

## Small Game Hunting and Expanded Spring Turkey Hunting in State Parks Pilot Review

Kurt A. Thiede, Regulation Policy Specialist  
Bureau of Wildlife Management, WDNR

### Introduction:

In 2002, the Natural Resources Board (NRB) adopted WM-33-02, a rule package modifying NR Chapters 10 and 45, Wis. Adm. Code that authorized small game hunting and would expand spring turkey in six of Wisconsin's state parks and approved the corresponding master plan amendments. Associated with this rule was a three year sunset and an understanding that the department would conduct a review of the three year pilot. The reason a three year sunset was incorporated into the rule was due to the anticipated controversy over user conflicts in the parks. This report has been prepared in response to the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) recommendation that a final report be developed following the second year of the pilot (Spring 2005). This report is prepared for review by the Bureaus of Parks and Wildlife Policy and Management Teams, the regional parks and wildlife supervisors, and the original CAC to determine whether these expanded hunting opportunities are continued.

### Background:

In 1997, the Legislature authorized small game hunting in state parks and directed the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop rules to implement the authorization. In 2001, both houses of the Legislature passed legislation opening up certain state parks to all forms of hunting recreation. The former Governor McCallum vetoed this legislation, and gave the Department the opportunity to expand hunting in state parks, through the administrative rule process, in a manner that minimizes conflicts with traditional park users. In 2002, former DNR Secretary Darrell Bazell appointed a 10 member Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) to assist representatives from the Bureaus of Parks and Recreation, Wildlife Management and Legal Services in developing rules that would expand opportunities for hunting in parks while minimizing conflicts. The CAC consisted of individuals selected by the Bureaus of Parks and Recreation, and Wildlife Management who represent the user groups affected by the addition of small game hunting and expanded spring turkey opportunities in the selected parks.

The CAC committee met three times from March 26 – April 29, 2002. The CAC developed their recommendations based on discussions with and input from the DNR. In addition to recommendations from the CAC, DNR Regional staff from parks and wildlife had an opportunity to provide input on CAC recommendations. This final proposal was therefore the result of a collaborative effort by the CAC, DNR Regional Staff, and the Bureaus of Parks/Recreation and Wildlife.

The six parks were selected based upon criteria developed by the CAC to determine the suitability of the parks to participate in the pilot (Table 1.). The criteria involved items such as, approximate undeveloped park acreage available for hunting, distance from populated areas, adjacent land uses, park layout, positive or negative local support, potential user conflicts, game species availability, and any special environmental concerns.

| PARK           | REGION | HUNTING SEASON RECOMMENDED  |
|----------------|--------|---|
| Governor Dodge | SCR    | - Small Game (Already offers Spring turkey hunting)   |
| Interstate     | NOR    | - Spring Turkey   |
| Mill Bluff     | WCR    | - Small Game (Already offers Spring turkey hunting)   |
| Mirror Lake    | SCR    | - Small Game (Regular Migratory Waterfowl Season)<br>(Already offers Spring turkey hunting) |
| Newport        | NER    | - Spring Turkey, Small Game   |
| Willow River   | WCR    | - Spring Turkey   |

Table 1. State Parks participating in the three year small game and turkey hunting pilot.

In addition to selecting the parks, the CAC created procedures for conducting the pilot in the selected parks:

- The 6 parks will be named in the Department Administrative Code ("Code") and will be open to limited small game and turkey hunting for 3 years.
- The Code amendment will provide a sunset clause that requires the Department to evaluate the success of hunting in these 6 parks after 3 years.
- Ongoing evaluation will take place at the end of each season and a final evaluation will be completed by the end of the third year. The third year of the Pilot will have hunting and will also be used as an evaluation year.
- The Department may close a property to small game or turkey hunting during the pilot if significant user conflicts

develop and are documented.

- If a property is closed, the Department will determine if another property could be suitable for hunting based on the established criteria and opened for small game or turkey hunting to complete the pilot project.
- If evaluations determine that some of the 6 properties have had successful experiences with small game and/or turkey, the Department will determine if other properties are suitable for hunting based on the established criteria.

The implementation of the pilot required the promulgation of rules that provided hunting opportunities, while limiting user conflicts.

