

WISCONSIN BOWHUNTERS ASSOCIATION®

President's Message

Fall 2014

Is Wisconsin the center of the bowhunting universe?

Wisconsin leads the nation in the number of deer harvested with archery equipment year after year. We produce more trophy bucks than any other state, and our bear and turkey hunting opportunities aren't bad either. Much of the history of bowhunting was written right here in Wisconsin; a fact we recently celebrated at our 75th Anniversary convention. Pope and Young just held their first-ever rendezvous here because from their membership standpoint, "Wisconsin is the geographic epicenter of the bowhunting world".

And while the DNR gets blamed for a lot of things, our long history of great bowhunting opportunity and success, including generous seasons and regulations, suggests that our DNR has also been doing a lot of things right; especially when you look at what some other states have done. For one thing, our DNR, and the Conservation Department before them, have a long history of working with bowhunters to provide us with the most and best opportunities possible, while managing the resource and balancing the harvest among all users.

Fortunately our bowhunters also have a long history of being united and organized. I don't think it's a coincidence that many consider Wisconsin the center of the bowhunting world and we also have the largest state bowhunting association in the nation.

But why is WBH successful when other organizations struggle? I believe the answer to that question is: you, and members like you. You get it. You understand that bowhunting is special, and like so many things these days, it's under constant attack. It's easy to just go bowhunting and hope someone else steps up to fight for us, but you understand that if everyone did that, we wouldn't be bowhunting for long. So you don't just talk the talk. You understand that as individuals it's tough for any of us to make a difference, but together we can.

Your membership is the key. Bureaucrats and politicians tend to pay much more attention when a representative from a united group of thousands of bowhunters comes to see them.

Yep, we have an excellent magazine that helps keep you informed on what's going on with bowhunting in Wisconsin, share hunting information, success photos, where to shoot in the off-season, as well as details of various Association activities. And we have several awards programs to recognize your archery accomplishments – which we encourage you to participate in. And of course a great state broadhead shoot and convention. But our overall objectives are really quite simple: to promote, preserve and protect the great sport of bowhunting in Wisconsin.

We are all bowhunters. We are all in this together. And we all contribute in our own ways. Your membership really does help strengthen WBH's ability to promote, preserve and protect our sport, and for that all bowhunters owe you thanks.

And a special thanks to all of you that have supported our extended year membership drive. By joining for three years or five years or life (or Sr. Life) you not only save the time and hassle of rejoining every year, you also save money on the reduced extended year rate. And because we don't have the expense of extra data entry and renewal notices, we can offer the free Browning WBH knives besides. In fact, this membership drive has been so successful that the board has voted to extend the promotion for another year, until the end of August, 2017.

So what are some of the issues facing bowhunters today? Well, as someone that hunts in Wisconsin's north, I can tell you firsthand that one issue is the lack of deer. Deer hunting participation drops when there are fewer deer to hunt. There is little question that as hunters, in the past we overharvested deer, especially does, in several areas. But why aren't they coming back? The consensus seems to be: the population is so low it's hard to rebuild from such a small number (nothing plus nothing is still nothing), and predators.

Coyotes, bobcats, bears and wolves all take their toll on the deer herd. But coyotes, bears and bobcats prey mainly on deer fawns for a few weeks in spring and early summer when the fawns are vulnerable. Wolves, on the other hand, eat deer year-round; bucks, does and fawns. A recent study by the DNR has been cited as "proof" that wolves aren't the most significant predator on deer in Wisconsin. But what they don't say is that it was a study of Whitetail fawns. The smaller predators "binge out" to the extent that they can when does drop their fawns. Wolves on the other hand have just as likely been killing the pregnant does – and all their fawns - all through the winter and spring. Some animal-rights groups want the public to believe that Wisconsin's wolves have little impact on our deer herd. These same groups said the same thing about elk out west – until it was proven that smaller numbers of wolves have virtually wiped out large herds of elk across the west. In Wisconsin wolves primary food source is deer, night and day 24/7/365. And if you believe wolves only take the weak and the sick, or that they eat everything they kill, there is plenty of information available to show that it's simply not true. And you don't have to look to other states or ancient history to find examples. Just within the last 2 months and just in Wisconsin in two different parts of the state, wolves went on killing sprees, wantonly slaughtering 17 sheep in one case and 7 in another. As usual, these and many other incidents weren't widely reported by the media, however there is now a website called wisconsinwolffacts.com that is committed to reporting all the facts regarding the detrimental impact of wolves in Wisconsin. There will also be a wolf conference in Cumberland, WI on Sept. 15th to help refute all the misinformation being put out by the animal-rights groups.

Again, it's easy to blame the DNR, but in this case their hands are tied by a federal judge. Hopefully that decision will be reversed soon and the DNR can re-establish hunting to bring the wolf population back down to the statewide management goal of 350 wolves. Even before the new pups were born, the number of counted wolves was more than 2 ½ times that many, with the actual total wolf population through most of the year probably closer to 4 or 5 times that goal. The other thing to watch for is the

strategy by the animal-rights groups to keep tying this up in court while the populations continues to skyrocket (which the “experts” said several hundred wolves ago couldn’t happen); and then try to raise the goal instead of managing the wolves at a biologically reasonable level.

WBH will continue supporting the efforts of the DNR and CDACs to rebuild our deer herd through good management practices and responsible predator control.

The other issue that is having a significant impact on bowhunting in Wisconsin is crossbows. Not surprisingly, based on what we have seen in other states, many bowhunters switched from archery equipment to crossbows. Many who just gun hunted in the past also took up crossbows. The main reason is undoubtedly because of their much better chance of taking a buck with a crossbow.

Crossbows are here to stay; there is way too much money involved to have kept them out. But in Wisconsin we were able to do what no other state was able to accomplish till now: keep crossbows separate from archery hunting so they could be regulated and measured separately.

Well the first two years of data are now in, and while the results aren’t surprising to those of us that understand hunting with a bow and arrow, some legislators seem dumbfounded to see the confirmation that crossbows are much more effective. Elsewhere in this issue is a breakdown of that data – and potential solutions – which I encourage you to read, but the bottom line is that the DNR now has the authority, and responsibility, to adjust the crossbow season to bring it in line with other forms of deer hunting, while returning advantages for the handicapped and elderly that were effectively lost with this change.

We will be working through several channels to help bring this all about.

Like many of you, my anticipation is already building for the upcoming bowhunting seasons, which are now only weeks away. I try to shoot at least a couple times a week, get to some 3D shoots, and I’ve put out a couple trail cameras to see what’s roaming the woods. If the big buck from last year’s pictures is still around, he should be a dandy this year.

It’s a great time to be a bowhunter!

