**Proposed law could thwart referendum**

**State wolf hunting debate continues**

A Michigan senate committee has approved a bill that reportedly would allow the state’s Natural Resources Commission (NRC) to authorize the hunting of wolves—even if voters decide to reject the idea. In what opponents see as a preemptive strike against a possible 2014 ballot initiative that would outlaw the practice, the Senate Natural Resources, Environment and Great Lakes Committee voted to advance legislation that would give the NRC power to designate wildlife as game animals and manage the state’s wolves through controlled hunts.

Currently, the power to designate game animals for hunting rests solely with the state Legislature. The new law would allow the NRC’s political appointees to also designate which animals could be hunted, except for livestock and domestic animals.

In addition, under the proposed legislation, the NRC could allow hunters to shoot mourning doves, despite such hunts being ended in 2006 by statewide referendum, according to the bill’s sponsor, Sen. Tom Casperson (R-Escanaba). The bill contains a $1 million appropriation, which apparently means it cannot be overturned by a future citizen’s referendum.

Opponents of wolf hunting say this is a deliberate attempt to nullify their referendum before it even gets to the ballot. The group Keep Michigan Wolves Protected has launched a campaign and is collecting petition signatures. At last report, they had submitted around 250,000 signatures. If at least 161,305 signatures are found to be valid, the previously passed wolf management law will be suspended until a statewide vote can be held in November 2014.

Meanwhile, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in April recommended to the NRC that controlled hunts be held this fall in the Upper Peninsula to help manage the wolf population. Hunters would be allowed to kill up to 47 wolves this fall in parts of Baraga, Gogebic, Houghton, Luce, Mackinac, Ontonagon and Gogebic counties. The key of proposed harvest and location of wolf management units are linked to the level of nuisance complaints and depredation events.

Under the proposal, the 2013 season would run from Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, or whenever the desired unit harvest is met—whichever comes first. There were two options suggested for distributing the wolf licenses. One is a lottery system allowing 1,200 licenses and the second option would allow licenses to be sold over the counter in advance of the season. Any current legal hunting device would be allowed, including firearms, crossbows and bow and arrow.

Foothold traps could also be used, but only on private land if checked daily.

In a related matter, the Michigan United Conservation Clubs has urged conservationists to support (Continued on Page 2)

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**Michigan Environmental Hall of Fame**

Gov. Milliken and others honored

Former Michigan Gov. William G. Milliken and four other honorees have been selected for the Michigan Environmental Hall of Fame. The 2013 awards will be presented during a 7 p.m. ceremony May 9 at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum in Grand Rapids.

In addition to Milliken—widely known as Michigan’s “conservation governor”—the honor goes to Howard Tanner (former director of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources), Fred Wolder (former president of the Muskegon Conservation Club), Huron Pines (a Gaylord-based nonprofit conservation organization serving an 11-county region) and the Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service.

All were selected for their efforts in support of Michigan conservation.

The Michigan Environmental Hall of Fame is sponsored by the Muskegon Environmental Research and Education Center, which encourages the continuation of environmental research and education for young people, as well as developing opportunities for the public to participate in environmental education.

In 1997, the organization acquired the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve, which now does environmental education for approximately 5,000 students each year. The Environmental Hall of Fame awards were launched in 2012.
From tree to table, a sweet path to success

The maples of Russ Forest may have felt unloved and forgotten. For 55 years, they’d waited faithfully, demure in their clouds of silvery gray. All the while their sweetness went unrealized—not unlike a shy country girl who never gets asked to the prom. With the invitation finally arrived in 2000. That’s when Sandy Wiseman looked out with new eyes from the little school next door.

Wiseman needed a hands-on project for her economics class at Volinia Outcomes School. When she asked the experts, they suggested a stationery store. This, in Volinia, Michigan, a crossroads of maybe a 100 people nine miles from Marcellus (pop. 1,191).

“Well that’s boring,” Wiseman said. “There must be something these kids can do here.”

That something was the neglected maples. As a U.P. native, Wiseman knew what a sugar bush looked like. And behold: there were some, but no one had ever tapped them. So we agreed to lease them.

Don Price, Volinia principal, who took over the maple project when Wiseman retired. “It actually taught the Michigan State University owned forest, no power tools, or vehicles, are used in the sugar bush.

From spring through the fall, they’re getting kids involved in making maple syrup. They’re sending kids to horse around by the equipment, but the kids are in control of it. The kids are in charge of it. The kids actually move the sap from the trees to the sugar house. They’re handling the barrels, they’re bringing in the sap buckets, and they’re storing it their own way. They’re making sure the syrup is boiled down and the right pressure is reached. It’s all kid power. They’re the sugar boss Wegner would have none of it.

The project is reported down the wrong path and this can totally turn them around,” says Don Price, Volinia principal, who took over the maple project when Wiseman retired. “It actually makes them better students.

They’re kept on their feet. They’re got to keep their grades up, or they can’t do this.”

With most youth activities there’s a surplus of coaches, clip-boards and rule-bound scrutiny; But Price manages with a light touch. He lets two motivated 17-year-olds, Tim Wegner and Austin Owens, oversee production.

