



HARVEST INFORMATION PROGRAM WORKING GROUP

Chair: Karen Waldrop, Ducks Unlimited

Vice-Chair: Josh Avey,

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

11:30 – 12:30

86th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference

Attendees

Judith Scarl, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Marc LeFebvre, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Karen Waldrop, Ducks Unlimited
Chris Smith, Wildlife Management Institute
Jon Gassett, Wildlife Management Institute
Kenneth Duren, Pennsylvania Game Commission
Melanie Weaver, Pennsylvania Game Commission
Robert Crevey, Massachusetts Army National Guard
Todd Sanders, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Todd Bishop, Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Joel Brice, Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Jeff Ver Steeg, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Adam Phelps, Indiana Department of Natural Resources
Catherine Justice, United States Air Force
Richard Schultheis, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
Dave Scott, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Billy Dukes, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Jeffrey Knetter, Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Kevin Luepke, Fort McCoy Directorate of Public Works Environmental Division Natural Resources Branch
Brandon Reishus, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Brad Bortner, Wildlife Management Institute
Kevin Blakely, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Larisa Harding, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Donna Ogilie, Naval Air Station Lemoore
Larry Reynolds, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
John Brunjes, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Alicia Hardin
Morgan Johnson, DJ Case and Associates
Michael Szymanski, North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Kathy Fleming, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Melanie Steinkamp, United States Geological Survey
Dave Olson, United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Matt Eckert, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Shaun Oldenburger, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Hanna Bijl, iSportsman, LLC/HAMS
Scot Williamson, Wildlife Management Institute
Joe Benedict, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
Tina Johannsen, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Rick Jacobson, Connecticut Fish, Forests and Wildlife
Keith Gauldin, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
Josh Avey, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Rocco Murano, South Dakota Fish and Parks
Cindy Longmire, DJ Case & Associates
Will Inselman, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Brad Carner
Kent Van Horn, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Leslie Mcinenly, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Matthew Garrick, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Toby Boudreau, Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Crystal Decker, Colorado State University
Jesse Travis, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Christopher Berens
Kevin Kraai, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Phil Seng, DJ Case & Associates
Min Huang, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
Dean Smith, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Stasey Whichel, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Melissa Vogt, Camp Pendleton Environmental Security Department
Alex Schubert, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Jason Fraker, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command

Minutes

Karen Waldrop, Chair of the Harvest Information Program (HIP) Working Group, called the meeting to order and gave a brief overview of the agenda for March 9, 2021.

Karen asked for a motion for approval of the minutes from the September 9th Association of Fish and Wildlife Meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Rick Jacobson, Connecticut Fish, Forests and Wildlife. The motion was seconded by John Brunjes, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. The minutes were approved.

Kathy Fleming, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), provided the group with an update on monitoring and data management with respect to HIP and harvest surveys. The online harvest survey is in the second year of a third year overlap with the paper survey and is anticipated to be fully implemented by the 2022-2023 hunting season. Improvements have been made to the design of the survey resulting in less requests for technical support. The branch is in the process of building a migratory bird data warehouse to improve processing, storing and making accessible parts collection survey data. It will also provide a place for anyone in the migratory bird program to store and make data accessible. The goal is to add public access, in addition to agency access, to migratory bird data in the future. A new model-based harvest estimation project is being started with Andy Royle, United States Geological Survey, and will provide species-specific harvest estimates and precision.

Continuing and new efforts with HIP include:

- documenting and assessing states' online HIP registration processes to achieve consistent standards;
- hunter focus groups;
- continuing stratification analysis; and
- a new project happening this summer that aims to connect hunters with data.

Kathy stated that HIP data problems are extremely complex, but not intractable. A number of factors must be considered and no one solution works for every state. We need to work on solving problems together with better communication, as well as gaining a better understanding of what is causing these problems. New tools, such as dashboards, are being developed to diagnose problems quickly. Another imperative step is to recognize triggers for new problems, such as new license contracts and agency staff turnover, among others, and adapt accordingly. Communication is extremely important and can include communication between the USFWS and states, states and license contractors and the Branch of Monitoring and Data Management and hunters.

