



## Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council DNR Division Reports

**Date of Production: February 2024** (information current as of 2/13/24)

This documentation is provided by Michigan DNR staff as supplemental information to the Eastern UPCAC members.

### *Meetings/Events/Press Releases*

**Please feel free to share this list of events with everyone!! With all the amazing things happening in the U.P., let's help spread the word. 😊**

#### DNR Public Meetings

For virtual or conference call meeting information, please go to the DNR website at: [DNR Meetings](#) and click on the appropriate meeting and/or agenda for instructions.

February 8	Natural Resources Commission Meeting, 9am, Lansing (nrc@michigan.gov)
February 16	Timber and Forest Products Advisory Council, 8:30am (517-582-3220)
February 20	Eastern UP Citizens' Advisory Council Meeting, 6pm, Newberry (906-226-1331)
February 21	Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee, 2pm (517-284-6135)
February 21	Michigan Wildlife Council, 10am (517-284-6056)
February 22	Michigan State Waterways Commission, 9am (517-285-0747)
February 22	Shingleton Sportsman's Coalition Meeting, 6pm, Munising Township Hall
February 29	Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup, 9 am (517-331-6219)
March 14	Natural Resources Commission Meeting, 9am, Lansing (nrc@michigan.gov)
March 25	Western UP Citizens' Advisory Council Meeting, 6pm, Baraga (906-226-1331)
April 4	Eastern UP Citizens' Advisory Council Meeting, 6pm, Manistique (906-226-1331)

#### U.P. State Park, State-Sponsored & Other UP Activities

Please check with the state park before attending activity for any scheduling changes.

For all activities: [DNR Things to Do Calendar](#)

February 17	Tahquamenon Falls State Park – Guided Snowshoe Hike & Lantern-Lit Snowshoeing/Skiing
February 17	Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park – Guided Snowshoe Hike & Lantern-Lit Trail
February 24	Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park – Guided Snowshoe Hike & Lantern-Lit Trail
February 24	Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park – Porkies Winter Carnival – 2024 Snowburst
February 24	Tahquamenon Falls State Park – Guided Snowshoe Hike & Lantern-Lit Snowshoeing/Skiing

#### Recent DNR Press Releases

For full details, go to: [DNR Press Room](#)

- Make some no-snow outdoor plans today (2/8/24)
- New mass timber community of practice meetings kick off March 5 (2/7/24)
- DNR News: Bird feeding 101, NRC meeting, new 'Wildtalk' and 'Wardens' (2/6/24)
- DNR receives metallic minerals lease application for several UP counties (2/6/24)
- Apply or share! Hundreds of summer park jobs available (2/5/24)
- Last chance to apply for a spring turkey license is today! (2/1/24)
- Invasive plants, boating hygiene and K-12 learning: NotMISpecies webinars feature recent grant projects (2/1/24)
- New Forest Health Highlights report focuses on successes, collaboration (1/31/24)

- DNR Wildlife Habitat Grant application period now open (1/31/24)
- Showcasing the DNR: Buffalo Reef Task Force issues alternatives analysis (1/30/24)
- DNR gets \$3.6 million grant to share Native American history at Father Marquette Memorial (1/30/24)
- Explore recreation grant options at Feb. 7 virtual workshop (1/30/24)
- DNR News: Hunting at 94 [video], free fishing/snowmobiling, ways to help (1/30/24)
- DNR announces \$100,000 available for UP Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative grants (1/29/24)
- DNR reports hazardous ice conditions (1/28/24)
- DNR February meetings cover wildlife, state parks, history, trails and more (1/25/24)

## Grant Contacts

For grant information, to go: [DNR Grants](#)

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|---|---|
| ▪ Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant     | Merrie Carlock, 517-284-5931, <a href="mailto:carlockm@michigan.gov">carlockm@michigan.gov</a>                                      |
| ▪ Recreation Passport Grant                       | Merrie Carlock, 517-284-5931, <a href="mailto:carlockm@michigan.gov">carlockm@michigan.gov</a>                                      |
| ▪ Michigan Spark Grants (Public Recreation)       | Merrie Carlock, 517-284-5931, <a href="mailto:carlockm@michigan.gov">carlockm@michigan.gov</a>                                      |
| ▪ Aquatic Habitat Grant                           | Chip Kosloski, 517-284-5965, <a href="mailto:kosloskic3@michigan.gov">kosloskic3@michigan.gov</a>                                   |
| ▪ Fisheries Habitat Grant Program                 | Chip Kosloski, 517-284-5965, <a href="mailto:kosloskic3@michigan.gov">kosloskic3@michigan.gov</a>                                   |
| ▪ Michigan Invasive Species Grant                 | Erin Campbell, 269-300-9698, <a href="mailto:campbelle6@michigan.gov">campbelle6@michigan.gov</a>                                   |
| ▪ Wildlife Habitat Grant                          | Clay Buchanan, 517-614-0918, <a href="mailto:buchanenc1@michigan.gov">buchanenc1@michigan.gov</a>                                   |
| ▪ U.P. Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Grant | Bill Scullon, 906-563-9247, <a href="mailto:scullonh@michigan.gov">scullonh@michigan.gov</a>  |
| ▪ Forestry Grants                                 | <a href="https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/buy-and-apply/grants/forestry">https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/buy-and-apply/grants/forestry</a> |
| ▪ Land & Water Conservation Fund                  | Christie Bayus, 517-242-8737, <a href="mailto:bayusc@michigan.gov">bayusc@michigan.gov</a>  |
| ▪ Waterways Program Grants                        | Linnea Dawson, 517-290-2200, <a href="mailto:dawsonl@michigan.gov">dawsonl@michigan.gov</a>   |

## Western UPCAC Update

The **Western UP Citizens Advisory Council** met virtually on January 24. Agenda topics included UP deer season feedback, an update on the new Great Lakes fishing agreement, a UP habitat workgroup report and trail updates for Gogebic and Houghton Counties. A review of the DNR's response to the Joint UPCAC's resolution regarding implementing a Michigan moose hunt resulted in a lengthy discussion with more information being requested. The council's wildlife committee also proposed two additional resolutions: allowing December crossbow use in a portion of the UP, which passed by a 66% majority, and including crop damage & DMAP take in harvest reports, which passed unanimously. Dave Lemmien was happy to report the latter resolution has already been implemented. The council also held annual officer elections with both current chairman Tom Solka and vice-chairman Dr. Kirk Schott successfully retaining their positions for another year.

More information on both the Western and Eastern CACs can be found at [www.michigan.gov/upcac](http://www.michigan.gov/upcac).

## February NRC Meeting Summary

The Natural Resources Commission met on the West Campus of Lansing Community College on February 8, 2024.

DNR Director Scott Bowen approved:

- The department's [annual forest road inventory](#). The inventory is completed to comply with Act 288 of 2016, which requires the DNR to post maps of state forest roads and mileage open to motorized use each year, and requires us to inventory forest roads by region.
- [Changes to Fisheries order 255.24](#), which bring regulations into compliance with state law, implementing new catch reporting requirements that were part of the [renegotiated Great Lakes Decree](#). In addition, the proposed changes to FO 255.24 reflect compliance with new catch reporting requirements under state law for inland sportfishing guides.
- Two land transactions. Details of those transactions can be found [in the NRC agenda](#).

## **Wildlife Committee**

Cody Norton from the Wildlife Division reviewed bear population trends in Michigan. The state's bear population is concentrated in the Upper Peninsula and the northern Lower Peninsula. In the U.P., the bear population has increased steadily in the last 30 years, with a total estimated population in 2022 of 10,218 bears. The department's goal in the U.P. is to continue to increase the bear population but at a slower rate by increasing harvest slightly. In the northern Lower Peninsula, bear population has increased significantly in the past 30 years. The goal of the department here is to slow population growth to eventually achieve a stable population. Cody also reviewed hunter effort and success rates, the opinions of hunters, habitat and mast and the occurrence of nuisance bear complaints.

Chad Stewart from Wildlife reviewed guidelines for the NRC and the DNR regarding mandatory antler point restrictions. Chad talked about the history of mandatory APRs and the criteria for implementing APRs in parts of the state.

## **Committee of the Whole**

Chad Stewart updated the commission on the Deer Management Initiative, a new public engagement effort by the department and NRC to address emerging issues in deer management across Michigan. The initiative will convene two 20-member groups, one in the Upper Peninsula and one in the Lower Peninsula, to explore distinct challenges in each. The department wants to include members of established stakeholder groups, as well as unaffiliated members of the public who are interested in deer hunting. We received 2,500 applications, with the bulk of them (87 percent) applying for the Lower Peninsula group. Chad expects members to be chosen and meetings to start in the next couple of weeks.

