2014 HUNTING & TRAPPING FORECAST
Dear Hunters & Trappers,

Welcome to another great hunting and trapping season in Wisconsin! This is your guide to another safe, fun and successful season. Our team here at the department has worked hard to put together this forecast giving you predicted conditions, season information and bag limits to help you create new stories you'll tell your friends and family for years to come. Be sure to check out the deer section – while the rules have changed, the tradition remains the same! It is especially important this year that we work together to track wildlife populations and work to improve our unique and beautiful resources. Play a key role in monitoring deer and other wildlife species by contributing to one of our online wildlife surveys – your help is greatly appreciated! Thanks to your input, Wisconsin continues to offer a wide variety of hunting opportunities for upland game, migratory birds, deer, bears and other furbearers.

Wisconsin's hunting seasons offer a great opportunity to create new family traditions and get future generations involved in the outdoors. Take advantage of all the fantastic ways to get involved and inspire your kids with hunter safety courses and youth hunts. You never know what you might discover out there!

We will do everything we can to help you get started. Again this year, first-time hunters can get a price break on many licenses, and you can earn points toward a discounted license just by recruiting new participants. Make sure to bring your blaze orange, your hand warmers and a friend!

Don't forget to check out the information about the new early teal season, beginning September 1, so we can make sure this three-year experimental season leads to more opportunities for our waterfowl hunters. With the continental duck population at an all-time high, it's a great time to be a hunter in Wisconsin.

To learn more about trapping and hunting near you and how the department uses the information you provide, give us a call at 1-888-WDNRINFO (1-888-936-7463).

I look forward to seeing you out there this fall! This is the time to make those life-long memories. Good luck!

Cathy Stepp
Migratory Birds
Season Forecast

Contributed by Kent Van Horn and Taylor Finger

Biologists are looking ahead to the upcoming waterfowl season with great optimism. “With good habitat conditions in Wisconsin and on the U.S. and Canadian prairies and a high total number of ducks, the outlook for fall 2014 is promising,” said DNR migratory waterfowl biologist Kent Van Horn.

Three primary sources of information regarding yearly waterfowl breeding conditions are used to determine the fall season structure in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Breeding Waterfowl Survey was completed in May, and is very significant because a large proportion of the ducks harvested in Wisconsin are also raised in Wisconsin.

Second, a cooperative survey of Canada geese, the Mississippi Valley Population Breeding Survey, is organized by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Lastly, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service breeding waterfowl survey for the northern U.S., Canada and Alaska was released in early July.

The Wisconsin mallard population estimate of 159,000 is statistically unchanged from 2013 and consistent with a stable trend experienced over the last ten years.

The second most abundant duck in Wisconsin, at close to 20 percent of the total fall harvest, is the wood duck. The 2014 Wisconsin breeding population estimate of 104,000 is similar to 2013 and consistent with a stable trend experienced over the last ten years.

“Wood ducks continue to be an important component of Wisconsin’s breeding duck population and hunters’ fall bag,” said Van Horn. The breeding wood duck population showed significant gains in the 1980s and early 1990s and appears to be leveling off at roughly 120,000 ducks. Based on improved water conditions and the department’s best interpretation of the survey results, quality wood duck production similar to recent years is expected in 2014.

The continental Blue-winged teal estimate of 8.5 million was the third highest number ever recorded for the species, while the 2014 Wisconsin blue-winged teal breeding population estimate of 34,000 is down from 2013.

**Migratory Birds**

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New In 2014: Early Teal Season

**New in 2014**, Wisconsin will offer a three year experimental teal season September 1–7. This is a teal-only season where hunters will only be allowed to harvest blue-wing and green-wing teal. The daily bag limit will be six ducks. The continental population of blue-wing teal has grown in recent years, and a harvest assessment concluded that teal could sustain higher harvest beyond that incurred during the regular duck season and existing early teal seasons. It is important to understand that this is an experimental season and the results of the experiment will determine if Wisconsin is granted an operational early teal season. The key to the evaluation is hunter success in properly identifying and harvesting teal. For more information, please visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “waterfowl.”

A recent survey of Wisconsin duck hunters indicated those who did not scout prior to hunting harvested an average of 4.8 ducks per season. In comparison, those who scouted once harvested 7.1 ducks, those who scouted twice harvested 8.1, and those who made three or more scouting trips harvested 14.7 ducks. The conclusion is clear: while hunters cannot control the weather, they can improve their odds significantly by being flexible and scouting before and during the hunting season.

For more information, please visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “waterfowl.”

**Overall, 2014 looks like a good year for duck numbers and production across North America. In both 2013 and 2014, we saw encouraging continental duck numbers and good to excellent habitat conditions. However, a duck hunter’s success in the fall will depend heavily upon fall weather, water conditions and preseason scouting.**

Missouri Department of Conservation

To be successful

**scout, scout, scout and then scout some more**

**Duck Season Information**

**Northern Zone:**

Sept. 27 – Nov. 25

**Southern Zone:**

Oct. 4 – 12, Oct. 18- Dec. 7

**Mississippi River Zone:**

Sept. 27 – Oct. 5; Oct. 18- Dec. 7

**POSSESSION LIMIT:** Federal rules on possession limits have changed and now allow three times the daily bag limit. In Wisconsin, a hunter may possess up to 18 ducks at one time.

**OPENING DAY SHOOTING HOURS BEGIN AT 9 AM.**

A trend in the state population estimate for blue-winged teal for the last ten years is not clear, due to challenging survey issues and high annual variation in population estimates.

The continental outlook for other duck species of interest to Wisconsin hunters is also relatively good. Most population estimates have shown stability or a slight increase, compared to generally high levels in 2013. Scap population estimates increased 11% over 2013 and were similar to the long term average. It appears that scap numbers have increased over the past several years and, though somewhat below their historical average in quantity, Scap are still one of North America’s more common duck species with an estimated total population of 4.6 million. At 685,000 ducks, the canvasback estimate is down from last year but 18 percent higher than the long-term average.

The Importance of Scouting

In 2014, Wisconsin will offer a 60–day regular duck season with a daily bag limit of six ducks. Of these six, no more than four can be mallards and only one of these can be a hen. The bag can contain (in combinations that do not exceed six birds) up to three wood ducks, one black duck, two redheads, three scap, two pintail or one canvasback. In addition five mergansers, but no more than two of these can be hooded mergansers.

For duck species not listed, like teal and ring-necks, the combined total with all other species may not exceed six ducks. The daily bag limit for Coot is 15.

To be successful

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Canada Geese

The 2014 Wisconsin breeding Canada goose population estimate of 126,000 was similar to 2013 and a previous ten-year average. Wisconsin’s resident breeding Canada goose population appears to be stabilizing at 120,000 after a long term increase.

“We expect a healthy Canada goose population this fall, particularly for the early September Canada goose season (September 1–15 with a 5 bird daily bag limit), which makes up one-third of our total statewide goose harvest,” said Van Horn.

Despite a late spring, hunters can expect good Canada goose hunting opportunities. Hunting early in the fall and adapting as goose change movement patterns could be the key to harvest success in 2014.

According to Van Horn, two populations of Canada goose represent most geese in Wisconsin during the fall. Wisconsin’s locally breeding Canada geese represent over 90 percent of the goose harvest for the early season from September 1–15 and about 40 percent of harvest during the late regular goose season.

A majority of the remaining 60 percent of regular season goose harvest is supported by a second population of Canada geese who breed along the Hudson Bay coast in northern Ontario. Although Wisconsin shares this population with other states, these locally breeding birds comprise the majority of harvest. This breeding population of Canada geese appears to be at normal levels, with an estimated 2014 breeding population of 323,099. This number is similar to 2013 and the long term average.

Regular Canada goose hunting seasons in Wisconsin include the Exterior Zone season, which will allow for 92 days of hunting and a two bird daily bag limit. When combined with the 15-day early season, this gives Wisconsin hunters the maximum number of hunting days (107) allowed by international treaty.

New in 2014: in the Horicon Zone, each hunter who harvests a goose will be required to punch/slit the permit for the date of kill with the total not to exceed the season limit. Hunters will also be required to report each goose harvested within the Horicon Zone within 48 hours of kill by calling 1–800-99-GOOSE (1–800–994–6673). This system is similar to Exterior Zone and the early season reporting.

Early Canada Goose Season

The early Canada goose season specifically targets locally breeding giant Canada goose and takes place before migratory geese begin to move into Wisconsin. Last fall’s harvest of 19,407 was down slightly from 2012 but similar to harvest in recent years.

“The early Canada goose season has become a popular hunt and an important part of our resident Canada goose population management,” said Van Horn. “The early season now accounts for a third of our total statewide goose harvest.”

The statewide early Canada goose season requires a separate permit and $3 fee. The early season does not affect an individual’s ability to hunt in any zone during the regular season.

The early Canada goose season will run statewide September 1–15 with a daily bag limit of five geese.

Canada Goose — Season Information

North: Sept. 16 - Dec. 16
South: Sept. 16 – Oct. 12 & Oct. 18 – Dec. 21

In 2014, the Horicon Zone season is 92 days, with 12 harvest tags offered per hunter. Horicon will be divided into two permit periods. Period one is Sept. 16 – Nov. 2 and period two is Nov. 3 – Dec. 16. New in 2014, the Horicon Zone boundary has changed. Property west of Hwy 73 and north of Hwy 23 is no longer part of the Horicon Zone and is now part of the Exterior Zone.

The early Canada goose season will run statewide Sept. 1-15 with a daily bag limit of five geese. Regulations for more information on harvest limits of other goose species.

Youth Waterfowl Hunt

Wisconsin’s youth waterfowl hunt is designed to recruit new hunters in Wisconsin. In recent years, roughly 2,500 youth have taken advantage of this opportunity. Annualy, these hunters harvest nearly 9,000 ducks and 250 geese.

This year’s youth hunt will take place September 20–21. Licenses and stamp requirements are waived for eligible young duck hunters (ages 10–15) during the youth hunt, but they must be HIP certified (free of charge). Youth hunters who wish to harvest geese need an early Canada goose season permit. Normal bag limits apply.
Mourning Doves

Approximately 10,000–15,000 dove hunters are expected to take to the field during the 2014 season. More information on dove hunting is available online.

For the eighth consecutive year, Wisconsin is participating in a national plan to monitor mourning dove populations for harvest management. In 2014, hunters will once again be asked to examine harvested doves closely for leg bands. Biologists have set a goal of capturing and banding 850 doves at several locations throughout the state with a small aluminum U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg band. Hunters who harvest a banded dove are asked to report them to the Bird Banding Lab online at www.reportband.gov (exit DNR) or if you do not have internet access, by phone at 1–800-327-Band (2263).

Based on recent data, the continental mourning dove population has been estimated at roughly 350 million, making it one of the most abundant birds in North America. The 10-year population trend for the eastern management unit (states east of the Mississippi River) has been stable, showing a 0.6 percent increase. Hunters should expect to see doves in numbers similar to years past.

Regulations and license requirements for dove hunting can be found in the 2014 Small Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet, which is also available at any license vendor. Mourning doves are migratory game birds, so hunters must be HIP certified and hunt with a plugged shotgun that only holds three shells. It is important to note that dove hunters must use non-toxic shot when hunting on federal or DNR-managed lands.

Hunters who choose to hunt with lead shot elsewhere should be aware that possession of lead shot will prohibit them from hunting waterfowl.

“Doves use a wide range of habitats, but fields with an abundance of weed seeds or grain, open gravel areas, and water sources are all good hunting locations,” said Van Horn. Dove hunting provides an excellent opportunity to introduce a new hunter to bird hunting.

