

2017 LOUISIANA
WHITE-TAILED DEER
MANAGEMENT PLAN





LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

2017 Louisiana White-tailed Deer Management Plan

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This public document was published at a total cost of \$434.52. 250 copies of this public document were published in the first printing at a cost of \$434.52. This document was published by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, 2000 Quail Drive, Baton Rouge, LA to provide information on the department's Deer Management Plan. This material was printed in accordance with the standards for printing by state agencies established pursuant to R.S. 43:31. Printing of this material was purchased in accordance with the provisions of Title 43 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes.



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INTRODUCTION

White-tailed deer are an abundant and sustainable game species in Louisiana. However, deer densities are not homogenous, with populations and productivity being highly variable across the state. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is charged with managing the white-tailed deer resource. To provide management continuity and guidance to current and future deer program biologists and support staff, this deer management plan has been developed. In an ever changing landscape, it is necessary to continually monitor and recognize habitat variables that may affect deer carrying capacity, health, and recruitment. These three factors determine hunting opportunity and potential success. This plan will create and define objectives and strategies to meet the goals of the deer program defined in the mission statement.

MISSION STATEMENT

This purpose of this document is to provide broad guidance and direction for programmatic function, incorporating sound deer and wildlife habitat management principles, administration, and public input, to promote healthy, sustainable and balanced deer populations, while providing recreational hunting opportunity for Louisiana deer hunters.

PLAN COMMITTEE

Statewide deer committee - 16 members:

- LDWF - 3
- Industrial pineland owners - 2
- Hunting media - 2
- DMAP clubs - 2
- Bottomland hardwood landowners - 2
- Coastal and swamp hardwood landowner - 1
- USFWS - 1
- KNF - 1
- Farmers - 2

AUTHORITY

Title 56 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes



PROGRAM PERSONNEL/DELIVERY

- Full Time - 1 Program Manager and 1 DMAP Coordinator
- Part Time - WMA and Private Lands biologists and technicians

HISTORY OF WHITE-TAILED DEER IN LOUISIANA

Prior to colonization, the statewide deer population estimate was 400,000. During the 19th century, early settlers and market hunting reduced the herd. The lowest deer population occurred between 1915 and 1925 following the large scale timber cuts of the late 1800s and early 1900s (St. Amant 1959). Deer were left concentrated in remaining cover and habitat where they were vulnerable to over-harvest. The all-time low deer population estimate was 20,000 deer in 1925 (St. Amant and Perkins 1953). Hunting laws and bag limits were too liberal or not enforced, and deer numbers fell dramatically. However, some deer survived in the deep swamps and margins, and as formerly denuded habitats grew into second growth forests, deer began to recover (St. Amant 1959).

Deer management began in the late 1940s, and by the early 1950s a successful restocking program was well underway. Initial trapping efforts were with box type traps. Later, airboats were used to capture deer at Delta National Wildlife Refuge and this proved highly successful (Moreland 1996). Deer were captured at numerous public and private land tracts throughout the state. Deer were also imported from Texas and Wisconsin (McDonald and Miller 2004).

Subsequent to the early management and restoration period, harvest regulations were liberalized in response to increasing deer herds, enforcement efforts, and habitat improvement. In 1960 there were 22 deer areas (DAs), the longest deer season was 56 days, and most were only two to four weeks in length. The season limit was two deer, mostly bucks only hunting was in effect, and many areas were closed to hunting all together (Durham 2014). Today, we have 90+ day gun seasons in some areas, 120+ day bow seasons, and a 6-deer season limit of which up to four can be antlerless.

Moreland (1996) estimated the Louisiana deer herd at 1 million at its peak. According to the long term mail survey, harvest estimates peaked in 1997 at 267,600 deer. It then trended down until about 2012.* The minimum deer population estimate today is around 500,000.

