**Wildlife Technical Section Agenda, Redwing, MN**

March 21, 2017

Wildlife Technical Chair: Jeff Horn, IL DNR

1:00-1:10 Introductions and Orientation

**Bigger picture land use and programs that can benefit river quality**

1:10-1:30 **Gulf Hypoxia Initiative, Precision Conservation Blueprint for wildlife, water quality, energy and agriculture**. (Gwen White-Science Coordinator, US FWS, Bloomington, IN and Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative)

1:30-1:50 **The Minnesota Prairie Plan** (Greg Hoch, Prairie Habitat Team Supervisor, Minnesota DNR Wildlife, St. Paul, MN)

**Upper Mississippi River floodplain forest**

1:50-2:10 **Bird use of Mississippi River Floodplain Forests** (Eileen Kirsch, USGS Biologist, La Crosse, WI)

2:10-2:30 **Upper Mississippi River Floodplain Forest Management and Regeneration** (Ben Vandermyde, US Army Corps of Engineers, Pleasant Valley, IA)

**Minnesota Wildlife Research and Disease Management**

2:40-3:00 **Long Term Minnesota Moose Project** (Michelle Carstensen, Minnesota DNR Wildlife Health Program Supervisor, Forest Lake, MN)

3:00-3:20 **An Overview of MNDNR’s Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Surveillance History, the Current Outbreak near Preston, and what Future Plans are going forward for SE MN** (Erik Hildebrand, Minnesota DNR Wildlife Health Program Specialist, Forest Lake, MN)

**Vegetation Committee**

3:20 – 3:35 UMRCC vegetation database (Ben Schlifer)

3:35 – 3:55 Review of 2016 sampling efforts: Pool 8 SAV sampling (Ruth Nissen) and Pool 9 Reno Bottoms forestry sampling (Andy Meier)

3:55 Review and selection of 2017 veg sampling effort (Mike Griffin)

**Meeting Notes**

The Wildlife Technical Section had 36 people in attendance. Mike Tenney, MN DNR presented opening remarks and welcomed the group.

Gulf Hypoxia initiate was presented by Gwen White. There is a tool available on line with the primary purpose to disseminate spatial data and other resources. Contains a 200 layer database which is publicly accessible.

The Minnesota Prairie Plan was presented by Greg Hoch. This is a revision of their living plan. They are halfway to goal protecting all remaining remnant prairie clusters. There is still a loss of 3 acres of grassland for every acre gained mainly due to conservation reserve program loses.

Bird use of Mississippi River floodplain forests was presented by Eileen Kirsch. Data collected from 1990’s to 2015 using point counts. Overall recorded a lower abundance and forests of matured.

Upper Mississippi River floodplain forest management and regeneration was presented by Ben Vandermyde. Noted the dynamic of a failing forest, old even aged stands with no regeneration. Work has incorporated modification to shelterwood cuts. Plantings will use trees 5 feet and taller. Conducting monitoring efforts before and after prescriptions and both outside and inside treatment areas.

Long term Minnesota moose project was presented by Michelle Cartensen. Reviewed 3 year research that is providing insight to what is killing MN moose using collared animals to determine disease and predation rates. Two thirds of the mortality is caused by disease/parasites, winter ticks, brain worm and liver flukes which is driving the decline and with one third impact by predators.

Eric Hildebrand gave an informative overview of current status of CWD in MN since its first report of occurrence in 2010.

**Vegetation Committee Notes**

Ben Schlifer from USGS reviewed the progress that has been made to date on the UMRCC vegetation database. It will be located on the USGS Long Term Research Monitoring program website. Goal is to make all data from sampling efforts through 2016 available to allow for selection of pool and year and the ability to run multiple queries.

Review of 2016 sampling efforts for pool 8 and Reno Bottoms, pool 9.

A motion was made by Mike Griffin, IA DNR, seconded by Steven Winter, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refgue, and passed unanimously to select the 2017 vegetation sampling effort which will be targeted SAV sampling in Harpers Slough, pool 9 and Timber Inventory, pool 21.

Brenda Kelly requested that $500.00 remain on the budget to secure gps units for UMRCC sampling efforts. Costs were supported and acquisition will occur in 2017.

Respectfully submitted by Brenda Kelly, WDNR representing Jeff Horn, IL DNR, wildlife technical chair that was unable to attend.

