

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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December 29, 2008

Out the Outdoor Door *Saying goodbye to another year*

By Dick Ellis



Andy Derwinski watches the sun come down on another year, and another deer season December 14th during the statewide antlerless deer season. A move to halt the season by the Wisconsin Hunter's Rights Coalition claiming over harvest of does was denied by the Natural Resources Board. (Dick Ellis)

The last deer hunt of the year December 14 may have been reflective of the season itself, and possibly the future; storm clouds on the horizon, and fewer deer. In our case hunting Waukesha County during the four-day statewide antlerless only season that began December 9...there were no deer at all.

But this is Wisconsin and along with the not-so-good there is always the extraordinarily good and even the bizarre to be found. And several readers helped me find some of that too during the final weeks of 2008 to share with you now as we bid goodbye to another year in the field.

DEER

I followed friend Andy Derwinski over 200 acres of private prop-

erty during the antlerless-only hunt hoping to capture on film a doe being tagged. We captured instead lots of snow, the promise of more, and the sun going down on our season and another year. There were shots being

fired, not in the fields around us, but at the DNR, which more hunters this year are not endorsing as properly managing the state deer herd. Serving as catalyst for the discontent was the 2008 nine-day gun deer season harvest that declined 20 percent from 2007.

With a 276,985 harvest falling 66,782 deer short of last year, some hunters challenge the state Sex, Age, Kill (SAK) formula used to estimate the number of deer in Wisconsin. The formula, which uses the number and ages of harvested bucks, ratio of bucks to does and annual fawn production, has also gained strong endorsement as a superior system for estimating deer numbers in a 2006 independent review.

The DNR said that 1.5 million to 1.7 million Wisconsin deer roamed the field prior to the season, with a goal of just over 700,000 targeted for post-season. After the decline in harvest, the Wisconsin Hunter's Rights Coalition sought to have the four day statewide antlerless only season halted on the basis that the DNR has overestimated deer numbers in Wisconsin. The Natural Resources Board denied the request because they stated in part that the health of the state deer herd is not threatened and that many hunters had already made plans for the special hunt.

Wolf and bear numbers are also playing a larger part of the deer discussion. Wisconsin wolf numbers are estimated at 550 by the state, with each animal said to consume approximately 20 deer annually or 11,000 deer in Wisconsin. State bear numbers have probably been underestimated for years. According to a new method of estimating bear numbers, more than 26,000 bears are in Wisconsin, or about double the 13,000 animals thought to be here under the previously used population estimate model. Bears consume fawns, (and elk calves at Clam Lake) during the spring.

Hard winters unforeseen by deer biologists can also deliver devastating blows to the herd, most often in the north country. With heavy snows already on the ground

statewide, could this be a winter that starvation adds to the fuel of controversy? Everyone hopes not but no one knows, and with almost 70 percent of Wisconsin hunters saying personal observation is what they trust most when it comes to the number of deer in Wisconsin, things are certain to be interesting in 2009.

WEIRD DEER

Wisconsin deer hunter Karl Gress sent a photo of an eight point buck tagged on his Sauk County property during the November gun



This eight point buck shot in November in Sauk County by Kevin Boone of Brookfield still wore summer velvet on its antlers. The buck appeared to have suffered an injury, perhaps when jumping a barb wire fence, which probably halted the natural growth progression of the antlers. (Submitted by Karl Gress)

hunt with its antlers still in summer velvet. Kevin Boone of Brookfield shot the animal, which appeared to have its...buckhood...injured and scarred sometime during the year. Injury often leads to the halting of the normal progression of growth hormones and deformed antlers.

With the photo, Gress said that he had seen a cable program of an out-of-state doe that had been harvested sporting a 21-point rack. It is not extraordinarily uncommon for does to grow antlers. This doe, Gress said, was also in November velvet.

GREAT FISH

A fish story worth retelling came in from Guide Lynn Nicklasch. He sent a photo of the spotted musky caught and released in November by client Craig Truemper on Green Bay. The 53 inch fish weighed an estimated 51 pounds and had a measured girth of 28 inches. Wisconsin licensed guide and Great Lakes Captain Nicklasch, who also guides multi-species ice fishing trips, can be reached at Your Fishing Pal Guide Service at 262-370-6771.

ANOTHER FISHY STORY

When my fellow outdoor writer and friend JJ Reich of New Berlin sent a story and photos of his Minnesota ice fishing trip targeting the great tasting and just as ugly eel pout, it re-



One of the more notable catches in 2008 was this 53 inch Green Bay spotted musky weighing in at an estimated 51 pounds with a measured 28 inch girth. The guide was Lynn Nicklasch, the angler was Craig Truemper, and the fish was....released. (Submitted by Lynn Nicklasch)



JJ Reich of New Berlin traveled to Minnesota and joined guide Matt Breuer to discover the fine tasting eel pout. Ashland's Chequamegon Bay will offer the same this winter and, the writer challenges; you may just like this poor man's lobster better than bluegill or walleye. (Submitted by JJ Reich)

mind me to remind you to go after this poor man's lobster yourself. This is no joke. I will be returning this winter to Ashland, Washburn and Chequamegon Bay specifically to target eel pout for the frying pan. In 2007, I was introduced to this great tasting fish by guide Roger LaPenter of Ashland and Gary Johnson of Cumberland.

Try it...you'll love it. Even if you have to close your eyes when unhooking it. For multi-species Chequamegon Bay ice fishing, including trout, salmon, walleye, northern pike, perch...and the beloved eel pout, contact Angler's All at 715-682-5754.

INVASIVE SPECIES

According to Diane Schauer, DNR Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator for Calumet County, Wisconsin traditions of hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation are being challenged as native plants and animals are overrun and destroyed by invasive species. Invasive species, she said, are plants, animals and insects that were introduced to this area from another region or country. In their home environment, the invaders have checks and balances to keep them under control. Placed in a different environment, they have no natural controls and spread aggressively. These invaders displace native species and disrupt entire ecosystems.

"People are the primary means of transport of aquatic invaders, usually moving the invasive species from one water body to another on boats, trailers and personal watercrafts,"



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said Schauer. "But this can be prevented. When leaving a body of water, inspect your equipment. Drain water from your boat, motor, bilge and live wells. Remove all plants, plant fragments and animals from your equipment. Do not move bait or other aquatic plants and animals to another water body."

For additional information on the identification of impact of invasive species, visit the DNR website at www.dnr.state.wi.us. For invasive plants, the websites for the Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin at www.ipaw.org and the Midwest Invasive Plant Network at www.mipn.org provide great photos and information. ^WO



Invasive species are challenging Wisconsin traditions of hunting and fishing as native plants and animals are being overrun and destroyed. You can help stop the invasion. (Submitted by DNR Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, Calumet County Diane Schauer)