



Deer Management Network

## SAM's Deer Management Network - A Progress Report

By Gerry Lavigne

It's been a little over a year since we launched the Deer Management Network. The concept was conceived by long-time SAM volunteer, now Board Member, Gerry Lavigne. Implementation of the network got a major boost when David Trahan took the helm as SAM's executive director in October 2011. At SAM, we believe that successful deer recovery in Maine is as much the responsibility of sportsmen and women as it is state government. In fact, there is much that we, as hunters, landowners, and outdoors enthusiasts can do to support deer recovery and management that the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is unable to do. We envision numerous partnerships between SAM, the hunting public, fish and game associations, hunting organizations, small and large landowners, and the Department to facilitate deer recovery by focusing on habitat protection, predation management, and wise hunting regulations. Our logo reflects that emphasis.

We currently operate the network on a shoestring, as time and financial resources are limited. Yet, it is amazing what capacity Maine outdoorspeople have to volunteer time and treasure for a good cause. In addition, we are fortunate that David Trahan is an expert at building coalitions with groups, companies, and individuals to address one or another small (and some potentially huge) steps toward improving deer survival. The following is a brief synopsis of what SAM and its partners are involved with as part of the Deer Management Network to date.

**Habitat Protection** - Protecting and maintaining wintering habitat is critical to deer survival in Maine. Maintaining high quality summer range is also important for keeping deer in top condition. We've been busy on the habitat front over the past year:

- ✓ SAM helped draft and supported passage of landmark legislation in 2012 that establishes a \$5 million bond for the Land for Maine Future Fund that prioritizes acquisition of Deer Wintering Areas.
- ✓ SAM is a partner in negotiations that may result in DIFW acquisition of a major deer wintering area and native brook trout spawning area near The Forks.
- ✓ SAM has reached out to Plum Creek Co, the Maine Forest Products Council, and other major landowners to discuss and promote deer wintering habitat management.
- ✓ SAM routinely monitors progress between DIFW and timberland owners toward cooperative management of deer wintering areas.
- ✓ We launched a project in 2012 with DIFW, and Agway Co to distribute information on the proper methods to feed deer in winter. Information sheets were made available at feed stores, DIFW offices, and SAM's website.
- ✓ SAM played a major role in shaping DIFW's rule governing winter feeding of deer that seeks to strike a balance between responsible deer feeding, and safeguarding deer health and safety.
- ✓ We have initiated a major project in cooperation with Central Maine Power to re-seed the 300+ miles of electrical transmission corridors with cool season grasses and clovers that will benefit the pre-winter nutrition of deer and other wildlife. We anticipate making the seed mixes available for use by timber companies, and other landowners.
- ✓ SAM and First Wind Co. are collaborating on a project to improve deer habitat management in the vicinity of one of First Wind's wind turbine farms. Other collaborative projects with First Wind may follow.

**Predation Management** - In the northern half of Maine, deer recovery cannot proceed, unless losses to predation are reduced. In the central and southern reaches of Maine, reductions in predation directly increase allowable harvest of antlerless deer. Here are some of our efforts on the predation management front:

- ✓ We have been working tirelessly to help transform coyote hunting into a major hunting activity, just as bear hunting evolved from a nuisance activity to an important economic asset for rural Maine.
- ✓ Predation control has long been the black sheep among wildlife management tools. SAM has set out to reverse that misconception.
- ✓ SAM sponsored and helped pass legislation requiring DIFW to implement a coyote control program.
- ✓ Through SAM, Lavigne proposed: "An Integrated Plan to Control Coyote Predation on Deer". With SAM's active participation, (and the Legislature's prodding) DIFW modeled its new Coyote Predation Management Program after this plan.
- ✓ SAM is sponsoring legislation this year to expand night hunting opportunity for coyotes during autumn.
- ✓ SAM is reaching out to the public, to fish and game organizations and to legislators to promote coyote hunting and trapping as a means to improve deer survival. Lavigne and Trahan have presented this message at numerous personal appearances to interested groups, on radio and TV, and in the print media.
- ✓ SAM actively supports coyote contests, and privately-funded coyote derbies as a means to increasing coyote harvests. We are contemplating sponsoring a coyote derby of our own, as well.
- ✓ SAM has sponsored an all-day workshop devoted to improving coyote hunting and trapping skills. We are planning more workshops in the coming year.
- ✓ We are transforming our website ([www.sportsmensallianceofmaine.org](http://www.sportsmensallianceofmaine.org)) to provide up-to-date info on all aspects of the Deer Management Network. This will include an extensive library of coyote-related material, and links to other organizations, services, and information.
- ✓ Trahan and Lavigne have been vigilant, and eager to rebut misinformation published in Maine media by anti-hunting and trapping groups regarding predation management, hunting, and gun control issues. We regularly publish these rebuttals as well as our own proactive information pieces in the state's major newspapers. Copies of these publications also appear on our website.

**Hunting** - The final leg of SAM's Deer Management Network, no less important than the other two, involves hunting, and man's other interactions with deer. With low deer populations, hunting, illegal kill, and collisions with motor vehicles all play a role in deer recovery. Some of SAM's hunting-related activities appear below:

- ✓ Though it was unpopular to do so, SAM supported the Department's decision to restrict the harvest of does on Youth Day in WMDs in which no any-deer permits are to be allocated.
- ✓ SAM supports the Department in its efforts to curb illegal hunting, and we reinforce that support at public appearances, in the media, and in the Legislature.
- ✓ SAM places great importance on safeguarding, preserving, and enhancing hunting and fishing access. With 94% of Maine in private landownership, we cannot afford to lose our welcome in Maine's woods, fields, and waters. SAM maintains positive contacts with small and large landowners to ensure continued access for hunting, fishing and other recreational land uses. We explore new land use opportunities when they emerge, and we fight to protect those that become threatened.

We've come a long way toward making a difference in promoting deer recovery. However, it seems that we've only planted the seeds that will sprout into a Deer Management Network that will achieve a lasting impact on deer populations and deer hunting opportunities in Maine. We at SAM are eager to continue the effort. Join us!