

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resources Board Agenda Item**

SUBJECT: Approval of bear harvest quotas for the 2014 season.

FOR: January 2014 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: David MacFarland, Carnivore Staff Specialist

SUMMARY:

The department is requesting adoption of bear harvest quotas for the 2014 hunting season.

The department recommends a harvest quota of 4,700 bears and a harvest permit level of 10,460. In individual management units the recommended 2014 permit levels are: A) 2,100 B) 1,010 C) 5,100 and D) 2,250. These quota levels are intended to stabilize the bear population in units A, B, C and to decrease the population in unit D due to a large increase in nuisance bear complaints there. Permit levels are based on the recommended 2014 quota and hunter success rates over the last 3 years, and would be an increase of 22% compared to 2013.

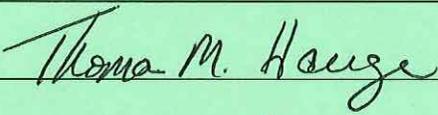
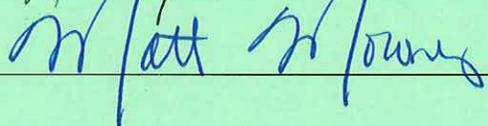
The recommended 2014 permit represents the highest number of Class A licenses ever available to Wisconsin bear hunters. Harvest goals and permit levels increased in 2009 and have remained at relatively high levels following the results of a tetracycline mark-recapture study completed in 2008. The study estimated more bear to be present than previously estimated.

In developing these quotas, department staff met with interest groups and analyzed 2013 bear harvest data. Recommended quotas for 2014 were determined using the department's bear population model to assess the effects of various harvest levels relative to the current population estimate and goals. Establishing bear quotas in January each year is an important step in the process of implementing the permit process that the board has asked to be involved in. The bear permit drawing will be held soon after the establishment of quotas so that successful applicants have ample time to plan for hunts.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval of bear harvest quotas for the 2014 season.

LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS (check all that are applicable):

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Background memo | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
| <input type="checkbox"/> N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |

Approved by	Signature	Date
Tom Hauge, Bureau Director		1/8/14
Kurt Thiede, Administrator		1/8/14
Cathy Stepp, Secretary		1/9/14

DATE: January 7, 2014

FILE REF: 2300

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Cathy Stepp

SUBJECT: 2014 Bear Season Quotas

The department recommends a 2014 bear harvest quota of 4,700 and a harvest permit level of 10,460.

The following table compares 2013 bear quotas, 2013 permit availability, recommended 2014 bear quotas and estimated permit availability by management unit. A map of bear management zones is attached on page 3 of this memo.

<i>Zone</i>	<i>2013 quota</i>	<i>2013 permits</i>	<i>2014 quota rec.</i>	<i>Quota Change</i>	<i>2014 est permits</i>
A	1,150	2,130	1,100	-4.3%	2,100
B	450	690	650	+44.4%	1,010
C	1,200	4,110	1,350	+12.5%	5,100
D	1,200	1,630	1,600	+33.3%	2,250
Total	4,000	8,560	4,700	+17.5%	10,460

Background

The Department considered the following when developing 2014 quota recommendations:

Bear Management Unit A:

Objective – Stabilize the population at current levels

Justification – The population in Unit A is estimated to be approximately 4,700. After several years of population reduction, nuisance and damage complaints are considered tolerable in Unit A. Hunter success has remained stable in the upper 50% range over the last 5 years however the age structure of harvested animals has shifted slightly toward younger bears. The committee recommendation of population stabilization is consistent with the 2013 recommendation.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,100 Estimated permit level of 2,100

Bear Management Unit B:

Objective – Stabilize the population at current levels

Justification – The population in Unit B is estimated to be 4,400. After several years of population reduction, nuisance and damage complaints have declined to more acceptable levels. In 2013, quota was reduced as the objective transitioned from reduction to stabilization. New data generated from the tetracycline estimate suggests the population is larger than estimated last year thus an increased quota is necessary to stabilize the population. The increased in quota in 2014 should result in stabilization however there is data uncertainty in this unit.

Recommendation – Quota of 650 Estimated permit level of 1,010

Bear Management Unit C:

Objective- Stabilize the population at current levels and slow population expansion into Southern Wisconsin.

