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GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
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DANIEL EICHINGER
DIRECTOR

SUBMITTED: April 25, 2022
RESUBMITTED: May 16, 2022

<p>APPROVED</p> <p style="text-align: right;">_____, 20</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">(ASSISTANT TO THE COMMISSION)</p>
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MEMORANDUM TO THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Subject: Deer Harvest Reporting
Wildlife Conservation Order Amendment No. 4 of 2022

Authority

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, authorizes the Director and the Commission to issue orders to manage wild animals in this state.

Discussion and Background

Effective deer management in Michigan has long relied on information regarding the number, location, and characteristics of hunter-harvested deer along with information on hunter behaviors and opinions. Information has historically been gathered using a post-season harvest survey that is sent to a random sample of hunters. This harvest survey allows the Department to estimate hunter harvest, hunter participation, harvest composition, and other data with statistical limits that generates yearly summaries that can be tracked over time. However, the Department's current deer harvest survey is experiencing a declining response rate that increases the degree of uncertainty in our surveys. Furthermore, the Department attempts to estimate the prevalence of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) and chronic wasting disease (CWD) in the deer population, a process that also relies on hunter-harvested deer collected at deer check stations. Declining budgets and staffing present challenges to operating these check stations in a manner consistent with historical norms. Additionally, there is interest expressed annually for real-time information on deer harvest as the deer seasons progress. The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) also requested the Department consider implementing real-time harvest reporting (Resolution Number 4, August 2018). The results of these challenges indicate a need for the Department to seek alternatives on how deer check is conducted, disease samples are collected, and harvest estimates are gathered to support management and meet information needs.

In November 2018, the Department started development on a new licensing system called MiConnect Outdoors. The new system provides enhanced capabilities for the Department to interact with its customers including support for harvest reporting and post-harvest surveys. MiConnect Outdoors will support harvest reporting through a web-based app and eventually a mobile app that will allow the Department to ask questions of hunters about their harvest and will allow the hunters to report their harvest to the Department. MiConnect Outdoors also assigns a unique identifier that's printed on every kill tag that will link back to the hunter and the type of license or tag the hunter used. In addition, the Department allowed voluntary harvest reporting for deer in 2021, and 6,856 hunters reported their harvest using this new system.

Online harvest reporting will only be effective if most hunters comply with the new process. Completing the current post-season harvest survey is voluntary; however, if harvest reporting is adopted and required by all hunters, law enforcement officers will help enforce this requirement. Furthermore, beginning with the 2022 deer hunting season (starting with the Liberty Hunt), the Department recommends that hunters report all harvested deer within 72 hours after retrieval of their deer and before transfer of possession of their deer (e.g., dropping a deer off at a processor). The hunter must retain the associated harvest confirmation number. The proposed timeframe for reporting harvest is a similar timeframe to many other states with required harvest reporting.

In addition, the Department recommends the following:

- A person who kills a deer may designate another person to report their deer harvest.
- Clarifying that transfer of possession means one of the following:
 - The entire deer carcass is transferred to another individual for consumption.
 - The entire deer carcass, or head, has been accepted by a processor or taxidermist.
 - The entire deer carcass, or head, has been submitted to the department.
- The kill tag (notched license) remains with the head of the deer if the head and body of the deer are separated.
- The kill tag (notched license) remains attached to the carcass until one of the following conditions are met:
 - The carcass is processed and butchered for consumption by an individual for their personal use.
 - The head is transferred to or transported by someone other than a processor or taxidermist. If the head is not attached to the carcass, the kill tag shall remain with the head.
 - The carcass, including the head, has been accepted for processing and recorded by a commercial processor or taxidermist. The kill tag shall remain with the head.
 - The carcass, not including the head, has been accepted for processing and recorded by a commercial processor or taxidermist. The kill tag shall remain with the head.
- Those in possession of a deer carcass, with or without the head, after the harvest reporting timeframe expires, may exhibit the associated harvest report confirmation number.
- Meat processors and taxidermists may record the harvest confirmation number associated with the deer or deer head in their possession.

Issues Pros and Cons

Moving to online harvest reporting will allow the Department to provide more timely responses and better information to its external customers and internal deer management program due to the ease of data collection and data analysis. The online reporting tool provides hunter convenience for submitting harvest information. Whereas previous biological data was collected only from deer brought in to check stations and from hunters selected to receive a post-season harvest survey, harvest reporting will capture information from all successful hunters who report their harvest. The Department expects an increase in hunter reporting rates over time and will continue to conduct post-season mail surveys to account for non-compliance estimates for the first couple of years. There will be an online dashboard that staff hopes will lead to increased public acceptance of deer harvest recommendations and credibility of management programs since all reported harvests are public facing and transparent throughout the season.

Online harvest reporting will also increase the likelihood that deer heads submitted for disease testing will have a harvest report with hunter information and a harvest location on record before they arrive at the disease lab. In addition, requiring the notched license to stay with the head of the deer will allow the Department to easily scan the licenses to pull harvest reporting information and verifying heads are from a surveillance zone for disease testing before they are sent to the lab. These changes will streamline the process for submitting deer heads to the lab for disease testing.

