

# Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (EUPCAC)

## Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 15, 2022

6:00-8:30pm Eastern

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

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*Chair: Tom Buckingham Vice-Chair: Gary Gorniak Secretary: Jack Thomas*

### Council Members Present

Jarrold Biebel	Travis Kangas	Jack Thomas
Tom Buckingham	Robert Liebermann	Julie Weist
Jeff Cox	David Lieble	Tony Wright
Gary Gorniak	Tom Paquin	
Tim Hass	Mark Spencer	

### Council Members Excused/Absent

Ken Collier	Kyle Edwards	Bernie Hubbard
Grant Dewitt	Kevin Erickson	
AJ Downey	Al Garavaglia	

### Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff Liaisons & Guests

Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division, Newberry  
Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette  
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Executive Division, Marquette  
Dave Jentoft, Wildlife Division, Sault Ste Marie  
Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division, Newberry  
Kristen Matson, Forest Resources Division, Newberry  
Carol Moncrieff Rose, Natural Resources Commission Chair  
Jon Spieles, Marketing & Outreach Division, Newberry  
Ron Yesney, Parks & Recreation Division- UP Trails, Marquette  
Acting Sgt. Mark Zitnik, Law Enforcement Division, Alger County

### Call to Order/Introductions

The Eastern UP Citizens' Advisory Council meeting began at 6:03pm with **Ms. Stacy Haughey**, DNR UP Field Deputy, welcoming everyone to the virtual winter meeting. She provided an overview of the advisory role of the Upper Peninsula Citizens' Advisory Councils (East and West) and thanked Council members for their interests, passion, support, and dedication. She welcomed Natural Resources Commission Chair Carol Moncrieff Rose and Mr. Tom McNamee from Sen. McBroom's office to the meeting as well as additional guests who registered to attend.

**Chair Buckingham** welcomed everyone in attendance and asked Ms. Dahlstrom to read off the list of virtual attendees.

### Adoption of Agenda

**Chair Buckingham** asked the Council if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda; none were brought forth. **Mr. Cox motioned to adopt the agenda as presented; Vice Chair Gorniak supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See listing on page 1. Motion carried.**

### **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

**Chair Buckingham** asked the Council if there were any corrections to the December 6, 2021, EUPCAC meeting minutes, which were emailed to the Council previously; none were brought forth. **Secretary Thomas motioned to approve the minutes as submitted; Mr. Hass supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See listing on page 1. Motion carried.**

### **Chair Comments**

**Chair Buckingham** asked for comments and discussion on agenda items to be respectful.

### **Public Comments on Agenda Items**

**Chair Buckingham** opened the floor for public comments on agenda items only; none were brought forth.

### **DNR Reports from Division Staff**

Written staff reports were provided via email to Council members on February 8, 2022. The following were verbal additions to those reports:

1. **Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy:**

- Two new NRC commissioners were recently appointed: Dave Anthony of Bark River and Leslie Love of Detroit. Mr. Anthony is a past member of the WUPCAC. Former NRC Commissioner JR Richardson's contributions, commitment and dedication were highlighted.
- The Michigan Officer of State Employer announced today the extension of telework for state employees from February 28 to May 1. DNR Customer Service Centers are open Tuesdays-Thursdays; however, staff are available for questions by phone or email at any time.

2. **Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division:**

- The Black Lake sturgeon season (in Cheboygan and Presque Isle Counties) lasted 36 minutes on February 5 with a season quota of six fish speared. 565 anglers registered for the February 5-9 season this year.
- Ice fishing is in full swing, with good reports in most eastern UP locations.

3. **Kristen Matson, Forest Resources Division:**

- Staff are working on timber sales. It's been a good year for loggers in the lowland areas due to the cold weather.
- Fire planning is in full gear for the spring fire season.
- **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked what a roller chop is that was mentioned in the division report. **Ms. Mattson** indicated explained it is a metal piece of equipment filled with water that is rolled through areas that have been previously harvested to reduce competition.
- **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked if there were any prescribed burns planned for the eastern UP. **Ms. Mattson** stated there are a few currently planned (two in Newberry and four in the Sault Ste. Marie area).

