



WISCONSIN BOWHUNTERS ASSOCIATION - DNR REPORT - SPRING 2023

By Richard Kirchmeyer

The past season was very successful for some, while for others it was a chance to enjoy the outdoors.

As harvest numbers for the past season are now being tallied, or have already been, they show many hunters were successful. Bear hunters had good success and were able to harvest many decent sized bears. Several 500 pound plus and a few 600 pound plus bears were harvested. Every BMZ was at or very near the harvest goals set for the 2022 season. In the northern BMZ's the harvest of these large bears has decreased over the past few years, not necessarily because of over harvest of bears, but over harvest of larger bears. The population goals in the northern zones have remained stable for quite a few years now. BMZ C and portions of E and F do still hold some very nice bears. These zones have some good scattered bear habitat, and hold some very good natural food sources. These food sources make it harder to keep these large bears consistently coming to bait sites put out by hunters during legal hunting hours. The 2023 harvest quotas and harvest permits are similar to those of 2022. At this point in time all hunters can do is wait and see what the weather will be like, as many times this dictates how much bears move during hunting hours.

The DNR is asking all citizens of the state to report any bear denning sites to them. In this ongoing study the DNR takes tissue and hair samples for DNA, which will help with estimating bear populations for the future. The DNA data will be similar to the tetracycline survey data, but allows the DNR to sample the bears through both harvest data or future live animal sampling. This data is vital for us to be able to manage and estimate the bear populations of the state.

Deer hunters had mixed impressions and success during the past deer hunting season. Some areas of the state seem to have ample numbers of deer, while others are suffering to have harvestable numbers. The Northern Forest deer management zone has many critters that are preying on deer. Wolves, we know, love deer and it seems bears are more and more liking the taste of venison and preying on them as well, especially around food plots. Poaching of deer seems to be increasing in many areas of the state, which in turn reduces the number of deer law abiding hunters have available to harvest. This type of illegal harvest gives hunters a bad image among non-hunters and anti-hunters because they don't always differentiate between legal and illegal harvests.

I am not at all ready to predict what is going to happen to deer hunting in this state now and into the future as we deal with CWD in some areas and out of control predators in other areas. It's a crap shoot at this time. All we can do is pray that the DNR, CDAC's and concerned citizens work together to manage the deer herd at numbers that provide a quality experience for all hunters throughout the state. At a meeting I attended on deer the other day, some of the DNR wildlife managers stated that the Winter Severity Index in their areas is near 70. This represents the number of days that the snow depth is at 18 inches or over and the number of days the temperature drops below zero, added together. Seventy is at the threshold of being a bad winter for deer. We still have a good number of days left in the north where the snow depths can remain over the 18-inch mark. Additionally, a crust of ice that predators can run on, while deer break through, can hamper deer movement, thereby increasing predation on these helpless animals. The end of winter is when these data points mean more because deer are reaching the



WISCONSIN BOWHUNTERS ASSOCIATION - DNR REPORT - SPRING 2023

maximum point of stress, due to the long winter and the inaccessibility of good food sources. The deer in my area have all herded up in the green swamps, or what the DNR calls deer yards, since early January because of the snow depths. Several years ago I did a test of my own to find out what the difference in temperature was between the high lands and green swamps. On real cold nights the temperature in the hardwoods could be 18- 21 degrees colder, not including the wind chill factor, than temperatures in the green swamps. No wonder the deer like the green swamps.

As far as the winter goes for turkeys, I think it has been okay. Turkeys in my area have also gone to green swamps where they dig in the sphagnum moss looking for seeds dropped by the cedar and tamarack trees. Turkeys over the past few years have been eating more and more tree buds, like ruffed grouse do, which may add to a better winter survival rate. By the time you read this, the DNR turkey committee will have met to distribute funds from turkey stamp sales to various projects submitted to the DNR. The projects must help enhance habitat for turkeys in the state.

The Learn to Hunt Bear committee has been meeting often over the past months to revise the program to better fit modern times. There are a few new changes already in place for the 2023 LTH hunts. For the past several years, due to covid restrictions, youth completed the LTH classroom portion virtually. It looks like this will continue going forward, although each youth will also be required to complete a minimum of 4 hours of field time to qualify for the hunt. This critical training allows the youth to learn firsthand from their mentor about bears, and what bear hunting is all about. There is a set limit of 70 LTH permits for the state, which includes the 4 special LTH permits given to 4 organizations, 1 of which is WBH.

I haven't had an elk committee meeting since the last issue of *THE Bowhunter*. As many of you know, this past season the first elk harvested with archery equipment in modern times in Wisconsin was taken by a WBH member! Dan Evenson was the lucky tag holder and harvested a beautiful 6 by 6 elk with his bow. Congratulations Dan!

As I write this, the elk seem to be surviving the winter fairly well. I'm not sure why, but each year we lose some elk as they cross rivers, break through the ice and drown. There is some trapping and collaring being conducted in both elk management zones, mainly to monitor the cows of each herd. The Black River Falls herd was possibly going to have a harvest season in 2023. It has been decided to wait, giving the herd another year to get closer to the defined population goals. The elk committee will meet soon to discuss setting suggested harvest permits for the fall 2023 harvest season for the northern herd.

I hope each of you, as WBH members, will consider every opportunity to keep our hunting heritage alive by taking a youth or non-hunter into the outdoors, so they too can experience what we have come to enjoy so much.