

# DNR Deer Advisory Committee meeting

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Wednesday, February 1, 2017

9:30 a.m.

Mead Wildlife Area

## Attendance

### Deer Advisory Committee members present:

Kevin Wallenfang, Chair, DNR deer and elk ecologist  
Brad Koele, DNR wildlife damage specialist  
Dan Storm, DNR ungulate research scientist  
Jen Stenglein, DNR population ecologist  
Linda Olver, DNR customer service policy advisor  
Bret Owsley, DNR SCR wildlife supervisor  
Jeff Pritzl, DNR NER wildlife supervisor  
Mike Zeckmeister, DNR NOR wildlife supervisor

Brad Hutnik, DNR forest ecologist  
Dave Matheys, DNR WCR wildlife biologist  
Kevin Mickelberg, DNR law enforcement  
Travis Bartnick, GLIFWC wildlife biologist  
Jon Gilbert, GLIFWC director of biological services  
Gary Dieck, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation  
Al Horvath, Wisconsin Conservation Congress

### Guests present:

Brian Dhuey, DNR wildlife survey scientist  
Curt Rollman, DNR deer biologist  
Matt Esser, DNR deer biologist

Morris Nader, member of the public  
Note-taker: Meredith Penthorn (DNR)

## Welcome and Introductions

Meeting started at 9:31 a.m. Members of the committee and guests introduced themselves.

## Customer Service Deer Season Report—Linda Olver

Linda presented a summary of license sales, call center statistics and common themes of the 2016 deer seasons. License sales were down slightly, but more contacts were handled (over 80,000) than last year. Customers increasingly used the online Go Wild system to purchase licenses (22%), but many continued to go to a license agent (77%). Common customer questions revolved around selecting Farmland (Zone 2) antlerless tags, paper carcass tag requirements, Holiday Hunt rules and registering a deer with GameReg.

Deer Advisory Committee discussion centered on identifying areas of hunter confusion, last-minute license purchasers not being as aware of new rules for the upcoming season and how to better distribute the hunting regulations. Because hunting is such a social sport, some of these new rules (i.e. eliminating backtags) can cause concern as to whether a hunter has a license. Hunters also may not be receiving the regulations as in past years.

## GameReg Year 2 Overview—Brian Dhuey

Brian discussed the unique carcass tag number and how it links to the GameReg system, which is a new feature this year. Previously, we could not distinguish farmland and bonus tags in the data, but now we can determine tag-specific success rates for each tag type with the switch to carcass tag numbers used in registration. This will be important to analyze how farmland tags were used above and beyond bonus tags and on public vs. private land. Registrations provide the data for the deer season harvest summaries, and weekly harvest totals have been made available for all seasons starting after the first week of the gun season (search “deer harvest summary”). This year, with the data provided through use of the new carcass tag numbers, the department has been able to follow up on harvests in split deer management units to ensure that deer have been correctly harvested and registered. Currently, over 316,000 deer have been registered for 2016 (up from 2015). This represents the 25<sup>th</sup> highest harvest in the past 84 years, the 30<sup>th</sup> highest buck harvest (up from 2015) and the 27<sup>th</sup> highest archery harvest (but combined with crossbow it is probably in the top 10). The antlerless harvest is similar to last year, but most of the increase in buck harvest has occurred in the northern forest, causing consternation about the accuracy of the harvest numbers. This year, preliminary registration compliance varied from 91-92% to 82%, depending on the survey method.

Deer committee members commented on compliance that varies regionally and year-to-year. In the northern forest, rumors of hunters registering a deer without having harvested one may have occurred, but there is no

evidence to indicate this occurrence (registration patterns from 2016 mimic results from previous years) and is likely at such low levels that it did not affect the overall outcomes or population calculations. The increased buck kill in the north was not unexpected or unusual following mild winters. History shows as much as 41% buck harvest increases in the past, and models predicted a 30% buck harvest in 2016 due to El Nino effects. Even during a hard winter, there is generally good survival of buck fawns, so with mild weather a significant uptick in bucks is not unexpected. Retaining the paper tag with unique tag number streamlines the registration process and provides more accurate data, and the GameReg system prevents people from using a tag twice. A new method of validating tags is in progress to make this convenient for hunters.

