

DNR Bureau of Law Enforcement 2011 Deer Gun Season Report

Chief Conservation Warden Randy Stark
December 13, 2011

SYNOPSIS

I'd like to share a brief synopsis of the Bureau of Law Enforcement Deer Season Report. More details can be found in the remainder of the report.

- There were seven (7) firearm related hunting incidents with NO FATALITIES. This is the second consecutive year without a fatality, a milestone in Wisconsin hunting history. The incident rate for the 2011 deer gun season was 1.12 incidents per 100,000 hunters.
- The number of people purchasing Mentored Hunting Licenses increased by 12% overall.
- Wardens reported seeing more mentored hunters, youth and families in the field.
- 56,458 females bought deer hunting licenses. Of all hunters age 10 who purchased mentored hunting licenses, nearly one quarter (22.56%) were female.
- There were many examples of hunter actions that reflect very positively on hunters including the return of a lost rifle and hunters who went the extra mile to ensure poachers were apprehended by wardens.
- The vast majority of hunters contacted in the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Zone expressed satisfaction with the new EAB rules that allowed one buck to be harvested without first harvesting an antlerless deer for each person's gun and archery buck deer carcass tag.
- In general, field staff reported hunters had a positive outlook on their deer hunt. Some hunters, predominantly in the north, expressed the view that certain deer management units should have been more conservatively managed by closing the unit to antlerless harvest instead of having antlerless quotas and \$2 Herd Control antlerless permits available.
- Hunter methods continue to evolve. Wardens report more hunters are hunting from fixed locations, and fewer deer drives are taking place. Wardens reported high pressure opening weekend. As the years go by, wardens continue to report reduced hunting pressure the remainder of the season after opening weekend. Hunters are increasingly using trail cameras to gather information about deer activities in the areas they hunt. Using this technology has added a new dimension to the overall hunting experience.
- Wardens, particularly those in northern Wisconsin where there were units with no antlerless quota (and therefore no \$12 bonus antlerless tags available) reported fielding many questions regarding Herd Control tags. These tags are issued with each license sold, and hunters had questions about how and where the tags could be used. Wardens provided some potential solutions to help reduce the confusion.
- Law-abiding hunters and citizens continue to demonstrate a low tolerance for violations. There were 594 calls for service during the season, similar to prior years.
- There were 1,009 arrests, down 22% from 2010. Changes in firearm casing laws and a reduction in the number of baiting violations largely account for this change.
- Baiting and feeding complaints and arrests were down 15% from 2010. This is the second year in a row the number of baiting violations has dropped.

- Complaints and arrests for hunting and shooting from roadways increased compared to previous years.
- Wardens gave 1,792 verbal warning for violations encountered, that's one warning for every 1.75 arrests, or nearly a 2:1 ratio.
- Wardens were involved in 22 search and rescue situations during the deer gun season.
- As time permitted, and as a customer service, wardens registered 665 deer in the field. Daily deer registrations in the field generally reflect hunting pressure on a daily basis.
- While conflict between hunters was present, wardens reported fewer conflicts between hunters and fewer hunter harassment complaints this year, as compared to prior years. These conflicts tend to fall into three main areas: conflict between neighboring landowners, conflict between hunters on public lands, and conflict occurring between hunters at the property lines between public and private properties. Increased parcelization of land, which tends to bring more hunters in closer proximity to each others' hunting activities, continues to be reported as an underlying contributing factor to conflict.
- Wardens track the number of buildings struck by projectiles as reported to them directly or through other law enforcement agencies. In 2011, 12 buildings and one vehicle were reported to be struck. The number in 2010 was also 13, all of which were buildings.

Warden Experience and Hunter Feedback on New Laws in 2011

Change in Earn a Buck – Wardens who work in the CWD zone report that hunters overwhelmingly approved of the change. Hunters reported they really liked the ability to harvest one buck without first tagging an antlerless deer. This opportunity was available to both gun and archery license holders.

Youth Age 10-17 Statewide Antlerless Tag – Wardens reported many hunters, especially those with younger hunters in their group, spoke highly of this change. Both hunters and wardens liked it. It was easy for wardens to regulate and for hunters to understand.

