

WBH DNR Report
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The past couple months have been quite busy with DNR wildlife meetings. Bear with me if some of this seems like a repeat of my last update. Many of the committee discussions take several sessions to address. You will see a definite mixture of the old and the new here.

First off, the DNR has appointed a new person to guide whitetail deer management here in Wisconsin. His name is Jeff Pritzl. He is a long-time game manager and at times has filled in to help different DNR committees as a lead person when needed. Hopefully, Jeff will bring some consistency to a committee that has some controversial issues to deal with most of the time. The DNR deer committee has met a couple times since the first of the year and while writing this I know I have another meeting coming very soon. One of the big issues is the CDAC's proposal to divide a few DMZs. The deer committee has been reviewing these divisions to see if they will be beneficial to the management of deer in Wisconsin. If these divisions are approved by the NRB they will not go into effect until the 2022 deer seasons.

The Winter Severity Index (WSI) is very low this year throughout the whole state so deer should come out of the winter in good shape as long as we don't have a long, cold, snowy spring. Sooo!!!! Let us all pray for a great fall deer season.

Bears in my opinion are one of the most wonderful critters on this planet. This past bear season was highly successful for those who held a harvest permit. All BMZ's exceeded their harvest goals. I helped do that a little by harvesting a bear myself. Although many bears are being harvested it seems populations are staying consistent on private lands but seem to be, in most circumstances, being harvested pretty much to full potential or exceeding comfortable levels on public lands. In the north more females are showing up in harvest stats and the size of bears is decreasing some also. Bear reproduction seems to be holding up to expectations with some sows producing 3-5 cubs each birthing cycle which equates to more small bears on the landscape. In Rusk and Sawyer counties bears the past few years have decided they really like the taste of farmer's field corn. This past year around 300 bears were trapped and relocated out of corn fields in those two counties. They are causing a lot of damage and farmers are applying for damage shooting permits. This means these bears are being taken before the harvest season, usually by someone who does not care about the harvesting of a bear.

This upcoming 2021 bear season will have some changes; mainly there are now six BMZ's compared to only four in the past. Although a particularly good percentage of harvest

data and population estimates were able to be transferred to the new BMZ's, the DNR bear committee still had some reservations when it came to setting harvest goals and permit levels. I am not saying they were conservative, but rather they used good sound biology, not social pressure to set these figures. Unfortunately, pressure was put on the NRB and one zone was changed without solid supporting data showing a need for the decision. It may take a few years to get everything totally in order with the new BMZ's.

Elk hunting here in Wisconsin has not become a tradition nor will it be in the near future for most families, but it has become a yearly event that those who get to participate will remember for all their lives. This past year five elk were harvested by a group of hunters that did not get to meet in person but kept in close contact via social media prior to and also during the hunt. The five elk harvested were 8 1/2, 10 1/2, 13 1/2, 2 1/2 and 2-year-old bulls, which means 3 were mature bulls of breeding quality. One bull elk was the first ever game animal of any kind harvested by that person. What a way to start your hunting career! Another first was that one bull was harvested by a female hunter. Native Americans did not harvest any elk this year due to many unfortunate circumstances. The elk committee is in the final stages of producing an elk management plan. This plan will be the main guiding tool in managing elk here in Wisconsin for the next decade. An early archery only elk season was discussed in committee but did not receive enough support to put into the elk management plan. I tried my best to convince the committee of the value of this but was unsuccessful in persuading a majority that it should be put into the management plan for a possible hunt in the future.

For those of us who hunt turkeys, it's been fun ever since 1983 when the state held its first turkey hunt in many years. Turkeys are now decently populated throughout the state of Wisconsin. The northern part of the state does not have nearly the population level as the southern portion of the state, but it does have a huntable population, which means more opportunity for everyone during the spring seasons when we cannot pursue other game. There have been a few complaints about late starts to the past few turkey seasons. Here are some facts that may support a later opener which was supported at the spring hearings in 2017. By having a later opener, it allows for more of the adult toms to do the breeding which usually means better reproduction. There are chances, especially in the north, not to have a lot of snow on the ground which means the turkeys will not still be in their winter flocks and are scattered around more. This also allows for a better chance that the youth hunt will not be held during bad weather or possibly with lots of snow on the ground. For some who like to hunt turkeys it also means that if you want 3 days to hunt, the Memorial Day weekend will always be during the 6th season. I know some hunters are not happy with the later opener but biologically it is sound turkey management. Extra harvest permits will be on sale over the counter in a few days and I hope to purchase a couple permits, so I stay out of my wife's hair.

Last week the DNR Turkey committee had to decide where the million dollars plus turkey stamp monies should be spent. This is a biennial event where clubs, state organizations,

DNR, and USFS put in proposals that will enhance and or create more or better habitat that will help turkeys survive in Wisconsin. A vast majority of the monies are allocated to public lands, but a portion is allocated to helping private land holders create better habitat for turkeys.

I hope you enjoy the upcoming hunts and remember to introduce a youth to hunting, share your knowledge with them, and help start a new tradition for them. Youth are the Wisconsin Bowhunters Association's future.