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North Unit 4 Deer Working Group Meets for First Time

🕒 March 27, 2023 👤 hiaenvironmental 📁 Hoonah Native Forest Partnership, SASSi 💬 0



North Unit 4
Deer Working
Group Update



On the call : Ian Johnson (Hoonah, HIA), Mark Ortega (Gustavus), Cal Casipit (Gustavus), Kevin Maier (Juneau, AC), Norm Carson (Pelican), Phil Manlick (USFS), Lisa Gredigan (OSM), Steve Bethune (ADFG), Rob Cross (USFS), Lauren Sill (ADFG), Samia Savell (NRCS), Cathy Needham (Juneau, SERAC), Dan Eacker (ADFG), Julian Narvaez (Hoonah, HIA), Patrician Phillips (Pelican, AC), Greg Strevler (Gustavus)

The goal of this first meeting was : get to know each other a bit, starting thinking about what our needs are, and set some goals for ourselves for future meetings.

If you are a member of Hoonah, Pelican, Gustavus, or Angoon who would like to be in on these meetings in the future please call or email Ian Johnson.

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On March 15th, the initial members of the North Unit 4 Deer working group assembled for their first meeting to discuss their needs and goals in deer management and research for the Northern Unit 4 area – focusing mostly on North Chichagof and Western Admiralty. This group came about through funding through the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASSi) funding by the USFS. The funding was secured by Hoonah Indian Association in late 2022 and has a few primary goals:

- Complete annual community surveys on deer harvest and use by training people in the community to do the work
- Understand if/how competition is impacting subsistence use of deer on North Chichagof
- Collect deer data through camera traps in overwintering areas to begin to get trend data for deer numbers
- Host meetings where managers, community members, and non-community members can discuss their needs around deer harvest
- Increase community understanding of how harvest reporting is used in management with the goal of increasing community reporting

Review of ongoing management and research

The group reviewed current and ongoing research and management for deer in north Unit 4. Each topic is summarized below:

1. Through the Hoonah Native Forest partnership there has been deer habitat improvement in lands around Hoonah. Most work lately has focused in Spasski. Have been working since 2009 in this area. Have done some of that gap and slash treatment in West Port Frederick before HNFP. Goals are for more prescriptions for “leave areas”, Areas for low slash loading for deer to travel through the watersheds, Change from 14’ spacing and no slash treatment. More complex prescriptions to facilitate the breakdown of slash.
 1. There was comment from Pelican that this type of work is not needed out there because no young growth
2. Biological deer data – ADFG is Looking to get camera projects going. Region wide transition out of pellet surveys, and moving forward with new technology. Trail camera methods for estimating deer abundance. Setting up 25 cameras in Western Baranof, Hoonah Sound
3. Aerial surveys will be happening on NE Chich in July. Has been a couple years since aerial deer surveys were flown
 1. Mortality surveys are mile long transects on the beach looking for deer. Unit 4 predator are low, many areas are still old growth. Start those in March. Will be doing them in Hoonah this spring
4. Spring body condition surveys- can do an estimate of deer body condition through the winter survey. There wasn't much snow this year in Sitka area. Only saw 5 deer total, deer weren't using beaches. Saw deer sign up to 1500 feet when hiking. Body condition and sex ratios are difficult this year. These surveys aren't happening in North Unit 4 this year
5. Pellet surveys were done in the past for deer populations. Have transitioned out of using them in favor of cameras. Camera provides age class, composition data, and other value-added data such as antler points on bucks. Pellet surveys were “noisy”. There were trends, but annual abundance was difficult.
6. Camera trapping – currently none occurring on North Unit 4. – deployed another 40 cameras out on Mitkoff. Continuing to collar deer there. Another project further south on Ravina. Provides a trend in the data. Antler configuration. Presence of other carnivores. Have 15 deer collared. HIA deploying cameras in Hoonah this year in 3 winter areas. Best time to deploy is when we can get them out. Not too much worry about the bears. Protective lock boxes. Haven't had too much issues with bears. There is a lot of initial effort to set them up. Setting that up early on is better and then service them later. Can be brushiers – late June or July at the latest. Battery life – lithium batteries can last for a whole year.
 1. Follow up question : Is there work in localized areas for determining populations in a unit?
 1. This is a good question, this is the primary concern for areas with roads and access. Capacity is difficult, so it's good Hoonah is building a camera network. 100 cameras in POW? Focus on more important hunting areas . It's a good idea to monitor in local areas, and building that capacity is key. Steve – department response to local concern – did several mortality surveys in Angoon and southern Admiralty, Pelican, NEC,

