

# 2023 DEER SEASON FORECAST



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**The 2023 deer hunting season will bring increased opportunity for hunters to secure venison for the freezer and create memories to cherish for years to come. More antlerless harvest authorizations are available than last year in most parts of the state, as well as more late season opportunity in more counties, such as the Holiday Hunt and January archery seasons. In other words, 2023 is the year of opportunity!**

**Hunters should keep in mind that Wisconsin's varied landscapes support different deer population densities. The presence or absence of deer at a given time depends on a multitude of factors including forage, cover and hunting pressure. As always, spending time in the field and scouting prior to the hunting season is important! The DNR offers [resources](#) to help hunters get prepared, from public land mapping tools to recent harvest data trends to resources for CWD testing.**

## NEW FOR 2023

The antlerless-only holiday hunt will run Dec. 24 to Jan. 1 in 39 counties this year. Of these 39 counties, 31 will also be extending the archery and crossbow deer seasons to close Jan. 31, 2024.

Farmland Zone counties have modified the number of antlerless harvest authorizations that will be issued with each license. Two permits issued with each license is most common (28 County Deer Advisory Councils or CDACs) across the zone, which is consistent with past years. Sixteen CDACs (up from 14 in 2022) chose three permits, and three CDACs (up from two in 2022) are recommending four permits in 2023. The remaining Farmland Zone CDACs are recommending one permit be issued with each license. Some metro sub-units also have modified permit availability.

Baiting and feeding regulations have changed in select counties. For more information, visit [dnr.wi.gov](https://dnr.wi.gov) and search "[baiting and feeding regulations](#)."



## DEER MANAGEMENT ZONES AND UNITS

Wisconsin has four deer management zones (DMZs): Northern Forest, Central Forest, Central Farmland and Southern Farmland. These zones are divided into 77 deer management units (DMUs). DMUs follow county boundaries in most cases, and 10 counties are split by zone boundaries into separate Forest and Farmland DMUs. Antlerless deer permits are set at the DMU level, allowing for localized deer herd management.

Much of the state experienced another mild to moderate 22-23 winter. However, some northwest counties received an extremely high amount of snowfall, pushing their Winter Severity Index into the Very Severe category. In response to the severe winter, Iron County is not offering antlerless harvest authorizations this fall, but junior antlerless harvest authorizations will remain valid.

Farmland Zone DMUs increased permit availability and harvest opportunities are an effort to control herd densities, reduce agricultural damage, improve forest regeneration and minimize deer-related conflict. Hunters who fill their freezer early on and have additional harvest opportunities available are encouraged to hunt for others. The Deer Donation program is a great way to help meet antlerless harvest quotas in these counties while making a difference in your community for those who are food insecure.

For an overview of deer hunting rules, please check the [2023 Wisconsin Hunting Regulations available online](#) or at hunting license vendors.

For additional information, visit the DNR's [deer hunting webpage](#). There, you will find an abundance of helpful information including FAQs, maps, resources to help find a place to hunt and more.

## BONUS ANTLERLESS HARVEST AUTHORIZATIONS

Bonus antlerless permits went on sale Aug. 14 and can be purchased at a rate of one per person per day. Bonus harvest authorizations will be sold by zone according to the following schedule:

Monday, Aug. 14 at 10 a.m. (Northern Forest and Central Forest Zone)

Tuesday, Aug. 15 at 10 a.m. (Central Farmland Zone)

## 2023 SEASON DATES

### ARCHERY AND CROSSBOW

Sept. 16 to Jan. 7, 2024

### EXTENDED ARCHERY AND CROSSBOW

Jan. 8-31, 2024

### YOUTH DEER

Oct. 7-8

### GUN DEER HUNT FOR HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES\*

Oct. 7-15

### TRADITIONAL NINE-DAY GUN DEER

Nov. 18-26

### METRO SUB-UNIT GUN DEER \*\*

Nov. 18 to Dec. 6

### MUZZLELOADER

Nov. 27 to Dec. 6

### FOUR-DAY ANTLERLESS HUNT

Dec. 7-10

### ANTLERLESS-ONLY HOLIDAY HUNT\*\*

Dec. 24 to Jan. 1, 2024

\*On sponsored properties only

\*\*In select DMUs only.

See page 5 for details.



Wednesday, Aug. 16 at 10 a.m. (Southern Farmland Zone)

Thursday, Aug. 17 at 10 a.m. (All remaining tags may be purchased until the unit sells out or the deer hunting season ends.)

