

## BEAR ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

11/12/2015, DAYS INN, WAUSAU WI

### **Introductions – Dave MacFarland (WDNR)**

Introduced staff and thanked the Committee members for their dedication, attendance and work. Handouts on biological, survey and harvest data were distributed.

### **Bear Harvest, Registration and Biological Data– Brian Dhuey (WDNR) and Dave MacFarland (WDNR)**

Discussion on electronic registration system and some preliminary adjustments that were made after initial deer registrations being called in as bears. Customer service did direct checking with hunters and modified the system to adjust. Slight increase in zones not matching permits, 1% registered incorrectly historically, while 3.5% in 2015. Some reported bears harvested outside historic bear range, some confusion with damage deer; however, a handful were bears targeted by hunters (e.g. Brown Co).

Discussion on potential to create unique number for bear registration; however, WDNR has a desire to have a 'one stop shop' for registering all animals (e.g. bears, deer, turkey, geese, etc). Some options for registering (e.g. removing species during closed seasons) is ongoing. In the future an option to search for confirmation number will occur to cut down on multiple registrations and/or CS calls.

The new licensing system will likely rectify many of these issues. Overall success in achieving quotas are comparable to other years on a by management zone basis. Some quota areas were very close to projections while in others they follow past trends (e.g. zone C). Historic tooth submission rates averaged 95%. As of November 10 2015 total harvest <4,200 with 3,118 (75%) teeth submitted. Reminder mail card is being mailed to encourage submission. Potential biases may exist. These will be evaluated as ages are received back.

Discussion on what the WDNR can do in terms of methods or communication to improve bear registration and data submission process. What revisions options exist given the current system and possible incorporation of some of the old methods? In the past committee gave recommendations to maintain a portion of the historic registration stations. WDNR did analysis on maintaining a number of stations within certain parameters and forwarded onto administration. Currently providing options for voluntary stations. Over 200 in-person stations as of November 11 2015.

Discussion on enforcement considerations that would increase compliance through time. Look into businesses that would facilitate these efforts. 2011 rib submission was 91% in 2012 94%. Need to get postcards out sooner before skulls are misplaced. Phone and online systems had prompt to submit tooth.

### **Bear Harvest Overview - Brian Dhuey (WDNR)**

4,158 bears registered, 4,198 including tribal harvest. Confident in County, bear unit; however, less confidence in game management unit (e.g. old deer management units). Sex ratios for 2015 look the same. Overall hunter success was down a little bit. Without stations to man less involvement and hence knowledge about field conditions.

Discussion on harvest type success and/or harvest frequencies. Department agreed with suggestion to include GMUs in the bear harvest regulations. About 1,000 didn't select a GMU and these same GMU issues appear to be occurring with furbearers. Pretty concerned about the GMUs, what is wrong with county reporting? Is there a way maps specifically the GMUs can be more available? Group interest in maintaining the value of the information gathered/inferred from GMUs. Each GMU is totally within a zone and historic data by each zone. Tribes have expressed and maintained an interest in managing by GMU and are continuing to gather deer and bear harvest data by old DMU.

Tribal harvest is well below treaty threshold. In 2012 started collecting public vs. private harvest and method of harvest. In 2015, analysis of land open to public hunting (i.e. public-access for deer) and percent of harvest and by percent for method of harvest distribution. Skew seems driven by method. Confirms long-held belief. Discussion on harvest trends of bears through AFWA. In terms of actual average harvest WI is number one followed by AK. No states seem to have issues meeting quotas. Wisconsin has a very high density of bears. Managing bear population for a high harvest. Most states have some limit on permits or restrict season length but generally more hunting permits are available.

### **Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission Update – Jonathan Gilbert (GLIFWC)**

Distributed tribal harvest statistics for 2015. No upcoming tribal issues. How can state and tribal hunters hunt together (e.g. whose dogs can be used, whose tags, etc). Discussion on regulations when tribal and non-tribal hunters are hunting together. Don't want to see rules that prohibit these activities. Legal has concluded that tribal harvest during state hunters 'training' is not legal. Administration has been briefed on the issue at both WDNR and GLIFWC and work is ongoing.

Note from committee to finalize these types of situations. Ultimately tribal bear harvest is biologically minimal but that may not be a minimal issue to those involved. Inter-agency discussion is appreciated. State can work to inform state hunters of rule parameters. More an issue for species such as bobcat.

### **Update on Bears and Bear Hunting in National Forest - Dan Eklund (US Forest Service)**

Public interest (e.g. phone calls and emails) has been expressed given ongoing efforts to petition the stopping of bear baiting and use of hounds on National Forest lands. Significant National Forest staff time answering questions about these activities and bear hunting. Typical road closure issues, baiting issues and conflicts between bait sitters and dog hunters. Increase in guns being brought out which will put the National Forest in a compromising situation. FS LE is responding to these types of issues; however, hunters who are recklessly endangering people are a County law enforcement issue and not handled directly by the FS. Negative interactions between consumptive and non-consumptive users are getting worse on all public lands. Interest in discussion on the duration you can bait, distance from the road you can bait and the density of baits on the landscape. Change in Class B license has increased out of state hunters hound training on WI public lands.

