

# GEORGIA'S DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN

2015-2024

Department of Natural Resources

Wildlife Resources Division



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October 28, 2014

# **GEORGIA'S DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN 2015-2024**

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# GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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## WILDLIFE RESOURCES DIVISION



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State law charges the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) with the management and conservation of Georgia's wildlife resources. White-tailed deer are one of these important wildlife resources and Georgia's most popular game species. Deer provide diverse recreational opportunities and significant economic revenue, but also contribute to a variety of deer-human conflicts.

Over the past 40 years, Georgia's human population increased from 4.8 million people to more than 9.9 million while the deer population increased from an estimated 250,000 deer to an estimated peak of 1.4 million (1998), and then decreased to the present estimated population of 1 million deer. Deer herd reduction goals from Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014 were accomplished primarily through hunter harvest. While the statewide deer population is currently at an ecologically appropriate level, local populations vary widely across the state.

WRD manages deer herds for long-term sustainability in balance with dynamic habitat capabilities and social tolerances on a regional scale. The 2012 pre-hunt statewide estimated deer population currently stands at 25 deer per square mile of forested acreage on average. Overall physical condition of the deer herd is excellent. However, at a fine scale (e.g., property level) deer population densities may number fewer than 10 deer per forested square mile or may exceed 100 deer per forested square mile. Due to the focal nature of this issue, individual property level deer management is the most appropriate solution.

Management of Georgia's deer population occurs primarily through regulated hunting. In an effort to broaden the issue of deer management and better fulfill its mandate to all Georgians, WRD initiated the revision of a citizen-directed deer management plan involving multiple levels of public involvement. The planning process from the first 10-year Deer Management Plan (2005-2014) was repeated and improved to develop this version.

Planning was directed by a citizen-based steering committee representing broad interests in deer and deer management. The Steering Committee identified 11 key deer management issues, established four geographic-based subcommittees to develop management recommendations, and reviewed, amended or approved recommended actions. Key deer management issues identified by the Steering Committee were: 1) deer seasons; 2) deer bag limits; 3) hunting methods & equipment; 4) deer management techniques; 5) hunter access; 6) privatization of wildlife; 7) deer density; 8) deer conflict management; 9) education & outreach efforts by DNR; and 10) miscellaneous issues.

The four regional subcommittees (Mountains/Ridge and Valley, Piedmont, Upper Coastal Plains, and Flatwoods/Lower Coastal Plain) used biological and social science information to develop recommendations on all key issues that influence their geographic area and those with statewide implications. Information used by the Steering Committee and subcommittees included technical input from WRD's wildlife biologists, an independent scientific survey of Georgia residents, landowners, and hunters ("Deer Management in Georgia: Survey of Residents, Hunters, and Landowners", Responsive Management, Inc., 2013), public input derived from ten (10) public meetings, and public input received through written and electronic mail.

All committees functioned on a consensus basis. "Consensus" means that all representatives can accept a proposed action even if any individual representative does not consider the proposal ideal. This approach ensures working to solutions where all interests are served and improved. When consensus could not be reached the alternative was voting.

The bulleted list below provides the DNR-WRD action items, specific to key issues, to direct deer management in Georgia over the next decade. For a more detailed and comprehensive discussion of the planning process, public input, technical information, scientific survey, and subcommittee discussions and recommendations refer to the complete "Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2015-2024."

## **WRD ACTION ITEMS BY KEY ISSUE**

### **Deer Seasons**

- Use the best available in science in setting biologically appropriate either-sex deer hunting opportunities.
- Work with the General Assembly on determining the best method for designating urban and suburban counties eligible for an extended archery season to facilitate herd reductions (OCGA 27-3-15).
- WRD recognizes the considerable support among hunters for having one statewide deer season. However, exactly how this would be achieved lacks consensus. As such, WRD will assess public opinion and evaluate regulatory options through extensive public involvement in an effort to resolve this important issue starting in January 2015 with WRD's hunting regulation cycle.
- Consider impacts to small game hunting opportunities when adjusting deer season.

### **Deer Bag Limits**

- Maintain the current buck bag limit (Two (2) antlered bucks. Only one antlered buck may have less than four points, one inch or longer, on one side of the antlers).
- Work with the General Assembly on determining the best regulatory process for setting the deer bag limit.
- Develop and implement a mandatory harvest reporting system when cost effective that complements the current deer harvest record.

### **Hunting Methods & Equipment**

- WRD recommends that the current law concerning hunting deer over bait be maintained and will continue to provide science-based information as a foundation to discussions on this issue.
- Maintain the current laws and regulations for hunting deer with dogs.

### **Deer Management Techniques**

- Investigate DMAP options for private lands that provide management flexibility. Develop a proposed program and provide to General Assembly for funding consideration to implement. Implementation of such program is contingent on adequate funding.
- Oppose coyote bounty programs because there is no documented scientific evidence indicating that bounty programs temporarily or permanently reduce coyote abundance.
- Maintain current policy and procedures for county-wide initiation of antler restriction regulations.
- Address deer predation issues through research and education on deer and predator management.

### **Hunter Access**

- Explore opportunities to improve presentation of regulatory information for public lands in the annual hunting seasons and regulations guide.
- Publish information in the annual hunting seasons and regulations guide and on social media that explains Georgia's statutory liability protections for landowners who allow hunting on their property. Explore additional opportunities to disseminate this information.
- Utilize in-house funding, grants and partnerships to acquire high conservation-value lands, WMA inholdings, and WMA edge-holdings to provide hunting opportunities on acquired lands and enhance public access.
- Investigate opportunities to enhance hunter access to department managed lands, increase hunting opportunities on other state lands and improve maps showing access.
- Publicize road closures through WRD's web site and other social media outlets.
- Identify opportunities to engage local governments and encourage deer management through hunting on county and municipal-owned properties.

### **Privatization of Wildlife**

- Maintain opposition to legalizing artificial breeding of white-tailed deer and farming of white-tailed deer.
- Maintain opposition to importation of white-tailed deer and non-native deer species.
- Maintain opposition to hunting of farmed and non-native deer species inside high-fenced enclosures.
- Maintain existing regulations concerning the confinement of white-tailed deer.
- Pursue efforts to require registration of all high-fenced enclosures.
- Act as needed to maintain regulatory authority over white-tailed deer.

### **Deer Density**

- Facilitate, through harvest regulations, an increase in the deer population in the Blue Ridge Mountains region.
- Facilitate, through harvest regulations, a slight increase in or stabilize the deer population in the Ridge & Valley region, across the Piedmont and in the Lower Coastal Plain.
- Maintain, through harvest regulations, a stable deer population across the Upper Coastal Plain.

### **Deer Conflict Management**

- Incorporate the Urban Deer Management Plan in the Deer Management Plan 2015-2024.

- Maintain current deer crop depredation permit policies and program.

### **Education & Outreach Efforts by DNR**

- Provide youth shooting education programs and efforts to recruit those students into youth hunting education programs.
- Provide and increase mentored youth hunting education opportunities.
- Enhance youth hunting opportunities.
- Improve and develop shooting ranges in GA and provide youth/novice shooting education programs on these ranges.
- Develop partnerships with conservation organizations to further mutually beneficial hunting and shooting educational goals.
- Provide landowner/hunter outreach programs at appropriate venues and field days.
- Develop educational seminars for deer management and predator trapping for hunters and landowners.
- Provide more opportunities to take the required hunter education course.

### **Miscellaneous Issues**

- Maintain current disease surveillance and management efforts to include monitoring and evaluating the effects of hunting deer over bait on deer harvest.
- Work with the General Assembly to explore opportunities for increasing funding for wildlife management.
- Work with partners to explore opportunities to increase minimum fines for wildlife violations, establish penalty standards for wildlife violations that can be used by local court systems and pursue efforts to establish restitution for big game violations.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **GEORGIA'S DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN 2015-2024**

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division thanks the following people for their input and support as committee members on this important effort: Judson Alden, Jon Ambrose, Brandon Anderson, Nick Baker, Greg Barlow, Alan Bennett, Jeff Blackstone, Billy Bouchillon, John Bowers, Stephen Cash, Dana Chapman, Jay Childers, Mike Conner, Cory Croft, Mike Deal, Reggie Dickey, Emory Dunahoo, Dave Edwards, Todd Edwards, John Fischer, Frank Flanders, Dan Fletcher, Lee Floyd, Jim Freeman, George Gallagher, Glenn Garner, Rusty Garrison, Ronnie Gaskins, Jim Gowen, Cliff Grant, Johnny Groover, Will Gulsby, Graylen Hall, Tyler Harper, Matt Haun, Jimmy Henderson, Rob Hicks, Todd Holbrook, Bobby Holton, Daymond Hughes, Tommy Hunter, Aubrey Iler, Jimmy Jacobs, Glenn Johnson, Robert Jones, Jr., Kent Kammermeyer, Tommy Key, Charlie Killmaster, John Kilpatrick, David Knight, Walter Lane, Wesley Langdale III, Phil Lewis, Joe Massingill, Adam McGinnis, Mike Mengak, Karl Miller, Keith Mitcham, Daniel Morris, Brian Murphy, Colin Myerson, Robert Neel, Dan Oliver, David Osborn, Jim Overman, Eddie Overstreet, Camron Owens, Kym Partridge, Jeff Phillips, Michael Pisciotta, Will Ricks, Ken Riddleberger, Sid Roberts, Trae Sims, Brant Slay, Jon Smith, Steven Smith, Craig Sowers, Vince Stanley, Leif Stephens, Jim Stickles, Ron Storie, Bubba Sumerlin, Scott Tanner, Steve Tarvin, Lee Taylor, Reggie Thackston, Lindsay Thomas Jr., James Tomberlin, James Vick, Fred Wammock, Jim Wentworth, Chuck Williams, Brent Womack, Donnie Wood, Alan Woodward, James Youmans, Jr., and Jeff Young.

The Department extends special thanks to several individuals and organizations for providing meeting facilities: Georgia Wildlife Federation, Georgia Forestry Commission, Pickens County Sheriff's Department, Dalton Convention Center, Gainesville Civic Center, Cobb County Parks and Recreation, Greene County Library, The Newnan Carnegie, Henry County SPLOST, The Georgia National Fairgrounds, Georgia Southern University, Flint Riverquarium, City of Monroe Community Center, Town's Bluff Heritage Center, Fire Station Community Center of Canton, Leesburg Library, Monroe County Library, Greystone Power Auditorium, and Loudsville Methodist Church.

### **GEORGIA'S URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division thanks the following people for their input and support as committee members on this important effort: Brandon Anderson, John Bowers, David Colmans, Norm Cressman, Reggie Dickey, Glenn Dowling, Linda Fulmer, Rusty Garrison, Jimmy Gisi, Chuck Gregory, Doug Hall, Steve Henson, Sean Jerguson, Charlie Killmaster, Doug Lowry, Don McGowan, Mike Mengak, Brian Murphy, Sid Roberts, Alton Powell, Jim Simmons, Mike Stewart, Ron Storie, Marsha Webb, and Mark Whitney.

The Department extends special thanks to several individuals and organizations for providing meeting facilities: Ms. Deen Day Sanders and the Georgia Garden Club for use of the Bellmere Garden House, The Georgia General Assembly and Representative Sean Jerguson for use of meeting rooms in the Coverdell Legislative Office Building, Georgia Wildlife Federation for use of the Alcovy Conservation Center, and the Quality Deer Management Association for use of their headquarters conference room. Additionally, we thank the Garden Club of Georgia, Georgia Wildlife Federation, and Quality Deer Management Association for sponsoring meals at several of the meetings.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS



CWD	Chronic Wasting Disease
DMAP	Deer Management Assistance Program
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
FLCP	Flatwoods/Lower Coastal Plain
LED	Law Enforcement Division
MRV	Mountains and Ridge & Valley
OCGA	Official Code of Georgia Annotated
RMS	Responsive Management Survey
UCP	Upper Coastal Plain
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WRD	Wildlife Resources Division

## **PRELUDE**

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) is charged by State law with the management and conservation of Georgia's wildlife resources for present and future generations. The white-tailed deer is one of these important wildlife resources and Georgia's most popular game species. Deer provide recreation for hunters and wildlife observers, and deer hunting contributes more than \$890 million annually to Georgia's economy. Deer also cause agricultural and property damage, and present driving safety concerns.

Because of Georgia's diverse landscape, the deer herd varies greatly throughout the state. WRD's goal is to maintain a herd that provides excellent hunting and viewing opportunities that are sustainable, statewide and regionally. Sustainability requires deer numbers in balance with habitat capabilities and within social tolerances. Management of Georgia's white-tailed deer herd is increasingly challenging and often a mix of complex issues.

At the core of most of these issues lies the question: how many deer should we have? The answer depends upon whom you ask and the area of reference. Currently, management of our deer population occurs primarily through regulated hunting. However, there are a number of non-hunting issues and opportunities directly linked to this resource. These include wildlife viewing, ecological functions, predation, agricultural and property damage, and deer-vehicle collisions. In an effort to broaden the scope of deer management, better fulfill its mandate, and become a more responsive agency, WRD initiated a planning process that involved multiple levels of public involvement and this plan represents the second successful iteration of that process.

## **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

Statewide deer plans are not new for Georgia. Hunting regulation changes that allowed WRD and Georgia hunters to control deer numbers were developed from a series of science-based deer plans written by WRD professionals. In 2004, WRD's deer management planning efforts were expanded to include a broader scope of public involvement for development of Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014. The foundation of that planning effort involved four levels of public involvement in addition to professional input from WRD's wildlife biologists. With the success of that plan, WRD continued to utilize this method for development of the second iteration: Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2015-2024.

Level One of public involvement was the appointment of a 20-member steering committee by the DNR Commissioner, working in conjunction with the Governor's Office and the WRD Director. The Steering Committee represents broad interests in deer and deer management including university researchers, transportation interests, legislators, agribusiness, landowners, forest industry, deer hunters, small game hunters, sportsmen organizations, and one WRD professional (non-voting member; Appendix I). The Steering Committee's jobs were to identify membership of four regional subcommittees, to identify key issues for subcommittee review, and to review, amend or approve WRD actions resulting from subcommittee recommendations.

Level Two of public involvement was discussion and formal recommendations from four geographic-based subcommittees (16 to 18 members each). These subcommittees represented the Mountains/Ridge and Valley, Piedmont, Upper Coastal Plain, and Flatwoods/Lower Coastal Plain provinces. As with the Steering Committee, all subcommittees were comprised of broad interests in hunting (big and small game), conservation, and deer management (Appendix II). Subcommittees were tasked with reviewing key issues as identified by the Steering Committee and discussed in open-house public meetings. Subcommittees developed recommendations on all key issues that impacted their geographic areas. Natural resources professionals, who are trained facilitators, managed subcommittee meetings. Each subcommittee chairperson wrote a report of the results of the subcommittee meeting.

Level Three was public involvement through open-house public meetings. Meetings were held in November of 2013 in Dalton, Gainesville, Marietta, Greensboro, Newnan, McDonough, Perry, Statesboro, Albany, and Waycross. Input was taken on key issues identified by the Steering Committee and on any other topics desired by participants (Appendix III-IV). Meetings were advertised in a variety of outlets. Again, WRD sought input from a wide variety of interests in deer and deer management. Additionally, information presented at the public meetings was posted on the WRD website allowing citizens, who were unable to attend the public meetings, to provide written and electronically mailed comments (Appendix IV). Finally, public meetings specific to the draft deer plan will be held in August 2014 in Monroe, Hazlehurst, Canton Leesburg, Douglasville, Forsyth, Cleveland, and Brunswick. Comments will be taken on the draft plan at these meetings as well as written letters and e-mails (Appendix V.).

Level Four of public involvement was an extensive scientific survey of public attitudes and opinions on deer and deer management. WRD contracted with Responsive Management, Inc. of Harrisburg, Virginia to conduct a survey of hunters (N=825), the general population (N=807), and landowners (N=200). Survey results (Appendix VI) were presented to the Steering Committee and subcommittees by WRD as background for development of key issues and to further quantify an understanding of public attitudes and opinions on deer and deer management.

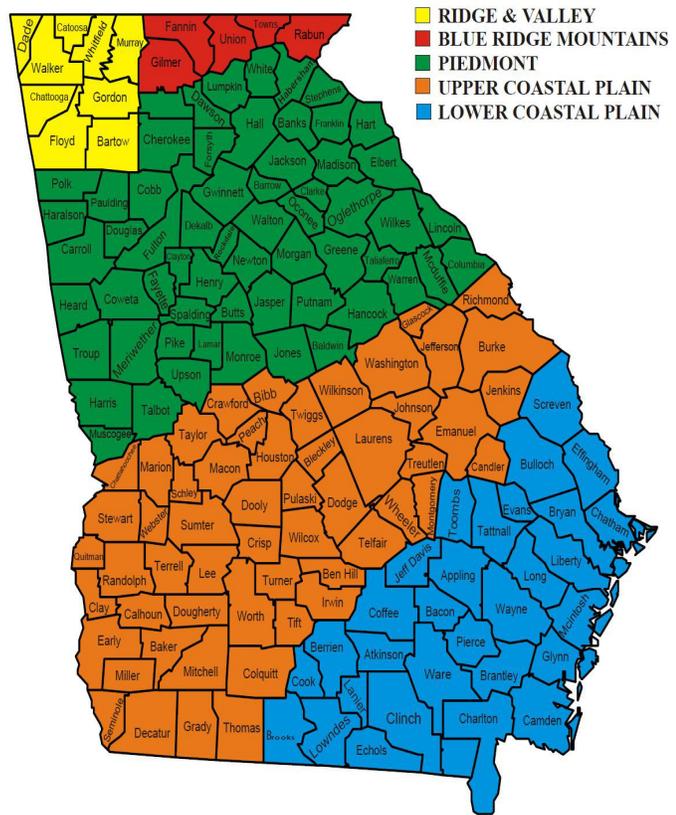
All committees functioned on a consensus basis. "Consensus" means that all representatives can accept a proposed action even if any individual representative does not consider the proposal ideal. This approach ensures working toward solutions where all interests are served and improved. The alternative is voting which means that one side wins and one loses. Voting was only done when consensus could not be reached.

The four geographic subcommittee reports were consolidated into one statewide plan. The consolidated plan was presented to the Steering Committee for their consideration. After some modification to proposed WRD actions, the plan was adopted by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee reached consensus on all WRD action items.

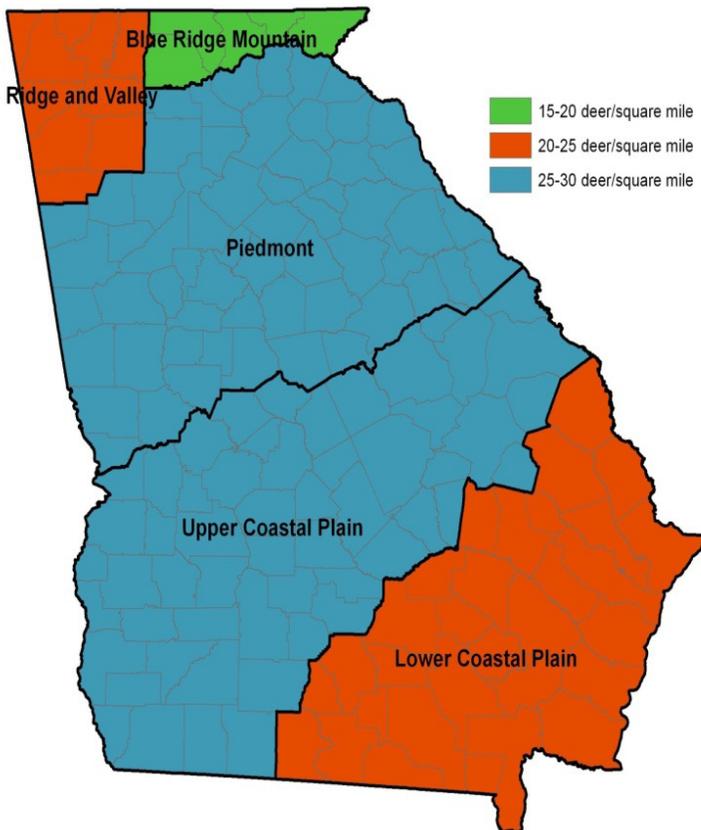
# STATE OF THE STATE

This report is a summary of vital deer population statistics critical to informing effective, science-based deer management. Georgia has over 57,000 square miles of land in five (5) physiographic provinces (Figure 1; hereinafter, regions). These regions include the Blue Ridge Mountains, Appalachian Ridge and Valley, Piedmont Plateau, Upper Coastal Plain and Lower Coastal Plain. With the great diversity of habitat and deer densities found in Georgia, deer herd monitoring is analyzed at the regional and statewide level. This report contains statewide and regional information regarding human population, forested cover, deer populations, deer harvest, deer reproductive metrics and status of population goals originally outlined in Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014. To derive information at the region level, biologists and technicians collect data annually from each county as well as wildlife management areas. These data represent a sample of all deer harvested throughout the state. Similarly, deer harvest estimates are derived using a statistically-

**Figure 1. Delineation of physiographic regions in Georgia.**



**Figure 2. Estimated 2012 pre-hunt deer populations presented in number of deer per forested square .mile.**



driven telephone survey of hunters, described later in this (Section III).

The boundaries of each region are based in geology and do not align with county boundaries; however, utilizing county boundaries is essential to efficiently collect and analyze deer data. Current deer population density (Figure 2) estimates are derived from a quantitatively-driven population reconstruction model based on deer harvest, sex ratio, fawn recruitment, and age structure of harvested deer. Model estimates are considered minimum pre-hunt populations. Thus, trends in population estimates are the more valuable and dependable measures as opposed to absolute numbers. While disparities exist in deer population density across regions and within counties, regulatory action on such a small scale is impractical and results in complex regulations that needlessly limit individual flexibility.

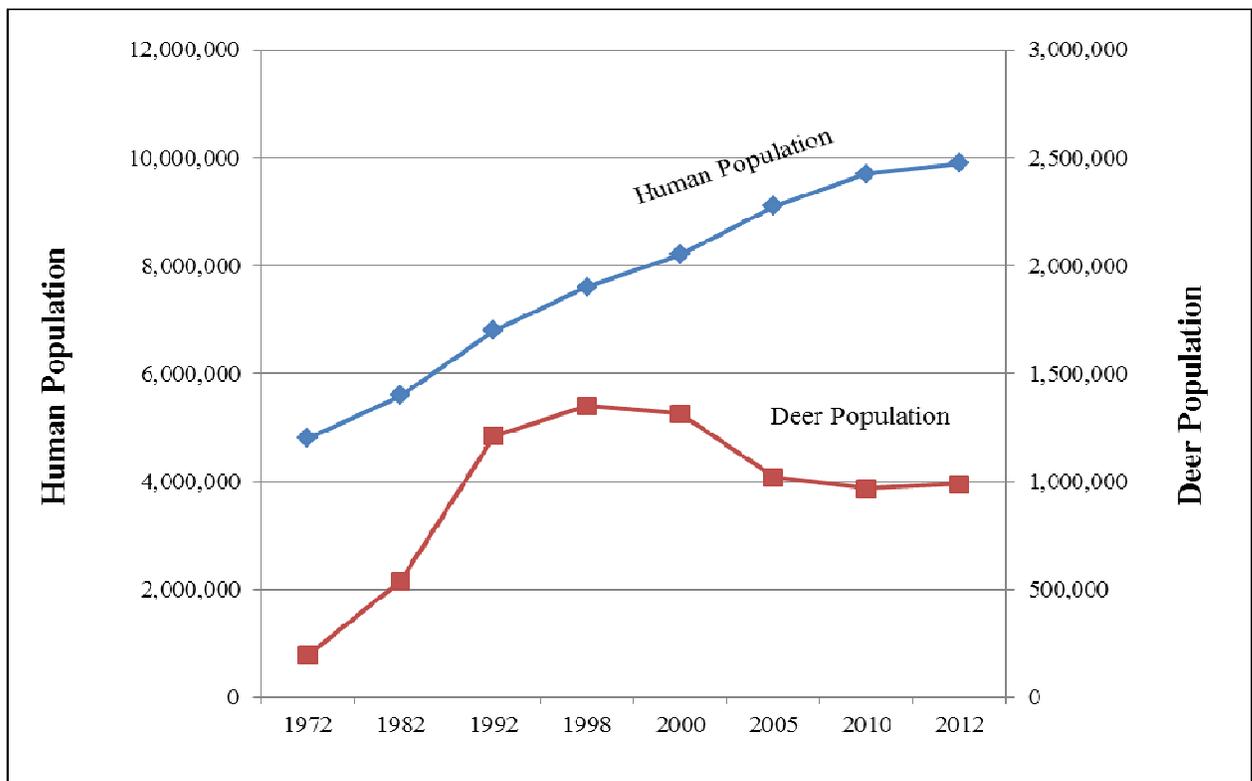
## I. TRENDS IN HUMAN POPULATION AND DEER POPULATION

Georgia's human population has doubled in the last 40 years growing from 4,800,000 in 1972 to 9,900,000 in 2012 (Table 1-1). Concomitantly, the deer population fluctuated between 198,000 in 1972 to an estimate of 990,000 in 2012. The deer population peaked in 1997 at about 1.46 million. Starting in 1998 deer population estimates gradually declined and dipped below 1 million in 2004, remaining stable at 900,000 to 1 million deer since that time. This reduction in the deer population to the current level was an objective of Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014.

**Table 1-1. Forty-year trends in Georgia's human population, deer population, and hunter population.**

Year	Human Population	Estimated Deer Population	Estimated Deer Harvest	Total Deer Hunters
1972	4800000	253,000	51,000	220900
1982	5600000	540,000	144,000	294100
1992	6800000	1,211,000	347,000	335600
1998	7600000	1,352,000	427,000	316600
2000	8200000	1,269,000	402,000	294600
2005	9100000	960,000	318,808	257404
2010	9700000	970,000	464,003	342716
2012	9900000	990,000	385,410	318113

**Figure 1-1. Georgia's deer and human populations since 1972.**



## II. TRENDS IN GEORGIA FORESTLAND

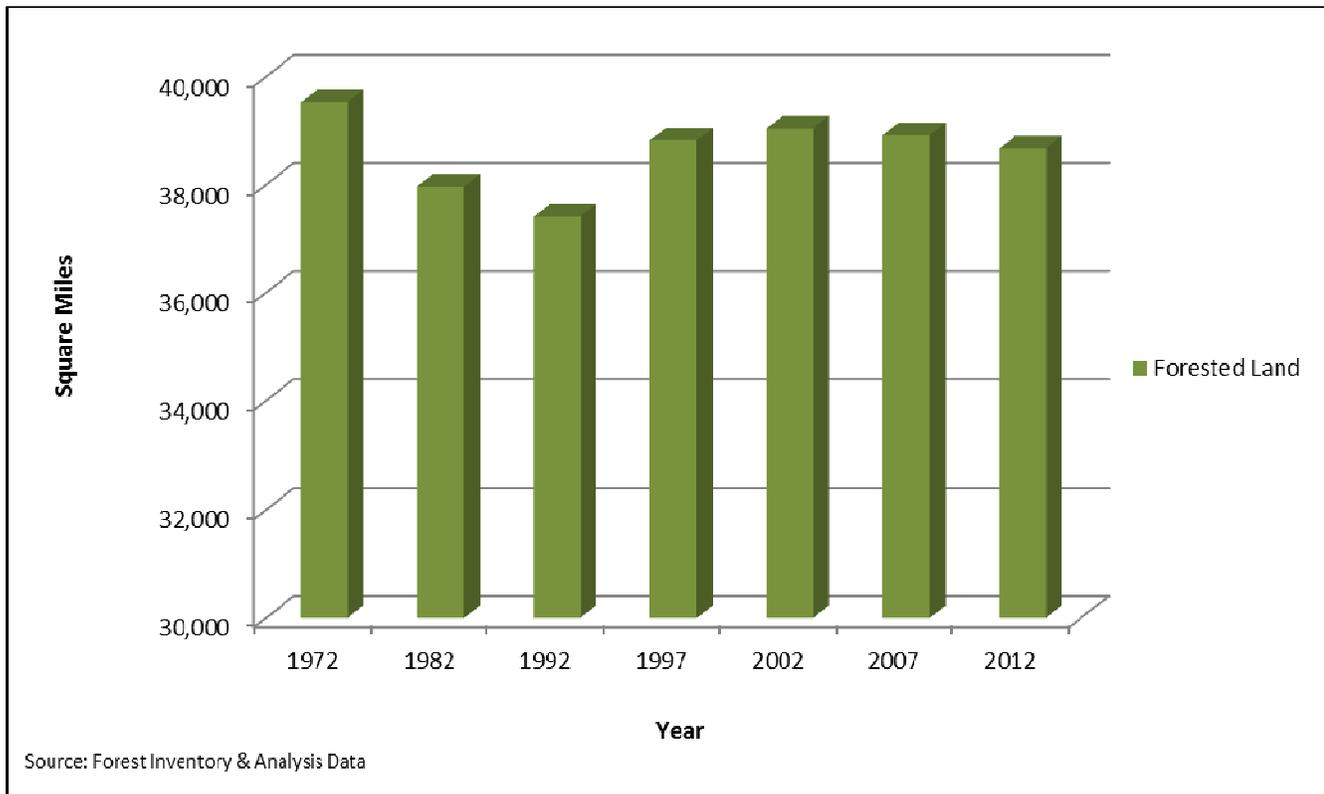
Deer population parameters, with respect to land area, are typically expressed in forested square miles. The use of forested square miles allows the exclusion of large bodies of water, urban development, and vast agricultural fields that are not generally regarded as deer habitat. Georgia's forested area accounts for roughly 67% of the state's land area and has remained relatively stable over the last 50 years (Harper 2012), ranging between 39,500 mi<sup>2</sup> and 37,500 mi<sup>2</sup> (Table 2-1 and Figure 2-1).

