

# Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Management Report

August 2010

*Note: The following reports have been contributed by staff from the WDNR wildlife management and research programs and compiled and edited by Bill Vander Zouwen. This report is intended to raise awareness of DNR staff and stakeholders regarding wildlife management activities, accomplishments, challenges and plans.*

## **Migratory Bird Management**

Open Water Hunting: Meetings have been scheduled from Sept 7-10 across the northern part of the state (Vilas county (3 lakes), Grindstone Lake, Lake Wissota, and Shawano lake) to have some local discussions regarding the proposed additional open water hunting lakes. Kent Van Horn, Todd Schaller, and local staff will meet with lake associations, residents, area sportsmen/women, and any other interested parties.

New Duck Zones: We are working with Conservation Congress' Dick Koerner and other groups to put together the ad hoc committee on new duck zones.

Dove and Duck Banding: Dove banding is wrapping up. Duck banding is going well in some areas, while high water has proven challenging in others. New banding efforts in Horicon, Sandhill/Meadow valley, and on a couple NWR refuges should help in meeting our statewide banding goals.

Waterfowl Hunting Regulations Process: On July 12, DNR staff met in Portage with interested individuals and groups to discuss the status of waterfowl and address issues prior to the Flyway Council meeting. Two days later, we presented similar information to the La Crosse County Conservation Alliance at their annual meeting. During the entire next week in Mobile, Alabama, Kent Van Horn, Ron Gatti, Tom Hauge and others represented Wisconsin at the Mississippi Flyway Council and Technical section meeting. The Mississippi Flyway Council is group of 17 provincial and state representatives that work together collectively to manage our migratory birds as a shared resource. On July 28th, the DNR Migratory Game Bird Committee met to review the season proposal, and on Friday, July 31 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regulations committee made their recommendations on the proposed hunting season frameworks. It appears that our request for additional duck hunting zone options has finally been answered. Along with population status updates, this new information was presented to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress in Wausau on Saturday July 31st and, after discussing the issues, the Conservation Congress voted in support of each of the Department's season proposals. The afternoon was spent soliciting input from waterfowl groups and interested individuals. A final proposal was put together over the weekend and taken to statewide public hearings for input during August 2-5. Wisconsin's waterfowl hunters are a diverse group, but a majority of the input supported our season proposals or fell split on the issues.

This year's populations and habitat were mostly good overall, and with few complicating issues, the proposal was essentially similar to last year's. A new federal harvest strategy will allow a 2 bird bag on pintails; however, it should be noted this is not based on a population increase, but rather on a different method of analysis and season options. The new USFWS harvest model for pintails will not allow a 30 day pintail season within a

60 day season and predicts that pintail seasons will be closed more frequently. Two goose subzones (Burnett and Rock Prairie) that are no longer needed were proposed to be eliminated in time for the 2010 season. There was also a proposal to eliminate the Collins zone because of low hunter use and changes in management needs, with the change to go into effect next year. Over 80% of Collins zone hunters supported this move, and it received no negative feedback during the period of public input.  
*Contributed by Kent Van Horn and James Christopoulos.*

## **2010 Wisconsin Waterfowl Hunting Seasons Set**

The state Natural Resources Board approved the 2010 Fall Waterfowl Season framework at its August 11 meeting in Superior.

Highlights include an increase to a two-bird daily bag on pintails and the elimination of the Burnett County subzone closed area. This Canada goose subzone is now open to goose hunters as part of the Exterior zone.

### Duck Season Structure:

- 60-day season, the overall daily bag limit for ducks is six, no more than four mallards of which only one can be a hen, three wood ducks, two redheads, one black duck, two pintail, two scaup and one canvasback. (For species of duck not listed, such as teal and ring-necks, the combined total with all other species may not exceed six ducks).
- In addition the daily bag may also include 5 mergansers to include not more than two hooded mergansers and 15 coot.
- Northern Zone – Sept. 25 at 9 a.m. through Nov. 23.
- Southern Zone – Oct. 2 at 9 a.m. through Oct. 10, and Oct. 16 through Dec. 5.

Youth Waterfowl Hunt - Sept. 18-19: Youth may harvest Canada geese in all zones during these 2 days, however, the bag limit and/or tag requirement applies for the respective zones. These days overlap with open goose seasons in most areas so adults will also be able to shoot geese but not ducks during the youth hunt.

Canada geese: The state is apportioned into three goose hunting zones: Horicon, Collins and Exterior. Other goose management subzones within the Exterior Zone include the Brown County and Mississippi River subzone.

Exterior Zone (including subzones):

- 85 days. Daily bag of two geese.
- North Zone – Sept. 18-24 and Sept. 25 at 9 a.m. - Dec. 11.
- South Zone – Sept. 18 - Oct. 1, Oct. 2 at 9 a.m. – Oct. 10 and Oct. 16 – Dec. 16
- Mississippi River Subzone – Oct. 2 at 9:00 a.m. – Oct 10 and Oct. 16 – Dec. 30.
- Burnett County and Rock Prairie Subzones have been eliminated.

Horicon and Collins: Hunters with Horicon and Collins zone permits will be issued six tags for the time period that they are awarded. The daily bag limit will be two geese with a possession limit of six.

- Horicon - Period 1, Sept. 16 - Oct. 31; Period 2, Nov. 1 – Dec. 16.
- Collins – Period 1, Sept. 16 – Oct. 3; Period 2, Oct. 4-24; Period 3, Oct. 25 – Nov. 19.

All migratory game bird hunters must become HIP certified when they purchase their hunting license. *Contributed by Kent Van Horn and James Christopoulos*

### **Furbearer Management Program**

Furbearer Management Committee: We were able to conduct the two-day Furbearer Committee Meeting in early June at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point. Agenda topics were similar to past years with reports from various agencies and the Wisconsin Trappers Association in addition to presentations, requiring the evening hours as well. Recommendations for 2010 - 2011 harvest quotas for bobcat, fisher and otter were developed. And a high note was the presence of Dave MacFarland, our new Science Services Furbearer Researcher. With his presence we've begun the process of a serious review of needed furbearer research and a priority ranking of the same.

Beaver Management Plan: We coordinated a beaver management meeting in late June where various agency folks shared their efforts and scope of activities relative to beaver and beaver control. Thirty-eight were in attendance including representatives from the Wisconsin County Forest Association, USDA-Wildlife Services, Trout Unlimited, Wisconsin Trappers Association, US Forest Service, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Agencies, DNR Endangered Resources, DNR Fish Management, DNR Wildlife Management and DNR Research (Fish and Wildlife). With this initial input, we will now develop a communication plan and work forward to better understand and eventually recommend a change of course that would assure protection and balance of important natural resources while still conducting damage control efforts. Wildlife Management will move forward on a re-write of the 1990 Beaver Management Plan over the next several months.

Cougar Management Committee: A new milestone has been achieved! The first official meeting of a Cougar Committee in the state of Wisconsin occurred at the historic MacKenzie Center on August 3. The special guest and presenter was John Kanta, Big Game Supervisor for the South Dakota Department of Fish and Wildlife (Black Hills Region). With John's experience and wisdom, we were able to move forward and discussions related to needed details of a general protocol on how the Department should respond as dispersing cougars appear in Wisconsin. Eventually, recommendations will be presented to the respective policy teams for Wildlife and Endangered Resources. Dispersing cougars are beginning to appear with four known individuals based on DNA, track and/or trail camera verification, and one verification based strictly on a trail camera image.