When I visited on the last Friday in March, the season was still going due to the late spring. They’d made 90 gallons of syrup with more on the way. As Wegner and Owens skimmed brown foam from the boiling sap, maple-perfumed steam corkscrewed up and away through the roof’s open peak. The evaporator’s fuel oil-fired burner rumbled along with a rocketey vengeance.

Minutes later, like quail flushed from a fence row, seven or eight students rushed over from the school. A few started to horse around by the equipment, but sugar boss Wegner would have none of it.

“Those kids are on their own out there,” says Owens, a lanky redhead, who lives with his grandfather. “You guys need to get out there and empty sap buckets,” he says firmly.

It was sunny, in the mid-20s, but the sap pails were clogged with discs of ice an inch thick. How to get it off? With your bare hands. While immersed in a sub-freezing ice bath. Until they hung with an angry, arctic fire. But no rubber gloves for Volinia kids, thank you; they say it slows down the process.

From February onward, they’ll make thousands of such trips to the 700 trees. They climb up into 50-gallon plastic barrels, which are then pushed—actually weigh 200-300 lbs. apiece—by a two-wheeled handcart to the sugar house. If it weren’t for their saggy jeans, you’d swear the Volinia kids were Amish.

All told, Volinia offers lessons that no textbook can teach.

“Last year, I didn’t know anything about maple syrup except—that it tasted good,” said Wegner, over the evaporator’s frothy roar. “Now, in one day we cook down about 300 gallons of sap.

“There, it just hit 217 degrees,” he said, pointing to a red LED sensor. “It’s pretty much auto-mated, but you’ll burn a batch of syrup if you don’t watch it.”

The old sugar houses offered warmth from open wood fires that heated the evaporators. This one is ice-cave cold, with a bare concrete floor that would make a penquin’s feet go numb. I can’t imagine how frigid it must be in the pre-dawn darkness.

But the crew’s other half can.

“Get up at 4 a.m. to be here by 5,” says Owens, a lanky redhead, who lives with his grandfather. “But we’re lucky. We don’t have to make syrup every day.”

Michigan wolf management debate continues

(Continued From Page 1)

the state’s “Scientific Wildlife Management” package (Senate Bills 258 & 289, and House Bills 4522 and 4535). The legislation will establish a right to hunt, fish and trap, allow the NRC to designate special sport fisheries orders, and provide $1 million in conservation funding for fish and game management, and research, and provide free licenses to active-duty members of the military. It will be an effort of stop anti-hunters—led by the Washington, D.C.-based Humane Society of the United States—from being able to “buy their way onto Michigan’s ballot and take away any more hunting rights.”

The brown earth gave at the weight of the shovel. It crumbled, it slid, it gave way beneath human muscle—sliding, easing, opening. It gave but a shovel full. Yet it gave a ton—tens of tons—to a cen- tury of man-desired progress. A link bridged the past to the future.

The dirt slid from the shovel. It slid and smeared a picture, the image dreamed of years in the past. The picture of brave men, of men of courage, of men who bent steel to their will, who twisted iron and hammered spikes, who made the glowing forge grow red to bend the white hot metal into spans as tangible as spider webs.

The shovel brought the dream into focus. It brought the bridge into reality. It dug into the earth and threw the earth into the air. It threw the bridge into the air—high, high into the air—the blue of the water, above the blue of the Mackinac Straits.

The crowd roared. The crowd sang its song of victory, of achieve- ment, of victory over the disbelievers. [A] song of the future, of the unquenchable spirit of the north woods.

Bands played, bands marched—forty bands from little schools and little hamlets ... Floats passed by ... depicting the old north country ... the dreams, the achievements, the history and the strength of the north woods.

On a platform were men and women who had centralized the strength of the visionaries. There was the governor of the State of Michigan, young enough to carry on the vision of men of long ago—young enough and in love enough with the north woods to stump to the state, talk [to people], to sell the bridge to the Upper and Lower penin- sulas.

There were the strings of cars clogging the highways, the street dance where civic pride overflowed in laughter, the flaming sky rock- ers cross-cris-cross the deep blue of the sky, bursting into stars that told in more than written words of a state’s achievement, history and progress.

It was the dedication, the groundbreaking, the symbol of progress, of 20th Century achievement, of battles in the Capitol, the House, the corridors, the cities and the townships. It was the voice of victory ...

“But no one had ever tapped these kids can do here.”

And so the bridge was begun under a Michigan sky, with Michigan strength of the visionaries. There was the governor of the State of Michigan, young enough to carry on the vision of men of long ago—

Help compile The North Woods Call history

If you have stories to share about The North Woods Call or photos and background information about the newspaper’s role in Michigan conservation history, please contact us at:

editor@mynorthwoodscall.com

Also follow us on Facebook, Twitter & Blogger
The proposed bill would remove “biological diversity” from the list of state forest management goals and prohibits the DNR from managing an area of land specifically to promote biological diversity.

“The effect is staggering,” Olson said. “It will essentially eviscerate the Michigan Endangered Species Act and violate the DNR’s statutory duties pursuant to its originating act — the Michigan Constitution — the Michigan Environmental Protection Act’s public trust requirements and Michigan case law.”