Justification – The Unit C bear population has grown and expanded over the last several decades and is currently estimated to be approximately 6,000. Population estimation remains a challenge in the unit due to great variability in bear density across the unit and uneven distribution of harvest pressure. A matter of management interest is continued expansion into areas of Southern Wisconsin with higher human population densities and greater potential for conflict. While harvest pressure is light on the advancing edge of bear range, higher harvest in established areas should slow the rate of dispersal into new areas. In 2013, the committee recommended a 50% increase in quota to begin stabilizing the population. Preliminary data suggests we fell short of this quota by 18%. This is somewhat expected due to reduced success rates in response to a significant quota increase. For this reason, the committee recommends keeping the quota level similar to 2013 to allow success rates to stabilize.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,350 Estimated permit level of 5,100

Bear Management Unit D:

Objective- Increased rate of population reduction

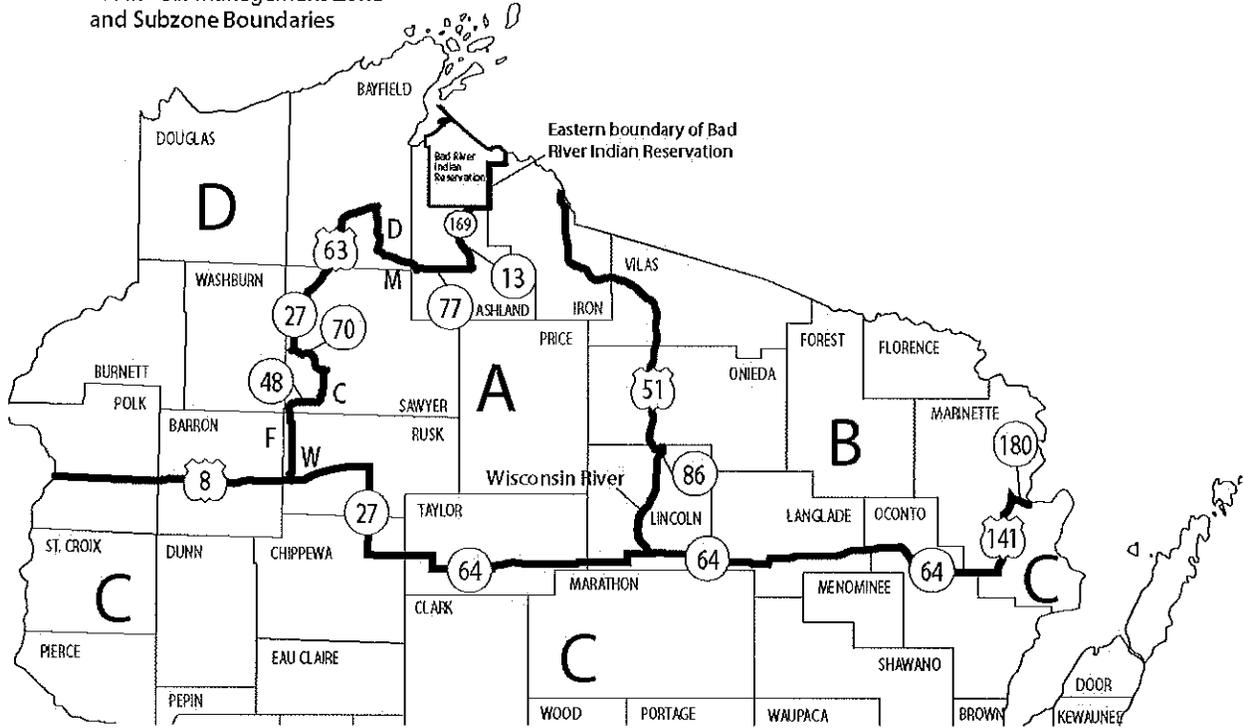
Justification – The population in Unit D is estimated to be approximately 7,200. Unit D accounted for 47% of bear complaints and 57.8% of nuisance bear captures in 2013. According to WM staff located in Unit D, the severity of bear related nuisance activity has increased markedly in recent years. This has included several situations where bears have entered residences and 2 confirmed human attacks in 2013. Analysis of population data suggests despite increased quotas being met over the last few years, we have not had a significant impact on the population. Public lands, and therefore harvest pressure, are concentrated in the north while nuisance activity is concentrated in the south. The committee will discuss a more comprehensive strategy to address this issue when the bear management plan is updated. Under current regulations, increased quota provides the most direct means of addressing managers' concerns. 2013 represented a 20% quota increase over 2012, this year the Department recommends an additional increase of 33%.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,600 Estimated permit level of 2,250

Conservation Congress:

The Conservation Congress Bear Study Committee reviewed these recommendations and unanimously approved them on December 7th, 2013.

— Black Bear Management Zone and Subzone Boundaries



(Zone C extends south to Wisconsin-Illinois State Line)