

Minnesota Bowhunters - *Continuing the Tradition*



Attn: Environment and Natural Resources Policy and
Finance Committee Members
Re: MNDNR Crossbow Report & Expiration
Date: 2/25/26
Position: We do not support the continued full inclusion of crossbows into
designated archery seasons and seek a compromise.

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

We write to express our strong opposition to the continued full inclusion of crossbows into designated archery seasons. Archery seasons were established as extra hunting opportunities intended to promote the sport of archery. These seasons have historically provided those interested in bowhunting with longer seasons and less hunting pressure which resulted in improved access, better opportunity, and the fostering of community archery events. This system worked, was not broken, and was not in need of this significant change. For example, archery license sales have been incredibly steady since 2008, while during the same time period, firearm and muzzleloader sales have seen significant declines of 14% and 28%.

Making archery seasons easier through the unnecessary inclusion of more advantageous non-archery weapon platforms is not a solution to the overall decline in hunters. Since 2003, youth archery license sales were steadily increasing to a peak of 12,212 in 2012 when there was no crossbow inclusion compared to only 9,884 in 2024. Neither data from other states or the MNDNR crossbow report show a conclusive or statistically significant lasting real net benefit to youth, female, or overall R3. While a 43% increase in specifically youth female archery license sales does sound good on paper, it is important to recognize that nearly all of these young girls are going to deer hunt regardless of their ability to hunt with a crossbow during the archery season. For the most part, this would be with a firearm or crossbow during the firearm season, but they do also hunt and find success during the muzzleloader season. Unlike a permanent disability, some youth not yet being able to effectively hunt the archery season is a temporary hurdle that gives them something to work towards as they inevitably grow and practice into increased capability.

While we are not increasing the number of adult or youth hunters with crossbow allowances, we are starting to see a transition of existing firearm and muzzleloader season hunters now also hunting the archery season with a crossbow. This makes sense and was expected based on data from other states. The report expressed that

removing barriers would make participation easier thus likely benefitting retention. While that's a nice thought, hunter retention is not directly correlated with weapon allowances. The firearm season has the lowest barrier to entry paired with the best time to hunt, and this season has experienced a significantly higher rate of decline than the pre crossbowed archery season. Instead of undermining the purpose of archery seasons, we would encourage more research into why firearm and muzzleloader season participation is declining and work on fixing the cost-benefit ratio of those opportunities.

Archery is one of the most inclusive sports for almost all ages with only around one percent of bowhunters in MN requiring some form of disability allowance in order to participate. Simply put, almost all hunters have the option and ability to purchase a license and hunt the archery season without the use of a crossbow. For most hunters, learning how to shoot a compound bow proficiently enough to ethically hunt deer within 20 yards is easy. One aspect that separates bowhunting is needing to learn, through a lot of trial and error, how to get close, draw, and execute an accurate shot while remaining undetected. Bowhunting can be difficult, but it is an incredibly worthwhile experience for those willing to put in the extra effort. This need to practice and share experiences has fostered a community of around 30 archery clubs throughout the state who facilitate archery shoots and host whole family community events.

Modern crossbows are often advertised as long range weapon platforms that are more similar in function, use, and ergonomics to firearms than archery. Ravin, one of the leading crossbow manufacturers, is famous for their "Your next rifle" slogan and touted 135 yard hunt ready accuracy. While crossbows should absolutely be legal tools for hunting, the archery season is not the appropriate or best fit for this weapon category. This is not a fringe debate about a nuanced component of archery. At its core, your decision is either going to preserve these unique and highly valued archery seasons for archery or fundamentally restructure MN deer hunting toward the majority of hunters now also hunting the archery season with crossbows. In Ohio, nearly 80% of firearm hunters now also hunt during their archery season. 73% of their archery season harvest is with a crossbow, and because of that, 56% of their total yearly buck harvest occurs during their archery season. Typically, Minnesota has around 20% archery season participation with only 12% of our buck harvest occurring during this season.

Hunters are not gravitating towards crossbows because they view them as modern archery equipment. Frankly, crossbow use has been clearly differentiated from archery for thousands of years. These existing hunters are leaving archery because there is a considerable advantage to do so and that would hold true whether we are talking about the inclusion of crossbows, air bows, air rifles, muzzleloaders, handguns, shotguns, or even rifles into archery seasons. There are several other weapon platforms and

configurations that are less effective than modern crossbows and inherently better for youth that are also not archery. If the archery requirement for archery seasons does not matter, there will no longer be a clear line differentiating archery seasons.

➤➤ Ideally, we would like to see the 2023 crossbow inclusion allowance fully expire. This would initiate a return to normalcy where hunters with disabilities and those over 60 could continue using a crossbow during archery seasons. While plenty of hunters over 60 are very capable and guiding disabled hunters particularly toward crossbows is incredibly arbitrary and perhaps wrong, most hunters thought this was fair. Purchased crossbows would continue being legal options during the general/firearm seasons which provides equal opportunity for use with many other weapon categories.

● If a compromise is desired, we stress the importance of a separate crossbow endorsement paired with either a delay or shortened season length. We would like to see archery and community participation with archery clubs continue to be relevant and incentivized. Most hunters naturally gravitate towards things that are easier and more advantageous for short term gain. Continuing to provide additional hunting opportunities specifically for archery will help keep archery clubs alive for future generations to enjoy.

- December crossbow season. This would provide additional hunting opportunities outside of the firearm season for those who have invested in crossbows.
- Crossbow inclusion starting on firearm opener. This would preserve the first 8 weeks of the archery season for archery and the remaining 7.5 weeks for crossbows and potentially other weapon use.
- Crossbow inclusion starting after youth firearm season. If crossbow use is permitted prior to the youth season, the youth season will be largely irrelevant due to how functionally similar crossbows are to firearms within the reasonable range of many youth. Delaying crossbow inclusion until after the mid October youth season would retain excitement for this youth hunting opportunity and provide these kids with better hunting opportunity due to less hunting pressure and harvest occurring prior to them hitting the woods. Hunting pressure is a consumptive use that negatively impacts opportunity.

We appreciate your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working with you on solutions!

Sincerely,
Nick Amunrud



President - Minnesota Bowhunters