4. **Acting Sgt. Mark Zitnik, Law Enforcement Division:**

- Qualified applicants are being sought for the upcoming Conservation Officer Academy. The deadline to apply is February 28. Those that are qualified are difficult to find.

- Officers have been focusing on snowmobile patrols the last two months with an effort to keep unauthorized access and speed down. Ice fishing patrols have also occurred and is an opportunity to provide education to anglers.

5. Jon Spieles, Marketing & Outreach Division:

- The 4<sup>th</sup> Nature Center Summit was held at the RAM Center on February 11 in a virtual format. Nearly 250 registered for the event and each session had a minimum of 100 viewers. This program educates staff from Michigan nature centers, zoos, conservation districts and universities about the latest science and policies governing natural resource management. Topics included virtual presentations on cormorants, nuisance wildlife, Arctic grayling, sturgeon recovery, CISMAs, valuing forests, bird conservation, and the effects of climate change on natural resources. All presentations were recorded, and a YouTube link will be forwarded to Council members.

6. Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division:

- After missing last year, Tahquamenon Falls State Park is back to hosting its guided snowshoe hikes at 2pm and lantern-lit hikes at 6pm. A few more Saturday events remain. Snowshoes are available for free. Hikes are one mile in length.

7. Ron Yesney, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails:

- Interviews are currently in process for the Eastern UP trails specialist position that was vacated by Mr. Paul Gaberdiel when he retired. A decision by late February is anticipated.

8. Dave Jentoft, Wildlife Division:

- The application period for the UP Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative competitive grant program is now open. The MDNR initiative is a cooperative grant program designed to enhance deer habitat on private lands in the UP. \$100,000 is available; the maximum amount of individual grants is \$15,000 and the minimum is \$2,000. Applications are due by March 11 and successful candidates will be notified by March 25.

### Annual Election of Officers

**Chair Buckingham** noted the Bylaws require the Council to have a yearly officer election, which traditionally occurs at the first meeting of the year. He turned the floor over to Ms. Haughey to conduct the election; **Ms. Haughey** opened the floor for nominations for 2022:

1. Chairman: **Mr. Gorniak** nominated Mr. Buckingham; **Mr. Buckingham** accepted the nomination. After three more opportunities, no additional nominations were brought forth.
2. Vice Chairman: **Mr. Buckingham** nominated Mr. Gorniak; **Mr. Gorniak** accepted the nomination. After three more opportunities, no additional nominations were brought forth.
3. Secretary: **Mr. Hass** nominated Mr. Thomas; **Mr. Thomas** accepted the nomination. After three more opportunities, no additional nominations were brought forth.
4. Vote: **Mr. Cox** motioned to close the nominations for all three officer positions; **Mr. Paquin** supported the motion. A vote was conducted by an online Zoom poll visible to all in attendance. **Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See listing on page 1. Motion carried unanimously.**
5. Final Results: **For 2022, Mr. Buckingham, Mr. Gorniak and Mr. Thomas remain as Chairman, Vice Chairman and Secretary, respectively.**

