

INSIDE MICHIGAN POLITICS

Inside: **Senate Democratic Strife**
They Said It

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NIMROD NIRVANA: GAME GALORE, HUNTERS ABOUND, BALLOT PROPOSALS PROLIFERATE

For the first time in Michigan history, there may be as many as three proposals on a statewide general election ballot relating to the hunting of a single species of game — wolves.

It's already certain that there will be a referendum on the law enacted early last year to allow a wolf hunt (it will probably be Proposal 2014-1 when voters go to the polls Nov. 4).

It's also possible there may be a second proposal asking the electorate to overturn P.A. 21, which the Legislature hastily passed last spring in an effort to make Prop 1 moot by granting the state Natural Resources Commission the power to designate game species without voter oversight. Now the issue is bigger than wolves — it's about fighting an end-run around voters.

Each of the petition drives to put these two proposals on the ballot has been spearheaded by a coalition calling itself "Keep Michigan Wolves Protected," consisting of animal welfare groups, conservationists, veterinarians, business owners, clergy and Native American tribes — not to mention the U.S. Humane Society.

Now comes a third effort — this one led by the 42,000-member Michigan United Conservation Clubs — aimed at scuttling both of the above-mentioned proposals if it can persuade the Legislature (and/or voters) to approve a "Scientific Fish & Wildlife Conservation Act," which would cement the power to designate game species with the NRC. This is an initiative, so supporters are seeking some 300,000 signatures by May.

"Keep Wolves Protected" calls the MUCC-types "trophy hunting and trapping interest groups." The MUCC dubs the lupinophiles "animal rights extremists trying to take away hunting rights in Michigan."

This isn't below-the-radar niffnawing by a handful of outdoor adventure zealots unrepresentative of the Michigan population. On the contrary, hunting and fishing have always had a huge impact on the state's economy and its politicians. In 2012, the Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) estimated that more than \$2.3 billion was spent on trip-related expenses and equipment while hunting game of all sorts.

Michigan's hunting participation ranks third in the nation — 795,535 licensed hunters in 2011 — contributing nearly \$28 million in federal funds to wildlife management and wildlife habitat restoration.

Gov. **Rick Snyder** doesn't exactly look like he's done a lot of time in a deer blind. But in this year's State of the State address, he made sure to play up Michigan streamlining the hunting and fishing licensing process so folks could "waste less time figuring out what license and

get out there and catch something and shoot something and have a good time."

Even in a legislature in which hunters are a distinct minority (there are fewer nimrods in Lansing today than at any time in the past century), lawmakers still take a two-week fall break for "hunting season," following the lead of now-retired longtime Senate Appropriations Committee chairman **Harry Gast** (R-St. Joseph), who retreated every autumn to his Upper Peninsula cabin for an "Escanaba in Dah Moonlight" ritual. Some Democrats may protest, but several will be term-limited at the end of this year; our furry (and feathered) friends and their human predators won't be.

In sum, the total of various different birds and mammals harvested in the "pleasant peninsulas" is staggering — well over 3 million every year, about a third of the state's human population.

Every year, the DNR tinkers with its hunting regulations aimed at stabilizing fluctuating game populations and, sometimes, attempting to mitigate crop damage by providing more targets for nimrods. DNR tactics can include a limited bonus deer option; more licenses and expanded areas open for "hunter's choice," which allows gun totes to take either a buck or a doe; more landowner-limited hunting licenses; and an elastic season in certain geographical areas for, say, more antlerless deer hunting. Here is a list of facts and figures to put it all in perspective (statistics from the most recent year available):

Gray Wolf. Wildlife officials say 23 wolves were killed in the Upper Peninsula during a 45-day hunt at the tail end of last year. That fell well short of the quota of 43 the DNR was hoping for, possibly because of unusually

HUNTING BALLOT PROPOSALS, 1964-2012

	Year	Approve	Disapprove
Proposal D Limit bear hunting season, banning dogs & bait piles (initiative)	1996	37.9%	62.1%
Proposal G Manage state's Wildlife pop. (referendum on legislative action)	1996	68.7%	31.3%
Proposal 06-3 Hunting season for mourning doves (referendum on legislative action)	2006	31.0%	69.0%

cold weather. It was the state's first wolf hunt in four decades, following the animal's escape from the federal endangered species list. The 1,200 licensees hunted in three different zones, but they caught only five of a possible maximum 16 wolves in the far western U.P.; 14 of 19 in four central U.P. counties; and four of eight in the eastern U.P. Trapping and baiting are among options the DNR is considering for this year's hunt, but first they want to conduct another wolf count, evaluate hunters' and farmers' comments, and find out whether Michigan voters will allow a repeat. Fewer than 700 wolves are considered to inhabit the U.P. today; Isle Royale, which had as many as four dozen a half-century ago, now has just eight inbred and increasingly weakened animals.