Cody Norton from Wildlife gave a presentation on proposed furbearer regulations. The department presented the following proposals for consideration by the NRC:

- Require a warning sign to be posted if a trap is set within 25 feet of a public road or trail. The warning sign would have to be posted in both directions, 100-150 feet before nearest point to the trap. The proposal is meant to warn dog owners in particular of traps that might ensnare their animals. The department included the proposal as a stakeholder recommendation but does not support it because of already existing regulations. The department favors instead education and outreach.
- Change the bobcat trapping season in the Upper Peninsula, which would retain the same number of days in the season but shift dates for better conditions and to avoid conflict with the firearm deer season.
- Allow a second bobcat tag to be used on both private and public land in Unit A, which is most of the Upper Peninsula. Currently the second tag can be used only on private land in this unit. The proposal would expand opportunity.
- Change fisher and marten bag limits. Currently, the bag limit is two, of which only one can be a fisher. The proposed change would allow for the harvest of two of any combination. The change would simplify regulations and expand opportunity.
- Allow centerfire firearms of .269 caliber or less to be used at night in the limited firearm deer zone on public and private lands to hunt coyote, fox, raccoon and opossum. Currently, centerfire firearms are allowed in this zone – which is in the southern Lower Peninsula -- on private land only. The change would increase opportunity and simplify regulations with no expected safety concerns.
- Change the coyote hunting season statewide to July 15 through April 15. Currently coyote hunting is allowed year round. The proposed change would avoid the time when coyotes have dependent young, and it would be consistent with our management of other species. The change would also address potentially negative public perception regarding coyote hunting and would likely not significantly affect harvest. People could still take coyotes year round on private land to address damage.

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### ***How to Participate in the NRC Meetings***

- If you're unable to attend the meeting but wish to submit written comments on agenda items, please write to: Natural Resources Commission, P.O. Box 30028, Lansing, MI 48909 or email: [nrc@michigan.gov](mailto:nrc@michigan.gov).
- If you would like further information or would like to address the Commission, please contact [nrc@michigan.gov](mailto:nrc@michigan.gov). Persons registering on or before the Friday preceding the meeting will be allowed up to five (5) minutes for their presentation. Persons registering after the Friday preceding the meeting or at the meeting will be allowed up to three (3) minutes. Persons with disabilities needing accommodations should contact the NRC Assistant.
- Look for the agendas and other Natural Resources Commission items at the Natural Resources Commission webpage ([www.michigan.gov/NRC](http://www.michigan.gov/NRC)).

**February 2024 Legislative Updates – Taylor Ridderbusch, Legislative & Legal Affairs Office**

There were no legislative updates given at the February 2024 NRC meeting.

If you would like to learn more about any bills listed, you can access the Michigan Legislature website at <https://www.legislature.mi.gov>.

**Division Updates**

**Executive Division: Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy**

- See reprinting of article by John Pepin published on December 21, 2023 at the end of this document: **Taking stock of Michigan’s latest deer harvest, DNR and hunters look to address harvest decline in Upper Peninsula.**

**Parks & Recreation Division-Eastern UP Trails: PJ Costa-Eastern UP Trails**

Project Name: Haywire Grade – 11 Bridges	Project Name: Trail 8 – 3 Bridges	Project Name: Millecoquins River Bridge
Description: Engineer and replace 11 bridges	Description: Engineer and replace 3 bridges	Description: Snowmobile bridge footing replacement
Trail Use: ORV/Snowmobile	Trail Use: Snowmobile	Trail Use: Snowmobile
Anticipated Completion: TBD	Anticipated Completion: 2025	Anticipated Completion: 2023
Q2: Waiting on approval from USFS on the engineered plans.	Q2 Update: Ionia culvert substantially completed, final grading and rehab in the spring. Beartrap bridge to be installed in the spring. Waiting on funding for the Melstrand crossing.	Q2 Update: Project is complete. Final update.

**Fisheries Division-Eastern UP – Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Biologist**

- Northern Lake Huron Management staff are writing up survey reports on the eastern Upper Peninsula, including the St. Marys River and Highbanks Lake.
- Cory Kovacs completed the Big Trout Lake, Marquette County, Status of the Fishery Report. The document encompasses nearly 100 years of fisheries management on this lake, which included the early days of Arctic Grayling reintroduction (1926). This report can be found on the Michigan DNR Fisheries Division webpage or by request.
- The Lake Superior Basin Team met in January. Topics discussed were the burbot permitting program, Fish Marking Proposal for Eagle Lake strain Rainbow Trout, walleye regulations, and attendees shared roundtable updates.
- UP DNR Fisheries staff, including Northern Lake Huron, Eastern Lake Superior, and Northern Lake Michigan, met with personnel from the US Forest Service staff for the Hiawatha National Forest to review the prior year’s work accomplishments and to discuss workplans for the upcoming year. This annual meeting promotes collaboration and information sharing between agencies.
- Fisheries Division has a new Lake Huron Basin Coordinator, Doug Schultz. Mr. Schultz has over 18 years of experience with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources including 12 years as an area fisheries supervisor. In his previous position, Doug supervised over 10 employees, managed a complex budget, and collaborated on the assessment and management of multiple water bodies with tribal nations. Doug has a bachelor’s degree from South Dakota State University and a master’s degree from Southern Illinois University. Doug has extensive experience in

creating and managing teams including being chair of the walleye technical committee and serving on an interagency cormorant working group which he will continue to do so but as Michigan's representative. Doug has extensive inter-jurisdictional fisheries management experience working with tribal nations, local units of government, and the public on complex aquatic resource issues involving large inland lakes in Minnesota.

- Eastern Lake Superior and Northern Lake Huron Fisheries Management staff met with Bay Mills Indian Community, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and US Army Corps of Engineers regarding compensating gate operations. The meeting was organized to overview compensating gate operations and preventative measures to protect Lake Sturgeon and other important fish species.
- Eastern Lake Superior field staff have been working on equipment repairs, boat and trailer upgrades, and aging fish structures collected from surveys in 2023. Remainder of winter work includes limnological profiles on area lakes to monitor winter conditions and specifically dissolved oxygen concentrations. Low dissolved oxygen concentrations in inland trout lakes results in poor performance and survival of stocked trout. Having this data is helpful when making decisions on stocking these lakes.
- Becky Papke, Creel Clerk for Fisheries Division started the survey season on Munising Bay on February 1st. Once weather begins to turn, Becky also covers the creel survey in Grand Marais. Becky has been with conducting creel with Michigan DNR for 11 years.
- The Tribal Coordination Unit is planning to conduct a walleye population estimate on Milakokia Lake in spring 2024. This lake has been selected as part of a larger walleye monitoring program and more information can be obtained by contacting Fisheries Biologist Emily Martin at [martine13@michigan.gov](mailto:martine13@michigan.gov).
- Staff continue to participate in the process with MDNR Park and Recreation Division to write 10-year management plans for Indian Lake State Park and Palms Book State Park. Currently the writing team is reviewing public comments from the recent public outreach efforts and finalizing the plan for approval.
- Staff have been working with USFWS Sea Lamprey control staff to set guidelines for operation of the gates on the Manistique Dam over the course of the year to ensure effective sea lamprey trapping while providing river flow conditions that support recreational fishing opportunity for Lake Michigan trout and salmon.
- Black Lake sturgeon season was cancelled due to marginal ice conditions and deteriorating ice. The season was scheduled to begin on February 3rd. Safety of anglers and staff and the inability to protect the sturgeon population from overharvest were factors in this decision. Part 411 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act grants the DNR the authority to cancel the season.

### **Marketing & Outreach Division: Jon Spieles, Chief**

- Social media 2023 wrap-up: Overall department social media impressions and engagement were up over 2022. Here is a look at some of the more impactful metrics: impressions: 110 million (up 4%), average reach: 322,000 (up 15%), number of posts: 6,240 (up 32%). The department's final social media post of 2023 was created by our new digital content creator, Lydia Taylor. The video – a trimmed down version of a spotlight video on a Michigan DNR fisheries biologist – had our highest total reach for an Instagram post in 2023.
- Timber sale and building demolition were completed in preparation for the development of the new Roscommon Shooting Range that is expected to be completed by November 2024.
- The DNR Archery Coordinator certified 145 Basic Archery Instructors for the National Archery in the Schools Program through 16 classes leading up to the second school semester. An additional 14 instructors were certified as USA Archery Level 1 instructors in 2 classes.

- Nature at School season is well underway with interpretive staff offering virtual programming for K-12 classrooms. Over 600 students participated in November alone beginning what will be a very productive winter's work.
- Agent contract work group: Marketing and Outreach Division (MOD) is updating the DNR contract with its 1,500 retail license sales agents that is set to expire on March 1, 2025. It was last updated in 2022.
- Low-sales agent list: MOD has notified license sales agents who have not yet met the contractually required minimum \$2,000 worth of licenses that their accounts will be discontinued if they don't meet that threshold before the license year ends on March 31.
- SAH partner meeting: MOD is hosted a meeting with Sportsmen Against Hunger (SAH) program partners on January 9 at Rose Lake. The goal was to bring key partners together to share thoughts on how to enhance this critical program. Attendees include representatives of the meat processing, food bank communities and university logistics program representatives.

**Finance & Operations: Becky Randazzo, Eastern UP**

- Customer Service Survey: Thank you to all who participated. We had around 30,000 responses!
- Newberry CSC Update: The following photos show the status of the mass timber installation phase of the new building.



