

## OPEN HEARING ON DEER MANAGEMENT

Madison, Wisconsin - December 17, 2009

### Unedited presentation by George Meyer, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

#### Deer Management Motion

**Background.** The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation has spent a great deal of time over the last year working on the issue of deer management in Wisconsin. Ralph Fritsch was appointed by the Natural Resources Board to be on an advisory committee to come up with an "alternative to Earn a Buck" as a herd reduction tool in Wisconsin. The Natural Resources Board had suspended the use of EAB for the 2009 and the 2010 session because of the strong concerns about the size of the deer herd and hunting success in the 2008 deer season.

The Department of Natural Resources sent out a proposed change in deer season framework for 2010 for public hearing. There was overwhelming opposition by a large majority of individuals attending the hearings or commenting on the rule. Before the hearing the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation worked closely with a coalition of hunter and other recreational groups in order to come up with an alternative to EAB that would best meet the needs of hunters in the state.

After the public hearings, the Department made relative few changes to the draft rule before

they sent it to the Natural Board for adoption at the Board's December meeting.

That was prior to the 2009 deer season.

There was a very strong negative reaction from a large number of deer hunters to the 2009 deer season experience. Statewide, deer totals were down 29% from 2008 and 51% from 2007. One hundred and ninety-five thousand deer were harvested in the 2009 nine-day gun deer season in comparison to 401,000 in the 2007 season.

Based on the overwhelming negative hunter reaction to the 2009 season and the concerns raised by deer hunters both on the size of the deer harvest and the reduced sightings of deer, the Department withdrew their proposed 2010 season framework from the Board agenda. Due to weather reasons, the Board postponed any discussion of the deer situation until its January meeting. The Secretary has indicated that the Department will be formulating a new plan for the 2010 and beyond deer seasons.

There will also be a legislative hearing on December 17th regarding the over winter goals for deer in all of Wisconsin's deer management units.

There are some critical issues facing deer management in Wisconsin. First, there is the need to

rebuild the deer herd in many units in northern Wisconsin. Second, there is a need to address the widespread lack of confidence by hunters in the Department's estimate of the deer population in Wisconsin. Third, the Department has seriously damaged its credibility with sportsmen and women by coming up with two deer season frameworks in the last three months, both of which had overwhelming opposition by hunters.

The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation should represent its many members that have serious concerns over the current deer management situation in the state. But the Federation should do so in a manner that this is thoughtful and will assist in seeing that the answers to hunters concerns are done in a scientifically sound manner.

#### Suggested Actions for the WWF Board of Directors

1. The WWF should appear at the December 17th legislative hearings on deer goals and report on the large number of dissatisfied hunters that the Federation has heard from about the 2009 deer season. It is recommended that the WWF request that the legislative committees send the over winter goals for deer back to the Natural

Resources Board asking for changes in the rule.

- One such recommended change should be to re-evaluate the number of acres of deer range assigned to individual deer units. This is having a major impact in actual deer goals in the state especially in the farmland region of the state. The Department should be directed by the legislature to work with sportsmen to make changes in the deer range calculation to better reflect deer range in the state. DNR biologists have indicated that there is a need to do this in the farmland units.

2. At the legislative hearings and at the January Natural Resources Board, the WWF should take the position that the current deer season framework be continued for 2010 with no expansions. There is a need to stabilize the situation and give the hunters and the Department an opportunity to rebuild public confidence in the fundamentals of deer management in Wisconsin.

3. The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation should call for the formation of a group to evaluate the Department's estimate of the current deer population in Wisconsin. This group should include deer ex-

perts from outside Wisconsin and representatives of deer hunters along with Department staff. The purpose of this group is to evaluate the process and assumptions that Wisconsin has used in setting the base estimate of deer populations in the state. The group should recommend changes to the system and issue an opinion on the accuracy of the Department's current estimate of the deer herd size.

4. After the completion of this outside group's work, the Natural Resources Board should, with the major involvement of sportsmen and women, direct the formulation of a deer season framework for 2011 and beyond, with a major focus on stabilizing the deer season framework for five years without the use of EAB so that an enhanced Sex-Age-Kill formula can be used to manage deer. This new season framework should be based on the

new re-estimate of the deer population in the state developed by the outside group

5. It is recommended that for the 2010 season and beyond that the Department use free herd control tags for two years in any unit actually needing herd control before any other herd control measure is employed in those units. The tags should be allocated proportionately by acreage between private and public lands as recommended by the EAB alternative recommendations.

6. In order to improve Wisconsin deer management process, the Department should immediately fund and conduct research on:

a. an estimation of the survival and cause-specific mortality of white-tailed deer bucks in Wisconsin,

b. a quantification of the impacts of predation, winter weather, and habitat on white-tailed deer fawn recruitment in Wisconsin.

c. an evaluation of ecological impacts of white-tailed deer on forest productivity, understory vegetation, mammals, birds, and ecosystem function in Wisconsin,

d. an evaluation of deer hunter demographics and the identification of strategies and tactics to slow down and reverse the impending decline in hunter numbers.

*Unanimously adopted by the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation Board of Directors at its December 12, 2009 Board of Directors meeting at Stevens Point, Wisconsin.*

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