

# **Louisiana Deer Report**

**July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021**

LDWF Wildlife Division

Prepared: July 2021

## **Introduction**

The Louisiana deer program is administered by the Office of Wildlife and implemented through 6 field offices where wildlife biologists and technicians perform year around research and management activities on public and private lands. Season dates and bag limits for private lands are set at the Deer Management Area (DMA) level. Louisiana is currently divided into 10 deer management areas (DMAs, Figure 1). In addition, Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and other public lands within Louisiana have independent season dates and regulations.

Seasons are set according to general breeding periods, biological indices, habitat productivity, and landscape features. The statewide deer limit is 6 per season, not to exceed 3 antlered or 4 antlerless per season, except Deer Areas 4 and 10 with a 3 deer limit/season (not to exceed 2 antlered or 2 antlerless deer). Antlerless deer may be taken during the entire season in all deer areas except 5 & 9. Antlerless hunting is limited to designated days in DMA 5, and 9. Daily bag limits are 1 antlered and 1 antlerless when legal.

All deer harvested in Louisiana must be reported through either the license tag reporting system or the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). Harvest data is instrumental in the development of deer season regulations. The license tag reporting system provides male and female harvest rates at the parish and DMA levels. Additional harvest and participation data is gathered through the annual email survey which is covered later in this report.

## **2020 Update**

Louisiana was directly impacted by 5 named tropical systems during the 2020 hurricane season. Southwest Louisiana was hit particularly hard by Hurricanes Laura and Delta. Both storms made landfall within a few miles of one another. Due to the intensity of the storms, the path of destruction effected Louisiana residents over a large portion of the state. In addition to the effect on residents and communities, there was extensive habitat damage to parts of the state. While it is difficult to immediately assess impacts to deer, past research in Louisiana revealed that most deer survive hurricanes. However, accelerated erosion from storm surge can impact available acres of habitat as well as plant species composition. North of the coastal marshes, strong winds cause the majority of damage. In the short term, canopy openings promote the growth of forest plants that provide added forage and cover for deer. Forest impacts were influenced by storm intensity, stand age, hydrology, tree species composition, and past forest management practices. More information on hurricane impacts to deer is available in the Summer 21 Wildlife Insider.

COVID-19 had an influence on the 2020 deer season. Changes in protocol for WMA deer check stations were aimed at speeding up processing time and reducing crowds at check points. In addition, the public

comment meeting for the proposed changes to the 2021 – 2022 hunting season was held virtually. Less obvious were impacts to harvest and participation. While the number of hunters was almost unchanged from the previous season, the number of days afield by hunters was up significantly. More about the number of deer hunters, harvest and hunting efforts will be covered in the Email survey section of the report.

### **Major Changes 2020 – 21**

There were no major changes for the 2020 – 21 deer season. Changes for the 2021-22 season include a new format for licenses and deer tags. Deer tags will not be printed on the traditional water-proof perforated stock that has been used in past seasons. Tags will be printed on 8.5" x 11" paper, which will require a new method of separating and attaching tags. There is a proposed electronic deer tagging option for the future which would alleviate some of the challenges created by paper tags.

### **Deer Regulation Reminders**

Regulations have been established in recent years to prevent the introduction and spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in deer. Similar regulations have been established in other states. Hunters traveling across state lines should check the regulations for the states along their route.

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission amended Cervid carcass import regulations in the spring of 2019 to include Louisiana lands east of the Mississippi River in East Carroll, Madison and Tensas parishes. Cervid carcass import regulations were established in March 2017 to reduce the potential introduction of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) into Louisiana by prohibiting the importation of deer carcasses from outside of Louisiana. The regulation includes all members 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. Exceptions include deboned meat, packaged meat, quarters without any part of the head or backbone, antlers, clean skull plates with antlers, cleaned skulls without tissue attached, capes, tanned hides, finished taxidermy mounts and cleaned cervid teeth.