NTA Convention: The National Trappers Association held their national convention (rendezvous) at the Marshfield fairgrounds August 3 - 7. With over 1,200 campers and thousands of fair goers, nearly everything in Marshfield and up to 20 miles away was

booked or sold out. Roughly 40 states were represented as were several national organizations including the Fur Takers of America, North American Fur Auctions, and Fur Harvesters. The Wisconsin DNR had 5 displays (martens, mussels, carnivore tracking, law enforcement, and furbearer management) in addition to displays from the USDA-Wildlife Services, Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC), and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The WCC display received the Excellence in Education Display for their great exhibit! *Contributed by John Olson and Shawn Rossler*

## **Public Wildlife Surveys**

The Wildlife and Forestry Research Section is asking the general public for their help in collecting data for two wildlife surveys that occur during the summer: Operation Deer Watch, and Wisconsin Game Bird Brood Observations. Participants have been notified of these opportunities via "Gov-Delivery" and news releases, and are asked to submit their observations using the internet.

Operation Deer Watch: Beginning August 1, 2010 through September 30, 2010 DNR biologists, foresters, property managers, wardens, and staff from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Forest Service record deer they see as they go about their daily duties. Yearly since 1960, DNR employees have reported the location, deer type, and number of fawns seen from dawn to dusk for the summer months. These observations are one of many factors biologists use in developing deer population estimates and monitoring herd health.

This year, the survey has been opened to observations by the public as well. As of August 6, outdoor enthusiasts and wildlife watchers from across the state have reported 548 summer deer observations with only 6 days of the survey period completed. Observations have been reported from 105 of 139 deer management units (DMUs) in the state. The DMU with the greatest number of observations is 77M (36 observations), followed by DMU 64 (22 observations).

Direct observations from the field provide important information for deer managers, especially in northern and central forest deer management units (DMU) where harsh winter weather can have a much greater impact on fawn production the following spring. In the northern and central forest regions, observations are bunched into "population modeling" groups of 3 to 4 DMUs and plugged into the department's deer population estimating model. Each summer, new observational data are put into the population estimate. For more information, please visit:  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/harvest/summerdeer.htm>

Wisconsin Game Bird Brood Observations: Each summer, wildlife personnel around the state are asked to fill out ten-week brood observation reports. These 10-week brood surveys have been ongoing for some species for over 30 years. Ruffed grouse, gray partridge, and pheasant 10-week brood surveys have been collected since 1970. Wild turkeys were added to the 10-week brood survey in 1987. Prior to 1970, department personnel did game bird brood observations for ruffed grouse and pheasants.

The public has been invited to help collect game bird brood observations during the 10-week brood survey which runs from June 13 through August 21. As of August 6, we have received 622 game bird brood observations. Observations have been reported from 70 of 72 counties. Most brood observations occurred in Dane county, followed by

Oconto. The most frequently observed game bird species is turkeys (81% of observations) with an average of 4 poults per hen. Ruffed grouse are the next most frequently seen game bird (12% of observations) with an average of 5 chicks per hen. Pheasants (7% of observations) average 6 chicks per hen.

Information gathered on game bird brood production is used by the Wisconsin DNR for monitoring population indices, making all hunting forecasts, and monitoring regional trends. For more information, please visit: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/harvest/brood.htm>. *Contributed by Jessica Kitchell and other Science Services staff*

### **Master Planning**

The Sandhill/Meadow Valley Work Unit held a public meeting on the draft Regional and Property Analysis (RPA) on July 27. The few folks that attended seemed supportive of the vision and goals for the property and offered a few of their own ideas of things to consider for the property. Here is the link to the Sandhill Master Planning effort: [http://dnr.wi.gov/master\\_planning/sandhill/](http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/sandhill/). Wildlife manager Jake Fries is leaving Dane County to take Steve Hoffman's position in Waupaca. Kristen Tomaszewski has been hired as an LTE by Facilities and Lands to take over the master planning duties for the Columbia County properties that Jake was leading. Progress on the Lower Wolf and Southeast Region master plans is slow but steady. *Contributed by Alan Crossley*

### **Forest Certification**

The land and forestry division have been gearing up for this year's forest certification audit, scheduled to take place August 16-19. Numerous state wildlife areas are on the tour so wildlife staff have been preparing for that audit. Independent, third-party certification means management of land owned by Wisconsin DNR meets strict standards for ecological, social and economic sustainability. Forest certification helps Wisconsin remain competitive in global markets that increasingly demand certified raw materials. Objective review is also instrumental in improving how we care for our forests. For more information on certification visit this website: <http://dnr.wi.gov/forestry/certification/>. *Contributed by Alan Crossley*

### **Joint USFWS/DNR Meeting**

The second annual meeting between U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge managers and DNR wildlife staff occurred on July 20 at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge. These meetings are designed to identify opportunities for collaboration among the staff that are responsible for a big chunk of the public land in Wisconsin that is managed specifically for wildlife. In times of dwindling human and financial resources, identifying ways to work together to accomplish common goals becomes all the more important. *Contributed by Alan Crossley*

### **Upland Wildlife Program**

Fall Turkey and Sharp-tailed Grouse Seasons on the Horizon: The fall turkey season is just around the corner with 95,700 permits available to turkey hunters. Permit levels were finalized by the DNR Wild Turkey Advisory Committee after consideration of hunter interference rates, previous fall permit levels and hunter participation, the results of the

2010 spring harvest, and predicted spring turkey production. Permits remaining after the drawing will go on sale beginning at noon on Saturday, August 28th, 2010.

The 2010 fall turkey season runs from September 18th through November 18th for all 7 of Wisconsin's turkey management zones. As in 2009, an additional extended season for Zones 1-5 ONLY will run from November 29th through December 31st. Hunters who receive a fall turkey permit in Zones 1-5 can use those permits during the extended season in the zone for which they were issued. The bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per fall turkey hunting permit. Beginning this fall, hunters may use dogs to hunt wild turkeys throughout Wisconsin. This is the result of a pilot program that ran in a limited 9-county area and was extended statewide following review.

Hunters had until Monday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> to apply for one of 330 Sharp-tailed Grouse hunting permits available for the 2010 season, which will run from October 16<sup>th</sup> through November 7<sup>th</sup>. Two management units have grouse permits available in 2010. 295 permits will be available for DMU 2, and 35 permits will be available for DMU 8.

*Contributed by Sharon Fandel*

### **Wildlife Stamp Programs**

Saturday, August 28th, marks the date of the 2011 Wisconsin Wild Turkey, Pheasant, and Waterfowl Stamp Design Contests. The contest judging will be held at the Aldo Leopold Legacy Center in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The Leopold Center and the surrounding 1,500-acre Leopold Memorial Reserve offer the perfect setting in which to explore and appreciate the earliest attempts at habitat restoration in Wisconsin and to celebrate the contributions of wildlife art to habitat conservation. This is also the first time in the history of the three wildlife stamp programs that the judging of all three design contests will be held at the same time.

A panel of judges has been assembled with the goal of bringing together professionals with expert knowledge on the Wild Turkey, Ring-necked Pheasant, various waterfowl species, and general bird and wildlife ecology. Judging will take place from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m., followed by a public viewing from 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. In addition to allowing the dedicated stamp artists some time in the spotlight, this viewing will allow the public a "sneak peek" of the winning designs for the 2011 stamps. Wildlife Management staff will be available to discuss the history and accomplishments of the Wild Turkey, Pheasant, and Waterfowl Stamp programs and how wildlife artwork has been central to our habitat conservation efforts. *Contributed by Krista McGinley*

### **Farm Bill Policies and Wildlife**

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - The timeframe for the general CRP sign-up was recently announced and underway. General sign-up is running from August 2<sup>nd</sup> through the 27<sup>th</sup>. DNR Wildlife and Forestry staff are assisting Farm Services Agency (FSA) staff in select counties throughout Wisconsin. Wildlife staff will meet with landowners to discuss the benefits of CRP for wildlife and how they can improve their application scores while creating the best habitat possible on their property. Several landowner informational meetings have been organized and will be held in many counties throughout the state. DNR Wildlife staff and Farm Bill Biologists presented information at these meetings.

