WISCONSIN

FALL HUNTING & TRAPPING FORECAST

2017
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2017 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
COMING SOON!

Wisconsin DNR Presents

WILD WISCONSIN

YOUTUBE.COM/WIDNRTV
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 mapping tool is designed to help hunters locate prime habitat on public lands for ruffed grouse, woodcock, pheasants and doves. FFLIGHT 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 for the 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 while in the field.

For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “FFLIGHT.”
This fall, 102,100 wild turkey permits will be available to hunters, not including Fort McCoy. This is an increase of 800 permits from the 101,300 offered in 2016. Permit availability has been increased by 200 in Zones 5 and by 300 in Zones 6 and 7 in order to better meet hunter demand and provide additional hunting opportunity.

**LEFTOVER PERMITS & SEASON INFORMATION**

The permits remaining after the 2017 fall drawing will go on sale Saturday, Aug. 26 at 10 a.m. Hunters may purchase one leftover permit per day until permits are sold out or the season ends. The fall 2017 season in Zones 1-5 will run from Sept. 16 through Dec. 31 and remain open during the 9-day gun deer season. The season end date for Zones 1-5 has the possibility of extending until Jan. 7, 2018, pending legislation. The 2017 fall season in Zones 6 and 7 is Sept. 16 through Nov. 17, with hunting permitted on the Friday before the nine-day gun deer season.

**PROOF OF LICENSE**

A turkey license, stamp authorization and carcass tag is required to turkey hunt in Wisconsin. Licenses, stamps, and tags are sold through Go Wild, the Wisconsin DNR online licensing system. Hunters must have a valid copy of each while hunting. Acceptable forms of proof for turkey license and stamp include a Wisconsin conservation card, a verified Wisconsin driver’s license, a paper printout, or a PDF displayed on a mobile device. In addition, hunters will need a paper printout of their carcass tag. Using Go Wild, hunters can print carcass tags directly from their account, eliminating the need to wait for carcass tags to arrive by mail. Hunters can also stop by a DNR Service Center or license vendor to have their tags printed. The option to print a duplicate copy is always available online via your Go Wild account.

**BAG LIMIT**

The 2017 fall bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per fall turkey permit (also known as a carcass tag).

**VALIDATION**

New for 2017! Hunters will no longer validate their carcass tag by writing the date and circling the time of kill on the tag. Instead, hunters will validate their tag by detaching the bottom portion (the “validation stub”) from the rest of the tag. The bottom validation stub can then be properly disposed of after validation.

**TAGGING**

If you leave it, tag it. Hunters are required to immediately attach the validated tag to their turkey if they leave the carcass. Consider using a zip-top bag to keep the tag dry and legible. Hunters are required to keep their carcass tag with the meat until consumed.
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 over two decades 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 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.”

TURKEY REGISTRATION

All turkeys must be registered by 5 p.m. the day after harvest. Registration is available online or over the phone, there are no in-person registration options for turkey. Confirmation numbers will be issued after a turkey is successfully registered, for the hunter’s records. It is no longer required to write the confirmation number on the validated carcass tag.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Total number of turkey permits available in 2016: 342,952
Total number of turkey permits issued in 2016: 281,578

TURKEY HUNTING SUCCESS RATES:

2016 spring: 21.3%
2016 fall: 7.3%
2017 spring: 20.4%
RING-NECKED PHEASANT

To increase hunting opportunity, the department will stock around 90 public hunting grounds with approximately 75,000 pheasants in 2017 (similar to 2016 efforts). The 2017 Pheasant Stocking Information sheet identifies public hunting grounds slated for pheasant stocking as well as Hen/Rooster Areas. 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 2017 Wisconsin Small Game Hunting Regulations booklet. Hunters will need to purchase a 2017 Pheasant Stamp and small game license, and make sure they know which public hunting grounds allow hen pheasant hunting (referred to as Hen/Rooster Areas) and which close at 2 p.m. on weekdays between Oct. 17 (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. Results from the 2017 survey estimate that there were 829 pheasants observed along survey routes, up from the estimated 745 roosters observed along the same routes in 2016. The number of pheasants recorded during the first three minutes of each stop in 2017 was 0.49 birds/stop, a slight increase from 0.42 in 2016, and from the five-year average of 0.48 birds/stop in 2008-2012. 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. Rural mail carrier sightings of pheasant in 2017 decreased by 6.6 percent compared to 2016 levels. The number of pheasants seen per 100 miles driven was 0.40 in 2017, an decrease from 0.42 in 2016, and still lower than the long term average of 0.57. In 2017, the number of rural mail carriers participating in the survey decreased by 1.2 percent.

Temperatures during the winter of 2016-17 were relatively mild for the third year in a row. Wisconsin did see average to above average rainfall during June and July during the critical brood rearing period; however, the rains were not accompanied by cooler temperatures, the combined effects of which can have a significant impact on brood success. Overall, production estimates will not be available until brood surveys are completed and summarized in September. Look for pheasant survey results on the “wildlife reports” page on the department’s website.

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 238,000 acres in 2016. 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 2016-17 season, an estimated 43,520 hunters pursued pheasants, spending 403,927 days afield and harvesting 307,240 pheasants. Participation and harvest estimates reflect the pursuit of both wild and stocked pheasants. Fond du Lac, Waukesha and Kenosha counties harvested the most pheasants in 2016.

For more information regarding pheasants in Wisconsin, search keyword “pheasant.”

PHEASANT SEASON INFORMATION

Oct. 14 (9 a.m.) – Dec. 31, possibly extending to Jan. 7, 2018, pending legislation
Daily Bag Limit:
Oct. 14-15: 1 cock
Oct. 16-End of Season: 2 cocks
Possession Limit: 3 times the daily bag limit
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.

Numbers from the 2017 ruffed grouse drumming survey showed a 17 percent increase statewide from 2016. Both the northern and southwest regions showed increases in drumming activity. The largest increase occurred in the southwest, with a 55 percent increase, followed by the northern forest regions with a 30 percent increase. The central region saw a 13 percent decline and the southeast region had no change from 2016. It is likely that Wisconsin is through the trough of the grouse cycle and population numbers will increase until they surpass the next peak in 2021 or 2022.

“The Northern forest, one of the two regions that comprise the primary grouse range in the state, increased 30 percent from last year, while the Central Forest decreased 13 percent,” said Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources wildlife survey coordinator 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 passed the low point in the population cycle and have started the increasing phase, which should continue the next few years as the grouse population moves toward the next peak. “

Weather conditions influence drumming activity by male grouse. Most surveyors felt weather conditions were conducive to
accurate surveys this spring. Surveyors rated the overall survey conditions as “excellent” on 53 percent of transects runs, compared to 46 percent in 2016. Surveyors rated 2017 conditions as “fair,” the lowest available weather condition rating, 8 percent of the time in 2017, compared to 7 percent in 2016. Results from the 2017 survey show that grouse populations in both the southwest and southeast region remain well below historic levels. According to DNR upland wildlife ecologist, Mark Witecha, maturation of southern Wisconsin’s forest community and the resulting loss of dense, brushy areas that grouse need for cover have resulted in lower numbers of grouse in the region in recent decades.

“Ruffed grouse are closely associated with dense, young forest cover,” said Witecha. “Young forests are generally the result of some disturbance, like logging or intense wildfires. Forest management and fire prevalence in southern Wisconsin have declined in recent decades, leading to more mature forest communities that are not as suitable for grouse.”

Beyond managing state-owned lands, Wisconsin DNR is working to provide young forest cover through an extensive collaborative effort known as the Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership. This partnership provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners interested in managing for young forest. The program is helping to create habitat for ruffed grouse and other wildlife species, and helping maintain healthy and diverse forest communities.

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 2016-17 season show that 66,648 hunters reported spending 547,182 days in the field hunting grouse, with approximately 262,943 grouse harvested. Highest harvests were reported by hunters in Price, Douglas and Sawyer counties.

Hunters may need to scout different sites in order to find pockets of birds. 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 2016 and 2017 drumming reports, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “ruffed grouse.”

**SHARP-TAILED GROUSE**

No sharp-tailed grouse permits are available for the 2017 season. Spring surveys showed an 18 percent decrease in observed birds on managed land, leading to the closure of the 2017 season.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Sharp-tailed Grouse Advisory Committee, made up of department staff and key stakeholders, is hopeful that the sharp-tailed grouse population will respond positively to increased habitat management efforts in Wisconsin.

In northwestern Wisconsin, sharp-tailed grouse are found primarily in association with large blocks of barrens habitat on public lands. Wisconsin’s Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan provides framework to combine habitat development for barrens-dependent wildlife species with working forests, with a goal to expand the suitable habitat for sharp-tails and reconnect isolated populations wherever possible.

Barrens habitat in northwestern Wisconsin is recognized internationally as a key conservation opportunity area. Sharp-tails are a popular game bird species, and also well known for dramatic breeding displays. The birds attract many visitors to the northwestern part of the state each year.

In 2016, 25 permits were issued in Game Management Unit 8. Hunters reported harvesting seven sharp-tailed grouse. For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “sharp-tailed grouse.”
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 3,041 hunters spent 12,636 days chasing hares in 2016, with an estimated harvest of 8,306 snowshoe hares.

Cottontail rabbits are a very popular small game animal and provide for great recreational hunting opportunities throughout Wisconsin. Rabbits are extremely prolific – their annual reproduction is typically dependent upon local weather conditions during the breeding season. Portions of the state with adequate rainfall and plenty of green, succulent vegetation should see good rabbit production and quality hunting opportunities this fall. Surveys for cottontail rabbits are conducted in unison with the biennial bobwhite quail survey. Each cottontail rabbit observed while conducting the bobwhite quail survey routes is recorded. Results of the 2017 survey indicate that the number of cottontail rabbits seen at each survey stop in 2017 was 0.33 rabbits per stop, an increased from 0.29 rabbits per stop in 2016. Hunters are encouraged to check the wildlife reports page on the department website for more information.

During the 2016-17 hunting season, an estimated 21,925 hunters spent 106,199 days pursuing rabbits, accounting for an estimated harvest of 92,266 cottontail rabbits.
GRAY AND FOX SQUIRRELS

GRAY & FOX SQUIRREL SEASON INFORMATION

Sept. 16, 2017 – Jan. 31, 2018
Daily Bag Limit: 5 squirrels
Possession Limit: 15 squirrels

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 locations with ample mast production when choosing a hunting spot.

During the 2016-17 season, mail-in survey results indicated that 40,668 small game hunters spent 243,634 days hunting squirrels with an estimated harvest of 266,421 squirrels.

BOBWHITE QUAIL

BOBWHITE QUAIL SEASON INFORMATION

Season Dates: Oct. 14 (9 a.m.) – Dec. 6
Daily Bag Limit: 5 birds
Possession limit: 15 birds

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.

Populations showed a decrease in 2017, with the long-term trend showing a significant decline throughout southern and western Wisconsin. Hunters are encouraged to check the wildlife reports webpage on the department website for more information. The next round of survey results will be available in 2019.

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 fencerows 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 fencerows 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 quail 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.

BOBWHITE QUAIL HUNTING BY THE NUMBERS:

Estimated bobwhite quail harvest for the 2016 season: 71
The number of people hunting bobwhite quail in 2016: 212
Percentage of small game hunters pursuing bobwhite quail in 2016: 0.1%
Estimated total number of bobwhite quail hunting days in 2016: 213
MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

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With fall right around the corner, another Wisconsin waterfowl hunting season is near, and hunters have much to be excited about. “This year we had excellent habitat conditions here in Wisconsin and on U.S. and Canadian prairies range from average to fair and with a high continental total number of ducks, the outlook for fall 2017 is very promising,” said Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources migratory waterfowl biologist Taylor Finger.

Finger 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.

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

CHANGES IN 2017 INCLUDE:

With the department’s transition to Go Wild, the Canada goose harvest registration phone number is now consistent with all other species registered in Wisconsin, and this new system provides for online registration. Hunters will now register online at gamereg.wi.gov or via phone at 844-426-3734 (844-GAME-REG).

Canada Goose Hunting Permits are now printed on paper; but in-field validation of harvest permits is no longer required. Hunters may legally hunt in open water as long as part of their boat, blind or similar device is located within three feet of the shoreline, including islands.

Daily bag limit of pintails has now dropped to one a day.

Stevens Point flowage, south of highway 10 is now part of the Southern zone.

Please register all bands online at the Bird Banding Lab at reportband.gov.

Phone reporting using has been discontinued.
Ducks

Waterfowl breeding areas in North America showed mostly fair to good conditions in 2017, and the duck breeding quality is expected to be high overall. Wetland conditions were above average in all regions of Wisconsin’s breeding waterfowl survey in early May, and 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. Finger 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 USFWS has adopted a new timeline for the regulatory process of migratory game birds and this changes as altered when the spring breeding waterfowl numbers are generated. In some years the current year estimates of waterfowl breeding populations may not be available, however, the USFWS report came out in time for the fall forecast.

The 2017 continental breeding duck population estimate from the USFWS was 47.2 million which is slightly down from 2016 but still near record high. 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 479,100 ducks. This estimate shows an increase from 2016 and is above 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 Finger.