It is prohibited to use scents or lures that contain natural deer urine or other bodily fluids while taking, attempting to take, attracting or scouting wildlife; except natural deer urine products produced by manufacturers or entities that are actively enrolled and participating in the Archery Trade Association Deer Protection Program or the Responsible Hunting Scent Association (RHSA) Deer Protection Program, which has been tested using real-time quaking induced conversion (RT-QuIC) and certified that no detectable levels of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) are present and is clearly labeled as such. The emergency rule was first enacted September 1, 2019, and remained in effect for the duration of the 2019-20 Deer Hunting Season. The rule was adopted through the season setting process in 2020 making it a permanent addition to the regulations pertaining to deer hunting. The prohibition of natural deer urine is aimed at preventing the possible introduction and spread of Chronic Wasting Disease.

Please visit the LDWF website for additional information. <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/hunting/deer>



hunter survey revealed an estimated 171,800 hunters harvested 192,000 deer (Figure 2.) The sex ratio of the harvest was 55% bucks and 45% does. Although hunter numbers changed very little from the previous season, the number of days spent deer hunting increased by 24%. The estimated number of days hunters spent deer hunting was 4.5 million, accounting for 77% of all hunting days afield.

A decline in hunters is observed for the past 8 seasons (Figure 2) while harvest has not followed the same rate of decline. The sharp increase in 2012 was influenced by senior hunters being included in the survey for the first time.

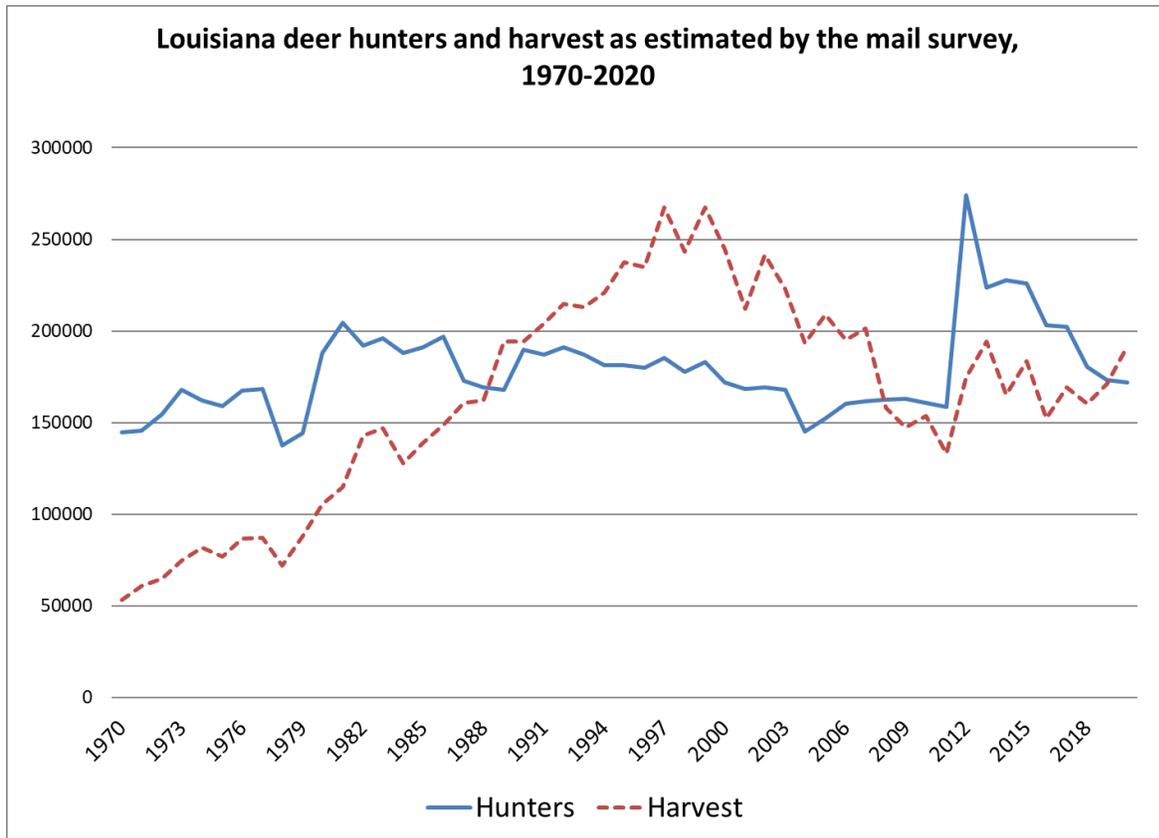


Figure 2. Mail survey estimate of Louisiana deer hunters and deer harvested, 1970-2020. 2012 mail survey forward estimates for hunters and harvest include senior hunters (hunters >60).

