

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: 12/10/14
TO: All Members of the Natural Resources Board
FROM: Cathy Stepp, Secretary
SUBJECT: 2014 Deer Season Report

Wisconsin continues to provide opportunities for world-class deer hunting, and 608,711 hunters from every state in the US and 19 foreign countries purchased licenses to participate in Wisconsin's nine-day gun deer season, 163 years after our first regulated season.

As we always do, during and after the season department staff received a number of great stories and photos from hunters throughout the state.

This year, the department saw hunting traditions passed along to 21,223 new resident hunters who bought a gun deer license for the first time, or the first time in 10 years. New female hunters represented 35 percent of this total, and female hunters made up 10 percent of all deer license sales entering opening weekend.

Preliminary harvest totals through the nine-day season indicated 191,550 deer were harvested, down roughly 15 percent from 2013's call-in numbers. The preliminary tally showed hunters harvested 90,336 bucks and 101,214 antlerless deer. Of those, over 4,500 were registered by hunters selected to participate in the electronic registration system pilot that will be available to all hunters in 2015.

Deer season communications placed a large focus on keeping the message simple, engaging with new demographics, and utilizing staff in central office and the field to engage with hunters, using tools ranging from live chats to quick phone calls. In 2014, the department's hunting and fishing mobile app continued to see success, with 12,003 downloads in November – this shattered the previous record for monthly downloads. In all, 85,026 total users are finding the mobile app to be a useful tool.

The department is focused on ensuring a safe hunt, and in 2014 the team work of safety conscious hunters, coupled with the staff and volunteers statewide, was a winning combination. During the nine-day hunt, a total of four confirmed shooting related incidents were reported, with no fatalities – this is an all-time low. Deer hunting in Wisconsin continues to get safer with 4 of the past 5 deer gun seasons being fatality-free. More than 28,000 students complete the hunter safety program every year, thanks to the work of more than 4,100 volunteer hunter education instructors.

In the days leading up to the nine-day season opener, the DNR call center set a record for calls handled, and provided excellent customer service to a number of hunters. On Friday, Nov. 21,

the call center fielded 4,734 customer contacts, and From Nov. 1 through opening day, over 33,000 total calls were received.

With new rule changes this year, hunters throughout Wisconsin took an active role in learning which rules pertained to the areas where they hunt and investing in the future of deer hunting through mentored hunt, learn to hunt, and youth hunt programs.

The department thanks hunters, their families, DNR staff and volunteers for their continued involvement and enthusiasm for such a time-honored tradition.

Deer Season 2014 Communications Summary

Communications for the 2014 deer season placed a great deal of emphasis on keeping the message simple and easy to understand for hunters, no matter which zone or unit they chose to hunt.

The use of existing communications tools was fine-tuned for efficiency and effectiveness. Meanwhile, resources were focused on the development of new tools to increase the reach and impact for this year's season. New tools included the launch of DNR's first fish and wildlife guide mobile app, as well as the launch of DNR's Pinterest page, the development of the First Harvest Certificate, and a concentrated effort to promote the First Time Buyer license through both earned and paid media strategies.

Earned, paid, and social media strategies, as well as timed web promotions and landing page development, were used to direct people to our web site and call center. Through a notable increase in call center volume and web metrics showing an increase in visits in conjunction with our media outreach, we are confident that the use of a carefully constructed media plan was extremely valuable.

The season kicked off with the production and airing of Deer Hunt Wisconsin 2014 television special with Dan Small. Segments featuring DNR staff and Sec. Stepp focused on tips and information hunters would find useful going into the season.

In the week before the nine-day opener, communication efforts became more intensive, and included four live chats with DNR experts and a number of news releases and informational documents to make sure hunters were prepared for another gun deer season.

New this year, the department began its "Your Tradition, Your Words" project. In four words or less, outdoor enthusiasts in Wisconsin were asked to show us their favorite fall traditions. We received a number of great videos, ranging from photos at "deer camp" to a picture of eagle watching near a marsh.