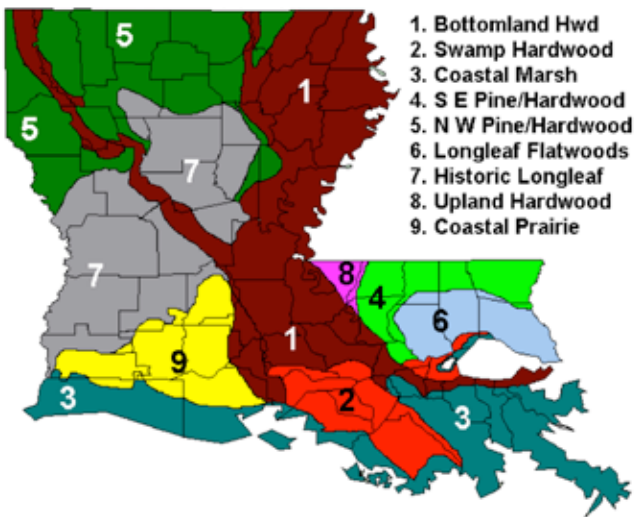
DEER HABITATS, PRODUCTIVITY AND HISTORICAL HARVEST RATES

According to reporting data, the greatest portion of the statewide deer harvest comes from the low to moderately productive northwest mixed and historic longleaf portions of the state. This is a large region, consisting of rural, heavily forested and mostly pine dominant parishes. The highest harvest rates come from the upland and bottomland hardwood habitats primarily along the Mississippi River. These regions have the most fertile soils, more hard mast, and surrounding large scale agriculture, contributing more food resources to deer. See Durham et. al., 2009, for a description of the deer habitat types in Louisiana.

High productivity habitats include the upland and bottomland hardwoods. Moderate productivity habitats include the southeast and northwest mixed pine/hardwoods. The rest of the state deer habitats are considered low in productivity. These habitat regions include swamp hardwoods, coastal marsh, coastal prairie, longleaf flatwoods, and historic longleaf (*Figure 1*).

** The survey technique was modified in 2012 to include senior hunters, not previously counted before.*

FIGURE 1. LOUISIANA DEER HABITAT UNITS



STATEWIDE GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

I. MANAGE AND MAINTAIN HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE DEER HERDS IN BALANCE WITH THE HABITAT

A. Monitor deer populations and herd health by habitat regions.

1. Monitor deer density indices.
 - a. Harvest data- weights, lactation, age structure, and antler measurements.
 - b. Habitat surveys (browse surveys and landscape changes measured via remote sensing over temporal scales).
 - c. Herd health checks.
 - d. Others as developed.
2. Annual Deer Report for analysis and assessment of harvest and user trends.
 - a. Harvest analysis and historical trend data.
 - b. Annual DMAP sub-report.
 - c. Annual WMA sub-report.
 - d. Disease report summary.
 - e. User demographics.

B. Continue statewide minimum population estimate.

1. Continue annual population reconstruction.

C. Maintain current sources of herd health and harvest data.

1. DMAP.
2. Reporting system (parish and deer area [DA] level).
3. Wildlife Management Areas, KNF, USFWS, other public lands.

D. Manage deer herds by DAs.

1. Recommend season/limit changes when needed- Criteria for season/bag limit change or DA changes (must meet 3 of 5).
 - a. Landscape scale or habitat issues affecting deer productivity.
 - b. Harvest data trends.



- c. Field staff recommendations supported by scientific data (DMAP, breeding, other).
 - d. Public support.
 - e. Commission request.
 2. Define regulations / season setting / change process.
 - a. Season setting timelines- Appendix A.
 - b. Commission actions- Notices of Intent (NOI), Declarations of Emergency (DE).
- E. Fund scientific research that answers important questions pertaining to deer health and deer habitat management.**
 1. LDWF.
 2. Universities.
 3. Other contractors.
- F. Monitor and observe landscape factors/issues potentially affecting deer productivity and harvest potential. Some examples are development (industrial, residential, energy), fragmentation feral swine, invasive plant species, forest management practices, droughts, rainfall timing, prescribed fire occurrence, cervid importation (LDAF), and subsidence and forested wetland decline.**

1. Work with GIS lab to document and create landscape data bases (Examples- well pads in NW LA, industrial forest ownership, agricultural acreage/crops).
2. Monitor forest types and acreage through available resources.
3. Monitor LDAF cervid enclosures.
4. Continued support of prohibition of cervid importation.
5. Development and implementation of a cervid carcass importation ban - Appendix B.
6. Monitor Palmer drought indices.
7. Monitor annual mast surveys.
8. Work with Louisiana Forestry Association (LFA) to track ownership patterns and forest types across the state to understand landscape implications.

