

1995 MIDWEST DEER AND TURKEY GROUP MEETING

DEER PORTION

Ed Langenau, Big Game Specialist  
Wildlife Division, Michigan DNR

This year's Midwest Deer and Turkey Group Meeting was held at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park near Ashland, Nebraska from January 15-18, 1995.

The meeting opened with a general session attended by both turkey and deer representatives. The Assistant Director of NE Game and Parks Commission welcomed the group. Wes Sheets emphasized the need for all technical committees to work through the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Gary Garabrandt discussed a task force approach to handle a suburban deer problem in Bellevue, NE where subdivisions have been built adjacent to a public forest (Fontenelle Forest). Significant hunting on the forest and in some of the adjacent areas has not yet controlled the herd to the level the foresters would like. The average harvest is about 140 deer, or about 20 deer per square mile. The winter herd has averaged about 80 deer per square mile. He believed that extensive communication with the public is needed to educate people about control methods. The task force is discussing methods of deer control that have been used in other urban areas—trap and move, trap and euthanize, sharpshooting, etc. So far, the group has been successful in raising \$45,000 to fund a University study on deer movements.

Kurt Vercauteren, a graduate student from the University of Nebraska, discussed the research on deer movements. From observations of radio-collared deer caught in clover traps, he found that there were 2 subpopulations of deer—residents and transients. There was a significant (35%) migration of juvenile does (1 year olds, which would remain at their birth site in MI) between April 15 and May 30. During parturition deer would remain in small home ranges. Mortality of emigrants was 35%, compared to 19% for deer that did not leave the study area. Then when hunting season arrived, about 1/2 of the deer would remain on the area and about 1/2 would leave, often to return later. He concluded that a hunting season earlier than the current would help control deer numbers in this area.

The state of Nebraska is establishing a forensic science unit modelled after some of the multi-state organizations in the southeast. Two people who worked at this center talked about their efforts to apply forensics to wildlife law enforcement cases. The

Sent to  
Regional  
Director  
Game  
Dept

first (Dave Oates) discussed traditional methods of sexing and aging wildlife, blood and tissue identification, establishing time of death, and using bone structures to differentiate wild from domestic turkeys. The second speaker (Ron Bromley) talked about the use of DNA fingerprinting in wildlife management and law enforcement. Their laboratory is willing and able to serve as contractors to do DNA research for Midwest states, to supplement and handle some of the overflow work from the federal lab at Ashland, WA.

In the afternoon, the group divided up into 2 separate conferences, one for deer and one for turkeys.

### Wisconsin

In 1994, there was an increase of 15% in the buck kill after 2 years of conservative antlerless quotas. Total firearm harvest was about 301,600 (134,000 of which was antlered buck). Archery harvest was about 87,900 for a total take of about 389,500. Many units in farm county are way above population goals and the state is worried about having enough hunting pressure to control herds in the south. This year a 1-800 line was set up to help issue leftover antlerless licenses- 46,000 licenses were issued over the phone to hunters using credit cards. After the deadline there were still licenses left and the DNR was ordered to make them available in 22 field offices. Still, WI did not get the antlerless harvest that biologists said was necessary to develop desired levels of deer. Focus groups were used in settings with 17 regional deer task forces composed of 8-10 assigned persons with broad interests in deer. All day meetings were held on the same day throughout the state. Outside facilitators were hired and a new publication on Wisconsin deer management was issued to provide information to these task forces. Despite some initial reservations about the speed at which these groups were formed, the method worked well. This next year there will be more deer in the state of Wisconsin than there ever has been (1.5 million).