### **Agricultural Damage and Overview - Brad Koele (WDNR) Bob Willging (USDA Wildlife Services)**

Information presented encompassed 1 January through November 5<sup>th</sup> 2015. Nuisance complaints have been decreasing and holding at lower levels. Total complaints are down from 1,200 a few years ago to the 800-900 range the last few years. There have been 825 thus far in 2015. Two-thirds have been handled with technical assistance which is higher than the one-half handled with only technical assistance during higher complaint periods. Of 519 relocated bears only 120 were due to nuisance bears with agricultural damage accounting for the remainder. Abatement payments were variable, peaking in August and winding down by early September. No bears were euthanized for agricultural damage; however, 7 bears were euthanized for health and safety in 2015. Local issues in Grantsburg caused by two sows. Complaint in Florence Co on Feb 27<sup>th</sup> 2015 was a small bear cub.

Clark County has seen an increase in abatement enrollments. In general, fairly steady enrollment for last 8 years, partly due to crop/commodity prices. Trap and relocation to public properties done to make more bears available for Class A hunters. Five agricultural damage permits denied in 2015, as damage had already occurred. With elimination of a Class B license now anyone with a license that authorizes hunting with a firearm are acceptable for hunting under a bear shooting permit. Rusk and Sawyer Counties traditionally have highest agricultural damage and shooting permits. Some issues with electronic registration and bears shot on agricultural damage permits (e.g. erroneous reporting). No tracking of bears harvested on enrolled abatement properties. Discussion on putting harvest quotas and forfeiture stipulations on agricultural damage shooting permits.

### **Population Analysis and Quota Setting - Robert Rolley (WDNR)**

Discussion of population, harvest and age structure data for each Bear Management Zone and statewide abundance estimates. Comparison of these estimates to bear harvest, model outputs, bear bait visitation rates and negative bear-human interactions. Bear models were readjusted in 2006 to better fit tetracycline estimates; however, additional re-calibration in 2011 improved fit and model has run off of these recalibrations since that time. Discussion on relationship between model estimate(s) and bear bait visitation rates. These reiterate the importance of incorporating nuisance complaints, harvest, success rates and other parameters in making management decisions.

**Bear Management Zone A** – In the past management strategy for Zone A was meant to stabilize the population. Discussion on change to desired population trajectory for Zone A. Discussion on potential conflicts between Zone boundaries. Some feel the potential for localities where overharvest may be occurring exists. Some managers indicate hunters concerned about predator issues on ungulates; however, majority indicating a desire to continue with current population and quota. A recommendation for a decrease in the quota due to a potential decline in abundance; however, private land in western part of zone A seems to have abundant bears.

Agricultural damage in Sawyer and Rusk Counties. Area still has been experiencing depredation problems. Class A success rates seem stable lots of sows with multiple cubs.

**Recommendation was for a harvest quota of 1,000, down from 1,100 in 2015.**

**Bear Management Zone B** – Discussion on model outputs, bait station visitation rates and negative bear-human interactions. To stabilize population a harvest of 650 would be required. Consensus for slight increase in harvest goal (850 versus 750 in 2015) to reduce abundance as good number of large bears occur in the Zone. Discussion on how the interspersed private land influences the bear harvest. Department will continue to monitor the female component of the harvest to explore any changes in the composition and age structure which may indicate a decline; however, none has been observed.

**Bear Management Zone C**- Past management strategy has been slow controlled population growth. Harvest success rates declined in 2015 part of a long-term trend. Law enforcement indicates high hunter effort in northern tier counties while bears continue to expand south and bears are harvested in new areas annually suggesting continued expansion. Discussion on how bear population may be much lower than models predict given discrepancy in hunter distribution and/or harvest. Additional discussion on how ample permit availability may be increasing hunter selectivity. The proportion of females in the harvest is low increasing the potential for population expansion. In some counties agricultural crop damage have increased. Specifically, Sauk and Richland Counties have seen increasing bear abundance and issues with bee hive operations; however, public appears to be responding to technical assistance and learning to live with bears. In one instance one bear created thirty-one complaints in 2015. Local manager has expressed desire for Green Lake County to have over-the-counter harvest permits.

**Committee recommendation was for a harvest quota of 1,300, same as in 2015.**

**Bear Management Zone D** – Management strategy has been population reduction for the past 2-3 years. Discussion on how negative bear-human interactions may be a function of both bear abundance and land use patterns. Declining harvest success rates, bear bait visitation rates and harvest below goal in 2015 may suggest bear abundance has decreased. Discussion on abundance discrepancies in the Northern and Southern portion of the Zone. Past outreach efforts meant to increase hunter effort on southern part of Zone D have not led to noticeable increases in the harvest. These outreach efforts should continue. Biologists in Southern portion of the Zone have noticed increased negative bear-human interactions and would like to explore ways of mitigating these negative interactions.