“Taking a kid dove hunting is the wing-shooting equivalent to taking them pan-fishing,” said Van Horn. “It doesn’t require a lot of specialized gear, you don’t need to be up at O’dark-thirty, and the potential for action makes it an experience they are not likely to forget.”

Reminder: Hunters must use non-toxic shot when hunting doves on DNR-managed lands and be HIP registered.

New in 2014, Wisconsin’s 12th dove hunting season will have an additional 20 days added to the end of the traditional dove season, running Sept. 1 – Nov. 29. The daily bag limit is 15 doves and possession limits for doves are three times the daily bag limit.

Woodcock

In the past 35 years, the woodcock population in the Midwest and northeastern U.S. has experienced a steady decline. Biologists believe this is primarily related to changes in young forest habitat. While the population decline had stabilized in recent years, the last two cold and wet springs have contributed to a declining 10-year trend.

Interest in pursuing the “timberdoodle” throughout the forests of Wisconsin remains high – nearly 15,000 hunters pursue woodcock annually. Wisconsin has ranked either second or third in the nation for woodcock harvest in recent years, with 38,400 birds harvested in 2013. Overall, surveys in Wisconsin and throughout the region indicate a stable population. Depending on the weather, hunters should expect to see woodcock numbers similar to the past few years and enjoy a productive fall season.

Note: Hunters must be HIP certified while hunting woodcock.

For more information regarding migratory game bird hunting in Wisconsin, please visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “waterfowl.”

For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “waterfowl management.”
Among the vast diversity of Wisconsin wildlife, a small group of mammals comprises a mix of common, unique and rare species known as furbearers. Furbearers, unlike humans, have two types of hair—guard hair (long, stiff and sleek) and underfur (dense and fine). For centuries, many furbearers have been a key source of both food and warmth. Beavers, coyotes, raccoons and muskrats are some of the more abundant and common species found throughout Wisconsin.

Less common, the stone marten is a non-native and rather unique furbearer scattered within the Kettle Moraine State Forest. The endangered American marten, a Wisconsin native, calls remote regions of northern Wisconsin home. The more secretive bobcat, fisher and river otter are present statewide with a more recent population expansion into southern portions of the state.

As we move through late summer and early fall, many citizens and outdoor enthusiasts begin to ask: “How are things going out there?” or “What can I expect to see this upcoming fall and winter?” From trekkers to trappers, folks are excited about potential viewing opportunities and regulated harvest during late fall and winter seasons.

Raccoons

Raccoons can be found in a wide variety of both rural and urban habitats. Areas close to a wetland or farmland mosaic have the highest populations, but even northern forests are now home to raccoons.

“We have large populations of raccoons in Wisconsin, with the highest densities in southern and western portions of the state,” said DNR assistant furbearer specialist Geriann Albers. “Raccoons are relatively abundant in all counties and in a wide variety of habitats, with populations continuing to extend northward.”

While raccoon numbers remain high in most areas, localized disease prevalence has been observed.

“We routinely see localized outbreaks of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) caused mortality in our raccoon population,” said DNR wildlife veterinarian Lindsey Long. “CDV has also been documented in other species of wildlife, especially those in the canid (dog) and mustelid (weasel) families. The impacts it can have on a local population can involve numerous factors. Documenting and analyzing the areas where these outbreaks occur and the species involved is an important component of monitoring the health of our furbearing populations.”

According to Long, CDV infections over the past four years have caused mortality in other furbearers in the state, including gray fox and striped skunk. Since the clinical signs of distemper and rabies overlap, Long stresses that everyone should take special care with raccoons or other furbearers who seem to be acting abnormally. Rabies is a fatal viral disease for humans and other mammals and cannot be differentiated from canine distemper without laboratory testing.

In northwestern Wisconsin, DNR regional wildlife supervisor Mike Zeckmeister has reported numerous cases of sick or dead raccoons during late winter and spring. According to Zeckmeister, disease testing of these raccoons has confirmed distemper as the culprit.

In west-central Wisconsin, Adams County wildlife biologist Jon Robaidek reports high raccoon numbers, with nuisance problems and road kills quite evident. Despite high numbers, these raccoons seem to be healthy – no major disease outbreaks have been documented in the area. A high population provides a great opportunity for hunters and trappers to gain access to private lands, as farmers and landowners experience nuisance and damage problems. Hunters and trappers
are reminded to utilize this renewable resource while numbers are high and help to maintain a healthy population.

With a large raccoon population throughout Wisconsin, a few frustrated individuals have resorted to the illegal practice of poisoning. According to DNR wildlife damage specialist Brad Koele, there are no legal toxicants or poisons approved for use on raccoons. Individuals who choose to illegally poison raccoons and other animals risk receiving a citation for illegally poisoning wildlife (maximum penalty of $2,100 and 3 years revocation of all hunting, fishing and trapping licenses and privileges), and also risk killing non-target animals like dogs, cats and other wildlife.

Property owners concerned with raccoons have a number of legal options for dealing with Raccoons. Removal of food sources, harassment, exclusion, live-trapping and relocation are all non-lethal options. Anyone relocating animals must have the landowner’s permission when releasing the animal on private property. Relocated animals may not be released onto public lands.

If lethal control is needed, trapping and shooting are both valid options. Retired administrative warden Tom Van Haren notes that state law allows landowners or occupants of land to trap or shoot raccoons year-round and without hunting or trapping licenses. However, anyone conducting removal efforts on behalf of a landowner must possess a valid trapping license if they are removing raccoons or a valid small game license if they are removing raccoons with a firearm. In both cases, hunters and trappers must have written permission from the landowner. Individuals must also follow all other trapping and hunting regulations.

The department encourages interested landowners to contact trained and licensed hunters or trappers and allow them to remove animals during fall harvest seasons.

Wildlife managers throughout Wisconsin are confident 2014 will be a good year to ask permission to trap raccoons on new lands. With the harvest of raccoons, landowner permission to hunt or trap is normally not a problem. Regardless, be sure to ask for permission early—landowners appreciate the common courtesy and it will give you more time to prepare for the season opener. It is important to note that those interested in trapping in road right-of-way areas must receive permission from the owner of the land underlying any public road, street or highway.

Kris Johansen, DNR wildlife supervisor in Black River Falls, urges trappers and hunters to do their homework with preseason scouting and obtain permission from landowners well in advance. Through preseason efforts, hunters and trappers can be more efficient, save money, and reduce fossil fuel consumption.

Raccoon season opens statewide for residents on October 18, 2014 with the exception of the Mississippi River Zone where the season opens with the muskrat and mink season. The non-resident raccoon trapping season runs from November 1, 2014 to February 15, 2015.

**Beavers**

Recovering fur prices, deep snow and thick ice, and a late spring with good late-April ice cover may have affected trapper interest last season. Based on helicopter surveys of Beaver Zones A and B in 2011, beaver population is estimated at roughly 82,000 animals. This is an increase from 2008 (the lowest statewide population estimate since these surveys began in 1992). An additional helicopter survey is scheduled for northern management zones in October 2014.

Interest in beaver populations is being addressed by fish and wildlife biologists, fishermen, trappers, user groups and interested citizens statewide through the Wisconsin Beaver Task Force’s revision of the beaver management plan. The task force’s management plan is currently being finalized, with agency and public review expected in late 2014 and early 2015.
Beaver populations in southeastern Wisconsin and on the Mississippi River appear to be stable or increasing. Outside of these regions, populations are stable or decreasing.

High water has led to the dispersal of beaver into places that haven’t held beaver for years.

Robert Rolley, a wildlife researcher from Madison, coordinates and analyzes the helicopter aerial surveys conducted every three to four years in the northern portions of the state. Following 2011 fall aerial surveys, northwestern Wisconsin (Zone A) was home to approximately 31,000 beavers, compared to 28,000 in 2008 and 41,000 in 2005. In northeastern Wisconsin (Zone B), a 2011 population estimate was set at 24,000, compared to 18,000 in 2008 and 29,000 in 2005.

According to Pat Beringer, a DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Park Falls, high water has led to the dispersal of beaver into places that haven’t held beaver for years. An increase in precipitation and recharge of the ground water can affect beaver movements.

In Zones A and B, where more intensive beaver control programs exist, long term beaver population declines have reduced damage to trout streams and town roads. Since population levels are now at or below acceptable levels, beaver trapping season in Wisconsin opens in November, rather than mid-October. In addition, Zone C (southern Wisconsin) will close at the end of March, rather than the end of April.

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**Otter**

Current statewide otter populations are below the management goals of approximately 13,000. Although a majority of the population is found in the north, otter numbers in southern Wisconsin are on the rise. Otter are now present in many of our major river systems in the south and southwest, namely the Kickapoo, Black, Chippewa, Buffalo, Trempealeau, Mississippi and Wisconsin. Otter are affected by many of the factors that impact beaver populations. “Beaver are herbivores that prefer the inner bark of aspen, willow, alder and cottonwood for food, and the branches of those same species for construction of dams and lodges. In contrast, otter prefer other animals for food – mainly fish, crayfish, and amphibians,” said DNR wildlife biologist Dianne Robinson.

Otter, like many furbearers, depend upon clean rivers, lakes and streams for quality habitat. “Anyone interested in river otter should thank those who have worked so hard to improve the water resources of southern Wisconsin – farmers, landowners, DNR, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Land & Water Conservation Districts and Trout Unlimited, to name a few,” said DNR southeastern Wisconsin area wildlife supervisor Dale Katsma. “Most people are thrilled when they see otters, while a few trout fishermen and farmers are not. If damage occurs, permits are issued (only a few each year).”

Otter harvest is highly regulated – this helps to control harvest pressure while fur prices remain strong. Permits are issued based on annually adjusted quotas, estimated fail populations, and expected success rates. In 2014–15, harvest quotas will increase slightly to 1,300 statewide.

Trappers who plan to harvest within the Upper Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Refuge must apply for a trapping permit through the District Fish and Wildlife Service Offices, located along the Big River. For more information regarding refuge opportunities, contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Brian Stemper at 507–494-6221 or via email at Brian_Stemper@fws.gov.

In 2014, the statewide opener for otter is the same as beaver – November 1. The season continues until March 31, 2015 in the central and south otter zones and April 30, 2015 in the northern otter zone. Anyone interested in harvesting an otter must apply annually for a permit before August 1.

**New in 2014**, successful hunters and trappers are required to report their harvest using a call-in system in addition to registering harvest with a conservation warden. Within 24 hours of harvest, successful permit holders must call 1–800–994–6673 the automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest.

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**Season: North Zone: Nov. 1, 2014 – Apr. 30, 2015**

**Central & South Zones: Nov. 1, 2014 – Mar. 31, 2015**

**Bag Limit:** One per permit

**Information Regarding Refuge Opportunities**

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**Beaver — Season Information**

| Zone A (Northwest) Nov. 1, 2014 – Apr. 30, 2015 |
| Zone B (Northeast) Nov. 1, 2014 – Apr. 30, 2015 |
| Zone C (South) Nov. 1, 2014 – Mar. 31, 2015 |
| Zone D (Mississippi River) Day after duck season closes to Mar. 15, 2015 |

**Bag Limit:** None

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**Questions? Call the DNR Call Center at 1-888-936-7463, 7 AM – 10 PM, 7 days a week**
Bobcats

The long term population decline appears to be due to lower pregnancy rates, especially in yearlings. These low rates are likely a result of reduced prey availability (reflective of habitat and climate conditions). As a result, the Northern Bobcat Zone harvest quota for 2014–15 is the same as last year.

