

Strategic White-tailed Deer Management Plan

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Wildlife Management Division



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Prepared by

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In Consultation with

Ozark Mountains, Ouachita Mountains and Arkansas River Valley
Deer Management Citizen Advisory Group
Gulf Coastal Plain Deer Management Citizen Advisory Group
Mississippi Alluvial Valley and Crowley's Ridge
Deer Management Citizen Advisory Group

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The 2007 Strategic White-tailed Deer Management Plan

Mission Statement

The mission of this document is to provide strategic direction that will result in quality recreational opportunities through maintaining a stable, healthy deer herd consistent with long-term habitat capabilities utilizing sound wildlife management science and open public input.



History of White-tailed Deer in Arkansas

Deer management in Arkansas began in 1916, when a legislative act established a hunting season of 61 days for deer, turkey and bear that lasted from Nov. 11 through Jan. 10. The newly established deer season was accompanied by a bag limit of two buck deer. At that time the statewide deer population was approximately 2,000. In the 1920s deer had been eliminated from numerous counties in Arkansas because of over-harvesting, leaving an estimated 500 deer statewide (Donaldson et. al 1951).

The development of state and federal game refuges in the late 1920s was vital for re-establishing Arkansas's deer population. Stocking efforts were initiated and continued for approximately 20 years on the refuges, and the deer population expanded from the refuges throughout the state. In addition to restocking efforts, restrictions on season length and bag limits became an important facet of deer management (Cartwright 2003).

Another important turning point was the 1944 passage of Amendment 35, which placed the management responsibilities

and regulation of all wildlife resources under the authority of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. In subsequent decades, the goal of deer management was to increase deer numbers using tools of protection, restocking, strict law enforcement and limited "buck-only" hunting seasons (Cartwright 2003).

By 1985 the deer population was estimated at 500,000 animals, and management emphasis shifted from herd growth to stabilization. As either-sex deer hunting opportunity continued to increase in the 1990s, the public grew more accepting of doe harvest. The three-point rule was implemented in 1998 as an attempt to reduce yearling buck harvest and improve buck age structure. During the late 1990s the AGFC implemented additional deer hunting restrictions, increased research efforts, developed a new deer management plan and initiated the Deer Management Assistance Program (Cartwright 2003).

Review of 1999 Strategic White-tailed Deer Management Plan

The 1999 Strategic White-tailed Deer Management Plan was developed by a team of Arkansas Game and Fish Commission biologists. The plan provided strategic, long-term guidance for managing Arkansas's deer population. Public input was obtained through a telephone survey (1997-1999). The survey gathered information about the opinions and attitudes of Arkansas's hunters and residents concerning deer management. The goals of this process were intended to be evaluated and updated after five years.

The AGFC's deer management goals were specific to the six Deer Management Units (Appendix I, Map 1), which follow natural physiographic boundaries varying in topography, hydrology, soils, vegetation and land use. The six DMUs, which were further delineated into zones, were identified as Ozark Mountains, Ouachita Mountains, Arkansas River Valley, West Gulf Coastal Plain, Mississippi Alluvial Valley and Crowley's Ridge (Cartwright, et al. 1999).



Purpose of 2007 Strategic White-tailed Deer Management Plan

The 2007 Strategic White-tailed Deer Management Plan (hereafter referred to as the plan) was developed to provide long-term, strategic goals using public input in conjunction with scientific wildlife management principles. The plan will be evaluated and updated on a five-year cycle.

Development of Plan

To better understand and address the overall desires related to public use of the deer resource, AGFC contracted with an independent facilitator to assist with developing an all-inclusive deer management plan for Arkansas. Dynamic Solutions Group, an independent consulting firm, was retained to facilitate this process.

During the development of this plan, the state was divided into three geographical groups (Appendix I, Map 2): Ozark Mountains, Ouachita Mountains and Arkansas River Valley; West Gulf Coastal Plain; Mississippi Alluvial Valley and Crowley's Ridge. In April 2007, each geographic region was assigned a Deer Management Citizen Advisory Group (hereafter referred to as Advisory Group) consisting of approximately 30 members to assist with formulation of the management plan. Members were selected based on their ability to represent and provide perspectives of all deer hunters, as well as other stakeholders. An Advisory Group Charter (Appendix II) was developed by Dynamic Solutions Group and AGFC to help guide the work of the Advisory Groups. Guiding principles in the Advisory Group Charter were:

- a. To represent and provide perspectives of all deer hunters and other stakeholders.
- b. To assist in completion of the plan by providing input on deer management goals for the three geographical regions of the state.
- c. To advise and assist with the implementation of the plan by reviewing and providing input on various management scenarios developed by the AGFC.
- d. To help with the evaluation of deer management in Arkansas as the result of implementation of the plan.
- e. To provide information and perspectives to help with needed modifications to the plan.