In all, this year's communication strategy combined tools that have worked well in the past with new tactics. While new methods of electronic communication have become invaluable, news releases and print ads have continued to be a very valuable tool.

Proactive Communications

- 2014 Deer Season Media Packet sent to media statewide and posted on dnr.wi.gov keyword "deer" page during October and November.
- Comprehensive statewide news outreach project – focused on getting wildlife staff on local news programs for informational interviews.

News Releases

- January through December 2014→ 30+ deer and deer hunting focused news releases distributed statewide, with additional regional releases for localized issues.
- DNR Weekly News currently has over 21,000 subscribers.

2014 Media Packet

- A media packet was sent to media contacts statewide in 3 waves, beginning in late-October, with each instance getting very positive feedback.
- Focus on proactive and positive messaging at an early stage – contents included:
 - What will this year's changes mean for my hunt?
 - Deer Chronology in Wisconsin: A Brief Overview
 - Deer Hunt 2014 Communications Summary
 - 2014 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Forecast (PDF with just the deer section of fall forecast)
 - Hunting in Wisconsin: An Economic Summary
 - Deer Hunt 2014 Fact Sheet

Live Chats

- Informational chats open to the public with DNR wildlife, law enforcement, regulations and communications specialists.
- So far in 9 chats focused on deer season (including four chats the week before the nine-day opener):
 - 1,371 Live Participants
 - 2,017 Viewed It Later
 - 427 Total Questions Answered

Week leading up to nine-day opener:

- November 18: Deer season forecast
 Live participants: 346
 People reviewing chat later: 369
 Questions answered: 83
- November 19: Find a place to hunt (public lands, etc.)
 Live participants: 181
 People reviewing chat later: 158
 Questions answered: 40
- November 20: Hunting safety & regulations
 Live participants: 150
 People reviewing chat later: 205
 Questions answered: 76
- November 21: Women & youth in hunting
 Live participants: 62
 People reviewing chat later: 57

Questions answered: 21

*Overall, our readers (both live and those reading it later) spent 113,833 minutes (1,897 hours) in November alone reading or participating in our chats.

Gov Delivery

- Gov Delivery is an email service that allows interested individuals to sign up to receive updates pertaining to a specific topic – Gov Delivery has been a very useful tool in deer season communications.
- Deer Trustee Report “Fast Facts” informational campaign → coupling quick gov delivery messages with our informational chats – large emphasis placed on directing people to the “deer” page.

Targeted Media Outreach

- Targeted media outreach plan, running from 9/8 through gun deer opener.
- Full media strategy and media plan created:
 - TV and Radio spots, online ads, newspaper and magazine ads (statewide, and also fringe markets for out of state hunters in IL and MN)

Video Projects

- :30 TV and radio spots – a lot of great feedback and comments from the public that they saw and enjoyed these features; directing the public to the “deer” page.
- Many videos were featured in releases and on the department’s homepage.
- Dan Small’s “Deer Show 2014” → worked closely with DNR staff for interviews and input, and received great feedback from the public.

Alternative Outreach

- Proactive outreach to Hmong and Hispanic Community Groups throughout Wisconsin with positive results.
- LE presence at Hmong New Year and other cultural events to answer questions.
- Hmong and Spanish translated regulations brochures available on “deer” page and included within media packet.

Web

- Weekly updates to the “deer” page with timely information – able to address issues quickly as they arise.
- “Frequently Asked Questions” document, regulations, meeting information, and other informative materials, including a very popular “info packet for media” regarding deer season found on dnr.wi.gov, keyword “deer.”
- “Deer” page visits:
 - January 2014-July 2014 Monthly Average: ~17,000 visits
 - August 2014-October 2014 Monthly Average (beginning of main “deer season 2014” media plan and outreach rollout): ~67,500 visits

- November 2014 (heavy push): 190, 268 visits!

