



JAMES W. EDMING

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 87TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 63

Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business, and Rural Issues
February 24, 2022

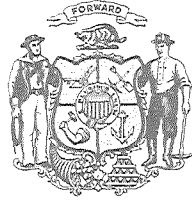
Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for holding this public hearing today on Senate Bill (SB) 63. This legislation is a redraft of AB 695 that was approved by the Assembly on a voice vote in February 2020. Unfortunately, it was not concurred in by the Senate due to COVID-19.

SB 63 makes needed reforms to two programs that provide assistance to farmers that suffer crop damage or loss caused by wild animals: the wildlife damage abatement program and the wildlife damage claim program. Senator Petrowski and I began looking at reforming these programs a few years ago when we heard concerns from farmers in northern Wisconsin that these programs were not fully meeting the needs of many farmers in this part of the state.

The wildlife damage faced by a number of farmers in northern Wisconsin is caused by bears. While any type of wildlife damage can cause problems for farmers, bear damage is particularly destructive. When a bear feeds on crops in a field, it will usually roll around and damage far more of the crop than it actually eats. Only a small number of bears, sometimes as few as one or two, can level a large portion of a 40-acre field. For a number of farmers, the financial cost of these damages quickly reaches the \$10,000 limit on claims for the wildlife damage claims program. I have heard from some farmers that have experienced wildlife crop damage losses in the range of \$30,000- \$40,000 in one year. I heard a story from a farmer in my district that illustrates just how quickly the \$10,000 cap can be reached. This constituent said that a sow and her cubs broke open some of the silage bags on his farm that he uses to store feed. Due to exposure to the elements, much of this feed was ruined and the damages from this one incident alone put him at his \$10,000 limit, without taking into consideration any other damage done throughout the year in the fields.

SB 63 seeks to solve this problem by lifting the \$10,000 limit on damage claims. If the amount of claims exceeds the available revenue in a year, payments will be prorated. This bill also allows farmers to receive payments for damage to crops caused by the placing of bear traps and streamlines the administration of these programs under the Department of Natural Resources. In addition, SB 63 creates a new portion of the abatement program to provide some abatement assistance for farmers who farm on leased land and the landowner does not want to open their property for hunting.

Mr. Chairman and members, thank you again for hearing this bill today and I ask for your support.



JERRY PETROWSKI

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

Senate Bill 63

February 24, 2022

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for taking the time to hear Senate Bill 63, which makes various changes to improve the function of the wildlife abatement program.

This legislation has been drafted at the request of farmers in northern Wisconsin and has the support of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Wisconsin Bear Hunters, and Wisconsin Corn Growers Association. The bill was developed in consultation with the Department of Natural Resources and is intended to improve the efficiency of the program and address specific issues brought to my attention by local farmers.

Under current law, a person who owns, leases, or controls land on which certain wild animals cause damage to crops or livestock can apply to the county for wildlife damage claim payments and wildlife damage abatement assistance if the location of the damage is in a county that administers these programs.

The bill eliminates the \$10,000 limit to landowners who submit claims and provides that in any year in which claims exceed available revenue, the payments will be prorated. While there are a limited number of farms reporting extensive damage, there are some who experience a severe impact on their bottom line. It is my understanding that the available program revenue at the department should be able to fully cover payments in the short term, but they may have to be prorated in the future.

Additionally, the bill removes counties from the administrative process for the program and instead allows DNR to administer the entire program. Our conversations with the department indicate this should result in lower administrative costs and more consistent treatment of farmers throughout the state.

Under the bill, the program would also allow payments to farmers for the destruction of crops that occurs when DNR or their contractors have to operate a vehicle in the field in order to place a bear trap. Due to the size and weight of the traps and the ability to access portions of fields, it is often necessary to drive over several rows of corn or other crops in order to place and maintain the traps. The anticipated cost to the program of this change is minimal.

To address circumstances where farmers are leasing land that may belong to someone who wants to hunt on the land, or simply do not wish to open the land for public hunting, the bill creates a

29TH SENATE DISTRICT

second tier of enrollment in the program. Under this second tier, with permission of the land owner, a farmer could enroll the property in the program solely for the purpose of placing bear traps on the property for abatement purposes. Enrollment in this portion of the program would not allow the farmer to receive compensation for crop loss or kill permits, and would not require that the land be opened to hunting.