White-tailed Deer. This is the trophy target for most hunters. Nobody, even the DNR, is sure how many deer are in Michigan today, but the best guess is about 1.7 million (with dozens making their home near **IMP's** Okemos headquarters). There were only some 45,000 a century ago, but conservation practices and the end of the lumber boom catapulted the number to more than 1.1 million by 1937. Then the DNR attempted to "correct" what it perceived as deer overpopulation with "The Slaughter of '52," when wildlife officials' encouragement of an orgy of doe and fawn shooting fomented widespread opposition to non-buck killing as a game management tool. In 2012, 654,100 licensed hunters spent 9.4 million days afield killing 418,000 deer (59,800 of them with a crossbow), nearly the same count as a year before. Roughly half (46%) of all hunters got at least one deer, but less than 5% got two antlered bucks. The DNR estimates there are 11% fewer hunters than a decade ago, but more are younger than 14 and older than 49. Nearly 12% last year were under 17 years of age.

Elk. This majestic beast, native to Michigan, was wiped out in both peninsulas by 1875. The current herd emanates from seven released from city parks and public facilities in 1918 about three miles south of Wolverine, on the edge of I-75. This herd grew to 300-400 by 1939, and to 900-1000 by 1958. During 1964-65, 477 were harvested during limited seasons to reduce crop damage, but annual hunting seasons weren't initiated until 1984. The current goal is to maintain at least 500-900 during winter in the northern Lower Peninsula (DNR officials estimate the current herd at 800-1,400). Last year, 171 elk were harvested over two seasons (Aug.-Sept. and early Dec.). In 2012, 194 hunters took 158 elk, 38% of which were antlered bulls and 62% antlerless cows or calves. Four of every five hunters felled at least one elk, all with firearms. Just over half (55%) were taken on private land, 45% on public.

Black Bear. Big controversy over what is the "fair" way to prey on these behemoths resulted in two statewide ballot proposals in 1996 asking voters whether it should be legal to hunt bear over bait traps. In a battle somewhat similar to this year's controversy over a wolf hunt, the hunting crowd won out over the Humane Society types, and the bait traps prevailed. Consequently, in 2012 most of the 5,644 licensed hunters harvested 1,691 bears using traps, although employing dogs also helped. The number of licensees was reduced somewhat from previous years because of concerns over declining bear population, even if nobody knows for sure what that is.

Moose. A DNR survey exactly three years ago

revealed that there are an estimated 433 moose in the western Upper Peninsula. Maybe we're lucky, because the moose, native to Michigan when the state was settled, were extirpated in the Lower Peninsula by the 1880s with only a few stragglers left in the U.P. The animal was given protection in 1889, and 63 moose were imported from Isle Royale and released north of the straits in the 1930s. The breed still struggled to survive, so 29 were brought from Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario in 1985 and relocated in the north central U.P. It was hoped that the population might reach a thousand. It never has, so even though technically the DNR could approve a hunt (as it has for elk), the DNR won't allow hunters to pull the trigger.

Eastern Wild Turkey. This upland bird, native to Michigan, was obliterated by 1897. Its comeback began when the DNR imported birds from Appalachia in the 1950s and from the Ozarks (Missouri and Iowa) in the 1980s. Today, turkeys are more numerous in Michigan than in all but five or six other states. The DNR estimates 82,621 licensees — 2% higher than a year before but down 3% from a decade ago — bagged a total of 31,931 birds in 2013. Nearly two of every five hunters killed a turkey last spring (late April and all of May) in a hunt that spanned virtually the entire state. Weapons of choice included bow and arrow, shotgun, and cross bow. Leading counties were Kent, Montcalm, Ottawa, and Jackson. The vast majority (86%) of turkeys were killed on private land. Nearly three-quarters of the kill were bearded males (two years old and up), while a quarter were juveniles (less than one year-old).

