

## **History of the State Chapter of Michigan Quality Deer Management Association December 22, 2009**

Mr. Perry Russo, of Clarkston, Michigan, while serving as the QDMA Region Director, formed the first State Chapter of the Michigan Branch of the Quality Deer Management Association in 2002.

Perry solicited support from a handful of active QDMA members and branch presidents to form the first board of directors and officers of the organization. Michigan's first elected president was Jim Strader (Eaton County Branch), Tony Smith (Eaton County Branch) was vice-president and Leon Hank (Superior Deer Management) was treasurer. Others serving on the first board of directors and active in getting the state chapter formed included Ed Spinnazola, (Mid-Michigan Branch), Marsha McKee, (Mid-Michigan Branch), Phil Andres (Mid-Michigan Branch), and Dan Timmons (Three Rivers Branch).

The first state chapter branch worked on these projects: (1) helping branches get started, (2) promoting QDM cooperatives, (3) meeting with the DNR on experimental mandatory antler restriction projects, (4) establishing a formal dialogue with the DNR (quarterly meetings with their Big Game Specialist), (5) issuing a statewide newsletter, and (6) supporting branches in member recruiting efforts at major outdoor events.

In the first few years, the Mid-Michigan Branch, the first and biggest local branch in the state, provided much of the funding and administrative support for the state chapter. In these early, formative years, only the state of Pennsylvania had another active state chapter.

As the state membership grew in size, so did the state chapter's effort to be the voice of deer management in Michigan. During the 2000 decade, the state chapter formed a Deer Management Policy Committee, chaired by Boyd Wiltse (Mid-Michigan Branch). This six-person committee, began studying major deer management issues in great detail, outside of state chapter meetings. The members immersed themselves in these issues, often conducting their own reviews of professional literature on the subject and checking on best practices in other states. The Committee would then advise the state chapter board of directors on a recommended position for the organization. Kip Adams and the national staff also assisted in these reviews and the recommended positions for the organization, assuring there was alignment and support of any position taken. In some cases, the national QDMA board of directors might also be consulted on an issue. These deer management positions, (on issues like early antlerless seasons, antler restriction programs, bag limits, season and date changes, etc.) were then presented to the DNR staff and also at NRC meetings and hearings. Over time, the state chapter became respected by a number of key stakeholders for its thoroughness in reviewing these issues, some of which had quick turnaround times.

In 2008, the State Chapter, with guidance from Kip Adams and Brian Murphy, held the first Deer Management Summit among its statewide members. The state chapter used this two-day summit to solicit direction from the membership on how the organization should be run, what strategic plan it should follow, and to identify key issues of importance to members.

The state chapter has always had high standards for accountability and transparency. Since the organization was formed, board members have served without any compensation and, in nearly all cases, board members have not been reimbursed for any expenses incurred for costs of running the organization. Nearly all board members have contributed significant financial resources to QDMA to keep operating expenses to a minimum. The state chapter has also set high standards for communicating with its local branch officers and members. Early on in the organization, the state chapter set a standard that would engage as many branch presidents and members in the issues as possible. The state chapter developed a reporting and feedback model where the state chapter president copies via e-mail all branch presidents on nearly all correspondence with the board members, keeping branches informed and up-to-date on almost all issues. Branch presidents in turn pass on this information to other board members as they determine is important. This method has improved communication throughout the organization and engaged more members in key decision-making issues.

Having set this standard for communication and decision-making, the state chapter board has also held several lengthy meetings to validate that it must sometimes act quickly and nimbly to be a player on key deer management issues. Several times the board has debated this issue and affirmed that it is better to rapidly develop a position on an issue (or an interim position) and to be a part of the discussion and debate, than to be engaged in a lengthy debate and miss the chance to be influential in the decision-making process, thereby letting others make the decision for us.

As the state chapter was formed, the Mid-Michigan Branch produced and distributed quarterly newsletters for the state chapter. In 2005, the state chapter took over this process from Mid-Michigan and has produced statewide newsletters since. Alex Giftos (Cadillac) has served on the state chapter board since 2005.

In 2009, the Michigan United Conservation Club asked the state chapter if it would participate in a Deer Advisory Team review of a possible long-range management plan for how to manage white-tailed deer. The state chapter appointed John Knevel (SouthEast Michigan Branch) to the wide-ranging stakeholder committee. John contributed hundreds of hours of work to this project and many QDMA views on deer management were incorporated into the committee's final report.