Finally, Senate Amendment 1 moves the effective dates in the bill to provide the department time to implement the changes. The amendment requires that all bear traps be equipped with remote monitors by June 30th of this year and makes the rest of the changes effective January 1, 2023.

One of the main concerns raised by farmers in areas heavily impacted by bear damage is that if the traps are placed without a monitor, the farmer has to go around and check every trap every day. This can be very time-consuming and may be a deterrent to enrolling in the program.

Thank you again for taking the time to hear this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.



Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues

2021 Senate Bill 63

Changes to the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Program

February 24, 2022

Good afternoon Chair Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Eric Lobner, and I am the Wildlife Management Bureau Director with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 49 (SB 49).

The Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Programs were established by the State Legislature in 1983. These programs provide damage abatement assistance and partial compensation for damage to commercial agriculture crops caused by deer, bear, elk, turkey, and geese. In 2020, the program provided damage abatement assistance to over 870 agriculture producers and paid more than \$850,000 to 237 producers that sought compensation for wildlife damages.

The programs are funded by hunters through a \$2 surcharge on each hunting license and from revenue generated through the sale of Antlerless Deer Harvest Authorizations, commonly referred to as "bonus permits." Hunters, in exchange for funding the programs and with a few exceptions, are provided hunting access to properties enrolled in the program. In 2020, more than 148,000 acres were made accessible to public hunters through this program. This is a win-win for hunters and agriculture producers. Hunters get the benefit of accessing private lands for hunting and agriculture producers benefit from reduced crop damage.

SB 63 proposes five changes to the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Compensation Programs:

1. Elimination of the current \$10,000 compensation limit
2. Elimination of the requirement that counties administer the program
3. Creation of an abatement only option for bear damage enrollees
4. Allowing compensation for crops damaged to access locations for bear trapping
5. Requiring that all bear traps are equipped with trap monitors by June 30, 2021

I will address each of the proposed changes individually.

Elimination of the maximum compensation limit

Currently there is \$10,000 maximum compensation limit on wildlife damage claims. There is a \$500 claim deductible and once that is met, producers are compensated for 100% of wildlife damage up to \$5,500 and 80% for damage in excess of \$5,500 up to the \$10,000 maximum. In 2020, 24 producers enrolled in the program had losses that exceeded the \$10,000 compensation limit. Appraised wildlife damage totaled approximately \$5,200 per enrollee in 2020.

The \$500 claim deductible and \$10,000 compensation limit have been in place since 2009. Prior to 2009, the deductible was \$250 and the maximum claim payment was \$15,000. In 2009, the Legislature

increased the program deductible and decreased the compensation limit in response to a projected budget shortfall.

The department estimates that eliminating the maximum compensation limit would increase program expenditures by \$378,000 to \$555,000 annually. Reviewing program revenues and expenditures over the last several years, these added expenditures will exceed annual revenues, eventually resulting in the proration of damage compensation payments made to producers. Revenue generated from the sale of "bonus permits" can vary significantly from year to year. For example, program revenues totaled approximately \$2.65 million in FY19 and in FY20, revenues totaled \$3.1 million.

An alternative to eliminating the compensation limit would be increasing the limit to \$25,000. This would be a considerable increase in the amount of compensation available to producers but would reduce the risk of prorated claims. In 2020, two producers exceeded \$25,000 in appraised damage. At a \$25,000 compensation limit, 98% - 99% of current program claimants would receive full compensation for wildlife damage.

Elimination of the requirement that counties administer the program

The department respectfully requests that the effective date of this provision be changed from January 1, 2022 to January 1, 2023, and appreciates the amendment that has been introduced to that effect. Current statute requires that counties administer the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Program. The DNR cannot administer the program on behalf or instead of a county. Currently, fifty-three counties contract program implementation to USDA-Wildlife Services, eight counties have a county employee administer the program, nine counties hire an independent damage technician for program implementation, and two counties, Kenosha and Menominee, do not participate in the program.