**February 2024**

- 2/1 Deadline for Spring Turkey applications; Early Crow season opens
- 2/1 Bobcat Hunting closes in Unit D
- 2/3 Sturgeon spearing season on Black Lake, Cheboygan Co. – **Cancelled**
- 2/10-11 Free Snowmobiling Weekend
- 2/17-18 Winter Free Fishing Weekend
- 2/25 Last day for ice shanties on Lake St. Clair (see p. 70 in guide)

**March 2024**

- 3/1 New Year: Hunt/Fish/Orv licenses go on sale (most licenses expire 3/31)
- 3/1 Can apply for 2025 Pure Michigan Hunt
- 3/1 Hand netting opens (smelt, suckers, bowfin, carp, gar, shad, goldfish) – see p. 23
- 3/1 Fox hunting closes; also Coyote, Fox, Muskrat, Mink trapping all close.

- 3/1 Bobcat Hunting closes (Units A, B, C), and Badger Trapping closes in Zone 3.
- 3/1 Tree stands and ladders must be removed from all public lands
- 3/1 Last day for ice shanties in southern Lower Peninsula counties, see p. 70
- 3/1 Pike, Walleye, Sauger close on the “Boundary Waters” (see p. 25 for exceptions)
- 3/11 Drawing Results posted for Spring Turkey hunts
- 3/11 Last day to register Bobcats taken by hunting (Units A, B, C) – see p. 12 for all dates
- 3/15 Last day for ice shanties in northern Lower Peninsula & Boundary Waters; see p. 70
- 3/15 Walleye, Pike, Muskie seasons close in most waters (exceptions p.11-12 and p. 25)
- 3/15 Sturgeon seasons close (see p.15 for legal waters and St. Clair possession dates)
- 3/18 Leftover Turkey on sale for unsuccessful applicants; over the counter begins 3/25/24
- 3/20 May use dip nets (smelt, suckers, bowfin, carp, gar, shad, goldfish) – see p.23 for hand nets
- 3/25 Leftover Turkey and Hunt 234 on sale for ALL hunters (at 10:00 am)
- 3/31 Hunt, Fish, and ORV Licenses expire (Fur Harvester is valid until April 30)
- 3/31 Last day for ice shanties in the Upper Peninsula, see p. 70
- 3/31 Squirrel, Early Crow, Raccoon, and Rabbit/Hare seasons close
- 3/31 Last day of Otter trapping (For incidental Otter trapped in April, see p. 12 fur digest)

**Wildlife Division: Dave Lemmien, UP Wildlife Supervisor (submitted by Jayne Roohr, Wildlife Technician)**

▪ **Staffing Update:**

- Each unit in the UP will be hiring a non-career wildlife assistant (NCWA) to help with various tasks throughout the summer months, typically beginning in May. The hiring process is under way and the job posting was open from 1-22-24 to 2-6-24. NCWA’s typically help with nuisance bear issues, sick and injured wildlife, habitat projects and crop damage complaints among other things.
- Wildlife Biologist Heather Shaw has accepted a six-month working out of class position with the Forest Resources Division. Heather will be responsible for the DNR forest certification program, state forest biodiversity conservation, and serve as the FRD archeology and tribal liaisons. She will also retain many of her biologist responsibilities and continue to work out of the Shingleton Field Office.

▪ **2024 Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative (DHPII):**

- The Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative (DHPII) is a competitive grant program offered by Wildlife Division and focuses on cooperative projects enhancing deer habitat on private lands in the UP. Now in its’ sixteenth year, over \$1,150,000.00 of deer hunting license dollars have been invested into UP deer habitat through the DHPII program, with an additional \$800,000 of matching funds contributed through partners in over 132 projects, enhancing thousands of acres of deer habitat in nearly all UP counties.
- The request for grant proposals opened on Monday, January 29, 2024, with a total of \$100,000 available to award as grants through the DHPII program. Grants awarded in 2024 will range from a minimum of \$2,000 to a maximum of \$15,000 and require a 25% project match from partners in the form of financial or in-kind contributions. Completed applications must be sent or emailed to: Bill Scullon, Field Operations Manager, Norway DNR Field Office, 520 West US Hwy 2, Norway MI 49870 by close of business on Monday, March 18, 2024. Final notification of project selection process will occur by April 5, 2024.
- Complete grant materials are available online at DNR Wildlife Grants page or type [www.michigan.gov/dnr-grants](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr-grants) then follow the *Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative* link.

▪ **2024 Wildlife Habitat Grant Program:**

- The Wildlife Habitat Grant Program began in October 2013 and is funded from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. The DNR administers the program with the main objective to enhance and improve the quality and quantity of wildlife species habitat in support of the Wildlife Division’s strategic plan. Funding is available for local, state, federal and tribal governments, profit and nonprofit groups, and individuals through an open competitive process. Minimum grant amounts will be set at \$15,000, with the maximum being the amount of funds available for that grant cycle. The 2024 overall available grant amount is approximately \$1 million.

- Applications opened January 31 and must be submitted through the [MiGrants system](#) no later than March 18 to be considered for funding. Successful grant applications will be announced in early summer 2024. The [detailed program handbook](#) and more information are available at [Michigan.gov/DNR-Grants](#).
- **Winter Conditions and the Impact on Deer:**
  - Winter conditions so far have been quite mild across the majority of the UP. As of February 5<sup>th</sup>, we have surpassed the half-way point of monitoring snow conditions and the average region-wide snow depth is 5 inches, less than the long-term UP average of 18 inches. The number of days with snow on the ground greater than 12” deep is only one day, while the long-term average from past years was 28 days.
  - Staff will opportunistically monitor deer wintering complex activity this winter as snow conditions allow.
- **UP Winter Wolf Survey:**
  - UP staff are involved in conducting the winter wolf track survey to determine an UP minimum count. The survey is a stratified random sample design with 13 of 21 units being surveyed this year. The survey requires staff to survey predefined areas using vehicles, snowmobiles, etc., to count and distinguish packs. The survey will conclude at the end of winter when tracking conditions become unfavorable.
- **Deer Camp Survey:**
  - Deer hunters from across the UP contribute data from the 16-day firearm season to provide DNR staff and hunters with feedback on the status of the deer herd and hunting satisfaction soon after the season ends. Data from camps across the UP was collected and is being analyzed with results expected to be released soon. Thanks to all the participants for their interest in deer and deer hunting.
- **Other Updates:**
  - Some wildlife staff have been participating in wildland fire academy trainings in preparation for the 2024 fire season.
  - Wildlife Division recently held a wildlife program coordination meeting with staff to discuss statewide direction including various game species regulations, invasive species management, climate adaptation, research needs and more.
  - Staff are currently planning spring projects, outreach programs, developing project contracts and planning spring wildlife surveys.
  - Newberry staff wrapped up the Youth in the Outdoors Survey, where they asked local youth to return surveys answering 4 simple questions related to their outdoor interests. Youth that returned surveys were entered into weekly prize drawings throughout the two-month long survey window; 92 surveys were returned, over 45 youth were drawn as prize winners and got to pick out an outdoor related prize at the Newberry DNR Office. Wildlife staff partnered with the Newberry News and were able to feature pictures of youth in the local paper enjoying their favorite outdoor activities. Survey responses are used to create local workshops and events that youth are interested in.
  - The Shingleton Sportsman’s Coalition meeting will be held on February 22, 6pm at the Munising Township Hall. An overview of the 2023 hunting season and planned projects for the 2024 field season will be discussed.

## **Forest Resources Division: Scott Lakosky, Eastern UP Supervisor**

### **Timber Sales**

- Newberry FMU
  - Offered 1 timber sale since the last report, no bid. Predominately hardwood pulp and long distance to mill.
  - 6 current sales with varying degrees of activity on the unit.
  - Market Summary: Logging activity has been light due to mild winter weather and current markets. Producers cutting sales with access issues where winter conditions are necessary. Thus far the winter has not cooperated very well for sales requiring snow and extended cold periods.
  - Forestry staff have been busy preparing timber sales and administering active sales. Nearly 1,400 acres have been contracted to be prepared by various forestry consultant firms; staff are administering that work as well.



- Sault Ste. Marie FMU
  - 3 bid openings since the last report; 2 bid openings in Naubinway and 1 in the Sault. 6 timber sales were sold, and 2 sales went no bid. There is a total of 6 no bid sales that will soon be evaluated for either being re-offered or cancelled.
  - Poor winter conditions have yielded slow progress on winter sales with some producers opting to cut “summer” ground instead of moving into sales that require frozen conditions.
  - Active Sales: Currently 4 Sales active near Naubinway and 1 active near the Sault.
  - Staff are continuing to prepare timber sales with the hopes of getting some class A sales bid out before ‘break up’.
  - Market Summary: Although the market conditions over all are bleak in the EUP there have been some areas in the markets that offer glimmers of hope.
- Shingleton FMU
  - Sold 3 sales in December, all had good access and marketable timber which is why they sold well over minimum.
  - Market Summary: All pulpwood markets continue to have poor demand but pine sawtimber and hardwood logs remain stable. Aspen markets are sluggish. Overall sale activity has picked up, apart from a brief cold snap in early January harvesting on winter ground is challenging.

### **Forest Inventory**

- Field forest inventory is underway across all units of the EUP.
- Poor winter conditions are making it difficult/impossible for staff to visit winter ground.

