2015 FALL HUNTING & TRAPPING FORECAST
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A Message from Secretary Stepp

With another classic Wisconsin summer in the books, it’s time to dust off your fall hunting gear and head out into the woods. I’m excited to introduce this year’s *Fall Hunting and Trapping Forecast* – where you will find all the information you’ll need to create new memories with friends and family.

We worked together last year to usher in a new era of deer hunting with some important changes, and this year I’m excited to introduce another new feature – electronic registration. Since the 1950s, harvest data has been the backbone of Wisconsin’s deer management program, and this year we’ve taken another step forward to make it easier than ever to register your deer, keep your hunting traditions intact and allow us to continue capturing important harvest data.

Thanks to electronic registration, this year you’ll be able to register your deer in the field, saving time and giving yourself more time in the outdoors. To learn more about this exciting new way to register your deer, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “electronic registration.”

But remember, registration stations in Wisconsin aren’t going anywhere – to find one near you this fall, search keywords “registration stations.”

And before you climb into your tree stand, take advantage of Wisconsin’s fall waterfowl and upland game hunting opportunities. Many of these seasons are right around the corner, including the second year of Wisconsin’s early teal season. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates for 2015 show the highest continental duck populations since the survey began in 1955. This is exciting news, and speaks to the passion that hunters like yourself and others exhibit through attending public meetings and other activities linked to waterfowl management in Wisconsin.

I also want to thank you for continuing to play a key role in managing Wisconsin’s wildlife species through contributions to one of our online wildlife surveys. Your help is greatly appreciated.

For those of you looking to take the first step on the trail to hunting or trapping, be sure to sign up for one of our Learn to Hunt and Learn to Trap events. We take great pride in helping people discover hunting and trapping and the role they play in managing our wildlife. Search keywords “learn to hunt” and “learn to trap” to find out more.

If you have questions, give us a call at 1-888-WDNRINFO (1-888-936-7463). I look forward to seeing you out there this fall, have fun – and most of all – be safe out there.
If summertime observations and reports from the public are any indication, 2015 is shaping up to be a great deer hunting year in many areas across Wisconsin. In 2014, hunters across the state adapted to a number of new deer management regulations. With one year already under their belts, we hope 2015 will be easy to grasp and feel familiar to most hunters. However, as always, hunters should also be aware of some important new changes for 2015.

For a complete overview of all deer hunting rules including changes for this season, please check the [2015 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations](http://dnr.wi.gov) available at any hunting license vendor or DNR Service Center. For additional information, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword “deer.” Here, you will find an abundance of helpful information including FAQs, maps, resources to help find a place to hunt, and more.

### Electronic Deer Registration in 2015

In 2014, over 14,000 hunters were invited to test electronic registration methods for registering deer. Hunters called in or went online to register more than 10,000 deer during all seasons.

Electronic registration will be used by all deer hunters in 2015. Deer registration is going entirely paperless, and can be completed by phone or Internet. Hunters will also have the option of registering electronically at a participating in-person registration station. For a list of participating businesses in your area, search keywords “deer registration.”

To register a deer electronically, hunters will...
call 1-844-426-3734 (1-844-GAME-REG) or visit gamereg.wi.gov. The electronic registration system will prompt hunters to enter their DNR Customer ID number and harvest information such as location of kill, age (adult or fawn) and sex (buck or doe) of the deer and weapon type used to harvest the animal. Once hunters have provided this information, they will receive a unique confirmation number for each deer.

In order to complete the registration process, the hunter must write the 10 digit confirmation number on the validated carcass tag attached to the animal. The tag with your confirmation number will serve as proof that the deer was legally registered, and must accompany the animal until the meat is consumed. All deer harvested during any deer season must be registered by 5 PM the day after harvest. For more information, search keywords “electronic registration.”

**County Deer Advisory Councils**

County Deer Advisory Councils were formed in 2014 to increase local involvement in deer management issues. Each of Wisconsin’s 72 counties directly participated in setting population objectives, antlerless quotas and bonus antlerless permit levels that will affect the 2015 deer seasons. County councils are comprised of representatives from local hunting clubs, conservation clubs, forestry and agriculture interests, tourism, and local governmental interests. Each council was led by local Wisconsin Conservation Congress delegates, while a team of three liaisons from the DNR’s wildlife, forestry and law enforcement programs attended CDAC meetings to present data and offer professional perspective.

Last fall, councils reviewed county deer herd metrics and solicited public input to develop three-year population objective recommendations to increase, decrease or maintain herd levels in each county. Once these population objectives were approved in early 2015, the CDACs immediately began forming antlerless quota and antlerless permit recommendations, relying on deer herd data and public feedback. These quotas and permit levels now guide bonus tag availability for the 2015 deer seasons. For more information regarding County Deer Advisory Councils, search keyword “CDAC.”

**SEASONS**

The crossbow / archery season runs September 12 — January 3, 2016. Hunters are reminded to purchase a crossbow license or archer/crossbow upgrade to hunt with a crossbow.

**Gun Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities** season runs October 3 — 11

**Youth gun** season runs October 10 — 11

The gun deer season runs the traditional 9 days starting the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Season runs November 21 — 29

The muzzleloader season runs 10 days immediately following the 9-day gun season. Season runs November 30 — December 9

The December 4-day antlerless-only hunt runs December 10-13. During this season, hunters may only harvest antlerless deer; buck harvest is not allowed.

The holiday hunt has been discontinued. It could be reinstated under the recommendation of CDACs in the future.

READ THE 2015 WISCONSIN DEER HUNTING REGULATIONS FOR MORE INFORMATION.
Management Zones and Units

Wisconsin’s four Deer Management Zones and Deer Management Units (DMUs) have not changed in 2015. DMUs follow county boundaries in most cases, and nine DMUs are split by zone boundaries. Baiting and feeding are prohibited in DMUs that are designated as CWD-Affected Areas.

Tags and Licenses

All hunters will receive a Farmland Zone Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag with the purchase of each deer hunting license (archer/crossbow and gun). This tag must be designated for use in a specific zone, DMU and land type (public access or private) at the time of issuance, or may be deferred until a later date with payment of a $2 convenience fee.

Youth hunters age 10 — 17 will receive a Junior Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag, valid for an antlerless deer statewide, with each deer license. Youth hunters do not need to specify zone, DMU or land type on this tag in 2015.

Class A and C disabled hunters will receive a Farmland Zone Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag that is valid for an antlerless deer in any zone or DMU statewide with each deer license. Although this tag will be designated to a zone, county and land type it may be used in any DMU statewide as long as it is filled on the land type (public access or private land) designated on the tag.

Antlerless Deer Permits

In 2015, antlerless permit availability may vary between the Farmland Zone and Forest Zone portions of the following county units: Adams, Clark, Eau Claire, Jackson, Juneau, Marinette, Monroe, Oconto and Wood.

With each deer hunting license, hunters will receive one Buck Deer Carcass Tag valid statewide and one Farmland Zone Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag valid in the zone, county DMU, and land type (public access or private) of the buyer’s choosing at time of license purchase. Farmland Zone tags may not be used in the Northern Forest or Central Forest zones, but bonus antlerless tags may be available in these zones. All Bonus Antlerless Deer Permits are zone, DMU and land-type specific. Bonus permits cost $12 for residents, $20 for nonresidents and $5 for youth (ages 10 and 11).

Public lands include state, federal or county properties open to hunting, stewardship and utility properties, Managed Forest Law and Forest Crop.
Law lands (in whole or in part) designated as open for public hunting, and Voluntary Public Access lands leased for public hunting. Private lands include all lands not listed above. It is important to remember that hunters must have permission to access all private lands.

Bonus antlerless permit availability may vary by zone or DMU. Each of the four zones contains several DMUs—nine units are split by zone boundaries.

For more information regarding bonus permit availability and sales, search keyword “deer.”

**Bonus Antlerless Deer Permits**

Bonus permits are valid only in the Zone, DMUs and land type (public access or private) indicated on the carcass tag. Tags are limited, including 13 counties in part or whole where zero will be available. Hunters may purchase bonus permits at a rate of one per person per day. Sales are broken up by zone and will occur August 17th (Northern and Central Forest zones), August 18th (Central Farmland) and August 19th (Southern Farmland Zone). All remaining permits go on sale August 20th. Sales begin each day at 10 AM.

**Buck-only DMUs**

TTwelve county DMUs, in whole or in part, are designated as buck-only units. All buck-only units are restricted to the Northern and Central Forest zones. Only the Buck Deer Carcass Tag issued with each deer license is valid in these DMUs, with some exceptions for youth, Class A and C disabled and military hunters. Buck tags may not be used to tag a buck during the 4-day antlerless-only season in December. Bonus antlerless tags are not available for purchase in buck-only DMUs, with the exception of the Superior Metro Subunit of Douglas County.

As in 2015, qualified members of the U.S. Armed Forces (home on furlough or leave) and Class A and C disabled permit hunters will be allowed to harvest an antlerless deer in any buck-only DMU using their Farmland Zone Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag issued with each hunting license. Youth hunters ages 10−17 will also be allowed to harvest an antlerless deer in any buck-only DMU using their Junior Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag, issued with each junior deer hunting license.

**Transportation**

While afield, no person may possess or transport another hunter’s deer, even after it has been registered (unless accompanied by the person for whom the carcass tag was issued). However, anyone may transport another person’s registered deer on a public road or possess it at a residence, camp or business. The carcass tag must be attached to the deer when transported.

**Use of Bows and Crossbows**

All hunters using a crossbow to hunt deer must purchase a crossbow license or a crossbow upgrade after purchasing an archer license. Hunters may also hunt with a bow or crossbow under the authority of a gun deer license, but only during a firearm season. Laws regulating the use of bows and crossbows for hunting within cities or villages may have changed. Check with local city or village authorities for local ordinance restrictions.
New Rules in 2015

Bonus Buck has been discontinued, and **no bonus buck authorization stickers from any year are valid.** Hunters will no longer be able to earn a Bonus Buck Authorization Sticker upon harvesting an antlerless deer, regardless of zone.

Albino and all-white deer are protected statewide, including those found within the CWD-affected areas.

Management Zones and Units in 2015

Deer management zones and DMUs remain unchanged from 2014. However, deer hunters should be familiar with the zone, DMU and land type (public access or private) in which they plan to hunt. Hunters will need this information for their Farmland Zone Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag and any Bonus Antlerless Permits that they purchase.

Metro Sub-units

Six metropolitan areas are designated a sub-units to provide additional hunting opportunity, including extended gun and archery/crossbow seasons. Hunters wishing to pursue antlerless deer in a metro sub-unit must do so using a valid antlerless deer permit designated for the county and land type within the sub-unit where they intend to hunt. Some local municipalities may have weapons restrictions—hunters are encouraged to check local ordinances before hunting in Metro Subunits.

December Four-day Antlerless-only Season

The four-day December Antlerless-only deer season will once again be a statewide hunt, occurring in all DMUs (antlerless permit availability will limit participation), and will run December 10–13. Hunters must possess (or be in a group with someone that does) an antlerless deer carcass tag valid for the DMU and land type in which they choose to hunt during the December Antlerless-only deer season. All deer hunters and small game hunters are required to meet blaze orange clothing requirements during the December antlerless-only hunt.

Youth Deer Season

The youth gun deer season will be held October 10–11. This special hunt was established to provide youth hunters with an opportunity to hunt with the guidance of a mentor.

The youth season will be held in all DMUs statewide. Resident and non-resident youth hunters ages 10–15 who possess a valid gun deer hunting license may participate. It is important to note that youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult parent or guardian during this hunt, even if the youth hunter holds a hunter education certificate. Qualified youth hunters may harvest one buck deer with their gun buck deer carcass tag and one antlerless deer to fill their statewide Junior Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag. Youth hunters can harvest additional antlerless deer through the purchase of Bonus Antlerless Deer Permits, where available (specified to zone, DMU and land type).

Youth hunters must be within arm’s length of an adult mentor. No more than two youth hunters may be accompanied by a single mentor. Supervising adults may not hunt while accompanying or mentoring a youth deer hunt. All statewide deer, turkey and small game
hunters, with the exception of waterfowl hunters, are required to meet blaze orange requirements during the 2015 youth gun deer hunt.

**Gun Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities**

The 2015 gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities will be held October 3–11. This special hunt was established to provide an opportunity to participate in Wisconsin’s various deer hunting seasons. Disabled hunters with a valid Class A, C or D disabled permit, or a Class B permit that is issued for longer than one year (and authorizes hunting or shooting form a stationary vehicle) may participate.