The DNR estimates that department administration of the program will save approximately \$50,000 annually in administrative costs. Department administration of the program also provides the following benefits:

- Reduced administrative workload by eliminating 70 county agreements and annual budgets and up to 200 county reimbursement requests
- Expedited implementation of bear damage abatement (trapping and relocation services) in counties not currently administered by USDA-Wildlife Services
- Streamlining of claim processing resulting in producers receiving compensation 4-8 weeks earlier than the current process
- Improved consistency of program implementation

Wildlife damage program funding is currently used to support a portion of a county employees' position in nine counties and it employs three independent private wildlife damage technicians. Damage program funding used to support these positions and individuals ranges from \$4,500 to \$42,000 depending on the county and the number of enrollees and acres enrolled in the program.

Creation of an abatement only option for bear damage enrollees

Currently, apart from apiaries, public hunting access is required on all properties that receive bear damage abatement assistance. In some situations, agriculture producers are not able to receive assistance on properties they lease because the landowner is not willing to allow public hunting access to the property. Under SB 63, public hunting access would not be required on the property if bear trapping and relocation is the only abatement being provided and the producer is not eligible for bear damage

compensation. SB 63 would provide abatement assistance to producers in locations that were not historically eligible for the program.

Allowing compensation for crops damaged to access locations for bear trapping

Currently, damage compensation is only available for crops damaged by wildlife. Compensation is not available for crops damaged when implementing abatement. This damage occurs primarily when bear trapping efforts are being implemented. On some fields, bear trappers need to run down corn with a vehicle to access the best locations for trapping and removing bear.

SB 63 would allow the department to provide compensation for crops damaged when accessing bear trap locations. This would make bear trapping and relocation more acceptable to agriculture producers. The added costs to the program are expected to be insignificant. In 2021, bear trappers recorded the amount of corn damaged to access trap sites. Statewide, less than one acre of corn was damaged at an estimated value of \$800.

Require that all bear traps are equipped with trap monitors by June 30, 2021

The department respectfully requests that the effective date of this provision be changed from June 30, 2021 to June 30, 2022, and appreciates the amendment that has been introduced to that effect.

Historically, producers were required to check bear traps by 8:00 a.m. This was a significant workload for producers that had to check multiple traps, especially if the traps were located a significant distance from their home. To reduce this workload, the department began using bear trap monitors in 2013. Trap monitors send an email or text alert to the bear trappers when the trap door closes, and traps equipped with monitors are not required to be checked by the producer. The use of these monitors eliminates the producer's workload, provides efficiencies for bear trappers since they no longer need to wait to be notified by producers, and is more humane for the bear by reducing the time they spend in the trap. Since 2013, the department has steadily purchased additional monitors, and we currently have 90 monitors in inventory. At the peak of the bear damage season, 130 bear traps may be on the landscape. Given the current inventory of trap monitors and the number of traps that could be on the landscape, this proposal would require the purchase of 40 additional trap monitors.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, I would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

My name is Mike Robers, I farm with my wife, Elaine, and son Dan and daughter-in-law Morgan.

We milk about 400 cows, raise all our replacement heifers, and run 500 acres of corn, 170 acres of alfalfa, 70 acres of winter rye, and 65 acres of grass hay in Sawyer County,

From 2009 to 2020 farmers have had a hard time making ends meet because of low commodity prices, but farmers, especially in northern Wisconsin, have another problem, Wildlife. Deer, bear, wolves, coyotes, and now elk are destroying large amounts of crops and livestock. John VanDoorn, from Tony in Rusk County, this year had \$36,115 in just elk damage, plus deer and bear damage.

There have been several dozen farmers each year that have between \$10,000 and \$30,000 and in a few cases \$40,000 to maybe even \$50,000 of damage each year.

Under the current crop damage program a farmer can only collect \$10,000 in crop damage each year, leaving the farmer to withstand the rest of it. Lets say a farmer has to withstand \$20,000 per year, in 10 years that's \$200,000 and we have been fighting this for 20 to 30 years.

Tourism is big business, especially in northern Wisconsin and I admit they need to make a living too. Resorts, hotels, taverns, gas stations, grocery stores, etc. all benefit from wildlife, and farmers pay to feed these animals out of our pockets.

Hunters, and especially the DNR, want wildlife numbers to keep increasing and bring in new species into the state to make hunters happy, but at the farmers expense.