The harvest allocation by weapon type (Table 1) reveals that modern weapons are still the most popular method for harvesting deer in Louisiana. The percentage of harvest by weapon type has been stable in recent years.

Table 1. Louisiana Deer harvest by weapon, based on 2020 – 21 email survey.

Weapon	Harvest	Percentage
<b>Modern Firearm</b>	150,300	78%
<b>Primitive Firearm</b>	21,700	11%
<b>Bow and Arrow</b>	13,100	7%
<b>Crossbow</b>	6,900	4%
<b>All Weapons (Total)</b>	192,000	

## **Reported Harvest**

The total reported harvest for the 2020-21 season was 88,256, an increase of 5% from the previous season. Table 2 shows the total reported harvest since mandatory harvest reporting began in 2008. The total number of deer reported per parish, and the number of forested acres per deer harvested for the top 20 parishes are shown below in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

*Table 2. Combined reporting data from all sources.*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>WMA managed</b>	<b>DMAP</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2008-09</b>	87,237	8,481	2,877	17,976	116,571
<b>2009-10</b>	78,444	9,035	2,335	17,641	107,455
<b>2010-11</b>	74,346	9,742	3,004	17,740	104,832
<b>2011-12</b>	53,860	5,596	2,526	14,396	76,378
<b>2012-13</b>	46,814*	na	2,425	14,039	63,278
<b>2013-14</b>	51,319*	na	2,713	14,956	68,988
<b>2014-15</b>	41,563	6,735	2,655	14,128	65,081
<b>2015-16</b>	50,634	7,845	1,279	13,416	73,174
<b>2016-17</b>	46,237	6,952	2,544	13,096	68,639
<b>2017-18</b>	62,021	8,480	2,344	13,744	86,779
<b>2018-19</b>	57,843	10,389	1,952	12,624	82,599
<b>2019-20</b>	60,537	10,904	1,390	10,865	83,696
<b>2020-21</b>	65,154	10,957	**	12,145	88,256

\*Combined private and public land reporting.

\*\*Combined with public land reporting.

*Table 3. Top 20 harvest parishes in Louisiana derived from total reported harvest, 2020-21.*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Parish</b>	<b>Harvest</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Parish</b>	<b>Harvest</b>
1	Union	4074	11	Bossier	2654
2	Bienville	3834	12	Rapides	2588
3	Claiborne	3498	13	St. Landry	2162
4	Vernon	3171	14	Madison	2068
5	Natchitoches	3131	15	Ouachita	2034
6	Jackson	3122	16	Grant	2026
7	Winn	3039	17	Avoyelles	1954
8	Tensas	2767	18	Catahoula	1953
9	Webster	2743	19	Morehouse	1950
10	Sabine	2706	20	La Salle	1935

Table 4. Top 20 harvest per forested acre parishes from total reported harvest, 2020-21.

Rank	Parish	Acres / deer	Rank	Parish	Acres / deer
1	Tensas	61	11	Avoyelles	100
2	Richland	66	12	Jackson	101
3	Franklin	67	13	Pt. Coupee	102
4	E. Carroll	74	14	Webster	105
5	St. Landry	77	15	W. Feliciana	106
6	Madison	82	16	Union	117
7	W. Baton Rouge	86	17	Bienville	118
8	W. Carroll	92	18	Ouachita	123
9	Morehouse	93	19	Claiborne	125
10	Catahoula	94	20	Lincoln	138

### **Mail Survey vs. Reported Harvest**

The mail survey deer harvest index is consistently higher than the total reported harvest. The total reported harvest consists of the DMAP harvest and the license tag reporting system. The total reported harvest was up 5%, while mail survey respondents reported a 12% increase (Table 5).

