

THE GREAT LAKES DEER GROUP

A History, Statement of Purpose, and Suggested Plan of Procedure

FOREWORD

During the last few years the need for a reappraisal of the official status, organization, purpose, and procedure of the Great Lakes Deer Group has been increasingly evident. This was made an important part of the agenda of the Bayfield, Wisconsin meeting of the Group February 11, 12, and 13, 1958. These matters were discussed by a steering committee, by a panel discussion on the program, and at the business meeting.

Following these discussions a committee was appointed consisting of Hepburn of Ontario, Erickson of Minnesota, Hale of Wisconsin, and Bartlett of Michigan (chairman). Olson of the Milwaukee office of the U. S. Forest Service, and Krefting of the St. Paul office of the Fish and Wildlife Service were named as ex-officio members. This committee was charged with responsibility for writing a history, a statement of purpose, and a suggested plan for future procedure for the Group.

The following is the first draft of material being distributed among members of the committee for critical analysis and revision.

HISTORY

In the 1930's and 1940's, as game biologists increased in number, conferences and meetings of those interested in wildlife management became increasingly frequent. Each conference had sessions on upland game, farm game, waterfowl, and fur bearers. In the Great Lakes area deer began to emerge as an important species of wildlife; yet at conferences deer men were forced to sit through paper after paper on muskrats, quail, pheasants, rabbits, pintails, and such, to have the opportunity to present or listen to a short paper on deer, often scheduled just before final adjournment, before an audience of a few die-hards scattered through row after row of empty chairs.

Deer men finally grabbed the buck by the antlers and called evening sessions of their own. These attracted so many interested persons from concurrent sessions on other species that strong protests were heard. However, the deer meetings persisted, proved very popular and valuable and became of increasing importance.

On April 25, 1944 at the ninth North American Wildlife Conference deer workers meeting under the direction of Aldo Leopold, summarized their opinions in the statement "The Deer Problem - Nation Wide." This action seemed to knit the deer men into an identified unit. During later years the need for a Great Lakes deer group materialized at the Midwest Wildlife Conferences.

Deer men regularly met in separate meetings at the Midwest, discussed related problems, swapped information, and passed on the knowledge gained through certain experiences. All through these discussions it became more and more apparent that a certain void, a blank spot, a lack of clear understanding was obstructing the smooth interchange and most efficient use of such information. There was a hesitancy to accept the other fellow's findings. After some discussion this obstruction was identified as a lack of knowledge of the conditions under which the other fellow was working. Similar experiments did not bring the same results in Wisconsin as they did in Michigan, in Minnesota, or Ontario, and vice versa. If deer men were to make efficient use of the information gained in other states, then it would be desirable for the men to be more familiar with those out state areas.

In 1946 Michigan sent men to Wisconsin to observe deer feeding operations first hand and to discuss mutual problems with the Wisconsin men while actual field conditions were under observation. This trip was highly successful.

In 1947 deer men from Wisconsin and Michigan met at the Cusino Wildlife Experiment Station in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Experimental feeding of deer in pens was discussed while examining the pens, the deer, and the adjacent browsed out deer yarding areas.

During March, 1948, Michigan deer men profited greatly from a week's field trip in northern Wisconsin with the deer committee of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress and a number of Wisconsin deer men.

The first attempt at an organized "get-together" of deer men from the Great Lakes area was made in February, 1949. Discussions at the December, 1948, Midwest Conference had pin-pointed the serious need for a better understanding of the other fellow's problem

in obtaining the most efficient use of a pool of deer information. It also had become apparent that each state could not run all the desired experiments. If these could be split up among the various federal, state, and provincial agencies, more and better results could be obtained. Especially if men in each unit were acquainted with the other fellow's research facilities.

In February, 1949 Ontario sent a man to Wisconsin to observe certain phases of deer work there. During his stay Minnesota deer men and the regional biologist of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service worked in the field with the Wisconsin-Ontario group. Through previous arrangement the Wisconsin-Ontario group then moved across to Michigan's Upper Peninsula for a meeting in the field with a group of Michigan deer men. From this beginning the Great Lakes Deer Group developed. Later the regional biologist from the U. S. Forest Service joined and completed the group.

Members of the deer group got together with others for an informal meeting December 14, 1949 just prior to the regular meeting of the Midwest Wildlife Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. No winter field meeting was held in 1950 but the group convened December 14 and 15, 1950 in Columbus, Ohio, again prior to the Midwest. Here again, the need for broader knowledge of field conditions for better understanding and first hand examination and discussion was emphasized.

