

Deer Winter Complex/UP Habitat Workgroup Meeting

Tuesday, June 11, 2017

River Rock Lanes and Banquet – Ishpeming

Attendees: Jim Hammill, Stu Boren, Jake Walcisak, Warren Suchovsky, Bernie Hubbard, Eric Stier, George Lindquist, Tony Demboski, Dennis Nezich, Matt Watkeys, Clay Buchanan, Terry Minzey, Pam Nankervis, Stacy Welling-Haughey, Lowell Larson, Bryan Reitter, Bill Scullon, Bob Doepker, and Jeff Stampfly

UPHW – Phase II Updates

2017 implementation 6 WUP counties and in 2018 implementation in 9 EUP counties

Working on the following for Non-industrial private lands in the UP:

- Location maps of the various landowners
- Identify and GIS various plans in place
- Oldest plans – do they include DWC language
- Incorporate DWC language in the new plans
- Outreach to other landowners

Grants available with number of acres and plans involved for the UP:

- DNR Forest Stewardship - 420K acres with 2,500 plans
- Commercial Forest – 369K acres with 1,300 plans
- QFP – 180K acres with 2,800 plans
- CS-EQUIP (NRCS) – 115K acres with 800 plans

These 7,000 plans cover about 1 M acre. We need to update these plans to include DWC language and get these plans in a GIS layer.

GIS Data

Information is limited to the section, and is of poor quality, and expensive to create which will affect the precision of the plan locations. It is essential to develop a GIS base to create various maps for analysis, outreach, habitat, forest cover type, etc. When the plan is in the GIS database as it relates to a specific DWC, we can contact the landowner for a plan update/review. We can help re-engage landowners in their planning process. These plan holders will be contacted directly by the Conservation District or CF foresters. With plan renewals, there is a great opportunity to include DWC language. We can also use mapping to 'piggy back' smaller land holders into a larger scale timber sale or scarification to make the job worth it to the contractor.

We are getting the message out through the Forest Stewardship Quarterly newsletter and the direct mailing to 140+ consulting foresters. Also we are including a DWC consideration checklist in all the program plans. Another idea is to include a check box for interest in DWC management on the DNR Deer Camp Surveys. If there is room on the form, ask if they have a plan. Ms. Nankervis said the Forest Service has been working with TNC and has received tree planting monies for forest health in DWC areas. We are conducting riparian plantings for winter habitat rather than species

specific projects in the Ottawa. Mr. Minzey said we should invite Tina Hall from TNC and Tom Bailey to our meetings. We have common goals with TNC to get conifer on the ground.

Mr. Suchovsky asked how we are tracking the landowners who do not have plans, but are actively managing their lands. Mr. Boren said with the GIS data, we will be able to see the holes in the DWC areas where landowners do not have plans and will have the Conservation District or foresters contact these owners who might slip through the cracks.

Mr. Minzey would like to partner with the Keweenaw Land Trust to re-establish mesic conifers on the 1,200 acre parcel of land in the Keweenaw when they remove the fence from around the property.

Ms. Nankervis said the Forest Service seeks to provide educational outreach about DWC improvement to private landowners within the ONF boundary. Also, in light of promoting the preservation or enhancement of hemlock on the ONF, she has had several people question relevancy to climate change models showing a decline for that species. She feels that those of us trying to do so should be prepared to answer that climate question.

It was also suggested to engage Michigan Association of Timbermen by attending a board meeting a giving a presentation. Another suggestion was to include Mr. Hammill on the agenda for the upcoming regional UP Conservation District/NRCS meeting.

Conservation District Coordination efforts with the UPHW

Mr. Hammill asked how we get more activities on the ground to benefit White tailed deer. We have the Conservation Districts in direct contact with private landowners. He suggested a large scale grant for planting hemlock, cedar, and white pine. We would be able to contract local nurseries and give the stock to the Conservation Districts who would sell the stock at a deep discount to land owners who have a current plan in place. This might encourage others to obtain plans in order to get the discount on trees. We could also include scarification and contractors for both planting and scarification in the grant as well. Also include the monitoring efforts by MTU. Combine all these ideas into one large scale grant project. What are we planting and why – will we be excluding anyone? We will still have a core mission with contacting DWC land owners and owners in deer yards and the immediate area. If someone is not eligible, we can direct them to other grant possibilities.

Conifer Planting and Grant Discussion

This grant is a two-year cycle using license dollars to focus on deer in the UP. People are asking for more money for larger projects as groups are tying in together and obtaining a grant writer. Mr. Boren said we need to clarify what needs to be done and how to implement it and have the Conservation Districts defined where the money will

go. Mr. Minzey offered some helpful hints for grant applications: identify up front where the trees will be planted specifically in order to monitor the grant and success of the plantings. Concentrate on areas of public access Ottawa/Hiawatha and CFA lands or on private ownerships that would directly benefit the public. An example would be mesic conifer restoration in a DWC related area where the deer will migrate 10 miles into the area rather than a food plot on private land farther away from a wintering area. We would then show animal dispersement which would benefit broader hunting opportunities.

Where are eligible sites for successful plantings – how to go from the landscape to plan to stand level – find acres available for planting that fit the criteria as opposed to we have several locations in three counties.

Mr. Suchovsky suggested spreading things out from the traditional deer yards to encourage migration to other areas. This would help lessen the impact on the yard in light of CWD. Mr. Lindquist said transitional areas are also important and trees have a higher potential to become established and keep the deer out of the deer yards a little bit longer.