Both sources of data serve important and complimentary roles. The mail survey index is best used to monitor trends over time, since it utilizes a consistent format and sampling distribution. It provides statewide harvest and deer hunter numbers. However, it has limited application at the parish level due to sample size. Conversely, the reporting system provides percent buck and doe harvest at the parish level. It also reveals the number of successful hunters harvesting between 1 and 6 deer. When used in combination, trends can be assessed at the state, parish and deer area level.

Table 5. Reporting harvest vs. mail survey index, 2008-2020.

Year	Reporting system (all sources *)	% Change from previous season	Estimated harvest mail survey	% Change from previous season
2008/09	116,571	na	158,300	-21%
2009/10	107,455	-8%	147,300	-7%
2010/11	104,832	-2%	153,500	4%
2011/12	76,378	-27%	133,000	-13%
2012/13	63,278	-17%	174,700**	31%
2013/14	68,988	9%	194,100	11%
2014/15	65,081	-6%	165,300	-15%
2015/16	73,174	12%	183,400	11%
2016/17	68,639	-6%	152,200	-17%
2017/18	86,779	26%	169,400	11%
2018/19	82,599	-5%	160,400	-5%
2019/20	83,696	1%	171,000	7%
2020/21	88,256	5%	192,000	12%

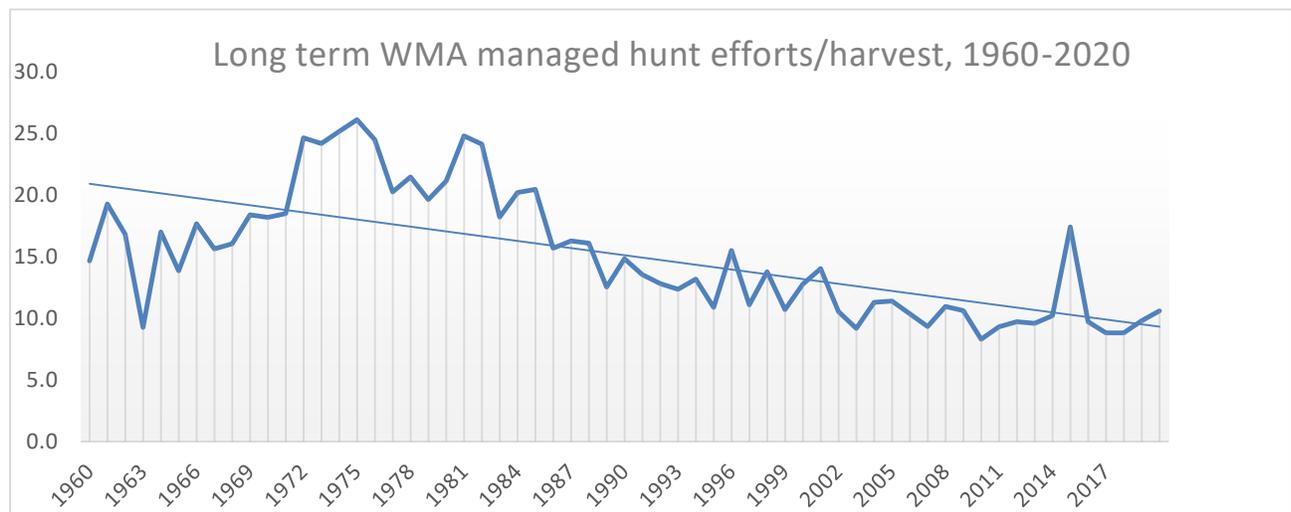
\*= DMAP, WMA managed hunts, public and private reporting system total

\*\*= mail survey includes senior hunters for the first time

## Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)

LDWF manages and provides deer hunting opportunity on over 1,500,000 acres. WMA deer seasons vary in length and timing based on management strategies and breeding chronology. Hunters may utilize modern firearms, primitive firearms and archery weapons when allowed. Youth and handicapped hunts are also available on many areas. Bucks only seasons provide extended hunting opportunity and coincide with the rut on most areas. WMA harvest rates vary by WMA depending on deer physiographic region, habitat conditions, and hunter efforts. In some years, WMA harvest rates equal or surpass intensively managed DMAP properties. On other WMAs, harvest rates are low due to habitat type, forest conditions, accessibility issues, or other management objectives. In general, WMA deer herds are managed in a way that helps ensure long term forest regeneration, diversity, sustainability, and a healthy deer herd.

