

WISCONSIN BOWHUNTERS ASSOCIATION®

President's Message

Winter 2014

It's mid-November as I write this, and we had 10 below zero this morning here in northcentral Wisconsin - and that's before the wind chill. Rut or not, sitting long hours in a treestand in these conditions isn't fun. We have 10 inches of snow on the ground, and if the long-term forecasts are correct, it may still be here in April. The bucks are still moving, but around here they haven't re-opened their scrapes.

Despite all this, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. Bowhunting in Wisconsin is special, and every year brings new challenges – and opportunities. Congratulations to all of you that have been successful, whether you held out for a buck or took a doe for the freezer, you did it the hard way – with a bow and arrow.

While some of our members may have tried crossbow hunting this year, I suspect I'll be getting a lot more call like I have in the past from the 65+ crowd who tried them and switched back to archery equipment - because "it's not like bowhunting". Sure, it's an easier and faster way to harvest a deer, and we applaud anyone that gets out hunting – with any weapon. But you, our members, perhaps more than anyone, understand that bowhunting isn't really about harvesting an animal as quickly or easily as possible.

The results from the crossbow harvest this year will be very interesting, and combined with next year's results will dictate how that season may be limited or restricted in the future.

The deer herd still appears to be down considerably in many areas and I expect there will be a lot of complaining to the DNR, especially after the gun season. But going forward, determining the deer population in your area won't be as much up to the DNR as it will be up to you and the people in the county where you hunt. One of the biggest changes resulting from the "deer trustee" recommendations is that every county now has a "deer committee" that will recommend changes in the deer population; specifically, should it go up, down or stay the same? These county committees, or County Deer Advisory Councils (CDAC's) have all met and developed recommendations for the next three years.

Unfortunately, hunter participation at many of the meetings was light, and with many other conflicting interests involved, many counties did not recommend rebuilding their deer populations. This is something new, but if we as hunters don't "show up", then others in our counties will determine how many deer we will have to hunt.

In several parts of the state, wolves also have an impact on the deer population. Deer are amazing animals and a healthy population can rebound quickly; however a population that has been reduced to very sparse numbers may take many years to rebuild - under ideal conditions. However if predators take a percentage of the few remaining does that hunters spare, the population may never rebound. While wolves aren't the only predators affecting deer, unlike other predators that can switch to small game and rodents as deer numbers drop, wolves' primary food source in Wisconsin is whitetail deer, and that's day and night, 24/7/365, not just fawns in the spring like most other predators here. As the

deer herd in the north has been depleted, wolves have been moving south into more unsuitable habitat and closer proximity to people and livestock - because that's where their food source is still available. You can't blame the wolves, they're doing what wolves do.

But we can manage wolves. While some folks think we should have no wolves, others (many from outside the state) believe wolves should exist wherever their food source exists, and in whatever numbers that food source will allow.

Wisconsin is approaching a critical point in the determination of whether wolves should continue to expand their range and numbers, or be controlled to areas where they don't create a lot of problems and in numbers that don't have a significant adverse effect on other wildlife populations, livestock, pets and concerns for human safety.

I have represented WBH on the DNR Wolf Committee in all-day monthly meetings going back for well over a year. The biggest charge for that committee has been to develop a new (10 year+) Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan. As you might imagine, there are a wide range of opinions but it's all going to come down to a series of public hearings, probably in January, to select from four options developed by the committee. After that, the Board of Natural Resources will make the final decisions in February or March.

Here's where WBH needs you to "show up". The "wolf people" and animal rights groups will be turning out a lot of people at these public hearings, and if we as hunters, farmers and sportspeople don't attend in even larger numbers and support responsible wolf management and reduced wolf numbers, we will be facing a bleak deer hunting future, and worse yet, we will have allowed animal rights and anti-hunting groups to set wildlife management policy in Wisconsin. The long-term repercussions of that are scary to even think about.

There are a lot more of us than there are them. But if we don't "show up" at these public hearings, it doesn't matter. Hunters have a history of sitting back and figuring someone else will take care of these kind of things for them. And in some cases, WBH and others can do that. But at times we need your help to show that WBH isn't just a few spokespeople; as a group we are several thousand committed hunters that will stand up for what we believe in.

I'm still waiting on the dates and locations of the public hearings, and we will try to get them in this magazine if there is still time. Otherwise, they will be posted and published in as many places as we and other sporting groups can get them out to.

Finally, assuming we prevail and obtain a recommendation of 350 or less wolves statewide, the battle then moves to the Natural Resources Board at their February or March meeting. The animal rights groups will send a lot of lawyers and out-of-state spokespeople to try to intimidate the NRB to increase the population goal. However, here again, if we "show up" in significant numbers, the Board has a long history of supporting the people that come and testify.

As you know from elsewhere in this magazine our 2015 convention will be in Oshkosh at the Best Western Premier Waterfront Hotel and Convention Center.

It's a beautiful facility and we have a great lineup of seminars and speakers as well as exhibitors, trophy displays and a NASP archery tournament. Be sure to get your hotel reservations in early because room space is limited and it's a great opportunity this year because we've worked out a deal where free breakfast buffets and free ramp parking are included. It works out to a better deal than many of the "bargain" hotels and you're right on site, with just a skyway walk to the convention center. Even if you can't stay overnight, be sure to come on Saturday to take in the seminars and exhibits.

I hope that each of you has had a rewarding hunting season and I look forward to seeing you in Oshkosh!

Mike