Copies of correspondence in the files of Michigan's Game Division indicate that the official formation of the Group was discussed by the administrators at various meetings in both 1949 and 1950 and that correspondence was exchanged on the matter. There appeared to be a general agreement that such an organization was desirable and that it should be given official recognition.

The Department of Lands and Forests of the Province of Ontario invited the Group to meet with them in the Fort Francis-Lake of the Woods territory January 29, 30, 31 and February 1, 1951.

The Fort Francis-Nestor's Falls meeting was an enthusiastic success in spite of 40° below temperatures. In December, 1951 following the Midwest in St. Paul, Minnesota, the Minnesota deer men conducted the deer group on an extremely interesting and

informative tour of various deer ranges in the state including the northeast central area and the Red Lake District and ending at the Federal Mud Lake Refuge in the north-western prairie edge country.

This was an exceedingly enlightening trip, especially the discussion held on the last evening involving the vast differences in wintering areas from the cedar swamps of Michigan and Wisconsin to the willow-Phragmites thickets of western Minnesota.

No regular organized Great Lakes Deer Group meeting was held in 1952. However, some of the members who attended the evening session on big game at the Midwest in Des Moines, Iowa, on December 18, 1952 kept notes that were later distributed to all the members of the Deer Group.

In 1953 the Group seemed to "hit their stride" and very successful annual winter meetings have been held as follows:

1953 - Michigan	1955 - Ontario	1957 - Michigan
1954 - Wisconsin	1956 - Minnesota	1958 - Wisconsin

These meetings have been characterized by organized discussions on assigned topics during which discussion leaders brought out the pertinent information by calling on the specialists from each state and province. The organized field trips and field discussions have opened new horizons on the reaction of deer herds to the varying conditions found in different parts of the Great Lakes territory. Copies of the informal transcripts of the discussion held at each meeting starting in 1949 through 1957 are available.

Meetings have comprised of from 20 to 50 persons, with an effort to keep the Group in the 20 to 40 range to facilitate discussion and make field trips more efficient. In the last few years there has been a definite swing towards research and more technical discussions. The Group as a whole feels this results in a repetition or duplication of effort running parallel to the Midwest. Future meetings are planned to include a more informal, broad program spending about equal time on research, general investigations, and management. Discussions should follow the more informal discussion-leader pattern rather than an individual giving a "paper."

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Great Lakes Deer Group is organized:

1. To promote a better interchange of information, among members, on deer and deer range, investigations, hunting, and management through closer association, field trips, and round-table discussions.
2. To improve the understanding of conditions in various territories by actual field examinations and discussions.
3. To supplement, not overlap or duplicate the work of the "Midwest" or the "North American."
4. When so requested by administrative agencies, to make recommendations on specific topics, management practices, and coordination of research and investigations.

Its long range policy is:

1. To develop a progressive inventory and more efficient use of basic knowledge of deer range and deer.
2. To maintain a current list of projects active in search of knowledge on deer range, deer, and their relationships.
3. To list the more important needs as pertains to a knowledge of deer range, deer, and their relationships.
4. To outline a basic program for deer range and deer herd management in the Great Lakes area.

PLAN OF PROCEDURE

The Group shall be known as,

"The Great Lakes Deer Group"

It shall consist of representatives from the Federal, State, and Provincial Wildlife Conservation organizations and Educational institutions in

Ontario
Michigan
Wisconsin
Minnesota

Officers shall consist of a chairman and a secretary, appointed each year by the host state or province.

It shall hold annual meetings rotated each year among the states and province. The meetings preferably to be held in midwinter in major deer or deer study areas and to comprise two full days including a field trip of at least a half day duration. Details, dates, location and other features may be adjusted at the discretion of the host organization.

Attendance shall be restricted (with reasonable exceptions) to those working on deer investigations, deer management, deer research, administration, and wildlife education with emphasis to be placed, at least partially, on the lower brackets -- those who are actually doing the work on the ground. It is strongly suggested that the total attendance at the annual meetings be kept within the 30 to 40 range by each visiting state or province sending not to exceed 5 delegates with the host organization unlimited as to number.

Meetings shall be of the "discussion-leader" type with topics for discussion assigned to various organizations or individuals at the previous annual meeting or as the need arises. Specialists from outside the group may be invited to discuss pertinent topics but should take up not more than one meeting period. It is suggested that meetings be held in midweek; that the group gather first for the evening meal, hold a meeting in the evening, a field trip the following forenoon, a meeting in the afternoon, another in the evening, a final meeting the next forenoon and adjourn immediately after lunch. This pattern may be varied to fit local conditions.

