

Midwest Deer and Wild Turkey Study Group Meeting
Fort Robinson, Crawford, NE. September 14-17, 2008
Notes by Robert E. Rolley

The meeting was held at Fort Robinson, a historic US Army fort that was actively used by the Army from 1874 to 1948. The fort was transferred to the NE Game and Park Commission in 1955. Today more than 20,000 acres are in public ownership. The property is located in the Pine Ridge region of northwestern Nebraska and served as a focal point for much of the wildlife restoration in Nebraska. Wild turkey were introduced in 1957. An elk herd became established in the 1960s and now numbers approximately 1,000 animals. Bighorn sheep have been reintroduced to the fort and approximately 125 bison are on the fort.

Space use of sympatric deer in an endemic chronic wasting disease area of western Nebraska. David Walter, National Wildlife Research Center, Fort Collins, CO. Studied home range overlap and movements of mule deer and white-tailed deer in the panhandle of Nebraska. Used the volume-of-intersection index to measure home range overlap. Long range migratory movements were noted by female mule deer. Approximately 50% of males of both mule deer and white-tailed deer dispersed. Home range overlap was much greater among female mule deer than among either sex of white-tailed deer or among species of deer. Both species used riparian corridors of woodlands, especially in winter. Home ranges of white-tailed deer were smaller than mule deer and were closer to water. Mule deer made greater use of open habitats.

CWD in Nebraska. Bruce Trindle, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Presented the history of CWD in Nebraska. Began monitoring in 1997 after CWD was detected in several captive elk facilities. First positive free-ranging deer was detected in 2000 in southern portion of the panhandle. This discovery prompted to culling of about 100 deer in the vicinity of the positive. In late 2001-early 2002 the Edwards ranch in the northwestern corner of the panhandle was depopulated with a high prevalence of CWD found in deer within the fence and lower prevalence extending outward from the facility. Hunting seasons were extended and unlimited numbers of antlerless permits were offered to hunters in the panhandle but increases in antlerless harvests were modest. Additional positives throughout the panhandle were found in 2003 and a few positives outside of the panhandle were detected in 2004. Discovery of distant positives were followed by localized culling. In 2007 new sparks were found along the Kansas border and near Grand Island along the Platte River in eastern Nebraska. Over time, hunter's concerns about CWD have diminished as has their acceptance of population reduction efforts. Focal culling around positives has been difficult, deer densities are often low and landowners have often restricted access. It is difficult to document if management has had any impact on CWD spread.

Bighorn Sheep in Nebraska. Todd Nordeen, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Bighorn sheep were native to western Nebraska but were extirpated around 1900. Reintroduction efforts began in 1981 with the release of 6 sheep, followed by 21 released in 1988, 22 in 2001, 49 in 2005, and 51 in 2007. Most releases have resulted in initial

population growth but then have suffered disease mortality that have reduced populations approximately 50%. *Pasteurella pneumonia* has been the primary cause of mortality. Some evidence that greater stress on private lands may contribute to disease. Seeing some hoof deformity in lambs that may be due to EHD. Have harvested 12 trophy rams to date, 1-2 permits/year. First permit has been distributed through lottery with \$25 application fee. In 4 years distributed a 2nd permit via auction to highest bidder. Raised ~\$600,000 for sheep management program.

Antler Point Restriction. Lonnie Hansen, Missouri Department of Conservation. State facing challenges of declining hunter numbers and increasing support to adult buck management making it more difficult to achieve population control. Wanted to shift harvest pressure from bucks to does and address hunter desires. Conducted a 3 year study of antler point restrictions (4 points/side) in 29 counties with controls. In northern experimental counties doe harvest did not increase greater than in control counties but doe harvest did increase 11-18% above controls in the central experimental counties. Overall buck harvest was reduced 20%, 60-70% reduction in harvest of 1.5 year old bucks, with increased harvest of older bucks. Hunters are reporting seeing more adult bucks. Overpopulation more of a problem in northern Missouri where point restrictions had least effect on doe harvest than in central Missouri. Hunter support for point restrictions >70% in northern Missouri but not popular in southern Missouri due to low deer densities. In 2008 will expand antler point restrictions to 65 counties in northern and central Missouri. Looking to shift gun season from mid rut to 1 week later to increase harvest pressure on does, but this change was delayed due to administrative concerns. May have to look at earn-a-buck in the future.

