

Wisconsin

**Department of
Natural Resources**

NEWS

SPECIAL EDITION

2007 Wisconsin Fall Hunting Forecast

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Deer season forecast

MADISON – Deer hunting is a mainstay of Wisconsin’s long conservation legacy and there will be terrific deer hunting opportunity statewide again this fall, according to state wildlife biologists across the state.

A very mild winter across the north and abundant food and habitat in nearly every corner of the state has produced a herd that is quite a bit larger than it should be. Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologists estimate that the herd will number between 1.6 and 1.8 million animals going into the fall 2007-08 seasons -- even after a harvest of over a half million deer (506,947) in the 2006-07 seasons.

“In Wisconsin we are lucky to have dedicated conservationist-hunters who not only provide valuable input to deer management policy but also, through their efforts in the field every fall, help keep Wisconsin’s herd in balance with the ecosystem,” said Keith Warnke, DNR big game ecologist.

“Hunters helped design the seasons we have in place to manage the deer herd. Through their hard work, we have a December gun hunt statewide, a long archery season, a nine day regular gun season, and an early youth hunt opportunity.”

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October hunt

This year will be the second year of a trial moratorium on antlerless-only gun hunting in October in areas outside of chronic wasting disease (CWD) management zones. The trial was one of several recommendations made by Wisconsin deer hunters with the goal of improving the state's deer hunt. Hunters told DNR biologists that they would like to try suspending the October antlerless gun season in favor of a statewide December antlerless gun hunt, indicating that they felt that with the December hunt they would be able to kill enough antlerless deer to move deer populations close to established goals.

“In order to move the herd to established goals, hunters had to register two antlerless deer for every buck over the two year trial period,” Warnke says. “We fell short of this goal in the first year in four of our five deer management regions. Hunters will need to harvest more than two antlerless deer per buck in 2007-08 to prevent return of the October gun hunt. Moving the deer herd toward goal is difficult and it will take several years to get where we need to be, but we are making progress.”

Population model reviewed

In 2006, a group of stakeholders consisting of representatives of deer hunting groups and many other stakeholders (including foresters, farmers, and tribes) contracted an independent review of the DNR's deer population estimation model. The review team consisted of an expert panel of biologists and statisticians from around North America. The panel concluded in a report to the Natural Resources Board that the mathematical model used to estimate Wisconsin's deer population model is reliable and robust. The panel also reported that hunters in Wisconsin and the DNR cooperate to collect more deer-related harvest and age data than any of the other 21 states they studied.

“Every fall, Wisconsin hunters contribute to what may be North America's premier example of citizen based environmental monitoring and data collection by participating in the deer hunting seasons,” says Warnke. “Since the 1950s, Wisconsin deer hunters have collected the information required to manage our deer herd. And, lately, they've done it in remarkable numbers.”

The average annual kill for the last 10 years is more than 466,000 deer – every year! The average kill in the 1980s was less than 270,000. That is an increase of 75 percent in just over 20 years. Almost 4.7 million deer have been harvested by hunters in the past 10 years.

As hunters bring in their game for registration, wildlife managers at dozens of registration stations collect age information from around 20,000 of these deer every year. This information is input to Wisconsin's population estimation model.

“Without hunters participating as ‘citizen-biologists’ in collecting this valuable information, there would be no way to evaluate the deer population in Wisconsin,” add Warnke, “there is no better or bigger deer population survey -- including aerial flights -- that could be used with the same effectiveness.”

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Scouting is important predictor of success

Even with historical kill figures and a pre-season population projection of 1.6 to 1.8 million deer this fall, some hunters do not see deer. Why is this? The answer, Warnke says, is deer biology.

“Deer are not spaced evenly across the landscape. They do not use all habitats equally and over time their patterns change. Deer densities can vary radically over a small area on the landscape, so the deer stand that was productive 10 years ago (or even last year) may not be any good this year. Careful scouting is tremendously important to deer hunter success and satisfaction. Deer hunting magazines are chock full of how-to articles on scouting and patterning deer movements. Hard work is really the one thing that will up a hunter’s odds this fall.”

Ecological impacts of high deer populations

Wisconsin’s deer population is about 70 percent over goal. All these deer must eat and deer browsing can cause long term (perhaps permanent) changes to the variety of plant species in the forests. In a heavily grazed habitat, the tree, shrub and other plant species preferred by deer decline in abundance after years of heavy browsing. Altering the types of plants on the landscape will result in lower deer populations (and less hunting opportunity) in the future and could cause a decline of other species (birds, mammals, and reptiles) that depend on habitats that are no longer available as a result of heavy deer browsing.

Overabundant deer populations cause other impacts as well. DNR figures indicated there are 40,000 to 50,000 deer-vehicle collisions in Wisconsin every year. (The Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation also compiles deer-vehicle collision figures, which are lower, because they only include collisions resulting in reportable damage to vehicles.) These encounters are costly for the vehicle owners and create a roadside mess that must be cleaned up. At the worst, deer-vehicle collisions can result in injury or death to motorists.

Wisconsin farmers claimed over \$1.5 million in crop damage caused by deer in 2005. Estimates of total crop damage are much higher. In addition to the financial loss suffered by farmers, hunters also pay – it is their dollars that pay the damage claims. Lower deer numbers would no doubt reduce crop losses say biologists and agriculture officials.

“Recreational deer hunting is far and away the most effective way to manage deer populations,” says Warnke. “It is also a foundation of tradition, wise management and conservation of our natural resources. The next generation of hunters will need a conservation legacy of sound, cooperative deer herd management and we all must keep working to pass that legacy along.

“Consider taking a son, daughter, niece, nephew or friend of the family out during the Oct. 6-7 youth hunt. Future support for hunting and hunters is dependent on our youth and society’s perception that hunting results in a properly managed deer herd, ethical and safe hunting and not simply record harvests.”

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Deer Management Units for 2007

Regular Units

Deer populations are at or near goal in these units. For the 2007 season, regular units will have a limited number of Unit Specific Antlerless Deer Carcass Tags. Hunters can purchase unit specific Antlerless Deer Carcass Tags on a first-come, first-served basis until sold out at any license vendor beginning at noon on August 25. Tags can be purchased by phone (1-877-945-4236) or at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Online Licensing Center. Fees are \$12 each for resident and \$20 each for non-resident. Hunters must possess a 2007 Wisconsin deer hunting license to apply for the additional tags. Online maps of Deer Management Units are available in the 2007 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>].

Herd Control Units

Formerly known as Zone-T Units, Herd Control Units are designated when a deer population is over goal and increased antlerless deer harvest is required to bring populations toward goal. Every 2007 Wisconsin deer hunting license will include one free Antlerless Deer Carcass Tag that can be used in either Herd Control or Earn-a-buck Units. There is no limit to how many additional Antlerless Deer Carcass Tags can be purchased at \$2 each for use in Herd Control and Earn-a-Buck units. Tags can be purchased at any license sales location or at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Online Licensing Center. Online maps of Deer Management Units are available in the 2007 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>].

Earn-a-Buck Units

Fifty seven of Wisconsin's 130 deer management units will have Earn-a-Buck (EAB) requirements for the 2007 archery and firearm deer hunting seasons. All 21 CWD units (Disease Eradication Zone and Herd Reduction Zone) are under the Earn-a-Buck requirements, as well. Earn-a-Buck requires hunters to first tag an antlerless deer before they can legally tag a buck. Online maps of Deer Management Units are available in the 2007 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations at [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>].

Earn-a-Buck units in 2007: 22A, 23, 24, 27, 46, 47, 54B, 54B CWD, 54C, 57B, 59B, 59C, 59M, 60M, 61, 61A, 62A, 62B, 63A, 63B, 64, 64A, 64M, 65B, 66, 67A, 67B, 68A, 68B, 70, 70A CWD, 70B CWD, 70C CWD, 70D CWD, 70E CWD, 70F CWD, 70G CWD, 71 CWD, 73B CWD, 73E CWD, 74A, 75A CWD, 75B CWD, 75C CWD, 75D CWD, 76 CWD, 76A CWD, 76M CWD, 77A CWD, 77B CWD, 77C, 77C CWD, 77D, 80A, 80B, 80C, 81

First used in 1996, EAB is prescribed if a DMU has been a Herd Control Unit for two consecutive years, and unlimited antlerless tags along with antlerless only hunts failed to reduce the population to near goal. EAB is an effective method of population control. EAB units offer unlimited Antlerless Deer Carcass Tags, one free with each license purchased, and additional Antlerless Herd Control Carcass Tags can be purchased at \$2 each.

NOTE: It is illegal to use a car-killed deer to obtain a buck authorization sticker or as authorization to register a buck.

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2007 Earn-a-Buck

Deer hunters hunting in any of the 57 Deer Management Units under Earn-a-Buck regulations for 2007 will be required to “earn” a buck sticker authorizing them to shoot a buck by first shooting an antlerless deer during the current 2007 hunting season or to have earned and not yet used a buck sticker during the 2006 season.

2007 Earn-a-Buck prequalification

Under a program started in 2006, some hunters may be prequalified for a buck harvest sticker by virtue of having killed and registered an antlerless deer last year in a unit that is under EAB rules this year. This includes more than 65,000 hunters who have “prequalified” for a buck sticker in 2007 by registering an antlerless deer during 2006.

If the unit where the antlerless deer was killed was under EAB last year, the hunter received a purple buck authorization sticker on the spot. The sticker could be used immediately to shoot and tag a buck last year or saved for this year. An EAB buck authorization sticker is good in any EAB unit.

If the unit where the antlerless deer was killed was not EAB in 2006 but is under EAB in 2007, the hunter should be in the EAB Prequalification Database. Hunters in this category will be mailed a buck sticker beginning in August 2007. An EAB buck authorization sticker is good in any EAB unit.

Hunters can also earn a buck sticker for the gun deer season by killing and registering an antlerless deer during the early archery deer season in any EAB unit.

How to check your EAB status

Deer hunters who believe they have pre-qualified for a buck authorization sticker in one of these units can check their status over the Internet.

Hunters will need to have their Department of Natural Resources customer identification number handy when they go online to the deer hunting page of the DNR Web site [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/deer/index.htm>] and click on the link for “EAB Pre-qualification Status” and follow the instructions to check on your authorization.

The on-line check allows hunters to determine if their information is in the database to receive a buck sticker for the 2007 Earn-A-Buck (EAB) season.

“You should be included in this database if you registered an antlerless deer in 2006 in any Deer Management Unit which was not EAB 2006 and is EAB in 2007,” Warnke says. “Data entry errors do happen. Some of the errors come from incomplete or unreadable information on the deer registration stubs so it’s really important for hunters to be very careful in filling out their registration stubs.”

Warnke also advises hunters not to wait until the last minute to check their status.

“You don’t want to be scrambling for a sticker the week before the opener, so please check and take action now,” he says.

Hunters who believe they have pre-qualified by registering an antlerless deer in 2006 in units that were not EAB in 2006 and are EAB in 2007 but do not find a buck authorization associated with their customer identification number should contact DNR via email directly from the Web page. Press the ‘enter my info’ button and enter everything you can remember about the deer you killed.

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Hunters are encouraged to make sure the address DNR has associated with their customer identification number is correct. This address is where the buck authorizations will be mailed.

People who don't have access to the Internet either at home or at a local library or through a friend, can contact their local DNR service center who will look up the information. People may also contact the DNR Call Center toll free at 1-800-282-0367.

Repeat EAB Units

Hunters who killed and registered an antlerless deer in an EAB unit in 2006 received a purple buck sticker at the registration station last year and will not be in the on-line database.

Units that were EAB last year and again this fall include: 46, 54B, 59B, 59C, 59M, 60M, 61, 61A, 62A, 62B, 63A, 63B, 64M, 65B, 66, 67A, 67B, 68A, 74A, and 80B.