## **Old Business**

### **1. Wolf Management Advisory Council Update (Ms. Haughey):**

- A review of previous discussions in relation to a wolf hunt included three items: 1) the legal status of wolf should be more permanently settled; 2) the wolf management plan should be updated; and 3) there would be meaningful consultation with the federal recognized tribal governments in Michigan.
- This ties into the events of February 10, 2022, when wolves were relisted as a result of a ruling from United States District Court Judge Jeffrey S. White. Changes on wolf protections took effect immediately, suspending two Michigan laws, Public Act 318 of 2008 and Public Act 290 of 2008.
- The WMAC was established under state legislation to make recommendations to update the current wolf management plan and they will continue to move forward. The recent ruling does not affect their work.
- Upcoming meeting dates for the WMAC were shown on screen. The next meeting is February 22 & 23 in Gaylord, and the next UP meeting will be on March 15 & 16 in Sault Ste. Marie. The WMAC added a work session before each meeting day to help meetings run more efficiently. A listing of previous meeting dates and locations from their inception were shown.
- Meeting information, public comment instructions and the current wolf management plan can be viewed at: [www.michigan.gov/wmac](http://www.michigan.gov/wmac).
- The WMAC is tasked with submitting to the NRC and the legislature a report that makes non-binding recommendations as to the proper management of wolves in Michigan. An excerpt of this legislation was shown on screen.
- At the January meeting, the WMAC indicated they will review the following plan sections at upcoming meetings: 1) February: 6.12 & 6.10, 2) March: 6.7 & 6.8, 3) April: 6.9 & 6.11.
- A timeline was briefly reviewed indicating delisting and relisting events going back many, many years.
- Council questions:
  - **Mr. Gorniak** asked how many times wolves have been relisted. **Ms. Haughey** stated the timeline is 6 or 7 pages long and between 2012 and 2016 there have been 13 different actions involving legislation at the state and federal levels. She later reviewed some older statistics going back as far as 1817 and 1921. **Mr. Gorniak** stated work needs to continue to delist wolves. He indicated Congressman Jack Bergman is attending the UPSA meeting on February 19 and he will be pressured to delist wolves through Congress.

### **2. Snowmobile Grooming Equipment Update (Mr. Yesney):**

- At the last Council meeting, members asked for additional information regarding how revenue in the snowmobile program is distributed and how grooming equipment is funded.
- A little-known fact is the snowmobile program is 100% self-funded, with funding coming from snowmobile trail permit dollars, registration fees and 2% of gas sales.
- A flow chart was shown indicating where each of these revenue streams are directed:
  - Registration Fees > Permanent Snowmobile Trail Easement Fund, Snowmobile Registration Fund, Secretary of State, and Snowmobile Trail Improvement
  - Gas Tax Revenue > Snowmobile Trail Improvement
  - Trail Permits > Snowmobile Trail Improvement, Admin Costs, Sticker Sales Agents
- Trail Permit fees are set legislatively and are designed to increase with inflation to alleviate new legislation each time.

- Funds coming in through registration fees also fund law enforcement, safety education and training, trail enforcement grants, and financial assistance to county sheriff departments.
- Fund coming in through trail permits also fund planning, constructing, maintaining and acquiring trails, as well as provides financial assistance to local units of government and non-profit snowmobile clubs (not all grooming is done by clubs, some local units of government also groom).
- Grooming is reimbursed with a certain amount of dollars per mile, which varies every year. A formula takes into consideration all the costs including fuel, greased fluids, etc. used for the grooming equipment. Snowmobile groomers keep track of expenses and submit a report which is then applied to the formula for a per mile reimbursement. When gas prices increase, it becomes more expensive to groom trails.
- Those clubs and organizations grooming, brushing, and signing of trails are all volunteers and put in a lot of hours to maintain these trails; they deserve our respect.
- An informational piece was created a couple of years ago to help explain to riders what a snowmobile trail permit pays for (copy was shown).
  - A \$48 snowmobile trail permit pays for 9.4 miles of groomed trail-just once! (it's now \$52)
  - Your snowmobile trail permit dollars pay for: trail grooming & signage; bridges, culverts, and grading; purchase of new equipment and insurance; and trailhead maintenance and more.
- The piece helps to put the price of a permit in perspective: A one-day downhill ski pass is \$52; a trail permit is currently \$52 for an entire season and helps pay for all that was listed.
- Mr. Yesney attends the International Association of Snowmobile Administrators meetings and Michigan's trail permit is one of the least expensive in the country. Canada's permits are \$300-\$500/year and other states are around \$60-70/year. Without volunteers, like Canada, Michigan's permits would be more expensive.
- To answer previous questions about how decisions are made on which club get new equipment, it was explained some members of the DNR's Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup are equipment maintenance folks who review all of the state's equipment and repair costs, mileage, hours used and overall condition of the machines. They then make recommendations on new equipment purchases for the upcoming year.
- A list of clubs/locations who received new machines in 2021 were shown. New equipment for 2022 is currently being evaluated. New groomers are between \$200,000-\$300,000. The process for who gets new groomers, who operates them, and how grants are distributed are kept fair.
- In summary, there is about \$6-7 million per year that is authorized to be spent in the snowmobile program. Most of it goes to clubs for grooming, signing, maintaining trails as well as towards buying new equipment. Some also goes towards trail infrastructure (culverts, bridges, etc.). There are always more requests than funding available. The funding doesn't go as far as one thinks with the cost of new equipment and infrastructure.
- For the last 19 years or so, the Upper Peninsula has been ranked as one of the top 10 snowmobile destinations worldwide. It generates a lot of economic activity for the UP. There are 69 clubs statewide with 31 of those in the UP, handling all of the trails. Some clubs run well, others have struggles and need assistance. Please remember all of them are volunteers.
- Questions:
  - **Mr. Paquin** thanked Mr. Yesney as well as Mr. Rob Katona (trails specialist for the central UP) for working on getting equipment to the clubs that need it and for assisting the St. Ignace club. **Mr. Yesney** indicated the club is looking for a new president if anyone interested. **Mr. Paquin** knows the program is a lot of work. Club members get burned out, so it helps to have new people who have a passion for snowmobiling join those clubs.

