

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resources Board Agenda Item**

SUBJECT: Approval of bear harvest quotas for the 2016 season.

FOR: January 2016 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: David MacFarland, Carnivore Staff Specialist

SUMMARY:

The department recommends a harvest quota of 4,750 bears and a harvest permit level of 11,520. In individual management units the recommended 2016 permit levels are: A) 1,655 B) 1,195 C) 6,190 and D) 2,480. These quota levels are intended to stabilize the bear population in units A, B and C and to decrease the population in unit D due to a high level of nuisance bear complaints there.

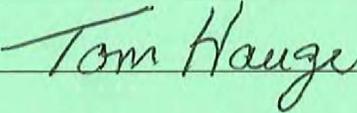
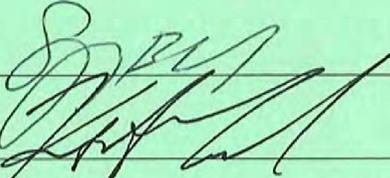
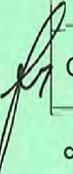
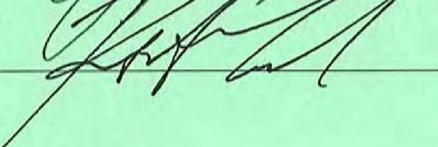
The 2016 permit level recommendation represents a record number of Class A licenses available to Wisconsin bear hunters. The last 7 bear seasons represent the 7 highest bear harvests in Wisconsin history. Wisconsin continues to lead the nation with more bear harvested than in any other state.

In developing these quotas, department staff met with interest groups and analyzed 2015 bear harvest data. Recommended quotas for 2016 were determined using the department's bear population model to assess the effects of various harvest levels relative to the current population estimate and goals. Establishing bear quotas in January each year is an important step in the process of implementing the permit process that the board has asked to be involved in. The bear permit drawing will be held soon after the establishment of quotas so that successful applicants have ample time to plan for hunts.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval of bear harvest quotas for the 2016 season.

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

- Background memo
- N/A
- N/A
- N/A

Approved by	Signature	Date
Tom Hauge, Bureau Director		1/7/16
Sanjay Olson, Administrator		1/7/16
 Cathy Stepp, Secretary		1/8/16

cc: Board Liaison – AD/8

DATE: January 7, 2016

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Secretary Cathy Stepp

SUBJECT: Bear harvest quotas and permit levels

We recommend the following quotas and permit levels for the 2016 bear hunting season:

<i>Zone</i>	2015 quota	2015 permits	2015 Harvest	2016 quota recommendation	2016 est permits
A	1,100	1,875	1,119	1,000	1,655
B	750	1,090	764	850	1,195
C	1,300	5,490	972	1,300	6,190
D	1,600	2,235	1,341	1,600	2,480
Total	4,750	10,690	4,198	4,750	11,520

Background and Justification

The Department considered the following when developing 2016 quota recommendations:

Bear Management Unit A:

Objective – Stabilize the population at current levels

Justification – After several years of population reduction, nuisance and damage complaints are considered tolerable in Unit A. The Department recommendation of population stabilization is consistent with the 2015 recommendation. There is some evidence that the population is declining slightly. Population modeling data suggests a minor decrease in the quota from 2015 levels will achieve stabilization.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,000 Estimated permit level of 1,655

Bear Management Unit B:

Objective – Stabilize the population at current levels

Justification – This objective is consistent with the last several years. Population data suggests slight growth, and modeling suggests an increase a modest increase in quota will lead to stabilization.

Recommendation – Quota of 850 Estimated permit level of 1,195

Bear Management Unit C:

Objective- Stabilize the population at current levels and slow population expansion into Southern Wisconsin.

Justification – The Unit C bear population has grown and expanded over the last several decades. Population estimation remains a challenge in the unit due to great variability in bear density across the unit and uneven distribution of harvest pressure. One potential concern is continued expansion into areas of Southern Wisconsin with higher human population densities and greater potential for conflict. While harvest pressure is light on the advancing edge of bear range, higher harvest in established areas should slow the rate of dispersal into new areas. In 2013-2015, the Department recommended increased quotas to begin stabilizing the population. We fell short of quotas in all years. It is possible we are reaching a point of hunter saturation in primary hunting areas which is reducing success. This may result in shifted effort into new areas of zone C. The Department recommends keeping the quota level equal to 2015 levels to allow success rates to stabilize.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,300 Estimated permit level of 6,190

Bear Management Unit D:

Objective- Increase the rate of population reduction

Justification – According to local Wildlife staff, and our damage program data, the severity of bear related conflicts continues to be high in Unit D. Analysis of population data suggests increased quotas over the last few years are beginning to reduce the population. The 2015 quota of 1,600 was not met with 1,397 bears harvested. The Department recommends maintaining 2015 quota levels with increased permits due to the observed change in success rate.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,600 Estimated permit level of 2,480

Conservation Congress:

The Conservation Congress Bear Committee considered and approved this quota recommendation on 12/5/15.

Permit Availability:

The 2016 permit level recommendation represents a record number of Class A licenses available to Wisconsin bear hunters. The last 7 bear seasons represent the 7 highest bear harvests in Wisconsin history. Wisconsin continues to lead the nation with more bear harvested than in any other state.