The Group shall make no recommendations on research, investigations, or management unless such is definitely requested by an administrative unit. However, the Group as a whole represents an important pool of knowledge on deer and deer range research, investigations, and management in the Great Lakes area and requests from administrative units for expressions of opinion or recommendations will be welcomed.

A record of topics discussed shall be kept, and an informal report distributed each year following the meeting, to pass on in written form the latest important

acquired knowledge and experience regarding deer.

At the present time it is the policy of the Group to weave the theme of future meetings around one major area of consideration with related side topics augmenting the overall theme. These major topics are to be adjusted to the basic needs of knowledge as emphasis changes with the progress of time.

Discussion

As outlined in "History" the Great Lakes Deer Group was organized to fill a very evident void at the lower levels where a better understanding was needed of the work of deer men in other states in the Great Lakes area. This need has been met by the meetings of the Group and the interchange and analysis of pertinent information has been much facilitated by the intimate association made possible by the field trips, the small attendance, the informal meetings, and round table discussions.

Every effort has been made not to duplicate the activities carried on at the other wildlife conferences already established.

The name, "The Great Lakes Deer Group," was adopted only after much consideration. Terms like Council and Committee were passed over as not representing the organization.

The area encompassed by the present group membership covers territory having similar herd, range, and climatic conditions and where problems are reasonably comparable. Also there are sufficient important problems arising in this area to consume all the time available for discussion. The territory covered by the Group should not be expanded.

Annual meetings are needed to keep up to date on progress and for best use of progress made in other areas.

The two-day midwinter meeting fulfills the most urgent need but variations are sometimes desirable to meet local conditions.

Too many people in a meeting limits free discussion; leads to presentation of papers and formality which this group should avoid. By limiting meetings to the 30-40

bracket the efficient round-table, assigned-topic type of discussion can be used to best advantage and should reduce the tendency toward giving papers or individual dissertations.

Originally, suggested delegates were one field management person, one research person, one deer management coordinator, and one administrator from each organization (state-province) plus the wildlife biologist from the local regional office of the U. S. Forest Service, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with the numbers from the host area unlimited. This basic policy still seems good with a few exceptions. If more than 30 persons are present the round-table discussion-leader type of program begins to lose efficiency. It is considered inadvisable to put a strict limitation on numbers attending but each organization should strive to include the pertinent people without exceeding a quota. The host organization is asked to use discretion; however, it is realized that this is the only opportunity that many lower bracket workers have of discussing their problems with comparable workers from other areas. Therefore, the number of persons attending from the host organization is unlimited. It seems advisable that where expedient, the heads of the wildlife management departments of the major educational institutions of each state or province, where wildlife management is taught as a major subject, should be invited as guests. Such invitations should be extended by the regular members from the state or province in which the educational institution is located and the guest would be included in the limit of 5. Also when deemed expedient guest specialists should be invited to discuss certain pertinent subjects. These specialists should be invited only with the sanction of the Group as a whole and especially the sanction of the host state or province.

It also seems advisable to suggest a limit of (1), (2), (3) (cross out two) from the regional office of the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, local personnel from these or comparable Canadian agencies would be considered as coming from the host state or province.

The round-table discussion-leader type of procedure has proven highly successful in the past in bringing out the most valuable information. These are the experiences

of the man doing the work and how they fit into the other fellow's program. This is the type of knowledge, not brought out at the North American or the Midwest conferences, but which is invaluable to the fellow doing similar work in another territory.

It has been found advantageous in a well-rounded continuous annual program to suggest certain topics for discussion for the following year. This leads to organized discussion on the more overall-important topics.

Outside specialists are a very important addition to the program and should be invited in when the time and topic fit.

The field trip presents an opportunity for observing various types of range in different localities and the reaction of deer under different conditions. This is a valuable part of the meeting when location and conditions are right.

To forestall the appearance of trying to dictate policies it has always been a strict rule to make no recommendations or even to take a stand on any subject. Discussions have been very impersonal and no advice given except suggestions between individuals. However, it is the feeling of the Group that this policy has led to the wasting of much talent and knowledge and the Group would welcome requests from the administrators for an expression of opinion or recommendations.

The Group feels that its meetings are filling an important need and with cooperation and steering from the more experienced administrators its continued contribution to deer management can be maintained at a high level.