

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

SUBJECT: Approval of bear harvest quotas for the 2015 season.

FOR: January 2015 Board meeting

TO BE PRESENTED BY: David MacFarland, Carnivore Staff Specialist

SUMMARY:

The department recommends a harvest quota of 4,750 bears and a harvest permit level of 10,690. In individual management units the recommended 2015 permit levels are: A) 1,875 B) 1,090 C) 5,490 and D) 2,235. These quota levels are intended to stabilize the bear population in units A, B and C and to decrease the population in unit D due to a high level of nuisance bear complaints there.

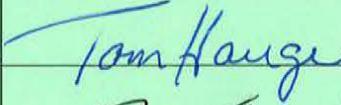
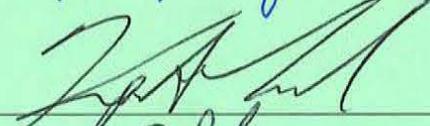
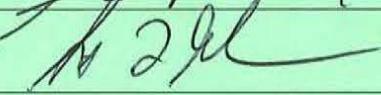
The 2015 permit level recommendation represents the highest number of Class A licenses ever available to Wisconsin bear hunters, breaking last year's record. 2015 represents another record year for bear applications with over 109,000 received. The last 6 bear seasons represent the 6 highest bear harvests in Wisconsin history. Wisconsin continues to lead the nation with more bear harvested than in any other state.

In developing these quotas, department staff met with interest groups and analyzed 2014 bear harvest data. Recommended quotas for 2015 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 to time to plan for hunts.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval of bear harvest quotas for the 2015 season.

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

- Background memo
- N/A
- N/A
- N/A

Approved by	Signature	Date
Tom Hauge, Bureau Director		1/15/15
Kurt Thiede, Administrator		1/15/15
<i>for</i> Cathy Stepp, Secretary		1/16/15

DATE: January 15, 2015

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Secretary Stepp

SUBJECT: Request approval of bear harvest quotas for the 2015 season

The department is requesting approval of the following bear harvest quotas for the 2015 hunting season:

<i>Zone</i>	<i>2014 quota</i>	<i>2014 permits</i>	<i>2015 quota rec.</i>	<i>Quota Change</i>	<i>2015 est permits</i>
A	1,100	2,070	1,100	0%	1,875
B	650	990	750	+15.4%	1,090
C	1,350	5,050	1,300	-3.7%	5,490
D	1,600	2,230	1,600	0%	2,235
Total	4,700	10,340	4,750	+1.1%	10,690

Background and Justification

The Department considered the following when developing 2015 quota recommendations:

Bear Management Unit A:

Objective – Stabilize the population at current levels

Justification – 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. The Department recommendation of population stabilization is consistent with the 2014 recommendation.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,100 Estimated permit level of 1,875

Bear Management Unit B:

Objective – Stabilize the population at current levels

Justification – After several years of population reduction, nuisance and damage complaints have declined to more acceptable levels. In 2013, the quota was reduced as the objective transitioned from reduction to stabilization. The 2015 quota is a continuation of our population stabilization objective.

Recommendation – Quota of 750 Estimated permit level of 1,090

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. Population estimation remains a challenge in the unit due to great variability in bear density across the unit and uneven distribution of harvest pressure. One potential concern 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 and 2014, the Department recommended increased quotas to begin stabilizing the population. We fell short of quotas in both years. It is possible we are reaching a point of hunter saturation in primary hunting areas which is reducing success. This may result in shifted effort into new areas of zone C. The Department recommends keeping the quota level similar to 2013 and 2014 to allow success rates to stabilize.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,300 Estimated permit level of 5,490

Bear Management Unit D:

Objective- Increase the rate of population reduction

Justification – According to Wildlife staff located in Unit D, and our damage program data, the severity of bear related conflicts continues to be high in Unit D. Analysis of population data suggests despite increased quotas over the last few years, we have not had a significant impact on the population. 2014 represented a 33% quota increase over 2013. This quota was not met with 1,397 bears harvested. The Department recommends maintaining the 2014 quota levels.

Recommendation – Quota of 1,600 Estimated permit level of 2,235

Conservation Congress

The Conservation Congress Bear Study Committee reviewed these recommendations and unanimously approved them on December 6th, 2013.

Permit Availability

The 2015 permit level recommendation represents the highest number of Class A licenses ever available to Wisconsin bear hunters, breaking last year's record. 2015 represents another record year for bear applications with over 109,000 received. The last 6 bear seasons represent the 6 highest bear harvests in Wisconsin history. Wisconsin continues to lead the nation with more bear harvested than in any other state.