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WISCONSIN OUTDOOR NEWS

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Single DNR hotline tip led to many convictions

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Edgar, Wis. — The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) poaching hotline plays a key role in nabbing poachers each year.

It's expected that the hotline will result in poaching cases being made again during this year's archery, rifle and muzzleloader seasons.

All sportsmen have to remember is (800) TIP-WDNR, or dial (800) 847-9367.

A Marathon County case from 2014 serves as an example of how the hotline can work.

DNR game warden Paul Leezer was serving as field training officer for then new warden Chelsey Collette when Leezer received an anonymous tip through the hotline. Responding to approximately 100 hotline tips per year, Leezer never knows what to expect, but being that the gun season was under way, they were prepared for anything.

Collette took the lead and quickly discovered multiple alleged violations on 80 acres of hunting land outside of Edgar.

The DNR TIP line is set up in Madison and is staffed 24 hours a day. Most calls that come in are anonymous, although Leezer said, "Callers are protected by statute if they give information." This often becomes important when they are trying to build a case and need to gather specific information.

Once the information is processed, the local warden is called first and then the next closest until they reach someone who can respond quickly.

In last year's case, the crew determined the exact location of the violation and that the suspect had reportedly harvested more deer than he could legally. Hotline staff also identified the person for whom they were looking — in this case it was a man by the name of David P. Wright, of Edgar.

Proceeding to the site, Leezer and Collette found their suspect in an old trailer that was being used as a hunting camp. In

front of the trailer was an ATV with a dead tom turkey, clearly shot with a rifle during the closed portion of the fall turkey season. After identifying themselves, Collette questioned Wright.

Wright revealed some information, much of which the wardens already knew. The wardens found out that Wright had shot multiple deer during the 2014 archery and gun deer season. After confirming nine deer were shot, they identified problems with each, but needed evidence. Some had not been tagged while others were moved and later tagged by someone else. These accomplices were where the investigation led next. Before they left, the turkey was seized and an initial citation was issued. It turned out it wouldn't be the last citation.

While inquiring about the turkey, the wardens asked to see the rifle and found a loaded gun in Wright's vehicle. After another citation was issued, they went to question the other two suspects, who cooperated and quickly confirmed the illegal activity. Both were issued citations, which

they promptly paid.

With evidence in hand, the wardens returned to visit Wright and issued additional citations. The investigation started on Nov. 27, 2014, and was finalized and written on Dec. 1, 2014. Five deer were seized and Wright was issued four citations totaling more than \$1,700. In addition to the illegal turkey and loaded firearm in a vehicle violations, Wright was also cited for group deer hunting violations, failure to validate and attach a deer carcass tag, possession of untagged deer, hunting deer with a crossbow without a crossbow license, reusing deer carcass tags and possession of velvet antlers.

Wright was requested to show up for a Jan. 2, 2015, court date, but failed to appear, prompting Marathon County Circuit Court Judge Gregory Huber to issue the following statement. "Failure to appear is deemed to be a plea of no contest and defendant is found guilty of the following charges."

Wright eventually paid the fines and court costs.