According to 2012 Forest Inventory and Analysis data, seventy-eight percent (124) of Georgia's 159 counties are more than 50% forested (Figure 2-2). Trends in forestland ownership have not been so stable. Since 1982, timberland ownership by the forest industry has declined by 65% while corporate ownership, or groups of private investors, has increased 250% (Harper 2012). The individual/family ownership category still represents the majority of private forestland ownership in Georgia at 55%, but has declined as a percentage of ownership as

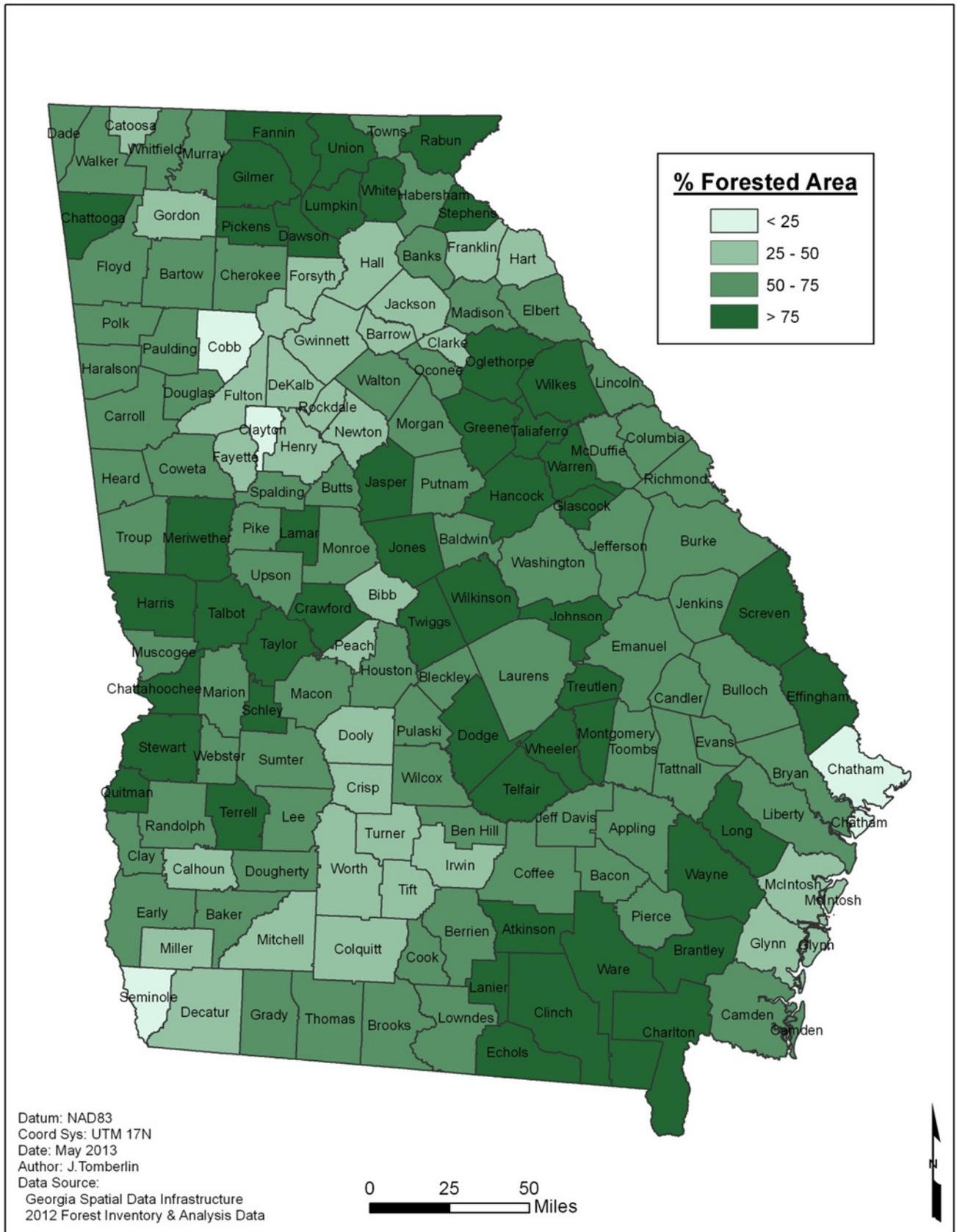
**Table 2-1. Georgia forested acres and forested square miles, select years 1972-2012.**

Year	Acres	Forested Land (mi <sup>2</sup> )
1972	25300000	39,531
1982	24300000	37,969
1992	23943680	37,412
1997	24847116	38,824
2002	24989084	39,045
2007	24908865	38,920
2012	24751603	38,674

**Figure 2-1. Georgia forested square miles, select years 1972-2012.**



**Figure 2-2. Georgia current percent forested area by county.**

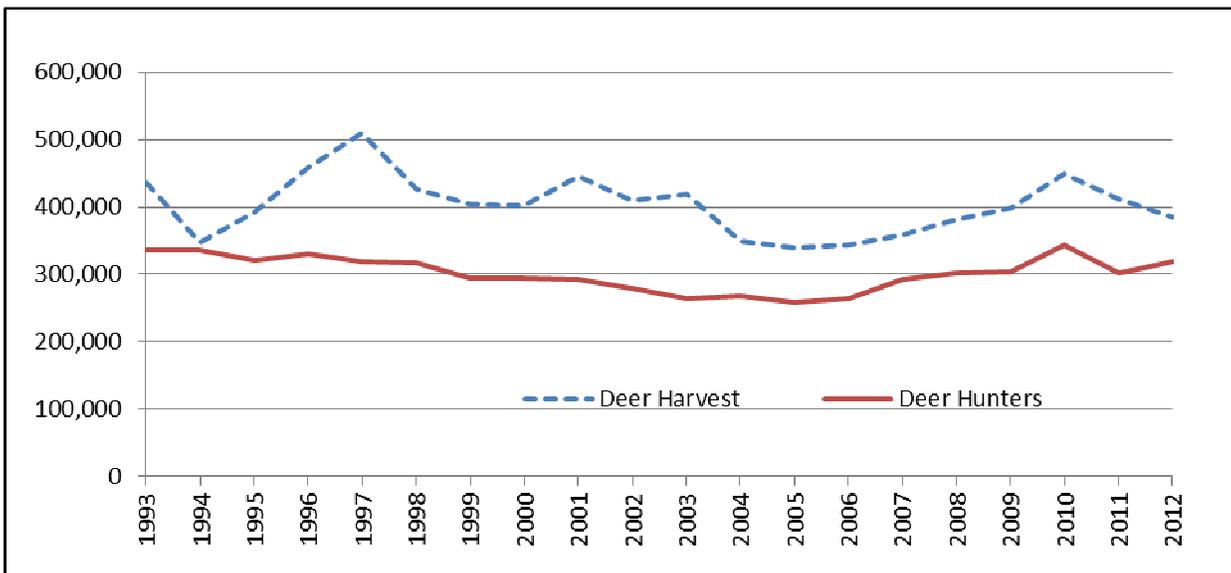


Harper, Richard A. 2012. Georgia, 2011 – forest inventory and analysis factsheet. e-Science Update SRS – 053. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Southern Research Station. 5p.

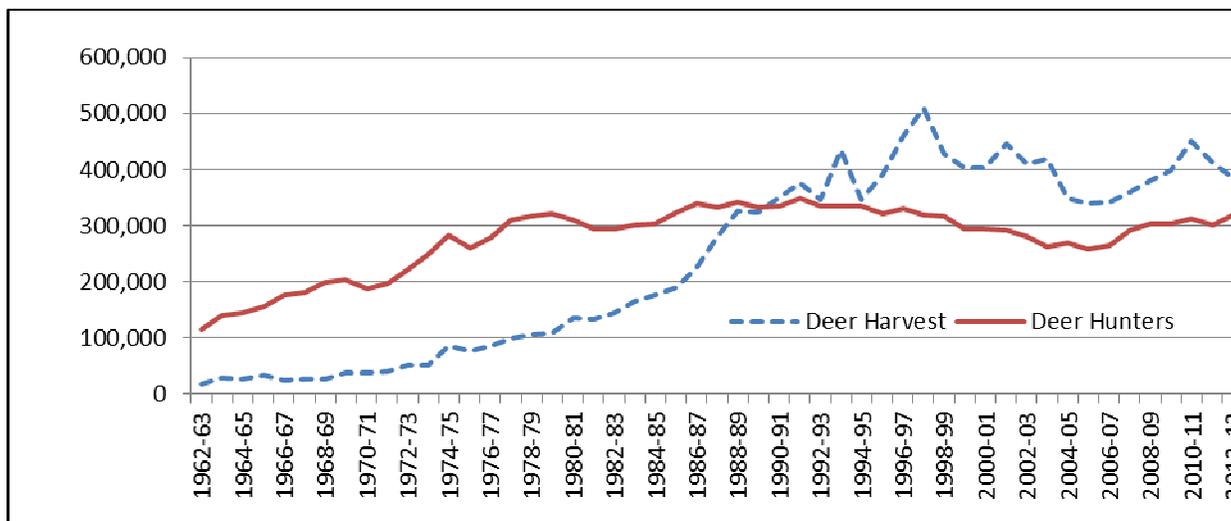
### III. TRENDS IN DEER HUNTERS AND DEER HARVEST

WRD uses license sales and issuance records from its Licensing and Boating Registration Unit (LBRU) as well as hunter harvest and effort data gathered from a professionally administered telephone survey of randomly selected hunting license holders in order to estimate both deer hunter numbers and deer harvest. Analysis of the most recent 20-year period in which data are available (1993-2012; Figure 3-1) shows a slight, but steady decline in Georgia deer hunter numbers from 1993 to 2005, but then a rebound to a generally increasing trend through 2012. Estimated statewide deer harvest over this same time period has shown more variation and a trend is more difficult to detect. Low years of the 20-year time frame occurred in 1994-95, 2005-06, and 2006-07 seasons when the estimated deer harvests were 347,000, 339,733, and 342,672, respectively. A longer-term perspective of Georgia's deer hunters and deer harvest is given in Figure 3-2. Georgia's deer harvest peaked in the 1997-98 season when an estimated 509,500 deer were harvested. It is interesting to note that before the 1989-90 deer season, Georgia deer hunters, on average, harvested less than one deer per hunter. Since, hunter harvest rates have consistently averaged more than one deer per hunter.

**Figure 3-1. Estimated number of Georgia deer hunters and deer harvest from 1993-2012.**

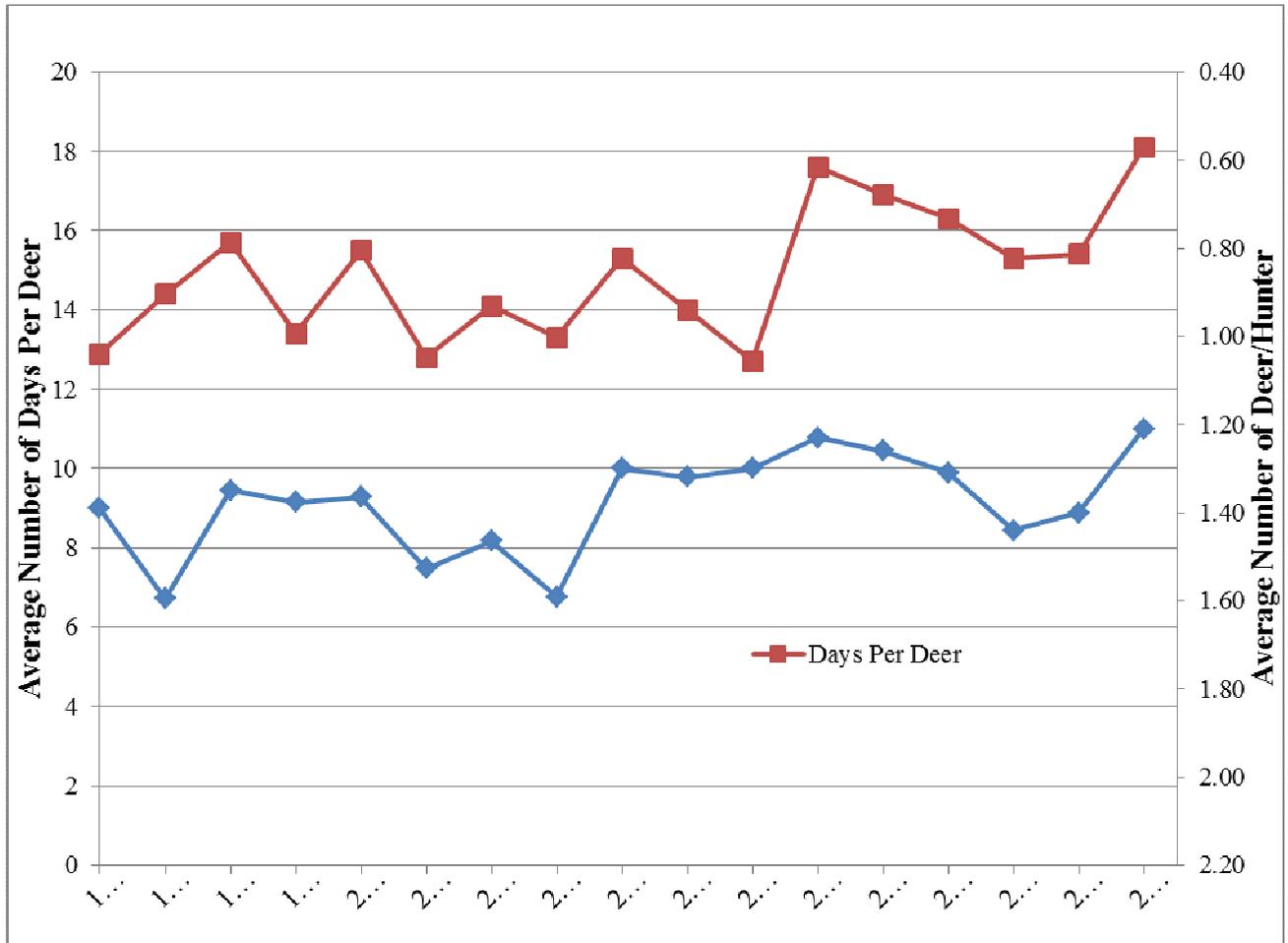


**Figure 3-2. Estimated number of Georgia deer hunters and deer harvest from 1962-2012**



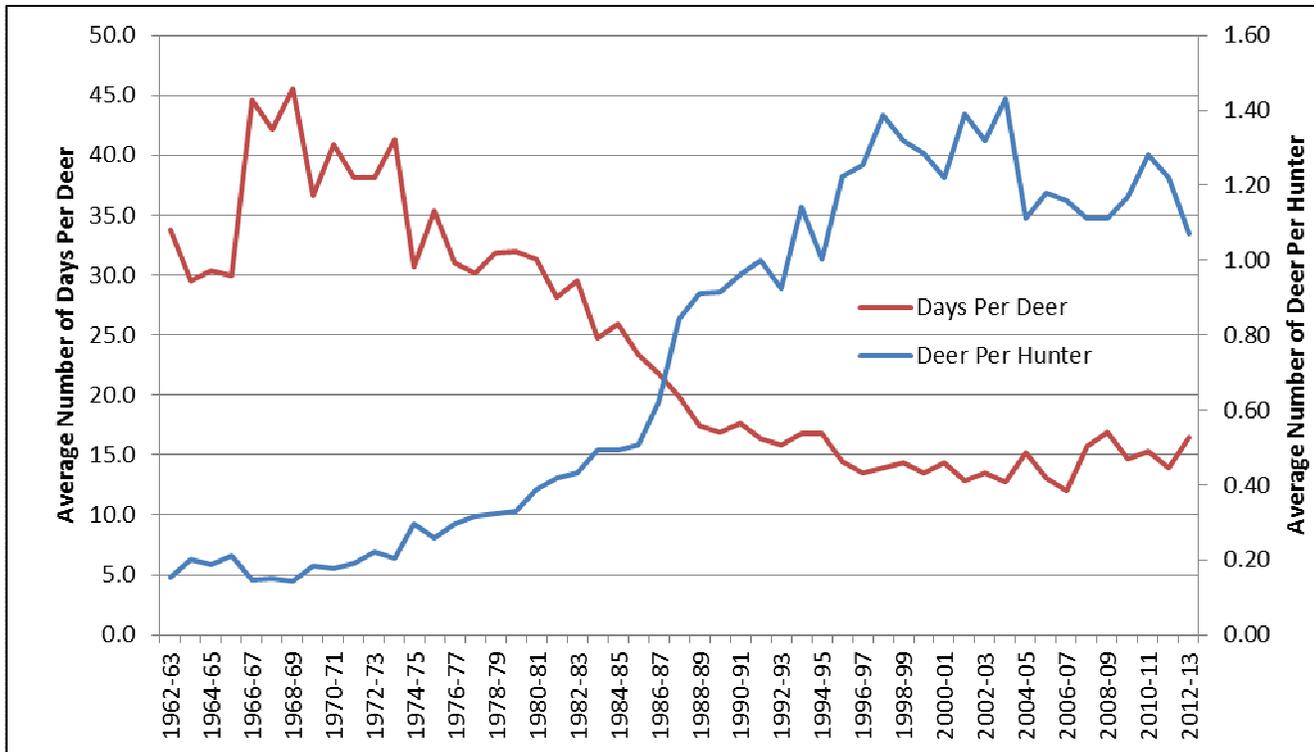
An analysis of hunter effort (number of days required for deer hunters to harvest a deer), along with other population parameters, provides valuable trend information. The average effort expended to harvest a deer is partially influenced by deer population density; therefore trends in this metric are an important component in gauging deer abundance and hunter satisfaction. Figure 3-3 shows the average hunter effort from 1996-2012. One may note that though fluctuations occurred between 1996 and 2006, the average hunter effort was 14.0 days. Since, the average hunter effort has increased to 16.4 days.

**Figure 3-3. Average number of days required to harvest a deer and average number of deer harvested per deer hunter from 1996-2012.**



Average number of deer harvested per deer hunter (deer harvest rate) is a metric that gauges hunter success. Deer harvest rates, derived from hunter surveys, are of particular importance in determining regional and total deer harvest estimates (see section VI). This metric is sensitive to changes in deer population density, deer movement patterns, and specific regulatory actions, such as bag limits. Coupled with other deer population statistics, deer harvest rates can help gauge deer population density, response to regulatory actions, and hunter satisfaction. A long term perspective on average number of days required to harvest a deer and average number of deer harvested per hunter can be found in Figure 3-4.

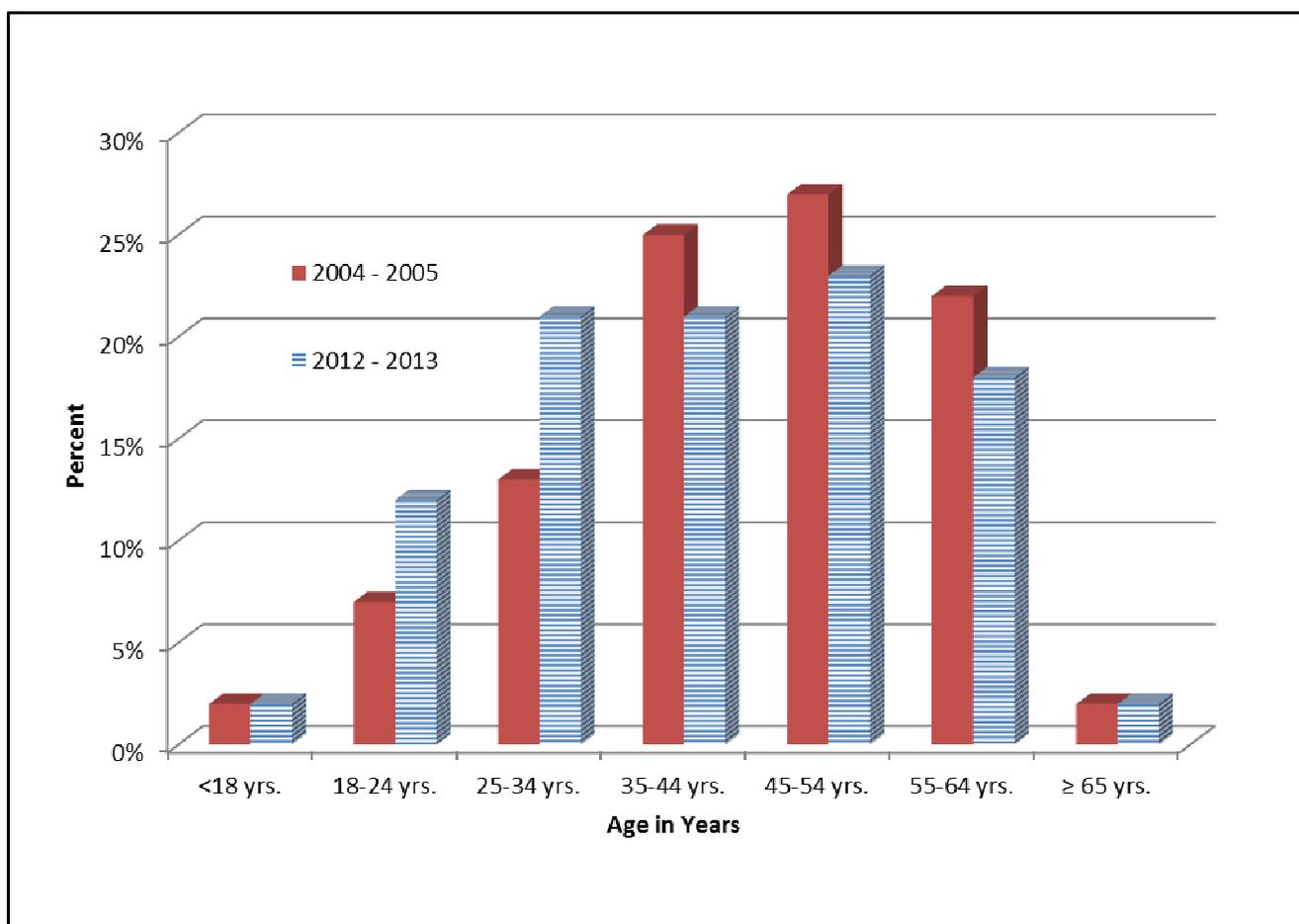
**Figure 3-4. Average number of days required to harvest a deer and average number of deer harvested per deer hunter from 1962-2012.**



From the mid-1980s through the 1990s, Georgia, like many states, experienced a slow, gradual decline in licensed hunters. Much of this decline was attributed to a decline in hunting participation by younger hunters while at the same time active hunters were aging. Since the early 1980's, there has been a slow, gradual decline in the number of newly licensed, young hunters in Georgia. The factors causing this decline have been speculated and researched, but consensus among many wildlife professionals is that the continued urbanization of Georgia's population, loss of wildlife habitat coupled with loss of hunting access, competition between diverse recreational activities and increasing family or work obligations have contributed to this decline. As a result, Georgia's hunters have been gradually aging with disproportionately low recruitment of new, young hunters. This is a concern because hunters provide critical financial contributions to support wildlife management programs and hunters are the primary tool by which several wildlife populations are managed. This is especially true for Georgia's white-tailed deer herd.

Due to the decline in hunter recruitment, many state wildlife agencies and nonprofit sportsmen organizations initiated hunter recruitment and retention efforts. Such efforts include special youth hunts, training sessions, increased shooting sports opportunities, mentoring programs, and other efforts. While conclusive data are challenging to obtain, some data suggest that hunting participation appears to be increasing in younger age classes (18-24 yrs & 25-34 yrs; Figure 3-5). Whether these increases can be attributed to specific recruitment efforts or programs is generally indeterminate because objective data evaluating such programs is neither exhaustive nor widely available.

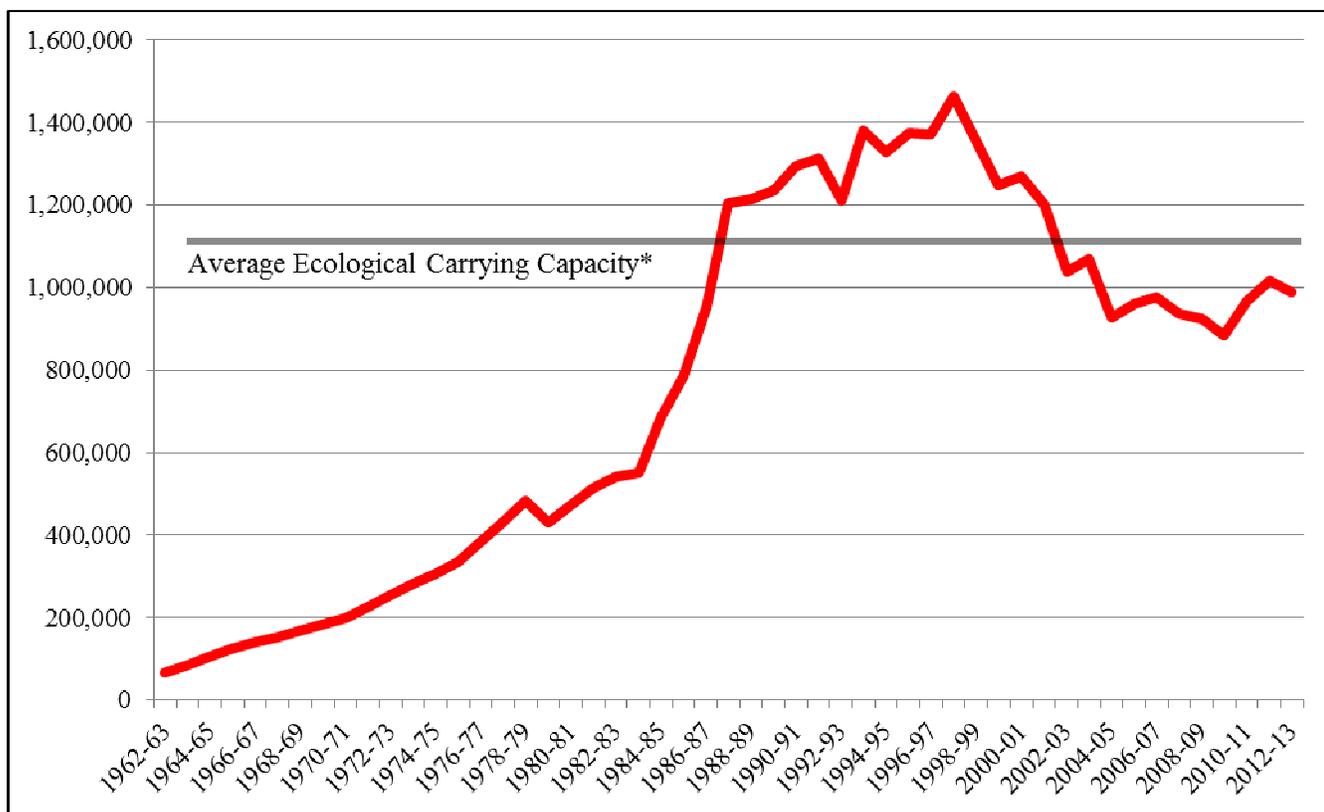
**Figure 3-5. Select Age-Classes of Georgia's Licensed Resident Hunters between the 2004-05 and 2012-13 Hunting Seasons.**



#### **IV. TRENDS IN DEER POPULATION AND VITAL STATISTICS**

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the deer population growth rate was moderate but steadily rose as restoration efforts continued (Figure 4-1). By the mid-1980s, focal populations increased and geographically expanded leading to a rapid, exponential increase in the statewide population. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, much of the state remained above carrying capacity, especially the Piedmont physiographic region. A progression of regulatory (e.g., either-sex days, season length) and statutory (e.g., bag limit) modifications combined with a decline in fawn recruitment rates resulted in curtailing this exponential growth and reducing the statewide population by the mid-2000s. This reduction was consistent with goals and public desires identified in Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014. Recently, the population has remained relatively stable; however, the declining trend in fawn recruitment remains a point of discussion and concern among many hunters.

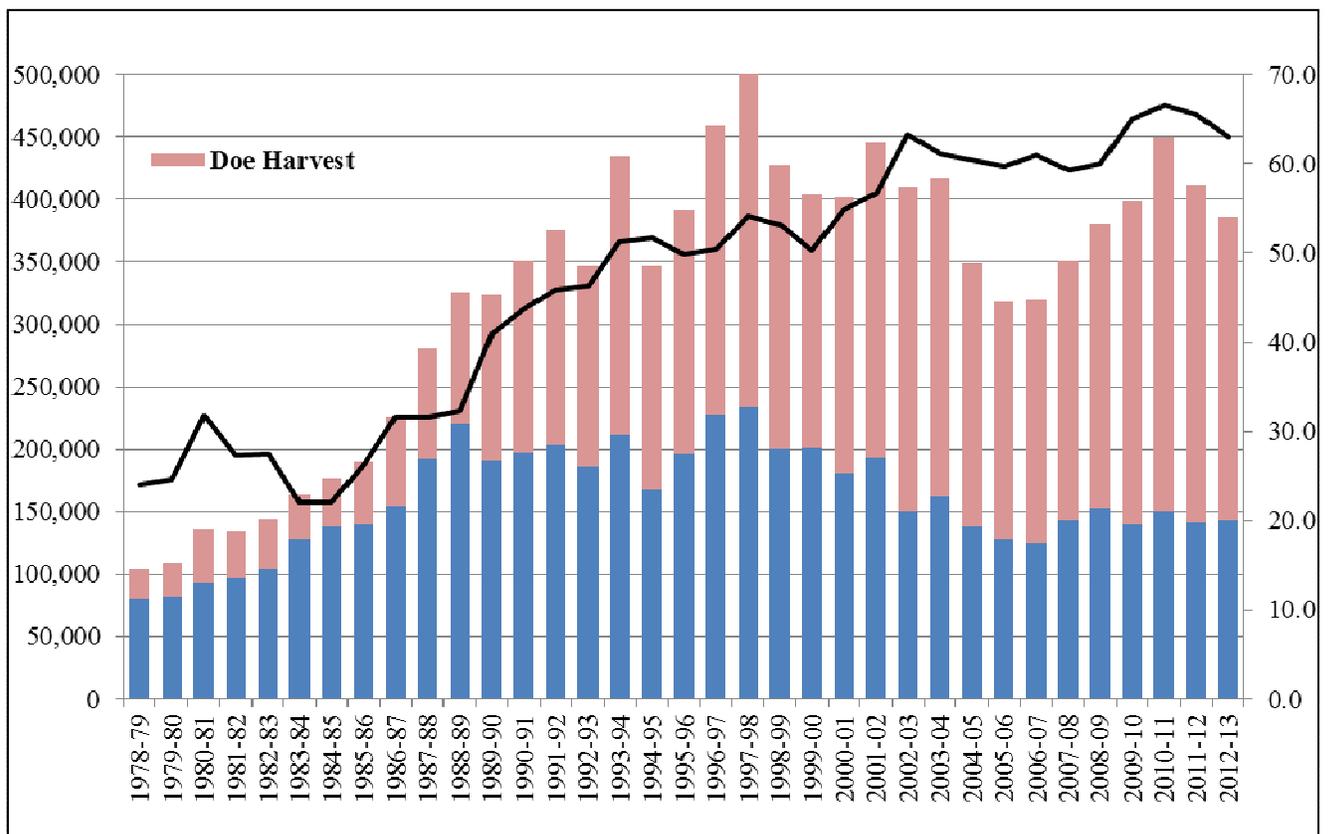
**Figure 4-1. Annual deer population estimates from 1962 to 2012, derived from deer population reconstruction.**



*\*Average ecological carrying capacity represents the collective sum of regional estimates from WRD regional biologists.*

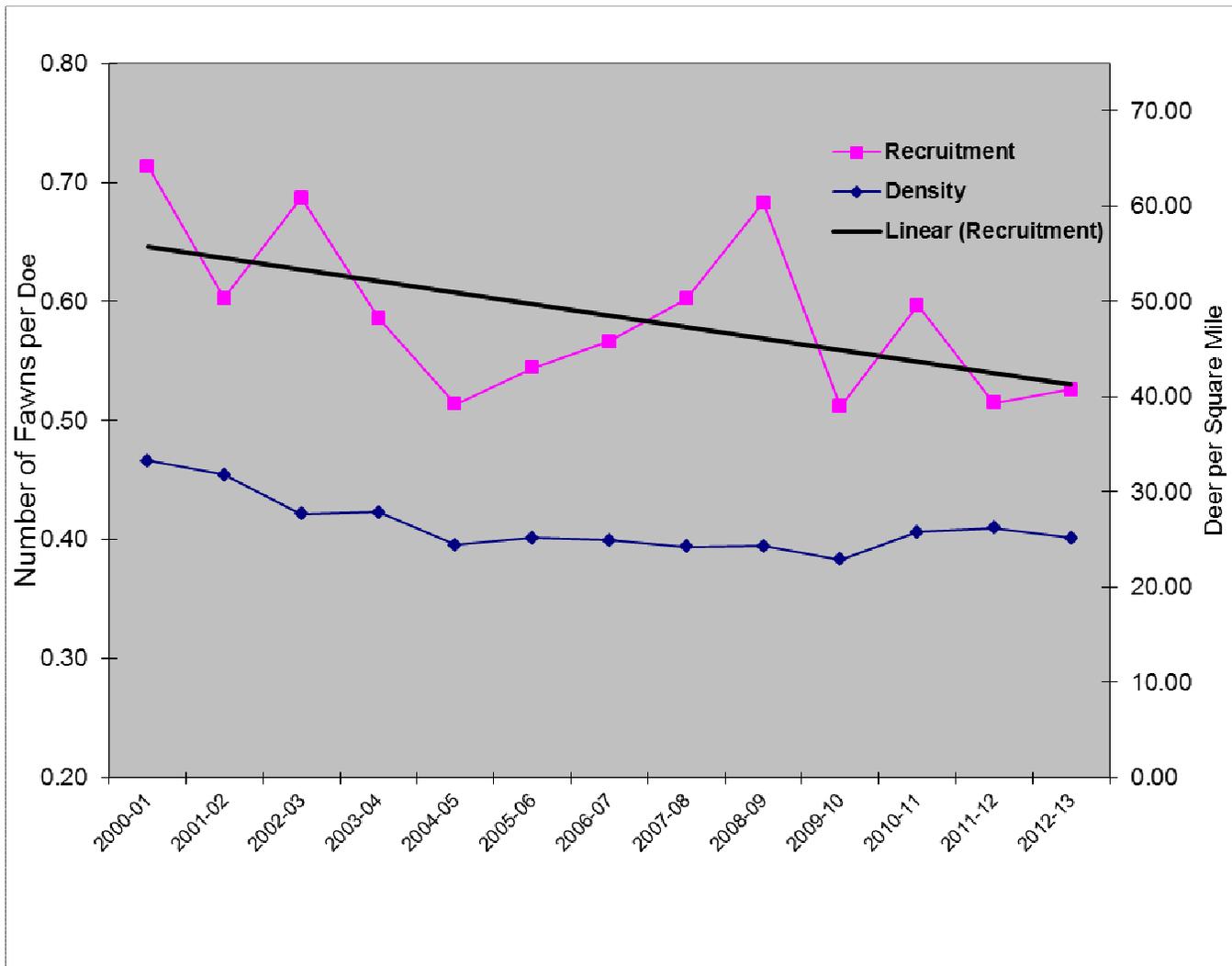
Figure 4-2 depicts the proportions of bucks and does in the total annual harvest as well as the percent does in the harvest from 1978 to present. The late 1970's marked the completion of Georgia's restoration effort. Hunting regulations at the time were largely protective of does to facilitate population growth and expansion. Restrictive regulations on doe harvest were systematically relaxed from the early 1990s through the early 2000s resulting in a substantial increase in the proportion of does in the harvest. Since 2002, the percentage of does in the harvest remained at, or above, 60% and has recently (2009-12) been as high as 65%. Increased public interest in managing for older age bucks, implementation of statewide antler restrictions on one of the two bucks allowed in the bag limit, and a decline in the statewide deer population likely contributed to the decrease in the number and proportion of bucks in the harvest from 2000 to present.

