

Pennsylvania Game Commission Releases Deer Harvest Report March 20, 2018 - PGC News

Pennsylvania's buck harvest increased 10 percent, and the overall deer harvest also was up 10 percent, in the state's 2017-18 hunting seasons, which closed in January, the Pennsylvania Game Commission reported today.

Hunters harvested an estimated 367,159 deer in the 2017-18 seasons, which easily topped the overall deer harvest of 333,254 in the 2016-17 seasons. Across the 23 Wildlife Management Units (WMU) used by the Game Commission to manage whitetails, the deer harvest decreased in only three units.

The 2017-18 buck harvest totaled 163,750, representing a 10 percent increase over the 2016-17 buck harvest of 149,460. It is the second largest harvest of bucks since antler restrictions were put in place in 2002. The largest harvest – 165,416 – occurred in the first year of antler restrictions.

The 2017-18 buck harvest also compares well with big buck harvests in Pennsylvania since the Game Commission began using calculated harvests in 1986. From that perspective, the 2017-18 buck harvest ranks as the 10th best.

But when comparing deer harvests over time, it's important to remember that deer and hunter numbers have changed from decade to decade.

In the 1987-88 deer seasons, 16 percent of deer hunters took a legal buck. Ten years later, that rate increased to 19 percent. In the 2007-08 seasons, which were five years into antler restrictions, 15 percent of deer hunters took an antlered deer. In the 2017-18 seasons, more than 20 percent of deer hunters took an antlered deer.

The antlerless deer portion of the 2017-18 harvest also increased. Totaling 203,409, the antlerless harvest was up 11 percent over the 2016-17 antlerless harvest of 183,794. But that was by design. The 2017 antlerless license allocation increased about 7 percent over 2016's allocation.

About 64 percent of the antlerless deer harvest was adult females; button-bucks comprised 19 percent and doe fawns made up 17 percent.

In what is becoming an annual occurrence, bowhunters accounted for about a third of Pennsylvania's 2017-18 overall deer harvest, taking 118,110 deer (62,830 bucks and 55,280 antlerless deer) with either bows or crossbows. The archery harvest also increased 10 percent over 2016-17's total harvest of 109,250.

Good fortune also came to muzzleloader hunters, who took 23,490 deer (1,310 bucks) in the 2017-18 seasons. This harvest also represented an about 10 percent increase in overall muzzleloader harvest.

The percentage of older bucks in the 2017-18 deer harvest remained high. About 57 percent of the bucks taken by hunters were at least 2½ years old. The remainder were 1½ years old.

Game Commission Executive Director Bryan Burhans found the latest harvest news from Pennsylvania's deer woods to be indicative of the big bucks and good deer hunting that can be found in the state's forests and from farming valley to farming valley.

"Everywhere I go, hunters are telling me about and showing me photos of the trophy bucks they took last season," Burhans said. "It's something that started months ago and hasn't stopped. I consider it a pleasure to share their excitement and see their pride."

Agency staff currently is working to develop its 2018 antlerless deer license recommendations, which will be considered at the April 24 meeting of the Board of Game Commissioners.

In addition to harvest data, staff will be looking at deer health measures, forest regeneration and deer-human conflicts for each WMU as it assembles antlerless allocations, according to Matthew Schnupp, agency Bureau of Wildlife Management director.

Total deer harvest estimates by WMU for 2017-18 (with 2016-17 figures in parentheses) are as follows:

WMU 1A: 6,300 (6,500) antlered, 12,600 (10,400) antlerless;

WMU 1B: 8,300 (7,900) antlered, 13,000 (8,200) antlerless;