If they want these big numbers they should pay to feed them, not us.

On our farm, with the help of friends and others, we shot 16 bear last year, and always shoot between 10 & 15 every year on crop damage tags. Where would I be if we didn't shoot that many, not to mention that the DNR usually traps between 10 to 20 every year as well.

This year as well we had three wolves, maybe four take a cow down and kill her, she was two weeks from calving. Five times this spring and summer we had wolves on top of our haylage bags, poking them full of holes which we had to patch, spending at least half a day each time.

Several years ago, two years in a row, we had 50 acres of alfalfa on the back end of the farm that in the fall the deer ate off as fast as it grew, thus not letting the plants store food in roots for the winter, which ultimately killed it.

While the wildlife ag tags to kill deer and bear are an essential tool to help control them through the DNR, the DNR makes these programs very difficult to participate in. Hunter logs for everytime they hunt, when they started, when they left, which field they hunted, checking the fields for damage, getting permission from the people you rent from, making a percent of quota in so many days, and in the case of bear, not being able to bait. Hunters can bait and use dogs, but we can't.

The DNR is not consistant on how it issues permits and kill tags between counties either, some counties respond faster than others.

Its not fair to put a sport in front of a persons way of life.

Number of bear trapped in Sawyer and Rusk Counties:

100 Bear trapped in 2018

286 Bear trapped in 2019

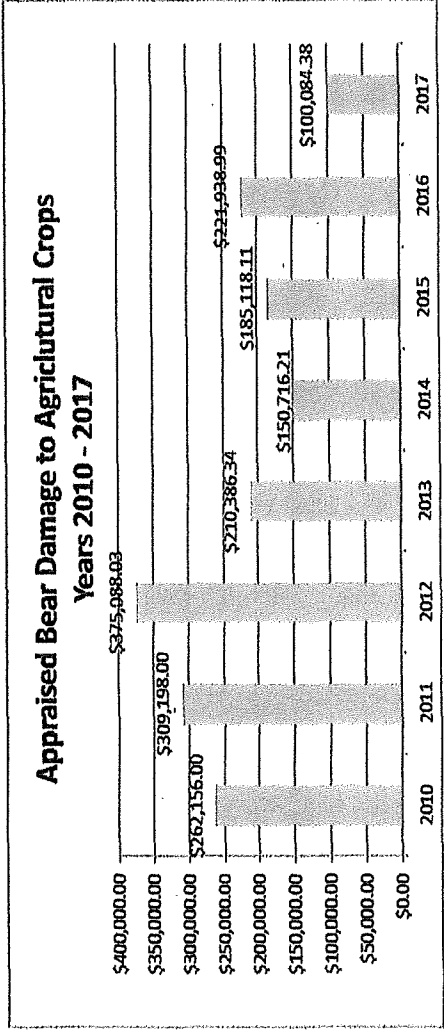
379 Bear trapped in 2020

Dollars of wildlife damage in Sawyer and Rusk Counties:

	2018	2019	2020
Sawyer	\$57,404.00	\$38,245.0	\$38,886.00
Rusk	\$19,836.00	\$31,042.00	\$48,495.00