Panel discussion - Lead in Venison: Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Wisconsin. The discussion was limited because representatives from North Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa were not able to attend. In response to tests this spring that detected lead in 50% of ground venison samples, North Dakota removed all remaining venison from food pantries. North Dakota is planning to resume venison donation program this fall with guidelines to hunters and meat processors, only whole cuts will be used. Minnesota is conducting a study of lead fragmentation from different types of bullets. Results are not yet available. Minnesota's hunting regulation booklet includes a page with their test results; 26% of 1029 packages of ground venison contained lead versus 2% of 209 packages of whole muscle cuts. Missouri reported that they are not changing their venison donation program but an article has been published in their conservation federation magazine on how to process meat to reduce bullet fragments. Iowa is going ahead with their venison donation program, is including precautions in their hunting regulations. South Dakota is including a statement in their hunting regulations to trim more around wound channel. Concern was expressed about the uncertainty of amount of ingested lead that is absorbed. Many states are awaiting results of ongoing CDC study being conducted in North Dakota.

Hunter recruitment-retention discussion - Nebraska is trying to maintain or increase number of deer hunters by removing as many barriers to participation as possible. They are increasing antlerless permits, bonus antlerless tags for white-tailed deer, reducing the

price of antlerless permits for non-residents and landowners, implementing season-choice permits, etc. Nebraska is also considering a hunter access program for 2010 funded at \$500,000. Some concern about devaluation of antlerless deer was expressed. Nebraska is also increasing opportunity for turkey hunting with an unlimited number of statewide permits with a bag limit of 3, and bonus fall permits. Interest in fall turkey hunting increasing especially among non-residents.

Youth hunting discussion (augmented by review of regulation booklets) –

Nebraska has lowered minimum age for deer hunting from 12 to 10. Youth deer season is Sept 15- January 15. Firearm and crossbow hunters under 12, any deer hunter ages 12-15, and hunters ages 12-29 using an Apprentice hunter Education Exemption Certificate must be accompanied at all times by an experienced hunter age 19 or older. Hunters aged 12-29 who have not completed a hunter education course may obtain an Apprentice Hunter Education Exemption Certificate once in their lifetime for \$5. Youth deer permits are valid for ages 10-15 and allow the taking of a deer of either sex with any legal weapon statewide.

South Dakota has a mentored hunting program for ages 10-15. No hunting license is required for the youth, no hunter education class is required, must be accompanied (within arms length) by an unarmed mentor who must be licensed, be hunter education certified, and 18 year of age. If the mentor is not the parent or guardian they must have written permission of the parent or guardian. Only 1 mentored hunter per mentor. Their youth deer season is Sept 13-January 31.

Illinois has enacted an Apprentice Hunter License which is a one-time, non-renewable license for resident only. It allows persons 10-17 to go hunting with a parent, grandparent, or guardian who has a valid resident hunting license. Persons 18 and older may go hunting with any family member or friend who is validly licensed resident hunter. A hunter education course is not required to purchase this license. Their youth deer hunt is October 11-12 with a \$10 fee.

Missouri has an early youth deer season November 1-2 and is adding a late youth season January 3-4. Youths must be 6-15, except there is no minimum age for resident landowner youth hunting on their own property. Youth permits can be used for ages 6-15 who are not hunter education certified but are hunting in the immediate presence (close enough for normal conversation without shouting) of a properly licensed adult who is hunter education certified. Missouri has also enacted a new mentored hunting program for hunters 16 and older who are not hunter education certified. An Apprentice Hunter Authorization can be purchased for \$10 in 2 consecutive years, but a firearms hunting permit is also required. Apprentice hunters must hunt in the immediate presence of a properly licensed hunter 21 years old or older who is hunter-education certified. The mentor must also have a permit for the prescribed season.