**State Updates**

**Illinois,** submitted by Jeff Horn

**CWD**

Illinois continues its statewide surveillance through hunter harvest, processors, and taxidermists.

Our sharpshooting operations are in full swing in counties with CWD. Carroll Co. had its first CWD positive deer this season. We are getting more positives in new areas than in previous years – several along the Wisconsin border.

**Feral Hogs**

To our knowledge, all known populations in Illinois have been eradicated. We are currently investigating another population.

The state of Illinois is nearing the 2 year mark without a budget in place. There was a stop gap budget passed at the end of 2016 which allows the IDNR to carry out most of its functions through the end of the fiscal year.

**Iowa,** submitted by Mike Griffin

**CWD**

Iowa continues surveillance along the Mississippi River.

During the regular season and special scientific collection efforts 11 new cases of CWD were detected in Iowa’s Wild deer population. (See attached map). One new case in a captive deer in Buchanan Co.

The results of the special hunt in Allamakee and Clay ton Co. was:

* Allamakee collected an additional 202 samples in the special CWD Zone.
* Clayton collected an additional 130 samples in special CWD Zone (Not all samples back yet)

**Fishers**

* A bow hunter saw a fisher on a trail camera in January. He posted the picture to our website. 3 days later a predator hunter shot an animal coming into his call under a full moon. The animal was turned over to DNR and identified as a Fisher. First Fisher in Iowa since mid 1800’s. This Fisher was killed about 12 miles from the picture on the trail camera.
* In early February IA DNR was called on a road killed Fisher just North of Marquette IA. Clayton County (see photo attached)

**Hogs**

We have no hog population at the present but each unit receives calls on pigs running loose. We have been successful so far in removing those hogs.

Waterfowl:

* Experimental teal season extended.
* Canada goose nesting. WI and I searched a bermed HREP containment area in Pool 10. We discovered over 100 nests on the manmade island.
* Hunting season was good for the most part as told by hunters at our spring listening sessions.

**Projects**

* Odessa pool (17-18) HREP Completed dedication April 6. 4 spillways into area, interior dredging, moist soil units and levee work.
* Harpers Slough Islands HREP. Work continues should be completed this year. New islands on Lower Pool 9.
* Pool 12 Over-wintering. Sunfish Lake done. Started dredging two other lakes. Reforestation of several areas with dredged material.
* Huron Island HREP Pool 18 dredging completed. Reforestation begins this year. Several different heights of new forest. Closing structure to be put in this year.
* Blackhawk Bottoms 206 Pool 19. Moist soil project under 206 essentially complete.
* Green Island Non Structural Alternative under PL 84-99. Iowa DNR got possession of 374 acres of a levee district that failed. Used WREP to buy out ag value then used PL 84-99 NSA to buy out residual value.

Kelly Myers our division administrator took a job with FWS LLC’s. She was replaced by Dr. Dale Garner the former chief of the Wildlife Bureau. Wildlife chief is still open.

Bill Ohde retired from the DNR. His position has not been filled yet.

**Minnesota,** submitted by Mike Tenney

**Modest User fee increases are recommended for DNR**

The Game and Fish Fund is expected to slip into a deficit starting in 2019. To maintain the fund’s basic level of services, the governor’s budget proposes adjustments to fishing and deer-hunting license fees. Under this plan, a resident annual angling license would be adjusted by $3 (from $22 to $25), while a nonresident annual angling license would be adjusted by $6 (from $45 to $51). A resident deer hunting license would increase from $30 to $34; a nonresident deer hunting license would increase from $165 to $185.

State park permit fees have not been raised since 2003, while visits, as evidenced by permit sales, have increased by about 30 percent in just the last three years. The governor’s budget proposal would adjust daily park permit fees by $1 (from $5 to $6) per day. Annual permits would increase by $5 per year (from $25 to $30). The fee increase as well as $9.3 million in new General Fund money will be used to support parks and trails operations in order to meet the needs and expectations of a wide variety of outdoor recreationists.

**Minnesota Deer Plan**

During the summer and fall of 2016, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) asked stakeholders and staff about their goals for deer management, and which topics they felt were important to address through a statewide deer management plan. The purpose of a statewide deer plan is to communicate the DNR responsibilities and efforts related to deer and deer management while defining strategic goals, objectives and strategies that direct deer management into the future. Adhere to the DNR Section of Wildlife’s mission.

