

Fish like a
GIRL

Taking composting
 one step further



By Beckie Gaskill
 OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

As many know, I am a gardener. Of sorts. I may or may not be good at it. The jury is still out on that. I seem to be doing pretty well this year, though, so I will take that small success where I can. From there, though, I decided to branch out and start composting for my garden. I originally thought I would buy a composting bin much like the one I saw the Master Gardeners of the North use at the community garden in Rhinelander. That seemed like a much easier option than the big pile my mom used to have in the corner of the garden back in the day. She had to turn it by hand, and it seemed like a pretty good deal of work. I am not against some hard work here and there, but the bins that just need a little spin here and there seemed like a cool idea.

I have also been interested in vermicomposting. Laurie McGill spoke about it at a Master Gardeners' meeting a while back, and that was what got me interested in it. I have been looking at a certain supplier online and toying with the idea for the last few months.

As luck would have it, my sister was also interested and decided she would go ahead and get a starter kit of sorts. However, when she did that, my brother-in-law was less than impressed. He is, apparently, not into worms. He thinks they are gross. And that is cool. They are not for everyone. Shortly after splitting them up once, my sister asked me if I wanted to take them. Of course, I said yes.

So, I came home from her house with a small plastic bin filled with, essentially, worms and dirt. I dug around in there a little bit and found some of those red wigglers, looking happy in their little home. As luck would have it, two weeks later I was teaching a gardening camp at a friend's learning facility. It was time to move the worms into a bigger home anyway, so I thought it would be fun to have the kids help with that.

I had many plastic totes left over from when we moved last year, so I decided to use one of those as my new worm palace. I got some dirt, collected some food scraps and shredded up some newspaper. I referred

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DEAN HALL/LAKELAND TIMES

CRANE AND COLTS

A pair of sandhill crane colts follow close behind one of its parents on Wednesday, June 29, in Minocqua.

**Deer season recommendations
 a topic for Natural Resources
 Board consideration**

By Beckie Gaskill
 OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Deer program specialist Jeff Pritzl spoke to the Natural Resources Board (NRB) this month regarding the County Deer Advisory Council (CDAC) recommendations for the 2023 deer hunt in the state. In the past, he said, there were two CDAC meetings in each county. In the first, a preliminary recommendation was brought by the council to the public, who would then weigh in on that recommendation. From there the councils would take that public input as well as the department's deer metrics for the county, and craft their final recommendation that would be brought to the NRB. However, this year that was one in just one meeting with a virtual option. Pritzl said the department felt they could get just as much public feedback with this simplified format. They received 9,951 public input form as part of this process, he said. This was approximately the same amount of participation the department had received in recent years with the two meeting format.

Pritzl said the department supported all of the CDAC recommendations as received with the exception of Marathon County. That CDAC had voted to reduce their private land tags from 2,000 to 1,800. The county had been at 2,000 for several years, he said, and their quota objective had been at 7,000 for several years also. The CDAC there recommended an increase in

their public land tags from 200 to 500. Private land antlerless tags, he said, had been selling out their 2,000 permits for the last several years and had not achieved their goal. For that reason, the department recommended that private land antlerless tags should remain at 2,000.

When looking back at 2021 and 2022 and comparing those permit levels to 2023, Pritzl showed there had been a trend statewide to increase the number of antlerless tags on public land. This year 53,030 were recommended. In 2022 that number was just under 50,000, and just under 49,000 in 2021. The number of metro bonus antlerless tags had trended higher in the last two years as well, he showed.

The total antlerless quota in 2021 was 285,175. In 2022, that number was lower, at 274,170. This year, the quota is closer to the 2021 number, at 283,495.

The only county to recommend bucks only was Iron County. This was in response to the Winter Severity Index metric, he said. The remainder of the counties in the Northern Forest Region opted for at least some antlerless tags.