Under the state Constitution, Olson said, all state agencies—including the Natural Resources Commission, DNR and Department of Environmental Quality—have a duty to protect the state’s natural resources. Thus, the legislature also has a mandatory duty to enact legislation to protect Michigan’s natural resources, he said.

“In effect, the Constitution and Michigan case law have imposed a ‘self-executing’ duty on the legislature to pass laws that protect air, water, and natural resources—not the contrary,” Olson told LaFontaine.

“Accordingly, Senate Bill 78 flies in the face of this mandatory and clearly articulated constitutional provision,” Olson said.

The legislation did carry out this duty in 1970, Olson said, when it passed the Michigan Environmental Protection Act, which provided citizens with a legal right to protect the environment from public or private degradation. Measuring biodiversity enables the DNR and other natural resource agencies to assess the environmental health and quality of an ecosystem, according to Olson, and to “understand the effects of conservation in the management of natural resources of the state, and the potential effects, or impacts of proposed activities.”

Without this rigorous scientific tool, he said, the DNR and other agencies “will be empty handed and unable to satisfy their duty to protect 4.6 million acres of state public trust resources from likely pollution, impairment and destruction.”

Curiously, the DNR itself has said it remains “neutral” on the matter and doesn’t believe the bill prohibits managing state lands for biodiversity.

Still, Olson told LaFontaine in the aforementioned letter that the DNR has legal responsibilities to ensure it manages the state lands with enhancement and management tools. Under current laws, he said, the DNR’s responsibilities are enforceable by the courts.

The proposed bill, according to Olson, would only encourage violations of these longstanding and vital obligations and duties to our natural ecosystems.

Angulars push for increased fees

The Anglers of the Au Sable organization is pushing for a new fishing license fee package that would increase costs, but raise several million dollars annually to help implement the Michigan Department of Natural Resources’ new fisheries strategic plan. Members and other citizens are being asked to contact state representatives to express their support for an across-the-board fishing license fee of at least $25 for Michigan residents and $75 for out-of-state anglers. The fee level was proposed by Gov. Rick Snyder, but instead a watered-down version was recently approved by the House Appropriations Natural Resources Subcommittee.

Unfortunately, according to Anglers of the Au Sable, the subcommittee ignored all of the recommendations made previously by the group, while stripping $18 million in general funds from the DNR budget, and eliminating funding for 25 new conservation officers, as well as for an invasive species specialist and a new fisheries research analyst. They have asked that—and minimally—the governor’s original bill be amended and the state license fee of at least $25 be restored. “They are instead advocating a higher all-inclusive fishing license fee of at least $25 for Michigan residents and $75 for out-of-state anglers. The fee level was proposed by Gov. Rick Snyder, but instead a watered-down version was recently approved by the House Appropriations Natural Resources Subcommittee.”

Unfortunately, according to members of the subcommittee, which is the committee to which the bill was referred, they have asked that—the minimum—the governor’s original bill be amended and the state license fee of at least $25 be restored. “They are instead advocating a higher all-inclusive fishing license fee of at least $25 for Michigan residents and $75 for out-of-state anglers. The fee level was proposed by Gov. Rick Snyder, but instead a watered-down version was recently approved by the House Appropriations Natural Resources Subcommittee.”

Ballot initiative to ban fracking under way in Michigan

A citizen-led ballot initiative to ban horizontal hydraulic fracturing—known as “fracking”—in Michigan kicked off in April with a goal of collecting at least 258,088 valid signatures to get the issue on the 2014 ballot. So far, several kickoff events were held around the state to enlist volunteers, distribute petitions and hand out literature. Initial training angles are being held on how to circulate the petitions and organize their communities.

“In Michigan we have the constitutional power to write our own laws through a ballot initiative and put them before the voters,” said LuAnne Kozma, campaign director and treasurer at the Committee to Ban Fracking in Michigan, which is organizing the drive.

“Beavers are aquatic mammals, and they have sharp teeth into the man’s thigh, severing a main artery. Despite his friends’ attempts to stop the bleeding, the man bled to death. Beaver attacks are rare, wild biologists say—mostly from rabid animals.

Fatal Beaver Attack

Here’s some news from far outside Michigan that you don’t hear every day. At first it sounded like some kind of belated April Fool’s joke, but apparently it’s true—an Outdoor Life-style experience with tragic consequences. A man was attacked and killed April 11 by a beaver in eastern Europe’s public of Belarus. Sky News reported the man was on a fishing trip with two friends at Lake Sheskator when they spotted the animal on the side of the road. The beaver attacked the man as he approached to take a photograph. The London Daily Telegraph said the man wanted to pose next to the animal, but the beaver would have none of it. The agitated rodent reportedly tried to use his sharp teeth into the man’s thigh, severing a main artery. Although his friends’ attempts to stop the bleeding, the man bled to death. Beaver attacks are rare, wild biologists say—mostly from rabid animals.

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To “frack” or not to “frack”

While we aren’t opposed to oil and gas exploration, and generally support the careful use of fossil fuels—at least until we can come up with safe, effective and affordable alternatives to power the engine of our economy—we don’t like what we see and hear when it comes to horizontal hydraulic fracturing.