VPA-HIP "Open Fields": - The rule for the new Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) was recently released by USDA. There will be \$16.67 million available the first year through this new USDA FSA competitive grant program, which is available to all states and tribes. Wisconsin has worked fast and furious on a proposal to meet the deadline of August 23, 2010. An external partner meeting was held on August 13<sup>th</sup> to gather feedback on the proposal and stakeholder endorsements that should help Wisconsin compete for this grant. The proposal would target lands in west central, central, east central, southwest and southeast Wisconsin. We have requested \$1 million per year over 3 years to provide incentives for landowners to allow public access to private woodlands, wetlands, grasslands and farmlands for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-oriented recreation. If our proposal is funded, all leased lands will be posted on the internet so that recreationists know where they are. Proposed funding could secure up to 80,000 acres of leases. We'll hear this fall whether Wisconsin's proposal will be funded. *Contributed by Missy Sparrow*

### **Wildlife Damage Program**

The Department continues to assist municipalities and private landowners dealing with problems from resident Canada geese. In 2010, the Department issued 115 Canada Goose Nest and Egg Depredation Permits to municipalities, lake associations, and private residents which allows them to oil eggs and/or remove nests of Canada geese from March 1 - June 30. The number of permits issued in 2010 increased from 97 permits issued in 2009. All permittees are required to submit a final report to the Department by October 31, summarizing nest removal and egg oiling activities. A summary of removal efforts conducted under these permits will be completed sometime in November.

This year, the Department also implemented the USFWS's Agriculture Control Depredation Order which allows the Department to issue shooting permits to agriculture producers experiencing crop damage from Canada geese. Previously, these goose removal activities required the agriculture producer to obtain a Federal Migratory Bird Depredation Permit issued by the USFWS. The federal permit costs \$100. Now that the permits are issued through the Department, there is no cost for the permit. To obtain a permit the Department requires the agriculture producer to enroll in the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Program and open their land to the public for goose hunting during the Wisconsin Canada goose hunting season. These shooting permits are valid from May 1 through August 31. As of August 6, 52 permits have been issued statewide. All permittees are required to submit a final report with harvest figures to the Department by October 31. A summary of removal efforts conducted under these permits will be completed sometime in November. If anyone would like additional information on these permits, they can contact Brad Koele, DNR Wildlife Damage Specialist at 608-266-2151. *Contributed by Brad Koele*

### **Bear Management Program**

The DNR Bear Committee met on July 29, 2010 to discuss updates to the Bear Management Plan and the tetracycline mark-recapture study slated for 2011. There will be opportunities for the public to provide input on the bear plan. Details will be announced later this year on where and when the public may provide their input. The 2011 mark-recapture study will produce a population estimate that will assist wildlife managers in setting harvest quotas and permit levels.

Bear sightings in southern Wisconsin are becoming more frequent. Since March 2010, DNR biologists have documented reports of bear sightings within areas designated as "occasional" and "rare" on the Wisconsin black bear distribution map. The list of sightings is an informal collection of reports received from e-mails, telephone calls, and reports taken from the media. Reports from areas of the state where bears are "common" or "abundant" were not collected. The more than 140 sighting reports received to date are shown on the map at the following link:  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/bear/popndist.htm>.

The 2010 Bear Season is scheduled September 8 - October 12, 2010 in Zone C where hunting with dogs is not allowed. Bait sitters in Zones A, B, and D, where bear hunting with dogs is allowed, will have the first week to themselves beginning September 8th and they may hunt through October 5th. Hound hunters in Zones A, B, and D will start on September 15th and they may hunt through October 12. Hound hunters will go first in zones that allow hunting with dogs in 2011. There are 22% more harvest permits available statewide for the 2010 bear season than were available in 2009. For the 2010 bear season, there will be 8,910 harvest permits available. Bear hunters received a letter in early July with instructions on bear registration and submitting a bear tooth for age analysis. The letter also contained a bear registration stub, a bear tooth envelope, and 2010 bear hunting regulations. The deadline to transfer a Class A bear license to a youth is two weeks prior to the start of the bear hunting season, which is August 24, 2010. In 2009, 431 Class A bear licenses were transferred to youth hunters.

*Contributed by Linda Olver*

### **Gun Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities**

The 2010 Gun Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities will be held October 2 - 10. More than 59,000 acres are enrolled in this year's hunt, less than the 66,000 available in 2009. Hunters with Class A, long-term Class B that authorizes shooting from a vehicle, or Class C disabled hunting permits are eligible to participate. A list of participating sponsors with contact information is available on DNR's web site:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/HUNT/DEER/DDHunt/ddhsponsor.pdf>. Interested hunters should contact sponsors directly prior to September 1, 2010 to get signed up.

*Contributed by Linda Olver*

### **Wetland Habitat Management**

NAWCA Grants: Two North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant applications were submitted, each seeking \$1 million for wetland and associated upland protection and restoration. The two applications, the Southeast Wisconsin Coastal Habitat Initiative (SWCHI)-Phase V and the South-Central Wisconsin Prairie Pothole Habitat Initiative (SCWIPPHI)-Phase V, were able to be submitted because the collection of agencies and groups that came together to identify the required match, develop quality uses for the potential grant funds, and, possibly the most challenging part, piece together the complicated application document. Special thanks go to the organizations that have stepped up to oversee the application process and who would become the grant administrators - Ducks Unlimited (Jason Hill) for the SWCHI grant and Madison Audubon (Marsh Cannon) for the SCWIPPHI grant.

Leigh Fredrickson Wetland and Waterfowl Workshops: Dr. Leigh Fredrickson, arguably the nation's foremost authority on moist-soil management and other wetland and

waterfowl issues is going to present two workshops for Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Management staff. The first workshop, "Moist Soil Management for Wisconsin Managers and Biologists," will be held on August 19-20. The second workshop, "Waterfowl Ecology and Management," will be held the following week on August 23-25. Both workshops will be held at the Mead Visitor and Education Center. Twenty-five Wildlife Management staff are scheduled to attend each workshop. Funding to provide this valuable training event has been provided by the Bell Charitable Trust, money that comes to the Bureau of Wildlife Management wetland program and is used to fund wetland research and staff training. *Contributed by Ricky Lien*

### **Antlerless (Bonus) Tags and State Park Deer Hunting Access Permits**

Bonus antlerless deer tags for regular deer management units, and state park deer management unit hunting access permits will be sold at the rate of one per person per day. Tags and permits for odd numbered units were sold on Saturday Aug. 21 at noon. Even numbered unit tags and permits were sold beginning Sunday Aug. 22 at noon. All units with remaining tags or permits continue sales on Monday Aug. 23 until sold out or until the hunting season ends. Remaining permit availability will be updated online daily whenever a unit sells out of bonus antlerless tags or state park access permits.

Deer hunters are encouraged to check the 2010 deer management unit designations online or in the deer hunting regulations booklet for the units they plan to hunt in this fall. Forty seven regular units will require hunters to purchase antlerless (bonus) tags if they wish to tag antlerless deer in those units this fall. Nineteen regular deer management units will not have any antlerless tags available for sale this year to encourage herd growth. Every gun and archery deer hunting license will include antlerless carcass tags valid for units designated as Herd Control or CWD (EAB).