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 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 Wisconsin mallard population estimate of 180,930 saw an increase from 2016, but is still 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 2017 breeding population estimate of 102,400 is up from 2016 and is above the long-term average. “Wood ducks continue to be an important component of Wisconsin’s breeding duck population and hunters’ fall bag,” said Finger.

The breeding wood duck population saw significant increases in the 1980s and early 1990s, and appears to be leveling off around 100,000 ducks. Based on improved water conditions and our best interpretation of the survey results, the department expects wood duck production in 2017 to be good and similar to recent years.

The 2017 Wisconsin blue-winged teal breeding population estimate of 85,500 is up from 2016. 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, and the continental population is up compared to 2016.

Hunters are reminded that success in the fall will depend heavily upon weather, water conditions and preseason scouting.

2017 DUCK HUNTING SEASON STRUCTURE

Northern Zone: Sept. 23 – Nov. 21
Southern Zone: Sept. 30 – Oct. 8; Oct. 14 – Dec. 3

12 • Migratory Game Birds
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 2017, Wisconsin will take part in a fourth year of the three-year experimental teal season. An additional year is required due to the change in the US Fish and Wildlife federal regulatory timeline. The season will be held Sept. 1-7, and hunters will only be allowed to harvest blue-wing and green-wing teal, of which the daily bag limit will be six. 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.

As of 2016, hunters can now legally hunt in open water as long as part of their boat, blind or similar device is located within 3 feet of the shoreline, including islands. This change eliminates the concealment requirement so long as the boat or blind is within three feet of any shoreline. “This change will open up countless opportunities throughout the state especially where the water levels fluctuate throughout the year and that vegetation wasn’t always available for concealment,” said DNR waterfowl ecologist Taylor Finger.

For more information, check out the 2017 regular season waterfowl regulations.

Mississippi River duck hunters should note a change in season structure for the Mississippi River duck and goose zone. Since the zone’s creation in 2011, the department has tested an earlier opening date with a long (12-day closure) split in October to extend the season. While hunters desire a temporary duck season closure on the river to allow a build-up of duck migrating into this area, feedback showed that a 12-day closure was too long. As a result, the department proposed a seven-day split in 2015 and 84 percent of public comments received supported this proposal. We went with a similar seven-day split proposal in 2017 and 83 percent of the public comments received supported this proposal.

**BAG & POSSESSION LIMITS**

The daily bag limit statewide during the regular waterfowl season will be six ducks, including no more than:

- four mallards, of which only one may be a hen;
- 1 black duck;
- 2 canvasback;
- 3 wood ducks;
- 1 pintail;
- 3 scaup; and
- 2 redheads.

For species of duck not listed, such as teal and ring-necks, the combined bag total with all other species may not exceed six ducks. It is important to note that the possession limit is three times the daily bag limit.

The daily bag limit for Coot is 15.

**POSSSESSION LIMIT:**

Federal rules regarding possession limits now allow three times the daily bag limit. These rules permit Wisconsin hunters to possess up to 18 ducks at any one time.
According to Finger, 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 2017 Wisconsin breeding Canada goose population estimate of 158,000 is up from 2016 and just slightly above the average over the last decade. Wisconsin’s resident breeding Canada goose population may be stabilizing near 130,000 after a long-term increase.

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

According to Finger, 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 50 percent of harvest during the late regular goose season.

Canada goose breeding survey methods in Ontario were revised in 2016 so a population estimate is not available. The new survey will provide an index of change in the future but at least one more year of additional surveys will be needed before we can determine if the population status is changing. Based on weather conditions and field biologist observations in 2017; the advent of spring conditions and nest initiation in northern Ontario were about average, below average temperatures and freezing rain in June may have had a negative impact on gosling survival and young/adult ratios during banding operations were average. Overall we expect a fall flight of Canada geese from Ontario similar to recent years.

Another large change which occurred in 2016 was that the department transitioned to Go Wild, and the Canada goose harvest registration phone number is now consistent with all other species registered in Wisconsin, and this new system provides for online registration. Hunters will now register online at gamereg.wi.gov or via phone at 844-426-3734 (844-GAME-REG). Also, with the transition to Go Wild, the Early, Exterior and Horicon Zone goose permits are printed on regular white paper, not the green thermal paper that was used in the past. While afield hunters must still carry their Canada goose harvest permit, acceptable methods of proof include a paper copy, department approved PDF displayed on a mobile device, Wisconsin driver’s license or Go Wild Conservation Card. In-field validation of a goose harvest permit is no longer required however, hunters are still required to register their harvested geese.

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.
2017 Canada goose season structure:
- North – Sept 16– Dec 16
- South – Sept 16 – Oct 8, and Oct 14 – Dec 21
- Mississippi River Subzone: Sept 30 – Oct 6; Oct 14- Jan 4, 2018
- The Horicon Zone season will last 92 days, with 12 harvest tags per hunter. Season runs Sept. 16 – Dec. 21

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. Similar to the early and exterior seasons, all geese harvested must be registered using the new GameReg phone number 844-426-3734 (844-GAME-REG) or they can be registered online at gamereg.wi.gov.

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 16,880 was above the 2015 harvest but slightly below recent years, likely due to last year’s relatively warm conditions during the early season.

“The early season has become a popular hunt and an important part of our resident Canada goose population management,” said Finger. “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 Sept. 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 300 geese. This year’s youth hunt will take place Sept. 16-17. 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 Exterior or Horicon Canada goose season permit depending on the location they hunt.

Normal bag limits apply.

Photo Right: Mentored hunt participant tracks a flock of geese flying overhead. USFWS
MOURNING DOVES

Remember: Hunters must be HIP registered and use non-toxic shot when hunting doves on DNR-managed lands.
In 2017, the dove hunting season will run from Sept. 1 to Nov. 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 13th 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 reportband.gov.

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 2017 Migratory Bird 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 Finger. “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.”

WOODCOCK

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 ranks second or third in the nation for woodcock harvest in recent years, with. 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.

Woodcock season structure is as follows:
Sept. 23 to Nov. 6, with a daily bag of three birds. Note that possession limits for woodcock are three times the daily bag limit.

For more information regarding waterfowl hunting in Wisconsin, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “waterfowl”.

For more information, contact: Taylor Finger, DNR migratory game bird ecologist at 608-266-8841 or Trenton Rohrer, DNR assistant migratory game bird ecologist at 608-261-6458.
Maggie Stewart, DNR assistant big game ecologist, 608-261-7588, Maggie.Stewart@Wisconsin.gov

Photo by Steve Maslowski / USFWS
This fall is shaping up to be another great one for Wisconsin bear hunters. With another record set for permit availability we are providing more opportunity than ever before. This year’s quota is 5,000 bears, one of the highest quota on record. Wisconsin’s robust bear population, and effective management practices, ensure these opportunities will be sustained for years to come.

Our most recent population estimate is 28,600 bears statewide, or between 0.9 and 1.6 bears per square mile depending on zone. We continue to see the range of bears extending south, with the Driftless Area in the southwest part of the state seeing increased in bear activity. As bear range continues to expand, hunters are finding new opportunities to participate in Wisconsin’s bear hunting traditions.

The DNR is in the process of developing a new bear management plan. This plan will allow us to review our bear management program including population objectives, hunting regulations, conflict control program and population monitoring efforts. There will be many opportunities for citizens of the state, including hunters, to weigh in throughout this process.

Keep an eye on the DNR bear page and the public meetings calendar for updates on this process and opportunities to have your voice heard.

Last year, we issued a record-setting 11,520 permits and achieved the second highest bear kill of 4682. This was slightly below the harvest goal of 4750. This year, the DNR Black Bear Advisory Committee, with support from GLIFWC, USFS, Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, and the Wisconsin Conservation Congress established a harvest goal of 5,000 bears for the 2017 season. A total of 12,850 Black Bear harvest permits will be available to hunters to achieve this goal.

Interest in Wisconsin bear hunting remains strong with 112,985 applicants. A new change in state law has removed the minimum age to begin accumulating preference points. Parents may now start accumulating points for their children at birth. This should help more kids get tags as they reach hunting age with points already in their pocket.

Tagging regulations have changed in 2017. For a summary of how these changes impact tagging and registration procedures for all species, including bears, see the Go Wild section of this document.
Hunters will once again submit tooth samples by mail this year - tooth submission is required and legal registration is not complete until the tooth has been submitted. Hunters who successfully drew a bear harvest permit received instructions and materials needed to submit a tooth by mail. The age data generated from the teeth are critical in the state’s efforts to monitor Wisconsin’s bear population.

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

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 conflicts with wolves have occurred. For information regarding wolf depredation, search keywords “wolf management,” and select the “dog depredations” link. This website features maps of caution areas, and is updated as new information becomes available.

The deadline to apply for a 2018 bear harvest permit or preference point is Dec. 10, 2017. 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 or disabled hunter, a purple heart recipient or an active duty member of the military search keywords “bear transfer.” For more information regarding bears in Wisconsin, search keyword “bear.”

NORTHERN DISTRICT

Mike Zeckmeister, DNR Northern District wildlife supervisor, 715-635-4090, mike.zeckmeister@wisconsin.gov

This is the second back-to-back year of a very mild winter and an early spring green up, so conditions again appear to be very favorable for bears. This past spring, most areas of northern Wisconsin did not have a late spring frost or freeze so this favored soft mast berry crop production. This is unusual, compared to last year when in many parts of Northern Wisconsin we experienced a very hard freeze in mid-May that affected early soft and hard mast production, especially early blooming plants. With the lack of early frost and good rainfall to date, flowering soft mass producing plants like blackberries should produce a good crop. Soft and hard mass production makes up a very important part of the diet of black bears and its availability can affect hunting success. For example, in a good acorn production year, an “acorn drop” during the bear season often results in bears to quit hitting hunting baits. Acorn reports, to date, indicate a mixed bag for acorn production in 2017. If this holds true, bears may not get “turned off” to bait due to a huge acorn drop.

Bear nuisance complaints throughout most of the north picked up steam as we entered the bear breeding season this past June. The level of bear complaints (nuisance and agricultural damage) 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) and the southern portion of Zone A (including Rusk, Taylor, Price and Lincoln counties) where we have the highest number of bear-related issues,” said DNR wildlife supervisor Michael Zeckmeister.
The Northeast District includes portions of bear management zones B and C. The bear population in Zone B has been fairly stable for the last few years and the management objective in this zone is to continue maintaining that healthy population. The bear population in Zone C is growing slightly and bears are expanding their range. They are most abundant in the northern portion of Zone C but opportunities for successful hunts in new areas will develop as bear populations grow.

The recommended quota and harvest permit level increased slightly in Zone B for the 2017 season. Hunters enjoy a high success rate in this Zone but the wait for a permit is long. For the 2017 bear season in Zone C, the quota was unchanged but there was a slightly higher number of harvest permits available. The success rate for hunters in Zone C is low but some hunters draw permits with only one preference point. Food sources may be more diverse and plentiful in Zone C and bear visitation to bait sites can change with food availability. Preseason scouting for hunting locations will be crucial in each zone. Hunters who have back-up plans and who can be flexible about location or method of hunting will give themselves the best chance of success.

Precipitation has been plentiful during the summer growing months in northeast Wisconsin and food sources such as berries look fairly good. Acorn production is sporadic and localized but if they are available in your hunting spot, they can affect bear use of bait sites.
Wayne Hall, DNR wildlife biologist, 715-884-2437, wayne.halljr@wisconsin.gov

Throughout the West Central District black bears continue their laid-back expansion. Bear sightings have become a novelty to local residents in counties such as Adams, Juneau with reports of cubs observed as far south as Crawford County. Overall, calls involving nuisance bears appear to be minimal this year likely due to the abundance and diversity of foods across the areas. Most sightings in Verona, Adams, La Crosse and Monroe counties typically occur in spring. The bears are first coming out of their winter sleep looking for food and again in late fall when they are packing weight on for their winter sleep known as “torpor”. Sightings in Adams County are similar to the year before but like everywhere else these sightings occurred within the normal time of high activity. Combined with a prolonged lush growing season reports across the West Central District of nuisance complaints this year appear minimal, if not less, than last year.

Reports around the West Central District indicate that bear activity around baits throughout the summer have been consistent. However, with the anticipation of thousands of acres corn coming into its milk stage and an average acorn yield, the general consensus of those baiting is, “acorns will probably drop as the season starts”, which may affect success.

In 2016, there were 6190 permits available in Zone C, hunters harvested 1067 bear for a 17 percent permit success rate. Majority of the WC region’s harvest took place in Chippewa (124), Clark (72), Jackson(62) and Marathon(104) counties, with a small number of bears harvested further south towards Juneau (10), La Crosse and Vernon counties and as far east as Portage County. For 2017, 7050 harvest permits were issued in Zone C, up an additional 860 permits from 2016 (6190) to stabilize the current population to minimize bear damage and nuisance concerns while at the same time slowing the population expansion rate towards Southern Wisconsin.