Archery Hunting During Deer Gun Season – This was the first year archers could hunt during the regular 9-day gun deer season outside of the CWD management zone. Wardens fielded some questions prior to season about which tags could be used by archers during deer gun season. Based on warden reports, it does not appear that many people hunted deer with bow and arrow during the gun deer season.

Waupaca County Use of Rifles – This was the first year rifles could be used in Waupaca County. No hunting related shooting incidents involving rifles occurred in Waupaca County, or any of the other counties where rifles have been approved recently for deer hunting.

Firearm Casing Law Change - Wardens reported they spent considerable time educating hunters on the new law prior to the season, as well as answering questions incidental to field contacts during the deer season. Since the law became effective on opening day and had passed shortly before the 9-day season, many hunters were unaware the law had changed, while others knew of a change, but did not understand what the law changes actually meant. Wardens reported that early in the season, most people continued to case their firearms as they always have. Many hunters stated that transporting their firearms in a case was their personal preference for safety reasons and as well as for protection of their firearms. As the season progressed, wardens observed an increasing number of hunters transporting uncased firearms, but the majority continued to use cases. During contacts with hunters around the state, wardens said they heard mixed reviews about the law. Common remarks from hunters who expressed concern about the law change regarded impacts to safety and whether this change would result in an increase in road hunting incidents.

2011 BUREAU OF LAW ENFORCEMENT DEER GUN SEASON REPORT

In this report, we provide readers a snapshot of the role of conservation wardens during this time when more than a half million people enjoyed spending time in the outdoors, carrying on traditions with family and friends, and introducing new hunters to the sport.

The focus of the wardens' work is enforcement, education and public safety. Wardens respond to citizen complaints, check for license compliance, and investigate hunting accidents. But the wardens also spend a great deal of time simply answering questions about the laws, tagging deer for hunters, and assisting other agencies. They often find themselves in situations where they are apprehending individuals involved in serious violations like felons in possession of firearms, individuals with warrants and intoxicated people possessing firearms and operating vehicles.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!!

Wardens contacted thousands of hunters during the nine day season. The vast majority of hunters are law-abiding people enjoying the outdoors with their family and friends. Hunters aid our efforts to protect our resources from poachers and people who endanger public safety. Wardens recognize people who violate the law may only represent a very small percentage of those in the field, but these few can adversely impact public safety, our wildlife, and the image of all hunters. The assistance provided by the public in helping us apprehend violators who endanger public safety or steal opportunity from law abiding hunters is greatly appreciated. The public is the key to our success in protecting the people and natural resources in Wisconsin on behalf of future generations.

WEATHER

With the exception of an opening weekend snowstorm in northwestern Wisconsin, weather conditions were mild throughout the state, from highs of 50 degrees and lows below freezing. Travel conditions were favorable. Precipitation on opening weekend was a steady drizzle in southern Wisconsin, sleet in central counties and snow in the north. Corn crop harvest was almost 100% which has an effect on huntable acreage, visibility, and reduces the number of places deer can hide.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

In general, field staff reported hunters had a positive outlook on the deer hunt. Some hunters, predominantly in the north, expressed the view that certain deer management units should have been more conservatively managed by closing the unit to antlerless harvest instead of having antlerless quotas and \$2 antlerless permits available.