Bear Damage by County, Years 2014-2017

County	2014			2015			2016			2017		
	Appraised Bear Damage	Acres Damaged by Bear	Appraised Bear Damage	Acres Damaged by Bear	Appraised Bear Damage	Acres Damaged by Bear	Appraised Bear Damage	Acres Damaged by Bear	Appraised Bear Damage	Acres Damaged by Bear		
Ashland	\$4,010.74	8.77	\$6,015.74	10.45	\$4,189.49	7.19	\$1,540.87	2.83				
Barron	\$6,117.43	12.15	\$5,676.44	8.05	\$10,133.72	16.79	\$10,294.56	16.80				
Bayfield	\$3,352.13	15.50	\$4,461.56	6.92	\$2,574.77	4.01	\$424.72	0.74				
Burnett	\$0.00	0.00	\$6,652.16	11.60	\$17,549.75	32.20	\$21,420.52	36.18				
Chippewa	\$1,280.00	1.00			\$643.30	4.00	\$2,149.85	1.00				
Douglas	\$1,280.00	1.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00				
Dunn	\$196.03	3.00	\$266.31	5.00	\$8,855.00	1.00	\$334.55	5.00				
Florence	\$1,272.03	2.50	\$0.00	0.00	\$1,159.32	2.45	\$0.00	0.00				
Grant	\$987.64	19.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00				
Iron	\$1,609.73	3.74	\$3,183.02	6.40	\$2,249.48	4.24	\$1,674.07	3.03				
Jackson	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$3,064.25	5.00				
La Crosse	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$920.27	3.00	\$0.00	0.00				
Langlade	\$768.86	1.50	\$1,932.53	4.25	\$2,458.86	2.00	\$0.00	0.00				
Marathon	\$0.00	0.00	\$2,000.00	1.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00				
Marquette	\$547.75	1.75	\$458.61	0.88	\$662.49	1.53	\$726.42	1.50				
Ozaukee	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00				
Pepin	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$163.30	0.30				
Polk	\$32,991.33	62.56	\$18,767.22	30.00	\$15,521.57	28.29	\$4,368.42	8.05				
Portage	\$0.00	0.00	\$7,133.70	8.00	\$2,059.00	8.00	\$3,504.15	4.00				
Price	\$4,189.52	7.25	\$10,858.00	18.50	\$2,209.41	4.25	\$13.00	0.04				
Rusk	\$32,863.13	82.75	\$36,362.96	54.75	\$50,446.62	151.58	\$22,328.98	179.47				
St. Croix	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$1,234.20	2.00	\$1,600.00	8.00				
Sawyer	\$53,552.40	137.27	\$57,891.68	99.49	\$70,173.40	121.69	\$17,260.45	29.21				
Taylor	\$0.00	0.00	\$809.99	1.33	\$2,194.48	2.59	\$51.36	0.10				
Washburn	\$4,791.18	16.35	\$20,729.44	24.77	\$26,705.06	37.65	\$8,033.19	12.00				
Waushara	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$0.00	0.00	\$1,528.80	8.00				
Total	\$149,809.88	376.09	\$183,199.37	291.39	\$221,940.18	434.46	\$100,481.45	321.24				



Enrollment ID	Year	First Name	Last Name	Final Payment	
				Appraised Loss	Amount
	54285	2018 DAN	TRITZ	\$43,868.35	\$10,000.00
	54247	2018 LYNN	KIRSCHBAUM	\$25,407.46	\$10,000.00
	54379	2018 DENNIS	SUZAN	\$21,827.26	\$10,000.00
	54256	2018 MARLENE	WAGNER	\$21,470.11	\$10,000.00
54630 and 54327		2018 DALE	BEISSEL	\$19,637.17	\$10,000.00
	54081	2018 JOHN	STEUCK	\$18,063.02	\$10,000.00
	54286	2018 TRAVIS	MARTI	\$17,710.11	\$10,000.00
	54091	2018 TIMOTHY	BRANDSMA	\$17,354.28	\$10,000.00
	54287	2018 RONALD	KNUTH	\$17,326.40	\$10,000.00
	54322	2018 MIKE	VANDEN HEUVEL	\$17,199.56	\$10,000.00
54883, 54093 and 527093		2018 MARK	SCHWOCH	\$17,126.40	\$10,000.00
	54188	2018 TOM	KUCHTA	\$16,753.95	\$10,000.00
	54161	2018 MICHAEL	LUEBKE	\$16,574.46	\$10,000.00
	54082	2018 WAYNE	HEIN	\$16,110.30	\$10,000.00
	54711	2018 JOHN	HOFFMAN	\$14,901.93	\$10,000.00
	54880	2018 PATRICIA	HOFFMAN	\$14,678.84	\$10,000.00
	54080	2018 GORDON	LICHTENBERG	\$14,662.25	\$10,000.00
	54099	2018 RYAN	EVANS	\$14,606.25	\$10,000.00
	54079	2018 KENNETH	BORZICK	\$13,662.14	\$10,000.00
	54088	2018 STEVEN	VINZ	\$13,287.65	\$10,000.00
	54086	2018 DANIEL	BERNDT	\$13,031.81	\$10,000.00
	54085	2018 RICHARD	DUKELOW	\$12,232.10	\$10,000.00
	54243	2018 JOHN	ZHRER	\$12,000.00	\$10,000.00
	55084	2018 LARRY	PASANEN	\$11,981.18	\$10,000.00
	54245	2018 DENNIS	HAAS	\$11,816.63	\$10,000.00
	54276	2018 LARRY	VAN STRATEN	\$11,651.37	\$9,921.10
	54290	2018 TONY	RUESCH	\$11,430.55	\$9,744.44
	54358	2018 RANDALL	STAHL	\$11,079.79	\$9,463.83
	54182	2018 MICHAEL	ZDROIK	\$11,037.23	\$9,429.79
	54870	2018 HERBERT	MAST	\$10,885.25	\$9,308.20
	54095	2018 KENNETH	WILLIAMS	\$10,740.86	\$9,192.70
	54157	2018 RANDOLPH	KOEHLER	\$10,513.89	\$9,011.12
	54108	2018 JERRY	STREY	\$10,347.42	\$8,877.95
	54265	2018 WAYNE	MORACK	\$10,310.83	\$8,848.66
	54083	2018 JAMES	HEBBE	\$10,138.94	\$8,711.15

