

**From: Plymouth DNR Service Center
"The Woodchucks"**



**To: Sheboygan County Conservation Association
December 16, 2009**

From the Front Line: Deb, Cheryl, & Bob

- **Fall turkey season extension** - Reminder that the fall turkey season is extended for the first time this fall in Zones 1 through 5 (including Sheboygan Co). The fall season in those zones now runs through December 31st.
- **Deer Season** - All gun hunting is now closed in Sheboygan County. The archery season runs through January 3rd in Unit 69, and through January 31st in Unit 77M. Either bucks or does may be taken, depending on what tags the hunter has remaining for the unit they are hunting.
- **Snowmobile Registration** - Reminder to check your registrations. Decals and registration certificates are available immediately at Plymouth DNR for a \$5 expedited service fee. Registrations can also be completed online at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cs/registrations/wivrs/> (remember to print a confirmation receipt). For Sheboygan County trail conditions, please call 892-7455, or check online at www.nkmsnow.com.
- **Snowmobile Safety** - Any operator born in 1985 or later must have a snowmobile safety class. Students can take a traditional course in the classroom (check dnr.wi.gov for classes), or online at www.snowmobile-ed.com/wi. The snowmobile safety CD's are no longer being issued.
- **SERVICE CENTER HOURS TO CHANGE** - Beginning January 4th, the Plymouth Service Center will only be open to the public Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00am-12:30pm & 1:30-4:00pm. The DNR customer service line will still be available 7 days a week, 7am-10pm, at 1-888-WDNR INFO (936-7463).

Fisheries Management

- **Area DNR Fisheries vacancies** - Lateral transfer announcements have been posted within State employment for the Fisheries Biologist position in Plymouth (John Nelson's former position) and the Fish Hatchery Supervisor position at the Kettle Moraine Springs Fish Hatchery in Adell (Randy Link's former position). If no eligible State employees choose to transfer, these positions will be filled from statewide exam lists. This is the first step in filling these positions, so it's hard to tell how much longer they will be vacant.

From Wildlife: Dale, Missy, Dan, Ed, & Steve

- **An update on the possible incidents of distemper in our area furbearers** - In the past couple of weeks, we've been able to collect (1) raccoon, (2) gray fox, and (1) red fox from the Sheboygan area for testing of distemper and necropsy. All four of these specimens were exhibiting signs and symptoms of disease. We're attempting to document if distemper or some other disease is the reason for an increased number of reports of sick or dying furbearers in our area. Now that colder weather has set in, the reports have dwindled. However, these four specimens should be enough to make a determination of disease prevalence.
- **An update on the 9-day deer gun season:** Here's a comparison of the deer registration totals for the 9-day deer gun seasons from 2009 and 2008. These numbers are obtained by calling all deer registration stations on the Tuesday after the

close of the 9-day deer gun season. A final picture of the deer harvest for 2008-2009 will be available a few weeks after all deer hunting seasons close on January 31, 2010.

Sheboygan County Call-in Deer Registration Totals
(Compared at the end of the 9-day deer gun season of each year)

	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Antlered:	503	418	-85	-16.90%
Antlerless:	<u>992</u>	<u>651</u>	<u>-341</u>	-34.38%
Total:	1495	1069	-426	-28.49%

Statewide Call-in Deer Registration Totals
(Compared at the end of the 9-day deer gun season of each year)

	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Antlered:	98840	86251	-12589	-12.74%
Antlerless:	<u>178145</u>	<u>109396</u>	<u>-68749</u>	-38.59%
Total:	276985	195647	-81338	-29.37%

There were 638,040 gun licenses sold through the end of the season on November, compared to 642,419 in 2008. This year, over 80,000 of those gun license holders were teenagers, and over 50,000 were seniors.

Lower total harvests were expected due to deer populations in several units that are closer to goals, and changes in season structures in many units.

In response to hunter comments after the 2008 season, significant changes in this year’s season structure were made. Units closer to goal, fewer antlerless tags, fewer Earn-A-Buck units, and a reduced number of Herd Control Units all mean a lower total harvest.

- (13) units had no antlerless tags available.
- (29) units were moved out of Earn-A-Buck to Herd Control.
- (38) units were moved out of Herd Control to Regular.
- The number of regular units grew from (21) in 2008 to (59) this year.

The factors that influence any year’s hunt have not changed much over the years. Most important are local populations which are not equally distributed on the landscape, along with crops in the field, antlerless deer harvest quotas and weather – all impact harvest. Wildlife management and especially deer management is a process of continual adjustment. Seasons were adjusted this year to reflect lower populations across the north and central forests, and Earn-A-Buck was suspended in many areas. In February, unit-level harvest numbers will be compared against over-winter population estimates. Adjustments in the 2010 season structure will then be made to address population trends with the goal of a healthy, sustainable deer herd in mind.

- **Recent wolf reports in Sheboygan County** - There have been a number of reports floating around since the start of the 9-day deer gun season about a wolf pack in Sheboygan Marsh and in the Kettle Moraine State Forest - Northern Unit (KMSF-NU). Normally, a handful of reports of wolf sightings are heard around the time of deer season, but an increased number of them have occurred this year. Rumors this year have ranged from “the DNR stocked a pack of wolves in Sheboygan Marsh that are collared”, to “a pack of wolves (again, with collars) are roaming the KMSF-NU”. The first rumor is false since DNR doesn’t stock wolves. As for the second rumor, as far as we know, there are no wolf packs roaming any part of our Sheboygan County area, or any area in the southern one-third of Wisconsin.

The only first-hand report of a wolf sighting that the Plymouth DNR Wildlife program has taken this season was last week from a deer hunter who said he saw a wolf chasing a deer just east of the Greenbush group camp area in the KMSF-NU. We spoke with that man and we filed a report on the “DNR Rare Mammal Observation Form”. However, that report is not substantiated as being a wolf because there is no other evidence (i.e., tracks, scat, photos, etc.) available and the observer's description could also be that of a dog or coyote.

Generally, DNR attempts to follow-up on first-hand reports of any “rare mammals” (i.e., wolf, cougar, bobcat, etc.) whenever possible. If there is an opportunity to track-down the first-hand reporter of any second/third/fourth-hand reports, then some follow-up investigation with that person is possible to try and substantiate that report. If someone has photos, tracks, or other physical evidence to look at, we need to see them to substantiate any reports of sightings. Otherwise, second/third/fourth-hand reports amount to nothing more than rumors that complicate the legitimacy of valid reports.

What makes all of these reported sightings so difficult is that we need good, reliable observational and physical evidence before we can substantiate any reported sighting of a wild gray wolf in the area. That type of evidence often doesn't come until we have a carcass (live or dead) in-hand that we can use to absolutely verify the animal as a wild gray wolf vs whatever similar is running around in the wild (i.e., escaped captive wolf, wolf/dog hybrid, dog, coyote, coyote/dog hybrid, etc.). Based on past occurrences in Wisconsin, the likelihood of a single wolf being present at one time or another in (almost) any part of Wisconsin is possible. Those reports from southern areas of the state that have been substantiated in the past by examining carcasses from car-kills or coyote hunters, or identifying tracks, scat, or photos have generally been dispersing yearlings. On the other-hand, the probability of having an established pack of wild gray wolves in our area vs a pack of dogs (neighborhood or feral) or coyotes is very low.

For more information about wolves in Wisconsin, take a look at the DNR wolf web page located at:
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/mammals/wolf/>.