Winter Severity Index

Pritzl also took a closer look at the Winter Severity Index in the northern portion of the state, specifically the northwestern counties, which saw significant amounts of snow. Some CDACs, such as Vilas and Oneida Counties, adjusted their

Winter Severity Index (WSI) numbers based on the inconsistency of that number from one portion of the county to another. Board member Sandra Naas spoke about Bayfield County and the differences in the WSI from one part of the county to another. She wondered if there might be a better way to track those numbers in the future rather than only at the county level. Pritzl said he agreed assigning a number to a county does wash out some of that information. Going forward, though, he said, there is recognition that, in order to get the most accurate severity information, it may need to be more targeted.

Public v Private

There was some discussion about the tools given to the CDACs in attempting to manage the deer herd within their county. Former DNR employee Michael Foy spoke as a hunter and member of the public, stating he felt there was a difference between how private land and public land hunters were being treated as well when it came to antlerless tag availability. He said he wanted to make sure access to the resources did not become more challenging than it already was for some. Without a separate quota for public and private land, Foy said, he could not understand why there were 53 times in recent years where a county set a zero bonus antlerless

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Northwoods six county lakes meeting July 14 at Nicolet College

Lake group leaders and members from six northern Wisconsin counties will convene for a discussion of water resource issues on Friday, July 14, 8:30 a.m. to noon, at Nicolet College.

The meeting features a panel of experts involved with enforcing laws and regulations that address boating and safety, shoreland zoning, short-term property rentals, fish and game rules, and general outdoors-related activity. Panelists are:

- Karl Jennrich, director, Oneida County planning and zoning.
- Erika Roeder, administrator, Iron County zoning.
- Darren Kuhn, conservation officer, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
- Grady Hartman, sheriff, Oneida County (or designee).
- Wisconsin DNR conservation warden (to be announced).

The meeting will also include an update on state government policy related to water given by Mike Engleson, executive director of Wisconsin Lakes; an update on invasive zebra mussels and spiny water flea from Gretchen Gerrish, director of

the UW-Center for Limnology's Trout Lake Research Station; and a presentation on loons and lead poisoning given by Mark Naniot, director of rehabilitation at Wild Instincts in Rhinelander.

There will be time for a question-and-answer session in which attendees can raise issues of specific concern to their lakes. Master of ceremonies for the meeting will be Eric Olson, director of UW-Extension Lakes.

Exhibits will be offered by area educational, nonprofit and government organizations. Attendees are expected from Oneida, Vilas, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, and Iron counties.

The event is jointly sponsored by the Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association (www.oclra.org) and the Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association (www.vclra.org). No pre-registration is required.

For more information, contact Ted Rulseh at 920-242-8671 (trulseh@tjrcommunications.com) or Tom Ewing, 630-985-8472 (president@vclra.org).

Wonderful World of Wolves program at Winchester Public Library

The North Lakeland Discovery Center will present the program "Wolves for Kids" on Tuesday, July 11, at 10:30 a.m. This program is educational for children and adults alike.

Join us as we explore the unique adaptations, life and communication style of wolves. Discover facts about wolves through artifacts and a fun wolf survival game.

Refreshments will be served.

DNR retiring Hunt Wild Wisconsin mobile app

App users encouraged to use online hunting resources

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced that as of June 29, the Hunt Wild mobile application will be retired. Instead, hunting and regulation resources can be found on the DNR's Hunting webpage.

The Hunt Wild mobile application was launched in 2018 to provide mobile access to hunting information. Hunting hours, site-specific rules and regulations, CWD sampling locations, public lands information and more could be found on the app.

The DNR is retiring the app as it has reached the end of its life cycle. The hunting information from the app is still available in a mobile-friendly version by visiting the DNR's hunting webpages. In early July, hunters will also be able to download a copy of the current 2023-24 Combined Rules and Regulations Pamphlet from the Hunting webpage for offline access.

Current users of the app will be able to open and access data stored in their app until June 29. After that date, the application will no longer be updated and maintained. The DNR thanks everyone who downloaded and used the app over the years.

