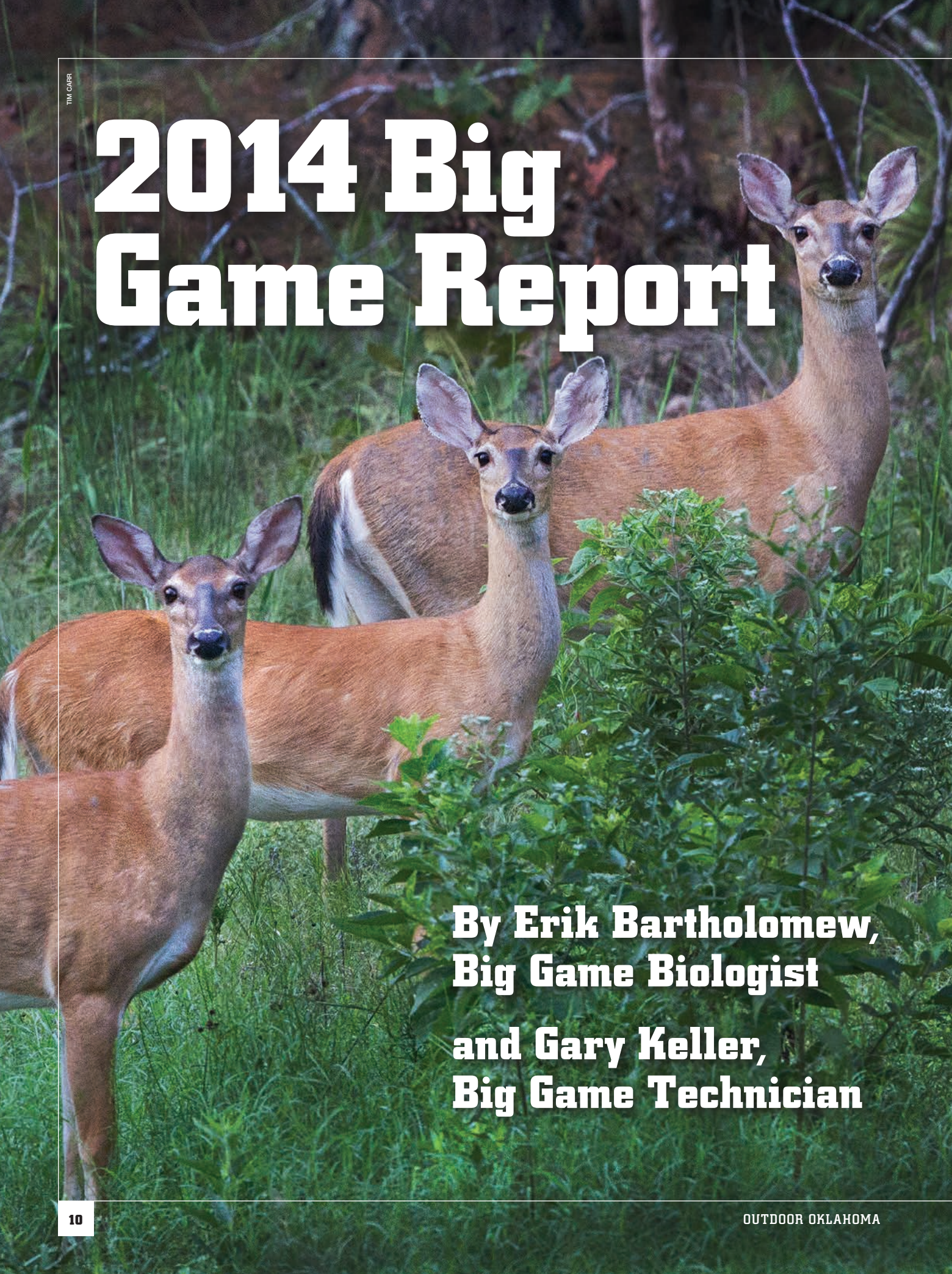


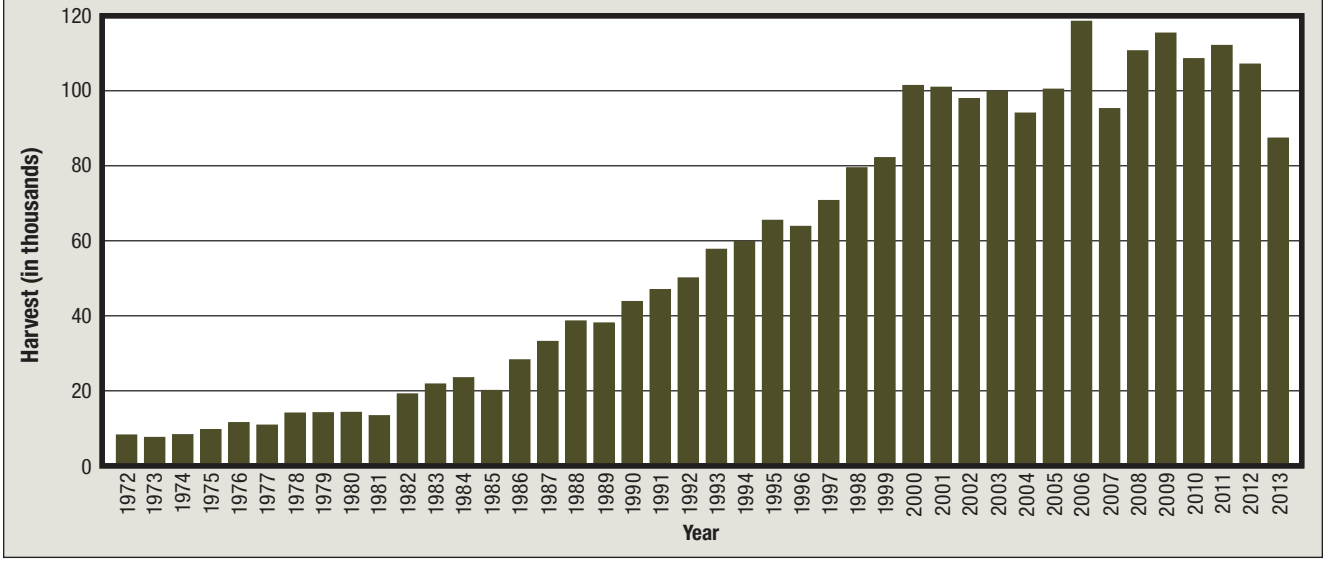
TIM CARR

2014 Big Game Report

By Erik Bartholomew, Big Game Biologist

and Gary Keller, Big Game Technician

FIGURE 1: Total Deer Harvest



Someone once said, "The only thing constant is change." We would have to agree! Whether we are talking about the weather, the price of ammunition, or hunting, things are always changing.

Looking back at the summer of 2013, for much of the state conditions were much wetter and cooler than during the summers of 2011 and 2012. Even in western Oklahoma, there was at least some green foliage at the end of summer! Who would have imagined that it would be so hard to find cheap .22 shells to go plink for an afternoon? At least the prices and supply are beginning to loosen up a bit.

Deer season was also different for 2013. For the first time since 2000, the deer harvest fell below the average of 105,000. Why?