## COUNTY DEER ADVISORY COUNCILS (CDACS)

CDACs were formed in 2014 to increase public involvement in deer season decision-making. Representatives from local hunting or conservation clubs, forestry, agriculture, tourism and local governmental interests make up each council and are led by Wisconsin Conservation Congress delegates. A team of three liaisons from the DNR's wildlife, forestry and law enforcement programs attend CDAC meetings to present data from past seasons and offer professional perspectives. Each county's council members directly participate in reviewing and recommending population objectives, antlerless harvest quotas and antlerless harvest authorization levels. Members also provide recommendations on various season structure options, including opting to implement the Dec. 24 to Jan. 1 antlerless-only holiday hunt and extending the archery and crossbow seasons through Jan. 31.

For more information regarding County Deer Advisory Councils and to get involved, visit DNR's [CDAC webpage](#).

## PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Excellent public land deer hunting opportunities are in almost every corner of the state. Public lands, and lands open to public hunting, come in all shapes, sizes, habitat types and deer densities. Each requires specific hunting strategies. Familiarize yourself with property boundaries and key features prior to the season and consider connecting with adjacent private landowners to make any necessary mid-season contacts easier.

The DNR provides an [online](#)

[mapping tool](#) to help hunters find land on which to hunt.

## GO WILD LICENSING SYSTEM

Through [Go Wild](#), hunters can purchase their deer hunting licenses, select their antlerless harvest authorization(s), submit CWD sampling information, check CWD testing results and print all their license and permit documents for free from the comfort of home. For those looking to make an in-person purchase, there are still more than 1,000 license agents available to hunters. To find a license agent, visit the DNR's [license agent webpage](#).

As proof of license, hunters may present a paper copy of their license printed from Go Wild, their DNR-authenticated Wisconsin driver's license, a department-issued Conservation Card or a department-approved PDF of the license displayed on a mobile device.

## DEER HARVEST AUTHORIZATIONS

Since September 2017, hunters are no longer required to validate or physically tag a harvested deer. However, hunters must carry proof of their harvest authorizations (formerly called tags). Forms of proof include an original





paper harvest authorization, a reprint, a Go Wild Conservation Card, a DNR-authenticated Wisconsin driver's license or a department-approved digital file displayed on an electronic device. Hunters can continue to use paper copies that they have printed themselves and should keep in mind that they will need to use their unique harvest authorization number to register deer. A hunter may only hold a single copy of any individual harvest authorization when afield.

To replace a paper harvest authorization, the easiest option is to log onto your Go Wild account and reprint from home for free.

### **GAMEREG - ELECTRONIC HARVEST REGISTRATION**

Successful deer hunters may register their deer either online (fastest and easiest method) or by phone. They also have the option of registering electronically at a participating walk-in registration station. For a list of participating businesses offering walk-in registration, the

