

State of Wisconsin
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
101 S. Webster Street
Box 7921
Madison WI 53707-7921

Tony Evers, Governor
Preston D. Cole, Secretary
Telephone 608-266-2621
Toll Free 1-888-936-7463
TTY Access via relay - 711



Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage

Clearinghouse Rule 18-010

Elk Management

March 20, 2019

Good morning Chairman Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Eric Lobner, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Wildlife Management with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. With me is Kevin Wallenfang who serves as the Department's Deer and Elk Ecologist. We thank you for the opportunity to testify on Clearinghouse Rule 18-010 related to elk management.

Current rules establish that the department may not hold an elk hunting season until a minimum population level is reached, and that harvest tag numbers must equal 5% of the total population. Clearinghouse Rule 18-010 would repeal the current season triggers and the requirement to issue harvest tags based on a percentage of the total population. Doing so would allow our state's growing elk herds to be managed based on scientific data that informs the department and our partners of the overall herd structure, population dynamics, winter severity, and other metrics.

Current rules require at least 200 elk in the Clam Lake elk range and 150 elk in the Black River elk range before a public hunt may occur. We have already surpassed the Clam Lake minimum. Wisconsin held its very first elk hunt in 2018. While the original rule was well-intentioned to assure the public that the herds would be allowed to grow before a hunt occurred, these numbers now have limited significance and are a hinderance to overall elk management.

The current rule also limits harvest tag issuance to 5% of the total population. This is somewhat arbitrary and unnecessarily restrictive. No other species is managed in this way. A set percentage of tags is simply not good management of elk or any species. This approach could have the effect of either causing overharvest that could negatively impact population growth or could result in under harvest that leads to lost opportunity and limited ability to manage the population as it grows over time.

On behalf of the Bureau of Wildlife Management, I would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.