"The sticker you received last fall is the sticker you need to have this hunting season," says Warnke. Hunters who used all their buck stickers last fall or did not kill any antlerless deer in these units last fall will need to register an antlerless deer in an EAB unit this year to get a buck sticker. The stickers issued last fall will not be re-issued or replaced.

"Hunters were advised last fall to keep track of the purple buck stickers they earned. The same is true of stickers that will be mailed in August – close to the start of bow hunting. We need hunters to be careful to keep stickers safe. We can't replace lost ones," Warnke says.

The EAB "watch list"

Hunters looking ahead to the 2008 seasons can get an idea of which units might be in Earn-a-Buck by looking at the EAB "watch list" described below.

Based on population trends, deer management unit history and harvest history, deer managers have created an EAB "watch list." These are deer management units that could potentially be designated as EAB in 2008. Hunters harvesting and registering an antlerless deer in these units in 2007 will pre-qualify for a Buck Authorization sticker if the unit is designated as EAB in 2008.

Because harvest information is taken directly off the deer registration stub, hunters are reminded to completely and legibly fill out the registration stub if they want to receive their "Buck Authorization" sticker in 2008.

The following is the "watch list" for 2008: all 2007 EAB units, plus units 1, 1M, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 30, 36, 51A, 51B, 52, 53, 54A, 55, 57, 57A, 57C, 58, 59A, 59D, 60B, 72, 73B, 73D, 74B, and 77M.

October Antlerless Gun Deer Hunt

Except in CWD units, there will be no October antlerless gun deer hunt in 2007.

"Wisconsin is entering its second year of a two-year trial moratorium on October gun deer hunting," Warnke says. "There is a benchmark two-to-one average harvest ratio of antlerless deer to bucks in herd control units (does not include CWD units) needed over the two years of the trial.

"Unfortunately, only one of Wisconsin's five deer management regions made the two-to-one ratio in 2006. The October antlerless deer gun season will return in 2008 unless the harvest ratio in herd control units is significantly higher than two-to-one in most regions of the state."

The October antlerless gun deer season has been replaced during the moratorium by a December statewide four-day antlerless season.

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Statewide December Antlerless Gun Deer Hunt

The four-day December antlerless deer hunt will be held Dec. 6-9 in DMUs statewide, except State Park units, non-quota units and those portions of units west of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad that are posted closed to hunting. Hunters will need to have a valid antlerless deer carcass tag for the unit in which they wish to hunt. All deer and small game hunters, with the exception of waterfowl hunters, are required to meet blaze orange requirements on these two days. Only CWD units will have October gun deer hunting.

Youth Hunt

The fifth annual Youth Gun Deer Hunt will be Oct. 6-7. This special hunt was established to provide more youth deer hunting opportunity. The hunt will be held in all DMUs statewide, except State Park units, non-quota units and those portions of units west of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad which are posted closed to hunting.

Youth hunters ages 12 to 15 who have successfully completed a hunter education program and possess a gun deer hunting license may participate in this hunt. Qualified hunters may harvest one buck deer on their gun buck deer carcass tag and additional antlerless deer with the appropriate carcass tag.

All deer, bear, and small game hunters, with the exception of waterfowl hunters, are required to meet blaze orange requirements on these two days. For more information on the youth hunt, check the 2007 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

NOTE: Earn-a-Buck restrictions do NOT apply in EAB units during the youth hunt.

State Park Units

State Park units 23A, 52A, 57D, 61A, 69C, 72A, 73A, 77D, 77E and 80C allow deer hunting during one or more deer hunting seasons.

Hunters wishing to hunt in these State Parks must purchase a \$3 State Park Access Permit online or at any DNR license location for the State Park of their choice. Permits are available beginning Saturday August 26 at noon on a first-come, first served basis until sold out.

A State Park sticker or pass is required for all vehicles in a State Park. Special season dates, hours and area restrictions may apply within the parks; this information will be mailed to successful applicants.

Metro Deer Management Units

Metro units 59M, 60M and 64M are designated as EAB units, while 1M and 77M remain as Herd Control units in 2007. These metro units also have special deer hunting season dates.

Hunters should review the 2007 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet, available online now, and in hard copy in August, for season dates in these units and for other deer hunting regulations.

Check local ordinances on firearm and bow use before hunting because many areas within the borders of the Metro Units do not allow firearm discharge and some may not allow the discharge of a bow or crossbow.

2007 Deer Hunting Regulations

Wisconsin deer hunting regulations and a map of the Deer Management Unit Structure in Effect for 2007 are available on the DNR Web site [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>].

2007 Season Dates:**Archery:**

- Sept. 15 – Nov. 17
- Nov. 26 – Jan. 6, 2008

NOTE: Archery harvests in all units are restricted to antlerless only Dec. 6 – 9.

Gun:

- Regular Gun: Nov. 17 – 25
- Muzzleloader: Nov. 26 – Dec. 5
- Herd Control hunt: Dec. 6 – 9 (statewide antlerless only)
- Youth Gun Hunt: Oct. 6 – 7
- Disabled Hunt: Oct. 6 – 14

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Units:**Disease Eradication Zone (DEZ):**

- Archery: Sept. 15 – Jan. 6
- Early Gun: Oct. 13 – 21
- Late Gun: Nov. 17 – Dec. 9

Herd Reduction Zone (HRZ):

- Archery: Sept. 15 – Jan. 6
- Early Gun: Oct. 18 – 21
- Late Gun: Nov. 17 – Dec. 9

NOTE: All CWD units are unlimited earn-a-buck for the entire 2007 season except for the Youth Gun Deer Hunt (see page 38 of the 2007 Deer Hunting Regulations for specifics on the youth hunt)

NOTE: Hunters are reminded that coyote hunting is closed in approximately the northern third of the state during the gun deer seasons from Nov. 17 through Dec. 9, 2007. See page 51 of the 2007 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations for the southern boundary of this special closed area. The coyote hunting season will remain open during the two-day youth hunt on Oct 6- 7. As with all hunting seasons, hunters are reminded to be absolutely sure of their target before they shoot. Mistakes in identification can be very costly.

Regional Season Forecasts**Northern Region**

By Mike Zeckmeister, Regional Wildlife Supervisor (715) 623-4190

Of the 45 DMUs in the DNR Northern Region, 32 are subject to Herd Control regulations and 2 are subject to Earn-a-Buck (EAB) regulations for the 2007 seasons due to high deer numbers.

Last year, 28 units were in Herd Control so we are still in a major herd reduction effort throughout most of Northern Wisconsin. Last year, we had two units on the EAB "Watch List" which meant that they were candidates for EAB for this coming season. This year, we have 25 units on this "Watch List". The reason we have so many units designated for herd control is because we had another mild winter and we did not have an October antlerless-only gun season. These two factors resulted in growing deer populations. In the absence of a severe winter or an early October antlerless-only gun season, it is uncertain whether we will get our deer population in check with overwinter goals.

Sustaining a deer population above these goals for any length of time is a major concern for all of us because it affects overall herd health, forest and native plant regeneration, the number of car-deer collisions, damage to agricultural crops, nursery stock, and landscape plantings.

In Herd Control Units there will be unlimited \$2 permits for anyone interested in shooting antlerless deer. In the two EAB units, hunters who did not pre-qualify, must shoot an antlerless deer before shooting a legal buck. In the remaining units of the Northern Region, deer populations are at or slightly below goals.

It is hard to believe that we had an even milder winter compared to 2005-06. Last winter we measured a Winter Severity Index (WSI) of 32 compared to 36 the winter before. The 30 year average WSI is 56. Anything less than a 50 WSI is considered a mild winter. Again, winter mortality was low and recruitment of fawns and yearling deer is expected to be above average in 2007. In most units, we need a heavy harvest of antlerless deer to help keep a healthy deer herd, maintain good habitat, and maintain a high regard to Wisconsin's truly magnificent big game animal.

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Northeast Region

By John Huff, Wildlife Biologist (715) 582-5047

Deer hunting opportunities and deer populations in the Northeast Region vary from north to south in 2007. Hunters should review the regulations for season structure in units they have traditionally visited as there are some changes from 2006.

DMUs in northern Oconto and Marinette counties (41, 44, 45, 49A, 49B and 50) have deer populations at or near management goals. These units will have the traditional hunting structure plus a December antlerless season, and the availability of antlerless deer tags depends on population status.

Units 45 and 49A have a limited number of tags available while tag numbers in units 41, 44, 49B, and 50 are more generous. Good hunting opportunities are found in all of these units which have a mix of public and private land. Pre-season scouting will help hunters to determine deer movement patterns in these largely forested units.

For the remaining southern two-thirds of the region, deer populations remain above population goals, and in some cases, far above. Most of these units had Earn-a-Buck regulations in 2006. Harvest numbers were high and progress in managing populations was noted in many of the units although deer populations remain high throughout this part of the Northeast Region. Units 51A, 51B, 65A, and 69 have Herd Control regulations in 2007. These units will not have an Earn-a-Buck (EAB) requirement in 2007 but they are on the watch list for EAB in 2008. Hunters are encouraged to take advantage of liberal harvest regulations in these units so that population management gains that have been achieved can be continued.

The following units in the Northeast Region will have an EAB season structure in 2007: 47, 62B, 63A, 63B, 64, 64M, 65B, 66, 67A, 67B, 68A, 80A, 80B, and 81. Units 47, 64, 80A, and 81 were herd control units in 2006. Hunters who registered an antlerless deer in these four units in 2006 will be mailed an EAB buck authorization sticker for each antlerless deer registered. The remainder of these 2007 EAB units were EAB in 2006. Hunters who registered antlerless deer in these units during any deer season in 2006 should have received a buck authorization sticker. Unused stickers from the 2006 season are still valid in any EAB unit.

Hunters are crucial to management of deer populations and can demonstrate their commitment to sound conservation practices by contributing to maintaining deer populations at goal. In Herd Control and EAB units it is particularly important that hunters focus harvest on antlerless deer. We are striving to harvest at least 2 antlerless deer for each buck registered in these units. All EAB and most Herd Control units are on the watch list for possible inclusion in future EAB seasons.

Hunters will receive a free antlerless tag with each deer license that is good in any Herd Control or EAB unit. An unlimited number of additional antlerless permits at \$2 each are available over the counter for Herd Control and EAB units. Deer hunting opportunities will be plentiful, and it is important for hunters to take advantage of them.

There will be a youth-only gun hunt for deer on Oct. 6-7. This hunt is open to youth aged 12 to 15. Youth hunters during this hunt may shoot and tag a buck with their regular gun buck carcass tag in EAB units without having to shoot an antlerless deer first. Antlerless deer can be harvested according to the number of antlerless tags available to the youth hunter. This is a great opportunity to help a youth hunter start a lifelong tradition of hunting.

Remember to be safe and enjoy yourself while hunting deer in Northeast Wisconsin!

West Central Region

By Kris Belling, Regional Wildlife Supervisor (715) 839-3736

Thanks to the hunters who allowed us to sample their deer in 2006, we were able to determine that the units in the West Central Region remain free of CWD.

For 2007, the DNR West Central Region again has high deer numbers in general, and the season framework will provide ample opportunity for hunters to take advantage of it. Only one unit in the region will have a regular season framework (Unit 33). All other units are substantially over management goals and will have Herd Control (53, 54A, 55, 56, 57, 57A, 57C, 58, 59A, 59D, 60A, 60B, 65A, 72, 74A, 74B) or EAB seasons (22A, 27, 46, 54B, 54C, 57B, 59B, 59C, 59M, 60M, 61, 62A, 74A).

Hunters in the region are urged to take advantage of the liberal seasons to harvest antlerless deer, qualify for next year's EAB (in units that are EAB or are on the EAB "watch list") and assist in reducing deer numbers where it is needed.

