

## CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

STATE OF WISCONSIN

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From: Frank Haberland ~~JHA~~

Subject: Report on the 1979 Great Lakes Deer Group Meeting

The 1979 Great Lakes Deer group met at Algonquin Park, Ontario from Sept. 25-27. About 35 persons attended including 4 from Minnesota, 1 each from Michigan and Wisconsin and the rest from Ontario. The reports and presentations given by others at the meeting are summarized as follows:

Deer Season Reports

Michigan - Total estimated 1978 deer harvest was 171,240 which included a record high 106,990 bucks, 25,130 archery deer and the most antlerless deer since 1969. Michigan has about 730,000 deer hunters. Deer were in poor condition with low yearling percentages, poor antler development and markedly reduced productivity. Michigan recorded their highest winter severity index last winter and surveys showed at least 83,000 deer were lost in region 2 (northern lower penninsula) and 16,900 in one upper penninsula district (District 2) where a survey was run. Michigan's hunters choice permit results in a 25% average success rate on antlerless deer.

Minnesota - total registered deer harvest in 1978 was 50,326 which included about 2,600 bow deer and 346 muzzle-loader deer. The gun harvest included about 10,000 antlerless deer. There were about 314,000 licensed gun deer hunters. Minnesota's registration system is admittedly weak and the corrected kill estimate was 56,000 deer. The antlerless permit success rate averages only 18% in Minnesota. Estimated wounding loss rate is 40% of the registered kill and another 40% is illegally wasted. I questioned the 40% wounding loss and cited our data which indicates something less than 10%. However, the Minnesota people remained firm, maintaining that their hunters commonly abandon deer which do not drop in their tracks when shot at.

Ontario- an estimated 14,000 deer were taken by 103,000 hunters. Deer populations and harvests are continuing on a long term decline and only bow kills show an increase. Either sex of deer may be taken and hunting with dogs is allowed in many areas. Ontario is proposing a new deer management plan designed to achieve a 30,000 deer harvest in 10 years. The plan calls for selective harvest, improved enforcement, planning for habitat management, winter deer feeding, and removal of predators in yarding areas. The major deer predator is the timber wolf and the use of snares is expected to be the principle method of wolf control!

Habitat Management Programs

Michigan - a well financed program with \$1.50 from each deer license earmarked for habitat. Michigan's goal is to maintain 35% aspen and 15% openings on state lands. Good progress is being made.

Minnesota - Financing has been inconsistent and variable. At present there is not enough provided to make any significant impact. There is considerable optimism over a proposal to undertake a comprehensive forest inventory to provide the basic data needed for effective planning. (sound familiar?)

Ontario - Present activity is limited to making trails and cutting browse in yarding areas. Any significant progress will depend on approval and funding of the new deer management plan. Major emphasis will be on yard improvement. The use of Tordon is prohibited in Ontario and the quality of summer range is not believed to be a limiting factor to deer in Ontario.

Supplementary Deer Feeding

Michigan - a state feeding program ended in 1968, none has been done since and there is no intent to feed in the future. Michigan did conduct a research study on feeding and a cost of \$82 per deer per year was determined.

Minnesota - Fed deer quite extensively this past winter with a pelleted ration which cost \$140 per ton. The purpose of the feeding was to retain a breeding herd in areas below carrying capacity or to lure deer away from agricultural crops. Minnesota intends to develop guidelines for a regular feeding program where the above conditions exist. Private feeding operations are also quite extensive and the DNR hopes to provide guidance and uniformity.

Ontario - Trail plowing and browse cutting were traditionally employed in deer yards. This past winter grain feeding was tried and believed successful in improving deer survival. A mixture of 40% corn, 40% oats and 20% barley was fed at a cost of \$5.20 per deer of which \$1.00 was for the feed. Winter feeding will be greatly expanded if the new deer management plan is approved and funded. As in Minnesota, the belief is that deer populations are below carrying capacity because of recent severe winters and predation. In Ontario, wolf control will be an integral part of winter deer feeding.

A Private Citizens Experience in Deer Feeding

A lengthy slide talk was presented by an elderly man about his deer feeding experience. His home is in a small deer yard and last winter he fed about 40 deer with a 40% corn, 40% oats and 20% barley mixture. He encourages visitors and solicits donations to pay for the feed. He has named and recognizes most of the deer. He claims success and in response to questioning, he admits to starting with 12 deer in 1974 so he is apparently successful although if this elderly man becomes incapacitated, the future of this herd is in doubt. Fortunately, this gentleman recognizes that a government agency cannot become as intimately involved with deer as he has. Unfortunately, the Ontario DNR people on the scene regard his operation as a very positive influence and hope to duplicate it elsewhere.

Ruminant Nutrition

Dr. Wally Pidgen, a prominent retired university professor specializing in ruminant nutrition talked about general principles of feeding livestock and admitted ignorance of deer nutrition. He stressed the importance of rapid digestion of animal feeds to increase total feed intake and that digestibility improves with finer particle size. Important nutrients affecting feed intake are nitrogen, vitamin A, phosphorus, selenium, vitamin E and cobalt. Any feeds containing urea must be accompanied by carbohydrates to avoid urea toxicity.

