

WBH DNR Update • *Winter 2018*

Wisconsin Bowhunters Association has been granted representation on various DNR committees that make decisions and recommendations on natural resource issues for the State of Wisconsin. For the past five plus years I have represented WBH on the Bear, Turkey, Elk, and Deer Committees, attending several weekday meetings each year. In this report I will give a quick overview of actions or points of discussion at some of those meetings.

The Elk Committee met three times this past year and will be meeting a few more times this coming year to work on a new elk management plan, and any other elk-related issues that may come to light. The State of Wisconsin has two main elk herds, one in the Clam Lake area, and the other in the Black River Falls area. The original elk of the Clam Lake herd came from Michigan, but now has additional elk transplanted in from Kentucky. Wisconsin has a contract to trap elk from Kentucky for five years; we now have three years of trapping done. In 2018 there will be no elk coming from Kentucky, but Wisconsin will trap elk in 2019 to help add genetic diversity to the Clam Lake herd. The Black River elk herd seems to be doing fine. There were some problems with the elk getting into cranberry bogs, but abatement programs have helped that situation. And yes, wolves have taken some of these elk, but those conflicts seem to have passed for the moment.

A hunting season for elk in Wisconsin is on hold until all trapping from Kentucky is completed. The committee is also working on redoing some of the parameters that mandate and regulate an elk hunt here.

Turkey permits for the 2018 Spring season have been proposed by the DNR Turkey Committee, and now need to be approved by the DNR policy team and the Natural Resources Board. At this point turkey management zones 2 and 6 may see a slight rise in turkey permit numbers. The other zones should remain the same as in 2017. Zone 6 may have enough permits to meet the demand for permits for the very first time. Some areas of the State had really good poult production, but other areas did not because of cold and wet weather this past spring.

Demand for bear harvest permits has continued to increase. Bears have become a very sought-after animal by hunters in Wisconsin. The 2017 harvest was a little less productive for hunters than in the past, but still had decent success rates. A 3-year average of success rates and the number of bear harvested each year compared to set quotas, dictate the number of harvest permits that will be given to hunters for the upcoming season.

A big problem the Bear Committee deals with is the hunting pressure, and over-harvest of bear on public lands, and the under-harvest of bear on some private land areas. The committee has come up with recommendations for the 2018 harvest quotas and permit levels, which also need to be approved, by the DNR policy team

and the NRB before becoming final. Zone A could possibly see a slight increase for 2018, Zone B could see a slight decrease, Zone C will see a slight increase (mainly because of lower success rates), and Zone D will probably see a slight decrease in harvest permits. Statewide, permits should be up slightly.

The Bear Committee will be meeting a few more times than usual in 2018 to finish working on a new bear management plan. The plan we are managing bear from is now 30-plus years old, and needs to be updated. When the plan does come out for public comment, bear hunters need to attend those hearings and express their opinions. A couple of the changes that are being discussed are possible zone boundary changes (taking a portion from Zone C and adding it to Zone D, and taking some of Zone D and adding it to Zone A). Another possible change that may be an area of contention is a change to the length of time a person could bait for bear (now April 15 through the end of the bear harvest season). If you have any interest in bear hunting, make sure you attend these hearings later in 2018.

Deer hunting is a subject that most hunters like to talk about, and with close to a million licenses sold it's not surprising. Many have opinions on how deer should be managed, and with local County Deer Advisory Committees, those opportunities for communication have been improved. Every county CDAC should have a bowhunter representative. However, the CDACs have taken some of the biology out of managing deer here in Wisconsin, with social issues now dictating more of how our deer herds are managed in each county.

I hope you all had a great outdoor experience this past year, and have many more to enjoy in the future.

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