We are hoping that the high deer population and liberal seasons will provide for a good harvest and high hunter satisfaction in the region for 2007.

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South Central Region

By Eric Lobner, Regional Wildlife Supervisor (608) 275-3474

Deer numbers in the south central region continue to be above goals throughout the entire region. As in recent years, WDNR wildlife management staff conducted aerial surveys throughout a large portion of the region with specific attention paid to the core of the disease eradication zone and miscellaneous sections throughout the herd reduction zone.

Although deer numbers are not evenly distributed across the landscape, the overall deer numbers are significantly above goal. As a result, to increase overall success, it will be very important that hunters spend some time scouting their favorite hunting areas this late summer and early fall as the unequal distribution of deer means that hunters may need to move to new areas if their pre-season scouting shows few deer in their area. While scouting, hunters should pay special attention to natural food sources, in particular oaks as deer behavior and movement are closely tied to the acorn crop, especially in years with high acorn yields.

Deer studies specifically in the SCR have also shown some interesting deer behavior that hunters should keep in mind when in the field. Radio telemetry studies show that deer tend to stay in their home range even when hunters are moving through the area, and the deer simply avoid the hunters. In other words, deer pattern the hunters!

Think about the way you hunt deer. Do you park in the same spot and use the same route to your favorite stand? Do you typically arrive at your stand at the same time every day you hunt? Deer know their home range like you know your home and yard. Would you notice when a person walked across your yard every day at the same place and time? If your scouting shows you have plenty of deer in your area, you may need to change your stands and timing a bit to intercept deer. After all, there are plenty of deer as shown by the 509,000 deer harvested in Wisconsin last year in Wisconsin - but it still takes some work to find them.

Lastly, the CWD management zone boundaries will be the same as they were last year. One big change, however, will be the implementation of earn-a-buck again this year. Largely due a 10,000 animal reduction in the antlerless deer harvest in the region last year without the EAB requirement, it was decided to reinstate this requirement throughout the all of the CWD management zones.

Statewide, the Archery season will run from Sept. 15 through Jan. 6, including the CWD zones. Also, the youth hunt will occur on Oct. 6 and 7. Gun deer seasons in the DEZ portion of the region will occur from Oct. 13 – 21st and Nov. 17 – Dec. 9. Within the HRZ portion of the CWD zone, the gun-deer hunting seasons will run from Oct. 18 – 21 and again on Nov. 17 – Dec. 9.

In the remainder region, DMU's 73B and 73D in Grant County are currently on the watch list for potential implementation of EAB next year if this year's antlerless harvest does not meet goals. The remainder of the region, including the Dodge County portions of DMU's 68B and 77C and the Columbia County portions of DMU's 67 A & B will also be EAB units this year. As always, hunters are reminded that it is their efforts which effectively manage the deer herd at the sociologically and ecologically acceptable levels and as a result, they are strongly encouraged to harvest antlerless deer to bring herd numbers back to goal.

Southeast Region

By Tami Ryan, Regional Wildlife Supervisor (414) 263-8710

Deer populations within our eight counties (Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Sheboygan, Walworth, Washington and Waukesha) are highly variable due to diverse habitat conditions and variations in hunting pressure. Some of the best deer habitat is found in the Kettle Moraine State Forest and within our DNR Wildlife Areas located throughout the Region.

The remainder of the Region is covered by urban areas and agricultural landscapes with inclusions of scattered habitat that deer also utilize. Hunting pressure is typically very high on public lands whereas private land hunting opportunities are by permission only. Hunters interested in hunting on private lands are encouraged to get out well in advance of the deer season to meet with landowners to obtain permission to hunt. Scouting well in advance of the season will also help hunters to increase their chances of securing a good hunting spot. Hunters should always check with local municipalities on their ordinances to determine if there are any prohibitions regarding firearms or archery equipment.

The 2007 deer harvest for the Southeast Region will likely be higher than the 2006 season. Even with some heavy snowfalls, local mortality was not severely affected and is reflected in the over-winter deer population estimates that were either at the same level, or substantially higher, than last year. Reproduction rates will likely be higher as well due to the low number of antlerless deer harvested during the 2006 deer season.

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The 2007 harvest increase will primarily be due to an increase in antlerless harvest as a result of Earn-A-Buck (EAB) & Herd Control regulations. This year, the Southeast Region has EAB regulations in units 77B, 77C and 77C-CWD and herd-control regulations in 77M and 69 due to deer numbers being well above established goals.

Unit 69 - Deer numbers are expected to be up in most of the unit Last year's "Regular Unit" designation resulted in a decrease in the antlerless harvest from the previous year. This year's "Herd Control" designation should result in more antlerless deer taken, and possibly a decrease in the buck harvest.

Unit 77C: Unit 77C was split three years ago into 77C-CWD (south of Hwy 18) and remaining 77C in northern Waukesha County and southwest Washington County. Deer numbers in the remaining 77C are substantially above goal. Being the third year following the boundary split resulted in 77C meeting the criteria for Earn a Buck designation. Hunters that "pre-qualified" for EAB by shooting a deer in a unit that became EAB this year will be mailed their EAB stickers in late summer. Hunters shooting antlerless deer this fall will receive their EAB stickers when they register their deer.

Unit 77D (Loew Lake Unit): - This unit will be "Earn a Buck" (EAB) for both archery and muzzleloader hunting. Hunters can bow hunt for deer at Loew Lake if they have a current archery license and unused archery tag (EAB applies). They don't need a "park access permit" to bow hunt. Sixty "park access permits" will be issued for muzzleloader deer hunting, and only those hunters can muzzleloader hunt. The season runs 19 days. The park access permits for Loew Lake and other park units will be sold on a first come, first served basis beginning at noon on Saturday, August 25 from ALIS vendors. Other than the 19 day muzzleloader season by access permit holders, no other gun deer hunting is allowed. There is no Oct. 6-7 Youth hunt or Dec. 6-9 Antlerless hunt in any of the park units in our region.

Unit 77M (the "metro" unit)The deer population, hunting season framework and the deer harvest should be very similar to last year. Most of this unit is under private ownership and many communities require special discharge permits and hunters need to check with local authorities before hunting.

Units 77B-CWD & 77C-CWD: The boundaries of the chronic wasting disease (CWD) management zones remain the same as in 2006. There will be unlimited EAB in all CWD zones during all seasons this year except during the Oct. 6 and 7 youth gun hunt. During the 2-day youth gun hunt, EAB will not apply but only one buck may be harvested with a gun. We continue to depend on hunters to help us contain chronic wasting disease in southern Wisconsin by reducing deer populations in both the HRZ and DEZ. Hunters using this area should carefully examine the 2007 CWD deer hunting regulations to ensure they understand the rules for EAB and for the portion of the season in which they are hunting.

During the upcoming season, deer harvested within the Eastern Disease Eradication Zone (DEZ) will require mandatory CWD testing as has been done in past years. However, due to budget constraints, testing deer from the Herd Reduction Zone (HRZ) will be targeted on sparks areas (northwest Walworth and northeast Rock counties) and will be on a voluntary basis. As a reminder, deer taken from zones requiring CWD testing must be registered and sampled within 24 hours of harvest at appropriate stations. Department wildlife staff and DNR contractors will work with those hunters who wish to have their deer heads mounted. Chronic wasting disease sampling and testing will continue to be conducted free of charge and the test results will be provided to the hunter by the DNR.

In the Southeast Region, baiting for deer hunting is only allowed in two counties - Washington and Ozaukee Counties - and is banned in the remaining six counties. The primary rules are: no baiting until the day before bow season starts (Sept. 1), no baiting within 100 yards of another bite site, no more than 2 gallons per bait site.

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Chronic wasting disease update

By Alan Crossley, CWD Project Leader (608) 266-5463

The discovery of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in southern Wisconsin represents a significant threat to the state's white-tailed deer population and the culture of deer hunting in the state. Wisconsin has more than 700,000 deer hunters who have harvested an average of 460,000 deer annually during the past decade. Deer hunting contributes more than 7 million days of recreation each year. Deer hunting annually generates more than \$500 million dollars in retail sales and nearly \$1 billion in total impact to the state's economy.

An extensive CWD surveillance program has been conducted in Wisconsin since 2002. Through June 2007, nearly 130,000 deer have been tested from across the state. Sample intensity has been sufficient in the majority of the state to have a high degree of confidence that CWD would have been detected if it exists at 1 percent prevalence. A total of 856 free-ranging deer have tested positive for CWD. Of these, 801 were from the Disease Eradication Zones (DEZ) and 55 were from the Herd Reduction Zone (HRZ). No CWD-positive free-ranging deer have been found outside of the CWD Zones.

Analysis of the sex and age composition of positive deer has shown that disease prevalence increases with age and the rate of increase is faster in males than in females. Only 2 to 3 percent of yearling females and males from the core area have tested positive for CWD. This increased to roughly 5 percent of females and 10 percent of males for deer 2 years old and older. Prevalence in the core among adult does, 2002-2006 and prevalence among adult bucks, 2002-2006 has not changed significantly between years for each sex.

In 2006, in response to hunter concerns, we shortened the early gun season in the DEZ to 9 days and moved the season start date ahead of the rut to mid-October. We also shortened the late gun season in the DEZ and the HRZ to end on Dec. 10. And in response to concerns about the earn-a-buck regulation, we went to an either-sex season throughout the fall. The response to these regulation changes was an increase in the buck harvest of 1,500 over the previous year, and an 8,000 deer decline in the antlerless harvest. Not surprisingly, our helicopter surveys produced stable to increasing deer population estimates in the Western DEZ, Eastern DEZ, and deer management unit 70A.

Thus, in 2007, we are returning to Earn-a-buck rules throughout all seasons in both the HRZ and DEZ. The season dates will remain similar to last year. Zone boundaries remain unchanged.

- Archery in both zones: Sept. 15 – Jan. 6
- DEZ Early Firearm: Oct. 13-21
- HRZ Early Firearm: Oct. 18-21
- Late Firearm in both zones: Nov. 17 – Dec. 9

Hunters who shot an antlerless deer last fall in one of the CWD Zones will pre-qualify for a buck sticker and will receive those in the mail, prior to the opening of the bow season.

Landowners not required to buy deer hunting license

Landowners in the DEZ and hunters they designate will again be able to hunt the DEZ without buying a regular deer hunting license by requesting a DEZ landowner's permit. These permits will be available from any license vendor before the beginning of the deer season.

Beginning in the summer of 2007, the Department is embarking on an extensive public involvement effort to include the public in helping us establish the next phase of CWD management in Wisconsin. The dialogue will engage the multiple and diverse interests potentially affected by the department's disease and deer herd management decisions. The goal of the CWD dialogue is for the public and the DNR to reach decisions on how to manage chronic wasting disease to minimize the impact of the disease on Wisconsin's free-ranging deer population, the habitats and biological systems that include deer, the economy, hunters, landowners and others that benefit from a healthy deer herd.

The goal of the Department's CWD management strategy is a healthy deer herd. We recognize that goal is not attainable without the cooperation of landowners and hunters. We hope we can count on your continued support.

CWD testing for hunter-killed deer

Current legislative budget actions will reduce the department's 2007 CWD management budget by \$1.72 million starting immediately (\$1 million in state Joint Finance Committee mandated cuts; \$700,000 in federal legislative cuts).

The magnitude of these reductions require the department to suspend important disease control activities and direct remaining funding into limited testing of hunter-killed deer for disease surveillance. Even more federal cuts are possible.

Current funding levels will only allow us to test a total of 10,000 deer statewide, less than half of the average number of deer tested in the last 4 years.

