

Legislative Report

Our state legislature has been relatively quiet on hunting related issues – until recently.

Perhaps it has been due to all the controversy surrounding confirmation of the new Wolf Management Plan. I testified before the Natural Resources Board on behalf of WBH in opposition to several provisions in the new plan, and in support of state management of wolves and a statewide population goal of 350 wolves, as our membership has voted to support. Unfortunately, the NRB, which has now clearly become a political entity, controlled by the governor, voted to support a plan with essentially no cap on the number of wolves in Wisconsin.

I was the first chairman of the Wolf Advisory Committee of the Conservation Congress in the 1990's, and I have served on virtually every wolf committee and discussion ever since. One thing that I have become painfully aware of over that time is that the anti-hunting forces are real, organized, are politically connected and are becoming more effective in achieving their ultimate goal: to end all hunting. Today it's wolves, but make no mistake, they are constantly working towards outlawing other types of hunting, especially "inhumane" (their word) practices like bowhunting and trapping. Fortunately, we still have strong support in our state legislature.

As mentioned, several hunting related bills have been introduced in the last couple weeks. The most concerning are AB633 / SB586, that provide for hunting with an air gun in Wisconsin. Air rifle technology has improved in recent years and larger caliber air rifles have shown to be effective on small to medium sized game. Several states are expanding air rifle hunting opportunities in response. These two bills suggest the same for Wisconsin. The only problem is that the WI DNR considers an Air Bow as a type of air rifle. These bills specifically read that "air rifles" would only be allowed in existing firearms seasons. However, that's eerily similar to the promises we heard several years ago as it related to crossbows. The reality is that despite advances, conventional air rifles are still largely inadequate to humanely harvest a deer – except for Air Bows. WBH would have no problem supporting an air gun hunting opportunity that doesn't affect bowhunting, but if Air Bows are included for harvesting deer, we see a very substantial risk of future efforts to allow them during the archery season. After all, they're not as effective as firearms, they shoot arrows and of course the word BOW is part of their name – almost the same arguments used to try to get crossbows into the archery season. I will be testifying to exclude Air Bows, and the like, as well as big game air rifle hunting from these bills. We may need additional member support testifying at the capitol if this can't be worked out.

SB30 is a bill to narrow the prohibitions on baiting and feeding by county. Currently if CWD occurs in a county, all baiting and feeding is prohibited for 3 years, whether it's a free-ranging deer or one in a captive herd within that county. This bill changes the prohibition to include only free-ranging deer, but not for deer contained in a captive herd.

SB545 expands the time for dog training in the north. It would eliminate the closed period from May 1-June 30 now in DNR regulations. This has been supported by the dog hunting community and the thought is that it hasn't been necessary in the southern part of the state and this would make it uniform.

As more hunting-related bills are introduced, we will continue to monitor them, and I will continue meeting with legislators to keep them apprised of our concerns and desires.

Finally, thank you for your membership and support of WBH. Lobbyist and fringe groups only represent a few companies or a handful of members. WBH has thousands of dedicated members – and that makes a difference to legislators.