

# Proposed Population Goals Strike Better Balance for State's Deer Herd

The only sure things in Michigan deer management are: (1) the herd size will go up and down and (2) people will disagree about what to do when it's up or down. Such controversy is expected and helps ensure deer are properly managed for all people in the state. We are fortunate in Michigan to have a public that cares about white-tailed deer.

Wildlife managers for the Department of Natural Resources are in the midst of holding a series of statewide meetings to gather public input on recommended deer population goals through 2010. The recommendations were presented to the Natural Resources Commission at its November meeting.

The statewide meetings are a way for wildlife managers to involve citizens, both sportsmen and the general public, in determining the goals for Deer Management Units (DMUs) in each of Michigan's eight Wildlife Management Units (WMUs).

"The deer population goals we recommended at the NRC meeting reflect the first time the DNR has proposed goals for each of the state's DMUs," said Rodney Clute, DNR big-game specialist. "Current goals were established in 1999 for each WMU. The proposed goals will guide management for the next five years at which time they will be re-evaluated."

This re-evaluation, Mr. Clute said, will be based on resource and social conditions present in 2010.

The DNR deer population goals through 2010 call for between 1.28 million and 1.56 million white-tailed deer in the state. This is lower than the current estimated population of 1.7 million deer statewide.

By region, the recommended deer population goals through 2010 are:

**Upper Peninsula:** The proposed goal calls for a population between 323,000 and 411,000 deer in the U.P., which is below the current goal of 475,000, but close to the current estimated population of 336,000 deer. Harsh winters in the U.P. make it impractical to sustain larger deer numbers.

**Northern Lower Peninsula:** The proposed goal through 2010 is 459,000 to 546,000 deer, which is within the range of the current estimated population of 498,000 and current goal of 538,000 deer.

**Southern Lower Peninsula:** The proposed goal through 2010 is between 501,000 and 602,000 deer, which is within range of the current goal of 566,000 deer, but far lower than the current estimated population of 868,000 deer.

Wildlife managers say the proposed goals will help the DNR manage the deer herd in Michigan to support a healthy population without

causing problems for the environment or the public.

All the values and problems that deer bring to Michigan must be weighed when considering population goals. Among the values is the economic boost to the state provided by hunting. Deer hunters contribute \$500 million to the state's economy each year. On the other hand, deer damage in agricultural areas reduces the profits for farmers and orchard owners, and car-vehicle accidents are above acceptable levels in many areas.

In addition, wildlife managers must weigh other factors, such as the regeneration of forests and woodlots, changes in forest structure, land use and fragmentation, as well as the age and health of deer, including the risk for wildlife diseases in deer.

Michigan's history of scientific management began in 1921, when the Department of Conservation (precursor to the DNR) was created. In 1928, the Game Division was established within the department, and with it the pool of scientific data on deer in Michigan began to accumulate. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, deer management techniques were introduced, refined and sometimes abandoned.

Forest succession also was changing the landscape. By the 1960s, mature stands of timber lacking in deer food existed on logged-over lands, and there was not much logging to produce new browse. As a result, the habitat for deer in northern Michigan collapsed, and even the increased presence of deer in southern Michigan did not prevent a major decline in the herd from 1.5 million in 1949 to only 500,000 in 1972.

Although many blamed the decreasing herd on antlerless hunting, DNR wildlife managers understood that habitat improvement was the real answer.

Between 1972 and 1987, about \$20 million was invested in habitat improvements for deer. Specific impacts included the creation, seeding, cultivation and maintenance of more than 70,000 acres of forest openings. A total of 5,113 acres of critical deer range were purchased, and more than 137,292 acres were improved. Such improvements and acquisitions continue today in many areas of the state.

The deer range improvement program was a success and following several mild winters in the 1980s, the herd reached a new peak of about two million deer in 1989.