“We’ve been very fortunate to have such a great support from landowners in the state,” said DNR disabled hunt program coordinator Adam Murkowski. “For this year’s hunt, we’ve enrolled over 74,000 acres of land in 46 counties.”

The gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities is not a statewide season. This special hunt is only authorized on lands specifically enrolled in the disabled hunt program. Landowners or managers interested in sponsoring lands for the 2016 hunt must submit an online application before June 1, 2016. Qualified disabled hunters are encouraged to contact sponsors before September 1. For a list of sponsors for the 2016 season, search keywords “disabled deer hunt.”

**Where Can I Find More Information?**

Hunters are encouraged to check out the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page for additional information. The FAQ feature provides brief responses to a wide variety of deer hunting questions, ranging from DMU boundaries to antlerless permits. To help deer hunters prepare for the 2015 season, the department will host a number of online chats with wildlife and regulations experts. For more information and to view a schedule of upcoming chats, search keyword “chat.”
Deer Management Assistance Program
A PARTNERSHIP FOR HEALTHY DEER AND HEALTHY HABITAT

The Wisconsin Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) provides habitat and herd management assistance to landowners interested in managing their property for deer and other wildlife. The department assists landowners with the implementation of forest regeneration and deer hunting practices that will help achieve property goals while considering the ecological and social impacts of white-tailed deer.

In its first year, DMAP enrolled over 43,000 acres across the state. More than 300 landowners were surveyed to help gain insight into their experiences with the program. Most landowners looked to improve habitat for deer and other wildlife, including turkey, grouse, woodcock, small game, songbirds and other species.

Survey responses indicated that landowners enjoyed the simplicity of enrollment and were satisfied with additional resources provided through the department’s website. Eighty-seven percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the site visit and worked alongside a local DNR biologist and forester to achieve management goals, while ninety-three percent said the site-specific management plan was useful. Ninety-seven percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the site visit and worked alongside a local DNR biologist and forester to achieve management goals, while ninety-three percent said the site-specific management plan was useful.

Landowners can enroll in one of three levels:

**Level one:** No acreage requirement, no annual fee (ongoing enrollment);

**Level two:** 160-640 acres; $75/3 year commitment (annual enrollment deadline of March 1); or

**Level three:** 640+ acres; $150/3 year commitment (annual enrollment deadline of March 1).
percent of DMAP enrolled landowners intend to implement at least some of the recommendations provided in their management plan. Overall, landowners gave the program a ninety-three percent good or very good customer service rating. Landowners signed up another 44,000 acres in DMAP in 2015. The program is currently working with over 700 landowners throughout Wisconsin.

Properties can be enrolled by an individual landowner or through a cooperative of landowners whose property boundaries are within one-half mile of each other. A group cooperative can be formed to qualify all landowners at a higher enrollment level.

DNR staff have worked hard to expand program offerings to DMAP cooperators, and four workshops were offered around the state to share information with enrolled landowners about cost-share program availability, invasive species management, timber harvest strategies, and deer research and herd health updates. Workshops included tours of DMAP enrolled properties led by the landowner to share their experiences and lessons learned on land management. In addition, DMAP cooperators are able to voluntarily participate in a mentored hunting and trapping program that may help them achieve their property management goals while providing novice hunters access to their property. For workshop opportunities open to the public, check the DNR calendar.

FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING WISCONSIN’S DEER MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, VISIT DNR.WI.GOV AND SEARCH KEYWORD “DMAP.”
Get Involved in Wisconsin’s Deer Management

Deer Herd Forums and Online Public Input Opportunities

Beginning in 2015, annual deer herd forums were combined with spring County Deer Advisory Council quota and permit meetings. These meetings are open to the public, and comments are also gathered during the public comment period of these meetings. CDAC meetings provide an opportunity to interact with local wildlife biologists and learn more about deer biology and management, population objectives, and harvest statistics in each county.

Those interested in providing feedback on preliminary quota and bonus antlerless permit recommendations can also comment online. To provide input, search keyword “CDAC.”

Trail Camera Photos

Do you have a trail cam photo of a rare or unusual animal? Trail cameras are a valuable resource for documenting more elusive wildlife, including species that are endangered in Wisconsin. Send in your trail camera photos during any season of the year. To submit photos, search keywords “deer hunter wildlife.”

Conservation Congress Spring Hearings

Annual Wisconsin Conservation Congress meetings, held in each county statewide on the second Monday in April, give citizens the opportunity to comment and vote on proposed fish and wildlife rule changes and submit resolutions for the Wisconsin Conservation Congress.
future rule changes. This opportunity is unique to Wisconsin and helps play a significant role in determining how you enjoy your time in the outdoors. For more information regarding spring hearings, search keywords “spring hearings.”

Deer Hunter Wildlife Survey

Help monitor the relative abundance and distribution of deer and other wildlife species in Wisconsin. Use an online form to record your experiences and submit information you collected during your time in the field. To submit your observations, search keywords “deer hunter wildlife.”

HELP MONITOR DEER REPRODUCTION IN WISCONSIN. KEEP A TALLY SHEET IN YOUR CAR TO RECORD ALL DEER SIGHTINGS FROM AUGUST 1 TO SEPTEMBER 30.

Operation Deer Watch

Help monitor deer reproduction in Wisconsin — keep a tally sheet in your car, or go online, and record all deer sightings from August 1 to September 30. DNR biologists are interested in all buck, doe and fawn sightings. Operation Deer Watch data is combined with DNR staff observations to help estimate fawn-to-doe ratios and deer population estimates. For more information regarding Operation Deer Watch, search keywords “operation deer watch.”

Contact Your Local Biologist

Wildlife biologists are available to speak with you and to answer questions, address any concerns you have and to gather input when setting the upcoming deer season framework. To get in touch with your local wildlife biologist, search keyword “contact.”
White-tailed Deer Research

Population Research

Contributed by Daniel Storm

During late spring in 2015, wildlife biologists assessed pregnancy rates and fat reserves in deer killed in vehicular collisions. Specifically, biologists examined fat stores at various points within the deer carcass, including the rump, around the heart and kidneys, and in bone marrow. This statewide effort will help to better understand how weather and habitat impact the deer herd.

Biologists examined 522 deer in 2014 and 459 in 2015, and found that deer in farmland regions tend to have greater fat reserves than deer in the northern forest, confirming that habitat and winter weather impact deer condition. Over 90 percent of does two years of age or older were found to be pregnant. In farmland regions, roughly 70 percent of these deer had twins or triplets. In the north, about half of these does had twins or triplets. Research is ongoing to help the department learn more about how local habitat conditions and weather influence deer condition and reproduction.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Tim Marien, DNR wildlife biologist, (608) 264-6046, timothy.marien@wisconsin.gov

Wisconsin has monitored Chronic Wasting Disease for 13 years. Between 2002 and March 2015, the department tested over 190,000 free-ranging deer, of which roughly 2,800 have tested positive for CWD. Per Deer Trustee Report implementation, last season the CWD management zone transitioned to CWD-affected counties. These boundaries match the counties that are prohibited from baiting & feeding. A county is included if a wild or captive animal has been tested and confirmed to be positive for CWD in the county or if a portion of the county is within a 10-mile radius of a wild or captive animal that has been tested and confirmed to be positive for CWD.

CWD Monitoring in Wisconsin

During the 2014 deer hunting season, the department sampled 5,460 deer statewide – 331 tested positive. Sampling strategies were aimed at detecting location changes and prevalence trends. Monitoring plans focused surveillance on adult deer (the age group most likely to have CWD).

Following the 2012 discovery of a CWD-positive adult doe near Shell Lake, 2014 marked the third year of surveillance efforts in Washburn County. Following recommendations from a local community action team, local landowners and hunters helped the department sample over 1,900 deer in the area over the last three years. No new positives have been detected. Based on three years of sampling, all information has indicated CWD is not widespread in the Washburn area, and occurs at a very low prevalence rate.

OVERALL PREVALENCE OF CWD IN THE ENDEMIC AREA OF SOUTHERN WISCONSIN HAS DOUBLED ACROSS ALL SEX AND AGE CLASSES OF DEER.
The 2012 discovery of CWD in wild deer in Juneau, Adams and Portage counties prompted 2013 surveillance efforts in a ten-mile radius surrounding the positives through hunter harvested deer. Four additional positives were found in 2013 in Adams and Portage counties, while two additional positives were discovered in Adams County in 2014. Surveillance was also conducted surrounding a CWD-positive captive deer farm in Marathon County, with no wild CWD deer detected.

CWD Prevalence in Wisconsin

Since 2002, CWD prevalence within the western monitoring area, encompassing northwestern Dane and northeastern Iowa counties, has shown an overall increasing trend in all sex and age classes. During the past 13 years, the trend in prevalence in adult males has risen from between 8-10 percent to over 25 percent and from between 3-4 percent to more than 10 percent in adult females. During that same period, the prevalence trend in yearling males has increased from about 2 percent to roughly 8 percent and roughly 2 percent to close to 7 percent in yearling females. Despite yearly fluctuations, overall prevalence in the endemic area of southern Wisconsin has doubled across all sex and age classes of deer.

2015 CWD Sampling in Wisconsin

During the 2015 deer hunting season, DNR will continue to sample deer within the Southern Farmland Zone and at select locations in the CWD-affected area. The department will also sample deer around CWD positive deer locations in Washburn, Adams, Juneau, & Portage counties, as well as in the wild deer herd surrounding CWD positive captive deer farms in Marathon and Eau Claire counties. Exact sampling locations will be available on the department’s website prior to the 2015 archery and crossbow season opener.

Weighted surveillance will continue to play a key role in attempts to further increase the efficacy and efficiency of CWD detection surveillance efforts. Weighted surveillance focuses collection and sampling efforts on select age and sex classes of harvested deer that are most likely to have the disease. Since
CWD is found at higher prevalence rates in adult males than in other demographic groups of harvested deer, they are at the highest CWD risk and represent the most valuable group of harvested animals to test for CWD detection in areas where the disease has not previously been found. For 2015, weighted surveillance will take place in Marquette & Green Lake counties. In 2014, taxidermists in Vernon and Crawford counties provided samples, with no positives detected.

**CWD in North America**

As of 2015, 22 states and provinces have identified CWD within free-ranging herds of deer, elk, and/or moose. In some of these states, CWD has been detected in only a handful of animals, while in others vast geographic areas and large numbers of deer are affected.

In Colorado and Wyoming, where CWD has been present for several decades, recent studies have documented high prevalence rates of 20-40 percent. In Wyoming, high prevalence rates at roughly 35 percent have been identified across extensive geographic areas encompassing more than 4,000 square miles. Research suggests CWD is reducing deer numbers in these populations. Examining CWD in other states will help the department anticipate any future impacts of CWD in Wisconsin.

Successfully managing CWD will require a sustained effort for many years, and will require cooperation and communication among the department, hunters, agricultural agencies, landowners, farmed cervid producers and the many citizens of the state who benefit from a healthy deer herd.

DNR game managers are grateful to hunters and other conservationists for their role in assisting with CWD surveillance during the past 13 years. Wisconsin is fortunate to have citizens with such a great conservation ethic and high appreciation for the natural world. For information regarding CWD in Wisconsin, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword “CWD.”
Across the 19-county DNR West Central District, wildlife biologists are optimistic about deer hunting opportunities for the 2015 deer hunting seasons. As deer hunters may recall, the Deer Trustee Report led to some notable deer hunting regulations and deer management strategy changes in 2014, with deer management units now realigned to coincide with county boundaries.

The WCD now lies within three distinct deer management zones: the Southern Farmland Zone, Central Farmland Zone and Central Forest Zone. Each deer management unit has a specific three-year goal to increase, decrease, or stabilize the deer population. The goal for 2015-17 in all WCD farmland units, except for Buffalo, Chippewa, and Trempealeau Counties, is to stabilize deer populations, while the goal in all central forest units is to increase deer populations. The goal in Buffalo County calls for a decrease in deer numbers, while Chippewa and Trempealeau Counties have elected to work to increase deer numbers. Season structure and antlerless deer permit numbers in each county deer management unit are used to achieve these goals; these numbers are suggested by local County Deer Advisory Councils.

