

IMPLEMENTING CALIFORNIA'S DEER HERD MANAGEMENT PLANS

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Abstract: Under Assembly Bill 3735 (1984), sponsored by Frank Hill, the California Department of Fish and Game is provided additional funds to implement the recommended actions stated in deer herd management plans. The bill provides funding through an increase in the price of deer hunting tags. Because demand for funding significantly exceeded supply, criteria were developed for choosing specific projects. Since 1984, 75,000 acres of habitat have been improved for deer, 18 projects have been initiated to investigate the seasonal movements and habitat preference of deer, and many other projects have begun, including communicating information about deer management to the people of California.

During the past two years, the deer management program in California has benefited significantly by legislative change. In 1984, Assembly Bill 3735 (Frank Hill) was incorporated into the Fish and Game Code. That law provides an economic means for the California Department of Fish and Game to implement the recommended actions stated in management plans for deer herds statewide. The program born from the new, ear-marked funds is called the Deer Herd Management Plan Implementation Program (DHMP/IP).

The objective of the DHMP/IP is to perform the actions identified in approved deer herd management plans in California. This program is the California Department of Fish and Game's major vehicle for conducting deer investigations, deer habitat improvement projects and other actions regarding deer management in the state. Assembly Bill 3735 provides funding for this program through an increase in the price of deer hunting tags. The statutes provide for an increase in the price of deer hunting tags over a two-year period (Table 1). After Fiscal Year (FY) 1986-87, the price will change in relation to an inflationary index reported by the Department of Finance. Specific language is found in Fish and Game Code Section 4332.

The increase in the price of deer tags provided \$940,000.00 in FY 1986-87 and an estimated \$1.7 million in FY 1987-88. The funds are used for the purpose of implementing the deer herd management plans, and the funds are intended to be in addition to, and not a replacement for, the funds budgeted by the Department in that year or the previous year for deer management.

Seventy-nine deer herd management plans were completed by the Department and submitted to the Fish and Game Commission in December 1985. These plans provide direction for deer management for each deer herd in the state. Each of the plans contains specific management objectives designed to meet the statewide deer herd management goals of restoring and maintaining healthy deer in a wild state and providing high quality and diversified use of the deer resource. These statewide goals (Anonymous 1976) are specified in Section 453 of the Fish and Game Code. Specific actions needed to attain these goals are variable from herd to herd, and are contained in seven elements common to each of the 79

plans: (1) inventory and investigation, (2) habitat, (3) utilization, (4) mortality control, (5) law enforcement, (6) communication of information, and (7) plan review and update. Each of these elements is designed to treat a separate aspect of deer management, while the herd plans include all of the actions listed in each element. The actions listed in any of these elements are subject to receiving program funds as long as they are in addition to actions performed prior to the program.

In 1985, two-thirds of the contractual funds of the program were expended on actions listed in the habitat element of deer plans and one third on actions listed in the inventory and investigations element. In 1986, a little more than half of the contractual funds were expended on habitat projects and about 45% on investigations. Approximately two-thirds of the funds will be used for habitat projects in 1987.

The most common type of project for improving habitat quality involves brush burning. Other habitat projects include planting browse species, fencing livestock from key areas and improving water availability. Investigations involve delineating herd ranges using radio-collared animals, monitoring infectious diseases, determining the economic value of deer, assessing herd range with remote sensing and investigating the physiological condition of free ranging animals.

Because the demand for funding has significantly exceeded the supply of funds for each year of the program, funding criteria were developed. The proposed projects for habitat modification and improvement are ranked according to the following criteria: (1) Is the project over and above current programs in the Department? (2) Will the project produce recognizable results? (3) Are the project actions visible? Can the public see that something is being accomplished? (4) What is the relative importance of this herd compared to others in the state? (5) What is the relative importance of the project to the herd? (6) Is this project on land owned by a cooperative landowner and will the landowner stay with a long range plan? (7) Is public hunting permitted on this project site? (8) Has an environmental assessment been prepared for the project? (9) Are there other funds available to assist in the project? (10) Is there a good potential for success? (11)

Table 1. Changes in deer tag prices.

Year	1-Deer Tag	2-Deer Tag
1984	\$ 4.25	\$11.25
1985	7.50	17.50
1986	10.00	22.50

Was the project funded by the program during the previous year? (12) Will the project contractor forgo administrative overhead charges?

Similar criteria are used for investigative and inventory projects: (1) Are there any previous project data to use as a baseline? (2) Is the project over and above current programs? (3) What is the relative importance of this herd compared to others in the state? (4) What is the relative importance of the project to the herd? (5) Will the project provide information to assist the local county general plan? (6) Will the project contractor forgo administrative overhead charges?

Each proposed project is subjected to the criteria to rank the projects in order of importance to the deer resource and users of the deer resource and to insure that the maximum benefits are obtained for each dollar spent.

The benefits of this program are many. Since its

beginning, 75,000 acres of habitat have been improved for deer, 18 projects have been initiated to investigate the seasonal movements and habitat preference of deer, and many other projects have begun, including communicating information about deer management to people of the State.

The future for deer in California is bright. The best management successes can be expected with the continued cooperation of land managers, and their clear priority for deer management.

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LITERATURE CITED

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