

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
 Natural Resources Board Agenda Item

Corrected on 2/18/2015

**SUBJECT:** Request that the Board approve white-tailed deer population objectives for each deer management unit.

**FOR:** February 2015 Board meeting

**TO BE PRESENTED BY:** Tom Hauge, Director, Bureau of Wildlife Management

**SUMMARY:**

This action will establish deer population objectives for a three year period. The proposed objectives are based on the recommendations of county deer management advisory councils.

Administrative rules implementing the 2012 Deer Trustee Report establish that the department will seek input from groups or representatives for certain deer related interests in establishing quotas by creating county deer management advisory councils. These councils have considered comments from members of the public on the status of the deer herd and made recommendations to the department upon which these proposed population objectives are based.

The same rules have eliminated numeric deer population goals and replaced them with a simplified statement of objectives to "increase, stabilize, or decrease the deer population." The board's approval will establish the new population objectives in each unit for the first time. Deer population objectives for each county will continue to be reviewed on a recurring three year basis.

Antlerless deer permit levels will be developed based upon the new population objectives. The department will request approval of the number of antlerless permits to issue for the 2015 season at the May board meeting.

Correction: The map on page 5 has been corrected to show Calumet with an objective to "maintain".

**RECOMMENDATION:** Request that the Board approve white-tailed deer population objectives for each deer management unit.

**LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS (check all that are applicable):**

Background memo

Approved by	Signature	Date
Tom Hauge Bureau Director	<i>Tom Hauge sr</i>	2/13/15
Kurt Thiede, Administrator, Land Division Administrator	<i>Kurt Thiede</i>	2/13/15
Cathy Stepp, Secretary	<i>Michael D. Brul</i>	2/13/15

DATE: February 16th, 2015  
TO: Natural Resource Board Members  
FROM: Cathy Stepp, Secretary  
SUBJECT: Three-year Deer Population Objective Recommendations

FILE REF: 2300

**Recommendation:** I am offering the following deer population objective recommendations for Natural Resources Board (NRB) consideration and approval. The objectives will be in effect for this year and remain in effect through the 2017 deer season (Figure 1 and Table 1).

**Background:** With the changes implemented as a result of the Deer Trustee Review (DTR) of Wisconsin's deer management program, we have converted to a county-based system of deer management units. In addition, we are switching from numeric three-year deer density (15 deer/mi<sup>2</sup>) population goals to three-year deer population trend objectives (increase, maintain or decrease). NRB approval of the deer population objectives is required to inform the 2015 antlerless quota setting process that will begin in March.

The recommendations before you represent the work of the newly-established County Deer Advisory Councils (CDACs). These councils were created as part of the DTR changes to strengthen local public involvement in deer herd management. With these CDAC recommendations for the 2015-17 deer population objectives, we have opened a new chapter in the history of Wisconsin deer management.

CDAC formation and processes – The formation of the CDACs began in late summer of 2014. Our key partner in this early stage was the Conservation Congress. Each CDAC is chaired by a county delegate of the Conservation Congress. In addition, the Congress provided an alternate Chair for each CDAC to record CDAC minutes and to serve as the Chair, if needed. We are very grateful to the Congress delegates that have agreed to serve in these roles and to Congress Chair Rob Bohmann and Vice-Chair Larry Bonde for their leadership.

Working together, council members and department staff were able to fill almost 550 stakeholder seats, and thereby established a CDAC in all 72 counties of Wisconsin. Council members included representatives of local and statewide hunting groups, various aspects of agriculture, forestry, tourism and business owners, as well as transportation and urban representatives, and cooperators newly enrolled in the Deer Management Assistance Program. The assembling of these county entities alone was an incredible accomplishment in such a short timeframe. Many council members have told us that this experience has been an eye-opening and gratifying experience. I thank and welcome them to the multi-faceted and complicated world of deer management!

Department staff from the Wildlife Management, Forestry, and Law Enforcement programs committed thousands of hours serving as liaisons to each county council by attending and presenting information at meetings, providing input and answers to deer and forest management questions, and working with council members on all aspects of this effort. In addition, the Science Services staff developed more than 6,200 pages of county-specific deer metrics to help inform council members on the current deer impacts, harvest, and other key information that council members used in developing their final recommendations.