“Fracking,” as the controversial process is known, requires the use of massive amounts of water, sand and chemical additives to pressurize permeable underground rock formations and force the flow of oil and gas from reserves that were previously difficult—if not impossible—to tap.

There is reportedly much waste generated by this process, which is routinely disposed via deep-well injection and other methods that many say pose serious threats to the health of people and the environment. (The whole idea of deep-well injection of toxic materials seems to be a Faustian bargain that succeeds in generating generations may live to regret.)

The oil and gas industry, of course, claims otherwise and insists that the fracking and related waste disposal activities are well-regulated and safe.

It’s troubling to us that hydraulic fracturing continues to be used and even expanded in various locations around Michigan when the overall impact of the practice is not sufficiently known. And it’s equally baffling that state officials charged with protecting our natural resources would routinely approve leases on land targeted for this type of exploration.

Much more needs to be known about the practice and it’s only after any more reliable decisions can be comfortably made about such things.

Fortunately, citizen advocates are rising up across the state to challenge this foolishness and some are circulating petitions to get a potential fracking ban placed on the 2014 ballot. We are compelled to support these efforts if for no other reason than a petition drive will help focus light on the debate and educate voting citizens as to what’s at stake for us.

There’s nothing wrong with the wise use of natural resources, but all who would do so need to proceed in the public interest and refrain from activities that can damage to the environment.

Ownership is key and we need to hold individuals, business, industry and government accountable when they are doing things that endanger the health and well-being of people.

Upgrading the bottle deposit law

When Michigan’s new beverage container law was implemented in the late 1970s, many merchants and other opponents were complaining about the “hurdles” placed on both businesses and consumers.

The law, approved by voters in the 1976 general election, outlawed non-returnable beverage containers and required a deposit on every can and bottle.

At the time, numerous stores and customers said the returns were costly, filthy, unsanitary and inconvenient, while supporters of the law touted its environmental benefits.

The reality检查s the change-over seems to be working nearly 35 years later and we see far fewer discarded bottles and cans than we used to. Unfortunately, the law applied primarily to beer and soft drink containers—little else.

Since the 1970s, there has been a virtual explosion of various other types of take-out beverages—packaged in all manner of discardable bottles and cans—both glass and plastic—that inevitably end up along roadways, in lakes and streams, deep inside landfills and at assorted other inappropriate locations.

Consequently, there is a need to upgrade the original beverage container law.

A new grassroots organization is stepping into the breach by starting a petition drive to get the issue placed on the 2014 general election ballot. The group, known as Expand Michigan’s Bot-tle Bill, is spearheading the state-wide effort to add sealed drink containers such as juice, sports drinks, energy drinks, energy drinks and alcoholic beverages to the law. Members are seeking to collect more than 250,000 legally valid signatures on petitions currently being circulated.

Given the continued blight that such discarded containers inflict upon the landscape, the growing wisdom of recycling and the ongoing costs associated with trash disposal—for people and the environment alike—we need to act.

It has already been proven that these containers can and will be returned without too much problem. Consumers are used to paying deposits and returning bottles and cans, and businesses are already set up to handle the activity.

Let’s plug the gap in the existing law and make it less desirable to toss such containers out of the car window, or deposit them in landfills.

The assault in Michigan forests

Recent and current legislation in the Michigan House and Senate has many conservationists to believe that there is an ongoing and intentional assault on Michigan forests.

With ample reason, it appears to us that commercial interests are being favored over good stewardship.

We’ve already covered at length the so-called “anti-biodiversi- sity” bill that has conservationists seeing red. Now, as of this writing, the state House had already passed House Bill 4326—requiring the Department of Agriculture and Rural Develop- ment and the Department of Natural Resources to “jointly promote forestry and the development of the forest products industry.” Meanwhile, Senate Bill 56—if approved—would expand the tax breaks for owners of forest property.

Add to this the pressures of strip mining, and oil and gas explora- tion (especially “fracking”), and there seems to be either a carelessly implemented, or carefully orchestrated, plan to deliver our natural treasures to special interests.

It’s time to slow down a bit and think critically about the con- sequences of these actions. Sure, it’s important to stimulate the economy—but at what cost?

Do we want to return to a time where resource abuse was the order of the day and negate decades of dedicated work by conservation-minded citizens who—in the words of Dave Dempsey—returned Michigan from ruin to recovery?
Dear Mike VanBuren:

We appreciate receiving The North Woods Call and wish you much success with publishing The Call into the future.

Thank God for people like Dr. John W. Richter and Anne Zelley. Their views point to a cautionary environmental safety and health agenda. As they do their work, we need to support them. They argue that hydraulic fracturing (Fracking) will do to our environment what ‘Armageddon’ is like to the human heart.

Multiply that by hundreds of thousands of acres, imagine five football fields of abandoned land, multiply that times hundreds of thousands of acres—imagine what it ‘sounds like’ when 792 million gallons of ruined water, which has been pumped into the ground, is all polluted, and worse. It’s gone. Us.