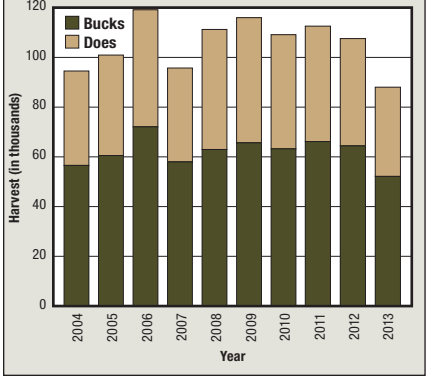
2013-14 DEER SEASON

Several factors contributed to a reduced harvest in the 2013-14 deer season. Several years of drought have certainly affected reproduction, particularly in western portions of the state. A wet summer in 2013 resulted in ample native food sources being available. Reports of large acorn production and bumper crops of persimmons and muscadine in parts of the state kept deer away from feeders and food plots. Major winter weather events affected the beginning and end of gun season, with fog and hot temperatures in between. Additionally, the first part of the holiday season saw another winter weather event. All of these factors combined resulted in fewer hunters afield and fewer hunters harvesting deer. While this lower-than-average harvest is notable, it is not cause for panic or alarm. Deer management relies on trend data collected over time. While this lower harvest certainly cannot be overlooked, it will be important to see whether it will be repeated in future years. The important thing to remember is not to over-emphasize one data point, but to look at the overall trend shown in the data.

One "first" that is particularly important to note is that more archery hunters were afield this past season than ever before. With that many hunters afield, even with the lower overall harvest, archery harvest was the third-highest ever.

Once all the deer had been tallied, Oklahoma hunters took home 88,009 deer for the 2013-14 seasons, the lowest since 2000. This number is 19,839 fewer deer than were taken for the 2012-13 seasons. As in years past, Figure 2 shows bucks made up the bulk of the harvest, with 52,197 antlered deer being checked. Doe harvest came in at 35,812, making up 41 percent of the total harvest. Table 1 lists the deer harvest by county, season and sex. Table 2 shows only the deer taken from wildlife management areas (WMAs) and other areas managed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

FIGURE 2: 10 Year Deer Harvest Trend, All Seasons Combined



Gun hunters again took home the bulk of the harvest: 59 percent of all deer taken. When all gun seasons were combined (general gun, youth and holiday antlerless), hunters bagged 51,588 deer in 2013. Muzzleloader hunters added 14,981 deer to the total. Similar to previous years, archery hunters harvested more deer than muzzleloader hunters, taking home 21,440 deer in 2013-14. To see the individual seasons and their respective harvests, see Figure 3.

Looking at Table 1 (see page 12), you will see a listing of deer harvests by county, perhaps noticing a large disparity in the numbers of deer taken. This is influenced by the size of

FIGURE 3: 2013 Deer Harvest by Season Type

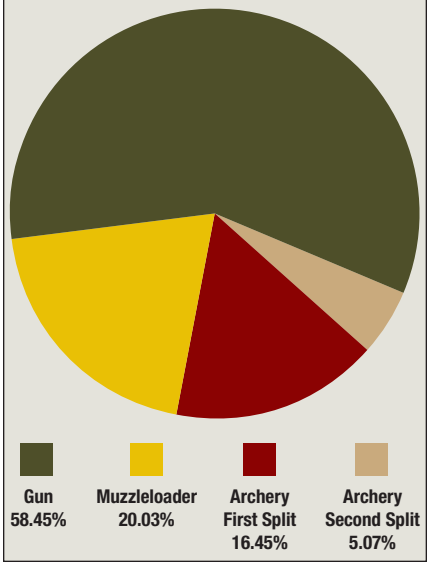


TABLE 1: 2013 Deer Kill By County, Season, and Sex (WMAs not included in county totals)