In June 2007, 10 public workshops and eight AGFC staff workshops were conducted throughout the state. During each facilitated workshop, participants were asked to answer the following two questions:

1. What are your issues, concerns or problems about deer and deer management in Arkansas?
2. What is your advice, recommendation or suggestion concerning actions that should be taken regarding deer management in Arkansas?

Participants' responses were compiled and analyzed to provide direction for development of an initial outline of the plan goals and objectives (Appendix III).



In September 2007, a second round of 10 public workshops was held at the same locations as in June. The purpose of these workshops was to determine if the AGFC had correctly interpreted the public's perceptions concerning the two questions. Participants were provided the opportunity to comment on the draft goals and objectives statements. At each facilitated workshop, attendees were asked to answer the following three questions:

1. What is your assessment of how well the draft plan identifies the required goals for improving deer management in Arkansas?
2. What is your identification of what you think are the most important strengths of the draft goals?
3. What are your suggestions along with your rationale for the changes you recommend concerning the goals?

A Deer Summit Workshop was held in late September 2007. Participants were grouped by DMU for break-out sessions. During each of the break-out sessions, participants were asked to answer the following two questions:

1. What are your suggestions about how to achieve the goals and objectives in the plan?
2. What are your suggestions about who needs to be involved in helping achieve your suggested actions?

Following the Deer Summit Workshop, the AGFC Deer Team analyzed all public input and produced a working draft of the plan. To increase communication with the Advisory Groups, the

AGFC developed an on-line message board that allowed only the Advisory Group members to comment on the development of draft strategies.

Organization of Plan

For organizational purposes, the plan is divided into the six major goals related to white-tailed deer management in Arkansas:

- Resource
- Communication
- Sociological
- Habitat
- Education
- Enforcement

Appendices included in the plan will address implementation issues concerning harvest and habitat management.

Implementation of Plan

Implementation of the plan will involve the following:

- Develop habitat and harvest management guidelines to be included as appendices in this plan. These guidelines will be the quantitative component and foundation for measuring the success of the plan.
- Submit recommendations/regulations/budget from the AGFC Deer Team for review by Advisory Groups, AGFC staff and general public, with final approval from AGFC Commissioners.
- Implement, monitor and evaluate approved strategies.
- Create annual status reports which will be included as appendices in this plan.
- Long-term consistency in regulations will be needed to effectively monitor results.

All examples included in this plan may vary by DMU and will be evaluated prior to implementation.

Statewide Goals and Objectives

RESOURCE GOAL:

Manage and maintain a healthy, stable deer herd appropriate for the habitat.

Objective A:

Determine, manage and monitor deer populations consistent with desired targets and herd condition standards for each Deer Management Unit (DMU).

Strategy 1: Determine, manage and monitor appropriate sex ratios and age structure by DMU. These criteria will be established in the Deer Harvest Management Guidelines to be developed as the first step of the implementation phase of the plan. Determining appropriate sex ratios and age structure will be accomplished through collection of biological data and deer observation surveys. Management options may include permits, season length and timing adjustments, bag limit manipulation and antler restrictions.

Strategy 2: Determine, manage and monitor herd health and productivity by using winter and summer herd health checks, as needed, in conjunction with biological data collected from harvested deer.

Strategy 3: Manage and monitor the herd to minimize the impact of disease. This strategy will be accomplished through continued surveillance for the presence of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) as well as conducting additional disease monitoring with the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study and Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission. In addition, it is necessary to identify and document locations of all known captive deer and develop/maintain regulations that minimize health risks to native deer populations.

Strategy 4: Work with partners to incorporate deer population management strategies on cooperatively managed public lands. Partners may include state, federal and private cooperators in development of conservation plans.

Strategy 5: Re-evaluate the deer population management strategies for all WMAs and make adjustments, as needed.

Strategy 6: Provide deer management opportunities for all private landowners. Provide general technical assistance and evaluate potential methods for management on small acreages.

Objective B

Establish effective harvest guidelines for management of deer on both public and private lands within each deer zone.

