MUCC Resolutions Responses from Michigan DNR – January 2026

Proposed Resolution #1

Title: REQUEST DNR TO FORM PANFISH COMMITTEE AND/OR SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT PLAN

Fisheries Division established an internal Centrarchid (sunfish and bass) Committee in 2024. The Centrarchid Committee recently identified development of a sunfish management plan as a major charge of the committee. The Committee has begun development of the plan as recommended by this MUCC resolution. The plan would establish management strategies and goals for Bluegill, crappie, and other sunfish species in Michigan. Fisheries Division supports the resolution for MUCC to work with the Warmwater Resources Steering Committee to support development of the management plan for sunfish. Updates will be provided to MUCC representatives on the Warmwater Resources Steering Committee at future meetings, including this upcoming spring.

Proposed Resolution #2

Title: SUPPORT OF HUNTING BOBCATS AT NIGHT WITH CALLING METHODS

Current regulations allow for daytime hunting of bobcats with the use of calls, bait, and dogs in six management units across the entire Upper and much of the Lower Peninsula. In order to pursue bobcats, hunters must obtain free bobcat kill tags prior to the start of the season. Hunters can use one of their kill tags anywhere in the State, and a second in the Upper Peninsula (excluding Drummond Island). Seasons vary in length, from as short as 11 days in parts of the Lower Peninsula, to as long as two months in the Upper Peninsula. Changes to regulations specifying methods, bag limits, and season lengths are the primary mechanisms the Department can use to ensure a sustainable number of bobcats are taken each year.

The Department researched other Midwest states' regulations regarding nighttime hunting of bobcats with calls and found that Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Wisconsin allow the use of calls to hunt bobcats. However, of these states, only Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska allow nighttime hunting of bobcats. In addition, Indiana had their first trapping season for bobcats in 2025, where hunting was prohibited.

Hunting bobcats at night with the use of calls has the potential to increase hunter success and resulting bobcat harvest and therefore decrease bobcat populations in the State. If harvest levels increased to unsustainable levels, the Department would need to remove nighttime hunting as a method or decrease bag limits and/or season lengths, which could impact hunters using bait, calls, and dogs during daytime and nighttime, as well as trappers. There is limited information we can draw from surrounding states that allow nighttime bobcat hunting with calls. New abundance estimates that are being developed would help verify that Michigan's bobcat populations are robust enough to sustain increased harvest and measure the impact of the change following implementation. The regulation change in this proposed resolution has already been brought to the Department for consideration, and the Department plans to wait until new

abundance estimates are in place prior to addressing this proposal, in order to ensure that the best available science is used to make a recommendation during the 2028-29 regulation cycle.

Proposed Resolution #3
Title: BEAR TRAPPING

Currently, bears can be hunted using bait, dogs, firearms, and archery equipment throughout the Upper and Northern Lower Peninsula during portions of September and October. Hunters are selected for a bear license using a preference point drawing system. The number of licenses awarded each year is determined by the desired number of bears to be taken and the average hunter success rate during the prior three seasons in each Bear Management Unit (BMU).

Trapping is an effective and important management tool for a variety of species in Michigan. However, there are several important things to consider with the proposed resolution. Maine is the only state in the Country that allows black bear to be harvested with traps, including foot snares and barrel traps. Most Maine bear trappers use foot snares, as barrel traps are relatively cost-prohibitive. Bears generally cannot be safely released from a foot snare without chemical immobilization. Maine regulations allow for a trapper to harvest any bear, including cubs and females with cubs, which avoids situations where a bear that is illegal to take would need to be chemically immobilized by Department staff and released. Maine trappers must also harvest the first bear they catch in a foot snare, as Department staff do not release bears deemed "too small" or otherwise undesirable by trappers. Any bear chemically immobilized is unsafe for human consumption for several weeks or months (depending on the chemicals used), which is why, in Michigan, the Department tries to avoid chemically immobilizing bears soon before or during the hunting season.

Department staff in Michigan use, during certain times and in specific situations, foot snares for capturing bears for research projects, in addition to barrel traps. These activities typically occur during spring and early summer. Foot snares are only used during April 16 to July 7, outside of the dog training period in order to avoid situations where hunting dogs may encounter a bear that is restrained by a foot snare. They are also only placed in areas that are extremely unlikely for humans or pets to encounter, and warning signs are placed so that they are visible within a certain radius of the snare location in case anyone does wander near the location. Foot snares are anchored to a tree with several swivels, a shock absorber, and in a way that the cable cannot be slid up the trunk of the tree, with all trees, stumps, vegetation, etc. removed from the potential catch circle and all limbs, knots, etc. cleared on the anchor tree at least eight feet high. If measures like these aren't taken, the bear can be seriously injured or killed in the snare. Some other foot snare set types (e.g., baited bucket) can result in the death of bears and nontarget species as well, even with the previously-mentioned measures taken.

