

Hoof Disease Public Working Group Meeting Notes

February 12th 2014, 2-5pm

WDFW Region 5 Office

In Attendance: B. Anderson (Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation), D. Carlson (Safari Club Intl), C. Chandler (USFS), W. Clifford (WA Dept of Health), D. Cothren (Wahkiakum County Commissioner), B. Johnson (WA DNR), C. Madsen (NW Indian Fisheries Commission), J. Misner (Cowlitz County Commissioner), M. Rochelle (Weyerhaeuser), M. Smith (Local resident/business owner), A. Swanson (Clark County Senior Policy Lead), WDFW Staff: D. Anderson, S. Bergh, M. Cope, B. George, E. Holman, S. Jonker, K. Mansfield, P. Miller, G. Norman, N. Pamplin, N. Stephens, D. Ware

On Phone: Dr. T. Besser (Washington State University), J. Nelson (WDFW)

Updates to questions asked by working group members

- The online hoof disease reporting tool map will be updated and posted on the agency's website quarterly
- WDFW received an elk road kill report from WSDOT and only 6 elk have been hit on I-5 (from MP 71-49) during 2001-2012.

Sandra Jonker (SJ) gave a PowerPoint presentation on highlights from the Mt. St. Helens Elk Herd Study, HD Pathology Results Update, and Management Options:

Mt. St. Helens Elk Herd Study

- Axel Swanson (AS) asked if WDFW took HD into account when determining permit numbers.
- SJ answered yes, but not with a specific number since we do not know the exact effects on survival and reproduction.
- Dan Cothren (DC) stated that the elk are being overharvested and that it is healthy elk being taken—not elk with HD. He is frustrated because he is in between the farmers with elk damage and the other public who wants to see more elk.
- AS agreed that we are not harvesting elk with HD.
- Mark Smith (MS) stated that he has heard rumors of people shooting elk with HD and then leaving them in the field when they realize the elk was sick. He is not sure how we get people to harvest elk with HD.
- SJ stated that the agency is in the process of learning more about prevalence and survival, but that we need to manage the herd in the meantime—we can't stop management because of HD.
- Chris Madsen (CM) brought up the point that it is difficult to tell which elk have HD and hunters might think they are shooting a healthy elk. Same difficulty with estimating prevalence.
- DC stated that we need to find out what causes HD before we harvest more elk.
- There was a general discussion about the body condition results and the difference in body condition between elk on the west and east side of the Cascades.

- MS asked about percent error for these data and SJ responded that would be included in the forthcoming report.
- AS asked how this body condition data differed from Rachel Cook's study and SJ responded one of the differences was that these data are from November and the Cooks' study data came from February.
- MS asked about the body condition data from the 2003-2005 elk translocation and Pat Miller (PM) answered that it was from October.
- AS asked if the agency is taking into account the Cooks' study in terms of summer forage being important to an elk population as well as a hard winter?
- SJ answered yes and that these results agree with that and emphasize the importance of multiple factors.
- Carol Chandler (CC) added that the USFS has vegetation plots on its grazing allotments that are monitored every 5 years, so we shouldn't expect to see the results/changes from our actions right away.
- The group wanted to see the report, but was reminded that it was not ready yet and does not have a public distribution date yet.
- AS asked that since 1 in 3 in the MSH herd is now gone, have we achieved our population reduction goal?
- Dave Ware (DW) answered that yes, it looks like we have.
- MS asked how we know what percent population decrease is appropriate. What is carrying capacity?
- Guy Norman (GN) reminded everyone that the report only covers 5 GMUs, not the entire herd.
- MS suggested that maybe GMUs should be smaller and that the herd size area should be smaller since it goes all the way to the desert.
- DW replied that while the MSH herd size is large there are other herds in the state this large as well. Harvest is done by GMU.
- Bob Johnson (BJ) asked what the decrease was in the GMU 550 population.
- SJ answered that we do not have the report yet.

