

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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Wisconsin Outdoors

Decisions made indoors steer our course

By Dick Ellis

Reader Note: Ellis will file his field hunting report next week with story and photos from Unit 34 in Vilas County.

It was business as usual at the McMiller Sport Center in Eagle late this week as hunters took last minute reprieve from busy schedules to prepare for the 2009 deer hunt. Like at hundreds of site-in stations across Wisconsin, sportsmen and women fired rounds at targets on 50 and 100 yard ranges under the watchful eyes of hunter safety instructors, adding their own notes to an unending chorus of rifle and shotgun reports.

The Wisconsin deer season is so much more than tagging a deer. Preparation, anticipation, family tradition, thanksgiving and ultimately, memories are a major part of the Wisconsin deer hunting heritage. Of course, saying the actual hunt isn't the main reason we do prepare annually to join with family and friends on this special journey is a lot like saying people travel to Lambeau for a Green Bay-Dallas tilt primarily to tailgate. We want to tag the deer, as much as we want to watch the Packers destroy Dallas.

What happens in the field, though, is often dictated by decisions made in the meeting rooms. In the past two weeks, Wisconsin's Outdoor Writers received media releases from the DNR predicting a lower harvest this year than in 2008; from the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

offering a formal response to Governor Jim Doyle's veto of the legislative vote that would have placed the appointment of the DNR Secretary back in the hands of the Natural Resources Board and out of governor control; and from the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) amending its position on the 2010 Deer season proposal adopting alternatives to Earn-A-Buck. Highlights from each statement follow.

The DNR lowered hunter expectations for the overall harvest, citing a throttling back of aggressive hunting regulations, below average fawn production in 2007 and 2008 with no word at the time of the release of 2009 production, a drop in doe permits in some northern units and a delayed corn harvest. We'll know next week.

The expected decrease in harvest in part, according to the DNR, is the state's response to hunters wishing to return to a more historically traditional hunt. "They will see that traditional hunt in many management units in the north and central forest where deer populations are at or close to a healthy goal and where there will be no Earn-A-Buck and few or no antlerless deer permits issued," said Keith Warnke, DNR Big Game Ecologist."

A separate DNR release states "as wildlife managers expected, preliminary registration returns entered through November 5 show a decreased total archery harvest (about



Hunters are spending vigils on deer stands throughout Wisconsin this week in hopes of filling their tags. The DNR has issued a media releases predicting a harvest during the 9-day season lower than 2008. (Dick Ellis)



Thanksgiving is a time when Wisconsin hunters have often been able to reflect during seasons past on a successful deer harvest as part of their blessings. (Dick Ellis)



Anticipation, family tradition and ultimately, memories are a major part of the Wisconsin deer hunting heritage. Then - 14 year old Dan Potrykus of Boulder Junction took his first buck in 2007 with a perfect shot at 150 yards. (Dick Ellis)

31,000 in 2008 vs. about 22,000 in 2009).

“The archery antlerless harvest in this time period dropped by about 39 percent and the buck harvest climbed by about 7 percent,” said Warnke. “This was expected due mainly to fewer herd control units and no Earn A Buck outside of the CWD management zone.”

On Friday November 6, the Executive Council of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress reviewed the preliminary feedback from the 11 public hearings held by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on a proposed deer season offered as an alternative to Earn-a-Buck (EAB). Data from the on-line survey and random mail-in survey were not available at the time of the meeting.

“However, based on responses from participants at the public hearings, attendees appeared to reject

all 16-day proposals regardless of where or when the hunt to place. Therefore, the Congress Ad-Hoc

Committee assigned with the task of evaluating alternatives to EAB concluded that none of the present proposals, including their own, were ready for enactment.

“Based on the feedback from the hearings as well as deer hunters within the counties we represent, the committee members felt that enacting a 16-day season, that was developed by a Natural Resources Board special committee was too big of a step,” stated Bohmann. “That is why we reversed our previous position and recommended that the current suspension of EAB remain in place through the 2010 season, while more data is gathered on the status of Wisconsin’s deer herd.”

“The Ad-Hoc Committee I assigned to work on issues which include EAB alternatives, issues related to how deer population numbers are estimated, and how the

public is involved in setting quotas and over winter goals feels that the issues are bigger than how, when and if to use Earn-A-Buck,” said Ed Harvey, Congress Chairman. “They hope that the additional year will allow the DNR and hunting groups an opportunity to prepare a more complete, and less hurried proposal. Also, one more year of harvest data free from extreme herd reduction prescriptions like EAB, which complicate population predictions, will be invaluable.”

The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation (WWF) expressed in strong terms its great disappointment in the action of Governor James Doyle to veto Assembly Bill 138, the bill passed overwhelmingly by the Assembly and the Senate restoring the appointment authority of the DNR Secretary Bill to the Natural Resources Board. The Assembly passed AB 138 by a 61-32 margin and the Senate passed the bill by a 21-11 margin. In both cases, sponsors of the bill were absent from the vote. The Assembly later concurred in a minor amendment to the bill by a 49-42 margin and sent the bill to the Governor.

Governor Doyle was Attorney General, the WWF release states, in

1995 when the appointment authority was removed from the Natural Resources Board and given to the Governor. At that time he was a strong and adamant opponent to the change. For the next fourteen years, Doyle advocated to restore the appointment authority back to the Board, making it a very visible commitment to Wisconsin’s sportsmen and women in both his 2002 and 2006 campaigns for Governor. Doyle appeared at many meetings of sporting organizations like the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, stating that he would sign a bill like AB 138 when it reached his desk. In other private meetings, he looked sports men and women in the eye, giving them his word that he would sign such a bill.

“Governor Doyle’s major flip-flop on the DNR Secretary bill is exactly what gives some elected officials such a bad name for Wisconsin citizens,” Jack Nissen (Dousman), President of the Wildlife Federation. “Doyle really misled Wisconsin sportsmen and women to get their vote when he ran for office. It is very disappointing when the Governor, the highest official in the state of Wisconsin does not keep his promises. Sportsmen and women of this state should not, and will not forget the broken promises made by the Governor. This issue has had more interest and public input than anything else that I have ever been involved with, but yet the Governor has seemed to have forgotten his obligation to do the work and the will of the people he represents.”

“Sportsmen and women are upset by the Governor’s actions and our eyes are on our state representatives and senators to see if they will override the Governor’s ill-advised veto,” indicated Ralph Fritsch (Townsend), Wildlife Federation Wildlife Committee Chair. “While the Governor is not running for office next year, our representatives and senators are and sportsmen and women will not accept similar flip-flops on their part.” *W*

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