

## WBH DNR Update - Spring 2020

Over the past few months I have attended many DNR committee meetings. Some of you may know, some may not know, that I represent WBH on the Bear, Turkey, Whitetail Deer, and Elk committees. For the past eight years I have tried my best to represent the bowhunters of the state and what I think is also best for the resource. Sometimes this can become difficult to do.

I will start with the bear committee which didn't have as many meetings this year being as we had completed the new Bear Management Plan. The new, yet totally unapproved bear management plan is in its final stages of approval. There will be some changes that hunters will have to adjust to. There will not be a 3-day wait period if you buy your harvest permit during the harvest season. This is a simple one to adjust to. Okay, now for some more difficult ones to adjust to. There are going to be some Bear Management Boundaries changes (BMZ). This may affect some people a great deal, some others not so much. The northern portion of BMZ D is going to be adjoined with BMZ A. This allows for more similar bear habitat, bear damage reports and nuisance complaints to be put into one zone. This adjustment will probably make it so that people who applied in the old portion of BMZ D (now part of BMZ A) which had a six year or so wait period for a harvest permit may now have an eight to nine year wait period. The most northern portion of BMZ C on the western part of the state will now be added to the southern part of BMZ D. This will really affect bear hunters here because in the current BMZ C you can receive a bear harvest permit on an average of every other year.

Also, the western portion of BMZ A is being added to BMZ D. These two areas have similar habitat and have many bear damage complaints each year. With the new zone in place hunters may now have to wait five to seven years or so. A big change.

The last big change that the remaining portion of the current BMZ C is now divided into three BMZs. The Central Forest region, which is the best portion of BMZ C for bear habitat, will be a zone. On the western edge of the state the new BMZ E has all somewhat similar bear habitat and bear are thought to be able to thrive in this area. It's hard to even begin to predict what wait times for a harvest permit there might be. I guess we will see.

The eastern portion of the state will be BMZ F. This area includes the Fox Valley, Milwaukee, and Madison. If bear want to live here, they may but will be equally regulated by available habitat and social tolerance. This BMZ may have the lowest wait time. These new BMZs will not go into effect until the 2021 bear harvest season if approved as written in the BMP.

Because of the time it takes to get all these changes in place correctly there will probably be a delay in the time you will be able to apply for a harvest permit or preference point for the 2021 bear season. The thought now is that in 2021 you will not be able to apply until the beginning of June of that year. I know how we can plan other hunts out west or wherever when I have to apply for a bear permit so late. We all will have to grin and BEAR it for that year.

■ Now for harvest permit and quotas for 2020. I attended a meeting the other day and preliminary quotas and permits are very similar to last year but are generally down. Because of a four-year average of success rates a little higher and the desire by most of the DNR Bear Committee to want bear populations to increase is why permits and quotas are going to be down.

Deer is the same old–same old. I have not had a meeting for a few months on this but am sure multiple meetings will be scheduled once all harvest seasons are completed. From what I hear, harvest success rates were considerably lower across the whole state during the gun deer season. The crossbow, archery season, and youth hunts are a different story all together.

Elk in Wisconsin are here to stay as long as hunters quit harvesting them thinking they are whitetail deer. A lady in Rusk County harvested two small bull elk thinking they were deer.

The 2019 elk hunt went well. All five general elk harvest permits were filled. For the first time a female hunter harvested an elk in Wisconsin during modern times. Native Americans harvested their five elk also. The DNR Elk Committee is updating the state's EMP so I have had, I believe, four meetings this past summer dealing with the plan. 2020 will bring in a new way of procuring elk permits. In the past permits were calculated by taking 5% of the elk herd population in the Clam Lake area. This would give you the amount of permits available to harvest. That will change in 2020. We will now adjust permits according to the best estimates of available adult bulls in each herd. For some reason there were about 8,000 less people applying for an elk harvest permit in 2019, which is good for those who are still applying. Predation of elk by bears and wolves continues in certain areas of the state, both in the northern and southern EMZs. Survival rates of calves have been good on an overall average. Two of the older living elk have died over the past year. The one big bull was a killer of younger elk bulls. He had a good reputation for that.

Turkeys are easy. So far, the fall harvest is down somewhat but that has been a trend for the past ten years. Bowhunters are the biggest number of hunters harvesting turkeys in the fall. The 2020 turkey harvest permits have been approved by the DNR Turkey Committee but have to be approved by the upper management of the DNR, policy team and the NRB. All TMZ have very similar harvest permits to 2019.

There may be a change on the horizon to the starting date for the spring season. The change would be to start the first harvest season on the second Wednesday in April instead of the third Wednesday. Also, there is talk of doing away with the landowner preference system, of which turkeys are the only species the state does this for.

This is my report. I know there are many other points of interest that I could include but I only have so much time. Good Luck hunting!!!

Richard Kirchmeyer  
WBH District 2 Director  
DNR Liaison