G. Monitor deer disease occurrence and prevalence.

1. Perform annual blood serum surveillance as directed by wildlife veterinarians.
2. Collection of blood serum and tissues from WMA managed hunts.
3. Perform herd health checks.
4. Necropsy and tissue surveillance of suspect and diseased deer.
5. Communicate with DMAP clubs on the availability of diagnostic services for diseased deer.
6. CWD surveillance and testing.
 - a. Revision and Update of CWD response plan. (Rev. March 2016).
 - b. Neurologic deer, deer within or adjacent to captive facilities, and road kill deer.

H. Monitor and work to eradicate or control feral swine populations.

1. Continue disease surveillance of feral swine.
2. Continue research efforts to understand feral swine biology and impacts to other wildlife species.
3. Continue working on a legal toxicant for use to control feral swine.
4. Continue research efforts for an environmentally safe biological control for feral swine.

II. PROVIDE A HIGH LEVEL OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO HUNTERS AND LAND MANAGERS

A. Wildlife Management Area deer management.

1. Wildlife Management Area deer management plans.
 - a. Collection and assessment of harvest and user data.
 - b. Harvest adjustments based on herd health, and habitat conditions.
2. Perform browse surveys and habitat assessments.
3. Provide public opportunity for sustainable harvest and management of the resource.
 - a. Regulation review and development.
4. Support and provide assistance to the LDWF Forestry Program.
 - a. Development of timber prescriptions.
 - b. Managing for desired forest conditions for wildlife.
 - c. Mast surveys.



B. Fund and provide adequate manpower to the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). Since 1981, the program has provided technical assistance to participants while gathering age specific harvest data for each of the state's physiographic regions.

1. Prioritize LDWF manpower availability for browse surveys during spring and summer months.
2. Perform site visits and attend club meetings annually and as requested. Ensure that hunters understand and can comply with the DMAP rules.
3. Maintain good communications with industrial landowners, attend meetings and assist as requested. Utilize industry resources and data bases to communicate public meetings and other events or information.
4. Develop annual/alternate years regional DMAP cooperator meetings to discuss deer issues, season outcomes, current research and new information.
5. Attend annual PLB meetings to discuss program function, current research, deer biology and management.
6. Publish annual DMAP report and contribute deer and deer habitat related articles to spring and fall editions of the Wildlife Insider.

C. Provide technical assistance to all public requests concerning deer, deer hunting and deer habitat.

1. Site visits and evaluations.
2. Phone interviews and email correspondence.
3. Provide and update technical information through the LDWF website.

D. Provide technical assistance to other public lands partners (USFWS, KNF, & USACOE).

1. Assist with mandatory check hunts.
2. Assist with browse and habitat surveys.
3. Provide annual analysis reports of harvest data gathered/ provided.
4. Attend annual cooperative meetings as requested.

III. PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY AND PROPERTY

- A. Update and keep current nuisance deer management plan.**
 - 1. Maintain airport permitting.
 - 2. Maintain nuisance deer permitting for agriculture concerns.
 - a. Tier 4 DMAP.
 - b. Agriculture permits.
 - 3. Provide technical assistance for urban property owners.
 - 4. Provide technical assistance for state historic sites and parks.

 - B. Work with city municipalities to manage urban deer issues anticipating increased herbivory, public safety issues and wildlife disease risks.**
 - 1. Develop urban bow hunting programs modeled after other successful state programs.
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IV. INCREASE/IMPROVE HUNTER EDUCATION AND EXTENSION OUTREACH

- A. Publish Wildlife Insider and annual reports, and ensure distribution availability in hard and electronic formats. Utilize LDWF website, social media, and Big Game Records, to share important information and research results.**
 - 1. Publish pertinent articles and research results on topics such as predation, habitat management, and herd monitoring.
 - 2. Publish articles and success stories of the benefits of quality deer management (balanced sex and age ratios/deer densities).

