

2016  
**WISCONSIN**  
**HUNTING & TRAPPING**  
**FORECAST**



**STARTING NEW TRADITIONS**





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# MESSAGE FROM DNR SECRETARY CATHY STEPP

Another series of Wisconsin hunting seasons are about to open - time to make sure the gear is in good shape. Time-honored traditions are part of our hunting experience, but it's also a great time to start new traditions.

In 2016, we will continue to introduce enhancements to our hunting heritage — whether through new opportunities available with *Go Wild* or a broader commitment to include Wisconsin's citizens in our management processes. With change comes opportunity, and I am confident that together we can take Wisconsin's hunting and trapping experience to new heights - together. It's a great time to be a hunter or trapper in our state.

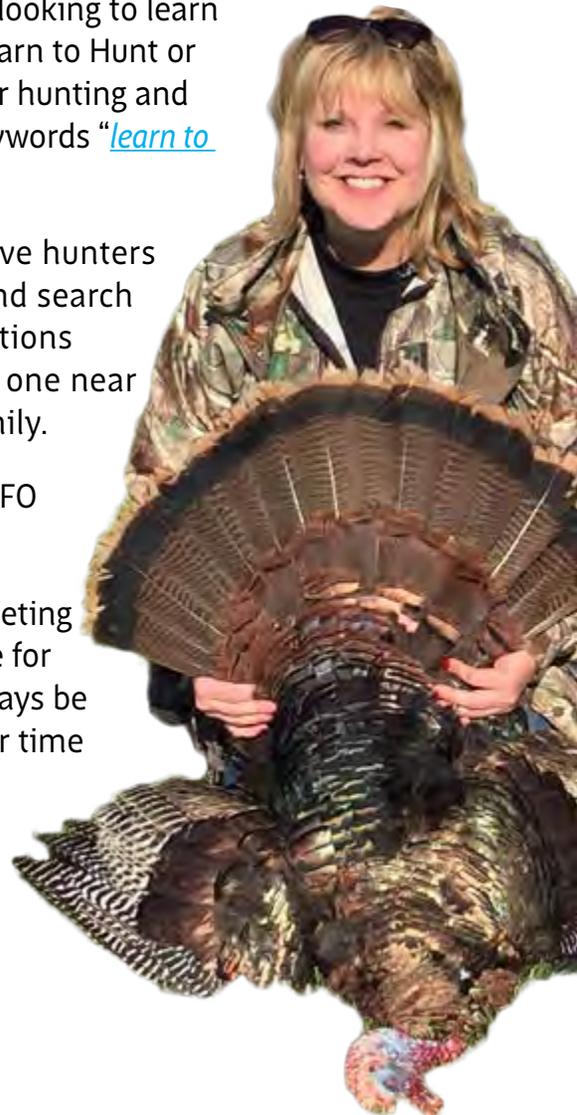
Whether you have your sights on deer, ducks, or anything in between, a mild winter has helped ensure that hunters and trappers are set for a great year. While many of you're gearing up for another fall deer hunt (me included), I challenge you to try a new season this year - like pheasant or grouse. Maybe learn how to trap, or just try a new hunting spot!

And, for those of you who have tried it all, use this year as an opportunity to introduce someone new, young or old, to these traditions we all love so much. If you're looking to learn about what hunting is all about, be sure to sign up for one of our Learn to Hunt or Learn to Trap events. We take great pride in helping people discover hunting and trapping and the role they play in managing our wildlife. Search keywords "[learn to hunt](#)" and "[learn to trap](#)" on the DNR website to find out more.

Now in its second year, electronic registration will continue to give hunters added convenience in the field. To learn more, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords "[electronic registration](#)." And remember, registration stations haven't gone away, search keywords "[registration stations](#)" to find one near you and show off your deer or trade stories with friends and family.

As always, if you have questions give us a call at 1-888-WDNRINFO (1-888-936-7463).

Whether through attendance at a County Deer Advisory Council meeting or submissions for one of our wildlife surveys, the passion you have for our natural resources never ceases to amaze me. Remember to always be safe, focus on why you hunt or trap in the first place, and enjoy your time spent in the woods this fall!





# FIND A PLACE TO HUNT



## DNR LAND TYPES

The department owns a variety of lands, including State Parks, Natural Areas, Wildlife Areas, Fisheries Areas, Recreation Areas, and Forests. Most are open to hunting, however some have closed areas and special regulations and season dates. Be sure to check the property web page or contact the property manager if you have questions.

## POCKET RANGER APP

The Pocket Ranger App gives hunters the tools to make it easier than ever to find a place to enjoy the outdoors and stay safe in the field.

### Features include:

- Places to hunt
- Deer registration locations
- Rules and regulations
- License and permit information
- Safety communication tool
- Advanced GPS mapping features
- Trophy Case, join a community of anglers and hunters
- News and alert feature
- And much more

Since its launch in November 2013, more than 210,000 people have downloaded the Wisconsin Pocket Ranger to their Apple or Android mobile devices. To learn more and download this free application, search keyword “[mobile apps](#),” or search “Wisconsin Pocket Ranger” in the Apple App Store or Android Market from your Apple or Android device.

## PUBLIC ACCESS LANDS (PAL) ATLAS

Whether you are looking for new public hunting grounds or a spot for a fall picnic, the DNR Public Access Lands Atlas is a great tool for finding new public lands and creating new memories.

The Public Access Lands Atlas is a set of maps identifying state, county, federal and other land accessible to the public.

The atlas contains 441 maps, two indexes, a glossary, and extensive contact information to help you connect with land managers to learn more about the properties. Hunters are reminded to contact

landowners beforehand to verify that hunting is allowed on a given property. You can [download and print](#) these maps free of charge from your home computer or order a hard copy from the DNR.

An interactive map viewer allows users to zoom to an area of interest and see all the department-managed public lands, overlaid with air photos, topo lines, roads, lakes, rivers, and other geographic features. You can create custom maps to save and/or print from your computer.

For more information, visit [dnr.wi.gov](#) and type the keyword “[PAL](#)” in the search bar.

## MANAGED FOREST AND FOREST CROP LAW PROGRAMS

The [Managed Forest Law](#) and [Forest Crop Law](#) programs are landowner-incentive programs that incorporate sustainable forest practices, such as timber harvesting, wildlife management, water



quality and recreation — all while improving public access to these lands.

When landowners enroll in the Managed Forest Law, they may choose whether they want their lands designated as open or closed to public recreation. Lands open to public recreation are available only for hunting, fishing, hiking, cross-country skiing, and sight-seeing.

Hunters are encouraged to contact their local DNR Forester to learn more about these programs - search keywords "[forest landowner](#)," then click *Find a Forester* and use the Forestry Assistance Locator to find the DNR forester who has responsibility for that area of the state.

Visit [dnr.wi.gov](#) and search keywords "[managed forest law](#)" and "[forest crop law](#)" for an FAQ and other helpful information regarding these programs.

### FINDING OPEN LANDS

A mapping tool shows the approximate location of all MFL-Open and FCL lands in Wisconsin - here, you'll find landowner info, acreage, and enrollment information. To access the mapping tool, search keywords "[MFL open land](#)."

### VOLUNTARY PUBLIC ACCESS - HABITAT INCENTIVE (VPA-HIP) PROGRAM

The [VPA-HIP](#) program provides financial incentives to private landowners who open their property to public hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife observation and improve wildlife habitat.

Currently, there are over 230 VPA properties totaling over 35,000 acres of land. These lands are open to public use under certain guidelines. VPA lands are displayed on

the PAL interactive map viewer. Visit [dnr.wi.gov](#) and search keyword "[VPA](#)" to learn more.

### FFLIGHT

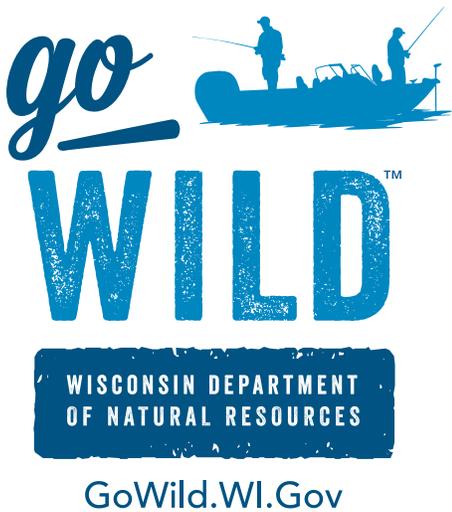
The [Fields & Forest Lands Interactive Gamebird Hunting Tool](#) gives hunters an interactive summary of young aspen and alder habitat to find woodcock and ruffed grouse hunting areas, pheasant-stocked public hunting grounds, and dove fields found on public hunting lands throughout Wisconsin.

Features available within the program will help hunters locate DNR public parking areas, overlay township descriptions, and provide access to maps and aerial photos of prospective hunting areas. FFLIGHT allows users to print maps and find GPS coordinates to assist in navigation and provides measuring tools to help estimate acreage and walking distance. Mobile users can use the tool on-the-go to find habitat suitable for the species they wish to pursue.

The mapping application is compatible with all major desktop and mobile web browsers (internet access is required). To learn more and start your search for hunting land, visit [dnr.wi.gov](#) and search keyword "[FFLIGHT](#)."

# GO WILD

ARE YOU READY TO “GO WILD?”



[With the debut of the new license system, Go Wild](#), the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources initiated a broader campaign that encourages people to head outdoors and enjoy the numerous recreational opportunities made possible by the sound management of Wisconsin’s natural resources.

Go Wild allows customers to conveniently purchase licenses, tags and other DNR products online at [GoWild.WI.Gov](#). Customers can also make purchases at over 1,000 license agents throughout the state. Go Wild, however, does not provide the option of purchasing by phone.

The new Go Wild system secures licensing and registration information electronically and enables customers to use a variety of methods for providing proof of purchases. Customers will receive a plain paper license with applicable carcass tags or goose harvest cards when they make a purchase online or at a license agent. Paper carcass tags or goose harvest report cards are

still required, and must be in your possession and validated upon harvest if pursuing deer, bear, turkey, sturgeon, geese, or sharp-tailed grouse. Hunters are limited to carrying only one copy of the same unique carcass tag or goose harvest report card while afield, hunting or trapping. Backtags are no longer required in Wisconsin and are no longer printed.

Alternative forms of proof of purchase for fishing, hunting and trapping licenses include a current, valid Wisconsin driver’s license that has been authenticated in Go Wild, an optional Conservation Card, or a digital image on a mobile device, such as a smartphone. These can be used when hunting or fishing Wisconsin’s



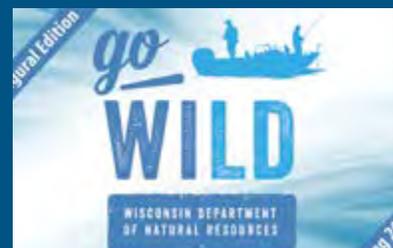
waters that are not boundary or outlying waters. Alternative forms of proof of license purchase are not valid while fishing on state boundary waters or the Great Lakes, nor to show proof of a Federal duck stamp. Alternative forms of proof of purchase do not take the place of paper carcass tags or harvest report cards, which are still required.

It has never been easier to obtain a plain paper original or reprint of your hunting, trapping or fishing license or safety education certificate. With the ability to reprint these products from the convenience of home, you can do so for free. Reprints are available from license agents for a \$2 processing fee.

*DNR CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES ARE AVAILABLE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS 7 DAYS A WEEK FROM 7 A.M. TO 10 P.M. AT 1-888-WDNRINFO (1-888-936-7463).*

### **CONNECT WITH DNR**

The department uses current technology to reach users of all ages and backgrounds and provide for convenience, whether they are already in the field or looking for new places to explore. Be sure to visit our Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and LinkedIn pages to learn more and connect with DNR staff!



### **GO WILD LINKS**

#### **PROTECT IT:**

<http://dnr.wi.gov/GoWild/documents/GoWildTagProtectIt.pdf>

#### **FORMS OF PROOF:**

<http://dnr.wi.gov/GoWild/documents/GoWildLicenseProveIt.pdf>

#### **TAGGING FAQ:**

<http://dnr.wi.gov/GoWild/documents/tagItFAQ.pdf>

# WHITE-TAILED DEER

**Kevin Wallenfang**, DNR big game ecologist, 608-261-7589, [Kevin.Wallenfang@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Kevin.Wallenfang@Wisconsin.gov)

**Derek Johnson**, DNR assistant big game ecologist, 608-264-6023, [DerekJ.Johnson@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:DerekJ.Johnson@Wisconsin.gov)

**W**ith another mild winter and good reports from the public, expectations for a very good deer hunting season are running higher in 2016 than we have seen in recent years. Hunters are also settling into new rule changes that were implemented in recent years. As a result, we are hoping that hunters will feel more comfortable with the rules and can focus on the excitement of a great deer season.

[2016 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations](#) available online or at any hunting license vendor or DNR Service Center.

For additional information, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://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.

## GO WILD LICENSING SYSTEM

The DNR will introduce the new Go Wild licensing and registration system for deer hunters this year. Through Go Wild, hunters are now 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](http://dnr.wi.gov), and search keywords "[license agent](#)."

In 2016, there will be no over-the-phone purchasing of licenses in 2016 - hunters must purchase licenses online, at a DNR service center or at a 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 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](http://gowild.wi.gov).

EXPECTATIONS ARE HIGH FOR THE 2016 DEER HUNTING SEASON.

For a complete overview of all deer hunting rules including changes for this season, please check the

## CARCASS TAGS AND TAGGING IN 2016

Beginning in 2016, all deer carcass tags will be printed on plain paper. 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 on 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 fee for having a tag reprinted at a license agent.

While afield, a hunter may carry just one 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. Hunters are still required to immediately

validate their carcass tag after harvesting a deer by writing in the date and circling the time on the tag. For this reason, hunters are encouraged to carry a pen in the field as well.