Enrollment ID	Year	First Name	Last Name	Appraised Loss	Payment Amount
	52806	2017 RYAN	EVANS	\$34,424.25	\$10,000.00
53424 and	53138	2017 DALE	BEISSEL	\$33,141.53	\$10,000.00
	52935	2017 LYNN	KIRSCHBAUM	\$26,870.40	\$10,000.00
	53345	2017 DAN	TRITZ	\$25,957.00	\$10,000.00
	53069	2017 TOM	KUCHTA	\$21,868.39	\$10,000.00
	52826	2017 MARLENE	WAGNER	\$20,953.93	\$10,000.00
	52842	2017 DANIEL	BERNDT	\$19,243.14	\$10,000.00
	53463	2017 GREG	SWOPE	\$18,633.48	\$10,000.00
53707 and	53735	2017 GARRY	CROSBY JR.	\$18,533.56	\$10,000.00
	52828	2017 DEIRDRE	BIRMINGHAM	\$18,076.25	\$10,000.00
	52868	2017 KENNETH	BORZICK	\$17,426.48	\$10,000.00
	52944	2017 LARRY	VAN STRATEN	\$16,340.56	\$10,000.00
53004 and	52998	2017 RYAN	BUSHMAN	\$15,955.49	\$10,000.00
	53056	2017 JOHN	HOFFMAN	\$15,682.50	\$10,000.00
	53133	2017 PATRICIA	HOFFMAN	\$15,489.87	\$10,000.00
	53763	2017 WILLIAM	INGERSOLL	\$15,382.50	\$10,000.00
	52922	2017 JOHN	ZHRER	\$14,850.00	\$10,000.00
	53134	2017 JOHN	HOFFMAN	\$14,756.41	\$10,000.00
	52847	2017 MORRIS	VINZ	\$14,325.43	\$10,000.00
	52843	2017 RICHARD	DUKELOW	\$13,320.37	\$10,000.00
	52865	2017 GORDON	LICHTENBERG	\$12,984.56	\$10,000.00
	52846	2017 STEVEN	VINZ	\$12,839.01	\$10,000.00
	52864	2017 WAYNE	HEIN	\$11,925.72	\$10,000.00
	52866	2017 JOHN	STEUCK	\$11,803.32	\$10,000.00
	52936	2017 DENNIS	HAAS	\$11,696.16	\$9,956.92
	52798	2017 TIMOTHY	BRANDSMA	\$11,628.69	\$9,902.95
	52800	2017 KENNETH	WILLIAMS	\$10,769.51	\$9,215.61
	53085	2017 MIKE	VANDEN HEUVEL	\$10,765.40	\$9,212.33
	52955	2017 TRAVIS	MARTI	\$10,159.10	\$8,727.27

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues
FROM: Karen Gefvert, Innovation and Engagement Strategist
DATE: February 24, 2022
RE: Support for SB 63 – Wildlife Damage Abatement Legislation

On behalf of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, we would like to express our support for SB 63, wildlife damage abatement legislation. Thank you to the bill authors, Senator Petrowski and Representative Edming as well as Chairman Stafsholt for holding a hearing on this bill.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau supports the proposed changes to the program which include eliminating the current \$10,000 limit on claims, increasing the claim amount threshold and transferring administration of the program to the Department of Natural Resources. Damage to corn, soybeans and other commodities by wildlife species such as deer, bear, geese, elk and other wildlife can result in the loss of tens of thousands of dollars in a single season. This bill creates a fairness in the program. It will help crop farmers across the state but specifically address areas where crop damage due to wildlife is significant. This legislation will provide them the opportunity for reimbursement that is a more significant portion of their actual loss.

