

## Hunters Alarmed

### Readers respond to deer management issue

By Dick Ellis

Stating in print that the DNR is mismanaging the deer herd over a significant section of northern Wisconsin, as I did last week, is not something to be taken lightly. I hope that I am incorrect. I may be. My opinions are based solely on anecdotal evidence of what I do not see during extensive field time and from talking to very many hunters who also have seen deer number over several years declining at an alarming rate.

Last week I failed to offer the specific numbers of antlerless tags that were available in 2009 in the Deer Management Units that I focused on; DMU 34 in Vilas County and DMU 3 in Bayfield County. There were 550 antlerless tags available in Unit 34,



One great state program has been the reintroduction of the wild turkey. Numbers have increased so that hunters may harvest either sex in Fall. Dave John (shown) and Randy Rothenbuehler of New Berlin tagged these fall hens in Fennimore in Grant County on October 21st. (Randy Rothenbuehler)

and 1700 antlerless tags available in Unit 3 prior to the season. It is my understanding that any tag left unfilled following the gun season may be filled during the four-day statewide antlerless only hunt in December. Because Guide Mike Foss and I have collectively seen two fawns in these column focus areas during the spring of 2009 and very few deer overall as detailed last week, I do not understand and strongly disagree with this management philosophy. I believe that we may be harvesting too many deer and that, coupled with increasing natural predation of bears and wolves particularly on fawns may be difficult to recover from.

Also, I stress that in two decades of working with state wildlife and fisheries experts, including many deer managers and conservation wardens in bear dens, trapping wolves, tagging elk at Clam Lake, and on hundreds of other stories on the water and in the field, I have great admiration for the overwhelming majority of those experts. They are people devoted to their jobs. My opinion on deer management is not stated with anger or emotion. I believe that the hunter's opinions are valid. Last



Some letter writers think seeing less deer will make young hunters less interested in pursuing the whitetail. (Dick Ellis)

week, in writing, I offered this space to the DNR anytime they wish prior to the gun deer season to tell you anything they wish. I have not received any response yet but have begun to receive many letters from hunters representing each region of Wisconsin.

Excerpts are printed here. We will try to follow up again after the deer season harvest numbers are registered and the smoke has settled on another year.

#### FROM LAKE MILLS:

In the past year I have written to the Natural Resources Board (NRB) and the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) informing them that they along with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) are responsible for the poor management of our free roaming whitetail



The rut has historically meant great bowhunting in Wisconsin but some northern hunters are reporting a drastic decline in deer numbers. (Dick Ellis)

deer and that it needs to stop.

I have even contacted my state legislatures, the Secretary of the WDNR, and Governor Jim Doyle to voice my concerns about this issue. However, it appears that my efforts and concerns have fallen onto deaf ears in Madison.

That is why I'm a strong supporter of 2009 State Assembly Bill 138. If passed, this bill would give the NRB the power to appoint the next WDNR Secretary. For far too long the WDNR has been governed by politics, special interest groups, and the automobile insurance companies. We need a WDNR that listens to its customers and manages our natural resources (like the whitetail deer) properly.

If this type of poor whitetail deer management continues there won't be enough free roaming whitetail deer left for future generations to enjoy.

#### FROM BURLINGTON:

Thank you for your article. I wrote a similar article that was published in the Milwaukee Journal and Lakeland Times after last year's deer hunt. The DNR simply refuses to listen to those of us with years of experience in the field. I would argue that it is not only the northern part of the state with a decimated deer herd. The DNR claims the southern half of

the state is 20% over goal yet this southern half is largely comprised of CWD areas that have been hammered for years. There may be a few areas with a deer herd that is above goal but I haven't seen it. I am near the point of losing my boys interest in hunting because they not only don't harvest deer, they don't even see any.

#### FROM SOUTH-CENTRAL WISCONSIN:

I could not agree with you more on the demise of the deer herd. I am an avid bowhunter and have been for 20 years now. I hunt in south central and central Wisconsin. Over the past 2-4 yrs both areas that we hunt we have seen a huge decrease in deer sightings. I am also a forester, so I have been able to notice a pretty dramatic change in the amount of browse taking place.

