15. DEER MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES [LFB Paper 458]

Governor/Joint Finance: Provide $1,300,500 in 2013-14 and $641,500 beginning in 2014-15 with 1.5 positions for deer management initiatives. The administration indicates that the Department anticipates increased federal funding over the 2013-15 biennium from Pittman-Robertson grants (funded through an 11 percent excise tax on sporting arms and a 10 percent tax on sales of pistols and revolvers and apportioned to states primarily based on land area and the number of paid hunting and fishing license holders). The Department plans to use the funds to support several deer management projects, primarily items identified in the 2012 Kroll report.

On October 1, 2011, DNR entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DOA to cover expenditures associated with a deer trustee, Dr. James C. Kroll, and two other deer management experts, David C. Guynn, Jr. and Gary L. Alt, for a study of white-tailed deer management in Wisconsin. In July, 2012, Dr. Kroll released a report entitled, "Final Report and

PR - $42,800

SEG 42,800

Total $0

Funding Positions

FED $1,942,000 1.50 NATURAL RESOURCES -- FISH, WILDLIFE, AND RECREATION Page 461

Recommendations By Wisconsin White-Tailed Deer Trustee and Review Committee". Overall, the report encouraged DNR to increase public involvement in deer management, particularly by landowners, hunters and the 11 tribes of Wisconsin. The report made a number of recommendations including recommendations related to: (a) deer population management; (b) hunting regulations and seasons; (c) predator management; (d) chronic wasting disease management; (e) development of a Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP); as well as recommendations related to DNR research topics (including deer habitat, forest health, and public opinion) and technological needs (the report recommended a statewide geospatial information system be developed in Wisconsin to aid in land management). Funding would be provided for the following projects (items and estimated costs are listed in order of the Department's current priority, but are subject to change):

	2013-14	2014-15	FTE		
Update Land Cover Assessment	$300,000.00	$150,000.00	0		
Statewide Trail Camera Monitoring Project	$350,000.00	$60,000.00	1		
Buck Mortality and Fawn Predation Studies	$170,000.00	$70,000.00	0		
Herd Health Metrics to Assess Deer Population Status	$110,500.00	$110,500.00	0		
Deer Management Assistance Pilot Program	$0.00	$0.00	0*		
Research to Set Management Goals and Strategies	$45,000.00	$45,000.00	0.5		
Citizen Wildlife Observational Surveys	$30,000.00	$30,000.00	0		
Deer Habitat Management Review Committees	$6,000.00	$6,000.00	0		
Baiting and Feeding Study	$40,000.00	$20,000.00	0		
Disease Response Plan	$115,000.00	$90,000.00	0		
Citizen Monitoring Initiative	$55,000.00	$10,000.00			
Charge fees for Antlerless Tags in CWD Zone	$4,000.00	$0.00	0		
Quicker CWD Test Reporting	$45,000.00	$20,000.00	0		
Field Necropsies Training and Implementation	$30,000.00	$30,000.00	0		
Total	**$1,300,500.00**	**$641,500.00**	**1.5**		

*1.0 federal position was provided for a DMAP coordinator through the DOA allotment process in February, 2013.

Update Land Cover Assessment. Currently, the Department uses land cover data dating from 1992. Land cover data describes the types of land cover throughout the state (such as croplands, forests, prairie, urban structures, wetlands, and water bodies, among others). Funding would be used to acquire satellite imagery of the entire state. For each satellite image scene, automated computer processes would be run to derive a representation of land cover in a format that can be used in a Geographic Information System (GIS). Then, personnel (DNR staff and potentially partners from the University of Wisconsin) would visit various locations to verify whether the type of land cover identified in the satellite imagery is consistent with that found on the ground, a process known as "ground truthing". For each satellite image scene, information gathered during the ground truthing process would be used to assess the quality of the automated land cover classification; how closely the land cover type identified by the computer processing matches the actual land cover found on the ground. This information, together with other current geospatial data (including high-resolution aerial photography) would then be used to adjust the automated computer processing to improve the accuracy of the land cover classification. The individual satellite scenes would be compiled into a statewide updated land cover database in a GIS format that could be used to support a variety of needs for DNR, other government agencies, the University of Wisconsin, and a variety of other stakeholders. Updated land cover data would assist the Department in understanding current land use and wildlife habitat and assist with planning recreational opportunities and managing timber resources, as well as providing data to aid deer density evaluations, and habitat suitability models for deer throughout the state. In addition, the bill would require DOA to establish an implementation plan for a statewide digital parcel map.

Statewide Trail Camera Monitoring Project. The Department plans to develop a standardized statewide citizen trail camera research and monitoring project. In addition to predator information, the cameras would provide a measure of fawn recruitment rates, estimates of buck densities, and age structure. Citizen participants would submit all observations and photos of predators and unique animals via the Department's website. The bill would provide 1.0 research scientist-advanced position to annually conduct regional workshops and develop training materials for the citizen volunteers, oversee team members in responding to volunteer inquires and coordination of cameras and training materials, develop and implement web applications and statistical packages to determine animal abundance and distribution through an interactive website, secure external funding to support research activities and collaborate with field managers and other researchers. In addition, the research scientist would be responsible for developing a comprehensive reporting system to inform volunteers, interested citizens, DNR managers and administrators of results on a semi-annual basis and conducting presentations to citizen groups and professional organizations and producing peer-reviewed publications.

Buck Mortality and Fawn Predation Studies. Funding would be utilized for a two-year continuation of studies being conducted in northern and east-central Wisconsin using radio telemetry to track fawns and adult deer to evaluate deer survival and causes of deer mortality.