### **Evaluation:**

The CAC developed evaluation criteria that will be utilized by the Department throughout the pilot and at the end of the pilot to determine the suitability of the expanded small game and spring turkey hunting in the six parks.

Information collected by the Department will include:

#### **1. Interference with Primary Park Activities during Hunting Seasons.**

- Document, to the extent possible, how many people chose not to use an area because hunting was taking place. (Through the use of surveys, questionnaires, comment cards, etc.)
- These numbers will help indicate perceived loss of access to an area within the state park for non-hunting activities (including hiking, skiing, or biking, etc.)

#### **2. Reduction/Increase in Park Visitation during Hunting Seasons.**

- Document park visitation during the hunting seasons. These number should be compared to the number of visitors for the same time period for the 10 years prior to the park being open for hunting in order to determine if park use has increased due to use by hunters or decreased due to loss of non-hunting park visitors.
- In addition, user levels from other state parks within the same region should be analyzed to determine if these parks see an increase or decrease in the number of users in relation to the park that has been open to spring turkey and/or small game hunting.

#### **3. Hunter Density.**

- Document the number of times that a hunter sees or comes into contact with another hunter. (Through the use of surveys, questionnaires, comment cards, etc.)
- Document the number of hunter and non-hunter interactions including the nature of the contact.

#### **4. Hunter Compliance.**

- Hunters will be asked to abide by certain rules including firearm, dog restrictions as well as boundaries where hunting is permitted. DNR staff should document all cases of violations of these regulations as well as adherence to these rules.

#### **5. Hunter Utilization.**

- Document the number of hunters utilizing the park property. This should be attained through a sign in book. In addition, at the end of the hunting season, during each year of the pilot, hunters purchasing a special hunting permit will receive a questionnaire.

#### **6. Economic Impact.**

- To the extent possible, document the economic impact of adding a hunting season to a state park property. DNR staff should document the start-up and maintenance costs (including staff time) of the hunting seasons.
- DNR staff should document revenue during the hunting seasons. This can be compared to past years prior to implementation of hunting in a park.

### *Spring Turkey Hunting:*

Prior to the implementation of this hunting pilot, spring turkey hunting opportunities were already available at 13 state parks and in the northern and southern unit of the kettle moraine state forest. Of the 13 parks, four were open only to disabled hunters. This pilot provided spring turkey hunting opportunities at three additional parks. Interstate, Willow River and Newport state parks. In addition to spring turkey hunting opportunities in parks, fall turkey hunting is offered at one park and in both the southern and northern unit of the Kettle Moraine state forest.

In each year of the pilot access permits were made available to those individuals who were successful in drawing a permit for the surrounding turkey management zone for one of the first three time periods. A secondary drawing was done to determine which individuals would receive the limited number of access permits for the park. Each year the local biologist and park manager determined the number of access permits that would be available (Table 1.) This analysis was derived from the feedback we received from the park and feedback from hunters utilizing the park.

### Interference with Primary Park Activities during Hunting Seasons.

According to park staff at Willow River State Park there were unaware of any conflicts between hunters and other park users or park neighbors. Park visitors offered no negative comments and no visitors indicated changes in plans as a result of turkey hunting in the park. Similar comments were received from staff at Newport State Park. No interference with other activities, no non-hunters that staff talked with left the park due to the turkey hunting and no written or verbal complaints were issued. According to staff at Interstate State Park, it was difficult to determine how many people chose not to use the area that was open to hunting. All hiking trails entering that area of the park had signs informing hikers that the area ahead was open to turkey hunting. They were aware of only a few visitors annually that stopped at the office and decided to leave.

### Reduction/Increase in Park Visitation during Hunting Seasons.

Attendance changes from year to year at state parks. In the spring, according to staff at Interstate State Park, attendance is correlated to weather conditions. Without factoring in weather conditions it is difficult to analyze the effect of hunting on visitation. However, none of the parks reported change in traditional non-hunting use patterns during the three weeks the hunts were offered. Nor was there a significant increase in use due to the hunting opportunity. Due to the number of permits issued, hunters holding permits for the park only equate to a fraction of a percent of total visitation.