My hunting party and the surrounding land owners have made a concerted effort to shoot does every year. The land surrounding our central Wisconsin land is surrounded by 1000 acres of former papermill land that is still public. It has finally come to the point that we are afraid we have killed a much higher percentage of the deer than we knew. The DNR continues to make our southern area earn-a-buck and yet I have not even seen a doe this season. My dad has seen one doe and it was

not close enough to shoot. Our central Wisconsin hunting property used to be public and is now private. We have been given permission to hunt it, but ironically we see fewer deer now than we ever have in 20 yrs. of hunting it. Also the coyote population has exploded up there over the past 4 - 5 yrs. Between hunters killing the does and the coyotes killing the fawns, we are not seeing any deer up there at all. I mean that literally. We have hunted 3 weekends up there and between 5 guys we have seen ZERO.

I can't believe what I am about to say, but the guys in my hunting party are considering giving up deer hunting for a couple of years in hopes that other guys will do the same and allow the deer herd to recover. I can say that now, but that is easier said than done. I just feel guilty killing more deer when I can scarcely come across one as it is.

#### FROM CHETAK:


I don't hunt the north woods but I have hunted my area in Barron Co. for 20 years. I can honestly say I have seen fewer and fewer deer over the years. We have not had a bear problem until about 4 years ago. I observed several does with fawns in the spring of 2005. By Aug. of that year the fawn had disappeared and 3 bears 1 wolf and a number of coyotes were spotted in the area. My hunting friends and myself hunt an area of about 220 acres. We had no problem filling buck or doe tags before and up to 2005. The past few years have been real sparse. 7 of us have hunted hard in this area only to see 3 does, 1 spike and 1 fork. Where are the deer? They are not in this piece of land or near by. We are surrounded by alfalfa fields and I have not seen one deer in those fields in the evening or any other time. You're right; something needs to change before hunters just give up enjoying the hunt.

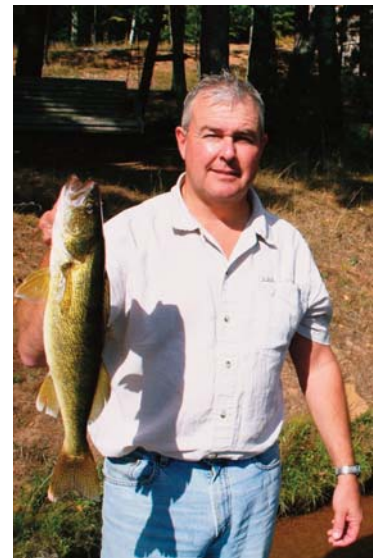
#### FROM SUN PRAIRIE HUNTING IN IRON RIVER:

I have hunted deer around Iron River for over 40 years. I agree that the whitetail population has declined for all those years and then some. I also agree that the bear population and the wolf population has

increased. My son hunted bear this fall north of Iron River for the first time. He waited seven years for his first permit. He baited 3-4 times and the bait was always eaten. He had many pictures on his camera, but, he did not see a bear in 21 hours in his stand. They were there, but, smarter than he was I guess. He told the land owner that he wanted to shoot one with his bow and the landowner said that was fine.....adding he hoped he would shoot five before bagging one. The bear were a nuisance to him. He also commented on the bear being hard on the deer population. He recalled walking through his clover field, knocked down by the bear and noticing a pile of bear manure. In the middle was a fawn's hoof! My son's college roommate and his father and two other men were also in Iron River for the bear hunt. They all got bear. Back to the deer population..... It is my opinion that the DNR promotes the deer population so it can sell 650,000 hunting licenses!! A huge income for the Department.

#### FROM BOULDER JUNCTION:

Your article in the Lakeland Times was right on! Last winter when I was out hiking around, all you would see were wolf tracks. I even found a wolf den. 



Even though the deer hunt takes center stage in Wisconsin, many other fishing and hunting activities also take place. John Ellis took this September walleye on the Manitowish Chain. (Jim Ellis)