



# SUMMARY REPORT

## 2022 Deer Summit | Prince of Wales Island, Alaska | Unit 2

A summary of planning, activities, and content shared over the course of three days, from October 14-16, 2022, at a summit designed to foster dialogue around issues related to the deer population in Unit 2.

**Sustainable Solutions**  
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## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **2022 Deer Summit**

#### **Executive Summary:**

The 2022 Deer Summit took place in the community of Craig on Prince of Wales Island (POW), Alaska. It was held in response to an observed decline in the deer population on the island. After two years of thoughtful planning and postponement due to the COVID pandemic, the 2022 Deer Summit took place in-person at the Craig Tribal Hall, from October 13-15, 2022. Over the course of three days, roughly 50-60 community members, hunters, biologists, researchers, and land and wildlife managers gathered to exchange information, insights, observations, and experiences related to the deer population and access to the deer population on (POW) and within Unit 2.

#### **Goals:**

- To bring together community members, hunters, researchers, and land and wildlife managers to share information and learn about factors that influence deer populations on Prince of Wales Island.
- To improve understanding, to support the long-term health of the deer population.

#### **Background and Planning:**

Local observations and experiences on Prince of Wales Island indicate a decrease in the deer population and/or a decrease in the ability to access deer in recent years. In 2020, a steering committee came together, made up of individuals and entities that are invested in ensuring a healthy deer population on POW.

The purpose of their coming together was to plan an event on POW that would give participants the opportunity to discuss some of the factors that impact the deer population on Prince of Wales Island, and to share their information, experience, and observations as they relate to the deer population and access to deer. The goal of the summit was to improve understanding in order to support the long-term health of the deer population.

In December of 2020, the Sustainable Solutions facilitators were brought in to support the steering committee in planning for the event (and inadvertently, navigating COVID pandemic considerations) Over the course of two years, the steering committee and facilitators met to discuss what content, format, agenda, presenters, and logistics would best support the goals of the summit.

In February of 2022, the facilitators distributed a pre-summit needs assessment throughout POW to identify issues most important to POW locals that the 2022 Deer Summit could address. The needs assessment also provided facilitators with some preliminary knowledge about what POW locals were observing and experiencing around the island's deer population.

The combination of the steering committee meetings and the collective input via the needs assessment gave critical context to the format and content of the 2022 Deer Summit.

## **Format and Content:**

The summit wove together formal presentations with small-group and full-room dialogue; giving space for attendees to learn, to share knowledge and lived expertise, to challenge their own preconceptions, to cultivate understanding of experiences different than their own, and to better understand factors that impact the deer population.

The planning and hosting of the Deer Summit was carried out by a diverse steering committee. The Deer Summit Steering Committee (steering committee) met for over a year to ensure the goals of the summit were attainable. They utilized facilitators, Jess Kayser Forster and Mandy Park from Sustainable Solutions, to build and facilitate an event that met the goals and priorities set forth by the steering committee. The steering committee consisted of POW locals, resource management agencies, and nongovernmental organizations invested in various aspects of the health and wellbeing of the deer population<sup>1</sup>. Collectively, they identified the following factors impacting deer and access to deer on POW, around which presentations and discussion were framed: past/present/future, habitat, predation, socio-cultural factors, and harvest & regulation. Steering committee members acknowledged many factors influencing the deer population, but prioritized those factors most significant to POW residents and aligned with the experiences of steering committee members.

To set the stage for a “safe place” to discuss a topic that has left people from different backgrounds feeling that the situation is unfair or unjust, facilitators and steering committee members requested that all who were present commit to a set of “Dialogue Agreements” at the start of the event. These dialogue agreements<sup>2</sup> helped to initiate and sustain a transparent and mutually respectful culture for the duration of the summit, allowing for true exchange of differing opinions and lived experiences to take place.

The first day’s content began with descriptions of the deer population and surrounding environment on POW over time – with accounts of the past, overview of present conditions, and informed predictions of what the future holds. Participants were also briefed on the April 2006 report, “Unit 2 Planning Process: A report from the Southeast Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council to the Federal Subsistence Board.” Opening remarks from longtime residents of POW summarized the dramatic changes seen on the island over the last 75 years, and ideas for resolving the resulting challenges residents are seeing now and those likely in years to come. Finally, a presentation was given summarizing the research that points to the multitude of factors that are impacting the deer population and causing a decline in the population.

At the close of the first day, participants and community members gathered to share a meal prepared by locals in Craig. For the entire event, meals and door prizes were donated by supporting businesses, individuals, and community groups around the island. This demonstrated their buy-in to the importance of deer, as well as their support for the exchange of knowledge and collective desire to improve the situation.

Day two of the Deer Summit saw presentations about deer habitat, predation, and sociocultural influences on the deer population. For the topics of habitat and predation, attendees heard from a series of presenters on various facets of the main factor, followed by a brief question and answer period to clarify content shared. Then facilitators asked a series of questions which guided participants to self-

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A (Summit Materials) for a full list of Steering Committee Members

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A (Summit Materials) for a list of the Dialogue Agreements

reflect, discuss their observations and experiences in small table groups, then share out to the full group a synthesis of discussion points and perspectives. For the topic of socio-cultural factors, participant self-reflection, group discussion, and full room dialogue encompassed the entirety of content shared. The intentional lack of formal presentations on this piece underscored the notion that participants at the Deer Summit were ultimately the most knowledgeable on how social and cultural behaviors are impacting the deer population on POW. No technical researcher could better represent this lived expertise.

The final day of the Deer Summit addressed the topic of harvest and regulation, using the same format of formal presentations, brief question and answer, then participant dialogue and share-out. The full group then took a field trip to the Harris River Trail to solidify concepts shared over the previous days in first-hand observations of changes in deer habitat, and the results of various human interventions at different stages of a forest stand.

Finally, the group returned to the Craig Tribal Hall to engage in a discussion on looking forward. Individually and as a collective, all present answered the question, "What information shared could be used to support a healthy deer population and access to the deer population on Prince of Wales Island?" Then, "What are the unintended consequences of the ideas we've come up with to support a healthy deer population?" Reflections and suggested actions were captured and collected for inclusion in this report. While the Deer Summit was not meant to produce a collective strategy to implement post-summit, facilitators and Steering Committee members wanted to provide time for participants to think about what they had learned over the course of the summit and how these learnings could be used to support a healthy deer population.

Overall, the goals set forth by the steering committee were met, thanks to all who attended and contributed – not just their knowledge, but their willingness to hear and digest new information.

The Deer Summit would not have been possible without the financial contributions from the United States Department of Agriculture, The Nature Conservancy, and The Mule Deer Foundation. Additionally, many donations were put forth by local businesses and artists on POW. Steering Committee members and summit organizers greatly appreciate these gifts that were a part of daily raffles, which were a highlight of the event. Thank you to the following businesses and artists for their donations: Tyler Rental, Windy City Woodworks, Papa's Pizza, Strictly Local, Interisland Ferry Authority, Diamondtail Photography, Liberty Church, Church or Christ, Island to Island Pet Boutique, Alaska Echo, Whale Tail Pharmacy, Johanna Nelson, Craig Tribal Association Smoke Shop, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, Alaska Gifts, Klawock Alaskan Commercial Company, Islander Calls and Creations, Cambazam Art, and Log Cabin Sporting Goods.

The remainder of this summary report is organized by the deer summit sessions and the four identified factors impacting the POW deer population: habitat, predation, socio-cultural factors, and harvest & regulation. Under each factor are highlights from panelists' technical presentations, followed by broad themes gleaned from participant share-outs and discussions on the topic area. Attendee ideas for looking forward are included at the close of the report. Summit materials and additions from Steering Committee members are included in the appendix.

## SUMMIT CONTENT: PRESENTATIONS, QUESTIONS, AND DISCUSSION THEMES

### DEER SUMMIT DAY 1

Thursday October 13<sup>th</sup>,2022

The goal for day one of the deer summit was to ensure all participants had common understanding of the purpose and goals for the deer summit, and to cultivate buy-in to the dialogue agreements (see appendix).

The content shared by presenters and participants on day one was meant to ground us in the importance of deer, provide context of the past and present conditions of the deer population on Prince of Wales Island, and to share experiences and observations from the people of Prince of Wales regarding factors that have and will impact the deer population and deer hunters on island – now and into the future.

#### **SESSION: PAST PRESENT FUTURE**

Longtime residents of Prince of Wales present their observations and lead a discussion with other longtime and recent Prince of Wales residents on the past, present, and future outlook for deer harvests on the island. Plus, a brief overview of the tasks identified during the 2006 Unit II Deer Planning Process.