Testing will be prioritized to those areas where hunters are most likely to encounter CWD-positive deer. Additionally, to stay within available budgets, we will have to reduce the number of CWD testing sites and hours of operation. Details on the location of CWD sampling sites and hours of operation will be available by late August.

We are still working out the details but in short, free testing of hunter-killed deer will be limited to known high disease prevalence areas within the eastern and western disease eradication zones and known or suspected disease 'sparks' we've discovered around Devil's Lake State Park and in northern Rock and Walworth counties.

CWD Zone Food Pantry Program: Another result of the budget cuts is the food pantry program within the CWD zones. In a choice between funding this program over testing of hunter killed deer, disease management and hunter confidence won out. More than 2,250 deer were contributed to the CWD zone food pantry in 2006. However, each deer donated to the food pantry program costs twice the amount of a deer kept by hunters because of the cost of meat processing and storage until the testing results are returned.

Agency sharpshooting: We will not do any sharpshooting within CWD hotspots and new spark areas this winter unless outside funding is provided. We will use existing funds to maximize testing of hunter-killed deer. In winter 2006, DNR personnel removed 978 deer, 26 of which were CWD positive, after the normal hunting seasons were closed.

CWD research: We will not fund any new research efforts this year.

Sick deer: DNR staff will investigate reports of sick deer and, if needed, euthanize and remove the deer.

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Wisconsin black bear season forecast

MADISON – Wildlife managers have established a harvest quota of 2,650 black bears for the 2007 season. A total of 4,405 black bear harvest permits were available for the Sept. 5 through Oct. 9 black bear hunting seasons.

“The 2006 black bear season was very successful,” says Linda Olver, assistant deer and bear ecologist, “and the 2007 Wisconsin black bear season looks to be just as promising.”

Hunters harvested 3,068 black bears in 2006, with a hunter success rate over 71 percent. Bayfield, Price, and Sawyer counties recorded the highest harvests. Bear Management Zone A led the state with 968 bears harvested, followed by A1 with 829, B with 626, and C with 639 (6 from “unknown” zone). Several large bears weighing more than 500 pounds were harvested in 2006 and a significant number of hunters reported multiple sightings of bears.

The Department of Natural Resources, UW-Madison, and the Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association are in the second year of a two-year mark-recapture study for estimating Wisconsin’s black bear population. The success of this study relies upon tooth and rib samples submitted from each hunter-harvested bear. Letters with sample collection instructions will be mailed to all hunters eligible to receive a Class A Permit.

“If you harvest a bear this season, please follow the directions carefully, collect the tooth and rib sample prior to registering your bear, and leave the samples with the bear registration station,” Olver says. “Data from this study will help us to maintain a strong and healthy black bear population in Wisconsin and assure a sustainable harvest quota of this great game species.”

Hunters are also asked to turn in any ear tags found on their bear at the time it is registered. The ear tags indicate the bear has been previously captured and released. The most likely reason for capture was the bear was causing a nuisance but bears are also tagged during winter den surveys and with other research projects.

2007 Wisconsin black bear season:

- Zone C where dogs are not permitted: Sept. 5 – Oct. 9
- Zones A, A1, and B where dogs are permitted: Sept. 5 - 11 (with aid of dogs only)
- Sept. 12 – Oct. 2 (with aid of hounds, bait, and other methods)
- Oct. 3 - 9 (with aid of bait and with other methods not utilizing dogs)

Detailed information on bear hunting in Wisconsin is available on Wisconsin bear hunting web page of the DNR Web site: [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/bear/index.htm>].

Note: Zone A1 may (pending legislative approval) be renamed to Zone D beginning with the 2008 season. Hunters will no longer be able to hunt in Zone A1 if they possess a permit for Zone A, so keep this in mind when applying for 2008 permits. The deadline to apply for 2008 bear hunting permits is Dec. 10, 2007.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Linda Olver, assistant DNR deer and bear ecologist – (608) 261-7588

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Bear Forecasts by DNR Region

Northern Region

Another healthy black bear population awaits successful tag holders in our primary bear range in Northern Wisconsin. Summer and early fall forage will vary by locale due to regional differences in moisture. In many areas, we are dealing with some drought like conditions which will affect soft mast production. We expect another great year of bear hunting with high success rates. As in the past, high success rates can be attributed to those hunters who do good pre-season scouting, have alternate hunting locations arranged well ahead of time, and most importantly really stick it out.

Northeast Region

The Zone B bear population continues to be healthy and productive. Bear hunters in Zone B have enjoyed good success in recent years. Late spring frosts and scattered areas of low rainfall have affected berry production in some portions of northeast Wisconsin. Reduced availability of soft mast might help bring bears in to bait stations. Hound hunters will go first in 2007.

In Zone C, the bear population continues to thrive and expand. Large bears are harvested every year in this Zone. Public land hunting opportunities are more limited in this portion of the region, so hunters with a Zone C tag should consider contacting private landowners early to establish a place to hunt. Running bears with hounds is not legal during the harvest season in Zone C.

West Central Region

Except for the extreme northeast corner of Chippewa County, all 19 counties in the West Central Region lie within Bear Management Zone C. This means that even though bear dogs can be trained in this zone, bear hunters cannot use dogs during the hunting season. Zone C has the longest hunting season of all four zones, starting Sept. 5 and running through Oct. 9.

Last year's Zone C harvest was 639 bears. This number is significantly higher than 2005 harvest of 488 bears and near the quota of 600. The 2007 Zone C quota will remain at 600. This translates into a permit level of 1,560, compared to 1,510 in 2006. Bear sightings and harvest data indicate that Zone C bears appear to be continuing their southward range expansion and the population remains healthy.

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Upland game forecast

Ring-necked pheasant

Hunters heading out to Wisconsin's fields in search of ring-necked pheasants will find this year's pheasant hunting regulations included in the 2007 Wisconsin Small Game Hunting Regulations. In previous years, the pheasant regulations had been published separately. Hunters should be aware of the new statewide requirement of a pheasant stamp and carefully verify which public hunting grounds have a 2 p.m. closure and/or allow hen pheasant hunting.

This fall the Department of Natural Resources biologists plan to stock 71 public hunting grounds with approximately 58,000 game farm pheasants. This is an increase from 2006 when 52,000 game farm pheasants were stocked on 70 public hunting grounds. 2007 stocking numbers are preliminary and final numbers will not be known until late September or early October.

People can check the pheasant page of the DNR Web site [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/pheasant/index.htm>] for a 2007 Pheasant Stocking Information Sheet identifying public hunting grounds slated for pheasant stocking.

Results from the 2007 rural mail carrier pheasant survey indicate a 22 percent increase (from 0.68 in 2006 to 0.83 in 2007) in the number of pheasants observed by rural mail carriers per 100 miles driven. These results are higher than the long-term mean of 0.61. The spring crowing count survey indicated only a slight decrease of 6 percent in the statewide average of roosters per square mile.

"Generally, given the survey information we have received, it appears that the population has shown little change over the past few years despite year to year fluctuations," says Sharon Fandel, assistant upland wildlife ecologist, "With a fairly stable pheasant population, hunters can expect a great fall pheasant season." Brood survey information for 2007 will become available later in the summer.

Changes in pheasant populations have coincided with changing agriculture and land use patterns. Pheasants once relied on small grain and hay fields for nesting and brood rearing. These areas are now being replaced with larger row crops such as corn and soybeans. Areas that contain adequate winter cover (cattail and shrub-carr marshes and thick switch grass fields that have more than 15 percent of the landscape in idle grassland) will have the highest pheasant densities. In addition, research has shown that wetlands are one of the most important year-round cover types for pheasants. It will be important for hunters to identify areas with high quality habitat and concentrate hunting efforts in that area.

New for the 2007 pheasant hunting season is the statewide requirement of a pheasant stamp. The 2007 pheasant hunting opens statewide on Oct. 20 at noon and closes on Dec. 31. From Oct. 20-21, the daily bag limit is one cock and possession limit is two. For the remainder of the season the daily bag limit is two cocks and the possession limit is four. Some public hunting grounds have both hen and cock pheasant hunting (requires free permits and tags) and/or 2 p.m. closure times.

See the 2007 Small Game Hunting Regulations for additional details or visit the pheasant page of the DNR Web site at [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/pheasant/index.htm>].

Ring-necked pheasant season

Oct. 20 (noon opener) – Dec. 20

Bag limits: Oct. 20-21, one cock, possession limit of two cocks; Oct. 22 – Dec. 20, two cocks, possession limit of four cocks

Wild turkey

This fall, 94,800 wild turkey permits will be available to hunters. This is an increase in permits compared to 2006 when 90,600 permits were issued. Brood counts will be completed in August and should provide us with additional information on brood survival.

Historically, wild turkey occupied much of southern Wisconsin with the northern boundary of distribution fluctuating in response to severe winters. Following reintroduction efforts throughout the state, coupled with several years of mild winter weather and expanded habitat development and improvement, the Wisconsin wild turkey population now extends well into the northern part of the state.

In fall, wild turkeys tend to move from open or field habitats to forested habitats. Flocks make extensive use of areas dominated by oak and hickory. This habitat shift coincides with food availability as succulent vegetation and insects become less available and mast becomes more available. Mast crops, such as acorns, can influence hunting success. In years of poor mast production, turkey flocks are drawn to localized areas where food can be found; often this results in turkeys frequenting farmland and open fields where they become more visible and vulnerable. Turkey hunters should monitor the mast crop in the area they hunt to determine where turkeys will be feeding.

Following the fall permit drawing, any remaining permits will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis beginning Thursday, Sept. 6, at 10 a.m. The fall 2007 season will run from Sept. 15 through Nov. 15 for all permit holders, which is an extension of 21 days over last falls' season. This straight season allows for more hunter opportunity and flexibility and differs from the spring season which is divided into six, five-day hunting periods. Also new for fall 2007, Zone 45 is open to fall hunting for the first time. In addition, all turkey hunters statewide are now required to wear at least 50 percent blaze orange clothing above the waist during the youth firearm deer hunt on Oct. 6 and 7. The clothing requirement also applies during chronic wasting disease October gun hunts. The Disease Eradication Zone season is Oct. 13-21 and affects portions of Turkey Management Zones 4, 5, 11, 12, 16, 27, and 29. The Herd Reduction Zone season is Oct. 18-21 and affects portions of Turkey Management Zones 3, 4, 5, 11, 12, 16, 17, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29.

The 2007 fall bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per hunting approval. Hunters should remember they must bring their tagged turkeys to a designated registration station no later than 5 p.m. the day after it is harvested. As an additional reminder, most turkey hunting occurs on private land so it is important to keep landowner relationships a high priority. Landowners in Wisconsin are usually willing to allow hunters to use their land as long as they ask politely for permission to do so. And as always, remember to focus on safety during the fall hunt!

Additional information on wild turkey is available on the DNR's wild turkey page of the DNR Web site [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/turkey/index.htm>].

Over the counter sales of remaining available fall turkey hunting permits begin 10 a.m. Sept. 6.

Fall turkey season

Sept. 15 through Nov. 15 (Blaze Orange required statewide Oct. 6 & 7 due to youth gun deer hunt and during October gun hunting in CWD Disease Eradication units Oct. 13 – 21 and in CWD Herd Reduction Zone units Oct. 18-21)

Bag limit: one turkey of any age or sex per permit

Ruffed grouse

Each spring, biologists, conservation wardens, foresters, members of the Ruffed Grouse Society and other volunteers travel survey routes recording the ruffed grouse drumming activity. Drumming is the sound produced by a male grouse during the spring breeding season. The male will display on a drumming log then rapidly beat his wings producing a drumming sound with the intention of attracting a female.

