

2018 WCTWS Fall Technical Training Summary

By Jeremy Holtz, President

We hosted our WCTWS technical training event in September on the Flambeau River State Forest in north central Wisconsin. It was a full two-day event, and we had a lot of great participation and excellent presenters throughout. On the first day, we boarded a bus and travelled to the elk quarantine facility where wildlife veterinarian Dr. Lindsey Long and WDNR wildlife biologist and noted elk whisperer Laine Stowell gave us the history of the elk reintroduction process. We also saw sites where habitat work and timber management have enhanced the area for elk and other wildlife. Afterwards, we enjoyed a grilled supper and social event, followed by a campout at Connors Lake campground.

The next day started off with a trip afield to look for bugling elk; while there wasn't much for bugling, participants had a great opportunity to see a bull up close. We then had an excellent line-up of presenters talking about bats, deer browse impacts to forest regeneration, cooperative wildlife management in the ceded territory, sharptailed grouse reintroduction, chemical immobilization uses and limitations, social science applications, and the "elk in Wisconsin" kiosk project.

A huge THANK YOU to the organizers, presenters, and everyone else who helped make this a success. I especially want to thank Bob Holsman and Scott Hygnstrom, without whom the event would not have taken place. I also want to thank the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society, and the North Central Section of The Wildlife Society for providing funding to make this event basically free for attendees.

To see my photos from the event, you can visit our [WCTWS Facebook page](#); I have set up an album and each photo is captioned.

A Morning with the Elk Whisperer

By Bob Holsman, Board Member

Laine Stowell has been the elk biologist for Wisconsin DNR for 19 years, a position he has held since the elk reintroduction effort began. He's overseen translocations and release of elk from both Michigan and Kentucky. He has tracked those animals closely and helped devise strategies to move them to where the food and cover will best support growth of the population. This fall marks a milestone in those efforts when the first state elk hunt in the modern era takes place.

Stowell is practically on a first name basis—or more accurately a first number basis—with many of those cervids sporting VHS-radio collars. We had the good fortune during the recent state chapter training to watch Laine work his calling magic on a couple of the bulls he keeps tabs on. Dawn was just breaking when he led a dozen of us down a gated trail and into the Flambeau River State Forest. He paused a couple of times and pulled out his wind tester. A puff of powder swirled a bit before dissipating. Laine blew his cow call and immediately a love-struck bull

returned a bugle, a noise that is arguably the most haunting, yet beautiful sound produced by any mammal in North America. Laine motioned us to follow and broke into a jog. Eventually the trail split and we took the left fork up a slight ridge and into a meadow. Laine stopped and motioned the group to duck. He called again and a large bull appeared and walked within 50 yards! He later told us that the bull was 8 years old, had been born near Clam lake, and moved to the state forest as part of an “assisted dispersal” strategy. Later at a second location, Laine guided us to an even larger bull that was in the company of at least three cows. It bugled at close range before slipping off the trail and back into the timber. For some of the UWSP students on the trip, the sightings represented their first encounters with elk in the wild.

In addition to the bugling trip, training attendees also got a tour of the elk quarantine facility from DNR veterinarian Lindsey Long. The tour also included stops to highlight aspen management on the state and county forest land. Research has established the importance of young aspen for elk, not only as forage, but also as escape cover from predators. Active management of young forests continues to be important for several species of game and non-game wildlife in northern Wisconsin. The goal is to eventually have 1,400 elk in Wisconsin. With more elk expected to arrive from Kentucky next year, Stowell and others expect the state to make additional progress toward that goal.