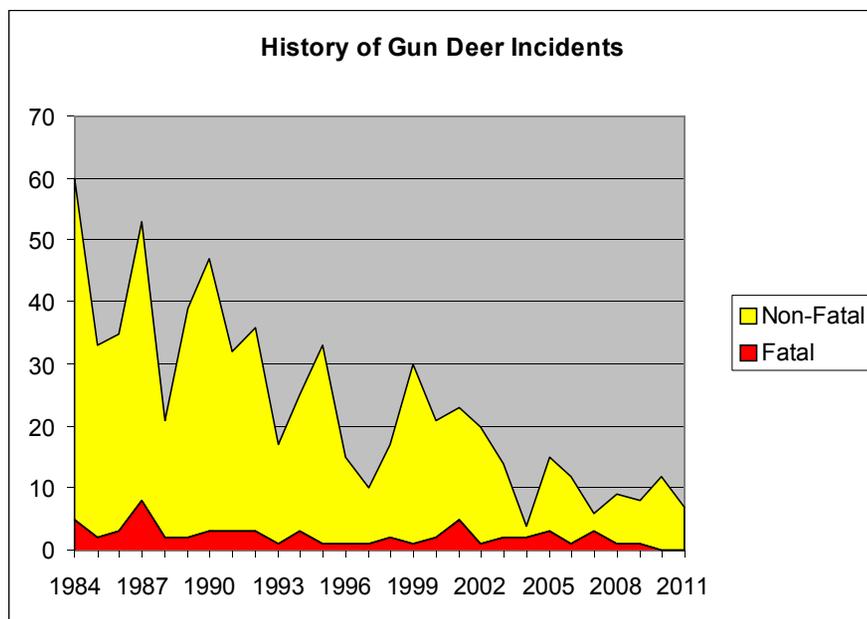
Wardens report the trend of larger properties being divided into smaller parcels continues statewide, with associated impacts on hunter access to places to hunt, and conflict. Conflict occurs when adjacent landowners have different tolerance levels for hunting activity, or even if adjacent landowners do deer hunt, they may have differing opinions on how to manage "their" deer. Drives are less likely on small tracts as landowners are reluctant to move deer off of their own property. Wardens report heaviest pressure on public lands on opening weekend, and that an increasing numbers of hunters are paying to lease property.

Hunting methods continue to evolve. Wardens report more hunters are hunting from fixed locations, and fewer deer drives are taking place. Wardens reported high pressure opening weekend, and as the years go by, wardens continue to report fewer hunters after the opening weekend. Hunters are increasingly using trail cameras to gather information about specific deer in the area and to monitor deer habits. Using this technology has added a new dimension to the overall hunting experience.

HUNTING RELATED SHOOTING INCIDENTS

I would like to thank everyone for their part in making 2011 the second consecutive deer season with NO fatal hunting incidents! This is the third time in the recorded history of Wisconsin's gun deer hunting that the season ended with no fatal injuries. Our many partners, which include hunter safety instructors, public affairs managers, Call Center staff, and Hotline dispatchers, all have a part in communicating to the public what the rules are, why they should be followed and how to hunt safely. CONGRATULATIONS EVERYONE AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!! I recognize, however, that seven people were injured this past season, and our hopes for speedy recoveries are with those people and their families.

Our goal is to eliminate all injury and loss of life while hunting. Wardens conduct thorough investigations to learn what happened in these incidents so we can work to prevent such incidents in the future. By knowing who did what, when, where and how, we are able to positively affect hunter behavior via hunter education curriculum, media outreach efforts and training of our volunteers and Department staff.



A brief overview of the seven hunting incidents during the 2011 gun deer season –

Three of the seven injuries reported during the 9-day season were self-inflicted, and four of the seven injuries were 2-party incidents (a separate shooter and victim.) Of those four 2-party incidents, three involved a shooter and victim who were members of the same hunting party. Historically, this breakdown is a fairly consistent statistic over the years of recording hunting incidents. Most all accidents are a breach of one or more of the four rules of firearm safety. Members of the same hunting party are injured often when shots are taken at a running deer or during a deer drive. In 2011, all three of the 2-party incidents that involved members of the same party, took place during a deer drive.

The firearms involved in the incidents were four rifles and three shotguns.

There were no incidents involving rifles in any of the areas recently opened to rifles for deer hunting (areas formerly shotgun only) including Waupaca County.

The age of shooters involved in the incidents ranged from 16– 63, 2 shooters were under 18, and the average age of the shooters was 31. Once again, this year there were no hunting incidents involving mentored hunters.

There were 619,938 gun deer licenses sold, which makes the incident rate 1.12 incidents per 100,000 licensed deer hunters.

PASSING ON THE TRADITION THROUGH THE MENTORED HUNTING PROGRAM

Wisconsin has a hunting heritage like no other, and it's important to pass on the tradition of hunting to the next generation. Deer season presents an opportunity for seasoned hunters to pass on the rich history and tradition to the next generation of hunters.

The Mentored Hunting Law allows a person as young as 10 years old to hunt prior to completion of a hunter education course. Wardens reported contacting high number of mentored hunters and their experienced partners afield this deer season.