Beginning in 2010, a $3 fee increase for bobcat permit applications earmarked funds for bobcat research in Wisconsin. These funds have been combined with Pittman-Robertson funds over the past four years to further understand bobcat populations and habitat quality in south-central Wisconsin. Studies have occurred in what is now known as the Southern Bobcat Zone and have shown a sustainable breeding population of bobcats. Although habitat is less consistent and density estimates are lower than in the Northern Zone, there is a robust population that can sustain regulated take. Beginning in fall 2014, the new Southern Bobcat Zone will be open for limited harvest.

According to DNR assistant furbearer ecologist Geriann Albers, the preference system will allow a continuous applicant to receive a bobcat tag approximately every seven to eight years. The department won’t know if this expanded harvest opportunity in southern Wisconsin will decrease the wait time for a permit until after a few years of harvest at which time harvest interest can be evaluated in the Southern Zone.

There is a robust bobcat population that can sustain regulated take.

The bobcat harvest season is split between two distinct time periods, with permits valid for the time period selected. When applying for a bobcat tag, applicants will request either the early period (October 15–December 25, 2014) or the late period (December 26–January 31, 2015). This split-season format was a “test case” for two years and is now permanent and entering into its fourth year, with the bobcat harvest quota split equally between the two time periods.

The bobcat harvest season is split between two distinct time periods, with permits valid for the time period selected.

Permit levels are lower for the latter season due to higher success rates. Generally, snow cover increases harvest success because permit holders can locate bobcats easier. Permit levels are calculated using previous success rates from each specific time period.

Similar to fisher and otter, bobcats must be tagged at the point of harvest and registered with the department. Hunters and trappers may keep the pelt, but bobcat carcasses (and in some years otter and fisher carcasses) are collected from the tracker or hunter. “Registration and carcass collections allow biologists to gather important management information such as harvest pressure, overall age structure of the population, reproductive age, and previous litter sizes,” according to Shelby Hiestand, Lincoln County wildlife biologist.

During the 2014–2015 season, carcasses will be required from all bobcat harvests. In addition to registering bobcat harvest with a conservation warden, successful hunters and trappers are required to report their harvest using a call-in system. Within 24 hours of a kill, successful permit holders must call 1-800-994-6673. The automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest. Call-in reporting will allow DNR officials to closely monitor and potentially close a season early if harvest levels exceed the established quota.

Bobcat — Season information
Season (same for both zones): Oct. 18 – Dec. 25, 2014

BAG LIMIT: One per permit
Furbearers • Coyotes, Foxes & Wolves

Coyotes, Foxes & Wolves

Coyotes, Wisconsin’s second-largest native canids, have expanded their range throughout southern and western Wisconsin and seem to be well-established throughout the state. Their lowest densities are in established gray wolf territories, where wolves may drive them away. However, many coyotes have learned to be less vocal and avoid wolf interactions. Coyotes seem to fare equally well in rural, urban and suburban settings. Wildlife managers and conservation officers across much of central and southern Wisconsin are reporting healthy coyote numbers.

There is an abundance of coyotes on the landscape in south-western and west-central Wisconsin. This is the third year trappers in southern Wisconsin will start trapping two weeks earlier than in years past, and now the north and south coyote (and fox) season dates are combined. This will provide trappers south of highway 64 additional days during a pleasant time of year to be afield with coyote and fox sets.

According to wildlife biologist Sam Jonas, cable restraints are proving more effective for coyotes each year as trappers learn to use this relatively new tool – 2014 is a great year to try this technique and extend trapping opportunities into the winter. Cable restraint trapping allows trappers to get out and about during snow cover, a great time to read signs and learn about animal behavior. DNR wildlife biologist Steve Hoffman adds, “The cable restraint was thoroughly tested during three years of science-based research, and was remarkable in its ability to restrain without injury.” For additional information, request DNR Publication WM-443–2004, Cable Restraints in Wisconsin, A Guide to Responsible Use.

A positive outlook is being observed for both gray and red fox, with red fox closer to human dwellings and gray fox in the brush land and woods. “Gray foxes, the smallest of our four native canids, prefer a more rural setting,” said southeastern Wisconsin wildlife biologist Dale Katsma. “Coyote numbers are stable and steadily increasing in the southeast portion of the state, where they’ve been known to cause quite a stir around some communities.”

In Dane County, red fox populations seem to be holding strong. “We’ve gotten pretty regular reports of red foxes, especially in our urban and suburban areas,” said Dane County wildlife biologist Andy Paulios. “Red foxes have realized there’s a ton of food sources available around people and are taking advantage of those resources.”

Red fox numbers in the last several years have increased across much of the north. However, disease and coyote competition occasionally impact populations, especially in the western and southern portions of the state. A density dependent disease, sarcoptic mange, was observed throughout Wisconsin in susceptible canid species including red fox, coyote and gray wolf in 2003. Sarcoptic mange has since diminished significantly. Gray fox have experienced fewer cases of mange and appear to be doing well in southern and central Wisconsin.

In January 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisted the eastern gray wolf from the federal endangered species list. In the following month, the Wisconsin State Legislature established a regulated wolf harvest season in state law, establishing season dates and allowable methods of harvest. Under this law, the first wolf harvest in Wisconsin occurred in 2012.

The wolf harvest quota for the 2014–2015 season will be 156, with zone-specific quotas for each of the six wolf harvest zones.

Each year, a harvest quota is established in accordance with current population goals and management objectives. “The harvest is closely monitored on a daily basis so when the harvest approaches the allowed quota for any zone, we can close that zone to any additional harvest and ensure we do not exceed the established quota,” said DNR large carnivore specialist.

**Coyotes, Foxes & Wolves — Season information**

| Hunting Season of Coyote: | Statewide: Year round |
| Bag Limit: None |

*Zones may close early if harvest quota is reached

**BAG LIMIT:** One per permit
the 2015–16 harvest,” said MacFarland. Wolf permit holders who wish to trap a wolf are required to complete a trapper education course (unless exempt from that requirement – see trapping regulations for more detail). The department and Wisconsin Trappers Association will offer an additional (optional) course focused on wolf trapping techniques. This course will not fulfill trapper education requirements, but will provide you with great information on how to safely, effectively and ethically employ wolf trapping techniques.

Every additional collared wolf ‘on-the-air’ helps the department keep track of wolves throughout Wisconsin.

The gradual population increase and expansion of the gray wolf across northern and west-central portions of the state offers a unique opportunity for hunters and trappers to observe these wild canines. Wolves are occasionally observed in southern Wisconsin, and the department encourages the public to report these observations. Hunters and trappers who are intimately familiar with their area of the state are especially vital in wildlife observations – this information is valuable in efforts to monitor populations. MacFarland urges trappers who have incidentally captured a wolf to check their local DNR office to see if a wildlife biologist is available to radio collar and assist in safely releasing the wolf. Every additional collared wolf ‘on-the-air’ helps the department keep track of wolves throughout Wisconsin.

The harvest quota for the 2014–2015 season will be 156 wolves, with zone-specific quotas for each.

“Harvested wolves need to be reported within 24 hours so we can keep an accurate daily account of the harvest,” said assistant large carnivore specialist Dan Kaminski. Carcasses need to be registered in-person with a conservation warden so the department can collect important biological information, such as teeth, to get wolf ages and reproductive tracts from female wolves to determine litter sizes.

“It has been remarkable to receive such great support and cooperation from our many wolf harvesters to help manage this native Wisconsin species,” added Kaminski.

For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “wolf.”

Wolf Trapper Education

Wolf trapper education workshops are available in five locations this fall with dates and details as follows:

- Sept. 13, 2014 - Northern Pines Golf Course, 69420 Airport Rd., Iron River
- Sept. 20, 2014 - Crex Wildlife Area Education Center, 102 E. Crex Ave., Grantsburg
- Sept. 27, 2014 - Furbearer Resources Training Center, 4439 Buckley Rd., Madison
- Oct. 4, 2014 - Mead Wildlife Area, S2148 County Road S, Milladore
- Oct. 11, 2014 - Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Classroom, 4321 South Shore Dr., Rhinelander

For updates & additional Info, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “Wolf Trapper Ed.”
Fisher

Strong interest in fisher harvest has resulted in more applicants than available permits, especially in Fisher Management Zone A (northwestern Wisconsin), Zone E (west-central Wisconsin) and Zone F (southern Wisconsin). Permit numbers are low in northern zones and the same or slightly higher in southern zones compared to 2013. The number of applications received will determine whether a trapper receives a permit in their zone of choice or is awarded a preference point.

There are six fisher management zones in Wisconsin. Southern portions of Fisher Zones A through D have the highest fisher populations, with much lower fisher numbers in the northern portions of these zones. West-central Wisconsin’s (Zone E) fisher population has leveled off in recent years.

**Fisher—Season Information**

Oct. 18 – Dec. 31, 2014 for all zones

BAG LIMIT: One per permit

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Aug. 1

Zone F includes the remainder of the state and will be open for harvest in 2014 for the eleventh consecutive year. In Zone F, good opportunities exist in southern Marathon, Shawano and Oconto counties. Marathon County trappers have the best opportunity, with four different zones and good fisher populations, be sure to receive landowner permission prior to applying for harvest permits.

Even in areas where fishers have flourished for over four decades, Wisconsin is experiencing localized declines. According to Ashland County biologist Todd Naas, fisher numbers remain low in Price and southern Ashland and Iron counties. Although localized areas may still have a considerable amount of fisher, many trappers have reported low numbers in the last several years.

In other areas, wildlife biologists are reporting an increase in fisher presence. Jess Carstens, wildlife biologist for Dunn and Pepin counties, and Harvey Halvorsen, area wildlife supervisor from Baldwin, have observed a growing fisher population in west-central Wisconsin – especially in Pierce and St. Croix Counties.

Successful permit holders must call 1-800-994-6673 within 24 hours of a kill – the automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest. Trappers are required to report their harvest using a call-in system, in addition to registering harvest with a conservation warden.

Muskrat & Mink

Mink and muskrat populations appear to be doing relatively well in most of the state, though local populations can be variable. “There are concerns throughout the eastern U.S. about declining muskrat populations,” said Waupaca County wildlife biologist Jake Fries. “We’re not quite sure why, but water quality, predation and habitat changes have all been suggested as possible issues that could be affecting our muskrats long-term.”

Muskrats are doing very well and it should be a good year for harvest.

Researchers from throughout the region are hoping to observe muskrat populations in the coming years – there are locally strong populations of muskrats if quality habitat exists. On a statewide basis, opportunities to trap muskrat and mink are quite good, as they exist in most areas where permanent water can be found. According to Horicon wildlife technician Chris Cole, “Muskrats are doing very well and it should be a good year for harvest.”

However, USFWS biologist Brian Stemper suggests muskrat populations on the Big River appear to have experienced a rough period. High water levels last fall and through the winter months, combined with high water levels this spring, have reduced populations and seriously affected trapper access on the Big River. It is important to note that trappers on the USFWS Refuge systems on the Mississippi will need a USFWS trapping permit and tags and a Wisconsin license.

The department fields numerous calls from property owners and municipalities regarding muskrat damage annually. These individuals are encouraged to reach out to a local trapper for help – consider having someone trap muskrats each year as annual maintenance.

Trappers are reminded that the use of colony traps is legal in Wisconsin, with maximum outside dimensions of 6” x 6” x 36”. Be sure to check with your local conservation officer on the exact language of the law and what is acceptable, especially if you construct your own colony traps.

**New in 2014**, statewide open and close dates for mink and muskrat will be consistent, with the exception of the Mississippi River Zone. This new structure was the result of Conservation Congress resolutions to simplify regulations and make seasons and zones more consistent statewide.

