

DNR Report

Richard Kirchmeyer WBH DNR liaison

This time of year doesn't have me attending a ton of meetings. I did attend one deer meeting and 2 turkey meetings since writing my last article.

The main purpose of the deer meeting was to review the newly configured Northern and Central Forest deer management units that were originally proposed by the DNR deer committee, then considered and approved by local CDAC's. The Natural Resources Board has since approved the new DMU's for both the Northern and Central Forest. These new DMU's will be used for the 2025 deer hunts. They also approved the season structure for the state, except for Grant County, where they eliminated the holiday and extended hunts. Currently, antler growth seems normal or a little better than average. Fawn production also seems to be a little above average due to the mild winter last year, allowing does to enter the spring in good shape. I have noticed in the past few meetings there has not been a lot of talk about CWD. I am not sure if that is good or bad. I am not sure if the DNR and/or hunters are just not that concerned about CWD anymore. It's here, live with it may be the current attitude. I don't know what to think.

My first turkey meeting involved make decisions on the allocation of DNR Turkey Stamp funds for projects submitted to the DNR. Not all projects are approved or fully funded. For a project to get funded by these monies it must either promote turkey habitat or promote the expansion of turkeys in the state. It is tough sometimes to decide which project in our mind is more worthy than another project.

The second meeting was very informational, and below are some facts that I found very interesting:

- For the 2025 spring turkey season there were 246,068 harvest permits available, of which 228,844 were purchased. Why is there a difference in numbers? In some cases, successful applicants simply do not end up buying a harvest permit. Some of this is likely due to Patron License purchasers who automatically get entered into the drawing, but don't hunt turkeys.
- The average success rate for the spring season was 22.6%. There were 50,287 birds harvested, which is the 5th highest harvest recorded for the spring hunt.
- 83% of hunters surveyed said they supported the present season structure and start date we now have.

- Approximately 3-4% of the turkey hunters in the state harvest more than one turkey in the spring hunt.
- Each hen turkey on an average statewide produces 2.25 poults, likely varying a bit depending on the weather in the spring. An interesting stat that was presented was that 50% of all poults die of natural causes in the first 2 weeks after hatching. Of the remaining poults, another 50% will die in the next 6 to 8 weeks. It gets better from here on out, with those remaining having a 90% chance of making it to adulthood. WOW!! That is a huge loss of potential birds that we could hunt if they all lived.
- Turkeys are adapting well to northern climates, so much so that Canada now has turkeys in some areas.

The committee was told of a research project that is capturing turkeys and fitting them with transmitters so the DNR can keep track of their movements and monitor them during nesting time. A couple of hens traveled many miles, one eventually almost returned to its original home range. One hen was very persistent in trying to hatch her eggs. The first 2 settings were destroyed by critters and finally on her 3rd try she hatched her eggs successfully. Life for a turkey in the wild can be very frustrating and challenging when trying to raise future generations.

We discussed the one question that came from the DNR/WCC Spring Hearings. The resolution proposed that the turkey stamp fee be raised from \$5.25 to \$10.00. This fee has not been changed since the first turkey hunt back in the early 80's. This additional fee increase would bring in an estimated \$400,000.00, which could be used for turkey management and research. This question will be forwarded for the April 2026 Spring Hearing questionnaire.

The turkey management plan has now reached its 10th year (2015-2025), which is all a management plan is normally written and approved for. This means over the next 12 months there will be multiple meetings geared toward rewriting the turkey management plan. The basics will not change, but some specifics will need to be adjusted or totally changed. The plan needs to address current and future factors that will allow turkeys to thrive, so they remain one of the state's greatest success stories. The reason for a management plan is outlined as follows: "To maintain a healthy turkey population in all suitable ranges, optimize quality turkey hunting opportunities for the spring and fall hunts and promote public images of our wild turkey resource." Now that is a mouth full. But it is what we will need to keep in mind when writing a new management plan.

A final item that was discussed by the committee was how to close the gap between the turkey harvest permits allocated and those ultimately purchased. No consensus was reached, but the topic will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

I did not have an elk, bear or LTH meeting during this period but I am fully aware of what is to come in the future months.

The upcoming fall will be very busy again. I will be taking the WBH LTH youth out bear hunting and I have helped transfer 2 other bear harvest permits to youth who will be hunting with me this fall. Thank you to the 2 gentlemen who transferred these permits to me so a youth could bear hunt here in the great State of Wisconsin.

Good luck hunting and enjoy God's great outdoors.