County	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does			
Adair	206	161	467	379	325	117	998	657	1,655
Alfalfa	149	123	541	457	86	71	776	651	1,427
Atoka	335	367	762	593	393	175	1,490	1,135	2,625
Beaver	23	15	197	84	15	7	235	106	341
Beckham	82	64	485	203	55	21	622	288	910
Blaine	65	46	318	200	43	43	426	289	715
Bryan	177	197	384	234	94	55	655	486	1,141
Caddo	141	146	612	458	99	64	852	668	1,520
Canadian	85	77	240	158	44	21	369	256	625
Carter	253	184	561	414	126	70	940	668	1,608
Cherokee	364	371	782	616	455	189	1,601	1,176	2,777
Choctaw	173	220	411	308	175	95	759	623	1,382
Cimarron	16	6	85	.	6	.	107	6	113
Cleveland	207	160	380	281	128	78	715	519	1,234
Coal	143	109	402	257	175	49	720	415	1,135
Comanche	73	52	212	147	29	23	314	222	536
Cotton	40	39	147	93	27	22	214	154	368
Craig	297	268	861	584	258	112	1,416	964	2,380
Creek	310	278	901	594	246	162	1,457	1,034	2,491
Custer	60	43	290	162	22	26	372	231	603
Delaware	316	270	565	476	326	122	1,207	868	2,075
Dewey	45	38	323	180	29	35	397	253	650
Ellis	70	39	417	211	28	27	515	277	792
Garfield	74	66	293	227	62	35	429	328	757
Garvin	98	83	265	156	86	29	449	268	717
Grady	103	83	320	227	55	35	478	345	823
Grant	108	118	538	361	93	78	739	557	1,296
Greer	44	51	193	123	18	30	255	204	459
Harmon	59	63	218	154	38	27	315	244	559
Harper	35	15	227	111	35	11	297	137	434
Haskell	183	143	341	276	234	87	758	506	1,264
Hughes	139	102	465	274	185	66	789	442	1,231
Jackson	44	60	180	119	16	30	240	209	449
Jefferson	68	52	274	155	31	28	373	235	608
Johnston	129	154	304	300	75	50	508	504	1,012
Kay	110	92	426	307	89	57	625	456	1,081
Kingfisher	58	56	229	155	41	23	328	234	562
Kiowa	39	42	177	140	29	18	245	200	445
Latimer	183	157	370	248	232	106	785	511	1,296
LeFlore	223	162	406	280	318	143	947	585	1,532
Lincoln	206	187	579	314	147	78	932	579	1,511
Logan	191	141	420	284	108	38	719	463	1,182
Love	81	78	211	156	40	23	332	257	589
Major	109	100	505	271	47	49	661	420	1,081
Marshall	115	94	197	135	50	31	362	260	622
Mayes	217	213	433	322	219	90	869	625	1,494
McClain	58	32	133	72	22	10	213	114	327
McCurtain	265	256	637	400	413	164	1,315	820	2,135
McIntosh	94	73	218	109	84	31	396	213	609
Murray	90	69	266	153	73	38	429	260	689
Muskogee	192	174	368	252	165	84	725	510	1,235
Noble	67	72	271	264	54	38	392	374	766
Nowata	145	119	630	323	148	62	923	504	1,427
Okfuskee	100	57	288	177	89	61	477	295	772
Oklahoma	126	116	102	74	22	13	250	203	453
Okmulgee	130	100	281	183	110	52	521	335	856
Osage	398	333	1,545	1,005	304	170	2,247	1,508	3,755
Ottawa	167	123	339	299	131	62	637	484	1,121
Pawnee	49	52	227	188	44	39	320	279	599
Payne	115	89	338	286	80	54	533	429	962
Pittsburg	335	320	666	397	443	160	1,444	877	2,321
Pontotoc	181	142	355	258	129	59	665	459	1,124
Pottawatomie	157	135	425	294	163	66	745	495	1,240
Pushmataha	218	270	484	363	395	164	1,097	797	1,894
Roger Mills	108	65	544	306	58	50	710	421	1,131
Rogers	293	227	466	351	137	58	896	636	1,532
Seminole	74	71	233	177	102	45	409	293	702
Sequoyah	233	248	465	389	312	113	1,010	750	1,760
Stephens	127	104	376	216	61	50	564	370	934
Texas	7	5	86	14	10	1	103	20	123
Tillman	44	45	169	145	14	17	227	207	434
Tulsa	111	89	151	99	30	16	292	204	496
Wagoner	132	114	227	152	68	39	427	305	732
Washington	76	47	303	157	37	30	416	234	650
Washita	13	17	131	76	7	11	151	104	255
Woods	101	57	450	240	68	42	619	339	958
Woodward	70	77	407	206	54	32	531	315	846
County Subtotal	10,522	9,283	29,495	19,809	9,259	4,577	49,276	33,669	82,945
WMA Subtotal	815	820	1,445	839	661	484	2,921	2,143	5,064
Grand Total	**11,337**	**10,103**	**30,940**	**20,648**	**9,920**	**5,061**	**52,197**	**35,812**	**88,009**