Generally speaking, from Dunn County in the north to Crawford County in the southern end of the district, deer in the WCD’s farmland zones are doing well, and hunters can expect an increase in deer numbers compared to 2014. Deer numbers in the WCD’s Central Forest Zone are comparable or slightly improved from 2014.
Ryan Haffele, a DNR wildlife biologist for St. Croix and Pierce counties, gave a few reasons for optimism, shared by his fellow wildlife biologists throughout the WCD farmland zones, by stating, “Mild winter weather, good to excellent spring fawn production and survival and conservative antlerless permit issuance over the past several years has boosted deer populations. The increased populations should lead to increased hunter observations of deer and harvest opportunities.”

Haffele’s observations are echoed by Mark Rasmussen, wildlife biologist for Buffalo and Trempealeau counties who notes, “Deer numbers are very strong in both counties, and there should be ample hunting opportunities for archers and gun hunters.” While bonus antlerless permits are available for both private and public lands in Buffalo County, Rasmussen noted that bonus antlerless permits are available for only private lands in Trempealeau County, as the Trempealeau CDAC set its three-year goal to increase the number of deer.

As a reminder, DNR wildlife biologist Bill Hogseth notes that in an effort to rebuild deer populations on public lands in Chippewa County, there will be no bonus antlerless tags issued for public lands. Hogseth has received indications of improving deer numbers, such as many does with twin fawns, and some with triplets, from citizens who live in the southeastern and western portions of Chippewa County.

Deer hunters in Crawford, Vernon, La Crosse, and the farmland portions of Monroe, Adams and Juneau Counties should encounter strong deer populations this fall. Some of the stronger deer numbers in the WCD reside in Vernon County. “Like most counties in the driftless area, Vernon County’s rugged topography and minimal amount of public land leads to challenging deer hunting,” said Viroqua DNR wildlife technician Anna Jahns. She further explains that these two factors, however, play vital roles in the county’s notoriety for producing large-antlered bucks. La Crosse DNR wildlife biologist Ron Lichtie reminds hunters that the La Crosse Metro Subunit and Hudson Metro Subunit have extended archery and gun
deer seasons again this year in an effort to help control deer numbers. Please see the 2015 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations for Metro Unit hunting season dates.

Hunters who traditionally hunt the Central Forest Zone areas of Eau Claire, Clark, Jackson, Wood, Adams, Juneau and Monroe Counties should notice more deer this year. The department’s Black River Falls wildlife biologist Scott Roepke offers that fawn recruitment appears to have improved this year compared to the last couple of years, but summer fawn-to-doe observations will provide a final assessment. In a continuing effort to increase the deer population in eastern Jackson County, Roepke reminds deer hunters that the Central Forest Zone portion of Jackson County has a buck-only season structure for 2015. In addition, elk reintroduction efforts are under way in Jackson County, and deer hunters are reminded that elk are currently a protected species. As always, hunters must exercise the basic principles of hunter safety, and deer hunters in this area should be particularly mindful to be sure of their target and what lies beyond.

Long-time Central Forest Zone wildlife biologist Wayne Hall forecasts deer numbers and deer hunting opportunities in Wood County to be improved from 2014 due to mild winter conditions and increased fawn recruitment. Hall notes that adequate and timely spring and summer moisture has vegetation in excellent, lush conditions. Blueberries, huckleberries, and blackberries all have abundant fruits highly sought by deer.

According to Darren Ladwig, wildlife biologist for Adams and Juneau counties, a few years of conservative antlerless
permits and increased fawn production in the Central Forest portion of these two counties has continued to facilitate deer herd growth. Similar observations have also been noted in the Eau Claire County and Clark County portions of the Central Forest Zone. Ladwig also notes that timber harvests on public lands in Adams and Eau Claire counties over the past several years are regenerating aspen and oak, and thus creating ideal deer habitat that can have positive impacts on deer for years to come.

Hunters should be aware that the Farmland Zone antlerless tag that is included with each deer hunting license is now unit (county) and land type (public or private) specific. Dunn County wildlife biologist Jess Carstens notes that all hunters purchasing deer hunting licenses in the Southern Farmland or Central Farmland Zones select public or private land for their antlerless permit issued at the time of license purchase. There are no limits to tags issued in this manner for either land type. Those who hunt both private and public land types should think carefully before declaring their antlerless tag land choice.

Limited quantities of bonus antlerless tags are available in most Farmland Zone units.

Hunters within either the Central or Southern Farmland Zones will find great opportunities to put some meat in the freezer this fall if they are able to spend some time scouting and find areas that deer are consistently using. Deer in their summer patterns can be keyed in on early, resulting in great success during the first couple of weeks of archery season, especially with an early September 12 opener. Bucks will likely be in bachelor groups and can be very visible.
and predictable from late August into mid-September. Hunters should pay close attention to the acorn crop in their area and focus on stand sites with concentrations of white and bur oak. Once acorn drop begins, deer will key in on this vital food resource and their movement patterns will change accordingly.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was discovered on a captive deer farm in Eau Claire County in 2015. As a result, Eau Claire, Clark, and Jackson Counties join the list of CWD-affected counties. A year-round baiting and feeding ban is in effect for all CWD-affected counties.

West Central District wildlife management staff encourages all deer hunters to enjoy a safe, fun and successful 2015 deer hunting season.

**Northern District Forecast**

**Mike Zeckmeister,** DNR Northern District wildlife supervisor, 715-635-4090, Mike.Zeckmeister@Wisconsin.gov

Conditions during the winter of 2014-15 were much milder compared to the very severe winter we experienced in 2013-14. Last year, without question, we saw both direct and indirect losses (reduced fawn recruitment) from that severe winter. Hunters saw the results of that severe winter during the various deer seasons in 2014. Historically, we have seen the buck kill fall as much as 25% when the winter severity index is in the very severe category. So it was no surprise that we saw a significant reduction in the buck kill in most northern counties during the 2014 deer seasons.

Following a relatively mild winter and an early spring in 2015, deer went into this spring in good shape and we expect fawn recruitment to be much improved. This is good news for those counties where we are trying to rebuild the deer herd. Likewise, we should see improved antler development due to the milder winter. Conservative quotas in much of the Northern Forest Zone, as recommended by the County Deer Advisory Councils, should spell increased deer numbers in Northern Wisconsin. It will however, take several years to get over the 2013-14 very severe winter from a deer age structure perspective.

**Northeast District Forecast**

**Jeff Pritzl,** DNR Northeast District wildlife supervisor, (920) 662-5127, Jeffrey.Pritzl@Wisconsin.gov

The deer population in the Northern Forest Zone portions of Marinette and Oconto Counties entered the winter at about the same size as the previous year, but we expect both buck and total deer sightings to improve this fall due to very conservative antlerless harvests last year and a much milder winter. County Deer Advisory Councils in these counties offered a conservative antlerless quota, which will provide for some antlerless harvest this fall while still allowing for a larger herd to enter the coming winter.

Fawn production and survival is expected to be very good this
year, which is welcome news for the north and those pockets in the farmlands where deer densities are below average. A few Farmland Zone counties (Fond du Lac, Sheboygan and Winnebago) have an antlerless quota that will allow for herd growth. Buck harvests this year in Sheboygan and Winnebago are anticipated to be similar to last year, but most of the Farmland Zone counties will likely see an increase in buck harvest - these CDACs have set antlerless harvest goals to either stabilize or slightly reduce their herds. Antlerless harvest opportunities will be liberal across the Farmland Zone, which may present a challenge. Because of the anticipated growth rate of these farmland herds, the antlerless harvest needed to stabilize the herd size is higher than traditional antlerless harvests have been (in some cases significantly). Both the DNR and CDACs encourage hunters to increase their antlerless take in these counties.

**Southern District Forecast**

**Eric Lobner**, DNR Southern District wildlife supervisor, 608-235-0860, Eric.Lobner@Wisconsin.gov

The fall 2015 deer herd in the Southern District, all of which falls within the Southern Farmland Zone, came through an extremely mild winter and generally, the population is looking very good to great. In general, deer numbers should be slightly higher than last fall. However, it is important for hunters to keep in mind that there is great variation in the habitat as well as the quality of the habitat across the landscape and as a result, the number of deer on an individual property can vary significantly.

The southern district encompasses a wide range of deer habitat from the wooded ridges and coulees in the southwest to the flatter, agriculturally-dominated landscape in Green, Rock and Walworth counties along the Illinois border to the rolling southern kettles in the east and the extensive wetland and woodland areas of Dodge and Columbia Counties. This high level of variation in the habitat types and conditions results in local deer numbers that can vary dramatically from one square mile to the next.

Overall, habitat conditions and food availability across the District is looking very good. Based on scattered reports from foresters, the acorn crop appears to be doing well and should provide a great food source this fall so hunters should keep an eye out for those groups of oak trees in the areas they are hunting. In addition, agricultural crops are currently about a week ahead of schedule so as long as the growing season continues to go well and the amount of rain in the fall is not excessive, hunters should expect that the corn and soybeans will be harvested early which will impact deer movements.

Most of the southern district deer are harvested on private property which makes up more than 90 percent of the landscape, but good deer hunting
can also be found on the thousands of acres of county, state and federally owned lands open to deer hunting in the southern district. Hunters who are interested in finding public land available for hunting can check out the DNR website at dnr.wi.gov, keywords “public hunting lands.” Those interested in hunting on private lands are advised to get out well in advance of deer season to meet with landowners and seek permission to hunt. Remember to get out early to scout the areas you plan to hunt throughout the fall and keep an eye out for those natural food sources that will attract deer and pattern their movements to and from those sources.

Another important aspect for southern district deer hunters to keep in mind is that the prevalence of Chronic Wasting Disease continues to increase in the herd. All but Ozaukee County in the southern district is within the CWD – Affected Area and as a result, baiting and feeding of deer is prohibited. With the transition to electronic registration, hunters interested in getting their deer tested for CWD will be able to go to one of the co-op CWD sample stations that will be posted on the DNR website prior to the season opener.

The venison donation program will again be in place so that hunters can donate deer to food pantries throughout Wisconsin including in the CWD-Affected Area. Field dressed deer can be donated at no cost to the hunter in each county and will go to needy families within those counties. This is an extremely valuable program that fills an ever growing need. A list of participating butchers and pantry drop-off sites will be available on the DNR website, at local deer registration sites and at food pantry locations as we get closer to deer season.

Lastly, hunters in the Southern Farmland Zone which includes the entire Southern District are reminded that there will not be a Holiday Hunting season this year (during the Christmas holiday). Also, similar to last year, hunters should be aware that they will need to identify the county and land type for any antlerless tags that they receive at the time they purchase their license. In the Southern District, all counties have bonus antlerless permits available except Racine County in the far southeastern portion of the District.
With fall right around the corner, another Wisconsin waterfowl hunting season is near, and hunters have much to be excited about. “With good habitat conditions here in Wisconsin and on U.S. and Canadian prairies and a high continental total number of ducks, the outlook for fall 2015 is very promising,” said Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources migratory waterfowl biologist Kent Van Horn.

Van Horn said three primary sources of information regarding yearly waterfowl breeding conditions are used to determine the fall season structure for Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Breeding Waterfowl Survey was completed in May, and is very significant since a large proportion of ducks harvested in Wisconsin are also raised in Wisconsin.

Second, a cooperative survey organized by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources focuses on Canada geese that nest in Ontario but are harvested in Wisconsin.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service’s breeding waterfowl survey for the northern United States, Canada and Alaska is released each year in early July.

Kent Van Horn, DNR migratory game bird ecologist, 608-266-8841, Kent.VanHorn@Wisconsin.gov

Taylor Finger, DNR assistant migratory game bird ecologist, 608-261-6458, Taylor.Finger@Wisconsin.gov

Changes in 2015

- opening day shooting hours will now begin one-half hour before sunrise;
- Mississippi River Zone will open a week later, with a shorter split; and
- increase in daily bag limit for canvasbacks (from one bird to two).
Ducks

Waterfowl breeding areas in North America showed mostly fair to good conditions in 2015, and the duck breeding quality is expected to be high overall. Wetland conditions were below average in all regions of Wisconsin's breeding waterfowl survey in early May, but have improved greatly and are now at or above average – this should provide good brood rearing habitat.

The four most abundant ducks in Wisconsin's fall hunting harvest make up close to 70 percent of total harvest, and include mallards, wood ducks, green-winged teal and blue-winged teal. Van Horn notes that many of the mallards and wood ducks harvested in Wisconsin come from birds that breed in Wisconsin, while about two-thirds of the blue-winged teal harvested in Wisconsin are raised in other prairie regions. Most green-winged teal migrate to Wisconsin from northern boreal forests in Canada.