*Presenters: Mike Douville, Tlingit lifetime resident of Craig/POW Island; Don Hernandez, Point Baker Resident & 20-year Member of the Southeast Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, Present Chair; Michael Kampnich, POW Resident & Field Representative for The Nature Conservancy; Todd Brinkman, Wildlife Ecologist, University of Alaska Fairbanks.*

**Mike Douville** began, speaking to the profound change to the landscape he has witnessed over the last 75 years on Prince of Wales Island. Mike spoke of predation control measures in the 50s and 60s and the intact old growth forests that provided rich habitat and thus an abundance of deer for hunters.

He cautioned against continued human impact on the forest; whether that take the form of thinning measures, restoration, and/or logging. He assured that the forests know how to take care of themselves and we need to stop intervening and let them recover. With that, he also acknowledged that even if interventions halted immediately, a healthy and bountiful forest is not possible within our lifetime.

#### **Todd Brinkman:**

Todd spoke about the Unit II Deer Planning Process in 2004 and resulting report put out in 2006.

The planning process was prompted by households reporting not being able to get enough deer, beginning in the late 1990's to early 2000's.

- At the time, the issue manifested as a conflict between user groups: POW residents and off-island hunters. As well, hunters had begun to notice forest change: less forage and therefore more challenging access to the deer.
- The 2006 report delineated several recommendations, which Todd summarized:
  1. More research on the drivers of deer numbers: population, harvest trends, subsistence processes (didn't have to report harvest back then, this change came about as a result)

- 2. Minor adjustments to harvest management
- 3. Manage young growth for habitat (i.e. thinning, TWYGS, deer response to thinning)
- Outcome: management priorities through consensus process and implementation of research
- Viewed as a success for a while. Understanding of perspectives, strategy, etc.
- Nearly 20 years later we have come together again to address community concerns with the deer population and access to the deer population. What has changed?

**Don Hernandez:**

- Don brought into the room the need for hunters to adjust their expectations. It is not possible to lose as much habitat as we have and continue to have an abundance of deer.
- In addition to habitat loss, access has become more of an issue. Therefore, there is a decrease in habitat and a decrease in access to the remaining good deer habitat
- Reflection on the decades prior of putting in new roads and getting access to new deer habitat. We build new roads which lead to new hunting areas and new timber harvest areas. We never looked back to fix what we left behind, until now because we do not have enough deer
- Now we are having to confront the consequences of our decisions of the past several decades.

**Michael Kampnich:**

- Hunting on POW used to be a question of which deer you want vs. the question of whether you'll see one at all.
- These challenges were all foretold (by locals, researchers like John Schoen, and others) but most people didn't believe it because things (logging, deer populations, etc.) were so good at the time.
  - Michael reflected on how he was one of the people who ignored warnings from ecologists and how, now we are living exactly the consequences that were foretold.
- The last 7 or 8 years, it's been hard to find a deer.
- Hoping for broader awareness.
- Stem exclusion wasn't well acknowledged roughly 5 years ago but need to get there to know relationship between habitat and deer and in order to improve things
- Acknowledgement that we have made a mess of this place.

**Themes pulled from Small Table Discussions and Sharing Out to full Group**

- Significant change in the past 75 years
- There are compounding factors impacting the deer population and hunter access.
- People are challenged, saddened, and frustrated by what they are seeing.
- Hunters have had to change their tactics to find deer.
- Hunters are losing access, and are perceiving higher levels of competition for deer.
- Remembering Forward: Seeking the wisdom of our ancestors who lived in this place since time immemorial, for thousands of years. They lived in reciprocity with the environment, animals and plants.
- "Our land is crying."
- We need a different approach to land management. A paradigm shift will be required by land managers if we are to ensure a deer population in the future.
- We took so much for many decades from the natural environment and we never gave back
- There are short term and long-term solutions.

- The deer population has gone up and down over the decades. Even though we see this same trend the overall population is down
- Habitat loss has been so significant, we need to change our hunting expectations.
- We need more information on all predators, not just wolves but also black bears.
- People have a desire to do something, and to work together. Participants feel that the situation is at a point where action is required. What should be done?

### **SESSION: OPENING STATEMENTS**

#### ***Jim Baichtal, Sc.D. (Hon.): Alaska Regional Coordinator, Mule Deer Foundation***

Sitka black-tailed deer populations across much of Unit II are in decline because of Old growth habitat loss and Young Growth stands in stem exclusion. Competition and conflicts between man and predators for the remaining deer are increasing. Prince of Wales communities need to work with landowners and managers to develop effective management strategies and habitat improvements for deer.

- Severity of 2011 winter (Sophie Gilbert's documented fawn mortality) drove him to dig into relationship between climate drivers and deer populations, particularly the pacific decadal oscillation (20-30 year cycle)
- Other evidence: deer populations are still recovering on Kupreanof, Mitkof, and Kuiu after a deadly winter in 1972
- Black bears take a large percent (50%?) of fawns in the first two weeks of their lives
- Hair loss syndrome another emerging impact in southern Southeast AK
- Sophie Gilbert's research shows a continued decline in every scenario/projection
- Need to continue to develop precommercial thinning with benefits for habitat
- Use LiDAR and best available habitat mapping to show where treatments should be focused
- Healing and recovery for second growth will take lots of time
- Research can help identify prescriptions for restorations
- We are in a crisis.

### **DEER SUMMIT- DAY 2**

Thursday October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The goal for day two of the deer summit was to explore how habitat, predation, and socio-cultural factors impact the deer population and hunters' access to the deer population.

### **SESSION: HABITAT**

*Presenters: John Schoen, Bonnie Bennetson, Todd Brinkman, Michael Kamprich, Mike Sheets and Bret Foster*

#### ***John Schoen, Ph.D., Wildlife Ecologist, retired (ADF&G, Audubon Alaska)***

A description of forest change as a result of logging and its influence on deer habitat values. Deer are highly selective of the habitats they use seasonally and with varying winter snow accumulation. Providing a diversity of high-quality habitats will be essential for maintaining productive deer populations on Prince of Wales.

- Deer habitat use varies seasonally
  - Value of old growth habitat for deer, particularly in winter (snow interception)
  - And for light reaching the understory (light penetration)
  - Characteristics: shaggy, uneven, big-limbed canopy
  - Only 4" of snow accumulation results in forage (forbs and shrubs) beginning to become inaccessible
- Only 30% of the Tongass forest land base has productive old growth forest providing deer habitat
- High-grading of timber (example of Northern POW) contiguous large tree old growth in Northern POW study area was reduced in some areas by 94%
- All old growth is not the same: small tree old growth (low productivity) is not as beneficial habitat.
- Large tree old growth is the rarest habitat
- Tongass habitats are variable on a fine scale.
- Habitat is the driving force for deer cycling through the seasons, and their ability to survive harsh winters
- Predators can keep numbers from rebounding after a harsh winter
- Two critical elements for future deer management:
  - Conservation: Maintain unlogged watersheds (or watersheds with a lower % of harvest/YG) particularly ones with diversity of habitat (elevational, latitudinally, etc.) by restricting old growth harvest.
  - Restoration: combine where possible restoration for deer and restoration for salmon.

***Bonnie Bennetsen, Wildlife Program Manager, USFS, Tongass National Forest***

A presentation on the relationships between deer and management of young growth forest.

- Critical resource. 79% of rural households in SEAK rely on deer as a food source (likely higher on POW)
- Economic value
- Ecological value
- Endemic subspecies
- Population concerns
- Predator-prey relationships
- Habitat needs <--> forest management
- Habitat concerns:
  - Even aged timber harvest = >435,000 acres of young growth and 162,000 of those acres are in conservation areas (riparian, beach fringe, old growth reserve)
  - Young clear cuts don't provide any cover during heavy snows, are barriers to movement
  - Stem exclusion in older young growth = no forage
  - Slash from thinning, impacts connectivity and forage accessibility
- Objectives
  - Accelerate and promote development of old growth characteristics
  - Promote winter forage, fine and broad scale heterogeneity in YG
  - Retain landscape connectivity for deer
  - Retain and protect residual trees and patches.