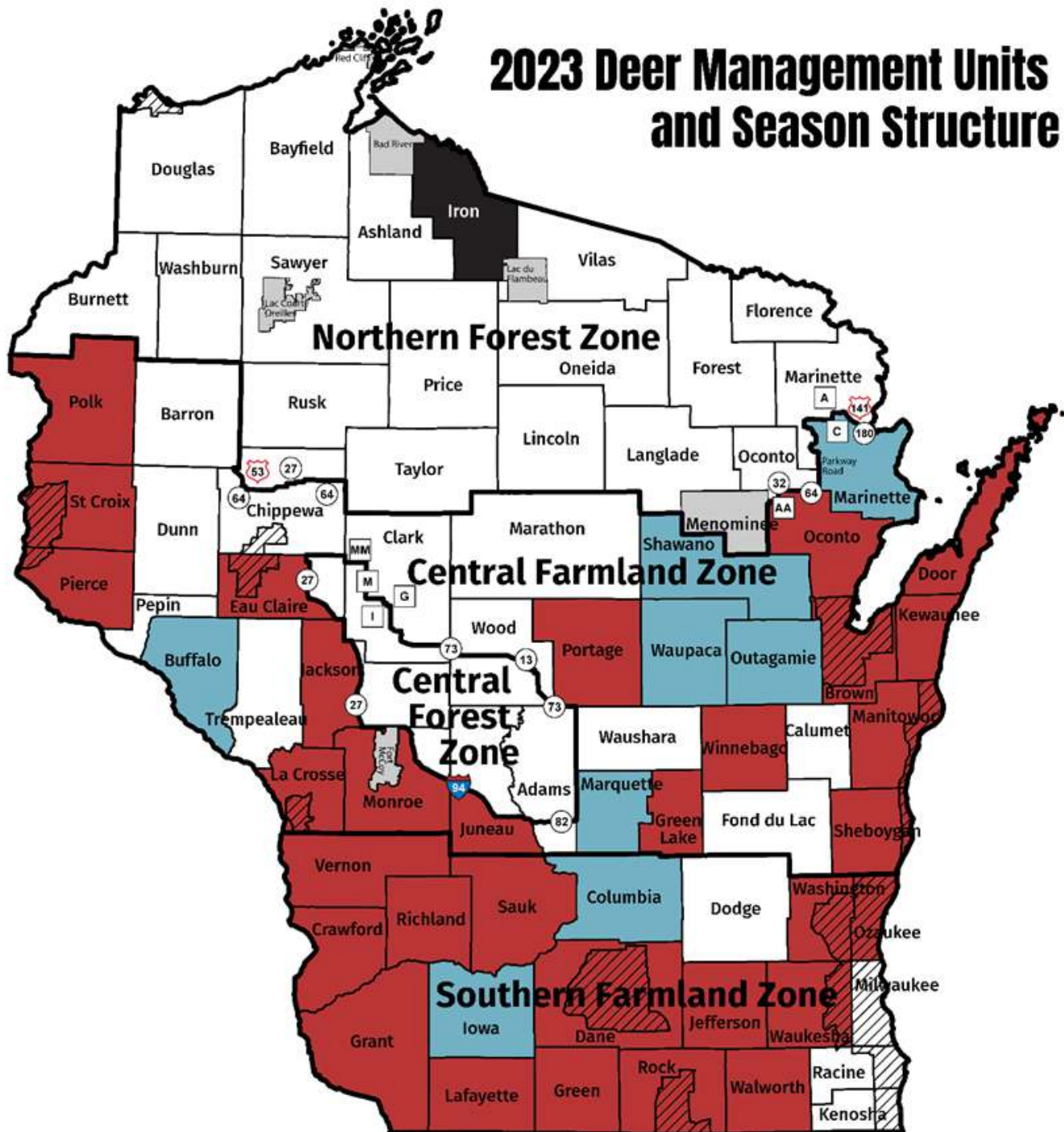
DNR website offers a [database of participating businesses](#).

To register a deer electronically, hunters will visit [gamereg.wi.gov](http://gamereg.wi.gov) or call 1-844-426-3734 (1-844-GAME-REG). To start, the electronic registration system will prompt hunters to enter the unique deer harvest authorization number for the harvest authorization they have filled as well as their date of birth. Then, harvest information such as the DMU in which the deer was harvested, age (adult or fawn) and sex (buck or doe) of the deer and weapon type used to harvest the animal will be collected. Once hunters have provided this information, they will receive a unique 10-character confirmation number. This number is no longer required to be written on a deer harvest authorization, but hunters are encouraged to record it.

All deer harvested during any deer season must be registered by 5 p.m. the day after harvest. For more information, visit the DNR's [electronic registration webpage](#).



# 2023 Deer Management Units and Season Structure



## 2023 Deer Season Structure

Statewide: Bucks plus antlerless by harvest authorization\*

- \*Buck only county: No antlerless harvest authorizations available for purchase  
Junior antlerless harvest authorizations remain valid
- Holiday Hunt: Antlerless only. Dec. 24 - Jan. 1
- Holiday Hunt: Antlerless only. Dec. 24 - Jan. 1 and Extended Archery Season: Jan. 8 - 31, 2024
- Metro Sub-unit: See regulations for detailed boundaries
- Non-quota area: No harvest authorizations issued by the DNR