**Figure 4-2. Proportional redistribution of the deer harvest by sex and percent females in the harvest from 1978 to 2012.**



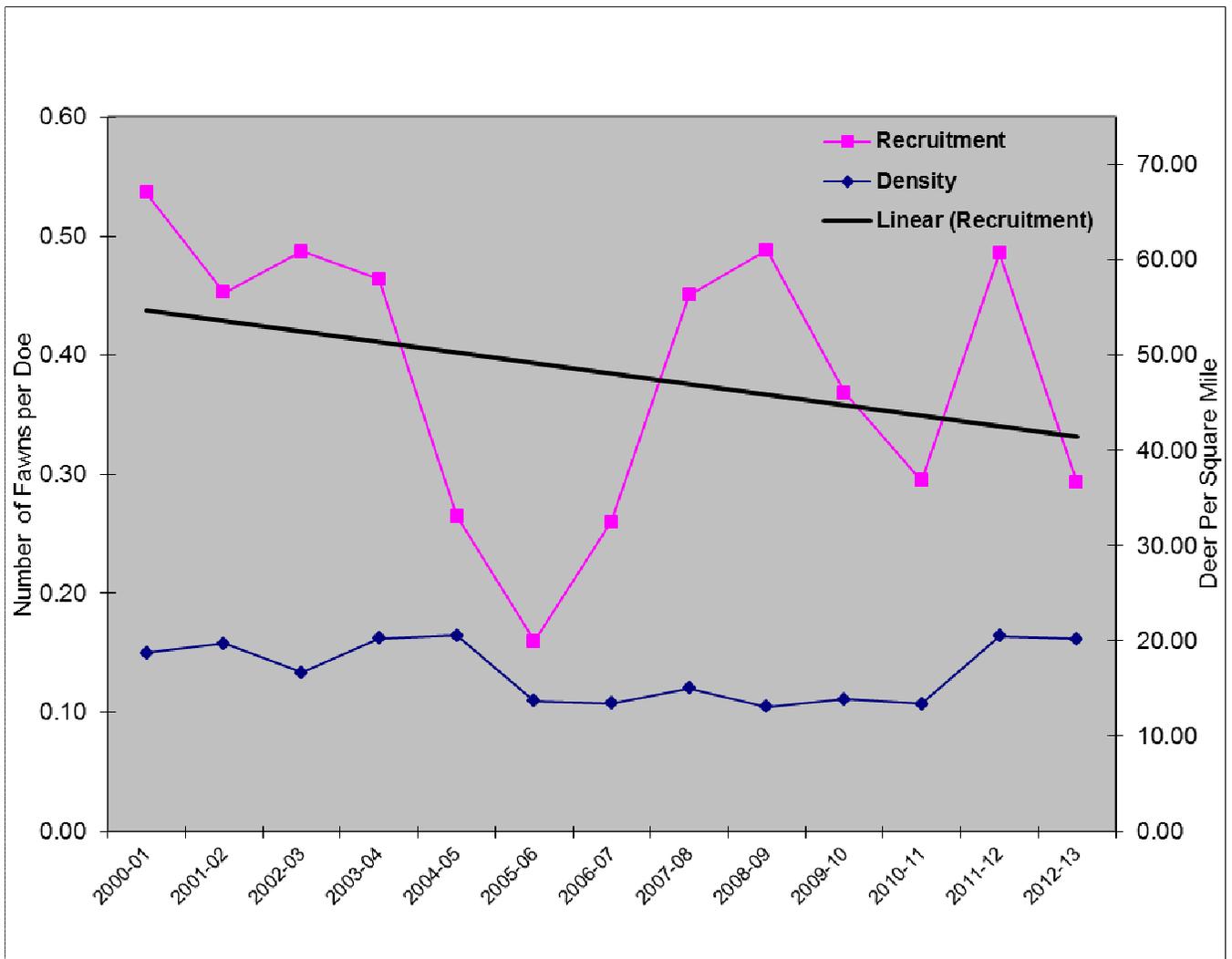
Fawn recruitment rates (the average number of fawns per doe surviving to 6 months of age) have declined in recent years in all five physiographic regions of the state resulting in a statewide decline of about 26% (Figure 4-3). This vital population statistic is of particular interest for deer population monitoring as it represents a measure of the reproductive capacity of a deer population and a population's capacity to annually replace deer lost through mortality. Assessing fawn recruitment rates in the fall provides an index to reproductive capacity. Current research indicates that most coyote predation on fawns occurs between birth and 6 months of age.

**Figure 4-3. Statewide fawn recruitment rates and deer density, 2000-2012.**



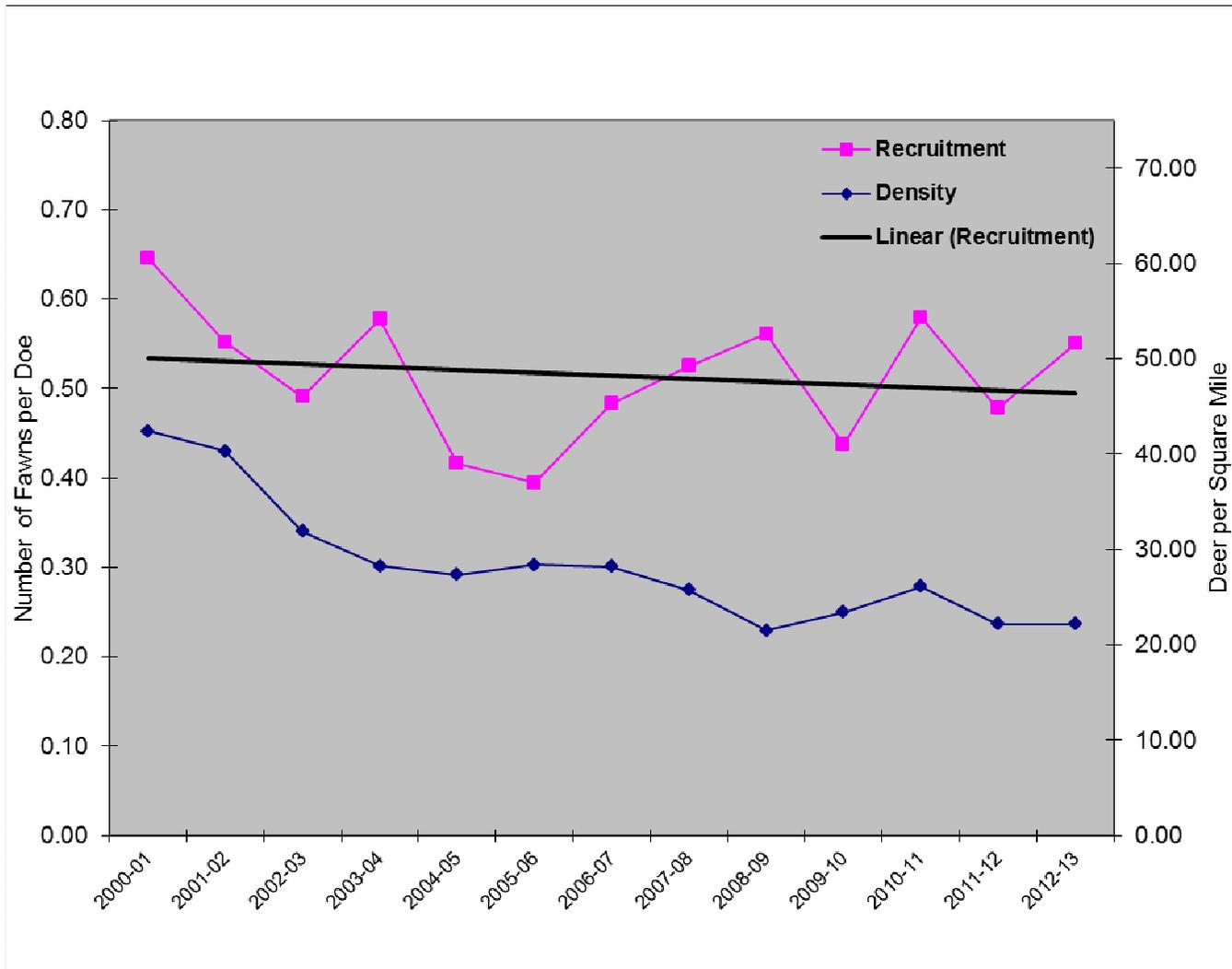
The Blue Ridge Mountain physiographic region is a small province within the Appalachian Mountain range. It consists of five counties in northeastern Georgia with 1,220 forested square miles and most counties greater than 75% forested. Climax forests of the Blue Ridge are predominantly closed canopy oak-hickory, thus habitat conditions are largely mast driven. Land ownership in this region differs substantially from other regions in that 43% of the land base is under public ownership. This presents unique deer management challenges as land management objectives differ widely between private and government owned land. Since 1993, deer population density estimates have ranged from 13 to 39 deer per forested square mile. The most recent 5-year average is 16 deer per forested square mile (Figure 4-4). Fawn recruitment rates show a dynamically declining trend over the past 12 years; however estimates vary widely ranging from 0.16 to 0.49 fawns per doe during that time. The most recent 5-year average is 0.39 fawns per doe and peak fawn production occurred in 1993 at 0.75 fawns per doe.

**Figure 4-4. Fawn recruitment rates and deer density for the Blue Ridge Mountain physiographic region, 2000-2012.**



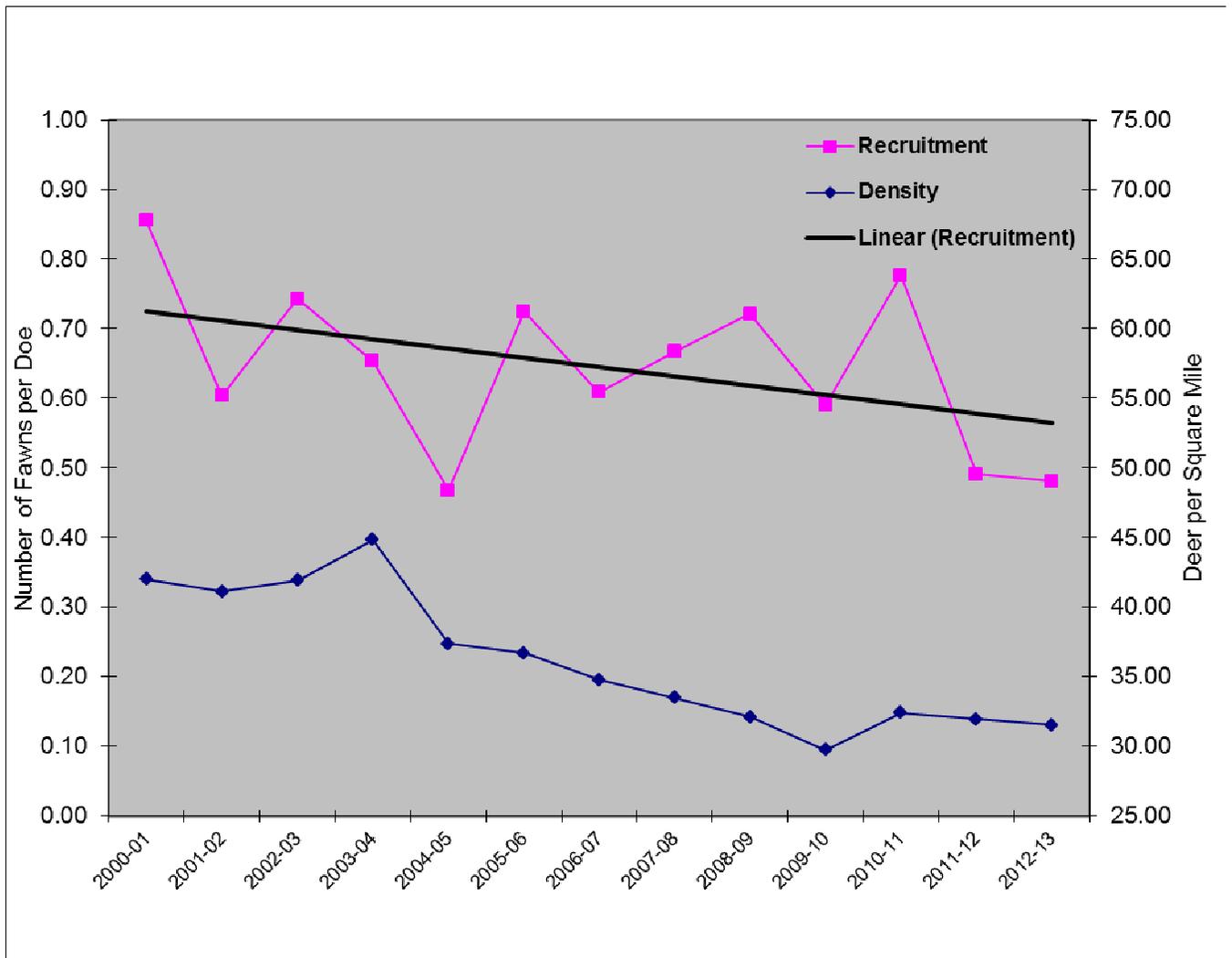
The Ridge and Valley physiographic region is characterized by long, narrow ridges with dynamic elevation gradients and adjacent fertile valleys. Due to the dramatic contrast in habitat conditions between these ridges and valleys, management strategies that provide an equitable balance between deer density and habitat prove difficult. This region consists of 10 counties in northwestern Georgia with 2,889 forested square miles. Since 1993, deer population density estimates have ranged from 21 to 48 deer per forested square mile (Figure 4-5). The most recent 5-year average is 23 deer per forested square mile. Fawn recruitment rates show a moderate decline over the last 12 years and have averaged 0.52 fawns per doe over the past five (5) years. Peak fawn production occurred in 2000 at 0.65 fawns per doe.

**Figure 4-5. Fawn recruitment rates and deer density for the Ridge and Valley physiographic region, 2000-2012.**



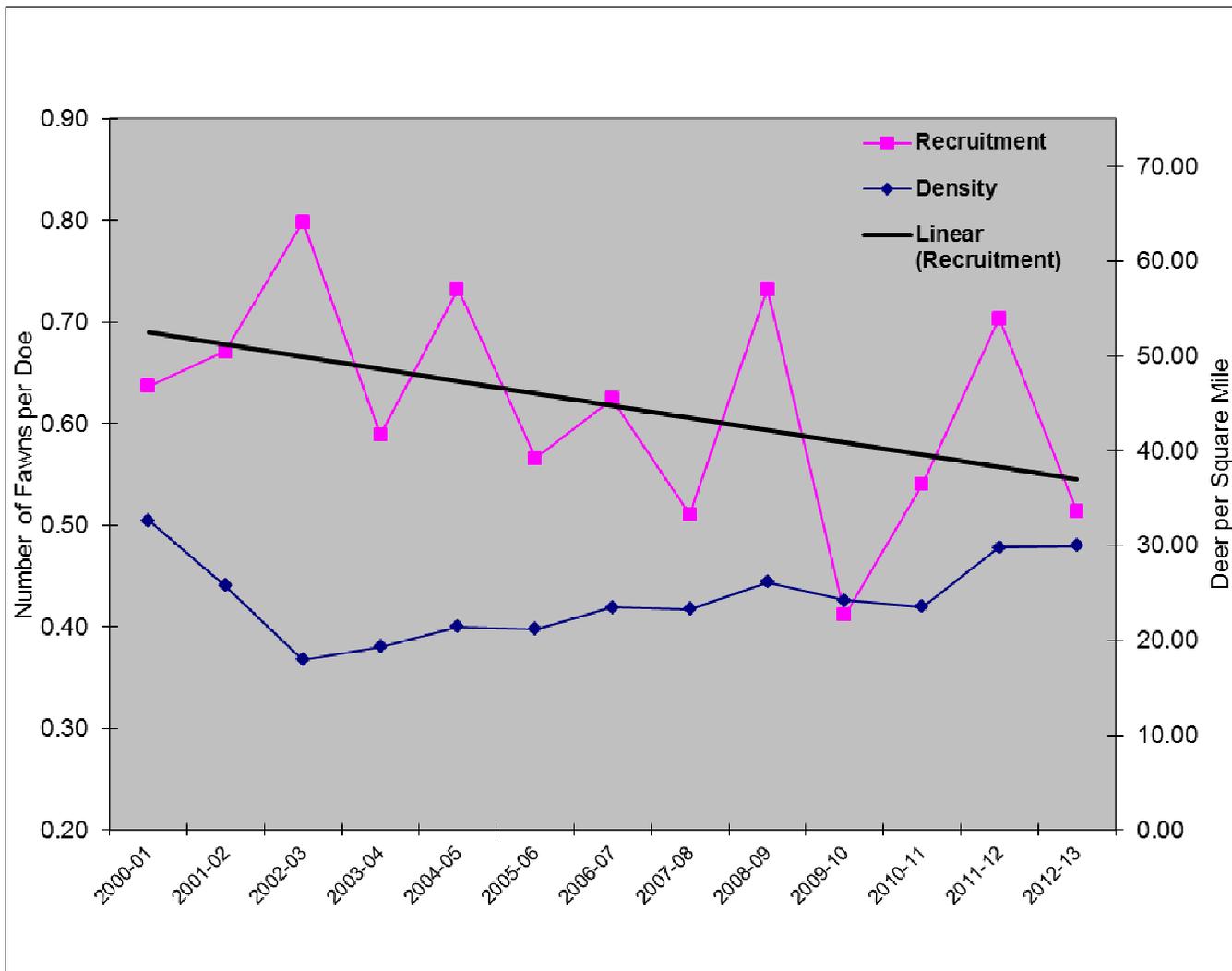
The Piedmont physiographic region is a plateau characterized by rolling foot hills of the Appalachian Mountains. It consists of 59 counties across Georgia's mid-section and is the largest of the five physiographic regions in the state. The Piedmont contains the largest amount of developed land in the state and contains a diversity of forested and open habitats with 10,883 forested square miles. Since 1993, deer population density estimates ranged from 30 to 54 deer per forested square mile, with the most current 5-year average at 32 (Figure 4-6). Fawn recruitment rates have declined over the past 12 years and currently average 0.61 fawns per doe for the most recent 5-year period. Peak fawn production occurred in 1995 at 1.02 fawns per doe and the Piedmont has experienced the greatest decline in fawn recruitment rates of all regions with a 32% decline over a 20-year period.

**Figure 4-6. Fawn recruitment rates and deer density for the Piedmont physiographic region, 2000-2012.**



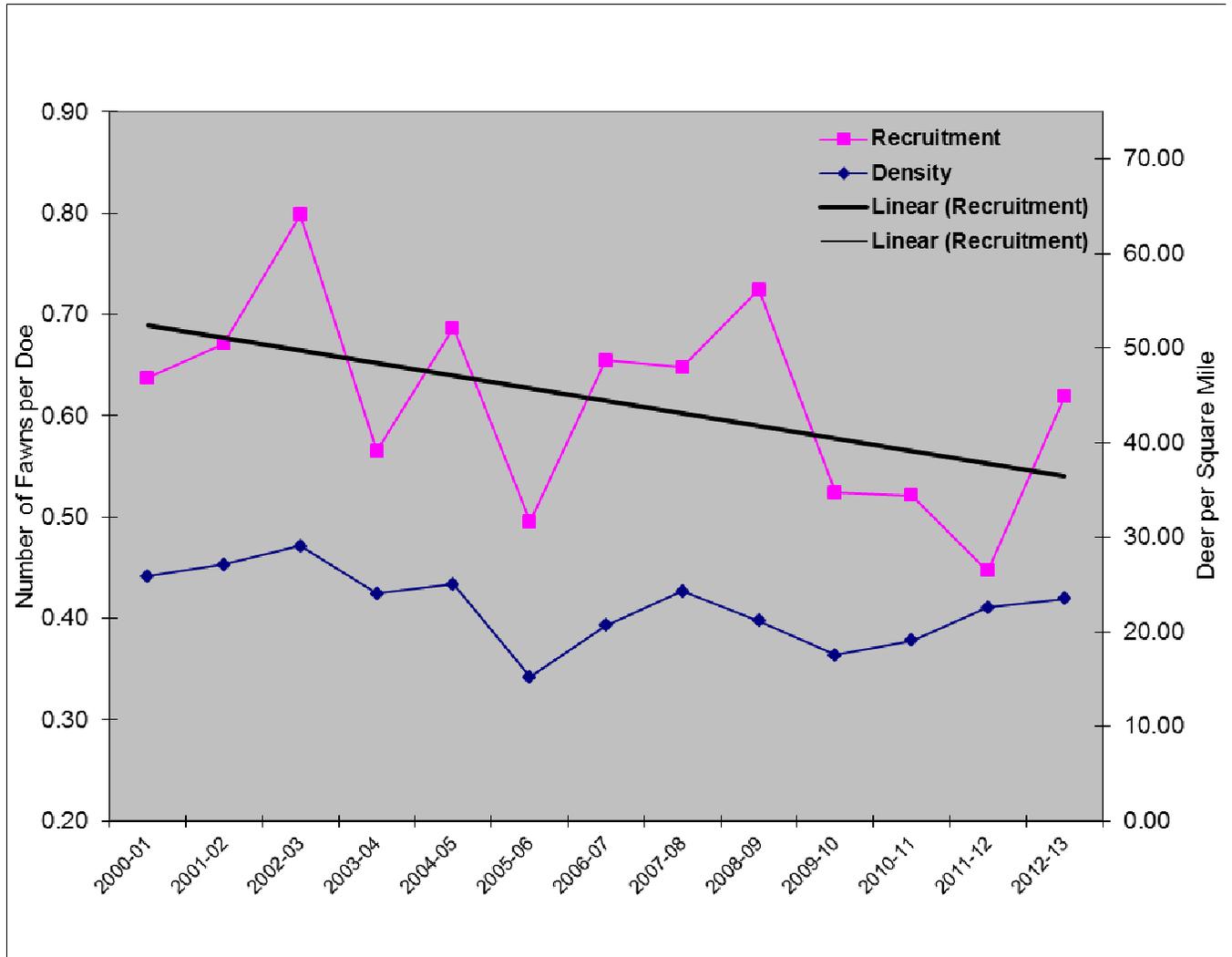
The Upper Coastal Plain physiographic region is characterized by low, gently rolling hills of well-drained soil and is separated from the Piedmont by the fall line. Due to the relatively flat topography and soil fertility of many counties in this region, the bulk of Georgia's agricultural acreage is found here. It consists of 55 counties from southwest to east central Georgia and contains 12,414 forested square miles. Since 1993, deer population density ranged from 18 to 32 deer per forested square mile, averaging 27 deer per square mile in the most current 5-year period (Figure 4-7). Fawn recruitment rates are annually dynamic and range from 0.45 to 0.80 fawns per doe. Fawn recruitment rates have declined over the past 12 years and currently average 0.58 fawns per doe for the most recent 5-year period. Peak fawn production occurred in 2002 at 0.80 fawns per doe.

**Figure 4-7. Fawn recruitment rates and deer density for the Upper Coastal Plain physiographic region, 2000-2012.**



The Lower Coastal Plain physiographic region is characterized by low, poorly drained flatwoods, coastal marsh, and inland swamp. It consists of 30 counties in southeast Georgia containing 9,594 forested square miles. Since 1993, deer population density has ranged from 15 to 37 deer per forested square mile and averaged 21 deer per square mile over the last five years (Figure 4-8). Fawn recruitment rates are annually dynamic and range from 0.45 to 0.80 fawns per doe. Fawn recruitment rates have declined over the past 12 years and currently average 0.57 fawns per doe for the most recent 5-year period. Peak fawn production occurred in 2002 at 0.80 fawns per doe. Peak fawn production occurred in 2002 at 0.80 fawns per doe.

**Figure 4-8. Fawn recruitment rates and deer density for the Lower Coastal Plain physiographic region, 2000-2012.**



## V. HUMAN-DEER CONFLICTS

### Deer/Vehicle Collisions

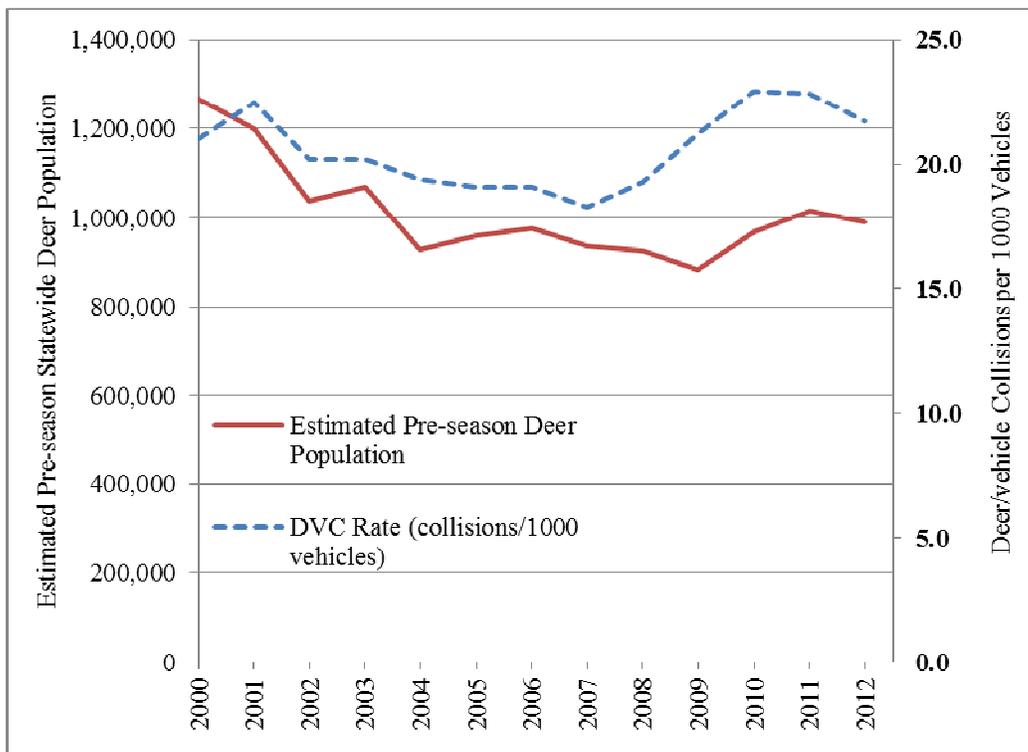
Other than the black bear, the white-tailed deer is Georgia's largest terrestrial wildlife species. Implications of deer/vehicle collisions (DVC's) are numerous: injuries or fatalities to both deer and motorists, property damage, and the associated economic costs related to DVC's (Figure 1). Since World War II, when Georgia and the rest of the United States experienced unprecedented economic prosperity, the miles of roads and number of motorists on those roads have increased dramatically. This increase in driving habits was simultaneous to increasing numbers of white-tailed deer in the U.S. and Georgia, primarily resulting from deer habitat improvement and population restoration efforts.

**Figure 5-1. The negative implications of deer/vehicle collisions are many.**



WRD compiles data from select insurance companies, the Georgia Department of Revenue-Motor Vehicle Division (MVD), and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to produce

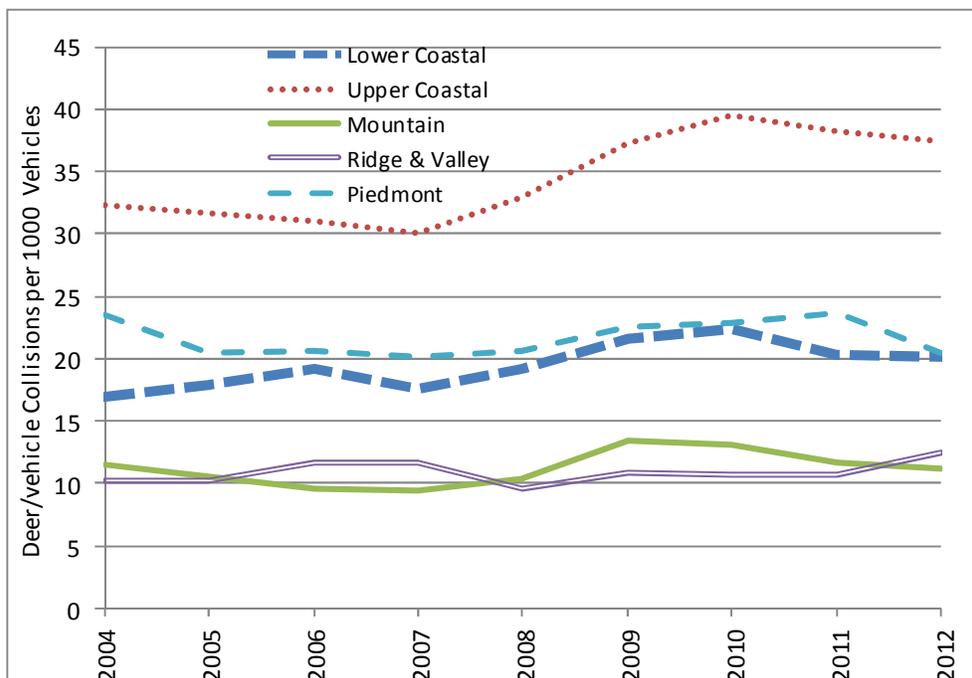
**Figure 5-2. Georgia Deer/Vehicle Collision (DVC) Rates (collisions/per 1000 vehicles) versus Georgia's estimated pre-season deer population from 2000-2012 (based on Georgia Farm Bureau Insurance Deer Colli-**



DVC estimates and monitor DVC trends in Georgia. DVC assessments can provide a supplemental index to deer population trends assuming data collecting and reporting methodologies remain consistent over time and motorist habits remain relatively consistent.

