

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

**BIG GAME ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT
NOVEMBER 21, 2023**

PRESENT: Neil Wiens, Chair David Dixon, Vice Chair Jeff Bevilacqua Troy Blackwell

Dr. Chris Davies Roy DeCorte Kelsi Doughty Gerry Giesler

Allison Hannah Rob Hare Tony Jackson Donn MacMillan

Rick Moore Eric Smith

ABSENT: Wally Motz

STAFF: Mark Ryckman, Liaison

GUESTS: Patrick Hubert and Kyle Morrison, MNRF

The meeting commenced at 6:00pm with a welcome from the Chair and a round of introductions from those in attendance.

Moose Aerial Inventories

Patrick Hubert outlined the Moose Aerial Inventory schedule for the upcoming 23/24 winter. The government has an ambitious plan for this season with a total of 9 Wildlife Landscape Zones covering 29 WMUs being scheduled, plus 3 contingency units. Planned for survey include two WLZs that were not completed in last year's schedule due to poor survey conditions. With the exception of WMU 25 that will be a transect survey with a fixed wing aircraft, all surveys will be carried out by helicopter.

MNRF is in the initial stages of training for MAI observers. They habitually rely on previously trained staff and observers who have some experience with the program. Volunteers have not been part of the program for some time due to safety and insurance concerns.

Cost to complete the program has gone up significantly. MNRF uses four of its own helicopters and pilots and contracts out for private companies in order to take advantage of windows of opportunities that present themselves to complete surveys with a good level of confidence in the data collected.

Unclaimed Moose Tags

At our last regularly scheduled BGAC meeting in July 2023, the MNRF presented the committee with some initial thoughts about how to address the issue of unclaimed moose tags and wanted some feedback from committee members. Timing at that meeting did not afford sufficient opportunity to fully discuss what was presented and the committee reconvened in September to further delve into what we heard in order to provide MNRF with more thoughts on solving the issue. MNRF was invited to this meeting for further discussion and clarification on where we could be going to get more unclaimed tags into the hands of moose hunters. Initial uptake of awarded tags for the 2023 hunt mirror past claim rates. About 30% of tags allocated to resident hunters go unclaimed. This a significant loss of opportunities for hunters and funding into the SPA.

Both the committee and MNRF agree that the issue of unclaimed tags needs to be addressed and some changes to the draw will be necessary. There is insufficient time to adopt changes for 2024 and a bit of a time crunch if changes can be implemented for the 2025 moose season. We had a very in-depth discussion with Patrick and Kyle on the pros and cons of different options which they have indicated they will take back and consider as they endeavor to come up with a solution to the problem. We have invited them back for further consultation on the MNRF's preferred changes.

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The committee moved on to some updates on other items on our agenda.

Chronic Wasting Disease

MNRF conducted surveillance in 3 zones in 2022. These zones covered 25 WMUs and sampled 646 animals. All samples tested negative for CWD. A question regarding sample size was raised and although 2022 numbers were less than ideal, there were enough to have confidence that CWD has not appeared in the province. Total samples since the program started have reached 14,843 -- all negative.

For the 2023 deer season there will again be 3 areas sampled. Surveys will be done in the Northwest at Rainy River/Atikokan, Central Ontario near Bancroft/Algonquin Park and in Southwestern Ontario near Sarnia/London. The exact WMUs have been listed in the Nov/Dec issue of Ontario Out of Doors magazine. Roving crews and drop off sites have been set up. A concern was raised from a committee member regarding deer heads being turned away from drop off locations because too much time had elapsed since the animal was harvested. Mark will follow up to see if there has been a standardized protocol for elapsed time for samples to be delivered.

Manitoba has designated a significant portion of the western part of the province as a mandatory sample collection zone. It is interesting to note that they have a timeframe for providing samples by hunters up to a maximum of 7 days. They have also banned the practice of baiting for the purposes of hunting. Since 2021, they have reported CWD positive samples in 20 mule deer and 2 white-tailed deer.

Hemorrhagic Disease in Deer

There have been no recent reports of bluetongue or epizootic hemorrhagic disease in Ontario's deer population. A committee member has since provided a photograph of an obviously sick deer. Mark will undertake to follow up with his contacts to see if a cause of the emaciation can be determined.

Controlled Deer Hunt

There has still been no movement by MNRF to address our request that they undertake a review of the controlled deer hunt to determine if it is doing what it was set out to accomplish and is still a valid tool across that part of the province where it has been implemented. There were some changes to the hunt which saw some new opportunities for bow hunters in a number of units. The uptake of tags is quite strong in that more than 90% of CDH tags allocated are claimed.

Tracking after dark

The committee was made aware that our request to have an amendment to the FWCA has been forwarded to MNRF. This brought about a brief discussion around the use of drones to help in locating downed big game. A recent article in OOD magazine seems to imply that this would be acceptable. Mark will follow up further with MNRF Enforcement to get a clearer position on the use of this tool.

Respectfully submitted,

Neil Wiens

Chair