



# Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society

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<http://wildlife.org/Wisconsin>

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*Approved: 23 October 2010*

**Position Statement on:**

## **Deer Herd Management**

**By the  
Deer Issues Committee  
Of the  
Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society (WCTWS)**

### **Status**

Wisconsin has experienced more than two decades of over-abundant deer numbers. Since 1984, deer populations in Wisconsin have been above community-established population goals (with the possible exception of 1992).

Increased agricultural crop damage and car-deer crashes are obvious consequences of over-abundant deer. The emergence of chronic wasting disease and bovine tuberculosis among deer in the Upper Midwest has heightened concerns of disease establishment and the over-abundant herds have increased transmission risk. Less obvious to the public are the impacts of deer on trees, wildflowers, threatened and endangered species, songbirds, and other elements of the ecosystem.

For example, a survey of DNR foresters in 2005 can serve as an index to the extent of deer damage in forest ecosystems of the state. The survey qualitatively rated deer impacts to tree regeneration in each county by five categories ranging from 'little damage' to 'frequently a problem'. On a scale of 1 to 5, the statewide average of 72 counties exceeded 4. Thirty-six counties scattered from Bayfield to Green rated a 5.

Wisconsin's landscape creates an excellent matrix of habitats providing high carrying capacity and reproductive potential for deer. Yet, a number of recent environmental and social factors have contributed to increasing carrying capacity and deer numbers. These factors include the frequency of mild winters, the increased popularity of baiting and feeding deer, the reluctance to embrace proven harvest strategies (e.g., Earn-a-Buck and supplemental antlerless seasons), and the growing number of landowners that are restricting access to privately managed "their" deer.

Deer are of high economic and esthetic value in Wisconsin, but their current abundance has diminished their value and relegated them to the status of a pest in some circles. Restoring deer populations to ecologically sustainable and community-established population goals must be a high priority for the sake of the deer, society, and the environment.

**It is the position of WCTWS to emphasize that**

- a. deer and other wildlife continue to be recognized as a public resource under the Public Trust Doctrine, owned by citizens and managed by the State for the benefit of all.
- b. science is the basis for exercising wildlife policies in accordance with the Roosevelt Doctrine espoused by Aldo Leopold and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.
- c. deer populations be expediently brought to and maintained at goals established in Wisconsin Administrative Code and that goals be revised as necessary to balance the benefits of deer with the problems and impacts that deer may cause when too abundant and to maintain a healthy deer herd.
- d. public hunting is the preferred mechanism for deer herd control.
- e. non-traditional harvest strategies be used as necessary to maintain herds at goals.
- f. research efforts increase to quantify densities of deer that are compatible with public safety, hunting, timber production, disease management, and conservation of terrestrial ecosystems so that these values can be reflected in the establishment of deer population goals.
- g. educational and legislative efforts increase to change human attitudes and behaviors that are confounding deer herd management and to acquaint the public and elected officials with the ecological and societal consequences of abundant deer populations and methods necessary for proper deer management.

**The Wildlife Society is an international organization of wildlife biologists that has chapters in every state and many countries. It is the largest organization of professional wildlife biologists in the world and exists to promote excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education.**

This position statement expires 1 November 2015 unless revised, extended or withdrawn.