WI DNR DMAP ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

2/21/2014 – Schmeeckle Reserve, Stevens Point

Introductions

Committee Chair Bob Nack who is the newly appointed DMAP Coordinator within the DNR thanked those in attendance for their interest in the program. With this being the inaugural meeting of the DMAP advisory committee, it was understood that many who were in attendance were there on a "fact finding" mission to determine if they felt their role would be beneficial to both the committee and their organization. Attendance by multiple organizations was as follows:

- Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association
- Pheasants Forever
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- Wisconsin Department of Forestry
- Wisconsin Consulting Foresters
- Quality Deer Management Association
- Wisconsin County Foresters Association
- Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association
- Wisconsin Bow Hunters Association
- Safari Club International
- Whitetails Unlimited
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
- Aldo Leopold Foundation/Driftless Forest Network/My Wisconsin Woods
- United States Forest Service
- Ruffed Grouse Society
- Wisconsin Conservation Congress
- Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission

- One role of the committee is to provide recommendations to our wildlife policy team. Anything that comes out of this committee that we want to suggest or recommend needs to be vented toward the policy team.
- The question was raised if there was going to be any other invites on the committee. Agencies/Organizations that were mentioned included the County Land and Conservation Departments and the DNR education program. Many programs mentioned would most likely be invited to meetings as committee members or on a consulting basis. Absent from the meeting were representatives from the National Wild Turkey Federation (weather) and the Hunters Rights Coalition (vacation). Both intend to participate in the future.
- Bob as moderator for the meeting began with a presentation to show committee members the initial vision and background on what has been done so far on DMAP (see link at the end). This presentation is what facilitated most of the following discussion.

Initial thoughts on implementing DMAP in Wisconsin

- The DMAP program is going to be very positive and not controversial so we would hope that everyone will be on the same page and provide outreach toward other groups that the program may reach.
- It might be an appealing program with there not being any mandatory requirements or practices.
- Questions asked that will need to be answered included: "Will DMAP be something that will allow us to tax accordingly our property?" and "How many rules are going to be attached to what we do and how we do it?"
- Within some non-government organizations, DMAP is perceived to be a great additive program that the state of Wisconsin is giving to landowners to help manage deer on their properties.
- We will bring people in with deer but will also talk about a number of other wildlife and habitat management projects.
- If you advocate that a healthy forest is also going to be good for wildlife it may help reach people who weren't previously engaged with similar programs. May take some good lessons from the Driftless Forest Network.
- ***In relation to the MFL program***:
    - MFL may also have some plans in place on some properties so what would take precedence? - MFL would but DMAP plan would be provided as a supporting document.
    - The vast majority of properties in an MFL program are already well-managed and if new management objectives are desired it would be fairly simple to work new goals into the existing plan.
- ***Enrollment:***
    - Could people be enrolled in both the Agricultural Damage program and the DMAP program? There were some pretty significant legislative changes recommended on the Agricultural Damage program. With the role of this committee we can make recommendations to the department prior to any legislative action so this may be something to explore.
    - There are a group of people out there that we need to reach that do not trust government agencies. Somehow we need to educate these people with the idea that we are not going to come on your property and force you to do this; rather we are going to help you get the most out of the property.
    - This will be the mechanism to bring in periphery people and unengaged people as well as bring the landowner together with the hunter and the department.
    - People will see benefits of enrollment in the program in a rather short-term time frame which may help narrow the gap between these people and the DNR. It is going to take some time but it will happen.

- The formation of cooperatives (i.e. joining landowner's together who have adjacent properties), may allow more management to be done to accomplish greater deer and forestry objectives on a greater scale.
- We are initially thinking one tier 2 or 3 cooperator per county. Following the first year we will reassess the program and make some decisions regarding staffing. As the applications come in some of that will sort itself out. We may need to target properties that have more conflicts with deer and negative consequences from overabundance.
- We want to be able to have antlerless tags in the hands of landowners by the opening of deer season. A start and stop period is really important in order to get people tags and get a site visit in. By having a block of people in an applicant pool we could form a meeting for everyone included in a county to try and get them geared up for next year.
- We would like to encourage applications with the caveat that we may not take everyone. From a long-term marketing standpoint the worst thing we can do is turn people away for two or three years. However, a waiting list isn't a bad thing and bodes well on the program.
- Take applications and if they're not initially selected for tier 2 or 3, we still take them as tier 1 applicants to give them a start with the program. Even if they start on a tier 1 enrollment basis they will still have access to data and assistance via email/phone which is something.
- If a person submits and application and they are not chosen does their application go into a pool to be considered for next year? Maybe have an enrollment deadline for those who want to be included for the 2014 year but possibly keep it open for people who want to be in the program but don't necessarily want to be included for 2015 and beyond.

