

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

**SUBJECT:** Elk herd update and approval of the 2019 elk season quotas

**FOR:** April 2019 Board meeting

**TO BE PRESENTED BY:** Kevin Wallenfang, Deer and Elk Ecologist, Bureau of Wildlife Management

**SUMMARY:**


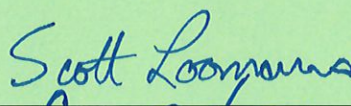
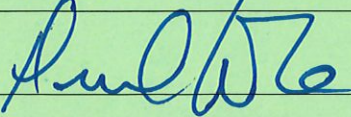
This item will update the board on the 2018 elk season, the 2019 population projections and season, the elk management plan, and a translocation update.

The rule that allowed the department to set elk quotas based on a variety of metrics will not be effective in time to impact the 2019 elk season. The Department will establish a harvest quota equal to 5% of the total estimated post-calving population projection as was done for the 2018 elk season

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the board approve the 2019 elk season quotas.

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

- Background memo
- Type name of attachment if applicable
- Type name of attachment if applicable
- Type name of attachment if applicable

Approved by	Signature	Date
Eric Lobner, Bureau Director		3/21/19
Scott Loomans, Division Administrator		3/21/19
Preston D. Cole, Secretary		3/25/19

**CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM**

DATE: March 21, 2019  
TO: Natural Resource Board Members  
FROM: Preston D. Cole, Secretary  
SUBJECT: 2019 Elk Harvest Quota for Natural Resources Board (NRB) Consideration and Approval

The following elk population projection and 2019 harvest quota is provided to the Natural Resources Board (NRB) for consideration and approval. This memo also provides additional information regarding elk management activities in Wisconsin.

**2019 Northern Elk Population Projection and Elk Hunt Quota:**

Since 1995, Wisconsin's elk population has continued to grow. That fact, coupled with our final and largest elk translocation from Kentucky, supports a bright future for the state's elk herds. The Clam Lake herd now contains over 100 breeding-age cows with more from Kentucky to be released this summer. The department's elk advisory committee, which includes DNR staff and external partners, project a 2019 post-calving population of 211-236 elk in the Clam Lake herd, not including this year's Kentucky transplants.

Considering the rule language that requires a harvest quota equal to five percent of the projected population, the department recommends that the quota be rounded to the lowest population projection of 211 elk. This equates to a total harvest quota of ten bull elk with up to 50% available to the Ojibwa tribes in accordance with treaty rights. Assuming the tribes will utilize their full quota, a total harvest quota of five bulls will again be available to state hunters for the 2019 season. We recommend applying a 100% success rate to the state quota, resulting in a final state tag level of five bull elk. The license application period will again be May 1 through May 31 with winners notified in early June. Each hunter (both state and tribal) will be required to participate in an elk hunter orientation class before tag issuance.

**Black River Herd Update:**

The Jackson County herd has demonstrated the growing pains that one would expect from a reintroduced herd. After the release of a total of 73 elk between 2015 and 2016, the population declined somewhat as elk learn the challenges of their new home range. There are clear indications that this herd is adapting well. For example, last spring 17 calf births were documented in the Black River herd, and all remain alive today. The 2019 post-calving population is projected to be 70-80 elk. As anticipated, there are challenges associated with having an elk herd in Jackson County. However, the benefits for the community are significant and I am excited about the future and the department's ability to find a balance.

**2018 Elk Hunt Summary:**

Last fall, Wisconsin held its very first managed elk hunt in state history. Hunter interest was high with 38,494 applications for an elk tag received. From those, four lucky hunters were selected in June to receive an elk tag which provided maximum time to plan for their hunt. In addition, one tag was awarded through a raffle conducted by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation whose efforts resulted in the sale of almost 5,000 tickets at the price of \$10 each. Combined with application fees, this first hunt generated over \$350,000 in revenues that is statutorily earmarked for elk management and research in Wisconsin.

The total harvest quota for the inaugural season was 10 bulls, and in accordance with tribal treaties, was split evenly between state hunters and the Ojibwa tribes. To protect recently introduced Kentucky elk, hunting was restricted to the original Clam Lake elk range.

Ojibwa hunters could begin hunting as early as September 4<sup>th</sup>, but chose to wait until late September after the majority of the elk rut was complete and cooler temperatures prevailed. Over the course of several weekends, they filled their harvest quota of five bulls.

The state season opened October 13<sup>th</sup>. While it was unfortunate that the first elk harvested was shot under illegal circumstances, the remainder of the hunt occurred without incident. Three of four hunters found success in harvesting mature bulls, all in November.

**Elk Management Plan Update:**

In 2012, this Board approved an amendment to the state's elk management plan that allowed us to capitalize on opportunities to start the new Black River elk herd, supplement the original Clam Lake herd, and take steps to increase and manage the elk herds into the future. Now that many of the goals of that amendment are being fulfilled and new challenges are on the horizon, there is a clear need to do a complete review of the state's current elk management and develop a new ten-year plan. Big Game Ecologist Kevin Wallenfang has been given the task of coordinating this effort with a goal to complete the plan in the summer of 2020. Already a great deal of public and stakeholder outreach has occurred with much more planned throughout the process. I am excited about kicking off the next chapter of Wisconsin's elk program and look forward to presenting the final plan to you next summer.

**Kentucky Translocation:**

2019 marks the final year of the five-year agreement with Kentucky to translocate elk from their state to ours. Thanks to an outstanding partnership and the great effort of staff from both states, 50 elk were captured in fewer than three days in January. In early March, after the elk completed the first 30-days of quarantine, the first phase of health testing occurred in Kentucky. By the time the April board meeting occurs, the elk are expected to be in Wisconsin and undergoing the remainder of the 120-day quarantine and health testing as required by both U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, before their release into the Flambeau River State Forest later this summer.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the many great partners, including agencies, organizations, and individuals, who helped make the reintroduction project possible. I would also like to commend the dedicated biologists and scientists from both Kentucky and Wisconsin who made it all happen. While I know many of them will say this is the most enjoyable, gratifying and meaningful undertakings of their career, I also know it had more than its share of challenges. This took a great amount of planning, execution, hard work, and significant time spent away from family over a several year period. Because of their efforts, I am confident that Wisconsin's elk reintroduction will go down as one of our state's greatest conservation stories in the years to come. Congratulations and thank you to all involved.

Drafter: Kevin Wallenfang