Bear populations in the West Central District continues to expand from the core central forest counties to more agricultural counties surrounding the central forest region but at a slower pace. The northern parts of the region’s hunting grounds experiences higher hunting pressure but does hold plenty of bears, offering hunters opportunities. However, the southern portion of the West Central District experiences relatively much lower hunting pressure as well as lower success rates but offers opportunities to harvest older mature bears in those areas. Regardless, bear hunters still need to scout, scout a little more, and scout more to be successful in Zone C, a bear management zone of opportunity.
Among the vast diversity of Wisconsin’s wildlife are a group of mammals known as “furbearers”. Furbearers are animals that were traditionally utilized to provide warmth, but only considering their use as clothing doesn’t represent their entire value. Many furbearers are an excellent source of food and are a challenging, but rewarding quarry for wildlife watchers and photographers. Furbearing animals also play a vital role in the ecosystem (the beaver even creates its own ecosystem to the benefit and sometimes detriment of other wildlife). This group of mammals is quite diverse including the largest rodent in North America, the smallest mammalian carnivore in the world and a marsupial. Wisconsin furbearers are primarily nocturnal but dawn and dusk can be good times to catch a glimpse of one of these elusive animals. For 2017–2018 trapping/hunting regulations search keywords “trapping regulations” “hunting regulations” on the DNR webpage at: dnr.wi.gov or pick up the regulations booklet at DNR Service Stations statewide.

Wisconsin is home to 18 species of furbearers. Of these 18 species, American (Pine) marten is on Wisconsin’s Endangered Species List, badgers are protected and spotted skunks may no longer reside in the state. One other species, the stone marten is a non-native furbearer that may still reside in small pockets of southeast Wisconsin. Wolves and black bears are considered large carnivores. For information about our large carnivores search keyword “wolf” or “black bear” on the DNR webpage. Cougars (mountain lions) are a species of large carnivore that irregularly visit Wisconsin.
Coyotes are Wisconsin’s second largest native canine behind the gray wolf. Unlike the gray wolf, coyotes are usually solitary when not breeding, but will form packs if advantageous. Coyotes (like the raccoon) have largely benefited from European settlement in North America. The reduction of larger predators in the 19th century and the opening up of large forest tracts has allowed coyotes to expand their range over all of North America up to approximately the Arctic tree line.

Coyotes are frequently seen in urban environments though population densities are probably at their highest in agricultural 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 uwurbancanidproject.weebly.com or find them on Facebook at facebook.com/uwurbancanidproject.

COYOTES

Coyotes are prolific and abundant, and landowners often request their removal for nuisance reasons especially around livestock. Coyotes will prey upon livestock and deer (especially newborns) but smaller animals comprise the bulk of their diet in Wisconsin. Prey availability drives coyote social structure. When widely distributed small animals are available it makes sense for coyotes to hunt alone, if larger game must be sought coyotes will form a pack. Coyotes are a species of wildlife that landowners may readily grant access to trap/hunt. For the trapper/hunter as well as the wildlife viewer the “wily” coyote is a worthy adversary.

With the mild winter last year and productive spring and summer thus far in 2017 we are hearing reports from all over Wisconsin that prey populations (like rabbits) are up. The large prey volume should promote high juvenile survival and a healthy population of predators like coyotes in 2017.

COYOTE AND FOX TRAPPING SEASON:
Statewide: Oct. 14, 2017 – Feb. 15, 2018
Coyote hunting Season:
Statewide: Year round
Fox Hunting Season:
Statewide: Oct. 14, 2017 – Feb. 15, 2018
Bag Limit: None
GRAY FOX

This elusive creature, the smallest of Wisconsin’s four wild canines, prefers forests with deciduous trees and early successional growth. Unique to North American canids, the gray fox readily climbs trees to escape danger or to access food sources unavailable to competitors. Small but tenacious the gray fox is dominant to the larger red fox where home ranges overlap but can be prey for coyotes and bobcats. In Wisconsin, gray foxes range over most of the state but population density varies greatly with habitat suitability. Gray foxes have been known to select home ranges fairly void of coyote and bobcat activity which further restricts their range in Wisconsin.

Gray foxes are particularly susceptible to the canine distemper virus (CDV). 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. There have been some gray fox mortalities linked to CDV in Burnett County this summer. Gray foxes show some resistance to mange which is a significant threat to red foxes. Trappers report that gray fox populations are low in the south-central portions of the state, but harvest in parts of central Wisconsin remains stable. Deer hunter observations had the most gray fox sightings in the Central Farmland Zone, while the lowest observation rate was seen in the Southern Farmland Zone. Visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “wildlife reports” for the full deer hunter observation report.

RED FOX

Wisconsin’s more recognized and easily viewable fox is the red fox. Red fox easily adapt to living in cities and close to people. This makes them easier to view than other canids but also can be detrimental to their pups, which have yet to develop a healthy fear of roadways. Despite their familiarity, populations have been in decline since the 1980s.

Red fox are on the lowest rung in pecking order among the canids and in general, healthy coyote populations make for lower red fox populations. Coyotes will not only kill red foxes directly but also will inadvertently spread mange, which is more devastating to the red fox than the coyote. Winter track surveys have shown a slight increase over the last few years in the northern portions of the state, while the department has little data for the southern portions of the state due to poor winter tracking conditions. In Wisconsin with healthy coyote populations and less edge habitat in agricultural areas, we may not have the number of foxes we had 30 years ago but as with all of the predators a productive spring and summer results in healthy reproduction. While local populations may vary, the 2017 red fox population in Wisconsin should be the same or slightly higher than that of a year ago.

Keep an eye out for signs of mange in red foxes. Mange is caused by a mite that burrows under the skin causing irritation. While some animals can recover from mange, red foxes in the Wisconsin winter are typically not one of them. Sarcoptic mange can be spread to your domestic dogs (and cats on rare occasions) but can be easily treated. Treatment of wild animals is much more difficult and generally ill advised.

LISA HUPP / USFWS
Bobcats have successfully expanded their range in Wisconsin so that they are practically statewide in distribution. Bobcats are elusive and few people get to see them in the wild even where population densities are at their greatest. Being notoriously secretive, bobcats present a problem for wildlife surveys as their detection rate may be lower than most other species.

To help fill the data gaps left by lack of detection in the track survey, the DNR is conducting bobcat research in the North and Southwest portions of the state. This research is partially funded by a special application fee that Wisconsin trappers/hunters requested. This research is made possible by cooperation with local trappers who call in incidental bobcat captures that the DNR collar and release.

The collared bobcats are providing location data allowing home ranges and habitat usage to be calculated, and in some cases allows for cause specific mortality to be determined. This research is proving that the bobcat population in Wisconsin is healthy and additional harvest opportunities exist. As our data on Wisconsin bobcats expand, the population model improves. The increase in bobcat permits have more to do with increased data on the species than any sudden population boom. In the northern zone the 2017/18 bobcat quota was raised to 550 (up from 225 a year ago).

The Southern Bobcat Zone was opened for the first time in fall of 2014. It will take a few years of data collection and research before the department is able to establish a population model for this region. The southern bobcat quota was set at 200 (up from 150 a year ago).

Nick Forman, research scientist for the DNR said this about the southwestern predator study: “The Southwest Wisconsin CWD, Deer and Predator project collared seven coyotes and seven bobcats this past fall and winter. We’ll be collaring animals again this year beginning in August, and we’re looking to coordinate with trappers to collar bobcats and coyotes. Trappers interested in participating in paid research activities should call Nick Forman at 715-577-6288. Trappers MUST sign-up to participate, and can then receive payments for coyotes they call in to have collared and released. The coyotes must be caught within five miles of the SWCPP study areas. We are asking that any trapper with an incidentally caught bobcat in southwest Wisconsin call these in as well, but we are not offering any payments for bobcats called in for collaring.”

**BOBCAT SEASON**

Dec. 26, 2017 – Jan. 31, 2018
Bag Limit: One per permit
Application Deadline: Aug. 1

Bobcat carcasses are collected annually and provide critical management information. The carcass/parts collection (which occurs on bobcats, fisher and otter) allows us to gather information on age and sex distribution as well as sometimes age specific reproduction. This vital data coupled with the predator research being conducted by the DNR has improved our understanding of the all too often out of sight yet common bobcat. 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 northern bobcat tag roughly every seven to ten years and a southern bobcat tag every five 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 or the later season 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.

Similar to fisher and otter, bobcat must be tagged at the point of harvest and reported within 24 hours of harvest online at gamereg.wi.gov by calling 1-844-GAME-REG (1-844-426-3734). An automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest. Separated pelts must be registered in person within five days of the month of harvest by contacting a local conservation warden or other authorized DNR personnel. Conservation wardens and personnel can be found by visiting dnr.wi.gov keyword “trap” or by calling 888-936-7463. Bobcat carcasses are collected at time of registration. Registration and carcass collection gives the department important management information, including age structure of the population, reproductive age and previous litter sizes. As with all three of our limited draw species, the season is subject to close early if harvest quotas are met. It is the responsibility of the permit holder to monitor the season status.

**Raccoons**

Raccoons have a well-deserved reputation for being generalists. Raccoons are well suited to live close to people, making them one of the most accessible furbearers for wildlife watchers and trappers/hunters. Occasionally these masked bandits will make an early withdrawal from your garden, making attitudes sour about their accessibility. Raccoons rank only behind muskrats in number harvested in Wisconsin. Current season dates and regulations aim to achieve a balance that allows for both harvest and viewing while minimizing human/wildlife conflicts.

Raccoons are common throughout Wisconsin and may have especially high densities near urban areas and seasonally abundant food sources like cornfields. Regional population densities are highest in Wisconsin’s central and southern farmland regions, as reported by deer hunters and DNR field staff in the annual deer hunter observation survey, though localized populations can vary.

Raccoons are susceptible to rabies but canine distemper (CDV) is more prevalent. Raccoon mortality attributed to CDV has been confirmed in several counties across Wisconsin in 2017. Most mortality is human caused by harvest and vehicle collisions respectively but disease outbreaks and severe weather can have significant impacts on local populations. High density populations may be more susceptible to disease outbreaks. A drop in harvest mortality as seen here in Wisconsin recently may increase other forms of mortality (like disease or vehicle collisions) thus dampening increases in population.

Raccoon harvest was high in 2012 and 2013, when pelt prices were higher, and declined in 2014, 2015 and 2016 along with the market. This past winter was relatively mild and likely allowed for good survival rates in juvenile raccoons. Local populations can fluctuate during severe weather and disease outbreaks but in general the 2017 raccoon population in Wisconsin looks to be robust.

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 Lindsey Long of the DNR’s wildlife health. “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, harvesting them can be a great way to build relationships with landowners. Kris Johansen, DNR wildlife supervisor in Black River Falls, urges trappers and hunters to make sure to do your homework with preseason scouting and obtain permission from landowners well in advance. Preseason efforts from hunters and trappers can provide for a productive and efficient experience. Finally, don’t forget to follow up after the season with a thank you card or another token of appreciation for those landowners that are willing to provide you access to trap and/or hunt on their lands.

**Resident Raccoon Season:**
Oct. 14, 2017 – Feb. 15, 2018

**Non-resident Raccoon Season:**
Nov. 4, 2017 – Feb. 15, 2018

**Bag Limit:** None
BEAVER

Before the United States was a country, beavers were influencing where the major cities would be. Cities like New York, Chicago and St. Louis began as trading posts and beaver pelts were the most important resource. Beavers were such an important resource that wars were fought over land where they were abundant. The beaver (North America’s largest native rodent) is an animal capable of manipulating its habitat, which is a trait the beaver shares with humans. When the two acts of engineering are at odds, human tolerance of the beaver diminishes.

The beaver was not only the dowsing rod for westward expansion, but also plays an important role in the Wisconsin ecosystem. Beavers create dams to stop the flow of water thus creating the type of habitat they prefer. Beavers are not the only animals that benefit from their industrious endeavors. Other furbearers, waterfowl, songbirds, reptiles, amphibians and some fish benefit from beaver ponds as well. By stopping the flow of streams, some fish like trout are negatively impacted. Migration routes are blocked and the hydrology of the water changes, becoming warmer, siltier and more conducive to spreading fish parasites. While beavers’ infrastructure is an important component to our ecosystem, management through trapping helps to limit damage to crops and other property.

Low fur prices coupled with a mild winter and wet spring/summer has resulted in a bevy of traveling beavers. Jenna Kosnicki, a wildlife biologist in Iron County, has received beaver complaints from landowners that haven’t encountered dams on their property in over a decade. High water at times of dispersal may have locally opened up new travel corridors, spreading beaver to newly accessible places.

All the reports coming in have indicated that beaver populations across the state are nearly the same or higher than last year. Beaver trapping and viewing opportunities in Wisconsin should be exceptional for 2017. Beaver numbers on the Mississippi River seem to be especially abundant. To pursue trapping or viewing possibilities on the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge and Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge, 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.

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 through 2025; 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 plan was approved by the Natural Resources Board on Oct. 28, 2015 and is available online by visiting dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “management plans.”

A north-central Wisconsin program 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 provides guidance for management in appropriate areas to encourage young forests.