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getting cameras out in NE Chich. Focus on trends and statistics is easier. Spring can be hard at higher elevations.

7. Browse data. USFS will be working to determine how much “energy” is on the landscape. It’s been around for 10 – 15 years since browse datasets were updated. There are new tools (DNA) for that to look at browse to understand what deer are eating. ADFG and USFS working together to try and get better estimates of deer diets. Looking at fecal pellets seasonally. Focusing on Northeast Chichagof, POW (TWIGS project), Mitkoff study. These results can help with deer habitat management Biggest limitation – have funding for personnel and people to do that. Access is hard – don’t have budget for travel. Working with folks to share the load on collecting the pellets. Collecting feces and plants. If you are interested in this type of stuff can put together sampling kits.

1. Follow up – there may be opportunities for youth to take part in this and increase labor pool.
1. f. An update on community deer survey work
1. Have been doing social surveys in Gustavus, Pelican, Hoonah. To date have 5 responses from Pelican, 14 from Gustavus, and 20 from Hoonah. Goal of the data is to give better insight into local perception of competition issues and deer abundance. Data will be sent back to communities and shared with managers. Will be providing those data results to folks.

Creating Group Goals and Metrics for Success

The group used a collective workspace, Jamboard, to work through three questions and provide anonymous answers, “What do you hope to get from this group”, “How can this group meet your needs”, and “What are your group goals or expectations based on what you’ve seen/heard?”. For each of the items, we’ve grouped the responses (regular text) under themes (bold text). These responses will be used to guide future meeting agendas and as metrics for members to determine if we are meeting our goals for ourselves.

1. What do you hope to get out of this group?
 1. **Documenting local knowledge and integrating it into deer hunting**
 1. Document local knowledge and experiences regarding Unit 4 deer harvest
 1. Build capacity locally to support possible co-management
 1. Integration of local knowledge into deer management
 1. Increased local capacity to do deer research
 1. How to integrate local and traditional knowledge into regulatory cycles
 1. **Increasing trust among user groups (communities to communities and agencies to communities)**
 1. Understanding of subsistence needs of rural residents in Unit 4
 1. Increased trust among community and agencies and communities and communities
 1. Find ways to avoid conflict between state and federal management agencies
 1. Willingness to work together and hear different perspectives
 1. **Increasing richness of biological data sets**
 1. Better understanding of deer populations and habitat on N Chichagof
 1. Another area of focused deer abundance estimates that I might not have been able to achieve on my own
 1. Better understanding of pleasant island deer and wolf management
 1. **Increasing local workforce development around deer research and data collection**
 1. How to support local workforce development on deer research to enhance the data set for unit 4, so that all data sets can be used for management decisions
 1. Exploring the potential for community-based surveys and the obstacles to their implementation, and their use in integrating TLK into management Build youth engagement into deer research such as pellets
 1. PNW/FS 1) Collaborators/partners to help collect data that can be used to model deer habitat/nutrition
 1. **Develop our understanding of the user conflict issue**
 1. Get to the bottom of this idea or perception of increased competition between FQUs and NFQUs
 1. Engage broader southeast community to find shared problems and solution to hunting pressure concerns



1. How do we provide a meaningful priority for subsistence users for maintain continuation of subsistence uses for those in Unit 4 while still providing opportunity for NFQ