Strategy 1: Evaluate current zone structure statewide for uniformity based on key factors such as habitat suitability, deer population and land-use patterns. Boundaries should be well-defined by landmarks (roads, waterways, levees, etc.) and easily identifiable for the public.

Strategy 2: Evaluate and monitor harvest records, and adjust management strategies to ensure zone-specific harvest guidelines are being accomplished.

Strategy 3: Develop and monitor long-term (stable) regulations to meet desired guidelines. Regulations may be manipulated before the term of the regulation has been completed if it is determined that harvest guidelines are not being met by the current regulations.

Objective C:

Conduct scientific research to support deer management techniques.

Strategy 1: Define, prioritize and implement needed deer research. Continue to review existing literature concerning deer and refer to current techniques for deer research.

Strategy 2: Implement the Commission-approved Choctaw Island WMA Deer Research plan.



SOCIOLOGICAL GOAL:

Be responsive to public concerns.

Objective A:

Provide assistance to the public regarding deer/human conflicts.

Strategy 1: Identify the various types of deer/human conflicts and their impact on a statewide basis by using the Advisory Groups and exploring opportunities for surveying Arkansas residents.

Strategy 2: Use media to distribute information statewide, addressing deer/human conflicts.

Strategy 3: Review depredation permit policy and revise as needed.

Strategy 4: Partner with communities in managing urban deer populations, to include providing information on developing management plans, plan implementation, public safety and deer population monitoring.

Objective B:

Determine approval level and appropriate actions to maintain public support.

Strategy 1: Use the Advisory Groups as a tool for gathering public opinions and explore opportunities for surveying Arkansas residents.

Strategy 2: Inform the public concerning various deer management issues, providing additional perspectives and management options.

Objective C:

Increase the availability and quality of public hunting opportunities.

Strategy 1: Explore options for increasing the amount of public land through purchasing, leasing and conservation easements.

Strategy 2: Based on specific user needs, designate and manage WMAs based on public expectations, habitat composition and deer population.

EDUCATION GOAL:

Improve education and promotion of deer management and deer hunting in Arkansas.

Objective A:

Explore ways to recruit and retain deer hunters.

Strategy 1: Assist organizations and hunting clubs with increasing deer hunting opportunities for youth.

Strategy 2: Develop an operational template for youth deer hunting camps.

Strategy 3: Explore senior (65 years and older) hunting opportunities, looking for ways to increase hunter retention.

Objective B:

Develop/enhance educational opportunities throughout the state.

Strategy 1: Enhance school programs that are focused on deer management and biology.

Strategy 2: Provide deer workshops throughout the state.

COMMUNICATION GOAL:

Improve communication between the AGFC and Arkansas deer hunters.

Objective A:

Make regulations easy to understand.

Strategy 1: Use the Advisory Groups as a sounding board when developing new regulation proposals.

Strategy 2: Publish deer hunting regulations in an easy-to-read format.

Objective B:

Improve communication with the public, especially concerning information related to regulations and management.

Strategy 1: Make regulations more accessible to the public by using AGFC mail-outs and increasing statewide distribution.

Strategy 2: Re-evaluate methods for obtaining public input by exploring on-line forums and re-evaluating the current structure of public meetings.

HABITAT GOAL:

Enhance and improve deer habitat.

Objective A:

Increase and enhance deer habitat on AGFC-owned lands.

Strategy 1: Use guidelines established in the Deer Habitat Management Guidelines to be developed as part of the implementation phase of the plan for detailed habitat management plans for state-owned WMAs.

Objective B:

Increase and enhance deer habitat on non-AGFC-owned public lands.

Strategy 1: Partner with other state and federal agencies with lands in public ownership and encourage the use of the Deer Habitat Management Guidelines.

Objective C:

Increase and enhance deer habitat on private lands.

Strategy 1: Promote private lands assistance programs (DMAP, Farm Bill programs, Forest Stewardship Program, non-governmental organization programs), and encourage landowners to implement deer habitat management practices on their land.

Strategy 2: Help promote a cooperative Web site that combines deer habitat management information from many sources in one location.

Strategy 3: Investigate opportunities to work with corporate private landholders.

ENFORCEMENT GOAL:

Enhance enforcement efforts to ensure compliance with AGFC regulations.

Objective A:

Coordinate efforts within the AGFC to address deer hunting-related violations.