Pro-Cell-A High Energy Feed From Aspen

Dr. William Eisdale, the director of nutrition for Stake Technology Ltd. of Ottawa, talked about his company's product, a livestock feed made from aspen chips. The process involves subjecting the chips to high pressure steam (300 p.s.i.) which breaks the lignin bonds with cellulose and h<sup>2</sup>emi-cellulose to produce a product which is 55-60% digestible. This compares favorably with alfalfa and other roughages. The process is continuous and automatic and no additives are involved. The final product is deficient in protein and minerals so these must be added to produce a balanced feed ration. Many feeding trials with livestock have been conducted and show excellent results. The product sells for \$40 per ton but requires a plant investment of about \$400,000.

Michigans Deer Damage Control Program

Michigan does not pay compensation for deer damage but because of increasing damage complaints, the DNR is fearful of becoming saddled with a damage compensation program. Like us, they have issued permits to shoot with the requirement that the deer be dressed out and turned over to the state. This system caused problems similar to those we encounter such as public resentment, gut shooting by farmers and spoilage of deer before they were picked up. Above all, the permit system was not reducing the damage complaints. A new permit system was begun this year. A wildlife biologist inspects complaints and recommends damage abatement techniques. (They have not had much success). If shooting is determined to be the best solution, the biologist recommends the number of deer to be removed, the farmer designates the shooters which are approved by the local conservation officer, and tags are provided. The deer then belong to the shooters. Other conditions of the permit are highly variable to fit the particular situation. Selling of permits or deer is prohibited but Michigan DNR people are well aware of the ways to avoid that prohibition. The system is so new that no public reaction has surfaced. The DNR is fearful of a negative reaction but feels they had to take some action to avoid a damage compensation program.

Lakeshore Capacity Study

Ontario is involved in a very comprehensive research study to determine the effects of lakeshore development on the ecosystem. Ontario is in the enviable position of still having numerous beautiful undeveloped lakes. The Ontario MNR people realize they cannot stop development so they are attempting to establish guidelines to minimize the adverse effects of such development.

This is essentially a long term environmental impact study and much work remains to be done. The wildlife people have looked at the potential effects of development on deer yarding areas and have developed criteria for rating deer yards according to percent canopy closure, percent conifer composition distance to significant feeding areas, canopy height and presence or absence of travel lanes. This meeting was the management peoples first exposure to the criteria and values assigned. They were quite critical so it was obvious that more work is necessary. The study is in its infancy but it may prove valuable to all of us if carried to completion.

#### Hunter Control Problems

Parts of Ontario are subject to high deer hunting pressure with the attendant problems of trespass on private lands and hunting from public roads. (Sound familiar?) Excellent results in reducing the problems were achieved by requiring written permission from a landowner attached to the hunting license for all hunters except landowners hunting on their own lands. This approach has only been tried on Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron where access is very limited. Its applicability elsewhere may not be feasible because of opposition from organized urban hunter groups. (nothing new here).

#### Experimental Deer Management

In very preliminary stages is a proposal to implement a controlled deer hunt on a 50 square mile area designed to manipulate deer herd social structure. The benefits of maintaining a certain social structure are quite a story in themselves and were not explained but involve the theories of Tony Bubenik, an animal behavior specialist in Ontario and are essentially the European system of managing ungulates. The Ontario modification of the system would concentrate hunting effort on specific age and sex classes of deer rather than individual animals as in Europe. The proposed management experiment would require lease agreements with private landowners on the 50 square mile area and flexibility to hunt at any time of the year. Initial removal of the undesirable deer (supernumeraries) would be by staff people plus a few specially trained volunteers. Public hunting permits would only be granted after an extensive training and testing session was successfully completed by the applicants. Potential benefits to the landowners involved would be the lease payments, payments for hunter services, hunter control and damage compensation.

This presentation did not generate as much discussion as I anticipated but it did raise questions about costs, location and feasibility. It is obviously a most ambitious undertaking and I will be surprised if it ever happens.

#### Field Trip

Algonquin Park is one of Canada's largest at nearly 3,000 square miles in area. While generally assumed to be a wilderness area, it is continuously logged and has an extensive road system which is closed to vehicular travel by the public. Our field trip involved a bus trip on one of these roads to the approximate center of the park and took us through the two major timber types in the park. The western half is primarily hardwood-hemlock and the

eastern half, pine and aspen. Spruce and fir stands are present throughout the park. Biologists estimate a moose population of about 3,000 and a deer population of about 150. Twenty years ago this ratio was reversed with deer very abundant and moose very rare. Severe winters and wolf predation are blamed for the change. Several early morning and late evening trips were also available to observe moose and call wolves.

#### General Comments

As usual, the Great Lakes Deer Group meeting provides an excellent opportunity to learn what goes on behind the scenes in the participating states. The informal structure of the meeting is an ideal forum for exchange of information, ideas and opinions. However, I am concerned about the interest in winter deer feeding indicated by both Ontario and Minnesota. Both are justifying it on the basis of a temporary need to retain breeding herds depleted by severe winters and predation. At the same time, both are realizing a replacement of deer by moose. This exchange seems to be an acceptable if not desirable natural occurrence particularly in view of the difficulties in doing anything about it.

Overall, it was a very good meeting. Minnesota will host the meeting next year and I hope we can send more people.

FH:pl