## Final County Deer Advisory Council Recommendations for 3-Year Deer Population Objectives

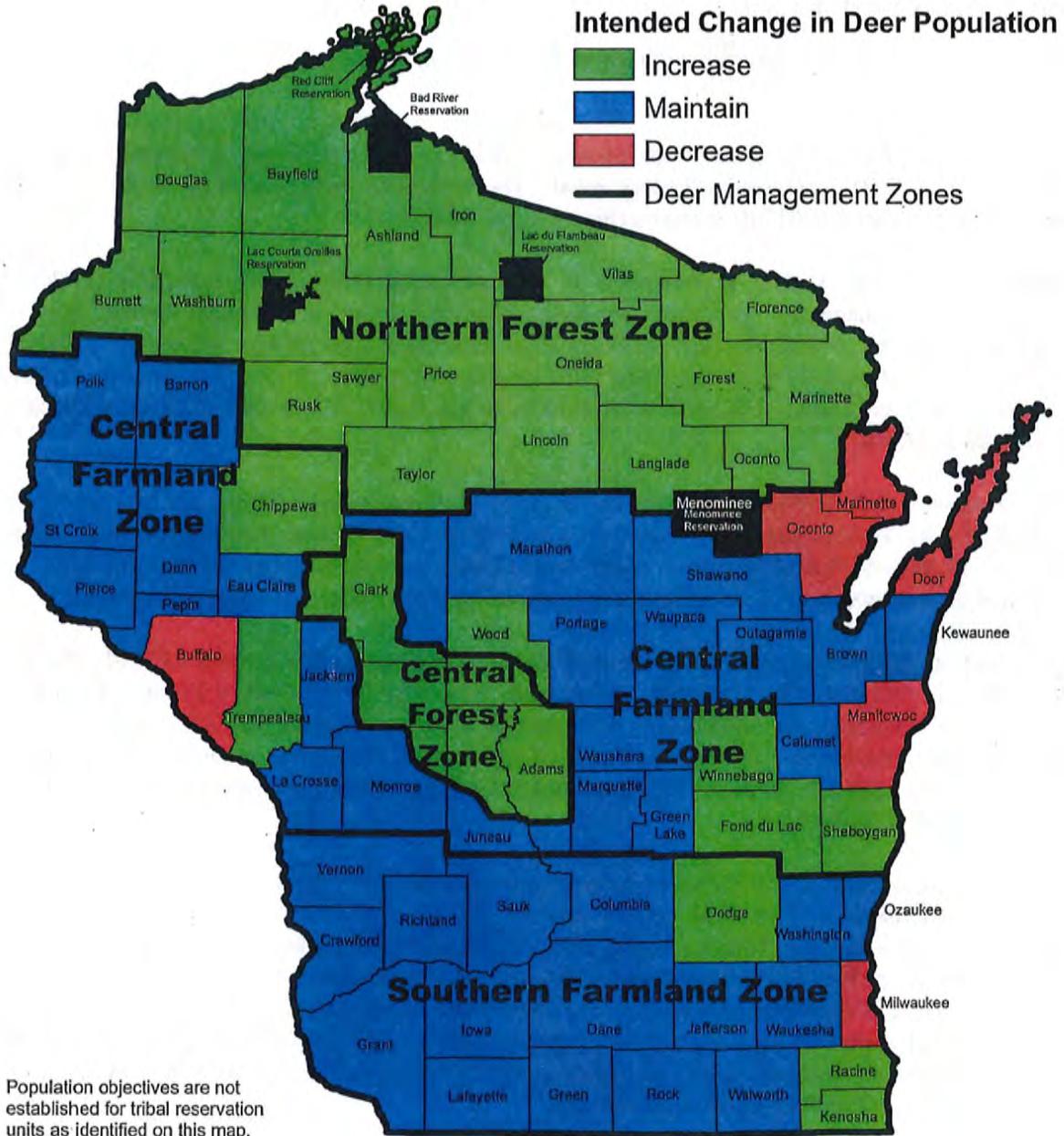


Figure 1: Final County Deer Advisory Councils recommendations for 3-year deer population objectives - February 2015

Science Services was also instrumental in helping to develop methods of gathering public feedback within each county. Council training sessions, videos, timely email updates, and so much more were created by several department programs to help support the councils.

In addition, department staff developed various documents to assist the councils in keeping the public informed and engaged in their efforts to establish a population objective for their county. Forms to capture meeting minutes, recommendations, public comments and more were developed, along with statewide and local press release templates and other documents to help announce meeting dates and locations. A CDAC web site was developed as both a place for the public to follow and participate, as well as apply for a seat or find basic information. More than 375 county-specific documents were submitted by the councils and posted to this web site for public viewing.

Public participation: Three public meetings were held in each county with the exception of Menominee County. These included September and October meetings where councils formulated their preliminary recommendations. Those recommendations then went out for public review in November and early December, and the information gathered during that period was used by the councils to develop their final recommendations at the December meetings.

