

SUBJECT: Bear Depredation Update

FOR: May 2013 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Brad Koele, Wildlife Damage Specialist

SUMMARY:

The department is proposing a number of changes to bear damage management program guidance in order to address concerns relayed to the department by members of the public. In preparing these recommendations, department staff met with multiple stakeholder groups over the last few months and listened to their concerns. The proposed changes attempt to balance stakeholder interest and the fiscal realities of bear damage management. The policy modifications would:

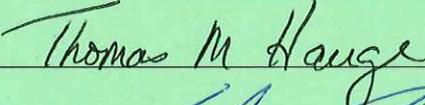
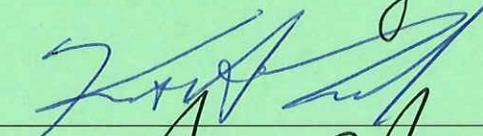
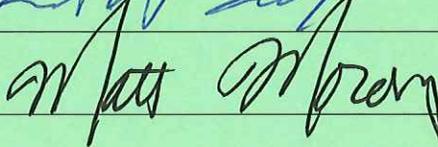
- Establish a threshold for when shooting permits will be issued automatically.
- Allow the use of dogs at the discretion of the permittee.
- Restrict permittees and participants so they can retain only one bear.
- Improve hunter / farmer communication and awareness

The department will provide opportunities for additional public comment and review of this guidance through our new process for revising program guidance. Through this process, there will be a comment period of 21 days. The guidance will be posted on the department's website and people who have signed up will be automatically notified. All comments will be considered and the final product will be shared.

RECOMMENDATION: Information only

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

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Background memo | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
| <input type="checkbox"/> N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |

Approved by	Signature	Date
Tom Hauge, Bureau Director		5/14/13
Kurt Thiede, Administrator		5/14/13
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		5/15/13

cc: Board Liaison – AD/8

DATE: May 22, 2013

TO: Natural Resources Board

FROM: Brad Koele – Wildlife Damage Specialist

SUBJECT: Proposed Modifications to Bear Damage Program

There were a number of concerns raised by Board members regarding the bear damage management program at the Board meeting in January. Per the Board's request, department staff have met with and listened to the concerns of multiple stakeholder groups over the last few months and several proposed solutions for addressing program concerns have been developed. The proposed changes attempt to balance stakeholder interest with the fiscal realities of bear damage management.

Proposed modifications

1. Bear Shooting Threshold Policy

Under this proposal WDACP enrollees with \$5,000 or more in appraised bear damages would be issued a bear shooting permit by August 1 of the following year. Looking at 2012 bear damage claims, twenty-one producers would qualify for a bear shooting permit in 2013 using this criterion (table 1). The department would continue to use current guidelines for issuing bear shooting permits to other producers experiencing damages from bear in addition to the threshold system.

This proposal was developed in response to concerns that the primary abatement technique —bear trapping and relocation —was not adequately reducing damages, and by the time a shooting permit was issued, the majority of damage has already been done. Some stakeholders also felt that trapping and relocation is not effective and is too costly, and that the department should be issuing shooting permits to remove bear from damage sites rather than relocating them. By issuing shooting permits early on to farms that experience chronic bear damages, we are hopeful that the added hunting pressure in conjunction with trapping and relocation efforts will reduce bear damages as well as reduce the number of bear that are relocated.

The department feels that an integrated approach is best given the size of properties that are currently meeting this threshold, and we continue to use trapping and relocation abatement in conjunction with the shooting permit. Using both forms of abatement will allow better distribution of abatement across the property, and the use of trapping will be beneficial for capturing and removing bear visiting fields after legal shooting hours.

Table 1: Number of bear damage claims and appraised bear damages, years 2009 – 2012.

Year	>\$1,000	>\$1,500	>\$2,000	>\$2,500	>\$5,000
2009	40	31	25	20	8
2010	58	42	34	26	14
2011	61	49	40	35	20
2012	85	74	58	48	21

2. Allow the Use of Dogs on Shooting Permits

This proposal was suggested by the Board in December. It is being proposed to address farmer's observations that many bear do not leave the corn fields, and in some cases den in cornfields, which has the potential to significantly damage equipment. The department has the authority to allow the use of dogs on shooting permits under Administrative Code NR 12.15(13) if extraordinary conditions exist.

The following constraints are being proposed for using dogs with shooting permits:

- Dogs must be started on the damaged field.
- The number of dogs used may not exceed six.
- Per NR 12.15(10), bear may only be shot on permittee's land, or on neighbors land <1/4 mile from the damaged field with written permission.
- Multiple bear may be shot if permittee has multiple carcass tags. Family groups should be removed instead of taking individual bears from multiple groups.
- All other hunting regulations apply.

The use of dogs will be at the discretion of the permittee. Permittees who feel that the use of dogs will result in trespass or other conflicts are not obligated to allow their use. The use of dogs may be beneficial for harassment and running bear out of cornfields. Due to the Administrative Code limitations on the "effective area" of shooting permits, we are unsure if the use of dogs will be effective for removing bear. Increasing the effective area of shooting permits would require a change in Administrative Code.

3. Restrict permittees and participants so they can retain only one bear.

This proposal was developed at the recommendation of the Board in response to perceived concerns regarding the practice of individuals harvesting and keeping multiple bear shot under shooting permits when hunters are waiting 4 to 6 years for a Class A permit. In 2012, 16 individuals shot multiple bear on shooting permits. Under this proposal permittees and participants can shoot multiple bear, but they can only retain one bear. Any additional bear shot after their first must be given to a friend or family member.

This proposal balances the need for flexibility of allowing a permittee or participant to shoot multiple bear for damage management purposes with the need to assure that bear are being distributed and not retained by a limited number of individuals. At one time Administrative Code placed the same limit on permittees and participants using deer shooting permits.

4. Increased Hunter/Farmer Communication and Awareness

The department recognizes the need to increase efforts connecting hunters and farmers. In most cases farmers know a bear hunter(s) that are willing to assist them, but it is important that farmers have resources available to them if they don't know any bear hunters and that bear hunters are aware of, and provided opportunities to participate in damage management activities. The department will use the following outreach efforts in 2013 to improve communications between farmers and hunters:

- Use of gov. delivery to send email and text messages to anyone that subscribes to the "bear hunting" and "wildlife damage/nuisance" subscriber lists.
- The department will put out a press release prior to corn entering the milk stage reminding hunters to check the DNR's website for a list of farmers experiencing damages from bear.
- A section has been added to the 2013 Bear Hunting Regulation Pamphlet informing readers about the bear hunting opportunities available through the WDACP.
- The department will continue to work collaboratively with farmers, bear hunters, the WI Bear Hunters Association and the Farm Bureau to make sure the needs for farmers and hunters are met.

After the May Board meeting, proposals 1 through 3 will go through the department's program guidance process and will be open to public review/comment for 21 days. The department will review public comments at the end of the review period, and may make modifications based on those comments. The department will then implement the policy changes in July prior to corn entering the milk stage when the majority of bear damage occurs and is most severe.