If hunters are planning to hunt in any of the twelve state parks that require access permits for deer hunting, they should plan accordingly, as many units will sell out quickly. Those interested in hunting these properties should first check the 2010 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations or the Hunting Opportunities Web page to learn about special weapon restrictions and season dates. Some state parks that allow deer hunting may not require access permits, but may have special season dates. *Contributed by Jason Fleener*

### **2010 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and West Nile Virus (WNV)**

WDNR was again provided grant funding from USDA to collect 600 avian influenza samples for the National HPAI Surveillance Program. USDA-Wildlife Services (WS) staff in Wisconsin will collect an additional 800 samples to complete the requested 1400 samples from Wisconsin. The HPAI sampling year runs from April 1, 2010 through March 31, 2011. WDNR will conduct three types of HPAI surveillance for free-ranging wild birds including examination/sampling of carcasses from mortality/morbidity events affecting wild birds, sampling of hunter-harvested waterfowl, and sampling of live-caught (banding operation) waterfowl. This is the last year that federal grant funding will be provided to states for HPAI surveillance activities. All samples collected to date from Wisconsin morbidity/mortality investigations, hunter-harvested ducks, and during DNR duck banding activities and submitted to the National Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Surveillance Program have shown no evidence of HPAI.

WDNR West Nile virus (WNV) surveillance efforts for 2010 during May through October are focused on collection of non-corvid birds, as well as mammals, exhibiting clinical signs of WNV or that are involved in a significant mortality event (die-off of >5 individuals), and as part of routine diagnostic testing during necropsies and avian influenza surveillance efforts. USDA-Wildlife Services and the Wisconsin Department of Public Health continue to sample corvids (crows, blue jays, ravens) throughout the WNV season to detect WNV activity by county and to issue public health alerts. The statewide Dead Bird Hotline (1-800-433-1610) is being staffed daily from May 1 through October 31 to respond to citizen reports of sick/dead birds and requests for WNV and avian influenza information. During the off-season, the hotline number will have a messaging service where callers can leave sick/dead bird reports and hotline staff will respond back to the citizen or refer calls to WDNR staff as appropriate. *Contributed by Nancy Businga*

### **Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Response Plan**

After more than 8 years of CWD management in Wisconsin, it is increasingly clear that controlling CWD in Wisconsin's free-ranging white-tailed deer will be extremely challenging and will require a commitment of human and financial resources over an extended period of time. The Department has been developing a multi-year CWD response plan recognizing its public trust responsibility for managing wildlife and ensuring the health of wildlife populations in the state. The draft 15-year CWD response plan is available on the DNR's Website (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/whealth/issues/CWD/plan.htm>). Many groups and individuals have provided input on this draft, which will be taken into consideration before the final draft is submitted to the NRB for approval in September. *Contributed by Dan Jones*

### **CWD Management Zone Deer Population Surveillance**

A short video has been posted to the website in which WDNR Wildlife Manager Don Bates describes winter aerial deer population survey techniques used to determine whitetail deer populations in the CWD deer management units of southern Wisconsin. The video about the January 2010 helicopter deer surveys is found at the following link just below the maps produced by those surveys: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/whealth/issues/CWD/maps.htm>. *Contributed by Dan Jones*

### **Cooperative CWD Management Agreement with Illinois DNR**

Wisconsin and Illinois signed an agreement on guidelines for cooperative management of CWD. The agreement, referred to as a memorandum of understanding or MOU, identifies mutual goals for managing CWD. Wisconsin and Illinois also will develop a cooperative management plan they hope will lead to a level of federal funding. Wildlife biologists and wildlife health experts from Illinois and Wisconsin DNRs have been talking and sharing experiences for several years. Raising this level of professional cooperation to a formal agreement signed by the two agency leaders will benefit both states in the long run and make us both more efficient and cost effective. Both states have identified reducing deer densities and limiting geographic spread of the disease through herd

reduction strategies as important goals. Cross-border research opportunities will be explored and the states plan to share common public messages relative to effective CWD control. Staff is authorized to assist the other state when needed in CWD control activities when expected results are considered mutually beneficial. Data sharing in particular will be helpful to identifying the most effective management strategies. The ultimate goal in this effort is to preserve the health and quality of our white-tailed deer resource and the traditions associated with deer viewing and hunting for now and for generations to come. *Contributed by Tami Ryan*

## **Orphan Wildlife**

During the warmer months of spring and summer, the frequency of human-wildlife encounters increases, especially those involving young animals of the year. While most of these encounters are harmless, there are times when well-intentioned people interfere in wildlife situations because they incorrectly assume an animal is orphaned. To assist the public with learning about some animals commonly seen during the spring and summer months and provide tips that can help determine whether an animal is truly an orphan in need a new webpage has been posted.

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/Whealth/rehab/orphan.htm>. *Contributed by Jennifer Ahn*

## **Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative**

WBCI Webinars: WBCI has been making an effort to increase the levels of communication across the WBCI partnership. In order to do this, WBCI has recorded a series of webinars that are archived at the WBCI website [www.wisconsinbirds.org](http://www.wisconsinbirds.org). All of the talks from the WBCI annual meeting are archived here as well as topical issues including birds and lead, the Southern Wings program, Bird City, and others. WBCI anticipates additional webinars to be forthcoming throughout 2010.

WBCI Education: The WBCI education committee is working to implement the Flying Wild program in communities across Wisconsin. Flying Wild (<http://www.wisconsinbirds.org/Education/flyingwild.htm>), the newest program of the Council for Environmental Education, introduces students in the upper elementary and middle school grades to bird conservation. This occurs through a standards-based classroom activity guide and through environmental stewardship projects. Flying WILD encourages schools and nature centers to work closely with conservation organizations, community groups, and businesses involved with birds to implement school bird festivals – events which students take a leading role in teaching their classmates and community about migratory birds. If you or your school is interested in working with Flying Wild in a formal education setting or through a nature center, etc. see the Flying Wild website for a list of upcoming training sessions.

WBCI Grasslands: The WBCI grassland committee is currently working to create a strategic grasslands conservation plan for Wisconsin. This plan will set bird population goals and habitat objectives for Wisconsin conservation partners and will help those partners to evaluate their work towards those goals over time. Grassland birds are currently declining faster than any other group of birds in Wisconsin. This plan seeks to coordinate partner effort to those areas where we can most effectively impact populations of these birds for future generations to come.

WBCI Bird Monitoring: Spring and summer mark the peak of activity for WBCI's bird monitoring programs. Hundreds of volunteers ventured into the field again from April - June 2010 to conduct priority surveys for birds that previously have been poorly monitored. Data entry and analysis is currently underway, but preliminary accounts suggest another successful year for the Western Great Lakes Owl Survey (6th season), Wisconsin Nightjar Survey (4th season), Wisconsin Marshbird Survey (3rd season), and new Red-shouldered Hawk Survey (1st season). Stay tuned at <http://wiatri.net/projects/birdroutes/index.htm> for detailed results and project summaries as they become available. Kudos to all the citizen bird monitors that make these surveys a reality! *Contributed by Andy Paulios and Ryan Brady*

### **Elk Management**

On July 15, the Elk Committee met in Hayward and recommended an assisted dispersal proposal to translocate elk within the existing Clam Lake elk range. This proposal has since been approved by the Wildlife Policy Team. Elk would be caught in coral traps during normal trapping efforts. A number of elk 1-2 years of age would be selected for translocation to a selected site, roughly 10-15 miles away. The elk would be held in a pen until spring green-up, when they would be released into their new habitat. The proposal to move elk is intended to help the herd expand its range within the area previously approved for elk in the elk management plan. *Contributed by Jason Fleener*

