

## WBH President Message • *Winter 2017*

Decisions, decisions.

One thing that is unique about bowhunting is that we sometimes have more opportunities to be selective than we do in the short and crazy gun season.

I love to bowhunt, so forgoing my bowhunting time in the woods by filling my tag early in the season is almost like not getting to hunt at all, especially during those exciting days in late October and early November. Where I hunt we don't have many deer. I often go several days on stand without seeing a deer, so, although my license includes a doe tag, I decline to use it until our herd comes back. That means that if or when I fill my buck tag, I'm done bowhunting for the year – it's a decision I don't take lightly, but one that can often lead to "tag soup". It's a bittersweet dilemma that I know many of you also deal with each year.

One well known traditional bowhunter (who also contributes a column to this magazine) had to make that tough decision early on opening morning. Despite misgivings, he wisely took the shot and harvested a beautiful 10-pointer. Although his 2016 buck hunting in Wisconsin was over almost before it started, he had the good fortune to hunt the rut in Iowa, where he was able to harvest a heavy 9-pointer with his trusty recurve. Congratulations Greg!

Another good friend from Manitowoc County who also serves on the Conservation Congress was excited to have the opportunity to bowhunt for a huge buck that he had been following on trail cameras for months. Early on he decided not to shoot smaller bucks, hoping for a chance at the big guy; however, when the opportunity came to fill a doe tag, he decided to harvest one of the many does in the area. After making a clean shot and recovering the deer, he was crushed to discover that his "doe" was a very small but legal buck – thus ending his chance to arrow the giant, at least for this year. Sorry Larry.

As bowhunters we hear of and often live out similar situations, sometimes with positive results, and sometimes not so much. And although many of us usually don't enjoy the luxury of deciding which buck to shoot at, I believe all the consequential decisions we have to make are an integral part of why bowhunting is so special. As Aldo Leopold (an early Wisconsin bowhunter) famously noted: "A peculiar virtue in wildlife ethics is that the hunter ordinarily has no gallery to applaud or disapprove of his conduct. Whatever his acts, they are dictated by his own conscience, rather than by a mob of onlookers. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this fact." Many who view hunting from the outside sometimes consider it a competition between hunters. I think hunters, particularly bowhunters, understand that the "competition" is usually within ourselves, and that as my dad always used to say "You get out of something exactly what you put into it".

Perhaps the biggest WBH news since our last issue is the new and improved WBH website. Our old site was not compatible with the mobile devices like iPhones and iPads that are so common these days, and we needed to bring the site up-to-date. Over the last several months many folks have put in literally hundreds of hours to

not only make it compatible, but to rebuild the site into a dynamic and informative resource that I think we can all be very proud of. I encourage you to check it out, and perhaps just as importantly, encourage your non-member bow-hunting friends to log on. I think they will like what they see – and they can join right then on-line. The website address is: [www.wisconsinbowhunters.org](http://www.wisconsinbowhunters.org) Check it out!

One new feature on the website is a picture gallery of successful members with their trophies. But now we need your pictures to fill it. The more we receive, the more interesting the site will be for everyone. If you have a tasteful picture (minimal blood, no open body cavity, no arrow in animal, and preferably in a somewhat natural pose) of your bow-harvested trophy, please e-mail it to the office (electronic pictures much preferred) with the name of the hunter, city of hunter, date of harvest, county of harvest and details about the trophy. This isn't just for big bucks either – every animal taken with archery equipment is a trophy, so don't hesitate to share your bowhunting success. And if you're a youth or beginner at archery, we really want your picture. Please e-mail it in to the office. Thanks.

The other exciting news is that we are going back to Chula Vista in the Dells for our 2017 convention. We had a great event there for our 75th Anniversary Convention last spring, and we plan some improvements to make 2017 better than ever. Frank Noska, our seminar and featured banquet speaker, did a fantastic job last year, and this year we have one of the top names in the bowhunting world: Tom Miranda. Make plans now to attend. The dates are March 3rd, 4th and 5th. The Dells are less than a two-hour drive from home for the majority of our members. If you haven't attended a convention lately, or never at all, this might be a good opportunity to check it out. If you can only make it for one day, consider Saturday the 4th. There are seminars all day, head displays, exhibitor booths and much more. Then stay for the banquet and enjoy Tom Miranda's presentation.

Crossbows. Most of the calls I've been receiving are in regard to crossbows; and not just from bowhunters, but gun hunters too, and even a former archer who took up a crossbow this year. He called to say that although he spent a lot on a new crossbow, he might not continue using it "because it's just not fair". He shot his buck at a ridiculous distance with a complete pass through. Gun hunters are upset because a lot of bucks—and big bucks, are being killed with crossbows before the gun season. I just saw a new ad for Ravin crossbows touting 3-inch groups at 100 yards with enough retained energy to easily harvest deer at that range. All in a sleek, narrow, scoped weapon that they introduce with: "Meet your next rifle". I guess if I hunted with a weapon with that range and capability, without the problems of having to draw when the critter is within whisper distance or no way to rest my bow, I too might wait for the biggest buck in the woods to walk within the equivalent of shotgun slug range.

I try to point out to those who call that bowhunting hasn't changed, and please don't confuse us or lump us in with crossbow hunters.

Legislators, some of whom are now upset that they were "misled" that crossbows "were no more effective" than archery equipment, provided in the law that after two years of data collection, the DNR could adjust the crossbow season if those claims proved not to be the case, as we suggested. So far, the DNR has not proposed any

changes. And some have tried to dilute the significant difference in success by suggesting the number of crossbow hunters be almost doubled, compared to the fixed crossbow harvest, by adding in all Patron license holders. That then lowers the crossbow success percentage dramatically. The Deer and Elk Committee of the Conservation Congress also declined to advance questions to address the issue, despite the fact that four counties passed resolutions requesting that the crossbow season be adjusted to give all weapon types a fair and balanced chance at harvesting Wisconsin whitetail bucks.

The general limitations of what can be done with hand drawn, hand held archery equipment were pretty well reached several years ago; however, crossbows have almost limitless potential due to a fixed, rigid stock and winch type drawing devices. So the gap will continue to widen. The gap will also widen between gun success over nine days compared to crossbow success over three-plus months with a weapon already approaching the same capabilities. There is little doubt that the crossbow season will have to be shortened at some point, and in my opinion it's unfair to everyone to wait much longer. It's unfair to the bowhunters and gun hunters that are leaving in droves, and it's even unfair to the guy that spends \$1,000 for new crossbow equipment, thinking he will always have the tremendous advantage that's now in place.

The DNR is trying hard to retain and recruit hunters. We are optimistic that they will recognize that the data from Wisconsin and other states which shows that these inequities are almost certainly causing the opposite effect, and take action to correct them.

Don't misunderstand. Crossbows are a viable and very effective hunting tool if used wisely, and there is no biological or ethical reason that folks shouldn't have the opportunity to hunt with them if they choose. I have no problem with that and WBH as an organization has not had a problem with that. But they're not bows—as is becoming increasingly clear. And fortunately in Wisconsin, we were able to insure that they would be regulated and licensed separately from archery equipment. And unlike other states where they were just combined, Wisconsin now has the data to show that crossbows are indeed more effective. All that's left is to make adjustments to distribute the resource equitably between user groups. We will continue to work to get that done.

Finally, I know I've said it before, but THANK YOU for supporting WBH as a member. It really does make a difference, not only for us, but so our kids and grandkids can enjoy the great sport of bowhunting as we have.

*Mike Brust*