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

## SEASON DATES

The **crossbow / archery** season runs **September 17, 2016 — January 8, 2016**. Hunters are reminded to purchase a crossbow license or archer/crossbow upgrade to hunt with a crossbow.

**Gun Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities** season runs **October 1 — 9**

The **youth gun** season runs **October 8 — 9**

The traditional 9-day **gun deer** season starts the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Season runs **November 19 — 27**

The **muzzleloader** season runs 10 days immediately following the 9-day gun season. Season runs

**November 28 — December 7**

The statewide **December 4-day antlerless-only** hunt is once again an annual component of the season framework. **Season runs December 8 — 11** - during this season, all deer hunters may only harvest antlerless deer; buck harvest is not allowed.

The **antlerless-only Holiday Hunt** will be offered in select DMUs and will run from **December 24, 2016—January 1, 2017**. DMUs offering the holiday hunt in 2016 are: Brown, Columbia, Crawford, Green Lake, Marinette (Farmland Zone portion only), Marquette, Milwaukee, Pepin, Richland, Rock, Sauk, Waukesha and Waupaca. Only antlerless deer may be harvested with any weapon type during this season, in the listed DMUs. Buck hunting is allowed by archery/crossbow hunters in any DMU not included in the holiday hunt.



**AUDRIANNE KIELER warms up with some cocoa. Photo by Dean Kieler**

## YOUTH DEER HUNT

The youth gun deer season will be held Oct. 8-9. This special hunt was established to provide youth hunters with an opportunity to hunt with the guidance of a mentor.

Resident and non-resident youth hunters ages 10-15 who possess a valid gun deer hunting license may participate.

no longer required to immediately attach their validated carcass tag to the deer. The tag is not required to be attached until the hunter leaves the animal. 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.

**A PLASTIC ZIP-TOP BAG IS RECOMMENDED TO KEEP CARCASS TAGS INTACT.**

## ELECTRONIC HARVEST REGISTRATION

More than 300,000 deer were registered electronically by phone or internet in 2015. While some expressed concern before the season, Wisconsin deer hunters adapted well to this new method of registration. 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 complied and registered their deer. This range is estimated to be

similar to compliance rates when registering in person was required.

Successful deer hunters in 2016 are required to register their deer online, by phone, or 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](http://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 that must be written on the validated carcass tag. The tag with confirmation number will serve as proof that the deer was legally registered, and must be kept by the hunter and accompany the animal or processed carcass until the meat is consumed. 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](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords "[electronic registration](#)."

## 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 setting population objectives, antlerless harvest quotas and antlerless tag levels. They also provide recommendations on various season structure elements that will affect the 2016 deer seasons. These include whether junior antlerless tags may be filled in a specific county, and whether to implement the December 24-January 1 antlerless-only "Holiday Hunt."

BE SURE TO READ THE 2016 WISCONSIN DEER HUNTING REGULATIONS FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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 to recommend antlerless harvest quotas, antlerless tag levels and certain season options that will guide the 2016 season.

*FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING COUNTY DEER ADVISORY COUNCILS, VISIT [DNR.WI.GOV](http://dnr.wi.gov) AND SEARCH KEYWORD "[CDAC](#)."*

## MANAGEMENT ZONES AND DEER MANAGEMENT UNITS (DMUS)

Wisconsin's four Deer Management Zones and DMUs have not changed in 2016. DMUs follow county boundaries in most cases, and nine DMUs are split by zone boundaries.





STEVE MASLOWSKI / USFWS

## 2016 DEER HUNTS

Aside from the traditional archer, crossbow, 9-day gun deer and muzzleloader seasons, the following hunts will be offered in 2016.

### ANTLERLESS-ONLY HOLIDAY HUNT

The antlerless-only Holiday Hunt will run Dec. 24 - Jan. 1, 2017. This hunt is only occurring in select Farmland (Zone 2) DMUs. For this year the Holiday Hunt will be offered in Brown, Columbia, Crawford, Green Lake, Marinette

(Farmland Zone portion of unit only), Marquette, Milwaukee, Pepin, Richland, Rock, Sauk, Waukesha and Waupaca counties. 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. 8-11. The season is restricted by antlerless tag

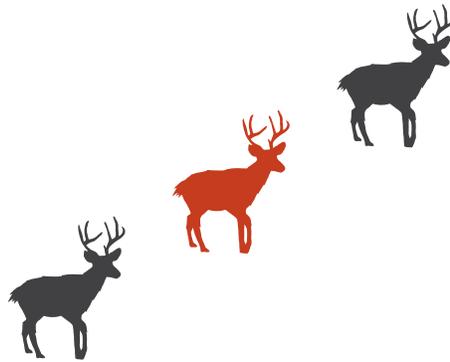
availability, and no antlered bucks can be harvested, with any weapon type, in a DMU. Therefore, all hunters must possess (or be in a group with someone that possesses) an antlerless deer carcass tag valid for the zone, DMU and land type in which they choose to hunt. All hunters with the exception of 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. 8-9. 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 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 2016 youth gun deer hunt.

## **GUN DEER HUNT FOR HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES**

The 2016 gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities will be held Oct. 1-9. This special hunt was established to provide an option to hunters

with disabilities to have more opportunities 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.

"Sponsoring landowners all over the state have again stepped up, and we are grateful to them for their willingness to provide opportunities for disabled hunters," said DNR disabled hunt program coordinator Derek Johnson. "Providing access to over 77,000 acres of land in 45 counties is instrumental in making this unique opportunity a great success story."

The gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities is not a statewide season. This special hunt is only authorized on lands specifically enrolled in the disabled hunt program. Landowners or managers interested in sponsoring lands for the 2017 hunt must submit an online application before June 1, 2017. Qualified disabled hunters are encouraged to contact sponsors before Sept. 1. For a list of sponsors for the 2016 season, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords "[disabled deer hunt](#)."



# TAGS & LICENSES

With each deer hunting license, hunters will receive one Buck Deer Carcass Tag valid statewide and Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag(s) valid in the zone, DMU, and land type (public access or private) of the buyer's choosing at time of license purchase. Farmland Zone tags may not be used in the Northern Forest or Central Forest zones, but bonus antlerless tags may be available in these zones.

## **FARMLAND (ZONE 2) ANTLERLESS DEER TAGS**

All hunters receive Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tag(s) with the purchase of each deer hunting license (archer/crossbow and gun). All Farmland (Zone 2) tags must be designated for use in a specific zone, DMU and land type (public access or private) at the time of issuance or selection may be deferred until a later date. New in 2016, Farmland Zone DMUs may issue more than one Farmland (Zone 2) tag with each license. This allows hunters more opportunities to harvest more deer, if they wish. For more information about farmland zone tags and how many are issued per DMU, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword "[antlerless tags](#)."

## **JUNIOR ANTLERLESS DEER TAGS**

Youth hunters age 10-17 will receive a Junior Antlerless Deer Tag, valid for harvesting one antlerless deer in any unit statewide except Ashland, Forest, and Sawyer counties. One junior antlerless tag is issued with each deer license. Youth hunters are not required to specify zone or DMU, but must indicate a land type where they will attempt to fill this tag. As a reminder, group hunting on these tags is not allowed. Only the youth hunter who was issued the tag may fill it.

**WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT STAFF ENCOURAGES ALL DEER HUNTERS TO ENJOY A SAFE, FUN AND SUCCESSFUL DEER HUNTING SEASON.**

## **ANTLERLESS TAGS FOR DISABLED HUNTERS**

Class A and C disabled hunters will receive Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer

Carcass Tag(s), of which one is valid for an antlerless deer in any DMU statewide, with each deer license. The tags will be designated to a zone, DMU and land type, but only one may be used in any DMU statewide as long as it is filled on the land type (public access or private land) designated on the tag.

## **BONUS ANTLERLESS DEER TAGS**

Bonus tags are valid only in the Zone, DMU and land type (public access or private) indicated on the carcass tag. Bonus tags are limited in number, including ten counties in part or whole where zero bonus tags will be available for sale.

Hunters may purchase one bonus tag per day, where available, until the DMU or metro sub-unit is sold out or until the hunting season ends. Sales begin August 15 by zone, and begin each day at 10 a.m. Bonus tags cost \$12 for residents, \$20 for non-residents and \$5 for youth (ages 10 and 11).

Bonus antlerless tag availability may vary by zone, DMU and even metro sub-unit. For more information regarding bonus tag availability and sales, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search "[antlerless tags](#)."



# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR 2016

## 2016 BUCK-ONLY DEER MANAGEMENT UNITS

Ten 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, Bayfield Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Jackson (Forest Zone portion only), Oneida, Sawyer, and Vilas 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, with the exception of the Superior Metro Sub-unit of Douglas County.

## 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 or directly following the vehicle carrying their deer.

**If you leave it,  
tag it!**

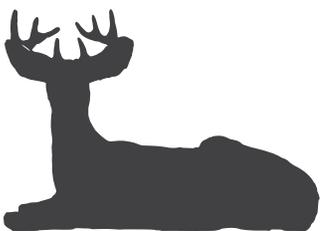


## USE OF BOWS AND CROSSBOWS

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.

## NEW RULES IN 2016

Due to a legislative change, back tags are no longer required to be worn while hunting. No back tags will be issued with the sale of a deer hunting license in 2016. Fluorescent pink may be worn by hunters as a substitute for blaze orange. Those hunters who wear fluorescent pink are subject to the same minimum clothing coverage requirements as those who wear blaze orange. Fluorescent pink cannot be used as a substitute for blaze orange when marking a ground blind on public lands.



A HUNTER DOES NOT NEED TO ATTACH THE CARCASS TAG TO THE ANIMAL IF THEY ARE IN THE VEHICLE CARRYING OR DIRECTLY FOLLOWING THE VEHICLE CARRYING THEIR DEER.

## DEER MANAGEMENT ZONES AND DEER MANAGEMENT UNITS IN 2016

Deer management zones and DMUs 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 (public or private) listed on the tag.

## METRO SUB-UNITS

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





USFWS PHOTO

**BACK TAGS ARE NO LONGER REQUIRED TO BE WORN WHILE HUNTING.**

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.

### **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 2016 season, the department will host a number of online chats with wildlife and regulations experts. For more information and to view a schedule of upcoming chats, search keyword "[chat](#)."



# WISCONSIN'S DEER MANAGEMENT GET INVOLVED

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

## 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](#)." Help monitor deer reproduction in Wisconsin. Keep a tally sheet in your car to record all deer sightings from Aug. 1 to Sept. 30.

## 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 local wildlife biologists and learn more about deer biology and management, population objectives, and harvest statistics in each county. Those interested in providing feedback on preliminary quota and bonus antlerless permit recommendations can also comment online. To provide input, search keyword "[CDAC](#)."

## TRAIL CAMERA PHOTOS

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

## CONSERVATION CONGRESS SPRING HEARINGS

Annual Wisconsin Conservation Congress meetings, held in each county statewide on the second Monday in April, give citizens the opportunity to comment and vote on proposed fish and wildlife rule changes and submit resolutions for 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](#)."

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*THE WISCONSIN CONSERVATION CONGRESS GIVES CITIZENS THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE THE STATE'S CONSERVATION POLICIES*

# WISCONSIN'S DEER MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

## *A PARTNERSHIP FOR HEALTHY DEER AND HEALTHY HABITAT*

**T**he 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 2016 enrollment period the total acreage enrolled in DMAP approached 221,000 acres. In 2015, more than 200 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. Over 90 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the site visit and working alongside a local DNR biologist and forester to achieve management goals, while 93 percent said the site-specific management plan was useful. Ninety-seven percent of DMAP enrolled landowners intend to implement at least some of the recommendations provided in their management plan. Overall, over 80 percent of landowners gave the program a good or very good customer service rating. The program is currently working with nearly 1000 landowners throughout Wisconsin. Properties can be enrolled by an individual landowner or through a cooperative of landowners whose property boundaries are within one-half mile of each other. A group

cooperative can be formed to qualify all landowners at a higher enrollment level. DNR staff have worked hard to expand program offerings to DMAP cooperators, and 2016 marks the second year of workshops offered around the state to share information with enrolled landowners about cost-share

### **ENROLL IN DMAP!**

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).



STEVE HILLEBRAND / USFWS

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 DMAP, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword "[DMAP](#)."

## BENEFITS OF DMAP

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.

# CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

**Tim Marien, DNR Wildlife Health Biologist, (608) 264-6046, [timothy.marien@wisconsin.gov](mailto:timothy.marien@wisconsin.gov)**

Wisconsin has monitored Chronic Wasting Disease for 14 years. Between 2002 and March 2016, the department tested over 193,000 free-ranging deer, of which over 3,100 have tested positive for CWD. There are currently 41 CWD-affected counties. These counties match the counties that are prohibited from baiting and feeding. A county is included if a wild or captive animal has been tested and confirmed to be positive for CWD in the county or if a portion of the county is within a 10-mile radius of a wild or captive animal that has been tested and confirmed to be positive for CWD.

## CWD MONITORING IN WISCONSIN

During the 2015 deer hunting season, the department sampled 3,145 deer state-wide with 298 testing 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).

Following the 2012 discovery of a CWD-positive adult doe near Shell Lake, 2015 marked the fourth 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 over the last four years. No new positives have been detected. Based on four 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 ten mile radius surrounding the positives utilizing hunter harvested deer. Four additional positives were found in 2013 in Adams and Portage counties, while two additional positives were discovered in Adams County in 2014 and two

more in 2015. Surveillance was also conducted surrounding a CWD-positive captive deer farm in Marathon County, with no wild CWD deer detected.

New in 2015, wildlife staff sampled wild deer in the Fairchild/Augusta area in Eau Claire County, where DATCP discovered CWD-positive deer on a private deer farm. Eighty wild deer were sampled with no wild CWD deer detected.

