

## DNR Report

By Richard Kirchmeyer, WBH DNR liaison

Since my last article I have had only one elk meeting. In the next month or so I do have a couple deer meetings and one more elk meeting.

The DNR still does not have a leader, which most identify as the Department Secretary. This position is appointed by, and takes direction from, the Governor of Wisconsin regarding natural resource matters. This position also oversees all the section chiefs within the DNR. It is very beneficial for us sportsman to have a DNR Secretary who has an outdoors background and is also a bowhunter. Adam Payne, the past DNR Secretary, who resigned late last Fall, was a bowhunter and understood what WBH stood for, and what its concerns were. Let's hope the next DNR secretary has a similar background.

The DNR's elk committee has recommended an elk hunt in the Black River Falls elk management zone for the Fall of 2024. The recommendation was approved by the DNR's policy team and by the Natural Resources Board. The next step for the elk committee is to recommend harvest goals and harvest permits for the northern Clam Lake elk herd and for the Black River Falls elk herd, which will occur in the next month. There is one change applicants will find when applying for an elk harvest permit for the Clam Lake herd management zone. This zone is no longer one big elk management zone, but has been divided into smaller zones so elk can be more closely managed. This subdivision of the EMZ lessens the chance of overharvesting adult bull elk from a specific herd, which could greatly reduce the reproduction rate for the next year, and slow down the capability of reaching the maximum herd population goal of 1,400 elk in the Clam Lake herd. All applicants vying for a chance to hunt elk in the State of Wisconsin have until May 31, 2024 to apply for this year's hunt.

When it comes to dealing with whitetailed deer, some things are currently up in the air, due to legislators proposing new regulations, particularly for the northern deer herd. I personally don't like having the legislators dictating to the DNR how or what to do when managing our natural resources. But in response to comments from their constituents, this sometimes happens. Many times, these bills don't have any biological support behind them, mainly dealing with social concerns.

The talk that is coming from legislators is that they plan to significantly reduce the antlerless harvest in the Northern Forest Deer Management zone. The problem here is that while there are some portions of this zone where the DNR does agree with the need to reduce the antlerless harvest, there are still some areas that have an ample supply of deer. These areas have a good amount of crop land throughout, with a decent amount of good deer habitat dispersed within them. These areas still have a fair amount of crop damage complaints caused by deer, which causes farmers to apply for damage shooting permits as a means of controlling the deer numbers. This results in fewer hunting opportunities for hunters to help control the deer population. This is not an ideal situation, and shows that a blanket solution for the entire zone is not the best approach, in my opinion.

Another proposal that is being circulated is to return to the old style of numbered deer management zones, instead of county deer management zones. To me this is better when it comes to managing deer. You can group or change management boundaries that have comparable habitat together, which also allows you to be able to differentiate between public and private lands, which need to be managed differently. There is also some talk of returning to in-person registration of harvested deer. Many are concerned that a good percentage of deer that are harvested each year are not being registered, which means harvest figures could be inaccurate. While some citations written by wardens show hunters simply forgetting to register their harvested deer, others don't register their harvested deer so they can continue hunting. Either way it calls into question the accuracy of harvest and overall population data. However, there is no data to indicate the potential magnitude of the problem.

The application date for hunters to apply for a bear harvest permit was December 10, 2023. The Natural Resources Board approved the proposed harvest quotas and permit levels towards the end of January. The following week harvest permits were drawn and shortly thereafter hunters were notified of their success in drawing a 2024 bear harvest permit.

Bear harvest quotas are slightly down from 2023 after the DNR computed the three-year harvest success rate, along with the percentage of females in the harvest, which are used to establish the quotas. They also considered the amount of crop damage and nuisance complaints in each BMZ. Over the past three years these numbers have shown in most BMZ's that the bear populations are at or near population goals. Some may agree or disagree with the harvest permit levels, but the DNR's bear committee needs to make sure we do not overharvest bears in each BMZ.

Remember, if you have harvested a few bears, or many bears, and want to transfer your harvest permit to a youth, you must complete this transaction at least ten days before the scheduled harvest season. The 2024 bear harvest season starts September 04, 2024 with the bait sitters going first.

Turkey populations seem to have rebounded somewhat due to the good poult recruitment from last year's hatches and the past mild winter. Harvest figures have not been released from last Fall's hunts, but I do not see those numbers fluctuating much from previous years. Hunters over the years have continually supported the current six-week, seven-day turkey season structure. All we need to pray for now is some decent weather to be able to pursue these willy, feathered adversaries.

Good luck in your hunting efforts, be safe, and take someone new hunting!