Toxic water would fill over 24,000 average bathtubs and, if you got into one of them, your skin would stick like glue, not likely to come off. Half the 22 million gallons stay in the ground and half is taken away in trucks to be injected elsewhere in another well. Now, imagine 12 more wells near each other on the same stretch of river. Beyond this, each well is fracked two or three times, so if you do the math, we’re talking 36 fracks 22 million gallons of ‘black gold’ and 792 million of ruined water, which has been mixed with 39 million gallons of chemicals. All of this fracking takes place under enormous pressure and there are literally millions of gallons of water, sand and toxic chemicals exploding inside an underground range of approximately two miles, crumbling fawse in rock that holds natural gas.

If you could see this, it would look like a mushroom cloud in side the earth and you know what that means. Earthquakes have come about because of this vio lence underground and there you have it. I speak from my own experience watching your skin slip off your body, while the tectonic plates under your house slide towards Georgia.

There’s plenty more devastation which accompanies this mon strosity. Columns of water in the woods: miles of clear-cut pipelines 75 feet wide, an apocalypse of sorts filled with industrial pumps and treatment fa ctories. What once was a forest, more miles of pipelines, diesel fumes and burned-off methane in the sky.

From the air, these places look like refineries surrounded by what seems to be the work of a mad man with too much pipeline to toss around. Think “Road War rior” in the woods of Kalkaska County and you have only a small view of what is going on.

Multiply this times hundreds of wells dotting Michigan and you get the idea that it is not likely to look like anything out of an alien invasion movie. We are being invaded by toxic chemicals exploding inside a range on a huge scale, and the chewing, sucking and draining of our collectively owned land and water.

This is how the oil mafia, in collusion with the State of Michi gan, corporations, views our land. It’s available for the price of a gas lease, so that fracking becomes the modus operandi of the contemporary ver sul.

Fracking is no different. While it is hard to see underground, above ground what you see is lit erally launch pads for gigantic un derground plumes of deadly chemicals. But you know this: that those thousands of acres and square feet cleared and cut and drilled and pumped exist on the landscape as seething scars. If you watch the make up of such a disaster in the air— inerial photos and videos—they oze and belch, while down below their roots inject their toxic blood di rectly into the cerulean heart that is pure Michigan water.

Mike Delp is a writer and ed itor living at Interlochen, Michi gan, and is co-editor of the “Made in Michigan” book series from University of Michigan Press. His most recent book is a collection of short stories, “As If We Were People” also from Wayne State University Press. An avid fly fisherman, outdoors man and poet, Delp is active with Anglers of the AuSable.

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Reader Comment

U.S. guns need to be regulated

The Call recently published a press release from the National Rifle Association, opposing new gun controls. But there are many reasons for the conservativestm and hard-core Nationalists to support changes in the current laws regarding firearms.

The Second Amendment says that the right to bear arms shall not be “infringed,” because “a well-regulated militia” is necessary for securing the country. The phrase “be ‘infringed,” means that there has never been any question about “well-regulated.” No state or federal government—no court—has ever said that citizens can own whatever they like. As a matter of fact and history, weapon ownership has always been regulated.

The question now is: Are firearms “well-regulated”? Do we think that the current laws about firearms possession and use are perfect, or do we think there is room for improvement? In a country where more than 30,000 people die every year from gunshot wounds and every two or three months another innocent person guns down a dozen or so innocent citizens, it’s impossible to believe that we can do it better. Many people do not realize just how much damage firearms do.

In 2011, the last complete U.S. Center for Disease Control report, motor vehicle traffic deaths were 33,687, and firearm deaths were 31,672. Guns kill nearly as many people as automobiles, but auto mobiles are highly regulated, while guns are not. To use an automo bile, you have to pass a test of competency. The car itself has many mandated safety features, and all transactions involving automobiles are recorded. Nothing as startlingly dangerous as guns is even men tioned in Congress.

Without going so far as to treat guns as carefully as we guard the right to use an automobile, how can we improve the current laws? What is at stake is the existing Second Amendment. In 1968, the Act was amended to add a background check requirement for some (not all) gun purchases. Licensed firearms dealers are required to send the potential purchaser’s name to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). This criminal records data base is administered by the FBI. If no notice is returned within three days, they are authorized to proceed with the sale. The law is actu ally easily teatable around the edges through “staw purchases,” when a person purchases a gun through a surrogate. Straw purchases are technically illegal under a 1968 law, but gifts from one person to an other are not, generating a very large loophole.

Another loophole is that the law applies only to licensed dealers. Non-licensed dealers can still sell firearms without making back ground checks. This exemption is known as the “gun show loophole.” Private sales between individuals are entirely unregulated. It is relatively easy to circumvent, through “straw purchases,” when a person purchases a gun through a surrogate. Straw purchases are legally technically illegal under a 1968 law, but gifts from one person to another are not, generating a very large loophole.

How can we change things? One part of the problem is the mass killings by the mentally unbalanced. Unfortunately, we can’t reli ablly predict who the insane killers are. There are 312 million Americans, of whom about 10 million are crazy enough to actually massacre total strangers. There really isn’t anyway to reliably detect that tiny fraction. What we can do is limit the damage that they do by keep ing assault weapons out of circulation.

While those mass murders are certainly horrible, the bigger problem is the 31,000 other deaths by homicide and suicide. How can we limit access to firearms so that the criminal and the suicidal can’t get them? There are many reasons to oppose new gun controls. But there are many reasons to oppose new gun controls.