Perhaps the most informative measure of DVC's is collision rate, specifically, the projected number of DVC's adjusted per 1000 vehicles, because MVD data show that the number of registered vehicles in Georgia tends to

**Figure 5-3. Georgia Deer/Vehicle Collision (DVC) Rates (collisions per 1000 registered vehicles) for each of Georgia’s Five Physiographic Regions from 2004-2012 (based on Georgia Farm Bureau Insurance Deer Collision Data provided to WRD).**



increase each year. Since 2000, the projected DVC rate has correlated pretty well with WRD’s pre-hunting season estimate of Georgia’s deer population (Figure 5-2). In general, DVC rates tend to rise and fall with the deer population. Figure 5-3 shows DVC rates by physiographic region (2004-12). Indeed, higher collision rates in the Piedmont and Upper Coastal Plain regions correlate with higher deer densities in those regions compared to the Lower Coastal

Plain, Ridge and Valley, and Mountains regions.

Since even urban and suburban counties in Georgia support deer populations, counties that have the highest overall DVC numbers tend to be the most human-populated counties in the state, especially in the Piedmont and Upper Coastal Plain Physiographic Regions (Table 5-1 and Figure 5-4). Conversely, when adjusted for number of vehicles, several of Georgia’s more rural counties have the highest DVC rates (Table 5-2 and Figure 5-5).

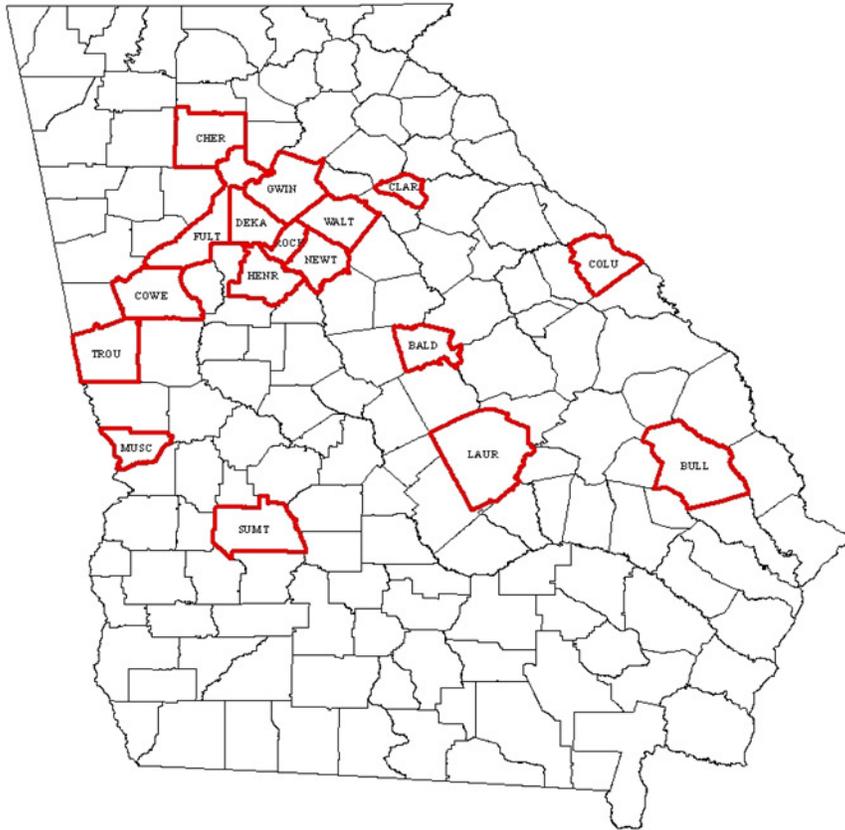
**Table 5-1. Top 10% of Georgia counties for projected deer/vehicle collisions in 2012 based on insurance claims data and numbers of registered vehicles.**

County	2012 DVC Estimate
Gwinnett	1,948
Fulton	1,849
DeKalb/Rockdale*	1,150
Newton	1,133
Coweta	967
Clarke	748
Bulloch	735
Walton	713
Columbia	705
Sumter	678
Baldwin	652
Muscogee	644
Laurens	633
Cherokee	631
Troup	629
Henry	588
* DVC data combined for DeKalb and Rockdale by Georgia Farm Bureau	

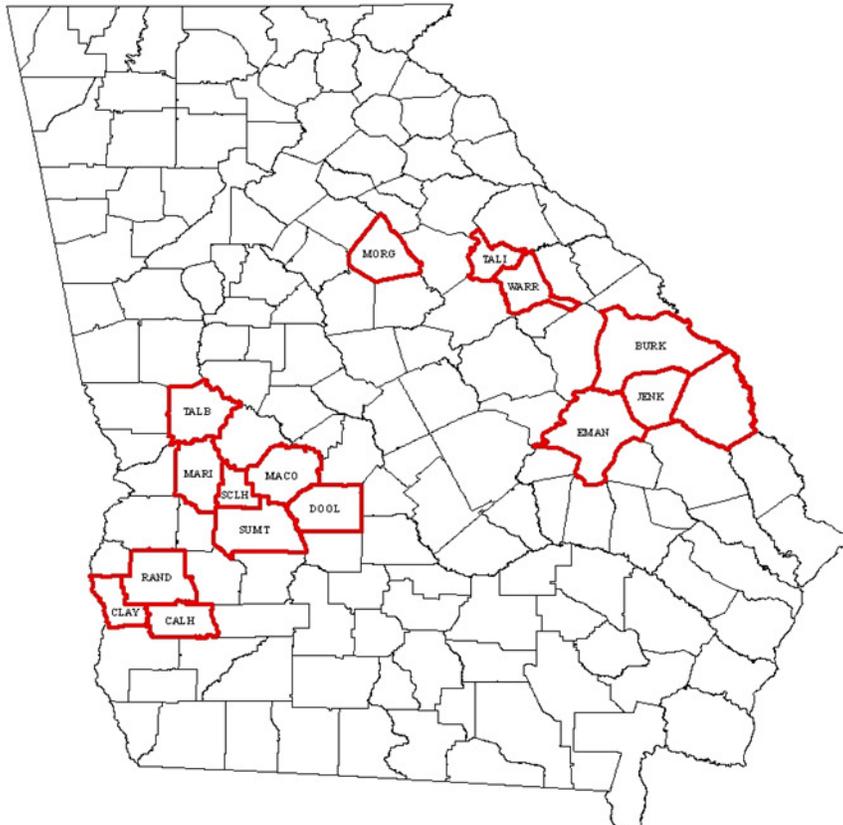
**Table 5-2. The top 10% of Georgia counties for deer/vehicle collision rates (collisions per 1000 vehicles) in 2012 based on insurance claims data.**

County	2012 DVC per 1000 vehicles
Schley	100
Dooly	75
Screven	73
Randolph	72
Macon	69
Clay	66
Calhoun	62
Jenkins	58
Taliaferro	58
Marion	54
Sumter	53
Warren	53
Burke	52
Morgan	51
Emanuel	50
Talbot	50

**Figure 5-4. Map showing the top 10% of Georgia counties for projected deer/vehicle collisions in 2012 based on insurance claims data and numbers of registered vehicles (corresponds to Ta-**



**Figure 5-5. Map showing the top 10% of Georgia counties for deer/vehicle collision rates (collisions per 1000 vehicles) in 2012 based on insurance claims data (corresponds to Table 2).**



An examination of DVC distribution throughout the year shows that more DVC's occur in the fall than at any other time. The reasons for this phenomenon are not completely known, but it is thought to be largely contributed to by the breeding season of white-tailed which usually results in more deer movement. Additionally, shorter day lengths occur in fall that reduce motorist visibility, especially during the morning and evening work commutes (Figure 5-6).

There has been research conducted in Georgia by principal investigators at Berry College and the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources at the University of Georgia, some of which funded through GDOT, that has examined physiological capacities of white-tailed as they relate to DVC deterrence devices. Other research has investigated behavioral characteristics of deer in regards to different roadside fence designs. UGA Warnell School researchers and GDOT are currently involved in a fence design study along a section of I-20 in Morgan County.

While DVC's result mostly in property damage (i.e. vehicle damage), an examination of some recent GDOT data shows that human injuries, and in some cases, fatalities, do occur as a result of DVC's. Georgia public safety agencies are asked to submit uniform traffic accident reports to GDOT on an annual basis. Table 5-3 shows GDOT DVC injury and fatality data made available to WRD 2008 through 2011.

**Figure 5-6. More deer-vehicle collisions occur during fall than at any other time of year.**



**Table 5-3. Number of human injuries and fatalities resulting from deer/vehicle collisions in Georgia during recent years (data compiled by GDOT).**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Injuries</b>	<b>Fatalities</b>
2008	210	0
2009	(data not available)	(data not available)
2010	427	2
2011	304	0

## Deer Crop Damage Permit Summary

WRD began issuing deer crop damage permits to farmers suffering economic damage to commercial agriculture crops in 1977. This system provided relief to farmers experiencing deer damage. Permittees had to demonstrate damage on an initial investigation by WRD staff. Permits are antlerless only. Bucks are only allowed under strict circumstances (i.e. rubbing trees in a nursery). Permits are issued to the crop owner, landowner, or farm manager. Basic information on the permits includes the names of assistants, crop type with acreage, number of deer allowed, sex of deer, and the regulations on use of permits. To collect information on the value and success of the program, a tri-annual telephone survey of permit holders began in 1999. Statewide data from the most recent survey (2011) are presented in Table 5-4.

Statewide, 91% attempted to harvest deer under their permits in 2011. A majority allowed deer hunter access to their property. More than one-third reported use of alternative deterrent methods. Total deer removed by surveyed permittees was 502 (10% sample), with a buck to doe ratio of 1:11.5. Permittees attempted to take deer an average of 16.8 days, 1.8 hours per day, while being assisted by 1.9 people. Overall, 99% of respondents indicate that this program helps alleviate deer damage to crops.

Average estimated crop damage ranged from the lowest in northeast Georgia (\$1,800) to the highest along the coast (\$10,700). Statewide the average estimated damage reported was \$7,597 for a total of \$501,402.

**Figure 5-7. Deer crop damage permits issued by year from 2002 to 2012.**



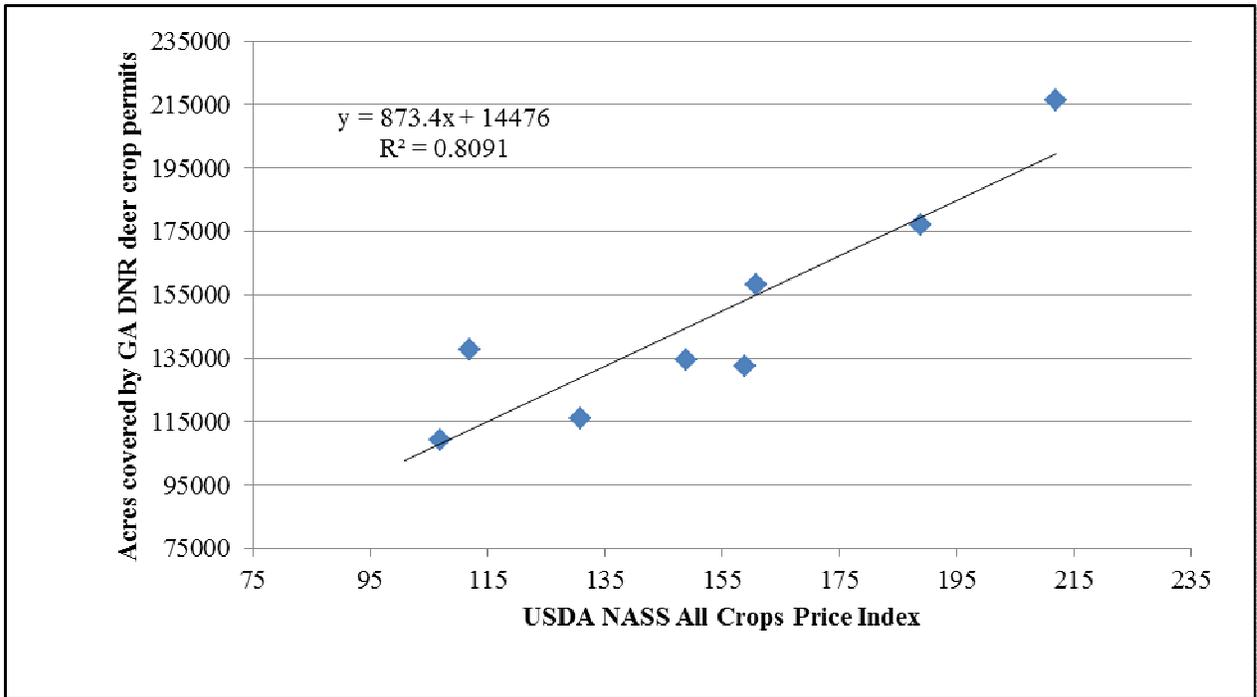
The data resulting from the 10% sample of 885 permittees suggest total statewide deer crop damage exceeded \$6.5 million. The number of deer control permits requested and issued each year (Figure 5-7) is influenced by a multitude of factors. Some of which are deer density, weather factors, crop prices, crop acreages, and proportion of crop type

**Table 5-4. Statewide deer control permit survey results (N = number of responses per question of 88 surveyed).**

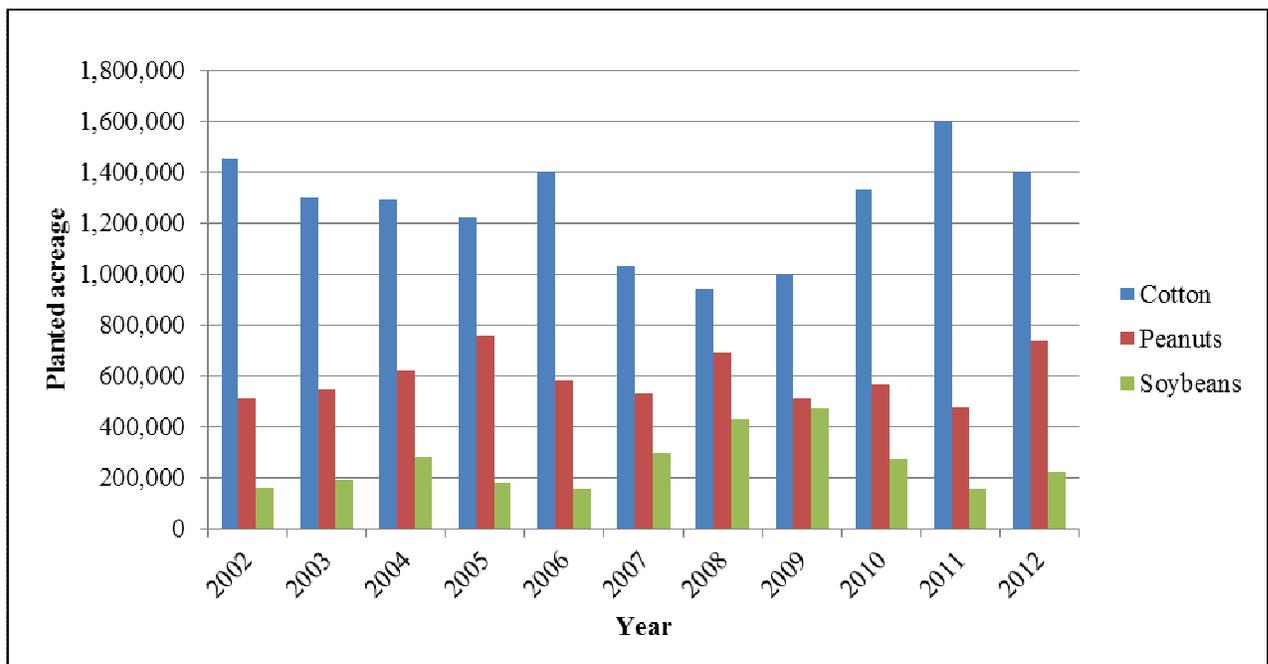
Responses	N	Mean	Total
Attempted	80		91%
Alternatives used	36		41%
Allow hunting access	77		88%
Effectiveness			
Greatly helps			67%
Helps some			32%
No help at all			1%
Total deer taken	66	7.6	502
Bucks	66	0.6	40
Does	66	7	462
Days attempted	80	16.8	1344
Number of assistants	80	1.9	152
Hours/attempt	80	1.8	144
Estimated damage	66	\$7,597	\$501,402

and associated deer browsing preference. For instance, Figure 5-8 shows a clear correlation between the number of permits issued and the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) all crops price index. Intuitively it would seem that the desire to reduce damage increases with the value of the crop. Figure 5-9 presents the proportional total acreages of the top 3 row crops in Georgia. Similar to the all crops price index, the number of deer control permits appear to trend with total crop acreage while being sensitive to fluctuations in more heavily browsed crops like soybeans. While analysis of these factors may shed light on annual variability in the number of permits issued, the number of permits issued is generally a poor predictor of deer density.

**Figure 5-8. The acreage covered by GA DNR deer control permits as it relates to the USDA-NASS all crops price index.**



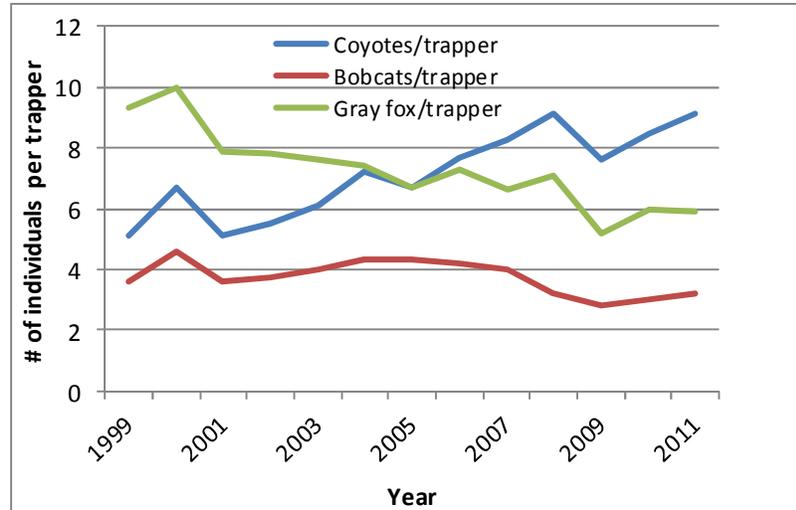
**Figure 5-9. The total acreage planted in cotton, peanuts, and soybeans in Georgia 2002 through 2012. Data provided by USDA-NASS.**



## VI. TRENDS IN TRAPPER DATA

From 1999-2011, the number of active trappers in Georgia nearly doubled from 385 to 767. During the same time frame, coyote take increased over 3.5 times, from an estimated 1,971 to 6,964 animals. The disproportionate increase in trapper numbers versus coyote take is evidenced by the near doubling of the coyote take, per trapper, from 5.1 coyotes/trapper in 1999, to 9.1 coyotes per trapper in 2011. The cumulative take of both bobcat and gray fox take have also increased over time. However, in contrast to the coyote take, the annual take/trapper of these species has declined. The take of bobcats declined from a high of 4.6 bobcats/trapper in 2000 to a low of 2.8 bobcats/trapper in 2009 while the gray fox take declined from a high of 10 foxes/trapper in 2000 to a low of 5.2 in 2009 (Table 6-1 and Figure 6-1).

**Figure 6-1. The number of coyotes, bobcats, and gray fox per trapper in Georgia from 1999-2011.**



Several indices indicate that coyote numbers have increased over the last 10-20 years within the state and across the southeast, although precise estimates of coyote abundance are unavailable. The increase in both the cumulative and per trapper take of coyotes in Georgia over the last 12 years is no exception. While these numbers can serve as indices of coyote abundance, caution must be exercised in their interpretation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that increasing coyote take is a product of trappers shifting their focus away from other furbearers and towards coyotes. Trappers have decreasing incentive to target predators for their furs because fur values have generally declined in the recent past and Southeastern furs typically bring lower values at auction than those from other regions,. In contrast, live sale of coyotes to commercial fox hunting operations can return profits nearing \$100 per animal. Additionally, hunters and landowners who perceive coyotes as a barrier to wildlife management objectives hire trappers to specifically target coyotes on their properties. Furthermore, some newly registered trappers may obtain trapping licenses with coyote capture as their primary objective. In contrast to traditional trappers, who began trapping by learning how to target all furbearer species, these individuals may focus on learning only the methods used to target coyotes. This phenomenon may result in greater coyote take while lowering the take/trapper of other furbearer species. Therefore, increases in cumulative and per trapper take of coyotes should be treated as an indirect index of coyote abundance. That is, increases in these estimates may appear to suggest a growing coyote population; however, an increase in take is not directly proportional to actual abundance.

**Table 6-1. Estimated number of active trappers, cumulative and take rate of coyotes, bobcats, and gray fox per trapper in Georgia from 1999-2011. Estimated cumulative take has increased over time for all three furbearer species, while take per trapper has increased for coyotes and generally declined for bobcats and gray foxes.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Trappers</b>	<b>Coyotes (#/Trapper)</b>	<b>Bobcats (#/Trapper)</b>	<b>Gray Fox (#/Trapper)</b>
1999	385	1971 (5.1)	1405 (3.6)	3573 (9.3)
2000	402	2697 (6.7)	1853 (4.6)	4016 (10.0)
2001	410	2075 (5.1)	1493 (3.6)	3239 (7.9)
2002	405	2224 (5.5)	1501 (3.7)	3140 (7.8)
2003	409	2494 (6.1)	1636 (4.0)	3108 (7.6)
2004	412	2966 (7.2)	1772 (4.3)	3049 (7.4)
2005	469	3138 (6.7)	2026 (4.3)	3142 (6.7)
2006	506	3906 (7.7)	2130 (4.2)	3694 (7.3)
2007	539	4501 (8.3)	2156 (4.0)	3552 (6.6)
2008	537	4908 (9.1)	1729 (3.2)	3802 (7.1)
2009	565	4305 (7.6)	1588 (2.8)	2938 (5.2)
2010	674	5731 (8.5)	2018 (3.0)	4038 (6.0)
2011	767	6964 (9.1)	2454 (3.2)	4502 (5.9)

# DEER MANAGEMENT KEY ISSUES AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

## I. DEER SEASONS

Public meeting input (Appendix IV) on deer seasons included opinions on the dates and length of deer season, number and timing of either-sex days, deer season impacts to other hunting opportunities, and the season closing date as it relates to the deer zones. Input from public meeting participants relative to deer season length showed that a majority (58%) favor the current deer season length. Regarding either-sex days, the public meetings took place after a regulatory change reduced either-sex opportunity by 25 days beginning the 2013-2014 deer season. A slight majority of public meeting participants (52%) favored season-long either-sex days, while the remainder favored fewer. It was unclear whether the comments supporting fewer either-sex days considered the existing reduction. A majority (80%) of public meeting participants favor a uniform, statewide deer season as opposed different season closing dates for the northern and southern deer zones. Very few individuals provided input on the impacts of deer season to other hunting opportunities; however, a popular suggestion was to consider reinstating the “December break” where deer season historically closed for several weeks in December in the Northern deer zone.

Quantitative data from the Responsive Management Survey (RMS hereinafter) showed that 77% (49% very satisfied) of hunters were satisfied with the current season structure. Regarding deer zones, support (55%) for a single, statewide season exceeded opposition (29%) among hunters. Support (60%) was slightly higher among northern zone hunters for a uniform, statewide season.

### Subcommittee Comments:

The MRV Subcommittee discussed the various methods for setting deer seasons. Generally, the subcommittee believes that decisions should be science based. Discussion also occurred regarding the recent modifications (2013-2015 hunting seasons) to either-sex days and the various impacts the timing of either-sex days may have on harvest, hunting activity and deer processors.

The Piedmont Subcommittee discussed some concerns with deer seasons that may create discord among deer hunters, and between deer and small game hunters. They also considered whether the recent reduction in either-sex days may impact youth hunters and deer processors. The committee believes that a single, statewide deer season is the most appropriate course of action. They feel that a minor reduction in the southern zone and minor extension in the northern zone represents the most equitable solution for all interests.

The UCP subcommittee discussed the difference in deer seasons between the zones. The subcommittee believes that there should be a single statewide deer season provided that the southern zone season is not shortened. Some discussion involved herd reduction options in urban and suburban areas of the state through the extended archery-only season and whether this could apply to additional counties. The subcommittee discussed the recent reduction in either-sex days with particular interest in the timing of these days. Members were curious whether this reduction will achieve desired objectives with minimal impacts to affected interests.

The FLCP subcommittee discussed dates and lengths of hunting seasons and related issues in southwest Georgia regarding the rut. The subcommittee favors maintaining the length of the season. Lengthy discussion occurred regarding the length and timing of either sex days. Ultimately, the subcommittee determined that WRD should use its discretion and information in setting the timing and number of either sex days. The subcommittee feels that deer season has little impact on other hunting opportunities in the southern zone.

### Subcommittee Recommendations:

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD should use the best available scientific information to inform the timing and number of either sex days.

- WRD consider potential impacts deer season modifications may have on small game hunters and other interests.

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD implement a single statewide season ending the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in January.
- If this change isn't acceptable then implement this change in the Northern Deer Zone.
- WRD evaluate impact of recent either-sex day modification following the current regulation cycle and consider adjusting timing to reach Deer Plan density goals while considering impacts to affected interests.
- WRD explore the possibility of opening small game seasons earlier and consider public land opportunities to mitigate impacts on small game hunters from any extensions of deer season.

UCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD implement a single statewide firearms deer season that runs from the first Saturday after October 15<sup>th</sup> through January 15<sup>th</sup>.
- WRD pursue a law change that gives the authority to designate counties eligible for the extended archery-only season to the agency.
- WRD maintain its authority and use the best available science to set the number and timing of either-sex days.

FLCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD maintain current deer season length.
- WRD maintain its authority over the timing and length of either-sex days.
- WRD should not change deer seasons based on small game seasons.
- WRD maintain deer season lengths respective to deer zones.

**WRD Proposed Actions:**

- **Use the best available in science in setting biologically appropriate either-sex deer hunting opportunities.**
- **Work with the General Assembly on determining the best method for designating urban and suburban counties eligible for an extended archery season to facilitate herd reductions (OCGA 27-3-15).**
- **WRD recognizes the considerable support among hunters for having one statewide deer season. However, exactly how this would be achieved lacks consensus. As such, WRD will assess public opinion and evaluate regulatory options through extensive public involvement in an effort to resolve this important issue starting in January 2015 with WRD's hunting regulation cycle.**
- **Consider impacts to small game hunting opportunities when adjusting deer season .**

## **II. DEER BAG LIMITS**

Public meeting input (Appendix IV) on deer bag limits included opinions on the buck bag limit, antlerless bag limit, deer harvest reporting, and recording or tagging harvested deer. Input related to the buck bag limit was supportive of the current bag limit of two bucks. The antlerless bag limit generated more public input than any single issue. Overall, 189 individuals provided input on the antlerless bag limit. Support for reducing the bag limit exceeded opposition. Regarding the implementation of a harvest reporting system, support exceeded opposition. Regarding a requirement to physically tag deer, support exceeded opposition.

Quantitative results from the RMS respondents had a similar opinion regarding the buck bag limit, with 90% satisfied (70% very satisfied) with the existing buck bag limit. However, opinions of RMS respondents regarding the antlerless bag limit differed substantially from the public comment respondents with 70% satisfied (55% very satisfied) with the existing antlerless bag limit. Regarding harvest recording, hunters were overwhelmingly satisfied with the current method of using the deer harvest record. Of those that were not very satisfied, 52% agreed that a harvest reporting system (telephone/internet) would improve their satisfaction, while 32% disagreed.

### **Subcommittee Comments:**

The MRV Subcommittee discussed bag limits and the current confusion among hunters who don't understand why the number of antlerless deer days was reduced while the bag limit stayed the same. Members expressed their desire for the authority to set deer bag limits to be delegated to WRD. The committee also had extensive discussions on the pros and cons of implementing a harvest reporting system as well as physical tagging systems.

The Piedmont Subcommittee discussed the impacts of bag limits on deer harvest and deer management flexibility on private lands. Members recognized the variation in deer density across the landscape and discussed the challenges in addressing such issues without having complex and burdensome regulations. The subcommittee supports WRD continuing to use scientific telephone surveys for determining accurate harvest estimates, but also supports using a harvest reporting system if WRD determines that the benefits outweigh the costs. The committee saw no benefits of a physical tagging system and believes that the current deer harvest record is sufficient for law enforcement purposes.

Discussions in the UCP Subcommittee began on the social and biological considerations of bag limits and the impacts on deer management from a local level to a statewide level. Members reinforced the importance of developing a Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP hereinafter) to dealing with the issue of deer bag limits and any potential change to bag limits, particularly at a local level. The subcommittee was surprised to learn the legislature had authority over deer bag limits. Members voiced strong opposition to the legislature having this authority and expressed their desire that this authority be delegated to WRD. Members believe that no change is needed to the bag limit for antlered deer, but feel a reduction in the antlerless bag limit, from a perception standpoint, could serve as an effective messaging tool. After a brief discussion, most members believe a harvest reporting system could be an effective information and outreach tool for WRD and useful for informing management decisions (e.g., setting either-sex days). They acknowledged the potential cost is a drawback, but favor a voluntary system. The members believe the costs of a physical tagging system are prohibitive.

FLCP Subcommittee discussions focused on several topics: maintaining the current season limit for bucks (2 antlered deer), lowering the antlerless bag limit, and using research through a DMAP to inform future management decisions. The subcommittee had a thorough discussion on the deer bag limit. Some members expressed the challenges in managing a property when neighboring properties (both public and private) shoot too many does. Generally, members were in favor of a DMAP throughout the state if the fees were reasonable. Contingent on implementation of DMAP program, members feel the antlerless bag limit should be lowered and WRD should have the authority and flexibility to adjust the bag limit as needed. Overall, the subcommittee is satisfied with the current deer harvest record, but would like to see implementation of a harvest reporting system without the use of physical tags.

Subcommittee Recommendations:

All Deer Management Plan subcommittees concurred and reached consensus on the following recommendations:

- Maintaining the current antlered buck bag limit.
- Developing legislation that delegates authority to WRD for setting the deer bag limit.
- WRD should not implement a physical tagging system.

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD set the antlerless bag limit at 5, or less.
- Implement a mandatory harvest reporting system for all hunter-harvested deer.