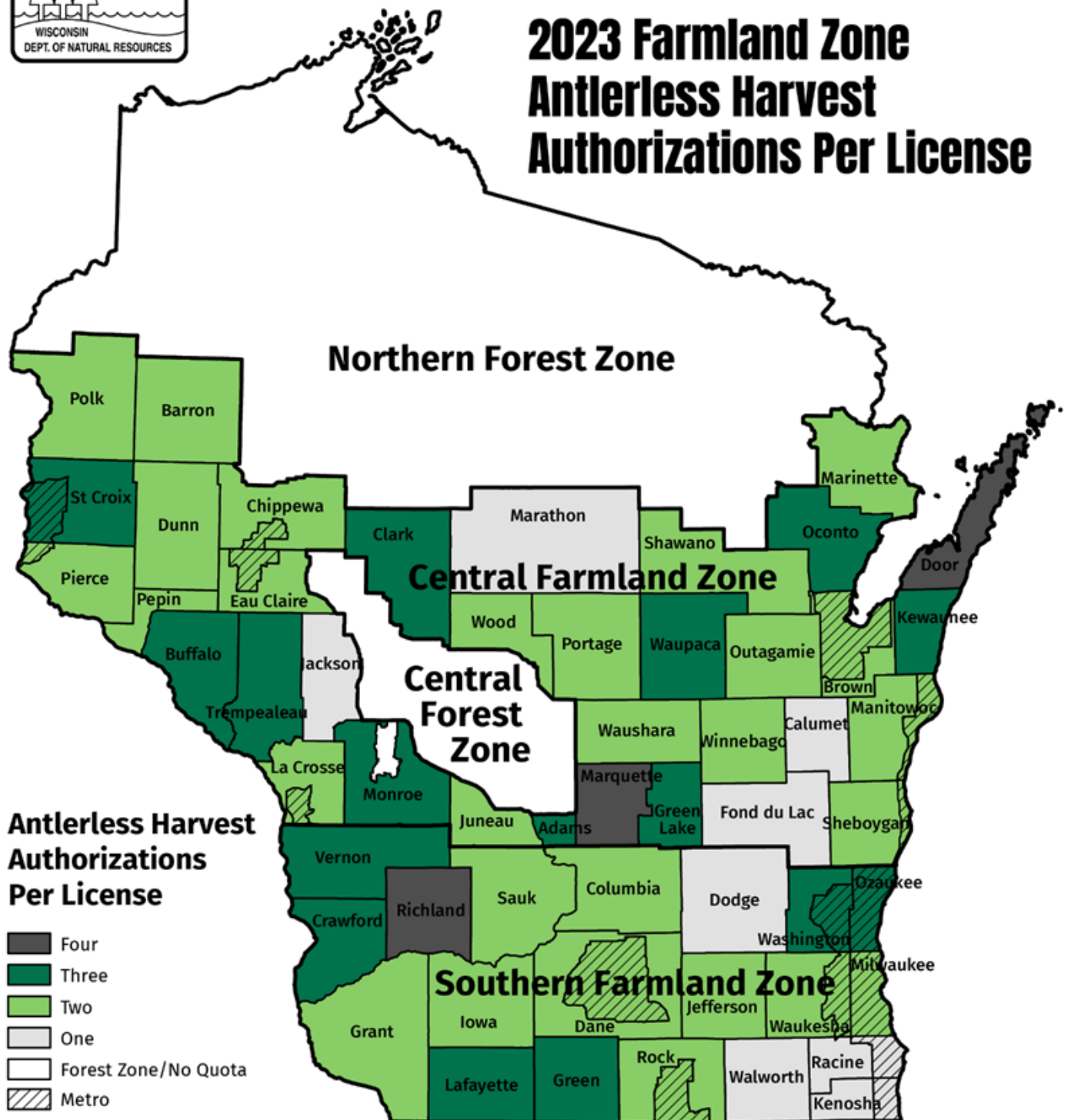


Updated June 30, 2023





# 2023 Farmland Zone Antlerless Harvest Authorizations Per License



Updated June 30, 2023

# CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

## HELP SLOW THE SPREAD OF CWD

CWD is a contagious neurological disease of deer, elk, moose and reindeer (caribou) caused by a misshapen form of a protein called a prion.

Infected deer shed CWD prions in their saliva, urine and feces. They can also shed prions after death as their bodies decompose into the soil. CWD is spread to healthy animals through contact with an infected animal's saliva, urine, blood, feces, carcass or contaminated environment. CWD prions are extremely resistant to destruction and disinfection. They can persist in the environment for a long time, exposing deer to the disease and making containment a challenge.

By taking precautions while in the field, hunters can minimize the spread of CWD. Using synthetic scents, refraining from baiting and feeding and proper deer carcass disposal are just a few of the many ways hunters can help. For more information on what you can do for the health of Wisconsin's deer herd, consult the [DNR's resource on slowing the spread](#).