Wild rice soup class

Celebrate Wisconsin's wild rice with two retired experts in the Feuniversity class "Wild Rice Soup: The Ecology, History and Harvest of Wisconsin's Native

Grain," with John Olson and Peter David, Aug. 8, 22, and 29, from 3 to 5 p.m. at Mercer Community Center, with an optional field trip on Sept. 8. Learn about

the ecological value and natural history of wild rice, or manoomin in Ojibwe, make "knockers," sample a delicious wild rice dish, and much more.

Classroom only, \$35; classroom plus field trip experience, \$45. Early-bird \$5 discount available until July 25. Learn more and register at feuniversity.org.

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back to McGill's presentation and also, of course, checked out some YouTube videos on the subject. There is a reason YouTube is the second most used search engine out there. A person really can find just about anything on that platform. Maybe anything, honestly. At any rate, I checked out some videos and I did not have enough time before the camp to properly move all of my worms over to one side of the tub, so I had to punt a bit.

From what I learned, if I were to feed the worms for a couple of weeks all on one side of their enclosure, when I went to move them, they would almost all be on that side. It makes sense. They are going to want to be near the food after all. This is also helpful, I learned, when a gardener wishes to remove the worm castings, or the compost, the worms have made. Yes, worm poop, essentially. But we have to have classier names for things sometimes, right? "Worm castings." It seems like a better term. Also, I looked up on Amazon what companies are getting for worm castings — it deserves that better name. I had no idea.

I brought all of the supplies to camp, which was an all boy camp, just by happenstance. They loved the idea of playing with worms and making them a new, bigger, better home. Not surprisingly, most of the boys had experience with worms, and were into handling them and playing with them. They did



BECKIE GASKILL/LAKELAND TIMES

My new worm condo, where the boys from gardening camp and I created a home for my gifted red wigglers.



I am now the proud owner of an unknown number of red wigglers and officially a vermicomposter.

not know much, though, about what it takes to keep worms alive. None of them had raised their own worms, but I feel as though that might change.

The boys helped me get the new "digs" ready for the worms. Each one of them got to use the cordless drill to drill a few holes in the side of the tote, which they thought was pretty cool. Power tools are kind of a big deal when a person is six or seven years old. Do not worry. They were very well supervised the whole time.

Next we put in the dirt and their food. We added the worms last. So far, it seems the boys did a great job making a happy home for my red wigglers. A few were climbing the walls, literally, for the first couple of days when I took the top off of the tote, but that is nor-

mal, from what I understand.

I checked the food after about a week, and what we had added that day at camp was gone, except for the newspaper. This told me I likely added too much newspaper, but the vegetable scraps and crushed egg shells were probably the right amount for the number of worms in the container.

One of the boys asked if I knew how many worms I had. To be honest, I have no idea. I could not even guess. One hundred perhaps would be a good guess, I had told him. I also learned that red wigglers can double their populations every two to three months. With the bigger size of their home now, I am sure they have plenty of room to do so. There may be more worms in there than I think, too. I am truly not

sure. But what I do know is that there will be more, which is almost as exciting as gardening itself.

I remembered McGill saying there were two reasons why people stop vermicomposting. One, she said, was that people feed too much food at one time. I learned to only feed as much as they can eat in one week. The other was that people get the bedding too wet. Worms breathe through their skin, so they do need moist soil. But soil that is too wet can be detrimental to the worms. Both bedding that is too wet and feeding too much can also cause the bin to smell.

I am looking forward to seeing how far I can take this adventure. I hope to be able to share compost and even worms with my new neighbor, who also likes to garden. In fact, he planted

any seedlings I grew for which I did not have room, and was more than happy to do so. I am looking forward to doing more of that and expanding my operations in years to come.

Composting of any sort is a good idea, I feel. It reduces the amount of garbage a house produces. It also makes a great addition to the garden — growing vegetables from vegetables, as it were. As long as the worms do not get too hot or too cold, stay fed, and stay in good bedding, it sounds like they will take care of bringing up their populations and making for some fun for years to come. A fun hobby that is also helpful with another hobby? Sign me up.

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