To learn more about the Young Forest Initiative, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “young forest.”
BEAVER SEASON:
Zone A (Northwest) Nov. 4, 2017 – April 30, 2018
Zone B (Northeast) Nov. 4, 2017 – April 30, 2018
Zone C (South) Nov. 4, 2017 – March 31, 2018
Zone D (Mississippi River) Dec. 6, 2017 to March 15, 2018

Bag limit: None
In terms of aquatic mammals in Wisconsin, the river otter reigns supreme. The otter is a member of the weasel family and somewhat resembles a furry torpedo. More gregarious than other mustelids, otters will hunt in groups when conditions favor it. Otter will prey upon about any animal it can catch but generally eats fish, muskrats and benthic invertebrates. Otters maintain large home ranges and can occasionally be seen out during the day. While viewing is available year round, harvest is regulated with a long closed season and limited permit allocation. Fun to watch and with a high quality of functional fur, it seems that the otter’s charm is lost only on the fisherman.

Permits to trap otter are available through a drawing that takes place in early August. A statewide quota recommendation (as with fisher and bobcat) is established during the annual Furbearer Advisory Committee meeting held in the offseason (search keyword “Furbearer Advisory Committee” on the DNR website for the meeting minutes). State, federal and tribal biologists are all represented on the committee as are other private interest groups. Data obtained through previous year’s harvests and surveys guide the committee as statewide quotas are suggested. In 2017 the statewide quota remains at 2000. Though unlikely, if this quota is met, the season will close.

It is the trapper’s responsibility to monitor the season status on bobcat, fisher and river otter.

River otter can be found on all of Wisconsin’s major river systems and can move extensively up and down riverine systems, covering miles of streams and tributaries. According to Milwaukee County’s DNR wildlife biologist Dianne Robinson, “Milwaukee county residents sometimes spot otter along the northern branches of the Little Menomonee and Milwaukee Rivers, as well as along 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.”

Aerial fixed-wing otter surveys are conducted each winter to document population trends. Tracks on snow (the dot-dash pattern of otter movements) are recorded at stream and river crossings on 30 mile transects that overlap all counties. In 2016, a total of 37 routes were completed. Surveys detected otter on 16 percent of crossings in the north, which is down from the early 2000s, but up slightly from the late 2000s; 10 percent of crossings in central Wisconsin, which has been slightly increasing the past six years; and five percent of crossings in the south, which is average to low detections for that zone. Snow conditions, especially in the south, make routes challenging to complete with regularity—where 130-140 crossings were surveyed in the north and central zones, the south zone had 41. Options for new otter survey techniques are currently being evaluated by DNR research staff.

The results of the bobcat, fisher and otter drawing are available now, check your customer profile on GO WILD. The durable carcass tag will arrive by mail before the season.

Within 24 hours of harvest, successful permit holders must register online at gamereg.wi.gov or call 1-844-GAME-REG (1-844-426-3734) and provide basic details regarding otter harvest. Separated pelts must be registered in person within five days of the month of harvest by contacting a local conservation warden or other authorized DNR personnel. Conservations wardens and personnel can be found by visiting dnr.wi.gov keyword “trap” or by calling 888-936-7463.

**OTTER SEASON**

North Zone Nov. 4, 2017 – April 30, 2018
Central Zone Nov. 4, 2017 – March 31, 2018
South Zone Nov. 4, 2017 – March 31, 2018

Bag Limit: One per permit

Application Deadline: Aug. 1
Musk, a historically popular furbearer due to their luxurious and functional pelts, are the smaller cousin to the otter. Being semi-aquatic, mink tend to stick close to water sources though they will hunt on land when harsh winter conditions facilitate it.

Mink are susceptible to the bioaccumulation of PCBs, heavy metals (like mercury) and other toxins just as river otter and fish-eating birds are. In this way, animals like mink can be an indicator species to the health of an aquatic environment. Mink populations can vary locally but are generally considered stable and statewide in distribution. Mink numbers appear low along the lower Fox River where historic contamination issues are present. In other parts of the state, mink populations are doing well.

Muskrats are a primary food source for not only the mink and otter but everything from muskellunge to owls will prey on these aquatic rodents. Muskrats eat primarily aquatic vegetation but will eat aquatic invertebrates, fish and other muskrats if the opportunity presents itself. Muskrat is on the menu for a great many, but they make up for this loss by being remarkably prolific. In Wisconsin muskrats can raise three or more litters per year with litter sizes averaging in the 5-8 range.

Muskrats can increase their population quickly under appropriate conditions. This wet spring and summer we have seen in 2017 has likely increased habitat and allowed for high reproductive outputs. These conditions should yield an increased muskrat population this fall. In some areas flooding may have negatively impacted muskrat numbers and/or decreased an area's habitat suitability for muskrats thus driving them elsewhere.

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge encourages trappers to obtain a special permit to reduce muskrats causing dike damage. Contact Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge for information regarding the property’s specific regulations and permit system at 608-539-2311 ext. 16.

Horicon Wildlife Area holds an open auction, where successful bidders receive special access permits to trap muskrats. Successful bidders are subject to rigorous report requirements. Contact each area’s office for more information: Horicon NWR, 920-387-2658; Horicon DNR Wildlife Area, 920-387-7860.

Muskrat research is being conducted at Horicon, Research focuses on disease surveillance, reproductive evaluations and analysis of aerial imagery to attempt to count muskrat houses and determine population trends and/or estimates. If you are on the marsh and find any dead muskrats, please contact the appropriate staff at the numbers listed above.

Wildlife biologists regularly get calls from landowners with concerns of 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 wildlife 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.”

MUSKRAT AND MINK

MUSKRAT & MINK:
Statewide Zone: Oct. 28, 2017 – March 4, 2018
Mississippi River Zone: Nov. 13, 2017 – March 4, 2018
Bag Limit: None
Another member of the weasel family, the fisher can hold its own as one of Wisconsin's most tenacious predators. Well known for being successful porcupine hunters, fishers eat a diversity of small to mid-sized animals and fruits.

Fisher populations have been shifting over the two past decades. While northern counties like Ashland and Bayfield saw high harvest rates in the past, harvest in those counties has declined more recently. Marathon, 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. This shift is not unique to Wisconsin as the surrounding states have also seen declines in what was considered the fisher’s core habitat, outward to the periphery. Iowa (the state) had confirmed sightings of a fisher recently, indicating that they are adjusting to the more fragmented agriculture land across their southern range in Wisconsin.

Zone estimates based on population modeling suggest numbers have stabilized in Zone A, while Zone B remains 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 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 and viewing.

Fisher harvest must be reported within 24 hours of harvest online at gamereg.wi.gov or by calling 1-844-GAME-REG (1-844-426-3734). An automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest. Separated pelts must be registered in person within five days of the month of harvest by contacting a local conservation warden or other authorized DNR personnel. Conservations wardens and personnel can be found by visiting dnr.wi.gov keyword “trap” or by calling 888-936-7463. This year, instead of collecting the entire fisher skull, only a section of lower jaw will be collected at the time of registration. See the 2017/18 trapping regulations for more details on jaw collection.

**FISHER SEASON**


Bag Limit: One per permit

Application Deadline: Aug. 1
WEASELS, SKUNKS AND OPOSSUMS

Wisconsin is also home to all three species of weasels (long-tailed, short-tailed or ermine and least). The least weasel is the smallest mammalian carnivore in the world. Short-tailed weasels are probably the most common across the state. In the winter most weasels will turn white to better match their surroundings. You can find weasels in any brushy habitat that has small mammals to hunt. With a productive year for most prey species, Wisconsin should provide good opportunity to see or trap weasels this fall and winter.

Striped skunks are a familiar sight to anyone living in the suburbs. Striped skunks have adapted quite well to using cities as long as some cover is nearby. This has not been a pleasant experience for a great many of pet dogs or dog owners who live in good skunk habitat. Skunks are usually considered a nuisance species for their ability to saturate an entire area with their pungent defense mechanism. Due to their fearless attitude and calm demeanor skunks can be a quite enjoyable animal to watch. Watch for signs of disease in skunks and be particularly cautious around any animals behaving abnormally. Skunks are known to carry rabies in Wisconsin.

And now, what all trappers have been waiting on, the predicted forecast of Wisconsin’s favorite marsupial, the opossum (or possum). Possums can be found practically statewide though those in the north tend to have frostbite issues in their extremities. This unique and overlooked furbearer is a quite interesting animal. Known to play dead, be short lived and generally oblivious to danger, the possum is surely special. No worries Wisconsinites, the possum population remains stable and seemingly quite adequate.

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 all counties throughout Wisconsin. Genetic evaluation has shown prominent gene flow throughout the state and suggests healthy, dynamic Wisconsin badger populations. In some northern and south central counties, badgers are 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. Old badger dens are used by many furbearers but few will challenge a healthy badger for an occupied one.
AMERICAN (PINE) MARTEN

American marten, also known as pine marten, is a state endangered mammal. 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 marten with a focus on those reintroduced from Minnesota in 2009 – 2011. A similar project to evaluate survivorship and genetic diversity began in 2015 in the Nicolet that will attempt to evaluate gene flow between Michigan’s marten population and the Wisconsin population. A third study was initiated through Purdue University to simulate potential dispersal corridors for the marten 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, trail camera surveys and hair snare sampling.

Two exciting discoveries related to American marten were made in 2014 when a Red Cliff tribal biologist documented a marten on a trail camera on the Red Cliff Reservation in northern Bayfield County and when the National Park Service documented martens within Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. In the 1950s, ten martens were introduced to Stockton Island, within the Apostle Islands, with no sightings documented since the late 1960s. That is until a visitor took a picture and recent trail camera images captured their presence on five islands. Staff from a number of organizations continue to conduct research and inventory projects in the Apostle Islands and Bayfield Peninsula in an effort to better understand the origin and abundance of this recently found new population of martens. Partnering organizations include the Red Cliff Band, National Park Service, Northland College, UW-Madison, DNR, GLIFWC, and Chequamegon- Nicolet National Forest. Projects include trail camera stations, track surveys and hair-catching devices for genetic sampling.

Harvest of the state endangered American marten is prohibited and special trapping restrictions of other species apply within Wisconsin’s Marten Protection Areas. These special restrictions allow for regulated take of several other furbearers while protecting marten. Restrictions can be found in the Wisconsin 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 at 715-365-8856 or James.Woodford@wi.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 Burlington area fur farm. In recent years, the only sightings of stone marten 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 martens can be easily confused with another member of the weasel family, the mink, due to the white markings on the throat.

The stone marten and American marten ranges 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 labs.russell.wisc.edu/pauli/.
ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

INCIDENTAL TAKE

Trappers are required to turn in incidentally trapped animals to local conservation officers. They can use the 1-800-TIP-DNR hotline (1-800-847-9367) to report incidentals or contact their local conservation wardens. Incidentally trapped animals are used in furbearer research and training workshops. Often pelts are provided for educational purposes. Sold pelt proceeds are used in growing the Wisconsin Cooperative 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.”

LOCAL ORDINANCES

Some villages, cities and towns throughout the state—primarily in urban areas—require special permits and/or have ordinances that restrict trapping or the discharge of firearms or bows. Check with local town or village offices before hunting or trapping to see if special rules apply. A quality hunting or trapping experience can be found on public or private lands, but pre-season scouting and permission from landowners is critical.

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 Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping. This is one of the largest collective trap research efforts ever undertaken with final products generating information and suggestions that each state, tribe and their trappers can use to improve animal welfare and trapping in general. BMPs are commonly used in trapper education programs to enhance student knowledge and produce trappers who understand humane and ethical trapping.

The Wisconsin DNR and the Wisconsin Trappers Association encourages all trappers to use this research when they are selecting traps as these documents recommend traps that have proven to be both humane and efficient at catching animals; points of great importance to trappers. John Olson, a former furbearer specialist reported, “As of June 2014, we have a science-based, published document for all furbears in the lower 48 states, from wolves to weasels.” You can find these 22 BMP studies and much more at 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 volunteer instructors with roughly 50 – 60 classes being offered every year (available via GO WILD). Search statewide to see the class that may be best for you. Trapper Education courses teach students the importance of trapper ethics, biology and ecology of furbearers, BMPs, furbearer management and diseases, and Wisconsin trapping rules and regulations. Hands-on field day(s) provide students with the opportunity to set traps, create sets, handle furs and observe fur handling demos. The course is $12 and includes a trapping license for your first license year for residents. A correspondence course is also offered for those individuals who are unable to attend an in-person course but proof of ability must be confirmed at a scheduled field test-out with a qualified instructor. An online version of the TE class will be launched and available this summer and will also require completion of the field test-out. Visit dnr.wi.gov, keywords “Trapper Ed” for more information.

RIGHT-OF-WAY TRAPPING

Right-of-way trapping is complicated. Who owns the land along Wisconsin’s roadways can vary 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. Know who owns the land and always get landowner permission before hunting or trapping along roadsides. Responsible actions today are critical for continued hunting and trapping opportunity in the future.