WMU 2A: 6,100 (7,000) antlered, 10,900 (9,200) antlerless;
WMU 2B: 4,500 (5,800) antlered, 14,000 (14,000) antlerless;
WMU 2C: 9,800 (8,300) antlered, 7,972 (8,335) antlerless;
WMU 2D: 14,700 (12,800) antlered, 17,391 (16,400) antlerless;
WMU 2E: 6,900 (5,200) antlered, 6,669 (5,341) antlerless;
WMU 2F: 9,500 (7,700) antlered, 7,202 (6,700) antlerless;
WMU 2G: 8,200 (6,200) antlered, 5,501 (4,000) antlerless;
WMU 2H: 1,700 (1,900) antlered, 1,900 (1,900) antlerless;
WMU 3A: 5,400 (5,400) antlered, 5,000 (3,800) antlerless;
WMU 3B: 8,900 (7,500) antlered, 7,000 (7,300) antlerless;
WMU 3C: 8,700 (8,600) antlered, 11,900 (11,000) antlerless;
WMU 3D: 4,700 (4,300) antlered, 4,200 (4,200) antlerless;
WMU 4A: 4,800 (4,400) antlered, 7,672 (7,913) antlerless;
WMU 4B: 5,600 (5,200) antlered, 7,108 (6,200) antlerless;
WMU 4C: 6,800 (6,400) antlered, 6,500 (5,300) antlerless;
WMU 4D: 10,600 (7,900) antlered, 8,417 (7,533) antlerless;
WMU 4E: 8,200 (7,300) antlered, 8,700 (7,500) antlerless;
WMU 5A: 2,900 (3,000) antlered, 3,801 (4,000) antlerless;
WMU 5B: 9,000 (8,900) antlered, 12,800 (12,400) antlerless;
WMU 5C: 8,800 (8,300) antlered, 15,600 (15,600) antlerless;
WMU 5D: 3,300 (2,900) antlered, 7,500 (6,500) antlerless; and
Unknown WMU: 50 (60) antlered, 76 (70) antlerless.

Season-specific 2017-18 deer harvest estimates (with 2016-17 harvest estimates in parentheses) are as follows:

WMU 1A: archery, 2,710 (3,030) antlered, 3,320 (2,950) antlerless; and muzzleloader, 90 (70) antlered, 1,480 (1,250) antlerless.
WMU 1B: archery, 3,370 (3,230) antlered, 2,730 (1,820) antlerless; muzzleloader, 30 (70) antlered, 970 (1,080) antlerless.
WMU 2A: archery, 2,040 (2,440) antlered, 2,030 (1,900) antlerless; muzzleloader, 60 (60) antlered, 1,170 (1,100) antlerless.
WMU 2B: archery, 3,060 (4,260) antlered, 6,490 (6,750) antlerless; muzzleloader, 40 (40) antlered, 1,010 (750) antlerless.
WMU 2C: archery, 3,400 (3,320) antlered, 1,500 (1,789) antlerless; muzzleloader, [100 \(80\)](#) antlered, 1,000 (1,006) antlerless.
WMU 2D: archery, 5,720 (5,350) antlered, 2,800 (2,590) antlerless; muzzleloader, 80 (150) antlered, 2,100 (1,910) antlerless.
WMU 2E: archery, 2,040 (1,760) antlered, 1,120 (908) antlerless; muzzleloader, 60 (40) antlered, 880 (626) antlerless.
WMU 2F: archery, 3,110 (2,530) antlered, 1,340 (1,100) antlerless; muzzleloader, 90 (70) antlered, 1,060 (800) antlerless.
WMU 2G: archery, 2,050 (1,620) antlered, 1,110 (830) antlerless; muzzleloader, 50 (80) antlered, 990 (670) antlerless.
WMU 2H: archery, 390 (480) antlered, 320 (310) antlerless; muzzleloader, 10 (20) antlered, 280 (290) antlerless.
WMU 3A: archery, 1,670 (1,470) antlered, 1,110 (700) antlerless; muzzleloader, 30 (30) antlered, 690 (500) antlerless.
WMU 3B: archery, 3,030 (2,440) antlered, 1,560 (1,380) antlerless; muzzleloader, 70 (60) antlered, 1,040 (1,020) antlerless.
WMU 3C: archery, 2,530 (2,340) antlered, 2,200 (1,880) antlerless; muzzleloader, 70 (60) antlered, 1,400 (1,220) antlerless.