### Ohio

Ohio also continues to struggle with getting control of the deer herd. This year, special antlerless only deer permits were issued over the counter at license dealers for use by hunters in 62 of the state's 88 counties. All permits were valid for any season (bow, firearm, crossbow, etc). Ohio has a deer license, that is valid in any season with appropriate hunting arms. Antlerless only and any deer licenses are also valid for any season. Urban deer zones were also established around 5 of the largest Metropolitan areas to provide extra hunting opportunities. The antlerless harvest was still 34% below expected levels. Ohio discontinued the rural mail carrier survey of deer seen- it was too variable and did not

correlate well with other deer indices. The total deer harvest was about 138,752- about 10% more than in 1993. The beam diameters of yearling bucks are dropping, suggesting the herd is beginning to show signs of stress, even in this state with an abundance of food and relatively mild winter. More conflicts are developing over shooting of deer out of season. The state is proposing several changes for 1995 to increase antlerless harvest.

#### North Dakota

Permits were reduced slightly in response to a smaller population from prior years of liberal harvest. Hunters in this state have to apply for a license through a lottery drawing, although landowners can always get a "gratis" license for their own property. In 1993 a preference system was developed to allocate deer hunting licenses. The harvest was good with about 65,000 deer taken for a success rate of about 75%. There was significant controversy about archers getting licenses over the counter valid for either mule deer or whitetails while firearm hunters had to enter a lottery drawing. There was a perception that archers were shooting too many mule deer bucks, which have higher status to ND hunters than whitetails. An early youth season was established for first time 14 year olds. 483 deer were harvested by 1,519 youth hunters during the Sept 16-25 either sex hunt.

#### Michigan

The herd was probably not much different in size than in the fall of 1993 but distribution and composition was. There were more deer in UP, less in northern lower and slightly more in southern MI. There was a bumper crop of 1 1/2 year old deer and a fair component of fawns with fewer old deer. This younger deer herd provided a good season- firearm kill was 226,000 (5% more than last year). Weather was good- hunters saw deer and seemed pleased. MI celebrated its 100th deer season in 1994 and made a few splashes about this event- patches, posters, brochure, news releases, magazine articles, etc. The retail sales system should be fully operational next year- sale of licenses from the terminals was tested this year at select sites. DNA research was initiated statewide. A proposal to ban bait in 1996 after a quantity restriction in 1995 was tested at the NRC meeting- has generated lots of response on all sides. For the first time, some DMU's were established to be bucks-only for archery season, as well as firearm season. A bowhunting conference was held by hunters for hunters last April. Although leadership of hunting groups seems to know the "real story", the controversy between hunters over bowhunting rages on. There is talk about a generic deer license to reduce conflict, but that talk is now 5 years old. Failures to deal with these issues might lead to public referendums as has happened in many states, where fish and game issues appear on voting ballots. MI is not sure if this is good or bad, but it is predictable.

## Kansas

Fewer antlerless licenses were made available in Kansas this year, in response to a smaller herd. Firearm success was 60%, archery was 30%. The state is having some enforcement problems with permits issued to about 12,000 landowners to hunt on their own land. Last year, for the first time, nonresidents could hunt deer in Kansas. Most of the nonresidents who at first were interested did not realize how difficult it would be to obtain public access. There was much less demand for out of state licenses than expected.

## Illinois

There was a slight increase (5%) in the deer harvest in 1994, compared to 1993. The state is increasing its training of students to work on check stations. A training video was shown at the meeting.

## Iowa

For the first time, quotas were established by counties instead of deer management units. The herd in northern Iowa was reduced through heavy harvest a few years ago. In response, there have been fewer antlerless licenses issued for the past 3 years. The herd in the north is beginning to get larger. In the south, the state is having trouble getting on top of the herd. Increased tags/hunter were issued this year in the south. There were lots of damage complaints from the floods, which forced deer into available areas. With less corn, farmers were also less tolerant of deer. Urban/suburban deer problems continue in select areas. Research in Iowa has shown that 40-50% of young leave the city and most die, although some come back in the winter. The group discussed current theories about urban deer movements. One school thinks that shooting adult does in parks and other concentration areas has little impact because other deer move into those spots left vacant by removal. Iowa research does not support that school of thought. Rather, the number of adult does within parks has been stable. Young deer produced by these resident does then disperse to adjacent areas outside of the concentration area. Thus, removal of adult does within a concentration area would have an impact on reducing deer numbers within and on the periphery of a core area. A youth deer season was held for 12-15 year olds. Success rates were 40% for hunters with either-sex tags. Law officers at first did not like the special season but have now changed their minds. Iowa hunters took 61,400 deer during the firearm season (about the same as last year), 5,102 during muzzleloading and 9,921 during archery seasons.