American marten are currently the only furbearer on Wisconsin’s endangered species list.
WHITE-TAILED DEER FORECAST
2017 DEER HUNTS

THE ARCHERY AND CROSSBOW SEASON
Sept.16 – Jan. 7, 2018

YOUTH DEER SEASON
Oct. 7 – 8

GUN DEER HUNT FOR HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES*
Oct. 7 – 15

TRADITIONAL NINE-DAY GUN DEER SEASON
Nov. 18 – 26

*On sponsored properties only
**Select DMUs (see page 44 for details)

MUZZLELOADER SEASON
Nov. 27 – Dec. 6

DECEMBER STATEWIDE FOUR-DAY ANTLERLESS-ONLY SEASON
Dec. 7 – 10

ANTLERLESS-ONLY HOLIDAY HUNT**
Dec. 24 – Jan. 1, 2018
With another mild winter, a very wet summer, and reports of increased sighting, deer collisions, and other measurable data throughout the state, all indicators point toward high expectations for an excellent deer hunting season in 2017. Hunters continue to settle into the many rule changes that were put in play during the past few years, and there are few changes for this year. As a result, we are hoping that hunters will feel more comfortable with the rules and can focus on the highly anticipated tradition of the upcoming Wisconsin deer season.

For a complete overview of all deer hunting rules including changes for this season, please check the 2017 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations available online or at any hunting license vendor or DNR Service Center. For additional information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “deer.” There, you will find an abundance of helpful information including FAQs, maps, resources to help find a place to hunt and more.

**COUNTY DEER ADVISORY COUNCILS AND ANTLERLESS TAGS**

County Deer Advisory Councils were formed in 2014 to increase local involvement in deer management. Councils are comprised of representatives from local hunting or conservation clubs, forestry, agriculture, tourism and local governmental interests. Each council is led by local Wisconsin Conservation Congress delegates, while a team of three liaisons from the DNR’s wildlife, forestry and law enforcement programs attend CDAC meetings to present data and offer professional perspectives. Each of Wisconsin’s 71 councils (Menominee County chose not to have a council) directly participate in reviewing and setting population objectives, DMU boundary reviews, antlerless harvest quotas and antlerless tag levels. They also provide recommendations on various season structure elements that will affect the 2017 deer seasons. These include whether junior antlerless tags may be filled in a specific county and whether to implement the Dec. 24-Jan. 1 antlerless-only “Holiday Hunt”.

During the fall of 2014, 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 quotas and antlerless tag recommendations, relying on deer herd data and public feedback. They again met in the spring of 2016 and 2017 to recommend antlerless harvest quotas, antlerless tag levels and certain season options that will guide the upcoming season.

For more information regarding County Deer Advisory Councils, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “CDAC.”

**DEER MANAGEMENT ZONES AND UNITS**

Wisconsin’s four Deer Management Zones and 76 Deer Management Units (DMUs) have not changed in 2017 but will be under review by CDACs this fall. DMUs follow county boundaries in most cases, and nine DMUs are split by zone boundaries.
This is the second year since the DNR introduced the new Go Wild licensing and registration system to deer hunters. Through Go Wild, hunters are able to purchase their deer hunting licenses, select their antlerless tag(s) and print them all from the convenience of home at no cost. There are still over 1,000 license agents that hunters can visit to purchase licenses and tags. To find a license agent, hunters may visit dnr.wi.gov, and search keywords “license agent.”

With licenses and tags being printed on plain paper, there are changes to the forms of proof for hunting licenses. Hunters may present, as proof of license, a paper copy of their license printed from Go Wild, their authenticated Wisconsin driver’s license, a department-issued Conservation Card or a department-approved PDF of the license displayed on a mobile device. All deer carcass tags will be printed on plain paper and a hunter may only hold a single copy of any individual tag when afield. Read more about Go Wild at gowild.wi.gov.

CARCASS TAGS AND TAGGING IN 2017

In 2016 the new licensing system provided for all deer carcass tags to be printed on plain paper, and this continues in 2017. This allows hunters to easily reprint a lost or damaged tag, but will require some care when tagging their deer. To replace a tag, the easiest option, with no cost, is to go onto their Go Wild account and reprint a lost/damaged carcass tag from home. Having a carcass tag printed at a DNR service center is also free, but there is a $2 processing fee for having a tag reprinted at a license agent.

While afield, a hunter can only carry a single copy of each individual carcass tag. Hunters must keep the tag intact and in legible condition. A plastic zip-top bag is recommended to keep tags intact.

ELECTRONIC HARVEST REGISTRATION IN 2017

More than 316,000 deer were registered electronically by phone or online in 2016. While some expressed concern during the previous two seasons, Wisconsin deer hunters have adapted to the new method. Hunters experienced few problems with 97 percent managing to register their deer with no assistance during the opening weekend of the gun deer season. The other 3 percent were provided assistance by talking directly to a Customer Service agent.

Hunter compliance was measured using several different methods. Results showed that 90 to over 93 percent of hunters...

NEW FOR 2017

- Hunters will no longer be required to validate their carcass tag by writing the date and circling the time of kill on the tag. Instead, hunters will be required to validate their tag by detaching the bottom portion (the “validation stub”) from the rest of the tag. Separating the validation stub from the rest of the tag, at the time of kill, will satisfy the requirements for validation. The department recognizes that immediately attaching a non-durable tag to a harvested deer could cause an increase in damaged or lost tags. To alleviate these issues, starting in 2016 hunters are no longer required to immediately attach their validated carcass tag to the deer. However, hunters are required to attach the top portion of the tag to their deer if they intend to leave it. Examples of leaving the animal include: walking back to get a vehicle to retrieve the deer, leaving the deer in the truck when going into a gas station or leaving the deer at deer camp. Hunters are still required to keep their carcass tag with the meat until consumed.

- All deer must be registered by 5 p.m. the day after harvest. Confirmation numbers will be issued at the completion of registration. However, the confirmation number is no longer required to be written on the validated carcass tag.

- North of Highway 64, ground blinds and tree stands may be left out overnight on DNR-managed lands; see requirements on page 34 or visit dnr.wi.gov and search “hunting regulations”.

- Oconto County is now closed to baiting and feeding deer.

- Baiting and feeding regulations have changed in select counties. See “Baiting & Feeding in Wisconsin” on page 47.
complied and registered their deer in 2016. This range is estimated to be similar to compliance rates when registering in person was required.

Successful deer hunters in 2017 will register their deer online (fastest and easiest method) or by phone. They also have the option of registering electronically at a participating walk-in registration station. For a list of participating businesses offering walk-in registration, search keyword “registration stations.” To register a deer electronically, hunters will visit gamereg.wi.gov or call 1-844-426-3734 (1-844-GAME-REG). To start, the electronic registration system will prompt hunters to enter the unique carcass tag number for the tag they have filled and their date of birth. Then, 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 will be collected. Once hunters have provided this information, they will receive a unique 10-character confirmation number. This number no longer is required to be written on the carcass tag. All deer harvested during any deer season must be registered by 5 p.m. the day after harvest. For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “electronic registration.”

DEER HUNTING SEASONS

The archery and crossbow season will run concurrently. Hunters are reminded to purchase a crossbow license or archer/crossbow upgrade to hunt with a crossbow. Season runs Sept. 16 to Jan. 7, 2018.

Gun Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities season runs Oct. 7 to Oct. 15 on sponsored properties only.

The Youth gun season runs Oct. 7 to Oct. 8.

The traditional nine-day gun deer season starts the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Season runs Nov. 18 to Nov. 26. The muzzleloader season runs 10 days immediately following the nine-day gun season. Season runs Nov. 27 to Dec. 6.

The statewide December four-day antlerless-only hunt is once again an annual component of the season framework. Season runs Dec. 7 to Dec. 10. Only antlerless deer may be harvested with any weapon type during this season; buck harvest is not allowed in any zone, DMU or land type throughout the state.

The antlerless-only Holiday Hunt will be offered in select DMUs and will run from Dec. 24 to Jan. 1, 2018. DMUs offering the holiday hunt in 2017 are: Adams (Farmland Zone portion only), Brown, Buffalo, Crawford, Door, Dunn, Iowa, Kewaunee, Marinette (Farmland Zone portion only), Milwaukee, Oconto, Polk, Richland, Sauk, Waukesha, Waupaca and Waushara. Only antlerless deer may be harvested with any weapon type during this season, in the listed DMUs. Buck hunting is allowed by archery and crossbow hunters in any DMU not included in the holiday hunt.
BUCK-ONLY DEER MANAGEMENT UNITS IN 2017

Four 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 and include Ashland, Iron, Vilas and Eau Claire (Central Forest Zone) counties. Buck tags may not be used to tag a buck during any antlerless-only season. Bonus antlerless tags are not available for purchase in buck-only DMUs.

A hunter does not need to attach the carcass tag to the animal if they are in the vehicle carrying their deer. If you leave it, tag it!

METRO SUB-UNITS

Six metropolitan areas are designated as sub-units to provide additional hunting opportunity, including extended gun, archery and crossbow seasons. Hunters wishing to pursue antlerless deer in a metro sub-unit must do so using a valid antlerless deer tag designated for the zone, DMU 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 sub-units.

Certain metro sub-units offer, at no cost, a Metro Sub-unit Antlerless Deer Tag. A metro sub-unit tag(s) will be issued upon request to any hunter who purchases a deer hunting license. These metro sub-unit tags are only valid within the zone, DMU, metro sub-unit and land type specified on the tag.

Also, select metro sub-units are offering Bonus Metro Sub-unit Antlerless Deer Tags for the same price as regular bonus antlerless tags. Bonus metro sub-unit antlerless tags are only valid for harvesting an antlerless deer in the zone, DMU, metro sub-unit and land type designated on the tag. These metro sub-unit tags will go on sale using the same schedule as normal Bonus Antlerless Deer Tags. The dates and times of sale are listed in a previous section.

DEER MANAGEMENT ZONES AND DEER MANAGEMENT UNITS

Deer management zones and units remain unchanged from last year. 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 2) Antlerless Deer Tag(s) and any Bonus Antlerless Tags that they purchase. All antlerless tags must be filled only in the zone, DMU and land type designated on the tag.

For registration purposes, it is important that hunters properly enter the information regarding where they harvested the deer. For example, if a hunter shot an antlerless deer in Taylor County, the deer would be registered in the Northern Forest (Zone 1), the Taylor DMU and the land type where the deer was shot (public or private).

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 and tagged deer on a public road or possess it at a residence, camp or business. A hunter does not need to attach the carcass tag to the animal if they are in the vehicle carrying their deer. If you leave it, tag it!

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 city or village authorities for local ordinance restrictions.

PUBLIC ACCESS LANDS

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.

Check out the Public Access Lands Atlas! 

[dnr.wi.gov, keyword “Maps”]
2017 DEER HUNTS

Aside from the traditional archer, crossbow, nine-day gun deer and muzzleloader seasons, the following hunts will be offered in 2017:

ANTLERLESS-ONLY HOLIDAY HUNT

The antlerless-only Holiday Hunt will run Dec. 24 – Jan. 1, 2018. This hunt is only occurring in select Farmland (Zone 2) DMUs including: Adams (Farmland Zone portion only), Brown, Buffalo, Crawford, Door, Dunn, Iowa, Kewaunee, Marinette (Farmland Zone portion only), Milwaukee, Oconto (Farmland Zone portion only), Polk, Richland, Sauk, Waukesha, Waupaca and Waushara. Hunters must possess an antlerless deer carcass tag valid for the zone, DMU and land type in which they choose to hunt during this season. No antlered deer can be harvested, with any weapon type, in a DMU where a holiday hunt is in progress. All hunters within the area of this hunt, with the exception of waterfowl hunters, are required to meet highly visible clothing (blaze orange or florescent pink) requirements during this hunt.

DECEMBER STATEWIDE 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 tag availability will limit participation), and will run Dec. 7–10. The season is restricted by antlerless tag availability, and no antlered bucks can be harvested, with any weapon type, in a DMU. Therefore, all hunters must possess (or be in a group with someone that possesses) an antlerless deer carcass tag valid for the zone, DMU and land type in which they choose to hunt. All hunters with the exception of waterfowl hunters are required to meet highly visible (blaze orange or florescent pink) clothing requirements during this hunt.

YOUTH DEER SEASON

The youth gun deer season will be held Oct. 7 – 8. 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 may harvest additional antlerless deer through the purchase of Bonus Antlerless Deer Tag(s), where available, or with a Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tag included with a license. Note these tags are not valid statewide and are specific to the zone, DMU and land type on the tag. 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 deer with a firearm 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 youth gun deer hunt.

GUN DEER HUNT FOR HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES

The gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities will be held Oct. 7–15. This special hunt was established to provide more opportunities for hunters with disabilities to participate in Wisconsin’s deer hunting traditions. 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 from a stationary vehicle) may participate. The gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities is not a statewide season. Individuals participating in this hunt will have the opportunity to harvest a buck using a gun and/or archery buck tag in any statewide unit. They will also have the ability...
to harvest one antlerless deer in any statewide unit with a Farmland (Zone 2) antlerless deer tag, including buck only units. Please see the 2017 deer hunting regulations for more details. This special hunt is only authorized on lands specifically enrolled in the disabled hunt program. Landowners or managers interested in sponsoring lands for the 2018 hunt must submit an online application before June 1, 2018. Qualified disabled hunters are encouraged to contact sponsors before Sept. 1. For a list of sponsors for the 2017 season, visit dnr.wi.gov and 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 tags. To help deer hunters prepare for the seasons, the department will host an online chat with wildlife and regulations experts in November. For more information and to view a schedule of upcoming chats, search keyword “chat.”