Ruffed grouse drumming surveys have been used since 1964 as an indicator of ruffed grouse population trends. Brood data will not be available until later in the summer, after eggs are hatched and the young birds are a month or two old. Still, brood production in the summer of 2006 was higher than in 2005 and set the stage for an increase in statewide grouse populations

For reasons not well understood by biologists, grouse populations cycle up and down over an 8- to 10-year period. The previous high population point was in 1999, with the population hitting the low ebb in the 8-to 10-year cycle in 2004-2005.

“Overall, drumming counts increased by 12 percent over the last year, on top of a 27 percent increase recorded between 2005 and 2006” said Scott Hull, DNR upland wildlife ecologist, “it’s a welcome indication that populations appear to be growing.”

The statewide average was 0.85 drums per stop in 2007, compared to 0.76 drums per stop in 2006. The Central and Northern regions of the state saw the largest increases in drumming activity (up by 28 and 17 percent, respectively), while the Southeast region also showed an increase of 13 percent, and the southwest region showed a small decline with 16 percent fewer drums than in 2006. Even so, this remains a small swing in an otherwise strong upward population growth trend.

DNR research personnel have also conducted a census of drumming males on the Sandhill Wildlife Area and Stone Lake Experimental Area since 1968. Sandhill Wildlife Area had an increase of 33 percent from 30 in 2006, to 40 in 2007. Stone Lake Experimental Area in Oneida County also increased by 17 percent in drumming activity from 2006 to 2007.

In general, the ruffed grouse population should still be continuing on the upward side of the 10-year cycle and hunters can expect ruffed grouse numbers to continue climbing over the next couple years. The 2007 results are in line with the 10-year ruffed grouse cycle that peaked back in 1999.

While populations appear to be on the upswing, hunters may not find uniformly high numbers of grouse across any given landscape. Successful hunters will need to seek good habitat for ruffed grouse hunting and may have to scout different sites to find the pockets where good numbers of birds can be found. Ruffed grouse use a variety of habitat types, but young, early successional forest types are most important when trying to find a good grouse hunting location.

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“Ruffed grouse drumming surveys are helpful in tracking statewide population changes over the long term.” Hull says. “However, they are not good predictors of local harvest or hunting opportunities. The most successful hunters usually are those who spend the most time in the field and cover the most ground.”

More birds generally lead to more hunting days in the field and higher success rates, say wildlife managers. During the 2006-2007 grouse season, about 99,000 hunters reported spending 756,000 days in the field hunting grouse. “Hunters reported harvesting roughly 384,000 grouse in 2006,” Hull says. “At the time of the last population peak, back in 1999, they reported taking about 768,000.”

New in 2007, there will only be two grouse hunting zones instead of three. The season dates, and the boundaries of the zone that makes up Southeast Wisconsin have not changed. The rest of the state has been combined into a new Zone A. For hunters in the northern portions of the new Zone A, that means an extra month of hunting. The ruffed grouse zone map has been updated to reflect the consolidation from 3 zones down to 2 zones. The Zone A (the northwestern portion of the state) ruffed grouse hunting season opens Sept. 15, 2007, and closes Jan. 31, 2008. The Zone B (the southeastern portion of the state) season runs from Oct. 20 to Dec. 8. The daily bag limit is 5 birds for Zone A and 2 birds for Zone B. The possession limit is twice the daily bag limit (i.e., 10 birds for Zone A, 4 birds for Zone B).

Overall, the message is clear for the 2007 ruffed grouse season: “These are great survey results and I’m very optimistic that we’ll have a great grouse season in 2007,” said Hull.

Additional information in ruffed grouse can be found on the ruffed grouse page of the DNR Web site [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/grouse/ruffindex.htm>].

Ruffed grouse season

- Zone A Sept. 15 – Jan. 1, 2008
Bag limit Zone A five birds per day possession limit is 10
- Zone B Oct. 20 – Dec. 8
Bag limit Zone B two birds per day possession limit is four

Sharp-tailed grouse

Sharp-tailed grouse populations are monitored each year using dancing ground surveys, which are a cooperative effort between Department of Natural Resources, US-Forest Service, Great Lakes Indian Fish Wildlife Commission, Northland College, members of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, and volunteers. A complete census of these displaying grounds is attempted on those properties designated as sharptail management tracts. Sharp-tailed grouse surveys on unmanaged lands are concentrated within a portion of northwestern Wisconsin (primarily in deer management units 2 and 9), often on private lands. Dancing grounds found within suitable habitat blocks are approached and birds are counted.

This year’s dancing ground surveys indicate that populations of sharp-tails were low this spring.

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“Sharp-tailed grouse numbers remain quite low and birds can often be challenging to locate,” said Sharon Fandel, DNR assistant upland game ecologist. “Because of this, we emphasize and encourage hunters to anticipate this challenge and allow themselves to enjoy the experience of the hunt rather than going just for the opportunity to harvest a bird.”

Last fall, 403 applicants applied for 775 permits. Hunters harvested 28 birds during the 2006 season. A total of 695 permits will be available for the fall 2007 sharp-tailed grouse hunting season Oct. 20 through Nov. 11. A total of four units [same boundaries and designations as deer management units (DMU)] will share the available permits. Those units with sharp-tail permits available for fall 2007 are: DMU 2 (520 permits), DMU 8 (50 permits), DMU 9 (100 permits), and DMU 10 (25 permits).

“This is a slight decrease from 2006 when 775 permits were available,” said Scott Hull, DNR upland wildlife ecologist. “Although there were a few more males observed this spring, traditional sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds have become less stable over the last few years, warranting a more conservative approach in our harvest framework this year.”

The sharp-tailed grouse is native to Wisconsin and historically occupied suitable habitat throughout the state. Long-term population declines across North America, including Wisconsin, have occurred since the early 1900s. Sharp-tailed grouse management began in northern Wisconsin during the late 1940s and early 1950s in response to concerns of habitat loss. Sharp-tailed grouse require specific habitat for courtship, nesting, brood-rearing, and wintering sites. However, suitable habitat currently exists only in relatively small patches separated by large tracts of unsuitable habitat. Today, sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin are primarily found in the early successional pine barrens and savannas of the northwestern portion of the state. Some of the larger state-owned areas that focus on sharp-tailed grouse management include Crex Meadows and Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Areas in Burnett County.

Sharp-tailed grouse resemble its close relative, the greater prairie chicken, and are also sometimes mistaken for the female ring-necked pheasant. Sharp-tails have a distinctive pointed tail edged with white, and produce a “chuck, chuck, chuck” call when flushed. They are largely known for their spring courtship display on clearings called “dancing grounds.” During this display, the male uses a stiff-bodied stepping motion, with tail and head feathers pointed up, wings spread, and head held low. This is followed by a vigorous “dance” (feet stamping) in small circles. While dancing, the male vibrates his tail feathers, which produces a clicking or rattling noise. Males also inflate and deflate lavender-colored air sacs in their breasts, creating soft cooing sounds.

Additional information in ruffed grouse can be found on the sharp-tailed grouse page of the DNR Website at [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/grouse/stgindex.htm>].

2007 Sharp-tailed Grouse Season

Oct. 11- Nov. 20

Bag limit one bird per permit

Bobwhite quail

Despite declining populations and habitat across the upper Midwest, there are still good to excellent local quail hunting opportunities on both public and private lands especially in West-central and South-central regions of the state. Green, Iowa, Lafayette and Rock counties have some of the best quail hunting opportunities. Habitat programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program and the Upland Buffers for Wildlife Program have been extremely beneficial for upland game birds like bobwhite quail and should continue to provide good local hunting opportunities. Weather conditions in the southern part of the state should have provided for ideal nesting and brood rearing conditions.

Data on male bobwhite quail densities have been collected biennially since 1991 using roadside surveys along predetermined transects in 15 counties comprising the species' primary range. Annual surveys initially began in 1949, and have been run biennially since 1991. The number of whistling males heard during a two-minute period is recorded. Populations have shown a small increase, but the overall trend is still a significant decline. The mean number of whistling males per stop decreased 30 percent, from 0.10 in 2003 to 0.07 in 2005. This remains well below the long-term average (0.57).

Bobwhite quail populations have been declining across North America for the past 20 years. These declines have been even more dramatic in states like Wisconsin that are on the northern edge of the birds' range. Habitat loss and habitat fragmentation are the top two primary causes for population declines in many bird species. Bobwhite quail populations have been declining across the Midwest and Great Plains States primarily due to a loss of critical nesting and brood rearing habitat.

Current research information has shown that hunting mortality has contributed little to this overall decline. The annual lifespan of quail is about 1.5 years and 60 to 80 percent of the quail population does not survive longer than a year. In addition, studies have shown that hunting mortality is largely compensatory, meaning that the quail harvested by hunters are birds that would have likely died by another, natural reason. The result is a difficult management challenge for wildlife managers. Efforts to "stockpile" quail by temporarily closing hunting seasons, or tinkering with the hunting regulations would not curb the decline or increase population numbers. Among the Midwestern States, Wisconsin already has the second most conservative quail hunting season. Only Ohio has a more conservative season.

In order to help bobwhite quail, the Wisconsin DNR is actively engaged in habitat programs for quail and other upland and grassland nesting species. Wisconsin is part of the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative which aims to restore quail populations across the country through habitat restoration [<http://www.bobwhiteconservation.org/>]. In addition, the DNR has been partnering for decades with the United State Department of Agriculture to restore habitat on private lands through the Farm Bill.

The 2007 bobwhite quail season opens statewide at noon on Oct. 20 and runs through Dec. 12. Daily bag limit is five birds and the possession limit is 10.

Please see the 2007 Small Game Hunting Regulations for additional details available in print, or on-line at [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/SGHunt07.pdf>].

Bobwhite quail season

Oct. 20 (noon opener) – Dec. 12

Bag limit five birds per day, possession limit is 10

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Cottontail rabbit

Cottontail rabbits are a very popular small game animal and typically provide for great recreational opportunities across the state. Rabbits are extremely prolific and their annual reproduction is usually dependent upon local weather conditions during the breeding seasons. Portions of the state with adequate rainfall resulting in plenty of green, succulent vegetation should offer good rabbit production and good hunting opportunities this fall.

Surveys for cottontail rabbits are conducted in union with the biennial bobwhite quail surveys. All cottontail rabbits seen on the bobwhite quail survey route are recorded. The numbers of cottontail rabbits seen per transect decreased 19 percent in 2005, from 5.4 in 2003 to 4.4 in 2005. During the 2005-2006 hunting season, the results of a mail-in survey indicated that hunters harvested approximately 253,716 cottontail rabbits, with the top counties being Lafayette, Fond du Lac, and Jefferson.

The 2007 cottontail rabbit season opens on Sept. 15 in the north zone and Oct. 20 at noon in the south zone. The season ends in both zones on Feb. 29, 2008. The daily bag limit is three and the possession limit is six in both zones.

Please see the 2007 Small Game Hunting Regulations for additional details (available in print, or on-line at [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>]).

2007 Cottontail Rabbit season

North zone Sept. 15 – Feb. 29, 2008

South zone Oct. 20 – Feb. 29, 2008

Bag limit (both zones) three rabbits per day, possession limit is six rabbits

Squirrels – gray and fox

Squirrels are a very popular game species and can provide some great early season hunting opportunities especially for beginning hunters. Squirrel production and resulting hunting opportunities are strongly tied to the previous year's mast production. While the DNR does not have a formal mast production survey, local biologists have reported mixed mast production reports across the state over the last several years. Drought conditions seem to be one of the biggest factors impacting both hard and soft mast production at the local level.

During the 2005-2006 hunting season, the results of a mail-in survey indicated that hunters harvested approximately 505,439 squirrels, with the top counties being Vernon, Waushara, and Marquette.

Gray and fox squirrel season opens statewide on Sept. 15 and closes Jan 31, 2008. Daily bag limit is five squirrels and possession limit is 10.