**Muskrat and Mink—Season Information**

**Statewide Zone:** Oct. 25, 2014 – Mar. 8, 2015

**Mississippi River Zone:** begins the day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first, through Mar. 8, 2015

BAG LIMIT: None
American (Pine) Marten

American marten, also known as pine marten, are a state protected mammal and currently the only furbearer on Wisconsin's endangered species list. Reintroduced into the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests in northwest and northeast Wisconsin decades ago, their population numbers remain low.

According to Natural Heritage Conservation field operations supervisor Jim Woodford, martens are a rare and unique member of our northern forest ecosystems and require additional conservation measures. The department, in partnership with the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, stocked 90 additional martens from northern Minnesota into the Chequamegon National Forest from 2009–2011.

Currently, these stakeholders are wrapping up work with the University of Wisconsin-Madison to evaluate the success of the most recent stocking project through studies on marten habitat quality, juvenile dispersal, and reproduction rates in the Chequamegon National Forest. Additional studies in the Nicolet National Forest are slated to begin later this winter. According to NHC field ecologist Carly Lapin, results from this research will direct management focus for continuing and future recovery efforts and provide genetic information regarding marten populations and possibly provide a population size estimate, something that has been previously unavailable. The data generated from these animals are being analyzed to determine mortality causes and improve our understanding of the habitats best suited to their survival. This information will help direct and inform future recovery efforts.

Although they have not ventured far from original release sites, the department has discovered additional martens in northern Iron County. Private naturalist Zach Wilson and retired wildlife biologist Bruce Bacon, both Iron County residents, lead a citizen science effort with local high school students. According to Wilson, local trappers in Iron County have helped determine where these rare marten have been living for the last ten years, and through their help we may learn of their connection with martens in our neighboring state of Michigan. Biologists and students have radio-collared several marten over the last 7–8 years. Martens are being tracked as part of the 'Woods and Waters' program in the Hurley and Mercer High Schools.

Stone Marten

A European 'cousin' of Wisconsin's marten, the stone marten began to appear in the southeastern corner of the state nearly 70 years ago. This influx was the result of an escape or release of specimens from a fur farm in the Burlington, WI area.

According to Jonathan Pauli, an assistant professor with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the stone marten or beech marten is a furbearer native to central and southern Europe. In Wisconsin they are present in deciduous woodlots of southeastern Wisconsin while, American marten inhabit northern, mixed hardwood-coniferous forests.

In order to distinguish between stone and American martens, observe the throat patch. The stone marten has a white throat patch (like Wisconsin's native mink), while the American marten has an orange or tawny-colored throat patch.

Dr. Pauli and the department are interested in the presence and distribution of stone marten. As an unprotected species, the stone marten is legally harvestable (but has low fur value). Stone marten observations should be reported to Dr. Pauli at 608–890-0285 or online via http://labs.russell.wisc.edu/pauli/.

For more information regarding furbearers in Wisconsin, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “furbearers.”

“Fisher depredation may be an important factor in the success or failure of the marten re-introduction efforts, and with fisher numbers down in the north it may be a factor in the success of martens in Iron County,” said Bacon.

Trappers are urged to consider using live trapping techniques such as cage traps in areas occupied by martens. Regulated trapping with special restrictions is allowed within Wisconsin's two Marten Protection Areas. These special restrictions allow for regulated take of several furbearers while protecting marten and can be found in DNR trapping regulations. Following these restrictions is very important to the future of American martens in Wisconsin.

American marten observations should be reported to a local wildlife biologist or Jim Woodford at 715-365-8856 or via email at James.Woodford@wisconsin.gov.
Furbearers • Additional Responsibilities

Additional Responsibilities

Incidental Take

Trappers are required to turn in incidentally trapped animals to local conservation officers – use the 1–800-TIP-WDNR hotline (1–800-847–9367) to report an incidental take. These specimens are used in furbearer research and training workshops. Often, pelts are provided for educational purposes, but if pelts are sold the proceeds are used in our growing trapper education program. Virgil Schroeder, president of the Wisconsin Trappers Association states, encourages trappers to follow these procedures. “We encourage trappers to use this service and turn in those rare incidentally taken furbearers,” said Schroeder. “It’s easy, it’s important, and it’s the right thing to do. Your efforts will not only help our furbearer education program but will be used to test new tools and new techniques you might use in the future that could increase opportunity and reduce incidental take.”

Local Ordinances

Some villages, cities, and towns throughout the state, primarily in urban areas, require special permits and may have ordinances that restrict trapping or the discharge of firearms or bows. Check with local town or village offices before you hunt or trap to see if special rules apply. A quality hunting or trapping experience can be found on public or private lands, but preseason scouting and permission from landowners is critical.

Best Management Practices for Trapping

In a progressive effort to improve the science of furbearer management, the State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Trappers Association, Wisconsin Conservation Congress and individual trappers have been actively involved in an international effort to develop best management practices for Trapping. This is one of the largest collective trapping research efforts ever undertaken, with the final product being information and suggestions that each state, tribe, and their trappers can use to improve animal welfare and trapping in general. Specifically, this information will be used within trapper education programs.

Advances in trapping through scientific study are the future of resource management in Wisconsin and in the United States, where our natural resources belong to all citizens. John Olson has been involved in this effort since its inception in 1998 and has chaired the national committee the last three years. According to Olson, regulated harvests combined with science-based knowledge, a caring public, and highly trained conservation officers will provide us with tools we can use to help us continue to manage wildlife populations while enjoying the immense pleasure and knowledge of having intact natural systems. As of June 2014, we now have a science-based, published document on all furbearers in the lower 48 states, from wolves to weasels. You can find these 22 best management practices studies and much more at www.fishwildlife.org.

To locate a current class near you, contact your local DNR office or visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “trapper ed.”

If you are interested in becoming a trapper, completion of the 12-hour, $12 course is mandatory. To locate a current class near you, contact your local DNR office or visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “trapper ed.”

For more regarding raccoons, beavers, otter, fisher, coyotes, muskrat, mink, fox, and other furbearers, please contact:

John Olson, DNR furbearer specialist,
johnf.olson@wisconsin.gov
715-685-2934

Geriann Albers, DNR assistant furbearer specialist,
geriann.albers@wisconsin.gov
608-261-6452

For more information regarding wolves, please contact:

Dave MacFarland, DNR large carnivore specialist,
david.macfarland@wisconsin.gov
715-365-8917

Dan Kaminski, DNR assistant large carnivore specialist,
dan.kaminski@wisconsin.gov
608-261-7588

2014 Wisconsin DNR Fall Hunting Forecast
Contributed by Dan Kaminski and David MacFarland

All signs point towards another great black bear hunting season in Wisconsin in 2014. Despite increased harvests over the last five years, the black bear population has remained stable throughout most of the state—this should be a welcome sign for bear hunters in Wisconsin. The bear population continues to slowly expand southward, providing increased harvest opportunities for bear hunters in central and southern Wisconsin. By early summer, one or more bears were observed in northern Illinois, and the first confirmed modern-day report of bear cubs was recorded in northeast Iowa (their origin is unknown).

Interest in Wisconsin bear hunting continues to grow; with more than 108,000 applications received in 2014 (106,500 applications were received in 2013). Bear populations have remained relatively stable at 20,000 bears statewide. “With one of the largest bear populations in the country and high hunter success rates, Wisconsin is a great place to hunt bears,” said DNR large carnivore specialist Dave MacFarland.

All signs point towards another great black bear hunting season in Wisconsin in 2014.

The number of preference points required to draw a bear harvest permit in 2014 ranged from one in Zone C to nine in Zone B. “Although wait times may be several years in some of the northern zones, Zone C gives hunters a great opportunity to participate more frequently,” said MacFarland.

Wisconsin consistently ranks as one of the top harvest states in the country. In 2013, hunters harvested 3,952 bears—the 5th highest harvest rate in state history. Zone A led all zones with 1,249 bears harvested, followed by Zone D (1,179), Zone C (1,029) and Zone B (490). Bayfield County led all counties with 423 bears harvested, followed by Price (290), Douglas (260) and Sawyer (254).

In 2013, hunter harvest success was highest in Zone B, with a 78 percent success rate. Zone B was followed by Zone D (72), Zone A (59) and Zone C (25). “The 70 percent success rate throughout the northern forests and the statewide average of roughly 50 percent are some of the best success rates in the country,” said DNR assistant large carnivore ecologist Dan Kaminski. “Demand for a limited number of harvest permits has consistently increased over the years, but Wisconsin continues to provide high-quality opportunities and high success rates for those hunters who draw a tag.”

Gun hunters harvested 3,349 bears in 2014, while bowhunters accounted for 556 bears. A majority of bears were harvested using bait (2,649), but the use of dogs (694), both dogs and bait (500), and neither dogs nor bait (26) were also relatively successful.

In order to address steadily increasing bear populations and agricultural damage and nuisance complaints, additional harvest permits were awarded to hunters in recent years. Additional permits also provide additional harvest opportunities for hunters. In 2014, 10,340 permits were issued to hunters. The department’s current management objectives include population stabilization in zones A, B and C and a slight population reduction in Zone D.

In zones A, B and D, the first week of the harvest season will be reserved for hunters using bait and other legal methods (excluding the use of dogs). In turn, the last week of the season is reserved solely for hunters who use dogs. In Zone C, the use of dogs is prohibited.

During the upcoming bear hunting season, hunters will be required to submit a tooth sample at the time of registration. This will help DNR wildlife managers estimate the age of each harvested bear. These age data are used as part of a population model that will estimate the size of Wisconsin’s bear population. All materials necessary to submit a tooth sample will be available at registration stations this fall. Hunters will not be required to submit a rib sample in 2014. For more information on tooth collection, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “bear.”

Wisconsin has an abundance of land open to hunting. Opportunities to bear hunt include state, federal and county forests, state-owned wildlife areas, and private lands open to public hunting through the open Managed Forest Law, Forest Crop Law, or Voluntary Public Access programs. Hunters have access to nearly seven million acres throughout the state—this should be a welcome sign for bear hunters in Wisconsin. The bear population continues to slowly expand southward, providing increased harvest opportunities for bear hunters in central and southern Wisconsin. By early summer, one or more bears were observed in northern Illinois, and the first confirmed modern-day report of bear cubs was recorded in northeast Iowa (their origin is unknown).
Northern District Bear Forecast

Contributed by Michael Zeckmeister

The late spring and relatively harsh late-winter conditions appear to have had an impact on bear behavior and will likely impact hunting conditions for the 2014 season. A late spring green-up seems to have delayed vegetation, including agricultural crops, by at least two weeks in Northern Wisconsin. Soft mast crops should fare better, although this spring marked two consecutive years of late winters and late spring green-ups. Despite these conditions, we continue to hear reports of bear litters of 2–4 cubs, even into mid-summer.

This year, the department and the Bear Advisory Committee selected a 1,600 bear quota in Zone D – this is the highest it has ever been. "This four-county area in the southern portion of Zone D will offer tremendous opportunities to harvest a bear in 2014," said Zeckmeister.

Enjoy pursuing this truly magnificent big game animal in the northwoods.

A higher Zone D quota will not only increase the chances of harvesting a bear, but will also help reduce human-bear conflicts in an area that has had serious conflicts in recent years. "Our goal is to allow bear hunters who have waited and drawn a harvest tag to successfully harvest a bear and reduce locally high populations," said Zeckmeister.