Michigan has an Apprentice Hunting license for persons who have not completed a hunter safety course. This license can be purchased for 2 years. Apprentice hunters under age 17 must be accompanied by a parent, guardian, or someone 21 or older designated by their parent or guardian who possesses a valid regular hunting license. Apprentice hunters 17 and older must be accompanied by someone 21 or older with a valid regular license. The minimum age for a firearm deer license is

12, but youths 10-16 can purchase a junior archery license. Michigan has a 2 day youth and disabled veteran firearm deer season September 27-28. Youths 10-11 years old must use archer equipment and youths 12-13 may only hunt with a gun on private land. Youths must be accompanied by an adult 18 years or older. Approximately 25,000 participate in the 2 day youth season and harvest about 10,000 deer.

Ohio has a 2 day youth gun hunt November 22-23 for hunters 17 years old or younger. Youths must be accompanied by a non-hunting adult. The bag limit is 1 deer of either sex. The cost of a youth deer permit is \$12, ½ the cost of a regular deer permit. A valid hunting license and deer permit is required unless the youth is hunting on land owner by their parents (both license and permit waived) or grandparents (license waived). The non-hunting adult may only accompany 2 young hunters. Apprentice Hunting Licenses are available for up to 3 years for new hunters of all ages to sample the experience of hunting under the mentorship of a licensed adult age 21 or older prior to completing a hunter education course. The apprentice license cost \$10 for youths and \$19 for adults.

Indiana has a youth consolidated hunting and fishing license for \$7 that includes all hunting and fishing (small game, deer, turkey, all state stamps). Also offers apprentice hunting licenses (\$7 for youth consolidated, \$24 for resident deer) for hunting without taking a hunter education class. Up to 3 apprentice licenses can be purchased in a lifetime. Apprentice hunters must be accompanied by a licensed hunter at least 18 years old. The mentor can accompany no more than 2 apprentice hunters. Youth deer season Sept 27-28.

Minnesota – persons aged 10-11 may take big game without a license or firearm safety certificate if they are under the direct supervision and immediate reach of a parent or guardian who is licensed to take big game. Big game taken by a 10-11 year old must be tagged with the parent or guardian's license. Apprentice Hunter Validation is available for \$3.50 for residents who are 12 year old or older who have not completed hunter education. These validations are good for 1 year and can be used once in a lifetime. Apprentice hunters must be accompanied by a licensed adult hunter and must purchase all applicable licenses and stamps.

Deer Exchange Program – Nebraska will be piloting a deer exchange program this year in a effort to increase antlerless deer harvest which they feel is limited by the number of deer hunters are willing to eat. They are attempting to develop a web-based system to match hunters with a deer to people who want a deer. The program will be free with a searchable database by county.

Deer damage and urban turkey management - Nebraska is dealing with severe deer damage on lands adjacent to a federal refuge and is considering options. Agreed to conduct an e-mail survey of member states to summarize methods for damage permits. Kearny, Nebraska police using pellet guns on urban turkeys. Kansas is experimenting with a walk-in trap to capture urban turkeys.

State Deer Reports.

Illinois: Total estimated 2007 deer harvest ~200,000 (81,000 bucks, 118,000 antlerless). The legislature created a deer population control task force with representatives from the house and senate agricultural and conservation committees, state police, farm bureau, insurance association, bowhunters, etc. Major issue was high numbers of deer-vehicle accident. Estimates that population is stable to slightly declining in most counties since 2003 or 2004. 3rd year of use of telecheck, data quality is improving. Due to park closures and layoffs, legislature transferred \$5 million of fish and wildlife funds, risking Federal Aid. Working on 5 year review of CWD program. EHD outbreak in 2007 with deaths reported in 56% of counties, ~2,000 dead deer reported, little effect on harvest. Deer population control permits were issued to 15 agencies for sharpshooting at 30 sites in 5 counties in 2007-08. Approximately 1,800 deer were culled out of ~2,000 authorized. The DNR conducted proficiency testing for sharpshooters (mostly police officers). Culled deer were processed at licensed meat processors and donated to charity. Participating agencies must submit proposals that include systems for evaluation of program impacts. Sharpshooting has reduced deer-vehicle accidents by 50% in some locations. Illinois issues deer removal permits for out-of-season shooting when landowners are experiencing excessive damage. Damage must be verified by IDNR personnel. Permits are issued for a maximum of 30 days during the time that damage is occurring (primarily summer) to remove up to 10 deer. The number of deer killed on these permits has increased from about 500 in 2002 to nearly 2,500 in 2007. Approximately 40% of the deer killed were from 2 counties on heavily damaged agricultural fields adjacent to under-hunted leased and/or outfitted properties.