Hunters who do not have direct access to the internet to report harvest will be able to rely on family, friends, or a harvest reporting site to help them report their harvest. As hunters are adjusting to the new system, there may be many hunters who will need assistance in the first few years. Given the increasing and almost universal adoption of mobile phone technology (96% of US adults), the Department predicts that most hunters will report their harvest without assistance and that the need for assistance will decline over time.

Other States

Nine of 13 midwestern states already require mandatory harvest reporting of harvested deer and most wildlife agencies in the US and Canada (64 percent) rely on mandatory harvest reporting as their primary source of harvest information.

Biological

The Department identified the following data on harvested deer as important for management:

- License type
- Harvest Season
- Harvest Date
- Harvest Location
- Land Ownership
- Weapon Used
- Deer Sex
- Deer Age
 - 0-year, 1+ year
- Antlers
 - Yes/No
 - Number Points

The proposed system will require hunters to report on most of these information items as part of the reporting process.

Social

With the increase in data available through harvest reporting, the Department anticipates reducing check stations over time. This will alter the face-to-face interactions between hunters and Department employees during the hunting season. Historically, only about 10 percent of successful hunters statewide visit check stations. With the Department prioritizing interactions amongst staff and hunters, additional outreach and engagement options are being discussed along with face-to-face opportunities at harvest reporting sites to help hunters with the online process of deer harvest reporting.

All successful hunters will be required to provide information to support deer management and to offer their opinions via questions included as part of harvest reporting. Response rates for the

post-season deer harvest surveys have declined from an average of more than 70 percent in the 1990s to about 50 percent in the 2010s, and response rates are projected to fall 20-30 percent by the 2030s. In 2020, the response rate for the deer harvest survey was 44 percent. The Department expects a greater confidence in hunter harvest data and increased hunter reporting rates with the new reporting system. Harvest estimates for each season would also be available during and shortly after the hunting season ends as compared to at least six months under the current system.

In addition, the Department expects an increase in compliance with reporting requirements by focusing emphasis on confirmation numbers. For example, in Alabama, harvest reporting compliance increased from 35 percent to 85 percent after requiring proof of harvest reporting before transfer of possession. In Michigan, failure to report harvest will be a misdemeanor with potential educational opportunities.

Economic

As hunters become more familiar with both processes over time, the need for harvest reporting sites should decrease. Overall, employee and equipment costs associated with harvest reporting sites and deer check stations should decrease dramatically.

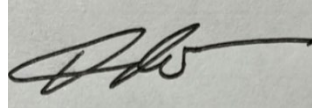
There is no cost to hunters for reporting their deer harvest.

In addition, the Department expects that future mail surveys will have fewer questions and will be sent to fewer people than our current harvest survey, resulting in cost savings.

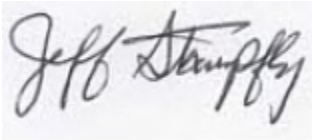
Relevant Divisions have contributed to the preparation of this order. This order was submitted for information on May 12, 2022, at the Natural Resources Commission meeting. This item appeared on the Department's May 3, 2022 calendar and may be eligible for approval on June 9, 2022.



Jared Duquette, Chief
Wildlife Division



David Shaw, Chief
Law Enforcement Division



Jeff Stampfly, Chief
Forest Resources Division



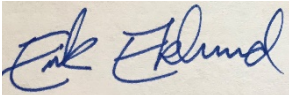
Ronald A. Olson, Chief
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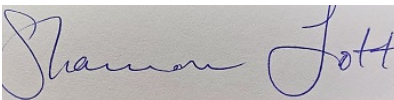
Kristin Phillips, Chief
Marketing and Outreach Division



Erik Eklund, Chief
Finance and Operations Division



Mark Hoffman
Chief Administrative Officer



Shannon Lott
Natural Resources Deputy

I have analyzed and discussed these recommendations with staff and concur as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Daniel Eichinger, Director

Date

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER

Amendment No. 4 of 2022

By authority conferred on the Natural Resources Commission and the Director of the Department of Natural Resources by sections 40107 and 40113a of 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.40107 and 324.40113a, it is ordered that effective June 10, 2022, the following section(s) of the Wildlife Conservation Order shall read as follows:

3.103 Issuance of deer or elk kill tags; validation elk kill tag; reporting deer harvest; validation of deer kill tag; unlawful acts.

Sec. 3.103 (1) The director shall issue a kill tag as part of each deer or elk hunting license. A person who kills a deer or elk shall immediately validate the kill tag by notching out the appropriate information on the tag and attach the kill tag to the antler, lower jaw, or gambrel of the deer or elk in a secure and permanent manner.

(2) Except as provided in this subsection for the removal of a kill tag, it shall be unlawful to possess or transport an elk without a validated kill tag attached. The kill tag shall remain attached to the carcass until any 1 of the following conditions are met:

(a) The carcass is processed or butchered for consumption by an individual for their personal use.

(b) The carcass is accepted for processing and recorded by a commercial processor. If the antlers or head is returned to the person submitting the animal to the commercial processor, the kill tag shall accompany the head or antlers.