- ***Program Funding:***
  - DMAP provided at three tiers – Fees would be per cooperator/cooperative on a three year enrollment basis.
  - How would this program be funded with the low enrollment costs? There has to be some source of funding to help pay for the time.
  - Has there been discussion about landowners contributing to the cost of a management plan?

<u>DMAP in other states</u>

- Have we talked to folks in other DMAP states that have been having such high levels of participation and what they have been doing and how they have been dealing with such high interest? - Other states have been having higher acreage requirements and aside from that we have not gotten much information.
- Are the fees charged in Wisconsin comparable to what other states charge?

- Is there any data available as to the average size of a property that is enrolled in DMAP in other states? There's a lot of value in bringing multiple small landowners together to form cooperatives.

<u>Year one logistics</u>

- We should take this opportunity to use this first year as an experiment as to using different techniques for getting this done. We want to sell this program to get a true reflection of interest.
- ***Site visit:***
    - We envision a biologist and a forester making a site visit together but staffing levels are a concern.
    - Should it be a requirement that a landowner has to be there when you do a site assessment? They'll probably want to in any situation.
    - There is a lot of value in bringing the professional wildlife manager onto your property. This may be the single practice that the landowner gets started with but the key is the follow up.
    - How do you convince people that they need to harvest more or less deer on their property? - Walking through the woods and seeing what is occurring first hand will be the most convincing aspect.
- In terms of the Division of Forestry providing assistance with DMAP, forestry leadership met with the DMAP people to discuss where they stand in this program. They initially discussed providing 8 hours or so toward this. There will be a lot of potential DMAP properties already enrolled in the Managed Forest Law (MFL) program so it may be advantageous to start with them.
- In terms of DMAP properties possibly allowing mentored hunting groups access to harvest antlerless deer: Whitetails Unlimited has a weekend youth deer group that could be one potential outlet.
- ***Public lands option in Wisconsin***
    - Not a clear idea yet as to what this program could provide to public lands but we want to make it an important piece. Committee may play a key role in providing suggestions for this option.
    - GLIFWC suggested that it is going to be relatively easy to work out on private land but would be more difficult on public land.
    - The public land problem isn't the same across the state. There are areas with high quality habitat with low deer numbers, but also low quality habitat with high deer numbers. We need to do a better job monitoring our forest regeneration. Browse by deer is not something that is getting tracked on a statewide scale very well.
- ***Measuring success:***

- There are a lot of ways to measure success of this program and to do evaluation in terms of achieving its objectives etc. One way may be a pre/post program survey about enrollee's knowledge of deer management and their attitudes toward the department.
- Some landowners don't think the department is serious about enforcing management recommendations. However, hopefully we're going to provide a product for them that they feel is beneficial for being involved.
- What will happen if cooperators do not follow recommendations? They may just get in it for the antlerless tags.

DMAP management plan

- Cooperators will be asked about the history of deer management on their property. In terms of wildlife habitat and deer harvest recommendations it will essentially be "this is what you've got, and this is what you can do".
- Every plan written doesn't necessarily have to qualify for a forest stewardship plan depending on the landowners goals.
- WFLGP would be a program to consider when initiating a plan on the property or MFL.
- A database is currently being created for staff to utilize to most efficiently create management plans/harvest reports.
- If we are going to reach these periphery people we should not focus as much on management plans because only about 25% of people who have management plans actually follow them. In some cases there may not need to be a written plan at all.
- Who is training biologists on what to recommend? - The biologists will have this expertise and work with the landowner to cater toward their interests. As highlighted during the DMAP action team process within the Deer Trustee Report, consulting plan writers will be certified. However, will there be other potential partners that will be certified to write these plans? It was probably initially thought that there might be some certification process for these DMAP plans.
- Has there been a discussion on how the property management plans on a single property scale have been worked out? – Not yet.
- Each landowner is going to differ with what they want. Someone is going to want verbal comments, some may be okay with bullet points and some may want a written contract.