As a community where firearms are normal and mostly well han dled, the hunting community can play an important and positive role in the gun debate. There is no way that 32,000 dead Americans every year is acceptable. We can do better.

Robert Johnson
Ann Arbor, Michigan

An end-run around state voters?

While we are not necessarily opposed to wolf hunting in Michi gan, we are against political maneuvers aimed at neutralizing the will of state voters.

It seems like such a cynical round-about is under way with the proposed bill to empower the Michigan Natural Resources Com mission to establish wolf hunts. Would such an action foster an important and positive role in the gun debate. There is no way that 32,000 dead Americans every year is acceptable. We can do better.

While the average citizen is not an expert in wildlife manage ment, the will of the people should still be respected.

The North Woods Call
Introducing the American Woodcock

One of the most rewarding aspects of being naturalists is to introduce children and the public to nature that they may not be aware of in their own backyards and neighborhoods.

Spring is one of the most exciting times to get outdoors, with most of us anxious to be there. This makes it easy to attract families to explore. The woodcock is a small shore bird that has short legs—unlike most other shorebirds—and long wings. It is not hard to find the shorebirds at the river’s edge, but it felt like a monster. When landed, my catch appeared to be some kind of a monster.

As years passed, my tackle and techniques became sophisticated. But I didn’t realize until later that my flies were not catching anything. I had to change my flies when we get to the river. "Weel," he will then start a descent, zig-zagging back and forth. At the end of each zig and zag, a flaring of his feathers makes a type of "wheel" or whirring sound. This happens above the open area where he started his ritual, until he gets about 30 or 40 feet above the ground, then he drops down and begins the "boozzz" all over again.

He does this all spring and into early summer. For the first month, the female woodcocks, who are the whole reason for this dance, haven’t even returned. When the woodcock is in the air, he is oblivious to what is happening on the ground. Because of this he can creep up close to where he is doing his dance. If you set your quiet back, you move when the bird is in the air—freezing on the spot in a crouch when he comes down—you can get quite close to observe his odd behavior.

A bonus that most people are unaware of is the sound that the woodcock makes just before it does the "boozzz." The bird takes a gulp of air, it seems, and you can hear this "gulf" if you are close enough. This distance is usually quite close, about six to ten feet. When taking groups out to see and hear the woodcock, we explain what is going to happen and how we have to be quiet and move when the bird is on the ground. Of course, everyone wants to be able to hear the "gulf." It is very hard to hear and the easiest way I can explain it to people is to listen for the "boozzz" and then listen (or remember) back. The next thing you recognize is the "gulf" sound. I know this is hard to explain, but it works.

What is most disconcerting is when people show up not properly dressed for the night temperatures and dampness. Luckily, we have a couple of areas that hold "peent" spots with one being close to our nature center building. One fairly cool evening, we had started the woodcock walk. We had explained that the male was hoping to attract a female with which to mate. The woodcock wasn’t exactly helpful in performing. He would linger for an abnormal time between flights. We could tell on a particularly chilly day was becoming impatient, as she very firmly stated "if he doesn’t find a mate soon I’ll go out and mate with him!"

The American woodcock has breeding records for every county in Michigan. Fortunately, Michigan is in the central part of its US range and has a healthy population. The woodcock breeds in succession stages of restorations. The best habitat is fairly dense shrubs and young trees in mixed hardwoods and conifers. There seems to be quite a variety of places to nest. I have seen them in beeche-maple forests and sand dunes. Woodcocks are a great sight in the north, dense alders and aspen thickets provide the best breeding and feeding grounds. Alders typically are in moist soils where the birds like to feed. Nests are on the flat ground with little underbrush. As I spoke with the four eggshells in the nest and chicks—being precocious—leave the nest in short time with the mother. Parenting is done by the female, which will feign injury—much like a Killdeer—when approaching the chicks, or nest.

It is estimated about 250,000 woodcock are harvested each year by hunters.

Get out and experience this wonderful game bird.

Richard Schinkel is a retired naturalist, educator and business man living in Berrien Springs. Michigan. A graduate of Lake Michigan College and Western Michigan University (WMU), he taught both junior high and high school, and has been an adjunct faculty member at Lake Michigan College, WMU and Michigan State University, as well as head naturalist at the Sarett Nature Center at Benton Harbor.
Trespassing, dead birds, meth, a speeding train & one AR-15 investigated

A NOTE TO READERS: These are brief excerpts from the C.O.’s monthly field reports. To conserve space, we have excluded the more routine activities in favor of what we think are the most unusual and interesting.

If you want a more complete log than we are able to provide, you can find an archive of them under the Law Enforcement tab on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources website.

District 1
CO Brian Bacon followed up on a trespass complaint from deer season. The complainant had received a woodchuck in the yard. CO Bacon identified the suspect and conducted an interview. The suspect stated he had been a wildlife officer who did not stop by, and confessed to shooting the deer and not paying attention to the private property. Enforcement action was taken.

CO Brian Bacon came across a vehicle parked along a two track in Dickinson County. Contact was made a short distance from the vehicle, and it was discovered that the two subjects were cutting firewood without a permit. CO Bacon also discovered a loaded and unsecured rifle on the seat of the truck as well. Enforcement action was taken.

