

WISCONSIN BOWHUNTERS ASSOCIATION®

President's Message

Spring 2016

To those that were able to come and enjoy it, thanks for making our 75th Anniversary Convention one to remember! From all the historic memorabilia, to a hall full of exhibitors, a NASP tournament of almost 200 young shooters, great seminars and a large display of trophy heads and mounts, there was a lot to do and see. Our banquet had our largest crowd in many years and we enjoyed an excellent meal and a great presentation from our keynote speaker, Frank Noska from Alaska (thanks Greg Prince and Tom Miranda). The site, Chula Vista Resort in the Dells was so well received that we will be returning there next year with Tom Miranda as our keynote speaker. You can start making plans now.

OK, now on to CWD. It's no exaggeration to say that CWD threatens our deer herd, and consequently, the future of deer hunting, as we know it. A researcher studying mule deer in some Wyoming CWD areas has determined that CWD, by itself, has caused a reduction of the deer herds in those areas by more than half. And in some of those areas deer will no longer exist by 2041. In Wisconsin we see CWD popping up in different parts of the state, usually around game farms. Almost all evidence suggests that the high concentration of deer within these pens is a contributor to the problem. In much of the wild, feeding is prohibited because the resulting close contact might contribute to CWD, but in deer farms there can be hundreds of deer in a relatively small area, with no similar restrictions.

Unfortunately, game farms aren't regulated by the DNR; they come under the jurisdiction of the Dept. of Agriculture who treats them similarly to how they might treat a dairy farm. Unlike dairy farms however, these high-fenced operations have the potential to be ticking time bombs, and every time one goes off, deer hunters are most affected, and often have to pick up the tab besides. For several reasons CWD has been downplayed in Wisconsin, but many believe that to stop its spread, game farms should be closed or at least regulated (and regulations strictly enforced) to the point where CWD can't be spread from them. And if it still happens, the owner can't collect for his "lost revenue" and should be held liable for the resulting loss to the deer herd/hunting as well as the contaminated ground created. To avoid this, many game farmers would simply declare bankruptcy, so they should be required to carry insurance to cover the potential liability.

This would require a change through our legislature. I have been told that the game farm lobby is just too strong to obtain these common sense changes. But hunters have a voice too, and if it takes a combined effort of the hundreds of thousands of deer hunters to protect the future of deer hunting, it may be something we all have to become involved in. The first step though, is to be aware of the very real threat CWD is to deer hunting.

Now on to another acronym, CDAC, which will be very important to all of us in the future. CDAC stands for County Deer Advisory Committee. Every county has one, and if you have any interest at all in deer hunting in any county – you should attend their meetings. Many of the spring CDAC meetings are already over, but the future of what deer hunting will look like in each county will depend a lot on decisions made by its CDAC. Especially since Act 21, attending these meetings will be as important, if not more important to deer hunters than attending the spring hearings. Everyone should understand that by definition, every CDAC has representatives from groups like the highway department, agriculture and forestry, and these groups generally favor less deer; so it's absolutely critical that hunters are strongly represented in order to balance things out.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find an alert from the Sportsmen's Alliance to call our two WI senators in support of the Sportsmen's Act now pending in congress. This is a great bill that, among other things, would prevent more animal-rights lawsuits intended to stop wolf hunting or any responsible management of wolves. Please make the calls. If everyone that receives this magazine would simply make these two calls, it could be huge, because senators from other states will be watching and probably supportive of the senators of affected states like Wisconsin. Also, be aware that the crossbow issue is far from over. The legislature specified that for 2014 and 2015 the length of the crossbow season would be the same as the archery season to confirm the crossbow folk's claim that crossbows were no more effective than archery equipment. Well, the data is now in, and it shows, not to our surprise, that crossbow hunters were much more effective on bucks than bowhunters in the archery season or even gun hunters in the gun season. And they are especially effective in targeting bucks before the gun season. Even though there were less than half as many crossbow hunters as archers, in 2015 crossbow hunters took more bucks in the highly stressed northern forest region than archery hunters did!

Historically, gun hunters in the gun season and bowhunters in the archery season have had almost identical success on bucks year after year, which would suggest that those seasons are pretty well balanced. However, over the first two years crossbow success on bucks has averaged almost 40% higher than either archers or gun hunters.

The data also shows that crossbows didn't bring the promised surge in deer hunters. Most switched from archery or gun, or just quit. Total deer hunter numbers actually dropped sharply when the crossbow season was added. And it's not really a big surprise that hunters have gravitated to a much more effective weapon used before the gun season opens.

After the first two years, it now becomes the responsibility of the DNR to adjust the new season to provide a fair and equitable balance of the resource to all Wisconsin deer hunters, and we will be encouraging them to do just that. Our knife promotion to stabilize membership has been going well. However, it only extends to the end of August, so re-up now for 3 or 5 years (or life) and enjoy your quality WBH knife on us.

Well, it's almost time to get out and start practicing for the upcoming bowhunting seasons. Have fun and remember to support your clubs!

- Mike Brust