The continental breeding duck population estimate from USFWS for 2015 is 49.5 million – an increase from 2014 and the highest duck population estimate in the survey’s 60 year history. The recent trend of wet conditions, increasing duck numbers and liberal regulations are very encouraging and have led to continued excellent waterfowl hunting opportunities throughout the U.S. and Canada.

In Wisconsin, the spring waterfowl survey provided mixed results, with a total breeding population estimate of roughly 373,000 ducks. This estimate shows a decrease from 2014 and is below the long term average.

“These are population estimates, not exact counts, so changes of 20 percent (whether an increase or decrease) may not reflect any real change in the actual population and are best viewed as trends,” said Van Horn.

The trend in the total breeding duck population in Wisconsin has been relatively consistent the last ten years within the range of 500,000 total ducks. The mallard breeding population is averaging lower than 10 years ago and wood duck populations have been relatively stable. Blue-winged teal and “other duck” survey estimates

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2015 duck hunting season structure

Early Teal: September 1-7

Northern Zone: September 26 – Nov 24

Southern Zone: October 3 – October 11, October 17 – Dec 6

Mississippi River Zone: October 3 – 9; October 17 – Dec 8
have been more variable.

Mallards are the number one duck in the fall bag, and represent over 30 percent of total duck harvest in Wisconsin. The 2015 continental mallard population estimate of 11.6 million is the highest on record. The Wisconsin mallard population estimate of 176,000 saw an increase from 2014, but is considerably lower than the 1995-2005 average of 272,000 ducks.

The wood duck represents over 20 percent of the total fall harvest, and the 2015 breeding population estimate of 68,142 is down from 2014 and below the long-term average. The population has been stable over the last few years and little can be concluded from a one year drop. “Wood ducks continue to be an important component of Wisconsin’s breeding duck population and hunters’ fall bag,” said Van Horn.

The breeding wood duck population saw significant increases in the 1980s and early 1990s, and appears to be leveling off around 120,000 ducks. Based on improved water conditions and our best interpretation of the survey results, the department expects wood duck production in 2015 to be good and similar to recent years.

The continental blue-winged teal estimate of 8.5 million was the third highest for that species, while the 2015 Wisconsin blue-winged teal breeding population estimate of 59,000 is up from 2014. A trend in the state population estimate for blue-winged teal over the last ten years is not clear – challenging survey issues and high annual variation in population estimates present unique challenges. Roughly two-thirds of the blue-winged teal harvest during Wisconsin’s regular duck season is supported by teal that nest outside Wisconsin.

The outlook for other duck species in Wisconsin, including green-winged teal, redhead, pintail and wigeon is relatively good, and most populations saw stabilization or a slight increase from generally high levels in 2014. Scaup population estimates are similar to 2014 and slightly below the long-term average. It appears that scaup numbers have generally increased over the past several years. While current population estimates are below their historical average, scaup remain one of Wisconsin’s more numerous
duck species with an estimated total population of 4.4 million birds. The canvasback estimate of 800,000 saw an increase from 2014 and represents a 30 percent increase relative to the long-term average.

Overall, 2015 looks to be a good year for duck numbers and production across North America. In both 2014 and 2015, encouraging continental duck numbers mirrored good to excellent habitat conditions. Hunters are reminded that success in the fall will depend heavily upon weather, water conditions and preseason scouting.

**Season Structure and Planning**

A recent survey of Wisconsin duck hunters indicated that hunters who did not scout prior to hunting harvested an average of 4.8 ducks per season, while those who scouted once harvested 7.1 ducks, those who scouted twice harvested 8.1 and those who made three or more scouting trips harvested 14.7 ducks. While hunters cannot change the weather, they can vastly improve their odds by being flexible and scouting before and during the season.

In 2015, Wisconsin will take part in the second year of a three year experimental teal season. The season will be held September 1-7, and hunters will only be allowed to harvest blue-wing and green-wing teal, of which the daily bag limit will be 6. The continental population of blue-wing teal has grown in recent years, and a harvest assessment concluded that teal can sustain higher harvest beyond the regular duck season and existing early teal seasons. It is important to remember that this is an experimental season, and results will determine if Wisconsin is granted an operational early teal season. The key to the evaluation is the success that hunters have in properly identifying and harvesting teal. More information on the teal season and proper identification can be found on the department’s [waterfowl management page](#).

In 2015, opening day shooting hours will begin at one-half hour before sunrise. Wisconsin duck hunters previously supported a 9AM opening time and even a noon opening time in the past for shooting hours on the first day of the duck season. However, over the last several years the public opinion has been slowly shifting to favor a one-half "**Ducks** Continued on page 33."
Canada Geese

According to Van Horn, hunters can expect good Canada goose hunting opportunities, and recommends hunting early in the fall and adapting as geese change movement patterns throughout the season.

The 2015 Wisconsin breeding Canada goose population estimate of 119,000 is similar to 2014 and on par with the average over the last decade. Wisconsin’s resident breeding Canada goose population may be stabilizing at 120,000 after a long-term increase.

“We expect a healthy Canada goose population this fall, particularly for the Early September Canada goose season (September 1-15, 5 bird daily bag limit), which makes up one-third of our total statewide goose harvest” said Van Horn.

According to Van Horn, two populations of Canada geese represent most Wisconsin’s geese during the fall. Locally breeding Canada geese represent over 90 percent of the goose harvest for the early season and roughly 40 percent of harvest during the late regular goose season.

Much of the remaining 60 percent of regular season goose harvest is supported by a second population of Canada geese that breed along the Hudson Bay coast in northern Ontario. Although Wisconsin shares this population with other states, it is unique in that these birds comprise over half of the state’s annual harvest. In neighboring states, like
Minnesota, locally breeding birds comprise the majority of harvest. This breeding population of Canada geese appears to be below average levels, with an estimated 2015 breeding population of 226,544 – this is below 2014 estimates and the long term average.

The regular Canada goose hunting seasons in Wisconsin include the Exterior Zone season, which will again allow for 92 days of hunting and a two bird daily bag. When combined with 15 hunting days offered through the early season, this gives Wisconsin hunters the maximum number of days (107) allowed by international treaty.

In 2014, the Horicon Zone boundary changed, and areas west of Hwy 73 and north of Hwy 23 were removed from the Horicon Zone and added to the Exterior Zone. Last year also saw permit change in the Horicon Zone – hunters were required to punch/slit the permit for the date of kill (with the total not to exceed the season limit). Hunters are also required to report each goose harvested within the Horicon Zone within 48 hours of kill by calling 1-800-99-GOOSE (1-800-994-6673), similar to reporting in the Exterior Zone and Early goose season.

Early Canada goose season

The early Canada goose hunting season specifically targets locally breeding giant Canada geese, and is held before migratory geese begin to move into Wisconsin. Last fall’s harvest of 21,732 was similar to harvest in recent years.

“The early season has become a popular hunt and an important part of our resident Canada goose population management,” said Van Horn. “The early season now accounts for one-third of our total statewide goose harvest.

This statewide season (no zones) requires a separate permit and $3 fee and does not affect an individual’s ability to hunt in any zone during the regular season.

The Early Canada goose season will run statewide September 1-15 with a daily bag of five geese.

Youth Waterfowl Hunt

This special hunt is designed to provide an opportunity for young hunters to enjoy a weekend in the field and help recruit new hunters in Wisconsin. In recent years, close to 2,500 youth hunters have taken advantage of this opportunity, with an annual average harvest of roughly 7,000 ducks and 250 geese. This year’s youth hunt will take place September 19-20. Licenses and stamp requirements are waived for eligible young duck hunters (ages 10-15) during the youth hunt, but hunters must be HIP certified (free of charge). Youth who wish to harvest geese need an Early Canada goose season permit. Normal bag limits apply.

2015 Canada goose season structure:

North – September 16 – December 16

South – September 16 – October 11, and October 17 – December 21

Mississippi River Subzone: October 3 – 9; October 17 – January 7, 2016

The Horicon Zone season will last 92 days, with 12 harvest tags per hunter.

The Horicon Zone will be divided into two permit periods in 2015:

Period one: September 16 – November 1; and

Period two: November 2 – December 16.
In 2015, the dove hunting season will run from September 1 to November 29. The daily bag limit is 15 doves, and possession limits for doves are three times the daily bag limit.

Approximately 10,000 to 15,000 dove hunters are expected to take to the field during the season. More information regarding doves and DNR properties managed for dove hunting is available online.

Hunters are again being asked to examine harvested doves closely for any leg bands. For the eighth consecutive year, Wisconsin is participating in a national plan to monitor mourning dove populations for harvest management. Biologists set a goal of capturing and banding 850 doves at several locations throughout the state with a small aluminum United States Fish and Wildlife Service leg band. Hunters who harvest a banded dove are asked to report them to the Bird Banding Lab online at www.reportband.gov or by phone at 1-800-327-BAND (2263).

Based on recent estimates, the continental mourning dove population is roughly 300 million, making it one of the most abundant birds in North America. The 10-year population trend for the eastern management unit (states east of the Mississippi) has been stable, showing a 0.6 percent increase. Hunters should expect to see doves in numbers similar to past years.

Regulations and license requirements for dove hunting can be found in the 2015 early Canada goose, early teal and mourning dove hunting regulations, which is also available at any license vendor. Mourning doves are migratory game birds, so hunters must be HIP certified and hunt with a plugged shotgun that only holds three shells. Dove hunters must use non-toxic shot when hunting on federal or DNR-managed lands. Hunters who choose to use lead shot elsewhere should be aware that possession of lead shot would prohibit them from hunting waterfowl.

“Doves use a wide range of habitats, but fields with an abundance of weed seeds or grain, open gravel areas and water sources are all good locations to find doves,” said Van Horn. “Taking a kid dove hunting is the wing-shooting equivalent to taking them pan-fishing – it doesn’t require a lot of specialized gear and the potential for action makes it an experience they are not likely to forget.”
During the past 35 years, the woodcock population across its range in the Midwest and northeast U.S. has shown a slight decline, which biologists believe is primarily related to changes in young forest habitat. However, in Wisconsin there is no significant increase or decrease in the 10 year trend. Interest in pursuing the “timberdoodle” throughout Wisconsin’s forests remains high with close to 15,000 hunters entering the woods in search of woodcock each year. Wisconsin has ranked second or third in the nation for woodcock harvest in recent years, with 49,300 birds harvested in 2014. Overall, surveys in Wisconsin indicate a stable population. Hunters should expect to see woodcock numbers similar to the past few years and enjoy a quality fall hunt.

**NOTE:** HUNTERS MUST BE HIP CERTIFIED WHILE HUNTING WOODCOCK.

For more information, check out the 2015 regular season waterfowl regulations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kent Van Horn, DNR migratory game bird ecologist at 608-266-8841 or Taylor Finger, assistant migratory game bird ecologist at 608-261-6458.
Among the vast diversity of Wisconsin wildlife are a group of mammals known as “furbearers.” Furbearers have two types of hair—longer, stiffer, sleek guard hair and dense, fine hair known as underfur. For centuries, many of these animals have provided food and warmth to mankind. Beaver, coyote, raccoon, and muskrat are some of the more abundant and common species across Wisconsin. Otters are present statewide, while bobcat and fisher are beginning to expand southward and can occasionally be seen in the far southern portions of the state. American marten, a native state endangered furbearer, call remote sections of northern Wisconsin home.
Raccoons are common throughout Wisconsin and have especially high densities near urban areas. Raccoons are well-adapted to living near people and will take advantage of any food source they can find. Populations are highest in Wisconsin’s central and southern farmland regions, as reported by deer hunters in the annual deer hunter observation survey and DNR field staff, though localized populations can vary. Bill Hogseth, wildlife biologist for Eau Claire County, reports: “A few trappers have told me raccoon numbers seem to be down a bit. We are still seeing some unfortunate roadkills, but I’m getting fewer nuisance calls in 2015 than last year.”

Raccoon harvest statewide varies annually—they are typically the second-highest harvested furbearer in Wisconsin, following the muskrat. Harvest was high in 2012 and 2013, when pelt prices were high, and declined in 2014 as pelt prices dropped dramatically. A relatively mild winter in 2014-15 likely allowed for good survival rates in juvenile raccoons.