### **Fire**

- Fire equipment has been winterized and preventative maintenance inspections completed. Preventative maintenance of equipment that need attention is ongoing.
- Fire staff have been completing snowmobile trail checks before recent trail closures (*see other/misc. section for more info on snowmobile trails*).

### **Road and Bridge**

- Sault Unit - In the final planning stages with Huron Pines and Chippewa County Road Commission for replacing the bridge over Beavertail Creek. Construction is planned to begin in summer of 2024.
- Weight Restrictions (Frost Laws) are currently in effect across all counties of the EUP as of February 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Facilities**

- Newberry Customer Service Center facility construction work continues.
- Manistique Fire Shop now complete.
- Shingleton Field Office working on procurement of new flooring.
- Seney Field Office bidding out electrical upgrades.
- Excess timber management equipment is being disposed of using the MiBid (DTMB-Surplus Services) system

### **Good Neighbor Authority (GNA)**

- 2 active GNA sales on the East Zone of the Hiawatha National Forest.

### **Land Use**

- 2 use permits were issued for road improvement on Shingleton Management Unit.
- 1 trespass case in Schoolcraft County is nearing completion.
- 1 LTA in the Garden Peninsula is out for field review.
- Reviewed and issued a snowmobile trail grooming permit to a private individual in Newberry Unit.
- Reviewing utility easement applications on Newberry Unit.

### **Commercial Forest/District Service Forester**

- Writing field inspection reports to send to landowners.

- Reviewing forest management plans.
- Uploading documents into commercial forest database.
- Sending letters to landowners.
- Working with site condition forester on conservation easement monitoring.

### **Training**

- All DNR FRD staff attended statewide professional development training in January.
- Multi-day forestry orientation training was held for newer land management staff at the RAM Center in Roscommon.
- Multi-day fire officer academy was held in Gaylord, with orientation for new fire officers and various classes for all experience levels of wildland firefighters. Many EUP staff were in attendance as students and/or instructors: facilitative instructor, incident command type 4, heavy equipment boss, crew boss and engine boss.
- Section Chiefs Academy (NWCG and FEMA Accreditation) – one attended.
- Several staff were successful in completing annual fire fitness testing requirements for the upcoming fire season.

### **Research**

- Staff are involved with a cedar research project being conducted by Michigan Tech to study cedar regeneration and recruitment as well as past practices of cedar management. Study will take place across several locations throughout the EUP.

### **Vacancies**

- Recently interviewed for 2 forest technician and 5 forester vacancies in the EUP. Looking to make offers in February.
  - Sault Unit planning to fill 1 forest tech and 2 forester positions.
  - Newberry Unit planning to fill 1 forest tech and 2 forester positions.
  - Shingleton Unit planning to fill 1 forester position.
- Joshua Brinks hired as the Unit Manager for the Sault Ste. Marie FMU.
- Lester Livermore hired as the EUP Inventory and Planning Specialist Forester.
- Joel Johnson accepted the Fire Officer 10 position in the Sault. Vacancy for Fire Officer 9 position in the Sault will be posted soon.
- David Pine and Christian Schuck have been hired as new Fire Officers in Seney.
- Sean Fischer GNA Forester at Shingleton is transferring to Gwinn FMU.

### **Snowmobile**

- All snowmobile trail sponsors have suspended grooming due to lack of snow. Trail 49 (Sault Ste. Marie to Kinross) was closed due to excessive water on January 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Sault Ste. Marie Snowmobile Association was approved a new groomer during the Summer of 2023. Expected delivery date is the end of February 2024.
- Snowmobile Trail 49 (Sault Ste. Marie to Kinross) engineering is almost completed. This will provide possible options to rebuild the trail. On February 8<sup>th</sup>, a meeting with FRD, WLD, PRD and the Engineer will be held to review the options.
- Snowmobile Trail 480 (Spile Dam Rd.) engineering to replace a bridge is in the final stages of completion. Funding allocated to the Sault Ste. Marie Snowmobile Association on the FY24 grant with intentions to complete the project during the Summer of 2024.

### **Law Enforcement Division (LED): Lt. Skip Hagy, Eastern UP (District 2)**

- Calling this winter unusual is a major understatement, as we all know. The warm weather along with the lack of snow on the trails and ice on the lakes has really slowed things down, for a rare change for our officers. They are, however, all still finding things to keep them busy.
- Our two new officers are reaching the conclusion of their FTO/PCO (Field Training Officer/Probationary Conservation Officer) field training and will soon be on their own in their assigned counties. Scott Pankow is assigned to Chippewa County and Jason Ruth is assigned to Mackinac County.

- Below are some of the activity's officers have been involved in since our last CAC.

#### DISTRICT 2 BI-WEEKLY REPORT 12-11-2023

- CO Andrea Dani** was on patrol in Alger County when a vehicle passed her marked patrol truck at a high rate of speed. Pacing the vehicle at approximately 85mph in the 65mph zone. A traffic stop was conducted, and the operator was cited for an expired registration and warned for the speed.
- CO Andrea Dani** had a ride along from the Alger County Sheriff's Office, when she observed an ORV cross M-28 in the evening with no headlights or taillights with the operator having a gun case across his lap. CO Dani followed the ORV, who then operated in the center of the roadway on a side street. CO Dani tried to stop the ORV. The operator looked back over his shoulder and sped up and fled, disregarding a stop sign onto the next street. The ORV pulled into an active logging operation road, where he nearly collided with an active wood processor. The ORV stopped shortly after, and the subject fled on foot with a cased rifle. The subject was apprehended after a foot chase, upon search of the subject, several containers of methamphetamine were located. The subject was arrested and has been charged with the possession of methamphetamine; felony firearm; fleeing and eluding 4<sup>th</sup> degree; resisting/obstructing; reckless driving; operating ORV with driver's license revoked.
- Pursuant a search warrant of the above subject's cell phone, **CO Dani** discovered evidence of the take of a whitetail deer in violation of APRs and possession of controlled substances by another subject. A search warrant was executed on the second subject's residence. A methamphetamine pipe, plastic bag with methamphetamine, and item with cocaine were located. The subject was arrested and has been charged with possession of methamphetamine and possession of cocaine. A search warrant has been granted for the search of his cell phone. The investigation is still active in attempting to locate the illegal deer.
- COs Steven Butzin and Robert Freeborn** investigated a report of a possible unlicensed meat processor. After concluding the investigation, several possible illegal deer were discovered. The COs followed up with the hunters involved and confirmed their suspicions of deer taken without licenses and loaning tags to others. Citations were issued for the violations.
- CO Robert Freeborn assisted CO Andrea Dani** with a search warrant involving a possible illegal deer.
- CO Robert Freeborn** was on patrol when he observed a side x side UTV pull out onto a state highway. The SxS then proceeded to drift sideways in the road while accelerating at a rapid rate. CO Freeborn conducted a traffic stop and issued the driver a citation for his actions.
- COs Robert Freeborn and Justin Vinson** participated in the annual Schoolcraft County Shop with a Cop program. The COs picked up their assigned child at their residence where they were then brought to 3 Seasons Café. The Café donated a complete breakfast to all kids involved for the day along with a to-go package. After breakfast, the kids were transported to various local shops where they spent \$150 donated by the local FOP Lodge on Christmas presents for family members. After shopping, the kids were transported to the local movie theater where they were treated to a movie along with snacks and drinks sponsored by the theater and FOP, while the officers wrapped the kid's presents. The kids were then transported back home with several goodie bags and presents. Several local agencies participated including MSP, Manistique Public Safety Department, Schoolcraft County Sheriff's Department and Sault Tribe Police Department.
- CO Steve Butzin** received a complaint of an individual trespassing and hunting deer after hours. CO Butzin located the hunter and observed him for a short while, contact was made approximately 40 minutes after legal hunting hours had ended. The hunter was found to be possessing a firearm while intoxicated. The hunter was lodged at the Delta County Jail. A report has been submitted to the court requesting additional charges for hunt deer without a license, hunt deer after legal hunting hours, hunt deer with a firearm closed season, recreational trespass upon lands of another, as well as failure to wear hunters' orange.
- CO Michael Evink** was patrolling State Land when he located a truck parked on a trail. CO Evink observed a woman in a camo jacket standing next to a Birch Tree. CO Evink asked what she was doing, and her reply was collecting Birch Bark. CO Evink asked if she was alone, and she stated that her boyfriend was looking for deer. A few minutes later her boyfriend emerged from the woods with no hunter's orange and no rifle. CO Evink asked what he was doing. He stated he was in fact hunting. CO Evink asked where the gun was. He stated he left it in the woods. CO Evink tracked the hunter's tracks in the snow and located the rifle. The hunter was issued a ticket for hunting without Hunter's orange.
- CO Justin Vinson** took part in Ask The DNR, a show produced by WNMU-TV, that allows callers to have their questions answered by a panel of MI DNR employees. Topics covered during the hour-long broadcast included the Upper Peninsula deer herd, wolf management, ORV use on snowmobile trails, and late season archery hunting.
- CO Cole VanOosten** conducted a processor inspection in Luce County and located an antlerless deer whose tag was bought just a couple hours previously. Additionally, the closest area where antlerless harvest is allowed was nearly an hour away from where the tag was bought. An interview was conducted at the hunter's parents address and it was determined that the hunter had returned downstate. CO VanOosten coordinated with CO Alexander Bourgeois who conducted an interview with the hunter. It was determined that the animal had been shot without a license and the tag had later been purchased before dropping off to the processor. A report was written requesting charges against the hunter for hunting taking an antlerless deer without a license.
- While returning from a trip to Lansing, **CO Cole VanOosten** encountered a log truck on I-75 with no lights displayed well after dark. After watching two vehicles nearly collide with the truck, CO VanOosten conducted a traffic stop on the vehicle to address the safety violation. It was determined that the trucks wires had been dragging on the road causing them to malfunction. The driver was able to phone a family member who was able to escort the vehicle back to their shop for repairs.
- CO Cole VanOosten** conducted two ride-a longs for perspective conservation officer applicants. Trapping enforcement was the focus of the patrols although several hunting violations were encountered and documented for follow-up.