Indiana: Experienced an EHD outbreak in summer 2007, 17 counties with confirmed cases (mostly in southwestern Indiana), 59 counties with reports. Seven counties experienced reduced antlered buck harvests of 20% or more and one county's buck harvest was 40% lower. Legalized the use of rifles with pistol cartridges (.357-inch diameter or larger). Considering telecheck to reduce mileage, will pilot with spring 2009 turkey season. Increasing problem with land leased for big bucks with insufficient antlerless harvest. Issuing out-of-season kill permits to adjacent farmland. In the process of evaluating 1-buck rule. Total 2007 deer harvest ~124,000 (49,000 bucks, 75,000 antlerless), similar to 2006.

Iowa: Total reported 2007 deer harvest ~146,000 (54,000 bucks, 91,000 antlerless), 3% lower than 2006. Harvest data was collected via telecheck, on the web, or at ELSI license dealers. Field checks of 3,800 deer found that 91% of encountered deer were reported, this is believed to be biased high. Believe the statewide deer population peaked in 2005-06 and is now declining based on model simulations, spotlight surveys, roadkill index, and aerial surveys. Among the 20 management units, populations are estimated to be at or near goal in 8, declining toward goal in 9, and in 3 units population growth has slowed or stabilized but greater harvest is needed for population reductions. Hunter complaints are increasing and starting to balance out landowner complaints. An ice storm affected the gun season in 2007 and shotgun season was extended another weekend

which overlapped the muzzleloader season. Season limit of 2 bucks (1 with bow and 1 with gun). Venison donation costs are exceeding program funds.

Kansas: Estimated total harvest ~71,000 white-tailed deer (37,000 antlered, 34,000 antlerless) and 2,600 mule deer (2,200 antlered, 400 antlerless). The estimated population trend as indexed by deer-vehicle collisions per billion miles of travel has stabilized or decline since the late 1990s after 3 years with harvests over 100,000 deer. Harvest is estimated using an on-line survey with invitation to participate mailed to 23,000 permit holders, ~45% response rate after 3 contacts. In 2007-08 landowners were able to apply for and purchase up to 50% of the non-resident permits and resell them at whatever price they may obtain. Non-resident firearm permits are capped at 20% of the resident permits and non-resident archery permits have a 25% cap. Simplifying regulations with a statewide either-sex any-weapon white-tailed deer permit. Reduced the price of antlerless-only WTD permits. Transferrable landowner permits were eliminated in 2008. Equipment restrictions were relaxed in 2007 with telescopes allowed on all deer hunting weapons. Crossbows were authorized for use in the firearm season. Knapped arrowheads have been allowed. Recently completed the 2006-07 landowner deer survey. This survey has been repeated 5 times since the mid-1990s. The percentage of landowners indicating deer caused damage to their land has decreased from ~60% in the late 1990s to about 50% in 2006 and the percentage of landowners expressing a desire for fewer deer has declined from ~70% to about 40% during the same time period. Approximately 2,200 deer and elk were tested for CWD in 2007-08 with 49% from "random" hunter samples, 35% from taxidermist, 14% from vehicle-killed animals, and 2% clinical suspects. Three deer from Decatur County next to Nebraska tested positive. A localized cull of 33 deer in the vicinity of those positives did not result in any additional positives.