Herd Health Metrics to Assess Deer Population Status. Historically, the Department has used the Sex-Age-Kill (SAK) model to estimate the deer population following harvest and determine deer management unit (DMU) goals. Funding would be used to utilize herd health metrics to evaluate deer herd populations based on their impacts to the ecosystem. The 2012 Kroll report recommended that,

rather than reporting numeric population goals and estimates of deer abundance at the DMU level, DNR should move to a system where deer management goals are expressed as a range of acceptable conditions across a set of criteria (e.g. harvest success or harvest levels, crop damage claims, deer vehicle collisions, forest regeneration success, etc.) within each DMU. The population goals would be expressed as either to increase, stabilize, or decrease deer population density as measured by these criteria.

Deer Management Assistance Pilot Program. The bill would require DNR to establish a Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). Under this program, DNR is required to provide deer management assistance to participating landowners. Further, the Department would be required to provide a method for collecting information from participating landowners about deer health and the deer population in Wisconsin and for receiving suggestions from participating landowners about managing the deer population. DNR must analyze the information received and use it to improve deer health and manage the deer population in Wisconsin. The bill would also require DNR to promulgate administrative rules to implement this program, specify that the Department may promulgate emergency rules without finding an emergency to implement the program, and that the emergency rules may remain in effect until June 30, 2015, or the date on which permanent rules take effect, whichever is sooner. The bill would specify that DNR may establish fees for participation in DMAP to be deposited in a newly created continuing appropriation in the fish and wildlife account of the conservation fund to be used for administering DMAP. No estimate of revenue is made for this appropriation. According to the Kroll report, "the primary goal of most DMAPs is to allow landowners and hunters to work together with the state agency to manage deer on a site-specific basis". Currently, twenty states "utilize DMAPs to facilitate deer management on private lands at the local level by involving landowners and hunters". These programs vary by state, and may involve both public and private lands. Participation is voluntary and is generally open to landowners, groups of landowners, or organizations such as a hunting club (some states have minimum acreage requirements). Generally, landowners and the state agency (in this case DNR) work together to establish a goal of whether to increase, stabilize, or decrease, the deer population on the property enrolled in a DMAP. These objectives are then accomplished through the issuance of DMAP antlerless tags. The tags are valid only on the enrolled property, may not be used for antlered bucks, and are issued to the landowner who distributes them to individual hunters. (1.0 federal position for a DMAP coordinator was provided to DNR in February, 2013, through the DOA allotment process).

Research to Set Management Goals and Strategies. The bill would provide 0.5 research scientist-advanced position to develop human dimensions (public opinion) research and conduct outreach at the local level to gather input for setting goals and implementing strategies for managing the deer population. The research scientist would meet regularly with stakeholders to gather input for developing, coordinating, and implementing annual surveys to assess social attitudes associated with deer management including, but not limited to, hunter satisfaction, rules and regulations, season structure, deer numbers, public attitudes on deer densities, herd health, vehicle collisions, browsing impacts, and crop damage. They would also oversee data collection and processing, analyze data using statistical software, generate annual reports of results, and provide information to stakeholders to

inform deer management policy and decision-making. Further, the research scientist would also be responsible for presenting information to citizen groups via the internet, in publications, and at meetings and producing peer-reviewed publications and securing external funding to supplement ongoing research activities.

Citizen Wildlife Observational Surveys. Funding would provide for the expansion of the Department's Operation Deer Watch (ODW) program and Deer Hunter Wildlife Survey program by developing journals to capture data. Through ODW, citizens record deer sightings during the summer months to monitor Wisconsin's deer reproduction. The goal of ODW is to gauge the number of fawns produced. This assists deer managers in making deer population estimates. Through the Deer Hunter Wildlife Survey program, deer hunters provide wildlife data used to monitor the relative abundance and distribution of deer and other mammalian/avian wildlife species in Wisconsin including deer, raccoon, skunk, porcupine, red and gray fox, turkey, ruffed grouse, coyote, bear, otter, fisher, bobcat, house cat, badger, wolf, opossum, and elk. Because hunters often spend many quiet observation hours in the woods, they can provide valuable information about species that is often difficult to measure.

Deer Habitat Management Review Committees. Funding would be utilized to create county-based committees comprised of stakeholder and tribal representatives, chaired by local Conservation Congress representatives, to annually review deer management issues. The Kroll report recommended involving the public more actively in deer management decision-making at the local level.

Baiting and Feeding Study. Funding would provide for the development and implementation of a study on the human dimensions (public opinion) surrounding baiting and feeding deer through the use of focus groups with current and past bait-using hunters as well as those who have never used bait, for the purpose of developing policy. The practice of baiting and feeding is currently prohibited in 32 counties.

Disease Response Plan. Funding would cover the development of sampling protocols and the implementation of surveillance efforts to determine how the area surveyed and number of samples taken affect the perceived prevalence of deer diseases, such as CWD and EHD (Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease).

Citizen Monitoring Initiative. Funding would cover refining the sick deer reporting system that is available to the public and reinforcing and supporting public relations efforts to encourage the reporting of sick deer. Citizen detection and reporting of diseased deer on the landscape is critical to detecting and managing wildlife diseases.

Charge Fees for Antlerless Tags in CWD Zone. Funding would support implementing bonus tags in Department-confirmed CWD areas (see the following *Bonus Deer Hunting Permits and CWD Management* entry).

Quicker CWD Test Reporting. In order to increase the speed with which CWD test results are provided to hunters, funding would provide for the development of a decentralized statewide approach to improve sample collection and testing turn-around.

Field Necropsies Training and Implementation. Funding would be provided for the development of a necropsy-oriented training program that would enable wildlife biologists to perform field necropsies (a necropsy is an autopsy performed on an animal). Funding would be used for training materials, training, and personal protective equipment and sample submissions for 10 animals per area from 46 biologists statewide.