Please see the 2007 Small Game Hunting Regulations for additional details (available in print, or on-line at [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>]).

Squirrel (gray and fox) season

Sept. 15 – Jan. 30, 2007

Bag limit five squirrels per day, possession limit is 10 squirrels

Snowshoe hare

During the 2005-2006 hunting season, the results of a mail-in survey indicated that hunters harvested approximately 20,471 snowshoe hares, with the top counties being Rusk, Taylor, and Sawyer.

The snowshoe hare season is open statewide year-round with an unlimited bag limit.

Please see the 2007 Small Game Hunting Regulations for additional details available in print, or on-line at [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>].

2007 Snowshoe Hare season

Open year-round

Bag limit – unlimited

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Scott Hull, DNR upland wildlife ecologist - (608) 267-7861 or Sharon Fandel, assistant upland wildlife ecologist - (608) 261-8458

Waterfowl season forecast

MADISON – Variable spring habitat conditions observed in the United States and very good conditions in Canada present a mixed picture for the fall 2007 waterfowl seasons in Wisconsin, according to the state waterfowl biologist. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists reported generally good duck and Canada goose breeding populations and conditions this spring across most of Canada and Alaska.

Duck breeding conditions in the U.S. prairie and Great Lakes states were variable earlier in the season, and some areas experienced declining conditions later on. Overall, production is expected to be fair for ducks and Canada geese. The impact of these spring reports on the fall waterfowl hunting in Wisconsin will depend upon fall weather and water levels.

Wetland conditions

Canada – Waterfowl breeding areas in Canada entered spring with generally good conditions and waterfowl breeding was expected to be good across most of these areas.

U.S. Prairies – Spring habitat conditions ranged from poor to excellent, resulting in variable breeding conditions.

Wisconsin - Spring precipitation was below average from March through May for most of the state, with the north half of the state being especially dry. The southeast portion of the state was wetter with better duck breeding conditions. As summer has progressed, hot and dry weather has lowered water levels. Additional rain this summer will be necessary to improved Wisconsin's fall waterfowl habitat.

Ducks

Duck populations

The four most abundant ducks in Wisconsin's fall hunting harvest are mallards, wood ducks, green-winged teal and blue-winged teal. Van Horn notes that many of the ducks harvested in Wisconsin come from birds that breed in Wisconsin, in contrast to other states in the flyway that rely more heavily on birds raised in the prairies or boreal forests of Canada.

This year's Wisconsin breeding waterfowl survey conducted in early May appeared to be well timed as biologists saw few migrant groups. The results indicate a below average number of breeding mallards, wood ducks and total ducks. The total state breeding duck population estimate of 470,614 is down 10 percent from 2006, but 9 percent above the long-term mean. When compared with the average estimate of 571,715 from more recent years, the 2007 estimate is lower but with the high standard error this estimate is within range of normal year to year variation. Because of the poor wetland conditions in a large part of the state, these results are not surprising. Overall, spring breeding waterfowl numbers in Wisconsin for 2007 appear to be lower than recent years but still higher than long-term means, representing a relatively stable and healthy waterfowl population.

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“In addition to the science of the survey, experience plays a role,” said Van Horn. “There are many things that can impact the results of a single year’s survey results. That’s why it’s important to look at the long-term and recent trends in populations rather than focus only on year to year variations in order to get a real feel for how populations are doing in the long haul,” says said Van Horn.

Mallards

“Because they are the most abundant duck in Wisconsin’s harvest at nearly 40 percent of the total harvest, breeding mallards are an important gauge of potential fall waterfowl numbers,” says Van Horn. “Our Wisconsin breeding population estimate for mallards is 210,219 which statistically similar to 2006 and is 16 percent above the long-term mean over the past 34 years. This figure is below the average for the previous 10 years. Breeding mallard numbers in the Great Lakes states (Minn., Mich., Wis.) in total were up 27 percent from 2006 but 24 percent below the 1992-2006 average. Breeding mallard numbers in most of Canada and the U.S. prairies were up from 2006. Overall, these numbers would suggest an average fall for mallard numbers statewide.

Blue-winged Teal

The 2007 Wisconsin blue-winged teal breeding population estimate of 124,093 is statistically similar to 2006, and 10 percent above the long-term mean. Additional years of data will be needed to reveal whether the long term blue-winged teal population decline has halted or if the results of the last couple of years are an artifact of sampling variation. The continental breeding population of Blue-winged teal abundance was up 14 percent from 2006 and 48 percent above the long term mean. The high continental blue-winged teal numbers will mean that nonbreeding states to the south of Wisconsin will have a 16 day early teal season in September. With blue-winged teal numbers good in Wisconsin and with the potential for an early migration into Wisconsin from Canada, an earlier opening date to the duck season would allow hunters to take advantage of this year’s high teal numbers.

Wood ducks

“Wood ducks continue to show a strong trend in the Wisconsin breeding population. This is very encouraging as these ducks are now a major portion of the fall harvest at 17 percent, says Van Horn. “The 2007 Wisconsin breeding population estimate for wood ducks is 87,875, which is a drop from 2006 levels but still 20 percent above the long-term mean. This decline would be expected since a high proportion of the wood duck population estimate in recent years has come from the northern survey areas and these areas have been in drought conditions in 2007.

Canada Geese

“Depending on fall weather conditions, goose hunters in Wisconsin should have a good season,” Van Horn says.

“There are two different populations of Canada geese that are present in Wisconsin during the regular fall hunting season,” says Van Horn. “One population, called giant Canada geese, nests in Wisconsin. A population of slightly smaller birds nests in northern Ontario along the coast of Hudson Bay and then migrates through Wisconsin and other Midwestern states. The latter is called the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP). Results from the most current banding data indicate that half of Wisconsin’s regular goose season harvest comes from the MVP.

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The breeding survey of MVP Canada geese estimated 402,640 breeding adults, which is the highest level since 1999 and 10 percent above the 1989-2007 average. The harvest of MVP geese is shared by several other states and provinces. For many years, quotas have been set to protect the breeding population and distribute harvest among several states. This year, however, a new management strategy in the Mississippi Flyway has replaced the quota system for a 5-year stable season trial. Because there are many more giant geese in the flyway, it is thought that the impact of hunter harvest on MVP geese will be buffered by that of the resident giants. In the end, the hope is that this will better control the increasing numbers of resident geese, while still providing for ample hunting opportunity. MVP populations will continue to be monitored during this 5-year trial.

The 2007 breeding population estimate for giant Canada geese nesting in Wisconsin was 125,195, which is down 7 percent from 2006 and 64 percent above the 21-year long-term mean. While the long term trend for Wisconsin's resident Canada geese is still increasing, recent survey years suggest that this increase may be slowing.

The Canada goose hunting seasons in Wisconsin include the Exterior Zone season of 85 days with a two bird daily bag, a Horicon Zone season of 92 days with six harvest tags per hunter and a two goose daily bag limit and a Collins Zone season of 62 days with six harvest tags per hunter and a two goose daily bag limit.

Early Canada goose season

The early Canada goose hunting period specifically targets local breeding giant Canada geese and is held before migratory geese begin to move into Wisconsin. An estimated 20,000 geese were harvested during this season in 2006. "This has become a popular early hunting season and an important part of our resident Canada goose population management," Van Horn says. Hunters should note that this season requires a special permit and \$3 fee.

The Early Canada goose season will run statewide from Sept. 1-15, with a daily bag of five geese. *Burnett County Subzone: Closed

Youth Waterfowl Hunt

This special hunt aims to recruit new hunters in Wisconsin. In recent years, about 2,500 youth have taken advantage of this opportunity and harvested almost 9,000 ducks and about 250 geese. The dates for this year's youth hunt are Sept. 15-16. The daily bag for ducks is the same as the regular season. This year, this special season straddles the early and the regular goose seasons. The daily bag for geese on Sept. 15 is the same for the early season (five) and the daily bag on Sept. 16 is the same for the regular season (two geese, regardless of zone). For early season goose hunting on Sept. 15, a youth must purchase and possess an early season goose permit. In the exterior zone on Sept. 16, a youth must purchase and possess an exterior goose permit. In the Horicon and Collins zones on Sept. 16, a youth possessing a valid tag for any time period within that zone may hunt geese within the zone where the tag is valid.

*Burnett County Subzone: Closed

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Waterfowl seasons

Canada goose seasons

Exterior Zone

- **North Zone:** Sept. 16 through Dec. 9; daily bag limit: two
- **South Zone:** Sept. 16 through Oct. 7 and Oct. 13 through Dec. 14; daily bag limit: two
- **Mississippi River Subzone:** Sept. 29 at 9 a.m. – Oct. 7 and Oct. 13 – Dec. 27; daily bag limit: two
- **Horicon/Collins Zones.** Hunters with Horicon and Collins Zone permits will be issued six tags for the time period that they are awarded.

Horicon Zone daily bag limit: two geese with a possession limit of the number of tags issued (six).

- Periods 1 and 2: Sept. 16-Oct. 26
- Periods 3 and 4: Oct. 27 – Dec. 16

Collins Zone daily bag limit: two geese with a possession limit of the number of tags issued (six).

- Period 1: Sept. 16-30;
- Period 2: Oct. 1-21
- Period 3: Oct. 22 – Nov. 16

Other geese

Light geese (Snow, Blue and Ross) and Brant: Seasons are the same as for the Canada goose zones and subzones. Daily bag limit: one brant and 10 light geese (Wisconsin hunters only harvest a few hundred light geese each year but they are overabundant in the US). White-fronted geese: Seasons are the same for Exterior Zone and Collins zone. For the Horicon zone the season begins on Sept. 22 and ends on Dec 16. Daily bag limit: one white-fronted goose.

*Burnett County Subzone: Closed

Ducks

A 60 day season with a daily bag limit of six ducks to include not more than four mallards of which only one may be a hen, one black duck, two redheads, two wood ducks, two scaup, one pintail and two canvasback (for the entire season). In addition five mergansers to include not more than two hooded mergansers. Coot bag limit of 15.

Northern Zone: Sept. 22 at 9 a.m. – Nov. 20.

Southern Zone: Sept. 29 at 9 a.m. – Oct. 7 and Oct. 13 – Dec. 2

Mourning doves

Dove hunters should look for bands on harvested doves

Wisconsin's fifth dove hunting season runs Sept. 1 through Oct. 30. Approximately 15,000 to 20,000 dove hunters are expected to take to the field at some point during the season.

Hunters are again being asked to examine harvested doves closely for any leg bands. For the third 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 750 doves at several locations in south, central and eastern area of the state with a small aluminum US Fish and Wildlife Service leg band. Hunters who harvest a banded dove are asked to report them to the Bird Banding Lab online at [<http://www.reportband.gov>] or by phone at 1-800-327-Band (2263).

In recent years, the spring call count surveys, coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, estimated that the continental population of mourning doves was about 400 million, making it one of the most abundant birds in North America. The 10-year population trend for Wisconsin shows a 3 percent increase. Hunters should expect to see numbers of doves similar to the last couple of years.

“Regulations and license requirements for dove hunting are contained in the 2007 Small Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet, which is available at any location that sells hunting licenses or online [<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>].

“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. Successful hunting is usually a product of good location scouting” said Kent Van Horn, migratory game bird ecologist.

Mourning dove season: Sept. 1 to Oct. 30, with a daily bag of 15 birds.

Woodcock

Over the last 30-plus years, the woodcock population across its range in the Midwest and northeast U.S. has shown a steady decline which biologists believe is primarily related to changes in forest habitat. However, in Wisconsin, this decline appears to have leveled off with no significant change over the last 10 years. Interest in pursuing the “timberdoodle” throughout the forests of Wisconsin remains high with over 19,000 woodcock hunters spending 72,000 days in the field in 2006. Wisconsin ranks second in the nation for woodcock harvest at almost 43,000 birds. Overall, hunters should expect to see woodcock numbers similar to the last few years and depending on the weather, should enjoy a good fall.