We have set a goal and implemented strategies to increase the number of mentored licenses sold by 2% each year. The number of mentored hunting licenses sold to 10 and 11 year olds was up 8% compared to 2010. The total number of mentored hunting licenses sold to hunters of all ages increased by 12% this year. That is an indication that teens and adults who have not hunted in the past are taking advantage of the mentored license to try it out.

Number of 10-11 year old Mentored Hunting deer gun licenses sold 2009-2011

2011	2010	2009
12,226	11,331	9,907

CONVICTED FELONS AND INTOXICATED INDIVIDUALS

One of the goals of the warden service is to create a safe and enjoyable outdoor recreational environment for everyone. To this end, wardens have placed emphasis on removing known criminal offenders, intoxicated individuals and subjects using illegal drugs from the outdoor recreational environment in the interest of public safety.

There is no law that prohibits a person with a felony conviction from purchasing a gun deer hunting license in Wisconsin. However, it is illegal for felons to possess firearms, therefore hunting with a firearm or participation in group deer hunting is illegal. During the 2011 deer gun season, wardens arrested twenty-one (21) felons in possession of firearms in the field.

Felons in possession of firearms during the gun hunt are frequently found to be in violation of other laws. As a group, they represent a larger proportion of serious violations compared to other violators, and their behaviors represent a disproportionate risk to public safety, hunter safety and officer safety.

Additionally, a number of other individuals were arrested during the week for violations that can have a great effect on public safety. They included four subjects who were armed while intoxicated, eight in possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia, five possessing open intoxicants in a vehicle, two operating vehicles while intoxicated (one of those was a 5th offense violation) and eight people with outstanding warrants.

Felons in Possession of a Firearm 2005-2011

Year	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Number	21	37	29	9	16	9	3

HUNTER/USER CONFLICTS

Some conflict is inevitable when more than 600,000 hunters and many other outdoor users hit the woods at the same time. Analyzing the sources of conflict can be instructive in terms of developing strategies to reduce conflicts and create a safe and enjoyable outdoor recreational environment for everyone.

While conflict between hunters was present, wardens reported fewer conflicts between hunters and fewer hunter harassment complaints this year, as compared to prior years. These conflicts tend to fall into three main areas: conflict between neighboring landowners, conflict between hunters on public lands, and conflict occurring between hunters at the property lines between public and private properties. Increased parcelization of land, which tends to bring more hunters in closer proximity to each others’ hunting activities, continues to be reported as an underlying contributing factor to conflict.

Hunter Harassment Complaints

2011	2010	2009	2008
3	9	15	4

SEARCH AND RESCUE EFFORTS

Being ready to respond to emergencies to enhance public safety is a major goal of the warden service. The conservation warden’s knowledge of their administrative area coupled with equipment furnished by the Department enhances efficiency and effectiveness during search and rescue efforts. The use of a Department aircraft with Forward Looking Infra-red (FLIR) capabilities, Global Positioning Units (GPS), computer mapping software, radios, cellular phones, Mobile Data Computers, boats and ATV’s were all deployed this deer season in 22 search, rescue, recovery and emergency response efforts. The variety of calls are documented in the addendum, and include deploying boats with sonar to aid divers looking for the operator of a capsized kayak, locating heart attack victims in the woods, searching for lost hunters and assisting sheriff’s deputies in two counties who were attempting to locate a downed small aircraft. The fact that wardens have vehicles with 4-wheel drive allows them to negotiate rougher areas than typical squad cars and rescue vehicles, and they are often requested to help other agencies to transport officers in, and victims out, of the field.

GROUND BLINDS

Ground blinds continue to become more and more prevalent, both on public and private properties. They are quick to put up, easy to carry, and are inexpensive. Wardens are somewhat concerned that if the popularity of these shelters keeps increasing, we may have safety issues on private land based on the fact that the blaze orange clothing worn by the hunter is not visible while in the blind. It was a positive sign to see that the need for visibility is

recognized, and even on private land some blinds are marked with blaze orange even though not required by law. More and more hunters are commenting that the blaze orange requirement should apply everywhere.

Law enforcement recognizes the concerns about marking blinds on all lands, but the DNR does not currently have the authority to regulate the color of blinds used on lands other than those properties owned or managed by the state.