- Treatments
  - Variable density thinning: 14x14 spacing for PCT with 50% variance
  - Small gap creation & tree release (center leave tree)
  - Pruning, girdling, slash mitigation
  - Unthinned corridors and patches
- Highlight of Tongass young growth Wildlife strategy, identifies criteria for where to focus
- Visuals on thinned (at age 20) vs unthinned in a 54 year old stand
- Benefits and science -- solid literature around restoration treatments and effects (cites number of studies that support the benefits)
  - Understory veg, vertical and horizontal structural diversity
  - Tree species diversity and composition
  - Large trees, large branches
  - Natural/historical growth rates
  - Large tree potential
  - Stand stability
  - Adaptive capacity and ecosystem resilience
- Additional science on influences on deer
  - Small gaps
  - Pre-Commercial Thinning
  - Commercial thinning
  - Slash (<5 inches DBH is ideal for promoting rapid deer use)
- Accomplishments with partners
  - 4,350 acres in 2022 to benefit deer
  - Improving knowledge (LiDAR, FRESH, snow and slash effects on forage accessibility, Tongass-Wide Young Growth Surveys (TWYGS) (currently commissioning a post-doc to look at slash after this 20 year remeasure mark)
- Opportunities
  - Capacity building for partnerships
  - Outreach/support

***Todd Brinkman, wildlife ecologist, University of Alaska Fairbanks; Michael Kampnich, POW Field Representative for The Nature Conservancy***

Changing relationships among habitat, deer numbers, and hunting opportunities: A 70-year case study on Prince of Wales – This presentation uses Staney Creek watershed as a case study to explore how logging, and the forest change that follows, have likely affected deer numbers and hunting opportunities over the last 70 years.

**Todd Brinkman:**

- Goal to explore how deer populations have changed in response to habitat from 1950's to 2022
- Staney Creek watershed – 10 mi<sup>2</sup> with Staney River cutting through it
- Key assumptions:
  - A healthy mixed forest = 10 deer/mi<sup>2</sup> (average and conservative estimate)
  - Different forest types support different deer densities (clearcut vs. old growth vs. muskeg, etc.)
  - Different forest types provide different deer hunting opportunities (i.e. PCT=bad)

- Habitat and deer number assumptions
  - High volume OG
    - Critical winter habitat
    - 14-16 deer/mi<sup>2</sup>
  - Clearcut
    - 12-14 deer/mi<sup>2</sup>
  - Young Growth (10-20 years)
    - Good but declining forage
    - 10-12 deer/mi<sup>2</sup>
    - Second Growth (>20 yrs)
    - Rapid decline in forage
    - 3-5 deer/mi<sup>2</sup>
  - Thinned forest
    - About the same as young growth
    - Returns to second growth after 15-20 years post thinning
    - 10-12 deer/mi<sup>2</sup>
- Ranked preferred habitat for deer hunting
  - Muskeg, clearcut, alpine = good
  - Old growth, beach shoreline = average
  - Young growth, second growth, thinned = poor
- Progression Through Slides
  - 1950's – life was good
  - 1960's – initial harvest, but maybe a boost from clearcuts for forage availability. Improved hunting access (roads), especially to previously inaccessible areas
  - 1970's – some clearcut transitioning to young growth (<20 yrs), but less useful to hunting (by ~yr 12, less accessible or desirable).
  - 1980's – deer numbers start to decline ~15% based on our assumptions
  - 1990's – young growth has transitioned to stem excluded 2nd growth. Some thinning taking place
  - 2000's – similar to the 1990s, however, conflict between on island and off island hunters become a resource management concern- these issues begin to highlight the resource scarcity issues beginning to materialize within the hunting population in regards to Unit 2 deer population.
  - 2020's – predominantly 2nd growth. Distance from road: bad habitats are changing right next to roads so our situation now is that 53% of the area has poor hunting access. 78% decline in critical winter habitat. Probably a ~38% decline in deer numbers.
  - Consequences: less deer than 70 years ago
  - Hunting is more challenging
  - Deer are more vulnerable
  - Deer are more vulnerable to predators as well, they're concentrating in remaining pockets. Not great data on this but, anecdotally, they may be focusing in on the patches of good deer habitat.
  - (Young growth can intercept some snow if it's a little at a time, but big snow loads can only be held back by old growth)
  - 75-100 years until high-volume old growth characteristics begin to return.

**Michael Kampnich:**

- Presentation captures trends well, varies across landscape, but tells the general story.
- Critical to recognize the 40% we've lost before predation is pretty devastating
- Still different opinions on stem exclusion and impact of poor young growth habitat (citing online statewide deer forums where POW residents are active). POW is big enough to hold all these effects, no doubt predators are driving declines on the outer islands where less logging has taken place, but that's tied to island biogeography.

***Mike Sheets, Tongass Young Growth Coordinator & Silviculturist, Tongass National Forest Supervisors Office; Bret Foster, Young Growth Forester and Biometrician, Tongass National Forest Supervisors Office***

A look at forest management on Prince of Wales Island with emphasis on the frequency and distribution of different forest stand structures.

- Overview of what state the forests are in and how that might change across the time
- Objectives:
  - Review which lands are managed by who
  - Understand natural stand development process
  - Summarize the distribution of old growth structure across all admin boundaries
  - Highlight existing young growth conditions within lands managed by USFS and review current forest plan direction
  - Review recent tech advances for land and resource mapping
- USFS manages 1.8 million acres on the island
- Young growth forest disturbance regimes on POW
  - The frequency size and type of disturbances help define current structure
- Stages of stand development
  - Stand initiation
  - Stem exclusion
  - Understory re-initiation stage
  - Old growth stage
- Silvicultural influences
  - Tongass is thinning about 60% of their previously harvested stands and losing ground over time
  - TWYGS in its 20th year and has validated some of the treatments
- Percent of USFS young growth
  - Stand initiation – 25%
  - Stem exclusion – 75%
  - Understory re-initiation – 1%
- 879,842 acres of productive old growth on POW (and surrounding islands) (regardless of land ownership)
- This represents about 38% of the island by area (not forested area) (regardless of land ownership)
- Recent advances in forest mapping:
  - High quality ortho-imagery from 2019
  - 2017 and 2018 LiDAR

- 2019 FUSION tree metric calculations (Conor's metrics) – how they're estimating old growth and young growth structure
- 2021 vegetation mapping
- The Tongass Forest Plan, SASS, and Future Forest Management on USFS lands
  - SASS: reviewed four key tenets of the SASS initiative. Clarified that old growth harvest limited to 5MMBF/year
  - Forest plan: LUDS where commercial young growth will not be allowed
  - If there is future timber management, many restrictions: TTRA, landslides/steep slopes, soils, karst, etc. which means 3/4 of lands are deemed unsuitable areas for USFS harvest.
  - 36,141 acres are unsuitable because they have the above regulations on them now
  - An estimated 437,511 acres are categorized as suitable for timber production on FS managed lands on POW.
- Co-intent areas:
  - Zones that allow limited commercial young growth harvest in areas normally off limits due to above restrictions, gives an opportunity to manage those areas or restore.
- Influence of the forest plan
  - 62,271 acres of young growth expected to return to old growth forest characteristics
  - 26,130 acres of co-intent
  - 36,141 acres of past harvest young growth in unsuitable areas.
- The 38% number of old growth is a new number derived from the LiDAR and the veg map

#### **Clarifying Questions for Presenters on Habitat:**

- I used to hunt Stanley Creek. I see less deer and an increase in grouse. Other prey food sources could be keeping predator populations stable even as deer decline.
- Are specific species selected for thinning?
- State of AK describes the old growth habitat (that has been described here as "high value") as low quality habitat.
  - FS: If you are looking at forage and cover in the winter then it should be considered high value.
- Need conservation areas on POW and outlying areas with and without cuts.
  - Some areas managed for old growth, also beach fringe, etc.
- FS talks about slash and PCT concerns but have also heard the need for restoration; how does restoration needs for wildlife habitat play into our plans for the future.
  - 12–15-year-old stand small height, will not be a long-term slash issue. An older stand (30 yr) will have larger slash volumes.
  - Slash issue determines that PCT window (15 out to 35 possibly, depending on productivity). Age of the stand is not definitive, depends on productivity and rate or growth.
  - Slash treatment doubles the cost, and it comes out over \$1000/acre. Full bucking would be up to \$2000/acre.
  - We've also had contractors walk off the job site because it's brutal work. Need to thin these stands when they're young in order to keep options open for future management.

## Themes Pulled from Focused Table Discussions and Full-Group Share-Outs, Habitat:

Dialogue Questions: What information and knowledge about habitat would you add from your personal observations and experiences? What is challenging, frustrating, or upsetting about the information shared by presenters and/or other participants about habitat?