HD Pathology Results Update

- AS stated that he has had reports of rubbery, messed-up, undeveloped horns on HD elk.
- SJ gave a presentation on the latest pathology results including more information on spirochetes and treponemes.
- WDFW's RMEF proposal to cover diagnostic and field collection costs was accepted.

Management Options

- SJ wanted to talk about the document "Draft Next Steps".
- MS asked if it was possible to receive the documents ahead of time and SJ answered that she would try her best.

- MS stated that he was confused on the goal of the group because we have not implemented any treatment or containment plans.
- Nate Pamplin (NP) said that there are two goals for the group 1) address misinformation, outreach; community leaders can disseminate information 2) WDFW will use the group as an advisory board and he would like to know what the group members' constituents think about the management options. Get feedback and bring concerns.
- MS asked if we are doing public outreach soon.
- NP answered that yes, it is on the "Draft Next Steps". WDFW is also developing outreach strategies for different audiences. He also asked for suggestions on outreach.
- DC stated that a town hall meeting would be best because not everyone has access to the internet and he gets questions all the time that he cannot answer.
- James Misner (JM) stated that they fill up public meetings, so the agency should do the same and suggested Toutle as a location.
- Brian Anderson (BA) suggested that we use multiple strategies. A digital flyer with our email address bank in addition to town hall meeting.
- MS emphasized the need to get the information out now because hunting season is coming up and no one will want to hunt the area and the local economy will decline. Also need to get the attention for funding. Wanted all of the working group members to be at the meeting.
- JM asked how we can incentivize hunters to shoot and report the harvest of HD elk. Give another tag?
- MS suggested that they receive a preference point and that we use photos, but cautioned if the amount of information we collect is worth the probability of an incorrect hunter diagnosis.
- CC stated that they use posters in multiple languages to educate about invasive species and give them to the counties to distribute.
- MS suggested that we could get sponsors for the posters to help pay for them.
- Dave Carlson (DCa) stated that they have a large mail and email list for distribution and could put information in their newsletter.
- CC suggested RMEF banquets as well.
- DC stated that all the ideas are good, but a town hall meeting is most important.
- AS asked what are we going to tell people since we don't have all the answers? We are sure it's a bacterium or is it? What about habitat issues? We can talk about habitat now. Studies show that local herds are in poor condition, so we can do things to make habitat better in the meantime. Public continues to ask about herbicides and we know from studies that they affect nutrition.
- MS stated that shed hunters go on the MSH Wildlife Area despite closures and that is stressing the elk.
- CC stressed that it is not one outreach strategy that will be effective, so as a working group we need to help with outreach. We can also help with forage. The national forest and private landowners can help provide forage.
- AS asked if WDFW staff is talking about nutrition? Does the updated management plan address habitat?
- SJ answered that yes the dialogue is there on WDFW lands and with our partners.

- AS asked if the DNR talks about this?
- BJ answered that yes, they manage for all wildlife under an HCP.
- NP wanted to get feedback on management options.
- CC asked where these management actions happen. GPNF has plans for forage enhancements.
- DC stated that elk damage control on the valley floor needs to happen in a way other than harvest/additional permits because people ask why we have additional permits when HD is present.
- AS asked why we are still talking about a reduction in elk density when we already know that we have a reduction? He wanted the group to have input on hunting season recommendations.
- SJ answered that the department will look at its season recommendations again.
- AS stated that we need to think about the length of seasons and that we do not need early and late seasons.
- NP stated that he/WDFW will check on the status of the working group's website, send out powerpoint and other documents, email the HD informational brochure, send out the CR 102s (season recommendations), continue to populate the "Draft Next Steps" document, work on a broader public meeting (with input from the working group), and more outreach in general.
- MS wanted to know staff time and money devoted to HD so that he can lobby for more money.
- NP stated that we are looking forward (not backwards) in terms of money and are trying to anticipate costs.
- AS wanted to weigh in on the 5 year Game Management Plan
- SJ responded that work on the 3 year package starts this summer and that we can share the comments that we receive from this group
- DW said that while he appreciated the group's interest in season setting, but that discussion can spiral out of control and is not the topic of this group.
- SJ reminded everyone that the GMP, 3 year package, and the CR 102s all receive public comment.

