**Beaver Task Force Meeting**

**Wausau, WI**

**Best Western**

**2/15/2012**

Participants: Jason Suckow – USDA APHIS, Kurt Waterstradt – USFWS, Jim Ruwaldt – WI Waterfowl Assoc. & WI Wetlands Assoc., Rick Stadelman – WI Towns Assoc., David MacFarland – WDNR – Wildlife Research, Lacey Hill – Bad River Band of Chippewa, John Gillen- WDNR Forestry, Brian Stemper – USFWS, Jonathan Gilbert – GLIFWC, Sue Reinecke – USDA-FS, Heather Stricker – Forest County Potawatomi, Jerry Knuth – WWF, Richard Clark – WI Trappers Assoc., Ed Harvey – WI Conservation Congress, Steve Avelallemant – WDNR Fisheries Mgmt., Todd Naas – WDNR Wildlife Mgmt., Dave Swanson – WDNR Law Enforcement, Don Reiter – Menominee Tribe, Kevin Kleinschmidt – WI County Forest Assoc., Matt Mitro – WDNR Fisheries Research, John Olson – WDNR Wildlife Mgmt - Ecology. Recorder – Shawn Rossler, WDNR. Facilitator – Debbie Beyer, UWEX.

Observers: Matt Steinbach – Forest County Potawatomi, Bill VanderZouwen – WDNR Wildlife Mgmt.

9:00 Deb reviewed the agenda.

**Jason Suckow and Dave MacFarland – Beaver data connecting the dots**

Review of USDA WS and DNR beaver data…what we know about the numbers. Source data on the first page of handout (beaver harvest information).

Goals – show the available data; investigate influence on population dynamics (strengths and weaknesses); identify information needs which may improve decision making process.

Habitat and population pressures are two major consideration.

Food source – is it declining? Statewide decrease in aspen from 3.5 million in 1996 to 3.2 million (2006-2010). Need to look at aspen stands near riparian areas. Is there some population effect?

Precipitation – statewide precipitation data (relatively flat), northern WI relatively drier, southern wetter…cancel each other out. Climate change maps indicate 20% decrease in precipitation from 1956-2006 in northern WI. How much habitat loss? – need additional research.

Population pressure from a mortality standpoint – harvest; damage management (raw figures are available); predation (hard to quantify); disease; other (road kill, etc.)

Series of graphs and interactions –

Beaver population (northern) vs. statewide (correction factor 30%), this is a data gap…reason for seeing different numbers.

Graph 1: Population estimate and beaver trapped

Jon G – questioning results from beaver questionnaire, Dave agreed.

Graph 2: Beaver Population Estimate and Trapper Success

10 beaver per trapper in last questionnaire, down from 17.

Jon – response bias to successful versus unsuccessful. Patron license – folks receive a trapping license although they have no intention to trap.

How can we get better harvest estimates??? Best way is through registration.

Steve – participation, trappers come and go – a better number might be catch per effort (ie. Trap nights). Richard – tough to have a trapper accurately report trap nights.

Dave – our harvest estimates are questionable and should be taken with a grain of salt.

Jason – Not a direct relationship with beaver population and the number of beaver an individual trapper catches.

Length of season, weather, and other influences impact harvest levels.

Jason – too many variables in the system to say A causes B.

Graph 3 – Season length and Harvest

Show number of days the season was open in each zone. Maximum season lengths have been fairly consistent, with some variation.

Different season timings – late spring season is inadequately captured in the graph.

Graph 4 – Trapper Participation and Average Fur Price

Number of trappers peaked in 2004, but more trappers now than in the 90s. Dynamic system currently at mid-level.

No evidence that fur price is driving the number of trappers.

Richard – beaver is one of the more costly animals to trap & more money tied up in each animal.

Graph 5 – Beaver Harvest Numbers and Fur Prices

Do not have zone specific information…can only get through mandatory registration.

John O – a mail questionnaire to all trappers. Issue is the timing of the survey.

Graph 6 – WI Beaver Purchased and Beaver Trapped

Hugh spikes in 1993-94, not sure of the reason.

Richard – 2 collection houses in Canada are taking in more beaver than in previous years…cutting out the middle man.

Anyone with WI fur buyers license gets a survey.

