

## **MULE DEER INITIATIVE**

### **Commission Briefing - February 20, 2009**

#### **Issue**

Researchers and wildlife managers generally concede mule deer achieved maximum abundance during the 1950s and '60s. Since then, mule deer have declined across the West, including Oregon. The most recent decline happened during the early 1990s and, though not fully understood, it is believed to be primarily due to the combined effects of drought and severe winters. Historically, deer populations rebounded quickly after such climatic extremes. However, in recent years, production and survival of fawns have remained at depressed levels. Low recruitment, severe winters, dry summers, changing predator/prey relationships, and increased habitat loss have pushed mule deer populations lower than the department and public desire.

#### **Approach**

The department is embarking on an ambitious program to address the decline of mule deer in Oregon. Known as the Mule Deer Initiative (MDI), this program is aimed at identifying and reducing limiting factors of mule deer populations in five designated Wildlife Management Units (WMU) (Heppner, Maury, Warner, Steens Mt., and Murderers Creek).

The MDI calls for the department to work with state, federal, and private partners (groups and individuals) to develop and implement strategies that will enhance mule deer populations. Not only will these efforts benefit mule deer but will also benefit a host of other species who share mule deer habitats. Strategies developed will be both short-term (1-3 years) and long-term (up to 10 years) and will serve as guidelines to be applied to other WMU in eastern Oregon.

#### **Development of Action Plans**

Over the course of the next four months, specific Action Plans will be developed for each of the five WMU with the overall goal to reach established population management objectives (MO) for that unit.

In the MDI Action Plans, objectives will be addressed under 6 major headings:

1. Habitat Management;
2. Population Management (includes harvest and hunter management, and competition with elk);
3. Predator Management;
4. Diseases and Parasites;
5. Law Enforcement;
6. Public Involvement and Outreach;

Under each objective, individual strategies will be listed in priority order and include when they will occur (timeframe) and estimated cost to implement (see attached Action Plan template). Some strategies will occur only during specific years while others will occur in each year of the program. Where possible, costs for each strategy will be calculated so that appropriate financial resources can be identified. Plan Implementation (funding, personnel and partnerships) and Monitoring will also be outlined.

## **Roles & Responsibilities**

### **Region Liaisons**

Each Region has identified one point of contact to serve as the liaison between the regions and the Wildlife Division. Greg Jackle from the John Day office and Meg Eden from the Prineville office will be responsible for:

1. Overseeing and assisting with the development, implementation, and monitoring of the WMU action plans, and;
2. Developing updates and reports summarizing actions, trouble shooting and problem solving, and as appropriate providing updates to interested organizations.

Initially, they will be focusing a significant amount of their time with organizing and assisting in implementing the action plans.

### **District Staff**

Under the direction of Meg or Greg, each district will set up an initial coordination meeting with a small group of individuals (e.g., Oregon Hunters Association (OHA), Mule Deer Foundation (MDF), key landowners, etc) to help the department identify who are key stakeholders who should participate in a larger Oversight Committee. Each Oversight Committee will review the specific draft Action Plan and give feedback to the district on which strategies should be implemented, when implementation should occur and potential funding resources. Once a district has developed a draft Action Plan, it will be forwarded to the watershed and regional manager for their approval. The Region Manager will then meet with the Wildlife Division to discuss the recommendations and once the Action Plan is approved by Division, implementation can begin.

### **Wildlife Division**

Division participation will be confined to high level review and providing assistance where appropriate. Division staff will be working closely with the USFS and BLM to facilitate their partnership and participation. We will also continue to work closely with the field director and executive director for the MDF and with the OHA Board to keep them apprised of what is occurring and ensuring they remain fully engaged at a high level.

**Mule Deer Initiative**  
**(Draft Outline 2/20/09)**

**Table of Contents**

**Executive Summary**

**Issue**

**Approach**

*Five separate Action Plans (one for each designated WMU) will be developed.*

*The following seven objectives could be addressed; not all seven may be relevant to a particular WMU:*

1. Habitat Management
2. Population Management
3. Predator Management
4. Diseases and Parasites
5. Disturbance and Harassment
6. Law Enforcement
7. Public Involvement and Outreach

**WMU Action Plans**

*Each WMU Action Plan will follow the outline below.*

**WMU Action Plan**

**Background** *(includes GIS map, deer population information., hunting opportunity)*

**Potential Limiting Factors** *(list those factors that are present and describe them in general terms across the WMU):*

Habitat Degradation, Predation, Illegal Activities, Disturbance and Harassment, Disease and Parasites

**Goal, Objectives, and Strategies**

**Goal:** Increase mule deer numbers to meet population management objectives for the specific WMU. *(MO per 2003 Mule Deer Management Plan)*

**Objectives and Strategies**

**1. Habitat Management**

Objective 1: *(using SMART criteria)*

Rationale *(describe specific assumptions, in order to support the objective)*

Strategy 1:

Timeframe:

Estimated Cost:

Objective 2: etc.

**2. Population Management**

Objective 1

Rationale

Strategy 1:  
Timeframe:  
Estimated Cost:

### **3. Predator Management**

Objective 1

Rationale

Strategy 1:  
Timeframe:  
Estimated Cost:

### **4. Disease and Parasites**

Objective 1

Rationale

Strategy 1:  
Timeframe:  
Estimated Cost:

### **5. Disturbance and Harassment**

Objective 1

Rationale

Strategy 1:  
Timeframe:  
Estimated Cost:

### **6. Law Enforcement**

Objective 1

Rationale

Strategy 1:  
Timeframe:  
Estimated Cost:

### **7. Public Involvement and Outreach**

Objective 1

Rationale

Strategy 1:  
Timeframe:  
Estimated Cost:

## **Plan Implementation**

**Funding**

**Personnel**

**Partnerships**

**Plan Revisions/Updates**

**Monitoring and Evaluation**