Hunter success and harvest vary, sometimes substantially, from year to year (Figure 3). The 2015 season is an example of this variation. The long term trend for WMA hunter success illustrates fewer efforts needed to harvest a deer. In addition to increased harvest success per effort, many exceptional deer are harvested on Wildlife Management Areas.



*Figure 3. Long term WMA managed hunt efforts per deer harvested.*

The recorded harvest for WMA either-sex managed deer hunts was 948 deer in 2020 (Table 6). Managed either-sex hunts had an average hunter success rate of 10.6 efforts per deer (Figure 3), slightly higher than the 10-year average of 10.2. The sex ratio for the WMA managed either-sex hunt harvest was 56% buck and 44% doe compared to 51% buck and 49% doe the previous year. While the harvest per effort comparison is still relevant, the number of participants has been influenced by temporary closures on Peason Ridge WMA and Fort Polk WMA. Both were closed for the second consecutive year due to military training exercises. On average, 4,100 efforts were recorded on the two areas. In general, participation on WMA managed hunts is declining, however, harvest success has been trending upwards over that same time.

Table 6. 2020 WMA Managed Hunts.  
2020 WMA Managed Hunts

WMA	Hunter efforts	Total harvest	Bucks	Does	Efforts per deer
<i>Alexander State Forest (Oct.)</i>	33	1	0	1	33
<i>Alexander State Forest</i>	184	17	7	10	10.8
<i>Attakapas *</i>	79	1	0	1	79
<i>Bayou Macon **</i>	241	33	20	13	7.3
<i>Big Lake **</i>	614	31	18	13	19.8
<i>Bodcau</i>	319	36	22	14	8.9
<i>Boeuf **</i>	486	88	55	33	5.5
<i>Buckhorn **</i>	241	27	14	13	8.9
<i>Camp Beauregard</i>	237	39	31	8	6.1
<i>Clear Creek (Oct.)</i>	484	107	59	48	4.5
<i>Clear Creek *</i>	819	27	14	13	30.3
<i>Dewey Wills</i>	734	100	46	54	7.3
<i>Fort Polk (Oct.)</i>	closed				closed
<i>Fort Polk</i>	closed				closed
<i>Grassy Lake **</i>	251	30	10	20	8.4
<i>JC Sonny Gilbert**</i>	87	9	3	6	9.7
<i>Joyce*</i>	41	3	1	2	13.7
<i>Loggy Bayou</i>	252	42	28	14	6
<i>Maurepas Swamp **</i>	294	17	7	10	17.3
<i>Pearl River *</i>	186	8	3	5	23.3
<i>Peason Ridge (Oct.)</i>	closed				closed
<i>Peason Ridge</i>	closed				closed
<i>Pomme de Terre**</i>	144	7	4	3	20.6
<i>Russell Sage**</i>	581	71	48	23	8.2
<i>Sabine*</i>	125	12	7	5	10.4
<i>Sandy Hollow *</i>	72	3	2	1	24
<i>Sherburne **</i>	588	25	21	24	23.5
<i>Spring Bayou *</i>	161	10	5	5	16.1
<i>Thistlethwaite</i>	454	20	11	9	22.7
<i>Tunica Hills **</i>	44	2	0	2	22
<i>West Bay (Oct.)</i>	510	102	56	46	5
<i>West Bay *</i>	551	12	3	9	45.9
<i>Richard K. Yancey**</i>	1204	68	34	34	17.7

Self-clearing Permit Only\*

Check station and self-clearing permit combined\*\*

Closed: Peason Ridge WMA and Fort Polk WMA were temporarily closed for military training.

