

(1) **HABITAT MANAGEMENT.** The natural growth and changing composition of forest stands, particularly in the north, is causing a long-term decline in habitat quality for big game and other forest wildlife.

(a) A planned program of maintaining forest diversity including shade-intolerant cover types, particularly aspen and forest openings, is required to slow or halt this trend and to maintain deer populations at established goal levels.

(b) For summer range, the objective is to maintain from 25-65% or more (depending upon the deer population goal) of each ¼ township habitat inventory unit in a mixture of aspen, oak, upland brush, jack pine and a grass type consisting of sodded openings comprising at least 3-5% of the forest.

(c) Traditional deer wintering areas also require a positive management program. Planning to provide adequate browse and cover through commercial timber harvest will help maintain deer herds at population goals during normal winters. However, severe winters will place abnormal stress on deer in some areas resulting in significant mortality and reduced fawn production. In such areas emergency browse cutting for supplementing naturally available food on public lands will be authorized but only where designated in an approved deer yard plan as part of a long-range browse production program. For deer yards on private lands, department personnel may make recommendations as to when, where and how emergency browse can best be provided. Direct assistance on private lands requires the declaration of a true emergency by the district director and the express permission of the landowner.

(2) **HARVEST.** Big game hunting regulations shall be designed to meet the following objectives:

(a) Maintaining a deer herd in balance with its range and at population goals reasonably compatible with agricultural and forest management objectives in each deer management unit. Deer management units are areas of similar habitat bounded by major roads. Population goals in the forested deer range are to be based on long-term average carrying capacity as determined by unit population responses to past winters of varying severity. Goals in the agricultural range are to be based upon hunter demand balanced with an assessment of local human tolerance to deer numbers, particularly as it relates to crop damage and the frequency of deer-vehicle collisions on highways. Annual hunting seasons will harvest deer to maintain goal levels and will include buck, either-sex or buck and party permit bag limits as the need dictates.

(b) Achieving and maintaining opportunities for a quality deer hunting experience while still allowing to the extent possible, freedom of choice by hunters. Regulations should provide incentives or disincentives to encourage better distribution of hunting pressure. If hunter numbers continue to increase, control of hunting pressure may become necessary.

(c) Maintaining the black bear as a trophy big game animal and offering the best opportunity for a quality hunting experience. In addition, the maintenance of a quality hunt will be emphasized by continuing controls over the use of bait and dogs.

(d) Deer and bear damage complaints will be handled according to the provisions of s. 29.598, Stats., and rules as published in the Wisconsin

administrative code. Damage can be most economically controlled by maintaining populations with a hunting season harvest as specified in par. (a).

(3) **RESEARCH AND SURVEYS.** Surveys, investigations and research shall be conducted to provide technical information necessary to establish population estimates, harvest recommendations, population goals and habitat management needs and guidelines.

History: Cr. Register, April, 1976, No. 232, eff. 5-1-76; r. and recr. Register, July, 1977, No. 259, eff. 8-1-77; am. (2) (d), Register, January, 1984, No. 337, eff. 2-1-84.

**NR 1.16 Furbearers.** For the purposes of this section, furbearers are muskrat, mink, weasel, beaver, otter, skunk, raccoon, fox, coyote, bobcat and opossum. The furbearer management program has the following essential needs and actions:

(1) **HABITAT MANAGEMENT.** (a) Wetlands are the primary habitat component for many furbearers so the actions regarding wetland protection and management stated in NR 1.12(1) are reemphasized in relation to furbearers.

(b) The capacity to produce furbearers on lands and waters under the management and control of the department can be increased through more intensive management of suitable habitat. Generally, management activities designed to improve furbearer populations are compatible with management for other species of wildlife. In certain situations populations of furbearers such as fox, raccoon, coyotes and skunks can depress the population of other game species. Management activities on department lands should be designed to achieve a desirable balance between predator and prey species which is consistent with goals and objectives established in the course of developing master plans for state properties.

(c) Since the majority of furbearers depend upon habitat under the control of private landowners, management information will be provided to private landowners requesting it. Incentive programs to encourage habitat preservation and management on private lands will be developed where they are feasible.

(2) **HARVEST.** Furbearers are significant from a biological, recreational and economic standpoint. Regulations will be designed to make optimum use of these species for these purposes.

(a) Every effort shall be made to design regulations on as uniform a basis as possible that will still maintain desirable population levels from year to year. High pelt prices on these species can result in temporarily depressed, local populations. Both recreational and biological objectives shall be accorded primary consideration in the establishment of harvest regulations.

(b) Because of the recreational and economic value of the furbearer harvest present trapping methods and techniques must continue. However, efforts to develop new trapping methods and techniques will be encouraged.

(3) **STOCKING.** Stocking of furbearers is restricted to the trapping and relocation of certain species to effect planned range extension or introductions.