**CWD in Minnesota’s Wild Deer Herd**

A hunter Harvested deer taken in Fillmore County tested positive for CWD this past fall as part of a region wide voluntary testing project. This triggered our Minnesota CWD Response Plan.

If CWD is detected in wild cervids in Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) has identified 4 primary goals of managing the disease:

1) Determine and monitor the prevalence and geographic distribution of CWD in the affected area.

2) Prevent or minimize further spread and new introductions of the disease.

3) Support and conduct applied research on CWD and its epidemiology.

4) Provide accurate and current information about CWD to the public, agency personnel, and constituent groups.

To accomplish these goals, a number of activities would occur as quickly as possible, regardless of the time of year the discovery is made. These would include a survey to determine deer density and distribution in the area where the CWD-positive cervid was detected, creation of a CWD management zone, implementing a feeding ban, prohibiting the import and export of cervid parts from within the zone, conducting opportunistic surveillance (e.g. vehicle-kill surveillance) and substantially increasing targeted surveillance within the zone.

To facilitate items 1 and 2 above, a late season hunting season was created, a landowner deer shooting project was established, and finally, a USDA sharpshooter project was initiated. These three extra deer removal protocols resulted in an additional 1,148 deer being taken and sampled, about 10% of the 11,600 deer estimated within the project area.

**Minnesota’s New Buffer Law**

Minnesota's buffer law establishes new perennial vegetation buffers of up to 50 feet along rivers, streams and ditches that will help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment. The law provides flexibility and financial support for landowners to install and maintain buffers.

The DNR's role in Minnesota's buffer law is to produce and maintain a map of public waters and public ditch systems that require permanent vegetation buffers. The DNR released the buffer protection map in July 2016. The map is helping to guide the implementation of Minnesota's buffer law by landowners, with the help of the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), Drainage Authorities and other local governments.

**Proposed Waterfowl hunting regs for 2017**

Black Duck bag going from 1 to 2, and pintail bag from 2 to 1 based the harvest strategies that have been adopted. Otherwise seasons will be same as last year and follow the federal frameworks.

CAGO – no changes to season; we’re maxed out on days. Same framework/structure as last year. Last year we closed the goose season the Saturday before the duck opener, but didn’t get any negative comments on that, so no plans to change the closure of the early goose season.

Cranes – no change planned from last year. Very few complaints about current relatively restrictive season. As with geese, we won’t have harvest estimates until later this summer. Has been around 250 birds, with about 1,000 permits offered. No planned changes to shooting hours, spinning-wing decoy restrictions or overwater hunting restrictions.

**Annual Frog and Toad Survey**

Volunteers are needed to help the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources track population changes in the state’s 14 frog and toad species as part of an annual survey.

“The frog and toad survey would not be possible without the dedication of generous volunteers,” said Janine Kohn, project coordinator. “Frogs and toads are indicators of habitat quality and provide valuable information on the condition of Minnesota’s wetlands. Through this 21-year citizen science program, volunteers gather important data which helps us track the health of the state’s frog and toad populations and, therefore, wetlands and water quality.”

**Minnesota CREP III**

In January 2017 Governor Mark Dayton signed a $500 million Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture. This federal, state, and local partnership will work with farmers and other landowners across 54 counties in southern and western Minnesota who choose to voluntarily implement conservation practices on up to 60,000 acres of land to restore and protect water quality and enhance habitat.

CREP is an offshoot of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the country’s largest private-land conservation program. Administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), CREP targets state-identified, high-priority conservation issues. This project is a federal, state, and local partnership and will voluntarily retire environmentally sensitive land using the nationally-recognized ReInvest In Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program. This is accomplished through permanent protection by establishing conservation practices via payments to farmers and agricultural land owners. CREP is implemented locally through Soil and Water Conservation Districts and many other partners.

**Missouri,** submitted by Mike Flaspohler

**CWD**

Missouri implemented mandatory sampling for all deer harvested during opening weekend of the firearms season in 2016 for hunters in 29 counties. This effort provided nearly 20,000 samples of which five were positive. One positive was picked up in SE Jefferson County which was the first positive for that county and will likely change the zone boundary. The other four positives were in counties that already had positives from previous years. We also had voluntary sampling along the Arkansas border. No positives were detected there! We have continued to get samples from across the state through taxidermists as well and recently were notified of two positives in St Clair County. This represents a completely new area in that it was outside of our previous CWD zones and is in the west central/southwest part of the state between Truman and Stockton Lakes.