DMAP at the county scale

- GLIFWC suggested that there is a high degree of likelihood that new county advisory committees will portion antlerless tags that will increase herd management on properties while forest managers will look to decrease antlerless deer on properties.
- How will antlerless harvest within DMAP enrolled lands buy into the recommendations from the county advisory committees when they make their herd recommendations? DMAP may help identify hot spots on a smaller scale because for the most part deer management recommendations for this program will be on a smaller scale, not at the county scale. An

example a committee member used is the idea that 100 deer have been observed in a 1 square mile block and 2 miles away 3 deer were observed in a 1 square mile block.

- County committees may need a DMAP coordinator on them to help identify hotspots in the areas. However, this would be going under the assumption that a hotspot for deer is enrolled in DMAP.
- The National Forest seems to be doing a better job at tracking regeneration surveys, but the county and state doesn't track it as well. We've always operated under the assumption that there are high browse and deer numbers in areas but we have not done a good job quantifying that on a spatial scale. This is something we are looking into and would like to feed this information to county committees to help make recommendations.

<u>Cooperator data collection</u>

- DMAP could get the DNR biological data that would give them an opportunity that they didn't have before.
- What are we going to ask from cooperators? - Some suggestions were to get age data from jawbones, antler characteristics, lactation data etc. Regardless of what is collected, we should really make the most use out of data as well as using this opportunity to provide educational opportunities.
- The suggestion was made to add WSI estimates to our list of data collection.
- ***GLIFWC***:
    - To keep the person interested in the program he/she should be involved with more data collection and be a part of a bigger picture. The process of engaging landowners in active science may provide a vehicle for increasing partnerships and improving relationships. Personal involvement in collecting data may initiate a shifting perspective. Going to be a great educational tool for landowners to see what is occurring on their property. There also may be many variable distribution issues at the county level that landowners could get keyed in to.
    - There should be a consensus on the value of collecting data from these cooperators on relatively small parcels of land vs. the need for data on a county wide basis to manage the deer in that county. What are thoughts on private landowners enrolled in a DMAP program and the purpose for their data collection? How are those data going to be used? It may be difficult to transition collected data to a bigger scale at the county level.
    - Initial response from the committee is that **it may benefit both** – the data we collect from DMAP may be a part of the county recommendations. No data is bad data because the more data you have the better access you have to trends. It may also depend on the amount of data that is being collected.
- ***Trail camera data:***
    - How can we use trail camera data and make it useful for the landowner? - There is quite a bit of WWOA ownership that includes non-residential properties which makes

trail cameras very advantageous for data collection and deer observations. Providing this is a viable option but it would be important to give landowners the proper education on how to create trail camera data sets and survey properly without using bait or mineral supplements.
    - Could camera data be treated more as an index rather than absolute numbers? Looking at trends instead of actual numbers? Statisticians would not approve of the accuracy of camera data.
    - A comment was made to not get hung up on trying to count deer. It would be more advantageous to assess the habitat and assess the deer and from that you can tell if you have too many or not enough and if it's in relative balance.
- Have the landowner do a little science on the impacts of deer on the environment. The more you can get the landowner to understand this, the better off they and you will be. We may not even need to quantify what they see on the landscape but just help them understand more of what is going on within their woodlot or property.