- B. Continue and increase cooperative educational efforts with other organizations/agencies.**
 - 1. Continue to participate in LSU/QDMA joint workshops or field days. Include topics such as feral hog trapping, habitat management basics, and ways to minimize disturbance.

- C. Assist Hunter Education branch with workshops, classes on deer and habitat management.**



- D. Partner with forest industry to host field days focusing on changes in the industrial forest landscape to understand implications to habitat quality and harvest potential.**
 - E. Explore ways to increase communications and collaboration with other wildlife and resource organizations such as Louisiana Forestry Association and Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.**
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V. INCREASE/IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS OF HUNTING SEASON REGULATIONS

- A. Communicate deer regulations clearly.**
 - 1. Update/edit deer regulation section in hunting pamphlet as needed.
 - 2. Strive to improve or simplify deer language and regulations on website as needed.
 - 3. Continue to request mobile apps for deer hunting regulations and reporting.
 - 4. Use improved maps and boundary descriptions.

VI. BE RESPONSIVE TO PUBLIC CONCERNS AND REQUESTS

- A. Public hearings/LWF Commission meetings.**
 - B. Emails/letters.**
 - C. Hunter surveys.**
 - D. Work with landowners and hunters to develop and share survey data and results.**
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VII. SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS AND EFFECTIVENESS

- A. Continue enforcement efforts towards tagging and reporting. Use every possible opportunity to educate and gain public trust.**
- B. Communicate potential deer regulations changes/proposals with Enforcement administration.**
- C. Attend annual Enforcement meetings as requested to discuss Deer Program function, biology/management, deer hunting regulations, and disease concerns.**
- D. Provide educational opportunities and deer hunting background information for enforcement academies as requested.**
- E. Expand Enforcement efforts in areas where increased or persistent problems or violations occur.**
 - 1. Assist private and industrial lands lessees.**
- F. Address dog hunting trespass issues where a concern, and work towards solutions.**
 - 1. Determine new management strategies/solutions for Office of State Lands deer hunting.**
- G. Assist landowners with trespass violations.**

VIII. SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE INCREASED HUNTER RECRUITMENT

- A. Support and encourage increased youth hunter recruitment.**
 1. Continue to assist Outdoor Writer Youth Hunter Awards Program.
 2. Support Archery in Louisiana Schools Program and its advancement in hunter recruitment activities.
- B. Support and encourage LDWF/Hunter Education mentoring program.**
- C. Support and participate in Becoming an Outdoors Woman program (BOW).**

LITERATURE CITED

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APPENDIX A: SEASON SETTING TIMELINES

Revised November 15, 2016 (KFR)

RESIDENT GAME HUNTING SEASONS: PROTOCOL FOR ADOPTION OF AMENDMENTS TO HUNTING SEASONS AND REGULATIONS

JANUARY - Staff will present its recommended Notice of Intent (NOI) for Season Dates (SD) and General/WMA (G/WMA) hunting regulations.

COMMISSION ACTS UPON NOI AT THIS MEETING.

Commission members may propose changes to the recommended NOI. Such proposed changes shall be made by motion, second and vote. Any such changes shall be incorporated into the NOI, which shall be published accordingly, in the January Register after approval by the Commission.

Public comment accepted.



FEBRUARY - Commission members may consider and propose amendments to the NOI. Any proposed amendments shall be by motion, second and vote, and if approved, shall be deemed to be conditionally adopted, subject to public comment and further deliberation.

Public comments shall be accepted on the NOI and on all conditionally adopted amendments. Conditionally adopted amendments shall require a second vote at the April meeting, and shall be considered for approval or disapproval only in their latest version and without modification.

(Statewide public hearings take place this month as well; dates would be Feb. 23 - March 1.)

MARCH - Commission members may propose amendments to the NOI. Any proposed amendments shall be by motion, second and vote, and if approved, shall be deemed to be conditionally adopted, subject to public comment and further deliberation.

Public comments shall be accepted on the NOI and on all conditionally adopted amendments. Conditionally adopted amendments shall require a second vote at the April meeting, and shall be considered for approval or disapproval only in their latest version and without modification.

This is the last meeting at which new amendments to the NOI will be conditionally adopted.