Adding an additional harvest method for black bears also has the potential to increase hunter (trapper) success rates, which could reduce the number of licenses available each year and resulting opportunity for bear hunters in Michigan.

In summary, there are several important considerations regarding the proposed resolution:

- Take of cubs and sows with cubs
- Chemical immobilization of bears during an open harvest season rendering them unsafe for human consumption
- Conflicts between hunting dogs and trapped bears
- Proximity of traps to areas with human and pet activity
- Trap set requirements that minimize injury or death to bears and nontarget species
- Potential reduced license numbers and resulting opportunity

Maine's bear trapping season appears to function well there, with the regulations they have in place, activity level of hunters and trappers using other methods, and human densities in the area trappers are operating. Bear trapping has also been a focus of a public referendum to ban bear hunting with bait, dogs, and traps in Maine. Careful consideration is warranted when considering how a bear trapping season could be implemented, and the overall implications for, a bear trapping season in Michigan.

Proposed Resolution #4

Title: **RESOLUTION TO DIRECT MUCC STAFF TO LOBBY AGAINST THE DEFUNDING OF THE UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY BIRD BANDING LABORATORY**

For well over 50 years, the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) has provided the scientific bedrock of U.S. migratory bird conservation and management decisions by providing critical data for hundreds of species such as harvest and survival rates, population trends, drivers of change, and relative abundance estimates. This program also serves as catalysts for discovery. For example, only through these long-term, foundational programs do we know that the U.S. and Canada have lost nearly three billion birds since 1970. The ongoing shortage of funding for the BBL, housed within the USGS Eastern Ecological Science Center (EESC), threatens the continued and improved delivery of foundational science products.

Data derived from recovery of bird bands are essential to assessing the status of bird populations. Banding data informs nearly all of the harvest strategies and management plans that establish sustainable hunting seasons. Michigan DNR and our partners rely on BBL data and support in order to monitor the harvest of migratory bird populations and develop hunting regulations to ensure sustainable harvest. Banding supported by the BBL is also a critical conservation and research tool for nongame migratory birds. Banding and auxiliary marking are by far the most common methods used to assess various aspects of avian demography. The BBL serves as the important intermediary between public reporting of banded birds and researchers; examples include reporting of color-banded Trumpeter Swans, Peregrine Falcons, Piping Plovers, and Loggerhead Shrikes. Information gained through banding and related research aids in strategic and focused efforts to implement conservation activities to assist in the recovery of these populations.

Proposed Resolution #5

Title: **BALANCE BEAR NUMBERS IN MICHIGAN'S UPPER PENINSULA**

The most recent Upper Peninsula bear abundance estimate is about 10,350 bears in 2024. This represents about a 30% increase in bear abundance since 2012. This increase was intentional, following a 10-year decline in bear abundance during 2002 - 2012 that caused concern for stakeholders, as well as the Department. The post-2012 increase was accomplished through reductions in bear harvest during that time period to allow the population to reach a level that attempts to maximize bear-related benefits while mitigating conflicts. The Department received input from bear-related stakeholders during years leading up to and following 2012 that the population was not at a level that provided adequate opportunities and there was concern that harvest levels prior to 2012 were not sustainable. Recently, stakeholder input has become much more positive, with hunters reporting adequate bear activity, size structure, harvest opportunities, dog training opportunities, and other benefits. This has resulted in Upper Peninsula Wildlife Division staff moving away from trying to increase the population and instead transitioning to a four-year Population Trajectory Goal to stabilize the bear population in the Upper Peninsula. In order to meet this goal, the Department will likely be increasing harvest in many UP Bear Management Units in coming years to stop bear population growth and work towards stabilization.

