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Natural Resources Board listening sessions set on plans for hunting and trapping in state parks

The public will be able to present their views on a proposed plan to implement a new law opening state parks to hunting and trapping at a series of listening sessions. State Natural Resources Board members will conduct the sessions around the state in late October and early November.

At the December meeting of the Natural Resources Board, the Department of Natural Resources will present a plan to implement the part of a new law the legislature approved earlier this year -- Act 168, known as the Sporting Heritage Bill -- that expands hunting and trapping in state parks.

“The Wisconsin State Parks program has a long history of effectively managing a wide variety of activities in state parks -- including many properties already open to deer and turkey hunting -- and we are confident we can implement the new law to safely allow additional uses of our state parks by hunters and trappers while still providing the quality experience that hikers, campers, bikers, skiers and others have come to expect at Wisconsin state parks,” said Dan Schuller, State Parks Program Director.

Natural Resources Board Chair David Clausen noted the listening sessions are being held to get input on how to implement the law, not the law itself, which the legislature approved last session and Gov. Scott Walker signed in April.

Act 168, which goes into effect Jan. 1, 2013, allows the Department of Natural Resources to prohibit hunting and trapping within 100 yards of a designated use area such as a campground, picnic area, or beach. A determination to prohibit hunting and trapping in any other areas of a state park, a portion of a state park, or during certain time periods must be approved by a majority of the Natural Resources Board, and can only be approved to protect public safety or unique natural resources such as fragile plant or animal habitat.

While Act 168 allows hunting when any season is open, the department is proposing that the board allow hunting in parks from Oct. 15 through the Thursday prior to the Memorial Day weekend.

“This would allow hunters and trappers to take part in virtually all major hunting seasons in parks, and it would avoid allowing hunting during peak times of park use by non-hunters, such

as during the busy summer camping and fall color seasons,” Schuller said. “In addition, the proposal offers maximum use of park areas as park user numbers are lowest at this time.”

The department will also be seeking to keep some properties closed to hunting, such as Heritage Hill State Park in Green Bay and Lakeshore State Park in Milwaukee. Both are within city limits. At parks where some lands are located within municipal jurisdictions that have prohibitions on the discharge of firearms, hunting with a firearm would not be allowed within those areas.

People attending listening sessions will be able to review maps designating which areas are proposed as open and closed to hunting, and will be able to comment to board members on the department’s proposal to implement the law.

Two or three Natural Resources Board members will attend each listening session. The board will then discuss the comments they received at the listening sessions at their Dec. 11 or 12 meeting in Madison. Listening session comments can be sent by U.S. mail to Wisconsin State Parks – Act 168, PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921 or by email to DNRWisconsinParks@wisconsin.gov by Nov. 23. In addition, the board welcomes testimony and written comments at its December meeting on this issue. December meeting information will be located at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/about/nrb/agenda.html>.

The listening sessions will all begin at 6:30 p.m. and attendees that would like to speak or submit written comments should sign up at the door on arriving at the session. Locations are:

Oct. 29, Fitchburg - Quality Inn and Suites, 2969 Cahill Main, with board members Preston Cole and Jane Wiley present.

Oct. 30, Eau Claire - Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC), 620 W. Clairemont Ave., with board members Dave Clausen and Jane Wiley present.

Nov. 5, Merrill - Merrill High School, 1201 N. Sales St., with board members Christine Thomas and Jane Wiley present.

Nov. 8, Appleton - The Bordini Center, Fox Valley Technical College Campus, 5 Systems Drive, with board members William Bruins, Terry Hilgenberg and Jane Wiley present.

Nov. 13, West Allis - Tommy Thompson Youth Center (State Fair Park), 640 S. 84th St., with board members Gregory Kazmierski and Jane Wiley present.

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