That was just too many deer, and DNR wildlife managers have continued to work with hunters and landowners to set new management goals based upon the biology of deer, habitat quality, interaction with other wildlife species and social issues. Deer are highly adaptable



**DNR wildlife managers believe the deer herd in southern Michigan remains at or above desired levels in most areas, and the number of deer in much of this region is exceeding public tolerance for damage. Of special concern is the high number of deer-vehicle accidents reported each year. (DNR photo by David Kenyon)**



**Winter deer yards are a critical feature in balancing white-tailed deer populations with their habitat. (DNR photo by David Kenyon)**

animals and have adapted to increasing land use and fragmentation. This has led to an increase in human/deer conflicts.

"Deer management is a complex science, and often not an exact one. Public involvement in the deer population goal setting process is critical so wildlife managers know what the public expects from the state in terms of deer population," said DNR Wildlife Division Chief Bill Moritz. "I encourage the public to attend these meetings and offer their comments in order to assist us in maintaining a healthy deer herd in our state."

## Public Meeting Schedule Eastern Upper Peninsula

The Eastern U.P. Management Unit meetings will take place **Thursday, January 5**, at Manistique High School, 100 N. Cedar Street; **Thursday, January 12**, Room 204, Lake Superior State University Crawford Hall of Science, 650 W. Easterday Avenue, Sault Ste. Marie; **Tuesday, January 17**, Newberry High School, 700 Newberry Avenue. All meetings are from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. These meetings include DMUs 017, 021, 048, 049, 117, and 121. Information

for the Eastern UP Management Unit also can be received by calling the Newberry Operations Service Center at (906) 293-5131.

## Western Upper Peninsula

The Western Upper Peninsula Wildlife Management Unit meetings will take place **Wednesday, January 4**, at the Bay College Auditorium in Escanaba; **Thursday, January 5**, at the U.S. Forest Service Visitor Center, intersection of US-2 and US-41 in Watersmeet; **Thursday, January 12**, at Best Western Lakeside Inn, 900 S. US-41, Baraga; **Tuesday, January 17**, Michigan Room at Northern Michigan University's Don H. Botton University Center in Marquette. All meetings are from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and include DMUs 007, 021, 022, 027, 031, 036, 042, 055, 066, 121, 127, 131, 152, 155, 252, and 255. Information for the Western UP Management Unit also can be received by calling the DNR's Marquette Operations Service Center at (906) 228-6561.

## Northwest Lower Peninsula

The Northwest Management Unit meeting was held Tuesday, December 20, in Cadillac.

Information for the Northwest Management Unit also can be received by calling the Cadillac Operations Service Center at (231) 775-9727.

## Northeast Lower Peninsula

The Northeast Management Unit meeting will be held from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. **Thursday, January 12**, at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center, 104 Conservation Drive, Roscommon. This meeting includes DMUs Alpena (001), Alcona (004), Antrim (005), Charlevoix (015), Cheboygan (016), Crawford (020), Emmet (024), Iosco (035 and 135), Montmorency (060), Ogemaw (065), Oscoda (065), Otsego (069), Presque Isle (071), Roscommon (072), and Bois Blanc Island (149).

Information for the Northeast Management Unit also can be received by calling the Gaylord Operations Service Center at (989) 732-3541.

More information on the public meetings taking in Lower Michigan is available on the DNR's Web site at [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr). Comments can be e-mailed to [Deer\\_Goals@michigan.gov](mailto:Deer_Goals@michigan.gov) or in writing to the DNR Service Centers.

## Learning Nature Through Art



Jayden Smith, a second grade student at Les Cheneaux Elementary School, draws his version of cedar leaves, using the leaves themselves as a guide at the school's Outdoor Classroom in Cedarville. He and other students of Laurie Pearson's class are studying trees over the year and charting their changes with the seasons. They have each been assigned to different trees, and are taking bark rubbings and drawing the characteristics of the trees, while taking care to notice the conditions and sounds of the forest around the trees.

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.

## Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



### Levin, Stabenow Criticized for 'Obstructing' U.S. Judge Nominees

Senator Carl Levin long was the chief obstructionist in blocking Senate confirmation votes on four Michigan judges nominated by President George W. Bush for the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati.