Media Tele-press Conferences

- Nov. 18: 18 members of the press on the call
 - Nov. 22: 15 members of the press on the call
- *recordings for each tele-press conference were sent to media statewide

News Outreach and Interview Volume

- Coordination between Office of Communications and Wildlife Management and Law Enforcement staff in central office and in the field – efficient management and delegation for an extremely large volume of deer season-related calls from media statewide.

Media Contacts in 2014

- Total media contacts through November 19, 2014 department-wide: 3,399
- Busiest days in 2014:
 - Tuesday, Nov. 18→ 54 contacts, 41 of these (76%) were deer-related
 - Wednesday, Nov. 19→ 48 contacts, 24 of these (50%) were deer-related

DNR Phone Applications

- The Hunt and Fish Pocket Ranger shattered its previous monthly record, with 12,003 downloads in November 2014
- 85,026 total users are finding the mobile app to be a useful tool

Social Media – Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

- Facebook: 49,134 likes
- Fans as of November 1: 46,835
- Fans as of November 22 (gun deer opener): 47,727
- Fans as of November 31: 49,106
- Total increase: 2,271 (1,379 likes in gun deer season alone)
- Most popular Facebook post in November was of one of our DNR wardens with a terminally-ill child from Minnesota who came to Wisconsin and harvested a six-point buck in Polk County. This was a program Warden Jesse Ashton put together to help give terminally-ill kids a chance to hunt. The post reached more than 323,000 people, was liked more than 10,000 times just on our post, was shared 906 times, and received 457 comments.
- Twitter: 11,400 followers

Specialized Social Media Outreach for Deer 2014

- “Your Tradition, Your Words”
 - In four words or less, show us your favorite fall traditions! Videos should contain no spoken words and be less than 15 seconds long and pictures will need your

words included→ 10 videos submitted so far from DNR staff and outdoor enthusiasts from throughout Wisconsin

- Example:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhNo1a7mH84&list=UUXxfKh4WwJuw0eCEC6LQ9w>
- 2014 #Wardengirl “Tweet-a-long”
 - Office of Communications staff member Joanne Haas teamed up with wildlife management, hotline staff and law enforcement staff to do a live “tweet-a-long” during the nine-day gun deer hunt

2014 9-day Gun Deer Registration Update

Overview

In 2014, hunters statewide experienced a traditional season structure along with several new rule changes implemented as a result of the Deer Trustee Report. Based on public feedback and herd declines due to the harsh 2013/2014 winter, the number of buck-only units was increased from four in 2013 to 19 (in part or whole) in 2014. This was the fourth year that hunters in the former CWD-MZ were permitted to harvest a buck without the prior harvest of an antlerless deer, and also the third year of permitting the harvest of additional “bonus bucks.” However, since the CWD-MZ was dissolved as part of the Deer Trustee Report rule changes and replaced with “CWD-affected areas,” bonus buck opportunities were instead restricted to the Southern Farmland deer management zone.

A preliminary tally of the 9-day gun deer season showed that hunters registered 191,550 deer which is a 15.5 percent decrease from 2013 (Table 1). Buck registration was 90,336 reflecting an 8 percent decrease compared to 2013 call-in figures, and antlerless registration was 101,214, representing a 21 percent decrease from 2013. Weather conditions consisted of moderately cold but comfortable temperatures statewide, intermittent rain and fog in southern counties at various times throughout the season, along with snow cover across much of the state. Although snow facilitated scouting and tracking, rain and fog appeared to affect hunter participation and success.