## CWD SAMPLING ACROSS WISCONSIN

In 2023, CWD sampling will be available to all hunters through a combination of in-person, self-service and on-request sampling locations. Exact [sampling locations](#) will be available on the department's webpage prior to the 2023 archery and crossbow season. Hunters can use an on-line form in Go Wild to enter data required for a CWD sample, but the sample still needs to be brought to a CWD sampling location. CWD test results can also be found in Go Wild for hunters that use either the online form in Go Wild or the paper copy form.

This year, the DNR will continue its sampling effort in the southern part of the state where monitoring the disease pattern is important to understanding the dynamics of the disease.

Sampling will also continue in central counties and around wild and farm-raised positive detections statewide.

There are currently [60 CWD-affected counties in Wisconsin](#) from detections in both wild and farm-raised deer with 37 of these counties having at least one CWD positive detection in the wild herd. Wisconsin has monitored CWD since it was first detected in 2002. For more information, please visit the DNR's [CWD webpage](#).

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Individuals and organizations can volunteer to sponsor a self-service kiosk or deer carcass dumpster through the DNR's Adopt-a-Kiosk and Adopt-a-Dumpster programs. A cost-sharing option is offered by the department to offset the expense of sponsoring a dumpster. Find more information on how to [get involved on the DNR website](#).

The DNR is also partnering with individuals and organizations to provide convenient deer donation drop-off locations through the Deer Donation Partners Program. Partners will donate the cost of a refrigerated trailer to collect and transport donated deer to participating processors. For more information on this new program, contact [Grace Nugent](#), Assistant Wildlife Damage Specialist.

## BAITING AND FEEDING DEER

The DNR is required to prohibit baiting and feeding of deer on a county-by-county basis in accordance with State statute. Please [check the DNR website frequently](#) for updates as baiting and feeding bans may be enacted or extended during the 2023 deer season or beyond.

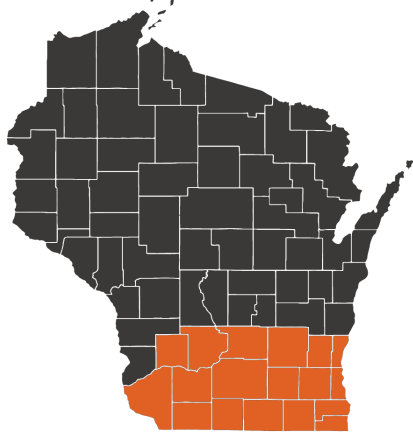
# 2023 REGIONAL FORECASTS

## SOUTHERN DISTRICT

**Eric Canania, DNR Deer Biologist**

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Across the Southern District, wildlife staff are eagerly anticipating the arrival of fall and the time-honored tradition of Wisconsin's deer season. Last year's deer harvest in the Southern District was on par with the past 5-year average. The mild winter conditions we experienced should lead to ample opportunities and happy hunters this coming fall.



Although spring was slow to start, warming temperatures and early rainfall quickly resulted in a good spring green-up that should have provided abundant cover and high-quality spring forage for does nursing fawns and bucks during antler development. In addition, antlerless harvests have been below recommended levels over the last couple of years and our highly productive farm ground continues to grow the deer population throughout much of the Southern Farmland Zone. Even with such favorable conditions, hunters need to keep in mind that there is great variation in the quality of the habitat across the landscape. As a result, the number of deer inhabiting individual properties can vary significantly. Habitat management even in highly productive regions, such as southern Wisconsin, is still very important.

The Southern District encompasses a wide range of deer habitat types. These habitats range

from the high wooded ridges and coulees in the southwest to the flat productive farmlands of the southcentral to the highly urbanized landscape in the southeastern counties, along Lake Michigan's border. We also host the rolling southern kettles in the east and an extensive mix of wetland, woodland and ag-land in Dodge, Jefferson and Columbia counties. This high level of variation in habitat types, conditions and quality contributes to great hunting and a robust deer population that has been stable to increasing year after year in many areas of southern Wisconsin.

Deer populations in the south tend to be somewhat higher in the western and central portions of the district due to several habitat and human population differences, but excellent opportunities to harvest deer, even impressive bucks, can be found in all counties that make up the Southern District. DNR staff are continually impressed with the number and the quality of deer that are observed and harvested each year in the Southern District. This is a testament to the productivity and resiliency of our habitat and local deer herd. It's no wonder why Wisconsin is and has been a world-class destination for white-tailed deer hunting.