The final portion of the meeting was set aside for public comments; 4 members of the public provided testimony:

- Boone Mora: He knows what causes the disease and how to cure it. Leptospirosis is not diagnosed in the US because 83% of cases are missed. He doesn't believe it is treponema because treponema works on the hoof. He has read many papers on Leptospirosis and there are 200 different types (it is ubiquitous) and it is transported by water. There is a primary lesion in all forms which is damage to the epithelial cells of the small membranes. He did a study that showed 20% of the US population has had Leptospirosis. He believes it is the cause of HD and it has not been investigated and would like to investigate it for free. All he needs is three elk.
- Jon Gosch: His family has hunted in GMU 550 for several decades and this was the worst year. We need more information in the hunting pamphlet. It's a good idea to incentivize hunters with points or a discount on butcher services. He harvested an elk with curled hooves two years ago. He suggested that people cut off the legs and turn them in. He would like a town hall meeting in every county because people think that WDFW is a big evil organization and they are not allowed information. Also agrees that herbicides need to be looked at.

- Tom Linde: He does not know what our goal is. He comes from the east end of the herd area, which has not had attention.
- Bruce Barnes: He talked to Senators Benton and Cleveland about a moratorium on herbicides. He saw one cow and three bulls in GMU 550. He believes that we are hunting these animals too much. DNR and timber companies need to provide habitat. He hasn't seen any information and no one has told him any information on HD. He asked why the game management meeting is in Moses Lake when the hunters are here. It shouldn't be about raising money to fund full time employees. We need a moratorium on herbicide spraying. We are no closer to solving this even after all of this work and staff time.

Once the public testimony came to a close:

- JM asked for Dr. Mora to be given more than the allotted three minutes of public testimony. SJ said that in fairness to the other members of the public who had also given public testimony; everyone has the same 3 minutes, so it would not be fair to allow Dr. Mora to continue beyond the 3 minutes already taken.
- MS asked about Mr. Mora's proposal to WDFW, why have we not addressed it?
- NP responded that we ran samples to test for Leptospirosis and those did not indicate it as a cause. WDFW has also met with Mr. Mora multiple times and has invited him to submit his study plan to review by the Technical Advisory Group.
- AS asked how many elk have we killed so far? Are we worried about not figuring out what it is? Next meeting can we talk about a Plan B?
- MS asked who to talk to about input on a public meeting? NP answered that he should talk to SJ.
- DC asked why we can't let Dr. Mora do his study when it does not cost anything. He stated that when you shut Dr. Mora down you also shut him down.
- MS suggested that the meeting be called to a close and that folks can talk to Dr. Mora afterwards.
- SJ responded that we are going down the avenue of the most likely cause. The panel of experts is open to all ideas and is guiding us in our research. We all want to get to the bottom of this.
- JM said that Dr. Mora has tenure and gut experience so that we should listen to him.
- NP reiterated the meeting format and that the meeting will continue, but not reopen the public testimony.
- Tom Besser (TB) stated that the technical working group has done work investigating Leptospirosis. Also, in his work (Animal Disease Lab) he diagnoses Leptospirosis in animals every month and the symptoms of Leptospirosis do not match this HD (no hoof symptoms). Leptospirosis has been here in WA for decades—it's not something new. 23 elk were tested for Leptospirosis with three tests. You look for a very high score on the antibody test and no animals showed this. Two control elk and two non-control elk had low titers of Leptospirosis DNA evidence in the kidney samples. The researchers try to follow the evidence and do more work there. Unless there is new evidence that comes out, he doesn't think it needs additional testing.
- JM asked if there were forage differences between control and non-control elk. Kristin Mansfield (KM) responded that yes some of the controls were from the east side of the Cascades.
- The meeting closed at 5:00pm.