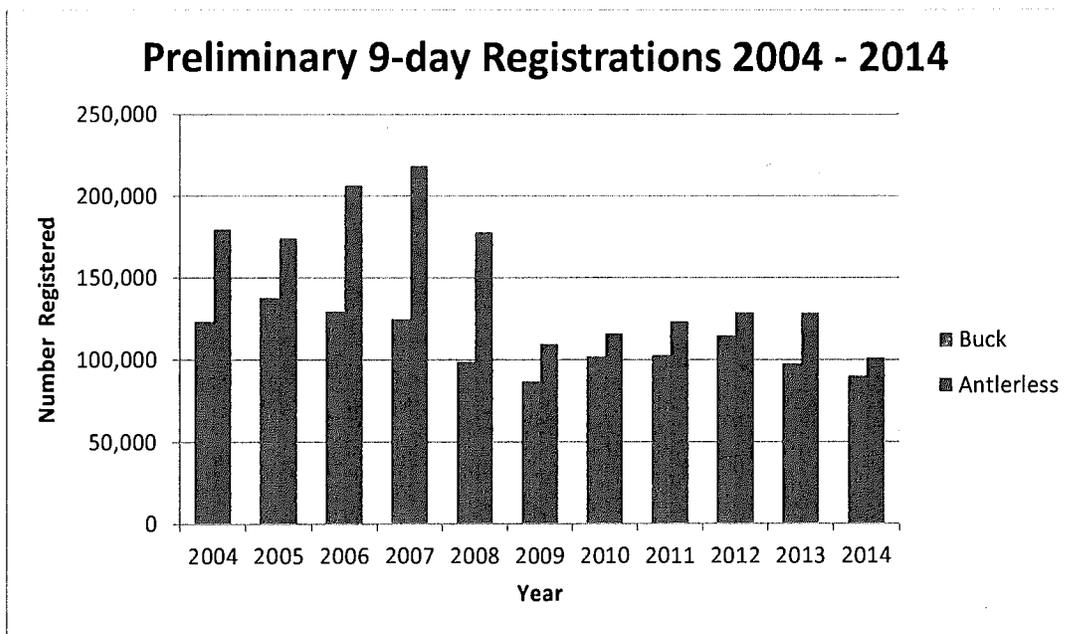
Preliminary registration figures and discussions with many hunters suggest that winter impacts again influenced success as well as antler development in some areas, particularly in northwestern and north central counties. It is also felt that the rule change that required all hunters pay for bonus permits impacted antlerless harvest, especially in areas where tags were free or \$2 in recent years.

Electronic registration was offered on a trial basis this year to about 14,000 pre-selected hunters. Over 4000 deer were registered either by phone or online during the nine-day gun season. Hunters provided feedback throughout the e-registration pilot, and the department is currently surveying participating hunters to further improve the system. E-registration is

expected to be available to all hunters for the 2015 deer season, and any local business with a phone or computer open to the public will be able to offer registration services as well.

9-Day Firearm Season

The 9-day firearm season registration data comes from phone surveys of the 600+ deer registration stations and is conducted on the Tuesday following the season closure. County registration results represent the reported total from all stations located in a county. The total includes deer harvested in other counties, but were registered in the county as listed.