## CWD PREVALENCE IN WISCONSIN

CWD prevalence in Wisconsin has changed over time. Since 2002, CWD prevalence within the western monitoring area encompassing western Dane and eastern Iowa counties has shown an overall increasing trend in all sex and age classes. During the last 14 years, the trend in prevalence in adult males has risen from 8-10 percent to about 30 percent and from about 3-4 percent to nearly 15 percent in adult females. During that same time, the prevalence trend in yearling males has increased from about 2 percent to about 10 percent and from roughly 2 percent to about 8 percent in yearling females. Despite yearly fluctuations, overall prevalence in the endemic area of southern Wisconsin has doubled across

all sex and age classes of deer.

## 2016 CWD SAMPLING IN WISCONSIN

During the 2016 deer hunting season, the department 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 farms in Marathon, Eau Claire, and Oneida counties. CWD sampling will also occur in Vernon and Crawford counties for surveillance bordering CWD positive deer detected in northeast Iowa near the Mississippi River. Exact sampling locations will be available on the department's website prior to the 2016 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 2016, weighted surveillance will continue in Marquette and Green Lake counties. In 2015, taxidermists in Marquette and Green Lake counties provided samples, with no positives detected.

A LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM HELPED THE DEPARTMENT SAMPLE OVER 2,000 DEER IN THE WASHBURN AREA OVER THE LAST FOUR YEARS. NO NEW POSITIVES HAVE BEEN DETECTED.

## CWD IN NORTH AMERICA

As of 2016, 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 helps the department anticipate future impacts of CWD in Wisconsin.

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

DNR game managers are grateful to hunters and other conservationists for their role in assisting with CWD surveillance during the past 14 years. Wisconsin is fortunate to have citizens with such a great conservation ethic and high appreciation for the natural world. For information regarding CWD in Wisconsin, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword "CWD."

# WHITE-TAILED DEER RESEARCH

Contributed by Daniel Storm, Ungulate Research Scientist, 715-365- 4712 [Daniel.Storm@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Daniel.Storm@Wisconsin.gov)

## SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN DEER STUDY

DNR researchers are embarking on a new, comprehensive study of deer populations in southwestern Wisconsin. This new study will be similar to the recently-completed deer mortality studies, but with a few important differences. The new study will take place in the CWD-endemic area and will determine how CWD impacts deer survival and population growth. In addition, DNR researchers will collar bobcats and coyotes in order to understand the impact of these predators on deer populations in southwest Wisconsin.

## WINTER SEVERITY INDEX

The winter severity index is a measurement to help gauge the effects of the winter weather on deer survival. The index was developed in the early 1970s, and is calculated by adding the number of days with 18 inches or more of snow on the ground

to the number of days when the minimum temperatures were 0°F or below. In general, the severity of the winter is based on the total number of points accumulated over the collection period. A winter with an index of less than 50

Winter in 2015 was mild across most of northern Wisconsin. The average winter severity index for northern Wisconsin was 22, which is considered mild and is also the fourth-mildest winter since record-keeping began in the winter of 1960-1961.

is considered mild, 50 to 79 is moderate, 80 to 99 is severe, and over 100 is very severe. Winter in 2015 was mild across most of northern Wisconsin. The average winter severity index for northern Wisconsin was 22, which is considered mild and is also the fourth-mildest winter since record-keeping began in the winter of 1960-1961. Most stations reported WSIs between 15 and

25, while the Gile, Upson, and Mercer stations in Iron County had WSIs in the mid-50s. Based on both history and the recent deer mortality studies, WDNR expects minimal impacts from last winter on deer survival and reproduction.

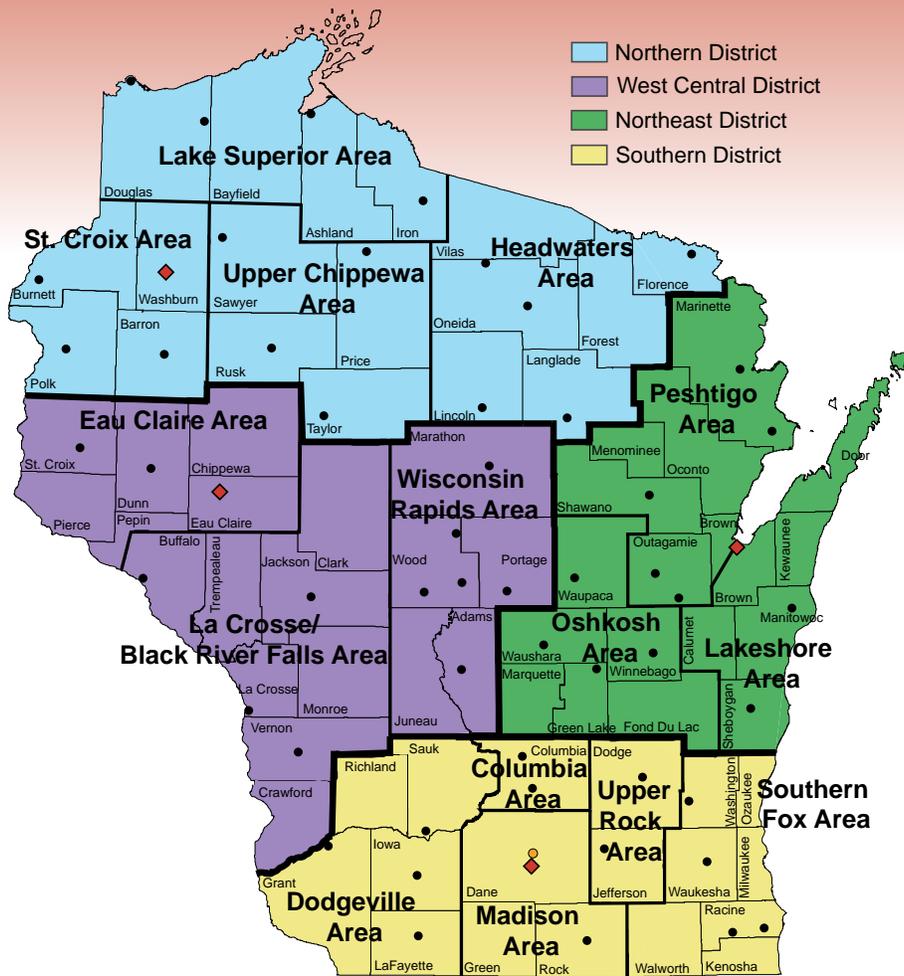
## SNAPSHOT WISCONSIN

Snapshot Wisconsin is a trail camera project run by DNR staff and volunteers to help monitor deer, predators of deer, and other wildlife across the state of Wisconsin. This project launched in Spring 2016 in Iowa and Sawyer counties, where over 150 volunteers were enrolled by Summer 2016 to host a Snapshot Wisconsin trail camera on their property. Over the next five years, Snapshot Wisconsin will extend into all of Wisconsin's counties and reach over 3,000 volunteers. In fall 2016, Jackson, Iron, Manitowoc and Waupaca counties will open to interested volunteers. For more information, please visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) keyword "[Snapshot Wisconsin](#)."



# 2016 DEER SEASON

# DISTRICT FORECASTS



- Wildlife Staff Offices
- ◆ Headquarter Office
  - Central Office
  - Staff Office

Note: Office locations are approximate.



## WEST CENTRAL

**Dave Matheys**, DNR wildlife biologist, 608-637-3938, [david.matheys@wisconsin.gov](mailto:david.matheys@wisconsin.gov)

Across the 19-county DNR West Central District, wildlife biologists are optimistic about deer hunting opportunities for the 2016 deer hunting seasons. 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: the Southern

Farmland, Central Farmland, and Central Forest zones. Each deer management unit has a specific three-year population 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 objective in Buffalo County calls for a decrease

in deer numbers, while Chippewa and Trempealeau Counties opted to increase deer numbers. Season structure and antlerless deer permit numbers in each county Deer Management Unit reflect the strategies recommended by local County Deer Advisory Councils used to achieve these goals.

Generally speaking, from Dunn County in the north to Crawford County in the southern end of the district, deer in the WCD's farmland



zones are doing well, and hunters can expect an increase in deer numbers from those experienced in 2015. Deer numbers in the WCD's Central Forest Zone are comparable or slightly improved from 2015.

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: "Mild winter weather, good to excellent spring fawn production and survival, and conservative antlerless tag issuance over the past several years has boosted deer

populations. The increased populations should lead to increased hunter observations of deer and harvest opportunities. I expect very similar hunting conditions in 2016 in St. Croix and Pierce Counties as last year. We are seeing a lot of good fawn recruitment, with most does guiding two fawns around."

Those observations are echoed by Mark Rasmussen, wildlife biologist for Buffalo and Trempealeau counties who notes, "Deer numbers are very strong in both counties, and there should be ample hunting opportunities for archers and gun hunters - DNR staff

commonly see deer while in the field on both public and private lands. Farmers are reporting more deer this year than the past several years as well. With the mild winter and quick spring green-up, fawn recruitment appears to be excellent. Most does are being seen with at least one fawn, with twins being common as well."

While 4000 bonus antlerless tags are available for private lands and 500 for public lands in Buffalo County, Rasmussen mentions that only 500 bonus antlerless tags are available for private lands in Trempealeau County. There are no bonus antlerless permits for

Trempealeau County public lands. Farmland Zone antlerless tags are included with the purchase of each deer hunting license, so all hunters will have the opportunity to harvest at least one antlerless deer this fall.

Hunters in Dunn and Pepin Counties should generally expect to see slightly more deer this year following a second consecutive mild winter and exceptional fawn recruitment this spring, according to Jess Carstens, wildlife biologist for these two counties. "While irregular deer distribution throughout the two counties will continue to pose challenges to some hunters, overall herd numbers are strong," said Carstens.

This fall's acorn crop will be worth watching, as a late frost seemed to stunt the development of many oak trees in the area. Dunn and Pepin counties have a population objective of "maintain," and will have an abundant supply of bonus antlerless tags available to hunters for purchase in addition to the free Farmland (Zone 2) antlerless tag that comes with each license purchase. In Dunn County, there will be 2500 bonus tags available for purchase, with 2100 of those tags available for private land in the county, and 400 available for public land. The Dunn County CDAC

recognizes that the local herd is growing, and established an antlerless harvest quota of 7200, which, if achieved, will adequately maintain the population. The Pepin County CDAC also recognizes a higher rate of population growth - as such, two Farmland Zone antlerless tags (valid only in Pepin Co.) will be issued with

**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.**

each license purchased. Also, a seven day antlerless only Holiday Hunt, running from Dec. 24 - Jan. 1 is in place, in addition to the standard Farmland Zone season structure. Pepin County will also offer 1000 bonus antlerless tags, with 925 tags available for private land and 75 available for public lands.

It is also worth noting that both Dunn and Pepin Counties currently have open

seats on their County Deer Advisory Councils. Anyone interested in filling a seat and taking an active role in deer population management should visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword "[CDAC](#)" for more information.

Bill Hogseth, DNR wildlife biologist for Eau Claire County, notes that hunters in northern Chippewa County will be pleased that recent timber harvests in the Chippewa County Forest are creating ample deer habitat as regenerating timber provides plentiful food and thick shelter for winter cover and fawn production. In an effort to rebuild the deer herd, members of the local CDAC have chosen to not include Farmland Zone antlerless tags with each license in 2016; instead, only a limited number of bonus tags will be available for those wishing to harvest an antlerless deer.

Deer hunters in Crawford, Vernon, La Crosse, and the farmland portions of Monroe, Adams, and Juneau Counties should also 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,” said Anna Jahns, DNR wildlife technician in Viroqua. Jahns further explains that these two factors, however, play vital roles in the county’s notoriety for producing large-antlered bucks. Two Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tags are included at no cost with the purchase of each deer hunting license in Crawford and Vernon Counties. While there are no bonus tags available for purchase for use on public land in Crawford County, 3,500 private land bonus tags are available. In Vernon County, 100 public land and 1,000 private land bonus tags will be available for purchase. 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

2016 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations for Metro Sub-unit hunting season dates and visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search “[antlerless tags](#)” for tag availability. Hunters interested in hunting the La Crosse or Hudson Metropolitan Sub-units should be aware that they may now obtain a Farmland Zone tag at no cost for St. Croix or Pierce County valid countywide, as well as an additional Metro Sub-unit antlerless tag valid only in those metro areas to help increase harvest pressure on the urban deer. Hunters who traditionally hunt the Central Forest Zone areas of Eau Claire, Clark, Jackson, Wood, Adams, Juneau, and Monroe Counties should notice more deer this year. The department’s Black River Falls wildlife biologist, Scott Roepke, offers, “After another exceptionally mild winter and low overall antlerless harvest, deer numbers continue to rebound in both Jackson and Clark counties.” Hunters, motorists, and outdoor recreationalists all report seeing an increased number of deer on the landscape compared to previous years. Crop and natural forage production should be at or near their maximum potential this summer, providing deer a smorgasbord of food options on the landscape. Keying in on what deer are feeding on

at specific times during the hunting season can work to a hunter’s advantage. The Forest Management Zone areas of Jackson and Clark counties are a constantly evolving landscape due to timber harvest activities. Timber harvests are important for many reasons and in most cases provide deer with improved habitat conditions. Hunters are encouraged to scout their hunting area prior to the season rolling around and adjust their stand locations accordingly. Bonus antlerless tags will be in limited supply or not available in certain areas again as recommended by the CDACs. The Forest Zone of Jackson County will see another season of buck-only hunting and no bonus antlerless permits will be issued for public lands in the Farmland Zone in Jackson County. If hunters are interested in harvesting antlerless deer in the Farmland Zone of Jackson County, they are encouraged

**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.**

to utilize the Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tag included with the purchase of their deer hunting licenses.

Roepke reminds hunters that elk reintroduction efforts continue in the Central Forest Zone of Jackson County, and elk are currently a protected species. As always, hunters must exercise the basic principles of hunter safety, and deer hunters in this area should be particularly mindful to be sure of their target and what lies beyond.