Woodcock season: Sept. 22 to Nov. 5, with a daily bag of three birds.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kent Van Horn, DNR waterfowl ecologist - (608) 266-8841

Fall furbearer forecast

Wisconsin has a wonderful diversity of common and unique members of the furbearing group of wildlife. Beaver, coyote, raccoon, and muskrat are good examples of the more abundant and common species across the state. In contrast, the more secretive bobcat, fisher and otter are doing well in the north, and slowly expanding southward. And then there's the marten, still an endangered species and barely holding its own in two small regions of the north.

“At this time of the year many folks begin to ask in anticipation, ‘how are things going out there’, or, ‘what can I expect to see this fall?’” says John Olson DNR furbearer specialist. “From bear hunters, to berry pickers, trekkers to trappers, folks are interested in what they can expect this fall and winter.

“In a nutshell, furbearer populations are doing well, and in some areas a real challenge due to high numbers.”

Raccoon

Raccoons are found in a wide variety of both rural and urban habitats. Those areas close to a wetland or farmland mosaic have the highest populations, with even the northern forests now being home to raccoons.

“We have large populations of raccoons with the highest densities in the southern one-half of the state,” Olson says. “Raccoons are still very abundant in all counties in a wide variety of habitats -- often to nuisance levels, with populations extending northward into portions of southern Canada where the ancient language of Native Americans doesn't even include the word raccoon.”

On the western front, Kris Johansen, wildlife biologist for Buffalo and Trempealeau counties reports, “The raccoon population is doing well, making this species a great opportunity to gain access to private lands, as farmers and landowners experience nuisance and damage problems. Through regulated harvest, trappers and hunters can work with landowners in efforts to control these large populations.”

Julie Langenberg, department wildlife veterinarian notes however, that high populations of raccoons can be associated with local outbreaks of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) infection. Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) occurs in most of the state's raccoon populations and can cause raccoon deaths.

“Though canine distemper is a common disease in Wisconsin's raccoons, once it's in the environment, it can spread to other mammals,” according to Langenberg. “Infections have been found in coyotes, fox, badger, and mink. Everyone should take special care with abnormal acting raccoons, as distemper clinical signs mimic those of the rabies virus. Rabies is a fatal viral disease for humans and other mammals, and cannot be definitively differentiated from canine distemper without laboratory testing.”

Wildlife managers from around the state suggest that 2007 will be a good year to train that young dog or ask permission to trap on new lands. Raccoon is a species where landowner permission to hunt or trap is normally not a problem, but ask for permission now, don't wait until the week prior to the season opener.

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Mike Zeckmeister, northern region wildlife supervisor from Antigo urges trappers and hunters to “get permission from the landowner well in advance. It’s never too early to start asking permission.”

The raccoon season opens statewide for residents on Oct. 20 with the exception of the Mississippi River Zone where the season opens with the muskrat and mink season. Pending legislative approval, a trapping season will be established this fall for non-resident raccoon trapping, from Nov. 3 through Jan. 31, 2008. To check status of approval, contact your local conservation warden or DNR Service Center.

Raccoon Season: Oct. 20 – Jan 31, 2008.

Except: Mississippi River zone, which opens day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November (Nov. 12), which ever occurs first through Jan. 31, 2008.

Bag Limit: None

Beaver

With excellent mid-winter fur prices at the international auctions, where the average Wisconsin beaver pelt sold for just over \$28 in the January auctions, interest in this furbearer remains stable. Longer seasons, initiated in the 1980s, have helped to reduce beaver populations as planned, especially in northeastern Wisconsin.

Statewide the beaver population estimate is around 87,000 animals. This number varies dramatically depending on the area of the state and has not shown any signs of ill health from density-dependent wetland diseases such as botulism or tularemia, but can be affected directly by drought.

Regionally, beaver numbers in southeastern Wisconsin appear to be stable, decreasing in west-central and southwestern portions of the state, and remaining at good levels in the northern one-third of the state. Wildlife researchers conduct intensive aerial beaver population surveys every three to four years in the northern beaver management zones.

Michele Woodford, Rhinelander, coordinates the surveys, the most recent of which was completed in 2005.

“We have a population of approximately 40,800 beaver in northwestern Wisconsin, known as Zone A and around 29,000 beavers in northeastern Wisconsin, known as Zone B,” said Woodford. “At one time these zones were at similar levels, but the need to manage cold water streams for additional values, such as trout habitat, has resulted in a gradual reduction in beavers in Zone B.”

Mike Foy, wildlife biologist for Dane and Iowa counties reports, “Beavers are everywhere you’d expect them, with regular calls from farmers and highway officials about problems.”

However, Tom Meier from Marathon County and wildlife biologist of the Mead Wildlife Area said “beaver are down considerably over the past few years.” According to Pat Beringer, wildlife biologist for Price County, “beaver populations remain stable, with high numbers still found in remote areas where accessibility is limited.”

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In Zone B, where more intensive management programs exist, the population has declined and is now at a level where damage to trout streams and town roads are manageable. Because beaver populations are now at acceptable levels, the trapping season in Wisconsin opens in early November, rather than mid-October, and Zone C closes the end of March rather than the end of April.

Beaver Season

Zone A (Northwest) Nov. 3 – April 30, 2008

Zone B (Northeast) Nov. 3 – April 30, 2008

Zone C (South) Nov. 3 – March 31, 2008

Zone D (Mississippi River) Day after duck season closes to March 15, 2008

Bag limit: None

Otter

“Factors that impact beaver populations have similar effects on otter,” according to Caleb Bilda, assistant furbearer specialist. “Beaver are herbivores that prefer the inner bark of aspen, willow and cottonwood for food, and their branches for construction of dams and lodges. Otter, on the other hand, prefer other animals for food, mainly small fish, crayfish, and amphibians.”

Current statewide otter populations are at or slightly below management goals of approximately 13,000 animals. Although a majority of the population is found in the north, otter numbers in central and southern Wisconsin appear to be increasing. They are now present in many of our major river systems of the southwest, namely the Kickapoo, Black, Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers and tributaries.

Otter, like many of our furbearers, are associated with and depend on clean rivers, lakes and streams.

“People interested in otters should thank all those who have worked so hard to improve the water resources of southwestern Wisconsin – farmers, landowners, DNR, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Land & Water Conservation Districts, and Trout Unlimited to name a few,” suggests Dave Matheys, wildlife biologist for Vernon and Crawford counties. Matheys notes that high-quality riparian habitats are supporting abundant otter numbers.

“The otter harvest is highly regulated to control harvest pressures at a time when recent fur prices have strongly fluctuated, with an average of over \$100 per pelt in 2006 to a recent low of \$30 per pelt this past spring,” says Todd Naas, wildlife biologist for Ashland County. “Permits are issued based on estimated fall populations and expected success rates. Success rates have climbed almost three times what they were ten years earlier.”

The statewide opening date is the same as beaver, Nov. 3, and continues until March 31, 2008 in the Central and South Zones, and April 30 in the North Zone. Anyone interested in trapping otter must apply for a permit by August 1.

“The harvest quota will actually increase slightly, but permit levels may decrease slightly due to increased success rates,” says John Olson, DNR furbearer ecologist. “However, many applicants will receive at least one permit, depending upon the number of applicants in your zone of choice.”

Otter season

North zone: Nov. 3 – April 30, 2008

Central zone: Nov. 3 – March 31, 2008

South zone: Nov. 3 – March 31, 2008

Bag Limit: One per permit.

Application Deadline: August 1.

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Fisher

Strong interest in fisher by tribal and state trappers has resulted in more applicants than permits, especially in Fisher Management Zone A, in northwestern Wisconsin, and in Fisher Management Zone E, in west-central Wisconsin. Permit numbers are up slightly this year, but the number of permit applications received for each zone will determine whether a trapper receives a permit in their zone of choice or is awarded a preference point.

There are six fisher management zones in Wisconsin. Zones A through D have the highest fisher populations and are located in the northern portion of the state. Zone E is in west-central Wisconsin and has a growing population. In Zone E, the best opportunities will be in the northern portions, namely Chippewa, Clark, Eau Claire and Marathon counties, according to John Dunn, wildlife biologist at Eau Claire. Zone F includes the remainder of the state and will be open for harvest in 2007 for the fourth year. In this zone good opportunities exist on the eastern portion, in southern Shawano and Oconto and southeastern Marathon counties. Be sure to have landowner permission prior to applying for any permits.

However, even in areas where fishers have flourished for more than four decades, we're experiencing localized declines, while adjacent areas have strong numbers.

"Fisher numbers remain spotty in Price and southern Ashland and Iron counties. Although localized areas may still have lots of fisher, many trappers reported low numbers of fisher during last years trapping season," says Pat Beringer, wildlife biologist for Price County. Yet in other areas local wildlife managers are reporting an increase in fisher presence. Jess Carstens, wildlife biologist of Dunn and Pepin counties reports "hearing more and more about fishers, especially in Dunn County." And last year a fisher was caught and released in Columbia County.

Fisher season

Oct. 20 – Dec. 31, 2007 for all zones

Bag Limit: One per permit

Application Deadline: August 1

Bobcat

Bobcat populations have increased across the north.

"Even though we're on the northern edge of bobcat range, we do have relatively good habitat and mild winters compared to regions north of Lake Superior," says John Olson, DNR furbearer ecologist.

Conservative management efforts have allowed for this steady increase to an estimated population of just under 3,000 bobcats with an average annual harvest of around 250. Final permit numbers are determined in late summer when success rates and quotas are calculated. A preference system allows the continuous applicant a bobcat tag about every four to five years. Wildlife biologists and wardens in northern and even central portions of the state report an increase in bobcat sightings.

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As with fisher and otter, bobcat must be tagged at the point of harvest and registered with the department. Hunters and trappers keep the pelt, but bobcat carcasses, and in some years otter and fisher carcasses, are collected from the trapper or hunter.

“Registration and carcass collections allow biologists to gather important management information such as harvest pressure, overall age structure of the population, reproductive age, and previous litter sizes,” says Bruce Bacon, wildlife biologist from Mercer and an active member of the department’s furbearer committee. In 2007, carcasses will be required from all bobcat and fishers from Zones E and F, in addition to fisher skulls or complete lower jaws from Fisher Zones A thru D. There are no otter collections planned for the upcoming season.

Bobcat season

Oct. 20 – Dec. 31, 2007. North of highway 64 only.

Bag Limit: One per permit.

Application Deadline: August 1.

Coyotes, foxes and gray wolves

Coyotes, the second largest of Wisconsin’s native canids, have expanded their range throughout southern and western Wisconsin. In the remainder of the state they continue to do well with the greatest challenge being in established eastern gray wolf territories, where coyotes have learned to be less vocal and avoid their larger cousin.

An adaptable animal, coyotes seem to fair equally well in rural, urban and suburban settings. Wildlife managers across much of Wisconsin are reporting a marked increase in coyotes. The same is being observed for both gray and red fox, with “reds” closer to human dwellings and grays in the brush land and woods.

Jim Tomasko, wildlife technician from Waushara County reports a high population of cottontail rabbits and of course, coyotes. At the same time Nate Kroeplin, conservation officer in Dane County reports: “coyote and red fox trapping and hunting is very good with little to no mange present.”

A new tool, called the cable restraint, is now available for use during the latter portion of the existing coyote and fox season, namely from Jan. 1 to Feb. 15, 2008. According to Steve Hoffman, wildlife biologist from Waupaca, “...this tool was thoroughly tested during three years of science-based research, and was remarkable in its ability to restrain without injury, any wild or domestic canine.”