**Waterfowl**

Waterfowl numbers were really good this past year across the state. We saw significant numbers of ducks, geese, and swans throughout the fall and winter months. Mild conditions didn’t always help from the hunter standpoint but did provide good conditions for the birds. We saw early returns of large numbers of pintail, white fronted geese, and snow geese starting in late January and continuing through late February. During the first week of February at the Shanks area we estimated 250,000 ducks, 150,000 snow geese, 40,000 white fronts, and 4,000 canadas. We also saw numerous swans throughout the period and heard lots of reports of swans from people across the state.

We had a small outbreak of Avian Cholera at Shanks and Fountain Grove mostly involving snow geese.

**Projects**

Work has moved along on the Shanks HREP with the three phase electric pump station nearing completion. Mild, dry weather really helped with construction this past winter. Plans for this year include the completion of the pump station, tree plantings, and possible work on a slough outside of the Shanks area boundary known as Deadman’s Slough. The exact scope for that part of the project has not been finalized yet.

**Miscellaneous**

Mountain Lion reports continue to come in with the first female mountain lion being confirmed since the early 1990s. We have had three confirmed and likely a fourth (pending) since January 1, 2017, (although two or three of the reports are thought to be the same lion that was hit and killed on the highway in Warren County).

Turkey numbers continue to struggle in the northern portion of the state with poor production last year. Populations in the northeast counties seem to be worse than the rest of the state.

**Wisconsin**, submitted by Brenda Kelly

**Mississippi River Habitat Projects**

We continued to participate on UMRR project delivery teams and are currently working with the USACOE, USFWS, and IA DNR in Harpers Slough, lower Pool 9 in its final year of construction; Conway Lake in upper pool 9 which will be awarded contract in 2017; and in planning, McGregor Lake, pool 10. In addition, planning teams have met to work on Weaver Bottoms, pool 5, and Reno Bottoms, pool 9.

**Waterfowl Surveys**

In a collaborative effort with the USFWS Migratory Bird Management Office, Refuge, IA, MN and WI DNR’s, USGS, and IL NHS staff convened in January review Upper Mississippi River Aerial waterfowl surveys. The 1 ½ day meeting was organized and led by Chris Nicolai, Region 8 USFWS Biologist. Discussions included a history, uses of data, and focal species. Chris will be providing recommendations and a suggested path forward back to the group April 1.

In January 2-6, staff participated in the USFWS coordinated Mid-winter waterfowl survey. This data provides an index to winter waterfowl numbers and distribution. With the river still being in freeze up conditions, waterfowl use was low than 2016 results.

**Furbearers**

Muskrats were again surveyed in 2016/ 2017 in each pool, 4-11 and marked the 30th year.

**Education**

Education remains a priority for wildlife staff. In 2016 we hosted two waterfowl identification clinics, a backwater paddle of pool 9 and participated in the 30th anniversary celebration of the UMRR program. In 2017, dates have already been established for another backwater paddle in June and an identification clinic of Mississippi River migrating waterfowl in October.

**Miscellaneous**

Staff completed a prescribed fire on WDNR owned island in Pool 6. The goal has been to remove woody invasive species and rehabilitate the oak community to foster forest health. Plans are to conduct a prescribed fire in 2017.

For more information on any of the above topics, please don’t hesitate to call or write. For information on the status of species that were brought up at our meeting by other agencies (deer, elk, cougars, bears, to name a few), please refer to our Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource website, dnr.wi.gov or contact me, Brenda.kelly@wisconsin.gov or 608-785-9994.

**Refuge Staffing Update**

Cindy Samples, Park Ranger in the HQ office, retired.

Brian Stemper, Wildlife Biologist in the HQ office, accepted a position with the USDA NRCS in Yankton, SD.

Erin Adams is the new Wildlife Biologist at the La Crosse District.

Rich King, previous District Manager in the McGregor District, accepted a position with the USFWS Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning.  Rich's office is at the UMESC in La Crosse, WI.

Brandon Jones is the new District Manager in the McGregor District.  Brandon was previously an Assistant Refuge Manager at the Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District in Nebraska.