### Hunter Density.

Of the 12 hunter questionnaires returned at Willow River in 2003, four reported seeing no other hunter. The other 8 respondents saw no other hunters, and none of the respondents reported seeing non-hunters. At Newport State Park, no hunters reported encountering other hunters, and none of the turkey hunters encountered non-hunters. Based on reports from the 2003 season, the number of permits available was increased for the final two seasons (Table 2.). From limited information received from the turkey hunters at Interstate, they typically saw some hikers. The times they did not see hikers occurred when they entered the park very early and left before mid-morning. Staff at Interstate was not aware of any interactions other than hunters seeing the hikers and there were no confrontations that staff was aware of.

|   |    |                       |     |
|---|----|-----------------------|-----|
| <b>Interstate State Park (TMZ 37)</b>                           |    |                       |     |
| 2003 Total Permits Available                                    | 6  | 2003 Total Applicants | 69  |
| 2004 Total Permits Available                                    | 6  | 2004 Total Applicants | 125 |
| 2005 Total Permits Available                                    | 6  | 2005 Total Applicants | unk |
| (2 permits available for each of the first 3 time periods only) |    |                       |     |
| <b>Willow River State Park (TMZ 37)</b>                         |    |                       |     |
| 2003 Total Permits Available                                    | 24 | 2003 Total Applicants | 104 |
| 2004 Total Permits Available                                    | 24 | 2004 Total Applicants | 182 |
| 2005 Total Permits Available                                    | 24 | 2005 Total Applicants | unk |
| (8 permits available for each of the first 3 time periods only) |    |                       |     |
| <b>Newport State Park (TMZ 34)</b>                              |    |                       |     |
| 2003 Total Permits Available                                    | 12 | 2003 Total Applicants | 55  |
| 2004 Total Permits Available                                    | 18 | 2004 Total Applicants | 125 |
| 2005 Total Permits Available                                    | 18 | 2005 Total Applicants | unk |
| (6 permits available for each of the first 3 time periods only) |    |                       |     |

Table 2. Summary of permit availability and applicant interest for the three spring turkey hunting pilot parks.

### Hunter Compliance.

No violations of any regulations were observed or reported during the open season at Willow River. However, a hunter was reported during a later spring turkey hunting period, but the hunter left the property before the ranger arrived to investigate the complaint. All of the turkey hunters observed at the park had properly obtained park admission stickers prior to hunting. Park staff reported no violations or problems during the 2003 season. Hunters possessing a permit for Interstate abided by the rules. In 2004, staff contacted a hunter with a turkey which he shot in the park, but he did not have a permit to hunt in the park. The hunter did not appear to intentionally violate the requirement to possess an access permit, rather he believed since he had a turkey permit for the surrounding turkey management zone that he could hunt in the park.

### **Hunter Utilization.**

Of the 24 hunters who were awarded permits to hunt at Willow River in 2003, half returned the questionnaire, 9 of those respondents actually hunted in the park and 5 of those 9 respondents were successful in harvesting a turkey. Of the 12 access permits issued in 2003 at Newport, 3 hunters took advantage of the opportunity and two of the three were successful. Staff at Interstate reported that they could not confirm that all hunters receiving a permit actually hunted in the park. Hunters were asked to return a questionnaire, but most failed to do so. For the 2004 hunt the park only received one returned questionnaire and for the 2003 hunt they received two returned questionnaires. Of the returned questionnaires all hunters reported seeing turkeys, but none harvested birds. One of the hunters stated that hikers interfered with harvesting a turkey, but understood that it was a state park. Other hunters did not encounter hikers and none of the respondents encountered other hunters, leaving one respondent to suggest that more hunters could have hunted the property. Of the 2003 respondents, one hunter stated it was a positive experience the other was neutral.

### **Economic Impact.**

It appeared that approximately half of the turkey hunters at Willow River were Conservation Patron license holders which already included a park access permit. Anecdotally, Willow River staff recalls selling 6 park stickers to individuals who identified themselves as turkey hunters in 2003. Staff at the park estimates that approximately 20 hours of staff time was spent refining procedures, preparing and mailing forms, and posting signs, and approximately 12 more hours were spent patrolling during the season. Interstate also reported that the costs to the park for opening the park for turkey hunting are staff time. It takes approximately 8 staff hours to sign and remove signage for turkey hunting yearly. Law enforcement time is approximately 1 hour per day to monitor turkey hunting. Interstate staff added that attendance at the park is dependent on spring weather conditions and did not believe that turkey hunting in the park effected revenue.