Early season natural food sources such as mast-producing trees, native forbs/browse and early successional type fields appear to be surviving despite yet another year of low summer rainfall. The beauty of most natural food sources is that they tend to be adaptive and resilient to shifting weather conditions. Many of the hard and soft mast trees are still showing a promising crop. In addition to natural food sources, early season agricultural foods such as lush alfalfa, clover and soybeans are prime locations for hunters to begin their scouting efforts in late summer or early fall.



Pre-season scouting of early season food sources can significantly reduce the guesswork during the hunting season and can put hunters within range of unpressured deer before they switch up their patterns and become wise to hunting pressure. The USDA Wisconsin Crop Progress & Condition Report is reporting short to very short top and subsoil moisture levels in the southern part of the state, as of July 3. Hunters who plan to plant fall food plots should consider using minimal tillage or no-till methods to conserve as much soil moisture as possible. Timing plantings just before rainfall and utilizing minimal soil disturbance methods will increase the likelihood of a successful plot in these drought conditions.

With any luck, a few consistent and measurable rainfall events could have the potential to make up for lost ground, so we are hopeful to see more rain in the forecast. Weather permitting, these food sources should provide plenty of opportunities for hunters to base their hunting locations around. If drought conditions continue, hunters will want to take time to scout these food sources to make sure there will be no surprises come hunting season.

The rut may be exciting to hunt, but seasoned hunters know that it can be unpredictable at best. While early season hunting might be warm and buggy, it also offers a better opportunity to take notice of deer sign and reap the benefits of scouting efforts. Hunters should keep in mind that once seasonal foods are no longer available or palatable, deer will begin expanding their range looking for alternatives. In areas with the highest deer numbers, habitat damage or a reduction in habitat quality can occur. This results in deer traveling further in search of other food sources as they prepare for winter.

Appropriate habitat and herd management can help landowners achieve their property goals and increase hunting success. The Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) is a private land management program offered by the Wisconsin DNR that helps landowners interested in managing their properties for

better habitat and increasing their hunting success. I encourage folks that want to learn more about habitat and quality deer herd management to sign up for the Deer Management Assistance Program at [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov), keyword "DMAP."

Most deer within the Southern District are harvested on private property, which makes up more than 90 percent of the district landscape. In addition, the district offers tens of thousands of acres of county, state and federally owned lands open to deer hunting in southern Wisconsin. Public lands often get a bad rap as difficult to hunt but savvy hunters who are dedicated, adaptable, not afraid to go the extra mile (sometimes literally) and occasionally utilize non-traditional methods will find adventure and plenty of deer to match wits with this fall. If you're looking for a new area to hunt and have never explored our public lands, I highly recommend giving it a shot. If you plan to hunt on private lands, get out well in advance of deer season to meet with landowners and request permission if you don't already have it.

Another important aspect for Southern District deer hunters to keep in mind is CWD. It slowly continues increasing in prevalence and geographic area within the district and state. Last year, Wisconsin detected just over 1,492 CWD-positive deer through annual sampling efforts, the majority of which came from the Southern District. Going into the 2023 deer season, hunters should be aware that baiting and feeding of deer is prohibited in all Southern District counties, except for Ozaukee.

County Deer Advisory Councils (CDACs) are offering, on average, similar quotas, antlerless deer harvest authorizations and extra hunting seasons in response to public feedback and the stable to increasing deer population trend. For the 2023 deer hunting season, 14 counties in the Southern District are offering the antlerless-only Holiday Hunt, and 12 counties are offering the extended archery/crossbow season. Check out the DNR's [deer hunting webpage](#) for more details and maps showing which counties are

offering additional seasons. These additional seasons are a great way to enjoy family time afield during the holiday season and to put extra meat in the freezer.

The 2023 deer season will be here before we know it and will be welcomed by deer hunters all over the nation. On behalf of the Wisconsin DNR, we'd like to wish everyone a safe and successful hunting season! We hope you take time this fall to get outdoors and enjoy the beauty and world-class hunting opportunities that Wisconsin has to offer.