Strategy 1: Maximize enforcement efforts to focus on the most severe violations by scheduling and prioritizing enforcement patrols to coincide with peak activity periods.

Strategy 2: Promote communication between wildlife officers, local sportsmen and hunting clubs/organizations by using community oriented policing techniques and by presenting credible witness programs at deer management workshops.

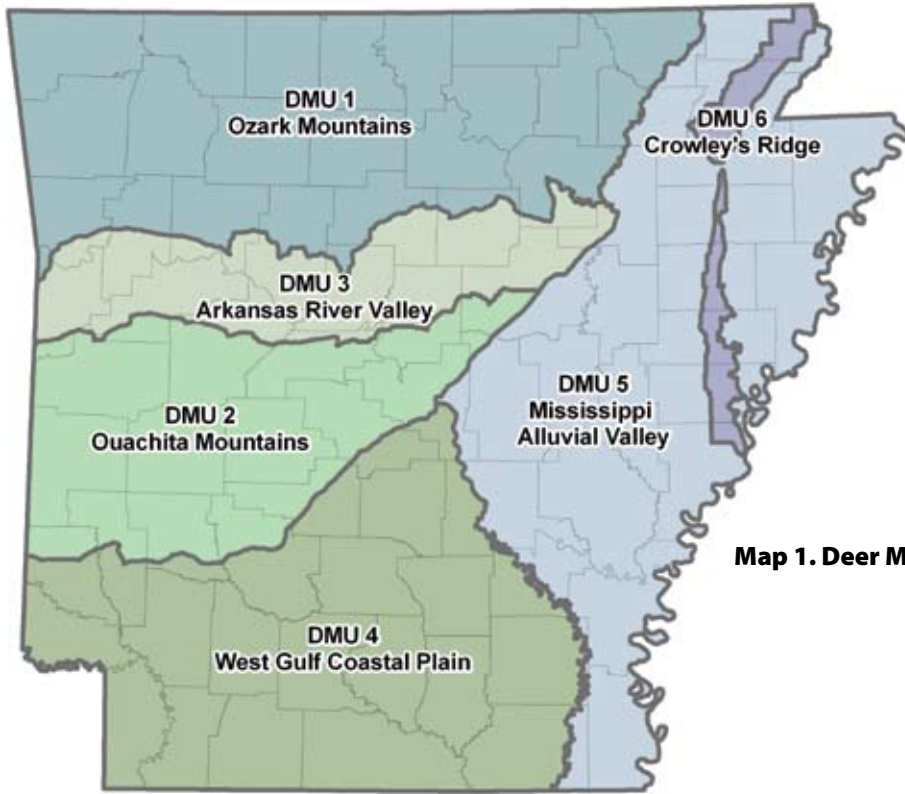
Strategy 3: Ensure that wildlife officers have the training and equipment to address citizens' concerns by maintaining maximum authorized enforcement staffing, by ensuring that wildlife officers are trained in the latest enforcement techniques, and by assessing equipment needs on an annual basis.

Strategy 4: Maintain penalties that defer violations of AGFC deer regulations by reviewing monetary penalties, confiscations and license suspensions. When it is apparent these penalties are not serving as adequate deterrents, AGFC action will be requested to address the problem.

Literature Cited

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Appendix I



Map 1. Deer Management Units

**Map 2. Deer Management
Citizen Advisory Group
Geographic Regions**



Appendix II

Deer Management Advisory Group Charter

1) Purpose:

- a. The purpose of the three geographically distinct Deer Management Advisory Groups is to help the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission improve overall management of deer in Arkansas.

2) Specific Objectives:

- a. To represent and provide perspectives of all deer hunters and other stakeholders.
- b. To assist in the completion of the Statewide Deer Management Plan by providing input regarding deer management goals for the three physiographic regions of the state.
- c. To advise and assist with the implementation of the Statewide Deer Management Plan by reviewing and providing input on the various management scenarios developed by the Wildlife Management Division.
- d. To help with the evaluation of deer management in Arkansas as the result of implementation of the Statewide Deer Management Plan through continued electronic or direct contact feedback to representatives of the WMD Deer Team.
- e. To provide information and perspectives to help with needed modifications to the Statewide Deer Management Plan through continued electronic or direct contact feedback to representatives of the WMD Deer Team.