BUILDINGS AND OTHER INCIDENTAL TARGETS SHOT

Wardens reported 12 dwellings/buildings and one vehicle struck by bullets or slugs during the 2011 deer gun season. Though no injuries resulted from these incidents, there are obvious concerns when shots strike occupied dwellings or vehicles. If the responsible shooter was located, they were liable for the damage to the structure.

Reported Buildings or Other Incidental Targets Shot

Year	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Number	13	13	10	25	19

ARRESTS, WARNINGS, SEIZURES and CALLS FOR SERVICE

For the purposes of this report, “arrests” is used to indicate **all** violations for which persons are cited. It includes forfeiture violations in which a citation is issued, cases where a person was taken into custody when warranted, and those cases in which the subject will later be issued a criminal summons by the District Attorney.

Summary of arrests and seizures

Summary by Year	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Total Number of Violations	1,009	1,284	1,404	1,400	1,518
Juvenile	22	43	13	33	4
Adult	987	1,241	1,391	1,367	1,514
Total Number of Seizures					
Illegal Deer	116	165	114	176	183
Illegal Bear	3	1	4	7	5
Other	82	105	105	106	144
Car Killed Deer	13	11	10	12	9

Top Ten Violations encountered by Wardens

Rank	Type	2011	2010	2009	% Change
1	Illegal use of bait	184	216	334	-15%
2	Hunt within 50 ft of paved road center	67	53	35	26%
3	Fail to validate tag	45	50	37	-10%
4	Use an illegal elevated device	45	43	51	5%
5	Hunt without a license	36	30	35	20%
6	Shoot within 50 ft of road or across road	35	28	32	25%
7	Transport loaded gun in vehicle	33	109	88	-70%
8	Feeding wild animals violations	28	32	42	-13%
9	Hunt deer before or after hours	25	18	24	39%
10	Shoot from vehicle	25	16	16	56%

Summary of arrests:

- There was a 22% decline in the total number of arrests from 2010 to 2011 (down from 1,284 arrests to 1,009 arrests.)
- The biggest shift in arrests is due to the change in the law which no longer requires casing firearms in vehicles. As a result, there was a 70% decrease in the arrests for having a loaded gun in a vehicle, and zero (0) transport uncased gun violations. There was also an 86% decline in group deer hunting violations from 73 cases in 2010 to 10 in 2011.
- Although the top violation in 2011 is illegal baiting – the number of arrests for illegal baiting (184) represents a 15% decline from 2010. This is the second consecutive year there has been a reduction in the number of baiting violations.
- Violations associated with road hunting increased from the number of arrests recorded in 2009 and 2010.
 - § *Hunting within 50 feet of a roadway* increased by 26%
 - § *Shooting from a roadway* increased by 25%
 - § *Shooting from a vehicle* increased by 56%

VERBAL WARNINGS:

During the 2011 deer season, the warden service tracked the number of verbal warnings for violations encountered during the deer season. A total of 1,792 warnings were given, which represents 1.75 warnings for every citation issued, or a nearly 2:1 ratio.

The Top Ten violations for which warnings were given

Rank	STATEWIDE REPORT TOTALS	Verbal Warnings
1	Hunt without, or improper, blaze orange	215
2	Illegal use of bait – firearms	148
3	Illegal tree stand or blind on state land	124
4	Hunt deer without back tag displayed	108
5	Hunt within 50 ft of paved road center	88
6	Fail to validate tag	83
7	Place/possess loaded gun in vehicle	60
8	Operate ATV on roadway	49
9	Operate ATV without registration	46
10	Hunt deer before or after hours	44

Calls to DNR Hotline during the 9-day season 2009-2011

Type of information reported by caller	2011	2010	2009
Found dead deer or other carcass	84	90	84
Baiting and feeding	23	24	48
Heard shots; believes poaching	19	13	23
Hunt within 50 feet of roadway center	29	30	20
Shoot from a vehicle	21	16	21
Hunt before or after hours	43	31	31
Possession of untagged deer	1	2	5
Possession of illegal deer	14	19	15
Miscellaneous	234	245	229
Total Hotlines	436	470	476
Calls to the Hotline not DNR violations or other calls for service/information	158	168	157
Total calls	594	638	633