Waterfowl. 42,427 licensees hunted duck and 35,751 went after goose in 2012 — an increase for both species from 2011. Still, since 1970 (the high point for the number of waterfowl hunters in the past half-century) there has been a 69% decline in the number of human predators. In the 2012 combined seasons, covering roughly late fall into early winter, 320,200 ducks were shot, nearly 40% of them mallards and 20% wood ducks (the rest were blue-winged teal, green-winged teal and buffleheads). Hunters also took 144,500 geese, taking advantage of an increase in the Canada goose season from 45 to 92 days two years ago. In 2012, the DNR estimates some \$22.7 million was spent in Michigan pursuing waterfowl alone.

Ring-necked Pheasant and Northern Bobwhite Quail. Pheasant numbers are far below their historical high levels of 1950s and '60s, largely because the bird population declines as tree cover increases — and forest growth increased 40,000 acres per year in southeast Michigan every year between 1980 and 1993, a pace that hasn't really slackened. True, the introduction of Sichuan pheasants in the mid-1980s compromised an accurate count because they crow less than other birds. As a result, the DNR's 1949-2002 pheasant crowing surveys were discontinued in 2003 because the information could be obtained through a summer brood count and harvest figures. Bottom line: in 2010, 27,450 hunters harvested over 27,224 pheasants (50% of them on private land). The pheasant season, with a bag limit of two per day, was Oct. 10-31 in the U.P. and Oct. 14-Nov. 14 south of the Mackinac Bridge. Tuscola, Gratiot and Huron Counties led the way in successful pheasant hunting, but the elusive quail can't be found even in southern Michigan for years at a time if the weather is too cold for a single winter

(like this one). Michigan is on the northern edge of the quail's range, and even if hunters with a standard license for upland birds can shoot it, predictable harvest numbers are sketchy.

Ruffed Grouse & American Woodcock. The federal "Harvest Information Program" says Michigan leads the nation in the number of active woodcock hunters and harvest, and we're third in grouse. In 2010, about 37,000 pursued woodcock and killed 97,000, although that was far less than the record 390,000 harvested in 1976. In fact, while there has been no significant change in the number of singing woodcock males between 2002-13, the bird's population has declined significantly in the long term from the period 1968-2002. That's partly because both of these upland species live in 10-year cycles in abundance; in Minnesota, for instance, the annual grouse harvest has ranged from a low of 150,000 to as high as 1.4 million. In 2010, about 85,000 Michigan hunters pursued grouse and harvested 260,000, up almost 8% from the year before. For hunters as well as bird watchers, hikers, bikers and campers, there is little to match the surprising start of an explosive grouse flush or the soft beat of a drumming male. As for the woodcock, its unique and entertaining courtship display is a true gem of nature. The sharp-tailed grouse is also hunted — in 2012, 394 hunters harvested 156 of them, down from 178 in 2011. The take is capped at six.

Otter & Beaver. In 2010, 4,159 licensed furtakers trapped over 1,200 otter (down 12% from 2011). Beaver trappers captured 14,936 — down 23% from the year before. There are both resident and non-resident seasons for these two mammals, in three different geographic zones, during a period lasting roughly from October or November through March or April.

Other Small Game. What is a fisher? One definition is that it's a larger, darker-colored marten. What is a marten? The dictionary says it's a semiarctic slender-bodied carnivorous mammal, larger than its relative the weasel. The DNR's efforts to restore martens and fishers to the Upper Peninsula were deemed successful three decades ago, so the first modern trapping season was initiated for fishers in 1989, and for martens in 2000. The season runs Dec. 1-15 in most of the U.P. Just over 400 martens were trapped in 2012, and about 350 fishers. Wait! There is other small game hunted or trapped as well, including three species that are vulnerable to 28,425 license holders year-round — opossum (32,731 killed in 2012), skunk (4,951), and weasel (2,106). A dozen other species were taken in overlapping 2009 seasons that ran roughly from late fall through winter — mink (17,909 harvested); raccoon (167,860); red fox (6,135); gray fox (2,462); coyote (39,356); bobcat (728); muskrat (208,070); badger (183); squirrels (440,330); crows (72,440); snowshoe hares (37,881); and cottontail rabbits (276,112).