3) Authority:

- a. The Game and Fish Commission, by law, has authority to adopt rules as necessary for the conservation, protection and management of fish and wildlife resources in the state. Using this authority, the Commission tries to fulfill their mandated responsibility in a way that meets the desires and needs of landowners, sportsmen and other citizens with an interest in fisheries and wildlife. In the case of deer management in the state, the Commission is interested in providing enhanced opportunities for structured input from deer hunters and other stakeholders who are the primary recipients of the benefits of deer management in the state.
- b. The AGFC retains final authority over management decisions regarding this and all other management plans.

4) Expectations:

- a. The Wildlife Management Division's Deer Team has identified and nominated deer hunters and other stakeholders for membership on three geographically distinct advisory groups.
- b. Staff from the AGFC Wildlife Management Division have contacted others to determine their interest and availability to serve on one of the groups. AGFC will attempt to include all interested parties.



- c. Each of the three advisory groups will meet in an initial organizational meeting to review individuals' expectations, identify general issues and constraints, and establish ground rules.
- d. Membership on the three advisory groups is expected to evolve as additional members may be identified and added, and some may leave.
- e. These initial meetings will be run by a facilitator from the Dynamic Solutions Group, LLC.
- f. Following the organizational meetings, the advisory groups will hold virtual meetings (by e-mail or other remote means), maximizing opportunities for members to provide input without disrupting their schedules.
- g. AGFC Wildlife Management Division staff will use the Commission's Web site to facilitate communication with the advisory groups and to keep other interested parties aware of progress.

5) Time Frame:

- a. The Deer Management Advisory Groups are expected to continue for several years (at least 1-3 years), with an indefinite time frame for completing their duties.

6) Roles and Responsibilities:

- a. Members of the three Deer Management Advisory Groups are expected to:
 - i. Read and learn information provided by AGFC Wildlife Management Division staff or the facilitator quickly and accurately.
 - ii. Attend the appropriate geographically distinct organizational meeting.
 - iii. Respond promptly to requests for information, reviews, critiques, etc.
 - iv. Articulate interests, concerns and perspectives on issues.
 - v. Maintain an open mind regarding other views.
 - vi. Work as a team member to address the responsibilities of the Advisory Group.
 - vii. Participate collaboratively in group decision-making.
 - viii. Communicate on a regular basis with interests the individual was selected to represent.
 - ix. Refrain from undermining group decisions.
 - x. Commit to participating for an indefinite period (probably 1-3 years).
- b. The AGFC has contracted with Dynamic Solutions Group, LLC (DSG) as facilitators and process coaches to assist the Deer Management Advisory Groups in organization and

function. The Commission may invite DSG to provide additional assistance. DSG is expected to:

- i. Provide a draft charter for the Advisory Groups.
 - ii. Provide a draft agenda for the organizational meetings.
 - iii. Facilitate the organizational meetings.
 - iv. Report promptly on the results of the organizational meetings.
 - v. Be available for further assistance if needed.
- c. AGFC Wildlife Management Division staff are expected to:
 - i. Provide assistance in the development of the draft charter and draft agenda mentioned above.
 - ii. Provide assistance with the organizational meetings.
 - iii. Provide the best scientific information available on deer management in Arkansas.
 - iv. Provide advice and counsel to the Advisory Groups.
 - v. Notify the Advisory Groups of changing circumstances, new information, etc.
 - vi. Provide clear direction and ongoing communication with the Advisory Groups regarding the roles and responsibilities as noted in this charter.
 - vii. Periodic news releases will update the public on Advisory Groups progress.
 - viii. Public information and public input will be made possible through the AGFC Web site and by other means.

7) Funding and Support:

- a. Deer Management Advisory Group operating expenses will be funded by the Wildlife Management Division budget.