## Indiana

Public tolerance for deer continued to decrease. About 15% more antlerless licenses were issued. A survey of landowners showed deer damage to agricultural crops to total 18.9 million dollars. A new law was introduced proposing that people be allowed to take deer, like is currently allowed for coyote, when they are about to cause damage. Another would permit people to kill deer within a mile of a park at any time without a permit or license. Rifles were authorized for use for taking deer on out of season kill permits. State biologists think that the deer herd is starting to decline, despite what appears to be evidence to the contrary. One theory was that the harvest went up because deer were more vulnerable this year with a failure of mast crop that encouraged deer to use fields more heavily. Lou Bender, a deer researcher with the agency, is re-evaluating the population model used in Indiana.

## South Dakota

Herds in this state showed different patterns of change in response to bad winter conditions in the north, flooding and heavy rains in the south, and heavy snow in the Black Hills. More licenses were issued by lottery this year in the West River Prairie and East River Farmland. Fewer were issued in the Black Hills because of heavy winter losses and reduced post-natal fawn survival. A special youth season was continued- this year 1477 deer were taken by 2366 youths for antlerless deer only with a limited quota for a preseason weekend hunt. Infrared census methods were tested and abandoned as being too expensive and not very useful. The state is trying to obtain hunting opportunities on "easement refuges" that were established as sanctuaries by the federal government in the 1930's. Each has to opened to hunting case by case through the USFWS office.

## Nebraska

They are back! After reducing the herd through heavy antlerless hunting, the state responded by establishing several bucks only units. The herd has now increased and they are now having some difficulty opening units to take antlerless deer after they were closed. A 5-year update is being done on a landowner study. A great deal of time and effort is being expended to develop a statewide deer plan. During firearm season 55,431 hunters took 33,885 deer. A total of 15,104 archers took 4,150 deer during archery season and a few more deer were taken in special hunts. Quality deer management continues in one deer management unit (Sandhill), where yearling bucks comprised about 1/2 of the adult buck harvest for both mule and whitetailed deer.

## Missouri

The herd in Missouri was thought to be about the same as last year. Population goals were recently raised- they want more deer in the south, less deer in the northwest and have about the right number elsewhere. The number of any deer permits were reduced slightly to allow the herd to build in some areas. In problem areas hunters were issued 2 antlerless licenses. A rule change now allows scopes on muzzleloaders. There is some question as to whether the deer vehicle accident rate per million miles of travel is serving as a useful index. The index is going down but biologists think the herd is stable. Speculation is that there is less reporting as the accidents have become commonplace. Research has showed that there is less fawn recruitment than previously used in the MO population model. Research on deer mortality is just about done- adult doe annual mortality about 0.14 and doe fawn mortality was 0.13. Almost all of the mortality was from hunting. Illegal kill was about 8% of the legal harvest, as was crippling loss (also 8% of the legal harvest). Data shows about 1.1 fawns per doe recruited in the fall. Lonnie Hansen's model has been using 1.4-1.5. DNA research has been begun in an area with intensive management and monitoring of herd status, movements, and harvest. There were 46 managed hunts in Urban/suburban areas, which took lots of staff and field time but did provide some good hunting and some excellent demonstration areas for educational purposes. Overall, about 162,120 deer were taken during the firearm season (about 4% more than in 1993) plus about 15,000 in the archery season.