GET INVOLVED IN WISCONSIN’S DEER MANAGEMENT

There are many opportunities available to play an active role in the management of white-tailed deer in Wisconsin:

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 gathered during the public comment period of these meetings. CDAC meetings provide an opportunity to interact with DNR 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.”

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 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.”

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.”

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress gives citizens the unique opportunity to influence the state's conservation policies.

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.”

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 Aug. 1 to Sept. 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.”

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.”

Help monitor deer reproduction in Wisconsin.
Keep a tally sheet in your car to record all deer sightings from Aug. 1 to Sept. 30.
Wisconsin has monitored chronic wasting disease (CWD) for 15 years. Between 2002 and March 2016, the department tested over 199,500 free-ranging deer, of which over 3,500 have tested positive for CWD. There are currently 43 CWD-affected counties. 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 2016 deer season, DNR sampled 6,097 deer statewide. Of these, 447 tested positive. Sampling strategies were aimed at detecting new locations and prevalence trends. Monitoring plans focused surveillance on adult deer (the age group most likely to have CWD).

Once again, hunter cooperation was outstanding. DNR staff continue to work to make testing easier for hunters through the use of self-serve kiosks and enhanced communication and outreach efforts in 2016. Kiosks provide a 24/7 drop-off option for hunters to help enhance sampling numbers, provide for ease of use, and increase options in the world of electronic registration. Overall feedback from hunters during the 2016 deer season reflected an appreciation for the kiosk option.

With more samples collected in 2016, the turnaround time for hunters receiving test results also improved. The average statewide turnaround time during the 2016 deer season for test results was just over nine days (weekends included), compared to just under 14 days in 2015. The department will continue efforts to lower the turnaround time by becoming more efficient with cost and time.

Following the 2012 discovery of a CWD-positive adult doe near Shell Lake, 2016 marked the fifth year of surveillance efforts in Washburn County. Following recommendations from a local community action team, local landowners and hunters helped the department sample over 2,000 deer in the area since the initial detection. No new positives have been detected. Based on five years of sampling, all information has indicated CWD is not widespread in the Washburn area, and occurs at a very low prevalence rate.

The 2012 discovery of CWD in wild deer in Juneau, Adams and Portage counties prompted the 2013 surveillance effort in a 10-mile radius surrounding the positives. There are currently 16 total CWD positive wild deer detections in the three county area. Surveillance was also conducted surrounding CWD-positive captive deer facilities in Marathon and Eau Claire counties, with no wild CWD deer detected. New for 2016, wildlife staff sampled wild deer in Oneida and Oconto counties and the surrounding area where CWD-positive deer were discovered on captive deer facilities.

**CWD PREVALENCE IN WISCONSIN**

CWD prevalence has changed over time. Since 2002, CWD prevalence within our western monitoring area has shown an overall increasing trend in all sex and age classes. During the past 15 years, the trend in prevalence in adult males has risen from 8-10 percent to over 30 percent and in adult females from about 3-4 percent to nearly 15 percent. During that same time, the prevalence trend in yearling males has increased from about 2 percent to over 10 percent and in yearling females from roughly 2 percent to about 9 percent. Despite yearly fluctuations, overall prevalence in the endemic area of southern Wisconsin has doubled across all sex and age classes of deer.
2017 CWD SAMPLING IN WISCONSIN

During the 2017 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 and Portage counties, as well as in the wild deer herd surrounding CWD positive captive deer facilities in Marathon, Eau Claire, Oneida and Oconto counties. Exact sampling locations will be available on the department’s website prior to the 2017 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 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 2017, weighted surveillance will begin in Dodge, Washington, Ozaukee, Sheboygan and Fond du Lac counties. In 2016, taxidermists in Marquette and Green Lake counties provided samples that tested negative.

BAITING & FEEDING IN WISCONSIN

Under state statute 29.336, Wis. Stats, DNR is required to prohibit baiting and feeding of deer when one of three criteria is found to exist. These criteria include a county within a designated CWD control zone, a CWD or Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) positive wild or captive deer within the county, or a portion of a county is within a 10-mile radius of the positive location of a wild or captive deer. The department determines a county meets at least one of these three criteria and issues a Secretaries order designating that county as a county where baiting and feeding deer is prohibited.

In August 2017, an Act signed into law to amend current state statute did the following:

- Remove deer baiting and feeding prohibitions in counties where 36 months have passed since any confirmed positive test for chronic wasting disease or bovine tuberculosis within the county; and
- Remove deer baiting and feeding prohibitions in adjacent counties where 24 months have passed since any confirmed positive test for chronic wasting disease or bovine tuberculosis within a 10-mile radius of the county.

With this new legislation, of the 43 CWD affected counties there are 15 counties for which baiting and feeding bans are lifted: Barron, Burnett, Calumet, Clark, Dodge, Jackson, Kenosha, Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Polk, Racine, Sheboygan, Washburn, Washington and Waushara. Twenty-eight CWD affected counties will continue to have baiting and feeding bans. No additional counties will be lifted from the ban during any of the 2017 deer season. The 24/36 month period would start over again with each new positive test result as they are confirmed. Please check the baiting and feeding webpage frequently for updates, as new baiting and feeding bans may be enacted in 2017.

dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/bait.html

CWD IN NORTH AMERICA

As of 2017, 23 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 future impacts of CWD in Wisconsin. If you hunt in other states, know the rules for carcass transportation.

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 15 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 and search keyword “CWD.”
WHITE-TAILED DEER RESEARCH

There is a variety of interesting and exciting deer research taking place in Wisconsin that included opportunities for hunters and volunteers to get involved. However, opportunities, outcomes and project specifics are changing regularly. Please visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/research/whitetaileddeer.html for current information.

In addition, fall 2016 marks the beginning of the largest and most comprehensive deer research project ever undertaken in Wisconsin: The Southwest Wisconsin CWD, Deer and Predator Study. This initiative stems from Governor Scott Walker’s commitment to reevaluating chronic wasting disease in Wisconsin. The goal of this project is to comprehensively examine factors that could impact deer survival and deer population growth in southern Wisconsin. Those include Chronic Wasting Disease, predation, habitat suitability and hunter harvest. Simultaneous studies will take place in areas with differing rates of CWD infection, which will help the agency better understand how CWD may or may not be interacting with other factors that ultimately impact the deer herd. Uniquely, this study will directly estimate the abundance and distribution of deer predators (bobcats and coyotes) within the study areas, and will examine their impact on deer survival and behavior. If you harvest a deer with a radio collar it is vital that you call the number on the radio collar so the research staff can record that deer’s information and re-use the collar. To get involved in the project visit “CWD Research.” For specific questions contact Daniel Storm, ungulate research scientist, (715) 365-4712 Daniel.Storm@Wisconsin.gov.
## 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

### ARCHERY TOTALS

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### GUN TOTALS

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Wildlife biologists are optimistic about deer hunting opportunities for the 2017 deer hunting seasons across the 19-county DNR West Central District. As deer hunters may recall, the Deer Trustee Report led to numerous deer hunting regulations and deer management strategy changes in 2014, with deer management units now realigned to coincide with county boundaries. The WCD lies within three distinct deer management zones: Southern Farmland Zone, Central Farmland Zone, and Central Forest Zone. Each deer management unit has a specific three-year objective to increase, decrease, or stabilize the deer population. The 2015-2017 objective in all WCD farmland units, except for Buffalo, Chippewa, and Trempealeau Counties, is to stabilize deer populations, while the objective 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 desire to increase deer numbers. Season structure and antlerless deer permit numbers in each county deer management unit are the strategies used to achieve these objectives, and local County Deer Advisory Councils or CDACs suggest them.

Generally speaking, from St. Croix 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 from those experienced in 2016. Deer numbers in the WCD’s Central Forest Zone, while lower overall than those in the Farmland Zones, have improved from 2016 levels. Although growing season conditions have been excellent over the last few summers, with ample moisture and heat, 2016 saw poor mast crops across much of the area due to a severe late spring freeze. Deer responded by shifting to alternate food sources. Food availability heading into the 2017 should be exceptional, resulting in plump deer, healthy fawns, and bucks reaching their maximum antler growth potential.
Hunters with the ability to do so should adjust their hunting locations as deer feeding behaviors change seasonally. For example, green soybean leaves may be an important deer food during the early bow season, while corn and soybeans are often most attractive during November and December. Alfalfa fields, oak stands with acorns and young clearcuts may be hunted successfully throughout the entire fall. Key in on these food sources or travel routes between bedding and feeding locations to have more success this fall. Be flexible and do not be afraid to adapt to changing or different local conditions.

Wildlife biologist for St. Croix and Pierce counties, Ryan Haffele, summarized the reasons for continued optimism shared by his fellow wildlife biologists throughout the WCD Farmland Zones by stating, “Several mild winters in a row, good to excellent spring fawn production and survival and conservative antlerless permit issuance over the past several years have boosted deer populations. The increased populations should lead to ample hunter opportunity to see deer in the field. Both counties increased the number of free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags issued with each deer license to two in hopes of increasing the antlerless harvest.”

Jess Carstens, wildlife biologist for Dunn and Pepin counties, shares similar thoughts and notes, “Deer numbers are strong in both counties, and there should be ample hunting opportunities for archers and gun hunters. While deer are plentiful in both counties, hunters will continue to battle the irregular distribution of deer across the landscape, with isolated pockets in each county that have little habitat and fewer deer.” Carstens further notes that, unlike last year, the Pepin County CDAC elected to not participate in the 2017 Holiday Hunt, and two free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags will be issued with the purchase of each deer hunting license with 900 private land bonus antlerless tags and 150 public land bonus antlerless tags available for sale. Dunn County, on the other hand will participate in the 2017 Holiday Hunt and offer one free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tag with each deer hunting license sold and an additional 2600 bonus antlerless tags, 2100 for private land and 500 for public land. The seven-day antlerless Holiday Hunt runs from Dec. 24 – Jan. 1.

Buffalo and Trempealeau counties, well known areas for producing large-antlered bucks, again possess a strong deer population according to wildlife technician Gary Wolf. He also remarks that landowners are reporting high numbers of does with multiple fawns, a lot of daytime deer activity, and trail camera photos showing bucks with good antler growth, including many bragging-sized bucks. An additional observation shared by Wolf is that landowners who have completed young forest habitat improvement projects are seeing more deer in those areas, reinforcing the connection between quality habitat and healthy deer. Wildlife biologist Mark Rasmussen comments, “While both counties have strong numbers of deer, hunting regulations in the two counties differ because the three-year population objectives established by the respective CDACs differ.” Attempting to decrease Buffalo County deer numbers, each deer hunting license purchased includes three free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags, an additional 1500 bonus antlerless tags are available for private land and 250 for public land, and the county will participate in the Holiday Hunt. Trempealeau County, having a three-year goal to increase deer numbers, has one Farmland Antlerless Deer Tag available for each purchased deer hunting license and 1000 bonus antlerless tags for private land. There are no bonus antlerless permits for Trempealeau County public lands.

Marathon County deer hunters can expect greater numbers of deer, according to wildlife biologist Brandon Stefanski who is stationed in Wausau. As elsewhere around the district, several mild winters in a row have aided fawn survival, resulting in increased deer numbers. Stefanski cautions, however, that increased deer numbers have increased urban and suburban nuisance deer complaints. “Deer can cause lots of damage to landscaping plants and gardens. Hunters can help curb deer population growth and minimize property damage by harvesting antlerless deer in and around communities where hunting is allowed.”
This year marks the second consecutive year that free farmland zone antlerless tags will not be available in Chippewa County. Hunters wishing to harvest an antlerless deer in Chippewa County will need to do so with a bonus tag. Members of the Chippewa CDAC were concerned about antlerless harvest on the Chippewa County Forest and voted to issue 5,000 bonus antlerless tags on private land only. “I recommend that folks buy their bonus tags early this year,” advises Bill Hogseth, wildlife biologist for Chippewa and Eau Claire counties.

Last year, bonus tags in Chippewa County sold out after only two weeks. If you want the opportunity to harvest a doe, do not wait until the last minute to get a bonus tag. Deer hunters in Crawford, Vernon, La Crosse and the farmland portions of Monroe, Adams and Juneau counties should likewise encounter strong deer populations this fall. Some of the stronger deer numbers in the WCD continue to reside in Vernon County. “Like most counties in the driftless area, Vernon County’s rugged topography and small amount of public land leads to challenging deer hunting within a remarkable deer habitat matrix,” remarks 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. Two Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags are included at no cost with the purchase of each deer hunting license in Crawford and Vernon counties. There are 100 public land and 1200 private land bonus antlerless tags available this year in Vernon County, while Crawford County has no public land and 2800 private land bonus antlerless tags, and Crawford County will again participate in the Holiday Hunt,” he says.

La Crosse DNR wildlife biologist Ron Lichtie points out that the La Crosse Metro Sub-unit and Hudson Metro Sub-unit have extended archery and gun deer seasons again this year in an effort to help control deer numbers. Please see the 2017 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations for Metro Unit hunting season dates and DNR website dnr.wi.gov/topic/Hunt/documents/2017_Metro_Sub-Unit_Tag_Information.pdf for tag availability.