- **Chair Buckingham** thanked Mr. Yesney for the insightful explanation of the program.

## **New Business**

### 1. **Michigan Wildlife Council Update (Dr. Jason Garvon):**

- **Chair Buckingham** welcomed Dr. Jason Garvon, former member of the EUPCAC and now a member of the Michigan Wildlife Council (MWC).
- **Dr. Garvon** stated he was happy to become a member of the MWC and has learned a great deal. He felt it was important to provide an update of the MWC's activities to the EUPCAC.
- *Public Acts 108 & 246 of 2013:* These acts established the Michigan Wildlife Council, a 9-member, governor appointed body to oversee public education efforts—it is not a lobbying group. It is funded through \$1 from the sale of every base hunting license and all-species fishing license. Revenue is allocated for marketing, education and outreach. The Council works with a marketing firm.
- *Goals:* Promote the essential role sportsmen and sportswomen play in furthering conservation in the state. Educating the general public about the benefits of hunting, fishing, and the taking of game and how these activities are: 1) necessary for conservation; 2) the primary sources of funding for conservation; 3) important drivers of Michigan's economy; 4) valued parts of our cultural heritage.
- *Data-Driven Approach:* Research has been the driving factor that defines the path the Council takes in conducting an annual research survey, a statewide survey that measures the progress in educating the public about hunting and fishing. Last year, Responsive Management—the established leader in natural resources research—conducted a study and their data was comparable to what the marketing firms' researcher had been getting. Virtual focus groups are also being held and Council members have the ability to oversee them and deeply understand the audiences. This also helps to drive the campaign approach.
- *Hunting & Fishing Approval:* Research surveys focus on the public opinion of hunting and fishing. A snapshot of approval ratings was shown, and how messaging will be tailored to specific audiences based on these ratings were explained. Approval of hunting and fishing is high, but it's conditional based on population control, food, if regulated and if done humanely. Approval is low on trophy hunting. There are over five years of research surveys, and the Council receives tracking reports from year to year.
- *Messaging:* When targeting the core audience, messaging and language used needs to consider what they think about wildlife, hunting and sportsmen. For example, from the surveys conducted, when we say wildlife, they think nature. When we say hunting, they think deer. When we say sportsmen, they hear athletes. When we say fees, they hear taxes.
- *2016-2020:* Examples of campaigns utilizing a variety of messaging throughout 2016-2020 were shown. The evolution of messaging first focused on fishing, since there is a higher approval of fishing, and then became more targeted towards hunting as well as constantly focusing on the impact of fishing and hunting licenses funding wildlife conservation.
- *Licenses Fund Wildlife Conservation:* A graph was shown that depicted the answer (agree, neutral, disagree) to the same question ("*The protection of wildlife and their habitat is largely funded by the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses.*") over a five-year period and the percentages of responses. For example, those that agree to the question: 60% in 2015, 57% in 2017, 57% in 2018, 64% in 2019, and 74% in 2020. Those that answered neutral: 33% in 2015, 35% in 2017, 37% in 2018, 28% in 2019, and 6% in 2020. The percentages show some of the neutral group moved to the agree group. This is a big part of the educational campaign.