### **State Fair -- Live Wild, Live Well: Wisconsin's State Wildlife Areas**

A brand new travelling exhibit was designed for the Wildlife Management Booth at the 2010 Wisconsin State Fair. The creative team of Alan Crossley, Tim Lizotte, Jeff Pritzl, Bill Ceelen, Mary Kay Salwey and Graphic Image imagined, designed and built this new travelling exhibit. Our new State Fair exhibit focused on State Wildlife Areas to help visitors better understand just WHAT these special places are, WHERE they are located in the state, HOW they can find out more information and property maps of these locations and what WELLNESS ACTIVITIES visitors can do at our Wildlife Areas. We created a special Statewide Map that pinpointed all 178 State Wildlife Areas and five DNR Region maps providing more detail showing county boundaries, roads and property boundaries for all of our State Wildlife Areas. We also developed 10 "Feature Property" exhibit panels that gave a little more detail about what visitors can expect to see and do at Crex Meadows, Horicon Marsh, Sheboygan Marsh, Powell Marsh, White River Marsh, Avon Bottoms, Vernon, Mead, Navarino and Sandhill Wildlife Areas. We developed three new games that involved the children who visit our exhibit booth: a Wheel-of-Fortune-style "Wondrous Wheel of Wildlife" Spin Game focused children's attention on the information contained in the text/graphic exhibit panels; a "Mystery Wildlife Area" Game used with the Passport to Fun activity; and a "Meet Your Wild Neighbors" hands-on activity where kids learned some "Cool Facts" about 16 typical wildlife residents of our Wildlife Areas. In addition, a new Wild Card on State Wildlife Areas was created as a handout, and kids had a chance to win a "Wild World Travel Fun Book to Wisconsin Wildlife Areas" by participating in the Wondrous World of Wildlife spin and win game. Our anecdotal experience at the State Fair was that visitors to our display were completely blown away to learn that we have 178 named wildlife areas in the state, covering over 589,000 acres, and that we had such an amazing website where they can learn much more about each property: [http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/wildlife\\_areas/](http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/wildlife_areas/). Building broader public appreciation of

and support for state wildlife areas will hopefully pay dividends in the future. *Contributed by Mary Kay Salwey and Alan Crossley*

## **Cormorant Management**

Population Status and Distribution Trends: All population issues continue to be in East-central Wisconsin associated with Lake Michigan and to a much lesser extent the Winnebago Pool Lakes and Upper Fox River. In the rest of the state, cormorant numbers are stable to declining, and represent less than 10% of the state population. Cormorant colonies that are being managed for reduction continue to decline slightly annually as expected; however, several unmanaged colonies (federal islands) are experiencing growth in excess of the reduced numbers at managed colonies. So the net population trend in the core nesting region continues to be increasing slightly. The estimated number of nesting pairs in 2009 were 17,945 compared to 14,462 in 2005.

At Lake Winnebago, where culling of adult birds has been employed for 3 seasons; 2 colonies have been reduced to 1, as the cormorants at Monkey Island in Oshkosh abandoned that site and joined the cormorants at Long Point Island. Although the nest count at Long Point increased as a result, the total number of nests on Lake Winnebago is declining. Cormorants on the Winnebago Pool have not been a great concern for fishery interests. Control there is based on protecting existing habitat for other colonial nesting waterbirds, specifically great egrets and black-crowned night herons.

Control Efforts: USDA Wildlife Services continues to carry out all cormorant control for DNR under contract. This covers 3 trips to the 3 large colonies in Green Bay to oil eggs and cull adults specifically at Lone Tree Island, where cormorants are still tree nesting. It also covered 7 trips during the month of May to cull and dispose of 758 cormorants at Long Point on Lake Winnebago. USFWS destroyed a peak of 832 cormorant nests in mid-June on Hog Island where they are trying to prevent any cormorant nesting activity. Cormorants attempting to nest at Hog Island and increasing in nesting numbers at Pilot and Spider Islands could be birds that are shifting away from managed islands to unmanaged islands. Michigan is also aggressively managing several islands north of Door County, and the increases in nesting birds at several colonies in Wisconsin may be related to control activities in Michigan more than in Wisconsin.

Although there hasn't been a net decline yet in cormorant breeding numbers, we have learned a lot about techniques that will work and how cormorants and associated colonial nesting birds will react, while national direction in cormorant management techniques is refined.

Resources: Ultimately, progress in cormorant management is determined by funding resources. WDNR has been funding Wildlife Services efforts primarily with Fisheries funding to date (\$15,000 annually). The past 2 years, Wildlife Management has provided \$3,000 to support the culling efforts on Lake Winnebago. Going into the near future, cormorant funding is dependant on each program finding some available funds. A GLRI grant application was written to cover cormorant research and management for the future, but this project was not selected in the competitive grant process. Considering current budget concerns at all levels of government, future cormorant management funding is far from secure. We must consider that this activity may not be a priority relative to other responsibilities, and some management may be required to take a recess. Cormorant management on privately owned islands may continue as the

landowners pursue their own permits and agreements with Wildlife Services to protect their properties (Long Point on Winnebago, and Hat and Jack Islands on Green Bay).

*Contributed by Jeff Pritzl*

### **Featured Region: Northern Region**

The DNR Northern Region consists of 18 counties in Northern Wisconsin, reaching from Minnesota to the south shore of Lake Superior to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. From an organizational perspective, the Northern Region is divided into four Areas with an Area Manager overseeing the wildlife program within that Area. Each Area has a team of Wildlife Biologists and Technicians. There is one Regional Wildlife Supervisor that oversees the Region and represents the Region at the statewide level. This report contains several Region-wide accomplishments followed by four Area Updates.

Region-wide Accomplishments: Prescribed burning is a major work activity in the spring in many parts of the Northern Region. We focus our spring burning on major wetland complexes and upland openings. In addition, this burning is an integral part of barrens management in the Northwest Sands. DNR Wildlife staff and DNR Forestry staff in the Northern Region work together on fire suppression (fighting wild fires) and conducting prescribed burns. Without this cooperative relationship, we would not accomplish this cost-effective habitat management measure. This past spring was a challenging spring considering below normal precipitation and early green-up. This resulted in spring burning prohibitions for both the public and the DNR. When safe burning conditions returned, we were very active in conducting these burns. Most of the Area updates contain acreages that were burned this past spring. Each Area held annual Prescribed Burn In-service Training. This is joint training with the Forestry Program. Typical subjects covered include: Spring burn coordination; smoke management; fire shelters and deployment exercises; and an overview of planned burning for the upcoming spring. In addition, all of our Wildlife Staff attended required training on traffic control and safety.

Personnel evaluations were conducted by the 5 wildlife supervisors in the Northern Region for 27 non-supervisory wildlife staff. They are distributed over the 18 county Northern Region. There are three Wildlife vacancies in the Northern Region (this includes one position that was temporarily loaned to work on CWD in Southern Wisconsin). Typical performance reviews include a review of the past year and what was accomplished measured by prior performance objectives. These evaluations are an excellent opportunity for both the employee and supervisor to discuss and document barriers that get in the way of accomplishments. Future performance objectives are discussed that might include new or a shift in priorities. A training plan is updated to include new training opportunities to keep a well-trained workforce. The evaluation is documented and retained for future reference. Workplace safety is always an area of emphasis during these evaluations in the Northern Region.