The deer resource in the Upper Peninsula has many challenges. A complex and varied predator load is one challenge deer need to navigate. The decline of forest health and winter deer yards, as well as increasing frequency of severe winters is another cause that often correlates strongly with deer harvest. Addressing only one issue in the suite of challenges to the UP deer herd is unlikely to translate into noticeable, positive change. Knowing both bear and deer management are both controversial, these issues are worthy discussion items between vested stakeholder groups to determine if a common view can be achieved

The Department generally attempts to avoid establishing numeric goals for animal abundance. This is due to several reasons. Any time a new abundance estimation technique is used, or changes are made to the structure of an existing technique, abundance estimates can fluctuate (due to estimation technique, not the number of animals). In addition, the number of animals is generally less important than the impact those animals have in a given area. For example, a density of one bear for every two square miles might be viewed as completely normal to residents in Gogebic County but considered completely unacceptable to residents in Grand Traverse County. This is why the Department sets Population Trajectory Goals, which allow us to evaluate the benefits being provided and conflicts associated with the bear population in a region, and recommend increasing, decreasing, or stabilizing the population over the next four years in order to maximize those benefits, mitigate conflicts, and provide direction for bear harvest recommendations.

Proposed Resolution #6

Title: **DEER MANAGEMENT FLEXIBILITY ACROSS MICHIGAN**

The Department currently has flexibility in season structure, season length, bag limits, and weapon use available to recommend to the Natural Resources Commission. This flexibility is currently displayed in current deer regulations. Southern counties have an early antlerless season, late antlerless season, extended late antlerless season, and January archery season (in some locations) available. There are restrictions for firearm use due to the limited firearm zone line. In the NLP, there is no extended late antlerless season or January archery season. These seasons can be recommended to be added or removed to any unit during any season.

In the Upper Peninsula, no early or late antlerless seasons exist anywhere. Bag limits vary extensively, with southern units allowing up to 10 antlerless deer to be taken, and in northern regions, no antlerless deer licenses are eligible to be used. In the mid snowfall zone, limited drawings occur to allow some antlerless harvest to meet limited demand. Antler point restrictions have been enacted regionally based on demand.

Research has shown that regulation complexity is a barrier to hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation and negatively affects hunter satisfaction and participation. Therefore, standardizing regulations, when possible, is advantageous, for simplicity.

The most pertinent question is the impact to the deer herd or the response of hunters when a specific regulation change occurs. One recent example is the change of antlerless bag limits across the Lower Peninsula being standardized to 10 per hunter across all units. While many locations certainly could not support this level of intensive removal should everyone meet these goals, the reality is very few people are taking more than one antlerless deer, let alone 10. Furthermore, hunters tend to moderate their harvest relative to deer densities, with restraint practiced when deer populations lower. Antlerless harvest across the state have not increased since this change has been made at the DMU level, and thus it is unlikely that it is contributing to overharvest of antlerless deer anywhere in the LP at the DMU level. While the public may enjoy seeing variable limits according to deer density on the landscape, the reality is that very little impact is likely to occur with variable antlerless bag limits over 1.

Proposed Resolution #7

Title: **USE OF CROSSBOWS**

According to the *2024 Deer Hunter Survey*, harvest estimates during the archery season based on data from Table 7 (pg. 47) and Table 23 (pg. 68) for crossbow and non-crossbow/vertical bow users, the antlered:antlerless harvest ratio for crossbow users in the SLP is 2.5:1, and for non-crossbow users is 2.3:1. In the NLP, the ratio is 1.67:1 for crossbow users and 1.7 for non-crossbow users.

Table 1. Archery harvest estimates from the 2024 Michigan Deer Hunter Survey

	Crossbow Harvest	Non-Crossbow Harvest	Total Harvest
SLP Antlered	29,968	17,814	47,782
SLP Antlerless	11,918	7,668	19,586
NLP Antlered	17,441	7,426	24,867
NLP Antlerless	10,465	4,334	14,799

Overall, total archery harvest has remained relatively stable over the past several decades, though this trend of taking more antlered deer than antlerless deer during the archery season has been in place for some time and has grown in recent years. Going back to 2008, the last year before crossbows were introduced into the archery season, antlered archery harvest in the SLP was estimated at 40,138 and antlerless archery harvest in the SLP was estimated at 26,433 for a ratio of 1.5:1. This marked a significant departure from 10 years prior, when antlerless harvest slightly exceeded antlered harvest statewide.

There is no real difference between crossbow users and non-crossbow/vertical bow users in terms of frequency in targeting antlered deer during the archery season. Penalizing crossbow hunters by limiting their time to take antlered deer during the archery season, when non-crossbow hunters exhibit similar harvest dynamics, is likely to be extremely controversial. Crossbows are popular with hunters and can help to address mobility and flexibility issues. Prohibiting crossbows for much of October, or from taking antlered deer, will likely result in a large influx of requests for disability permit exemptions so crossbows are eligible to be used by more hunters through the archery season.