

## THE GREAT LAKES DEER GROUP

BY

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### HISTORY

In the 1930's and 1940's, as game biologists increased in number, conferences and meetings of those interested in wildlife became more and more frequent. Usually each conference held sessions on big game, upland game, farm game, waterfowl, and fur bearers. Interest in white-tailed deer was high, but only a small part of a typical meeting was devoted to its discussion.

At the April 1944 North American Wildlife Conference deer workers met with Aldo Leopold and summarized their opinions in the statement, "The Deer Problem - Nation Wide." This action seemed to knit the deer men into an identifiable unit.

During later years, the need for a Great Lakes deer group became apparent at various wildlife conferences. Deer men met separately at these conferences, discussing related problems, swapping information, and passing on knowledge gained through experiences. With 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 efficient use of such information. There was a hesitancy to accept the other fellow's findings. Later on this obstruction was identified as a lack of knowledge of the conditions under which each researcher was working. Similar

experiments did not bring the same results in Wisconsin as they did in Michigan, Minnesota, or Ontario, and vice versa. It was recognized, therefore, that if deer men were to make more efficient use of the information gained in other states, they would need to become more familiar with out of state areas.

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

In December 1948 discussions at the Midwest Wildlife Conference pinpointed the serious need for a better understanding of problems in other States to obtain the most efficient use of a pool of deer information. It also became apparent that each state could not conduct all the desired experiments. If these experiments could be divided among the various Federal, State and Provincial agencies, more and better results could be obtained in a shorter time, especially if men in each unit were acquainted with the other researcher's facilities and findings.

In February 1949 Ontario sent a biologist to northwestern Wisconsin to observe certain phases of deer work there. Also, deer investigators from Minnesota and the regional biologist of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service joined the group and worked in the field with the Wisconsin and Ontario men. The group travelled to Michigan's Upper Peninsula for a meeting with deer

men from that State. Later on a biologist from the U. S. Forest Service joined which completed the group. This was really the unofficial beginning of the Great Lakes Deer Group.

Again in December 1949 deer men met for an informal gathering just prior to the regular meeting of the Midwest Wildlife Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. At this conference it was decided that the regional biologist of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service would write to the various State administrators in the Lake States and the Province of Ontario and outline the need for forming an official group.

The following year the group met at Columbus, Ohio, in conjunction with the Midwest Conference. In addition to member deer workers, a large number of other interested wildlife workers attended. Here again, the need for broader knowledge of field conditions, for better understanding and for first hand examination and discussion was emphasized.

Official formation of the Group was discussed by administrators at various meetings in 1949 and 1950. There was general agreement that the organization was needed and that it should be given official recognition.

The Department of Lands and Forests of the Province of Ontario invited the Group to meet at Nestor Falls, Ontario, in late January and early February 1951. Out of region guests included C. W. Severinghaus and R. W. Darrow of the New York Conservation Department. The meeting and field trip was an enthusiastic success in spite of the -40° temperature. This gathering marked the first official recognition of the Great Lakes Deer Group.

In 1953 the Group seemed to "hit its stride" and very successful meetings

have been held on a rotation basis as follows:

1953 - Michigan - February	1959 - Ontario - September
1954 - Wisconsin - "	1960 - No meeting
1955 - Ontario - "	1961 - Minnesota - "
1956 - Minnesota - "	1962 - Michigan - "
1957 - Michigan - "	1963 - Wisconsin - "
1958 - Wisconsin - "	1964 - Ontario - "

Proposed 1965 - Isle Royale National Park - September

Guest specialists during the above period have included the following:

D. I. Rassmussen, U. S. Forest Service, Utah; Henry Laramie, New Hampshire; Chester Banasiak and Jack Gill, Maine; Eugene Bossenmaier and Brian Ransom, Manitoba; Harvey Roberts and Steve Liscinsky, Pennsylvania; Leslie Robinette, U. S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Colorado; John Calhoun and John Piazza, Illinois; Dean Murphy and George Dellinger, Missouri; and Bill Severinghaus and Stuart Free, New York.

#### HOW THE GROUP FUNCTIONS

##### Statement of Purpose

The Great Lakes Deer Group was organized:

1. To promote a better interchange of information among members regarding deer biology, range relationships, deer hunting, management practices and investigational techniques.
2. To improve understanding of habitat conditions in various ranges by actual field examinations and discussions.
3. To supplement, but not to overlap or duplicate, the work of the "North American Wildlife Conference" or the "Midwest Wildlife Conference."