#### DISTRICT 2 BI-WEEKLY REPORT 12-24-2023

- While on patrol, **CO Robert Freeborn** observed a subject drive past him with several outstanding warrants from citations issued by he and CO Butzin over the past summer. CO Freeborn conducted an enforcement stop on the vehicle that still had the same expired plate from this past

spring. After confirming the multi-county warrants, the subject was placed under arrest for 7 misdemeanor warrants for Schoolcraft and Delta counties and transported to the local jail.

- **CO Michael Evink** assisted MSP with a search for an individual who fled on foot through a farm field into a wooded area. CO Evink used his patrol truck to access areas other patrol vehicles could not access. Unfortunately, the individual was not located.
- **COs Steve Butzin and Jackson Kelly** conducted an investigation into an individual who had taken an antlerless deer without a license in Delta County. Through the investigation it was discovered that this individual also loaned a deer license to a family member to tag an 8-point buck. It was later discovered that the individual that shot this buck had also taken a 5-point buck without a license. A report has been submitted to the Menominee County Prosecutors Office.
- **CO Brandon Maki** was invited to attend a trappers education course at the Escanaba field office. CO Maki attended the course and gave a presentation covering trapping / furbearing laws and assisted approximately 20 students who were eager to hit the field and learn about trapping.
- **CO Mike Olesen** received a complaint of a camper being parked on State Land in Chippewa County. Through the information provided CO Olesen was able to contact the owner who claimed that the parcel of land was being purchased by him from another individual through a "gentleman's agreement." After a quick check at the register of deeds CO Olesen informed the individual that the land in question was owned by the state and the camper and other items must be removed. The suspect agreed to remove the items and camper from State Land.
- **CO Cole VanOosten and Cpl Todd Sumbera** received a guilty plea in a recent case involving an illegally harvested 10-point buck from Mackinac County that was shot in the late archery season with a crossbow. The subject pled guilty and received \$6000 in restitution plus court fees and lost his hunting privileges for the remainder of 2023 and the next three calendar years.
- **CO Cole VanOosten** was the only law enforcement officer on duty in Luce County during the early morning hours when an active domestic assault was reported at approximately 4am. CO VanOosten responded to the area and investigated the complaint. The victim displayed physical injuries from the assault. The aggressor was arrested for the domestic violence and on another warrant and lodged in the Luce County jail and held on a \$5000 bond.
- **CO Cole VanOosten** was on patrol of Mackinac County on Christmas Eve when he encountered a trapper who had just harvested a bobcat. CO VanOosten congratulated the trapper on his catch and checked the tag. The individuals chatted about trapping and potential future regulation changes.
- **CO Cole VanOosten** was on patrol of Luce County when he encountered a bobcat trap which contained a dead skunk. CO VanOosten recognized the name on the trap tag as a trapper he had previously encountered in the northern part of the county. CO VanOosten called the trapper who stated he had not been up trapping in over a week and that he was certain he did not leave any traps set. After sending the man a point of the traps location he confirmed that it was not his trapping location. It was determined that the man had recently sold some traps to a family friend. CO VanOosten recognized the name of the friend as someone he had contacted earlier in the day setting traps nearby. A phone call was made, and it was determined that the skunk in the trap had been dispatched by the trapper and left to "Air out" and the trapper had missed switching out the tag on this trap. A warning was ultimately given for improperly tagged trap.
- **CO Cole VanOosten** received a complaint of stolen trail cameras in Luce County. The suspect had stolen two cameras but had missed two others which got his picture as he left. CO VanOosten recognized the man and contacted him regarding the theft. The man admitted to stealing the cameras because he knew he was trespassing and that the cameras had pictures of him. The cameras were recovered and returned to their owner. The owner of the cameras declined charges against the man because of his honesty after being told other cameras had taken his pictures.
- **CO Justin Vinson** was on patrol when he came across an individual who had set a 220 conibear trap on dry ground. The trap was set inside a container that was baited and did not meet the required minimum openings of being set on dry ground. The trap also did not have the required trapper's identification attached. A citation was issued for the violations.

#### DISTRICT 2 BI-WEEKLY REPORT 1-22-2024

- **COs Steve Butzin and Brandon Maki** interviewed an individual that had a suspicious deer license purchase. Upon interviewing the individual, he confessed to shooting a 10-point white-tailed deer before purchasing a valid 2023 deer license. The hunter stated that he realized his mistake after he had shot the deer, so he went to the store to purchase a license. The 10-point rack was seized, and a report will be submitted to the Menominee County Prosecutor's Office for review.
- **CO Brandon Maki** interviewed another individual who had a suspicious deer license purchase. The individual confessed to shooting a 4-point white-tailed deer then realized he had not purchased a valid 2023 deer license. The individual stated after he shot the deer, he went to the store where he purchased a tag. He claimed that he then returned to camp, tracked the deer, placed the tag on it, and field dressed it. The deer head was seized, and the suspect was informed a report would be submitted to the Delta County Prosecutors Office.
- The Alger County Prosecutor's Office authorized charges for an illegal deer from 2022. **CO Andrea Dani** subsequently issued the suspect a citation for take of antlered deer (spike) without a license.
- **CO Andrea Dani** and US Forest Service Officer Sean Hughes patrolled a busy intersection on Trail 8 in Alger County. Multiple snowmobilers were issued citations for no trail permits, failure to display/affix trail permits or registration decals, and unregistered snowmobiles.
- **CO Andrea Dani** patrolled Alger County snowmobile trails and issued multiple citations for no trail permits.
- **CO Justin Vinson** attended the Eastern UP Snowmobile Council meeting, along with the Alger, Luce, Chippewa, Mackinac, and Schoolcraft County Sheriff's departments. The council meeting provides an opportunity for both the grooming clubs and law enforcement organizations to discuss concerns from both riders and groomers, as well as review past enforcement efforts and their success.
- **COs Justin Vinson and Probationary Conservation Officer (PCO) Jason Ruth** were patrolling for snowmobile activity north of Newberry when the officers observed a sled with no registration. A stop was conducted, it was found that the rider had both registration stickers in the glove box. A verbal warning was given for failing to display registration.
- **CO Cole VanOosten** received disposition of a 2022 trapping case involving the trapping of an overlimit of fisher out of season. The suspect pled guilty, paying \$1150 in restitution for the four fisher that were illegally harvested.

- **CO Cole VanOosten**, Sgt. Tim Rosochacki and Lt. Mark Papineau assisted in conducting an “Interactive Wildlife Crime Scene” for a high school CTE class at Lake Superior State University. The 3-day program gave students a glimpse into the job of a conservation officer and demonstrated investigation skills and report writing.
- **CO Cole VanOosten** was on snowmobile patrol in Luce County when he encountered a group of snowmobilers driving against the flow of traffic on State Highway M-123. A traffic stop was conducted, and it was determined that three out of the five snowmobiles in the group were unregistered. A citation was issued to the owner of the snowmobiles for careless operation (Against the flow of traffic) and operating an unregistered snowmobile, warnings were given to the rest of the group for the careless operation, the registration violations and operating on a state highway.
- **CO Mike Olesen** performed a snowmobile patrol in Chippewa County. CO Olesen made contacts with many riders during the patrol. One group of sleds was discovered to have 2 snowmobiles with expired registrations. CO Olesen issued a citation to the owner of the snowmobiles for failing to display a valid snowmobile registration.