From 2019-2020, Chandler and Cain documented and examined all states' online HIP processes and noticed the following inconsistencies:

- four (4) states have a default "did not hunt" option;
- nineteen (19) states did not ask "will you be hunting migratory birds this season";
- three (3) states ask "did you hunt migratory birds last year" as opposed to "will you be hunting migratory birds this season" as the first question; and
- thirty-four (34) states do not specify that the answers are just for that state.

The goal is to move towards greater consistency and hold states accountable for making changes the next year so that the correct information will be there.

DJ Case helped to identify dove and waterfowl hunters, grouped by avidity and region. The primary objects were to learn what motivates hunters to participate in HIP and harvest surveys and boost participation rates and data quality. Questions were asked of hunters regarding their knowledge of the HIP, attitudes towards harvest surveys, memory of hunting activity and concerns about sharing information. They were also asked to test the online survey, register and log-in, enter hunts and provide feedback on design and ease of use.

This analysis was just completed and the results will be summarized this summer. Current observations include:

- the lack of understanding from most hunters who do not understand why they are asked HIP questions and think that this is the harvest survey;
- a genuine interest from hunters in knowing what the data is used for;
- a consensus from most hunters that the questions are not burdensome, but many have trouble remembering;
- confusion between state and federal agencies' roles; and
- survey timing and the preference to receive the survey before the season starts.

Regarding online survey testing, most hunters said it was easy to use and understand, registration/log-in can be burdensome and that it can be time consuming for avid hunters.

Regarding stratification analysis, there are preliminary results for waterfowl. By working with Dave Otis, a webless grant proposal is in the works. Questions to be answered include:

- how well last year's hunting predicts this year's harvest;
- how reliable the answers to the stratification questions are;
- what other information is predictive, such as number of days hunted, average daily bag, residency status and number of years harvested; and

- how the bag ranges in the questions affect precision.

Karen asked if there were any questions. Kent Van Horn, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, asked Kathy to elaborate on the statement that hunters do not understand the purpose of HIP. Kathy explained a project that will be in the works this summer that will create a visualization combining harvest data, waterfowl population data and habitat data, which will help hunters understand their role in providing information.

A member of the group asked Kathy if there is a model state for the questions that the states are erring on. Kathy mentioned several documents that she would distribute which demonstrate why questions are important and how they are used.

Brad Bortner, Wildlife Management Institute, provided an update to the group on the pilot program. He stated he has been in close contact with the flyway and the USFWS. The objectives are to work with the states to improve data quality and to eliminate third party data entry where license vendors are entering information for hunters and not answering stratification questions. He has also been talking to license system providers and vendors to educate them on the importance of data quality and what the data is used for. Additionally, he has been in communication with agency license and biological personnel, as well as hunters, on the importance of data quality.

In the past year, he has participated in all of the flyway and technical council meetings to discuss what we aim to accomplish with the pilot. A magazine article was distributed to a number of waterfowl groups and commercial magazines and three podcasts were recorded to increase awareness of HIP and the issues the focus groups have identified. Additionally, he has worked with Louisiana, Connecticut and Arkansas to modify their licensing procedures to eliminate third party data entry.

<https://www.fws.gov/harvestsurvey/harvest-vis>

Kentucky is the first state that has modified their system recently to eliminate third party data entry. This served as a model for the pilot. Louisiana and Arkansas have implemented modifications in 2020. Starting in December, Connecticut has modified their system so that hunters have to get online or call-in to get their HIP registration. In 2021, Arizona will implement a new licensing system. Due to Covid, Montana will get online in 2022. Brad has had a number of conversations with Kansas and they have begun looking at changes that can be made in 2022 when they have a contract out for a new licensing system. North Carolina has started changes to eliminate year-round HIP registration and move toward registration that starts at the beginning of the year. He has also had preliminary discussions with Florida and Iowa. Nevada is looking at what changes can be implemented to their system. As a result of the Atlantic and Pacific flyway meetings, South Carolina and Idaho have indicated that they are interested in making changes to HIP procedures when they issue new licensing contracts in the next year or so.