After four years of use by licensed trappers, Hoffman says things are going well, with further studies on the horizon. For additional information, request DNR Publication WM-443-2004, Cable Restraints in Wisconsin, A Guide to Responsible Use.

“Foxes, the smallest of our three native canids, prefers a more rural setting,” says, Tami Ryan, DNR southeast regional wildlife supervisor from Waukesha, who also reports that, “coyote numbers are stable and steadily increasing in the southeast portion of the state, where they’ve been known to cause quite a stir around Germantown, Meqon and Port Washington.”

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Red fox numbers have increased across many areas of the north, with mange and coyote competition impacting populations in western and southern portions of the state. A density dependent disease, sarcoptic mange, has been observed across Wisconsin in susceptible canid species including red fox, coyote, and gray wolf in recent years. Gray fox have fewer cases of mange and appear to be doing well in southern and central Wisconsin.

The gray wolf was removed from the federal endangered and threatened species list in March 2007 and is now protected under state law as a protected wild animal. Landowners may shoot wolves discovered in the act of killing, wounding or biting a domestic animal such as livestock or pets on land that they own. Such shootings must be reported to the DNR within 24 hours and the wolf carcass must be turned over to the DNR. It is still illegal to shoot a wolf for any reason on public land or someone else's land while hunting.

“This action was a major step forward in management of this species in the western Great Lakes region,” said Adrian Wydeven, DNR mammalian biologist and wolf specialist. “It gives the state and landowners much more flexibility to deal with depredating animals while providing for a healthy population of this native top predator.”

The most current wolf population count estimates the Wisconsin population at between 540 and 577 before pups were born this spring, up about 16 percent from the previous year.

The gradual increase in numbers and expansion of the gray wolf across northern and west-central portions of the state offer a unique opportunity for hunters and trappers to observe these wild and wonderful canines.

“We encourage the public to report their observations,” says Wydeven, “especially hunters and trappers who are intimately familiar with their area of the state. This kind of information is valuable in our efforts in monitoring populations. Every observation counts and we welcome the help.”

Trapping Season: Coyote and all fox species:

Northern Zone: Oct. 20 – Feb. 15, 2008 (North of US Highway 64)

Southern Zone: Oct. 27 – Feb. 15, 2008 (South of Highway 64)

Hunting Season of Coyote:

Year round with seasonal closure during gun deer season in some areas

Hunting Season of Fox:

Oct. 20 - Feb. 15, 2008 (North of Highway 64)

Oct. 27 – Feb. 15, 2008 (South of Highway 64)

Bag Limit: None

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Muskrat and Mink

Mink and muskrat populations appear to be doing relatively well in most of the state, with pockets of good numbers, and other spots with low numbers. “Fresh-water inland marshes and river systems in southern Wisconsin received better rainfall, making for improved conditions for mink and muskrat,” says Conservation Warden Nate Kroepelin.

On a statewide basis, opportunities to trap these species are quite good, as they exist in most areas where permanent water can be found. Mark Anderson, wildlife biologist for the Mississippi River suggests muskrat populations on the Big River “appear to be fair.” He further reminds trappers that, on the Mississippi River trappers must have a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service trapping permit and tags, as well as the Wisconsin license in order to trap.

Lack of rainfall in large portions of northern Wisconsin are affecting all aquatic and semi-aquatic life. “Due to severe drought conditions this summer, water levels in many ponds and waterways are below normal,” explains Nancy Christel, wildlife biologist for Washburn County. “Trappers targeting these animals should focus on larger waterways with more permanent and stable water sources.”

Muskrat and mink seasons

North zone, Oct. 20 – Feb. 29, 2008

South zones Oct. 27 – Feb. 29, 2008

Winnebago zone Oct. 27 – March 15, 2008

Mississippi River – begins the day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first – Feb. 29, 2008

Bag Limit: None.

Pine Marten

Marten, known by most as “pine marten,” appear on the state protected list as the only endangered mammal in Wisconsin. Reintroduced into two distinct forests of north central and northeastern Wisconsin decades earlier, they’re barely hanging on. Jim Woodford, wildlife research biologist for the DNR Bureau of Endangered Resources is also chair of the marten management committee and suggests, “marten are a unique, rare mammal of our northern forests of which we have focused continued interest, research and management in their direction.”

Although they’ve not ventured far from the original release sites one additional, small population was discovered in northern Iron County. Bruce Bacon, wildlife biologist for Iron County, says “local trappers have helped us determine where these rare marten have been living for the last 10 years, and through their help we may learn of their connection with healthy marten populations in our neighboring state of Michigan.” Bacon also has an adult marten radio-collared, which he says: “is being tracked as part of the Woods and Waters program in the Hurley and Mercer High Schools.”

Anyone with marten observations is asked to please forward this information to Woodford at (715) 365-8856, or Adrian Wydeven at (715) 762-1363.

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Additional Responsibilities

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 you hunt or trap 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 the final product being information and suggestions that each state and their trappers can use to improve on animal welfare, trapping in general, but specifically, trapper education.

“Advances in trapping through scientific study are the future of resource management in Wisconsin and in the United States, where our natural resources belong to all citizens,” says Tom Hauge, Director of the Bureau of Wildlife Management. “Regulated harvests, combined with science-based knowledge, a caring public, and highly trained conservation officers will provide us with reasonable tools with which we can continue to manage wildlife populations while enjoying the immense pleasure and knowledge of having intact, natural systems.”

There are opportunities to learn more about trapping techniques and history.

“If you would like to learn about furbearers, trapping history, responsibilities and ethics of the modern-day trapper, consider taking the trapper education course offered by the department and taught by dedicated volunteer instructors of the Wisconsin Trappers Association,” invites Scott McAuley, president of the Wisconsin Trappers Association. “If you are interested in becoming a trapper, completion of the 12-hour, \$8 course is mandatory. To locate a current class near you, contact your local DNR office or check the DNR Web page at:

[<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/trap/trapeduc/index.htm>].”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: John Olson, DNR furbearer ecologist - (715)685-2934, or Caleb Bilda, assistant furbearer specialist - (608)261-6452

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Equipment inspection and practice key to safe, successful outing

MADISON -- Hunting with a bow and arrows is not like riding a bike: practice and physical preparation are critical for a safe and successful outing, state hunting safety specialists say.

“If you haven’t been practicing with a bow, you’re already late,” says Tim Lawhern, hunter education administrator for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. “Shooting with archery equipment is not something that comes back to you just like that. You use specific muscles in archery that have to be conditioned, and it can’t be done overnight.”

Lawhern, himself a bowhunter, advises people who haven’t been practicing shooting with a bow to get out their equipment, inspect the bow limbs, string, handle, and other parts to make sure everything’s in sound condition and working properly. “If there’s anything that’s not in excellent condition, take your bow to any archery shop for repairs or replacement parts,” he says.

Hunters should start practicing immediately once the equipment checks out. The practice will help bowhunters get their arm, shoulder and finger muscles accustomed to the task of shooting, and will help improve the hunters’ accuracy.

Lawhern advises that bow hunters should practice at least 20 minutes every day. “Two weeks before opening day your first shot in practice is your gauge of whether you’re ready to go into the field,” he said. “If that first shot is right on target, you’re set.”

Lawhern advises hunters whose practice time has been limited to take closer shots than normal. “For most people, that’s going to be less than 20 yards,” he says. “The last thing any hunter wants is an errant shot.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Lawhern (608) 266-1317

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Simple steps can help hunters avoid falls from tree stands

MADISON -- Tree stands are popular among Wisconsin hunters -- especially among archery enthusiasts -- because they help improve the hunters' visibility and decrease the chance their scent will spook prey. But the stands also can be precarious perches if they're used incorrectly or carelessly, hunting safety specialists say.

"Research has shown that one out of three hunters will fall from a tree stand sometime during his or her hunting career," says Tim Lawhern, hunter education administrator for the Department of Natural Resources.

Falls can be caused by a variety of factors, including a weakness in the stand's structure, incorrect installation, failure to use a fall restraint device, and hunters dozing off while on the stand, Lawhern said.

Tree stands can also be a factor in other hunting incidents, such as when hunters shoot themselves while climbing trees with their guns, or when bow hunters fall on their arrows.

Lawhern recommends that hunters who plan on using tree stands follow these precautions to avoid accidents:

- Check permanent tree stands every year before hunting from them, and replace any worn or weak lumber before it breaks.
- Read, understand, and follow the factory recommended practices and procedures when installing commercial stands.
- Inspect portable stands for loose nuts and bolts each time the stand is used;
- Use either a safety belt or harness.
- Use three points of contact while climbing into or out off the tree stand (two feet and one hand; two hands and one foot etc.).
- Use a haul line to raise and lower your equipment – and keep firearms unloaded and arrows in a covered quiver.
- Select a tree – one large enough to support your weight -- before the season. Some mishaps occur as hunters are hurrying to set up their stands on opening morning.
- Make sure someone else knows the location of your tree stand and knows when you will be hunting there.
- Stay awake.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Lawhern (608) 266-1317

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Safe squirrel hunting begins with locating your target

By Tim Lawhern, Hunter Administrator for the Wisconsin DNR

Yes, some people still do hunt squirrels, and I'm one of them.

One of my favorite early season tactics is still hunting squirrels. To do this you have to creep quietly through the woods, taking only a few (three to five) steps at a time. Each step is conducted in slow motion; about the speed of flowing molasses in the winter time. This is best done just after a rain or early in the morning when the forest floor is damp.

You want to listen for any noise that might be made from a squirrel such as the swish of a branch made when a squirrel jumps from limb to limb. Listen for the sound of their toenails scraping as they climb. The sound of dropping nut shells is music to a squirrel hunters ears. When they are eating nuts you can hear them half way through the woodlot on a quiet day and they are not focused on watching for danger.

Along with listening you must watch for squirrels. Many times you can see them before they see you. I carry a pair of binoculars to verify what I'm seeing when hunting as all hunters should. Never use the scope on your firearm for that purpose. Once you've positively identified that what you thought was a squirrel actually is a squirrel you can then plan your shot.

Once the squirrel is spotted the game really heats up as you try to get in position without him seeing you. When the squirrel is not moving you should be very still. Move only when the squirrel is moving or cannot see you. The perfect shot is one where you have clear vision of the squirrel at close distance and a safe backstop for your bullet or pellets.

Some hunters just find a good feeding area where there are a lot of oak or hickory trees. Both of the nuts from these trees (acorns and hickory nuts) are favorite food sources of the squirrel. Sitting while squirrel hunting is just as hard as sitting while turkey hunting. Bring along something that will cushion your backside as you will likely be sitting for long periods of time without moving.

(more)

Move only your eyes and if you have to turn your head you should do so very slowly. Follow the rules of safe hunting once a squirrel is sighted and before you make the decision to shoot. Remember that there are other seasons like bow hunting for deer that might be going on at the same time and other hunters may be in the woods with you.

This is an excellent time of the year to practice many of the hunting skills you will need later in the year for deer or turkey hunting. It's also not so cold in the field during squirrel season so you don't have to dress to look like the Michelin man in order to be comfortable. Remember to know and practice the 4 basic rules of firearms safety every time you handle a firearm: TAB-K.

- Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
- Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.
- Be certain of your target and what's beyond it.
- Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.

Hunting squirrels can be an excellent way to kick-off the fall hunting season. Do your part and share the experience with other family members and friends. It's a great time to be in Wisconsin's great outdoors.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Lawhern (608) 266-1317



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Hunters, make your hunt safe and legal

Always ask permission to hunt on private lands and remember the formula for gun hunting safety: "TAB-K"

- T - treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
- A - always point the muzzle of your firearm in a safe direction.
- B - be certain of your target and what lies beyond and
- K - keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to shoot.

