

IDFG



# Mule Deer Update

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## Inside this issue:

Southeast regional 2  
update

Mule Deer habitat 3  
selection

MDI volunteer 4  
efforts

## For more information on MDI go to:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/mdi/>

## MDI Coordinator's Report

*Jim (JJ) Teare  
MDI Coordinator  
Idaho Fish and Game*

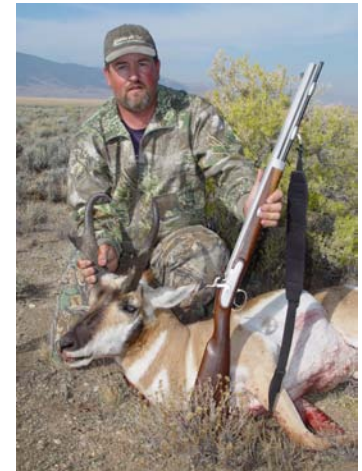
**POCATELLO**—Hard to believe I have been here as Mule Deer Initiative coordinator for a year and half already.

Over this time the MDI team has been busy completing private-land habitat projects; providing technical assistance on conservation issues and projects with our federal and state land management agencies; and working with sportsmen groups and conservation organizations to get additional mule deer research and habitat projects on the ground. Inevitably with a new MDI coordinator gaining his wheels, there will be new directions and visions for the MDI program. This winter and spring the MDI team revised the MDI Action Plan. This current edition identifies new conservation opportunities and management strategies that

will guide the MDI program over the next three years. A copy of the MDI Action Plan can be viewed on the Fish and Game Web site: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/mdi/>.

A stated objective of MDI is to increase mule deer populations. To date, the 18,000-plus acres of habitat improvement projects have been established, resulting in direct benefits for mule deer on a local herd level. To affect mule deer on a population scale (like a big game hunting unit) is a daunting goal we have set for ourselves. Achievable? Measurable? To be honest, we don't know. However, by setting the MDI bar this high and looking at new management strategies to improve mule deer habitats on a landscape scale and across mule deer seasonal ranges, I am confident we are heading in the right direction.

So where do we begin



**JJ Teare with his Idaho muzzle-loader pronghorn**

and how do we get there? The first steps will be to secure adequate project funding and develop multiple conservation partnerships. To complete large scale habitat improvement projects on private or public lands

*Continued on page 3, coordinator*

## Road mortality project updates for southern Idaho locations

**POCATELLO**—Resolving road mortality issues and saving deer across southeast Idaho remains a top priority for the Mule Deer Initiative. Following are updates on the various projects MDI and Idaho Fish and Game are working on.

**I-15 Black Rock Deer Fence**  
With assistance from Southeast Idaho Mule Deer Foundation and the Idaho



**I-15 fence project.**

Transportation Department, work began to extend the exist-

ing fence to 8 feet along the nine mile section of Interstate 15 from Pocatello to Inkom, called Black Rock area. Last year a majority of the wooden posts were placed along on both sides of the Interstate by Monroe Fence Co. through cooperative contracts between Transportation, the Mule Deer Foundation and MDI. The goal for 2010 is to install the remain-

*Continued on page 2, mortality*

## MDI update Southeast Region

This spring in the Southeast Region, planted 90,000 bitterbrush seedlings, 9,000 sagebrush seedlings, 800 mountain mahogany seedlings and 300 Rocky Mountain juniper trees.

We used volunteers as well as contractors to accomplish these plantings. We had 184 volunteers totaling 1,005 volunteer hours. These volunteers planted a total of 6,000 bitterbrush, 2,000 sagebrush, 800 mountain mahogany seedlings and 300 Rocky Mountain juniper trees.

We also had three contractors help with the plantings. Of these contractors, we had two tractor contractors that planted 73,000 shrub seedlings. In the Southeast Region this year, we tried a different method of planting some seedlings, we hired a hand planting contractor to plant 30,000 shrub seedlings. The 30,000 seedlings were planted in one of our very important winter ranges. These contractors and volunteers did a great job for us this year.