In all, 214 council meetings occurred throughout the state where public comment was heard. More than 8,100 people provided feedback regarding county specific recommendations through the online gathering of public opinion. Understandably, we found that people with fewer deer in their counties were more likely to provide feedback, while those with good numbers of deer were less likely to provide feedback. Additional interaction between council members and the public took place at deer camps, coffee shops, and other gathering places, as well as through emails, phone calls, and letters. This public feedback resulted in 14 counties that changed their preliminary recommendations to better reflect what they heard from their counties.

Tribal perspective: You will recall that within the Ceded Territory, all CDACs include membership for a representative from the Chippewa Tribes. The tribes elected to not appoint representatives to the CDACs, and chose to provide input directly to the department through the Voigt Task Force and GLFWIC staff. We received a letter from Dr. Jonathan Gilbert, GLFWIC Wildlife Section Leader, on February 9<sup>th</sup> indicating that the tribes desire population objectives that differ from CDAC recommendations for 8 of the 22 counties that fall substantially within the ceded territory. The Voigt Task Force has requested a consultation with the department to discuss these differences. We will provide an update to the NRB on any further meetings or discussions on February 25<sup>th</sup>.

NRB Policy regarding deer populations: NR 1.15 says: *(a) Deer population goals. The department shall seek to maintain a deer herd in balance with its range and with deer population and sustainable harvest objectives that are reasonably compatible with social, economic and ecosystem management objectives for each deer management unit. Deer population goals are to be based on:*

1. Carrying capacity as determined by unit population responses to habitat quality and historical records of winter severity.
2. Hunter success in harvesting and seeing deer and public deer viewing opportunities.
3. Ecological and economic impacts of deer browsing.
4. Disease transmission.
5. Concern for deer-vehicle collisions.
6. Chippewa treaty harvest.
7. Hunter access to land in a deer management unit.

- 8. Ability to keep the deer herd in a deer management unit at goal.
- 9. Tolerable levels of deer damage

During their deliberations, each council was provided background information on the deer population history for their county and made aware of any existing statutory or NRB policies that might guide their recommendations.

**Ongoing Deer Management Challenges and Concerns:**

The CDAC population objective recommendation process highlighted many of the challenges and concerns associated with Wisconsin deer management. Most can be categorized under one or more items listed in NR 1.15 above. The CDACs were charged to consider those items during their deliberation. Overall, council members became aware of the many challenges that they will face when making recommendations on managing the state’s deer herd in the future.

Of highest concern for many CDAC members is the decline in hunter numbers, deer harvest and the ability to simply see deer. They recognize that this challenge is not the result of one, but many things that may include: habitat quality; public vs. private land access; large predator numbers; hunting pressure; baiting and feeding; and many other issues that, combined, can serve as deterrents to seeing deer in satisfactory numbers.

When it comes to measuring the impacts of these and other pieces of the deer management puzzle, we have a clear need for better data that can help inform CDACs when making decision. As an example, measurements of the ecological and economic impacts of deer browsing are needed. It has long been recognized that deer impact just about every other wildlife species in Wisconsin as well as our \$20 billion timber industry, but balancing those impacts with the desires of hunters is clearly a challenge as was evident in many county council deliberations. Chronic Wasting Disease continues to be a concern, and one has to question the rationale behind recommending an increase in the deer herd when the spread of a deadly disease occurs more quickly at higher deer densities (figure 2). And then there is the problem of finding the right combination of deer hunting season frameworks and tagging options that can provide good hunting opportunities while attempting to increase, maintain, or decrease a local deer population. CDACs clearly recognized this lack of effective options, especially when faced with the challenge of reducing their deer herd, as some have recommended.

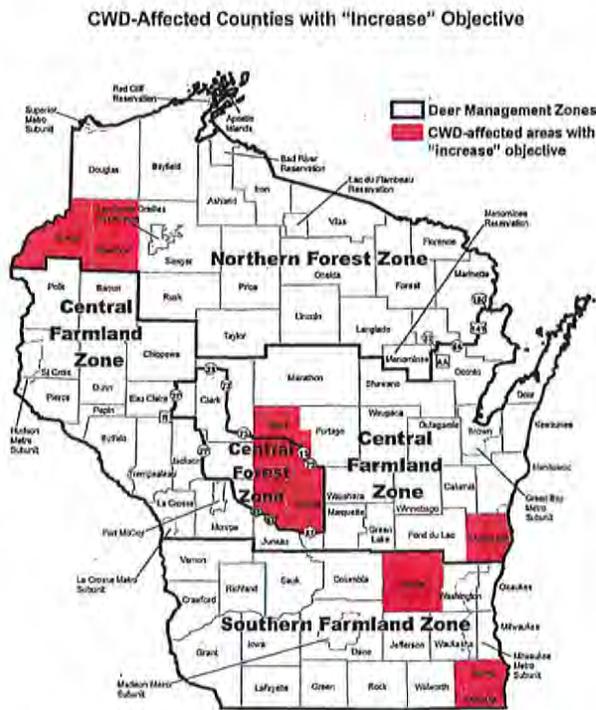


Figure 2: CWD-affected counties with "Increase" objective, February 2015

Finally, addressing agriculture issues was also an important part of the CDAC process. Several counties that meet the definition of “intolerable agricultural damage” have made recommendations to increase their deer herd (figure 3). Since final recommendations were submitted and more of the public is

becoming aware of them, we have heard from many who don't agree with the notion of increasing deer numbers in some counties.



