Comments on the proposed 2023-4 seasons By Meade Cadot, Ph.D.

My house is in Hancock in WMU H2 and roughly one mile from WMU K, so my big back yard is the SW region. We have 2 major wildlife management problems here: FAR too few Fishers and WAY too many Deer.

Since at least 2016 I have been commenting on the dearth of Fishers in our region. They were relatively common here 25 years ago and played an important role in controlling populations of both porcupines and Peromyscus Mice (which carry Lyme Disease). But the annual Fisher harvest in the SW region has dropped precipitously from more than 400 in 1998 to less than a 100 in 2009 to less than 50 in 2015. And for the last 5 years the number harvested has averaged below 10! That number is so low, that other statistics like catch per unit effort and age and sex determination are not really useful. To make matters worse, the Fisher population may be further depressed by exposure to rodenticides. Last year, a presentation of preliminary research conducted by the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry indicated the problem exists throughout the Northeast but that it may be most severe in Southeastern Vermont and Southwestern New Hampshire. Attached is a map from that presentation. NHFG contributed data for that study but unfortunately, according to Patrick Tate, the fishers that were analyzed this past year for age and sex determination were not

tested for rodenticides. Regardless, an extensive study of a managed Fisher population in South Central Maine, involving 76 radio-collared Fishers tracked over 6 years, showed that it was trapping that caused 80% of Fisher mortalities. (*Krohn, W. and Elowe, K 1993. Understanding a Harvested Fisher Population. Do the pieces fit? Maine Fish and Wildlife Magazine Vol 35 No.* 3)

With the Fisher population in the Southwest Region apparently so depressed, trapping should be paused. It is worth noting that when the Fisher population was in trouble in the 1970's, The New Hampshire Trappers Association supported a two year moratorium on trapping, during which Fisher numbers rebounded.

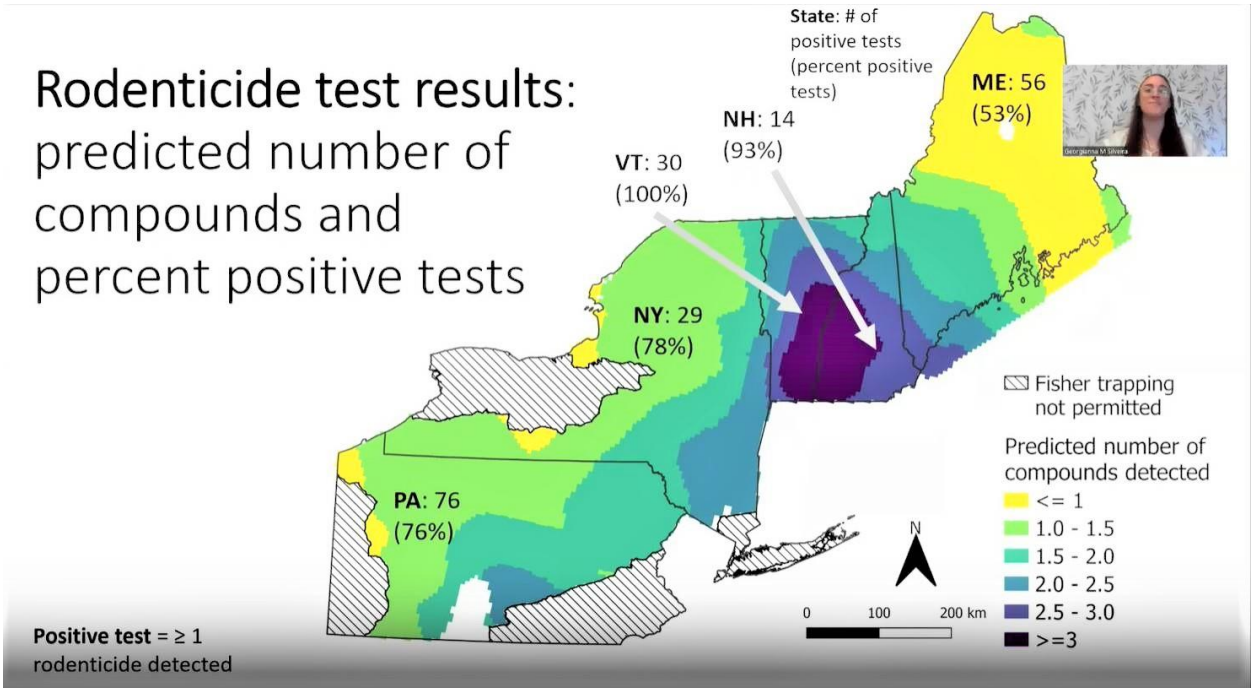
As for White-tailed Deer, the population in WMUs H2 + K has been allowed to grow way too big. The adult buck kill is considered "New Hampshire's most consistent index of the deer population ". In 1975 when I moved to Hancock the combined H2+K buck kill was 377. By Y2K that number had grown to 1150, and in 2021 the total was 1658. This shows the population has more than quadrupled. This is great for the growing population of Babesiosis and Lyme-disease carrying (Black-legged) Ticks which deer host, but it is not good for forestry or agriculture. Just ask any gardener in my neighborhood. And it is not good for our ecosystem in general.

For just one example, high deer populations lead to the decimation of herbaceous wildflowers like lilies and orchids (Wildlife Society Bulletin Vo. 25 No. 2 1997 Deer Overabundance). There was a large patch of Pink Lady Slipper Orchids near Lake Nubanusit that's been totally eradicated by deer, leaving no sign that the patch ever existed. What else have we lost? No one is checking. Adding just one day to the either sex rifle season is not going to stem the tide. That's increasing the length of the rifle season for does by just 4 % of the total season--not sufficient to control a population that has grown by 400%. During the rifle season I recommend both more days when does may be taken and allowing more than one doe per rifle hunter.

Meade Cadot, NHWC April 4th, 2023.

The attached map is from a 2022 video presentation by Geogianna Silveira about her research with Dr. Jonathan Cohen and Dr. Jacquline Frair at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and also with Dr. Krysten Schuler at the Cornell University Department of Public and Ecosystem Health. The presentation title: Comparison of Fisher (Pekania pennant) Population Trend to Rodenticide levels in the Northeast United States.

Rodenticide test results: predicted number of compounds and percent positive tests



Positive test = ≥ 1 rodenticide detected