

Musky Clubs Alliance

(From Page 1)

of 25% to 33% in muskie stocking for fiscal year 2024, as well as fiscal year 2025.

Hasz said the DNR’s shortfall is largely the result of 19 years without license fee increases combined with inflation of about 59% during that time.

“The cost of some of the things we do has increased by 200%,” she said.

As a result, the fisheries bureau has cut back in creel surveys, habitat work, and staff travel, and more than 50 fisheries positions have been eliminated. Stocking of muskies, walleyes, sturgeon, and cold-water species amounts to about 40% of the bureau’s costs, she said.

As for fiscal year 2026, Hasz said, “our budget looks worse. Our cost of doing things is going up.”

As for how that relates to muskie stocking quotas, Simonson said, “We had to cut over the last couple years by about half to 35,000 to 40,000 fish statewide.” He added, “Back in 2005 when we had the last fee increase, I think we were producing 100,000 to 130,000 muskies.”

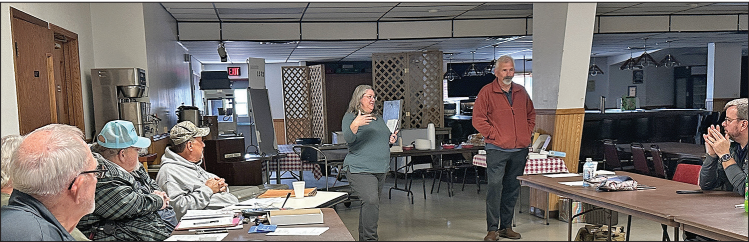
Simonson provided a handout to alliance directors that showed more than 55,000 muskies had been stocked statewide so far in 2024. This total exceeded projections thanks to what he called a “bumper crop” produced by the DNR’s Wild Rose hatchery.

Even with license fee increases, Simonson warned, “We’re not going to get back to 100,000 fish a year.”

Munsen said he met with Gary Muench, foreman at the Art Oehmcke State Fish Hatchery in Woodruff, who explained the cost of raising 6,000 muskies to stocking size in a hatchery pond is roughly \$30,000. Six of the ponds at the hatchery were not used in 2024, Munsen said.

“If it’s \$30,000 roughly to run a pond for 6,000 muskies, we could be raising three or four ponds, or maybe helping,” he said. “Instead of cutting 25% of the muskie stocking, maybe we could just hold for this calendar year and hope things get better. Our mission statement is to enhance the muskie fishery in the state of Wisconsin, statewide.”

After considerable discussion, a motion for Munsen to negoti-



Justine Hasz, DNR fisheries chief, and Tim Simonson, DNR district fisheries supervisor, address the Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin directors during their annual meeting in Stevens Point Nov. 2.

Photo by Steve Helting

ate with the DNR to spend as much as \$75,000 of the alliance’s funds to produce more muskies in the state’s hatcheries passed by a unanimous vote.

Also during the annual meeting, alliance directors voted unanimously to ban the use of forward-facing sonar (FFS, or “live” sonar) during its National Championship Musky Open

(NCMO) tournament. Held in Eagle River in August, the NCMO is the largest muskie tournament in the country with more than a thousand entrants every year. The NCMO is the alliance’s major fundraiser.

Finally, Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin Vice-President Dave Allen was re-elected, and Munsen was re-elected treasurer.

Poaching Case

(From Page 1)

miles in Fond du Lac, Washington, and Dodge counties. More than 100 deer are believed to have been killed by the suspects during that time.

The case finally broke open in July after the sheriff’s departments in Fond du Lac, Washington, and Dodge counties went to the media seeking help in solving the case.

According to the criminal complaint, DNR Game Warden Zachary Feest, of Hartford, and Fond du Lac County Deputy Trevor Theisen checked on a complaint of a foul odor coming from a garbage bag on Elm Street in Campbellsport. There they talked to Kroening behind a duplex where they noticed a terrible smell, swarms of flies, and a velvet antler protruding from the bag. Kroening at first said she didn’t know what was in the bag, whether the bag was hers, and said she couldn’t smell an odor, according to the criminal complaint.