WMU 3D: archery, 1,550 (1,470) antlered, 1,230 (1,060) antlerless; muzzleloader, 50 (30) antlered, 570 (440) antlerless.
WMU 4A: archery, 960 (940) antlered, 1,250 (1,374) antlerless; muzzleloader, 40 (60) antlered, 950 (1,031) antlerless.
WMU 4B: archery, 2,060 (1,850) antlered, 1,760 (1,400) antlerless; muzzleloader, 40 (50) antlered, 740 (600) antlerless.
WMU 4C: archery, 2,770 (2,570) antlered, 1,800 (1,380) antlerless; muzzleloader, 30 (30) antlered, 700 (620) antlerless.
WMU 4D: archery, 3,020 (2,420) antlered, 1,920 (1,629) antlerless; muzzleloader, 80 (80) antlered, 1,080 (876) antlerless.
WMU 4E: archery, 3,040 (2,750) antlered, 1,870 (1,570) antlerless; muzzleloader, 60 (50) antlered, 1,030 (730) antlerless.
WMU 5A: archery, 870 (970) antlered, 1,060 (870) antlerless; muzzleloader, 30 (30) antlered, 440 (330) antlerless.
WMU 5B: archery, 4,830 (4,730) antlered, 4,920 (4,330) antlerless; muzzleloader, 70 (70) antlered, 1,180 (970) antlerless.
WMU 5C: archery, 5,800 (5,300) antlered, 6,890 (6,990) antlerless; muzzleloader, 100 (100) antlered, 1,210 (1,010) antlerless.
WMU 5D: archery, 2,770 (2,280) antlered, 4,890 (4,180) antlerless; muzzleloader, 30 (20) antlered, 210 (220) antlerless.
Unknown WMU: archery, 40 (0) antlered, 60 (10) antlerless; muzzleloader, 0 (0) antlered, 0 (10) antlerless.

For additional information on Pennsylvania's 2017-18 deer harvest, please go to the agency's website – www.pgc.pa.gov – and go to the "White-Tailed Deer" page, then select **2017-18 Deer Harvest Estimates**.

PENNSYLVANIA'S DEER PLAN SCORES WELL INTERNATIONALLY

The Game Commission's deer management plan has the right stuff.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission's deer management plan recently was rated one of North America's best by Simon Fraser University in a recently published study that measured the scientific soundness and transparency of varied state and provincial wildlife management plans.

Pennsylvania tied with Wisconsin for the highest-scoring deer plans in North America among states and provinces that participated in the research conducted by Kyle A. Artelle and colleagues. The study used a framework that identified four fundamental hallmarks of science relevant to natural resource management – measurable objectives, evidence, transparency and independent review – and tested for their presence through 11 specific criteria in plan assessments, according to a research article recently published on the American Association for the Advancement of Science's *Science Advances* website.

The research paper, titled *Hallmarks of science missing from North American wildlife management*, challenged the widespread assumption that wildlife management in North America is science-based. Contributing to the investigation were researchers from Simon Fraser University, University of Wisconsin, University of Victoria, Hakai Institute and the Raincoat Conservation Foundation.

Pennsylvania's deer plan earned the highest score out of 667 species management plans among 62 wildlife management agencies in the United States and Canada.

"Pennsylvania's deer management plan was developed to meet high scientific standards," said Chris Rosenberry, agency Deer and Elk Section chief. "This article validates those efforts."

Rosenberry believes work in deer management from 2006 to 2009 paved the way for the Game Commission's deer plan to achieve the level of proficiency and transparency it has today.

“No management plan is perfect,” Rosenberry emphasized. “There’s always room for improvement. And it’s that mindset that has made Pennsylvania’s deer plan stronger and more defensible today than it was 10 years ago. But it was and remains a science-based plan.”

One of the most important take-home messages coming from this independent research is that it wasn’t sanctioned by Pennsylvania hunters or the Commonwealth’s deer managers, emphasized Matthew Schnupp, agency Wildlife Management Bureau director.

“This rating is a third-party assessment, an objective evaluation derived from specific scientific standards that were applied to the management plans of dozens of state and provincial agencies,” Schnupp said. “It clearly illustrates our deer biologists have our white-tailed deer plan moving in the right direction.”

After applying hallmarks of science to 667 hunt-management plans, Artelle and colleagues concluded 60 percent of them featured fewer than half of the indicator criteria.

“The key to honest discussions about wildlife management and conservation is clarity about where the science begins and ends,” said Artelle, who is now a biologist with the Raincoat Conservation Foundation and a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Victoria. “Our approach provides a straightforward litmus test for science-based claims.”