## WEST-CENTRAL DISTRICT

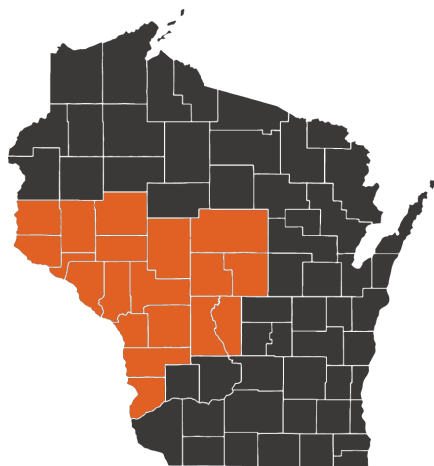
**Mark Rasmussen, DNR Wildlife Biologist**

**[Mark.Rasmussen@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Mark.Rasmussen@wisconsin.gov)**

The landscape of west-central Wisconsin offers some of the most productive white-tailed deer habitat in the U.S. It contains rolling valleys, fertile farmland, big rivers and wooded ridges. This region provides the ideal setting for hunters to reconnect with their passion for the outdoors, be that a solo tree stand sit or getting a group of family and friends together for a deer drive. There are plenty of reasons that hunters are drawn to west-central Wisconsin, from the opportunity to pursue world-class bucks, to acquiring high-quality protein for the table, to making new memories with family and friends.

Overall, last winter was considered relatively mild throughout the West-Central District, with few total days of significant snow depth or below-zero temperatures.

The district experienced a period of extended deep snow and cold during late winter. District wildlife staff received an uptick in reports of deer



experiencing winter stress during this time.

Thankfully, by early April, temperatures warmed and snow melted rapidly, providing better access to available food sources. These factors indicate that winter did not have a significant impact on the deer herd in west-central Wisconsin. Green-up was in full effect by May. Most crops were planted on or ahead of schedule this year across the district. Drought conditions took over after a warm and wet spring. Most areas in the district experienced a moderate to severe drought by early summer. If these drought conditions persist, this will likely impact crop yields and may impact acorn and wild berry production as well. Overall, natural vegetation and agricultural food sources are still abundant, supplying plenty of food for lactating does and growing bucks.

The West-Central District's landscape is diverse, with excellent deer habitat across all 19 counties. Much of the western border of the district is within the Driftless Area of Wisconsin and is characterized by steep wooded ridges, fertile ridgetops and valleys that are generally cropped with alfalfa, corn and soybeans. This area has some of the highest deer densities in the state and is known for excellent antler growth, producing some of the highest numbers of Boone & Crockett and Pope & Young entries in the country every year. While most of the Driftless area is private land, there are public lands scattered throughout the area. These areas provide quality hunting opportunities, especially for hunters who put in some time scouting prior to the season.

The district has extensive public land opportunities within the Central Forest Zone counties, where deer populations are not as high as the western or eastern fronts, but hunters can still expect to find ample hunting opportunities. Hunting pressure has been on a steady decline in the Central Forest Zone over the last 10 years, which offers a more relaxed experience for hunters but may result in less deer movement during the gun deer season. Of special note in Jackson and surrounding



counties, hunters are reminded that elk have been reintroduced and are established in the region. Elk numbers continue to increase. Know the difference between a deer and an elk, and if you aren't sure, don't shoot.

The eastern side of the district also has an abundance of deer. The mix of agriculture and woodlots provides good deer habitat, with great opportunities for hunters to fill antlerless permits and a good chance at harvesting a nice buck.

Most of the counties in the West-Central District have had CWD positive deer detected either within or close to their boundaries. Hunters are encouraged to have their deer tested for CWD and can find sampling locations and more information about DNR's [CWD webpage](#). It is illegal to bait and feed deer in counties that are classified as "CWD affected," so hunters should consult the deer regulations to comply with baiting and feeding regulations in the county they are hunting.

There are plenty of opportunities across the district. The West-Central District wildlife staff hope that everyone has a safe, enjoyable and successful 2023 deer season!