- Frustration with land swaps (mental health/SOA)
- Landless Tribes interest in coming here from off-island. Pressure on POW to keep logging for mill and export.
- USFS numbers/estimates on remaining POLD GROWTH (38%) seem generous based on their rules (>9" DBH) because it doesn't FEEL like there is that much accessible old growth, particularly not large tree old growth.
- Voiced concerns about restoration:
  - Concluded that it's a very long-term solution to the current deer pop.
  - Benefits are overblown. One problem is opening the canopy and allowing snow to the ground, reducing winter range.
  - Opening canopy to snow loads leads to no benefit. Summer browse isn't the limiting factor for deer.
  - Skeptic of the sustainability of large-scale restoration; lots of cost involved.
    - Pulp companies made a large profit and taxpayers are footing the bill for the impacts.
    - Infrastructure is great but this scale of problem is going to require long-term funding. Future of timber industry is being talked about in other rooms in SEAK.
    - Second coming is going to revolve around second growth harvest and the "wall of wood". How that comes about is going to be extremely important.
    - We're talking about restoring habitat in this room, but when it comes down to doing it, the industry is going to try to influence how this happens. If industry starts driving the project, they can't afford to do it the way we want to see it done. If that starts happening, it's game over. If forest management is profit driven, we will lose the forest completely.
  - An example as to how nature restores itself much more effectively than humans can: hunting in a 300 year old slide that self-thinned and was same-aged.
    - If we think we can do a better job than nature, we cannot.
    - The best forest is one that can take care of itself.
    - Thinning is a giant experiment and we don't know what is going to happen.
    - Young growth is going to take many times more the acreage to get a similar volume.
- Climate projections and heavy snow and how that plays into the mix.
- Seasonal forage availability and quality is key to have through space and time for a deer population to persist.
  - Knowing and predicting where those nutritional resources are, should inform forest management.
- This is a very "political" forest – inconsistencies with the Forest Service, turnover in staff, changes in administration.
  - Frustrations with continuity of the forest service; turnover of staff on the island and administrative changes influence higher level/leadership.
- Large scale disturbances/natural disturbances being represented as similar to human created clearcuts, but that's inaccurate based on the science.

- The conditions are different. Natural disturbances leave remnants. We can use our proven techniques to help that process along to facilitate the return of larger trees.
- Looking at ecological system/communities versus habitat which is attached to one species. Always want to look at the large scale of landscape.
  - Climate change, what is that going to do in the future and where are we driving towards? What are the trees going to look like in the future? What species are doing well or not doing well?
- Frustrated that land managers for POW don't seem to be recognizing the things that we were just told (i.e. AK mental health trust and State Forestry): quality, how much is left, people's subsistence need. We've seen the concentration of the animals, squeezing into old growth areas and there's wolf sign in those areas that hasn't been seen much before.
- Since so much of this young growth is low-value habitat. Would it be the worst thing to have it be logged again and start over with a better management plan?
  - FS- A couple pieces to that: if we do reset a stand, no guarantee that when we get to the entry window there will be funding or incentive. Also, sometimes these older stands are just starting to push through, and you've made some progress in functioning condition. If you're already at 60 years, you might have 20 years to where you have understory re-initiation so better to hold on than to start over.
- Challenge of communication amongst groups and differing strategies/priorities.
  - Silos need to be broken down so we're not doing piecemeal work across the island.
- Frustration with complexity and term definition consistency. Need for federal, tribal, state coordination for coordination for corridors. And a need for a more holistic approach, going from pre-commercial thinning to resource thinning...there's more than wood here.
- The priorities are different from one administration to the next- political shifts lead to local victims.
- Lots of terms used that are not universal nor interchangeable between land managers
- The state and the federal government classify their forests differently
- Need a map that shows all of POW's forest stands and their condition
- Different definitions between young growth and second growth
- By thinning, you're making the little habitat there even worse when you put slash on the ground.
- Different types of old growth have different benefits for deer
  - Logging targeted the most valuable forest habitat
- Without intervention- restoration, thinning- the forest will take an extremely long time to return to old growth
  - Acknowledgement that restoration is a long-term solution. The benefits for deer will take years.
- It is unfair that local people have to pay for the consequences of land management decisions based on commercial priorities

## **SESSION: PREDATION**

*Presenters: Sophie Gilbert, Ross Dorendorf, Sarah Markegard*

***Sophie Gilbert, Ph.D. Senior Lead, Natural Capital Development, the Natural Capital Exchange (NCX)***

An overview of the major causes of mortality for GPS/radio-collared deer from two different studies on Prince of Wales, including adult males, adult females, and fawns, as well as how these data are collected and analyzed to produce our estimates.

- Declines in total deer harvested (ADFG stats) and number of hunters have declined
- Deer critically important and can be thought of as the center of the food web here
- Widespread habitat alteration – can't talk about predation without understanding the system
- 31% of POLD GROWTH harvested on POW
- Image of forest succession and snow as opposing triangles...
- Continuing declines in deer habitat capacity are inevitable under all current management options. We need radical, large-scale restoration to change this. (Gilbert et al. graph)
- Methods: dart, tranquilize, collar, age by teeth, body measurements, ultrasound for fat and pregnancy, vaginal implant transmitter.
- 60 adult females, x fawns
- Tracked some migrations and showed some mostly localized movements
- Neonate survival is first 9 days. Many die in summer, sometimes over 50%
- Most of the mortality is black bear, really dominates. Would those fawns have died anyway? Depends if they were eating lightweight or larger fawns. If the fawn was lightweight, might have died anyway.
- Winter survival also challenging during deep snow winters. 2011 was a deep snow winter, survival was really low. Many deaths in later born fawns. Primary cause of death was malnutrition.
- Wolf predation was low, but also during a time when wolf populations were low.
- Bucks are harder to understand, their collars don't stay on for a full year because they get harvested. Males die a lot more.
- Snow is going to drive deer population dynamics less. Food and predation will.
- Predation and habitat are related. Animals being killed by a predator, but that animal might have died due to nutritional deficiencies anyway. "Compensatory mortality". These animals might be coming up against a population cap. Hard to detangle the relationship.
- Restoring the deer and their "salad bowl":
  - Nutrition will determine the bar above which deer numbers cannot climb.
  - Time to think about radical restoration. Less of a zero sum game. (don't want to define this for people on POW, but the sheer volume of acres is a huge habitat issue. PCT is fine, but more specialized treatments that are shaped around wildlife needs would have wider ranging and more persistent benefits.
  - Predation and snow determine how far below that declining bar deer will go

**Ross Dorendorf, Area Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation**

Wolf Diet: Wolves in southeast Alaska primarily prey on deer but wolves are able to survive on a large variety of prey. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game collected 860 wolf scats from 2010–2018 to assess southeast Alaska wolf diets. The results show that wolves prey on a large variety of species and are highly adaptable to prey availability.

- Recent publication by Gretchen "metabarcoding of fecal DNA shows dietary diversification in wolves substitutes for ungulates in an island archipelago" in other words, what do wolves eat if ungulates aren't present.

- Previous info said ungulates are a really important species for wolf survival. Moose and goats are more difficult, deer are easier. But what if they're in decline?
- Other species might be another source of food: bears, beavers, salmon
- Info sought after by the department to improve understanding for listing. It was a hole of knowledge, what do they survive on other than deer? How do wolves adapt to different geographical situations across SEAK or other prey sources? AKA how resilient is the wolf?
- Metabarcoding is DNA of wolf scat to determine what they're eating.
- Study area is spread across SE and was collected from 2010 to 2018, with 12 sites. 860 scats genotyped.
- What did they eat? 55 species detected. Beaver were the 2nd most important species.
- BIG finding: when wolves have fewer ungulates, they switch to many different species. They have a lot of each species in their diet. Very plastic and can mold to the situation they're given.
- On islands, the wolves eat mostly deer. On mainland, they eat more moose and goats. POW scats had greatest diversity of species in their scats.
- Pleasant island: rely heavily on marine food sources. They stay out there even with no deer. Eating all kinds of stuff: sea otters, barnacles, etc.
- Can these wolves maintain this long-term or is this opportunistic? It has lasted for quite some time and they are adapting for generations.

***Sarah Markegard, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Anchorage Field Office***

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was petitioned to list the Alexander Archipelago wolf as a threatened or endangered subspecies under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2020. This presentation provides a summary of the ESA listing determination process as well as the Species Status Assessment (SSA) which is being developed to inform the USFWS listing decision. The goal of this presentation is to shed light on a complex process that will ultimately determine whether protections are warranted for one of the primary predators of black-tailed deer within the Prince of Wales Island Complex and across much of Southeast Alaska and coastal British Columbia.