Buyers quit buying because they don’t want to carry over to the next year for marketing. Quite buying spring beaver.

MI furbearers licenses – need to record the total number of species and numbers by the end of each month – form of registration – capture zone information.

**Suggestion to review how other states are collecting fur buyer data.**

Graph 7 – Beaver per Trapper and Winter Gas Price

Seems to be a little dip in the number of beaver per trapper and the higher gas prices seen over the past 10 years…again how good is the data?

Graph 8 – Beaver Harvest and Winter Gas Price

Jon – difficult to critically look at graphs when we know the data is suspect.

Trends versus absolute numbers. Could use trend as a useful way to guide the

current conversation.

Dave – beaver population estimate reference…is fairly robust, and one of our stronger furbearer surveys. Independent every year, and mistakes do not influence subsequent years.

Richard – a federal fish survey came up with twice the number of colonies this year, bulk would be 2 beaver colonies…figure used in beaver population analysis is 4.5…this is a little concerning.

4.5 average colony size is solid and can provide that information to everyone on the task force.

Jason – first couple years of the beaver survey were biased to areas with more beaver. This could have had an influence on the total beaver population in the north. This would make the entire beaver population trend much flatter.

John Gillen – can we estimate the beaver population in zones A and B separately and manage zones separately.

Dave – yes, but loose statistical power

Damage Management –

Slide 1 – Beaver Take, by group, and estimated beaver population level.

Range from 9-23 beaver per wolf, used lowest population of wolves and beaver (9) to generate the number of beaver consumed by wolves annually.

Bears, coyotes, otter all eat beaver…no clue how many. Predation levels are a question that would require additional research to produce better estimates.

Only known figure on the entire graph is WS annual take.

Slide 2 – Wildlife Services Beaver Take, by Resource 2005-2011

Majority of take is on trout streams, followed by roads, impoundments, wild rice, and others.

WS established maintenance agreements for entire season, and WS is on call. Problems are resolved by technicians noticing a problem or calls received from township/county supervisors. Typical agreement is April through October.

Slide 3 – Beaver taken on select trout streams by WS and miles of streams protected

Slide 4 – Beaver take history, by group

Compares impact by group

Diseases – there has been no widespread beaver mortality events in WI 1990 - present.

WS does an environmental assessment for every task they do, but delaying their assessment on beaver due to figures reported in WI DNR surveys. Issue needs to be resolved.

Need to figure out numbers.

Estimate predation impact, rather than singling out one species (wolves). Wolf mortality not high enough to be driving changes in the beaver population.

Jason - Need to consider what we can control as a group.

John O – need to manage beaver because they are a part of the natural system, and that they do serve as a food source for predators on the landscape.

Richard – need to generate information so trappers and other groups can make informed decisions.

Break

**Review, discussion of updated survey compilation – Deb**

See handout for specific details. 571 respondents; age 13-81; 51 WI counties; 47% citizens; 46 trout angles; 36 landowners; 35 trappers.

Survey information is another way to provide input – opinions and ideas if they weren’t able to attend public input sessions.

Steve - applying a statistic to the response…Steve is suggesting trout anglers are underrepresented in the survey. Need to reference to the number of respondents when referring to the results.

**Steve could pull some related questions from the trout surveys.**

John – not a vote! Need to treat the results as such.

Dave – have the beaver control efforts caused lower order stream to jump or improve? Have any class 2 stream become class 1 stream?

**- Review of Goal Development Worksheet and definitions - Deb**

Reasonable balance, core beaver population, and aggressive damage control

Plan that is responsible to intolerable negative impacts on cultural and natural resources. (Need to identify to who it’s intolerable too, and regionally)

Group had a discussion on the pros and cons of having a hard number for a population goal. General feeling seems to be that it’s better not to have a number, even though it will be difficult to articulate goals and techniques on how the population can be managed.

John – a minimum of 10 years.

John – would want to include regional or word to acknowledge we’ll have different goals for areas of the state.