Big game registration station establishment work begins in July of each year. In the Northern Region, stations are spread out and the Region is big (18 large counties). Mandatory registration provides accurate kill figures to determine population size and for both credibility and enforcement purposes. These registration stations are the key contacts with our hunters who need animals to be registered. Stations must be well-supplied and well-trained to reduce confusion and to ensure accurate kill information is obtained. As a result, we have over 160 registration stations where these supplies must

be hand delivered. By July 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year, field staff had already inventoried their supplies and determined their registration needs for this upcoming season that begins in early September. Regional needs are consolidated into one order to our central warehouse on Darwin Road in Madison. We are frequently commended by our warehouse supervisor for this effort: *"Thanks for putting your order together in a nice 'useable' format. We appreciate the effort, believe me."*

After field staff receive these supplies (registration tags, stubs, mailing envelopes, tooth envelopes), they are divided up by station, and then delivered to the cooperative registration stations. Personal contact with station personnel is imperative to explain registration requirements and season structure. Trips are combined with other field work to reduce mileage and time to set up these stations.

DNR Wildlife Staff are trained and always available to help in emergency situations. Wildlife staff from Mercer, Woodruff, and Florence assisted in search and rescue and storm clean-up efforts from the July 21 storm damage on the Turtle-Flambeau Scenic Waters area. Wildlife management staff in the Northern Region are well dispersed within the Region and share offices with their colleagues from other DNR programs. As a result, we have developed close working relationships with these staff and this facilitates an "infusion" of wildlife management into other DNR programs and properties.

The Northern Region takes the lead on large carnivore management in the State. Our staff are heavily involved in conducting bear bait surveys in the spring and are already planning for the bear tetracycline survey to be conducted next spring. This survey will be conducted in each of our counties totaling over 2100 bait stations. Wildlife staff are actively involved in responding to emergency bear situations and implementing the nuisance bear policy with assistance from the USDA-Wildlife Services. Local Wildlife staff are also involved in conducting large carnivore track surveys during the winter months and are actively engaged in providing field-based input on over-winter wolf population counts. We are also home to the statewide wolf ecologist and this position is supervised by the Northern Region. Several major accomplishments were made in wolf management including: developing a State petition to the USFWS to de-list the timber wolf and to return wolf management under State-control; providing technical information to the USFWS to support Federal de-listing efforts; developing a technical review team to review wolf-dog hybrids cases and implementation of the new wolf-dog hybrid rule; and implementing wolf survey work in concert with citizen-based monitoring to provide the best science-based survey possible. The DNR wolf ecologist is viewed as a both a Statewide and National expert by his peers. Numerous public presentations and appearances are made each year. The DNR wolf ecologist will be involved in the USFWS structured, decision-making process to address the management status of the timber wolf. In addition, this specialist is co-chairing a team to develop a cougar response protocol for the State of Wisconsin.

Lake Superior Area Update: The Lake Superior Area consists of four counties that border Lake Superior including Douglas, Bayfield, Ashland, and Iron. Recent activities included:

- Capture and disease sampling of male sharp-tailed grouse and capture, disease testing, and translocation of 19 sharp-tailed grouse from Douglas County Forest to Taylor County.

- Trapped and radio-equipped one wolf in northern Bayfield County for continuing wolf monitoring program.
- Periodic monitoring of the status of peregrine falcons nesting on the Ashland ore dock to assist with coordination of ore dock demolition.
- Staff made 3 presentations at the Chequamegon Bird Festival.
- Conducted the bear bait surveys.
- Conducted surveys for ruffed grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, woodcock, bats, loons, and anurans
- Staff made presentation on Forest Management for Wildlife at 3 "Learn About Your Land" workshops for private woodland owners.
- Maintained 16 acres of native grass and forb plantings with herbicide and mowing.
- Maintained 230 of grasslands by prescribed burning.
- Maintained 320 acres of Pine Barrens habitat by prescribed burning.
- Site-prepared 17 acres for a prairie restoration project by prescribed burning.
- Conducted the once-every 5 years wildlife survey on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage.
- Maintained forest openings on County Forests by mowing, hand cutting, and herbicide application.
- Provided technical assistance to many nuisance wildlife complaints, especially for bear, badgers, fox, and coyotes.
- Maintained suitable nesting and young-rearing habitat and monitored the reproductive effort of the 2 colonies of common terns in the Lake Superior Basin.

Upper Chippewa Area Update: The Upper Chippewa Area includes Sawyer, Price, Rusk, and Taylor counties.

It's been a very busy time of year for wildlife management staff stationed at Hayward. The early spring paved the way for early fawns and hearty, healthy elk calves. The much needed rain was sometimes accompanied by very severe weather, however, creating major washouts and adding property damage assessments to the "to do" list. Between the nuisance and injured wildlife calls, the hardworking staff of the Upper Chippewa Area at Hayward took the bull by the horns, rolled up their sleeves, and began to knock these tasks off the list.

Kissick Swamp wildlife area was particularly hard hit by the storms, resulting in a path of destruction from the straight-line winds that whipped across the property, knocking down very large mature oaks, aspen, and various other trees. Damage assessment is under way to determine if there are enough acres of debris, in combination with mature timber, to conduct a salvage timber sale on the property.

Property inspections were completed for Kissick Swamp, Chief River, Eddy Creek, Weirgor and Totagatic wildlife areas from April to July 1st. Hunter walking trail maintenance of these properties is ongoing, with major mowing activity underway. Additional improvements to the local Wildlife Management properties include boundary marking, brush removal, parking area development, sign posting and installing a new gate. There was also a preliminary inspection and assessment completed for the Totagatic dam that resulted in a requirement for further engineering analysis and improvements to dike and spillway.

The spring survey season was kicked off with the vocalization monitoring of frogs and toads. The three "runs" of this survey were completed as by July 15th. Other surveys

that were conducted include ruffed grouse drumming, grouse and turkey brood counts, woodcock peenting, night-jar, owl, loon and bear bait stations. In addition, goose banding was done near Ladysmith at two sites, capturing 98 geese and applying leg bands to all birds. Cooperation was provided for American Marten monitoring via radio telemetry to determine den tree habitat selection. Staff also assisted with spruce grouse brood survival counts and operational support was provided to the state of Iowa for the interstate osprey chick translocation effort for restoration purposes.

Personnel items of note include the addition to the Hayward Team of Mike Bulgrin as the new wildlife technician FTE transferring here from Peshtigo where he was previously employed as a forestry technician. .

Price County received near record rainfall amounts during June and July. A 6-inch rainfall event in July caused major problems and nearly resulted in the loss of a 200-foot spillway and associated flowage at the Spring Creek Wildlife Area. The Kimberly Clark Wildlife Area had a major road wash-out during this rain event, and the Hay Creek Hoffman Lake Wildlife Area had a failed water-control structure that has deteriorated even more, resulting in the breach of the main dam.

Most wild rice beds in Price County were flooded in June or July, resulting in floating leaf stage rice being ripped from the substrate. Rice that survived was flooded again later on in July, and much was killed. Some patchy rice remains, but we continue to get rain weekly. Waterfowl, ricers and hunters will greatly miss the benefits of the rice crop this year, and the hope is that sufficient latent seed remains to re-start the beds next year.

This year, the bear bait survey in the county resulted in 84% hits, - one of the highest rates ever in Price County. The observed Ruffed Grouse broods have been small in number this spring and early summer but, considering the extremely wet conditions, are still more abundant than expected. Sightings of turkey broods have been very sparse for the Price county area and will likely continue what appears to be a downward trend for birds in this northern range.

Invasive plant species control work has begun, and roadside and trail mowing is soon to follow.

