

Legislative Update

Fall 2024

The legislature has been out of session since our last issue. Legislators are back in their home districts; with many campaigning for reelection.

Under Republican leadership, the legislature has generally been favorable towards hunting and hunters over the last few sessions. This could change, however. There are many new district boundaries that have been redrawn by the current administration, which caters to “environmentalists” instead of hunters.

While national politics receives much of the attention in the press during an election year, there are many everyday issues, on which our state legislature makes the call.

Local and state elections are as important, or often more important, than those receiving all the news coverage.

When you go to the polls – and DO go to the polls – make sure you support the “down ballot” candidates that support your views. You can be sure that the anti-hunting groups are encouraging their members to do this.

Even though legislators have not been in Madison it does not mean they have not been busy; I have been to meetings with several legislators in attendance. The focus of these meetings and most of the discussion, especially in the north, revolves around deer and wolves.

The governor vetoed the bill to temporarily prevent doe harvest in the north so the herd could rebound. Since then, legislators and others have been searching for ways to bring back the deer population, and deer hunters, to the north.

What much of the discussion at these meetings revolves around though, is wolves. Certainly, there are other predators impacting the deer herd, but wolves have reduced the deer population beyond the tipping point in many areas. In fact, if you use the DNR’s own numbers of how many deer are consumed by each wolf, and their own conservative wolf population numbers and locations, it shows that in several counties in northern Wisconsin, wolves remove more deer than hunters do.

At a recent meeting in Medford put on by Hunter Nation, one of the attendees lamented that the whole situation with wolves has almost nothing to do with actual wolf welfare or their impact on other species. Instead, it is all about money and political agendas. Unfortunately, this is sad but true.

Right now, our DNR is directly controlled by a governor beholden to tribes that contribute heavily, and a political base that thinks deer hunters should be replaced by wolves.

As for deer, some are suggesting that we scrap the whole County Deer Advisory Council (CDAC) system and county control and go back to the DNR managing everything under the old Deer Management Unit (DMU) format. While managing deer by habitat type makes a lot of sense, so does local control. In Marathon County, the largest county in the state, we have habitat that ranges from heavy agriculture in one part of the county to deep forest in another. We have been trying for years to get approval to divide the county so we can manage deer where they are. But because the DNR and NRB have not approved the changes, we must set quotas that overharvest deer in the areas where they are scarce to control them where they are more abundant. Instead of scrapping the entire system, if the DNR and NRB would just allow counties to manage deer in reasonable- sized units within the counties, based on their distribution and landowner tolerance, we could have the best of both worlds.

I have been a CDAC member since the program's inception and one main problem I see is with the make-up of the CDAC's themselves. Of the eight potential CDAC members in Marathon County, only one is there specifically to represent the interests of hunters. The others may or may not, depending on the individual. There are at least three members representing groups that would like fewer deer in practically every case. Fortunately, Marathon County is fairly good because there is still a strong hunting heritage here, but there are some counties where the CDAC members vote to remain at an already decimated deer population level. One would hope that those that take the trouble of coming to testify at CDAC meeting would direct the CDAC votes, but many hunters no longer come because they tell us "You don't listen to us anyway." You would think that the group that is paying most of the bills for the deer program, would be given more of a say in how the program is implemented.

Unfortunately, whether we like it or not, much of this comes back to politics and fortunately, that is where we do have a say: please VOTE.