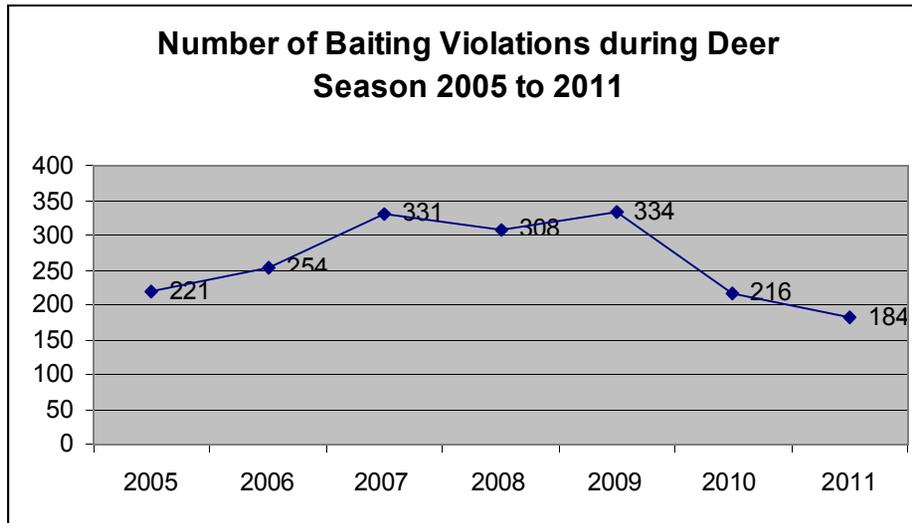
Public use of the DNR Violation Hotline continues to be strong. The total number of calls handled by Hotline dispatchers during the November 2011 9-day gun deer season was 594, down slightly from 2010. Hotline callers also took advantage of the texting feature, the second year they could do so. It is noted that there was a slight increase in the reports of subjects shooting from vehicles, and a more significant increase in reports of suspected hunting before or after hours.

ILLEGAL BAITING AND FEEDING OF DEER

Across the state, baiting and feeding complaints and arrests were down significantly. Hotline complaints regarding illegal baiting and feeding were down 5% from 2010 and 50% from 2009. Arrests for illegal baiting were down 15%, and arrests for illegal feeding were down 13% from 2010 numbers.

Arrests for illegal baiting and feeding deer by region during the 9-day season

Region	Baiting Cases	Feeding Cases
Northern	68	8
West Central	50	6
Northeast	41	9
South Central	16	4
Southeast	9	1
Total	184	28



WOLF SHOOTINGS

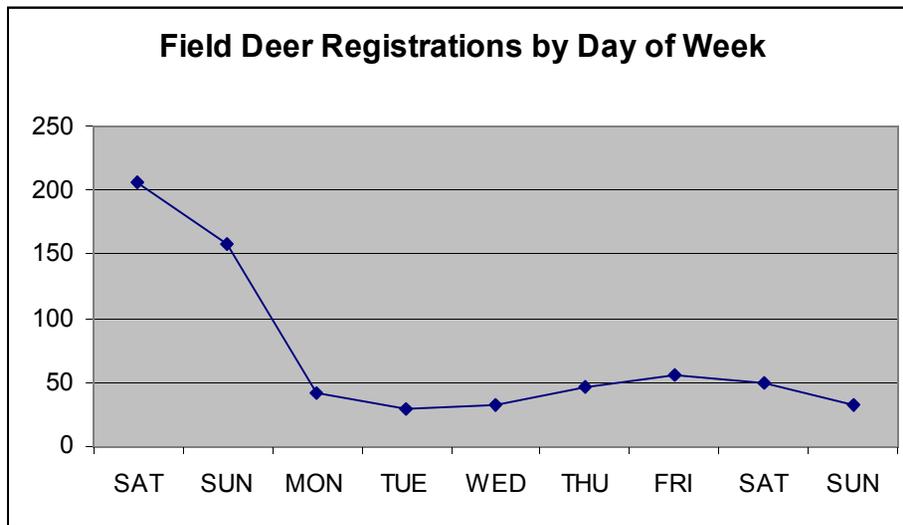
The number of wolves killed in 2011 was less than the record 9 kills in 2006 or 8 in 2009, but more than the 2 kills detected in 2010. There were seven (7) wolves killed during the 2011 gun deer season. This figure is preliminary pending investigation and animal necropsy to determine cause of death. Wolf shootings included the following:

1. WI-2011-72/ collared wolf 692F (AF) found dead on 11/21/11 in Vilas Co. - Carcass to be necropsied.
2. WI-2011-73/ collared wolf 734M (AM) found dead on 11/21/11 in Forest Co. - Only collar found.
3. WI-2011-74/ not collared (AF) found dead on 11/23/11 in Lincoln Co. - Carcass to be necropsied.
4. WI-2011-75/ not collared (AM) found dead on 11/25/11 in Dunn Co. - Carcass to be necropsied
5. WI-2011-76/ collared wolf 763F (AF) found dead on 11/28/11 in Adams Co. - Carcass to be necropsied.

- 6. WI-2011-77/ collared wolf 811F (PF) found dead on 11/28/11 in Marinette Co. - Only collar found.
- 7. WI-2011-78/ collared MI wolf (AF) found dead on 11/24/11 in Douglas Co. - Carcass to be necropsied, still waiting for details on collar.

CUSTOMER SERVICE, CWD/HERD CONTROL RULES AND TAGGING SYSTEM

In 2011, the warden service tracked the number of deer that wardens registered each day when contacting hunters in the field. Wardens have performed this customer service as time permitted for many years as a convenience to the hunter. A total of 665 deer were registered by wardens in the field during the 9-day season. The number of deer wardens registered each day of the season tracks closely with hunting pressure by day of the season.



CWD ZONE

The vast majority of hunters contacted in the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Zone liked the new EAB rules that allowed one buck to be harvested without first tagging an antlerless deer.

TAGGING SYSTEM

Overall, the current configuration of the tagging system is generally working well.

Wardens, particularly those in northern Wisconsin where there were units with no antlerless harvest allowed, reported fielding many questions regarding the use of Herd Control tags that are issued with every license sold. Several wardens offered a possible solution to reducing this confusion. The suggestion was to prompt hunters at the time of sale whether they intended to hunt in a Herd Control Unit. If so, they would be issued a Herd Control tag. If not, they would not be issued a Herd Control tag. If the hunter later decided they wanted to hunt in a Herd Control unit, they could then obtain their first Herd Control tag at no charge.

SYNOPSIS OF HUNTING INCIDENTS

Date	County	Synopsis	Shooter	Victim	Firearm
11/19	Iowa	Victim set gun on ground between legs when it discharged striking his foot.	Male 17	Self Inflicted	Rifle, semi-auto 223
11/20	Clark	Victim was a non-hunting member of party. Shooter jumped injured doe and shot struck victim who was approx. 60 yards away and was struck in leg.	Male 19	Female 17	Rifle, lever action 30-30
11/21	Waukesha	Victim was a stander on deer drive when drivers shot at deer running in his direction. Victim suffered minor wound to the chest from a slug that ricocheted.	Male 63	Male 61	Shotgun, semi-auto 12 gauge
11/23	Shawano	Victim and shooter were both standers in deer drive. Shooter not exactly aware of victim's location in dense brush when he fired. Slug hit a tree and a branch before striking victim's foot.	Male 23	Male 65	Shotgun, semi-auto 12 gauge
11/24	Iowa	Victim attempting to let hammer down on lever action rifle with stock resting on ground. Firearm discharged striking victim in upper arm.	Male 16	Self Inflicted	Rifle, lever action 30-30
11/27	Polk	Shooter fired once from the hip at a deer running away from him. Victim was out of sight of shooter and received an injury to his finger and chest.	Male 50	Male 31	Rifle, bolt action 270
11/27	Monroe	Victim had shotgun slung over his shoulder with the hammer cocked. Rubber sling broke and gun discharged into elbow.	Male 26	Self Inflicted	Shotgun, single shot 12 gauge

The 4 Rules of Firearm Safety

T = Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.

A = Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.

B = Be certain of your target and what's beyond it.

K = Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot.