

Minutes
EVALUATION SUBCOMMITTEE
Legislative Audit Commission
May 26, 2016

Members Present:

Representative Rick Hansen, Chair
Senator Mary Kiffmeyer

Members Absent:

Representative Connie Bernardy
Senator Warren Limmer

Other Members Present:

Representative Sondra Erickson

Representative Rick Hansen called the Legislative Audit Commission Evaluation Subcommittee meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. The purpose of the meeting was to release the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) evaluation, *Department of Natural Resources: Deer Population Management*.

Representative Hansen introduced Jim Nobles, Legislative Auditor, who said that the evaluation was primarily about a complex and technical computer model used by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to estimate and monitor deer populations around the state. He said that with interest from multiple stakeholders, criticism of DNR's management of deer will never go away. Mr. Nobles introduced Valerie Bombach, Evaluation Manager, to give a presentation on the report. Ms. Bombach said that the overall conclusions of the evaluation were: (1) DNR has a broad range of deer-related responsibilities, such as to acquire and improve land for public hunting and for food and cover for deer, enforce wildlife protection laws, prevent and control wildlife disease, etc.; (2) DNR does not have a formal deer management plan that defines their responsibilities and prioritizes resources, goals, and objectives for managing deer; (3) aspects of DNR's management of deer were commendable and reflected local interests; and (4) more work is needed to improve and utilize information for monitoring deer and setting deer population goals. Ms. Bombach said the evaluation made the following recommendations: (1) DNR should improve and validate its new deer population model; specifically, conduct field research to improve data using independent data to validate the model, improve recordkeeping and its database, and modify statistical methods to better simulate changes in deer populations; (2) DNR should continue updating deer population goals around the state; (3) DNR should clarify the role of the Deer Advisory Teams in setting deer population goals in state parks, game refuges, and other special areas; (4) DNR should compile and utilize more specific information about deer presence and deer impact within local environments; and (5) DNR should develop a deer management plan that includes clearly defined short-term and long-term goals and objectives that address DNR's many deer-related responsibilities, and strategies to improve and maintain hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities in targeted areas around the state.

Representative Hansen invited the DNR representatives to address the subcommittee. Tom Landwehr, DNR Commissioner, and Paul Telander, DNR Wildlife Section Chief, introduced themselves for the record. Mr. Landwehr said that the department is committed to continuous improvement of its deer population model, and agrees that a formal deer management plan would help to define, clarify, and prioritize deer management goals, objectives, and resources. He said that DNR is currently working on developing a process to complete a comprehensive deer management plan, and is planning to involve hunters and other stakeholders in the process. Mr. Landwehr said that DNR agrees with the recommendations of the evaluation and has already incorporated some aspects of the recommendations as they relate to overall model improvement, such as improving how the user inputs data in order to reduce the chance of input error.

With no further business, Representative Hansen adjourned the meeting at 11:29 a.m.