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- Contingent upon implementation of DMAP, reduce the antlerless bag limit to a biologically appropriate level.
- Implement a harvest reporting system if WRD determines such system is beneficial and cost effective.

UCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- Contingent upon implementation of DMAP, reduce the antlerless bag limit to a biologically appropriate level.
- Implement a voluntary deer harvest reporting system with the goal of it becoming mandatory.

FLCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD should implement a DMAP.
- WRD should reduce the current antlerless bag limit.
- WRD implement a deer harvest reporting system.

**WRD Proposed Actions:**

- **Maintain the current buck bag limit (Two (2) antlered bucks. Only one antlered buck may have less than four points, one inch or longer, on one side of the antlers).**
- **Work with the General Assembly on determining the best regulatory process for setting the deer bag limit.**
- **Develop and implement a mandatory harvest reporting system when cost effective that complements the current deer harvest record.**

### **III. HUNTING METHODS & EQUIPMENT**

Public meeting participants provided input (Appendix IV) on hunting methods and equipment . This input included opinions on the use of suppressors for hunting, dog-deer hunting, and hunting over bait. Concerning the use of firearm suppressors for hunting showed 61% in favor and 39% opposed to allowing firearm suppressors. However, during the 2014 legislative session legislation allowing the use of suppressors for hunting was adopted and enacted into law. Regarding dog-deer hunting, minimal input was provided. Generally, public meeting participants favored the existing dog-deer hunting regulations, although some opposition exists and a few favored stricter regulations. Hunting over bait generated comments from a relatively high number of individuals (139). Of those, most supported baiting statewide, some opposed baiting statewide, and a few supported the existing law allowing bait in the southern zone only.

Quantitative data from the RMS differed from public comment on the use of firearm suppressors for hunting. A majority of residents (55%), hunters (54%), and landowners (54%) opposed the use of firearm suppressors for hunting. Regarding dog-deer hunting, opposition exceeded support for this activity among hunters (47% oppose, 38% support) and residents (50% oppose, 30% support). Landowners had mixed opinions on this subject. Where dog-deer hunting is allowed in the entire county, 57% of landowners oppose (43% strongly oppose) dog-deer hunting and 31% support. Where dog-deer hunting is allowed in only a portion of the county, 28% of landowners oppose dog-deer hunting and 66% support. In counties where dog deer hunting is not allowed, 48% of landowners oppose dog-deer hunting and 37% support. Concerning hunting deer over bait, opposition (45% exceeds support (30%)) among residents. Among hunters, support (61%) exceeds opposition (30%); however, support is markedly lower (52% support) for northern zone only hunters compared to hunters that hunt in the southern zone (70% support) or hunt both zones (58% support). Landowners were divided on the issue of hunting deer over bait and opposition (43%) slightly exceeded support (42%).

#### **Subcommittee Comments:**

The MRV Subcommittee discussed the legalization of firearm suppressors as well as discussion of other non-traditional weapons. All committee members opposed the use of bait to hunt deer and expressed their strong desire that hunting deer over bait not be legalized in the northern zone. The subcommittee also voiced their desire to see the current allowance of hunting deer over bait repealed in the southern zone.

Hunting over bait generated quite a bit of discussion among the Piedmont Subcommittee members, citing pros and cons on both sides of the argument. While they recognized that this activity has been legalized in the southern portion of the state, the committee opposes hunting deer over bait. While they did not approve of the current ban on the use of firearm suppressors for hunting, concern over the use of sub-sonic ammunition was discussed.

UCP Subcommittee discussions focused on the utility and legality of firearm suppressors for hunting, dog-deer hunting, hunting deer over bait, and removing muzzleloading firearms from the primitive weapons classifications due to the technological advancements in those weapons. Discussions on the issue of dog-deer hunting permits and regulations were positive. The subcommittee commends WRD for the work they have done with the process for permitting dog-deer hunting from the 2005-2014 Georgia Deer Plan. Members supported the changes resulting from the 2005-2014 Georgia Deer Plan and are satisfied with current permit rules and regulations. Regarding hunting deer over bait, inconsistency between the two deer zones was the focus. Members felt there was no justification for the zone line in deer hunting regulations and would rather see a statewide regulation relative to hunting deer over bait. Some subcommittee members voiced support for hunting deer over bait and some voiced opposition. Members discussed the negative perception; mainly the unfairness of 'bait', hunting deer over bait gives the non-hunting public of hunters and hunting.

FLCP Subcommittee discussions focused on dog-deer hunting permits and regulations, hunting over bait, and the use of firearm suppressors for hunting. The subcommittee had a thorough discussion on dog-deer hunting permits and regulations. Subcommittee representation had a background and experience in both dog hunting and still hunting. Some members felt law enforcement presence is

insufficient to adequately enforce dog-deer hunting laws. Also, there are some concerns that hunting deer with dogs can be disruptive to adjacent lands that have different management goals. Some members felt that in some cases the individual should be punished and not the entire club. Overall, the subcommittee applauds WRD for the work they have done with the dog-deer hunting permit process from the 2005-2014 Georgia Deer Plan. Hunting deer over bait was discussed among subcommittee members and there were a range of opinions. Some members did not like the idea of hunting over bait because it takes away from the hunt, while others liked hunting over bait to get kids involved with hunting. As a whole, members agreed they would like more data collected statewide in regards to baiting deer and would like to see future changes if research shows there are negative implications. The subcommittee discussed the use of firearm suppressors for hunting, which was unlawful in Georgia (legality changed during completion of this plan). Generally, members were not in favor of legalizing the use of firearm suppressors for hunting. Some members felt that suppressors could increase poaching, but also recognized the high costs, taxes, background checks and strict regulations associated with purchasing a firearm suppressor may result in few purchases of firearm suppressors.

Subcommittee Recommendations:

All Deer Management Plan subcommittees concurred and reached consensus on the following recommendations:

- WRD maintain the current laws and regulations for hunting deer with dogs.

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- Legalize the use of firearm suppressors for hunting.
- Prohibit hunting deer over bait statewide.

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- Prohibit hunting deer over bait statewide.
- Maintain prohibition of hunting deer over bait in northern zone.
- Prohibit hunting feral hogs over bait during the deer season in the northern zone.
- Prohibit hunting feral hogs over bait during the turkey season.
- Legalize the use of firearm suppressors for hunting; however, sub-sonic center-fire ammunition should not be allowed.

UCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- Legalize the use of firearm suppressors for hunting.
- Legalize the hunting of deer over bait statewide.
- Changing the primitive weapons classification in the regulations to muzzleloader and/or archery.

FLCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD provide clarity on what defines a warning or revocation of a dog-deer permit.
- Maintain existing laws and regulations on hunting deer over bait.
- WRD continue researching, monitoring, and collecting data on the use of bait.
- Maintain prohibition on use of firearm suppressors for hunting.

### WRD Proposed Actions:

- **WRD recommends that the current law concerning hunting deer over bait be maintained and will continue to provide science-based information as a foundation to discussions on this issue.**
- **Maintain the current laws and regulations for hunting deer with dogs.**

### IV. DEER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Public input from the public meetings (Appendix IV) about deer management techniques included opinions on implementing a DMAP, antler restrictions, predator management, and geographic scale of deer hunting regulations. The idea of a DMAP generated minimal input (29), likely because many are unfamiliar with the function of such a program. However, of those that provided input, most supported implementing a DMAP. There were numerous suggestions for changes to the current antler restrictions; the most common of which were to impose a restriction on both bucks in the bag limit, add more antler-restricted counties, and remove all antler restrictions statewide. Predator management also generated numerous suggestions, however the most common response was that some sort of action should be taken by WRD, but they are not sure what action. Other suggestions included offering predator education/management programs, WRD sponsored hunting/trapping programs, and implementing a bounty on coyotes (this also received some opposition). Regarding the scale of deer management regulations, this topic received minimal input with most input suggesting that deer be managed regionally. While this seems to contradict support for a uniform, statewide deer season, these participants felt that deer population goals should be regionally identified and managed by regulatory means other than deer season length (e.g., either-sex days).

RMS respondents had no consensus on the implementation of a DMAP, except that all agreed that WRD should not provide any less assistance to landowners than currently offered. Among hunters, 42% felt that more assistance should be provided and 38% felt that the current amount should continue to be provided. However, when asked specifically for interest in a DMAP program (basic description provided), 79% of hunters expressed interest (41% very interested). Interest among landowners in such a program was split evenly between interested and not interested. Regarding the perceived impact of coyotes, the following percentages of respondents felt that coyotes are having a high or moderate impact on the deer population: 46% of residents, 82% of hunters, and 62% of landowners.

### Subcommittee Comments:

The MRV Subcommittee had a lengthy discussion on the need for a DMAP, particularly for intensively managed properties. Members supporting a DMAP program felt that participants should pay to offset program costs, it would allow additional flexibility for site-specific management, and would improve outreach efforts. There was concern as to whether a DMAP program may affect private consultants. There was discussion by members on whether this program would be necessary if bag limits remain high. Some members expressed that if such a program were developed that participation should not be restricted to large landowners, otherwise it may be perceived as a special privilege. The discussion of DMAP was closely intertwined with the discussion of antlerless bag limits. Members supported department outreach to provide guidance on how to trap coyotes and would also like trapping of coyotes to occur on state managed lands.

The Piedmont Subcommittee discussed the practicality, funding and benefits of implementing a DMAP. Most members viewed this program as a tool for property-level management when broad regulatory structure is more restrictive. Members also felt that such a program should be accompanied by broader changes aimed to reduce doe harvest across the state.

The UCP Subcommittee discussed the need for a DMAP at length, particularly for intensively managed properties. Members supportive of a DMAP program believed that participants should pay a

fee for this service to offset costs. Members were interested in a total herd management program that provides flexibility for antlered and antlerless harvest and predator management on participating properties. Members agreed the program needs to be applied at the property level but should be based on some minimum acreage criteria. Discussions on antlered deer management focused on countywide antler restriction regulations. Generally, members were satisfied with the current procedure for countywide antler restriction regulations. There was brief discussion about “trophy management”, how relative that term is based on the hunter, and the concern that such restrictions may discourage young or new hunters from an opportunity to harvest antlered deer. The subcommittee agreed that if a DMAP materialized it could alleviate some of these issues by providing harvest flexibility that would supersede countywide antler restriction regulations.

The FLCP Subcommittee discussed the importance of predator management. Members agreed predator management involves education and WRD should provide more information on the topic. There was a brief discussion about coyotes and their impacts on the deer population. Coyote bounties were viewed as an ineffective tool. Regarding coyote predation on deer, some members have experienced a large impact while others have experienced no change in deer populations. The subcommittee supports development of DMAP in conjunction with a broader reduction in antlerless bag limit. Members favored the current statewide antler restrictions and the countywide process.

#### *Subcommittee Recommendations:*

All Deer Management Plan subcommittees concurred and reached consensus on the following recommendations:

- WRD and General Assembly oppose coyote bounty programs.
- WRD maintain current procedure and policy on county-wide initiation of antler restriction regulations.
- WRD enhance outreach efforts on deer and predator management.
- WRD evaluate and develop a fee-based DMAP to be vetted through a public participation process prior to implementation.

UCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- Legalize the use of electronic calls for foxes and bobcats.

#### *WRD Proposed Actions:*

- **Investigate DMAP options for private lands that provide management flexibility. Develop a proposed program and provide to General Assembly for funding consideration to implement. Implementation of such program is contingent on adequate funding.**
- **Oppose coyote bounty programs because there is no documented scientific evidence indicating that bounty programs temporarily or permanently reduce coyote abundance.**
- **Maintain current policy and procedures for county-wide initiation of antler restriction regulations.**
- **Address deer predation issues through research and education on deer and predator management.**

## V. HUNTER ACCESS

Public meeting participants provided input on hunting access and land acquisition (Appendix IV). Unlike other key issues, most input offered ideas and suggestions rather than support or opposition for a specific issue. Regarding access to public lands, the most popular suggestions were to offer more days for deer hunting, reduce deer harvest on some public land, offer more quota hunts, allow season-long archery hunting on WMAs, and maintain existing levels of access. Regarding access to private lands, the most common suggestions were to offer incentives to landowners to allow hunting and require written permission to hunt another's property. Concerning land acquisition, most participants who commented felt that land acquisition efforts should increase. Regarding hunting on park and municipal lands, most public meeting participants suggested that WRD identify these lands and encourage hunting. Six (6) individuals felt that WRD already does a good job providing hunter access.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of landowner respondents from the RMS indicated that they currently allow hunting on their land and 6% formerly allowed hunting but currently do not. Typical people allowed to hunt are family members or friends/acquaintances rather than people they don't know who may ask for permission. Of those that stopped allowing hunting access, the most common reasons were people stopped asking permission to hunt, poor behavior of hunters, and concern for personal safety. Landowners (68%) believed that legal liability was at least a minor concern when considering allowing hunting access. However, a majority (66%) said they would not allow more hunting access if they didn't have to worry about legal liability. In addition, 73% disagreed that they would be very likely to allow more deer hunting access if they could receive financial benefits such as tax breaks or cash payments.

### Subcommittee Comments:

The MRV Subcommittee discussed the current status of public hunting access and the WMA system vs. the National Forest Lands outside of WMA's. Committee members liked that there were currently varying degrees of access and management on USFS properties through having some of their lands in the WMA system and some outside. The committee discussed the diverse opportunities between differing federal and state ownerships and the general need to enhance public access.

The Piedmont Subcommittee recognizes that hunter access to private lands is important to deer management, and that demand for access to public land will increase over time. The committee supports hunting on all private and public land where feasible; however, they recognize that obtaining access to private lands can be challenging.

The UCP Subcommittee discussed hunter access on parks, municipal properties and other publicly-owned lands not currently hunted and efforts to pursue access to these properties should continue. Some members voiced concern over access limitations on WRD lands during different hunting seasons whether through reduction of days open for hunting or road closures. WRD staff explained that the number of open days of hunting on a WMA is biologically driven. Road closures during open hunting seasons is primarily due to weather, maintenance or responsive to hunter input for increasing the hunt-able area of a WMA. Road closure during closed hunting seasons is primarily for maintenance purposes or inclement weather. WRD works to leave WMA gates open, when and where feasible, and has improved advertisement of road closures on WMAs. The subcommittee discussed land acquisition. Some members commented about not purchasing anymore land and focusing resources on lands where WRD already has management responsibility.

The FLCP Subcommittee members encourage providing access to all areas of WMAs and increasing minor land acquisition to provide additional access. Following the Urban Deer Management Plan is the proper way to answer any questions in regards to hunter access on private lands. Concerning land acquisition, some members encouraged WMA land purchases while others were opposed because it removes land for potential hunting leases. The subcommittee encouraged hunting on non-WMA public land to the extent possible.

Subcommittee Recommendations:

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD clarify federal lands hunting regulations including National Forest and Corp of Engineers in the Popular Guide.
- WRD maintain keeping large tracts of USFS property in the WMA system.
- WRD continue to provide information for landowners and hunters about the legal protections landowners have when allowing hunting on their property.
- General Assembly increase license fees if the revenue is dedicated to land acquisition and the management and operation of those lands.

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD maintain current process for evaluating and providing hunting opportunities on state-managed public lands.
- WRD continue to provide information regarding landowner liability through all available outlets.
- WRD continue using public-private partnerships to acquire conservation valued land.
- WRD encourage hunting where feasible (e.g., local governments, municipal lands, etc.).

UCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD continue current land acquisition efforts.

FLCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD should increase land acquisition and encourage more access on the WMAs.
- The Urban Deer Management Plan guides efforts to improve hunter access on private lands.
- WRD should encourage hunting on non-WMA public lands.

WRD Proposed Actions:

- **Explore opportunities to improve presentation of regulatory information for public lands in the annual hunting seasons and regulations guide.**
- **Publish information in the annual hunting seasons and regulations guide and on social media that explains Georgia's statutory liability protections for landowners who allow hunting on their property. Explore additional opportunities to disseminate this information.**
- **Utilize in-house funding, grants and partnerships to acquire high conservation-value lands, WMA inholdings, and WMA edge-holdings to provide hunting opportunities on acquired lands and enhance public access.**
- **Investigate opportunities to enhance hunter access to department managed lands, increase hunting opportunities on other state lands and improve maps showing access.**
- **Publicize road closures through WRD's web site and other social media outlets.**
- **Identify opportunities to engage local governments and encourage deer management through hunting on county and municipal-owned properties.**

## **VI. PRIVATIZATION OF WILDLIFE**

Public meeting participants input on the privatization of wildlife included opinions on the use of artificial breeding techniques to manipulate deer for stocking high-fenced shooting operations (unlawful), hunting non-native or farmed deer in high-fenced enclosures (unlawful), importation of live deer to stock high-fenced shooting operations (unlawful), and hunting wild, white-tailed deer in high fenced enclosures (lawful with restrictions). Regarding the use of artificial breeding techniques, opposition (89%) to this activity overwhelmingly exceeded support (11%). Regarding hunting of non-native or farmed deer, opposition (89%) to this activity overwhelmingly exceeded support (11%). Regarding the importation of deer, opposition (97%) to this activity overwhelmingly exceeded support (3%). Meeting participants were divided on the issue of hunting wild, white-tailed deer in high-fenced enclosures with 42% support for the existing regulated activity and 58% support for making it unlawful. Two individuals suggested that annual inspections should be required of all high-fenced properties.

RMS respondents held similar sentiment to most of these activities, except for hunting wild, white-tailed deer in high-fenced enclosures where opposition was more substantial. Among hunters, residents, and landowners opposition for all privatization activities overwhelmingly exceeded support. Additionally, strong opposition alone exceeded all support among each constituency for each activity.

### **Subcommittee Comments:**

The MRV Subcommittee reached consensus on most topics including opposing the artificial breeding of deer and hunting of farmed or nonnative deer and importation of deer. There was a lengthy discussion of the use of high fences to manage native deer populations with the committee unable to reach consensus on this issue.

The Piedmont Subcommittee spent little time debating most of these topics as members generally shared the same sentiment. The committee was flatly opposed to the use of artificial breeding techniques for whitetails, importation of any deer species, and hunting of non-native deer in fenced enclosures. High-fenced enclosures for white-tailed deer generated the most discussion where conflicts between private property rights and the North American Model were debated. The committee holds genuine concerns on the impacts to the North American Model from confinement of white-tailed deer for hunting purposes.

UCP Subcommittee members voiced strong concerns that inspection of high-fenced facilities is needed to abate illegal activities (e.g., importation). Additionally, the subcommittee believes that enhanced law enforcement efforts are requisite to ensure unlawful importation and other unlawful activities are not occurring on high-fenced properties. Relative to high fence enclosures, members recognized perceived conflicts with individual property rights, but emphasized that white-tailed deer are a public trust species not to be held in private ownership. Discussions focused on the current legality of hunting wild, white-tailed deer in high fence enclosures. These included: challenges in managing confined deer in a manner that does not degrade habitat and habitat quality, maintaining the health of confined deer, impacts to other wildlife and whether a permit should be required for all high-fence enclosures. There was also discussion of requiring disease sampling criteria to high-fenced enclosures as part of WRD's disease surveillance efforts (e.g., CWD). Ultimately, members recognized that current laws and regulations are tolerable.

The FLCP Subcommittee recognized that artificial breeding techniques to manipulate deer, stocking deer in high fenced enclosures, hunting non-native or farmed deer in high fenced enclosures, and importation of live deer pose disease risks to native deer and are all currently unlawful. The subcommittee supports maintaining laws and regulations that prohibit these activities.

### **Subcommittee Recommendations:**

All Deer Management Plan subcommittees concurred and reached consensus on the following recommendations:

- General Assembly maintain existing laws prohibiting artificial breeding techniques on deer.

- General Assembly maintain existing laws prohibiting hunting of non-native or farmed deer in high-fenced enclosures.
- General Assembly maintain existing laws prohibiting the importation of live cervids.

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus was not reached on all recommendations):

- WRD and the General Assembly prohibit construction of any new high fence enclosures statewide. (Vote: 10 in favor, 3 opposed, 1 abstained)

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD require registration of all high fenced enclosures.
- WRD investigate options to increase the minimum acreage and/or require double fencing for high-fenced enclosures for native deer.
- WRD explore a provision to prohibit intentional release of these animals.

UCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD and General Assembly maintain current legal status and criteria for hunting wild, white-tailed deer in high fenced enclosures.

FLCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- General Assembly/WRD should maintain existing regulations and laws related to the confinement of white-tailed deer.

**WRD Proposed Actions:**

- **Maintain opposition to legalizing artificial breeding of white-tailed deer and farming of white-tailed deer.**
- **Maintain opposition to importation of white-tailed deer and non-native deer species.**
- **Maintain opposition to hunting of farmed and non-native deer species inside high-fenced enclosures.**
- **Maintain existing regulations concerning the confinement of white-tailed deer.**
- **Pursue efforts to require registration of all high-fenced enclosures.**
- **Act as needed to maintain regulatory authority over white-tailed deer.**

## **VII. DEER DENSITY**

Public input on deer density was derived from public meetings and web submissions (results include a short survey provided at the public meetings). From the public meetings and input: 35% felt the population should be stabilized at the current level, 58% felt it should be increased, and 7% felt it should be decreased. From the public meeting survey, when asked about the deer population where you live: 30% said it was about what is needed, 7% didn't know, 13% felt there were too many, and 51% felt there were too few deer. When asked about the deer population where you hunt, 32% said about what is needed, 7% felt there were too many, and 62% felt there were too few deer.

RMS respondents had no consensus whether the deer population has increased, decreased, or remained stable in the past 5 years. The majority of respondents (54% residents, 48% hunters, 48% landowners) believed there is currently an appropriate deer density in their county instead of too many or too few. Of those that do not believe deer density is appropriate, hunters and residents are more likely to think there are too few while landowners are more likely to think there are too many. Of those that felt the population was too low (19% residents, 31% hunters, 16% landowners), a majority would support an increase in the population even if it meant more deer-human conflicts such as deer-vehicle collisions, agricultural damage, and damage to landscaping. However, support diminished if the consequences are poor deer health or ecological damage. Those that felt the population was about right cited reasons such as the hunting is good, few or no problems with deer, they don't see too many, and they don't see too few. Of those that felt the population was too high (15% residents, 12% hunters, 28% landowners), the most common concerns were deer-vehicle collisions, crop damage, and landscaping damage.

### **Subcommittee Comments:**

The MRV Subcommittee asked various questions of attending WRD staff to determine how healthy the current deer population is and where WRD staff thought the populations would trend overtime under various management scenarios. The impacts of coyotes on the deer population were also briefly discussed. The MRV Subcommittee desire was to increase the deer population.

The Piedmont Subcommittee generally felt that the deer population within this region was slightly below ideal deer density. They opted not to make any statewide recommendations and limited theirs to the Piedmont region of the state.

Discussion within the UCP Subcommittee was initiated by a question of how WRD estimates Georgia's deer population. WRD provided an overview of how the deer population is monitored and the source of the biological data for making assessments. This transitioned into a discussion of whether members felt the deer population should increase, decrease or stay the same. Some members felt the deer population needs to increase from the standpoint of hunter recruitment, particularly youth hunters. Other members felt the deer population needs to be decreased due to crop depredation concerns.

For the FLCP Subcommittee, discussion was brief. Some members believe the population is too low and others believe the population is too high. Overall, the subcommittee believes that the deer population fluctuates based on location.

### **Subcommittee Recommendations:**

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD moderately increase deer density in the Ridge and Valley.
- WRD significantly increase deer density in the Blue Ridge Mountains.
- WRD slightly increase and then stabilize deer density statewide.

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD slightly increase (e.g., ~10%) the deer density in the Piedmont and then stabilize at that level.

UCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD stabilize the statewide deer population at or slightly below the estimated carrying capacity for Georgia.

FLCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD's goal should be to slightly increase the Georgia deer population and stabilize the population over time.

**WRD Proposed Actions:**

- **Facilitate, through harvest regulations, an increase in the deer population in the Blue Ridge Mountains region.**
- **Facilitate, through harvest regulations, a slight increase in or stabilize the deer population in the Ridge & Valley region, across the Piedmont and in the Lower Coastal Plain.**
- **Maintain, through harvest regulations, a stable deer population across the Upper Coastal Plain.**

**VIII. DEER CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

Opinions on deer-vehicle collisions, controlling urban deer populations, agricultural damage by deer, and social limits on deer density were provided by public meeting participants (Appendix). Regarding deer-vehicle collisions, there was no clear consensus on potential solutions and input was minimal. Controlling urban deer populations received more input with most suggesting increased hunting opportunity. Public meeting input related to agricultural damage centered on the existing crop depredation permit program. There were some suggestions to improve or change the current program such as encouraging farms to allow hunting and monitor permittees more closely. A division of opinion surfaced on the program as a whole with support for the existing program and opposition to issuance of crop damage permits.

RMS respondents had somewhat variable responses to questions about deer damage; however, reductions in damage were apparent for all respondents compared to the 2004 RMS conducted for Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014. Only 16% (25% in 2004) of residents reported experiencing deer damage over the past 12 months, whereas 41% (43% in 2004) landowners experienced damage. The most common types of damage for residents included gardens, landscaping, and deer-vehicle collisions. Landowners reported gardens, agricultural crops, and landscaping most commonly. Regarding deer vehicle collisions, 17% (29% in 2004) of residents reported having had a collision in the past 2 years and only 5% (11% in 2004) reported having 2 or more. Among residents, the top driving hazards cited careless drivers, drivers using cell phones, and drunk drivers. Only 4% (6% in 2004) of residents considered deer to be a top driving hazard.

**Subcommittee Comments:**

The MRV Subcommittee reviewed the Urban Deer Management Plan and favored its continued use; however they felt that WRD should consider a more active role in encouraging hunting on currently un-hunted Federal lands, such as National Parks and historic sites.

Upon review of Georgia's Urban Deer Management Plan, the Piedmont Subcommittee recommended incorporating it in the Deer Management Plan 2015-2024.

UCP Subcommittee members discussed the development of Georgia's Urban Deer Management Plan 2005-2014, which led into some discussion on urban deer control through targeted population reduction by trained wildlife professionals. The subcommittee agreed that WRD should use regulated hunting as the primary method for managing deer in urban/suburban settings and targeted population reduction should only be used as a viable alternative where hunting is not feasible. There was some discussion on expanding the current system of eligible personnel for lethal removal of deer in developed areas

(current policy designates only WRD and USDA-Wildlife Service's personnel). By the end of the discussion, the subcommittee decided to maintain the current system as indicated in Georgia's Urban Deer Management Plan 2005-2014. There was also discussion on the current crop damage permitting program and whether it was meeting the needs of the agriculture producers in the upper coastal plain. Overall, the subcommittee felt WRD provided the most flexibility feasible for landowners to deal with crop damage caused by deer consistent with the sound principles of wildlife management.

The FLCP Subcommittee had a short discussion on this topic. Members agreed that incorporation of the Urban Deer Management Plan in this plan and its implementation is appropriate.

Subcommittee Recommendations:

All Deer Management Plan subcommittees concurred and reached consensus on the following recommendations:

- WRD incorporate Urban Deer Management Plan in this deer plan and implement as appropriate.

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD amend the Urban Deer Management Plan to support hunting on currently un-hunted National Parks and historic sites.

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD maintain current deer crop depredation permit program.

WRD Proposed Actions:

- **Incorporate the Urban Deer Management Plan in the Deer Management Plan 2015-2024.**
- **Maintain current deer crop depredation permit policies and program.**

**IX. EDUCATION & OUTREACH EFFORTS BY DNR**

Public meeting participants (Appendix IV) provided input on hunter recruitment and retention, connecting with customers, policy advocacy, and involvement of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The most popular comment was for WRD to keep up the good work. Regarding hunter recruitment and retention, the most popular suggestions were to offer more hunt and learn programs, increase game populations, and increase youth shooting sports programs. Connecting with customers yielded some diverse suggestions, the most common being to offer more field days and seminars. From the public meeting survey, commenters listed the best method for WRD to reach them with information. They indicated email (52%), the hunting regulations guide (21%), and the WRD website (11%).

RMS respondents differed somewhat on the best ways for WRD to provide them with information. Residents most commonly suggested direct mail (30%), email (25%), and the WRD website (15%). Hunters suggested email (41%), direct mail (25%), and the WRD website (23%). Landowners suggested direct mail (42%), the WRD website (15%), and email (14%).

Subcommittee Comments:

The MRV Subcommittee discussed the need to retain and recruit hunters. All committee members felt that education and outreach were critical to ensure hunting in the future. Discussion included making sure that the WRD pursues opportunities to mentor youth hunters through various means. There was also discussion as to what role WRD should occupy when it comes to policy advocacy and what relationships WRD should have with NGOs. The committee discussed adding space on license print outs to place informational messages for hunters.

The Piedmont Subcommittee recognizes that regulated hunting is central to the principles of wildlife management and an essential component of the North American Model. They recognize existing efforts by WRD for hunter recruitment and retention and encourage expansion where possible, including youth and women.

The UCP subcommittee discussed education and outreach at length and mainly focused on the topics of hunter recruitment and retention, promotion of WRD opportunities and connecting with customers and constituents. They suggested utilizing agricultural publications to reach more hunters, such as the Farmers and Consumers Market Bulletin. Members voiced support and appreciation of WRD workshops, field days and seminars for hunters and landowners. Discussion on hunter recruitment and retention focused heavily on youth and women hunters in order to continue the momentum of recruiting these demographics, particularly with increase in women hunters over the last 10 years. Appreciation was voiced to WRD for the development of the apprentice hunting license as an avenue to introduce people to hunting without having to complete a hunter education course. The subcommittee voiced displeasure with how confusing the WRD website is for users, particularly when it comes to searching for specific topics or material. The subcommittee was informed that WRD is currently taking steps to revamp the WRD website to a more user-friendly format. The committee commends WRD on its promotion of shooting sports through improvement and expansion of shooting range opportunities, growth and popularity of the National Archery in the Schools Program, and the shooting sports complex at Georgia Southern University.

Overall, the FLCP Subcommittee members felt WRD has done a great job with hunter education throughout the region. At the same time, WRD needs to work on getting new information out by additions to the website, emailing hunters, and any other possible means to distribute information. Youth should be a primary focus in the future. Increasing hunter recruitment and retention is the key to preserving the hunting heritage of the state of Georgia. NGOs should align their policies with WRD in matters regarding the future and perpetuation of hunting. WRD should do a better job at showing hunting advocates their appreciation for all their help.

#### Subcommittee Recommendations:

All Deer Management Plan subcommittees concurred and reached consensus on the following recommendations:

- WRD increase the amount of mentored youth hunting events.
- WRD reinforce deer management and stewardship through the most effective means to reach the average hunter.

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD maintain a large role in policy advocacy.
- WRD work with NGO's to the extent that it is mutually beneficial for both groups.

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD expand hunter recruitment and retention programs where possible.
- WRD use the hunting regulations to connect with hunters on deer management issues.
- WRD include deer management information in hunter education programs.
- WRD provide information to guide legislation to biologically, socially, and ethically sound practices.
- WRD continue to work with NGOs to inform legislation towards biologically, socially, and ethically sound practices.
- WRD take a strong stance against practices that are detrimental to hunting and wildlife management.

UCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD continue providing shooting sports opportunities, particularly for youths, and pursue ways to add school programs for shooting and hunting.
- WRD pursue more effective targeting of hunter recruitment and retention efforts to participants engaged in shooting sports programs, particularly youth and women.
- WRD consider adding a big game privilege to the Apprentice Hunting License.
- WRD pursue ways to incentivize hunters that take youth hunting.
- WRD continue to provide a large number of hunter education courses, in class and online, throughout the year and particularly prior to beginning of hunting seasons.
- WRD continue the lifetime license promotional contest.
- WRD expand hunter/landowner workshops and field days across the state and integrate predator management as a topic.

