

# **Proposal For Changing the Timing of the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference**

**By**

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## **Introduction**

The original founders designed the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference (MFWC) in order for fish and wildlife students and professionals to have a forum to discuss issues, and present current management and research findings. In 2009, the conference celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> year. The MFWC was started long before numerous state, regional and national conferences and even some conservation agencies and organizations were in existence. The conference also started before several species of fish and wildlife had legal fishing or hunting seasons. The states and Canadian provinces in the Midwest host the conference on a rotating basis. The host state/province has a Steering Committee to organize the meeting. Most Steering Committees follow a Procedures Manual provided by the previous host state to organize the meeting. There is no regional board, sponsor or committee for the conference other than the host state. The MFWC is considered one of the premier natural resources conferences in the United States and has been hugely successful over time.

## **Timing**

The original founders of the MFWC probably set the timing of the conference for early December over 70 years ago with the following considerations:

- 1) Most of the field work by fish and wildlife professionals would be over and a summary for the year could be presented.
- 2) Most fall fishing and hunting seasons would be over.
- 3) Most colleges and/or universities were on the quarter system so the conference would not conflict with their final exam time frames. Or, if a university or college was on a semester system, final exams were held in January, not December as is current practice.
- 4) The MFWC was one of the few conferences in the natural resources field so there were not any timing conflicts.

## Changes over Time

1. As state and federal agencies emerged and work on numerous species of fish and wildlife evolved, the species of fish and wildlife that could be fished/hunted and their respective seasons have expanded. The prime example is the hunting season on white-tailed deer which now occurs in all the Midwest states and with seasons often now occurring during the MFWC.
  
2. Most colleges and universities in the past few decades have converted from the quarter system to the semester system. Refer to the table below which illustrates that the first two weeks of December when the MFWC is typically held is in the time frame of final exams for most of the colleges/universities within the geography of the North Central Section of The Wildlife Society.

**Colleges and Universities with Fish and Wildlife Programs located within the 8 Midwest states in the North Central Section of The Wildlife Society. Data compiled in 2006 by Jim Schneider, MI State University Fish and Wildlife Dept.**

State/College or University	FINALS WEEK	Start of SPRING 07
○ Illinois		
• Southern Illinois University	Dec. 11-15	Jan. 16
• University of Illinois		
• University of Illinois - Champaign/Urbana	Dec. 11-16	Jan. 16
• Western Illinois University	Dec. 11-16	Jan. 16
○ Indiana		
• Ball State University	Dec. 12-16	Jan. 8
• Purdue University	Dec. 11-16	Jan. 8
○ Iowa		
• Iowa State University	Dec. 11-16	Jan. 8
○ Michigan		
• Central Michigan University	Dec. 11-15	Jan. 8
• Michigan State University	Dec. 11-15	Jan. 8
• Northern Michigan University	Dec. 11-16	Jan. 15
• Lake Superior State University	Dec. 18-22	Jan. 15
• Michigan Tech University	Dec. 18-22	Jan. 15
○ Minnesota		
• University of Minnesota	Dec. 14-20	Jan. 16
• University of Minnesota - Crookston	Dec. 18-21	Jan. 8
○ Missouri		
• University of Missouri	Dec. 11-15	Jan. 16
• Missouri Western State University	Dec. 9-15	Jan. 16
• Central Missouri State University	Dec. 11-15	Jan. 8
○ Ohio		
• Hocking College (Quarter semesters)	Dec. 4-8	Jan. 2
• Ohio State University (Quarter semesters)	Dec. 4-7	Jan. 3
○ Wisconsin		
• University of Wisconsin-Madison	Dec. 16-23	Jan. 22
• University of Wisconsin Stevens Point	Dec. 18-22	Jan. 22

Many veterans of the MFWC know that students have always represented a “good” percentage of the total attendees at the conference (probably has ranged from 20-50%). Many of the student attendees present research papers because the MFWC is an excellent venue for this professional growth experience. It is felt that many students are not attending the MFWC due to the timing of the conference.

3. Many other natural resources conferences have been initiated in states, regions and nationally in the past few decades. For example, The Wildlife Society started an annual conference about 16 years ago. TWS’s annual conference is typically held in September. In the near future, TWS Annual Conference will be held in October to capture the beginning of the federal fiscal year. Thus, with this timing change, TWS will provide federal natural resources employees one of the first conferences they can choose to attend in their fiscal year. The point here is that conferences should be adaptable to change to gain or retain attendees, etc.

### **Time for Change**

1. Changing the timing of the MFWC to early to mid-January would fall at the beginning of the semester for students making it much easier for them to attend. Students have always been a critically important part of MFWC and such a change would better accommodate their needs.
2. Students who are presenting papers at the MFWC may also be able to improve their papers by having the semester break time to spend “quality time” on their talk - not having to worry about final exams, etc.
3. More agency and organization staff members may be able to attend MFWC with the Christmas and New Years Holidays and most hunting seasons and field work concluded.
4. Many state chapter meetings of AFS and TWS occur in late January through April in the Midwest. Thus, the conference would occur just prior to state chapter meetings.
5. After 70 years of having the conference in early December, **it is time to consider a change**. We recommend a change be made when Missouri hosts the conference in 2013 (MN in 2010, IA in 2011, KS in 2012 have already locked into hotel contracts). Indiana will host the conference following Missouri. We recommend an experimental change for two years followed by an evaluation. If the change is not deemed beneficial to the conference, then a switch back to December or some other time frame can be made.
6. Please place this proposal on your MFWC Planning Committee’s agenda for consideration.

[Thank you for considering our request.](#)