APRIL - No further amendments to NOI will be offered or considered – either from Commission members, staff, or as a result of public comment. The only deliberation from this point on is regarding the NOI adopted in January and the amendments to the NOI which were conditionally adopted in February and March.

Public comments accepted, but the public will be advised that from this point on in the process, the Commission will be deliberating only the above.

COMMISSION MAKES FINAL DECISION ON NOI AND ALL PREVIOUS CONDITIONALLY ADOPTED AMENDMENTS AT THIS MEETING. NO CHANGES WILL BE CONSIDERED OR ADOPTED AFTER THIS MEETING UNLESS DIRECTED BY LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.

Commission votes on amendments to NOI conditionally adopted in February and March. Staff will compile a numbered list of all such amendments in the order they were adopted. Each amendment requires another motion, second and vote this month in order to be included in the package going to Oversight. The amendments conditionally adopted may be considered individually or in globo. Each amendment will be voted on, up or down, but only in the form in which it was conditionally adopted, and without modification. After all amendments have been considered and voted on, the Chair will entertain a motion to adopt the NOI as amended - or without amendments - as the case may be.

Any amendments to the January NOI which are finally adopted at this meeting are sent to Oversight immediately following this meeting. (This should be no later than April 10.)

MAY - NO ACTION (by Commission).

No public comment.

We should know status of Oversight by May 15. If Oversight makes no changes, the Secretary will proceed to finalize the Rule without further action or revisitation by Commission.

JUNE - Final Rule ratified as approved by Oversight, but only in the event that Oversight mandates changes. If no changes, Secretary will finalize the final rule prior to the June meeting, and this item WILL NOT be on Commission Agenda.

Thus, the LDWF Hunting Pamphlet (regulations) will go to the printer sometime during the period June 10-20.

This protocol shall be varied only in the event that there is a biological need that is recognized by LDWF staff, and there are recommendations made by LDWF staff as a result thereof.

INTERNAL TIMELINE

1. **July** - Seasons/regulations review mtg (internal and with other public land management partners)
2. **October** - First draft of reg changes sent for review (Word document)
3. **November** - Second draft of reg changes sent for review (Word document)
4. **December** - Final draft provided to LDWF Economist for FEIS preparation and submittal
5. **January** - Presentation to and Conditional Adoption by Commission
6. **February** - First draft of LDWF Hunting Pamphlet sent for review (pdf)
7. **March** - Second draft of LDWF Hunting Pamphlet sent for review (pdf)
8. **May** - Final draft of LDWF Hunting Pamphlet sent for review (pdf)
9. **June** - LDWF Hunting Pamphlet draft sent to printer



APPENDIX B: CERVID CARCASS IMPORTATION BAN

Title 76

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

Part V. Wild Quadrupeds and Wild Birds

Chapter 1. Wild Quadrupeds

§119. Cervid Carcass Importation

A. Definitions

Cervid - any animal of the family Cervidae including but not limited to white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose, caribou, fallow deer, axis deer, sika deer, red deer, and reindeer.

- B. No person shall import, transport or possess any cervid carcass or part of a cervid carcass originating outside of Louisiana, except: for meat that is cut and wrapped; meat that has been boned out; quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached, antlers, clean skull plates with antlers, cleaned skulls without tissue attached, capes, tanned hides, finished taxidermy mounts and cleaned cervid teeth. Any and all bones shall be disposed of in a manner where its final destination is at an approved landfill or equivalent. Said rule shall be effective March 1, 2017.

Approved parts or deboned meat transported from other states must be legally possessed from the state it was taken. Approved parts and deboned meat from other states must contain a possession tag with the hunter's name, out-of-state license number (if required), address, species, date and location (county and state) of harvest. All cervids transported into or through this state in violation of the provisions of this ban shall be seized and disposed of in accordance with Wildlife and Fisheries Commission and Department of Wildlife and Fisheries rules and regulations.

AUTHORITY NOTE: Promulgated in accordance with the Louisiana Constitution, Article IX, Section 7, R.S. 56:1, R.S. 56:5, R.S. 56:6(10), (13) and (15), R.S. 56:20, R.S. 56:112, R.S. 56:116.1 and R.S. 56:171 et seq.