### **General Comments.**

The staff at Newport reported that hunters have had a good deal of success in harvesting turkeys and have received a lot of good comments for the spring turkey hunt, and have also had quite a few calls from folks who are interested in the turkey hunt. They felt that the turkey hunt at Newport should continue.

### *Small Game Hunting:*

Unlike spring turkey hunting, small game hunting was a new endeavor for state parks, previously only offered in areas of state forests and some state trails. Individuals wishing to hunt small game at Mirror Lake, Governor Dodge, Mill Bluff or Newport state parks were required to register prior to hunting and were required to obtain a permit, which consisted of the hunting regulations for the park (Appendix A.) and a map that designated areas open to hunting. The permit also included a tear-off questionnaire that we requested be sent back to the park or mailed back to the Bureau of Wildlife Management. This analysis was derived from the feedback we received from the park and feedback from hunters utilizing the park.

### **Interference with Primary Park Activities during Hunting Seasons.**

Mill Bluff State Park stated that no interference with primary park activities occurred. Mirror Lake State Park- 3-5 cases of hikers not wanting to be on trails near small game area. These were verbal cases no complaint or written documentation. The hikers utilized other trails within the Park. Approximately ½ mile of trail runs through the small game area. Governor Dodge State Park felt that this item was difficult to quantify, as they did not tally the numbers of vehicles/visitors who turned and left when they found out there was hunting in the park. The small game season was concurrent with the CWD Intensive Harvest Zone (changed to Disease Eradication Zone in 2004) deer hunt, so people may have left due to the deer hunting, which was occurring throughout the entire park, versus the small hunting area small game hunters were in. Visitors would have had many trails open to them if small game hunting had occurred without CWD hunting. Governor Dodge estimates that on average 2-3 people left during the week and 10-15 visitors left on weekend due to hunting in the park. They stated that the user group most affected by the season was the horse trail riders. Their bridle trails traditionally remain open through November 15th each year. Due to the hunting seasons, while the trail was not officially closed, there were riders once hunting began. Also, the local stable ceased all guided rides once hunting began and they had to close the group camp and backpack campsites early due to hunting seasons.

### **Reduction/Increase in Park Visitation during Hunting Seasons.**

Governor Dodge stated that this was difficult to quantify as the CWD Intensive Zone hunting season skewed number significantly. On any given day during the small game season, the greater number of hunters in the park were deer hunters.

**Hunter Density.**

Both of the hunters who submitted surveys from Governor Dodge State Park encountered other hunters but only one had encountered a non-hunter. One of the two hunters who submitted surveys from Mirror lake State Park encountered another hunter but neither respondent encountered non-hunters. Mirror Lake State Park also reported that there were no reports of too many hunters and no reports of hunter and non-hunter interactions to any park staff. Governor Dodge found this difficult to quantify because virtually every hunter in the park reported seeing other hunters or other visitors. Non-hunting visitors also reported seeing hunters. These numbers were not tabulated.

**Hunter Compliance.**

Mirror Lake State Park reported no verbal, written warnings or citations issued for small game. At Governor Dodge State Park, law enforcement issued three verbal warnings (1 parking in an unauthorized area, 2 failure to register to hunt), 2 written warnings (hunting in a closed area), and 1 citation (hunting with a prohibited firearm). They also reported numerous information contacts in the field and in the park office.

**Hunter Utilization.**

Mill Bluff State Park, which has no staff after the end of Sept. until May of 2004 reported that no hunters submitted questionnaire and that no fees deposited in iron rangers. Mirror Lake State Park reported a total of 114 permits issued, and 181 number of names on daily sign. Governor Dodge State Park reported a total of 63 different hunters who registered to hunt small game (Figure 1.). Of these, 45 exclusively hunted small game. They hunted small game 120 different times.