#### **DISTRICT 2 BI-WEEKLY REPORT 2-5-2024**

- **CO Steve Butzin** was on patrol near the city of Gladstone when he heard a call over the radio of two individuals that had fallen through the ice on Bay De Noc. When CO Butzin arrived at the location Gladstone Public Safety and Delta County Ice Rescue was on scene and beginning to walk out to the individuals on the ice. CO Butzin and MSP Trooper Zane Weaver followed using a spud bar. Ice rescue was able to enter the water and grab a hold of the two individuals that had fallen through. CO Butzin and Trooper Weaver pulled ropes attached to the rescue members which pulled them out of the water and onto thicker ice. The two were transported to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries and were later released in good health.
- **CO Robert Freeborn and PCO Scott Pankow** served two arrest warrants on two suspects for MDOP and Larceny for cutting pine boughs on Commercial Forest Land earlier this fall. Both subjects were arrested and turned over to Schoolcraft County Jail without incident.
- **CO Robert Freeborn and PCO Scott Pankow** served a warrant for CO Butzin in Delta County for Damage to State Land and Larceny of pine boughs. The subject was arrested and posted bond at Delta County Court house.
- **CO Robert Freeborn and PCO Scott Pankow** served a warrant on an individual in Onaway for the illegal take of a wolf last fall. The subject posted bond and was given a court date to appear in Schoolcraft County District Court.
- **CO Cole VanOosten** conducted a foot patrol checking ice fishermen after dark in Mackinac County. CO VanOosten contacted 3 groups of fishermen resulting in 6 citations for fishing too many lines and unattended lines. Over ten warnings were given for no name on tip-up, fishing too many lines, and no fishing license on person.
- **CO Cole VanOosten** led a class of 35 students at Lake Superior State University. The purpose of the class was informing the students on the career as a conservation officer. The information was well received by the class which contained many students aspiring to become a conservation officer.
- **CO Justin Vinson and PCO Jason Ruth** were checking fishermen on Munuscong Bay. A fisherman was found with an 11” walleye, a citation was issued for possessing a walleye under the legal limit of 15”.
- **CO Justin Vinson and PCO Jason Ruth** while working snowmobile enforcement witnessed an individual disregard a stop sign at a historically busy intersection. A citation was issued for careless operation of a snowmobile.
- **COs Robert Freeborn, Cole VanOosten and PCO Scott Pankow** responded to a shooting at the Travelers Lodge in Curtis, MI. The COs and MSP Troopers assisted Mackinac County Sheriff’s Office with apprehending the suspects. Both suspects were placed under arrest without incident. Mackinac County Sheriff’s Office is investigating this incident.
- **CO Mike Olesen** was patrolling Munuscong Bay during a local fishing tournament when he came across a fisherman who had two eleven-inch walleye in his fishing pail. A citation was issued for possessing walleye less than 15 inches.
- **District 2 COs** patrolled the Sault Ste. Marie area during the 55<sup>th</sup> annual International I-500 snowmobile race on Saturday February 3<sup>rd</sup>. With no rideable snow in the area, recreational activity was extremely low. However, citations were issued for open intoxicants in a side by side, other UTV & ORV violations, and for operating snowmobile without a trail permit. Freezing temps at night in the days prior to the race allowed track personnel to water the track to build ice before the event. Many people were encountered who brought sleds up in the hopes of having rideable snow only to find snowless ground and mud. Attendance was reportedly up at the race and people were in good spirits even though they couldn’t ride the trails. ORV activity was still going on during the weekend.

### **Parks & Recreation Division (PRD): Eric Cowing, Eastern UP District Supervisor**

#### **Brimley State Park/Detour Harbor/Lime Island**

- Lime Island Harbor Upgrade Project: Docks are completed and usable but addressing dock adjustability issue with consultant, contractor and DTMB.
- Brimley Utility Improvement (waterline/storm water replacement): Contract is in place with contractor. Pre-construction kick-off meeting held January 25<sup>th</sup> with actual construction beginning on September 3, 2024.
- Lime Island Cultural Resource Plan Project: Consultant performed field work in fall of 2023 and waiting for development of a plan.
- Brimley Underground Primary Electric/Transformer Replacement (Design/Build): The contract was awarded, and construction will start early spring 2024 with completion by May 22, 2024.

- DeTour Harbor Surge Protection System Improvements: 50% plan review held on January 19. 90% plan review on February 8. This project is anticipating a mid to late February issue for bid and a construction timeline of Labor Day 2024 to Memorial Day 2025.
- A Brimley seasonal ranger was brought back in January to perform HWA surveys.
- DeTour/Lime has two seasonal ranger vacancies that will be posted soon.
- All locations are starting to get short-term worker interest forms and will be looking to start the recruitment process soon.
- Brimley: Restroom/shower buildings closed for the season on October 15, 2023.
- DeTour State Harbor: The Harbor closed for the season on October 1, 2023.
- Lime Island Recreation Area: Closed for the season just after Labor Day weekend.
- Algonquin Ski Trail: The trail has only been groomed a couple times this winter so far due to lack of snowfall.
- Conley Point Boating Access Site: Anglers using this location for parking for access to Fowlers Bay (Munuscong) has been very slow due to lack of ice and snow.
- DeTour has two vacant seasonal ranger positions (one that was not filled last year and recently one due to a ranger leaving state service).
- Two Brimley rangers have been assisting with HWA surveys at Tahquamenon Falls.
- Brimley and DeTour units have been planning upcoming projects, securing funding and ordering materials and equipment.
- Brimley ranger has only groomed Algonquin ski trail two times this winter so far.
- With warmer than normal temperatures and lack of snowfall, rangers are planning on doing early hazardous tree inspections/removals.

#### **Fayette Historic State Park**

- Townsite: Prebid meeting February 13<sup>th</sup> for these two projects: Phase 500 of the furnace wall replacement and Phase 500 of the townhall beam replacement. Staff working on hotel porch.
- Park: Replaced vault toilet doors in campground. Phase 500 plans review of the Visitor Center ADA upgrades. Phase 500 plans review all park drain field replacement.
- Lantern Hike/Snowshoe/XC Ski was held Saturday January 27<sup>th</sup> from 6-8pm. No snow on the trail but we still had a great turnout over 250 people walked the trail. Weather was above freezing so people were able to enjoy the fire.

#### **Indian Lake State Park & Palms Book State Park**

- Indian Lake and Palms Book improvement project is 50% completed in phase 400.
- DNR will have a final meeting in early February to finalize the general management plans for Indian Lake and Palms Book State Parks and then be sent on for approval.
- Indian Lake had soil boring take place last month for the improvement projects expected to begin in the fall of 2024.
- Waiting on a roof estimate to re-shingle keepers roof at Seul Choix Lighthouse.
- Applications have been sent out to people that have filled out short-term worker interest for the summer 2024.
- One of the seasonal rangers is helping Fayette staff with refurbishing the historic hotel porch this winter.
- Indian Lake staff is remodeling the mini cabins including new flooring, tongue and groove walls, and a new door in cabin A.

#### **Straits State Park/Father Marquette/Mackinac Island State Harbor**

- Campsite improvements have been ongoing in campground.
- Father Marquette lift station replacement project was awarded. Contractor has been moving in some materials end of January.
- Father Marquette Memorial site was awarded a \$3.6 million grant from the Mellon Foundation. With this grant, the project has the proper funding to move forward into the construction phase. This project plans are not at the 100% phase. Once they are, it would go out for bid possible construction start date in fall 2024 and through the use season in 2025.
- Straits had a forest recreation ranger position added in the new year which was posted just waiting to receive applicants from HR.

- Permits have been sent to Chicago Yacht club and Bayview Yacht club for their perspective sailing races for the 24 season (Port Huron to Mackinac and Chicago to Mackinac). This is Bayview's 100<sup>th</sup> running and they have many more boats than most years and have requested use of Straits State Harbor in Mackinac City.
- We are seeing a lot of walkers and hikers. We had the park ski trail groomed; however, now with the warmup things have deteriorated to where it is back to hiking.
- Park seasonal ranger staff will come back early to attend the Parks and Recreation Division inservice training held in March. This added about two weeks to those folks for this year only.
- Lots of great small projects planned to help improve the parks and trails this season.

### **Tahquamenon Falls State Park**

- Lower Falls Hemlock Campground Shower Building Replacement: Construction continues to be on schedule. We are hopeful the building will open to the public sometime in July 2024.
- Lower Falls Portage Campground Electrical Improvements: Construction bids have been received and are being reviewed by the consultant. Construction is slated to begin after Labor Day 2024 and be complete by Memorial weekend 2025. The project will provide much needed upgrades to the electrical service in that campground loop, including adding an additional 15, 50-amp sites and providing each campsite with its own electrical service.
- Rivermouth Employee Shop Project: We received only one construction bid, which was over our budget. The project team is adjusting the project scope and plans to seek bids for construction again soon. This project will update/relocate the existing, aged structure to a more convenient location and provide staff at this stand-alone unit the tools to maintain the Rivermouth Unit into the future.
- Upper Falls Brink Overlook: The project team is nearing the end of the design process and intends to advertise for construction bids in the spring of 2024 with construction starting in the fall of 2024 and ending in the early summer of 2025. The existing stairway and deck structures will be eliminated, and a new, universally accessible ramped boardwalk will be built in its place in the same general location. A new viewing platform will be constructed to better utilize the viewing opportunities at the Upper Falls Brink. The Brink area will be closed to the public for a large part of this project.
- Lower Falls Water Distribution Project: The project team is early in the design process for this project. The project scope includes replacing both aging wells that service the entire Lower Falls Unit as well as much of the underground water lines. A construction timeline has not been set yet for this project.
- Interviews were held for the vacant interpreter position in January with an announcement coming soon to introduce the successful candidate.
- All seasonal staff have been recalled for the season with extensive work ongoing to map/monitor this 48,000-acre park for the presence of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Approximately 3,000 acres have been mapped so far with no sign of the invasive insect.
- The park once again is hosting events each Saturday in February in 2024. Guided snowshoe hikes will be offered on February 17 and 24 at 2pm. Lantern-lit snowshoeing/skiing will be offered in the evenings on those dates from 6-8:30pm. Snowshoes are available to use on a first-come, first served basis at no charge and refreshments will be provided.
- The lack of winter conditions has resulted in fewer campers and day-users so far this winter.