Michigan: Estimated total 2007 harvest ~484,000 (267,000 bucks, 217,000 antlerless). Dealing with 3 deer diseases at once. EHD was documented in the southeastern portion of the Lower Peninsula in 2008 with about 50 dead deer reported. This was only the 4th time EHD had been documented in Michigan during the past 50 years. Previous die-offs occurred in 1955, 1974 and 2006. CWD was detected in a captive cervid facility near Grand Rapids in August. The facility was rapidly depopulated, no additional positives were found. All privately-owned cervid facilities have been quarantined. Conducting intensive surveillance in a 9 township area surrounding the facility. Banned all baiting and feeding of deer and elk in Lower Peninsula. Uncertain if they will be able to sustain the ban if surveillance does not detect CWD in wild deer. Legislative hearings are already scheduled. Prevalence of TB in the 7 county eradication zone was 1.3% in 2007. A TB positive deer was detected 100 miles south of the core area. Will be conducting additional surveillance in this area in 2008. In 2008 added a 5 day early antlerless deer season for all of the southern Lower Peninsula Sept 18-22 to increase antlerless harvest. Occurs before the opening of the bow season and was not opposed by the 2 major bow hunting organizations in the state. Michigan is hosting a deer symposium in late September to provide stakeholders information about issues of concerns. Experts from around the country have been recruited to participate.

Missouri: Estimated total 2007 harvest ~300,000 (120,000 bucks, 180,000 antlerless). All permits are sold OTC, quota system was eliminated, antlerless permits are unlimited but have county-specific bag limits. Based on deer-vehicle accidents, harvests, population modeling and hunter observation reports rural deer populations are believed to be fairly stable and near goal. Populations in western and southwestern counties appear to be down. Believe recent high doe harvests are resulting in greater variation in deer abundance across the landscape, more “cold spots” but “hot spots” still remain. Urban sprawl is contributing to overabundance. A small but increasing proportion of landowners are leasing their land for deer hunting, limiting harvest to increase abundance, and contributing to local overabundance. Using taxidermists to collect CWD samples from adult bucks, sampled the northern 1/3 of state in 2007 with 1,230 samples collected, none were positive. Considering moving the antlerless-only portion of the firearm season from December to October to increase harvest and move the mid-November general firearm season one week later. Testing the use of trail cameras for collecting demographic data on 3 state management areas. Also they are evaluating the potential use of trail camera information from the general public to assess questions of high-grading associated with antler point restrictions. About 5,500 deer were donated to the Share the Harvest program; the state contributed \$160,000 to the processing with remaining costs paid through donations. Hunter surveys found that 455 of respondents indicated they would harvest additional deer if they could donate the meat free of charge. Some communities are removing archery discharge ordinances in efforts to control urban deer, but others continue to resist any lethal control.

Nebraska: Estimated total harvest ~57,000 white-tailed deer (34,500 antlered, 22,500 antlerless) and 10,900 mule deer (8,500 antlered, 2,400 antlerless). The number of police investigated deer-vehicle collisions has declined since the early 2000s, perhaps reflecting reduced populations due to liberal seasons. Approximately 3,200 hunter harvested deer were tested for CWD in 2007, 17 new positives were detected, mostly in the panhandle. Additionally 31 targeted deer were tested and 1 was positive.

Ohio: Estimated total 2007 harvest ~233,000 (88,000 bucks, 145,000 antlerless). Poor harvest affected both regular and bonus firearm seasons, but total kill was still 2nd highest. Attempting to address barriers to greater hunter participation and added an additional weekend of firearms hunting before Christmas. Also reduced cost of antlerless permit for archers from \$24 to \$15 and required use during first 8 weeks of archery season. Believed expiration date encouraged archers to fill permit rather than wait until later and never fill it. Concern was expressed that long seasons may lull hunters into believing there is lots of time and defer harvest. At what point can a deer season be too long? Looking at ways to link hunters to landowners to increase access (web-based match making). EHD in 2007 caused local mortality, may have contributed to reduced buck kill.

South Dakota: Estimated total harvest ~70,000 white-tailed deer (34,000 antlered, 36,000 antlerless) and 17,100 mule deer (9,100 antlered, 8,000 antlerless). Statewide

harvest success was 48% in 2007. Feel they are starting to get on top of the herd in a few areas. Approximately 1,800 deer donated to Sportsmen Against Hunger at a cost of \$140,000. Continued problems with urban deer. Require communities to have a management plan that includes a feeding ban before the state will issue a kill permit, usually to mayor or chief of police. Last year of tooth collections due to changes in postal regulations. CWD has only been detected in Black Hills but testing outside of the Black Hills has been limited. Since 1996 the Black Hills had point restrictions and a limited drawing. Lifted point restrictions last year but retained limited draw. Trying to shift hunter pressure from mule deer to white-tailed deer.