



Big Game Committee Meeting Summary

August 26, 2015

Committee Chair David Hoyle, Jr. called the meeting to order at 11:25 am.

Attendees

Committee Members

David Hoyle, Jr., Chair
Tommy Fonville
Ray Clifton
Neal Hanks
John Coley

Wes Seegars
Tom Berry
Garry Spence
Brian White

Commissioners

John Litton Clark
Joe Budd
Mark Craig

Joe Barker
Jim Cogdell

Staff

Mallory Martin
Betsy Haywood
Andrew Helton
David Sawyer
Christopher Serenari
Allan Boynton
Thomas Harvey
Kyle Briggs
Kate Pipkin
Susan Bunn

Gordon Myers
Wes Barger
Brad Howard
Jon Shaw
Maria Palamar
Margaret Martin
Colleen Olfenbuttell
Doug Howell
Steve Chase
David Cobb

Visitors

Ned Jones – NC Trout Unlimited
Don Williamson – NC Bowhunters Assn.
Todd Purvis – Weyerhaeuser

Terry Morris – ENHA
Tommy Kimball – NCBA
Fred Harris – NC Wildlife Federation

Staff Report on Deer Management Forum Results

The committee received a staff report on results from the Deer Management Forums held earlier this year. Brad Howard reported that the objective of the forums is to help inform management goals for deer, state-wide. Feedback from constituents included opinions from avid deer hunters that may not represent all deer hunters state-wide.

Howard reported on some of the conclusions.

- A large percentage of participants believe that some changes are needed in setting seasons for deer management. Social desires of hunters must be investigated further.
- There are varying opinions about what “quality deer hunting” means. Beliefs on how deer management should change varies across the state. In certain regions there were outspoken minority opinions and subtle differences.
- When asked about the harvest of yearling bucks, 81 percent believe that too many were shot, but only 52 percent thought we should further restrict buck harvest and opinions on how to restrict varied widely.
- Hunters are willing to engage and help the agency with deer management. Ninety-five percent thought the forums were helpful and 97 percent want additional forums. Ninety-two percent of hunters with trail cameras are willing to work with the WRC on projects.
- In moving forward, the agency needs to meld the biological data with public attitudes and opinions.

Commissioner Questions

- Can we develop biological deer management units to lead deer management? YES
- Are the current seasons the best biological fit for today’s population? NO
- What deer season structures and regulations are the best fit?
 - Blend scientific management principles
 - Consider habitat and landscape
 - Meet desires of the people – **This is lacking. All agreed that we must consider public satisfaction.**

Discussion included the cost of improving the deer herd but no conclusions were drawn. The unhuntable population of deer in urban areas is high. Twenty-five percent of the WRC income is tied to deer hunting licenses. We need to find the best fit for effective management and seasons, while still meeting the desires of hunters.

Next Steps

- Disseminate information
- Initiate a state-wide science-based survey of deer hunters, drawing from a subset of 250,000 hunters.
- Use the information to guide the agency along the best path.

Chris Serenari, *Human Dimensions Biologist*, conducts the surveys. He discussed survey bias in modes of contact and the subtle differences from areas that have spotty cell phone and internet coverage. In the coastal areas mail is used for contact, followed by internet. Serenari stated that random sampling is conducted across the state.

Current analysis focuses on urban/suburban issues. Staff will conduct a scientific survey of deer hunters to determine best fit for seasons in various areas and regulatory strategies for success. Findings will be tested and discussed at public focus groups. A second series of public information meetings will be held to gather feedback. The WRC will determine whether regulations should be proposed. The committee was reminded that if the deer seasons are changed there needs to be discussion of possible consequences to small game hunters.

ACTION: The Big Game Committee directed staff to proceed with the next steps in the deer management planning.

Chairman Hoyle reminded the Big Game Committee that bears will need discussion at the next committee meeting.

Adjournment

Chairman Hoyle adjourned the meeting at 12:10 pm.