Local populations can fluctuate during spring floods as raccoons frequent riparian corridors. Raccoons are also susceptible to disease. Lindsey Long, DNR wildlife veterinarian, notes: “We routinely see localized outbreaks of Canine Distemper Virus, or CDV, which results in mortality in our raccoon population. This disease, as with all diseases, can have local population impacts, so it is important we monitor and document outbreaks whenever possible.”

A few raccoon carcasses submitted in 2014 and early 2015 came back as positive for CDV, including carcasses from Ashland and Douglas counties in the north and Racine County in the southeast. If you notice multiple dead raccoons this fall, contact your local wildlife biologist and help the department document emerging disease issues in furbearer species.

“Raccoons carry many diseases,” said Long. “Some, like CDV, are not transmissible to humans but can carry over to domestic pets. Others, like raccoon roundworm can infect people, so gloves should always be worn while handling carcasses and you should wash your hands frequently.” Since raccoons are abundant and occasionally considered a nuisance, they are an excellent species to pursue through permission to hunt or trap new properties—farmers are often welcoming of new harvesters. As a reminder, be sure to ask for permission early to help ensure you are ready for the season opener. Kris Johansen, DNR wildlife supervisor in Black River Falls, urges trappers and hunters "Raccoon" continued on page 45.

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**Resident Raccoon Season:**

October 17, 2015 – February 15, 2016

**Non-resident Raccoon Season:**

November 1, 2015 – February 15, 2016

**Bag Limit:** None

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**NOTE:** Mississippi River zone opens the day after duck seasons close or the second Monday in November (November 9), whichever occurs first, through February 15, 2016

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**Raccoons**
Otter

Otter are common furbearers and can be found throughout Wisconsin, but are not as abundant as beaver, raccoon, and muskrat. Current statewide population estimates are around 11,000. While this estimate is below the management goal of 13,000, it still suggests a good number of otters throughout the state.

Otters can be found on each of Wisconsin’s major river systems and they can move extensively up and down riverine systems, covering miles of streams and tributaries. According to DNR wildlife biologist Dianne Robinson, stationed in Milwaukee, “Milwaukee county residents sometimes spot otter along the northern branch of the Little Menomonee and Oak Creek. Otter, like all of our aquatic plants and animals, need clean water, and maintaining high water quality in our creeks is critical to maintaining healthy ecosystems, especially in our urban areas.”

The otter harvest is regulated, and as Brandon Stefanski, a wildlife technician from Wisconsin Rapids, notes that “having a permit system allows the department to hold long seasons without over harvesting this important predator.” Permits are issued based on annually adjusted quotas, estimated fall populations and expected success rates. In 2015–16, the harvest quota increased to 1,700 statewide.

Trappers have observed that most waters with a good food source hold otters and DNR field staff have reported that otter seem stable in most areas of the state. While quotas have been increasing, otter harvest has been well under quota for the last two years, possibly due to long, cold winters and low fur prices.

Aerial fixed-wing otter surveys are conducted each winter to document population trends. Tracks on snow (the dot-dash of otter movements) are recorded on 30 mile transects that overlap all counties. In 2014, a total of 38 routes were completed, which is the highest number of routes flown in the last several years. Surveys detected otter on 16 percent of routes in the north, which is down from the early
2000s, but up slightly from the late 2000s; 6 percent of routes in central Wisconsin, which is down from the early- and mid-2000s; and 3 percent of routes in the south, which is one of the lower detections for that zone since the survey started and a drop from 12 percent in 2013. Snow conditions, especially in the south, make routes challenging to complete with regularity, and options for new otter survey techniques are currently being evaluated by DNR research staff.

The deadline to apply for an otter permit is Aug.1—the drawing occurs shortly after the application deadline, and successful applicants should receive their permit by early September. Applicants can also monitor their online accounts to see if they were successful in the drawing through the Online Licensing Center.

For the second year, in addition to registering otter harvest with a conservation warden, successful trappers are required to report their harvest using a call-in system. Within 24 hours of harvest, successful permit holders must call 1-800-994-6673 and provide basic details regarding harvest. Otter carcasses are also required for 2015–16. Information from carcass collection every three years provides helpful management information regarding age, reproductive status and litter size.

**Beaver**

While spring trapping conditions were more moderate in the north, low fur prices and early freeze-up reduced trapper harvest last season. Beaver numbers on the Mississippi River seem to be regionally abundant, especially in the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge and Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge. To pursue trapping on these properties, contact the refuge offices at 507-452-4232 for the Upper Mississippi and 608-539-2311 ext. 16 for Trempealeau.

Trempealeau Refuge Manager Vickie Hirschboeck encourages trappers to attend their annual auction, and reminds trappers that they have several beaver units available and hold an auction for these units in October every year.

Zones A and B have higher levels of damage management control efforts, with beaver populations that have slightly declined or are beginning to stabilize at a lower population level.

Zone C, comprised of a large portion of central and southern Wisconsin, has variable populations depending on availability of habitat and water levels. For

**Beaver Season:**

- **Zone A (Northwest)**
  - November 7, 2015 – April 30, 2016

- **Zone B (Northeast)**
  - November 7, 2015 – April 30, 2016

- **Zone C (South)**
  - November 7, 2015 – March 31, 2016

- **Zone D (Mississippi River)**
  - Day after duck season closes to March 15, 2016

**Bag limit:** None
example, in the Fond du Lac area trappers have reported that beaver numbers seem to be increasing.

In fall 2014, helicopter surveys were conducted in zones A and B, resulting in an estimate of 17,270 colonies. This is roughly the same estimate seen in 2011 and a 43 percent decrease since the 1995 survey. The randomly selected plots of land are 4–6 square mile blocks, with 4–6 blocks per county. With the aid of helicopters, two observers look for active beaver signs, including food caches, fresh chews on trees, and/or recent dam building. Due to the high cost of these surveys, DNR research staff acquired satellite images of some of the survey blocks during the same time period as the helicopter surveys. These will be analyzed to help identify active colonies and counts and compare them to data gathered from helicopter surveys. If this survey provides comparable estimates and proves to be cost-effective, it may be an alternative survey method that can be applied statewide.

**Beaver Management Plan**

The current draft Beaver Management Plan outlines objectives for beaver management over the next 10 years, including improved research, goals for population management, strategies for habitat and damage management, beaver health monitoring, and education development. Population management goals include maintaining or slightly increasing beaver populations in Zones A and B, maintaining populations in Zone C and maintaining or slightly decreasing in Zone D.

The Beaver Task Force, made up of 24 agencies, tribes, and user groups, developed the plan over the last three years and will meet again in 2020 to review the most recent surveys, data, and objectives. The final plan should be available in late fall 2015—visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords “management plans” for more information.

**Young Forest Initiative**

A new program in north central Wisconsin called the Young Forest Initiative may provide opportunities for improvement in beavers’ preferred food sources, like aspen and willow, which may assist in long term goals of maintaining or slightly increasing beaver populations in that area. This partnership will provide guidance for management in appropriate areas to encourage young forests. To learn more about the Young Forest Initiative, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords “young forest”.

TOM SMYLIE/USFWS
Muskrat and Mink

Mink and muskrat populations appear to be faring relatively well in much of Wisconsin, though local populations can vary depending on water levels and wetland habitat. Good rains through the spring and summer should allow for good populations, except in localized areas where spring flooding may have occurred. Mink numbers appear low along the lower Fox River, where historic contamination issues may keep numbers low until restoration efforts are complete. In other parts of the state, mink seem to be doing well.

Paul Petersen, DNR wildlife technician at Crex Meadows in Burnett County, reports, “With good water levels, we expect fairly good muskrat numbers in most places except a few sections of the Upper North Fork, where draw downs have occurred.”

Muskrats are a concern on the Mississippi River—trappers and Fish and Wildlife Refuge staff have reported a decline within this area. However, nearby Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge encourages trappers to reduce muskrats causing dike damage by obtaining a special permit from the refuge office. Contact Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge for information regarding the property’s specific regulations and permit system at 608-539-2311 ext. 16.

According to Horicon Wildlife Area wildlife technician Chris Cole, “water levels remained stable on the marsh throughout spring and early summer, and the area has seen an increase in muskrats over the past year.” Concerns over water levels and two severe winters resulted in a reduction in trapping units at Horicon Wildlife Area in 2014, but muskrat numbers have rebounded well with a moderate winter and good spring water levels. Horicon staff anticipates more units will be open on the state’s side, barring a late summer drought. Harvest on the National Wildlife Refuge also increased last year, and muskrat numbers seem to be up on that end of the marsh as well. Harvest on these areas is by an open auction, where successful bidders receive special access permits and are subject to rigorous report requirements. Contact each area’s office for more information: Horicon NWR, 920-387-2658; Horicon DNR

“Muskrat and Mink” continued on page 45
American Marten

American martens, also known as pine martens, are a state protected mammal and currently the only furbearer on Wisconsin’s endangered species list. Reintroduced into the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests in northwest and north-central Wisconsin beginning in the 1970s, their numbers remain low. According to Jim Woodford, field operations section supervisor for the Natural Heritage Conservation program, “martens are a rare and unique member of our northern forest ecosystems that require additional conservation measures to remain in Wisconsin for future generations.”

Several American marten research projects are in progress. A recently concluded project in the Chequamegon evaluated the genetic diversity and survivorship of martens, with a focus on animals reintroduced from Minnesota in 2009–2011. A similar project to evaluate survivorship and genetic diversity began in the Nicolet this past year that will attempt to evaluate gene flow between Michigan’s marten and the Wisconsin population. Additionally, a study has been initiated through Purdue University to simulate potential dispersal corridors for martens throughout the upper Midwest to see how Wisconsin populations may be linked to Michigan and Minnesota. Monitoring efforts are ongoing, and include winter track surveys, den box monitoring and hair snare sampling.
Two exciting discoveries related to American marten were made earlier this year when a Red Cliff tribal biologist documented a marten on a trail camera on the Red Cliff Reservation in northern Bayfield County and the National Park Service documented marten on trail cameras on the Apostle Islands. Marten were introduced to the Apostle Islands in 1953, with no sightings documented since the early 1970s, until recent trail camera images captured their presence. Biologists from Red Cliff and the National Park Service, in cooperation with Northland College and UW-Madison, are hoping to collect genetic samples from these elusive animals. This information may determine if they are related to mainland marten (from Minnesota) or those introduced on The Apostles in the 1950s (from Colorado).

Since they are state endangered, harvest of American marten is not allowed and special trapping restrictions apply within Wisconsin’s two Marten Protection Areas. These special restrictions allow for regulated take of several other furbearers while protecting marten and are found in our trapping regulations (WM-002). Following these restrictions is critically important to the future of American martens in Wisconsin.

Anyone with a marten observation should contact their local wildlife biologist or Jim Woodford 715-365-8856 or via email at James.Woodford@Wisconsin.gov.

Stone Marten

A “cousin” of Wisconsin’s American marten, the stone marten is a native of Europe and first appeared in southeastern Wisconsin nearly 70 years ago as a result of an escape or release of specimens from a fur farm in the Burlington area. In recent years, the only sightings have been in the Southern Kettle Moraine area. According to Jonathan Pauli, an assistant professor with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, “You can usually tell a stone marten from an American marten by the throat patch, because stone marten have a white throat patch while our native marten has an orange or tawny colored throat patch.”

Stone marten and American marten range do not currently overlap in Wisconsin and as a non-native species, stone marten can be harvested. Dr. Pauli and the DNR are interested in the presence and distribution of stone marten. If you observe or harvest a stone marten, please notify a local wildlife biologist or Dr. Pauli at 608-890-0285. For more information, visit http://labs.russell.wisc.edu/pauli/.
Fisher populations have been shifting over the past decade. While northern counties like Ashland and Bayfield saw high harvest rates in the past, harvest in those counties has declined to just a few animals a year. Clark, Dunn, and Chippewa counties have become the top counties for fisher harvest in the state. Populations in the central forests (Fisher Zone E) and southern two-thirds of the state (Fisher Zone F) seem to be increasing, and quotas have reflected these changes in recent years.

Zones A and B include both areas with good fisher populations and those that have experienced fisher declines. This makes balancing quotas in these zones more challenging. Zone estimates based on population modeling suggest numbers have stabilized in Zone A, while Zone B remains well under goal. According to Steve Hoffman, DNR wildlife supervisor at Crex Meadows, “Fisher seem to be doing well in Polk, Barron, and parts of Burnett counties, but Bayfield and Douglas counties have not seen good fisher populations for the last several years.”

