

MEETING NOTES

DEER COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, February 17, 2016

6:30 P.M. – GALENA CITY HALL, 101 GREEN STREET

1. Call meeting to order - The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. with the following individuals in attendance: John Cox (Chairperson), Beth Baranski, Carmen Ferguson, Kirk Foecking, and Mary Hartman.
2. Approve agenda action – A motion to approve the agenda was made by Beth and seconded by Kirk. The motion carried.
3. Approve minutes of January 20, 2016 meeting – A motion to approve the January Meeting Notes was made by Carmen and seconded by Mary. The motion carried.
4. Presentation of and discussion by committee with Doug Dufford, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) on deer chronic wasting disease and other matters – Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a neurological disease that affects deer, elk and moose. The disease is caused by an infectious protein called a prion. It is always fatal. There is no current treatment, though research is being done in this area, and one deer being treated has survived. Once infected, a deer will die within 18 months to 2-1/2 years. The disease can only be confirmed through testing. It is not known to affect humans, however the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advise against eating contaminated deer.

Healthy-looking deer can be infected with CWD. Over time, the prions become integrated with the neural tissue and normal neuron function breaks down, resulting in weight loss, salivation, loss of coordination. The prions build up in the body and can be shed in fluids: saliva, feces, and urine. The disease is transferred primarily through saliva. The prion has gone through a mutation and it causes adjacent proteins to mutate. The nervous tissue – brain, spinal column and lymphatic system are affected. The prions can be shed into the environment, can attach to soil particles and remain active for 5 years. Plants can take up prions from the soil and deer then can eat the plants.

The first documented case of CWD in Illinois was Nov. 1, 2002 , northeast of Rockford on the Boone-Winnebago county line, near Roscoe. There are currently low infection levels in IL now – a low prion level – the prions have not built up here yet (in either the deer population or the environment). In the fall of 2014 they found 71 positive deer in 14 counties. 7 of these were in Jo Daviess County, with the westernmost infected deer harvested 3 miles south of Elizabeth. The southeastern corner of Jo Daviess County/southwestern corner of Stephenson County have a 2% infection rate.

The IDNR's CWD program consists of 1) Surveillance (testing 90% of the deer brought in to check stations), and 2) Management (trying to lower the deer density in infected areas – localized population reduction. The goals are lowered densities, a young age structure in the population, a high population turnover rate, and a low emigration rate.)

When a doe has two fawns, they are ready to have the next set of fawns, and don't tolerate the 1-1/2 year old males – so the males travel off, but the females stay around. So when you see groups of deer, they are typically multi-generational families of females. Males tend to be infected at twice the rate of the females.

The IDNR does an aerial count, marks a location for distribution of the deer, and tries to test 25% of that population. This is done with focused removals. Deer harvested by hunters and tested count towards the 25% goal, and IDNR sharpshooters cull deer to make up the balance. They cull deer Monday-Thursday from mid-January through the end of March within a 2-mile buffer of the infected sections. They use rifles, bait and shoot between mid-afternoon and 10 p.m. These deer are tested. The carcasses are sent to a processor. If the meat is found to be clean from disease, it is donated to the Northern Illinois Food Bank.

Because of the management program, there is more genetic information for our deer herd than anywhere in the world. The research being done is high-end, cutting edge science on the problem of CWD.

The cost for sharp shooting the deer is \$1.2 – 1.5 million annually in Illinois. Deer hunting permit fees bring in \$1 billion. The effort to slow the spread of the disease while a long-term solution is being developed is being undertaken to maintain the herds. The thinking is that in 10-20 years there will be a treatment to eradicate CWD.

In Illinois, deer are managed by county, so permit quotas and hunting seasons are set by county. The management by county is based on the number of deer-vehicle collisions. The bulk of the harvest takes place during the recreational firearm season running from 7 days before to 7 days after Thanksgiving. Hunters can get permits to hunt either sex (buck or doe) or an antlerless permit for does and bucks with antlers less than 3". In CWD counties, the IDNR adds hunting permits and/or extra seasons with an unlimited number of permits. In Jo Daviess County they have added 7 days. There are no check stations for this period, but the deer heads can be dropped off for IDNR testing. Because doe harvest is critical to reducing the population, they have added a "doe-only" 3-day hunting weekend in late December and 3 days in January.

Deer counts are a good indicator of population size, but they only give you a minimum number at a given moment. Vehicle collision records are a good indicator, but are not as precise as a flyover count. Doug was hesitant to give a deer population number that would be considered appropriate for a municipality like Galena, and instead suggested that it we need to understand the “cultural carrying capacity” of our community, i.e. the number of deer people can tolerate. What is the political will of the people? He suggested that Marty Jones, IDNR Urban Deer Biologist and Heritage Biologist would be a useful reference. He is doing deer plant studies, and he and Jeff could work with us on this.

While feeding deer is strongly discouraged, the baiting of deer for IDNR culling purposes has allowed for efficient culling that is leveling off of the increase in the disease. In 2003 there was a 0.5% infection rate in Illinois. In 2015 there was a 1.2% infection rate.

It is illegal to feed deer within a certain distance from a house. Law enforcement seem to generally be reluctant to write tickets for this. It is an education opportunity. Ask Marty Jones about other municipalities having local ordinances that are stricter on the feeding of deer.

Anything within the State’s hunting guidelines is allowed for deer management.

Doug provided committee members with a booklet, “Chronic Wasting Disease Management in Illinois: Fact or Fiction?”

5. Comments from citizens

Bill Grossahns (418 Harrison St.) – Bill did a FOIA request and found that less than 10 municipalities in Illinois are culling deer. Bill believes a survey should be mailed to every household. He believes police chief Lori Huntington should come to present on vehicular accidents with deer.

Tim Wedeward (535 S. High St.) – Tim notes that Wisconsin is not dealing with the deer issues across the border.

6. Committee comments and discussion on the issue of chronic wasting disease –

Carmen asked about the statement that deer eating conifers are starving – Doug said he wasn’t sure, that while deer wouldn’t be getting calories from conifers, there may be other nutritional benefits. Mark Moran spoke with Emily Lubke at the Galena Territory and she is not optimistic about getting the helicopter count this year.

7. Discussion by committee members of the proposed agenda for March meeting related to Deer Accidents, Deer count results and other issues – Lori Huntington, Galena Police Chief will be at the March 16th Deer Committee meeting.
8. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.