## NORTHEAST DISTRICT FORECAST

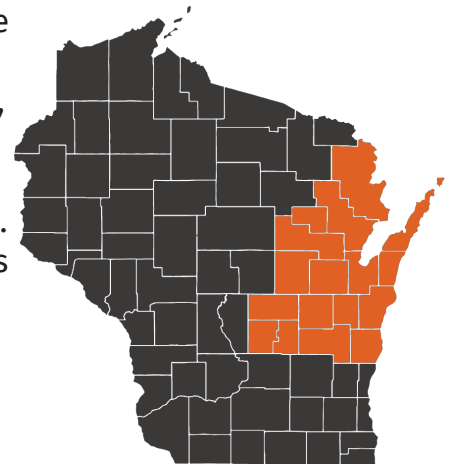
**Bryan Woodbury, DNR Wildlife Biologist**  
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Across the Northeast District, hunters have good reason to be optimistic as they look toward the upcoming deer hunting season. Most of the Northeast District experienced another mild winter, likely leading to a higher deer population this fall. Many DNR staff and members of the public have reported seeing deer frequently this summer and a high number of fawns. Agricultural crop schedules are near normal in 2023, despite drier weather. Corn and soybean planting were about a week ahead of the 5-year average. The dry conditions during the summer will affect crop growth and production. Scouting will be important as the

dry conditions could affect food quality and quantity.

The Northeast District offers a diverse mixture of deer habitat types. Habitat ranges from the northern hardwood forest in Marinette and Oconto counties to the flatter agricultural and wetland complexes of Winnebago, Fond du Lac and Calumet counties. The district's central landscape provides a combination of fertile farmland, bottomland hardwood forest and upland forest to provide ideal white-tailed deer habitat. This high level of variation in habitat types and conditions results in local deer numbers that can vary dramatically from one square mile to the next.

Marinette and Oconto counties are split into two Deer Management Units by the boundary of the Northern Forest and Central Farmland zones. In the Forest Zone portions of these counties, harvest opportunities have improved. More antlerless permits are available this year in Marinette, while Oconto will be the same as last year.



The central counties of the district including Shawano, Outagamie, Waupaca, Waushara, Green Lake and Marquette counties have carried high deer densities for a long time. Deer herds continue to exist above healthy levels in many pockets of the area, affecting forestry and habitat quality. Most of the County Deer Advisory Councils have harvest objectives to either maintain or decrease the size of the herd. The CDACs in these counties are utilizing all the available tools to maximize harvest opportunities and manage deer populations. They made ample antlerless permits available and allowed the antlerless-only firearm Holiday

Hunt and extended archery seasons. Hunters are encouraged to take advantage of these antlerless harvest opportunities to ensure the future health of the deer herd.

Deer habitat is more fragmented throughout the southern and Lake Michigan portions of the district. The habitat in Brown, Door, Kewaunee, Manitowoc and Sheboygan counties hold locally very high deer numbers. Calumet, Winnebago and Fond du Lac counties are dominated by agricultural fields, wetland complexes and smaller woodlots and forests. All these counties experience higher hunting pressure on the available cover, especially during the opening weekend of gun season. Public lands are limited, and deer are not distributed evenly across the landscape.

## NORTHERN DISTRICT

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The Northwoods are iconic in Wisconsin's celebrated deer hunting history. The diverse habitats, from mixed hardwood or conifer forests, aspen stands, open grasslands or vast wetlands, offer abundant opportunity. Private landowners are as involved on their property as ever and habitat management is more prevalent compared to years past. This effort, coupled with state, county and federal land management provides increased chances for hunters this fall.

Hunters of northern Wisconsin know that adaptability and resourcefulness are keys to success. The diversity and size of habitat areas allow deer to be more reclusive than deer in farmland regions. Recognizing and responding to habitat transitions is helpful. Changing your hunting strategy as deer behavior changes can lead to a fulfilling hunting season.

This past winter (2022-23) was notable, as a deeper snowpack remained into the late winter. That snowpack receded at a record pace in most areas, allowing deer an important reprieve into

spring. This allowed deer to slow their calorie usage and recover from reduced forage and movement ability. Observations from this spring and early summer show the deer herd made it through the winter in good shape. This should lead to more deer on the landscape and more chances for hunters this fall.

Last fall's harvest results indicate another positive trend in the deer population this fall. Harvest rates were up 19% on average. Both antlered and antlerless harvests increased, but the noticeable uptick in buck harvests suggests growth in the deer population. Hunters should be excited to hit the woods this season.

As always, hunters are encouraged to get out in the woods early and scout the areas they plan to hunt. This winter did bring some storm damage to younger hardwood, alder and willow stands. Hunters may need to do some maintenance or scouting for new hunting spots. This could be the year to hunt those areas you've always thought about. Look for areas of transition between evening food sources and dense cover. The food source could be a field, wildlife opening or trail system with desirable browse.

Whether you're a new hunter or a deer camp pro, have a safe fall and enjoy your time in the Northwoods.

