,000
- 1993 and 1996-1997 were really wet years, have to factor in age structure of birds
  - Geese take 3 years to reach breeding maturity
    - Need nesting structures
    - Food is not a limiting factor
- GFP feels comfortable with +/- 25,000 range around the population objective to account for the 95% confidence interval of the population index estimate
- Should population objective be different for different parts of the state?
  - Each strata has its own specific population goal in the current plan
  - Seasons will not be determined based on strata
  - Strata goals can be set
  - Get to midpoint and determine what is reasonable for each strata
    - 14,000 – strata 44 (2015)
    - 92,000 strata 48 (2015)
    - 44,700 strata 49 (2015)
  - 150,000 is statewide population – 2/3 of statewide goose population is in strata 48
    - 90,000 is 18-year average for strata 48
- Before stakeholders went to white board to select their desired population objective (each stakeholder was provided two stickers), Chad Switzer of GFP reminded that the stakeholders are here to provide their opinion and input
  - Do not have authoritative power

- Popular vote here may not be what gets put into the plan
- Each stakeholder had 2 stickers to place on their desired statewide 3-year average midpoint population index estimate with a +/- 25,000 range
  - 1 vote for current objective (80,000 to 90,000)
  - 3 votes for 100,000
  - 3 votes for 125,000
  - 11 votes for 150,000

### **Waterfowl Hunting Access—Mark Norton**

- Few Walk-in Area opportunities specific to waterfowl hunting
- Lot of land in the eastern part of the state for waterfowl hunting opportunity even though it may not be specifically enrolled for waterfowl hunting access
- Opportunities are now being enrolled around Sioux Falls with this area in Unit 2
- There are GPAs in Fall River, Bennett and other counties for waterfowl hunting opportunities
- Jacquie Ermer, northeast regional wildlife manager – cooperative areas for waterfowl hunting
  - Likely to decrease next year as the habitat has decreased in some of these areas
- Emmett Keyser, southeast regional supervisor
  - Lots of geese in and around Sioux Falls
  - As migration progresses more birds will come
  - 7 total CHAP areas for waterfowl hunting enrolled in 2015
  - Opportunities for local folks
- Nathan Baker, central regional wildlife manager – Lower Oahe Waterfowl hunting area
  - Just over 1,500 hunters last year that registered
  - Other unrestricted areas managed for waterfowl hunting (private land)
  - Trying to build on this program
  - 2 trailers full of all the gear you need to hunt waterfowl are available for hunters to check out
- John Kanta, western regional wildlife manager – Limited opportunities out in western part of state
  - Some GPAs have opportunities
  - Working with Lacreek NWR on potential waterfowl hunting opportunities
  - Also working on opportunities for waterfowl hunting adjacent to Rapid City

### **Private Lands Habitat Programs—Tim Olson**

- Discussed habitat programs and the things GFP has available for financial programs and technical assistance
- Trying to work with the private land community that are running livestock to maintain and manage grassland habitats
- Work with partners and incentivize some of the practices that promote wetlands and grasslands
  - West river tend to do more pond work.

- Spencer Vaa – commends the Department for putting habitat improvement articles in the South Dakota Conservation Digest
- Keith Fisk – question to landowners
  - Is email a good method to reach out to landowners?
  - Comments:
    - Older landowners will not use email
    - Worry about signing your email up and getting lots of useless emails
    - Don't want a bunch of emails
    - Mailing lists get sold to others and get lots of email that we don't want
- Chad Switzer – Landowners Matter newsletter
  - Comments:
    - Not everyone gets it
    - Currently goes out to about 17,000 landowners
    - Recently purchased a list to try to improve numbers

### **Urban Goose Issues**

- Keith Fisk overviewed the issues
- John Kanta reviewed the Rapid City situation
- Rocco Murano - Banding geese in and around Sioux Falls
  - Learn about where the birds are coming from and their harvest rates
- No comments from stakeholders

### **Action Items**

- Share “draft” decision matrix table electronically with stakeholder group
- GFP staff will now start working on objectives and strategies with the input provided by the stakeholder group
- Will provide a “draft” plan revision with the stakeholder likely in February or March
- Will meet one more time with stakeholder group once they are given time to review the “draft” management plan revision.