District 2
COs Hammill and Knowles on routine patrol after dark when they observed a vehicle driving without head lights. A traffic stop was initiated and the COs found the subject was driving while license suspended. This was the subject’s fourth offense for driving while license suspended, and in addition there was no insurance or current registration on the vehicle. The subjects also had two outstanding warrants for his arrest and he was lodged in the Luce County Jail.

COs Mike Hammill, Kevin Potna and Kyle Publicki conducted a surveillance patrol on a local lake in Mackinac County. A pair of anglers were doing quite well on bluegill. The pair was then issued a ticket for the violation.

District 3
CO Steve Spiegel responded to a suspicious situation where an angler noticed several dead waterfowl in the Elk Rapids Harbor. Upon investigation and assistance from the DNR Wildlife Division, it was determined that the birds had most likely died of botulism in the fall, froze under the ice and resurfaced after the ice melted.

CO Andrea Errett responded to a complaint with Charlevoix County animal control regarding a pet raccoon that had escaped a pen and the arm and leg. Animal control handled the human-animal bite issue, while CO Errett determined the raccoon was taken from the wild by young. A ticket was issued for possessing captive wildlife without a license.

CO Jon Skibha photographed a subject fishing next to the “Closed to Fishing” sign at the Au Gres River in Bay County and provided a fishing guide. In addition to fishing a closed section of stream, the subject was also fishing illegally within 100 feet of a property line. Enforcement action was taken.

District 4
While conducting a patrol on snowmobiles, COs Rebecca Hopkins and Justin Vanderlinde observed a mudder jeep being operated on a Benzie County snowmobile trail. The jeep operator failed to stop at a stop sign on a portion of the snowmobile trail which happened to be a seasonal county road. The COs conducted a traffic stop, and the vehicle involved had no vehicle registration. The operator was under the influence of marijuana, driving without a valid operator’s license which was sus - pended, and wanted on two out - standing arrest warrants. The operator was lodged in the county jail on several snowmobile trail violations.

CO Angela Greenway was pat - rol ling closed sections of trout streams when she located three subjects with fishing equipment walking along a closed stream. One of the subjects, a fishing guide, attempted to convince the CO that the section of river they were on was recently opened to fishing. In addition to fishing along a closed trout stream, all three subjects were trespassing on private property. The private land manager was contacted and denied having any knowledge of the identity of the subjects. Enforcement action was taken for the recreational trespass violations.

District 5
CO Mike Hearn assisted at the scene of a snowmobile per - sonal injury accident in Kalkaska County. The snowmobile opera - tor failed to negotiate a turn and hit a tree. The subject was air - lifted to the hospital. While patrolling the Au Gres River in Bay County, COs Mark Papineau and Brian Olsen observed several subjects actively fishing a closed portion of the stream. The subjects were targeting steelhead which were gradually starting to make their way up the rivers to spawn. In addition to fishing a closed sec - tion of stream, the subjects were also fishing illegally within 100 feet of a property line. Enforcement action was taken.

District 6
CO Josh Wright received a Report-All-Poaching (RAP) complain from a person who found a fox den on their property that was dug out with a shovel and a dead fox close by. CO Wright followed tracks from the den to another piece of property where they ended and from there vehicle tracks led to a house. The CO contacted the homeowner and found that they had found a friend come over and told them their dog got stuck in the fox den. CO Wright tracked the dog down and found out that he was training his new terrier to go in to dens and was using them to keep rats out of the house. The dog owner knew that the dog had got stuck but did not have a hunting license and did not know whose property they were hunting on. Enforcement action was taken for a fox out of season and trespassing.

CO Josh Wright could see a large amount of smoke coming from the Tuscola County shore - line. When he arrived at the loca - tion of the smoke on state land, he discovered that the shoreline was on fire, a Bobcat with a brush hog was mowing the marsh and a few people were sitting on ORVs tending the fire. One of the indi - viduals had permits or permission from the DNR or DEQ to do any work on the state land. CO Wright told the CO they were doing it so they could see the water from their homes again. Several violations were addressed and enforced along with the fire department being dispatched to put out the fire that was quickly getting out of control.

On November 17, 2013, Sgt. Ron Kimmerly arrested a subject who was operating a tractor, with a bow and arrow, while holding an AR-15 in his right hand. The sub - ject was intoxicated, failed to give the Sgt. the firearm when ordered, resisted arrest and threatened the CO. He was taken into custody and charged for resisting and obstructing a police officer, three counts of possessing a weapon, possessing an uncased firearm in a motor vehicle, and possessing a firearm while committing a felony. The defendant took a plea bargain and was recently sen - tenced. Along with jail time served, the defendant was ordered to pay $2,225 in fines, must at - tend anger management counsel - ing, was placed on an alcohol treatment program for 60 days, with the probation for two years, cannot possess a firearm for two years after forfeiting his AR-15 and surrender all other firearms.