We are gearing up to start the first process of our fall forage strip plantings. To date, we are preparing 276 acres of fall forage strips. We are also getting two projects up and running with the Mule Deer Foundation, Malad Chapter. We are planning to install two watering systems in one of our region's driest mountain ranges.

Continued from page 1, morality



**Fish Creek Pass project.**

der wooden post and all metal posts, build fence braces and construct deer escape jump-outs. Work will be completed through contracted labor and with help of volunteers and funding again from the foundation, MDI, the Bureau of Land Management and other partners. We will also be working on various fundraising activities to finish the fence by 2011 with the last step being to install the new woven wire top section.

### Hwy 30 Fish Creek Pass

The five-mile section of deer fence along U.S. Highway 30 from the city of Lava, east over Fish Creek Pass was in desperate need of repair. In 2009, in cooperation with Transportation, the Mule Deer Foundation, Bannock County Sheriff's Department and MDI, maintenance was completed on the north side of the highway with a woven wire bottom being added to the existing deer fence. With the continued help of volunteers and the Bannock County Jail Skills crew, maintenance will be completed along the south side of the highway this year and several new deer escape ramps built.

The project is scheduled to be completed fall 2010 and is sure to reduce deer mortality over the pass.



**Rocky Point Project**

### U.S. Highway 30 Rocky Point

Talks and planning have been initiated with the Transportation Department to begin resolving the worst road mortality issue in southeast Idaho which resides along U.S. Highway 30 east of Montpelier to Wyoming called Rocky Point. More than 8,000 deer and several hundred elk cross this dangerous section of highway during migration, with hundreds killed by vehicles annually. This year an overall project prospectus will be written and Idaho Fish and Game will be working with private landowners to secure conser-

vation easements needed to begin the project. Following procurement of the necessary easements a feasibility study will be completed to track animal movements and crossing locations and summarize mortalities. With this information better engineering designs will be developed and make this project "shovel ready" to implement when funding comes available. No time line has been set for completion of project.

### Dietrich Rail Road Fence Modification

Fence along a four-mile section of Union Pacific Railroad track outside of Dietrich has been modified recently to allow for improved deer and antelope passage. Deer and antelope train mortalities historically have been significantly high along this section of railway. The existing fence actually trapped animals along the rail line. With MDI funding the fence was rebuilt using a wildlife friendly design to improve passage. The project will be monitored this winter to determine its effectiveness.

### Highway 23 Island Park big Game Crossing Study

A two year study will begin this year to track big game movements across Highway 23 within the Island Park area. This research project is being funded through a Transportation Department stimulus grant and will consist of collaring elk and moose with GPS collars to track movements across the highway, identify crossing areas and monitor mortalities. Once the study is completed road mortality prevention measured would follow.

Continued from page 1, coordinator

is very expensive. Today there are more opportunities for projects than there is funding. The Idaho Fish and Game will never be able to come up with enough funding alone to fill the need. The primary objective of the MDI will be to develop cooperative partnerships with any conservation agency and organization that has similar objectives to improve wildlife habitats across the southeast Idaho landscape.

The new MDI management strategies for the private land habitat improvement work are a good example of how forming partnerships and combining conservation program funding can make a difference. Over the past six years MDI has been working with private landowners establishing and primarily funding many acres of habitat projects, such as forb forage strips and shrub plantings in existing Conservation Reserve Program fields. A new MDI strategy will be look at ways to cooperatively develop, fund and expand the types of habitat projects we complete on private lands through taking advantage of the various Farm Bill programs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies have the same budget and personnel constraints that all agencies are all facing today. The new MDI direction will be to train and certify Fish

and Game employees to become Farm Bill Technical Service Providers. Technical service providers will be able to work directly within Ag Department county offices completing the necessary conservation planning workload to implement Farm Bill Program/Project Conservation Plans for private landowners. This will relieve the burden on Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Services Administration personnel and allow for additional wildlife conservation work to be completed through the Farm Bill programs. Leveraging MDI project funds with Farm Bill program dollars will greatly stretch our limited MDI project budget and allow us to improve a lot more acres of habitat for mule deer annually.