I was critical of Levin and Senator Debbie Stabenow for using them as pawns in a shameful game of political payback over Republicans, not even holding hearings on two Michiganians nominated by President Bill Clinton to the federal bench.

They later relented, allowing confirmation of three of the Bush nominees, including Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Richard Griffin of Traverse City, whose district included all of the Upper Peninsula and 38 counties below the bridge.

More recently, after what I described as "especially thoughtful" deliberation, Levin voted to confirm U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts. He said Roberts "has not only a keen mind, but a mind open to argument."

The less thoughtful Stabenow voted against Roberts, and Republicans vow to make that an issue this year in her reelection bid.

Now comes the December 31 issue of the conservative National Review magazine with an article headlining Levin as "Obstacle in Chief." It said: "Inside the Bush

administration, and among Republicans on Capitol Hill, Levin has won the reputation of being perhaps the chief congressional obstacle to prosecuting the War on Terror."

That's a big perhaps. But let's hear out NR on the two ways it says Levin, ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee and second-ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee who is a party point man on national TV, earned that reputation:

"First, he has put 'holds' on key Bush nominees to national-security posts. And second, he has conducted an ongoing bureaucratic war with the Department of Defense, demanding investigations and re-investigations of issues that have already been extensively examined, all in the hope of finding evidence to support his apparently unshakable belief that a neo-conservative conspiracy inside the Pentagon led to the war in Iraq."

The Wall Street Journal also has been on Levin's case, editorially, for his "Ahab-like" pursuit of Bush appointees.

Levin last week was overseas and unavailable for comment. His office says he believes the Senate needs to see "critical documents" before acting on a nominee.

In a December 15 Detroit News article, he denied playing

politics on such matters, saying "I feel comfortable in myself to call them as I see them."

I would not presume from my Heartland perch to evaluate Levin's reputation on Capitol Hill. But I was impressed that last year he wisely rejected periodic calls by some fellow Democrats to cut-and-run from Iraq. Knee-jerk he's not.

### House Northern Ratings

On balance, northern state representatives are relatively moderate, not at the ideological extremes of either party. That's according to the latest Inside Michigan Politics newsletter's analysis of key votes of House members the past 10 months that follows earlier profiling of Senators voting the "liberal position" on 26 different roll calls.

The 11th most liberal House member was Rep. Steve Adamini, D-Marquette, voting that way 87.5 percent of the time. About in the middle of the Democratic pack was Rep. Matt Gillard of Alpena at 80.8 percent.

Among other Democrats: Rich Brown, Bessemer, 69.2, and Gary McDowell, Rudyard, and Joel Shelton, West Branch, 57.7.

Rep. David Palsrock of Manistee had the highest "liberal" rating among northern Republicans, 34.6 percent. Others: Tom Casperon of Escanaba and Howard Walker of

Traverse City, 30.8, and Kevin Elsenheimer of Bellaire, 26.9.

By way of contrast to show the extreme, Rep. Bob Gosselin, R-Troy, was rated at 7.7 percent, giving him the most conservative House voting record.

### Score Two for Allen

It took some jockeying with Governor Jennifer Granholm, but Senator Jason Allen, R-Traverse City, was able to applaud her signing of two legislative compromises last week.

One dealt with codifying the agreement between the Mackinac Bridge Authority and the Michigan Department of Transportation on who does what regarding Mighty Mac. Essentially, the package slaps down attempted MDOT takeover moves that Granholm reversed. House players in the compromise were McDowell, Elsenheimer, and Casperon.

Granholm, after earlier vetoing an Allen bill regarding a snowmobile trail between Gaylord and Cheboygan, signed his compromise bill that has some restrictions, but he hailed as "great news for the northern Michigan businesses that rely heavily on the dollars spent by snowmobile enthusiasts."

George Weeks is the political columnist for *The Detroit News* and is syndicated by *Superior Features*.