If you are fortunate to draw a tag this year, enjoy your time pursuing this truly magnificent big game animal in the northwoods. Advanced scouting and really "sticking it out" and being flexible will help maximize your opportunity. Bears have a habit of changing their movements, especially in response to changing food conditions – hunters often need to adjust to these changes. Enjoy your time outdoors!
Northeast District Bear Forecast

Contributed by John Huff

The Northeast District includes portions of bear management zones B and C. The bear population in Zone B is healthy, and the management objective in this zone is to stabilize the population near current levels. The harvest quota and corresponding permits for bears in zones B and C will increase from 2013 levels.

Hunters are experiencing good success rates and conflicts with bears have decreased in recent years. Bears are expanding their range in Zone C, but are most abundant in the northern portion of the zone. Hunters may find opportunities in new areas within Zone C as bear populations grow. Preseason scouting for hunting locations will be crucial in each zone.

Mid-summer berry crops were plentiful in northeast Wisconsin – blueberry, cherry and serviceberry crops were all good to excellent. A stretch of dry weather may have affected blackberry crops, but many areas will have fair to good production. The hazel nut crop will likely decrease from 2013, but early signs indicate that acorn production will be high. Natural foods will affect bear activity and movements – bear visitation may drop if abundant natural food is available near a bait site.

Bait-sitters and hunters not using hounds will have until September 30 to hunt in Zone B. Hunters using hounds must wait until September 10 and can track and trail bears until October 7. In Zone C, the use of dogs is not allowed – the season runs from September 3 to October 7.

West Central District Bear Forecast

Contributed by Wayne Hall

The black bear population throughout the West Central District continues to grow, but at a slower rate relative to other areas. Nuisance complaints received by biologists this year appear to be minimal, if not less, than last year across most of the West Central District. Reports of bear sightings throughout the southern and southwestern portion of the district remain a novelty to local residents and reports of nuisance bears in the La Crosse area appear to be down or stabilizing.

Based on reports, the percentage of bait stations hit or visited by bears is down (-17% in Marathon County) compared to the 10-year average.

In 2013, there were a total of 4,110 permits available in Zone C. Hunters harvested 1,029 (529 in the West Central District) bears at a 25 percent success rate throughout the zone. The majority of the district’s bear harvest took place in Chippewa (165), Clark (103), Marathon (100) and Jackson (45) counties. A small number of bears were harvested further south toward Monroe and Juneau counties, and as far east as Portage County.

In 2014, Zone C harvest permits were increased 20% (5,100) from levels in 2013 in order to stabilize the current population and minimize bear damage and nuisance concerns. This approach will allow the population to slowly expand into areas of suitable habitat in central and southern Wisconsin.

Bear populations in the West Central District remain healthy and continue to expand from the core central forest counties to more agricultural counties, but at a slower pace. The northern portion of the district’s hunting grounds holds plenty of bears, offering hunters ample opportunities for success. Regardless, bears hunters still need to scout, scout and then scout some more to be successful.
Upland Game Season Forecast

Contributed by Scott Walter and Krista McGinley

**FFLIGHT Takes Flight!**

In 2014, upland bird hunters in Wisconsin will have an exciting new tool to help make journeys into the field more enjoyable and productive. The Fields & Forest Lands Interactive Game bird Hunting Tool (FFLIGHT) will help hunters locate prime public lands where they can find ruffed grouse, woodcock, pheasants and doves.

The FFLIGHT tool features an interactive mapping environment—hunters can locate young aspen forests and lowland alder suitable for hunting ruffed grouse and woodcock, state properties stocked with pheasants, and fields managed for fall dove hunting in a matter of seconds. Hunters can also view topographic maps and aerial photos of hunting locations and download or print maps to carry with them in the field. A mobile version of the tool will allow hunters to access this information with a smartphone or mobile device while in the field.

“FFLIGHT pulls together a lot of very useful information for our state’s upland bird hunters,” said DNR Assistant Upland Wildlife Ecologist Krista McGinley. “It adds a new dimension that will help ensure a quality experience while in the field.”

For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “FFLIGHT.”

**Wild Turkey**

This fall, 96,700 wild turkey permits will be available to hunters, the same number of permits offered in 2013.

**Leftover Permits & Extended Season**

Following the 2014 fall turkey permit drawing, remaining permits [will go/went] on sale Saturday, August 23 at 10 a.m. Prior to the 2011 season, sales opened at noon each day. An earlier sale time was selected to increase hunter access to leftover permits.

The fall 2014 season will run from September 13 through November 20 for all permit holders, with an extended season in Zones 1–5 only from December 1–31.

**Bag Limit**

The 2014 fall bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per fall turkey permit (also known as a carcass tag).

Turkey registration in Wisconsin changed considerably in fall 2011. The previous system, which required hunters to transport their turkey to a local registration station, has been replaced with more convenient online or phone-in registration options. Hunters must register their turkey by calling 1–888/HUNT–WIS (1–888–486–8947) or through dnr.wi.gov, keyword “turkey registration.” Hunters are still required to register their turkey before 5 P.M. on the day after harvest.

**Turkey Tactics**

The restoration of turkeys in Wisconsin ranks as one of the greatest wildlife management success stories in our state’s history. Absent from Wisconsin as recently as the 1970s, Wisconsin spring turkey harvests now rank among the largest in the nation. Wild turkeys have proven surprisingly tolerant of harsh winter weather as populations have become established throughout northern Wisconsin. After 20 years of rapidly increasing population and harvest, turkey numbers in Wisconsin appear to be stabilizing at levels suitable to available habitat.

Brood counts will be completed in August and will provide additional information regarding this spring and summer’s reproductive levels. Turkey population numbers and harvests will likely ebb and flow near current...
levels in response to natural factors like weather and food availability. Hunters can expect some annual variation in both their personal success and turkey harvest. Hunters and biologists have been amazed at how resilient turkeys have proven in the face of even the toughest winter weather. Following an extremely harsh winter in 2013–2014, spring harvests increased in most of the state, and decreased slightly in northern zones. While this past winter caused some localized mortality among birds in the north, weather related mortality appears to have been fairly limited.

Fall turkey hunters can maximize their chances for success by learning about turkey behavior and the wild turkey annual cycle. In the fall, there is generally a shift in habitat use, with turkeys moving from more open field habitats to forested areas. Turkey flocks make extensive use of areas dominated by oak and hickory – this habitat shift coincides with food availability as succulent vegetation and insects become less available and mast becomes more available.

In poor mast production years, turkey flocks are drawn to areas where food can be found. This often results in turkeys frequenting farmland and open fields, where they become more visible and vulnerable to hunters. Turkey hunters should monitor mast crops where they hunt and determine where turkeys will be feeding. Spending a few evenings prior to turkey season locating roosting areas will help hunters find birds when the season begins.

Most turkey hunting occurs on private land, so it is important for hunters to make sure landowner relationships are a high priority. Landowners in Wisconsin are often willing to allow hunters to use their land, as long as hunters politely ask for permission and are respectfully.

Most importantly, please focus on safety during your fall hunt. For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “turkey.”

Turkey Hunting by the Numbers

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Total number of turkey permits available in 2013:</th>
<th>Total number of turkey permits issued in 2013:</th>
<th>Overall success rate for the 2013 spring turkey season:</th>
<th>Overall success rate for the 2013 fall turkey season:</th>
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<td>Total number of turkey permits available in 2013:</td>
<td>42,437</td>
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<td>Total number of turkey permits issued in 2013:</td>
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<td>Overall success rate for the 2013 spring turkey season:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall success rate for the 2013 fall turkey season:</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
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Each year, pheasant abundance in Wisconsin is indexed using a rural mail carrier survey. In late April, mail carriers record the number of pheasants observed while driving. Rural mail carrier survey results suggest a slight decline in pheasant numbers, with 0.33 pheasants observed per 100 miles – down slightly from the 0.36 observed in 2013.

Looking Ahead: Fall 2014

Given the loss of grassland and wetland acres and concurrent declines in pheasant numbers, hunters will need to scout diligently in order to locate birds. Hunters wishing to pursue wild pheasants should look for landscapes that include a mixture of several cover types. Agricultural areas with at least 10 to 15 percent grassland or idle ground with wetlands and/or shrublands are most likely to hold pheasants.

During the 2013 season, an estimated 43,725 hunters pursued pheasants, spending 368,434 days afield and harvesting 194,397 pheasants. Participation and harvest estimates reflect the pursuit of both wild and stocked pheasants. Fond du Lac, Kenosha, and Dane counties harvested the most pheasants in 2013.

Survey results. The Central Forest experienced a 24 percent decrease in breeding grouse this spring, while the Northern Forest yielded a 3 percent increase. Grouse populations in northern Wisconsin tend to follow a predictable cycle every 9 to 11 years. Survey results suggest that grouse populations in the state may have peaked in 2011 and are nearing a low point in the cycle.

According to DNR upland wildlife ecologist Scott Walter, the maturation of southern Wisconsin’s forest community in recent decades and a resulting loss of dense, brushy areas that grouse need for cover has led to lower grouse numbers statewide.
“Ruffed grouse are closely linked to young forest habitats that develop following disturbances, notably logging activities,” said Walter. “While we often focus as hunters on grouse numbers in a single year, it’s important to remember that the long-term health of grouse and other early-succession wildlife is dependent upon the availability of the dense young cover they require. In Wisconsin, we need to ensure that enough timber harvests are occurring to meet the habitat needs of ruffed grouse and other wildlife.”

In regard to the slight grouse population increase in northern Wisconsin, Gary Zimmer, coordinating biologist for the Ruffed Grouse Society, points to this past winter.

“While cold temperatures and deep snow are generally hard on resident wildlife populations, ruffed grouse often thrive in winters like the one we just experienced,” noted Zimmer. “Grouse roost under the snow, this can serve as a blanket to hide them from predators’ view and keep them warm even during very cold periods. It may be well below-zero out in the open, but under even a few inches of snow the temperature might only be a few degrees below freezing. Grouse utilize tree buds as food during winter, so snow cover does not reduce the availability of food. Weather conditions, especially during the brood rearing period in late May and early June, also play an important role in the fall ruffed grouse numbers. Newly-hatched grouse chicks are very sensitive to chilling – warm, dry conditions allow high survival during the first few weeks of life.”

For more information regarding ruffed grouse, including 2013 and 2014 drumming reports, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “ruffed grouse.”

Grouse hunters are very much in tune with grouse numbers relative to the population cycle – the number of hunting days spent in the field and overall harvests vary significantly from year to year. Preliminary ruffed grouse harvest data for the 2013–14 season show that 80,041 hunters reported spending 673,253 days in the field hunting grouse, with approximately 259,997 grouse harvested. Highest harvests were reported by hunters in Price, Marinette and Forest counties.

“Grouse hunters are used to the cyclic nature of ruffed grouse populations, and know that during low periods grouse can still be found in the best cover. Hunters might have to work a bit harder to flush birds, but sunny October days with your dog in the north woods are tough to beat – Wisconsin still has some of the best grouse hunting in the country,” said Zimmer.

Hunters may need to scout different sites in order to find pockets where birds can be found. Ruffed grouse use a variety of habitat types, but young, early-succession forests are most important when trying to find grouse. Finding the densest woody cover available is often the best way to locate grouse in a new hunting area. Checking harvested birds’ crops will show hunters what grouse are currently eating and may also suggest likely hunting locations.

Bobwhite Quail

Data regarding male bobwhite quail densities have been collected biennially since 1991 (annual surveys initially began in 1949) using roadside surveys along predetermined transects in the 15-county primary bobwhite quail range. The survey records the number of whistling males observed during a two-minute period.