**Committee recommendation was for a harvest quota of 1,600, same as in 2015.**

**Preliminary Bear Harvest Quotas and Permit Levels agreed upon by Bear Committee**

2016 Success Rates, Quota and Permit Levels					
	A	B	C	D	Statewide
<b>3 year Success Rate</b>	60.42%	71.02%	21.01%	64.47%	
<b>Expansion Factor</b>	1.65	1.40	4.75	1.55	
<b>quota</b>	1000	850	1300	1600	4750
<b>Projected permits</b>	1655	1196	6187	2481	11521
<b>Actual permits</b>	1655	1195	6190	2480	11520

**Research Update - Nathan Roberts (WDNR)**

- 1) New project looking at age-of-harvest model(s) for bears. Ideal behind this is to look at population trajectory through changes in age structure. Potential for similar abundance estimation with the age data and tetracycline marking. Currently recruiting a post-doctoral for these efforts. Tetracycline marking and rib collection scheduled for spring/fall 2016. Tetracycline marking contingent upon the USDA as the legality of the distribution of an antibiotic over landscape is in question. As we move forward – past operational help will be needed, County biologists will lead effort(s).
- 2) Snapshot WI - As of now, going to be a pilot study in two Counties (Iowa and one in Northern WI). Couple different pilots have been completed. Hundreds of cameras already deployed with more ready to be deployed.
- 3) Social Sciences – begin process for hunter values, attitudes and opinions survey of hunting community regarding bears and bear management. This will occur after preliminary discussions on management alternatives that may occur as part of the bear management plan to ensure they are incorporated into the survey.

**Bear Tag Transfer and Legislative Update – Linda Oliver (WDNR)**

Legislation AB434 (WDNR licensing bill) was signed by Scott Walker on 11/11/2015. Most components of the bill comes into effect March 2016. One change is now the person who draws the tag doesn't have to buy it, the transfer person buys it; however, people are not eliminating their option to transfer if they buy the permit.

Bill just signed SB20 that allows transfer of any limited draw permit from just youth to include disabled (Class A, B, C or D). One time transfer with no loss of preference points. In addition, Class A permit transfer to active duty military or person who have received a purple heart. One time transfer only. Updating transfer forms making bear a stand-alone form. Will be posted to WDNR internet page(s) in Dec 2015.

Discussion on what the WDNR can do to facilitate these transfers. Idea was raised as WDNR playing a more formal role (i.e. keeping lists of requesters and offered tags). Little interest in generating or having the WDNR maintain a list of interested hunters as current methods seem effective.

### **WCC resolutions: passed on County Level – Upcoming Discussions at WCC Bear Committee**

- 1) Non-resident preference point and application fees. Many states charge \$ 50.00 or more dollars for preference points and/or applications. Non-residents represent 2-3% percent of WI bear applicants. Resolution to charge \$35.00 for non-resident preference points and/or applications.  
Bear Committee Response: Application and license fees are established in state statute and out of the purview of the WDNR or bear committee.
  
- 2) Adjustments to bear baiting – Work with WDNR to reduce baiting to 14 days prior to the season to reflect regulations currently in Minnesota .
  
- 3) Adjustments to preference point system – work with WDNR to allow hunters to apply for preference points for 10 years at a time.  
Bear Committee Response: Process for distributing harvest permits established in state statute and contingent upon annual quotas and applications. The WDNR met with legislature to discuss these types of issues. Legislature is interested in re-evaluating the preference point system for potential modifications. Taking a fee is a statutory issue not under WDNR regulatory purview. New licensing system in 2016 will more readily display these types of information to interested parties so they can more easily check on the status of their preference points or standing in a lottery drawing.

### **Made it through the process WCC resolutions**

Earlier bear hunt in Zone C - 1941 support, 1521 opposed.

Bear Committee Response: Reoccurring issue for at least 15 years. WDNR is reluctant to have big game seasons start before Labor Day. This would result in a one day increase from current season if enacted. Move to table discussion- no opposition.

### **Public Input Period** - 2 members of the public in attendance, one comment

Lauri Groskopf: Thinks wolves may be impacting the ability to harvest bear. 15-20 percent of bears are harvested with the aid of dogs. In past she has been impacted by wolves in her area. She would like it to be placed on a future agenda of the bear advisory committee. Looked at pack count map and says it is difficult to find an area of the state where one could run dogs. Thirty-two county boards passed resolutions to work towards 350 wolves. Thanked Dave MacFarland and Brad Koele for their accessibility and willingness to discuss issues and provide information.