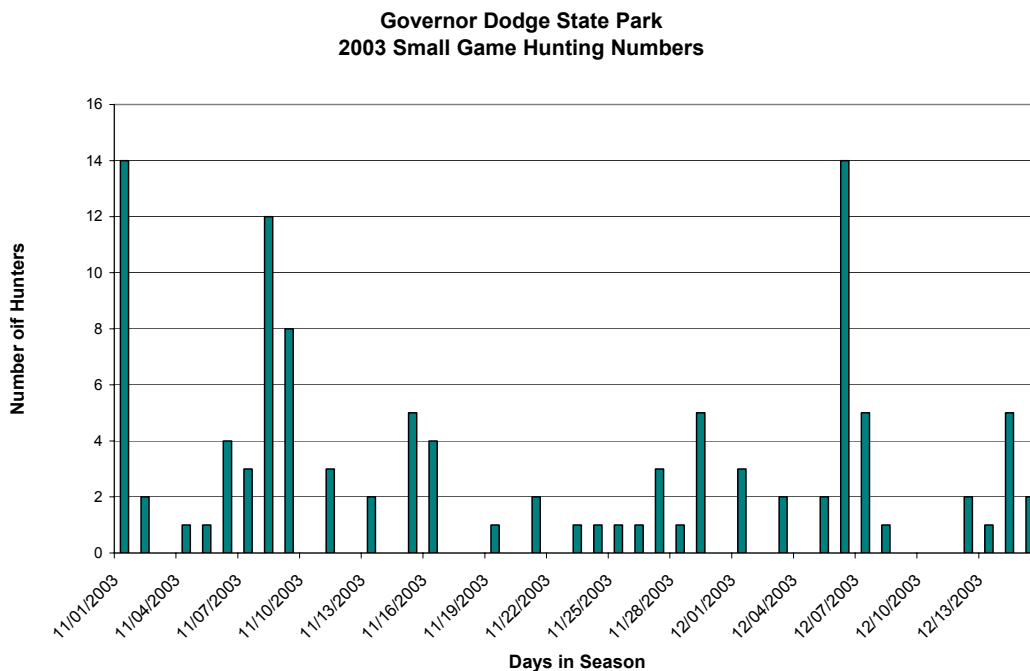


Figure 1. Number of hunters per day at Governor Dodge State Park in 2003.

**Economic Impact.**

Governor Dodge estimated the cost of signs, posts, boundary posting, and the materials and labor of the self-registration station to be approximately \$5104.00. They were unable to estimate the indirect costs. Since they received so few small game hunters and many already had an annual park pass, the Park’s admission sticker revenue did not increase much.

**General Comments.**

Mirror Lake State Park commented that the small game season went off well and was basically a non-event and they also sold some park stickers to people who normally do not purchase stickers. Some additional comments from the park staff were that it was hard to explain to small game hunters why they could only use shot guns and had to stop hunting at noon while gun deer hunters could use any firearm and hunt regular hours. Also, that it went very well for a first time hunt. Everyone was safe and no hunting accidents were reported. Overall, the hunters were very happy to have an opportunity to hunt even with a limited season and hours. The park staff did not spend a great deal of time enforcing special hunting regs, but when we did check compliance was very good and there was not a case where a hunter was hunting in a closed area. Michelle Hefty felt that the small game hunt has been a non-issue after its implementation. There was only one hunter the first year of the program, and this past year (2004) no one picked up a permit for hunting. However, there were folks who asked about it and have expressed some interest. There were no conflicts of any sort for either of the past years seasons.

**Recommendations.**

Based on feedback from State Park and Wildlife staff, we recommend continuation of the Spring Turkey hunts at Interstate, Willow River and Newport State Parks. To accomplish this administrative rules should be drafted that create individual turkey management zones for each of these parks. These hunts would be managed as hunts are currently managed at the other state parks that currently allow spring turkey hunting (Governor Dodge, Devil's Lake, Wyalusing, Wildcat Mountain, Mirror Lake and Buckhorn State Parks). Wildlife biologist will continue to work with park staff to determine appropriate permit levels for these parks.