While the 2013 survey results indicate a slight increase (from 0.013 males per 2 minute period in 2011 to 0.015 in 2013), the overall trend in bobwhite quail population still shows a significant decline throughout southern and western Wisconsin. Hunters are encouraged to check the wildlife reports page on the department website for more information.

Bobwhite quail were long considered to be a species that coexisted nicely with agriculture – high quail densities were once common in the farm country of southern and west-central Wisconsin. Quail favor the highly-interspersed habitats found on small farms with numerous small fields, idle lands, small grains, and brushy fencerows providing annual habitat and fulfilling foraging necessities.
Upland Game • Cottontail Rabbits

Cottontail Rabbits

Cottontail rabbits are a very popular small game animal and provide for great recreational hunting opportunities throughout Wisconsin. Rabbits are extremely prolific – their annual reproduction is usually dependent upon local weather conditions during the breeding season. Portions of the state with adequate rainfall and plenty of green, succulent vegetation should see good rabbit production and quality hunting opportunities this fall.

Surveys for cottontail rabbits are conducted in unison with the biennial bobwhite quail survey described above. Each cottontail rabbit observed on bobwhite quail survey routes is recorded. Results of the 2013 survey indicate that the number of cottontail rabbits recorded per stop increased from 0.14 rabbits in 2011 to 0.17 in 2013. Hunters are encouraged to check the wildlife reports page on the department website for more information.

During the 2013–2014 hunting season, an estimated 31,374 hunters spent 148,984 days pursuing rabbits, accounting for an estimated harvest of 129,830 cottontail rabbits.

Gray and Fox Squirrel

Gray and Fox Squirrel

Squirrels are a very popular game species and can provide great early-season hunting opportunities, especially for beginners. Squirrel production and the resulting harvest opportunities are strongly tied to the previous year’s mast production – hunters should focus on these locations when choosing a hunting spot.

During the 2013–2014 hunting season, mail-in survey results indicated that 52,866 small game hunters pursued squirrels, spending 327,969 days afield and harvesting an estimated 327,398 squirrels.

Snowshoe Hare

Snowshoe Hare

Many small game hunters who spend time in the dense forests of northern Wisconsin enjoy pursuing snowshoe hares. Snowshoe hares are widely distributed in association with mixtures of deciduous and evergreen cover close to the ground.

An estimated 6,176 hunters spent 24,418 days chasing hares, with an estimated harvest of 16,110 hare.

Cottontail Rabbit — Season Information

Northern Zone: Sept. 13 – Feb. 28, 2015
Daily Bag Limit: 3

Southern Zone: Oct. 18 (noon) – Feb. 28, 2015
Daily Bag Limit: 3

Gray & Fox Squirrel — Season Information

Bag Limit: Daily bag of 5, possession limit of 10

Snowshoe Hare — Season Information
Open year-round statewide with an unlimited bag limit

Questions? Call the DNR Call Center at 1-888-936-7463, 7 AM — 10 PM, 7 days a week
After a two-year review of Wisconsin’s deer management program, hunters will notice a variety of changes in 2014 designed to increase hunter enjoyment, streamline deer seasons, and provide greater opportunities for hunters and the general public to provide input regarding local deer management decisions.

In 2012, Gov. Scott Walker requested a full and independent review of Wisconsin’s deer management practices and hired a deer trustee to initiate the process. Over the course of the past two years, through countless hours of public hearings, public advisory committee meetings and various public comment periods and online surveys, over 60 recommendations were developed to help improve Wisconsin’s deer management and hunting experience. These recommendations were approved by the Natural Resource Board and Gov. Walker, and implementation will begin in 2014.

“The changes to the deer season are not complicated, although they may take some getting used to,” said Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Big Game Specialist Kevin Wallenfang. “This year, we’re recommending that hunters focus on the rules that apply to their specific hunting area, rather than trying to understand a lot of things that may not apply to them.”

For a complete overview of changes for the 2014 deer season, please check the 2014 Deer Hunting Regulations available at any hunting license vendor or DNR Service Center. For additional information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “deer.”

County Deer Advisory Councils

One overarching goal outlined by the Deer Trustee Report was to better engage the public and provide a system that will allow people to take more ownership of local deer management issues. Starting in 2014, new County Deer Advisory Councils are being formed to evaluate a variety of deer metrics, including forestry impacts, agriculture and habitat issues, deer population and health, and hunter satisfaction. County councils will be comprised of representatives from local hunting clubs, conservation clubs, forestry groups, agriculture groups, tourism groups, urban interests, and tribal groups where applicable. Each council will be chaired by a local Wisconsin Conservation Congress delegate — local DNR wildlife biologists will also be present to provide data and technical advice. At least three members on each CDaC must have purchased a deer hunting license in seven of the past 10 years.

In early summer 2014, the department mailed letters to each county board or council and forestry, transportation, and tourism department leaders to solicit a representative for each of the CDaC seats. Letters were also sent to local conservation clubs, giving each an opportunity to nominate someone to represent deer hunter interests in each county.

For more information regarding County Deer Advisory Councils, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “CDaC.”

Contributed by Dan Kaminski, Kevin Wallenfang, Melinda Nelson and Meredith Penthorn
There are a number of changes this year regarding deer season structure, management units and tag availability. The most notable changes are listed below. Be sure to read the 2014 Deer Hunting Regulations for additional information.

**What’s New in 2014?**

**Management Zones and Units**

- Wisconsin has been divided into four Deer Management Zones that impact bonus permit availability and deer season structure. Nine DMUs are split by zone boundaries.
- The DMUs have been changed and are now designated by county and tribal reservation boundaries.
- The CWD Management Zone has been dissolved. There is now a CWD Affected Area that includes all counties in which baiting and feeding are prohibited.

**Seasons and Bag Limits**

- The new crossbow deer season runs concurrently with the archery deer season (September 13 – January 4, 2015).
- The purchase of an archer license does not allow the use of a crossbow.
- The bow and crossbow deer seasons will now remain open statewide the day before the November 9-day Gun Deer Season.
- Sighting in firearms and small game hunting with firearms are now allowed statewide on the day before the November 9-day Gun Deer Season.
- The December 4-day antlerless-only hunt will now only occur in the Central Farmland and Central Forest zones.
- The Holiday Hunt has been shortened, and will occur within the Southern Farmland Zone. Only antlerless deer may be taken by firearm, bow or crossbow.

**Tags and Licenses**

- A free statewide Archery-only Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag is no longer available.
- There will not be any free CWD Management Zone or $2 Herd Control carcass tags available.
- Youth hunters will receive an Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag, valid for an antlerless deer statewide, with each deer license.
- Class A and C disabled hunters will receive a free Farmland Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag, valid for an antlerless deer statewide, with each deer license.
- State parks are no longer designated as individual DMUs. Hunting access permits are no longer required to hunt in state parks, but vehicle admission stickers are still required.
- Disabled and U.S. Armed Forces members may no longer use their Gun Buck Deer Carcass Tag to tag an antlerless deer, but will be issued an Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag that can be used for this purpose statewide.

**Bonus Antlerless Deer Permits**

- Bonus antlerless permits are valid only in the Zone, DMU and property type (public or private) indicated on the carcass tag.
- Bonus antlerless permits are now public and private land-specific.

**Registration**

- In 2014, all hunters must register their deer in person at a DNR registration station, unless selected in advance by the department to participate in the electronic registration pilot program.
- Deer must now be registered by 5 p.m. the day after harvest, except during the November 9-day Gun Deer Season, when registration is due by December 1 at 5 p.m. (the day after the season ends).

**Transportation**

- While afield, no person may possess or transport another hunter’s deer, even after it has been registered (unless accompanied by the person for whom the carcass tag was issued). The carcass tag must be attached to the deer. However, anyone may still transport another person’s registered deer on a public road or possess it at a residence, camp or business.

**Baiting and Feeding of Deer**

- The baiting and feeding ban has been extended to include two new counties: Waupaca and Shawano.

**Use of Bows and Crossbows**

- All hunters may now hunt deer with a crossbow during the crossbow-only deer hunting season, but must purchase a crossbow license.
- Laws regulating the use of bows and crossbows for hunting within cities or villages may have changed. Check with local city or village authorities for local ordinance restrictions.

**Additional New Rules**

- It is illegal to discharge a firearm, bow or crossbow on, from or across state trails and other areas which are shown as closed to hunting within state parks. Hunters must review maps available at dnr.wi.gov or a state park office before hunting.
- Albino and all-white deer are now protected statewide, including those found within the CWD Affected Area.
- Bonus-buck opportunities have changed and are only available in the Southern Farmland Zone.
- Antlerless deer must be registered in-person at a DNR registration station before a Bonus-buck Authorization sticker is issued and before a hunter may harvest a bonus buck.
- Since 2013, department rules have allowed the use of rifles for hunting deer during most firearm deer seasons.
Deer Registration in 2014

For fall 2014, all hunters must register their deer at an in-person deer registration station. A small number of hunters will be randomly selected by the department and asked to participate in the pilot program for a new electronic registration system – available to all hunters starting in 2015. See the 2014 Deer Hunting Regulations for further details regarding deer registration.

In 2015, all hunters will have the option to register their deer using a telephone or through participating businesses that will remain a registration station. If you are not part of this year’s pilot program, please register your deer at an in-person registration station like in past seasons.

State Parks

Wisconsin state parks are no longer designated as individual DMUs. Deer hunting is allowed in most state parks, although hunters should check the 2014 Deer Hunting Regulations for any exceptions. Hunting access permits are no longer required for hunting in state parks, but vehicle admission stickers are still required.

Buck-only Units

In 2014, 19 county units, in whole or in part, are designated as buck-only units. This approach will encourage herd growth. In these units, a Buck Deer Carcass Tag is issued with each deer license and is valid statewide (except during antlerless-only seasons in some units).

Bonus antlerless tags will not be available for purchase in buck-only units. However, qualified members of the U.S. Armed Forces (home on furlough or leave) and Class A and C disabled permit hunters will be allowed to harvest an antlerless deer in any buck-only unit using their free Farmland Zone Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag. This tag will be issued with the purchase of each gun and bow or crossbow deer license. Youth hunters ages 10–17 will also be allowed to harvest an antlerless deer in any buck-only unit using their free Junior Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag, issued with the purchase of each gun and bow or crossbow deer license.

Metro Sub-units

In the past, six distinct metropolitan DMUs existed near major urban areas. These boundaries have been retained to allow additional hunting opportunities not found elsewhere. In general, when purchasing Bonus Antlerless Deer Carcass Tags for use in a Metro Sub-unit, hunters should select bonus tags using the county DMU where the tag is to be valid. Some local municipalities may have weapons restrictions – hunters are encouraged to check local ordinances before hunting in Metro Sub-units.

Antlerless Deer Permits in 2014

For 2014, traditional Deer Management Units have been eliminated and replaced with a simple county-based system. Deer hunters will need to have a good idea where county boundaries are located before they start hunting, since many do not follow roads or rivers like DMUs used in the past.

Regular, herd control and chronic wasting disease DMUs have been eliminated. Free CWD-management zone and $2 herd control tags no longer exist and have been replaced with one free farmland zone antlerless deer carcass tag that will accompany the purchase of each deer license.

For 2014, traditional Deer Management Units (identified by numbers and letters and delineated using areas of similar habitat type and road and river boundaries) have been eliminated and replaced with a simple county-based system. Deer management units have been simplified from 134 units to 72 county-based and 4 tribal reservation units. Deer hunters will need to have a good idea where county boundaries are located before they start hunting, since many do not follow roads or rivers like DMUs used in the past.

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Zone DMU and on any land type (public or private). Free Farmland Zone tags may not be used in the Northern Forest or Central Forest zones.