- *Importance of Hunting & Fishing:* Other examples of survey responses over the course of several years focused on importance of hunting and fishing on the economy, jobs, culture, and heritage, all of which have positively increased between 10-14%. There was also a very large increase (27%) in the number of people who disagreed that hunting and fishing are important only to people who hunt and fish. The campaigns are working with target audiences and people are seeing the values of hunting and fishing.
- *Lagging Audiences:* There is a wide variation by region and demographic group (chart shown) in those holding a very favorable opinion of people who hunt. Research has found that key groups—black Michiganders, those living in southeast Michigan, young adults, and women—are least likely to view hunters favorably. Through this research, the Council identifies where the message is going to do the most good, which helps to target the next area.
- *Points of Connection:* How best to target these key groups were evaluated and different methods of communication channels were identified: billboards, videos, social media, and commercials. Influencers like Detroit Lions Frank Ragnow have partnered with the Council to deliver messaging to its target audience. Commercials are available on the Council’s website for viewing.
- *2021 Campaign:* Introduced a new character to help message breakthrough, showcase “people like me”; a lighter friendly, approachable tonality; had more direct messages about hunting and fishing, when most relevant during “fishing” and “hunting” seasons; leveraged the voice of influencers to deliver messages in a more authentic way. Several examples of the variety of messaging used in 2021 was shown and explained, such as a conservation kitchen, printed ads, social media posts by influencers being in the outdoors, targeted stickers to go with receipts at sporting good stores, Council appearances on the Mike Avery Out-of-Doors show, etc. The Council also communicates regularly with the Natural Resources Commission and the legislative sportsman caucuses.
- *What’s Next?:* Wrapping up the 2021 campaign; statewide survey in December to continue measuring audience knowledge, campaign performance; ensuring audiences are more aware, more informed, and more engaged—leading to stronger support of hunting/fishing and the important role hunters and anglers play in conservation.
- *Questions:*
  - **Chair Buckingham** thanked Dr. Garvon for the great presentation.
  - **Mr. Spencer** asked if trapping will be addressed in the Council’s campaign messaging going forward. **Dr. Garvon** stated trapping tends to lag behind hunting and it hasn’t been discussed much. The messaging focused on fishing first and now hunting. He indicated he will ask more about it at their next meeting.
  - **Mr. Gorniak** noted that many people don’t understand that wildlife is a part of the environment and should be managed, just like the rest of the environment. **Dr. Garvon** thanked him for his input and indicated messaging has included education on license fees being used for wildlife conservation and the need for wildlife to be managed.

2. State Parks/State Harbors 2021 Survey Results (Mr. Cowing):

- The statewide surveys are compiled from online surveys that are emailed to overnight visitors in state parks and state harbors and marinas.
- State Park Survey: The majority (62%) of respondents are in a camper or hard-sided shelter of some sort. Only 25% are camping in tents these days. The main reason guests are coming to parks are for the amenities or they enjoyed a previous visit. The third reason is proximity to local attractions. With record numbers last year, 93% would recommend it to a friend. Additional

survey statistics listed were reviewed. In comparison with the 2019 survey, most results were comparable with the exception of a large increase in where visitors are finding their information—78% of people are finding their information online compared to 50% in 2019.