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 actively searching for knowledge about deer range, deer, and their relationships.
3. To list the more important needs for increasing 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 region.

#### Selection of Name

The Group is known at "The Great Lakes Deer Group." The name was adopted only after much consideration. Terms like council and committee were passed over as not appropriate for the organization.

#### Plan of Procedure

The Group consists of representatives from the Federal, State, and Provincial Wildlife Conservation organizations and Educational institutions in Ontario, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

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

Annual meetings are rotated each year among the States and Province. The meetings are to be held preferably in September in major deer or deer

study areas and last two full days, include 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.

Meetings are held during midweek and follow essentially this pattern:

(1) start with the evening meal followed by an evening meeting, (2) on the second day, a field trip in the forenoon, and meetings in the afternoon and evening, and (3) a final meeting in the forenoon adjourning immediately after lunch. This pattern may be varied to fit local conditions.

A record of topics discussed is kept, and an informal report is distributed to participants each year following the meeting. This has made available in written form the latest knowledge and experience regarding deer.

At the present time it is the policy of the Group to weave the theme of each meeting around one major subject of deer ecology and management with related side topics augmenting the overall theme. The major topic of each meeting will be selected on the basis of the need for knowledge and current developments.

#### RESEARCH FOR DEER MANAGEMENT

At the 1957 Deer Group meeting at the Michigan's Higgins Lake Training School it was agreed that a committee should be appointed to summarize completed research and to outline future research needs. The senior author of this paper was designated as chairman of a research committee to be appointed by him. This committee was duly appointed and has met on various occasions during the past seven years. The effort of this group has culminated in the publication, "Research For Deer Management In The Great Lakes Region."

This publication is intended to summarize briefly the status of our knowledge on each topic as of early 1964; they are not intended to be a complete exposition of all known facts. Literature references are not cited since the committee assumes that readers wishing to use this report will have some familiarity with published information on deer. Further, much of the information cited has not been published.

The contribution should be used as a source of ideas to guide future programs and is not a long-range plan for any agency. By delineating the general areas of research needs and by recommending priority projects, the Great Lakes Deer Group hopes to assist the research planning of individual agencies, and to encourage productive inter-agency cooperation in deer and deer-range research.

#### GUIDELINES FOR THE FUTURE

##### Participants

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 workers in lower bracket positions -- those who are actually doing the work on the ground. It is strongly suggested that the total attendance at the annual meetings be kept to 30 or 40 by limiting each visiting State or Province to not more than 5 delegates with the host organization unlimited as to number.

Too many people in a meeting limits free discussion and leads to formal presentation of papers which should be avoided by this group. By limiting meetings, the efficient round-table, assigned-topic type of discussion

can be used to best advantage.

Originally, it was suggested that delegates from each State or Provincial agency include a field manager, a researcher, a deer management coordinator, and an administrator plus the wildlife biologist from the regional office of the U. S. Forest Service and the wildlife research biologist from the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. The number from the host area was to be unlimited. This basic policy still seems good with a few exceptions. It is considered inadvisable to put a strict limitation on numbers attending, but each organization should strive to include the pertinent people without exceeding the quota. The host organization is asked to use discretion. It is realized, however, 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 should be invited as guests. These invitations should be extended by the regular members from the State or Province in which the educational institution is located; the guest would be included in the limit of five persons. Also when deemed expedient guest specialists should be invited to discuss certain pertinent subjects. Out of region guests, invited to any one meeting should be limited to two. These specialists should be invited only with the sanction of the Group as a whole and especially that of the host State or Province.

#### Discussion and Field Trip

The round-table discussion-leader type of procedure has proven highly successful 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.

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

#### Recommendations

The region encompassed by the present group membership covers territory having similar herd, range, and climatic conditions and having reasonably comparable problems. Enough important problems arise in this region to utilize all the time available for discussion. The concensus of opinion is that the territory covered by the Group should not be expanded.

To forestall the appearance of trying to dictate policies it has always been a strict rule to make no recommendations or even to take no stand on any subject. Discussions have been very impersonal and no advice is 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 field trips and discussions are filling an important need. With cooperation and guidance from the more experienced administrators, its continued contribution to deer management can be maintained at a high level. The recent publication, "Research For Deer Management In The Great Lakes Region" demonstrates the sincerity of the Group in fulfilling its obligation to management and research.

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