Long-time Central Forest Zone DNR wildlife biologist Wayne Hall forecasts deer numbers and deer hunting opportunities throughout the Central Forest Zone to be improved from 2015 due to two mild winters in a row and increased fawn recruitment. The deer herd in the Central Forest Zone is not as productive as in the Farmland zones, and is slower to increase. Hall further notes that adequate and timely spring and summer moisture has vegetation in excellent, lush conditions. Blueberries, huckleberries, and blackberries all have abundant fruits highly sought by deer.

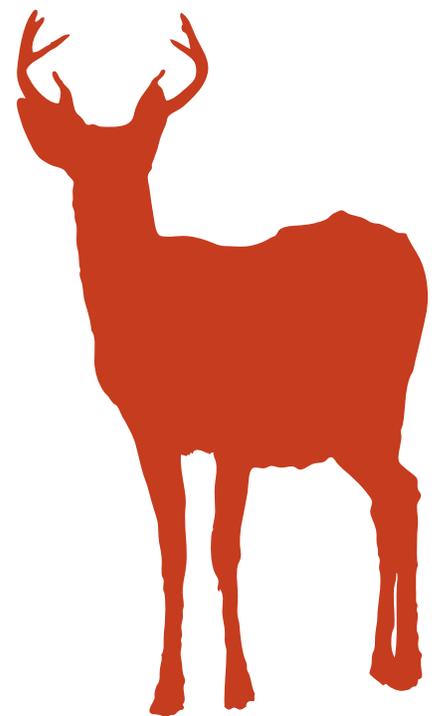
Portage County DNR wildlife biologist Lesa Kardash also expects deer numbers and hunting opportunities to be improved from 2015 due to mild winter conditions and continued



CARLY BROWN / DNR

conservative antlerless tag issuance. According to Darren Ladwig, DNR wildlife biologist for Adams and Juneau Counties, "A few years of conservative antlerless tags and increased fawn production in the Central Forest portion of these two counties continue to facilitate deer herd growth." Similar observations have also been noted in the Eau Claire County and Clark County areas of the Central Forest Zone. Ladwig also 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. In the Central Forest Zone portion of Eau Claire County, a low number of antlerless deer were harvested in 2015, which may translate into a greater reproduction rate

and an expanding herd size. Hunters in the Augusta and Fairchild area are encouraged to offer their harvested deer for CWD testing to assist the DNR in determining the potential effects on the wild deer herd following detection of a captive CWD positive deer at a game farm in 2015.





THERE ARE MANY OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF WHITE-TAILED DEER IN WISCONSIN

Hunters should be aware that Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tags are unit (county) and land type specific (public access or private). Some counties - Pepin, Buffalo, Vernon, and Crawford - also offer two farmland antlerless tags with the purchase of each deer hunting license. All hunters purchasing deer hunting licenses in the Southern Farmland or Central Farmland Zones have the option to declare this tag at the time of purchasing their deer hunting license, and will designate its use for either public or private land. Hunters who hunt both private and public land should think carefully before declaring their land choice. Limited quantities of bonus antlerless tags are available for sale

in most Farmland Zone units. For more information about bonus antlerless tags, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search "[antlerless tags](#)." Many counties within either the Central or Southern Farmland Zones have deer populations that are above goal, 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 frequent. Deer are currently in their summer patterns, and hunters can key in on those movements and have great success in the first few of weeks of archery season. Bucks will likely be in bachelor groups and can be very visible and predictable in late August into mid-September. Lichtie advises early

season archery hunters to pay close attention to the mast crops where they hunt. The late frost that occurred this spring seems to have reduced many soft mast-producing food sources like apples, dogwood berries, and wild plums. Hard mast like acorns and hickories may also have been affected by the frost. Hunters should pay particular attention to areas

BUCKS WILL LIKELY BE IN BACHELOR GROUPS AND CAN BE VERY VISIBLE AND PREDICTABLE IN LATE AUGUST INTO MID-SEPTEMBER.

with concentrations of white and bur oak. Once white and bur oaks begin to drop acorns, deer will key in on this vital food resource and their movement patterns will change accordingly.

Hunters in portions of Adams, Clark, Crawford, Eau Claire, Jackson, Juneau, Marathon and Portage counties should also be aware that the department will continue to sample hunter harvested deer for Chronic Wasting Disease and appreciate the assistance of hunters to obtain those samples. A network of cooperating taxidermists and meat processors will be assisting in collecting samples throughout the fall from hunter harvested deer. This testing will allow the department to track the prevalence and geographic distribution of the disease. Tests are conducted free of charge to hunters who submit samples with the required hunter and location information. More information regarding CWD surveillance areas and sampling locations can be found at [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov), keywords "[CWD sampling](#)."

West Central District wildlife management staff encourages all deer hunters to enjoy a safe, fun, and successful 2016 deer hunting season.





# NORTHERN

**Mike Zeckmeister, DNR Northern District wildlife supervisor, 715-635-4090, [mike.zeckmeister@wisconsin.gov](mailto:mike.zeckmeister@wisconsin.gov)**

An extremely mild winter in 2015-16 and an early spring green-up in 2016 will have a big impact on deer populations across northern Wisconsin. Conditions during the winter of 2014-15 were much milder compared to the very severe winter we experienced in 2013-14. Winter health assessments conducted during late winter and early spring reinforce what we already suspected: body conditions of these deer were in good shape and there was good productivity of does. We had several cases of doe fawns (born in 2015) carrying fawns. Although this is more common in southern Wisconsin, it is more significant for northern Wisconsin.

All of these factors add up to good news for the Northern Forest Deer Management Zone. Researchers and local wildlife managers expect fawn recruitment to be very good. This is good news for those counties where we have had zero or very low quotas the past few years in an attempt to rebuild the deer herd. However, hunters can expect that this re-building will still take some time - especially in northern tier counties.

**AN EXTREMELY MILD WINTER IN 2015-16 AND AN EARLY SPRING GREEN-UP IN 2016 WILL HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON DEER POPULATIONS ACROSS NORTHERN WISCONSIN.**

Likewise, we should see excellent antler development due to the milder winter. Conservative

quotas in much of the north, as recommended by the County Deer Advisory Councils, should spell increased deer numbers in Northern Wisconsin. It will, however, take several years to get over the 2013-14 very severe winter from a deer age structure perspective. Lower deer numbers should allow a few years of much-needed relief on forest communities that deer rely on. As always, the best way to prepare deer for the upcoming winter is to thin the herd and to create good browse through wise forest management.

According to Joe Weiss, Washburn County CDAC Chair, "I am encouraged by the number of young deer I am seeing this summer and despite the opinion that shooting does is not popular, it does seem to be warranted in many areas. We are hoping that our predictions for herd growth are proven right this fall."

# NORTH -EAST

**Jeff Pritzl, DNR Northeast  
District wildlife supervisor,  
(920) 662-5127,**

[jeffrey.pritzl@wisconsin.gov](mailto:jeffrey.pritzl@wisconsin.gov)

Deer harvest in the Northern Forest Zone portions of Marinette and Oconto counties did not show evidence of herd growth during the 2015 season, but after a second mild winter, we can expect more adult deer in the herd this fall. Buck sightings should improve as fawns from 2015 will be sporting their first set of antlers. County Deer Advisory Councils in these counties recommended a conservative antlerless harvest approach, waiting to see harvest evidence that the herd is growing before making more aggressive recommendations in the coming years. Antlerless quotas are reduced a bit in the Forest Zone portions of the counties, and held steady in the Farmland Zone. Conditions appear favorable for a solid acorn crop, although this can quickly be impacted, like in 2015 when what looked like good acorn numbers did not turn into a good food source as many acorns were attacked by insect larvae which consumed the nuts. Hopefully this year, more will be full of meat.



Fawn production and survival is expected to be very good again this year in the Central Farmland Zone. Some Farmland Zone County Deer Advisory Councils are finding it challenging to meet their objective to stabilize their deer herd in the face of high fawn productivity. Antlerless quotas increased compared to 2015 in 10 counties in the Northeast District, but some counties held steady, acknowledging that the quota is already higher than historical harvests.

The call for increasing the antlerless portion of the harvest in an attempt to stabilize herd growth was led by the Waupaca County CDAC's initial recommendation to have an antlerless-only season in 2016. Their final recommendation was to allow buck harvest, but the message from Waupaca

and surrounding counties, as well as the Lake Michigan coast counties of Door, Kewaunee and Manitowoc is that in order to demonstrate the ability to maintain a stable deer population, the antlerless harvest must increase. Those counties have provided hunters generous opportunities to achieve that goal in the form of multiple antlerless permits and implementation of the Holiday Hunt in some counties. Buck harvests are expected to be good throughout the District this year. Of course there are many variables that make hunting somewhat unpredictable, but that is also what makes hunting intriguing and an adventure every day. This year is a great opportunity to explore some new areas and enjoy all the bounties that the autumn landscape provides.



USFWS PHOTO

## SOUTHERN

**Bret Owsley, area wildlife supervisor, 920-387-7874, [bret.owsley@wisconsin.gov](mailto:bret.owsley@wisconsin.gov)**

The fall 2016 deer herd across the 18-county Southern District, all of which falls within the Southern Farmland Zone, came through an extremely mild winter. In general, the population is looking very good to great. Many DNR staff and the general public have reported seeing deer frequently this summer - including a high number of fawns. With lower than historic antlerless harvest

last year, 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 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. An expected increase in deer numbers has resulted in higher antlerless permit recommendations by most County Deer Advisory Councils (CDACs) within the district. This was the second year of operation for the CDACs, which encourage and provide opportunity for public involvement in deer management decisions. Department staff encourages 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, from high wooded ridges and coulees in the southwest, to flatter, agriculturally-dominated landscape in Green, Rock and Walworth counties along the Illinois border. We also have rolling southern kettles in the east and extensive wetland and woodland areas in Dodge 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 two weeks ahead of schedule so as long as the growing season continues to go well and the amount of rain in the fall is not excessive, hunters should expect that the corn and soybeans will be harvested early which will impact deer movements. 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 food sources. In areas where deer numbers are the highest, you can expect to see the quality of habitat decrease, resulting in deer traveling further 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](http://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. Those looking for public land available for hunting can visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords "public hunting lands." Those hunters interested in hunting on private lands are advised to get out well in advance of deer season to meet with landowners and seek permission to hunt. Remember to get out early to scout the areas you plan to hunt throughout the fall. Keep an eye out for those natural food sources that will attract deer, and pattern their movements to and from those sources.

**HUNTERS SHOULD EXPECT THAT THE CORN AND SOYBEANS WILL BE HARVESTED EARLY WHICH WILL IMPACT DEER MOVEMENTS**

Another important aspect for Southern District deer hunters to keep in mind is that the prevalence of Chronic Wasting Disease continues to increase in prevalence and geographic area. All but Ozaukee County in the southern district is within the CWD Affected Area and as a result, baiting and feeding of deer is prohibited. With one year 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.

Returning for the first time in a few years in 2016, hunters in six counties within the Southern District will have the opportunity to enjoy the Holiday Hunt during the winter holidays. Those counties include Columbia, Milwaukee, Richland, Rock, Sauk and Waukesha. Other surrounding counties just outside the district will also offer a Holiday Hunt, including Crawford, Green Lake and Marquette counties. The Holiday Hunt runs from Dec. 24 to Jan. 1.

Hunters in the Southern District will also receive 1 to 2 free Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tags with each deer hunting license. The number of tags received will depend upon the county of choice and the recommendations made by CDACs. In the Southern District, all counties have Bonus Antlerless Deer Tags available for sale, except Kenosha and Racine Counties in the far southeastern portion of the District.

We anticipate an excellent deer season in the Southern District in 2016, and wish everyone a safe and successful fall.

2015 Season Highlights  
Archery Totals

<u><i>Deer Management Zone</i></u>	<u><i>Antlered</i></u>	<u><i>Antlerless</i></u>	<u><i>Unknown</i></u>	<u><i>Total</i></u>
<u><i>Central Farmland</i></u>	<u><i>17,394</i></u>	<u><i>14,367</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>31,761</i></u>
<u><i>Central Forest</i></u>	<u><i>1,610</i></u>	<u><i>520</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>2,130</i></u>
<u><i>Northern Forest</i></u>	<u><i>4,628</i></u>	<u><i>1,123</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>5,751</i></u>
<u><i>Southern Farmland</i></u>	<u><i>7,597</i></u>	<u><i>5,765</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>13,362</i></u>
<u><i>Unknown</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>
<u><i>Total</i></u>	<u><i>31,229</i></u>	<u><i>21,775</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>53,004</i></u>

Crossbow Totals

<u><i>Deer Management Zone</i></u>	<u><i>Antlered</i></u>	<u><i>Antlerless</i></u>	<u><i>Unknown</i></u>	<u><i>Total</i></u>
<u><i>Central Farmland</i></u>	<u><i>11,112</i></u>	<u><i>9,208</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>20,320</i></u>
<u><i>Central Forest</i></u>	<u><i>1,184</i></u>	<u><i>428</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>1,612</i></u>
<u><i>Northern Forest</i></u>	<u><i>4,723</i></u>	<u><i>1,227</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>5,950</i></u>
<u><i>Southern Farmland</i></u>	<u><i>3,575</i></u>	<u><i>2,637</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>6,212</i></u>
<u><i>Unknown</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>
<u><i>Total</i></u>	<u><i>20,594</i></u>	<u><i>13,500</i></u>	<u><i>0</i></u>	<u><i>34,094</i></u>

Gun Totals

<u>Deer Management Zone</u>	<u>Antlered</u>	<u>Antlerless</u>	<u>Unknown</u>	<u>Total<sup>a</sup></u>
<u>Central Farmland</u>	<u>52,136</u>	<u>78,840</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>130,976</u>
<u>Central Forest</u>	<u>5,497</u>	<u>3,563</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>9,060</u>
<u>Northern Forest</u>	<u>19,528</u>	<u>9,266</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>28,794</u>
<u>Southern Farmland</u>	<u>22,596</u>	<u>31,279</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>53,877</u>
<u>Unknown</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>99,757</u>	<u>122,972</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>222,731</u>

a Includes damage deer



FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING WATERFOWL HUNTING IN WISCONSIN, VISIT [DNR.WI.GOV](http://DNR.WI.GOV) AND SEARCH KEYWORD "[WATERFOWL](#)."

# MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS



**Taylor Finger, DNR assistant migratory game bird ecologist, 608-261-6458, [Taylor.Finger@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Taylor.Finger@Wisconsin.gov)**

With fall right around the corner, another Wisconsin waterfowl hunting season is near, and hunters have much to be excited about. According to DNR assistant migratory bird ecologist Taylor Finger, even though this year was somewhat drier, the habitat conditions here in Wisconsin and on U.S. and Canadian prairies range from fair to excellent with a high continental

total number of ducks, and the outlook for fall 2016 is very promising.

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.

# DUCKS

Waterfowl breeding areas in North America showed mostly fair to good conditions in 2016, and duck breeding quality is expected to be high overall. Wetland conditions were below average in several regions of Wisconsin's breeding waterfowl survey in early May, but have improved greatly and are now at or above average - this should provide good brood rearing habitat.

The four most abundant ducks in Wisconsin's fall hunting harvest make up close to 70 percent of total harvest, and include mallards, wood ducks, green-winged teal and blue-winged teal. 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 has affected when spring breeding waterfowl numbers are generated. In the past, these numbers were provided in early July and could be provided within the Fall Forecast. However, in the future they will not be provided until mid-August. That being said, in 2015 the continental breeding duck population estimate from USFWS was 49.5 million (the highest duck population estimate in the survey's 60 year history). The recent trend of wet conditions, increasing duck numbers and liberal regulations are very encouraging and have led to continued excellent waterfowl hunting opportunities throughout the U.S. and Canada. In Wisconsin, the spring waterfowl survey provided mixed results, with a total breeding population estimate of roughly 390,500 ducks. This estimate shows an increase from 2015,

## CHANGES IN 2016

- 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](http://gamereg.wi.gov) or via phone at 844-426-3734 (844 GAME-REG);
- Canada Goose Hunting Permits are now printed on paper;
- Hunters may 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; and
- There is now one time period for Canada goose hunting in the Horicon Zone

### 2016 DUCK HUNTING SEASON STRUCTURE:

Early Teal: Sept. 1 - 7

Youth Duck Hunt: Sept. 17-18

Northern Zone: Sept. 24 - Nov 22

Southern Zone: Oct. 1 - Oct. 9, Oct. 15 - Dec 4

Mississippi River Zone: Oct. 1 - 7; Oct. 15 - Dec 6

**HUNTERS CANNOT CHANGE THE WEATHER, BUT THEY CAN VASTLY IMPROVE THEIR ODDS BY BEING FLEXIBLE AND SCOUTING BEFORE AND DURING THE SEASON.**



but is below the long term average. “These are population estimates, not exact counts, so changes of 20 percent (whether an increase or decrease) may not reflect any real change in the actual population and are best viewed as trends,” said Finger. The trend in 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 164,000 saw a decrease from 2015, and is considerably lower

than the 1995-2005 average of 272,000 ducks. The wood duck represents over 20 percent of the total fall harvest, and the 2015 breeding population estimate of 89,775 is up from 2015 and 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 120,000 ducks. Based on improved water conditions and our best interpretation of the survey results, the department expects wood duck production in 2016 to be good and similar to recent years. The 2016 Wisconsin blue-winged teal breeding population estimate of 38,000 is down from 2015. 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 in 2015 the continental population was the third highest ever. Although continental breeding estimates are not available at this time, 2016 looks to be a good year for duck numbers and production across North America. In both 2014 and 2015, encouraging continental duck numbers mirrored good to excellent habitat conditions. Hunters are reminded that success in the fall will depend heavily upon weather, water conditions and preseason scouting.

## SEASON STRUCTURE AND PLANNING

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

In 2016, Wisconsin will take part in the third and final year of a three year experimental teal season. 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 regarding the teal season and proper identification can be found on the department's [waterfowl management page](#).

In 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 3 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 assistant waterfowl ecologist Taylor Finger.

For more information, check out the [2016 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 7 day split in 2015 and 84 percent

of public comments received supported this proposal. We went with a similar 7 day split proposal in 2016 and 91 percent of the public comments received supported this proposal.

### POSSESSION LIMIT:

Federal rules regarding possession limits changed last year and now allow three times the daily bag limit. In Wisconsin, a hunter can possess up to 18 ducks at any one time.

### BAG LIMIT

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

- four mallards, of which only one may be a hen;
- one black duck;
- two canvasback;
- three wood ducks;
- two pintails;
- three scaup; and
- two 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 possession limits have been increased to three times the daily bag limit. The daily bag limit for Coot is 15.

# CANADA GEESE

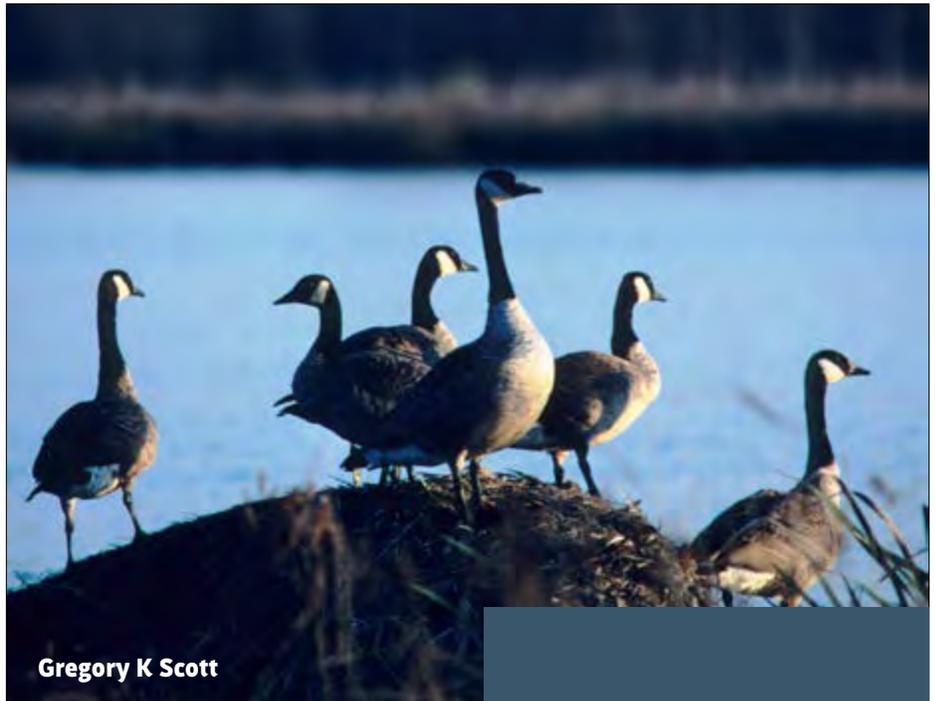
Hunters can expect good Canada goose hunting opportunities – hunters are encouraged to pursue geese early in the fall and adapt as they change movement patterns throughout the season.

The 2016 Wisconsin breeding Canada goose population estimate of 129,500 is up from 2015 and just slightly below the average over the last decade. Wisconsin's resident breeding Canada goose population may be stabilizing at 120,000 after a long-term increase.

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

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

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 40 percent of harvest during the late regular goose season.



Gregory K Scott

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 2 years 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 2016; 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.

## 2016 CANADA GOOSE SEASON STRUCTURE:

North – Sept. 16- Dec. 16

South – Sept. 16 – Oct. 9,  
and Oct. 15 – Dec. 21

Mississippi River Subzone:  
Oct. 1 – 7; Oct. 15- Jan. 5,  
2017

The Horicon Zone will be a  
single period:

September 16 –  
December 21

With the 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

## NEW IN 2016

THE HORICON ZONE  
WILL BE A SINGLE  
PERIOD: SEPTEMBER  
16 - DECEMBER 21.

online at [gamereg.wi.gov](http://gamereg.wi.gov) or via phone at 844-426-3734 (844 GAME-REG). In addition, the Early, Exterior and Horicon Zone goose permits are now printed on regular white paper, rather than the green thermal paper that was used in the past. While afield, hunters must still carry their Canada goose harvest permit and the department suggests when in the field the hunter should carry their permit in a plastic bag to protect it from any adverse conditions.

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

In 2014, the Horicon Zone boundary changed, and areas west of Hwy 73 and north of Hwy 23 were removed from the Horicon Zone and added to the Exterior Zone. 2015 also saw permit change in the Horicon

Zone - hunters were required to mark the permit for the date of kill (with the total not to exceed the season limit). 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](http://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 15,749 was below harvest in recent years, likely due to the unseasonably warm conditions during the early season last year.

"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 250 geese. This year's youth hunt will take place Sept. 17-18. Licenses and stamp requirements are waived for eligible young duck hunters (ages 10-15) during the youth hunt, but hunters must be HIP certified (free of charge). Youth who wish to harvest geese need an Early Canada goose season permit. Normal bag limits apply.

# MOURNING DOVES



IN 2016, 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.

**Remember:** Hunters must be HIP registered and use non-toxic shot when hunting doves on DNR-managed lands. In 2016, 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 ninth consecutive year, Wisconsin is participating in a national plan to monitor mourning dove populations for harvest management. Biologists set a goal of

capturing and banding 850 doves at several locations throughout the state with a small aluminum United States Fish and Wildlife Service leg band. Hunters who harvest a banded dove are asked to report them to the Bird Banding Lab online at [www.reportband.gov](http://www.reportband.gov) [exit DNR] or by phone at 1-800-327-BAND (2263).

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

Regulations and license requirements for dove hunting can be found in the [2016 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 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.***

FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING WATERFOWL HUNTING IN WISCONSIN, VISIT [DNR.WI.GOV](http://DNR.WI.GOV) AND SEARCH KEYWORD [“WATERFOWL.”](#)



JIM HUDGINS/USFWS

## WOODCOCK SEASON STRUCTURE:

Sept. 24 to Nov. 7, with a daily bag of three birds.

***Note that possession limits for woodcock are three times the daily bag limit.***



# BLACK BEAR FORECAST

*David MacFarland, DNR large carnivore specialist, 715-365-8917, [David.Macfarland@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:David.Macfarland@Wisconsin.gov)*

The past seven seasons have ranked as the top seven bear harvests in Wisconsin history, and this trend is likely to continue with a record number of permits available in 2016 (11,520). According to a recent survey of states conducted by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Wisconsin leads the nation with more bear harvested than any other state.

Current harvest levels are intended to stabilize the population, which should allow for continued abundance in hunter opportunities. Our latest population estimate is 28,850 bears statewide, or between

0.9 and 1.7 bears per square mile depending on zone. We continue to see the range of bears extending south, and hunters are finding opportunities in new areas of the state. In 2015 bears were registered in places not normally associated with bear hunting including La Crosse, Vernon and Marquette counties. Zone C hunters may want to consider driving south to hunt this year!

**THE PAST SEVEN SEASONS HAVE RANKED AS THE TOP SEVEN BEAR HARVESTS IN WISCONSIN HISTORY,**

Wisconsin continues to have very high interest in bear hunting. Bucking the trend of declining hunter participation rates, the number of bear hunting applicants continues to grow. With 109,221 applicants, 2016 continues a 16 year trend where every year has had more applicants than the last.

There are several new regulations in 2016. Most notably, hunters are no longer required to wear a back tag while hunting. Tagging regulations have also changed. For a summary of how these changes impact tagging and registration procedures for

all species, including bears, see the GoWild section of this document.

This is the second year hunters are asked to submit tooth samples by mail - 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](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword "[bear registration](#)."

The number of preference points required to draw a bear harvest permit in 2016 ranged from one in Zone C to ten in Zone B. "Although wait times may be several years in some of the northern zones, Zone C gives hunters a great opportunity to participate more frequently," said MacFarland.

In 2015, hunters harvested 4,198 bears. Bear Management Zone D led all zones with 1,341 bears harvested, followed by Zone A (1,119), Zone C (972) and Zone B (764). Bayfield County led all counties with 410 bears harvested, followed by Price (283), Douglas (269),

Rusk (262) and Marinette (235). In 2015, hunter harvest success was highest in Zone B, with a 70 percent success rate. Zone B was followed by Zones A & D (60 percent success) and Zone C (18 percent success).

"The 62 percent success rate throughout the northern forests and the statewide average of 39 percent are some of the best success rates in the country," said DNR large carnivore specialist David MacFarland.

Gun hunters harvested 3,610 bears in 2015, while bow hunters accounted for 403 bears. A majority of bears were harvested using bait (3,395), but the use of both dogs and bait (995) and neither dogs nor bait (69) were also relatively successful.

For the upcoming 2016 season, 11,520 permits were issued to hunters. This represents the highest number of bear permits ever available in the state. The department's current management objectives include population stabilization in zones A, B and C and population reduction in Zone D. In zones A, B and D, the first week of the harvest season will be reserved for hunters using bait and other legal methods (excluding the use of dogs). In turn, the last week of the season is reserved solely for hunters

who use dogs to pursue bear. In Zone C, the use of dogs is prohibited.