This spring season was an especially busy one for personnel at Ladysmith who work on wildlife projects in both Taylor and Rusk counties. In addition to the annually recurring spring duties, the entire crew as well as other Wildlife Management staff from the Upper Chippewa and Lake Superior Areas were involved with a sharp-tailed grouse translocation effort aimed at increasing genetic diversity of the sharp-tailed grouse population that inhabit the area around Pershing Wildlife Area in Taylor county. First, male sharptails were trapped at the main Pershing dancing ground for a routine health check that included getting blood drawn and shipped to Madison for analysis. At this same time, sharp-tailed grouse were being captured at the donor sites in Douglas County by Lake Superior WM staff with similar inspection and blood collection taking place. During the peak of the sharp-tailed grouse breeding season in late April, when hen attendance at dancing grounds is most prevalent, female sharptails were trapped at the Douglas county sites by wildlife staff of both areas. Once in the hand, the birds had blood and feathers collected for health screening and genetic analysis, were given a band and transported to Pershing Wildlife Area for release. At Pershing, the transport boxes were remotely opened at the main dancing ground, and the newly arrived hens

were serenaded with male sharp-tailed grouse display sounds being played on a recorder and silhouettes and mounts of displaying males in place on the ground.

Ladysmith staff have been spending a large amount of time this spring cleaning up the site at the new 537 acres acquisition of the former Big Rock Game Farm, which is now part of the Pershing Wildlife Area. Clean-up has included taking down acres of old pheasant pen netting and poles, removing internal and boundary fence, picking up scattered tires and scrap metal, coordinating asbestos removal in several old buildings on the property, and setting up 220 acres of sharecropping for eventual conversion to warm-season grass. Much remains to be done at this site but the eventual pay off should be a good one for wildlife and those that appreciate them.

Other more routine activities for Ladysmith staff included monitoring and regulating water levels on 17 flowages, conducting surveys of bears, grouse, woodcock, frogs, hawks and owls as well as being an observer for the northern aerial waterfowl flight, participating as wildlife expert in the Flambeau State forest master plan, site preparation for prescribed burning, maintaining roads, parking lots, dikes, posting and boundaries on 6 properties totaling over 11,000 acres, and coordinating wildlife-related activities with two county forests (Rusk and Taylor). Wildlife education is another important element of the wildlife picture provided to a wide audience over much of northern and central Wisconsin by the well known and in demand Chris Cold of Ladysmith. Chris is active as a wildlife educator for just about any type of public audience from youth expos and outdoor skills to in-school seminars and nature centers. Much of Chris's travel expenses for education work are picked up by the sponsoring entity in the form of donations to a DNR gift account which allows Chris to provide positive wildlife influence to a larger audience over a much larger geographic area.

Projects that are in the works for the immediate future by the Ladysmith staff include hosting the Wildlife Policy Team at the August meeting, hosting the Northern Region Annual Wildlife meeting Aug. 31 – Sept. 1, setting up fall big game and turkey registration and proceeding with a bid sale or demolition of remaining buildings associated with new acquisition at Pershing Wildlife Area.

Elk Management Efforts: The first elk calf found during this year's calving season was estimated born on May 13. That marked the end of the 2009/2010 elk year and the start of the 2010/2011 elk year. With losses observed since the end of December we estimated the elk herd at 131 as of May 13. This is the same number we had at the beginning of calving season in 2009, so that was zero growth for the 2009/2010 elk year. However, our early spring and lush green-up has resulted in excellent calf development and excellent health for cows and calves (see the 2010 calving season report below). We estimate 38 calves were born this year. Calf losses thus far have been light. Our current estimate is 164 elk. The best news is that our representative sample of 23 calves included 12 males and 10 females (1 unknown) and calf losses are light so far. This is one of the best sex ratios seen in the past 10 years. The other "exceptional" news is that we did not observe any bear predation of the 23 calves found, so far. No doubt we'll lose more elk during the rest of the elk year, but we're off to a good start.

We've collected 20 hair samples for UW Stevens Point graduate student, Scott Roepke, who's investigating the genetic variability of the Clam Lake herd. With the 20 samples collected this calving season, last calving season samples, and those from last winter's trapping...Scott has a good start. He's also made arrangements to obtain 100 samples

from the Michigan elk herd (the source of our herd) and will compare his findings with those of other elk genetic studies around North America. Scott will also be using our population information to develop other options for population census.

This year we had an early spring. Over 90 percent of snow was gone by March 9. By April 5, 50 percent of the ditches were green. By April 8 about 50 percent of the trembling aspens had leafed out, and by April 10 the maples started to leaf out. Ditches were 75 percent green by April 14. This had been the earliest spring observed since the elk arrived in 1995. Conditions would have been excellent if we had received significant rain prior to calving. During April and May, before calving started, we only received 7 days of between a quarter to half an inch of rain—none more than ½ inch. However, soil conditions that carried over from snow melt made a difference in vegetation development, ergo improved cow condition and fetal development.

We monitored 39 potentially bred cows, searching 26 of them 39 times, to find and attach radio collars to 23 calves (found 1 calf for every 1.7 searches). We estimate that 38 calves were born. Calf weights ranged from 27 to 50 pounds (the 50 pounder was a 1-day-old male, found on May 16 from Cow 65—11 years old). Average calf weight was 38 pounds, similar to the exceptional year we saw in 2007 (where we also had an early green up). We did not observe any still-births nor cow mortality due to birthing complications. We did have one 33 pound bull calf die a day after birth due to birthing complications, but most calves were above average in size, healthy and feisty. Calf condition was considered advanced this year with some 3-day-olds requiring us to chase. Most often this age class relies on hiding. This year we found 12 males and 10 females (1 unknown). This is our second best sex ratio in the past 10 years. Extrapolating observed numbers to the estimated total results in 20 males and 18 females. However, we've already experienced 3 observed losses, which expands to 5 estimated lost, or 33 calves remaining (33 plus 131 equals 164 total elk). Observed losses are less than half of what we lost last year at this time (3 in 2010 compared to 7 in 2009...expanded to 5 in 2010 compared to 14 in 2009).

Our searching efforts this year resulted in 23 calves found, second only to the 24 found in 2007. We could not have had such a successful season without the help from the 164 citizen volunteers who helped us find those 23 calves. Special thanks to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Wisconsin Natural Resource Foundation volunteers, Dr. Abigail Stowell (found 2 calves) other private citizen volunteers, Department staff Beth Blicharz (personally found 3 calves), Mike Bulgrin, Ken Jonas, Mike Zeckmeister, Gary Duns Moor, Tom Carlson, Mark Rasmussen, Jason Fleener and the wildlife crew from the South Central Region, and one of the best friends Wisconsin elk have, Jeff Morden.

During the last 6 months we made 2,100 telemetry location determinations and 4,786 telemetry mortality checks. During this quarter we gave 24 elk presentations to a total of 411 participants. We also gave 3 print and 1 radio interviews. We received help on 5 days of field work projects from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) volunteers and LCO Youth Conservation Corps. We also worked on 3 days of field work projects with the Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation.

We received approval of about \$19,000 worth of grant funding from the RMEF for the 2010/2011 elk year, that include elk monitoring, "assisted dispersal" and the Chequamegon High School monitoring of the eastern subgroup near Butternut.

Project staff produced a 44-page issue analysis for the "Assisted Dispersal" project, which included analysis of the past 9 years of elk telemetry locations. The focus of the assisted dispersal proposal is to move elk from the existing Clam Lake herd to other suitable locations within the approved Elk Management Project boundary to more rapidly expand and populate the elk range. During our existing winter trapping efforts, we propose to take incidentally captured yearling and 2-year olds, load them into a livestock trailer, and relocate them to a 3-acre acclimation pen at a predetermined site, at least 10 to 15 miles away. The elk would be held there until spring green-up, when they would be released to hopefully populate the new site. As part of this project we also looked at the 13 wolf pack territories on the Clam Lake Elk Range with the cooperative help of Adrian Wydeven and Jane Wiedenhoef, that will aid us in siting potential dispersal areas away from the centers of wolf activity areas.