Allowing DNR to administer the program directly even in counties that have not historically participated with the DNR will improve consistency in the practical application of the process. There will also be a fiscal cost savings with the transfer of the program to the DNR.

Specifically, regarding bear damage; when a bear trap is set in a field, often there is significant damage to the crop when transporting the trap to its location. This costly damage has not previously been eligible for claim reimbursement. This has discouraged some farmers from using bear traps but rather take their chances hoping to avoid being invaded. Under this bill, however, crop damage that is incurred while placing a bear trap in a field will also be eligible for a claim payment.

The past requirement for a claimant to participate in public hunting on their land also inhibits some farmers from participating in this program. This is especially true in the case of rented acres. Often the landowner does not want public hunting access on their land thus prohibiting the farmer from the ability to place a bear trap on the acreage. Within this legislation, changes are made to allow for placement of a bear trap without the requirement to open the land for hunting, provided the claimant also waives any eligibility to receive wildlife damage claim payments caused by damage from bears. These changes should positively affect participation by allowing the farmer to obtain and set a bear trap without forcing the landowner to open the land for public hunting.

Finally, the enhancement of remote monitoring on all bear traps should increase the efficiency of the inspection requirement. Traps must be checked on a regular basis and often this requires the farmer to drive many miles every day between traps. The benefit of technology in this application is significant.

In conclusion, we support the provisions included in SB 63 and appreciate the support this bill shows for farmers experiencing significant wildlife damage on their farms. Wisconsin Farm Bureau asks that you **support** SB 63.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate Committee,

Due to work issues, I was not able to make the trip here for today's meeting. As a farmer and member of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation I strongly support this bill. As a farmer I have experienced these issues on our own farm. We have had our silage corn damaged losing several acres, clover fields damaged by deer eating it too low before winter causing kill off, and wrapped silage bales ripped open by bear spoiling the feed inside.

This bill would drastically help many of the farmers in the State of Wisconsin with damage that is occurring year over year with little relief in sight. This bill is designed to help farms cope with the wildlife damage that is occurring. The damage is totaling in the tens of thousands of dollars. This also gives farmers smoother ways to work with this program by moving it to the State DNR to centralize and standardize the way this is implemented across the State. Also, by moving this program to the State DNR this could also give farms that are currently unable to participate in this program access due to the lack of a county administration.

By removing the cap from the current program this would give a fair number to all farmers participating in the program so that a farmer with \$50,000 in damages would be compensated up to 80% of the damage and a farmer that has \$500 in damages would be compensated the same 80%. No farmer would get all their damage paid in full while some max out at one third of their total damage. Second thing, removing the cap would allow farmers with high damage totals to survive living with wildlife in an already tight agricultural market. Every year Wisconsin loses a large number of farms, and anything that we can do to slow that is a big step forward in safeguarding our food supply in the State.

The final part that I want to discuss is the section 82 for bear. This would allow farmers who are renting fields for their farms to enroll them into the wildlife abatement program. This would allow trapping and kill tags to be issued for nuisance bears without opening the land up to public hunting. In return the farmer would not be able to collect payment for damage but will have the ability to reduce the damage being created.

All the items in this wildlife abatement bill would ensure farmers can received the fair compensation to survive in today's agriculture markets. The losses that they are incurring today from wildlife are becoming insurmountable in areas and forcing some to look at leaving farming. Here are key pieces to make these changes to streamline relief, allow fair compensation for damage, and open up fields that could not have anything done to protect them previously.

Thank you for your time,

Andrew Winiarczyk

Balsam Ridge Farms

Sawyer County Farm Bureau President