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

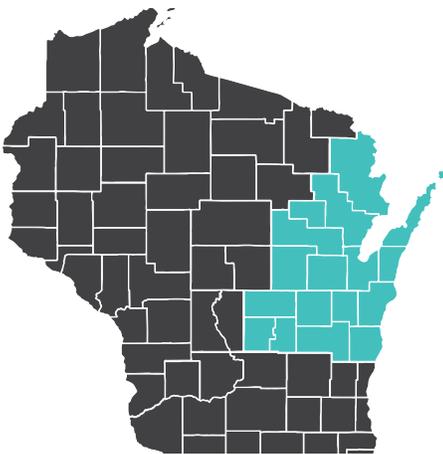






# NORTHEAST DISTRICT

**John Huff, Area Wildlife Supervisor, 715-582-5047**



The Northeast District includes portions of Bear Management zones B and C. The bear population in Zone B is healthy, with a management objective in this zone to stabilize the population near current levels. Bears are expanding their range in Zone C, but are most abundant in the northern portion of this zone. Hunters may find opportunities in new areas within Zone C as bear populations grow.

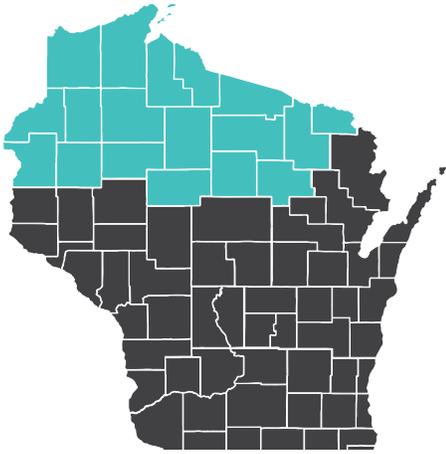
Harvest permit levels increased in both Zone B and Zone C in 2016. In Zone B, management is designed to stabilize the bear population. Though hunters must wait several years to get a harvest permit, success rates are high. Permit levels in Zone C are tailored to provide opportunities for hunters in areas with an expanding bear population. Success rates are lower in Zone C, but hunters can draw harvest permits more frequently. 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.

Soft mast berries look fairly good in northeast Wisconsin. Acorn crops will vary across the region, and because of their value to bears they can affect the activity at bait sites. Nuisance complaints regarding bears in early summer were about average or perhaps a little behind recent years.

In Zone B, hunters using methods not involving dogs can start September 7 and have a 28-day season ending October 4. Those using hounds start on September 14 and their season ends October 11. Hunters can change methods but must be aware of season dates for the type of hunting they are doing. In Zone C, the use of dogs is not allowed, and the season runs from September 7 to October 11.

# NORTHERN DISTRICT

**Mike Zeckmeister**, DNR northern district wildlife supervisor, 715-635-4090,  
[mike.zeckmeister@wisconsin.gov](mailto:mike.zeckmeister@wisconsin.gov)



Following a very mild winter and an early spring green up, conditions again appear to be very favorable for bears. 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. Late flowering soft mass producing plants like blackberries were not affected and will produce a good crop, especially with good rainfall into July.

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 seasons often results in bears to quit hitting hunting baits. Early spring corn planting will result in corn going into the milk stage earlier resulting

in a longer length of time before the bear season opens. Overall, prospects look good that bears may be more tuned into hitting baits, especially with bait-sitters going first this year.

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 remains high in the southern portions of Zone D – this could be an indicator of high bear numbers in these zones.

**OVERALL, PROSPECTS LOOK GOOD THAT BEARS MAY BE MORE TUNED INTO HITTING BAITS, ESPECIALLY WITH BAIT-SITTERS GOING FIRST THIS YEAR.**

“We need to continue to focus bear harvest in the southern portion of Zone D, including Barron, Polk, Washburn and Burnett counties where we have higher bear numbers and the highest number of bear-related issues,” said DNR northern district wildlife supervisor Michael

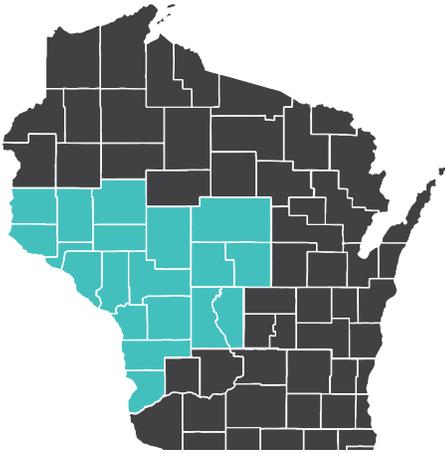
Zeckmeister. “The highest number of bear-related complaints, likely a function of higher bear densities, seems to be around the Grantsburg area in Zone D.”

This year, DNR and the Bear Advisory Committee selected another high bear quota for Zone D. “This four-county area in the southern portion of Zone D will continue to offer tremendous opportunities to harvest a bear in 2016,” said Zeckmeister. “A higher Zone D quota will not only increase the chances of harvesting a bear, but will also help reduce human-bear conflicts in an area that has had serious conflicts in recent years. Our goal is to allow bear hunters who have waited and drawn a harvest tag to successfully harvest a bear and reduce locally high populations.”

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

# WEST CENTRAL DISTRICT

Wayne Hall, Wood County Wildlife Biologist, 715-884-2437

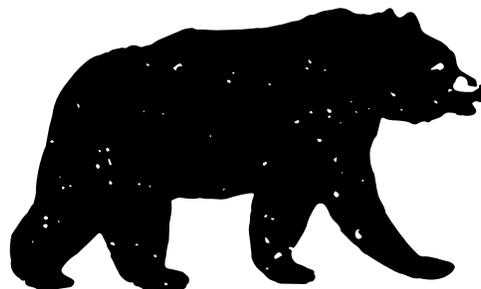


The black bear population has continued its leisurely expansion through the West Central District. Reports of bear sightings throughout the southern/southwestern portion of the district are becoming less of a novelty to local residents, but nuisance bear calls for the most part appear to be down or stable. Most sightings in La Crosse and Monroe counties typically occur in spring when 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 increased somewhat, but like everywhere else these sightings occurred within the normal time of high bear activity. Based on trailcams within Vernon and Crawford counties, there are a couple

of very plump healthy bears wandering around as well as locally produced cubs and their sows. Overall, reports across the WCD of nuisance complaints this year appear minimal, if not less, than last year.

In 2015, 5490 permits were made available in Zone C, and hunters harvested 972 bear for a 18 percent permit success rate. A majority of the region’s harvest took place in Chippewa (120), Clark(54), Jackson(40) and Marathon(101) counties, with a small number of bears harvested further south towards Juneau, La Crosse and Vernon counties and as far east as Portage County.

In 2016, 6190 harvest permits were issued in Zone C, an increase of 700 permits from 2015 (5490) in an effort to stabilize the current population and minimize bear damage and nuisance concerns while slowing the population expansion to a glacial rate towards Southern Wisconsin.



THERE ARE A COUPLE OF VERY PLUMP HEALTHY BEARS WANDERING AROUND VERNON AND CRAWFORD COUNTY AS WELL AS LOCALLY PRODUCED CUBS AND THEIR SOWS.

Bear populations in the WCD have continued their expansion from the core central forest counties to more agricultural counties surrounding the central forest but at a more noticeably slower pace. The northern parts of the region’s hunting grounds experience higher hunting pressure, but does hold plenty of bears, offering hunters plenty of opportunities. The southern portion of the WCD experiences relatively much lower hunting pressure (small parcels, modest human population density) as well as lower success rates but under the right situation offers an opportunity for a hunter to harvest an older mature bear in these areas. Regardless, “bears hunters still need to scout, scout and scout more to be successful” in Zone C.



Ben Pierson / DNR

# FURBEARERS

[Shawn Rossler, DNR furbearer ecologist, 608-267-9428, shawn.rossler@wisconsin.gov](mailto:shawn.rossler@wisconsin.gov)

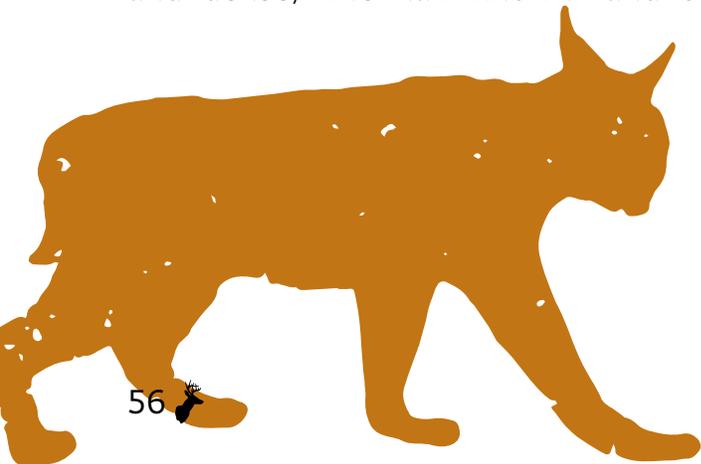
[Jenna Kosnicki, DNR assistant furbearer ecologist, 608-261-6452, jenna.kosnicki@wisconsin.gov](mailto:jenna.kosnicki@wisconsin.gov)

Among the vast diversity of Wisconsin wildlife are a group of mammals known as “furbearers.” Furbearers have two types of hair—longer, stiffer, sleek guard hair and dense, fine hair known

as underfur. For centuries, many of these animals have provided food and warmth to mankind. Beaver, coyote, raccoon, and muskrat are some of the more abundant and common species across Wisconsin. Otters are present statewide, while bobcat and fisher are beginning to expand southward and are seen in southern portions of the state.

American marten, a native state endangered furbearer, call remote sections of northern Wisconsin home.

AMERICAN MARTEN ARE CURRENTLY THE ONLY FURBEARER ON WISCONSIN'S ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST.



# RACCOONS

Raccoons are common throughout Wisconsin and have especially high densities near urban areas. Raccoons are well-adapted to living near people and will take advantage of any food source available. Populations are highest in Wisconsin's central and southern farmland regions, as reported by deer hunters in the annual [deer hunter observation survey](#) and DNR field staff, though localized populations can vary. Bill Hogseth, wildlife biologist for Eau Claire County, reports: "A few trappers have told me raccoon numbers seem to be down a bit. We are still seeing some unfortunate roadkills, but I'm getting fewer nuisance calls in 2015 than last year." Raccoon harvest statewide varies annually—they are typically the second-highest harvested furbearer in Wisconsin, following the muskrat. Harvest was high in 2012 and 2013, when pelt prices were high, and declined in 2014 and 2015 as pelt prices dropped dramatically. A relatively mild winter in 2014-15 followed by a late and short winter in 2015-2016 likely allowed for good survival rates in juvenile raccoons.

Local populations can fluctuate during spring floods as raccoons frequent riparian corridors. Raccoons are also susceptible to disease. Lindsey Long, DNR wildlife veterinarian, notes: "We routinely see localized outbreaks of Canine Distemper Virus, or CDV, which results in mortality in our raccoon population. This disease, as with all diseases, can have local population impacts, so it is important we monitor and document outbreaks whenever possible." If you notice multiple dead raccoons this fall, contact your local wildlife biologist and help the department document emerging disease issues in furbearer species. "Raccoons carry many diseases," said Long. "Some, like CDV, are not transmissible to humans but can carry over to domestic pets. Others, like raccoon roundworm can infect people, so gloves should always be worn while handling carcasses and you should wash your hands frequently." Since raccoons are abundant and occasionally considered a nuisance, they are an excellent species to hunt or trap with permission on new properties—farmers are often

welcoming of new harvesters. Kris Johansen, DNR wildlife supervisor in Black River Falls, urges trappers and hunters to "Make sure to do your homework with pre-season scouting and obtain permission from landowners well in advance. Pre-season efforts from hunters and trappers can provide for a productive and efficient experience. 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 or and hunt on their lands."

## RESIDENT RACCOON SEASON:

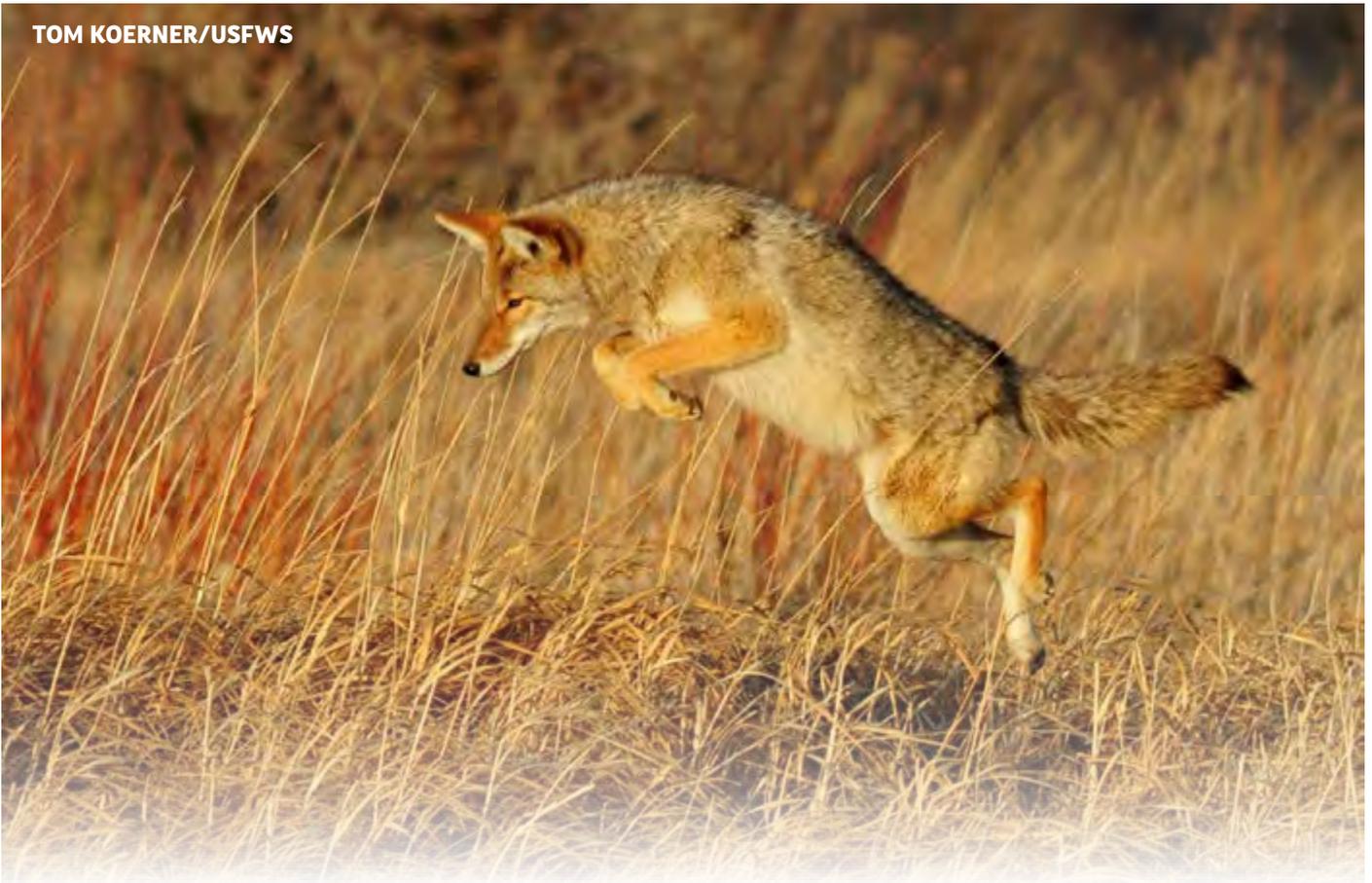
October 15, 2015 -  
February 15, 2017

**NOTE:** Mississippi River zone opens the day after duck seasons close or November 14, whichever occurs first, through February 15, 2017