How does all of the above compare with days gone by? Just over a quarter-century ago, **IMP** noted (11/16/87) that "although the state's 700,000-member 'orange army' may be down slightly in size from last year, DNR officials are predicting the biggest deer kill in Michigan history by the time nimrods finish off the 15-day firearm hunting season that began Sunday ... The projected 300,000 deer harvest, which would be 11% larger than (1986)'s 269,630, will likely include some 106,000 antlerless deer."

Note from that quote that the number of licensed deer hunters in the late '80s was substantially higher than in 2012 or '13, yet the take was well below the harvest of the past couple of years.

The archival **IMP** also noted that DNR officials pegged the 1987 statewide deer herd as nearly 1.5 million, up 7-12% because of 1986's mild winter. "When winters are harsh and habitat is overbrowsed as in 1985," wrote **IMP**, "an estimated 125,000 deer starved to death." The DNR couldn't foresee the other significant development in Michigan's deer population — their geographical shift southward because of climate change.

What **IMP** wrote in 1987 about what was then the state's sixth elk hunt was remarkably similar to the scenario we find today: "(The elk hunt) has been scheduled for Dec. 8-13 with 130 lucky nimrods randomly selected to open fire out of a computer pool of 38,546 applicants. The hunt area will be concentrated in 686 square miles in four northern Lower Peninsula counties — Montmorency, Otsego, Cheboygan and Presque Isle. In contrast to the state's deer herd, Michigan's elk population is tiny — 1,250 — and the proportion of licenses issued to elk taken has always been high (93 elk were shot by 95 licensed hunters in 1986, for example). Thus, the hunt is strictly controlled to maintain the herd at desirable size and minimize crop, range, and forest damage while leaving some of the animals standing to be 'viewed' by unlicensed nature lovers during the other 360 days of the year."

And we haven't even mentioned the fish.

MACKINAC ISLAND BLOWOUT!

No, not up there, not in this weather! We're talking about "The Friends of Mackinac Island Steak & Suds Society" that will host its always-jam-packed annual celebration on Wednesday, Feb. 19, from 5-7 p.m. at the offices of Kelley Cawthorne in the renovated Christman Bldg. across from the state capitol. This year's celebration will be the 41st straight for what is probably Lansing's longest-running trade association open house. KC partner **Dennis Cawthorne**, former chairman of the Mackinac Island Park Commission, got the ball rolling in the old Dines restaurant back in 1974 when he was a member of the Michigan House of Representatives (R-Manistee). The event then shifted to the famous MADA "Red Room" in East Lansing, then to Cawthorne's law/lobbying firm at 101 S. Washington Square before segueing to its present location in 2009.

DEMS IN DISARRAY? SENATE NO LONGER LOOKS IN PLAY

Lackluster fundraising and internal squabbling look to have dashed Democrats's dreams of taking back the Senate this year.

With a little more than six months before Election Day, Senate Republicans have amassed a \$1.6 million war chest to the Democrats's \$526,410. The Republicans raised \$445,593 in the last quarter — seven times what the Dems' did — but the R's spent less than half (\$29,675) as their counterparts.

The money haul was the result of increased contribution

limits, last-minute hustling by the Senate Republican campaign staff and lots of generous folks with the last name DeVos.

Because of this and more, Democratic funders are openly threatening to redirect their money for the upper chamber to the House.

Let's face it — the Dems's chances for majority in 2014 were always tenuous (*Vol. XIV, No. 27*). They're not just starting at their superminority status of 12 seats. During the 2011 redistricting, Republicans actually jammed them into 11 safe seats. Everything would have gone right for the Dems to win 20.

Compounding that misery is that '14 isn't shaping up to be a great Democratic year. Democrats at the top of the ticket — **Mark Schauer** for governor and U.S. Rep. **Gary Peters** (D-Bloomfield Twp.) for U.S. Senate — are underperforming in the polls and may not be much help down-ticket. There's also Obamacare and a sluggish economy, for which **Barack Obama** is increasingly being blamed.

So there's little hope of a 2008-style wave to propel the Dems across the finish line.

Democrats have been dealt a bad hand, but they haven't done themselves any favors. Since 2011, the bulk of Senate Democrats's press and political efforts have focused on raising Senate Minority Leader **Gretchen Whitmer's** profile, sometimes to the detriment of caucus fundraising and leadership building.

As the first female caucus leader in Senate history, Whitmer (D-East Lansing) was always going to stand out. And it's true that many senators weren't as comfortable in the limelight or had their own agendas, like Senate Minority Leader **Tupac Hunter** (D-Detroit), who consistently votes with Republicans on social issues.