- Presenting on species status assessment in response to listing petition
- Determination timeline: July 2020 petition received, July 2021 kicked off the species status assessment which is ongoing since Jan.
- SSA purpose: summarize the status of the species. An analytical framework. Compiles best available info. Informs decisions and management activities. Does not make a determination of regulatory status. It's a tool to inform the decision.
- SSA assumes AA wolf is subspecies of the gray wolf. Includes all islands from Yakutat to southern BC, except ABC islands and Haida Gwaii.
- SSA describes needs of species, threats, current condition, and future conditions.
- Also describes uncertainties and knowledge gaps:
  - Cultural significance
  - Info from BC and outside POW in SE AK
  - Population health
    - Reproduction
    - Survival and mortality
    - Abundance
  - Wolf movement across landscape. How they disperse between habitats and preferences.

- SSA info gathering included a TEK study, contracted with social scientists, Sealaska, and someone else to conduct interviews. Also tribal consultations and a lit review of cultural significance.
- TEK study:
  - 9 interviews: Yakutat, Kake, Craig, southern part, Excursion Inlet. Dennis helped on the island
  - Primary insights: wolf health and abundance, territories, travel circuits, denning behavior, habitat use and prey, wolf pack characteristics.
  - Relationships, worldviews, and science
  - Balance: subsistence priority and motivation to manage wolves.
  - Local experts and abundance estimates.
  - Recommendations: extend and expand this study (only 4-5 months), invest more time and funds on Indigenous knowledge, coproduce future research with local experts.

***Ross Dorendorf, Area Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation***

Black bear and wolf harvest and regulations: Black bears and wolves are popular species to hunt and trap in Game Management Unit II. This presentation focuses on understanding regulations, how regulations influence harvest of black bear and wolves in Game Management Unit II.

- Overview of black bear and wolf harvest and regulations
- The regulations are confusing and can change quite quickly

**Clarifying Question to Presenters on Predation:**

- When the estimate of population is high, why are you shutting the season down early? One month instead of four last year after claiming it would be a full season.
  - F&G: the language is left intentionally open ended to say "up to" four months.
  - F&G: We are seeing evidence of inbreeding, so managing conservatively as they're learning more about the population's genetic structure. The department is researching the genetic flow between unit II and surrounding units. That mixing is key to maintaining a genetically diverse population.
  - January 20-24 in Ketchikan will be board of game meeting, open for public comment.
- Why is there such a focus on unit II? We need more information about the AA wolf from around the region?

**Themes Pulled from Focused Table Discussions and Full-Group Share-Outs, Predation:**

What information and knowledge about predation would you like to add from your personal observations and experience? What is challenging, frustrating, or upsetting about the information shared by presenters and/or other participants about predation?

- Testimony about wolves close to homes near the Klawock airport
- Differing views on the extent to which predator control would help the deer population
- Grappling with the thought of a day and a half of habitat challenges and then we talk about listing the wolves and these seem like a double whammy for deer.
- Federal government's relationship to consult with tribes and ANCs, but there should be other ways we support Native people.

- Workforce development, capacity building, etc. to help address some of the challenges with a greater number of people
- Concern around technology of collaring, what about improving technology and coverage for manage: using chips instead.
- Two points of engagement for this topic: board of game comments AND public comments for the listing decision (next summer)
- Compensatory Mortality: nutrition is putting a cap on how many deer
- Predators include black bear. We need more information on black bears
- Need effective predator management and control
  - If wolf population goes unchecked, than this will have a huge impact on the remaining deer population
- We need to work together to ensure the wolf does not get listed.

## **SESSION: SOCIAL-CULTURAL FACTORS**

*Participants share the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that impact the deer population.*

Local residents have the opportunity to share their observations and lived experience on how these factors impact the deer population and their access to deer on POW, historically and today.

**The following list of socio, cultural, economic and political factors was generated by the participants of the Deer Summit.**

### **Economic Factors:**

- Economic pressure to continue with extraction practices/culture
- With more economic hardship more people are poaching, and more people will take does
- Cost of fuel
- Living a subsistence lifestyle requires a lot of time. Working fulltime is a significant barrier to having the time that is required now to get enough deer for the freezer
- We do not pay people to proxy hunt

### **Cultural Factors:**

- Acceptance of Doe Season
- Need to continue and increase our education on the value of old growth to wildlife
- Need to continue to and increase our education on customary practices and reciprocity with the environment that are central values to Lingit, Tismsian, and Haidi way of life
- Increase in competition from other hunters
- Need to bolster activities that focus on passing on our way of life that has been since time immemorial on POW
- Need to educate people on why poaching is bad
- Need to better understand why people are poaching and target the factors that are causing people to poach
- Entitlement to harvest deer easily off the road
  - Need to shift our expectations

- Loss of way of life
- We need a paradigm shift: need to take a longer term view of resource management and ensure long term, multi-generational sustainability

**Societal Factors (this category also captures factors influencing individuals and/or their community):**

- Road Closures on FS lands
- Work full or semi time that does not allow me time to harvest
- Increase in competition from other hunters
- Have had to change my tactics to access deer
- Personal health in decline
- Food Security issues
- People are seeing different things and success is varying/inconsistent
- Very little trust between all of the entities and individuals that play a role in ensuring a healthy deer population
- Very little trust with the State. The State and Feds continues to ignore our traditional, and local expert observations.
- We are not organized in a way to truly influence state and federal managers nor green groups from east coast.
- Need to organize ourselves to change management of deer, wildlife, forests, animals
- Off island hunters (though with increasing costs to get to POW, this factor may have resolved itself).
- People who claim POW residency but actually do not live here
- Hunting pressure from the roads combined with the wolves using the roads to travel push the deer to less accessible places.
- Definition of rural resident to qualify for subsistence user- many people do not live here through the year. They are only here seasonally and qualify as subsistence harvester
- Elderly hunting population. Need to teach young generations how to hunt and the cultural importance of providing for elders.
- It is traditional practice not to take does
- Need to somehow get young people financial incentive to hunt for families and community elders
  - It takes a lot of time to hunt and young people (proxy hunters) need to be compensated somehow because it means they are not working
- Illegal harvest/poaching
  - We actually have no idea how many deer are taken each year. The number is much larger but we do not take that into consideration
  - We need to manage deer as a conservation concern
- We do not focus on climate change factors and hair loss syndrome

**Political Factors:**

- Logging legacy
- Ongoing logging
- Pendulum swings between administrations
- Road closures and access issues
- Land management is all about extraction.
- Need to have co-management with Tribal entities.

- The control and decision making power in the hands of state and federal agencies is resulting in a significant imbalance
- It seems impossible to influence state and federal managers and administrations.
  - We are not organized in a way to truly influence
- Need to take a longer term view of resource management and ensure long term – multi generation- sustainability
- Politics rule resource management that is why we have unsustainable
  - Forest management
  - Predator management
  - Habitat management
  - Wildlife management
- Need public meeting on deer harvest and wolf/bear harvest
- Internal agency decisions

### DEER SUMMIT- DAY 3

Thursday October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The goals for day three of the deer summit were to explore how harvest and regulation factors impact the deer population and hunter's access to the deer population, learn about the various forest stands on Prince of Wales and how they impact deer by walking the Harris River Trail, and discuss what was learned during the deer summit in regards to supporting a health deer population and hunter's access to the deer.

#### **SESSION: HARVEST & REGULATION**

*Presenters: Robert Cross, Tessa Hasbrouck*

#### **Robert Cross, Tongass Subsistence Coordinator, U.S. Forest Service**

A summary of the Unit II Federal Subsistence deer harvest and regulations.

- Subsistence eligibility requirements
- State regs vs. federal regs
- They track permits issued. About 280 deer harvested by ~100 permits annually in SEAK under subsistence permit
- Perception of people going out and shooting hundreds of deer on POW using these permits, but that's not the reality. ~38 per year on island and only about 28 does since 2013.
- 8 member federal subsistence board-- Entity that manages the take of fish and wildlife subsistence resources on public lands.
  - Made up of regional directors of the 5 federal agencies in AK
  - 2 public members
  - Board chair, also public member
- Process for making changes to federal regulations
  - Wildlife on odd years
  - Fish on even years

**Tessa Hasbrouck, Assistant Area Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game**

An overview of Unit II state hunting regulations and how to change them, plus a Unit II deer harvest summary from 1997 to now.