### **Newberry Field Office**

- Dug out retaining pond at Sault Ste. Marie Customer Service Center.
- Building vault toilets.
- Charles Flory, Lead Ranger, retired January 1.

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## **Taking stock of Michigan's latest deer harvest**

*DNR and hunters look to address harvest decline in Upper Peninsula*

December 21, 2023

By John Pepin, Deputy public information officer, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

The 2023 firearm deer season is officially complete. Although there are still deer hunting opportunities happening in December, we know most of our 2023 hunter effort is officially in the books.

The license sales and harvest data are mixed throughout the state.

### **Harvest figures**

The reported deer harvest for the entire state is down compared to last year by a total of 11% or almost 30,000 deer. This is certainly significant in the eyes of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and something that is being closely watched. There are many factors that can contribute to the reduction of harvest.

Reported deer harvest in Michigan as of Dec. 5, 2023 (**all deer seasons**) decreased compared to the autumn of 2022 by 26% in the Upper Peninsula, 16% in the northern Lower Peninsula and 7% in the southern Lower Peninsula.



Taking a look at where the highest harvest totals are within Michigan's 83 counties, it is no surprise that they come in the southern portion of the state. Significantly milder winters and abundance of food from agriculture continue to support high deer density where these conditions exist.

### **Harvest reporting update**

This is just the second year of a required harvest report.

The historical method of estimating the deer season harvest would have relied on a random sample of hunters, who were mailed a paper survey, at the end of the deer season.

Although that method will be continued to be able to further our understanding of the relationship between the old survey and the new harvest reporting data, the required harvest provides a real-time evaluation between years that has previously not been available.

It is too early to tell whether harvest reporting has improved this year compared to last.

One of the major changes to the system includes a removal of the required pin drop for harvest location and instead asking hunters to select a township, range, and section from a map grid. The average time to complete a harvest report dropped from 3.7 minutes in 2022 to just 2.9 minutes in 2023.

The rate of hunters not reporting their harvest is currently unknown and could add a significant margin of error to the harvest decline.

### **More harvest data**

All 15 U.P. counties have recorded individual drops (**all deer seasons**) below 2022. Those declines range from 10.9% in Mackinac County to more than 40% in Gogebic (40.6%), Marquette (40.1%) and Ontonagon (42.2%) counties. Six counties in the U.P. reported declines greater than 35%.

The reported Michigan statewide harvest during the **firearm deer season** statewide decreased by 11.9%. Other Great Lakes states, including Wisconsin (-17.6%) and Minnesota (-7.4%) have also recorded harvest percentage declines during their gun deer seasons.

When reviewing the preliminary data available through Dec. 5 from the Midwest, the northern states appear to have very similar reductions in harvest.

### **Reaction**

Hunters in the U.P. have expressed a great deal of anger, frustration and concern with the low reported deer harvest this year. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources hears, appreciates and empathizes with those reactions, as DNR wildlife managers are also concerned with the reported harvest numbers.

In October, the DNR issued a U.P. season preview that stated:

*Deer numbers remain low in many locations, especially along the Lake Superior shoreline and in the western counties and even some locations in the eastern U.P., which will again temper expectations of overall harvest in the U.P. The southern portions of the U.P., including parts of Menominee, Delta and even Dickinson counties, seem to have consistent deer numbers, and another good year is anticipated for those areas. But to be clear, there will be places in the U.P. where deer densities remain low, and hunting efforts in some of these locations will prove extremely challenging.*

Even in those three counties predicted to have good harvest numbers, Menominee, Delta and Dickinson counties posted declines of 18.2%, 20.7% and 26% respectively.

To effect positive change, hunters, wildlife managers, landowners, foresters and others need to work together cooperatively, each doing what they can to help, given their own limitations.

We've been here before.

In 2015, the buck harvest in the U.P. bottomed out at an estimated 17,000. Two years later in 2017, buck harvest in the U.P. eclipsed 30,000.

The deer herd will come back.



The DNR has maintained many conservative deer management recommendations since 2015. There is no reason to think that the herd won't bounce back in a few years, barring unforeseen severe winter weather.

### **Limiting factors**

In Michigan, there are numerous factors that may act singularly or in combination to influence deer abundance, and they can vary over space and time.

Some of these factors have a greater impact on deer populations and thus are more important than others. In addition, some of these limiting factors can be managed by state wildlife agencies, while others cannot.

Predators (including wolves), winter weather, habitat quality, changes to deer harvest regulations, declining hunter numbers and changes in timber harvest all play a combined role in changes to the deer population in the Upper Peninsula.

Numerous factors can also affect deer harvest. For example, given that 50% of the deer harvests in rifle season occur within the first three to four days, unusual weather at the beginning of the season can decrease harvest, like the warm, windy days we had this season. Even what day of the week the opener falls on can change harvest.

### **Predators**

Wolves, more so than other predators, are often blamed for a lack of deer in the U.P.

From 2009 through 2022, the buck harvest throughout all hunting seasons has fluctuated up and down in association with severe winter occurrences.

Meanwhile, wolf population estimates have remained relatively stable, indicating something besides wolves is affecting the deer numbers – that something is severe winters, deer wintering habitat and even summer food availability.

When deer numbers decline, it is not because wolf numbers have increased, and when deer numbers increase, it is not because wolf numbers have declined.

Deer co-evolved with predators and, as such, have developed predator avoidance behaviors (selecting habitat outside of wolf core areas) and physical characteristics that increase survival (fast speed, wide field of view).



Some hunters and others question the results of DNR surveys, which calculate minimum population estimates for wolves in the U.P. (643 average since 2010), with some suggesting the true population is more likely in the range 2,000-3,000 animals.

The DNR acknowledges the number is an estimated minimum calculated during winter surveys when wolf numbers are at their lowest, prior to the birth of pups, which have a relatively high mortality rate.

The DNR has set out hundreds of trail cameras across the region to help assess wolf numbers. This is part of a new survey approach, which is expected to work in concert with the traditional aerial wolf surveys which occur every other winter.

Given the amount of land in the Upper Peninsula providing suitable habitat for wolves (roughly 10,600 square miles), an average pack size of 4.8 wolves and a median wolf territory size of 82 square miles, the number of wolves resulting given these limiting factors would be similar to minimum estimates the DNR is finding in its surveys.

The "Factors Limiting Deer Abundance in the Upper Peninsula" complete report shows that predation from wolves has a relatively small impact on the deer population.

This is because wolves are not the main predator on fawns, and fawn survival is what drives the deer population changes in most years. Other fawn predators include coyotes, bears and bobcats.

In studies elsewhere in the U.S., including some with no wolves present and one with no predators at all, fawn survival rate was measured at 45%.

During the U.P. Predator-Prey study, which took place over nine years (2009-2019) within three varying snow depth zones, indicated the U.P. fawn survival rate was 47%.

While wolves do prey on adult deer, adult deer survival is quite high. Predation from wolves is simply one portion of what impacts our deer herd in the U.P.

### **Winter conditions**

Since 1996, the Upper Peninsula experienced more than three times as many severe winters than between 1980 and 1996, along with three instances of back-to-back and two instances of three consecutive severe winters.

Severe winters are those with more than 90 days with snow depth of a foot or more. Some factors affecting winter snow depth would include climate change and Lake Superior not freezing over, which provides more moisture to generate lake effect snowfall.

Buck harvest was at an all-time high from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, and winters were noticeably milder during this time.

The consecutive severe winters beginning in 1996 and 1997 have resulted in periodic declines in buck harvest since then. Since 2013, eight of the 11 winters (73%) have been severe, impacting buck harvest, further restricting the growth of the U.P.'s deer herd.

When the duration of snow cover exceeds 90 days, winter is likely to impact deer populations to some degree. The graph also shows the linkage between buck harvest declines and severe winters, while the wolf population estimates remain steady.

### **Hunter demographics**

Reviewing license sales numbers through the end of November 2023, overall, for the state, about 590,000 people obtained a deer tag, which is 1% more compared to last year at this time.

The total number of deer tags sold was 1.3 million which is 2% more than last year. Nonresident hunters continued the decade-long upward trend totaling about 25,000 which is up 3% over last year.

Since 1995, the DNR has sold hunting licenses using an electronic license sales system (i.e., retail sales system). This system has allowed the DNR to maintain a central database containing sales information on every license sold.

This information is used to track changes in the number of deer hunting license buyers.

Among the key findings:

- In 1995, deer hunting licenses were sold to 872,000 people, while in 2019, licenses were sold to 582,000 people. This represents a 33% decline or an average decline of 1.7% per year.
- Participation has declined with each generation.
- The pace of decline has increased in recent years.
- The current level of youth recruitment is the lowest we have recorded since 1995.
- The DNR predicts that 434,000 people will purchase a deer hunting license in 2030. This represents a 25% decline from the number of license buyers in 2019.

These declines are part of a national trend, with very few exceptions, especially when looking at states that have experienced little to no population growth in decades, like Michigan.

Hunters are getting older on average and recruiting at lower rates.

