

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resources Board Agenda Item

SUBJECT: Season options to balance crossbow and archery success rates.

FOR: January 2019 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Eric Lobner, Wildlife Management Bureau Director

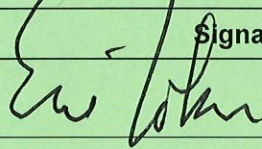
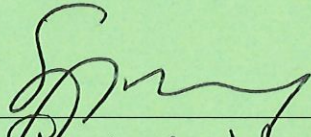
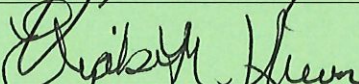
SUMMARY:

2011 Act 252 created a whitetailed deer crossbow season that runs concurrently with the deer archery season. Since the first season, the number of crossbow users has increased. At the request of a NRB member, this informational item discusses options to balance the success rates of crossbow hunters with those of archery hunters.

RECOMMENDATION: Type a concise recommendation or type "Information only" if an information item

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		1/9/2019
Sanjay Olson, Division Administrator		1/10/19
Preston D. Cole, Secretary		1/16/19

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cc: Board Liaison – AD/8

by Elizabeth Kluesner

DATE: January 9, 2019 **FILE REF:**

TO: Natural Resources Board

FROM: Preston Cole, Secretary, WI Department of Natural Resources

SUBJECT: Response to NRB Request concerning Alternative Season Structure to Reduce Crossbow Success Rates

At the request of the Natural Resources Board to investigate potential season options that would equalize buck harvest success rates during the deer seasons across weapon types, a review was conducted of 2014-18 buck harvest totals and registration dates of all deer harvested by gun, archery and crossbow hunters. In doing so, multiple alternative season frameworks are presented below that attempt to equalize buck harvest success rates for crossbow users under the age of 65 years old (assuming any potential changes would include reverting back to allowing 65 and older to use crossbows) to make them more equal to the success rates of gun and archery hunters. While the ability to do so is questionable due to a hunter's ability to focus their hunting effort during the open season for their desired weapon type, meeting this objective requires reducing the overall crossbow buck harvest. The only option in rule currently available to do so is changing the length of the crossbow hunting season.

Below are several options for potentially reducing crossbow deer harvest which may equalize antlered deer harvest success rates with gun and archery hunters for hunters under the age of 65. It is important to acknowledge that based on the adaptability of hunters, equalizing success rates by weapon type presents a significant challenge without annual seasonal adjustments as hunters may focus their hunting effort during the shorter season rather than the longer time period thus not impacting the success rate.

Since 2014 when the crossbow license was created, crossbow license sales and correspondingly participation in the crossbow season have risen annually. From 2014-2018, crossbows hunters have averaged a 6.8% (range 5.5%-7.9%) higher success rate on antlered deer than archery hunters. A reduction in the antlered deer harvest by crossbow hunters under the age of 65 of approximately 6,000 - 7,000 antlered deer would yield a success rate more equal with archery hunters at current crossbow license sale levels.

Potential Season Options:

Considering the timing of the antlered deer harvest by crossbow hunters in 2018, the following 7 options may achieve a reduction of crossbow success rates for bucks:

- OPTION 1: Eliminate the first five weeks of the current crossbow season, opening it on approximately October 23 each year. On average, approximately 6,200 bucks are harvested by crossbow hunters during this time.
- OPTION 2: Eliminate the last eight weeks of the season, closing it on approximately November 10th. On average, approximately 6,200 bucks are harvested by crossbow hunters during this time. Hunters could still use crossbows during any open gun season.
- OPTION 3: Close the season after the first weekend in November, then reopen the season on the opener of the 9-day gun season. On average, approximately 7,800 bucks are harvested by crossbow hunters during this time. This means closing the crossbow season on a date

that falls sometime between November 3rd through the 9th, depending on how it falls in the calendar year.

- OPTION 4: Open the crossbow season on Oct 15th and close it after the 9-day gun season. On average, approximately 6,200 bucks are harvested by crossbow hunters during the combined period of the first month of the current crossbow season, and after the 9-day season.
- OPTION 5: Close the crossbow season on all weekends for three weeks leading up to the 9-day gun season. This may reduce the crossbow buck harvest by approximately 6,900 bucks.
- OPTION 6: Close the crossbow season on all weekdays for two weeks leading up to the 9-day gun season. Theoretically, this may reduce the crossbow buck harvest by approximately 5,600 bucks.
- OPTION 7: Close the crossbow season on all Saturdays OR all Sundays throughout the entire fall. Theoretically, this may reduce the crossbow buck harvest by approximately 5,200 bucks.

Hunting during late October and early November is important to Wisconsin hunters. This period of the fall is when rutting bucks and hunters are most active, and when a significant percentage of the buck harvest occurs.

In closing, as the NRB considers modifications to the crossbow season, clearly there are a number of factors that should be considered.