- State hunting regulations for resident vs non-resident
- Harvest reporting methods
- Reporting rate for POW (after follow ups) was close to 70%
- Deer harvest
  - 1980-now
    - Deer harvest data collection has changed over time. Higher quality harvest data since 2011
    - Interesting that the highest number of deer per hunter was in 2011 (1.7 deer) when the harsh winter and deer mortality was recorded by Sophie Gilbert/Jim Baichtal
    - Over half of the deer harvest on POW takes place in November
  - 2012-now
    - By game management units, highest in ABC islands (unit 4), then unit 2 (POW), lowest is Juneau (1C)
    - Annual declines in deer harvest have occurred since 2015.
    - 50% of the harvest occurs on 20% of the available land (looks like central POW)
- How to change regulations
  - AK board of game: 7 member board, meeting on a 3 year cycle.
  - Current cycle: proposals were submitted march 2022. Written public comments due Jan 6. Meeting Jan 2023
  - POW has 3 ACs: Craig, East POW, Klawock

**Clarifying Question to Presenters on Harvest & Regulation:**

- The complexities and nuances between state and federal regulations.
- Questions around hunting from a boat.

**Themes pulled from Focused Table Discussions and Full-Group Share-Outs, Harvest & Regulation**

- People are looking for ways to have agency in what is happening; to influence decision-making
- Improved communication and outreach around opportunities to impact changes in regulations, calls for proposals
- Need clarity around the process for making changes to federal regulations
- The way data is being collected has changed over time
- Differing perspectives on interventions:
  - We need thoughtful, cleaner logging that is sustainable
  - Others said we need to stop cutting old growth completely – stop overseas exports
  - Restoration with the primary intention of improving habitat – not for commercial use
- Wolf numbers do not seem accurate based on what folks are seeing, We need more accuracy.
- We need to work together as a community
- I see a different, big picture after hearing all the information shared
- Agencies need to work with local experts and seek local knowledge around wolf management
  - Need to work with tribes to make good, applicable management decisions

- “Listen to locals who have been here.”
- Locals may not be able to share quantitative data, but they can intrinsically feel the imbalance
- Instead of numbers, they can back it up with memories and experiences
- Need to foster trust between the agencies
- Forest Service needs to change habitat management to center what is best for people and animals, and then maintain that approach with changes in administration and staff turnover
- Regulation and management feels really challenging from all sides.

## **SESSION: FIELD TRIP**

Harris River Trail: A walk through multiple second growth treatments with discussion about the impact of different habitat treatments on deer movement and foraging. Multiple speakers will cover how second growth is viewed from the deer's perspective and how wildlife thinning projects can improve habitat for deer more effectively.

***Julia Nave, Interim SE Alaska Program, Co-Director & Conservation Forester, The Nature Conservancy; Steve Belinda, Chief Conservation Officer, Mule Deer Foundation; Jim Baichtal, Sc.D. (Hon.), Mule Deer Foundation Alaska Regional Coordinator; Sean Harkins, Wildlife Biologist, US Forest Service; Dr. Kristina Harkins, POW Resident, Logistics Coordinator – Deer Summit***

## **SESSION: LOOKING FORWARD**

Dialogue Questions asked during the session on Looking Forward:

1. Considering all the info shared what could be done to support a healthy deer population and access to the deer population on POW?
2. What are the unintended consequences of the ideas we've come up with to support a healthy deer population?

**The following are lists of ideas generated by participants during this session that have been organized by thematic categories.**

### **Improve Understanding**

- What will be the impact of an Endangered Species listing for the wolf on the people of Prince Of Wales Island and Unit 2
- USFWS could draft up a memo that states the potential ramifications for a Endangered Species listing, including if the settle on a conditional listing
- Continue to education people on winter habitat importance
- Hair loss disease
- Malnutrition
- Better information on how deer are responding to restoration areas
- Think about what else we can make healthier, along with the deer
- Active education and outreach and dialogue on progress beings made

- Continued education and outreach on factors impacting the deer population and access to the deer population
- Inclusivity and broadening the conversation to reach more audiences
- Better understanding of deer disease uncertainties and their effects on population dynamics
- Need to continue wolf conversations
- Need to understand DOF and MHT forest management practices
- Improved Understanding of how to Influence Land Management decisions
- Need to understand land swaps taking place between the state and feds
- 804 of ANILCA

### **Paradigm Shift of Land and Wildlife Management**

- The FS must change their Management to what is best plan for habitat, fish, wildlife, and biodiversity and not commercial timber harvest.
- The plan for management of FS lands needs to stay consistent between administrations.
- A focus on healthy biodiverse ecosystems and what that would look like.
- Acceptance of co-existence will all critters and acknowledgement of the importance of predator prey relationships towards sustaining healthy ecosystems.
- A building of trust between agencies and communities to believe in the science and TEK to work on Future strategies and eventually become successful to reaching shared goals
- Don't focus solely on deer
- Incorporate more slash removal and clean logging practices
- No more old growth harvest: no small scales, microscales, no free use, for all landowners
- Leave pipes and bridges in after logging for increased access to deer, as well as firewood and berry picking and fish
  - Focus on wildlife values at core of restoration [rather than singularly focusing on timber values during PCT
  - Trust local people and their concerns/observations of imbalance between wolves/predators and deer, even if it doesn't always match up with what the data is saying
- Have Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Local Expert Knowledge lead the science and research
  - No more old growth logging or overseas export
  - Need for a paradigm shift. We all play a part and need to start thinking differently

### **Wolf Management**

- Develop a better more accurate wolf harvest tracking system. The old system with short reporting periods was more ideal.
  - Strategic wolf management
  - Continue to work with local experts on rational wolf management strategy
- People were assured the harvest would not go over
- The trappers won't be subjected to a derby style trapping season so it will be safer for them
- Need a rational wolf management strategy that incorporates local knowledge and participation
- Predation control – both wolf and deer- needs to be understood and encouraged. If the wolf population goes up there will be no more deer. I
- Strategic wolf management
- Set the wolf harvest at a historic sustainable level and not fluctuating

- Introduce new wolf stock for genetic diversity [in order to minimize inbreeding and likelihood of ESA listing]
- Improve on wolf numbers; offers to assist with data collection. More public engagement around data collection
- No more ESA petitions [for wolves]
- Transparency- explain the how and why behind decision making
- Increased effort on wolf research to establish accurate population and genetic health data
- Ensure the wolf is not listed under an ESA to retain ability to locally manage predator populations
- Share Trooper Ryan's info about the decoys and the difference between wolf poaching and deer poaching
- Promote wolf public relations in Unit 2 so we have a better image of our wolf trappers.
- Find a balanced population objective of the wolf that allows deer, humans, black bears to co-exist
- Ensure we think about the unintended consequences of our actions

### **Forest Management**

- No more old growth logging
- Maintain all old growth forests
- Moratorium on cutting any old growth forests left
- Habitat restoration for wildlife
- Leave pipes and bridges in to get to woods and berries
- Promote thinning projects
- Assist with wildlife studies
- Restoration should occur focused on high subsistence use areas with the primary intent to improve habitat
- Sealaska needs to be a part of the restoration discussion, since they have harvested big swaths of its land too
- Restoration in conjunction with future young growth harvest to reopen road infrastructure across the island
- Make timber sales improve habitat
- Consider hunter access projects
- Slash-free thinning; extract some materials and maybe even use them for other purposes (e.g. biomass)
- Cleaner logging practices for better natural regeneration and deer/wildlife mobility
- Opportunities with biomass from slash and from timber harvest residuals might help make restoration economical
- Make restoration a bigger priority [within the agencies]
- Leave pipes and bridges on roads for a period of time after logging to benefit hunting access
- Restoration should be focused on areas of subsistence importance
- Transparency- explain the how and why behind decision making
- Ensure we think about the unintended consequences of our actions

### **Habitat**

- Ensure/Protect winter habitat
- Connectivity in winter habitat areas

- Retain all remaining quality winter deer habitat
- Radical habitat restoration is needed
- Restoration objectives that are big enough opportunities to attract meaningful employment and business
- Require all thinning contracts to manage slash for improved deer success and forage
- Can habitat restoration be aligned in a way that allows for a commercial recovery of a product?
- Summer habitat restoration
- Slash removal in thinning units and important wildlife habitat
- Restore corridors between elevations
- Implement tested regrowth practices on a large island-wide scale
- Target habitat restoration on areas that are important to deer and that hunters use or have access points too
  - Restoration should be focused on areas of subsistence importance
- Ensure we think about the unintended consequences of our actions