Figure 3: Counties with intolerable agricultural damage and "Increase" objective – February 2015

Correction on 2/18/15 to reflect Calumet's "maintain" objective

**Next Steps:**

The County Deer Advisory Councils have done a remarkable job in a very short timeframe, but they've only just begun. Once staff and council members have population objectives to guide them for the next three years, they can begin the task of developing 2015 harvest quotas that will be the first critical step in achieving the deer population objective in each county.

The department recognizes that these challenges have been and will continue to be a part of deer management. We do not dismissing them. However, we stand behind the CDAC process and, therefore, endorse the 3-year population objectives as recommended by each County Deer Advisory Council. While the concerns are many, I would like to allow the department, CDACs, and the public to work within the recommendations and address the challenges together. Wisconsin's hunters are an integral part of solving our most pressing deer management issues, and without their confidence and involvement at the local level the job will be impossible. The formation of CDACs is intended to get the public more involved and builds trust, and that has certainly occurred. I believe that this new opportunity will allow for information exchange between the public, members of each council, and the department. In the long run, this process will work toward solutions that find compromise on tough issues and provide for the great deer hunting for which Wisconsin is so well known. The department looks forward to working with each of the CDAC's to address the challenges in deer management and to develop the local trust that will be critical in the years to come.

Table 1. County Deer Advisory Councils Preliminary and Final Recommendations – February 2015

County	Zone	Preliminary recommendation	Final recommendation
Adams	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Adams	Forest	Increase	Increase
Ashland	Forest	Increase	Increase
Barron	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Bayfield	Forest	Increase	Increase
Brown	Farmland	Decrease	Maintain

Buffalo	Farmland	Decrease	Decrease
Burnett	Forest	Increase	Increase
Calumet	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Chippewa	Farmland	Increase	Increase
Clark	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Clark	Forest	Maintain	Increase
Columbia	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Crawford	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Dane	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Dodge	Farmland	Increase	Increase
Door	Farmland	Decrease	Decrease
Douglas	Forest	Increase	Increase
Dunn	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Eau Claire	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Eau Claire	Forest	Increase	Increase
Florence	Forest	Maintain	Increase
Fond du Lac	Farmland	Maintain	Increase
Forest	Forest	Increase	Increase
Grant	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Green Lake	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Green	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Iowa	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Iron	Forest	Increase	Increase
Jackson	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Jackson	Forest	Increase	Increase
Jefferson	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Juneau	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Juneau	Forest	Increase	Increase
Kenosha	Farmland	Maintain	Increase
Kewaunee	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
La Crosse	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Lafayette	Farmland	Increase	Maintain
Langlade	Forest	Increase	Increase
Lincoln	Forest	Increase	Increase
Manitowoc	Farmland	Decrease	Decrease
Marathon	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Marinette	Farmland	Decrease	Decrease
Marinette	Forest	Increase	Increase
Marquette	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Milwaukee	Farmland	Decrease	Decrease
Monroe	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Monroe	Forest	Increase	Increase
Oconto	Farmland	Decrease	Decrease
Oconto	Forest	Maintain	Increase
Oneida	Forest	Increase	Increase

Outagamie	Farmland	Decrease	Maintain
Ozaukee	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Pepin	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Pierce	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Polk	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Portage	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Price	Forest	Increase	Increase
Racine	Farmland	Increase	Increase
Richland	Farmland	Decrease	Maintain
Rock	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Rusk	Forest	Increase	Increase
Sauk	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Sawyer	Forest	Increase	Increase
Shawano	Farmland	Decrease	Maintain
Sheboygan	Farmland	Maintain	Increase
St. Croix	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Taylor	Forest	Increase	Increase
Trempealeau	Farmland	Increase	Increase
Vernon	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Vilas	Forest	Maintain	Increase
Walworth	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Washburn	Forest	Maintain	Increase
Washington	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Waukesha	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Waupaca	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Waushara	Farmland	Maintain	Maintain
Winnebago	Farmland	Maintain	Increase
Wood	Farmland	Maintain	Increase
Wood	Forest	Increase	Increase