

Legislative Update
Summer 2023
by Mike Brust, WBH Legislative Liaison

Every two years the legislature develops and presents a new state budget. It's a long, drawn-out process that normally consumes most all of the legislative activity from the beginning of the legislative session in January until the budget is passed and signed, which is usually in June or July.

In some respects, that's a good thing because while it's going on, those opposed to hunting and their legislative counterparts aren't pushing bills contrary to our interests. That being said, there is still the outside chance that a desperate legislator will try to "sneak" something through by attaching it to the budget. Usually, it's something that they couldn't get enough support for on its own. It's discouraged because it could add more controversy to the budget process, but it sometimes happens. Fortunately, we have friendly legislators that will alert me if an attachment that affects bowhunting is proposed.

The only issue in this new budget that will affect a few bowhunters is a mandated increase in non-resident license fees, which has been shot down in the past by the Department of Tourism. And while we could have objected on behalf of some non-resident members, the reality is that many residents have been asking for this for years, and whether you agree with everything the DNR does or not, they are responsible for managing the resources that are very important to us, and they need money to do that. And they haven't seen a license fee increase in almost 20 years.

And speaking of the DNR, many of you know, they are now under the direction of a new Secretary, Adam Payne. Those that attended our convention awards banquet and got to hear from Adam already know that he is an avid bowhunter. He will still be part of a culture that hasn't been too friendly towards bowhunters in recent years, but it's an encouraging development. President Kirchmeyer and I have had the opportunity to meet with him on a continuing basis, and so far, we are optimistic. Unfortunately, some of that hope may be displaced due to the new make-up of the Natural Resources Board, who oversees the DNR. Recent appointments by the governor have replaced some of the strongest pro-hunting members, particularly Greg Kazmierski and "doc" Fred Prehn, with new members that have other interests. And while the press and anti-hunting interests tried hard to vilify "doc" and "Kaz", few folks will ever understand how hard they fought to protect and support hunting, especially bowhunting.

So now that the budget is passed the parade of new bills will begin. Fortunately, most won't involve hunting, and there may even be some that we request and/or support. But this session will run through late 2024, so we must constantly remain vigilant.

And as always, thank you for your membership and support. Without it, WBH would be like so many "paper tigers" that legislators largely ignore. With our large membership base, and members that step up when needed, we are definitely not ignored.

Thanks again,

Mike