Mr. Buchanan talked about the grant particulars. Staff money can be charged for writing the grant; however we haven't funded any full time staff to execute the grant. Matching funds of 10% can be in kind, the more matching funds, the better. With a strong project, the level of matching funds is not as important. It is a good idea to have an itemized grant as we can then award some of the project and the grant will not be an 'all or nothing' grant.

Ms. Haughey brought up some difficulties in obtaining grants. How do we connect the groups with the Conservation Districts? In the past we collaborated with Masters Students at NMU and several groups to write grants. We will need to have 1 or 2 people take the lead and bring everyone on board. Utilizing the Conservation Districts to coordinate the effort, provided they have time, would be a logical choice.

Mr. Lindquist asked if the application period could be extended. The time and effort to put in for a grant is a short window. It was suggested that the area, maps, and goals can be done before hand and during the six week application period a consultant can complete the write up. The consultant's time can be written into the grant. For next year's grant cycle, we can start the process now, so when the application period opens we have everything we need to put in for a strong, large scale grant. Out of the \$950K available, the average request is ~200K. The UP has not been granted anything over 100K. The UP average is between \$25-40K a year, due in part to some of the issues both Ms. Haughey and Mr. Lindquist brought up.

It was asked if we could resurrect old deer yards. Mr. Scullon said they are costly to re-establish and are lower on the priority list for the State. Ms. Nankervis said the Forest Service is planting green corridors to lure the deer and encourage them to re-establish in historic deer yards.

Mr. Boren said we are a year away from writing the grant. We need a decision making process including foresters, Conservation Districts, and consultants to pull together eligible planting sites that we know were harvested within the last 5 years. In these areas we can decide if it is to be replanted with the number of trees /ac or if it should be scarified. We can also ensure the areas are close enough to public land and deer yards. We can even get this type of information from many partners and have a list of criteria to rank potential sites.

DHPI Grants

Mr. Scullon said the grants are to improve habitat, establish partnerships, and to showcase the efforts. Grants have been awarded in all UP counties except Houghton. 61 projects have been funded for \$450K since 2009. Many of the grants come through the Conservation Districts. 11 projects were funding this year for Hunter Walking Trails, Hard mast, and Soft mast plantings. Part of the scoring criteria includes proximity to public lands. These are straight forward, transparent, 1-year cycle grants for tree planting. We have the ability to modify the grant, removing what is not feasible, yet fund what is appropriate.

Mr. Watkeys talked about the grant the Marquette Conservation District was awarded this year. There were 5 land owners who had a hardwood thinning. These small 5 acre project sites were given support to plant conifers. Mr. Reitter discussed the successful grant for the Dickinson Conservation District which is for scarification on 50 acres to promote natural regeneration, with supplemental trees for planting if needed. So far, 45 acres are lined up for rock rake and other site specific scarification methods.

Groups can apply to other grant programs. Each has their own criteria. The DHPI grant is specific to work on the ground. The groups can secure a grant from DHPI and seek other opportunities to fund habitat management plan writing in addition to grant writing.

UP-Wide Deer Management Study

With regards to the CWD Response Plan, Mr. Minzey said if an infected animal is found in the UP, there will be a 10-mile radius and any county in that radius will be shut down to baiting and feeding. This Management study will find out how much interaction deer have during the year. If there is an infected animal found, we can target the surveillance area based on biological research than an arbitrary county-wide feed/bait ban. We are currently working to identify wintering complexes in the western third of the UP and will begin by working west to east by radio collaring 150 animals. The animals will be GPS collared for 3 years. Also for the CWD Response Plan, we need a population estimate. We are developing a camera trap survey that will be conducted without using bait. We will be using 50 Stevenson box traps to capture deer. The data obtained from both the GPS collars and the camera traps will be used to estimate deer population densities. We can also use the data from the camera trap survey when establishing numerical deer population goals. The data gained from this research could also be used to review

our DMUs and re-design them based on the meta-populations. We would be able to see how many of our animals are moving down into Wisconsin as well.

Research studies discussed at a recent prion conference shows that there is the instance of cross-species contamination of CWD between cervids and monkeys. The CDC says this is more reason to be vigilant; however, there is no transmission to humans, yet. Baiting and feeding may well be going away and the need for larger habitat in order for deer to disperse will become more critical. The Kivela Bill will prohibit any carcass from being brought into Michigan from any other State. The cape, de-boned meat, and the cleaned out skull cap can still be brought in. Wisconsin passed legislation which lifts the baiting ban after 3 years in counties where CWD was discovered but not found again during those subsequent three years. In adjoining counties the baiting ban would be lifted after 2 years if no additional cases are found.

2018 Funding for the DWC-UPHW

Mr. Hammill said funding is secure through the rest of 2017. For 2018 there is a verbal agreement with the DNR for \$10K from Wildlife and \$5K from Forestry. SCI has agreed to help their various chapters with in-kind donations. Mr. Hammill's chapter donated \$2K with the \$2K match. The Hunter Legacy Fund, which is part of SCI, has \$600K this quarter to fund various good conservation projects. Mr. Hammill believes the work this Group has done would qualify and will apply for a \$100K grant. Could the each of the UPWT chapters donate \$1K? That would bring in an additional \$8K.

We need to communicate the successes of this Group to the clubs. Some have taken a wait and see approach before funding. They have also noted that there is not much participation, input, and funding from the deer hunting community. We need to change that as well.

Next meeting – Tuesday September 12th – meeting place to be determined