

**Wisconsin County Forests Association**  
**Position Statement Relating To White Tailed Deer Herd Management in Wisconsin**

**Concern**

Recent legislative decisions appear to place a greater emphasis on social and political interests than contemporary research, established science, and the observations of resource management professionals.

These decisions continue to pursue artificially high populations of whitetail deer by continuing to allow baiting and feeding, despite continued spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), and limiting the ability of professional wildlife managers to control populations.

The outcomes of the State's current approach to whitetail deer management will likely have a negative effect on forests and, subsequently, the forest products industry, the tourism industry, and the ability of northern local units of government to raise revenue from local timber sale programs.

**Background**

The Wisconsin County Forest Association (WFCA) is a non-profit organization comprised of 29 member Counties who employ professional foresters to manage 2.4 million acres of productive forest land, pursuant to the State of Wisconsin's County Forest Program authorized under Chapter 28 of Wisconsin Statutes.

Collectively, county forests make up the largest public land base in the State and play an important role in Wisconsin's economy and quality of life. County forests are third party certified as sustainably managed and provide raw materials essential to the States \$18 Billion forest products industry. County forests provide vast recreational opportunities that are utilized by many of the tourists who contribute to the State's \$16 Billion tourism industry. In addition to jobs and recreation, county forests provide important environmental benefits. All of these factors contribute significantly to a high quality of life for residents.

Wisconsin's county forests provide approximately \$30 million in timber sale revenues each year. These dollars are heavily relied upon by local units of government to reduce tax levies while providing necessary services. County Forest Administrators are tasked with ensuring the economic sustainability of county forests. Forest regeneration is of primary importance.

Some member counties invest tens of thousands of dollars in deer abatement practices to promote successful forest regeneration in areas of Wisconsin where deer populations are having a negative impact on forests.



Budcapping on the Douglas County Forest



Deer exclosures on the Bayfield County Forest



Regeneration inside versus outside the exclosure is visible in the pictures above and below



The understory outside the fence is dominated by ferns



Trilliums, yew, orchids, blue bead lily, winterberry holly, Viburnums and dogwoods, along with numerous other herbaceous and shrub species are impacted by heavy deer browse. Deer avoid ferns which in turn inhibit regeneration of many other species



Forest outside enclosure



Forest inside enclosure



Vilas County Forest Deer Exclusion



Exlosures are expensive to construct and to maintain



Vilas County budcapping on pine



Vials County utilized both balloon budcapping and paper budcapping in attempts to grow red oak seedlings above the browse line

### **Rationale for Concern**

Baiting and feeding promote artificially high populations of whitetail deer (population numbers that exceed the lands inherent carrying capacity) in concentrated areas. Contemporary research, established science, and observations of in-field forestry and wildlife professionals indicate that artificially high whitetail deer populations and concentrated populations:

- Inhibit natural regeneration of trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants and impact reforestation/revegetation efforts.
- Reduce overall health of forest ecosystems by reducing diversity and disrupting ecological balance.
- Increase the spread of communicable diseases.

## **Significance of Concern**

Adequate natural regeneration and reforestation are necessary for sustaining industry that depends on forests. The impacts of artificially high deer numbers jeopardize feedstock for the forest products industry and the aesthetics, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and environmental values vital to the tourism industry.

Additional spread of CWD within counties that have established county forests would have a severely negative economic impact on local businesses that rely on deer hunters. Spread of the disease may also hinder hunters' desires to harvest animals.

## **Recommendation**

It is necessary to give deep consideration to the social aspects of managing whitetail deer and other natural resources. At the same time, foresters have a professional obligation to recommend management schemes that are known to protect forest health, regeneration, and sustainability. We encourage lawmakers and policy developers to balance social perspectives with the scientific and ecological aspects of Wisconsin's forests in relation to deer herd management.

It is the collective judgment of the professional foresters who serve Wisconsin residents by implementing the State's County Forest Program to recommend that:

- 1) Baiting and feeding be banned statewide; and
- 2) Authority be restored to allow professional wildlife managers to utilize Earn A Buck regulations and October antlerless deer hunts to maintain whitetail deer populations at levels that ensure forest health and regeneration.