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 DNR’s Black River Falls wildlife biologist Scott Roepke comments, “Mild winters and reduced antlerless tag permit numbers have allowed deer numbers to rebound significantly in Jackson and Clark counties. Summer deer observations do not necessarily equate to more deer sightings during the fall deer hunting seasons, particularly the gun deer season. Hunters are encouraged to scout new hunting locales annually and adjust their techniques based upon their observations and discoveries. Be flexible and willing to try new areas – you may be pleasantly surprised.” Roepke also encourages deer hunters to take advantage of the various deer hunting opportunities throughout the fall. Explore opportunities during early archery or crossbow, muzzleloader, or late archery seasons to realize the full potential of what Wisconsin deer hunting offers. For the first time in four years, deer numbers in the Jackson County Central Forest Zone have rebounded to level that will support a small antlerless harvest, providing increased hunter opportunity to put meat in the freezer while allowing continued deer population growth. Therefore, 375 bonus antlerless tags are available for both public and private lands. Permit numbers have also increased in Jackson County’s Central Farmland Zone in an effort to maintain the population due to crop damage and deer-vehicle collision concerns. In the Central Farmland Zone of Clark County, antlerless permits have also increased over their 2016 levels to address rising deer numbers, while permit numbers were maintained at their 2016 levels in the Central Forest Zone of the county.

Roepke reminds hunters that elk reintroduction efforts continue in the Central Forest Zone of 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. The deer population in the Central Forest Zone is generally not as productive as in the Farmland Zones and is slower to increase, but deer quantity and quality have improved for 2017. Long-time Central Forest Zone wildlife biologist, Wayne Hall, forecasts deer numbers and deer hunting opportunities throughout the Central
Forest Zone to be improved from 2016 because of three mild winters in a row and increased fawn recruitment. Antler development is likewise looking very good throughout the area. Hall further notes that for the second year in a row, 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.

The Central Forest Zone area of Eau Claire County features a buck-only season for the first time in many years. “Because some members of the Eau Claire CDAC felt strongly that previous years’ herd growth was not adequately meeting their objective to increase the deer population in that area, they chose to limit antlerless harvest to only youth, disabled and veteran hunters,” says wildlife biologist Bill Hogseth. CWD testing will continue to be available in the area surrounding Fairchild, where a captive deer tested positive on a deer farm in 2015.

Darren Ladwig, wildlife biologist for Adams and Juneau counties, states, “As with much of Wisconsin, abundant rainfall this spring and summer has provided exceptional vegetation growth for fawning cover as well as deer browse. That being said, if increased precipitation continues into fall, deer will most likely be utilizing the sandy oak ridges which border extensive swamps more frequently than during a year with average rainfall.” Deer numbers in the Central Forest Zone portion of Adams and Juneau counties have increased roughly 25 percent over the last several years. Deer numbers in the Central Farmland Zone portion of these two counties remain strong too. The Adams County Central Farmland Zone will hold a Holiday Hunt in an effort to increase the antlerless harvest and provide more recreational hunting opportunity for deer hunters.

Fortunately, large blocks of public lands exist in the Central Forest Zone. These extensive areas offer opportunities for dedicated hunters to find areas that receive low hunting pressure, especially during the early archery season, which can result in enjoyable and successful experiences. Similar observations have also been noted for the Eau Claire County and Clark County areas of the Central Forest Zone. Ladwig further points out that timber harvests on public lands in Adams and Eau Claire Counties over the past several years are regenerating aspen and oak, creating ideal deer habitat that will have positive impacts on deer for years to come.

Deer hunters should be aware that the free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags are deer management unit (county) and land type (public or private) specific. Some counties – St. Croix, Pierce, Pepin, Buffalo Vernon, and Crawford - offer multiple Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags with the purchase of each deer hunting license. Marathon County wildlife biologist Brandon Stefanski remarks that all hunters purchasing deer hunting licenses in the Southern Farmland or Central Farmland Zones have the option to declare the free antlerless tag(s) issued at the time of purchase for public or private land. There are no limits to tags issued in this manner for either land type. Hunters who hunt both private and public land types should think carefully before declaring their free tag land choice. Limited quantities of bonus antlerless tags are available in most farmland units.
More information about bonus antlerless tags is available at dnr.wi.gov/Permits/bonusavailability.html. Many counties within the Central and Southern Farm Zones have abundant deer populations, and hunters 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 are in their summer patterns right now, and hunters can key in on those movements and have great success the first couple of weeks of the archery season. Bucks will likely be in bachelor groups yet and can be very visible and predictable in late August into mid-September. Wildlife biologist, Ron Lichtie advises early season archery hunters to pay close attention to the mast crops where they hunt. This year’s favorable growing season has set the stage for copious soft and hard mast crops. These food sources may influence wildlife movements and behaviors until the foods are depleted. Hunters should pay particular attention to areas with concentrations of white and bur oak. When white and bur oaks start dropping their acorns, deer will key in on this vital food resource and their movement patterns will change accordingly.

Hunters are reminded that many counties in the area are CWD affected counties. Carcass movement and baiting restrictions are in place to minimize the spread of CWD if it is present within the county. Although CWD sampling is not mandatory, hunters are encouraged to submit samples within both counties in an effort to help detect the disease if it is present. Hunters can find out where to sample their deer by visiting the DNR website and searching “registration stations.” Select the county you are interested in and make sure to check one of the CWD testing options under deer registration type.

West Central District wildlife management staff encourages all deer hunters to enjoy safe, fun, and successful 2017 deer hunting seasons. Additionally, deer hunters may contact local DNR wildlife staff for further deer hunting information. A DNR staff directory is located here: dnr.wi.gov/staffdir/_newsearch/contactsearchext.aspx.
2017 NORTHERN DISTRICT FORECAST

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With contributions from Northern District DNR wildlife biologists

There is no question that the overall deer herd in Northern Wisconsin is in a growth stage due in part to three back-to-back mild winters, conservative antlerless quotas and great spring-summer conditions. The rate of growth may vary from area-to-area and may not be observed on each hunting parcel due to varying degrees of habitat quality. In Northern Wisconsin, typical of the Upper Midwest, deer thrive in brushy and young forest habitats. Generally speaking, if you can see a long distance in the woods where you are hunting you are not in good deer habitat. This is especially true in the Northern Forest of Wisconsin. The key is to focus your scouting in areas that have a diverse age class of trees and don’t overlook marshy/brushy edges. The most successful hunters hunt in “funnels” and where edges of different habitat types come together. Hunting near recent timber sales and aspen clear cuts provide all of these key elements.

Last year, we predicted to see excellent antler development due to the milder winter. This was proved correct based on field reports during the hunting season and our deer aging survey conducted from hunter-harvested deer. The estimates from this survey indicated that the percentage of bucks with forked antlers in 2016 were slightly-to-substantially higher than the five-year means in the Northern Forest counties. The largest increase occurred in the Northwest Forest counties, which was 35 percent above the five-year mean and nearly double the yearling forked-antler percent in 2014. The extremely mild winter in 2016-17 will yield similar results this coming fall for antler development and fawn recruitment. In addition, an early spring green-up, and the absence of a late spring frost really boosted vegetation growth and this was all positive for deer. We had regular rains during the summer that also contributed to ample vegetation growth. In summary, deer are going into the fall and early winter in excellent shape.

We are now nearing the end of seeing the impact of the very severe winter of 2013-14 on deer age classes. This winter resulted in an especially weak 2013 age-class (bucks that would have been 3.5 years during the 2016 hunting season). The many deer that made it through this winter will be 4.5 years-old in the 2017 hunting season. For the upcoming season, we should see strong 2 ½ and 3 ½ age classes of bucks and they will have respectable antler development due to the mild winter. This may not apply to counties that have had zero to very low antlerless quotas because some hunter harvest has shifted to bucks resulting in negatively skewing the buck age structure (yearlings and mature bucks are the only deer that can be harvested in those counties).

Predation on deer in Northern Wisconsin is always a popular topic and often used as a reason to explain why fewer deer are seen on a particular hunting parcel. Habitat quality is the key for deer to prosper, and if you do not hunt in quality deer habitat it is unlikely you will see many deer...with or without predators. Predator populations do play a role in changes in deer populations; however, our research using collared deer shows that predation increases when deer are in poor nutritional condition. In addition, thick brushy habitat provides not only good forage, but also very good escape cover.

Jenna Kosnicki, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Iron County reports, “The 2017 deer hunting season should bring great hunting opportunities this year in Iron County. No antlerless tags were allotted in Ashland, Iron and Vilas counties in 2015 and 2016 (not including special hunts), and we’re continuing to see the effects of that. More deer are being seen in the wild and along roadsides. Deer populations seem to be rising with healthy fawn recruitment present; several cases of does with multiple fawns
have been spotted in Iron County. The 2017 season will bring another round of no antlerless tags in and around Iron County (not including special hunts) with the hopes of continuing this population trend. Herd health assessments conducted early this spring indicated a healthy herd with fat reserves still available to individual deer. With the back-to-back mild winters and deer with strong fat reserves, hunters could see larger bucks with greater antler development this fall and winter.”

Bob Hanson, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Burnett County reports, “Deer numbers are strengthening in Washburn, Burnett, and Douglas counties. Weather plays an intricate role in the sustainability of the deer population. A mild winter paired with ample growing season rains has created plenty of food and minimal winter die off for deer, even in the sandy soils. Healthy deer lead to more fawns, and early indications show very good fawn production heading into fall 2017. Deer and deer sign are being seen more frequently than in past years, and optimism runs high for this hunting season.”

Despite a general increase in deer numbers, deer are still not evenly distributed across the landscape. Some hunters scouting areas for better deer activity have found new “hot spots” when old haunts lack deer sign. Hunters looking for new traditions are now looking differently at our vast Northwest Wisconsin deer range. Large blocks of public or public access lands managed for young forest deer habitat exist in this part of the state. Public land managers in the past few years have reported less hunting pressure.

Not only are deer numbers strengthening, but decreased pressure can help bucks move into the more mature age classes. Scouting for a new hot spot on public land can be an adventure in itself, but the effort might be very rewarding.

Janet Brehm, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Lincoln County reports, “Deer hunting this fall in Langlade and Lincoln counties looks to be very promising for both archers and gun hunters. In speaking with many members of the public as well as area foresters, both are acknowledging seeing higher deer numbers. Many deer are being seen throughout both counties, even in areas thought to carry lower numbers. Does with a fawn or even twins, are not a rare sight. We’ve had three mild winters in a row, according to our Winter Severity Index, especially the winters of 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. Combined with several good growing seasons of lush browse, deer are projected to be in good health this coming fall. The acorn crop is looking to be an average year, so that will only add to the abundant food supply. Deer numbers projections have been on the rise for several years, now they’re getting verified on the ground. This year, Lincoln County has 6,000 antlerless tags available (600 public, 5,400 private lands) and Langlade County has 5,725 antlerless tags available (1,150 public, 4,575 private lands), an increase over that last several years. Overall, hunting in both Lincoln and Langlade Counties will be very exciting because of higher deer numbers and greater availability of antlerless tags.”

Derek Johnson, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Price County reports, “2017 is shaping up to be a great year for hunters in North Central Wisconsin. Conservative antlerless harvest quotas the past few years have noticeably increased the deer herd in Price, Rusk, Sawyer and Taylor counties. With a few relatively mild winters, we are strongly rebounding from the brutal winter of 2014. These mild winters will aid in fawn recruitment and that seems to be true since DNR staff have received many reports of does with fawns, even many sets of twins and a few triplets. The numbers on public land are also up across the area; whether it’s county, state or federal properties, hunters should be seeing more deer. Over 2,000 antlerless tags for private land are available in each county this fall, while 425, 1,025, 550 and 0 antlerless tags for public-access land, are available respectfully, in Price, Rusk, Sawyer and Taylor counties.”

Todd Naas, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Ashland County reports, “The deer population has responded positively to a managed effort to rebuild it by significantly limiting antlerless harvest opportunities the past several years. Early fawn observations appear good, and there appears to be excellent carry-over of last year’s fawn population. There was strong public support to continue to grow the herd
again this year in Ashland County, and antlerless harvest will only be available to youth, disabled and qualified military personnel. If we experience another mild to moderate winter this year, we can expect another significant increase to the overall population in 2018. If this happens, it will likely result in an overall decline in deer habitat due to over-browsing and in the long-term will reduce the land’s ability to sustain a healthy deer population.

It is important to understand that deer habitat and deer densities vary throughout Ashland County, and that is natural in the northern forest. A once productive stand of forest does not always remain productive. Habitat quality declines as forests mature. The greatest densities of deer are found in and near the agricultural areas of the county, and in areas where the forest is actively managed with good distribution of young forest throughout. Large blocks of mature forest hold some deer, but at low density, making it difficult to observe deer consistently, or at all. People who hunt mature forest need to put in their time scouting ahead of season, exercise patience and be prepared to move to alternative hunting locations for the best chance of harvesting a deer.