But there's a new, energized class emerging, led by the Senate's most junior member, Sen. **Jim Ananich** (D-Flint), and Whitmer's likely successor in the 23rd District, Ingham County Register of Deeds **Curtis Hertel Jr.** Both are excellent fundraisers. And Hertel, son of former House Speaker **Curtis Hertel**, can help shake money loose in his dad's old stomping grounds of Southeast Michigan.

Problem is, Hertel Jr. has faced a bumpy road to acceptance from Team Whitmer. She's set to endorse him now — long after the UAW, Teamsters, Lansing Mayor **Virg Bernero**, just to name a few — but that comes after efforts to recruit a woman to run against him last year.

Some inside the Senate Dem orbit felt Hertel not-so-gently pushed former Rep. **Joan Bauer** out of the race, and lobbyist **Nell Kuhnmuensch** was wooed to run. Another knock on Hertel — which even appeared in print — is that his wife was a prominent staffer for House Speaker **Jase Bolger** (R-Marshall).

Has the hatchet been buried? The official answer from everyone is that there was no hatchet to begin with. After all, Whitmer's father, former Blue Cross executive **Dick Whitmer**, and her husband, **Marc Mallory**, have both endorsed Hertel (Mallory, a dentist, also works on the Hertel kids's teeth).

For his part, Hertel had been one of the biggest donors to the Senate Democratic Leadership Fund. In fact, you could argue his Dec. 30 check for \$4,020 was what kept the fund from running in the red last quarter.

The public kumbaya makes sense. Team Whitmer would look petty trying to torpedo a surefire winner, who's likely

to join the caucus leadership team. Hertel gets to look magnanimous. He's also looking at a two-cycle strategy to win back the Senate, and doesn't want infighting to cost any pickups this year.

But it's not clear if this will assuage donors. And in the end, moving money to the House Dems might not help anyone. Having competitive Senate races — especially in areas like Kalamazoo and Monroe — would aid House Democratic candidates. And if the Dems concede the Senate, the Republicans can turn their impressive financial firepower into shoring up the House.

THEY SAID IT

■ "The Vice President missed the mark by making the auto industry's resurgence more about the federal bailout, and less about the hardworking men and women who design, build and sell the vehicles." — *Michigan GOP Chair Bobby Schostak, who, not surprisingly, wasn't impressed by Vice President Joe Biden's visit to the North American International Auto Show (MLive.com, Jan. 16).*

■ "It would be nice if Republicans in California tried anyone new. We've been using the same people since **Pete Wilson** was governor of California ... The state's changed a lot. You have a lot of consultant-lobbyist types who aren't really consultants all year. They're consultants half the year and lobbyists half the year. The way you communicate with voters has changed so much over the past 10 years that I think the newer generation of consultants are in a better position to take advantage of it. The demographics of the state have changed so much, but our party has not changed with demographics ... We're not running our campaigns anymore. We've gotten away from running the ground campaigns we were running when the party was still competitive. We're not doing the engagement with millennials and minority voters that should be mandatory because we've got all these new consumers in the market and we're not actually trying to sell a product to them." — *Jason C. Roe, former chief of staff to a Florida Congressman and consultant for ex-U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX), in a recent Campaigns & Elections magazine article entitled "The Consulting World's Colorful Coast." Roe, now living in San Diego and a partner in the Republican firm, Revolvix, was born and raised in Lansing and is the son of the Michigan GOP's former executive director, Jerry Roe of Delta Twp.*

■ "It's a weak recovery. So counting on continued growth, that's all right, but you ought to hedge your bets a little bit." — *Senate Appropriations Chair Roger Kahn (R-Saginaw), who's not fully on board with Gov. Rick Snyder's proposed homestead property tax cut in his Fiscal 2015 budget (Detroit Free Press, Feb. 5).*

■ "It's weird that Reporter **Dave Murray** and Press Sec Dave Murray can't agree." — *Senate Democratic staffer Ryan Sebolt noting that when Murray was with MLive, he reported on Snyder's education cuts. Now that Murray is Snyder's spokesman, he's sticking with the line that K-12 hasn't been cut. Interestingly, Murray still goes by @ReporterDaveMurray on Twitter (Facebook, Feb. 10).*