

**22nd Midwest Deer/Turkey Group
Camp Grafton, Devils Lake, North Dakota.
August 9-12, 1998**

The primary focus of this year's meeting was methods for monitoring deer populations and making harvest decisions.

Dr. Mark Boyce of the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, discussed how population models should and should not be used and the importance of considering density dependence in population models. He stressed that models are powerful tools for improving our understanding of population dynamics but that they have often been misused. Model cannot substitute for good data. Good models avoid unnecessary complexity but include important ecological processes. It is important to carefully explain models to avoid snowing managers.

John Roseberry, of Southern Illinois University, demonstrated the Illinois Deer Harvest Analysis and Modeling Program. The program combines data storage and retrieval with an accounting style population model. Analyses can be performed at various spatial scales. Model inputs can be adjusted to calibrate simulated trends to SAK estimates, roadkills, and kill/effort estimates. After county-specific models are calibrated they can be used to assess the effects of different harvest strategies.

I discussed the results of a survey of population monitoring methods. The survey was sent to the 12 states and 1 province that are members of the Midwest Deer/Turkey Group. Most jurisdictions use several different methods to monitor population changes. Five states made actual population estimates, most rely on trend indices. The most commonly used indices are harvest trends (11 jurisdictions) and roadkill trends (7 jurisdictions). Seven jurisdictions use accounting-style population models, 6 use SAK-type calculations, 2 use aerial surveys, 2 roadside counts, and 2 pellet-group counts. The average size of deer management units in Wisconsin is smaller than most states in the Midwest.

McCaffery gave a presentation describing Wisconsin's SAK method. Paul Shelton from Illinois discussed the problems of interpreting population age composition.

Several states provided written documents describing how harvest quotas are set. Most states indicated that their hunters did not pay much attention to how they counted deer or to the accuracy of population estimates, but their hunters did complain loudly when harvests declined.

Zone T Hunts - Brian Dhuey gave a presentation summarizing the results of the 1996 and 1997 Zone T hunts in Wisconsin.

Disease - Several disease issues were discussed at some length. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has spread into captive elk herds in South Dakota (3 of 40 herds had confirmed CWD) and Nebraska (1 herd). Elk from some of these captive herds have been shipped widely prior to the herds being quarantined. Both states will be conducting intensive testing to determine if CWD has spread to wild deer populations. Kansas will also begin monitoring deer. South Dakota passed legislation allowing the Animal Industry Board to regulate CWD exposed herds.

Indiana has proposed regulations prohibiting the import of captive cervids from any state or province where CWD has been diagnosed. The message from South Dakota is that CWD is coming so you better get ready. Considerable concern was expressed about the threat to wild ungulates.

Michigan updated the Group on efforts to control bovine TB. Feeding of deer and elk in the affected area was banned by the Michigan Department of Agriculture (a FELONY!!!!). The DNR imposed restrictions (5 gallon limit) on baiting in this area. Antlerless permits are unlimited. Michigan will also be checking for CWD in tested animals.

Missouri reported on an outbreak of EHD in the southern part of the state. 24% of the deer at checkstations had been exposed. 8% of 97 radioed deer in the area died. Without the radioed deer the outbreak would have been undetected, nobody reported finding any dead deer.

Captive deer - In Kansas, confinement of deer within a fence is considered to be a takings of state resources and can result in a fine. Illinois will not issue of permit to release captive deer within a pen until the applicant has hired a private contractor to conduct a helicopter survey over adequate snow cover and the contractor has certify all wild deer are out of the pen.

Chemical treatment of wild animals - Indiana has adopted regulations requiring a permit from the DNR to administer drugs, vaccines, steroids, micro-organisms, or other chemicals to wild animals. The concern is use by private organizations of unapproved drugs for contraception.

Trophy Management - Michigan has 3 units designated as QDM units with a forked antler rule. Proponents went around the department, directly to the commission. The department is trying to establish guidelines for evaluation of QDM proposals. In Indiana the trophy hunters are going to the legislature. The legislature requested that Indiana talk to Kansas to figure out how to do it right. The DNR drafted a position statement on trophy management that the governor rejected. Surveys indicate that there is moderate support for antler restrictions but not in the area where hunters usually hunted. Hunters strongly opposed any restrictions in season length or opportunity to hunt.

Other notes - South Dakota is adding a \$5 surcharge to all licenses with 1/2 the money for improving hunter access and 1/2 for damage abatement. Indiana - legislature forced a cross-bow season through despite overwhelming opposition from the hunters. Minnesota is rebuilding herd after 2 severe winters, everyone is happy to work together for this goal. Ohio and Indiana both report that they have finally gotten on top of their herds, and now their hunters are upset. Missouri is working out the bugs in their point-of-sale licensing system. They are continuing a large urban deer study with about 125 deer radioed. Michigan issues 2 type of antlerless permits, general (good on public and private land) and private-land-only. This targets the antlerless harvest to private lands and reduces the pressure on public lands.