## NON-RESIDENT RACCOON SEASON:

October 29, 2015 -  
February 15, 2017

**Bag Limit: None**



# COYOTES

Coyotes, Wisconsin's second largest native canids, are well-established throughout the state. Coyotes easily adapt to humans and are frequently seen in urban areas. In 2014, a University of Wisconsin-Madison research project was initiated to study Madison's urban coyotes and red foxes. According to graduate student Marcus Mueller, "We're using this project to learn more about urban canids and educate the public about

these unique, interesting animals." For more information, visit <http://uwurbancanidproject.weebly.com> or find them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/uwurbancanidproject>.

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

## COYOTE AND FOX TRAPPING SEASON:

Statewide: Oct 15, 2016 - Feb 15, 2017

## COYOTE HUNTING SEASON:

Statewide: Year round

## FOX HUNTING SEASON:

Statewide: Oct 15, 2016 - Feb 15, 2017

Bag Limit: None

# GRAY FOX

Trapper harvest of gray fox has been in the 1,200-1,500 range for the last few years, with estimated hunter harvest averaging 4,000-7,000.

This elusive creature, the smallest of Wisconsin's four canines, prefers forests with deciduous trees like oaks unlike its larger brethren, the red fox, which often prefer more open habitats. Gray fox, like raccoons, are susceptible to canine distemper virus. 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.



**GRAY FOX**

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 in 2015 reported the most gray fox sightings in the Central



**RED FOX**

Farmland Zone, while the lowest observation rate was seen in the Southern Farmland Zone. Visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords "wildlife reports" for the full deer hunter observation report.

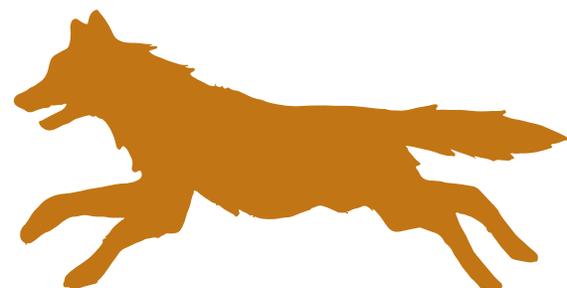
# RED FOX

Red fox populations have been a cause for concern for many hunters and trappers in recent years, as numbers seem to have declined in some areas. While harvest is not at levels seen in the 1980s, it has generally fallen between 7,000 and 9,000 since the early 2000s, with the exception of a bump in estimated harvest to over 17,000 in 2011. Winter track surveys

have shown a slight increase over the years in the northern portions of the state, while the department has little data for the southern portions of the state due to poor winter tracking conditions.

Red fox observations by deer hunters in 2015 were highest in the central and southern farmland zones and lowest in the central farmland zone. Southern portions of the

state, especially along "edges" where two or more habitat types meet will likely offer the best opportunities for hunting and trapping red fox this fall.





## BEAVER

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

Trempealeau Refuge Manager Vickie Hirschboeck encourages trappers to attend their annual auction, and reminds trappers that they have several beaver units available and hold an auction for these units in October every year. Zones A and B have higher levels of damage management control efforts, with beaver population models suggesting a long-term slightly declining population. Zone C, comprised of a large portion of central and southern Wisconsin,

### BEAVER SEASON:

- Zone A (Northwest) Nov. 5, 2016 - April 30, 2017
- Zone B (Northeast) Nov. 5, 2016 - April 30, 2017
- Zone C (South) Nov. 5, 2016 - March 31, 2017
- Zone D (Mississippi River) Day after duck season closes to March 15, 2017

Bag limit: None

has variable populations depending on availability of habitat and water levels. For example, in the Fond du Lac area trappers have reported that beaver numbers seem to be increasing while in the area, trappers suggest a decreasing population.

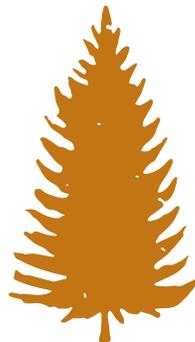
In fall 2014, helicopter surveys were conducted in zones A and B, resulting in an estimate of 17,270 colonies. This is roughly the same estimate seen in 2011 and a 43 percent decrease since the 1995 survey. The randomly selected plots of land are 4-6 square mile blocks, with 4-6 blocks per county. With 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 October 28, 2015 and is available online by visiting [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords "management plans."



## YOUNG FOREST INITIATIVE

A northcentral 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](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords "young forest."



## **OTTER SEASON**

North Zone Nov. 5, 2016-April 30, 2017

Central Zone Nov. 5, 2016-March 31, 2017

South Zone Nov. 5, 2016-March 31, 2017

### **BAG LIMIT:**

One per permit

### **APPLICATION DEADLINE:**

Aug. 1

# RIVER OTTER

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

Otters can be found on 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." The otter harvest is regulated, and as Brandon Stefanski, a wildlife technician from Wisconsin Rapids, notes that "having a permit system allows the department to hold long seasons without over-harvesting this important

predator." Permits are issued based on annually adjusted quotas, estimated fall populations and expected success rates. In 2016-17, the harvest quota increased to 2,000 statewide.

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

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 6 years; and 5 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 deadline to apply for an otter permit is Aug.1—the drawing occurs shortly after the application deadline, and successful applicants should receive their permit by early September. Applicants can monitor their online accounts to see if they were successful in the drawing at [gowild.wi.gov](http://gowild.wi.gov).

Within 24 hours of harvest, successful permit holders must register online at [gamereg.wi.gov](http://gamereg.wi.gov) or call 1-800-GAME-REG (1-800-486-9194) and provide basic details regarding otter harvest. Separated pelts must be registered in person within 5 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](http://dnr.wi.gov) keyword "trap" or by calling (888)936-7463.

# MUSKRAT AND MINK

Mink and muskrat populations appear to be faring relatively well in much of Wisconsin, though local populations can vary depending on water levels and wetland habitat. Adequate rainfall throughout the spring and summer that does not result in flooding typically allows for healthy populations. Mink numbers appear low along the lower Fox River where historic contamination issues may result in low numbers until restoration efforts are carried out. In other parts of the state, mink populations are doing well.

Paul Petersen, DNR wildlife technician at Crex Meadows in Burnett County, reports, "There are high water levels on our wildlife area flowages and I would expect good muskrat numbers. Muskrat populations appeared to increase this spring which may have been due to lower trapping pressure last fall." Muskrats are a concern on the Mississippi River—trappers and Fish and Wildlife Refuge staff have reported a decline within this area. However, nearby Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge encourages trappers to obtain a special permit to reduce muskrats causing dike damage.



## MUSKRAT & MINK:

Statewide Zone: Oct 22, 2016 – March 5, 2017

Mississippi River Zone:  
Nov. 14, 2016 – March 5, 2017

Bag Limit: None

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 wildlife technician Chris Cole states, "Water levels were lowered in the main pool of the marsh until dam repairs could be made. Since the middle of June, water levels have returned to average elevations. Muskrat numbers seem to be average and up from several years ago. Horicon staff anticipates all units will be open on the state's side, barring a late summer drought. Harvest on the National Wildlife Refuge also increased last year, and muskrat numbers seem to be doing well that end of the marsh as well." Harvest on these areas is by an open

auction, where successful bidders receive special access permits and are subject to rigorous report requirements. Contact each area's office for more information: Horicon NWR, 920-387-2658; Horicon DNR 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 respective 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](http://wistrap.org) and select the “nuisance animal removal” tab. Nuisance wildlife guidelines are available at [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov), keywords “[nuisance wildlife](#).”

## FISHER

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 to just a few animals a year. 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.

Zones A and B include both areas with good fisher populations and those that have experienced fisher declines. This makes balancing quotas in these zones more challenging. Zone estimates based on population modeling suggest numbers have stabilized in Zone A, while Zone B remains well under goal. According to

Steve Hoffman, DNR wildlife supervisor at Crex Meadows, “Fisher seem to be doing well in Polk, Barron, and parts of Burnett counties, but Bayfield and Douglas counties have not seen good fisher populations for the last several years.”

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

Like otter, fisher harvest must be reported within 24 hours of harvest online at [gamereg.wi.gov](http://gamereg.wi.gov) by calling 1-800-GAME-REG

(1-800-486-9194). An automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest. Separated pelts must be registered in person within 5 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](http://dnr.wi.gov) keyword “[trap](#)” or by calling (888)936-7463. Skulls will continue to be collected statewide at time of registration.

### FISHER SEASON

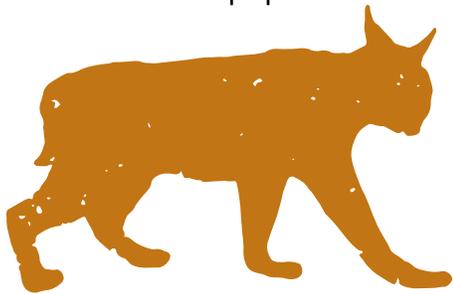
Oct. 15–Dec. 31, 2016  
for all zones

Bag Limit: One per permit

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:**  
Aug. 1

# BOBCAT

The Northern Zone bobcat population increased through the early 2000s and was followed by a decline. Population modeling estimates the current population at 2,250, which is within the established goal of 2,000-3,000. 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. Bobcat carcasses are collected annually and provide critical management information, particularly within the Southern Zone population.



Similar to fisher and river otter, a limited-permit system is in place for bobcats. The preference-point system provides a continuous applicant with a northern bobcat tag roughly every seven to nine 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 (Oct. 15-Dec. 25, 2016) or the later season (Dec. 26-Jan. 31, 2017) for the zone to which they apply.

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

point of harvest and reported within 24 hours of harvest online at [gamereg.wi.gov](http://gamereg.wi.gov) by calling 1-800-GAME-REG (1-800-486-9194). An automated system will ask the caller to provide basic details regarding the harvest. Separated pelts must be registered in person within 5 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](http://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.

## BOBCAT SEASON

Oct 15 - Dec 25, 2016

Dec 26, 2016 - Jan 31, 2017

Bag Limit: One per permit

Application Deadline:  
Aug. 1



## BADGER

The badger is a protected animal in Wisconsin, and there is currently no regulated harvest. Once thought to be most associated with sandy prairies, recent research from UW-Milwaukee has documented badgers in 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. Another research project in southwest Wisconsin studying habitat use among badgers should be finalized in the coming year.



## AMERICAN (PINE) MARTEN

American marten, also known as pine marten, are a state protected mammal. Reintroduced into the Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests in northwest and northcentral 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 and the Wisconsin population. A third study was initiated through Purdue University to simulate potential dispersal corridors for 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 marten within Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. In the 1950's, ten marten were introduced to Stockton Island, within the Apostle Islands, with no sightings documented since the late 1960's. 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, WDNR, 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 two 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](mailto: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 marten can be easily confused with another member of the weasel family, the mink, due to the white markings on the throat.

Stone marten and American marten range do not currently overlap in Wisconsin and as a non-native species, stone marten can be harvested. Dr. Pauli and the WDNR are interested in the presence and distribution of stone marten. If you observe or harvest a

stone marten, please notify a local wildlife biologist or Dr. Pauli at 608-890-0285. For more information, visit <http://labs.russell.wisc.edu/pauli/>.



JOXERRA AIHARTZA / Wikimedia



Ben Pierson / DNR

# ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

## INCIDENTAL TAKE

Trappers are required to turn in incidentally trapped animals to local conservation officers. They can use the 1-800-TIP-WDNR hotline (1-800-847-9367) to report incidentals 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

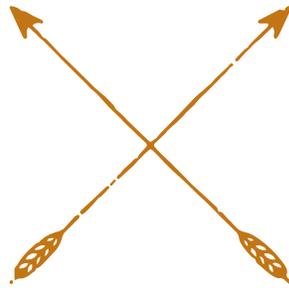
areas—require special permits and/or have ordinances that restrict trapping or the discharge of firearms or bows. Check with local town or village offices before hunting or trapping to see if special rules apply. A quality hunting or trapping experience can be found on public or private lands, but pre-season 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 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; two things of great importance to trappers. John Olson, former Furbearer Specialist reported that: "As of June 2014 we have a science-based, published document for all furbearers

in the lower 48 states, from wolves to weasels." You can find these 22 BMP studies and much more at [www.fishwildlife.org](http://www.fishwildlife.org) under the "furbearer management" section of the "focus areas" tab.



