



March 3, 2006

Mr. Frank Wheatlake, Commissioner
Natural Resources Commission

Mr. Rodney Clute, Big Game Specialist
Michigan Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 30028, 530 W. Allegan
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Commissioner Wheatlake and Mr. Clute:

I am writing on behalf of over 3,000 Michigan members of the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) to express our preferences for changes to the licensing process that you have under review. QDMA closely monitors processes of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that impact Michigan's deer herd, and we would like to provide you with our input for changes we believe would be an improvement over the current licensing process.

First, over the last twenty years, we believe the DNR has suffered significant reductions in the number of law enforcement officers and wildlife field biologists because the current license fee structure is inadequate. As license fees have not kept up with inflationary increases, the DNR has been forced to reduce its staff in these two key areas that directly impact hunters and the quality of the hunting experience in this state. We support increased license fees that will allow the DNR to increase its staffing in the law enforcement and field biology areas to levels necessary to adequately support and protect Michigan's deer herd. We believe staffing increases of at least 20% are reasonable. Our members would be willing to pay up to several dollars more per license to fund these necessary staffing increases.

Second, we believe the DNR must develop a long-range plan for managing the winter habitat in northern Michigan to provide adequate thermal protection and natural winter feed for Michigan's northern deer herd. While we do not presume to know exactly what should be in this long range plan, we believe the plan should likely include acquiring conifer swamps commonly known as "winter deer yards" (to keep a reasonable percent of this important forest in public ownership), providing technical and financial assistance to provide landowners managing significant deer yards, and including other measures to improve the winter survival of the northern Michigan deer herd. We also believe the DNR should have a habitat improvement program that includes improving habitat on public lands across the state, similar to common habitat improvement efforts implemented by many private land owners. These improvements would include food plots, travel corridor improvements, and other improvements that will increase the productivity of public land for Michigan's hunters. The DNR should also consider providing some of these

Commissioner Wheatlake and Mr. Clute

May 3, 2006

Page 2

funds to local outdoor groups who might be in the best position to make these improvements in their local public land habitat. We are currently experimenting with public land food plots in several areas and we believe we have demonstrated that these efforts significantly improve the productivity of the land and the quality of the hunting experience where we have attempted these experiments. While the DNR currently has the Deer Range Improvement Program (DRIP), funded by a \$1.50 fee on each license, we believe this habitat improvement fee should be significantly increased to provide the additional habitat improvements described above. As the wildlife habitat in Michigan continues to shrink because of increasing residential and commercial development, we believe these habitat improvement programs are essential to ensure hunting, as we know it today, continues for the next generation. Our members would be willing to pay up to several dollars more per license to fund these fee increases that would support meaningful habitat improvement efforts.

Third, the NRC and DNR have heard from several outdoor groups promoting a one-buck license and prohibiting the sale of a second buck license. Historically, the NRC and DNR have opposed this concept because returning to a one-buck license would have a significant negative revenue impact on the agency and it would reduce recreational opportunities for hunters. When considering new licensing approaches, we believe you should consider a new two-buck license that requires both licenses to be used on bucks that have four points on a side or some other reasonable measure (like those used by many other states) to ensure the bucks killed were not yearling bucks. A single buck license could still be used to harvest a younger, legal buck. We believe a clear majority of hunters and landowners would support such a change, and would continue to buy such a two-buck license, keeping revenue levels near current levels, and providing the same recreational opportunities. Most important to us, this licensing strategy would reduce the number of yearling bucks killed and would help us develop a more sex and age balanced deer herd that is more like nature intended. If this idea to reduce the harvest of younger bucks is not acceptable, we stand ready to work with you on other alternatives to reduce this excessive harvest of young bucks.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the licensing process and we would be pleased to provide you with more information on any ideas related to this subject.

Yours truly,

Leon E. Hank, President
Quality Deer Management Association, Michigan Chapter
4649 Crampton Way
Holt, MI 48842
517-699-2393

cc: QDMA State Chapter Board of Directors
QDMA Branch Presidents
Brian Murphy, QDMA Executive Director