TABLE 2: 2013 Deer Kill By WMA, Season, and Sex

WMA	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does			
Altus-Lugert WMA	11	5	12	.	5	2	28	7	35
Atoka WMA	12	10	32	18	9	4	53	32	85
Beaver River WMA	.	1	14	1	1	.	15	2	17
Beaver-McFarland Unit	2	.	8	3	1	.	11	3	14
Black Kettle WMA	12	16	140	93	15	26	167	135	302
Blue River WMA	7	5	4	.	.	.	11	5	16
Broken Bow WMA	5	1	4	4	7	3	16	8	24
Camp Gruber JMTA	9	11	24	.	24	11	57	22	79
Candy Creek WMA	5	2	.	.	.	1	5	3	8
Canton WMA	16	20	35	8	6	10	57	38	95
Cherokee GMA	5	3	27	11	.	1	32	15	47
Cherokee PHA	13	12	22	2	16	9	51	23	74
Chickasaw NRA	6	2	13	8	6	2	25	12	37
Cimarron Bluff WMA	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	1	1
Cimarron Hills WMA	2	.	2	.	.	.	4	.	4
Cookson Hills WMA	8	10	19	4	6	4	33	18	51
Cooper WMA	1	1	20	1	2	2	23	4	27
Copan WMA	24	26	38	5	6	11	68	42	110
Cross Timbers WMA	31	18	14	8	3	1	48	27	75
Deep Fork NWR	16	13	.	.	1	1	17	14	31
Deep Fork WMA	5	4	3	2	12	7	20	13	33
Dewey County WMA	.	2	2	.	.	.	2	2	4
Drummond Flat WMA	1	4	.	.	.	.	1	4	5
Ellis County WMA	3	.	25	.	2	5	30	5	35
Eufaula WMA	6	4	18	13	.	.	24	17	41
Fobb Bottom WMA	13	11	11	9	1	1	25	21	46
Fort Cobb SP	1	1	1	.	.	4	2	5	7
Fort Cobb WMA	16	17	8	2	.	.	24	19	43
Fort Gibson WMA	38	48	33	6	33	15	104	69	173
Fort Gibson WR	3	3	.	1	18	17	21	21	42
Fort Sill MR	29	34	71	40	26	25	126	99	225
Fort Supply WMA	5	8	14	.	4	6	23	14	37
Four Canyon TNC	.	.	2	1	.	.	2	1	3
Gary Sherrer WMA	.	1	.	.	1	2	1	3	4
Gist WMA	1	1	.	.	.	.	1	1	2
Grady County WMA	.	2	4	.	.	1	4	3	7
Gruber WMA	.	2	5	.	6	4	11	6	17
Hackberry Flat WMA	3	1	.	.	.	1	3	2	5
Heyburn WMA	7	7	10	4	4	3	21	14	35
Hickory Creek WMA	1	2	14	6	3	.	18	8	26
Honobia Creek WMA	14	12	38	34	53	24	105	70	175
Hugo WMA	25	23	32	43	21	14	78	80	158
Hulah WMA	12	15	48	5	12	12	72	32	104
James Collins WMA	25	27	35	13	1	.	61	40	101
John Dahl WMA	2	.	2	1	1	1	5	2	7
Kaw WMA	16	25	73	63	28	23	117	111	228
Keystone WMA	28	33	14	3	11	5	53	41	94
Lexington WMA	19	14	28	10	11	5	58	29	87