Regarding small game hunting at Governor Dodge, Mirror Lake, Mill Bluff and Newport State Parks, our recommendation is that these hunts continue at Mirror Lake and Mill Bluff. Each of these hunting opportunities has provided increased opportunity for hunters in these two state parks and there is little evidence of loss in non-hunting visitation or conflicts during these hunts. When a State Park develops or reviews a property's Master Plan, small game hunting under this model should be considered. In considering a property for small game hunting, issues that would be reviewed should include an assessment of undeveloped park acreage available for hunting, distance from populated area, adjacent land uses, park layout, local support, potential user conflicts, game species availability, and special environmental concerns. As for Newport and Governor Dodge, we recommended that the hunts not continue. Governor Dodge is located within the Chronic Wasting Disease Eradication Zone, as a result the park experiences increased deer hunting pressure from October through January. The park already offers many hunting opportunities through deer and turkey hunting, and the addition of small game hunting was viewed as having added negative impact on park use. Lack of hunter utilization was cited as the primary reason for discontinuing the small game hunt at Newport. This park, like Governor Dodge, will now offer deer and turkey hunting opportunities, both of which appear popular with hunters and will continue. However, with such limited use and interest in small game hunting, the administration of a continued small game hunt at the park was viewed as impractical and is not being recommended for continuation.

## **Appendix A. Small game and turkey hunting regulations.**

### General Regulations for Small Game and Turkey Hunting in State Parks

- All approved hunting areas will be designated, will be included on property maps, and will not include other designated use areas such as campgrounds, picnic areas, day-use area, state trails, areas within 100 yards of a designated trail in accordance with NR 45.09(1), buildings, paved roads, or parking areas.
- All hunts will be limited to shotgun, muzzleloading shotgun, and bow.
- The discharging of firearms will not be allowed outside of the designated hunting area, or on any portions of or across a state trail outside the boundaries of a state park.
- All state parks conducting hunting will be clearly posted to notify the general public where and when hunting is allowed.
- All hunters must register at the entrance station at the state park prior to hunting, or some other method shall be established for keeping track of how many hunters are in the park.

### Small Game Regulations

Small game hunting in State Parks will follow established Department rules for small game except as follows:

- The proposed Parks will be open to all small game species except those specifically exempted by the regional land leader, in consultation with regional wildlife biologist and the local property superintendent (Attachment 4).
- The use of dogs for small game hunting will be permitted.
- Small Game hunting will be permitted only between November 1 and December 15 (except as indicated in paragraph 4 below or where statewide or regional season ends earlier for a particular species). Bag limits applicable to the land surrounding the park would apply to the park as well.
- Waterfowl hunting in Mirror Lake State Park will be permitted for the full, regular migratory waterfowl season.
- Small game hunting will be permitted from one half-hour before sunrise until 12 noon.
- Small game hunting will be by permit only.

### Spring Turkey Regulations:

Turkey hunting in State Parks will follow the established Department rules for turkey hunting except as follows:

- Turkey Hunting will be permitted only during the first 3 designated spring turkey seasons.
- Turkey hunting will be by permit only.

## Appendix B. Small Game Hunting Hunter Survey Summary.

### Small Game Hunting Hunter Survey Summary (4 surveys submitted):

- Days hunted: 1,2,5,13
- Dog use: 4/4 used dogs
- Encounter other hunters: 3 out of 4 encountered other hunters
- Encounter non-hunters: 1 out of 4 encountered non-hunters
- Did these encounters interfere with hunting?: 3 out of 4 no; 1 out of 4 no answer
- Rate experience (1 to 5 with 5 being “excellent”): Gov. Dodge-3, Gov. Dodge- 3, Mirror Lake-3, Mirror Lake- 5

### Comments

Mirror Lake- “Average experience; some birds, coyote not the best.”

Mirror Lake- “Recommend making this permanent”

Gov. Dodge- “Nice hunting area. Did not see any birds”

Gov. Dodge- “Season should have been longer in length. The hunting was just getting good when season ended. Season should also go until sunset (legal hunting hours) each day. A .22 caliber rifle should be legal for small game hunting. They are just as safe as the shotguns are. The main thing is the open all-day and open later. We don’t get snow much anymore for skiing in southwest Wisconsin and if we do it is late in the year.”