MDI will begin to look at private land wildlife resources on a more landscape level. Instead of looking at private lands for specific project types we will be developing Wildlife Conservation Plans for the entire ranch or farm. MDI staff will complete an assessment of the property to identify the various habitat types and the limiting habitat factors for mule deer and all wildlife. Working cooperatively with the landowner potential habitat improvement projects will be

designed to address the various limiting factors and a time line for project implementation will be developed. At this point specific conservation programs (or a combination of state, federal and/or private programs) will be selected and implemented to best fit the resource and funding needs of the landowner and habitat project.

Landscape scale habitat management and large scale habitat improvement projects is the right direction for the MDI to head if we ever hope to see positive changes in mule deer populations. This is not a short term venture but will be a long term change in management actions and philosophies for the MDI team, conservation agencies, sportsmen and conservation groups, and landowners. With all groups collaboratively working together and sharing technical and funding resources to address habitat issues we will all get there together.

Thanks for your time reading our MDI news letter and feel free to contact any of the MDI staff members anytime at the Southeast Region Fish and Game office at 208-232-4703, to provide your thoughts and/or project assistance.

*Jim "JJ" Teare, is MDI Coordinator for Idaho Department of Fish and Game*

## Mule Deer Habitat Selection and Fawn Survival

### How Will Quality Summer Habitat Affect Mule Deer Success?

*By Jessie Thiel*

The effect the local plant community has on the physical condition of adult deer and how that correlates to survival of young is not well understood.

Over the past six years I have worked with biologists and researchers from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. In that time, I developed an interest in mule deer, and I have developed a graduate research project to further that understanding.

The project would try to answer: How does habitat choice affect survival? What choices do adult females make

that improve the chances that young will survive? Will these choices vary by region? Ultimately, once the research is done, can managers use the information to protect critical areas throughout the state?

The Department of Biological Sciences at Idaho State University accepted the project, and the initial funding followed from several nonprofit organizations. A year and a half later, I was ready to head to the field.

Between June 1 and June 18, a small crew of volunteers and Fish and Game employees

Continued on page 4, fawn survival



Coloration and remaining motionless helps the fawns hide.

**IDAHO DEPARTMENT  
OF FISH AND GAME**



For more information go to [fishandgame.idaho.gov](http://fishandgame.idaho.gov)

**Get Involved**

*If you would like to help Idaho mule deer and other wildlife, become a volunteer by contacting the Regional Fish and Game office in your area.*

Headquarter—334-3700

Panhandle— 769-1413

Clearwater—799-5010

Southwest—465-8465

Magic Valley—423-5198

Southeast—232-4703

Upper snake—525-7290

Salmon Region—756-2271

Continued from page 3, fawn survival

reproductive success in their summer habitats. Habitat assessments will classify local vegetation to measure percent cover and species diversity at each of the adult feeding sites. Forage species will be identified in three representative ecotypes; aspen, sagebrush-steppe and conifer grass-lands.

The forage preferred by mule deer will be determined based on the forage types available at the deer feeding sites and forage found in pellet samples.

The quality of the feeding sites will be evaluated based on condition of females and survival of their young. Cover will be measured by canopy and ground cover critical to avoid-



**Jessie Thiel is graduate student in biological sciences at Idaho State University.**

ing predation of new-born fawns.

The study will identify whether a particular suite of vegetation species are nutritionally vital or a balance of

adequate cover and forage are responsible for mule deer reproductive success.

For information or to offer volunteer services contact: [thiejes2@isu.edu](mailto:thiejes2@isu.edu).

**Quick notes on MDI Volunteer efforts:**

- 950 Volunteers plant more than 60,000 shrubs.
- Magic Valley – 604 volunteers (3,308 hours) for seed collection and shrub plantings.
- Upper Snake – 280 volunteers (1,680 hours) for seed collection and shrub plantings.

Southeast – 184 volunteers (1,005 hours) for shrub plantings.

Volunteers are key in getting shrubs in the ground and collecting seed stock. It's important to expose young and old alike to mule deer habitat management and winter range issues and requirements.

**Mule Deer Initiative Projects 2005-2010**