Little River NWR	4	9	14	7	.	.	18	16	34
Little River SP	16	32	.	.	.	.	16	32	48
Love Valley WMA	3	2	20	13	2	1	25	16	41
Lower Illinois River WMA	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	1	1
M-K Robert S. Kerr WMA	2	3	3	3	3	1	8	7	15
Major County WMA	.	1	2	.	.	.	2	1	3
McAlester AAP	88	91	.	11	.	.	88	102	190
McCurtain Co. WA	.	.	.	.	7	1	7	1	8
McGee Creek WMA	9	5	10	6	7	1	26	12	38
Okmulgee GMA	2	4	13	8	.	1	15	13	28
Okmulgee PHA	2	6	6	.	3	.	11	6	17
Oologah WMA	25	21	41	26	16	12	82	59	141
Optima NWR	1	.	1	.	.	.	2	.	2
Optima WMA	3	2	10	4	.	.	13	6	19
Osage-Rock Creek WMA	.	1	7	3	3	.	10	4	14
Osage-W. Wall WMA	2	4	2	.	2	.	6	4	10
Ouachita Cucumber Creek WMA	1	.	1	.	2	1	4	1	5
Ouachita WMA-Leflore Co.	13	9	37	31	35	16	85	56	141
Ouachita WMA- McCurtain Co	22	17	58	40	62	18	142	75	217
Ozark Plateau WMA	.	.	1	1	.	.	1	1	2
Packsaddle WMA	3	4	20	.	3	1	26	5	31
Pine Creek WMA	7	5	7	6	6	2	20	13	33
Pushmataha WMA	7	10	13	8	7	4	27	22	49
Red Slough WMA	7	2	.	.	.	.	7	2	9
Robbers Cave WMA	1	.	1	1	2	.	4	1	5
Salt Plains NWR	1	4	12	56	.	.	13	60	73
Sandy Sanders WMA	6	2	.	.	3	.	9	2	11
Sequoyah NWR	.	2	.	.	9	57	9	59	68
Sequoyah SP	.	.	.	.	9	20	9	20	29
Skiatook WMA	5	2	10	8	1	6	16	16	32
Sparrowhawk WMA	2	1	1	.	.	1	3	2	5
Spavinaw GMA	16	18	37	9	9	6	62	33	95
Spavinaw PHA	10	15	9	5	9	5	28	25	53
Stringtown WMA	.	.	1	2	1	.	2	2	4
Tenkiller WMA	6	4	1	3	1	.	8	7	15
Three Rivers WMA	44	42	109	91	67	43	220	176	396
Tishomingo NWR	.	.	4	7	6	8	10	15	25
Tishomingo WMA	7	3	9	4	2	1	18	8	26
Washita Arm WMA	5	2	19	5	3	2	27	9	36
Washita NWR	.	.	1	19	.	.	1	19	20
Waurika WMA	27	22	2	2	5	3	34	27	61
Webbers Falls WMA	1	1	2	.	1	.	4	1	5
Wichita Mts NWR	1	.	18	9	.	.	19	9	28
Wister WMA	8	14	21	24	18	10	47	48	95
Yourman WMA	.	1	3	5	1	.	4	6	10
WMA SUBTOTAL	815	820	1,445	839	661	484	2,921	2,143	5,064
COUNTY SUBTOTAL	10,522	9,283	29,495	19,809	9,259	4,577	49,276	33,669	82,945
GRAND TOTAL	**11,337**	**10,103**	**30,940**	**20,648**	**9,920**	**5,061**	**52,197**	**35,812**	**88,009**