Our Charge:

Develop an updated plan that uses science in combination with citizen input, and:

* Uses sound judgment to assure all aspects of beaver and beaver ecology management are considered.
* Identifies and protects sustainable beaver populations necessary to provide ecological services and social and cultural values.
  + Avoid use of hard numbers (range ?)
  + Regional goals, not statewide
  + Number of flooded acres statewide
* Addresses conflict and supports timely, focused control of beaver for conflict management to protect cultural and natural resources.
  + (omit) Responsible to intolerable negative impacts on cultural and natural resources
* Recommend strategies to identified problems and identifies future needs.

Goal development – All

Plan group – John reviewed the initial table of contents and the plan team.

After meeting identified folks will begin writing and eventually smooth out different styles.

Population Goal

* Social indicators
* Ecological indicators
* Trends

Social Indicators

* + Damage to cultural and natural resources
  + Aesthetic and recreational opportunities

Ecological Indicators

* + Change in the amount of habitat altered by beaver
  + Change in hydrology caused by beaver
  + Miles of free-flowing class I streams

Indicator = assumes measured

Factor = feel

Other categories of goals

* Research (Dave, Matt, et al.)
  + Address deficiencies in our harvest estimates and improve statewide population estimates
  + Develop a better understanding of beaver trout relationships
  + Look at biodiversity and climate change issues.
  + Information on trapper effort.
  + Research on predator relationship impacts on beaver
  + Habitat availability
* Monitoring (Dave, Matt, et al.) (populations, trapping effort, control efforts
  + Develop an affordable statewide population beaver survey – identifying the amount of information that is required to make the decision
  + Clearinghouse for beaver control data and improved reporting requirements for all damage control by resource – colony monitoring
* Recreational opportunities (John O., Shawn R., Steve A.)
  + Maintain beaver population that supports citizen trapping
  + Duck hunting
  + Wildlife viewing
  + Trout pond fishing
* Habitat for beavers (John Gillen, Jon G., Sue R., John O.)
  + Identifying areas to encourage and discourage beaver habitat
  + Identify opportunities for riparian zone management
* Biodiversity (Adrian W., Dave M., Steve A.)
  + Direct beaver management activities to promote biodiversity (sometime more or less beaver).
* Population (Dave Mac, Ed Harvey, Todd Naas)
* Trapping regulations (Dave Swanson, Richard Clark, Shawn Rossler, John O.)
  + Identify and promote the use of BMPs in beaver trapping
  + Identify flexibility in season length by management zone
  + Bag limits
  + Registration
  + Develop regulations that would reduce the incidental take of otter
  + Continuation of landowner provisions
* Tribal interests/interests (Jon G., Heather S., Lacey H, Don, Matt)
  + Protect significant wild rice resources
  + Maintain and encourage trapping opportunities for tribal members.
  + Respecting tribal spiritual values and sovereign rights (Co-management)
  + Tribal trappers on private land without a license for damage concerns.
* Education and outreach goals (Bob Manwell, John Olson, Shawn Rossler)
  + Increase E and O regarding beaver management, especially private property owners, local governments.
  + Literature stating the ecological benefits of beaver
  + Alternative control mechanisms when beaver are causing problems.
  + Promote trapper education and ecology through fur schools and the North American Model of Conservation
  + Roll of different agencies
* Damage control (Jason Suckow, Brad Koele, Steve A.) (resource - Fish, forest, wild rice) (cultural - roads, crops, timber values)
  + Cold water resources, agricultural, rice, roads, private property, sensitive species, unique habitats, wildlife flowages, infrastructure
  + Transparent criteria of why a creek is in the program.
  + All class one and selected class two streams.
  + Develop criteria for inclusion of those resources in damage control programs
* Health and disease of beaver (Wildlife health section, Lindsey Long, Tami Ryan)
  + Develop a beaver health surveillance program
* Collaboration (Bill VanderZouwen, Jon Gilbert)
  + Establish an annual meeting or mechanism for communication among agencies.

Outline of the Plan –

See how concern issues fit into the plan and if they don’t develop new bullets/topics. Core group will develop their sections. Sections would be evaluated by task force and meeting in early to mid-fall…will probably be a two day meeting. Finish making changes and hand over to DNR administration.

Authors should choose their own editors before bringing it back to the next meeting.

Tentative meeting date: May 17th (Wausau) 9AM – writings submitted and mailed by May 14th

Get comments back on the outline by: Feb. 20th

Adjourn 4:23 PM