### Harvest and Regulation

- More accurate harvest reporting
- Get some idea of the number of deer taken by poachers
- Align state and federal regulations
- Consider reducing/modifying bag limits, season, eligibility of hunters
- Improve and increase population estimates studies to refine management
- Better data on the harvest of DEER and does and better data on the harvest of wolves
- Agencies should continue to use the best data and TEK to make informed decisions that promote deer conservation and ensure subsistence use rights
- Maintain sustainable harvest of deer predators
- All ideas were suggested – **until the deer population rebounds:**
- Eliminate doe season until population rebounds
- Reduce season length
- Reduce the bag limit on all hunters
- Boost law enforcement to curtail poaching
- Lower the number of deer that everyone can shoot
- Decrease the length of the season
- Restrict hunting to forked horns or bigger
  - Eliminate doe season or
  - reduce bag limit or season
- Make near term adjustments to cover time needed to address habitat concerns
- Transparency- explain the how and why behind decision making
- Limit out of state hunters who have no family connection to POW
- Consider deer a conservation concern and take steps to limit take from non local residents
- Ensure we think about the unintended consequences of our actions

### Predation

- Better understanding of how predations is impacting the deer population
  - Predation has a role but seems to be more limited than we understand
  - For example- would the deer killed by predation have otherwise died of malnutrition.
- Better understanding of black bear mortality

- Big wolf harvests is a short term solution and is dangerous given the potential for the wolf to be listed.
- Unintended consequences of predator control could be a boom in deer population and hair loss disease
- Introduce wolves from outside Archipelago to ensure inbreeding does not result in an ES listing
- Better understand black bear predation on fawns
  - Since there is still enough habitat to sustain enough deer to keep everyone mostly supplied and predators are the most major year to year impactors we need more awareness and ability to keep a stable predator population in balance with available deer populations
- Promote wolf public relations in Unit 2 so we have a better image of our wolf trappers.
- Need to understand black bear impact on fawns and how that impacts deer population

### **Improvement in Data and Data Needs**

- Better data reporting for all species
- Population numbers reflect and account for all mortality factors
- Better data on road kills
- Better data on poaching
- Better data on doe kills
- Better deer census methods
- Locals need to assist with wolf studies to get better data
- Have more accurate info on all the different areas of unit 2
- Trust lifetime locals to help advise fish and game on more realistic numbers for predators.
- Continue to improve data gathering on hunter success utilizing local tribes
- Support Wolf population studies
- More research and data specific to how deer use the landscape
- Body condition of deer
- Wolf data
- Agencies need to document road kill numbers
- Need to monitor, need to track success of various restoration techniques
- Further study on the predator – prey relationships between black bear/wolves and deer followed by adaptive management of these 3 species
  - Improve deer numbers and data by considering roadkill and getting better handle on poaching numbers
- We need better systems for capturing and documenting TEK and local long term resident knowledge

### **Building Social Networks**

- What can we do to keep the interests of this group moving forward?
  - Coordinated effort needed around deer habitat (across land managers)
- Work together as a community to improve conditions and contribute more to information and data that is need by mangers
- Transparency – explain the how and why behind decision making
- Public outreach and education by land and wildlife managers
- Indigenous leadership and involvement
- Better collaboration with Agency land managers and land owners

- Learn from our mistakes
- Active education and outreach and dialogue on progress beings made
- Continue to leverage partnerships and communicate across stakeholder groups to sustain and enhance these efforts
- Encourage locals to report harvest of deer, black bear and wolves
- Discourage illegal take
- What can we do to help the FS and Native Corps in addressing habitat loss
- Community engagement to increase deer harvest report quality
- Joint committees to get multiple organizations on same page
- We need to figure out a ways to bring much more TEK into decision making processes
- Continue to education each other on expectations of deer harvest
- Inform people on areas of highest deer harvest and promote hunting in other areas
- Continue to educate people on why poaching isn't okay
  - Work together as a community -- happy with less fighting at this event
- Communities have to work together

– END –

# APPENDIX

## **A. Summit Materials:**

1. Summit Dialogue Agreements
2. About the Deer Summit
3. Summit Planning Process / Background
4. Summit Agenda
5. COVID Acknowledgement

# 2022 DEER SUMMIT

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PRINCE OF WALES ISLAND | ALASKA | UNIT II

Photo by Kris Larson



CRAIG TRIBAL HALL | October 13-15, 2022  
1330 CRAIG-KLAWOCK HIGHWAY, CRIAG, PRINCE OF WALES ISLAND

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# About

## SUMMIT GOALS

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- To bring together community members, hunters, researchers, and land and wildlife managers to learn more about factors that influence deer populations on Prince of Wales Island.
- To improve understanding to support the long-term health of the deer population.

### WHAT THIS SUMMIT IS NOT:

- ✗ Creating an island-wide or Unit II strategy.

## SUMMIT PRIORITIES

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- Support information exchange from local experience and perspectives
- Increase understanding of the interconnected factors at play
- Increase understanding of the complexity of the issue
- Ensure it is locally grounded
- Recognize a shared goal to support long-term healthy and abundant deer population

## STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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- Alaska Department of Fish and Game - Ross Dorendorf, Tessa Hasbrouck
- Natural Resources Conservation Service/USDA - Samia Savell, Chris Tcimpidis
- Prince of Wales Tribal Conservation District - Dennis Nickerson
- Southeast Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Committee - Don Hernandez
- The Nature Conservancy - Julia Nave, Christine Woll (through June 2022)
- University Alaska Fairbanks - Todd Brinkman
- Unaffiliated Prince of Wales Island residents - Michael Kampnich
- Southeast Alaska Conservation Council - Maranda Hamme
- US Forest Service - Mark Penticost, Sean Harkins

FACILITATORS: Sustainable Solutions - Jess Kayser Forster, Mandy Park

LOGISTICS COORDINATOR: Kristina Harkins | EVENT SUPPORT: Maranda Hamme

# Planning Process & Background

Over the last several years on Prince of Wales Island, local observations and experience indicate a decrease in the deer population and/or a decrease in the ability to access deer. In 2020, a steering committee came together, made up of individuals and entities that are invested in ensuring a healthy deer population on Prince of Wales.

The purpose of their coming together was to plan an event on Prince of Wales that would give participants the opportunity to discuss some of the factors that impact the deer population on Prince of Wales Island, and to share their information, experience and observations as they relate to the deer population. The goal of the summit is to improve understanding in order to support the long-term health of the deer population.

Over the course of two years, the steering committee met to discuss what content, format, agenda, presenters, and logistics would best support this goal. Since December of 2020, Deer Summit facilitators - Jess Kayser Forster and Mandy Park - have been supporting the steering committee in planning for the event and navigating COVID pandemic considerations.

In March of 2022, the facilitators distributed a pre-summit needs assessment throughout Prince of Wales to identify issues most important to Prince of Wales locals that the 2022 Deer Summit could address. The needs assessment also provided facilitators with some preliminary knowledge about what Prince of Wales locals are observing and experiencing around the island's deer population.

The combination of the steering committee meetings and the collective input via the needs assessment gave critical context to the format and content of this Deer Summit.

# Dialogue Agreements

## **In Every Chair, A Leader**

Each person engaging in this conversation has a unique and valuable experience that is their truth.

## **Speak with Care for Others**

We each hold the responsibility to choose our words and questions carefully with the intent to learn.

## **Value Each Other's Time**

We all share the responsibility to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and engage.

## **Listen Deeply**

This is a rare and valuable opportunity to connect with others through the sharing of life experience.

## **Be Present and Engaged**

Cellphone ringers off, be mindful of being fully present and listening.

## **Agree to Disagree**

Hearing differing perspectives and experiences without needing to argue.

## **Our Value of Humor**

Laughing is also an important way to relate with one another.

## **Safe Space for Meaningful Conversation**

All notes taken are non-attribution to ensure anonymity of all dialogue participants.

## **Take Care of Yourself, Take Care of Each Other**

Note restrooms, exits, other amenities.  
Help one another when possible.

## **Concerns?**

Speak with Deer Summit Coordinators, Facilitators, or Steering Committee Members.

Dialog agreements were inspired by the First Alaskans Institute  
© First Alaskans Institute, "Alaska Native Dialogues on Racial Equity" Project

# Agenda

## DAY I – Thursday, October 13

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3:00-3:10pm

### WELCOME

Craig Tribal Association welcomes summit participants, presenters, steering committee members, and facilitators into the Craig Tribal Hall space.

3:10-3:50pm

### INTRODUCTIONS

Facilitators, Steering Committee Members, and Summit Attendees will have the opportunity to introduce themselves.

*Jess Kayser Forster, Facilitator, Sustainable Solutions; Mandy Park, Facilitator, Sustainable Solutions; Deer Summit Steering Committee Members, various; Summit Participants, various*

3:50-4:30pm

### GROUND SETTING

Facilitators walk through purpose, goals, and agenda of the Deer Summit. Attendees learn about and agree to the Dialogue Agreements. Attendees are grounded in the importance of deer on Prince of Wales Island.