Appendix III

Primary Issues of Concern Identified by Public/AGFC Scoping Workshops

ANTLER RESTRICTIONS	OZ, OU and ARV	WGCP	MAV and CR
Repeal all antler restrictions.	✓	✓	
Allow harvest of one buck with no antler restrictions and one buck with antler restrictions.	✓	✓	✓
Slot limit for bucks (like 4-point on one side or 4-point total or less).	✓	✓	✓
Maintain current antler restrictions.	✓	✓	
Repeal antler restrictions on public lands.	✓		
Further develop antler restrictions.		✓	
Implement minimum beam length or inside spread as an alternative to the 3-point antler restriction.		✓	
Evaluate the effectiveness of the 3-point antler restriction.		✓	✓
DEER MANAGEMENT	OZ, OU and ARV	WGCP	MAV and CR
Reduce the size of deer zones.	✓	✓	✓
During the month of October, allow for archery deer hunting only.	✓		
Shorten or split the modern gun deer season.	✓	✓	
Move the modern gun deer season to a later date.	✓		
Shorten the bowhunting deer season.	✓		
Allow no deer hunting during January.	✓		
Manage for appropriate sex ratios, possibly requiring the harvest of a doe before a buck.		✓	✓
Evaluate the doe bag limit.		✓	
Consider deer seasons allowing the use of dogs while hunting, but also provide a season that does not allow the use of dogs while hunting.		✓	
Provide a better commitment to funding the Deer Management Assistance Program.		✓	✓
Allocate funding for deer research.		✓	
REGULATIONS	OZ, OU and ARV	WGCP	MAV and CR
Eliminate baiting for deer.	✓		
Reduce the time in which baiting for deer is allowed.	✓		
Stabilize regulations.	✓		
Evaluate current regulations pertaining to deer hunting with dogs.	✓		
Stop changing regulations without biological data to support said changes.		✓	✓
Simplify regulations.		✓	✓
Eliminate captive wildlife facilities.		✓	

PUBLIC LANDS	OZ, OU and ARV	WGCP	MAV and CR
Improve public land habitat management.	✓		
Work with the U.S. Forest Service and Corps of Engineers on public land habitat issues.	✓		
Evaluate all-terrain vehicle use on public lands.	✓		
Increase the amount of public land.		✓	
Seek methods for eliminating overcrowding on both state and federal lands, possibly considering quota permits for some areas.		✓	✓
Eliminate deer hunting using dogs on public land.		✓	
Use consistent camping regulations on all WMAs.		✓	
HUNTER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION	OZ, OU and ARV	WGCP	MAV and CR
Continue youth deer hunting opportunities.	✓		
Maintain ability for youth to harvest a buck of choice as their first buck of the season.	✓		
Evaluate ways to increase youth participation.	✓	✓	
Focus on youth programs that involve AGFC and other sporting groups.		✓	✓
Youth conservation camps.		✓	
Programs aimed at retaining existing hunters and those that may have lost interest in hunting-related activities.		✓	✓
EDUCATION	OZ, OU and ARV	WGCP	MAV and CR
Improve communication about deer management, research and regulations. Possibly use the AGFC magazine, Web site and education programs.		✓	✓
Expand the Deer Management Assistance Program.		✓	
ENFORCEMENT	OZ, OU and ARV	WGCP	MAV and CR
Provide more effective enforcement of regulations.	✓		
Adequate staffing.	✓	✓	
Increase penalties and focus enforcement activities on poaching.	✓	✓	✓

Appendix V

Glossary

Antler Restriction

An antler characteristic which identifies the deer as being legal to harvest (i.e. inside spread, beam length and number of points).

Bag Limit

The number of species allowed to be taken in a 24-hour period (midnight to midnight) unless otherwise specified.

Baiting

The direct or indirect placing, exposing, depositing, distributing or scattering of salt, grain or other feed that could serve as a lure or attraction for wildlife to, on or over any areas where hunters are attempting to take them.

Buck

A male deer.

Buck of Choice

A buck that may be legally harvested with no regard to antler restrictions.

Captive Wildlife Facility

The holding of living wildlife in a controlled environment that is manipulated by man for the purpose of exercising ownership, possession or control of the wildlife, and that has boundaries designed to prevent selected species from entering or leaving the controlled environment.

Deer Hunting with Dogs

Utilizing a dog as a means to locate a deer with the intent of harvesting.

Deer/Human Conflicts

Any conflict between the human population and the deer population usually resulting in property damage.

Depredation Permit

An official AGFC permit issued to allow the harvest of wildlife causing property damage, outside of normal regulations.

Doe

A female deer.

Goal

A general direction that provides purpose for taking action.

Herd Health Checks

A collection of data providing indices relating to the health and productivity of deer.

Objective

A specific measurable, anticipated result.

Permits

See Depredation Permit or Quota Permit.

Poaching

The illegal harvest of any animal.

Quota Permits

A permit that allows for the harvesting of deer under special regulations.

Regulations

Rules set forth by the AGFC that establish when, where and how game species may be harvested.

Seasons

The time periods for which hunting is allowed.

Strategic Plan

A list of long-reaching primary issues and their solutions for accomplishing a mission.

Yearling

A deer that is approximately 18 months of age.

Youth

A person under the age of 16 years.



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