### **Law Enforcement Report—Kevin Mickelberg**

Kevin reported that 2016 was a safe deer season with only 5 non-fatal incidents. Carcass tags were a challenge for hunters and law enforcement. Compliance for possessing a carcass tag in the field was estimated to be only 40-60%. Hunters were confusing the new proof of license methods [on a mobile device, through a driver's license, through a Conservation Card] with "paperless" carcass tags, so some didn't have a physical copy of the carcass tag with them as required.

The Deer Advisory Committee discussed the frequent deer season rule changes, baiting and feeding rules of which some hunters are unaware, methods of delivering tagging information to the public, the importance of person-to-person transfer of information and a plan to make the deer hunting regulations more accessible and simpler. Kevin talked about two new upcoming rules on use of tree stands on public land and hunting vs. shooting hours, and challenges for law enforcement on enforcing them.

### **2016 Deer Season Review—Jen Stenglein and Dan Storm**

Jen provided an overview of the Sex-Age-Kill model and its inputs. Next, she presented some data on opening day conditions and overall weather, which was cold, windy with snow cover in some areas. A mild 2015-2016 winter contributed to harvest being up in 2016: antlered harvest was up 3% statewide, antlerless harvest was up 1% statewide and the overall statewide harvest was up 2%. The Northern Forest Zone exhibited the most dramatic change with a 22% increase in antlered harvest and 21% in antlerless harvest. Ashland, Forest and Sawyer have a large decrease in antlerless harvest because they didn't allow use of the Jr. antlerless tags. The department partnered with meat lockers to age 15,612 deer. In addition, CWD aging provided over 3100 samples.

- Yearling buck and yearling doe percent: Yearling buck percent is up, but there is a slight downward trend in yearling doe percent in the farmland zones
- Buck Recovery Rate is the proportion of deaths due to legal harvests. The northern WI deer study found consistent buck recovery rates of 66-70% in both study areas and across the years, even considering different conditions. A tight interval of 60 – 85% in buck recovery rate for 2015/16 will be used for this year. The model can take into account the bias for low yearling buck percent.
- Fawn:Doe Ratios
  - During 2016, 2169 does were reported, up from 2015; this is due to increased efforts of supervisors to get staff to conduct surveys. Ratios were up across the regions, perhaps due to forest recovery and less browse pressure.
  - Operation Deer Watch experienced an 83% decrease in reporting from 2015, with ~900 deer reported in 2016.
  - The committee voted to combine Summer Deer Observations with Operation Deer Watch

### **2017 Quota-setting Process and CDAC Timeline for 2017—Kevin Wallenfang**

Kevin reviewed the timeline for the quota-setting process. Next up, Jen will provide deer population estimate information to the committee and staff in the field. The regional population modeling meetings will occur in mid-February in each of the four districts. CDAC meetings will occur March 13-16 and 20-23, followed by an April 3-13

public comment period on CDAC recommendations. Final CDAC meetings will occur the week of April 17. CDAC recommendations will go to the NRB for approval on May 24.

### **Tribal quota-setting (Jon Gilbert)**

- The Tribes exceeded the harvest threshold in 2 counties (Forest and Sawyer), aided by the restriction on youth harvest.
- As a result, the following steps may need to be followed for 2017:
  - The state would identify the total number of antlerless deer available for harvest for everyone, including in counties without the Junior antlerless tag valid.
  - Tribes would declare the percentage of the quota that they want (up to 50%).
  - The state would take out what the tribes have normally harvested to determine how many state hunters are allowed to harvest, but the state is then required to stay within this limit (very difficult).
- Discussions will be scheduled between DNR and GLIFWC

### **CWD Update—Jen Stenglein**

Information on CWD can be found online at keyword “CWD.” The CWD Response Plan five-year review is being finalized. Regional distribution of CWD reveals that there are hotspots of CWD-affected farms and 43 CWD-affected counties (60%) that are under a ban on baiting and feeding. New CWD-affected counties are Vilas, Oneida, Forest, Menominee and Oconto. Sampling in 2016 encompassed the addition of new surveillance areas due to CWD+ captive facilities. There was a 90% increase in analyzed samples compared to 2015—the number is currently up to almost 6000 samples.

