

PRESS RELEASE

Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association

February 10, 2006



Deer Hunters Have No Friends in the Legislature

Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association (WDHA) is extremely disappointed that the Senate and Assembly Natural Resource committees voted to side with a special interest group and dismiss the DNR's 2006 deer season proposal that is supported by every major deer hunting group in the state. What we find especially troubling is there was no basis for the denial of these new rules and was just another example of how far the legislature is out of touch with their constituency.

Assembly Natural Resources Committee chair Scott Gunderson wrote that his committee objected "on the grounds that the proposed rule was arbitrary and capricious, and imposes an undue hardship." Clearly Rep. Gunderson doesn't understand anything about this rule. It was drafted in a year long process in cooperation with all major deer hunting groups and was intended to simplify the deer season framework, which is hardly a basis to call it arbitrary or capricious. In addition the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs (AWSC) has never been able to provide any concrete evidence of a landowner issue with snowmobile trail access in 5 years of December antlerless hunts south of hwy 8, so there is no justification whatsoever to claim a hardship. This was clearly a political decision that was not in the best interest of the almost 700,000 deer hunters in this state.

The rule changes demanded by Rep. Gunderson and Senate Natural Resources Committee Chair Neil Kedzie present serious law enforcement issues, and they effectively take away hunting opportunity for muzzleloader hunters. Clearly these changes demanded by the legislature are at the sole request of the AWSC and are not acceptable to the WDHA and all the other deer hunting groups in this state.

The committee members who voted against this rule were obviously influenced by the lobbying efforts of a well-funded special interest group. They never took the time to investigate any of the facts provided by the DNR or the deer hunting groups, or determine if claims made by the AWSC had any merit. If Rep. Gunderson and Sen. Kedzie really wanted to step up as leaders they would have found a way to assure the AWSC that there wouldn't be any problems with this new rule, or that any documented problems would be dealt with immediately should they arise. Instead they demanded changes that will cause more problems than what the rules intended to eliminate. Nor did Rep. Gunderson or Sen. Kedzie bother to contact snowmobile associations in states like Michigan that have even later antlerless gun seasons without any snowmobile trail closures.

It's also appalling that legislators like Rep. Gunderson who championed the constitutional right to hunt and fish would ultimately vote against his own convictions. In fact his continued opposition to this new rule can be viewed as anti-hunting, in direct opposition to the rights he claimed he wanted to protect.

But the real damage will be to the businesses and snowmobilers of this state. A large number of landowners have already committed to closing their land to snowmobiling in protest and that will certainly spread as a result of this vote. By next year there will be massive snowmobile trail closures. The deer hunters of this state don't wish to engage in a fight with another group, we only wanted to simplify our rules, expand opportunity and find methods to help control the deer population. Our arguments were based on biology and sound science and the realities of

snowmobiling in this state. The legislatures willingness to believe in the unfounded claims by the AWSC and their paid lobbyist is obviously more of a deciding factor than common sense.

The WDHA is a statewide group of conservation minded deer enthusiasts whose mission is to promote scientific and ecological based deer management in Wisconsin. Our philosophy is do what's best for the deer herd, as we believe that is ultimately what's best for the deer hunter.

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