

WBH President Message • *Fall 2017*

It's started. For many of us, preparations for the Fall 2017 hunting seasons are well underway. Those unfamiliar with hunting, especially bowhunting, struggle to understand why we spend countless hours contending with ticks, mosquitos, high water, sweltering temperatures and constant archery practice – and that's all before the seasons even start. They don't understand our secret: it's ALL hunting. Many non-hunters think that pulling the trigger is all that hunting is about, and for a few it may be. A license entitles you to sit in a stand or blind with your bow in hand, but that's just the frosting on the cake. Many of us bowhunters get to "hunt" year-round making that license a real bargain. It might be cultivating food plots or working your body into shape for a western hunt, re-asking landowners for permission, brushing out or setting up tree stands, hauling bear bait, setting and checking trail cameras, scouting well-used deer trails before the leaves drop, and countless other excuses... I mean reasons, to spend time in the woods before the season even starts.

So why do we do it? There have been much more learned scholars than I who have devoted countless words about why people hunt, but I don't think it's all that complicated. I know, for myself, I hunt to: challenge myself, spend quality time outdoors, provide delicious meat for my family, and match wits with some of the most wary and elusive animals – on their turf. I readily admit that I try to seek out the largest and strongest of the species, which are usually the most difficult to harvest, but that's mostly to further challenge myself, and if successful, confirm to myself that I was able to accomplish my goal. I suspect the motivation is similar for many of you.

Also, like many bowhunters, I started shooting archery at a young age. My first bows were bent willow sticks with a string tied to each end. Arrows were fashioned from willow or dogwood with the aid of a handy Boy Scout knife. The bows were only good for a shot or two, but in the hands of a 7-year-old, they were lion killers.

As I got older I graduated to "real" bows. First "straight" bows, then recurves – that worked pretty well for slaying deer. But when compounds were invented, I just had to move up to the latest and greatest equipment. And I have to admit, compounds have allowed me to harvest a lot of critters over the years. The biggest difference over my previous bows and instinctive shooting has been to extend my range with a lot less practice. Which brings up the downside – I don't need to challenge myself as much to get as close to my quarry, and I didn't practice nearly as much.

I've been shooting a recurve a lot lately and together with instinctive shooting, I have to say, I'm really enjoying it; although if I don't start showing more improvement, I'm going to need to get really close.

Shortly after WBH was formed, the organization established a recognition program for archery-harvested animals in Wisconsin. There are big buck, big bear, big turkey, big rough fish, small game and other awards, but the most enduring of all is the Honor Roll. Many newer bowhunters have never seen the Honor Roll which was established to provide cumulative recognition as members harvested more animals as the years went on. It is a handmade fold-open series of decorative panels with individual leather name

labels attached and appropriately marked for each harvest. It traveled to shows and was displayed at WBH events, and was viewed with a sense of pride by those listed and their friends and relatives. Unfortunately, it became too large and unwieldy to transport and was difficult to keep updated as we added more members who were more successful, so it now resides in the museum given its historical significance. However, the Honor Roll is still being maintained and every big game animal registered with a big game questionnaire is still being recorded, and it is our plan to bring it back to be viewed and appreciated by all – on the WBH website. I can tell you that reviewing the amazing accomplishments of many of our members on the Honor Roll is a humbling experience.

There is a lot going on in Madison these days, both with the DNR and the legislature. We are monitoring it closely and I'm guardedly optimistic that it may lead to some good news for bowhunters, hopefully soon. On the national level, to the frustration of many, wolves still have not been delisted (as of July 19th) from the Federal Endangered Species List, which is dimming hopes for a 2017 hunting/trapping season to just begin reducing the ever-expanding wolf population. There are some counties where wolves are killing more deer than all types of hunters – combined; and that was a couple years ago, with the problem only getting worse. In several northern counties hunters can't shoot does in hopes that the few remaining can help rebuild the deer herd. Unfortunately wolves don't abide by the same restrictions and are out there hunting bucks, does and fawns night and day 24/7/365. Combine that with continual losses of livestock, pets, hunting dogs and other wildlife species and it's difficult to understand how animal-rights groups can get a federal judge (a woman living in Washington DC) to rule essentially that wolves must be protected at all cost until they re-inhabit their original range (virtually the whole continental United States).

What should be even more disturbing to most hunters is that these groups, who have been successful in protecting wolves beyond all reason, are in many cases, the same groups that are bent on ending all hunting, starting with bowhunting. Wisconsin recently passed a law prohibiting these activists from disrupting our hunts and harassing hunters in the field. The Animal Legal Defense Fund, another radical animal-rights group, has just filed suit in federal court to have that Wisconsin law struck down on the basis that it violates their right to free speech in order "to protect those who would prefer to prey on animals in secrecy". The sad fact is that based on other federal court rulings, they may be successful and we can look forward to the return of convicted eco-terrorists like Ron Coronodo.

It can get frustrating fighting what sometimes feels like an uphill battle, but I know I've been blessed with amazing opportunities to hunt, and from it, experience the outdoors in remarkable ways that have enriched my life immeasurably. Our kids, grandkids and future generations deserve the same opportunities and need us to make sure they aren't denied by people that don't understand hunting but seem to want to dictate what everyone else does.

Thanks to Roger Grundman and his family who donated 180 acres of hunting land in Polk County to WBH to help promote bowhunting, especially to new and young bowhunters, we have some great opportunities to do just that. Unfortunately travelling several hours to the very remote location of the property in the northwest corner of the state has proved to be a barrier to many prospective users and mentors. To address this, the WBH Board, together with the Land Trust Board and others are working on some exciting alternatives that could bring those opportunities much closer to potential users. This is

still in the planning stage but thanks to the generosity of the Grundman family and the hard work, skill and insight of several of our members, WBH is poised to take another large step forward in our mission to promote, preserve and protect bowhunting in Wisconsin.

Thank You – to all of you, because your support and membership is what makes this all possible.

Good hunt'n this Fall!

Mike Brust

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