Kevin Morgan, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Barron County reports, “Three mild winters in a row in these Central Farmland counties means high survival and high productivity. It also means good antler development as bucks can put their saved energy reserves right into antler growth. Even in normal winters Barron and Polk counties produce trophy bucks and provide entries every year in the Pope and Young and Boone and Crockett record books. Approximately 40 percent of the registered bucks are 2 ½ years or older so even if they do not make the record book, with abundant food, fertile farmland soils, and good genetics, bucks this age are quality deer in any body’s book.

Along with quality bucks, these counties produce good numbers of deer for those that want to fill the freezer. Polk County is consistently in the top 10 statewide for total harvest and was in the top five for both gun and bow harvest in 2016. The mild winter allowed adult does to be in excellent condition coming into the spring and fawn production appears to be excellent. There is also evidence that fawns from the year before are contributing to the population with fawns of their own. Deer condition assessments on car killed deer found three doe fawns from Barron and Polk counties out of seven examined would have given birth to one fawn of their own this spring.

With productive adult does and even some doe fawns from the year before producing young as well, managing the population in balance with the environment and social factors will require a substantial antlerless harvest. In Polk County, two free antlerless tags will be issued per license. In Barron County, one free antlerless tag will be issued per license. There will also be additional antlerless permits that can be bought over the counter. Some may be concerned about over harvest with these large numbers of antlerless permits available. However, along with population estimates which show growing populations in both counties, other independent indicators also show a growing deer population. There has been a substantial increase in vehicle collisions in Barron County, which amounted to one per day documented in January through March. The amount of nuisance complaints in regard to grazing on ornamental flowers, shrubbery, and gardens has increased. In addition, forest regeneration is starting to be affected in some areas. Managing deer populations for these factors as well as for the well-being of deer themselves is important. Before this string of mild winters, these two counties experienced one of the most severe winters ever, with 20 inches of snow on the ground into the first week of April. There were some deer losses as well as reduced fawn production. Maintaining a deer population in balance with the habitat allows deer to survive severe winters like that one. Overall, it looks like a great fall for hunting in Barron and Polk counties for whatever kind of deer that interests you, whether you are a buck hunter or just like to fill the freezer.”

Michele Woodford, DNR wildlife biologist stationed Vilas County reports, “With three back-to-back mild winters in a row, deer came through this past winter in fine shape. We had reports in February of bucks still retaining their antlers late into the winter. Bucks tend to drop their antlers early when they are stressed or lacking food and nutrients; this was not the case in the winter of 2016-2017. Bucks have seen 8- and 10-point bucks out foraging in local agricultural fields in the Rhinelander area. Vilas County continues the 2017 season with a bucks-only season structure; expect to see more antlerless deer and yearling bucks than last year, but the same or fewer mature bucks (males over two years old). Vilas, Oneida, Forest and Florence counties are having good fawn crops this year; we still depend heavily on the public to report fawn numbers through the “Operation Deer Watch” program. Reports of twin fawns are encouraging; triplet fawn sightings were reported in Woodruff, Rhinelander, and Eagle River areas. Fawn sizes appear to be back on track this year, too; there have been no reports of really small fawns. With an increase in deer sightings managers have also seen an increase in car-deer collisions this summer. Deer have been active all summer and deer car accidents are higher than the past three years.
There is good reason to be optimistic going into the 2017 deer hunting season. Another extremely mild winter has allowed for strong fawn production across the district, and reports are coming in from all areas that travelers on Northeast Wisconsin roads are seeing a lot of deer. Very good fawn production and survival the previous two years means there will be more adult bucks available for harvest this fall and predicted buck harvests for this year are higher in every Northeaster Wisconsin county. Marinette and Oconto counties are each split into two Deer Management Units by the boundary of the Northern Forest and Central Farmland Zones. In both Northern Forest Units, the buck kill is expected to increase this fall, especially in Marinette. Antlerless tags have been increased from 875 in 2016 to 1675 this year for Marinette Northern Forest, but held steady at 550 for Oconto. Bonus tags for these Northern Forest portions of the counties are likely to sell out quickly, so if you are purchasing tags, make sure to be aware which side of the line you hunt on. Bonus tags will likely be available during the season for the Central Farmland portions of the counties, but they cannot be used in the Northern Forest Zone. Buck harvest increases are expected in the Central Farmland units of both Marinette and Oconto as well, but the County Deer Advisory Councils and DNR are really looking for increases in antlerless deer harvest. Both counties are issuing two antlerless tags with each license as well as providing additional hunting opportunity during the Holiday Hunt in the Central Farmland Zone. Wildlife biologist Dave Halfmann from Peshtigo says he can’t recall seeing more deer on the landscape than he has this spring and summer over the nine years he’s worked in the area.
Wrapping around the bay of Green Bay, Wildlife biologist Joshua Martinez is working with County Deer Advisory Councils in Brown, Kewaunee and Door that are all concerned about achieving an adequate antlerless harvest. The deer herd continues to grow above healthy levels despite a harvest objective to maintain or decrease the size of the herd in these counties over the past three years. As a result, all three counties are offering multiple antlerless tags with each license and the antlerless-only Holiday Hunt firearm season. Door County is issuing an unprecedented five antlerless tags with each license, recognizing that most hunters will not fill that many tags, but allowing those that have access to high deer density areas the ability to take a significant number of deer. The deer donation program is very active in this area and will put any extra deer to good use in the community.

A similar situation exists for many other Central Farmland counties in the Northeast District. Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara, Green Lake, Marquette, Outagamie and Manitowoc counties all expect higher buck harvests than 2016 and need to keep up with herd productivity by encouraging hunters to take more antlerless deer. Each of these counties are issuing two or three antlerless tags with each license (as well as additional bonus tags for sale), however only Waupaca and Waushara are utilizing the antlerless only Holiday Hunt. Even in these high deer productivity counties, deer are unevenly distributed on the landscape and not all areas are equally good deer habitat. Preseason scouting for deer sign and habitat conditions, as well as landowner contacts will increase hunter’s chances of being in the right place at the right time. Unlike 2016, the corn crop will not be coming off early in 2017.

The group of counties around Lake Winnebago tends to have strong deer numbers in places, but the habitat is more patchy and fragmented, and hunting pressure is relatively high for the available cover. As a result, overall deer numbers across the county aren’t as robust and hunters in Calumet, Fond du Lac and Winnebago counties are limited to one free antlerless tag with each license, and a very limited number of bonus tags are available for sale. Sheboygan County also tends to maintain a relatively stable deer population and provides one antlerless tag per license.

Chronic wasting disease has not been detected in free-ranging deer in the Northeast District, but it is at our borders around the southwest corner of the district, and present in one Oconto County captive deer farm. An important strategy for minimizing risk of disease spread is maintaining a healthy deer population in balance with the habitat. Most of our counties near locations of known CWD have deer populations considered too high to be in healthy balance with the land. Hunters are encouraged to read and follow their County Deer Advisory Council recommendations for antlerless deer harvest in consideration of long term deer herd sustainability. Visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/cdac.html for more information.

Another important strategy for CWD management is to monitor our deer. Collection of deer heads for lymph node collection is again the focus for two areas in Shawano County and an adjacent portion of Oconto County. The areas target collection near CWD positive deer farms, but any sick deer is important to report to the DNR. Wildlife biologist Kay Brockman-Mederas says CWD collection sites in Shawano County are located in Cecil at the Lakeview Convenience Center and the DNR office on Lakeland Road in Shawano. Mama’s Place (Hwy 49/153 intersection) in Elderon is the collection site for the area in the southwest part of the county. In Oconto County, heads can be dropped off at the Underhill Town Hall or Gillett Shell station. Heads can also be dropped off for sampling at the DNR Services Centers in Green Bay and Peshtigo. Check the DNR CWD Sampling website for sampling locations, phone numbers and hours of availability. dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/registersample.html

Weighted CWD sampling will occur in Fond du Lac and Sheboygan counties for the next several years. Weighted sampling targets deer most likely to be carrying the disease if it exists in the area. This is accomplished by cooperating with taxidermists in the area and finding other opportunities to sample older age class deer.
Consecutive mild winters combined with reductions in antlerless harvest since 2014 are resulting in herd growth across the 18-county Southern District, all of which falls within the Southern Farmland Zone. Many DNR staff and the general public have reported seeing deer frequently this summer and a high number of fawns. With lower than historic antlerless harvest the past two years, hunters should see numbers slightly higher than last fall. However, it is important for hunters to keep in mind that there is great variation in the habitat type as well as the quality of the habitat across the landscape and as a result, the number of deer between individual properties can vary significantly. Southern Farmland Zone County Deer Advisory Councils (CDACs) are offering, on average, more antlerless tags with each license in response to the expected increase in deer numbers. This was the third year of operation for the CDACs which encourage and provide opportunity for public involvement in deer management decisions. We encourage the public to be involved with their local CDAC in developing the deer season structure.

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

Early season food sources appear to be doing well and should provide plenty of opportunities for hunters to locate deer taking advantage of the hard and soft mast produced during this time of year. In addition, agricultural crops are currently about 10 days behind due to a wetter than normal spring. If excessive rainfall continues into the growing season, hunters should expect that the corn and soybeans will be harvested later than normal which will impact deer movements. Hunters should keep in mind that once these seasonal food sources are no longer available, deer will start to expand their range looking for other sources of food. This is where the appropriate habitat and herd management practices can assist in your success throughout the hunting season. I encourage people interested in learning more about habitat and herd management to sign up for the Deer Management Assistance Program at dnr.wi.gov, keyword “DMAP.”

Most 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 southern Wisconsin. Nancy Frost, wildlife biologist in Sauk County mentions that Dell Creek Wildlife Area in northern Sauk County had some timber sales occur two winters ago, resulting in young forest vegetation that provides both cover and food sources. One area can be found on the west side of Town Hall Road north of North Avenue on the northern-most portion of DNR public land. The other timber sale area is on the east side of Town Hall Road, about a quarter of a mile in. Most timber sales will be occurring over the next two years on other areas of the property. Those looking for public land available for hunting can check out the DNR website at dnc.wi.gov, keywords “public hunting lands.” For hunters near Milwaukee, Wildlife biologist Dianne Robinson says that Big Muskego Lake Wildlife Area is a mix of grassland and oak woodland habitat great for deer hunting.
surrounding the shallow Big Muskego Lake, within minutes from greater Milwaukee. If you live near Milwaukee, new acquisitions off Ryan Road and North Cape Road (Muskego), or 116th St. (Franklin) make this a prime location for a quick bow hunting day trip after work or on weekends near home.

And if interested in hunting on private lands, hunters 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. 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 chronic wasting disease (CWD) continues to increase in the geographic area. Due to recent changes in baiting and feeding laws, hunters are expected to be able to bait and feed for white-tailed deer in Dodge, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine and Washington counties. Ozaukee County hunters will continue to be allowed to bait and feed, similar to previous years. With two years of electronic harvest registration under our belt, hunters interested in getting their deer tested for CWD will be able to go to one of the co-op CWD sample stations or self-service kiosks that will be posted on the DNR website prior to the season opener. Go to dnr.wi.gov and keyword search ‘CWD’.

Hunters in five counties within the Southern District will have the opportunity to enjoy the “Holiday Hunt” deer season during the winter holidays. Those counties include Milwaukee, Richland, Sauk, Iowa and Waukesha. The Holiday Hunt is an antlerless-only season that will take place Dec. 24 – Jan. 1, 2018.

Hunters in the Southern District will also receive one to four free Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tags with each deer hunting license. The number received will depend on the county of choice and the recommendations made by the CDACs. In the Southern District, all counties have Bonus Antlerless Deer Tags available for sale except Kenosha and Racine counties in the southeastern portion of the District.

We anticipate an excellent deer season in the Southern District in 2017. We wish everyone a safe and successful fall.
The Wisconsin Deer Management Assistance Program 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, and by the close of the 2017 enrollment period the total acreage enrolled in DMAP approached 268,000 acres. In 2017, more than 450 landowners were surveyed to help gain insight into their experiences with the program. Most landowners sought 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. 94 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the site visit and working alongside a local DNR biologist and forester to achieve management goals, while over 87 percent were satisfied and said the site-specific management plan was useful. Ninety-six percent of DMAP enrolled landowners intend to implement at least some of the recommendations provided in their management plan. Overall, 80 percent of landowners gave the program a good or very good customer service rating. The program is currently working with nearly 1,200 landowners throughout Wisconsin and received a 94 percent re-enrollment rate from the first year participants.

Landowners can enroll in one of three levels:
- Level 1: No acreage requirement, no annual fee (ongoing enrollment);
- Level 2: 160-640 acres; $75/3 year commitment (annual enrollment deadline of March 1); or
- Level 3: 640+ acres; $150/3 year commitment (annual enrollment deadline of March 1).

DMAP participants receive (depending on their level of enrollment as outlined above):
- personal interaction with DNR staff and communication on land and herd management
- access to an online library of wildlife and habitat management resources
- invitations to a series of interactive workshops
- networking opportunities with other landowners with common goals
- property site visits from a wildlife biologist and forester
- written site-specific management plan; and
- reduced price antlerless tags.

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 2017 marks the third year of workshops 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 include landowner-led tours of DMAP properties to share experiences and lessons learned in 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 more information regarding Wisconsin’s Deer Management Assistance Program, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “DMAP.”