1. Increase understanding of deer management topics and issues and tools

1. PNW/FS 2) understanding of tools needed by communities/partners
1. Keeping up to the date on issue to share with students and youth
1. Engage youth in the management processes
1. Education Juneau hunters on unique needs of rural hunters
1. I hope to increase collaborations with the deer community and broaden my understanding of local management issues
1. Building a network I can ask questions of about deer
1. Develop longterm, durable solutions Understanding of spatial scales and importance to the regulatory system and idea of subsistence “need”
1. Issues that may occur in Hoonah and Gustavus and unique. A “solution” in one spot could have adverse impacts on other spots
1. To help broader southeast communities think about habitat as a core part of management, avoiding allocation squabbles to focus on shared goal of healthy deer populations

■ How can this group meet your needs?

■ ***Develop community outreach materials and focus on generating data to meet needs***

- Increasing my understanding of local perspective
- Be inclusive of Angoon by sharing results with the community/tribe, perhaps Angoon will engage with outreach
- Help with developing materials to share why harvest and effort reporting is important
- Please come to our communities and present at meetings to share deer data or results

■ ***Create network of local workers, managers, and researchers to do deer work and support projects***

- Network of grant writing support to create new opportunities for local data collection
- Sharing of ideas needing work that we can do with local youth crews in Hoonah
- Citizen scientists to help set up and monitor trail cameras
- Build local capacity for social science data collection
- Need a space to share concerns across user groups and communities
- Need better ways to communicate concerns about user conflict
- I'm passionate about wildlife science and helping others design and implement research, and this group will help me continue to grow as a biologist in SE AK
- PNW – help with data collection at localized sites, fecal, veg collection, camera deployment, etc
- Build collaboration across user groups

■ ***Work towards increasing reporting harvest effort and harvest results***

- Solicit honest hunting effort information from FQUs via subsistence surveys and through increasing reliability of the data gathered in the harvest reports
- Increase the rate of harvest reporting in general
-

■ ***Participate regularly and put your best foot forward for solution-based discussions***

- Find ways to get state and federal management processes working together
- Consistent participation support to share study results
- Help with identifying social research objectives in Hoonah and other communities
- Continually engage the communities to provide specific issues surrounding difficulties in harvesting deer in Unit 4 and what solutions may be available
-

■ ***Engage in discussions that move federal regulation processes forward***

- Provide analysis support of Hoonah deer data
- Educate resource managers on what constitutes a meaningful subsistence priority
- Document the concerns expressed by community members
- Build analysis with results from north unit 4 deer study



- Helping us determine how to meet the continuation of subsistence need while keeping opportunity for NFQ
- Find management tools to deal with localized/small scale management issues
- What are your group goals or expectations based on what you've seen/heard?
 - Overarching goal : find durable, longterm solutions to deer management issues
 - Finding ways to alleviate user and agency conflict
 - How can we communicate data about deer in ways that alleviate user and agency conflict?
 - Find ways for AK board of game and federal subsistence board (perhaps through AC and RAC?) to facilitate and negotiate shared solutions to allocation issues
 - Increase the reliability of harvest and effort data
 - Additional reliable harvest data
 - Build youth experience in hunting and deer management
 - Engage next generation of hunters in management processes, data collection, and community engagement aspects of both
 - Develop community outreach needs and materials
 - Review and development of community outreach issues
 - Creating dialogue between communities on why competition is happening. Develop intercommunity data and relationships
 - Discuss the extension issues to Pleasant Island
 - Extension of Unit 4 to Pleasant Island (Unit 1C)
 - Increase research and opportunities on NE Chich
 - Generate a list of data or survey needs and how communities can participate
 - Additional deer population information specific to NE Chichagof
 - With input from workgroup, develop comments which are inclusive of the study results from the interviews
 - Recognizing that large scale population numbers may not scale to local experiences of abundance
 - Relationship of one resource abundance to the harvest of another
 - Specifically define and prioritize what additional data should or could be collected to address local community deer issues
 - Organize a deer summit to meet face to face
 - Organize a deer "summit" for us to meet face to face
 - Develop mapping resource for managers and community members
 - Create a collection of GIS and spatial data relevant to deer
 - A map where harvest is occurring, something to represent where harvest pressure is highest
 - A map where all of the biological studies are taking place
 - Discussing the Federal subsistence process and looking at possible solutions
 - A review of management tools available for addressing subsistence priority
 - Discussion of how the issue of competition translates to ANILCA and the continue of meeting subsistence need
 - Discussion of the current federal proposals to limit NFQs

Local and Manager deer observations

We left space for community members and agency members to talk about their observations and data around deer populations. This will occur during every meeting.