Bonus Antlerless Deer Carcass Tags are zone, unit and land-type specific. At the time of purchase, hunters will need to know their zone, county and whether they intend to harvest antlerless deer on public or private lands. Bonus antlerless tags will be available for $12 for residents, $20 for nonresidents and $5 for youth (ages 10 and 11). Hunters may purchase one unit-specific bonus antlerless deer tag per day, where available, until the unit is sold out or until the hunting season ends.

Central Farmland & Central Forest Zone Antlerless-only Hunt

The four-day December Antlerless-only deer season will no longer be a statewide hunt. The four-day December Antlerless-only deer season will now occur in the Central Farmland and Central Forest zones only. The season will be held December 11–14 in all Central Farmland and Central Forest zone DMUs (except non-quota areas and buck-only portions of units).

Hunters will need to possess (or be in a group with someone that does) an antlerless deer carcass tag valid for the unit in which they choose to hunt. All gun, archery and crossbow deer hunters and small game hunters are required to meet blaze orange clothing requirements during the December Antlerless-only hunt.

Note that the first three days of sales are zone-specific and begin:

- Monday, August 18 10 AM — Northern and Central Forest Zones;
- Tuesday, August 19 10 AM — Central Farmland Zone;
- Wednesday, August 20 10 AM — Southern Farmland Zone;
- Thursday, August 21 10 AM — all zones with remaining permits available.

Hunters have asked the department to more closely regulate antlerless deer harvest on more heavily-hunted public lands. In response, changes have been made to the use and availability of bonus antlerless deer tags. In 2014, hunters will select bonus antlerless tags based on the type of land they hunt (public or private). “This is a first attempt at addressing hunter concerns,” said Marinette County wildlife biologist Janet Brehm. “Over the next couple years, we’ll look at how it worked and, if needed, we can develop a new system.”

Public lands include state, federal or county properties open to hunting, Managed Forest Law and Forest Crop Law lands designated as open for public hunting, and Voluntary Public Access lands leased for public hunting. Private lands include all lands not listed. It is important to remember that hunters must have permission to hunt on all private lands.

Bonus antlerless permit availability may vary by Deer Management Zone or DMU. Each of the four zones contains several DMUs – nine DMUs are split by zone boundaries.

In 2014, antlerless permit availability will vary between the Farmland Zone and Forest Zone portions of the following county DMUs: Adams, Clark, Eau Claire, Jackson, Juneau, Marinette, Monroe, Oconto and Wood.

For more information regarding bonus antlerless permit availability and sales, pick up a copy of the 2014 Wisconsin bonus antlerless deer permit information sheet (available wherever hunting licenses are sold) or visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “deer.”

Bonus Buck in 2014

In the southern farmland zone, all hunters may harvest one buck deer with their gun buck deer carcass tag, one buck deer with their bow buck deer carcass tag, and additional buck deer using bonus buck opportunities.

Hunters can earn bonus buck authorization stickers by first harvesting and registering an antlerless deer in any southern farmland zone DMU. Upon harvest, a bonus buck authorization sticker will be issued to the hunter.

Hunters may only use one 2014 bonus buck authorization sticker during the 2014 season.

Bonus buck regulations will be addressed in the permanent deer trustee report rule in fall 2014 – any unused 2014 bonus buck authorization stickers may or may not be valid in 2015.

All bonus buck authorization stickers earned in 2013 will be valid in 2014. A hunter can use any valid 2014 deer carcass tag to tag a bonus buck, but must first attach a 2013 or 2014 bonus buck authorization sticker to the carcass tag.

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Gun Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities

The 2014 gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities will be held October 4–12. This special hunt was established to provide disabled hunters who might not have an opportunity to participate in the various deer hunting seasons because of their disabilities a chance to enjoy the state's rich deer hunting tradition.

Disabled hunters with a valid Class A, C or D disabled permit, or Class B permit that is issued for longer than one year (and authorizes hunting or shooting form a stationary vehicle) may participate.

“We’ve been very fortunate to have such a great outflowing of support from landowners in the state,” said DNR gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities program coordinator Dan Kaminski. “For this year’s hunt, we’ve enrolled over 76,000 acres of land in 44 counties.”

The gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities is not a statewide season. This special hunt is only authorized on lands specifically enrolled in the disabled hunt program. Landowners or managers interested in sponsoring lands for the 2015 hunt must submit an online application before June 1, 2015.

Qualified disabled hunters are encouraged to contact sponsors as early as possible and before September 1.

For a list of sponsors for the 2014 season, please visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “disabled deer hunt.”

New! The venison donation program starts at the beginning of archery season this year.

Donate
A Deer Here!

2014 Wisconsin DNR Fall Hunting Forecast

Questions? Call the DNR Call Center at 1-888-936-7463, 7 AM — 10 PM, 7 days a week
Get Involved in Wisconsin’s Deer Management!

There are many opportunities available for you to take an active role in the management of whitetailed deer in Wisconsin. Follow the instructions below to help play your part!

Deer Hunter Wildlife Survey

Help monitor the relative abundance and distribution of deer and other wildlife species in Wisconsin. Use an online form to record your experiences and submit information you collected during your time in the field. To submit your observations, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “deer hunter wildlife.”

Operation Deer Watch

Help monitor deer reproduction in Wisconsin! Keep a tally sheet in your car to record all deer sightings from August 1 to September 30.

Deer Herd Forums and Online Surveys

Informational meetings are held throughout Wisconsin each spring. These forums provide a perfect opportunity to speak directly to local wildlife biologists and learn more about deer biology and management, population objectives, and harvest statistics for your favorite hunting areas. In-person participants at each forum and those using online tools can provide their personal input to the department. To provide input, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “deer hunter forum.”

Conservation Congress Spring Hearings

Annual Wisconsin Conservation Congress meetings give citizens the opportunity to comment and vote on proposed fish and wildlife rule changes and submit resolutions for future rule changes. WCC meetings are held in each county statewide on the second Monday in April. This opportunity is unique to Wisconsin and helps play a significant role in determining how you enjoy your time in the outdoors. For more information regarding spring hearings, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “spring hearings.”

To help deer hunters prepare for the 2014 season, the department will host a number of online chats with wildlife and regulations experts. For more information and to view a schedule of upcoming chats, visit dnr.wi.gov for keyword “chat.”

For more information regarding deer season in Wisconsin, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “deer.”

Where Can I Find More Information?

Hunters are encouraged to check out the frequently asked questions page for additional information. The FAQ feature provides brief responses to a wide variety of deer hunting questions, ranging from deer management unit boundaries to antlerless permits.

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Chronic Wasting Disease

Contributed by Tim Marien

CWD in Wisconsin

Wisconsin has monitored Chronic Wasting Disease for 12 years. Between 2002 and April 2014, the department tested over 185,000 free-ranging deer — over 2,500 tested positive for CWD. Through Deer Trustee Report implementation, the CWD Management Zone (CWD-MZ) has been changed to CWD-affected counties. These boundaries match the counties that are prohibited from baiting and feeding. A county is included if a wild or captive animal has been tested and confirmed positive for CWD in a county or portion of a county within a 10-mile radius of a wild or captive animal that has been tested and confirmed to be positive for CWD.

CWD Monitoring in Wisconsin

During the 2013 deer season, the department sampled 6,662 deer statewide from within and outside of the former CWD-MZ. With over 6,000 deer tested, 357 tested positive. Sampling strategies were aimed at detecting changes in the location and prevalence trends of the disease.

After the 2012 CWD discovery in Washburn County, the department initiated a surveillance strategy based on a great deal of input from the public. Thanks to overwhelming cooperation from Wisconsin hunters, over 1,500 deer have been sampled from the area, with no new positives detected. Based on this comprehensive sampling, all signs indicate that CWD is not widespread in the area. It is currently at a very low prevalence rate in the area, and we may have discovered it early.

CWD Prevalence in Wisconsin

Since 2002, CWD prevalence within our western monitoring area in the former CWD-MZ has shown an overall increasing trend in all sex and age classes. In the past 12 years, the trend in prevalence in adult males has risen from between 8–10 percent to nearly 25 percent. In adult females, prevalence has risen from between 3–4 percent to more than 10 percent. During the same period, the prevalence trend in yearling males has increased from roughly 2 percent to about 7 percent. In yearling females, rates have increased from 2 percent to roughly 6 percent.

Despite yearly fluctuations, overall prevalence in the former CWD-MZ has doubled across all sex and age classes of deer. It is important to keep in mind that annual prevalence estimates are subject to sampling variation — trends over time give better information.

2014 CWD Sampling in Wisconsin

For the 2014 deer season, the department will continue to sample deer within the former CWD-MZ as well as select locations within the CWD-affected area. The 2012 discovery of CWD in wild deer in Juneau, Adams and Portage counties prompted a 2013 surveillance effort over a 10-mile radius surrounding the positives (utilizing hunter harvested deer). These efforts resulted in the detection of additional positives in Adams and Portage counties. In Portage County, two of the positives were from the southern part of the county, where no wild deer had previously tested positive.

Exact sampling locations will be available at registration and sampling stations and on the department website prior to the opening of the 2014 archery season. The department will also sample deer in CWD-positive deer areas in Washburn, Adams, Juneau and Portage counties.

The weighted surveillance program using taxidermists as sampling cooperators will continue to function as a key portion of the department’s testing efforts. By focusing the collection and sampling effort on select age and sex classes of deer, this program helps to increase the efficacy and efficiency of statewide detection surveillance efforts. Since CWD is found at higher prevalence rates in adult males than in other demographic groups, the department works closely with taxidermists who routinely receive older age bucks. In 2013, taxidermists in Dodge, Vernon and Crawford counties provided samples — no positives were detected.
Deer Research

Contributed by Daniel Storm and Dustin Bronson

In 2011, the department began an ambitious deer research study in Wisconsin, taking a close look at survival rates and mortality in white-tailed deer. The department’s goal is to learn more about specific causes of death in Wisconsin deer – whether from disease, predators, weather, vehicles or hunters. This knowledge will be used to refine DNR’s population estimating formula and help understand the impacts various types of mortality may have on overall deer survival.

The winter of 2013-2014 was the fourth and final season of deer capture for the mortality project. Over the course of the study, 1,001 deer were collared. Over 1,000 volunteers participated in deer capture and helped provide much needed assistance.

Successfully managing CWD will require a sustained effort and cooperation and communication among DNR, hunters, agricultural agencies, landowners, farmed cervid producers, and the many citizens of the state who benefit from a healthy deer herd.

DNR game managers are grateful to hunters and conservationists for their role in helping manage CWD. Wisconsin is very fortunate to have citizens with such a great conservation ethic and high appreciation for the natural world. Hunters are the cornerstone of conservation and wildlife management – your help and assistance is invaluable. For more information regarding Chronic Wasting Disease in Wisconsin, please visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “CWD.”

Lands Open for Public Hunting

If you are looking for a place to hunt this fall, please visit the dnr.wi.gov to learn more about public-access lands in Wisconsin. Wisconsin has an abundance of land open to hunting, including state, federal and county forests, state-managed wildlife, fisheries and natural areas, and private land enrolled in the Managed Forest Law, Forest Crop Law, Voluntary Public Access, or Wisconsin Damage and Abatement Claims programs. In all, hunters have access to nearly seven million acres of land throughout Wisconsin.

CWD in North America

As of 2014, 21 states and provinces have identified CWD within free-ranging herds of deer, elk and moose. In some cases, CWD has been detected in only a handful of animals; in others, vast geographic areas and large numbers of deer are affected.