<u>Thoughts and perspectives from committee members</u>

- ***Department of Forestry:*** Forest regeneration and deer is a huge issue and it is well documented that deer can have huge impacts on forests. We don't have the finer resolution on how it's impacting forests at a more localized level. Why are certain public lands not managed for deer? Management is really driven by objectives and lots of lands have very different objectives and not all of them are driven by deer habitat. When trying to get to unengaged landowners we should try to look to some of the lessons that forestry has learned when promoting the MFL program. Also, Foresters are going to want to know what their role is.
- ***Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association:*** Is the fee structure for getting into the program needed? It may not necessarily be worth it. The DNR doesn't have enough manpower right now to manage the potentially high enrollment levels and workloads. We should really try to promote the cooperative option.
- ***Pheasants Forever***: Should we have someone from the Department of Agriculture on the committee? One of the big things that affects deer harvest and deer management on a property is deer behavior. Past experience is that many hunters don't understand deer behavior. If they don't understand how a deer patterns hunters etc. they may do everything right and still have poor hunting success. Strategies are needed to try and combat that.
- ***Department of Natural Resources Local Biologists***: Would field workshops for DNR staff be the same across the state or tailored for the area you are in? Staffing levels are also a concern.
- ***Wisconsin County Foresters***: Just because we know that deer have a large effect on forest regeneration we have to identify where that is occurring and right now we don't have a good grasp on that right now.
- ***Quality Deer Management Association***: Their agency is behind the DMAP program with their goals which is managing for a sustainable herd and a balanced age and sex structure. Is enthusiastic that DMAP will build ties between the DNR and the public because people are going to see the results. They could also be beneficial in getting already current QDMA coop's together on board with the DMAP program.

- ***Wisconsin Consulting Foresters***: The key issue is balancing the deer population with a particular habitat. Are we making a habitat assessment a little too complicated? If we are short on manpower when starting this program maybe we should just stick to the basics when looking at the property and make more general and subjective assessments for less time and cost. This would be a good place at least to begin with. We should also look at the great success that the MFL program has had and use it to spur this program.
- ***Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association***: Nothing further to add at the moment.
- ***Wisconsin Bow Hunters Association***: Nothing further to add at the moment.
- ***Safari Club International***: Feels the DMAP program will be a win-win for the department.
- ***Department of Natural Resources Science Services***: Feels there are lots of opportunities to connect this program and the landowners' involvement to other department initiatives. For example, the DNR is going to be spearheading a very ambitious project which would need a lot of landowners to participate. It may be worthwhile to think about inviting other social scientists to a future meeting to share other social science results from studies.
- ***Whitetails Unlimited***: A lot of DMAP hits home to things that they're all about. Especially considering herd health and the future of deer and deer hunting. This organization has got over 100 local chapters and 30000 members in this state. It may be a good conduit for a dissemination of information.
- ***US Fish and Wildlife Service***: Feels that DMAP is an opportunity for WI DNR to get back into the private lands portion of management and they look forward to an opportunity to collaborate with us on this. Interaction with whoevers out there in the field delivering DMAP we need to coordinate just so we can reduce conflict over competing interests.
- ***Wisconsin Wildlife Federation***: They are really happy that this program got off the ground. Although it isn't for every landowner it could be developed for the landowner that would like to participate and learn about his land. Word of mouth and good experiences within the DNR and Forestry will expand this program greatly.
- ***DNR Area Supervisor***: Really appreciative of all the partners that came together today to participate and there is huge potential in this program to reconnect DNR staff with private landowners and our customers. This will be the great achievement of the program. Also, habitat and education to landowners on the effects of deer on habitat is important. Disease monitoring which is something we struggle with would be extremely useful to teach to landowners.
- ***US Forest Service***: Really pleased to have a seat on this committee.
- ***DNR Forest Wildlife Biologist***: Enjoyed the discussion and things sounded really positive. Generally is really looking forward to using this to promote more habitat management on private lands. Also is wondering if we also need a role for NHC on this committee. We also need to look at how metrics will be worked out and collected. Do FIA plots collect county wide information and can we somehow compliment in DMAP what might be done on FIA plots?
- ***Ruffed Grouse Society***: DMAP is going to do some good things on the ground no question and will provide helpful data. The real potential for this program is to alter the perception of the DNR with the positive relationships that will be built through DNR.
- ***Wisconsin Conservation Congress***: This has been a great experience so far and a lot of the questions and comments have been very encouraging. If we can teach data collection methods such as how to estimate deer on their property it will go a long way to support

everyone's goals including the department including giving the department more credibility. Awesome points that should help get the DMAP points out.