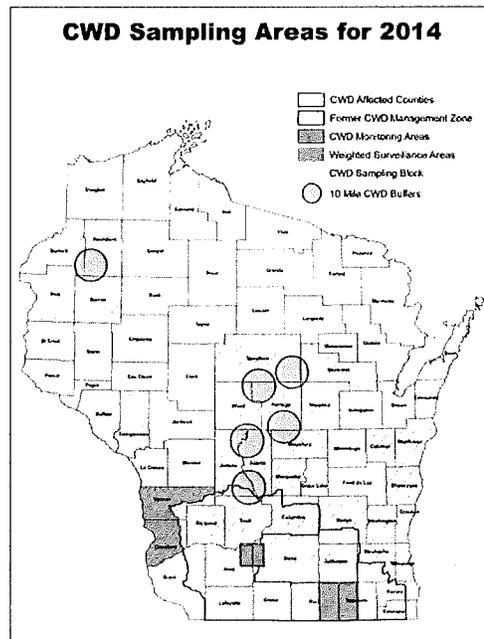
CWD Surveillance Update

The statewide CWD sampling budget allows for testing of approximately 7,800 deer statewide. We will continue to sample deer within the former CWD Management Zone, including both the southwestern and southeastern core infection areas, to track changes in both CWD prevalence and distribution. We will continue to sample deer in the ten-mile radius surrounding the 2011 Washburn County positive as well as sample deer in the four ten-mile radius areas surrounding the Juneau, Adams, northern Portage and southern Portage county positives. New for this year is the ten-mile radius in Marathon County around a CWD positive captive deer farm. Sampling efforts are assessing the prevalence and distribution of the disease in each area. Each of the Juneau, Adams, Portage and Marathon county sample areas has a goal of 300 samples. The Washburn County sample area has a goal of 500 samples. We will also sample deer in Dane, Jefferson, southern Dodge, Columbia, eastern Sauk and north-central Iowa counties.

One important project we are continuing this fall is the weighted surveillance program. The program is utilizing weighted sampling to attempt to increase the efficacy and efficiency of our disease detection surveillance efforts. The goal of the program is to focus collection and sampling efforts on select age and sex classes of deer. Because CWD is found at higher prevalence rates in adult males than in other demographic groups, they represent the most valuable group of animals to test for CWD detection in areas where the disease has not previously been found. As a result, our efforts will be focused on sampling adult male deer in Vernon and Crawford counties at select taxidermists and on opening weekend where the focus will be on older age deer which represent the highest hunter harvested weighted value.

Samples will continue to be collected through the archery and antlerless gun seasons. In the below illustration the map shows the statewide surveillance plan. As is always the case, hunter cooperation has been outstanding. Our sample total to date has been slightly down which parallels the reduced statewide harvest.

- Statewide goal of 7,800 samples
- 69 positives in the Southern Farmland Zone (as of Dec. 10)



Venison Donation

During the 15th season of the WDACP-sponsored deer donation program there were 57 counties and 120 processors participating in the statewide program. To date, hunters have donated 1,350 deer. Donations are down about 40% compared to last year (last year's final tally was 2,265 deer). This year marks the lowest number of donated deer since the program's inception in 2000. However, there is still time for hunters to contribute; participating processors will accept legally harvested and registered deer until February 1, 2015.

There has been an increasing number of charitable organizations contacting us this year to receive venison and many processors are alternating contacts so distribution is equitable.

Deer Research

In early 2011, the WDNR began a large-scale study of deer mortality. We focused especially on estimating harvest rates of bucks and causes and rates of fawn mortality. The research is being conducted in two study areas; in northern Wisconsin near the town of Winter, and east-central Wisconsin near Shiocton. This project has been a partnership involving WDNR, UW-Madison, UW-Stevens Point, numerous conservation organizations, and a great number of volunteers. Some of the notable highlights include:

- Marked nearly 1,600 deer in the first 3 years of the study.
- Collared 1,001 deer.
- Well over 1,000 volunteers have assisted with deer capture efforts.
- Hundreds of landowners have graciously granted us access to their properties
- For adult deer, hunting remains the #1 cause of mortality.
- Overwinter mortality of juvenile deer was significant (40-50% died) in the Northern Forest Study Area in 2013 and 2014; adult survival during these periods remained high (~10% died).
- Some starvation of juvenile deer in the Eastern Farmland Study Area occurred during the winter/spring of 2013 and 2014, but survival rates remained high.
- This study has also yielded substantial data regarding deer migration, dispersal and habitat use. We are beginning to analyze this data now.

The deer capture and collaring phase of this study is complete. We will monitor radiocollared deer intensively through the 2014 hunting season.

Table 1: 2014 9-day Preliminary Count Registrations, Nov. 22 - Nov. 30

	Buck	Antlerless	Total	% Difference from 2013 (Bucks)	% Difference from 2013 (Antlerless)	% Difference from 2013 (Total)
Northeast	23,835	27,075	50,910	-2%	-11%	-7.1%
Northern	19,949	10,633	30,582	-18%	-58%	-39%
Southern	15,291	19,763	35,054	1%	-8%	-4%
West Central	31,261	43,743	75,004	-8%	-15%	-12%
Total	90,336	101,214	191,550	-8%	-21%	-15.5%