In Colorado and Wyoming, regions where CWD has been present for several decades, recent studies have documented prevalence rates of 20 to 40 percent. In Wyoming, high prevalence rates (roughly 35 percent) have been identified across extensive geographic areas, encompassing more than 4,000 square miles. Research suggests CWD is reducing deer numbers in these populations. Examining CWD in other states helps to anticipate future impacts of the disease in Wisconsin.

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District Deer Season Forecasts

West Central District Forecast
Contributed by Dave Matheys

Although deer hunting regulations and deer management strategies have changed for 2014, deer populations across most of the West Central District remain healthy. As deer management units have been realigned to coincide with county boundaries, the number of deer management units in the WCD has been reduced from 30 to 19. Deer hunters may find this consolidation less confusing, but will need to know where county boundaries are located prior to hunting.

In addition, the WCD lays within 3 distinct deer management zones: the Southern Farmland Zone, Central Farmland Zone and Central Forest Zone. The objective in Farmland zones is to stabilize deer populations, while the Forest Zone’s objective is to increase deer populations. The availability of antlerless deer tags reflects these overall objectives. There are some notable differences in hunting seasons between each zone. For example, the Central Forest and Central Farmland zones will continue to offer the 4-day December Antlerless Hunt, while the Southern Farmland Zone will offer a December 24 – January 1 Southern Farmland Zone Antlerless-only Holiday Hunt. Hunters are strongly encouraged to become familiar with new deer zones, units and regulations before the hunting season begins.

Generally speaking, deer in the WCD’s Farmland zones are doing well – hunters can expect to see deer numbers comparable to 2013 or better. According to DNR wildlife biologist for Buffalo and Trempealeau counties Mark Rasmussen, the harsh winter of 2013-14 had a minimal effect on the local deer herd. Deer numbers seem to be excellent in both counties, and there should be ample hunting opportunities for archers and gun hunters.

Similar thoughts were expressed by wildlife biologist Ryan Haffele for the Pierce and St. Croix county area and wildlife biologist Bill Hogseth for Chippewa and Eau Claire counties. According to Haffele, car-killed deer assessments revealed that the majority of does in the area carry twins. Good numbers of fawns with does are being observed, indicating that there should be a healthy number of deer to chase this fall, with excellent opportunities in the Hudson Metro Subunit. Public land antlerless tags in this area are limited and will likely sell out early.

Hunters who traditionally hunt on public land, especially in county forests, are encouraged to purchase bonus antlerless tags early. With a new public-private land permit system, bonus tags have been significantly reduced for public lands in Eau Claire and Chippewa.
Wayne Hall predicts deer numbers and deer hunting opportunities to be similar to those experienced in 2013. The deer herds in the Forest zones are not as productive as in the Farmland zones and are slower to increase. Hall notes that adequate and timely spring and summer moisture has vegetation in excellent, lush conditions. Blueberries, huckleberries and blackberries have abundant fruits and are highly sought after by deer.

Hunters who traditionally hunt the Central Forest Zone areas of Eau Claire, Clark, Jackson, Wood, Adams, Juneau and Monroe counties will see some major changes this year with regard to management zones, deer management units, tagging options, and quotas. Black River Falls’ area wildlife supervisor Kris Johansen strongly encourages hunters to pick up a copy of the 2014 regulations prior to the season and familiarize themselves with the new zone and deer management unit boundaries.

Quotas for management units within the Central Forest Zone have been reduced following two harsh winters and a decline in deer numbers. Most notably, portions of Wood and Jackson counties within the Central Forest Zone will have buck-only hunting, while the remaining counties within the Central Forest Zone will have limited antlerless tags available for public and private lands. Central Forest Zone antlerless tags (where available) will go on sale (first come, first served) Aug. 18 at 10 AM. Deer hunters will also need to be aware of Chronic Wasting Disease–Affected counties in 2014. Marathon County wildlife biologist Cortney Schaefer reminds hunters that two captive deer have tested positive for CWD in southeastern Marathon County. Marathon County is already included on the list of counties with baiting and feeding bans, but hunters in the southeastern portion of the county should expect more efforts to collect tissue samples for CWD testing in the area. Biologists will be stationed at deer registration stations in Marathon, Portage, Adams and Juneau counties to collect CWD samples.

DNR staff will also be collecting tissue samples in Crawford and Vernon counties during opening weekend of the 9-day gun deer season as part of ongoing surveillance. This is the second consecutive year of CWD surveillance in these two counties. So far, CWD has not been detected in the area. Surveillance station locations will be announced closer to the gun deer season.

West Central District wildlife management staff is available to answer any questions regarding 2014 deer season changes – just give us a call or stop in. We encourage all deer hunters to have a safe, fun and successful hunt this season.
Northern District Forecast
Contributed by Pete Engman

Conditions during the winter of 2013-2014 were severe across northern Wisconsin. We experienced heavy snow and cold temperatures that began in late November - snow levels continued to build through the winter months, and did not moderate until late April. Record or near-record winter severity readings were taken at many sites in the northern forest. In addition to deep snow, as many as 78 days were observed in which the temperature dropped below zero.

Results from our deer research conducted in the Northern Forest study area confirmed winter’s harsh effects. Fawn mortality averaged approximately 43 percent, and adult deer mortality was measured at 10 percent. In addition to the direct loss of deer due to winter severity, pregnant does came out of the winter in poor condition, which will likely result in reduced recruitment. Local field biologists conducted numerous site visits to deer yards and examined car-killed deer throughout the district to check health and condition. Deer were examined for fat deposits and bone marrow condition.

A late spring in 2014 resulted in a delayed green-up and may compound the stress caused by severe winter conditions. Hunters should expect to see fewer fawns during this fall’s hunt. Antler development will likely be reduced and may be especially poor in yearling bucks.

As a result of the severe winter, there will be no antlerless tags available in any counties in the Northern District, and a reduced number of antlerless tags will be available in the Farmland Zone fringe counties (Polk and Barron). Only class A and C disabled hunters, in addition to youth hunters and qualified members of the armed forces, will be allowed to harvest antlerless deer in buck-only units.

While this past winter was severe, this is not a new phenomenon. Northern Wisconsin’s deer have survived tough winter weather in the past, and when more moderate conditions return populations will rebound. The elimination of antlerless tags is a logical step in encouraging herd recovery.

Northeast District Forecast
Contributed by Jeff Pritzl

Although winter 2013-14 measured even more stressful for deer than winter 2012-13, fewer losses related to winter weather were reported. Deer in the Northeast District have entered the fawning season in somewhat better condition. The 2013 harvest numbers showed a small decline in overall harvest, and there is no reason to assume the 2014 harvest will be affected more significantly than last year.

However, recognizing that two severe winters in a row will affect fawn production, antlerless harvest has been severely restricted in the Northern Forest Zone this fall. This zone covers northern Marinette and Oconto Counties in the Northeast Forest Zone. A small antlerless quota has been established for northern Marinette County - the herd is healthy there and crop damage is still quite prevalent.

Antlerless deer harvest increased in much of the district last year - this may have reflected awareness by hunters that some fawns did die the previous winter. Harvesting antlerless deer during the season is better for overall herd health than leaving them to over-browse the forests in winter before they die, and this may have contributed to the lower winter losses observed this year. Although official surveys had not begun in time for the 2014 fall forecast, observations indicate that this year’s fawn production is healthy.

Modest increases in buck harvest are projected this fall in most of the Northeast District, except the two Northern Forest Zone deer management units where harvest is likely to be similar to (if not somewhat below) levels experienced in 2013. Hunters will begin building new sets of harvest statistics this year and, together with wildlife biologists, will learn about deer population and harvest trends in the future.

Southern District Forecast
Contributed by Eric Lobner

The Southern District deer herd will continue to see great variation in 2014 relating to the number of deer on the landscape. Many areas within the district will offer hunters an increased opportunity to see and harvest deer, while other areas have seen stable or slightly-less deer numbers than in previous years. The Southern District encompasses a wide range of deer habitats, from wooded ridges and coulées in the southwest, to the flatter, agriculturally-dominated landscape in Green, Rock and Walworth counties along the Illinois border. The rolling southern kettles in the east and the extensive wetland and woodland areas of Dodge and Columbia counties offer stark contrast from other regions within the district. A high level of variation in habitat types and conditions results in local deer numbers that can vary dramatically from one square mile to the next.

Although the extremely cold conditions experienced last winter throughout Wisconsin proved difficult for many people to tolerate, car-killed deer
assessments completed by department wildlife management staff in the Southern District indicated that deer survived winter quite well. Of 125 car-killed deer that were inspected during March and April, body assessments indicated that fat content was at a moderate to high level, and there was an average of 1.7 fawns per 1.5 year old or older doe. In general, deer populations throughout the entire Southern District have stabilized or increased over the last several years.

Southern District hunters are encouraged to get out early, take time to scout the land they will be hunting, and travel the roads in the area to get a good understanding of the changes in their neighborhood. Deer shift their movements each year according to changing food sources or conditions, changing habitat types and conditions, and human activity.

Over the last several years, enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program has decreased, so land that was once grassland or tree cover may now be corn or soybeans. In addition, mature trees may have been harvested and will now be freshly cut or have re-sprouting trees anywhere from 1–10 feet or more in height. As a result, deer patterns can shift. A hunter sitting in the stand that yielded deer year after year a decade ago may be hard pressed to see a deer this year.

Most Southern District deer are harvested on private property, which makes up more than 90 percent of the landscape. However, good deer hunting can also be found on the thousands of acres of county, state and federally owned lands open to deer hunting in the district. Hunters who are interested in finding public land available for hunting can visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “public lands.” Hunters interested in hunting on private lands are advised to get out well in advance of deer season to meet with landowners and seek permission to hunt. Hunters are strongly encouraged to spend time getting familiar with changes resulting from Deer Trustee Report implementation. It is important to note that free CWD-Management Zone and $2 Herd Control tags are no longer available. Resident hunters interested in additional antlerless tags will need to purchase them for $12 ($20 for non-resident and $5 for youth ages 10 and 11). The Holiday Hunt, which used to run until the end of the archery season, has been reduced and will now end January 1. The Holiday Hunt area will grow slightly to include the Southern Farmland Zone - only antlerless deer may be harvested during the Holiday Hunt.

Chronic Wasting Disease continues to increase in prevalence within the Southern District herd. The overall infection rate of adult males is currently 20 percent in the western CWD core area and 6 to 8 percent in the east. The CWD-Management Zone has been changed to the CWD-Affected Area, which has been expanded to include every county in the district (except Ozaukee). Counties within the CWD-Affected Area are counties in which a CWD positive deer has been detected or is within 10 miles of a CWD-positive test result. It is important for hunters to remember that feeding and baiting deer is prohibited in the CWD-Affected Area. An updated list of locations where hunters can get their deer tested will be posted on the DNR website prior to the season opener.

Venison Donation Program

The venison donation program will allow hunters to donate deer to food pantries throughout Wisconsin, including the CWD-Affected Area. Field dressed deer can be donated (at no cost to the hunter) in each county, and will be sent to needy families within the area. This is an extremely valuable program that helps fill a growing need. A list of participating butchers and pantry drop-off sites will be available on the DNR website, at local deer registration sites, and at food pantry locations.
Questions about the content of this forecast?

Call the DNR info center toll-free at:
1-888-WDNR INFO (1-888-936-7463)
Local: 608-266-2621
Spanish and Hmong are spoken
dnr.wi.gov

General mailing address:
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707

Support Ethical Responsible Hunting Report Violations

CALL: 1-800-TIP-WDNR (1-800-847-9367; toll free) or #367 from your cell phone (free for US Cellular customers)
NOTE: This is NOT an information number.


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