FLCP Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD encourage NGOs to align their policies with WRD on matters that impact the future of hunting.
- WRD should formally recognize and show appreciation for the support NGOs provide.

**WRD Proposed Actions:**

- **Provide youth shooting education programs and efforts to recruit those students into youth hunting education programs.**
- **Provide and increase mentored youth hunting education opportunities.**
- **Enhance youth hunting opportunities**
- **Improve and develop shooting ranges in GA and provide youth/novice shooting education programs on these ranges.**
- **Develop partnerships with conservation organizations to further mutually beneficial hunting and shooting educational goals.**
- **Provide landowner/hunter outreach programs at appropriate venues and field days.**
- **Develop educational seminars for deer management and predator trapping for hunters and landowners.**
- **Provide more opportunities to take the required hunter education course.**

## **X. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES**

Public meeting input (Appendix IV) on miscellaneous issues included opinions on wildlife diseases, funding for wildlife management, license fees and structure, and law enforcement. Common suggestions included providing more disease information to hunters, ban the feeding of wildlife, and continue to prohibit importation of deer into the state. Input on funding for wildlife management included seeking a sales tax percentage to fund WRD and ensuring that license fees are not diverted from wildlife management (they currently are not). There were numerous suggestions for license fees and structure, the most common were to increase resident license fees and increase non-resident license fees. Law enforcement also had many suggestions, the most common were to hire more rangers and spend more time enforcing game and fish laws and regulations.

When asked what Georgia DNR should provide to private lands for deer management, hunters from the RMS indicated deer management advice (36%), management assistance/biological advice (30%), and law enforcement (18%). Landowners asked the same question indicated management assistance/biological advice (32%), deer management advice (30%), crop depredation permits (26%), and law enforcement (18%). When hunters were asked openly about issues that have reduced the quality of deer hunting experiences in the past 2 years, 56% indicated that nothing takes away and only 3% indicated the costs (including license fees).

### **Subcommittee Comments:**

The MRV Subcommittee discussed Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Discussion included information exchange and questions pertaining to CWD transmission, actions in other states, current status and Georgia's efforts and potential response. There was also some discussion of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD). Additionally, lengthy discussion occurred relative to WRD's budget and opportunities to increase revenues through a license fee increase. The committee felt that increases should be applied to the management of WMAs. Opportunities discussed included: creating a habitat management stamp, capturing more revenue from non-consumptive users and a nominal increase in the basic hunting license. The subcommittee voiced its desire to see a greater focus of law enforcement efforts on enforcement of game and fish laws and regulations, and a desire to see more Conservation Rangers in the woods. The committee expressed an interest in whether violation fines could be standardized and increased in a document that could be provided to counties in effort to achieve consistency across the state.

The Piedmont subcommittee has concerns about herd health implications of concentrating deer around bait and supplemental feed; however, the subcommittee does not oppose the ability of individuals to provide supplemental feed to deer. The committee strongly supports the authority of WRD to ban feeding in the event of a communicable disease. The committee recognizes that sportsmen have predominantly carried the financial burden for managing wildlife that belongs to all the residents of the state. Thus they strongly desire to see an increase in legislative appropriations from State General Fund to WRD.

Discussions in the UCP Subcommittee began with deer diseases in Georgia. EHD is the most prevalent disease concern in Georgia but from a management action standpoint, little can be done to prevent it or mitigate its impact. CWD was discussed and the members agreed that the best way to protect Georgia's deer herd was through a continued ban on cervid importation and aggressive enforcement of that ban. Other topics of discussion pertained to fees associated with youth non-resident hunting, lifetime license fees for seniors aged 64 being reduced to incentivize them to buy a license instead of waiting for it to be free (currently, seniors age 60-64 may purchase a lifetime license for \$95), and not enough conservation rangers on the ground. The group discussed fees for deer violations. The subcommittee is dissatisfied with the fines being too low for deer violation and the discrepancy among counties in fines levied.

The FLCP Subcommittee focused on two topics: funding for wildlife management and law enforcement. All members felt WRD needs increased revenue for wildlife management and for developing and implementing a DMAP Program. Opportunities discussed for increasing revenues included: increasing State General Appropriations, raising hunting license fees, permanent funding from a percentage of the State Sales Tax, application fees for quota hunts, and others. Members felt the Law Enforcement Division needs more rangers and there needs to be an increase in the monetary fines to deter wildlife violations.

Subcommittee Recommendations:

All Deer Management Plan subcommittees concurred and reached consensus on the following recommendations:

- WRD maintain current wildlife disease policies and management strategies.
- WRD and the General Assembly explore standardizing penalties for game and fish violations statewide.
- LED pursue ways to increase the number of Conservation Rangers on the ground.
- WRD and General Assembly explore opportunities to increase funding for wildlife management such as: increased appropriations from State General Fund, increasing hunting license fees, establishing permanent funding from a percentage of State Sales Tax, fees for quota hunt applications, and/or other potential sources.

MRV Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- LED ensure that law enforcement rangers focus their efforts on the enforcement of game and fish laws.

Piedmont Subcommittee recommended (Consensus reached on all recommendations):

- WRD improve outreach efforts regarding disease outbreaks and include maps where applicable.
- WRD and General Assembly should review license fees periodically for parity with other states respective of non-resident licenses and to account for inflation.
- General Assembly should explore options for restitution of poached wildlife.

**WRD Proposed Actions:**

- **Maintain current disease surveillance and management efforts to include monitoring and evaluating the effects of hunting deer over bait on deer harvest.**
- **Work with the General Assembly to explore opportunities for increasing funding for wildlife management.**
- **Work with partners to explore opportunities to increase minimum fines for wildlife violations, establish penalty standards for wildlife violations that can be used by local court systems and pursue efforts to establish restitution for big game violations.**

## **XI. STEERING COMMITTEE DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS**

Discussion from the Steering Committee relative to deer seasons primarily focused on the deer zone line issue as it relates to deer seasons. Committee members recognized that this issue is a social issue, rather than biological, thus discussion focused on the impacts to hunting opportunity under a variety of changes that would create a uniform, statewide deer season. After considerable deliberation, the committee recognized the lack of consensus among hunters specifically how a statewide season should be structured. Committee members recognized that the legislature sought resolution on this issue through this planning process and that a proposed action should be more assertive in developing a resolution. They concluded by recommending a proposed action that would include more extensive public involvement on potential options for a statewide season and a time constraint to take action on this issue.

The Steering Committee echoed the support of the subcommittees for maintaining the existing buck bag limit. When discussing the antlerless bag limit, committee members indicated a need for more hunter education regarding deer management and that the bag limit should be based on science under the purview of DNR regulation. As with the subcommittees, discussion of the bag limit shifted towards the potential for a DMAP to resolve bag limit issues and provide better technical guidance to hunters. Discussion of a DMAP included funding mechanisms, programmatic functions, costs, and benefits. The Steering Committee concluded that a draft program should be developed and submitted to the General Assembly for review and consideration for funding.

Discussion of hunting over bait focused on what role WRD should have on this issue. The committee concluded that, since no previous prohibition of feeding wildlife existed prior the law change allowing hunting over bait in the southern deer zone, the activity of hunting deer over bait is a social issue and that WRD's role should be to provide science-based information as a foundation for discussion. Additionally, they recognized a lack of consensus among the subcommittees on this issue, except for a consensus among the Piedmont and MRV subcommittees to not allow any further expansion of baiting into north Georgia. Thus, they recommended a proposed action that the current law regarding hunting over bait be maintained. Some members voiced concern over the effects of baiting on wildlife health, behavior, and impacts to migratory bird hunting opportunities. Research on deer behavior in response to bait is currently under way, which helped alleviate some of these concerns.

The Steering Committee concurred with the subcommittee recommendations regarding privatization of wildlife. In addition, they had some concern over recent attacks across the country to shift authority of captive deer away from state wildlife agencies. They recommended an additional action item to act as needed to maintain regulatory authority over white-tailed deer.

# **GEORGIA'S URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ACCG	Association of County Commissioners of Georgia
DVC	Deer Vehicle Collisions
DNR	Georgia Department of Natural Resources
GDOT	Georgia Department of Transportation
GMA	Georgia Municipal Association
GRPA	Georgia Recreation Property Act
OCGA	Official Code of Georgia Annotated
QDMA	Quality Deer Management Association
RMS	Responsive Management Survey
USDA-WS	U. S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services
WRD	Wildlife Resources Division

The Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) is charged by State law with the management and conservation of Georgia's wildlife resources for present and future generations. The white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) is a tremendous resource in Georgia offering diverse recreational opportunities. As a result, the economic value of hunting in Georgia is estimated at more than \$1.1 billion, generates more than \$82 million in estimated state and local tax revenues, and provides more than 14,000 jobs. However, Georgia's deer herd presents significant management challenges such as agricultural damage, property damage, and human safety concerns.

Management of Georgia's white-tailed deer population has become more challenging and controversial as humans and deer populations have increased. Over the past 35 years, Georgia's human population has increased from 4.8 million to more than 9.3 million while the deer population has increased from 198,000 to 1 million. Deer hunter numbers have not kept pace with human population growth. Deer hunter numbers have decreased from a peak in 1991 of about 349,000 to 292,000 in 2008. However, deer hunter success has increased steadily resulting in harvest levels sufficient to stabilize the deer herd across much of the state. Georgia's deer population growth rate has not been constant throughout the state and deer-human conflicts occur where the local deer population exceeds the biological or social carrying capacity. WRD strives to maintain a statewide deer population that is biologically, economically, and recreationally sustainable. Sustainability requires that deer numbers be maintained in balance with habitat capacity and social tolerances.

In an effort to broaden the scope of deer population management, better fulfill its statutory mandate, and become a more responsive agency, WRD initiated a planning process to address the needs at a statewide and local level for managing Georgia's urban deer population.

## **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

From a statewide perspective, Georgia's deer herd has been essentially stable for nearly a decade. The current estimate of 1 million deer statewide is a reduction from an estimated high of 1.4 million in the late 1990s. Despite this success, actions taken to date by WRD to address deer-human conflicts in developed areas have not been integrated into a comprehensive strategy. As such, issues surrounding urban deer populations in Georgia became a key conservation issue in *Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014*. The plan specifically states that a planning process is necessary to develop strategies for managing urban deer populations through hunting. In an effort to address this action item and the issues surrounding the urban deer population, WRD determined that it was essential to initiate an urban deer management planning process. This process focused specifically on urban deer population management issues and was designed as an abbreviated version of the successful model established by *Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014*. Public participation was accomplished by creating the Urban Deer Advisory Committee (hereinafter, Committee) and through considering the extensive public input provided in the development of *Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2005-2014*. The Committee was created through invitations sent to individuals and organizations sharing a common interest in managing white-tailed deer in the urban landscape. To this end, WRD established an organization and agency-based 18-member stakeholder group referred to as the Urban Deer Advisory Committee (Appendix I). Representatives included: animal control agencies, conservation organizations, county governments, federal and state agencies, insurance industry interests, legislators, municipal governments, and public safety interests.

For the purposes of this plan, urban areas are defined as those counties with a human density of at least 500 people per square mile of land (Appendix II). This demographic calculation was used because land area is static and provides a common base for human and deer habitation and should focus efforts in areas where rural landscapes and deer habitat are being replaced with subdivisions, shopping centers, and development infrastructure. However, this definition does not preclude the consideration or use of urban deer management tools outside of urban areas.

## INTRODUCTION

The white-tailed deer in Georgia is a readily recognized wildlife species that provides diverse recreational opportunities (e.g., hunting, wildlife photography, wildlife viewing) and is of significant economic value. Indeed, expenditures in Georgia for hunting, fishing, and wildlife-associated recreation exceed \$3.5 billion annually. These expenditures if expressed as a percent of Georgia's travel and tourism expenditures (\$16.6 billion) would represent an addition of almost 25% of those dollars.

White-tailed deer can be found from rural farmlands and forests to urban parks and suburbs. Despite the fact that the white-tailed deer is a valued resource, considerable controversy surrounds its management. In fact, one of the most challenging issues facing many state wildlife agencies, including WRD, is the management of deer in urban areas. WRD's deer management efforts are designed to balance the state's deer population with its habitat for the health of deer herd and other wildlife, provide sustainable deer populations for recreational pursuits, and allow for compatibility between deer populations and human land-use practices.

Historically, deer were eliminated from most of the state during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. By the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, widespread wildlife conservation efforts led to the reintroduction of many species, including white-tailed deer. White-tailed deer now thrive throughout Georgia and have become one of the greatest success stories in wildlife conservation. As deer populations grew from 1950 to 1980, interest in deer hunting increased (Figure 1). By the early 1990s the deer population peaked at 1.4 million statewide. Concomitantly, the number of deer hunters peaked at approximately 350,000.

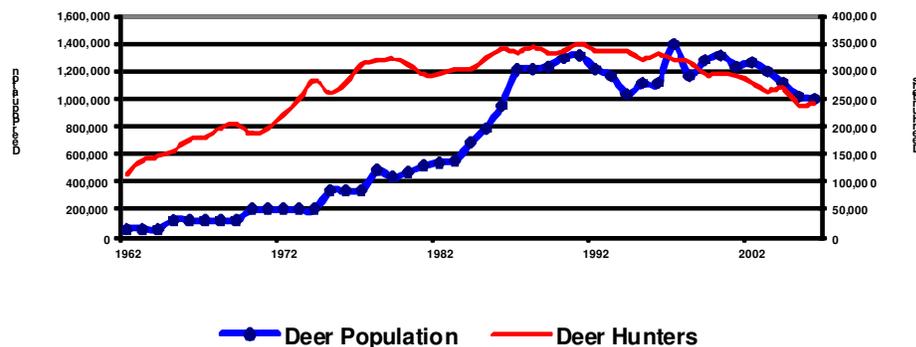
However, increased hunter interest did not lead to an immediate decrease in the deer population. With high deer densities and a rapidly growing human population, the volume of negative deer-human interactions steadily rose. A combination of expanding either-sex days and a willingness

of hunters to harvest female deer began to stabilize the population at a more acceptable level in 2004. Currently the statewide deer population remains stable at approximately 1 million. However, local areas of overabundance do exist.

Management of Georgia's deer population is achieved primarily through regulated hunting. Up to the present, the primary tools for regulating deer harvest have been season length, either-sex days (days on which female deer may be harvested), and bag limit. Over the past decades, the season length has been extended to maximize opportunity within biological and statutory frameworks. Presently, Georgia has one of the longest deer seasons in the nation encompassing more than 130 days. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the bag limit has been increased from two (2) to twelve (12) and either-sex days have been liberalized across much of Georgia. Presently, hunters may take deer of either sex the entire season throughout most of Georgia. This long season, combined with a flexible bag limit, has facilitated a reduction in the statewide deer population. However, the most recent increases in bag limit (2002) and either-sex days have not resulted in a significant increase in the deer harvest supporting that neither the current bag limit or season length are factors limiting additional deer hunter harvest. As such, further efforts to expand the season length or increase the bag limit are unlikely to result in significant additional deer harvest.

While regulated hunting is the most effective and economical tool available to manage deer populations, the growth of Georgia's human population and associated development have transformed a once rural landscape. These transformations primarily consist of replacing rural land uses (e.g., forestry and agriculture) with shopping centers, subdivisions, parks, and greenspace. Despite these land use changes, deer have adapted well and still occur in and around these areas. Concomitant with this land

**Table 1. Deer Population and Deer Hunters From 1962-2006**



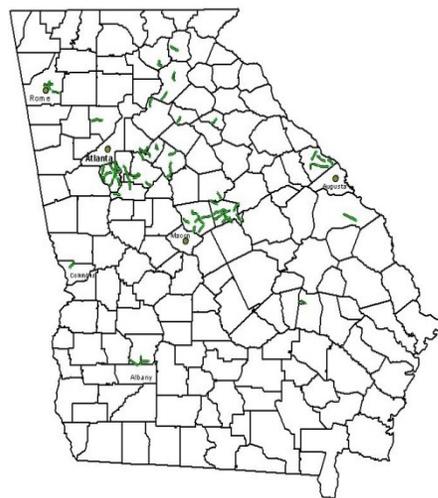
use change, a complexity of factors has limited the application of traditional hunting. These limitations include loss of hunter access, firearms ordinances, and social concerns. With the loss of hunting as the primary mechanism to manage deer population growth, deer populations can become locally overabundant exceeding social, biological, or ecological carrying capacities. Social carrying capacity is the point at which the number of deer-human conflicts becomes unacceptable to a majority of the community. This includes, but is not limited to, deer-vehicle collisions, property damage, damage to landscaping, agricultural damage, or aggressive behavior toward pets or humans. Biological carrying capacity is reached when the health of a deer population is compromised by a lack of resources resulting in malnutrition, excessive parasitism, and overall poor health. This juncture can be reached before visible effects become apparent (i.e., deer may appear healthy). Generally, this results from chronic over-browsing of local habitat by an overabundant deer population. Ecological carrying capacity is realized when deer browsing negatively impacts local plant communities and other wildlife (e.g., songbirds, small mammals, etc.) that depend on such habitat. Ecological carrying capacity may be surpassed long before the symptoms of reaching biological carrying capacity are apparent.

One of the more widely publicized and observable issues associated with abundant deer populations in urban areas is deer-vehicle collisions. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, an estimated 1.5-million deer-vehicle collisions (DVC) occur annually in the United States, causing more than 150 fatalities and \$1.1 billion in property damage. DVC often lead to expensive repairs and, tragically, to some loss of human life thereby elevating the need for management of urban deer populations in Georgia.

There is no single agency in Georgia that has a complete annual DVC count. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) keeps some records, as do some county Governments. A minimum reliable estimate of DVC can be produced using insurance industry data. WRD annually receives data from the insurance industry to calculate DVC estimates for the entire state using vehicle registration statistics from the Georgia Department of Revenue, Motor Vehicle Division.

Metropolitan counties tend to have the highest overall projected DVC. An analysis of high collision state route 5-mile road segments indicates “hot spots”, of which most are associated with metropolitan commuter corridors (see map). Recent estimates of Georgia DVC indicate a minimum yearly average of 45,000 DVC for the last 3 years. Statewide, this has remained relatively constant despite the increasing number of registered vehicles on Georgia’s roads. In 2004 there were 6.56 million registered vehicles in Georgia; in 2006 that number had increased to 7.08 million. These statistics indicate that DVC rates (collisions/vehicle) have slightly decreased. However, Georgia still ranks fourth nationally in the number of DVC. Efforts to minimize DVC require sustained management of deer in urban areas, and must include educating drivers on the awareness of deer in these areas and defensive driving strategies.

Location of State Highway 5-mile Segments with 10 or more Deer-Vehicle Collisions in 2007



Data Provided by GDOT  
Map produced by GA DNR

The white-tailed deer is an economically valuable and socially desirable natural resource. However, stakeholders (including responsible agencies, landowners, and citizens) should strive to reduce or maintain deer densities below biologically, ecologically, and socio-logically acceptable levels to successfully address the challenges associated with urban deer populations. Traditional strategies that manage for deer are not compatible with urban deer management objectives.

## **URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT**

The Committee strongly encourages DNR, local governments, private landowners, homeowners and homeowners’ associations to use regulated hunting methods to manage deer in urban settings. Further, the Committee supports the use of regulated hunting as the primary method for managing deer and human-deer conflicts in such areas. According to the Responsive Management Survey (RMS)

conducted in 2004 as a component of the Georgia Deer Management Plan process, most Georgians support the use of regulated hunting to manage deer populations (82%). Furthermore, most Georgians support the use of hunting to manage deer populations in urban areas, and on parks and recreational lands traditionally closed to hunting. Therefore, it is DNR's intent to encourage and support the use of regulated hunting as the primary tool for managing urban deer populations and minimizing associated conflicts.

Successful management of white-tailed deer requires a sustained effort. Deer-human conflicts in urban areas do not develop overnight and are not readily solved. There is no one-time fix to resolving deer-human conflicts. Confronting these conflicts requires that public officials and citizens accept responsibility in their communities. Additionally, public officials and residents must make a long-term commitment to effectively apply available deer management tools. These tools may include lethal and non-lethal methods. Lethal methods are further segregated into regulated hunting and non-hunting lethal methods. Non-hunting lethal methods include: targeted population reduction by trained wildlife professionals, capture and kill, and predator reintroduction. Non-hunting non-lethal methods include habitat modification, repellents, exclusion, contraception, and trap and relocate. These methods were explored and discussed by the Committee and are presented in the section, "Alternatives to Hunting."

The use of regulated hunting to effectively and efficiently manage urban deer populations is not groundbreaking. Recently, in fact, regulated hunting has been used successfully in Georgia on several State Parks and by local governments to resolve the challenges associated with urban deer populations. DNR's Parks, Recreation, and Historic Sites Division provides access to hunters through managed hunts on Bobby Brown, Fort Yargo, F. D. Roosevelt, Hard Labor Creek, Mistletoe, Richard B. Russell and other State Parks in its effort to responsibly manage deer populations. Interestingly, Ft. Yargo State Park is located entirely within the city limits of Winder, Georgia. Despite initial misperceptions and apprehension, these hunts have proven safe and effective. In fact, after years of ecological degradation on the park and significant DVC on boundary highways, the deer population has been reduced to an acceptable and sustainable level, the ecological integrity of the park is recovering, and DVC have been greatly reduced (see Appendix III). Additionally, several local governments have utilized regulated hunting to effectively and responsibly manage deer populations on the lands they manage. Two successful examples include Clayton County Water Authority Facility and the Covington/Newton County Land Application Facility (see Appendix IV and V, respectively).

### Regulated Hunting

In its discussions, the Committee identified and discussed several issues it believes must be addressed to facilitate the use of regulated hunting to effectively manage deer populations. These include hunter access, landowner liability, firearms ordinances, and public perceptions. Hunter access is critical. If hunters cannot gain access to hunt private and public lands, effective deer management likely is not possible. Perceptions of landowner liability and general perceptions of, or a lack of knowledge of, hunting, hunters, and deer ecology can affect hunter access. Further, broad firearms ordinances are statutory in nature and represent a tangible barrier that impedes effective deer management in urban areas. In addressing these issues and consistent with the goal of promoting the use of regulated hunting to manage deer in urban areas, the Committee focused on recommendations to increase and encourage opportunities for regulated hunting.

Legal liability has been identified as a major concern among landowners when considering whether to grant access to hunters. In fact, according to the RMS, most Georgia landowners (78%) indicated that legal liability is a major concern when considering whether to allow hunting. As a result of this perception, legal liability is a reason some landowners have stopped allowing hunting access to their property. This is an important issue of concern with the increasing need for sound deer management and hunting access.

In an effort to encourage landowners to make their lands available to the public for recreational purposes, including hunting and fishing, the Georgia Recreation Property Act (GRPA; OCGA §§51-3-20 through 51-3-26) explicitly shields landowners from civil liability for injuries to persons who use their

land for recreational purposes without charge unless the landowner willfully or maliciously fails to guard against or warn of a dangerous condition, use, structure, or activity. Landowners will not be liable unless they violate this standard of care. Georgia Courts have interpreted this standard of care as the “duty of slight care”, which is lower than that of ordinary care. The GRPA does not grant *total immunity* from liability to landowners who allow public recreation on their land. Rather, the GRPA offers a *limitation* on the duty of care owed by the landowner to recreational users.

Georgia law (OCGA 27-3-1) further extends this same protection to landowners, lessees of land, or lessees of hunting or fishing rights who give permission to another to hunt or fish on their property with or without charge.

According to a recent study by Ron Kaiser and Dr. Brett A. Wright and published in the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation (2002), 637 recreational landowner liability cases have reached the Appellate Courts nationwide. Of these, 307 involved public agencies and 330 involved private landowners. Kaiser and Wright analyzed these cases by state and recreational activity. They grouped recreational activities into 13 categories, including hunting. According to these data, there were 23 cases (5 against public agencies and 18 against private landowners) between 1965 and 2001 in Georgia. Interestingly, there were no recreational injury cases involving hunting. In more than 35 years, there have been no successful Appellate court cases for liability claims against landowners involving hunting activities in Georgia. Accordingly, it appears that Georgia’s recreation liability statutes with respect to hunting activities are among the strongest in the nation. Thus, the perception of landowner liability appears to be greater than the actual liability risks.

Contrary to popular belief, county and municipal governments are not authorized to regulate hunting. Georgia law (OCGA §27-3-1) is specific regarding the authority to regulate hunting with authority given solely to the Department of Natural Resources Board. Local ordinances that regulate hunting (e.g., include language so broad as to prohibit the lawful discharge of firearms, that deliberately prohibit hunting, or extend beyond firearms to include archery equipment) are contrary to the authority provided for in OCGA §27-3-1. While provisions exist in OCGA §27-3-1 allowing political subdivisions to reasonably limit the discharge of firearms for the explicit purpose of “public safety”, this allowance is limited unequivocally to the discharge of firearms. It does not include allowances for prohibitions on discharging archery equipment.

Ordinances prohibiting the discharge of firearms for public safety purposes vary widely and often have the unintended consequence of limiting the effectiveness of regulated hunting. As a result, the probability of DVC increase, presenting a tangible public safety issue. Additionally, damage to landscaping is estimated to cost Georgians \$26,000,000 annually. Addressing this regulatory issue likely requires political subdivisions to revisit their ordinance language and amend their ordinances. These amendments should focus more on irresponsible use of firearms while relaxing restrictions for lawful purposes (e.g., hunting) as opposed to enacting broad prohibitions on discharge of firearms based upon obscure perceptions. Interestingly, according to the RMS, a majority (52%) of Georgians feels that municipalities that pass firearms ordinances, thereby preventing deer hunting, should be required to mitigate deer damage.

Inadvertent impacts on deer management are not the only concern. Broad ordinances prohibiting the discharge of firearms affect the flexibility for private citizens to lawfully protect their persons and property from nuisance wildlife. Firearms, particularly small caliber and air rifles, are important tools homeowners and landowners can lawfully use in controlling certain wildlife species (e.g., squirrels, raccoons, coyotes) that create nuisance situations resulting in property damage. Additionally, the likelihood of wildlife diseases (e.g., rabies, tick diseases, ascarid roundworms, and fecal contamination) communicable to humans can become a considerable public health concern. As counties develop, the probability of these and other wildlife conflicts increase. When firearms ordinances are broad and indiscriminant, the use of the effective tools available to citizens and landowners for managing such problems are unduly restricted or lost.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Committee developed action items to facilitate and encourage regulated hunting as the primary tool for managing urban deer populations. These action items will be considered for implementation by WRD. The Committee recognizes attributes in common and unique to public and private lands. Therefore, public and private lands were considered individually where appropriate.

Public lands identified by the Committee include, but are not limited to: state-owned properties (including State Parks and GDOT holdings), local government lands, university holdings, and camps (FFA, 4H, etc.). Private lands include, but are not limited to: homeowners' association holdings, land trusts, resorts, golf clubs, tracts held by developers and other real estate investment entities, utility company holdings, industrial parks, and private school campuses (K-12 and college).

To encourage and facilitate the use of regulated hunting as the primary tool for managing urban deer populations, the Committee provided the following recommended action items for DNR's consideration.

### **Public & Private Lands**

- Work with appropriate organizations to develop and distribute information for use by local governments, homeowner's associations, and public schools on the need for sound deer management that incorporates regulated hunting as the primary management tool for addressing local deer issues.
- Explore opportunities for modifying existing laws or regulations that can facilitate hunter access and the harvest of deer in urban areas.
- Support legislation that would remove the statewide antler restriction requirements from the buck bag limit for deer harvested in urban areas.
- Encourage and promote venison donation.
- In collaboration with ACCG and GMA, develop a reasonable and uniform model discharge of firearms ordinance that promotes the safe and reasonable use of firearms while maintaining the flexibility needed to manage wildlife conflicts and advocate the adoption of this ordinance by local governments to address firearms discharge issues.
- With QDMA and ACCG, modify and distribute "Living with White-tailed Deer" educational video to local governments and schools citing specific successful case studies of urban deer management in Georgia.
- Work with the General Assembly, and other appropriate agencies, to study tax policies and develop tax strategies that facilitate venison donation to qualified non-profit organizations.
- In cooperation with the Department of Education, seek opportunities to incorporate segments of the Hunter Education course into the Georgia Performance Standards.
- Expand opportunities for youth shooting programs (e.g., GASP) and outdoor adventure days into urban areas.
- Develop public education/marketing campaign that conveys to the general public that safety and sportsmanship are a priority and are taught in the required Hunter Education course.
- Provide information on liability protection in Georgia to local governments, landowners, hunters, homeowners, and others.

- In partnership with ACCG and GMA, assist local governments with the development of ordinances prohibiting the feeding of wildlife (excluding birdfeeders) and encourage their adoption.
- In partnership with ACCG, GMA, and other appropriate government agencies, identify tracts of undeveloped property that may contribute to human-deer conflicts and develop strategies for such properties that encourage hunter access and regulated hunting to address deer management on such properties.

#### Public Lands

- Provide information to the General Assembly to justify passage of a joint resolution acknowledging the need to address urban deer population management on publicly owned lands.
- *Coordinate with ACCG, GMA, and Georgia Recreation and Parks Association to highlight and publicly acknowledge successful management of deer populations through regulated hunting on publicly owned properties in urban and developing areas.*

#### Private Lands

- *Encourage marketing of deer population management through nontraditional outlets (e.g., websites, utility bills, HOA newsletters, etc.) as an opportunity to serve the community, make a contribution to public safety, and responsibly manage deer herds.*
- Develop an online mechanism for landowners and hunters to facilitate hunting access on lands in urban areas.
- Develop an urban deer conservation program that recognizes (e.g., signs for posting property, day at the Capitol, advertisements in media outlets, etc.) participating landowners who allow hunting on their land.
- Develop and provide for landowners information relating to providing access and hunting opportunities on their property.
- Facilitate development of an urban deer hunter proficiency course.
- Develop and maintain a list of qualified groups and organizations willing to assist with urban deer management where hunting is the primary tool.
- Develop and provide for landowners a brochure covering: how to establish a customized hunting program on their property, safety and responsibility, liability, deer population management primer, public health concerns, benefits, and requisite hunter credentials and qualifications.
- Encourage General Assembly to investigate tax policies that provide an incentive to landowners who offer public hunting access.
- Encourage insurance companies to discount policies for landowners opening land to public hunting.
- Develop language for landowner signage/handouts that indicate hunting is occurring on this property and permission is required for access.
- Develop a guide for hunters on how to gain permission to hunt on private lands in an urban environment.

## Alternatives to Hunting

The Committee recognizes the need for an integrated approach to urban deer management and that there are circumstances that may preclude hunting as a viable management tool. However, a comprehensive deer management plan requires the implementation of several management practices to be used in conjunction with hunting. Alternatives may include: habitat modification, exclusion, repellents, trap and relocate, contraception, targeted population reduction by trained wildlife professionals, capture and kill, and predator reintroduction.

The Committee considered habitat modification, exclusion, repellents, trap and relocate, and contraception as alternatives to hunting. Habitat modification is defined in this document as the reduction or elimination of available food, cover, and travel corridors. Habitat modification can reduce the attractiveness of an area to deer; however, it may prove ineffective at high deer densities. Herd reduction prior to the implementation of any habitat modification techniques may enhance effectiveness. Habitat modification is a cost effective, long-term solution, but may not be aesthetically pleasant, may negatively affect other wildlife species, and may affect property values.