License vendors do not understand HIP and the difference between the stratification questions and the survey. As a result of North American, he has reached out to two more companies and scheduled meetings for April. Preliminary results from Arkansas and Louisiana in comparing the 2019 and 2020 licensing systems show weeks where discrepancies occurred in which registrations did not coincide with migratory bird hunting seasons. In 2020, more accurate answers to stratification questions were received due to eliminating a significant number of hunters that fall into the Stratum 1 category of “did not hunt”. This has resulted in much more efficient efforts for the USFWS.

In 2021, he stated that he plans to continue to work with all of the states that are in the pilot program and hopes to recruit additional states. He would like to work with states in the pilot program to develop disseminate lessons learned to other states both within and outside of the pilot program. He will continue to work on developing outreach material for the states to use on social media, educate

licensing system vendors on the importance of HIP, and publicize the importance of data quality submitted to the USFWS.

Karen asked if there were any questions. One participant remarked that as hunters concerns tend to quickly dissolve as they are educated on the importance of HIP. He stressed the importance of on-going communication efforts. Brad stated that even agency personnel do not necessarily understand the importance of HIP and efforts are underway to address this issue.

Larry Reynolds, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, provided an update on Louisiana's participation in the pilot project. The pilot program was implemented this year. Hunters lost throughout the years include:

- 25,000 active hunters in 2013; and
- 30,000 active hunters in 2015.

2015 was concerning because Louisiana had an estimate from HIP of 47,000 active hunters and 31,000 active hunters from a big and small game harvest survey. A large-scale waterfowl hunting survey was conducted. To get a sample for this survey, Louisiana took all of the duck license purchases in conjunction with the HIP registration database, and removed any hunter that reported killing at least one duck or goose was removed from the database resulting in 90,300 hunters for that year. License structure makes this so complicated because a number of licenses provide the capability to hunt ducks without buying a duck license. HIP is the one thing that will allow Louisiana to distinguish who hunts migratory birds.

Issues that arose from the pilot study include a lack of cooperation that arose from the low prioritization of the license section and insufficient outreach that led to hunters misunderstanding of HIP. It was found in the 2020 waterfowl hunter survey that 74% of HIP registrants did not hunt all species of migratory birds. These results were similar to those found by the USFWS. This led to email surveys being distributed to get a better understanding of the situation. 29% of the respondents were not waterfowl hunters. The licensing section quickly got on board. HIP registration was moved from all of the vendors and hunters were required to go online to complete their free HIP registration. Louisiana conducted additional outreach including podcasts and live Facebook conversations. This resulted in fewer complaints.

One problem that was discovered that all of the registration questions online were prefilled to "did not hunt". Additionally, if a hunter had a duck stamp, they had to complete HIP registration but once completed did not get certification for their license. It took three months to address many of the main issues from both hunters and staff. For example, if a hunter did not have an email address, they could not get their HIP certification.

Duck license sales continue to decline whether that means fewer duck hunters or only duck hunters buying senior licenses. The HIP registration dropped by over 120,000, but it is hard to determine how many of these are hunters who simply did not want to participate. Improvements were seen across all strata. Moving forward, Louisiana will continue outreach. They are hoping to have staff to dedicated to answering questions about HIP.

Karen asked if Louisiana's law enforcement officers checked for compliance and assisted with education. Larry said that law enforcement was not in support of this pilot project as they were not willing to enforce this as there would be a number of problems. He is working with law enforcement to get more compliance checks. Karen stated that moving forward, she wanted to focus on addressing the concerns with HIP enforcement.

Karen asked if there were any other questions. Being none, the meeting was adjourned.