

## UP Deer Management Initiative

As most of you are aware, last deer season was less than stellar. This results from many issues including the late snows in April 2023, predator load, decreasing hunter numbers and decreasing winter habitat.

We have an estimate on the deer herd put together by retired UP Wildlife Biologists of 175K-250K deer. To put this in perspective, this is the estimated deer herd just after the logging in the 1900's.

UP hunter numbers are estimated to be the lowest since just before WWII and before the soldiers came home. Hunter numbers can be equated to buck harvest and the long-term average over the past 10-15 years has been about 30%. It is estimated the UP buck harvest was down 25-26% for 2023. This also points to a low deer herd.

Predators on the landscape also play a large part. It is estimated that they take about 100K deer annually. Let's start with the obvious elephant in the room, the wolf. Retired UP Wildlife Biologists estimate that they take 13K a year. Bear at 9K population take 36K deer and coyotes 49K deer. These add up to just shy of 100K. The wolf is an additive load in the past 10 years. An argument can be made that they take out the weak and I must give that some credence, but given the opportunity they also take healthy animals. Most of the deer and coyote kills occur during the fawning season. It also should be noted that if we had adequate winter range, this would lessen the effects of the predators.

In talking with long time retired wildlife biologist, John Ozga, also known as the father of UP deer, it is habitat, habitat, habitat (carrying capacity of the land) and the strength of old man winter over a length of time. Even though we have made some strides in management, we need more emphasis on preserving low land conifer management for deer and other species. We also must realize anything done today will be recognized no sooner than 20-30 years from now at the earliest.

Given the above background, the DNR, influenced by the NRC put together the Deer Management Initiative (DMI). We spent a month with online presentations at least twice weekly for a month+ followed by an in-person meeting. The group consisted of folks from the UP and LP, 20 folks for each peninsula. We have a tale of 2 Peninsulas; the UP lack of deer and LP too many deer. This was compressed so the recommendations would come before the NRC for regulation changes at the July meeting. We were encouraged by the department to talk amongst ourselves and develop a plan.

Decisions would be made at the 2 day in-person meetings. The UP was held in Marquette. The UP DMI had 2 department employees, 4 from the Lower Peninsula and 1 from Wisconsin along with other UP residents.

The meeting was facilitated by MSU aided by Chad Stewart, DNR Whitetail specialist. In addition to the participants, Tom Baird, NRC Chair, Dave Anthony, NRC Member, Sarah Thompson, DNR Wildlife Chief, Brook Parmale, DNR and Stacy Haughey DNR UP Deputy Director. All of these were non-voting.

We were told this was the participant's meeting. **We voted that simple majority vote would be the recommendation of the DMI.** We defined the objectives and then decided on the all the objective those DMI thought were most important and consolidated several of the objectives.

As things progressed the 1<sup>st</sup> day we discussed non-regulatory items. During the day any vote taken was a simple majority.

Day 2, I started off explaining we had just gone through a sausage manufacturing the 1<sup>st</sup> day. I let folks know how disappointed I was that we did not discuss answers to the issues. I thought we would at least discuss population dispersal, dynamics, habitat, and predators. I offered to leave after my explanation of the process since we did not talk about the issues.

We did not discuss predators other than wolves and our inability to do anything until delisted. The only discussion had was that Sarah Thompson stated the Governor told her that there would not be a wolf hunt. Tom Baird stated the NRC's position is that after delisting, they will do what is necessary to have a wolf management hunt and then Sarah further stated after clarifying she had not talked with the Governor, but an aid, the Governor is in favor of a management wolf hunt.

I thought we would discuss the bear populations and coyotes.

As we progressed through the day avoiding the real issues, we again consolidated more objectives.

### **We voted all the votes based on a simple majority.**

It came time to suggest regulations and were in 5 different groups.

The presentation attached is the one UPSA, many of the UP Whitetail organizations and GLTPA all agreed on the attached presentation. Jim Hammill explained the proposed regs and long term items in the proposal including the science behind them. 3 groups of 4 or 12 folks (simple majority) supported this proposal and is the one Jim Hammill, Mike Taylor took to DMI members in the UP.

A group composed of Jordan Hoover, Bill Scullon, DNR Wildlife Biologist, Mark Zitnik, DNR CO, Chris Webster, MTU Professor and Bob Jones, President Michigan Bow Hunters, made a proposal that eventually was the vote winner in the weighted average final vote. No science or herd affect was discussed. Jordan Hoover and Bernie Hubbard are receiving notes from the Department to write the plan and Jim Hammill will review it. This proposal includes doe hunting in the Superior watershed. This has the least amount of deer per square mile in the UP. I will send out this proposal when I receive it.

**It is important to understand that Bob Jones filled in for another member and was a member of the LP DMI. He knew how the end vote was set up and I believe how 7-8 people defeated 12 people.**

At shortly before 5 PM, it was time to vote on the 3 proposals. **Instead of a simple majority as we had previously agreed to and had done so the rest of the day, it was changed to a weighted average vote based on the objectives and had a range from +2 to -2. As a result, our proposal lost even though we had the simple majority. Many did not understand how the vote would be tallied.**

**If someone would have explained how the vote worked or gave an example so all participants could understand, I'm sure the vote would have been different.**

**I have to question the vote. The 3 groups of 4 folks (12 folks out of 20 or simple majority) that wanted the proposal supported by UPSA and other organizations came in last place in the weighted average vote. The other 2 proposals with 4 each supported by 4 folks beat out the 12 folks. I am not sure how this would occur, unless someone had inside knowledge on how to vote.**

As I stated earlier, I believe this is a disaster because the UP deer herd and deer hunter did not receive the most biologically sound result and received a social science based decision.

David Johnson  
President UPSA  
UP DMI member