

PRESS RELEASE

Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association

March 17, 2004

WDHA Position Statement on the 23 Day Gun Deer Season Proposal



The Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association (WDHA) has taken a position against the 23 day gun deer season as proposed by the Natural Resources Board. While there are many controversial issues with the current season structure, we believe this proposal will be detrimental to deer hunting and the deer herd.

Our principle objection to this proposal is it essentially removes all control from DNR wildlife biologists to effectively manage deer populations by instituting a "one size fits all" strategy for the entire state. Without individual unit control of antlerless harvest and quotas this proposal will result in over harvest in some units and under harvest in others. Experience from the emergency extended seasons in 1985, 1990 and 1991 added less than 10% to the antlerless kill. In addition the 16-day seasons in 1958 and 1959 only resulted in 15-20% of the antlerless kill in last 7 days. Since the current T-zone seasons add around 43% to the antlerless harvest it is extremely unlikely a 23 day either sex season will meet even current antlerless quotas in many units, resulting in the possibility of re-implementing T-zones and earn a buck requirements.

A primary motive for the 23 day season proposal is the unpopularity of the October T-zone antlerless hunt. However many deer hunters, especially bow hunters, are not so much opposed to the October hunt as the timing. A simple solution would be to move the date to the 2nd weekend in October as originally proposed by the DNR. It should be noted that it was the legislature who requested the current last weekend date. The December T-zone should also be held across the entire state, and the October season held only in those units that remain above quota. This was the original intent of the DNR but the legislature intervened and removed the December T-zone hunt north of hwy 8. We also support keeping the increasingly popular 10 day December either sex muzzleloader season.

A principle reason for requiring T-zones and earn a buck seasons is the continued practice of deer baiting and feeding. It is clearly evident that these practices have dramatically increased deer reproduction especially in the north, and have thus required unpopular T-zones and earn a buck seasons to control artificially high deer populations. We feel that by eliminating baiting and feeding these unpopular deer management methods would not be required in many areas.

However perhaps the greatest issue confounding deer management is the dissimilarity of deer populations on private vs. public lands. Any successful change to the season structure will have to address this issue. These changes could be as simple as re-drawing the unit boundaries based on land ownership or by providing other incentives to harvest antlerless deer on private lands, thus avoiding the current problems with over harvest on public lands. The 23 day proposal also does not allow for antlerless only seasons. We feel that private landowners who do not allow access to outside hunters during the regular gun season would more readily allow access during an antlerless only season, especially one in December.

The WDHA is not opposed to changes to the current gun deer season, but any changes should be well thought out and based on experience and wildlife management principles. We support maximizing deer hunting opportunities for all hunters but not at risk to the well being of the deer herd.

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