



February 7, 2024  
Assembly Public Hearing – Committee on Sporting Heritage  
Assembly Bill 1030

Good Morning  
Committee Chair Pronschinski and Committee Members

My name is Tom Hittle, and I am here today in my capacity as chair of the Wisconsin Council on Forestry, and as a forester with 38 years of professional experience managing forest lands in northern Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Council on Forestry is a diverse group of forestry community leaders, appointed by the governor, who support Wisconsin's efforts to achieve sustainable forestry. The Council was created by State Statute 26.02 in 2002 to advise the governor, legislature, Department of Natural Resources, and other state agencies on a wide range of forestry issues. In addition to our 16 forestry community members, our legislative members include Senators Quinn and Smith and Representatives Mursau and Shankland.

The Council has a long history of engaging in discussions about the dynamic relationship between white-tailed deer and Wisconsin's forests. Our last formal position paper was in 2017, and while that is in the process of being reviewed and updated, we believe the core concepts of our 2017 position are relevant to the discussion today regarding Assembly Bill 1030.

The Council recognizes that the intertwined relationship between healthy deer populations, hunter experience, forest management and tree regeneration is complicated.

Ecological impacts to Wisconsin's forests in areas of heavy browsing are well observable and known. Economic impacts are harder to quantify but the inability to successfully regenerate vigorous forests has significant consequences for our \$24 billion dollar WI forest industry. Low deer populations, on the other hand, can result in undesirable hunting experiences, decreased wildlife recreational opportunities, and affect hunter participation numbers. Contributions to Wisconsin's economy from hunting and related wildlife opportunities also deserve consideration.

The Council has devoted significant time, especially over the last 4 years, toward efforts to support, develop and diversify our forest industry – an industry that faces many significant ongoing challenges. The connection between a strong industry, and the active forest management, including harvesting timber, that creates the habitat needed for healthy deer populations, cannot be overlooked. We need to support our industry to have the habitat in the amount needed to sustain reasonable deer populations appropriate for our hunters.

Wisconsin's Council on Forestry believes it is imperative to work toward better understanding of how goals for deer hunting and regenerating our forests through sustainable forest management can complement each other to realize society's need for renewable forest resources. We encourage decision-makers to value the voice of the forest industry, professional foresters and wildlife managers, and all Wisconsinites who care about the future of our forests and our overall ecosystem health when making deer management decisions.

Development of County Deer Advisory Councils (CDACs) empowered deer hunters and foresters, as well as tourism, transportation, tribal interests, urban interests, and agriculture with a role in regulating deer populations within their respective county.

Broad, one size fits all, deer management strategies, or decisions using arbitrary or uniformed boundaries, or defined time periods, such as noted in Assembly Bill 1030 may not address the unique habitat, and other dynamic factors that determine deer herd size and the consequential impacts on forest regeneration. Going forward, hunting regulations and deer population goals must consider impacts of disproportionate deer densities that contribute to poor hunter experience in some areas and significant impacts on forests from deer browse in other areas.

Healthy forests are important to the citizens of Wisconsin and to all wildlife populations. A disproportionate balance between deer numbers and healthy forests will, in the long run, do great harm to our natural resources, our forest products industry, and all aspects of outdoor recreation, as well as impairing our state's cultural and sporting heritage.

Wisconsin's Council on Forestry believes that working toward better understanding of how deer hunters' expectations and forest managers' goals can complement each other will benefit both.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this discussion today. The Council on Forestry looks forward to continuing to participate in this important discussion.

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