## TRAPPER EDUCATION

Anyone who has not purchased a Wisconsin trapping license prior to 1992 or is not a farmer as defined in statute is required to take an approved Trapper Education course. Courses are offered throughout the state by dedicated Wisconsin Trappers Association volunteer instructors with roughly 50-60 classes being offered every year. According to Jenna Kosnicki, Assistant Furbearer Specialist, "Trapper education is for people of all ages. Many parents, past trappers and adults with the desire to trap attend Trapper Ed courses and Learn-To-Trap workshops. Classes are not offered in every county and often fill quickly. Check often for open classes near you and register early." 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. A correspondence course is also offered for those individuals who are unable to attend an in-person course. Visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://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.



# UPLAND GAME

## PLAN YOUR FALL HUNT WITH FFLIGHT

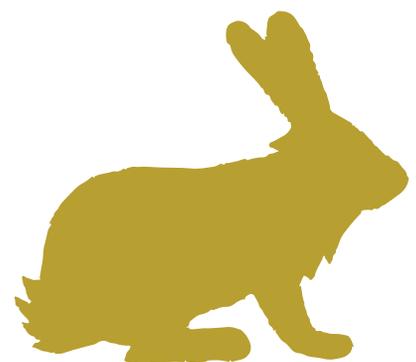
In 2014, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources launched the Fields & Forest Lands Interactive Gamebird Hunting Tool. This online map is designed to help hunters locate prime habitat on public lands for ruffed grouse, woodcock, pheasants and doves.

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

For more information, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword "[FFLIGHT](#)."

**Mark Witecha,**  
*DNR upland wildlife ecologist,*  
608-267-7861,  
[Mark.Witecha@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Mark.Witecha@Wisconsin.gov)

**Krista Pham,**  
*DNR assistant upland wildlife ecologist,*  
608-261-8458,  
[Krista.Pham@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Krista.Pham@Wisconsin.gov)



# WILD TURKEY

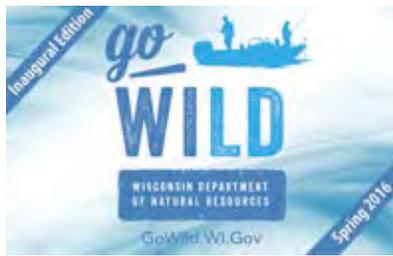
This fall, 101,300 wild turkey permits will be available to hunters – an increase of 600 permits from the 100,700 offered in 2015. Permit availability in Zones 5, 6 and 7 has been increased by 200 per zone in order to better meet hunter demand and provide additional hunting opportunity.

## LEFTOVER PERMITS AND EXTENDED SEASON

Following the 2016 fall turkey permit drawing, remaining permits will go on sale Saturday, Aug. 27 at 10 a.m. Hunters may purchase one leftover permit per day until sold out or the season ends. The fall 2016 season will run from Sept. 17 through Dec. 31 in Zones 1 through 5, and from Sept. 17 through November 18 in Zones 6 and 7. This is the first year that hunting will be permitted statewide on the Friday preceding the 9-day gun deer season. In addition, the fall turkey season will remain open during the 9-day gun deer season in Zones 1-5 starting this year.

## BAG LIMIT

The 2016 fall bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per fall turkey permit (also known as a carcass tag).



## PROOF OF LICENCE

This fall, turkey hunters will notice a few changes related to carcass tagging and harvest registration under the new Go Wild licensing system. Changes under the Go Wild system include elimination of thermal paper licenses and new ways for customers in most circumstances to show proof of their licenses using an optional Conservation Card, a verified Wisconsin driver's license, a paper printout or a PDF displayed on a mobile device.

In addition to one of these proof-of-license options, 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.

## IMPORTANT STEPS FOR TURKEY AND SHARP-TAILED GROUSE HUNTERS THIS YEAR

### VALIDATION:

Immediately upon killing a turkey, validate your carcass tag by writing the date of kill and circling AM or PM on the tag. Remember to carry a pen or pencil with you.

### TAGGING:

If you leave it, tag it. You are not required to attach the tag to the carcass as long as you are with your kill. However, as soon as you leave the carcass the tag must be attached. Consider using a sealable plastic baggie to keep the tag dry and legible.

### REGISTRATION:

You are still required to register your turkey by 5 p.m. on the day after harvest by calling the number or going to the website identified on the carcass tag. During registration, you will be given a confirmation number which must be written in the space provided on the carcass tag.

## 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 HUNTING BY THE NUMBERS:

Total number of turkey permits available in 2015: 338,892

Total number of turkey permits issued in 2015: 274,582

Overall success rate for the 2015 spring turkey season: 19.7%

Overall success rate for the 2015 fall turkey season: 7.3%

Overall success rate for the 2016 spring turkey season: 21.3%

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



# RING-NECKED PHEASANT

Visitors to DNR's ring-necked pheasant page this fall will find a 2016 pheasant stocking information sheet, which identifies public hunting grounds slated for pheasant stocking. The department plans to stock around 90 public hunting grounds with approximately 75,000 pheasants in 2016 (similar to 2015 efforts). Please note that these stocking numbers are preliminary, and final numbers will not be known until after the season has ended.

This year's pheasant hunting regulations can be found in the [2016 Wisconsin Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) booklet. Hunters will need to purchase a 2016 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 October 17 (the third day of the season) and November 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 2016 survey estimate that there were 745 pheasants observed along survey routes, up slightly from the estimated 707 roosters observed along the same routes in 2015. The number of pheasants recorded during the first three minutes of each stop in 2016 (0.42) was essentially the same as in 2015 (0.45), and slightly below the five-year average of 0.48 birds per 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 2016 increased by 26.9 percent compared to 2015 levels, but are still below the long term mean. The number of pheasants seen per 100 miles driven was 0.42 in 2016, an increase from 0.33 in 2015, but still lower than the long term average of 0.57. In 2016, the number of rural mail carriers participating in the survey decreased by 0.61 percent.

Temperatures during the

winter of 2015-16 were relatively mild for the second 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 won't 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 244,000 acres in 2015. 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 2015 season, an estimated 47,154 hunters

## PHEASANT SEASON INFORMATION

2016 Season Dates: Oct. 15 (noon) – Dec. 31

Bag Limit: 1 cock daily  
Oct. 15 & 16, 2 cocks  
daily remainder of season

pursued pheasants, spending 460,690 days afield and harvesting 298,495 pheasants. Participation and harvest estimates reflect the pursuit of both wild and stocked pheasants. Fond du Lac, Waukesha, and Jefferson counties harvested the most pheasants in 2015.

*FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING PHEASANTS IN WISCONSIN, SEARCH KEYWORD "[PHEASANT](#)."*

# RUFFED GROUSE



Each spring, biologists, wardens, members of the Ruffed Grouse Society and many others travel survey routes to record ruffed grouse drumming activity. Drumming is the sound produced by a male grouse during the spring breeding season, with the intention of attracting a female. A male will display on a drumming log and rapidly beat his wings to produce this sound. Ruffed grouse drumming surveys have been used since 1964 to monitor ruffed grouse population trends. Surveys begin 30 minutes before sunrise and consist of 10 stops at assigned points - surveyors listen for four minutes at each point for the distinctive thumping sounds made by drumming male grouse. Surveyors monitored 88 routes this year. Brood data is also collected throughout the

summer - these data will be available in early September. Collectively, these surveys help indicate grouse production levels and population trends in Wisconsin. Ruffed grouse enthusiasts should expect bird encounters similar to last year, according to the recently completed roadside ruffed grouse survey. "While statewide trends were essentially stable, the two regions that make up the primary grouse habitat in the state showed increased drumming activity in 2016," 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 reached the low point in the population

## RUFFED GROUSE SEASON INFORMATION

**ZONE A**  
(northwestern Wisconsin):

**September 17, 2016 -  
January 31, 2017**

**Daily Bag Limit: 5**

**ZONE B**  
(extreme southeastern Wisconsin):

**October 15 -  
December 8**

**Daily Bag Limit: 2**

The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit (15 birds for Zone A and six birds for Zone B).

cycle and may have started the increasing phase, which should continue the next few years as the grouse population moves toward the next peak.”

While the number of drums heard per stop statewide in 2016 was similar to last year, there were some notable differences among regions. Both the northern and central forest regions showed increases in drumming activity. The largest increase occurred in the central forest, with an eight percent increase, followed by the Northern forest regions with a four percent increase. The southwest region saw the largest decline at 67 percent. Declines in the southwest part of the state are more than likely driven by aging forest and the loss of prime grouse breeding habitat.

Weather conditions influence drumming activity by male grouse, and most observers felt weather conditions were conducive to accurate surveys this spring. Surveyors rated the overall survey conditions as “excellent” on 45 percent of transects runs, compared to 65 percent in 2015. Surveyors rated 2016 conditions as “fair,” the lowest available weather condition rating, seven percent of the time in 2016, compared to five percent in 2015.

Results from the 2015 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.”

**RUFFED GROUSE  
ENTHUSIASTS  
SHOULD EXPECT BIRD  
ENCOUNTERS SIMILAR  
TO LAST YEAR**

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 2015-16 season show that 60,743 hunters reported spending 504,503 days in the field hunting grouse, with approximately 210,412 grouse harvested. Highest harvests were reported by hunters in Price, Oneida, and Sawyer counties.

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

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*FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING RUFFED GROUSE, INCLUDING 2015 AND 2016 DRUMMING REPORTS, SEARCH KEYWORDS [“RUFFED GROUSE.”](#)*

# SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

Twenty-five sharp-tailed grouse harvest permits have been made available for the 2016 hunting season in Game Management Unit 8 in northwestern Wisconsin. The season will run from October 15 to November 6.

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 continue to respond positively to habitat management efforts in Wisconsin. Conservative harvest permit availability is aimed at providing an opportunity to pursue the species sustainably.

"We have a very dedicated group of sharp-tailed grouse hunters in Wisconsin," said Mark Witecha, DNR upland wildlife ecologist. "This limited season should provide those grouse enthusiasts with a chance to pursue the species while not impacting the long-term sustainability of the population."



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.

"Biologists will continue to assess the status of our sharp-tailed grouse population on an annual basis," said Witecha. "We would like to thank those who remain passionate

## SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SEASON INFORMATION

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 8 (northwestern Wisconsin):

October 15 - November 6

about Wisconsin's strong and historic tradition of sharp-tailed grouse hunting, and wish all hunters who successfully draw a permit the best of luck in the field."

Hunters are advised that sharp-tailed grouse tagging and registration procedures will change this fall as part of the switch to Go Wild; more information is available within the wild turkey section of this forecast.

In 2015, 100 permits were issued in the same unit and hunters reported harvesting 22 sharp-tailed grouse. For more information, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keywords "sharp-tailed grouse."

# BOBWHITE QUAIL

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

While the 2015 survey results indicate a very slight increase (from 0.015 in 2013 to 0.016 in 2015), the overall trend in the bobwhite quail population still shows a significant decline throughout southern and western Wisconsin. Hunters are encouraged to check the [wildlife reports](#) page on the department website for more information. The next round of survey results will be available in 2017.

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 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 SEASON INFORMATION

### SEASON DATES:

**October 15 (9 AM) —  
December 7**

Daily Bag Limit: 5

Possession limit: 15

## 2015 BOBWHITE QUAIL HUNTING BY THE NUMBERS:

Estimated bobwhite quail harvest: **1,746**

Bobwhite quail hunters: **680**

Percentage of small game hunters pursuing bobwhite quail: **0.3%**

Estimated total number of bobwhite quail hunting days: **3,341**

# RABBITS & HARES

## COTTONTAIL RABBITS

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 usually dependent upon local weather conditions during the breeding season. Portions of the state with adequate rainfall and plenty of green, succulent vegetation should see good rabbit production and quality hunting opportunities this fall. Surveys for cottontail rabbits are conducted in unison with the biennial bobwhite quail survey described above. Each cottontail rabbit observed on bobwhite quail survey routes is recorded. Results of the 2015 survey indicate that the number of cottontail rabbits recorded per stop increased from 0.17 in 2013 to 0.29 in 2015. Hunters are encouraged to check the [wildlife reports](#) page on the department website for more information. The next round of survey results will be available in 2017.



During the 2015-16 hunting season, an estimated 24,827 hunters spent 126,050 days pursuing rabbits, accounting for an estimated harvest of 91,348 cottontail rabbits.

## SNOWSHOE HARE

Many small game hunters who spend time in the dense forests of northern Wisconsin enjoy pursuing snowshoe hares. Snowshoe hares are widely distributed in association with mixtures of deciduous and evergreen cover close to the ground.

An estimated 4,101 hunters spent 24,451 days chasing hares in 2015, with an estimated harvest of 8,353 hares.

## COTTONTAIL RABBIT SEASON INFORMATION:

Northern Zone: Sept. 17 - Feb. 28, 2017

Southern Zone: Oct. 15 (9 AM) - Feb. 28, 2017

Daily bag limit of 3, possession limit of 9

## SNOWSHOE HARE SEASON INFORMATION:

Open year-round statewide with no bag limit or possession limit

# GRAY & FOX 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 these locations when choosing a hunting spot. During the 2015-16 season, mail-in survey results indicated that 38,805 small game hunters pursued squirrels, spending 219,220 days afield and harvesting an estimated 224,080 squirrels.

## GRAY & FOX SQUIRREL SEASON INFORMATION

**2016 SEASON DATES:**  
September 17 —  
January 31, 2017

**BAG LIMIT:**  
Daily bag limit of 5,  
possession limit of  
15

2016  
**WISCONSIN**  
**HUNTING & TRAPPING**  
**FORECAST**



**STARTING NEW TRADITIONS**