The Deer Advisory Committee discussed Minnesota’s current regulations related to CWD, especially near the WI border. In addition, sampling and testing turnaround time in Wisconsin is the fastest in the nation and has gotten even faster in 2016, with some hunters being notified of test results and receiving a replacement tag within days of harvesting the CWD-positive deer. Likely areas of new CWD detections and available resources determine where CWD surveillance occurs.

### **WSI Update—Dan Storm**

Dan reported that in December 2016, the WSI was less than 10, so pretty mild. Last year, December was at 0, but during severe winters it’s over 30. From a deer’s perspective, there’s an issue with snow on the ground melting and then freezing, which forms a crust. Food is likely inaccessible under this type of snow cover.

### **1<sup>st</sup> run population estimates—Jen Stenglein**

Jen is putting together an SAK spreadsheet to send to committee and staff within a week. To visually represent the data, the committee voiced preferences for 5-year maps with deer densities, graphs with five years of population estimates and population density changes compared to 2014 (when CDACs set their population objectives).

### **Research Update—Dan Storm**

Dan presented updates on several deer research projects occurring in different areas of the state.

- The Southwest WI Deer and Predator Study
- Evaluating new methods for estimating fawn:doe ratios
- Fall deer body condition assessment (pilot study with DMAP cooperators)
- Car-killed deer assessments

### **Deer Metrics—Kevin Wallenfang and Brad Hutnik**

The department has created an online deer metrics system which will be accessible to the public. Users can select a specific county to see county-specific information; the system will also contain the manager’s notes and

population objectives for each county, as well as explanations of how to use the metrics and limits to each type of metric. The system will also be able to generate reports for each county.

### **Forest regeneration metrics (Brad Hutnick):**

Brad provided an overview on current and proposed forest regeneration metrics. Forest regeneration was first studied in the 1940s, but significant resources were needed to be able to continue this on an annual basis. Currently, the department has several sources of regeneration data available, including current research, field surveys, deer exclosures, Forest Inventory Analysis and Continuous Forest Inventory data and the browse intensity index. Currently, the regeneration data provided to CDAC's is based on multi-county, regional data. To develop data at a County scale, the WDNR will need to increase FIA statistical power by sampling substantially more plots. The proposed FRM (Forest Regeneration Monitoring) plots are designed to shed light on forest regeneration composition and recruitment (how often seedlings progress into different age classes) by forest type. They will also inform discussion about variation in local and regional deer browse intensity, impacts on future forest growth and economic/productivity implications.

### **Law Enforcement Realignment Impacts—Kevin Mickelberg**

Alignment will remove credentials from park rangers and give them a choice between two sides of the formerly credentialed position: compete for one of 30 credentialed positions that will go to law enforcement, or compete for a position that will handle maintenance with Parks (non-credentialed). So, wardens will be heavily drawn into parks during summer when they may have other duties as well. However, when camping season is over, law enforcement will have 30 new warden positions that will be able to help with wildlife-related activities, accountability, registration, and other activities.

### **Damage Program Update—Brad Koele**

In 2016, the number of deer agricultural damage enrollments decreased, which is in line with the pattern for the past four years. Shooting permit issuance declined to 509 in 2016, but more deer are being harvested per permit. About 4,256 damage registrations have occurred so far, not including nuisance permits (used in airports and municipal areas). New damage tags will be issued through Go Wild and will be on plain paper. Agricultural damage tags will also now be issued with a unique tag number and will be registered through GameReg rather than with a customer service representative.

Increased forest damage in northern Wisconsin at various industrial and non-industrial forests has prompted forest owners to request forest damage permits, which seem to be working to increase regeneration in timber stands. On one property, hunters shot 113 deer with >75% success rate on the property (very good). The department has reached out to stakeholders for input. However, it is important to balance public input with providing hunting opportunities in these forests and offering a means of addressing overbrowsing, especially in buck-only units. This is an emerging issue with growing landowner interest, and the department is exploring options and a consistent framework for site-specific deer harvest to address damage issues.