Feest and Theisen asked Kroening for permission to look in the bag. They found the heads of four bucks in the bag.

The discussion that day and subsequent days brought up the names of three 16-year-old male teens who were referred to as Juvenile 1, Juvenile 2, and Juvenile 3 in the complaint. Feest, Theisen, Campbellsport Police Chief Andrea Dowland, and DNR game wardens William Hankee, of Fond

du Lac, and Paul Metzger, of Sparta, interviewed the three juveniles and other adults who had information about the alleged poaching.

One of the adults is identified as Witness 1 in the complaint. Witness 1 stated that Juvenile 1 “is the one that kills them” (the deer), and that Witness 1 believed Juvenile 1 had been shining and shooting deer for a little over a year with another person, Juvenile 2.

Law enforcement officers then interviewed Juvenile 2, who said they had been shooting deer at night with a spotlight and a rifle for approximately one year, and always used Kroening’s vehicle and firearms owned by Juvenile 1’s family. Juvenile 2 also stated that Kroening is aware of the juveniles shooting deer and has been on the phone with them while they are doing it. He also stated that Kroening, sometimes holding the spotlight from the backseat, and others have accompanied them to shoot deer.

Juvenile 2 stated they had most recently shot deer on Saturday, July 13 when Juvenile 3 was along. Juvenile 2 stated he believed that they shot three deer – two bucks and a doe. If they shoot a doe, they left it in the field to rot, he stated in the complaint.

The officers then talked to Juvenile 3 and his parents at their home in Campbellsport. Juvenile 3 showed officers where they shot deer in July – west of Kewaskum on Lake Bernice Drive, Townline Road, and

Highland Drive just south of Hwy. 28 in Washington County. An officer showed Juvenile 3 a photo of the four buck heads seized earlier Kroening’s home. Juvenile 3 stated those were the bucks shot on Saturday, July 13.

Juvenile 3 also admitted to going along and participating in shooting deer on July 10 and 11 from midnight to 4 a.m.

On July 25, game wardens Feest and William Hankee met with Juvenile 1 at his home in Campbellsport, where Juvenile 1 corroborated information the investigating team had collected earlier. Juvenile 1 stated that he and Juvenile 2 had been going out with a spotlight and shooting deer for months. He estimated they had gone out 50 times. Juvenile 1 stated he saved the heads from the most recent seven bucks to boil them and make European mounts, but he did not get around to it.

That same day Kroening consented to a search of her vehicle. Hankee found a bloody steak knife, a bloody wooden saw, a bloody Milwaukee brand spotlight, three bloody floor mats, a .22 caliber bullet, and two bloody pocket knives. Kroening eventually turned over two rifles the juveniles had used – a .22 caliber rifle and a 7mm rifle. The serial numbers were scratched off both rifles. In the report Hankee said it appeared the numbers had been scratched off recently due to the shiny metal where the serial numbers had been located, as well as metal shavings found on the stocks.

Any charges filed against the three teens will remain confidential because of their juvenile status. Trials for the juveniles, should the charges lead to trials, will take place in Fond du Lac County. It is customary for juvenile cases to be held in the county in which the juveniles reside, regardless of where the alleged crimes took place. The names of the 16-year-olds will not be released unless they are waived to adult court.

Alleged criminal and civil violations of DNR wildlife codes include: Mistreating animals resulting in death; possession of a dangerous weapon; hunting (shooting) deer with the aid of artificial light; hunting during the closed season; possession of a firearm while shining deer; possession of deer during the closed season; loading or discharging a firearm in or from a motorized vehicle; discharging a firearm from or across a highway or within 50 feet of the center of a roadway; hunting within 50 feet of a roadway’s center; transporting a loaded firearm in or on a moving vehicle; possession of game killed by unlawful or unknown means; hunting with weapon/ammunition of inherent design, or used in a manner, not reasonably capable of reducing target to possession (i.e. shooting an animal without the expectation of successfully harvesting the animal); unauthorized taking of live wild animals from the wild; depositing or discharging solid waste on public or private property; and obstructing a DNR conservation warden.

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