*Facilitators*

4:30-5:45pm

### PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Longtime residents of Prince of Wales present their observations and lead a discussion with other longtime and recent Prince of Wales residents on the past, present, and future outlook for deer harvests on the island. Plus, a brief overview of the tasks identified during the 2006 Unit II Deer Planning Process.

*Mike Douville, Tlingit lifetime resident of Craig/POW Island; Don Hernandez, Point Baker Resident & 20-year Member of the Southeast Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, Present Chair; Michael Kampnich, POW Resident & Field Representative for The Nature Conservancy; Todd Brinkman, Wildlife Ecologist, University of Alaska Fairbanks.*

5:45-6:15pm

**OPENING STATEMENTS**

Sitka black-tailed deer populations across much of Unit II are in decline because of Old Growth habitat loss and Young Growth stands in stem exclusion. Competition and conflicts between man and predators for the remaining deer are increasing. Prince of Wales communities need to work with landowners and managers to develop effective management strategies and habitat improvements for deer.

*Jim Baichtal, Sc.D. (Hon.): Alaska Regional Coordinator, Mule Deer Foundation*

6:30-9:00pm

**COMMUNITY DINNER**

Members of the Prince of Wales community and share a meal and celebrate deer.

## DAY II – Friday, October 14

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8:30-9:00am

*Coffee, tea, light breakfast snacks.*

9:00-9:30am

**DAY II OVERVIEW**

Recap of Day I, overview of Day II.

*Facilitators*

9:30-12:00pm

**HABITAT**

9:30-10:45am

**Presentations on how habitat impacts the deer on Prince of Wales.**

A description of forest change as a result of logging and its influence on deer habitat values. Deer are highly selective of the habitats they use seasonally and with varying winter snow accumulation. Providing a diversity of high-quality habitats will be essential for maintaining productive deer populations on Prince of Wales.

*John Schoen, Ph.D., Wildlife Ecologist, retired (ADF&G, Audubon Alaska)*

A presentation on the relationships between deer and management of young growth forest.

*Bonnie Bennetsen, Wildlife Program Manager, USFS, Tongass National Forest*

Changing relationships among habitat, deer numbers, and hunting opportunities: A 70-year case study on Prince of Wales - This presentation uses Staney Creek watershed as a case study to explore how logging, and the forest change that follows, have likely affected deer numbers and hunting opportunities over the last 70 years.

*Todd Brinkman, wildlife ecologist, University of Alaska Fairbanks; Michael Kampnich, POW Field Representative for The Nature Conservancy*

10:45-11:05am

**Forest Management, Tongass National Forest**

A look at forest management on Prince of Wales Island with emphasis on the frequency and distribution of different forest stand structures.

*Mike Sheets, Tongass Young Growth Coordinator & Silviculturist, Tongass National Forest Supervisors Office; Bret Foster, Young Growth Forester and Biometrician, Tongass National Forest Supervisors Office*

11:05-12:00pm

**Participant Experience & Observations**

A group discussion on how habitat impacts the deer population and/or access to the deer population on Prince of Wales.

12:00-1:00pm

**LUNCH**

1:00-3:30pm

**PREDATION**

1:00-2:30pm

**Presentations on how predation impacts the deer on Prince of Wales**

An overview of the major causes of mortality for GPS/radio-collared deer from two different studies on Prince of Wales, including adult males, adult females, and fawns, as well as how these data are collected and analyzed to produce our estimates.

*Sophie Gilbert, Ph.D. Senior Lead, Natural Capital Development, the Natural Capital Exchange (NCX)*

Wolf Diet: Wolves in southeast Alaska primarily prey on deer but wolves are able to survive on a large variety of prey. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game collected 860 wolf scats from 2010-2018 to assess southeast Alaska wolf diets. The results show that wolves prey on a large variety of species and are highly adaptable to prey availability.

*Ross Dorendorf, Area Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was petitioned to list the Alexander Archipelago wolf as a threatened or endangered subspecies under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2020. This presentation provides a summary of the ESA listing determination process as well as the Species Status Assessment (SSA) which is being developed to inform the USFWS listing decision. The goal of this presentation is to shed light on a complex process that will ultimately determine whether protections are warranted for one of the primary predators of black-tailed deer within the Prince of Wales Island Complex and across much of Southeast Alaska and coastal British Columbia.

*Sarah Markegard, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Anchorage Field Office*

Black bear and wolf harvest and regulations: Black bears and wolves are popular species to hunt and trap in Game Management Unit II. This presentation focuses on understanding regulations, how regulations influence harvest of black bear and wolves in Game Management Unit II.

*Ross Dorendorf, Area Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation*

2:30-3:30pm

### **Participant Experience & Observations**

A group discussion on how predation impacts the deer population and/or access to the deer population on Prince of Wales.

3:30-3:45pm

### **BREAK**

3:45-4:45pm

### **SOCIO-CULTURE**

#### **Social, cultural, economic, and political factors impact the deer population.**

Local residents have the opportunity to share their observations and lived experience on how these factors impact the deer population and their access to deer on Prince of Wales, historically and today.

*Participants, Prince of Wales Local Experts*

4:45-5:00pm

### **CLOSING**

6:00pm

*The Mule Deer Foundation is hosting "Beers for Deer" at Hill Bar.*

*Details can be found on Mule Deer Foundation Alaska's Facebook page.*

## DAY III – Saturday, October 15

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8:30-9:00am *Coffee, tea, light breakfast snacks.*

9:00-9:30am **DAY III OVERVIEW**

Recap of Days I & 2, overview of Day III.

*Facilitators*

9:30-11:30am **HARVEST & REGULATION**

9:30-10:30am **Presentations on how harvest & regulation impact deer on Prince of Wales.**

A summary of the Unit II Federal Subsistence deer harvest and regulations.

*Robert Cross, Tongass Subsistence Coordinator, U.S. Forest Service*

An overview of Unit II state hunting regulations and how to change them, plus a Unit II deer harvest summary from 1997 to now.

*Tessa Hasbrouck, Assistant Area Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game*

10:30-11:30am **Participant Experience & Observations**

A group discussion on how harvest regulation impacts the deer population and/or access to the deer population on Prince of Wales.

11:30-12:00pm **Travel to Harris River Trail**

**Location:** *Trailhead located off Hollis-Klawock Highway 2.0 miles east of the Hydaburg Highway Junction (milepost 23). Trail descends to the south side of the road and ends along the Harris River.*

*Bus available for 14 people, to and from Harris River Trail – first come, first served basis. Bathrooms available at the trailhead.*

12:00-2:30pm **FIELD TRIP & BROWNBAG LUNCH**

A walk through multiple second growth treatments with discussion about the impact of different habitat treatments on deer movement and foraging. Multiple speakers will cover how second growth is viewed from the deer's perspective and how wildlife thinning projects can improve habitat for deer more effectively.

*Julia Nave, Interim SE Alaska Program, Co-Director & Conservation Forester, The Nature Conservancy; Steve Belinda, Chief Conservation Officer, Mule Deer Foundation; Jim Baichtal, Sc.D. (Hon.), Mule Deer Foundation Alaska Regional Coordinator; Sean Harkins, Wildlife Biologist, US Forest Service; Dr. Kristina Harkins, POW Resident, Logistics Coordinator - Deer Summit*

2:30-3:00pm **Travel Back to Craig Tribal Hall**

3:00-4:30pm **LOOKING FORWARD**

A summit discussion on key takeaways and important considerations to support a healthy deer population on Prince of Wales Island.

*Facilitators*

4:30pm **SUMMIT CLOSE**

6:00-8:00pm **Strictly Local Gallery** is hosting a deer themed paint night. 40\$ for materials. To RSVP, email [strictlylocalgallery@gmail.com](mailto:strictlylocalgallery@gmail.com) or call 907-826-4825.

# COVID-19 Acknowledgement

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in October of 2021 and again in January 2022 the Steering Committee postponed the Deer Summit. At this time we feel thankful for having weathered a significant public health storm across the globe. To gather again in person - engaging in dialogue, learning, listening, and sharing - is a true blessing.

We acknowledge the risk of contracting COVID-19 and/or any illness at this summit. **Please make the choices that are right for you and respect the choices others are making for themselves.**

## COVID / ILLNESS MITIGATION MEASURES:

- Masks, hand sanitizer, and COVID-19 rapid tests are available at the registration table
- Please, sanitize/wash hands before coming up to the food tables
- If you feel so inclined, please use a "green, yellow, red" sticker on your name tag to indicate your level of comfort being in close proximity to others.

## Notes

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