## **DMAP**

DMAP continues to be the most important source of biological information LDWF has on private lands and we encourage hunters and managers to continue their participation in this program. Efforts to increase site visits and other services for participants continues to be a priority.

Participants receive detailed reports on their specific habitat conditions and deer herd. Harvest data collected greatly increases our ability to monitor deer and habitat conditions across the state while monitoring trends in deer quality and productivity on a local level. In addition, site visits and browse surveys allow biologists to set harvest recommendations for participants tailored to current assessed habitat conditions and herd densities.

The 2020-21 DMAP harvest was 12,303 deer (11.2% increase from last year), with a harvest rate of one deer per 115 acres compared to one deer per 134 acres the previous season. In 2020-21, there were 406 clubs (1,000,427 acres) enrolled in DMAP Tiers 1 and 2 in which cooperators provided full harvest data. An additional 250 clubs (390,792 acres) were enrolled in DMAP Tier 3, which does not require the collection of age specific data. Nineteen properties (22,123 acres) were enrolled in Tier 4, designed for farmers experiencing crop herbivory. Enrollment has remained stable in recent years. The DMAP sex-ratio for harvested deer was 41% bucks and 59% does, compared to 39% bucks and 61% does the previous season. The sex-ratios have been roughly 40:60 for DMAP over the past ten seasons.

## **Big Game Records**

The Louisiana Big Game Records Program documents all-time record white-tailed deer and wild turkey harvested in the state that meet or exceed minimum antler or spur measurements, respectively, as well as deer and turkeys that meet minimum recognition requirements over a three-year span.

Measurements are taken by a Boone and Crockett or LDWF-certified measurers for the records program. Entries are submitted on an official score sheet and signed by the measurer. Net measurements are used for entry. There is no charge for scoring and entry into the records program.

Seventeen new records were included in the 2020 – 21 recognition list as well as 15 new records for the all-time records list. A couple of highlights from 2020 included a 275 5/8" non-typical harvested in Richland parish. The buck is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest non-typical on the Louisiana records list. While it is not uncommon to add entries that are several years old, a large buck harvested in 1939 was recently added. The 186 6/8" Madison parish buck was entered by the family of the late hunter.

## **Deer Health and Disease Surveillance**

The Wildlife Health Program is administered by the State Wildlife Veterinarian, Assistant State Wildlife Veterinarian, and Wildlife Health Biologist. The program conducts disease investigations when sick, injured, or deceased animals are observed by Department personnel or reported by the public. Herd health collections and managed hunts provide samples for statewide serosurveillance of white-tailed deer. The program conducts diagnostic testing through six laboratories which include: 1) Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) at the University of Georgia, 2) Louisiana Animal Disease

Diagnostic Laboratory (LADDL) at Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine, 3) Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL), 4) Mississippi Veterinary Research and Diagnostic Laboratory (MVRDL) at Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine, 5) USGS National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC), and 6) USDA APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL).

### *Chronic Wasting Disease*

Chronic wasting disease has been detected in 26 states including our neighboring states. The closest positive was detected in Issaquena county, Mississippi approximately 6 miles east of the Mississippi River. That detection occurred in 2018. Since that time, both Louisiana and Mississippi have conducted extensive testing along the Mississippi River. No positives have been detected in Louisiana and only 1 additional positive was detected in Issaquena county. While prevalence is considered low, the threat remains and both states have implemented regulations aimed at reducing potential spread and introduction.

LDWF collected 826 CWD samples in 2020-21 and 11,949 since 2002. The bulk of samples are collected directly from hunters, but LDWF secured additional samples from roadkills, taxidermists, processors and target deer which include symptomatic deer and pen escapes.

Hunters in Louisiana may have their deer tested by contacting LDWF. Surveillance efforts are necessary for early detection. Proactive measures such as recommended disposal practices as well as limiting the placement of bait on the landscape could help slow the spread if discovered. More on CWD and what you can do to prevent it is available at <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/cwd>.