Exclusion can be considered for an entire community or an individual landowner. Fencing options include baited single-strand electric, electric polytape, high tensile electric, and woven wire. Fencing options vary widely with respect to initial cost and long-term maintenance. Permanent fencing may be preferable due to significantly lower maintenance than temporary fencing. With fencing, confinement of deer may occur; it is unlawful to confine deer on acreages less than 640 acres. Thus, WRD should be contacted to avoid unlawful actions.

Utilization of visual, auditory and olfactory repellents only should be considered when deer damage is localized (i.e., individual homeowner's landscaping or garden), a short-term concern, or other more effective options are not possible. Repellents should be expected to only reduce deer damage and are most effective at low deer densities. Factors further affecting the effectiveness of repellents include availability of more attractive food sources, ability of deer to become desensitized to the repellent, and climatic conditions. Reapplication and rotation of various repellents is necessary. Repellents are readily available and typically do not impact landscape aesthetics. Although repellents may be made at home, the most effective products are available commercially, but can be cost prohibitive. Repellents are not long-term solutions.

Trapping and relocating deer fails to address the central issue in deer overabundance — population management. This action involves capturing deer alive and relocating them to more rural areas. It requires significant financial and logistical resource costing \$261-567 per deer. Suitable relocation sites are unavailable or already populated with sufficient deer numbers. This method essentially relocates a problem or creates a problem where none previously existed. Additionally, the success rate of relocation is very slim. Susceptibility of deer to traumatic injury and death should be considered. In fact, experiments with live capture and relocation have led to high initial mortality (up to 85%) in relocated deer. **It is** currently illegal to trap and relocate deer in Georgia and this method is not supported by professional wildlife organizations such as The Wildlife Society.

No fertility control agents are federally approved for management of wildlife populations in the United States at this time. However, a gonadotropin-releasing hormone immunocontraceptive vaccine called GonaCon™ is under consideration for approval by the United States Environmental Protection Agency as a registered pesticide and approval is anticipated for Restricted Use. Contraception methods such as pregnancy prevention and termination are not effective for reducing free-ranging deer populations because there is no immediate reduction in deer numbers. Contraception methods are labor intensive, alter deer physiology, may result in unintended reproductive or developmental effects, create unknown public health concerns with regard to human consumption of venison, and are expensive. Research reveals an estimated cost of \$1,000 per deer to adequately treat a deer herd with immunocontraceptives.

Targeted population reduction by trained wildlife professionals, capture and kill, and predator reintroduction are non-hunting lethal actions. Targeted population reduction by trained wildlife professionals is a systematic lethal reduction of deer numbers by trained wildlife professionals. This is the only lethal alternative to hunting recommended by the Committee.

All methods for capture and kill are cost prohibitive and labor intensive. Many of the issues related to trapping and relocation apply.

Predator reintroduction involves restoring native predators such as bobcats, black bears, eastern gray wolves, and eastern mountain lions. The reintroduction of predators in Georgia's urban areas is not a viable option. The lack of a suitable habitat for the predators, mobility of the predators, close proximity to humans, and potential for predators to kill non-target species make this method unsuitable.

After thoughtful consideration and discussion, the Committee decided that the following non-hunting options should be available when hunting is precluded as a viable option: habitat modification, exclusion, repellents, and targeted population reduction by trained wildlife professionals. However, the Committee emphasized that regulated hunting should be the foremost lethal control method. In consideration of non-hunting tools, the Committee provided the following recommended action items for DNR's consideration.

- Targeted population reduction by trained wildlife professionals will only be used as a viable alternative where hunting is not feasible.
- Maintain current system for lethal removal of deer in developed areas (i.e., airport authority employees may be permitted for lethal removal from airports, WRD and USDA-Wildlife Services professional may lethally remove deer from developed areas when it is consistent with the sound principles of wildlife management).
- Collaborate with conservation partners to develop a comprehensive guide for habitat modification that includes a deer-resistant plant list.
- Continue to coordinate with other natural resource agencies to ensure that accurate and consistent information on exclusion and repellents is being disseminated.
- 
- Develop legislation authorizing DNR to regulate the administration of any chemical substance (e.g., contraceptives, fertility control, etc.) to wildlife and recommend General Assembly pass such legislation due to public safety/health concerns.
- Trap and relocate, contraception, capture and kill, and predator reintroduction are neither feasible or suitable for Georgia and should not be tools employed to address urban deer management.
- 
- Educate public as to ineffectiveness and other potential issues with trap and relocate, contraception, capture and kill, and predator reintroduction methods.

## APPENDIX I

### URBAN DEER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

David Colmans  
Georgia Insurance Information Service

The Honorable Sean Jerguson  
State Representative, District 22

Norm Cressman  
Georgia Department of Transportation

Doug Lowry  
Athens-Clarke County Commission

Reggie Dickey  
Georgia Hunting & Fishing Federation

Mike Mengak  
Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources,  
University of Georgia

Glenn Dowling  
Georgia Wildlife Federation

Brian Murphy  
Quality Deer Management Association

Linda Fulmer  
Georgia Animal Control Association

Sid Roberts  
Georgia Sheriffs Association

Jimmy Gisi  
Georgia Recreation and Parks Association

Alton Powell  
Chattahoochee Sportsmen

Chuck Gregory  
Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites

Mike Stewart  
Association of County Commissioners of  
Georgia

Doug Hall  
USDA – Wildlife Services

Ron Storie  
Suburban Whitetail Mgmt of N. Georgia, Inc.

The Honorable Steve Henson  
State Senator, District 41

Marsh Webb  
The Garden Club of Georgia

## APPENDIX II

Counties defined as Urban Areas based on a threshold of 500 people per square mile of land area 2006, 2010, and 2015.

<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2010*</u></b>	<b><u>2015*</u></b>
Bibb	Bibb	Bibb
Chatham	Chatham	Chatham
Clarke	Cherokee	Cherokee
Clayton	Clarke	Clarke
Cobb	Clayton	Clayton
DeKalb	Cobb	Cobb
Douglas	DeKalb	DeKalb
Fayette	Douglas	Douglas
Forsyth	Fayette	Fayette
Fulton	Forsyth	Forsyth
Gwinnett	Fulton	Fulton
Henry	Gwinnett	Gwinnett
Muscogee	Hall	Hall
Richmond	Henry	Henry
Rockdale	Muscogee	Muscogee
	Richmond	Newton
	Rockdale	Paulding
		Richmond
		Rockdale

\* Population estimates used were taken from Office of Planning and Budget population projections.

## APPENDIX III

### Managed Deer Hunts at Fort Yargo State Park, Winder Georgia

Ft. Yargo State Park is a 1,814-acre (1,554 acres of forest and a 260-acre lake) park located within the city limits of Winder, Georgia. The park is surrounded by residential and commercial developments and bordered by State Routes (SR) 81 and 11 (west and east boundary, respectively). The unmanaged deer population was degrading the park ecosystem and contributing to dangerous deer-vehicle collisions on SR 81 and 11.

A habitat evaluation conducted prior to initiating deer management revealed chronic over browsing of vegetation from ground level to 4 feet above ground level throughout the park. Additionally, a visible area spotlight survey was conducted and the deer density was estimated at 81-89 deer per square mile. Deer densities were greater than three times the ecologically acceptable level for habitat in this part of the state.

In its effort to responsibly manage the deer population on Fort Yargo State Park, DNR proposed a regulation establishing two quota firearms hunts to the Board of Natural Resources. DNR worked cooperatively with the City of Winder in developing the proposal, which allows the use of firearms in the Winder city limits. Subsequently, the Winder City Council supported, by unanimous vote, the use of firearms for deer hunting within the boundaries of Fort Yargo State Park. The Board of Natural Resources adopted the proposed regulations in May of 2006. Hunting regulations consisted of two quota hunts - November and January – with a quota limit of 65 hunters. Additionally, each hunter is required to pay a \$30.00 park hunting fee, a \$3.00 ParkPass fee, and attend an orientation meeting the night prior to the hunt. All harvested deer must be checked-out at the designated deer checking station. Biological data are recorded for each harvested deer.

The first hunt occurred in November 2006. Since then, annual deer harvest has averaged 100 deer, annual hunter participation has averaged 48 hunters (a density of 32 acres per hunter), and there have been no protests or public objections to the hunts. The hunts have been revenue neutral.

Park employees believe that there are fewer deer on the property, areas of previous vegetation damage are recovering and that overall ecological integrity of the park is improving. Staff feels management of the deer herd through regulated hunting has improved overall deer health and greatly reduced overbrowsing. Additionally, a 57% reduction in deer-vehicle collisions on SR 81 and 11 occurred in the year following the 2006 hunt.

Park staff considers the managed hunts as a long-term management tool to manage the deer population, address the issues associated with deer in an urban venue, and to facilitate an overall management goal of conserving the Park's natural beauty and ecological integrity.

## APPENDIX IV

### Managed Deer Hunts at a Clayton County Water Authority Facility

The E.L. Huie Facility is an approximate 4,000-acre wastewater land application facility in southern Clayton County near the city of Lovejoy. The Clayton County Water Authority (CCWA) owns and operates the facility. The facility is mostly forested with loblolly pine being the predominant overstory species.

The purpose of the facility is to allow nutrient uptake (primarily, nitrogen and phosphorous) in treated wastewater through direct land application by an extensive irrigation system. The DNR, Environmental Protection Division annually permits the facility.

In 1996, the CCWA Board of Directors (hereafter, Board) authorized deer management at the Huie Facility through hunting in an effort to reduce habitat damage by an overabundant deer herd. By state regulation, only archery equipment is allowed for deer hunting in Clayton County. Hunts were planned to be open to the public on a lottery system basis. Most available slots were reserved for Clayton County and Henry County residents, though nonresident CCWA Board member guests and some nonresident “standby” hunters are allowed.

Hunt applications are submitted in the summer preceding deer hunting season. Applications are available through the CCWA website or at the Huie Facility. A random drawing is held, and selected hunters are assigned designated hunt areas. Hunters are notified of selection results by mail.

Each selected hunter is required to pay a hunt fee before hunting, or risk losing his spot. In 2007 this fee was \$20 or \$30 per hunt weekend depending on the hunter’s county of residence. Guest hunt fees and CCWA employee hunt fees are based on a different structure that confers season long hunting access.

Hunts are scheduled for Friday afternoon and all day Saturday and Sunday on select weekends during the fall deer season. Hunters must check-in and check-out upon entering and leaving the Huie facility. All harvested deer must be checked-out at a designated deer checking station. Biological data are recorded for each harvested deer.

Since 1996, the annual deer harvest from the Huie facility has ranged from 100-200 deer. CCWA personnel who administer the hunts have found that the most practical, efficiently managed number of hunters for each hunt is 134-150. Most designated hunt areas range in size from 4-7 acres, but other areas for season guests and CCWA employees contain more acreage.

CCWA personnel feel that the deer herd has been reduced since the hunts began in 1996 and is now at a biologically acceptable level. Prior to initiation of deer management by CCWA, biologist estimates from survey techniques indicated a deer density of about 100 deer per square mile. CCWA personnel acknowledge that the deer herd has been reduced and much of the natural habitat at the Huie Facility is recovering, benefiting multiple wildlife species, due to a reduction in deer over-browsing. However, to maintain the deer population at the current level, the hunts are planned to continue in future years. CCWA personnel have received many positive comments from local residents who appreciate the additional public hunting opportunity that is allowed through regulated hunting at CCWA.

## APPENDIX V

### Deer Management at Covington/Newton County Land Application Facility

Since 2001, the Covington/Newton County Water and Sewer Authority has used managed hunts to control the deer population at the City of Covington/Newton County Water and Sewerage Authority Land Application Facility (LAF). The LAF is an approximate 1,200-acre area located about 2 miles south of Covington. The mostly forested area is used to spray treated wastewater for excessive nutrient uptake/removal in the Upper Ocmulgee River Basin as permitted by the Environmental Protection Division.

Prior to implementing deer hunts in 2001, LAF employees recognized indications of a burgeoning deer population on the area. Though LAF has been in operation since the late 1980's, Newton County has experienced a tremendous influx of people and associated housing/commercial development in the last 10-years, consistently ranking as one of the fastest growing counties in Georgia and the nation. Along with this growth has come the loss of traditional hunting access on properties surrounding LAF.

LAF employees with assistance from WRD documented several cases of epizootic hemorrhagic disease in deer in the summer of 2000. Evidence of ecological degradation through excessive deer browsing on vegetation within LAF was apparent. Additionally, complaints from the public about DVCs along an adjacent county road (Flat Shoals Rd.) and state highway (Hwy 36) were becoming more common.

Covington city officials met with a WRD wildlife biologist in spring of 2001 to discuss the deer situation and develop long-term solutions. After several options were discussed, all agreed upon using managed deer hunts as the solution. Before hunt plans were finalized, samples from 5 deer were collected by USDA-WS and were shipped for toxicology testing at the University of Pennsylvania. Tests came back negative for excessive heavy metals in muscle and organ tissues.

City and county officials, in consultation with LAF employees and the WRD formulated a series of archery deer hunts to occur during the regular deer season. A hunt application process was put in place for Newton County residents in mid-summer of 2001. Applicants were randomly selected for several designated units on the LAF property. Successful applicants were required to pay a \$25 administrative fee.

Hunts were held every other week on Friday afternoon and all day Saturday throughout most of the deer season (hunt schedule was later amended in subsequent years to provide ½ day Thursday, and all day Friday and Saturday hunts). Mandatory check-in/check-out is required upon entering and leaving the LAF property. Hunters are required to check out all harvested deer and biological data is recorded. Incentives are provided to hunters to harvest female deer in order to best manage the LAF deer herd. These incentives are: hunters who harvest a doe are entered into a raffle for a deer stand and are automatically guaranteed an opportunity to hunt the following season.

Hunts have continued every fall since 2001 with an average annual harvest of 30 to 40 deer. LAF employees believe that there are fewer deer on the property, less vegetation damage now than prior to implementation of hunts, and that the ecological integrity of the habitat is improving. Additionally, LAF employees feel that poaching and other illegal activities have decreased. The hunts have been revenue neutral with any costs of employee overtime pay being offset by revenue acquired through hunter registration fees. Hunter participation has been high, especially through the use of a hunter "stand-by" list.

Overall, LAF personnel believe that the hunts have been a positive experience by helping manage the deer herd on the facility while providing recreational opportunities to Newton County residents. To the knowledge of LAF employees, no protests or other public objection to the managed hunts has occurred. The managed deer hunts are planned to continue for the foreseeable future.



**GEORGIA'S DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN 2015-2024**

**APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX I.

### STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr. John Bowers, Chair  
Social Circle, GA

Dr. Karl Miller  
Athens, GA

Mr. Reggie Dickey  
Springfield, GA

Mr. Brian Murphy  
Bogart, GA

Mr. Todd Edwards  
Atlanta, GA

Mr. Michael Pisciotta  
Commerce, GA

Dr. John Fischer  
Athens, GA

Mr. Steven Smith  
Athens, GA

Mr. Glenn Garner  
Pine Mountain, GA

Mr. Vince Stanley  
Lyons, GA

Senator Tyler Harper  
Ocilla, GA

Mr. Ron Storie  
Kennesaw, GA

Mr. Todd Holbrook  
Covington, GA

Mr. Bubba Sumerlin  
Richmond Hill, GA

Mr. Bobby Holton  
Macon GA

Mr. Scott Tanner  
Atlanta, GA

Mr. Glenn Johnson  
Athens, GA

Mr. Steve Tarvin  
Chickamauga, GA

Representative David Knight  
Griffin, GA

Mr. Jeff Young  
Monroe, GA

Mr. Wesley Langdale, III  
Valdosta, GA

## APPENDIX II

### SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

#### I. MOUNTAINS AND RIDGE & VALLEY SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Brent Womack, Chair  
Armuchee, GA

Mr. Kent Kammermeyer  
Clermont, GA

Mr. Ken Riddleberger, Facilitator  
Gainesville, GA

Mr. Phil Lewis  
Lawrenceville, GA

Mr. Brandon Anderson, Facilitator  
Social Circle, GA

Mr. Joe, Massingill  
Lafayette, GA

Mr. Judson Alden  
Dallas, GA

Dr. Mike Mengak  
Athens, GA

Mrs. Dana Chapman  
Gainesville, GA

Mr. Robert Neel  
White, GA

Representative Emory Dunahoo  
Gainesville, GA

Mr. Dan Oliver  
Lafayette, GA

Mr. Jim Freeman  
Marietta, GA

Mr. Sid Roberts  
Cherry Log, GA

Dr. George Gallagher  
Mount Berry, GA

Mr. Craig Sowers  
Buford, GA

Mr. Johnny Groover  
Cedartown, GA

Dr. James Vick  
Rome, GA

Dr. Will Gulsby  
Colbert, GA

Mr. Jim Wentworth  
Blairsville, GA

Mr. Jimmy Jacobs  
Marietta, GA

## II. PIEDMONT SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Charlie Killmaster, Chair  
Social Circle, GA

Mr. Adam McGinnis  
Monticello, GA

Mr. Lee Taylor, Facilitator  
Thomson, GA

Mr. Keith Mitcham  
Covington, GA

Mr. Rusty Garrison, Facilitator  
Mansfield, GA

Mr. David Osborn  
Athens, GA

Mr. Billy Bouchillon  
Covington, GA

Mr. Kym Partridge  
Fortson, GA

Mr. Stephen Cash  
Eatonton, GA

Mr. Jeff Phillips  
Cumming, GA

Mr. Cory Croft  
Hamilton, GA

Mr. Leif Stephens  
Athens, GA

Mr. Frank Flanders  
Griffin, GA

Mr. Jim Stickle  
Athens, GA

Mr. Lee Floyd  
Chamblee, GA

Mr. Fred Wammock  
Eatonton, GA

Mr. Tommy Hunter  
Buford, GA

Representative Chuck Williams  
Watkinsville, GA

Mr. Tommy Key  
Pine Mountain, GA

Mr. Donnie Wood  
Columbus, GA

### III. UPPER COASTAL PLAIN SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr. James Tomberlin, Chair  
Dublin, GA

Mr. Graylen Hall  
Vienna, GA

Mr. John Kilpatrick, Facilitator  
Albany, GA

Mr. Matt Haun  
Winder, GA

Reggie Thackston, Facilitator  
Forsyth, GA

Mr. Daymond Hughes  
Albany, GA

Mr. Nick Baker  
Leesburg, GA

Mr. Aubrey Iler  
Newton, GA

Mr. Greg Barlow  
Eastman, GA

Mr. Jim Overman  
Bainbridge, GA

Mr. Jeff Blackstone  
Hephzibah, GA

Mr. Trae Sims  
Cordele, GA

Dr. Mike Conner  
Newton, GA

Mr. Brant Slay  
Omaha, GA

Mr. Dan Fletcher  
Columbus, GA

Mr. Alan Woodward  
Vienna, GA

Mr. Ronnie Gaskins  
Tifton, GA

Mr. James Youmans, Jr  
Swainsboro, GA

#### IV. FLATWOODS/LOWER COASTAL PLAIN SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Will Ricks, Chair  
Brunswick, GA

Mr. Jimmy Henderson  
Richmond Hill, GA

Dr. Jon Ambrose, Facilitator  
Social Circle, GA

Mr. Rob Hicks  
Brunswick, GA

Mr. Walter Lane, Facilitator  
Social Circle, GA

Mr. Robert Jones, Jr.  
Brunswick, GA

Mr. Alan Bennett  
Dupont, GA

Mr. Daniel Morris  
Waycross, GA

Mr. Jay Childers  
Saint Simons, GA

Mr. Colin Myerson  
Fargo, GA

Mr. Mike Deal  
Jesup, GA

Mr. Eddie Overstreet  
Glynn County, GA

Mr. Dave Edwards  
Woodbine, GA

Mr. Camron Owens  
Brunswick, GA

Mr. Jim Gowen  
Folkston, GA

Mr. Jon Smith  
Savannah, GA

Mr. Cliff Grant  
Valdosta, GA

Mr. Lindsay Thomas, Jr.  
Watkinsville, GA

**APPENDIX III**  
**PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARIES**

**I. MOUNTAINS AND RIDGE & VALLEY PUBLIC MEETINGS SUMMARY**

A total of 16 people attended the Dalton and Gainesville public meetings. Fifteen of the 16 participants were male with 1 being female. The age of the participants ranged from 28-72 with the average age being 53. Of that 25% were from Whitfield County, 12.5% from Floyd County, with the remainder from Jackson, Hall, Clarke, Gwinnett, Cherokee, White, Forsyth, and Catoosa counties, respectively. Of the 16 attendees, 100% identified themselves as hunters, 44% as landowners, and 19% as farmers. Landowners (7) owned land in Catoosa, Floyd, Forsyth, Jackson, Lumpkin, Walker and Whitfield counties. Property size ranged from 5-700 acres with the average being 128 acres. Most landowners (6 of 7) owned less than 65 acres.

Counties listed where attendees hunted included: Whitfield, Lumpkin, Floyd, Putnam, Franklin, White, Towns, Dawson, Jones, Jackson, McIntosh, Murray, Catoosa, and Taylor. Most (94%) of the participants indicated they deer hunt public land, 34% deer hunt land they own, and 94% indicated they deer hunt other private land. Additionally, 75% of the participants indicated they hunt small game.

When asked about the status of the deer population where they lived, 6 (38%) felt the population is about what is needed, 5 (31.2%) felt they had too many deer, 4 (25%) felt they had too few deer, and 1 (6.3%) did not know. When asked about the status of the deer population where they hunted, 7 (44%) felt that there were too few deer, 7(44%) felt the deer population is about what is needed, and 2 (13%) felt they had too many deer.

We asked participants to list the best ways for the Wildlife Resources Division to provide them information. Email (52%) was the preferred method to provide information. Participants also selected WRD website (25%), Hunting Regulations (25%), Social media/press releases (11%), and direct mail (7.5%).

**II. PIEDMONT PUBLIC MEETINGS SUMMARY**

A total of 49 people attended meetings held for public comment in McDonough, Newnan, Marietta, and Greensboro. Of that 49, 25(51%) were landowners in Bartow, Butts, Carroll, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Fulton, Gilmer, Greene, Heard, Henry, Jefferson, Oglethorpe, Pulaski, Putnam, Screven, Talbot, Twiggs, Washington, and Wilkinson counties. Land ownership ranged from 1 to 580 acres. Forty-six (94%) were hunters, five (10%) were farmers, and three (6%) were non-hunters.

Counties listed where our participants hunted included: Bartow, Butts, Cherokee, Cobb, Coweta, Crawford, Fulton, Hancock, Heard, Henry, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Monroe, Oglethorpe, Pickens, Pulaski, Putnam, Stewart, Talbot, Twiggs, Upson, Walton, and Washington counties. Twenty-five (51%) of the participants responded that they hunted deer on public lands, 24 (49%) on their own lands, and 39 (80%) on other private lands. Twenty-two (45%) responded that they are small game hunters. None of our participants were opposed to hunting.

When asked about the status of the deer population where they lived, 12 (24%) felt the population is about what is needed, four (8%) felt as though there were too many deer, and 29 (59%) felt there are too few deer. Four (8%) individuals responded, “don’t know”. When asked about the status of the deer population where they hunted, 11 (22%) felt it is about what is needed. Thirty-five (71%) felt that there were too few deer and no one responded that there were too many.

When asked about the best method for WRD to provide information to them, twenty-three (47%) felt the popular guide was best, seven (14%) said social media, 13 (27%) said the WRD website, twenty-five (51%) said email, five (10%) said direct mail, and two (4%) said press release.

Participants were composed of 48 males and one female. Age of participants ranged from 16 to 78 with the majority of the participants being between 40 and 70 (67%).

### **III. UPPER COASTAL PLAIN MEETINGS SUMMARY**

A total of 16 participants attended the meetings in Albany and Perry. Eight (8; 50%) of the participants were landowners in Taylor, Houston, Webster, Peach, Dougherty, and Murray Counties. Land ownership ranged from 0.5 to 300 acres. Of these, Three (19%) were farmers.

Of the participants, 16 (100%) were hunters. Counties listed where participants hunted were: Houston, Taylor, Bibb, Crawford, Twiggs, Dodge, Webster, Peach, Laurens, Muscogee, Terrell, Telfair, Murray, and Gordon. Of the participants, nine (56%) hunted deer on public lands, five (31%) hunted on their own land, and 12 (75%) hunted on other private lands. Eight (50%) responded that they were small game hunters.

When asked about the status of the deer population where they lived, four (25%) felt the deer population is about what is needed, one (6%) felt as though there were too many deer, two (13%) indicated that they didn't know, and nine (56%) felt there were too few deer. When asked about the status of the deer population where they hunted, six (38%) felt it is about what is needed, eight (50%) responded that there were too few deer, one (6%) responded there were too many, and one (6%) indicated they didn't know.

Regarding the best way for WRD to provide information to the participants, one (6%) of the participants preferred direct mail, six (38%) preferred email, three (19%) responded they preferred to receive information online through the WRD website, nine (56%) preferred to receive information via the hunting regulations, two (13%) preferred to receive a press release, and four (25%) preferred social media.

Participants were composed of 16 males. Age of participants ranged from 26 to 67, with the majority of participants being between 40 and 65.

### **IV. FLATWOODS/LOWER COASTAL PLAIN PUBLIC MEETINGS SUMMARY**

A total of 15 people attended the Waycross and Statesboro meetings. Of that 14 (93%) were landowners, 5 (33%) were landowners, and 4 (26%) were farmers.

Counties listed where our participants hunted included: Evans, Screven, Effingham, Bulloch, Brantley, Glynn, Atkinson, Ware, Berrien, Clinch, and Lowndes Counties. Five (33%) of the participants stated they hunted on public land while 14 (93%) of the participants hunted on private land.

When asked about the status of the deer population where they lived, 7 (47%) felt the population was too small, two (13%) felt there were too many deer, and 6 (40%) felt the population is about what is needed. When asked about the status of the deer population where they hunted, 7 (47%) felt the population was too small, three (20%) felt there were too many deer, and 5 (33%) felt the population is about what is needed.

Participants were comprised of 14 males and one female. The age ranged from 20 to 84 with an even distribution of ages.

## APPENDIX IV

### PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

This appendix contains a summary of comments submitted by public meeting participants, written and mailed to WRD, and emailed through the WRD website. Comments were organized by key deer management issue and comments from public meetings were organized by region. A total of 298 individuals submitted comments; of which 193 submitted comments by email, 2 mailed their comments, and 103 submitted comments at one of ten public meetings.

<b>DEER SEASONS</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
<b>Dates/length of hunting seasons</b>						
Satisfied with current season structure	40	25	10	2	2	1
Supports extending archery season	19	13	5			1
Supports a shorter deer season	29	22	4		1	2
Supports opening season later and closing later	29	21	7	1		
Supports opening season earlier	3	2				1
Supports removing muzzleloader season	4	3				1
Supports extending muzzleloader season	8	3	2		2	1
Supports a single season with all legal weapons types	2	2				
Supports lengthening rifle season	6	1	2	1		2
Supports adding a shotgun season	1		1			
<b>Number and timing of either-sex days</b>						
Satisfied with current either-sex days	12	10	1	1		
Supports season-long either-sex days	42	29	5	3	4	1
Supports fewer either-sex days	39	24	9	1	2	3
Supports buck-only days at the beginning of season	15	10	4			1
Supports setting either-sex days based on science	21	16	3		1	1
<b>Deer season impacts to other hunting opportunities</b>						
Open rabbit season later to minimize conflicts	1	1				
Supports reinstating December break	9	6	3			
Deer season is currently too long	3	2			1	
There are no impacts to other hunting, or don't care	4	4				
Deer season should not be impacted by other hunting	1	1				
<b>Season as related to deer zones</b>						
Supports a uniform, statewide season with no zones	40	34	5			1
Opposes a uniform, statewide season; maintain current zones	10	6	3			1

<b>DEER BAG LIMITS</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
Favors decreasing buck and doe limits for non-residents	1	1				
DNR should have authority to control the bag limit	2	1	1			
<b>Bag limit for bucks</b>						
Satisfied with the existing buck bag limit	79	54	14	6	4	1
Supports reducing the buck bag limit	16	15	1			
Supports increasing the buck bag limit	19	11	1	2	1	4
Button bucks should count against the buck bag limit	2	2				
Favors earn-a-buck where a doe must be taken first	1	1				
Favors separate bag limits for each weapon type	3	3				
<b>Bag limit for antlerless deer</b>						
Satisfied with the existing antlerless bag limit	21	15	5			1
Supports reducing the antlerless bag limit	165	111	29	14	6	5
Supports increasing the antlerless bag limit	2		1			1
Favors imposing a daily limit on antlerless deer	1	1				
<b>Harvest reporting</b>						
Supports implementing a mandatory harvest reporting system	76	49	13	3	3	8
Opposes implementing a mandatory harvest reporting system	10	10				
<b>Harvest tagging</b>						
Supports mandatory physical tagging of deer	53	37	8	2	2	4
Opposes mandatory physical tagging of deer	15	13	1			1

<b>HUNTING METHODS &amp; EQUIPMENT</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
Number of people	<b>298</b>	195	49	17	15	22
<b>Use of suppressors for hunting</b>						
Opposes legalizing suppressors for hunting	<b>24</b>	14	5	2	1	2
Supports legalizing suppressors for hunting	<b>38</b>	18	12	4	3	1
Supports legalizing suppressors for predator hunting only	<b>1</b>	1				
<b>Dog-deer hunting</b>						
Supports the existing regulations for dog-deer hunting	<b>16</b>	13	1		1	1
Ban dog-deer hunting in Georgia	<b>11</b>	4	4	2		1
Remove Grady Co. from dog hunting	<b>1</b>	1				
Decrease the minimum acreage for dog-deer hunting	<b>1</b>				1	
Favors stricter regulations for dog-deer hunting	<b>4</b>	2	2			
Dog-deer hunting regulations are not adequately enforced	<b>1</b>		1			
<b>Hunting over bait</b>						
Supports the existing law	<b>13</b>	6	4		2	1
Allow baiting in Northern Zone	<b>77</b>	58	15	2		2
Should be unlawful statewide	<b>34</b>	18	8	4	2	2
Don't care, but same law statewide	<b>15</b>	13	2			
<b>Other methods/equipment</b>						
Supports current regulations on methods	<b>2</b>	2				
Don't allow harvest of spotted fawns or does w/ fawns	<b>2</b>	2				
Limit magazine capacity for hunting	<b>2</b>	2				
Allow electronic calls for deer	<b>2</b>	1			1	
Allow knife/spear for hunting deer	<b>1</b>	1				
Allow pre-1880 rifles as primitive weapons	<b>1</b>		1			
Allow crossbows for handicap only	<b>2</b>	1	1			
Don't allow night vision for hunting	<b>1</b>	1				
Increase minimum caliber for deer	<b>1</b>	1				
No automatic weapons	<b>1</b>	1				
Allow removal of orange in deer stand	<b>1</b>	1				
Allow buckshot on WMAs	<b>1</b>				1	