District 7
CO Mike Mshar responded to a RAP complaint regarding a sub - ject shooting a turkey from his back deck in Ottawa County. Contact was made with the suspect and a full confession was ob - tained for killing the turkey. The suspect admitted he had killed 14 turkeys because the turkeys were tearing up his yard. CO Mshar pointed out a large deer feeder in the back yard with corn underneath it and asked what it was for. The suspect advised it was only for the squir - rebels and deer. The turkey and shot - gun were seized and the subject was charged with taking a turkey during closed season, and dis - charging a firearm in a safety zone.

CO Chris Holmes watched three subjects trespassing and would not leave their designated road tracks. The CO exited his vehicle to make contact with the subjects and asked what they were doing. CO Holmes found out that he was training his new terrier to go in to dens and was using them to keep rats out of the house and was making money from it. Enforcement action was taken for a fox out of season and trespassing.

CO Mike Mshar was contacted on a trespass complaint from deer season in Manistee County. The complainant was worried about ground water contamination because a property owner had acquired a pair of deer legs and was using them to make deer prints in the mud. The deer parts were dragged over to a swamp property by his dog. The COs contacted the sus - spect about the dog and learned several friends place their deer carcasses on his land. The complainant had been using them for years and did not think a garage door on the hole of an old barn foundation. In lieu of receiving a ticket for im - proper disposal of animals, the sus- spect agreed to dispose of the carcasses properly.

CO Kris Kiel checked the Snowbelt Dam and observed an anglers casting and retrieving a large crank-bait. The subject said he was fishing for northern pike and he was wrong-powered his northern pike season was open. The CO informed him otherwise because after checking the angler’s license the CO also observed that the two adult occupants were verbally fighting. CO Holmes stopped the vehicle and found the driver’s li - cense to be suspended, and in pos - session of methamphetamine and a “one pot” methamphetamine lab. The female driver was high on methamphetamine. A clandestine lab clean up team from the Bureau of Criminal Investigation’s Sheriff’s Department arrived on scene, the lab was secured and charges will be sought for methamphetamine charges.

District 8
CO Kyle Bader stopped at a residence to check on a fire that was producing a large amount of black smoke. The resident was building the fire to burn material from a trailer he was tarring down. Luckily for him, he hadn’t started burning the trailer. Un - fortunately for him, he had a warrant out of Indiana and they were will - ing to extradite. He was lodged in the Coldwater Jail.

CO Jon Skibha completed an investigation into a subject shoot - ing three deer and purchasing his猎奖. The suspect thought by purchasing the li - censes, he would be able to keep the deer. An interview with the suspect was conducted, and the suspect thought he would get a chance to shoot one deer, let alone three. A warrant was authorized.

District 9
COs Todd Szyaska and Kris Kiel responded to a call on St. Clair County京都 deer carcasses. The complainant was worried about ground water con - tamination because a property owner had acquired a pair of deer legs and had used them to make deer prints in the mud. The deer parts were dragged over to a swamp property by his dog. The COs contacted the sus - spect and found out that some of several friends place their deer carcasses on his land. The complainant had been using them for years and did not think a garage door on the hole of an old barn foundation. In lieu of receiving a ticket for im - proper disposal of animals, the sus- spect agreed to dispose of the carcasses properly.

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Marketplace of the North

Conservation Officer Logs (3/18/13 through 3/31/13)

THE NORTH WOODS CALL

Early May 2013

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Leave wildlife in the wild

Spring has sprung, and fields and forests are teeming with new life.

In addition to the glorious displays of wildflowers, wild animals are giving birth and hatching the next generation. These are sights to be enjoyed, but it’s important that we keep our distance.

“These are magical moments to witness, but sometimes the story has a different ending when people take baby wild animals out of the wild,” said Erin Victory, a Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wildlife biologist.

Victory said people should resist the urge to “help” seemingly abandoned fawns, or other baby animals, this spring.

“Some people truly are trying to be helpful, while others think wild animals would make good pets,” she said. “In most cases, neither of these situations ends well for the wildlife.

Species that are most problematic are white-tailed deer and raccoons, according to Victory.

“Deer seem so vulnerable and helpless,” she said, “but really they stay still because that is a mechanism to let them be undetected. Raccoons seem cute and cuddly, but they grow up to be mischievous and aggressive. It’s best to just leave them alone.”

It is not uncommon for deer to leave fawns unattended for up to eight hours at a time, which minimizes the scent of the mother and allows the fawn to go unnoticed by nearby predators, according to the DNR.

“While fawns may seem abandoned, they almost certainly are not,” Victory said.

Most mammals have a keen sense of smell and, if humans touch them, their parents will abandon them. Other wildlife, such as birds, should not be handled, either. Adult birds will continue to care for hatchlings that have fallen from their nests. Although most birds do not have a strong sense of smell, the adults may not be able to locate them if people have moved them.

It is illegal to possess a live wild animal in Michigan. Many baby animals will die if removed from their natural environment, and some have diseases or parasites that can be passed on to humans or pets. Some “rescued” animals that do survive become used to people and are unable to revert to life in the wild. Additional problems may arise as animals mature and develop adult animal behaviors, such as aggressiveness.

Trained and licensed wildlife rehabilitators may be able to help if a deer or other animal is truly orphaned.

—Michigan DNR

Sound off on The North Woods Call!

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