- ***Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission***: Appreciates the opportunity to be here and talk and efforts that Bob has put in putting this meeting together. I think the DMAP program on private land has great potential to do everything that has been talked to. I am concerned about the public land portion of DMAP and how that might work especially in the Ceded territories with the tribes. GLIFWC is also a bit skeptical that something could work like a DMAP program on public lands in the Ceded territories. Learning how to collect meaningful data from the deer on a landowners land is very helpful including aging data, lymph nodes, parasites, fat samples, and antler characteristics etc. Bottom line is let the deer tell you how they are doing.

<u>Future Staffing levels/Partnership opportunities</u>

- In terms of future staffing levels, the department may look into hiring LTEs (limited-term-employment) to offset the workload of county wildlife biologists. We could potentially have one LTE that would do the moving around and provide support to multiple counties.
- It is important that the county biologist have a long-term relationship with the landowners. The initial thought was the LTEs would more provide help or assistance to the local biologist to ensure the biologist is the face of the program.
- DNR staff and LTEs would "have the final say" and stay involved in all facets of the program but may look for opportunities to refer landowners to the consultants.
- ***The Young Forest Initiative:***
    - The Young Forest Initiative has been picking up in a few midwestern states. For the last few years Wisconsin has had an organized effort to target some young forest work with aspen and alder etc. It has been a very well received program and is in the process of expanding a partnership with multiple agencies to try and pool resources and get work done. The program is aimed at habitat improvement and keeping early succession for us on the landscape.
    - The YFI will also play a pretty large role as a partner with DMAP. Partnership biologists who may pair with the YFI may also look to put people on the ground.
    - DMAP and YFI are following two parallel courses and there is certainly potential for overlap but they will also have distinct personalities moving forward. The YFI shouldn't lose its identity and be swept away.
- The situation with the YFI may also be the case with so many other programs that are out there such as USDA, PF, DNR partnership programs that hire biologists to conduct site visits. We need to figure out how to put this together so that all of these different folks that are involved with private landowners can work cohesively. It takes consistent year-round relationship building. We would be foolish to not take advantage of those programs. Since a lot of this land were talking about managing is woodland, we ought to be looking at making sure that we bring US FS and other elements into this discussion. Do the forestry consultants have plan writing refreshers/workshops?

- Getting more staff and funding through the state isn't a very simple thing. We need to keep the option open of possibly the landowner kicking in on some of these costs as we go along with the program. However, that won't be true on public lands.
- Where will we get funding for this? The department is possibly looking at maybe cost-sharing some biologists to help implement some of these things on the ground.
- A group of conservation organizations has been looking at maybe a simplification of the state stamp program. The idea was proposed to have one wildlife stamp and one fisheries stamp. This would Increase the funds for the Department and a percentage of funds will be used for forest management and private lands management. It would be great for rule simplification and the money would be going directly onto the ground.

Outreach and advertisement

Bob Nack posed the question: What do advisory committee members need to help promote this program? Initial responses were with a copy of the DMAP PowerPoint presentation and meeting minutes. Other discussion was as follows:

- Would it be beneficial to enhance understanding of other examples of success stories in other states? Who else does this or how successful has this been? It would be beneficial to look at the 2014 QDMA Whitetail report. This document does a nice job of summarizing deer management including DMAP programs across the county at a national perspective.
- Could we get the WI outdoor news to get a regular publication on DMAP, or maybe an introductory story? This would be a good outlet for Wisconsin hunters and landowners to use to get more information on the implementation and success of DMAP.
- There are a number of up and coming QDMA banquets and educational events. Brochures and posters to display would be good to provide. Whitetails Unlimited and Pheasants Forever also have banquets and events coming up and could use a tabletop display and brochures. At smaller events there are a higher percentage of private landowners which would be beneficial. However, we can't overlook the average hunters and not just landowners when promoting this.
- Wisconsin County Foresters: Once we refine what we think this program would look like on public lands the DNR could go to one of their meetings and describe how we think it would look to the largest public land owner in the state.
- It would be helpful if there was a bullet point of what DMAP is. Crib sheet wouldn't hurt. Another idea is a business card idea. Baseball cards may also be a good idea to just provide a short description of the program and its main function.

Next meeting schedule and agenda

The committee will meet again on March 21st in Stevens Point to among other things discuss the public lands option for the program. At that time, there will also be a DMAP database in motion and committee members will be enlisted to help test the database prior to opening enrollment.