- Harbor Survey: Most users are power boats (80%) versus sailboats (19%). 74% consider local amenities when choosing a harbor, since most would be walking with no opportunity to drive. This is why the Mackinac Island Harbor is one of the busiest and most popular harbors. 91% are couples or families and satisfaction is high at 94%. 99% indicated they just wanted to spend time on the water.
- Council questions:
  - **Chair Buckingham** asked if there are future plans to expand portions of any eastern UP parks to accommodate larger travel trailers and trucks as he finds them difficult to traverse corners when the campground is full. **Mr. Cowing** indicated some sites at parks have been converted to pull-through sites for larger units but understand the issue first-hand. He added he is not aware of any immediate plans; however, updated electrical and larger sites are a definite consideration when park renovations are made.

### 3. Deer Camp Survey Results (Mr. Jentoft):

- *Background:* The 2021 Deer Camp Survey was just completed. This survey is comprised of information supplied by hunters from the 16-day firearm season. Survey forms are sent out prior to the firearm season to participants who have either participated in past years or new folks that desire to participate. Hunters complete the survey form and return it to the DNR where staff analyze the data and report back to the participants. The report provides both a regional perspective across the UP as well as a more DMU-specific perspective. The information provided includes sighting, harvest, and effort results as well as hunter opinions.
- *Distribution of Participants in 2021 (Map):* The UP is well-represented by camps or hunting locations from participating hunters.
- *Deer Sighting Rate:* The number of deer observed per hunter day during the firearm season. In 2021, on average hunters saw three deer per hunter day, which is up slightly from last year and just above the long-term average.
- *Hunter Success:* The percent of hunters that harvested a buck or antlerless deer. 26% of hunters reported harvesting a buck, which is up from 22% last year and near the long-term average.
- *Fawn-to-Doe Ratio:* Fawns observed per 100 does during the firearm season. Hunters reported seeing 56 fawns per 100 does on average, which is up from the last two years and above the long-term average.
- *Herd & Season Ratings:* Hunters were asked to rate whether there were fewer, the same, or more deer around their camp or hunting location this year. 44% of hunters indicated they felt there were fewer deer, 34% said the same, and 22% felt there were more. Hunters were also asked to rate the firearm season. 38% rated the season as poor, 33% as fair, 23% as good, and 6% as excellent.
- *Season Ratings:* Percent of participating camps rating the season as good to excellent. This information is only from deer camp survey participants. 2021 was rated as average and was an increase from 2020.
- *Deer Sighting Rates (by DMU):* The number of camps differ by DMU; interpretation must take that into consideration. The highest sighting rates were in the south central UP at 6.3 and 5.0 deer per hunter day on average and the lowest rate was in the far western UP at 0.6. Some DMU's have low hunter participation and it affects rates.



- *Buck Hunter Success (by DMU)*: This shows the percent of hunters reporting taking a buck on average by area. The highest rate was 57% in the southern part of the Keweenaw Peninsula and the lowest rate was 8% in the south-central UP region.
- *Fawn-to-Doer Ratio (by DMU)*: Number of fawns observed per 100 does on average. The highest rate was in the eastern UP in DMU 349. The lowest was in the far western UP in DMU 66. It was explained why this statistic can be mistakenly interpreted.
- *Age Structure of the Buck Harvest*: Age distribution of bucks seen at deer check stations for all seasons. There was a higher percentage of year-and-a-half old bucks seen this year than the past few years. Two-and-a-half-year-old and older bucks still accounted for the majority of the bucks that were aged this year. A special note to consider is in 2020 and 2021, check station availability was limited and not as many bucks were checked in these years as in previous years.
- *Snow Conditions in the UP*: Snow conditions are not part of the deer camp survey, but staff do assess and monitor conditions. The graph shown goes back to 2003-2004 and shows the number of days the average UP snow depth was 12 inches or more on the landscape based on SNODAS data. Through last winter, the 2020-2021 winter was mild in comparison to many of the past winters. However, the three winters before that were a bit harsh.
- *Summary of 2021 UP Deer Camp Survey*: Most UP regional rates increased compared to the 2020 season (deer sightings per hunter day, buck hunter success, fawns observed per 100 does, season rating); 2021 UP regional rates were near or above the average since 2012; rates increased in most DMUs but there was variation by DMU.
- *How to Participate in Future Years*: Contact Dave Jentoft at the DNR Sault Ste. Marie office or Colter Lubben at the DNR Escanaba office. Survey materials are sent out just prior to the firearm deer season (around November 1).
- *Questions*:
  - **Ms. Haughey** thanked **Mr. Jentoft** and the team that worked on the survey results as it is an immense amount of work, and there was a push to get it done for tonight's meeting. She stated she and the Council appreciate all of the effort that goes into the process and reporting.