The annual deer hunter observation survey documents fisher observations as low throughout the state. This survey has shown that most fisher observations come from the central farmland region of the state, followed by the central and northern forests. Field staff and trapper observations seem to mirror these observations, as the west-central counties appear to offer the best opportunity for fisher trapping as populations appear to be higher in these areas.

Like otter, fisher harvest must be reported within 24 hours of harvest by calling 1-800-994-6673. An automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest. Harvested fisher must be registered in-person with a conservation warden. Skulls will continue to be collected statewide.

Fisher Season

October 17–December 31, 2015 for all zones

Bag Limit
One per permit

Application Deadline
August 1
Badger

The badger is a protected animal in Wisconsin, and there is currently no regulated harvest. Once thought to be most associated with sandy prairies, recent research from UW-Milwaukee has documented badgers in every county in Wisconsin, and genetic evaluation has shown good gene flow throughout the state. This suggests badgers are doing quite well in Wisconsin and populations are healthy and vibrant. In some northern counties, badgers are a common nuisance species. According to Ashland County wildlife biologist Todd Naas, his region receives about a dozen calls a year about nuisance badgers.

Badger dens are easily seen along roadsides and hillsides, with large areas of excavated dirt in front of oblong den openings. Another research project in southwest Wisconsin studying habitat use among badgers should be finalized in the coming year.

Raccoon

Continued from p 37.

to “Make sure to do your homework with pre-season scouting, and obtain permission from landowners well in advance. Pre-season efforts from hunters and trappers can provide for a productive and efficient experience.”

MAKE SURE TO DO YOUR HOMEWORK WITH PRE-SEASON SCOUTING, AND OBTAIN PERMISSION FROM LANDOWNERS WELL IN ADVANCE

The raccoon season opens statewide for residents Oct. 17, with the exception of the Mississippi River Zone, where the season opens with the muskrat and mink season. The non-resident raccoon trapping season runs from Nov. 1 to Feb. 15, 2016.

Muskrat and Mink

Continued from p 41.

Wildlife Area, 920-387-7860.

Muskrat research is being initiated at Horicon, including aerial imagery to attempt to count muskrat houses as well as disease surveillance and reproductive evaluations. If you are on the marsh and find any dead muskrats, please contact the respective local staff at numbers listed above.

Wildlife biologists regularly get calls from landowners about muskrats digging into banks and dikes. The department encourages those landowners to contact local nuisance trappers to help mitigate this damage. If you are experiencing muskrat damage, or have interest in being on the nuisance trapper list, visit the Wisconsin Trappers Association website at wistrap.org and select the “nuisance animal removal” tab. Nuisance wildlife guidelines are available at dnr.wi.gov, keywords “nuisance wildlife.”

NICK MYATT, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Coyotes

Coyotes, Wisconsin’s second largest native canids, are well-established throughout the state. Coyotes easily adapt to humans and are frequently seen in urban areas. In 2014, a University of Wisconsin-Madison research project was initiated to study Madison’s urban coyotes and red foxes. According to graduate student Marcus Mueller, “We’re using this project to learn more about urban canids and educate the public about these unique, interesting animals.” For more information, visit [http://uwurbancanidproject.weebly.com](http://uwurbancanidproject.weebly.com) or by find them on Facebook at [https://www.facebook.com/uwurbancanidproject](https://www.facebook.com/uwurbancanidproject).

Coyotes are abundant, and landowners often request their removal for nuisance reasons. Farmers, especially, are often willing to allow trappers and hunters access to reduce coyotes around livestock. Early permission, quality scouting and well-placed traps will result in greater success this fall.

**Coyote and all Fox species trapping season:**

Oct 17, 2015 - Feb 15, 2016

**Coyote hunting Season**
Year round

**Fox hunting season**
Oct 17, 2015 - Feb 15, 2016

**Bag Limit**
None
Gray Fox

Trapper harvest of gray fox has been in the 1,200–1,500 range for the last few years, with estimated hunter harvest averaging 4,000–7,000. This elusive creature, the smallest of Wisconsin’s four canines, prefers forests with deciduous trees like oaks, compared to its larger brethren the red fox which often prefer more open habitats. Gray foxes, like raccoons, are susceptible to canine distemper virus outbreaks and several gray fox carcasses examined from Douglas and Manitowoc counties tested positive for CDV in 2014 and early 2015. This can affect local populations, and the department strongly encourages anyone that finds dead gray foxes to report the sighting to a local wildlife biologist. Trappers report that gray fox numbers seem down in the south-central portions of the state, but harvest in parts of central Wisconsin remains stable. Deer hunter observations in 2014 reported the most gray fox sightings in the Southern Farmland Zone, while the lowest observation rate was seen in the Central Forest Zone. Visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “wildlife reports” for the full deer hunter observation report.

Red Fox

Red fox populations have been a cause for concern for many hunters and trappers in recent years, as numbers seem to have declined in some areas. While harvest is not at levels seen in the 1980s, it has generally fallen between 7,000 and 9,000 since the early 2000s, with the exception of a bump in estimated harvest to over 17,000 in 2011. Winter track surveys have shown a slight increase over the years in the northern portions of the state, while the department has little data for the southern portions of the state. Red fox observations by deer hunters were highest in the central and southern farm-land zones. Southern portions of the state, especially along “edges” where two or more habitat types meet will likely offer the best opportunities for hunting and trapping red foxes this fall.
Bobcat

The Northern Zone bobcat population increased through the early 2000s—this was followed by a decline and the population has since stabilized. Population modeling estimates the current population at 2,400, which is within the established goal of 2,000–3,000. The Southern Bobcat Zone was opened for the first time last fall. It will take a few years of data collection and research before the department is able to establish a population model for this region. Bobcat carcasses are collected annually and provide critical management information, particularly within the Southern Zone population.

Similar to fisher and river otter, a limited-permit system is in place for bobcats. The preference-point system provides a continuous applicant with a bobcat tag roughly every seven to eight years. In addition to two zones, the bobcat harvest season is split between two distinct time periods, with permits valid only for the selected season. When applying for a bobcat tag, applicants will need to request either the early season (Oct. 15–Dec. 25, 2015) or the late season (Dec. 26–Jan. 31, 2016) for the zone to which they apply.

The addition of a second time period has increased harvest opportunity in better snow conditions to trail bobcats with dogs, resulting in higher success rates and longer wait-times for permits. Permit levels are calculated using previous success rates for each specific time period. The majority of bobcat harvest occurs in the second time period for both the Northern and Southern zones with the aid of dogs, and trapping remains the predominant method of harvest in the first time period in both zones. Harvest in the southern zone primarily occurred in the central portions of the state, where bobcat densities are greater than in the far south. Bobcat sightings in the south are increasing, with bobcats becoming more frequent on trail cameras in the southwest Wisconsin and occasional roadkill being reported in the southeast portion of the state.

Similar to fisher and otter, bobcat must be tagged at the point of harvest and registered in-person with

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<td><strong>Bag Limit</strong></td>
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In addition to registering bobcat harvest with a conservation warden, successful hunters and trappers are required to report their harvest using a call-in system. Within 24 hours of harvest, successful permit holders must call 1-800-994-6673. An automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest. This information is critical in monitoring harvest to ensure this valuable resource is not over-harvested.

Additional Responsibilities

Incidental take

Trappers are required to turn in incidentally trapped animals to local conservation officers. They can use the 1-800-TIP-WDNR hotline (1-800-847-9367) to report incidentals. These specimens are used in furbearer research and training workshops. Often pelts are provided for educational purposes, but if pelts are sold, the proceeds are used in our growing trapper education program. Scott Zimmermann, president of the Wisconsin Trappers Association encourages trappers to turn in incidentals, adding “It’s easy when you use the tip line, it’s important, and it’s the right thing to do.”

Right-of-Way Trapping

Right-of-way trapping is complicated. Who owns the land along Wisconsin’s roadways can vary a lot and over a short distance. All Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) roadways are not open to trapping, as per DOT policy. County and township roads may be owned by the local unit of government, or the adjacent landowner, depending on whether the particular locale is fee-acquired or an easement. Always get landowner permission before hunting or trapping. Know who owns that land before you venture forth or make trap sets. Responsible actions now are critical for continued hunting and trapping opportunity in the future.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Trapping

In a progressive effort to improve the science of furbearer management, the State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Trappers Association, Wisconsin Conservation Congress and individual trappers have been actively involved in an international effort to develop BMPs (Best Management Practices) for Trapping. This is one of the largest collective trap research efforts...
ever undertaken, with the final product being information and suggestions that each state, tribe, and their trappers can use to improve animal welfare and trapping in general, but specifically, in their trapper education programs.

The Wisconsin DNR and the Wisconsin Trappers Association encourages all trappers to use this research when they are selecting traps as these documents can recommend traps that have proven to be both humane and efficient at catching animals, two things of great importance to trappers. John Olson, Furbearer Specialist is excited to report that: “As of June 2014 we have a science-based, published document for all furbearers in the lower 48 states, from wolves to weasels.” You can find these 22 BMP studies and much more at [www.fishwildlife.org](http://www.fishwildlife.org) under the “furbearer management” section of the “focus areas” tab.

**Trapper Education**

Anyone who has not purchased a Wisconsin trapping license prior to 1992 or is not a farmer as defined in statute is required to take an approved Trapper Education Course. Courses are offered throughout the state by dedicated Wisconsin Trappers Association member volunteers, with roughly 50–60 classes being offered every year. According to Geriann Albers, Assistant Furbearer Specialist, “If you have interest in regulated trapping, plan ahead and enroll in one of these valuable courses. The courses are very hands-on with demos and trap setting and cover the basic of trapping, trapper ethics and responsibility, BMPs, rules and regulations, furbearer management and proper fur handling.”

The course is $12 and includes a trapping license for your first license year. There is also a correspondence course for those unable to attend an in-person course. Visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov), keywords “Trapper Ed” for more information.
A LOOK BACK IN TIME

If you like history or just like looking at cool photos, you'll want to check out a newly-released collection of DNR photographs. You'll find photos like these. The collection is a subset of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections and is the first 500 of what will eventually be 2,200 black and white photos from the 1930s to the 1970s, showing Wisconsinites enjoying and working to protect the state's natural resources. Check it out for yourself here: uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/WI/DNRPhotos.

Two hunters with their dogs preparing for a pheasant hunt in 1939. Photo by Dorothy Cassoday.


Six-point buck killed with bow and arrow by 12-year-old boy in 1953. Photo by Dean Tvedt.

Hunter looking at a “You’re welcome to hunt on the farm” sign, while behind him is a “No trespassing” sign in 1953. Photo by Dean Tvedt.
Plan Your Fall Hunt with FFLIGHT

In 2014, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources launched the Fields & Forest Lands Interactive Gamebird Hunting Tool (FFLIGHT). This online map is designed to help hunters locate prime habitat on public lands for ruffed grouse, woodcock, pheasants and doves.

The FFLIGHT tool features an interactive map where hunters can locate young aspen forests and lowland alder suitable for hunting ruffed grouse and woodcock. FFLIGHT also shows locations of state properties stocked with pheasants, and just in time for the upcoming dove hunting season, bird hunters in Wisconsin can now find every managed dove field on DNR managed land with ease. Topographic maps and aerial photos of hunting locations are available for download or print. A mobile version of FFLIGHT allows hunters to access this information with a smartphone or mobile device afield.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT DNR.WI.GOV AND SEARCH KEYWORD “FFLIGHT.”**

**Krista McGinley, DNR assistant upland wildlife ecologist, 608-261-8458, Krista.McGinley@Wisconsin.gov**
This fall, 100,700 wild turkey permits will be available to hunters – an increase of 4,000-permits from the 96,700 offered in 2014. Permit availability in Zone 2 has been increased by 4,000 in order to meet hunter demand and provide additional hunting opportunity.

Leftover Permits & Extended Season

Following the 2015 fall turkey permit drawing, remaining permits will go on sale Saturday, Aug. 22 at 10 a.m. Hunters may purchase one leftover permit per day until sold out or the season ends. The fall 2015 season will run from Sept. 12 through Nov. 19 for all permit holders, with an extended season in Zones 1-5 only from Nov. 30 through Dec. 31.

Bag Limit

The 2015 fall bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per fall turkey permit (also known as a carcass tag).