<b>DEER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
<b>Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)</b>						
Supports implementing DMAP	28	15	7	1	2	3
Does not support implementing DMAP	1	1				
<b>Antler restrictions</b>						
Antler restrictions on both bucks	43	31	6	1	4	1
Keep current statewide restrictions	22	18	2		1	1
More county antler restrictions	11	7	3		1	
More antler restrictions on WMAs	5	4				1
Don't apply restrictions to youth/senior/first buck	5	3	2			
Remove county antler restrictions	3	3				
Remove all antler restrictions	11	9	2			
Change statewide antler restrictions	7	4		1	1	1
Change county antler restrictions	2	2				
Remove spikes from herd	1	1				
Release genetically improved deer	3	1	1	1		
<b>Predator management</b>						
Current tactics adequate	6	5	1			
Lift restrictions on coyotes/hogs (no license, baiting,etc)	6	5	1			
DNR trapping/hunting program	13	8	4	1		
Implement bounty on coyotes	13	8	2	2	1	
Do not implement bounty	3	3				
Solve predation through research/education/seminars	12	8	4			
Make predator control unlawful	1	1				
Allow trapping on WMAs	2	2				
Something needs to be done	22	12	4		4	2
Increase coyote hunting on public land	6	3	3			
<b>Regulation by zone, region, statewide</b>						
Manage by different zones	26	12	6		2	6
Counties should manage deer by voting	2	2				
Let biologists decide	3	2				1

<b>HUNTER ACCESS</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
DNR does a good job	6	4	1			1
<b>Hunter access to public lands</b>						
Maintain current level	4	4				
Allow access to WMAs outside season	2	2				
More archery only WMAs	2	2				
Archery all season on WMAs	4	2	1			1
More quota hunts	5	1	2		1	1
Reduce deer harvest on public land	9	5	3			1
Fill quotas with residents first	1	1				
More days to deer hunt	20	10	5	1	1	3
Keep diversity in WMA deer regulations	1	1				
Allow dog training year-round	1	1				
Mark boundaries better	1	1				
Allow wheelchair hunter to hunt from vehicle	1	1				
Improve roads/open gates on WMAs	3	2	1			
Allow game retrieval on closed roads	1		1			
Improve WMA hunt scheduling	1		1			
Public land is too dangerous for access	2	1	1			
GORP on more WMAs	3		3			
Hold pay hunts on some WMAs	1		1			
More primitive weapons hunts	1	1				
<b>Hunter access to private lands</b>						
Require written permission	5	4	1			
Provide incentives to landowners to allow hunting	7	7				
Provide more access to private land	3		3			
Increase liability protection for landowners	3	3				
Access to retrieve game without permission	1	1				
<b>Land acquisition</b>						
No more acquisition	1		1			
Adequate	2	2				
Increase	27	13	5	1	3	5
<b>Deer hunting on parks, municipal properties</b>						
Adequate	2	2				
Make them all archery only	1	1				
DNR identify these areas and encourage hunting	37	12	20	2	1	2

<b>PRIVATIZATION OF WILDLIFE</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
<b>Using artificial breeding techniques for deer</b>						
Supports current law	57	26	19	1	4	7
Does not support current law	7	6	1			
<b>Hunting non-native or farmed deer</b>						
Supports current law	59	26	20	2	4	7
Does not support current law	7	5	2			
<b>Importation of live deer</b>						
Supports current law	63	28	22	2	4	7
Does not support current law	2	1	1			
Stock elk in GA	1	1				
<b>Hunting wild, white-tailed deer in high fenced</b>						
Supports current regulation	24	7	12	1	2	2
Should be unlawful	36	21	11		2	2
Require annual inspection	2	1			1	

<b>DEER DENSITY</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
<b>Remain the same, stabilize statewide</b>						
North	1	1				
South	1		1			
<b>Increase statewide</b>						
Increase in north GA	3		2			1
Increase in south GA						
Increase on National Forest	1	1				
<b>Decrease statewide</b>						
Decrease in north GA	1	1			2	
Decrease in south GA	1	1				

<b>DEER CONFLICT MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
Maintain existing tactics	3	2	1			
<b>Deer-vehicle collisions (DVCs)</b>						
Nothing can be done	3	2	1			
Insurance companies should pay for deer removal	1	1				
Insurance companies should waive deductible for DVCs	1	1				
Increase right-of way	1	1				
Educate drivers to avoid deer	2	1	1			
DOT should stop planting clover on roadsides	2				2	
More research on preventing DVCs is needed	1				1	
Require deer whistles on all vehicles	1			1		
Fence roadsides	1	1				
<b>Controlling urban deer populations</b>						
Increase hunting opportunity	43	22	12	6	1	2
Encourage doe harvest over bucks	5	5				
Provide incentives for landowners to allow hunting	2	2				
Allow baiting in metro counties	2					2
Extend firearms season in metro counties	1					1
Use sharpshooters to reduce deer numbers	1		1			
Trap and relocate deer	2	1		1		
<b>Agricultural Damage</b>						
Maintain current system	11	8	2	1		
Don't issue crop permits/too many deer killed	10	5	2	1	2	
Charge fee for crop permits	1	1				
Encourage farmers to allow hunting	9	8				1
Allow depredation harvest with no permit	1	1				
Donate all venison, DNR should pay processing fees	1	1				
Increase permit enforcement	6	5	1			
<b>Social limits on deer density</b>						
Only hunters should be able to dictate deer density	1	1				

<b>EDUCATION &amp; OUTREACH EFFORTS BY DNR</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
Keep up the good work	13	8	2			3
Like the deer plan process	1	1				
<b>Hunter recruitment &amp; retention</b>						
Increase youth hunts/shooting sports	5	2	1		1	1
Increase game populations	6	4	2			
Simplify regulations	1	1				
More hunt and learn programs	8	4	3			1
More hunts/programs for women	1					1
<b>Connecting with customers</b>						
Keep up the good work	1					1
More social media	3	2				1
More field days/seminars	8	4	4			
Add more apps/features	1	1				
Target non-hunters on the importance of hunting	2	2				
Website needs improvement	1	1				
Get rid of ads in hunting regulations	1	1				
More public meetings	1		1			
More TV programming	1					1
More information about aging deer	1		1			
Allow more speaking time at public meetings	1	1				
<b>Policy advocacy</b>						
Hunter groups should be more active	1	1				
<b>Involvement of non-government organizations</b>						
Continue to work with existing groups	4	4				
Form hunter advocacy group	2	2				
Partner with NRA	1	1				

<b>MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
<b>Wildlife diseases</b>						
Provide more info on diseases to hunters	5	3	2			
Ban feeding of wildlife	4	4				
Maintain closed borders for importation	5	2		1	1	1
Conduct random CWD testing	1		1			
<b>Funding for wildlife management</b>						
Adequate	1	1				
Charge fee for urban hunts	1	1				
Seek sales tax percentage	4	4				
Increase tax dollars to DNR	1	1				
Make sure license fees don't go to General Fund	4	2		2		
Hold fundraisers	1		1			
More information on funding to public	1		1			
Charge fee for quota hunts	1	1				
<b>License fees &amp; structure</b>						
Maintain current fees	4	3			1	
Increase resident fees	21	15	3	1		2
Decrease resident fees						
Increase non-resident fees	23	17	3	1		2
Decrease non-resident fees	9	6		2	1	
Provide discounts for good behavior	1	1				
Reinstate reciprocal agreement	5	5				
Cheaper license for non-resident landowners	3	3				
Charge fee for baiting	4	3	1			
Reduce senior license age to 55	1	1				
Increase WMA license for food plots	2	2				
Decrease fees for under 18	1					1
Longer grace period for license renewal	1					1
Charge fee for additional deer	5	3				2
Only require license for hunters 21 and up	1	1				
Should use GA company to sell licenses	2	2				

<b>MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES continued</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Email/ written</b>	<b>Piedmont</b>	<b>UCP</b>	<b>FLCP</b>	<b>MRV</b>
<b>Law enforcement</b>						
LE is adequate	1		1			
Increase fines	5	4		1		
Stop LE access to private land without consent	1	1				
Stop aerial and infrared surveillance without consent	1	1				
Use more road blocks	2	2				
Hire more rangers	16	12	4			
More patrolling	8	4	4			
More LE on public land	2	2				
Rangers need more customer service training	4	4				
Spend more time on wildlife than drugs	1	1				
Put LE back under WRD	5	5				
Make state/fed rules consistent	1	1				
Local LE should patrol lakes	1	1				
Raffle for those that report violations	1	1				
Too many warnings, not enough tickets	1	1				

## APPENDIX V

### PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY FOR DRAFT PLAN

This appendix contains a summary of comments on the Draft Deer Management Plan 2015-2024 submitted by public meeting participants, written and mailed to WRD, and emailed through the WRD website. Comments were organized by key deer management issue and comments from public meetings were organized by region. A total of 572 individuals submitted comments; of which 179 submitted comments by email, 8 mailed their comments, and 385 submitted comments at one of eight public meetings.

	Meetings	Email/ Written	Total
Number of people	385	187	572
DNR is doing a great job, thank you!	4	9	13
Support the draft deer plan as written	5	4	9
Deer plan should be more specific	1		1
Update/explain data and figures in the plan	2		2
10 years is too long for the deer plan	1		1
<b>DEER SEASONS</b>			
<b>Dates/length of hunting seasons</b>			
Satisfied with current season structure	1	7	8
Supports extending archery season	1	6	7
Supports a shorter firearms season	3	4	7
Supports opening season later and closing later	7	11	18
Supports extending muzzleloader season	2	3	5
Supports a single season with all legal weapons types		4	4
Supports lengthening rifle season	1	10	11
Supports adding a shotgun season		1	1
Move primitive weapons to after firearms season	1		1
<b>Number and timing of either-sex days</b>			
Satisfied with current either-sex days	1	2	3
Supports season-long either-sex days	9	16	25
Supports fewer either-sex days	1	14	15
Supports buck-only days at the beginning of season	3		3
Supports buck-only days at the end of season	2	1	3
Either-sex days should be spread out		2	2
Supports setting either-sex days based on science	2	2	4
<b>Deer season impacts to other hunting opportunities</b>			
Supports reinstating December break	2	6	8
Deer season is currently too long		2	2
Concerned about impacts of extending deer season	3	1	4
<b>Season as related to deer zones</b>			
Supports a uniform, statewide season with no zones	17	25	42
Opposes a uniform, statewide season; maintain current zones	2	2	4

	Meetings	Email/ Written	Total
<b>DEER BAG LIMITS</b>			
DNR should have authority to control the bag limit	5	12	<b>17</b>
<b>Bag limit for bucks</b>			
Satisfied with the existing buck bag limit	1	10	<b>11</b>
Supports reducing the buck bag limit	1	9	<b>10</b>
Supports increasing the buck bag limit		3	<b>3</b>
<b>Bag limit for antlerless deer</b>			
Satisfied with the existing antlerless bag limit	4	3	<b>7</b>
Supports reducing the antlerless bag limit	30	91	<b>121</b>
Supports increasing the antlerless bag limit		1	<b>1</b>
<b>Harvest reporting</b>			
Supports implementing a mandatory harvest reporting system	9	17	<b>26</b>
Opposes implementing a mandatory harvest reporting system	2		<b>2</b>
Harvest record should be mailed in	2		<b>2</b>
<b>Harvest tagging</b>			
Supports mandatory physical tagging of deer	3	12	<b>15</b>
Opposes mandatory physical tagging of deer		2	<b>2</b>
<b>HUNTING METHODS &amp; EQUIPMENT</b>			
Number of people			
<b>Use of suppressors for hunting</b>			
Opposes legalizing suppressors for hunting		2	<b>2</b>
Supports legalizing suppressors for hunting		3	<b>3</b>
Supports legalizing suppressors for predator hunting only		1	<b>1</b>
Opposes ban on sub-sonic ammunition	4	1	<b>5</b>
<b>Dog-deer hunting</b>			
Opposed to dog-deer hunting		3	<b>3</b>
Increase number of dog hunting counties	5	1	<b>6</b>
Favors stricter regulations for dog-deer hunting		1	<b>1</b>
<b>Hunting over bait</b>			
Supports the existing law	6	4	<b>10</b>
Allow baiting in Northern Zone	21	22	<b>43</b>
Should be unlawful statewide		18	<b>18</b>
Don't care, but same law statewide		7	<b>7</b>
<b>Other methods/equipment</b>			
Limit magazine capacity for hunting		1	<b>1</b>
Don't allow scopes on muzzleloaders		1	<b>1</b>
Allow removal of orange in deer stand		1	<b>1</b>

	Meetings	Email/ Written	Total
<b>DEER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES</b>			
<b>Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)</b>			
Supports implementing DMAP	9	9	<b>18</b>
Does not support implementing DMAP	3	3	<b>6</b>
Interested, but need more information	1		<b>1</b>
<b>DEER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES</b>			
<b>Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) cont...</b>			
Should be fee-based		1	<b>1</b>
Should not be used as a regulatory tool	1		<b>1</b>
<b>Antler restrictions</b>			
Antler restrictions on both bucks	4	9	<b>13</b>
Keep current statewide restrictions	1	2	<b>3</b>
More county antler restrictions		2	<b>2</b>
More antler restrictions on WMAs		1	<b>1</b>
Don't apply restrictions to youth/senior/first buck	1	3	<b>4</b>
Remove county antler restrictions		2	<b>2</b>
Remove all antler restrictions	1	5	<b>6</b>
Change statewide antler restrictions		2	<b>2</b>
<b>Predator management</b>			
Lift restrictions on coyotes/hogs (no license, baiting,etc)	4	4	<b>8</b>
Landowners shouldn't need a trapping license	1		<b>1</b>
DNR trapping/hunting program	2	5	<b>7</b>
Implement bounty on coyotes	3	10	<b>13</b>
Do not implement bounty		1	<b>1</b>
Solve predation through research/education/seminars	2	6	<b>8</b>
Allow trapping on WMAs	1	1	<b>2</b>
Something needs to be done about coyotes	14	28	<b>42</b>
Increase coyote hunting on public land	1	4	<b>5</b>
Maintain existing trapping laws and regulations	7		<b>7</b>
Oppose the use of land snares	8		<b>8</b>
Increase bear harvest	4		<b>4</b>
Encourage timber companies to allow trapping	2		<b>2</b>
<b>Regulation by zone, region, statewide</b>			
Manage by different zones	2	3	<b>5</b>
Let biologists decide		5	<b>5</b>

	Meetings	Email/ Written	Total
<b>HUNTER ACCESS</b>			
DNR does a good job		1	1
<b>Hunter access to public lands</b>			
Reduce deer harvest on public land		5	5
More days to deer hunt		1	1
Improve roads/open gates on WMAs	1	1	2
Allow game retrieval on closed roads	1	1	2
Improve WMA hunt scheduling		1	1
More primitive weapons hunts		1	1
More food plots on WMAs	3	2	5
More shooting ranges	1		1
More bonus tags on WMAs	2		2
Allow all handicaps on wheelchair hunts	2		2
<b>HUNTER ACCESS</b>			
<b>Hunter access to public lands cont...</b>			
Allow stand-by on quota hunts		1	1
<b>Hunter access to private lands</b>			
Provide incentives to landowners to allow hunting	2	1	3
Encourage hunter/landowner partnerships	3	1	4
Increase liability protection for landowners		1	1
Access to retrieve game without permission	2		2
<b>Land acquisition</b>			
No more acquisition	1		1
Increase		2	2
<b>Deer hunting on parks, municipal properties</b>			
Only youth should be allowed to hunt parks	1		1
<b>PRIVATIZATION OF WILDLIFE</b>			
<b>Using artificial breeding techniques for deer</b>			
Supports current law	6	1	7
Does not support current law	1		1
<b>Hunting non-native or farmed deer</b>			
Supports current law	1	3	4
<b>Importation of live deer</b>			
Supports current law	1	3	4
<b>Hunting wild, white-tailed deer in high fenced</b>			
Should be unlawful		1	1

	Meetings	Email/ Written	Total
<b>OTHER ISSUES</b>			
Require landowners to allow others to take excess deer	1		1
Require landowners to reforest clearcuts within 2 years	1		1
Increase restrictions on loaded weapons on WMAs		1	1
Revise Farm Bill for better habitat	1		1
Landowners should set hunting regulations	1	1	2
Solve the hog problem	1	2	3
No hunting within 50 feet of a property line	1		1
Invite legislators to public meetings	1		1
Concerned about timber companies spraying herbicides	6		6
Increase Hunters for the Hungry		1	1
Ensure new technology is fair chase		1	1
Change primitive weapons to muzzleloader		1	1
Keep politics out of deer management	5		5
Oppose fracking in Georgia	1		1
Supports a hog donation program	1		1
Hunters/landowners take more responsibility for managing deer	2		2
Form better partnerships with US Forest Service	1		1
Increase timber harvest on National Forests	1		1
<b>DEER DENSITY</b>			
<b>Increase statewide</b>	5	2	7
Increase in north GA	2	2	4
Increase in south GA		2	2
Increase on National Forest		2	2
<b>Decrease statewide</b>	1	1	2
Decrease in north GA		1	1
Decrease in south GA	2		2
<b>DEER CONFLICT MANAGEMENT</b>			
<b>Deer-vehicle collisions (DVCs)</b>			
Educate drivers to avoid deer		1	1
<b>Controlling urban deer populations</b>			
Increase hunting opportunity		3	3
Provide incentives for landowners to allow hunting	1		1
Use sharpshooters to reduce deer numbers		1	1
Use DMAP to help control urban deer	1		1
Trap and relocate deer	1		1
Allow fertility control to reduce urban deer	1		1
Pay attention to urban ecosystem damage	1		1
Maintain flexible harvest regulations	1		1
Allow sharpshooting by private companies	1		1

	Meetings	Email/ Written	Total
<b>Agricultural Damage</b>			
Don't issue crop permits/too many deer killed		2	2
Allow depredation harvest with no permit		1	1
Donate all venison, DNR should pay processing fees		1	1
Increase permit enforcement	1		1
<b>EDUCATION &amp; OUTREACH EFFORTS BY DNR</b>			
Keep up the good work	2		2
<b>Hunter recruitment &amp; retention</b>			
Increase youth hunts/shooting sports	1	4	5
Simplify regulations	1	1	2
Increase minimum age to hunt unsupervised	1	1	2
Direct recruitment programs at adults	1		1
<b>MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES</b>			
<b>Funding for wildlife management</b>			
Seek sales tax percentage	1		1
Increase tax dollars to DNR	1	1	2
<b>License fees &amp; structure</b>			
Increase resident fees		3	3
Increase non-resident fees	1	2	3
Decrease non-resident fees		2	2
<b>MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES</b>			
<b>License fees &amp; structure cont...</b>			
Charge fee for additional deer		1	1
Make it easier to purchase license	1		1
Non-residents from GA should pay resident, or reduced fee	1		1
<b>MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES continued</b>			
<b>Law enforcement</b>			
Increase fines/penalties; same fines statewide	7	4	11
Stop LE access to private land without consent		1	1
Establish violations for processors accepting unrecorded deer	1		1
Hire more rangers	4	2	6
More patrolling		2	2
Rangers need more customer service training		1	1
<b>Total comments</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>542</b>	<b>871</b>

APPENDIX VI

# Responsive Management™



## DEER MANAGEMENT IN GEORGIA: SURVEY OF RESIDENTS, HUNTERS, AND LANDOWNERS

Conducted for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
by Responsive Management

2013

# **DEER MANAGEMENT IN GEORGIA: SURVEY OF RESIDENTS, HUNTERS, AND LANDOWNERS**

**2013**

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to determine residents', hunters', and landowners' opinions on deer management and deer hunting regulations in the state. The study entailed a telephone survey of three groups: residents, hunters, and landowners.

For the survey, telephones were selected as the preferred sampling medium because of the almost universal ownership of telephones (both landlines and cell phones were called). Additionally, telephone surveys, relative to mail or Internet surveys, allow for more scientific sampling and data collection, provide higher quality data, obtain higher response rates, are more timely, and are more cost-effective. Telephone surveys also have fewer negative effects on the environment than do mail surveys because of reduced use of paper and reduced energy consumption for delivering and returning the questionnaires.

The telephone survey questionnaire was developed cooperatively by Responsive Management and the DNR. Responsive Management conducted pre-tests of the questionnaire to ensure proper wording, flow, and logic in the survey.

The survey used three samples: residents in general, hunters, and landowners. Residents were sampled proportional to where they lived (i.e., counties with greater populations had greater sample). The resident sample was representative of all residents across the state. The sample of hunters consisted of all license holders who were allowed to hunt deer. The sample of landowners was stratified to obtain 100 completed interviews from counties in which hunting for deer with dogs is allowed throughout the entire county (for convenience hereinafter referred to as "entire dog counties"), 50 interviews from counties in which hunting for deer with dogs is allowed in only part of the county ("partial dog counties"), and 50 interviews from counties in which hunting for deer with dogs is not allowed in any part of the county ("no dog counties").

Telephone surveying times are Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Saturday from noon to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., local time. The survey was conducted in August 2013. The software used for data collection was Questionnaire Programming Language. Responsive Management obtained 807 completed interviews with residents, 825 completed interviews with hunters who hunted deer in the past 2 years in Georgia, and 200 completed interviews with landowners who owned at least 20 contiguous acres.

The analysis of data was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences as well as proprietary software developed by Responsive Management. The analysis considered the three samples separately, even on those questions asked of all three samples.

## **OPINIONS ON DEER AND THE DEER POPULATION IN GENERAL**

Generally, there is wide acceptance of deer in Georgia. All three samples most commonly have the most acceptance on the scale from acceptance to rejection of deer, and overwhelming majorities think it is important that deer exist in Georgia. Additionally, most respondents think it is important to have deer around their home (when they live in an area appropriate for deer).

There is no consensus regarding whether there are more, about the same amount, or fewer deer now compared to 5 years previous—answers are fairly well distributed among response choices. Nonetheless, most respondents think there is the right number of deer in their county. Otherwise, residents and hunters are more likely to think there are too few than too many (particularly among hunters), while landowners are more likely to think there are too many than too few.

### **OPINIONS ON DEER AND OUTDOOR RECREATION IN GENERAL**

In general, respondents think it is important for people to have the opportunity to hunt deer in Georgia. This is true even of residents, most of whom do not personally hunt. Also, respondents generally think it is important that people have the opportunity to watch or photograph deer in Georgia. For hunters and landowners, the importance of being able to hunt deer is slightly higher than the importance of being able to view deer.

### **OPINIONS ON DEER MANAGEMENT IN GENERAL**

A majority of respondents agree that deer are properly managed in Georgia in general, with less than a quarter of any sample disagreeing. Regarding whether *landowners* properly manage deer in Georgia, agreement exceeds disagreement among all samples that they do (although agreement is not as high as for proper management in general in the previously reported question). Additionally, respondents most commonly think that the deer population should be kept at the same level as it currently is in their county of residence. Proper management also pertains to having a healthy deer herd, and the majority of respondents think that the deer herd in Georgia is healthy.

Respondents, in general, give positive ratings to the job performance of the Wildlife Resources Division of the DNR and to the DNR's Deer Management Program. Furthermore, hunters generally are satisfied with how well the DNR incorporates their desires into deer management, and landowners also give good ratings to how well the DNR incorporates landowners' desires into deer management. Finally, on a more philosophical plane, residents overwhelmingly think it is important that deer be properly managed (regardless of how they feel that deer actually are managed).

### **OPINIONS REGARDING INCREASING OR DECREASING THE DEER POPULATION**

Those respondents who wanted to have the deer population increased were asked for their reasoning for wanting it increased. Residents and landowners do so because they simply think the population is too low, and residents also want to see more deer. Hunters do so because they want better harvest success.

In follow-up to the opinion on whether to increase the deer population was a series of questions that asked whether these respondents would still want the deer population increased based on several consequences of having more deer. In general, they would still want an increase despite any of the consequences that directly affect humans (more damage to gardens, landscaping, or crops or more automobile accidents), but their support for an increase does not hold under the ecological consequences (that there would be poorer habitat for other wildlife or poorer health of the deer herd). The implication of the results is that if the DNR wants to *decrease* the deer herd, rationalizing doing so based on ecological concerns would be more effective than basing it on human concerns.

Those who want the deer population kept at the same level typically cite the lack of problems that they have had. Additionally, hunters who do so are currently satisfied with their success in hunting deer.

Those respondents who wanted to have the deer population decreased were asked for their reasoning for wanting it decreased. Residents and hunters most commonly do so because of concern about automobile accidents. While automobile accidents are also a concern of landowners, they also cite concerns about damage to crops, gardens, and landscaping.

As was done in follow-up to those who wanted the deer population increased, questions were asked of those who wanted the deer population decreased, asking whether these respondents would still want the deer population decreased based on several consequences of having fewer deer. Those respondents, whether residents, hunters, or landowners, who want to see a decrease still want to see a decrease despite any possible consequences: no consequence made the majority change their opinion on wanting the deer population decreased.

### **FACTORS CONSIDERED IN DEER MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

Of the five factors that could be considered in decisions regarding deer management, the top two that respondents overwhelmingly want the state to consider are *scientific information such as harvest and population data* and the *professional judgment of Georgia DNR biologists*. Additionally, there is much support for considering the *economic impact of hunting* (particularly among hunters and some landowners). There was also fairly wide acceptance of considering *social desires*. Not surprisingly, most respondents did not want *political desires* considered in deer management.

### **OPINIONS ON DEER MANAGEMENT METHODS**

The majority of respondents support controlling deer in urban and suburban areas. Preferred methods for doing so, however, vary among the samples. Residents most commonly say that *Deer Management in Georgia: Survey of Residents, Hunters, and Landowners v* trapping and relocation is the method they want, while hunters and landowners favor some type of hunting (either hunting in general or archery-only hunting).

The survey also discussed four methods for controlling deer in urban/suburban areas and in parks or other recreation lands where hunting is currently not allowed. In general, there is support for the use of regulated archery hunting in urban/suburban areas as well as the use of regulated hunting (not just archery) in parks/other recreation lands, but not much support for the use of professionals or sharpshooters in either urban/suburban lands or parks/other recreation lands. (It may be that there is a negative reaction to the term “sharpshooters” rather than to the method of shooting deer, as hunting itself was generally supported.)

Support is quite high for the use of regulated hunting as the primary tool to manage deer populations, even among residents and landowners (obviously, it was very high among hunters).

### **OPINIONS ON PROVIDING LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE**

There is no consensus on whether the DNR should provide more or the same amount of assistance to landowners to manage deer (the only consensus being that the DNR should not provide less assistance). Those who want more assistance typically want advice, although some want an increase in hunting. There was some, but not overwhelming, interest in a deer management program that provides management advice and harvest flexibility for landowners and hunters at the property level.

There is more agreement than disagreement that municipalities that pass firearm ordinances that impede hunting should be required to mitigate damage from deer, but the disagreement is not insubstantial, so there is no clear consensus on this.

Finally, one form of assistance is simple information. Respondents typically say that either email or direct mail are the best ways to provide them with information, although some also named the DNR website as a good way to provide information.

### **DEER HUNTING ON LAND IN GENERAL**

Most landowners in the survey allow deer hunting on their land. Typical people allowed to hunt are family members or friends/acquaintances rather than people they do not know who may ask for permission.

### **PROBLEMS WITH HUNTERS ON LAND**

In total, from 7% to 23% of landowners had experienced problems with deer hunters on their land in the past 2 years. The most typical problem cited was trespassing. Other problems ran the gamut, from violation of game laws, damage of fences/leaving gates open, to simple littering or unsafe behavior.

### **REASONS TO ALLOW OR DISALLOW DEER HUNTING ON LAND**

Although legal liability is a concern among landowners, most landowners would not allow more hunting in the absence of worry about liability. Additionally, financial incentives also would not produce a surge in landowners allowing hunting (very few landowners currently allow hunting for a fee). In short, it does not appear that the majority of landowners who do not allow hunting are likely to change their mind. Nonetheless, among those who expressed concerns about legal liability, about a third would allow more hunting if they did not have to worry about liability.

### **DEER DAMAGE**

About 1 in 6 residents have experienced damage from deer in the past year. Among landowners in the survey (who, by definition, owned a tract of at least 20 acres), from a third to half of the three landowners groups experienced damage. Types of damage typically cited were damage to gardens, landscaping, or crops, as well as vehicle collisions. Fortunately, the DNR is rated positively regarding how well it responds to damage complaints.

The survey also asked directly about vehicle collisions with deer, and about 1 in 6 residents had been involved in a collision with a deer in the past 2 years (note the timeframe difference between the damage in general question and the vehicle collision question). Nonetheless, residents are more concerned about careless drivers in general, drivers using cell phones, and drunk drivers than they are about deer on the roads.

### **PARTICIPATION IN DEER HUNTING**

Most hunters in the survey had household members who also hunted deer in Georgia. Additionally, from a third to half of the landowner groups had personally hunted deer, and more than a third had household members who hunted deer. About half of hunters who went hunting last year harvested a deer.

A small percentage of hunters (4%) had hunted deer with dogs in the past year, and another 7% had done so at some time but not in the past year. In short, about 1 in 10 hunters have some experience with hunting deer with dogs. The most typical reason for hunting deer is for the meat (about half did so for this reason), although the sport and recreation is the primary reason of 1 in 5 deer hunters.

### **QUALITY OF DEER HUNTING IN GEORGIA**

Most deer hunters indicated that nothing had taken away from their deer hunting satisfaction. Otherwise, social reasons are predominant in things that have taken away from satisfaction rather than reasons related to the resource. Nonetheless, the top things that took away from satisfaction over which the DNR has some influence are not enough places (5% of deer hunters gave a

response related to this), the poor behavior of other hunters (5%), not enough deer (4%), and coyotes or other nuisance animals (4%).

When asked about what quality deer management means to them, hunters typically cite an increase in the overall health of the herd or bigger deer.

### **OPINIONS ON DEER HUNTING REGULATIONS**

Most hunters are satisfied with the current deer season structure. Those who are not typically cite that the season is too short or that it opens too early when the weather is hot. Satisfaction with the buck and doe bag limits is very high, as most hunters are satisfied. There is more satisfaction, however, for the buck limit than for the doe limit.

Hunters are overwhelmingly satisfied with the current method of recording the deer harvest. Furthermore, only about half of those who are not satisfied say that they would be more satisfied with an Internet/telephone reporting system. A little less than half of all hunters (regardless of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current harvest recording system) would be willing to pay \$5 more to support an Internet/telephone reporting system.

A slight majority of hunters would support establishing a single, statewide deer season in Georgia by eliminating the deer zones, but about a third would oppose. Landowners are split on this question (many did not know how to respond).

Half of residents oppose the hunting of deer with dogs, while about a third support. Typical reasons to support are that it increases hunters' chances of harvest, while typical reasons to oppose is that it is not deemed to give the deer a fair chance. Among hunters there is more opposition than support, with supporters citing tradition and those opposed citing the unfairness to the deer. Landowners are split on this question.

Among residents, opposition exceeds support for hunting deer over bait; among hunters, the opposite is true, with support exceeding opposition. In both cases, supporters say it increases harvest success and those opposed say it is unfair to the deer. Landowners are split on this. Among all three samples, there is little support for high-fenced hunting of any kind, whether it be white-tailed deer, non-native deer, or deer raised in captivity.

Opposition far exceeds support for allowing firearm sound suppressors to be used in hunting among all three samples. Nonetheless, from 4% to 10% of the various samples and landowner groups have a firearm sound suppressor. Most hunters would not purchase one if it were made legal to hunt with one.

### **PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR RECREATION**

Wildlife viewing near home is the most popular of the outdoor recreation activities that were listed. Furthermore, about a third of residents and a majority of hunters and landowners had gone fishing in Georgia in the past 2 years.