Headwaters Area Update: The Headwaters Area encompasses six county's including: Lincoln, Langlade, Oneida, Vilas, Forest, and Florence.

Every spring presents unique challenges, and 2010 was no exception. April and May were warm and dry. Fire danger was extreme, and prescribed burns were generally discouraged. The major exception was in Langlade County, where Eric Borchert was able to burn 6 units totaling 232 acres. These burns were conducted with assistance from Forestry, Facilities & Lands, and Fisheries staff. Eric took advantage of the dry spring to repair over 0.5 mile of dikes at Ackley Wildlife Area and to repair 1.25 miles of roads and trails on Ackley and other wildlife areas.

Master planning at Powell Marsh Wildlife Area is still on hold as we wait for neighbors on Dead Pike Lake to conduct a series of studies of water quality and Lake Association attitudes. Early reports show that the downstream Dead Pike Lake has excellent water quality and contains a diverse and abundant plant community.

Water management has been a challenge in recent years. During the past several years of drought, maintaining required minimum flows has been difficult. Wild rice beds have been inaccessible for harvest or for foraging waterfowl. However, the Headwaters has received 10-15" of rain during June and July. Most impoundments are at full pool. Rice beds look very promising. Linda Winn, Bruce Bacon and Eric Kroening partnered with USDA staff to band ducks in Vilas County this spring. One hundred two total birds were captured, and 98 new captures were banded. All birds were tested for Avian Influenza.

Despite the wet weather, mowing of forest openings and trails is keeping pace. About 190 openings and 46 miles of trail are scheduled to be mowed in Lincoln and Langlade County forests and DNR wildlife areas this summer. Rick Weide is coordinating this work to be done by a combination of Wildlife, Forestry, and Facilities & Lands staff.

A combination of extensive drought, liberal harvest seasons and intensive control efforts on trout streams has substantially reduced the beaver population in the Headwaters. John Olson is working with Fisheries and Wildlife staff to examine our beaver management plan. Jeremy Holtz is leading efforts for the Headwaters Area. We hope that local fishery and wildlife biologists will ultimately agree which streams will be candidates for beaver control to favor trout habitat.

With the imminent threat of white nose syndrome in bats, baseline information about species distribution and abundance is important. The DNR has a citizen-based

monitoring program for citizens to assist in collecting bat data using an Anabat ultrasound detector. The detector records the ultrasonic bat sonogram and makes them audible to humans. An attached GPS unit records the survey route. Because the sonogram is species specific, this device enables surveys of species distribution. Linda Winn has conducted several surveys on land and on lakes in Vilas and Oneida counties and has trained some interested citizens to do their own surveys.

St. Croix Area Update: The St. Croix Area includes Burnett, Washburn, Polk, and Barren counties. This Area also includes the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Work Unit. This Area has had an Area Manager vacancy for the past two years. This position has been greatly missed.

Twenty two small wetland restoration projects were completed on the Straight Lake Wildlife Area in Polk County through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). NAWCA conserves North America's waterfowl, fish and wildlife resources while producing a variety of environmental and economic benefits. Its success is driven by partnerships involving federal, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations like DU, and community groups. Every federal dollar provided by NAWCA must be matched by at least one dollar from non-federal sources. Because the program is so effective, NAWCA funds are usually tripled or quadrupled on the local level. More than \$1 billion in federal grants has been allocated for NAWCA projects, a figure that has leveraged an additional \$3 billion from matching and non-matching funds. Since its inception, more than 1,600 NAWCA projects have contributed to the conservation of more than 25 million acres of habitat across North America.

We met our Canada goose banding quota of 500 birds this summer. Our objective was to have a well-dispersed sampling of birds within the 4 county-wide area and staying as close to our quota as possible. We banded 505 new birds this July. Our goose capture and banding efforts have become community outreach events that include young and old alike. This is a great opportunity to expose people to wildlife management techniques and explain the “why” behind “what” we do.

Glacial Lake Grantsburg Work Unit Update: The Glacial Lake Grantsburg Work Unit consists of four large wildlife properties in Western Burnett County: Crex Meadows, Amsterdam Sloughs, Fish Lake, and Danbury Wildlife Areas. Recent activities included:

- With the return of moisture in June 2010, we pumped enough water to flood over 1,000 acres to a depth of 12”. This allowed us to refill over 5,000 acres of drought-ravaged wetlands.
- Conducted Canada goose banding in Burnett and Polk Counties.
- Conducted dancing-ground surveys for sharp tailed grouse.
- Conducted waterfowl brood surveys on Crex and Fish Lake Wildlife Areas.
- Conducted surveys for ruffed grouse, pheasant, woodcock, sandhill cranes, wolves, small mammals, and anurans.
- Maintained 37 acres of native grass and forb plantings with herbicide and mowing.
- Maintained 175 of grasslands by prescribed burning.
- Maintained 1,518 acres of Pine Barrens habitat by prescribed burning.
- Managed 210 acres of oak savanna through heavy mowing and herbicide application.

- Supported operations for the Crex Meadows Camp through cooperation with the Northwest Wisconsin Concentrated Employment Program.
- Site-prepared 425 acres for oak savanna restoration project by whole tree timber harvest.
- Provided technical assistance to many nuisance wildlife complaints, especially for bear, badgers, woodchuck, and pocket gopher.
- Supported recovery monitoring for the Federally-endangered Karner Blue Butterfly.

Educators from Crex Meadows offered programs to 763 students from the Grantsburg and surrounding area schools in May/June 2010. Pre-kindergarten through eight grade students participated in pond studies, wildlife lessons, prairie investigations, and habitat explorations.

Early Childhood Environmental Education: Nature's Little Explorers: Young children and their parents have explored all that Crex Meadows has to offer while learning about bugs, birds, mushrooms, food chains, and other natural phenomena. This program has provided educational opportunities for about 25 children and adults on a weekly basis at the Education Center throughout the summer.

Full Moon Series: Crex Meadows has offered a monthly program on the full moon of each month since February 2010 and will continue until January 2011. Along with revealing the science and folklore of the full moon and its phases, visitors discover the seasonal changes occurring at Crex Meadow and participate in a full moon hike. This series has turned out to be a success, as 15 to 25 visitors consistently attend the program.

Fall Conference: Rare Species of the Barrens: Crex Meadows Wildlife Education Center is hosting its third annual wildlife conference this September. The conference will focus on rare animals, plants, and fungi that make Crex Meadows such a unique natural area. Experts in the fields of mushrooms, plants, turtles, birds, and butterflies will be sharing their knowledge during a day-long conference. The conference includes a catered lunch and a field trip. Proceeds benefit wildlife education and management at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area.

The Crex Meadows Photo Club had a successful first year. In September 2009, a group of amateur and semi-professional photographers began the Crex Photo Club at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. Many photographers frequent Crex Meadows and Fish Lake Wildlife Areas and the club is an excellent platform for people to share techniques and locations, as well as show off their photos to others who have similar interests. The Crex Photo Club meets on the first Saturday of each month at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center. In May, members of the photo club taught a class on Basic D-SLR to photographers new to Digital photography, and are planning another class in October. A summer Nature Photography Seminar was held on August 7<sup>th</sup>, featuring professional photographers discussing creativity in photography, and included a field trip into the wildlife area to practice newly-learned techniques. The third-annual Crex Nature Photography Contest also took place that week, with voting open to the public at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center. Winning photos will be featured in the 2011 Crex Meadows Calendar, which will be available for sale at the Visitor Center or online at [www.crexmeadows.org](http://www.crexmeadows.org) in mid-September. *Contributed by Mike Zeckmeister and other Northern Region staff*