Turkey registration in Wisconsin changed considerably in fall 2011. The previous system, which required hunters to transport their turkey to a local registration station, has been replaced with convenient online and phone-in registration options. Hunters can register their turkey by calling 1-888-HUNT-WIS (1-888-486-8947) or by visiting dnr.wi.gov and searching keyword “turkey registration.”

Registration is still mandatory, and hunters have until 5 p.m. the day after harvest to register their bird.

Brood counts will be available in September and will provide additional information regarding this spring and summer’s reproductive levels.

Turkey Tactics

The restoration of turkeys in Wisconsin ranks as one of the greatest wildlife management success stories in our state’s history. Absent from Wisconsin’s landscape as recently as the 1970s, our spring turkey harvests now rank among the largest in the nation. Wild turkeys have proven surprisingly tolerant of harsh winter weather as they have become established throughout northern Wisconsin. After 20 years of rapidly increasing population and harvest, turkey numbers in the state appear to be stabilizing at levels suitable to the available habitat. Turkey population numbers and harvests will likely ebb and flow near current levels in response to natural factors like weather and food availability. Hunters can expect some annual variation in both their personal success and overall turkey harvest.

Fall turkey hunters can maximize their chances for success by learning about turkey behavior and the wild turkey annual cycle. In the fall, there is a shift in habitat use, with turkeys moving

**Wild Turkey Continued on page 61**

**BY THE NUMBERS: 2014 TURKEY HUNT**

- Total number of turkey permits available in 2014: 334,465
- Total number of turkey permits issued in 2014: 273,204
- Overall success rate for the 2014 spring turkey season: 19.9%
- Overall success rate for the 2014 fall turkey season: 6.7%
Visitors to DNR’s ring-necked pheasant page this fall will find a 2015 pheasant stocking information sheet, which identifies public hunting grounds slated for pheasant stocking. The department plans to stock 89 public hunting grounds with approximately 75,000 pheasants in 2015 (similar to 2014 efforts). Please note that these stocking numbers are preliminary, and final numbers will not be known until after the season has ended.

This year’s pheasant hunting regulations can be found in the 2015 Wisconsin Small Game Hunting Regulations booklet. Hunters will need to purchase a 2015 Pheasant Stamp and small game license and make sure they know which public hunting grounds allow hen pheasant hunting (these are referred to as Hen/Rooster Areas) and which close at 2 p.m. on weekdays between Oct. 19 (the third day of the season) and Nov. 3.

Special permits and leg tags are no longer required when hunting Hen/Rooster Areas. However, hunters who clean pheasants while in the field must keep a wing or the head attached to the carcass while in the field and during transport.

The statewide ring-necked pheasant survey was redesigned in 2013 in order to ensure accurate data collection, the efficient use of resources and more reliable estimates of pheasant abundance. Preliminary results from the 2015 survey estimate that there were 707 pheasants observed along survey routes, up from the estimated 547 roosters observed along the same routes in 2014. The preliminary number of pheasants recorded during the first three minutes of each stop in 2015 (0.45) was also higher than in 2014 (0.30), though still slightly below the five-year average of 0.48 birds per stop in 2008-2012. However, this year marks the highest average number of pheasants heard per stop under the redesigned survey protocol. Estimated pheasant abundance along survey routes was highest in the west-central portion of the state (St. Croix and surrounding counties).

Each year, pheasant abundance in Wisconsin is indexed using a rural mail carrier survey. In late April, mail carriers record the number of pheasants observed while driving. The number of pheasants seen per 100 miles driven by rural mail carriers was 0.33 in 2015, the same as in 2014, and still below the long-term mean. In 2015, the number of rural mail carriers participating in the survey decreased 1.8 percent.

Brood survey information for 2015 will be available in September. Look for pheasant survey results on the “wildlife reports” page on the department’s website.

Temperatures this winter were relatively mild until late February and early March, when much of the state experienced temperatures well below zero. Wisconsin did see several inches of rain from various storms during late May and early June, however, precipitation levels from mid-June through mid-July were average or slightly below average in much of the state and provided good brood-rearing conditions. Overall production estimates won’t be available until brood surveys are completed and summarized later this summer.
A long-term reduction in the availability of stable grassland cover has continued to contribute to an overall decline in ring-necked pheasant populations. Enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program, a U.S. Department of Agriculture program which pays landowners to retire their cropland for 10- to 15-year periods and plant permanent cover like grass or trees, has declined significantly in Wisconsin. CRP enrollment in the state peaked in the mid-1990s at more than 700,000 acres, but in recent years high crop prices have pushed enrollment downward to approximately 263,000 acres in 2014. CRP has been shown to provide important habitat for pheasants and other grassland wildlife, and the loss of CRP and other grassland habitat in recent years is likely the primary factor affecting pheasant populations statewide.

Given the loss of grassland and wetland acres on the landscape and concurrent declines in pheasant numbers, hunters may need to scout to locate birds. Hunters who wish to pursue wild pheasants should look for landscapes that include a mix of several cover types. Agricultural areas composed of at least 10-15 percent grassland, or idle ground with wetlands and/or shrublands available to provide winter cover are most likely to hold pheasants.

During the 2014 season, an estimated 46,855 hunters pursued pheasants, spending 463,042 days afield and harvesting 294,483 pheasants. Participation and harvest estimates reflect the pursuit of both wild and stocked pheasants. Fond du Lac, Jefferson and Kenosha counties harvested the most pheasants in 2014.

FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING PHEASANTS IN WISCONSIN, SEARCH KEYWORD “PHEASANT.”
Ruffed Grouse

Each spring, biologists, wardens, members of the Ruffed Grouse Society and many others travel survey routes to record ruffed grouse drumming activity. Drumming is the sound produced by a male grouse during the spring breeding season, with the intention of attracting a female. A male will display on a drumming log and rapidly beat his wings to produce this sound.

Ruffed grouse drumming surveys have been used since 1964 to monitor ruffed grouse population trends. Surveys begin 30 minutes before sunrise and consist of 10 stops at assigned points – surveyors listen for four minutes for the distinctive thumping sounds made by drumming male grouse. Surveyors monitored 88 routes this year. Brood data is also collected throughout the summer – these data will be available in early September. Collectively, these surveys help indicate grouse production levels and population trends in Wisconsin.

Ruffed grouse enthusiasts should expect bird encounters similar to last year, according to the recently completed roadside ruffed grouse survey.

WE SHOULD START TO SEE INCREASES IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS AS THE GROUSE POPULATION MOVES TOWARD THE NEXT PEAK

“While we did see some continued regional declines, our roadside survey index to track ruffed grouse populations is essentially unchanged from 2014,” said DNR wildlife biologist Brian Dhuey. “Ruffed grouse populations are known to rise and fall over a nine to 11 year cycle, and the last peak in Wisconsin’s cycle occurred in 2011. Survey results suggest that we have reached the low point in the population cycle and we should start to see increases in the next few years as the grouse population moves toward the next peak.”

While the number of drums heard per stop statewide in 2015 was similar to last year, there were some notable differences among regions. While one of the primary regions for grouse in the state, the northern region, showed a 13 percent drop in the number of drums heard per stop, the primary region in central Wisconsin showed a 38 percent increase.

Weather conditions influence drumming activity by male...
grouse, and most observers felt weather conditions were conducive to accurate surveys this spring. Surveyors rated the overall survey conditions as “excellent” on 65 percent of transects runs, compared to 56 percent in 2014. Surveyors rated 2015 conditions as “fair,” the lowest available weather condition rating, five percent of the time in 2015, compared to seven percent in 2014.

According to DNR assistant upland wildlife ecologist Krista McGinley, maturation of southern Wisconsin’s forest community in recent decades and the resulting loss of dense, brushy areas that grouse need for cover has resulted in lower numbers of grouse in the region in recent decades. Results from the 2015 survey show that grouse populations in both the southwest and southeast region remain well below historic levels.

“Ruffed grouse are closely linked to young forests,” said McGinley. “While grouse enthusiasts often focus on numbers in a single year, the long-term health of grouse is dependent upon the availability of the dense young forest cover they require. In Wisconsin, we are working to provide the habitat needed to benefit ruffed grouse and many other wildlife species through proactive approaches to forest management that will maximize the health and diversity of forest communities.”

Dan Dessecker, Director of Conservation Policy for the Ruffed Grouse Society, reminds hunters of the importance of weather in grouse population dynamics.

“While cold temperatures and deep snow are generally hard on resident wildlife populations, ruffed grouse often thrive in such winters,” noted Dessecker. “This past winter saw crusted snow conditions across much of Wisconsin, and this can limit a grouse’s ability to burrow into the snow where it is protected from cold temperatures and predators. On the other hand, temperatures this winter were relatively mild until late February and early March when we experienced temperatures well below zero. Snow depths don’t really hamper grouse from feeding in the winter because they eat primarily buds from aspen and other trees at this time of year.”

According to Dessecker, weather conditions, especially during the brood rearing period in late May and early June, also play an important role in the fall ruffed grouse numbers. Newly-hatched grouse chicks are very sensitive to chilling, and warm, dry conditions can provide for high survival during the first few weeks of life.

“Grouse hunters are used to the cyclic nature of ruffed grouse populations, and know that grouse can still be found in the best cover during low periods,” continued Dessecker. “Hunters might have to work a bit harder to flush birds, but sunny October days with your dog in the north woods are tough to beat, and Wisconsin still has some of the best grouse hunting in the country. “Ruffed Grouse” Continued on page 61.

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**Ruffed Grouse Season**

**Zone A (northwestern Wisconsin):**

Daily Bag: 5

**Zone B (extreme southeastern Wisconsin):**
October 17 – December 8

Daily Bag: 2

The possession limit is twice the daily bag limit (10 birds for Zone A and four birds for Zone B)
Bobwhite Quail

Data regarding male bobwhite quail densities have been collected biennially since 1991 (annual surveys initially began in 1949) using roadside surveys along predetermined transects in the 15-county primary bobwhite quail range. The survey records the number of whistling males observed during a two-minute period.

While the 2015 survey results indicate a very slight increase (from 0.015 in 2013 to 0.016 in 2015), the overall trend in the bobwhite quail population still shows a significant decline throughout southern and western Wisconsin. Hunters are encouraged to check the wildlife reports page on the department website for more information.

Bobwhite quail were long considered to be a species that coexisted nicely with agriculture – high quail densities were once common in the farm country of southern and west-central Wisconsin. Quail favor highly-interspersed habitats often found on small farms with numerous small fields, idle lands, small grains and bushy fence rows providing annual habitat and fulfilling foraging needs. Large-scale mechanized farming has greatly simplified the landscape in farmed regions. The popularity of enlarged fields, removal of fence rows and emphasis on row crops has led to diminished habitat support for quail and other grassland-dependent wildlife. As a result, quail populations have experienced a decline across North America in the last 25 years. These declines have been dramatic in states like Wisconsin on the northern edge of the species’ range. Quail are extremely susceptible to the effects of deep snow and cold during winter.

The department has been working with numerous partners for decades to improve quail habitat conditions in agricultural regions through the implementation of Farm Bill conservation programs, like the Conservation Reserve Program. Farm Bill programs have been instrumental in producing quality habitat on the Wisconsin landscape.

Given a long-term loss of appropriate habitat, coupled with occasional severe winter weather during the past several years, quail are unevenly distributed at very low densities across their former range in Wisconsin. Hunters interested in pursuing quail should focus on areas with significant grassland interspersed with dense winter cover.

**BY THE NUMBERS:**

**BOBWHITE QUAIL HUNT**

Estimated bobwhite quail harvest for the 2014-2015 season: **1,059**

The number of people hunting bobwhite quail in 2014-2015: **488**

Percentage of small game hunters pursuing bobwhite quail in 2014-2015: **0.2%**

Estimated total number of bobwhite quail hunting days in 2014-2015: **3,045**
Cottontail rabbits are a very popular small game animal and provide for great recreational hunting opportunities throughout Wisconsin. Rabbits are extremely prolific, but their annual reproduction is usually dependent upon local weather conditions during the breeding season. Portions of the state with adequate rainfall and plenty of green, succulent vegetation should see a high level of rabbit production and quality hunting opportunities this fall.

Surveys for cottontail rabbits are conducted in unison with the biennial bobwhite quail survey described above. Each cottontail rabbit observed on bobwhite quail survey routes is recorded. Results of the 2015 survey indicate that the number of cottontail rabbits recorded per stop increased from 0.17 in 2013 to 0.29 in 2015. Hunters are encouraged to check the wildlife reports page on the department website for more information.

