

Winter 2023

DNR Report

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This time of year my world becomes busy with numerous DNR meetings and those of other associations I support and believe in.

The first meeting I am involved with is exciting to be a part of, the DNR's Elk Study Committee. The most revealing part is to review the harvest information from the 2022 season.

For those of you who haven't yet heard, it was a historic season. For the first time in the modern era of archery in Wisconsin an elk was harvested with a bow & arrow. One part of this I, and I suspect most WBH members, appreciate is that this bull elk was taken by Dan Evenson, who is a WBH life member. That is something we all should be proud of.

There were 3 elk harvest permits awarded by the DNR in 2022 to hunters in a lucky lottery draw system. An additional tag was given to the RMEF for their continued efforts in supporting the state's efforts to reintroduce elk in Wisconsin. (Note: this was the final such tag awarded to the RMEF in 5 consecutive years.) All 4 of these 2022 harvest permits were filled during the first few days of the season. There were some impressive bulls shot again this year with ages ranging from 3 ½ to 14 ½ years old. The largest was a 6 by 7 bull. Native Americans also filled all 4 of their harvest permits.

Within the committee some discussion was held about the elk management plan with minor revisions. These dealt with the future of elk management in Wisconsin and were based on good biological data.

As stated in my last article there is a chance that the Black River Falls herd (Central Forest) may have enough elk to allow a hunt in 2023. We will make that decision later this year.

There's an interesting new study which will begin either this winter or next. This study will allow biologists to implant a small disc into each elk cow that is trapped during the winter. When the calf is born the disc will be discharged at the same time and allows the biologist a new way of finding elk calves in the spring.

The Wisconsin elk herd is doing great and it is important to the state, and all of us, to help in any way we can to help propagate these animals.

Next, I participated in a DNR Bear Committee meeting. A lot of information was discussed but many biologists particularly pointed out hound issues, trespassing and unethical behavior by the participants of bear hunts.

There are a number of bear studies that are ongoing and include those related to reproduction, diet, litter size, and litter frequency. In addition, a hair study will allow the department to assess the bear population. They will match hair samples with DNA taken from bears which will allow the ability to see what portion of the bear population is being harvested. This is similar to the tetracycline surveys done in the past which measured the mark and recapture rate to give an estimate on the bear population in the state. A den survey started in 2021-2022. This study will go on for about four years. Around one hundred bears were collared this past winter. This study will also help with some of the other studies going on. The Wisconsin DNR is asking anyone who knows the whereabouts of a bear den to please contact your regional wildlife biologist about the location of that den.

The topic of rule simplification was brought up by the chairman of the committee. The Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association and the representative for the HRC made sure all were reminded that one simplification approved by this committee but rejected by the NRB is to allow hound hunting for bear in the new BMZ C. These two organizations are going to continually push for this to happen. Another simplification item brought up was to allow one group or the other (hounds men or baiters) to start the harvest season every year. I commented that while WBH is open to discussion, we currently support the flip flop of seasons as initially implemented in 1986. Besides, a hunter that wants to hunt by other methods can start at the earliest possible opener each and every year. A suggestion was brought up about allowing all hunters to start hunting at the same time which did not receive much discussion. One item discussed extensively at every meeting as of late is how to shorten the wait time for a harvest permit in some zones. WBHA suggested raising the application fee for a harvest permit or preference point to \$20.00. While this would likely reduce the amount of people who apply each year, it would primarily benefit hound hunters, who get to participate every year.

The big agenda item for the day was to examine and discuss the 2022 bear harvest report and to make suggestions for the 2023 harvest season. All BMZ's were close to reaching their harvest goal objectives; a few were lower, and some did exceed these goals. The committee was reminded that this was only the second year with the new BMZs so some data is an estimate using new numbers from the new zones and some old data from the old zones. I can report that the 2023 harvest quotas and harvest permit levels are fairly close to those of 2022. For BMZ F we did increase permits significantly. The LTH program this year resulted in the harvest of 8 bears. Remember, one of those bear harvests was from the WBH LTH harvest permit. Objectives for bear populations were discussed for each BMZ. Zone A was proposed to maintain and possibly increase, BMZs B and C are to maintain populations at present levels. BMZ D is still looking at reducing its bear population. We are looking to maintain or possibly initiate a slow growth of the bear population in BMZ E. And in BMZ F it was suggested to let local hunters control bear populations.

Turkey hunting in Wisconsin has been a great addition to our state's outdoor sports program. It occurs during a time where ice fishing is done, open water fishing for the most part has not opened yet, and most people have not started vacations and camping.

Turkey harvest figures from this past fall are similar to recent years. Harvest rates comparing hen vs. tom and juvenile are fairly equal with all ages.

The hunter survey still shows that close to 80% of those surveyed are happy with the present season structure and don't want it to change. Some complaints have been received from hunters about the reduction in turkey populations in selected areas of the state. Surveys taken by the state reveal some areas that were actually above goal at one time or another when it pertains to the habitat available for a good healthy population.

When addressing the harvest quotas and permits for the 2023 spring season it was recommended by the committee to keep all zones equal to 2022 except for TMZ 6 in which we supported an increase in the permits and quotas.

To those who participated in the 2022 brood survey...thank you! All TMZs had a good response to the survey giving the department a good census on turkey reproduction. In 2022 the survey lasted 90 days; in 2023 this will be reduced to the 31 days of August only.

The committee will be looking at awarding an estimated \$1.36 million dollars starting sometime early next year. These monies can only be used on lands open for public hunting and for improving turkey habitat and food sources. It can be applied for by any viable organization in the State of Wisconsin. The committee asked to be informed on how these projects were improving or helping turkeys in the state.

I have not had a deer committee meeting since my last report to this membership, but my understanding from the information received so far regarding the 2022 deer seasons was that participation was ok and the hunt successful for some.