(c) The carcass is accepted for processing and recorded by a taxidermist.

(3) Within 72 hours after retrieval of a deer and before transfer of possession of a deer, a person shall report their deer harvest as instructed by the department and retain the associated harvest confirmation number. A person who kills a deer may designate another person to report their deer harvest. "Transfer of possession" means 1 of the following:

(a) The entire deer carcass is transferred to another individual for consumption.

(b) The entire deer carcass, or head, has been accepted by a processor or taxidermist.

(c) The entire deer carcass, or head, has been submitted to the department.

(4) Except as provided in this subsection, it shall be unlawful to possess or transport a deer carcass without a validated kill tag attached. The kill tag shall remain attached to the carcass until any 1 of the following conditions are met:

(a) The carcass is processed and butchered for consumption by an individual for their personal use.

(b) The head is transferred to or transported by someone other than a processor or taxidermist. If the head is not attached to the carcass, the kill tag shall remain with the head.

(c) The carcass, including the head, has been accepted for processing and recorded by a commercial processor or taxidermist. The kill tag shall remain with the head.

(d) The carcass, not including the head, has been accepted for processing and recorded by a commercial processor or taxidermist. The kill tag shall remain with the head.

4.1 Possession of animals; duty to retrieve game animals; exceptions.

Sec. 4.1 A person may possess any animal or parts of any animal, from this state, or from outside of this state, whether living or dead, only as provided by this section:

(1) Game lawfully taken, acquired, and transported may be possessed by any person.

(2) Live game taken from the wild shall not be possessed. Wounded game, reduced to possession, shall be immediately killed and included in the daily limit. A person shall not kill or wound any game animal without making a reasonable attempt to retrieve the animal and include it in their daily limit.

(3) Dead game lawfully taken in another state, territory, or country, and lawfully imported into this state, may be possessed by any person.

(4) Game lawfully taken may be possessed afield, or in or upon a motorized vehicle, if the identification of species and sex is readily identifiable as provided by section 40109 of the natural resources and environmental protection act, 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.40109. Waterfowl may be transported or possessed only in accordance with sections 3.403 to 3.406 of this order. For the purposes of identification under section 40109, the species and sex of a butchered or processed deer, bear, or elk shall be considered readily identifiable if the carcass or parts thereof are accompanied by the head of the animal with the validated tag or seal as required for the species by this order.

(5) Animals, dead or alive, and parts thereof may be possessed by educational institutions, public agencies, and public zoological gardens. A qualified person may obtain a permit from the department to possess a live animal for expressed purpose of ultimately returning the sick or injured animal to the wild.

(6) Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, live game or protected species, and any other animals which closely resemble game or protected species, and can reasonably be confused with game or protected species as determined by the department, which have been lawfully acquired from within this state, or lawfully imported, may be possessed if the person first applies for and has been issued 1 or more of the following licenses or permits specifically authorizing the species to be possessed by that person:

(a) A shooting preserve license.

(b) A permit to hold game in captivity.

(c) A federally recognized falconry permit.

(d) A federal raptor propagation permit, except that the possession of a threatened or endangered species must be in compliance with part 365, endangered species protection, of the natural resources and environmental protection act, 1994 PA 451. A person shall not possess any species under the authority of a federal raptor propagation permit unless that species may be legally used for falconry in this state.

(e) A federal special purpose education permit or state scientific collector's permit.

(7) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the possession of a hawk, owl, or eagle, or parts thereof, by an American Indian for ceremonial or religious purposes or for the preservation of tribal customs and heritage. For the purposes of this section, proof of American Indian lineage shall be a Bureau of Indian Affairs countersigned identification card or a tribal identification card issued by a tribe recognized by the United States government.

(8) A licensed taxidermist may possess lawfully acquired dead game and protected animals only under the following conditions:

(a) Game and protected animals must be tagged with a taxidermist specimen identification tag supplied by the department and the information requested on the tag must be completely and legibly recorded. Harvest reporting information shall be recorded as instructed by the department.

4.4 Commercial processing and storage; records required; maintenance and inspection; exceptions.

Sec. 4.4 (1) The owner, operator, or agent of any commercial processing operation, refrigeration plant, or frozen food locker plant, shall obtain a free permit from the department and maintain records of all wild animals accepted for processing or storage for 90 days following receipt of the animal. Such records shall include the name and address of the owner of the animal, the date accepted, the number of the license or permit authorizing possession, and harvest reporting information as instructed by the department. These records shall be maintained on the premises and be available for inspection by a conservation officer or a law enforcement officer at any reasonable time.

(2) A commercial processing operation that receives a carcass or parts thereof, other than deboned meat, quarters or other parts of a cervid that do not have any part of the spinal column or head attached, antlers, antlers attached to a skull or skull cap cleaned of all brain and muscle tissue, hides, and upper canine teeth, from a cervid which originated from another state or a province shall report such acquisition to the Michigan department of natural resources, wildlife disease laboratory, within 72 hours.

Issued on this 9th day of June, 2022.

Approved as to matters over which the Natural Resources Commission has authority.

Tom Baird, Chair
Natural Resources Commission

Approved as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Daniel Eichinger
Director