During the 2014-2015 hunting season, an estimated 26,112 hunters spent 121,024 days pursuing rabbits, accounting for an estimated harvest of 93,284 cottontail rabbits.
Many small game hunters who spend time in the dense forests of northern Wisconsin enjoy pursuing snowshoe hares. Snowshoe hares are widely distributed in association with mixtures of deciduous and evergreen cover close to the ground.

An estimated 4,149 hunters spend 14,764 days chasing hares, with an estimated harvest of 3,244 hares.

Squirrels are a popular game species and can provide great early-season hunting opportunities, especially for beginners. Squirrel production and the resulting harvest opportunities are strongly tied to the previous year’s mast production - hunters should focus on these locations when choosing a hunting spot.

During the 2014-2015 season, mail-in survey results indicated that 48,807 small game hunters pursued squirrels, spending 301,236 days afield and harvesting an estimated 347,116 squirrels.

**Snowshoe Hare Season**
Open year-round statewide with no bag limit or possession limit.

**Gray & Fox Squirrel Season**
Bag limit: Daily bag limit of 5, possession limit of 10
Wild Turkey

Continued from page 53

from more open field habitats into forested areas. Turkey flocks typically make use of areas dominated by oak and hickory – this habitat shift coincides with food availability when succulent vegetation and insects become less available and mast becomes more available.

In poor mast production years, turkey flocks are drawn to areas where food can be found. This often leads to turkeys frequenting farmland and open fields, where they become more visible and vulnerable to hunters. Turkey hunters should monitor mast crops where they hunt and determine where turkeys may be feeding. Spending a few evenings prior to turkey season locating roosting areas will help hunters find birds when the season begins.

Most turkey hunting occurs on private land, so it is important for hunters to make sure landowner relationships remain a high priority. Landowners in Wisconsin are often willing to allow hunters to use their land, and Wisconsin hunters have continued to set the standard high in forming valuable relationships with these landowners.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEARCH KEYWORD “TURKEY.”

Ruffed Grouse

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Grouse hunters are very much in tune with grouse numbers relative to the population cycle – the number of hunting days spent in the field and overall harvests vary significantly from year to year. Preliminary ruffed grouse harvest data for the 2015-16 season show that 73,210 hunters reported spending 614,256 days in the field hunting grouse, with approximately 254,826 grouse harvest. Highest harvests were reported by hunters in Price, Forest, and Marinette counties.

Hunters may need to scout different sites in order to find pockets where birds can be found. Ruffed grouse use a variety of habitat types, but young, early-succession forests are most important when trying to find grouse. Finding the densest woody cover available is often the best way to locate grouse in a new hunting area. Checking harvested birds’ crops will show hunters what grouse are currently eating and may also suggest likely hunting locations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING RUFFED GROUSE, INCLUDING 2014 AND 2015 DRUMMING REPORTS, SEARCH KEYWORDS “RUFFED GROUSE.”
The past six seasons have ranked as the top six bear harvests in Wisconsin history, and this trend is likely to continue with a record number of permits available in 2015 (10,690).

The black bear population has remained stable throughout most of the state, which should allow the current level of hunting opportunity to be sustained into the future. The bear population has continued to slowly expand southward, providing increased harvest opportunities for bear hunters in central and southern Wisconsin. In addition to continued southern expansion in Wisconsin, black bears are being seen in areas where they had not previously been recorded since extirpation in the early 1900s, with sightings in Illinois and Iowa becoming more common (but still relatively rare). The first confirmed modern day report of bear cubs was recorded in
northeast Iowa in 2014, and Indiana recorded the presence of black bears for the first time since the 1800s in 2015.

This year represents another record number of applicants, with more than 109,000 applications received in 2015 (compared to 108,271 in 2014 and 106,500 in 2013). Bear populations have remained relatively stable at over 25,000 bears statewide. “With a large bear population, high harvest levels and high hunter success rates, Wisconsin is one of the best places to hunt bears in the United States,” said DNR large carnivore specialist David MacFarland.

Bear hunters should be aware of some important changes to bear hunting regulations in 2015. Specifically, state law was recently changed to eliminate the Class B bear license. A Class B license is no longer required to bait bears, train dogs to track bear, act as a back-up shooter, or assist hunters with pursuing bears provided that a person does not shoot, shoot at, capture, take or kill the bear unless acting as a back-up shooter. Any individual may now participate in bear hunting and training activities without a Class B bear license any time those activities are permitted and they are in compliance with applicable regulations.

Also new in 2015, hunters must submit a bear tooth directly to the department in lieu of registration stations. Hunters who successfully drew a bear harvest permit were provided with instructions and materials needed to submit a tooth. These age data are used as part of a population model that helps estimate the size of Wisconsin’s bear population. “Wisconsin bear hunters have a long history of complying with registration and tooth submission requirements, we trust this will continue with our new registration system” said David MacFarland.

For more information regarding tooth collection, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “bear registration.”

The number of preference points required to draw a bear harvest permit in 2014 ranged from one in Zone C to nine in Zone B. “Although wait times may be several years in some of the northern zones, Zone C gives hunters a great opportunity to participate more frequently,” said MacFarland. Wisconsin consistently ranks as one of the top harvest states in the country.

In 2014, hunters harvested 4,526 bears – the third highest harvest in state history. Bear Management Zone D led all zones with 1,444 bears harvested, followed by Zone A (1,315), Zone C (1,024) and Zone B (738). Bayfield County led all counties with 445 bears harvested, followed by Price (321), Rusk (307) and Sawyer (291). In 2014, hunter harvest success was highest in Zone B, with a 75 percent success rate. Zone B was followed by Zone D (65% success), Zone A (64% success) and Zone C (20% success).
“The 66 percent success rate throughout the northern forests and the statewide average of roughly 44 percent are some of the best success rates in the country,” said DNR assistant large carnivore ecologist Adam Murkowski.

Gun hunters harvested 3,776 bears in 2014, while bow hunters accounted for 695 bears. A majority of bears were harvested using bait (3,395), but the use of both dogs and bait (995) and neither dogs nor bait (69) were also relatively successful.

In 2015, 10,690 permits were issued to hunters. The department’s current management objectives include population stabilization in zones A, B and C and a slight population reduction in Zone D. In zones A, B and D, the first week of the harvest season will be reserved for hunters using dogs to pursue bear. In turn, the last week of the season is reserved solely for hunters who use bait and other legal methods (excluding the use of dogs). In Zone C, the use of dogs is prohibited.

Wisconsin has an abundance of land open to hunting. Opportunities to bear hunt include state, federal and county forests, state-owned wildlife areas, and private lands open to public hunting through the open Managed Forest Law, Forest Crop Law and Voluntary Public Access programs. Hunters have access to nearly seven million acres throughout Wisconsin. For more information on public land hunting in Wisconsin, or to find a place to hunt, search keywords “public hunting lands.”

For hunters using dogs, the department has a website showing areas where dogs have been lost to wolves. For information on wolf depredation, search keyword “wolf management,” and select the “dog depredations” link. This website features maps of caution areas around incidents, and is updated as new information becomes available. In general, hunters using dogs should use caution throughout bear range. Wolves are protective of their territories, particularly rendezvous sites, and can be protective when encroached upon by other canines.

The deadline to apply for a 2016 bear harvest permit or preference point is Dec. 10, 2015. Hunters are reminded that they must apply for a preference point or harvest permit at least once every three years in order to maintain their accumulated preference point total. Hunters may apply online at dnr.wi.gov, keyword “license,” or at any DNR service center or licensing agent. For additional information, call 1–888–WDNRINFO (1–888–936–7463). Hunters who successfully draw a harvest permit and are interested in transferring the permit to a youth hunter, search keywords “bear transfer.” For more information regarding bears in Wisconsin, search keyword “bear.”
North District Forecast

Mike Zeckmeister, DNR northern district wildlife supervisor, 715-635-4090, Mike.Zeckmeister@Wisconsin.gov

Following a relatively mild winter and an early spring, conditions appear to have been kinder to bears and deer compared to last year. We did experience some late spring frosts that will likely affect both soft and hard mast crops. Where this occurred, bears may be more tuned into hitting baits this year. Despite all of this, bears seemed to have a good production year, and we continue to hear reports of bear litters of 2–4 cubs, even into mid-summer.

Bear nuisance complaints throughout most of the north have tapered off compared to previous years. This could be a function of several factors, including increased harvest, abundance of natural food, timing of den emergence, and/or increased public awareness. Fewer nuisance-related complaints is a good thing, and we still have a healthy bear population throughout northern Wisconsin.

The level of bear complaints remains high in the southern portions of Zones A and D – this could be an indicator of high bear numbers in these zones. “We need to continue to focus bear harvest in the southern portion of Zone D, including Barron, Polk, Washburn and Burnett counties.
where we have higher bear numbers and the highest number of bear-related issues,” said DNR northern district wildlife supervisor Michael Zeckmeister. “The highest number of bear-related complaints, likely a function of higher bear densities, seems to be around the Grantsburg area in Zone D.”

This year, DNR and the Bear Advisory Committee selected another high bear quota for Zone D. “This four-county area in the southern portion of Zone D will continue to offer tremendous opportunities to harvest a bear in 2015,” said Zeckmeister. “A higher Zone D quota will not only increase the chances of harvesting a bear, but will also help reduce human-bear conflicts in an area that has had serious conflicts in recent years. Our goal is to allow bear hunters who have waited and drawn a harvest tag to successfully harvest a bear and reduce locally high populations.”

If you draw a tag this year, enjoy your time pursuing this truly magnificent big game animal in the northwoods. Advanced scouting and really “sticking it out” and being flexible will help maximize your opportunity. Bears have a habit of changing their movements, especially in response to changing food conditions – enjoy your time outdoors.

**Northeast District Forecast**

Janet Brehm, DNR wildlife biologist, 715-856-9160, Janet.Brehm@Wisconsin.gov

The Northeast District includes portions of bear management zones B and C. The bear population in Zone B is healthy, and the management objective in this zone is to stabilize the population near current levels. Bears are expanding their range in Zone C, but are most abundant in the northern portion of this zone. Hunters may find opportunities in new areas within Zone C as bear populations grow.
From 2014 levels, the harvest quota and corresponding permits for bears in Zone B increased slightly and decreased slightly in Zone C. Hunters are experiencing good success rates, and conflicts with bears have decreased in recent years. Preseason scouting for hunting locations will be crucial in each zone.

Mid-summer berry crops were plentiful in northeast Wisconsin; cherry, service-berry, and raspberry crops were all good to excellent. Late frost impacted blueberries in some areas, so crop success will be patchy and range from fair to excellent. With wet and warm weather, the blackberry crop will range from good to excellent production. The hazel nut crop is looking good to excellent, and early signs indicate that acorn production will be high. Natural foods will affect bear activity and movements - bear visitation may drop if abundant natural food is available near a bait site.

In Zone B, hunters using hounds can start Sept. 9 and can track and trail bears until Oct. 6. Bait-sitters and hunters not using hounds can start Sept. 16 and hunt until Oct. 13. In Zone C, the use of dogs is not allowed, and the season runs from Sept. 9 to Oct. 13.

The black bear population throughout the West Central District has continued to grow, but at a slower rate. Reports of bear sightings throughout the southern/southwestern portion of the district have continued to stream in, and nuisance bear calls appear to be down/stable. Reports of nuisance complaints received by biologist and APHIS this year appear to be minimal, if not less, than last year across most of the region.

In 2014, there were 5,050 permits available in Zone C, and hunters harvested 1,024 bear for a 20 percent success rate. Of the total harvest in Zone C, 526 bear were harvested in the West Central District. A majority of the region’s harvest took place in Chippewa (141), Clark (66), Jackson (62) and Marathon (95) counties, with a small number of bears harvested further south towards Monroe and Juneau counties and as far east as Portage County.

In 2015, Zone C harvest permits saw a 9 percent increase (5,490) above 2014 issuance in order to minimize bear damage and nuisance concerns while slowing the population expansion towards Southern Wisconsin.

Bear populations in the West Central District remain healthy and continue to expand from the core central forest counties to more agricultural counties surrounding the central forest, but at a noticeably slower pace. The northern portion of the region’s hunting grounds hold plenty of bears, offering hunters a good opportunity for success. Regardless, bear hunters still need to scout, scout and scout some more to be successful!

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