Over the years, there have been fewer license buyers for all age classes in the middle of the age curve (i.e., between approximately 12 and 55 years of age).

However, there were increased hunter numbers among the youngest and oldest age classes. The increased hunter numbers in the oldest age classes likely represented the rising share of older people in the population as the baby boom generation aged.

In addition, the legalization of crossbow use during the archery season probably increased participation among hunters in the oldest age classes.

The increased participation among the youngest hunters likely reflected the lowering of the minimum age requirements. In 2012, the minimum age requirement to hunt deer with a firearm was eliminated (mentors are required), while hunters had to be at least 10 years old to participate in 2008.

Rates of participation for deer hunting generally increased among generations until peaking among people born during 1944-1960 (baby boomers) but has declined among more recent generations.

The decline in hunter numbers has been widespread across the state. Since 2000, the greatest rates of decline have been in metro Detroit and in portions of the U.P.

The declines in Detroit are particularly troubling because the highest densities of license buyers reside in this area.

The total youth population in Michigan has declined 0.7% per year during the last six years, while the number of youth hunters has declined 7.1% per year. If this annual rate of decline continues, we could expect the number of youth hunters will be cut in half in less than 10 years.

While some limited increases in hunting license sales have occurred, including during the coronavirus pandemic, the overall trend of hunting license purchases is downward.



### **Things the DNR doesn't currently control**

The DNR manages resources on behalf of all the residents of the state of Michigan but can only do so within its authority. There are legal limits to what the department can do.

Just as we can't magically turn a dial and reduce deer numbers in southern Michigan right now, we can't magically turn a dial and increase deer in the U.P.

We cannot control the weather, the amount of snowfall given areas will receive throughout the course of a given winter, nor the relative severity of winter.



Additional things beyond DNR control:

- Gray wolves remain a protected species given federal court rulings in lawsuits that have kept wolves on the List of Endangered and Threatened Species. This status prohibits a wolf hunt, no matter its provisions.
  - The Michigan DNR supports removing wolves from the endangered species list, citing among its reasons the recovery of wolves in the state after meeting, exceeding and maintaining population levels far beyond original recovery goals.
  - [A 2019 letter from the DNR to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) clearly states the department's position supporting delisting.
- Even if wolves were delisted, the DNR does not have the authority to authorize a harvest season. This authority lies with the Natural Resources Commission or through legislative action.
  - The number of deer hunters has steadily declined overall since the mid-1990s.
  - The amount of hunter time and effort spent afield, hunter support for DNR initiatives, hunter activism and hunter efforts to recruit, retain and reactivate the sport's dwindling participation at all levels.

### **Actions taken by the DNR to address low deer numbers in the U.P.**

The DNR has taken numerous actions, often in concert with partnering groups, agencies or individuals, to improve deer habitat and low deer numbers.

Deer habitat management is ongoing, including efforts to identify and map over 50 deer wintering complexes and manage food and winter deer shelters on state-managed lands, according to regional state forest plans.

Biologists have been working to conserve winter shelter for deer, while also enhancing available food resources by planting oak trees and seeding forest openings.

Funding is available for deer habitat management. To have the greatest impact, deer habitat management needs to occur on multiple ownerships, not just state forest lands, with 80% of deer wintering complex habitat located on private or federal lands.

The U.P. Habitat Workgroup has worked for several years to improve habitat for deer in areas where they spend the critical winter months in need of shelter and food.

The charge of the group states: "Deer winter habitat is a critical component of a healthy sustainable deer herd in the Upper Peninsula. In most cases, deer yard complexes span across multiple land ownerships. More than 80% of the existing complexes occur on private and federal land. For this reason, accurate mapping of complex boundaries, the development of cooperative management strategies that span ownerships and communications to the landowners involved are key."

The workgroup membership is composed of DNR wildlife and forestry employees, federal forest managers, members of the Michigan Natural Resources Commission, and wildlife and forestry interests.

The workgroup effort has focused on identifying important deer wintering complexes, their boundaries and land ownership makeups. It has also involved cooperative conservation and timber harvest strategies that optimize benefits for wildlife and timber production on private lands within complex boundaries.

Through grants and other funding, the workgroup has affected deer improvement on thousands of acres of deer habitat across the U.P., with hundreds of private landowners contacted.

The Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative, now in its 15th year, is supported by the state's Deer Range Improvement Program, which is funded by a portion of deer hunting license revenue.

More than 114 initiative projects in nearly all U.P. counties have improved thousands of acres of deer habitat. In 2023, the program crossed the \$1 million threshold in hunter license dollars invested on U.P. deer habitat enhancements.



The DNR's Wildlife Habitat grant program provides funding to enhance and improve the quality and quantity of game species habitat in support of specific goals from the DNR Wildlife Division's strategic plan, guiding principles and strategies.

### ***Things hunters and the DNR can work on together***

Despite the things we cannot control, the DNR and hunters can work on several things together and separately to try to improve the U.P. deer herd and hunter success.



We can support continued initiatives like the U.P. Habitat Workgroup, helping to improve deer wintering habitat on private lands not administered by the DNR.

The DNR and hunters can continue to talk together about issues, problems and solutions to deer management concerns. To help facilitate this type of discussion, hunters could attend and participate in Upper Peninsula Citizens' Advisory Council monthly meetings where agenda topics are set by the eastern and western U.P. councils' members.

The councils develop resolutions on various actions, which are provided to the DNR for implementation consideration.

Hunters and the DNR can also continue a dialogue through various forums like the "Ask the DNR" live television broadcasts where DNR staffers answer questions from the public.

Any questions not addressed on the air are responded to in the days following the broadcasts if the caller leaves a phone number or email address. [View previous broadcasts.](#)

Hunters can also offer comments at Michigan Natural Resources Commission meetings, as well as comment when various state and federal agencies seek public opinion on a variety of issues, like wolf delisting and deer management.

Hunters could work within and among sportsmen's groups to find consensus on deer management concerns. The DNR can continue to attend the meetings of these groups and offer support for their efforts.

Hunters could advocate for eliminating supplemental feeding of deer. Though legal, feeding deer spreads diseases, causes social strife, kills deer through corn and toxic reactions to high carbohydrates and likely increases deer mortality by drawing deer away from deer wintering complexes and into poor winter habitat.

Hunters and the DNR can think of new ways to work together to confront old problems that are producing limiting effects on the U.P. deer herd.

Hunters and the DNR can continue to respect the others' viewpoints and work to find additional ways to work together cooperatively.

A new [Deer Management Initiative](#) will be starting up early next year.

We need to reevaluate our current management paradigm and develop a set of recommendations in both peninsulas to shift how management occurs, including short-term, actionable items and long-term approaches that take time.

These efforts must be collaborative and use best available science.

The DNR will develop U.P.- and L.P.-specific workgroups representing a diverse set of opinions and values. The groups won't be formed until January 2024, but will include traditional groups we have historically worked with and unaffiliated hunters and non-hunters who can provide unique perspectives.

The goal of the initiative is to position our deer management to meet future challenges. The workgroups will help develop a broad survey about deer trends to be distributed to hunters and non-hunters. The workgroup participants will attend a multi-day, facilitated meeting to look at data, identify problems and develop recommendations for DNR and NRC action.

### ***Things hunters can do***

Report deer harvest to the DNR to help ensure the most accurate harvest reports possible. The more data we are able to collect on deer harvest, the more accurate the results will be when calculating harvest and trends.

Keep abreast of activities of the Michigan Natural Resources Commission ([Michigan.gov/NRC](http://Michigan.gov/NRC)). Copies of presentations, contact and background information on commissioners and the commission is available at the webpage. A schedule of upcoming meetings and agendas is also there.

Read significant DNR publications like the [Michigan Wolf Management Plan](#), which is a valuable guide to learning what the DNR will, can and cannot do to manage wolves in Michigan. Find additional DNR wildlife publications online: [Michigan.gov/WildlifePublications](http://Michigan.gov/WildlifePublications).

Hunters can help police misinformation on social media platforms by posting positive and factual information and refuting false claims.

Work to introduce new hunters to the sport, including friends, family members and others who have not experienced the outdoors. Support efforts to encourage hunting by youth, veterans and others. Take somebody hunting. Seek out mentorship opportunities sporting groups provide that offer “learn to hunt” types of programs.

Volunteer to work on habitat improvement projects or help others by lending expertise to hunting groups and others seeking grants.

Talk to others about the benefits of hunting and outdoor activity, including promoting hunting to those interested in organic food and homesteading lifestyles.

Hunting groups could find more opportunities to work together for the overall good of deer hunting, habitat improvement and other important concerns.

Make purchases supporting [Pittman-Robertson funding for wildlife conservation](#), habitat restoration, habitat improvement, research and education.

Meeting the challenges to improving deer hunting in some parts of Michigan will take a concerted effort over time to achieve. These challenges are affected by multiple factors.

While hunters may perceive that there are too few deer in some regions of the state, others, like southern Michigan, are confronting too many deer on the landscape creating other complex problems affected also by multiple factors.

Wherever we might call home, we should all ask ourselves what we can contribute positively to the problems we are all working to address, inside and outside the DNR.

We are all in this together.

Find out more about [deer in Michigan](#).