1. Pelican user – has game cameras out. Pelican deer seem to be higher in the inlet and outside of the inlet. Last fall, didn't see any conflicts with outside users
2. Pelican user – back and forth to sunny side almost every day. There was an "early spring", but now have 5 feet of snow. Wasn't seeing deer in the beach fringe early on in January. Saw good numbers in the flats of the inlets. It seemed liked the deer were staying in the timber. Saw as many as 8 deer on beach in sunny side. Eating seaweed right now and seem to be in good shape. Haven't been to outside coast as much due to high cost. Would be a good time to look at the outside of the coast. There is a lot of browse on the berry bushes.
3. Gustavus user – Wasn't a lot of snow so the deer were hard to find. Pinta cove shelter and only saw 1 deer at distance. Was tough hunting this year. Getting over to find deer to hunt is difficult



because state dock is only in during summer and early fall. Have to keep boat up in the river and available at high tide. Keeps boat in Bartlett after the tourist season. Can be very difficult and dangerous to get to NEC from Gustavus. Made 7 trips this season with different people. Got 1 deer, spike buck. Tougher to get where the deer are on NEC. Saw 1 deer on there this summer, but first deer seen in years.

4. Hoonah Observation – harder to get deer in Hoonah this year. When will harvest data be out? Will try to get it out earlier this year. Maybe mayish.
5. ADFG – mortality surveys were low from the last year.
6. Gustavus User – historic deer population on Pleasant Island. There's wolves there that are eating sea otters. Wolves have removed deer from Pleasant. Nothing has been talked about in respect to the deer. Lots of monitoring in Gustavus that are wolf-focused. Predator pit on Pleasant Island. Started with the moose. No deer studies on PI and what can be done about it. Nothing about management or sustained yield. NEC is tough to access – there's a tidal access and distance access issue. ESA on the wolves is an issue on PI – if that occurs it will be difficult to manage wolves. POW is running into the same problem. This could translate to NEC in the future.
7. Gustavus User – PI is important to folks in Gustavus. Have always hunted that over 50 years. Impossible there now because of wolves. Should be starting to think about what's on Pleasant Island – start thinking about what the island is like for deer. Island will be different – thinking ahead – should there be active wolf management? When the wolves are gone how do we want to position ourselves? Cameras and enclosure on the island. High interest in that.

An overview of the proposed changes to federal regulation

1. Summarize the proposed draft – 3 proposals. Angoon proposal – 4022, 4055, 4041. The Hoonah NECUA area, and Pelican Federal land in Lisianski inlet, Stag bay, (get map of area). Three geographical areas. Same change to regulation “Federal public lands in these areas are closed to deer hunting Nov 1-15 for NFQs.” In those areas NFQs would be restricted
 1. Questions and Follow-up Is there a place to see a map of that? Proposal period is still open. These are still in draft form. Will be released for public comment. Proposal period that.
 1. These proposals came from discussions on conversations on how to continue the use of Sitka Blacktail. In order to do that the regulation has to provide meaningful priority that doesn't have conflict. Workgroup worked on that.
 1. Do proposals go public before end of call for proposals? Can look through transcripts of the FSB website. The call for proposals is still open. If there are other potential solutions that people are thinking about – get a proposal in for best solutions. Each proposals go through an analysis. Could give the SERAC could support another proposal.

Next Meeting

After discussion the group agreed meeting every two months would be a good schedule. Next Meeting is May 17th, 2023, 9:30 – 12:30


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