4. *Wildlife Disease Updates (Mr. Jentoft)*:

- *White-Nosed Syndrome (WNS)*: White-Nosed Syndrome is still present in Michigan. Unfortunately, due to Covid, Wildlife staff were only able to survey a few bat hibernacula the past 2 years. However, the few sites that we have surveyed continue to hold bats at decreased but stable numbers. A full survey season is planned for this winter/spring and staff should have a better idea of the impacts of WNS on Michigan's' bat populations. Strategies to mitigate impacts from WNS on bats continues with bat researchers from different universities.
- *Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV2)*: Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 (RHDV2) is a highly contagious virus affecting domestic and wild rabbits. RHDV2 is a Foreign Animal Disease that has appeared periodically in North America and has a high case fatality rate. It has been found in wild populations of hare and jackrabbit in numerous states but has not been detected in Michigan. The Wildlife Health Section is on the look-out and are currently conducting what is called passive surveillance for the disease. For passive surveillance to work, we are largely dependent on DNR staff and public citizens to be "eyes in the field". Any wild animals that are detected with symptoms or histories suggestive of RHDV2 are requested to be rushed to the lab for testing. This last year, there were a total of 9 individual animals submitted of species susceptible to the disease. Of those 9, only 2 had histories suggestive of RHDV2 and received disease specific testing. Both came back negative.

- Caitlin Ott-Conn is representing the DNR in a joint effort with MDARD to create a response plan to:  
1) detail current passive surveillance efforts for wildlife (DNR) and captive (MDARD) animals; and  
2) map out the who/what/when/where/how reaction for any detections. MDARD has taken the lead and the plan is largely complete. The public's help and any detections can be reported online (<https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/ors/Survey/4>) or by calling Caitlin (517-582-5696) or the lab's main line (517-336-5030).
- *Questions:*
  - **Secretary Thomas** asked what symptoms should he look for in rabbits. **Mr. Jentoft** stated rabbits usually appear somewhat normal but may have a bloody discharge from their nose or mouth and may be reluctant to move. He noted the disease is quite fatal.
  - **Chair Buckingham** asked if a wolf were to consume an infected rabbit, would there be any danger to the wolf's health. **Mr. Jentoft** stated to his knowledge it would not affect wolves; it is specific to rabbits. He added folks can go to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services' (APHIS) website for more information.
  - **Mr. Hass** asked if COVID has been found in any of the Michigan deer population. **Mr. Jentoft** stated he is aware of a research study being conducted but he did not have any specifics.

5. UP Moose Herd Update (Mr. Jentoft):

- *Monitoring Procedures:*
  - Aerial survey is conducted in prime moose habitat in the western UP.
  - Survey is typically conducted every other winter.
  - Because it is impossible to count every moose during this survey, counts are "corrected" with a statistical model to provide an estimate of the actual population size.
  - A survey of the population was not done in 2021 (last winter) due to the pandemic. The next survey is slated for 2023.
- *Population Size:*
  - Survey was last conducted in 2019 and the moose population was estimated to be just over 500 moose.
  - Collectively, survey estimates suggest the growth rate slowed to less than 2% since 2009.
  - While the growth rate appears to have slowed, other moose populations near the southern edge of their range have been declining.
  - There is also a small remnant population of moose in the eastern UP.
- *Questions:*
  - **Vice Chair Gorniak** stated the Michigan moose herd was growing at about 9% but around 2009, it started slowing down now to 2% or lower, which also aligns with the increase in the wolf population which was around 500 then and now it's quite a bit higher. He also stated he disagrees with the declining population in the southern edge as there are moose populations in Ontario and South Dakota which have similar weather conditions and their growth rates are doing fine. **Mr. Jentoft** stated he hasn't seen evidence of wolf predations on moose that would cause a population decline. He added he was not able to provide additional information without conferring with staff who work with the moose population. Discussion ensued regarding the moose population in the eastern UP and the difficulty in surveying them due their low numbers.
  - **Secretary Thomas** asked if the moose population estimate of 500 is a minimum estimate similar to how the wolf population is determined. **Mr. Jentoft** stated it is a population estimate, not a minimum estimate.

6. Additional Agenda Items Added by Council: No additional items were added.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

1. Fisheries Subcommittee Report (Vice Chair Gorniak): **Vice Chair Gorniak** reported on the status of cormorant control and his disappointment in learning another consumption index/study was needed before the program could receive funding. He stated sportsmen's groups are not going to want to spend money to stock and plant fish if cormorants will eat what they plant. **Mr. Kovacs** indicated the only additional information he has is a request for management units to provide the water bodies they would like to see listed for potential control. **Vice Chair Gorniak** also asked if control permits can be applied for without funding as there are many steps to get prepared in advance. **Ms. Haughey** indicated she will speak to Fisheries Chief Jim Dexter about the issue and report back.
2. Policy Impact Subcommittee Report (Mr. Hass): **Mr. Hass** indicated there is no activity to report from the subcommittee; however, it was brought to his attention yesterday, there are two pieces of legislation that has been introduced in the House pertaining to an opposition of the right to bear arms. After he has a chance to read through the legislation, he will forward an update to the subcommittee and Council. **Mr. Spencer** added he was told an introduction of a bill to outlaw predator hunting in the State of Michigan was on the horizon.

### **Next Meeting**

1. Next EUPCAC Meeting: **Chair Buckingham** indicated the next meeting of the EUPCAC is scheduled for Thursday, April 28, 2022, and is scheduled to be held in Newberry.
2. Items for Next Meeting Agenda: **Chair Buckingham** asked for suggested topics for the next meeting can be sent to him, Ms. Haughey or to Ms. Dahlstrom.

### **Public Comments (Any Topic)**

**Chair Buckingham** opened the floor for public comments on any topic.

1. *Mr. Steve Dey, Moran*: Mr. Dey asked if the DNR is close to having a smartphone app for the purchasing and storing of licenses. **Ms. Haughey** indicated the DNR is working on updating its website and believes an app is on the horizon. Discussion ensued regarding the ability to receive license renewal reminders, etc.
2. *Mr. Dey* also asked if the current wolf survey being conducted is using the same estimate model or if a new population count method is being used. **Mr. Jentoft** indicated the model has not changed at this time and will be reported as a minimum population estimate. Mr. Dey indicated his concern that the population will continue to be interpreted incorrectly by the public for the next few years as a result. **Vice Chair Gorniak** added Michigan is the only state that uses a minimum estimate whereas Wisconsin, Minnesota, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming all use an average number. **Ms. Haughey** stated the DNR is working with Michigan Tech on a population modeling system and noted Michigan's wolf management plan has been touted across the country as one of the best.

### **Closing Comments from the Council**

**Chair Buckingham** opened the floor for closing comments from the Council.

1. **Secretary Thomas** recognized Mr. Craig Woerpel from WYKX WDBC Radio out of Escanaba who has attended several Council meetings virtually and provides an outdoor news report in the central UP.

He also mentioned former EUPCAC Vice Chair Glenn Moll attended virtually this evening. He visited Mr. Moll last week and his health is improving; it was great to see him at the meeting.

**Adjourn**

There being no further business, **Chair Buckingham** thanked everyone for attending and thanked staff for providing very informative presentations and updates. He adjourned the meeting at 8:00pm Eastern.

DRAFT