RICH FULLER

Figure 4: 2013 Deer Management Zones

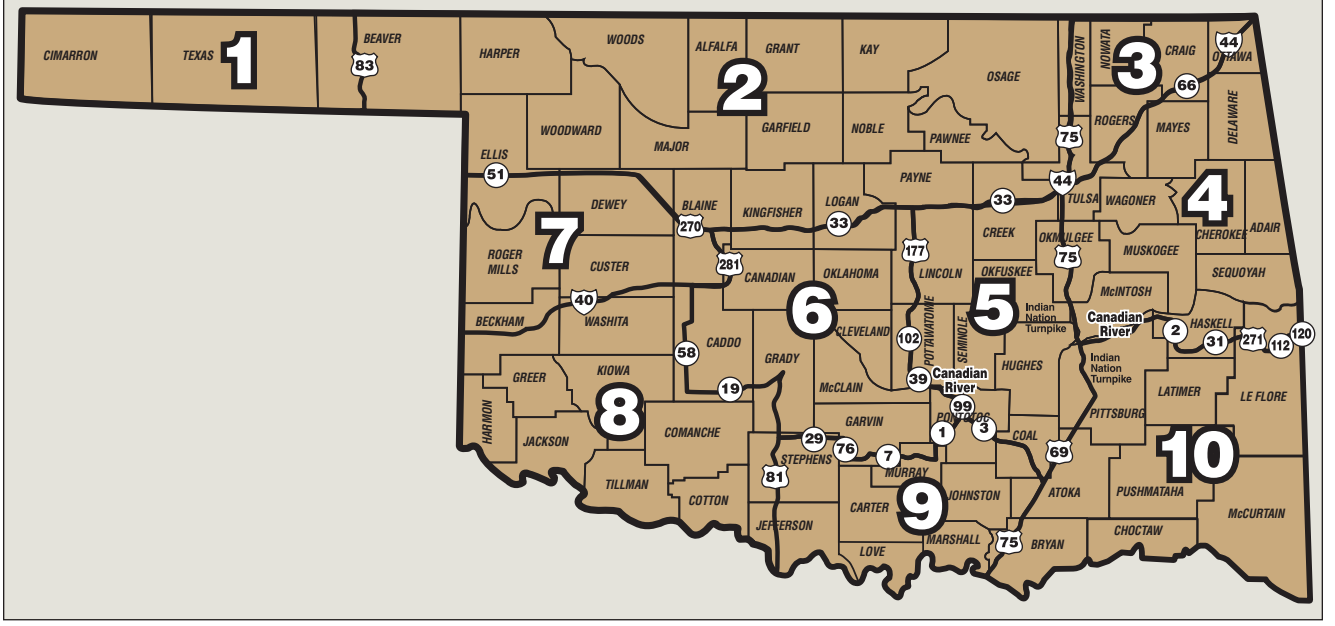
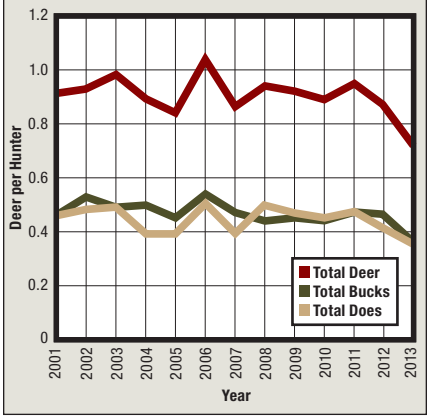


FIGURE 5: Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter, 2001-2013



the county, the amount of suitable deer habitat, hunter access, and a multitude of other factors. Some counties have WMAs, and others do not. Therefore, Table 1 reflects deer harvest totals with the WMAs removed. The usual suspects are represented this year, though they have changed position on the leader board. Osage County leads the top 10 counties with 3,755 deer harvested in 2013-14. Cherokee County edged out Atoka County, 2,777 and 2,625 respectively. The other counties that made the top 10 were Creek (2,491), Craig (2,380), Pittsburg (2,321), McCurtain (2,135), Delaware (2,075), Pushmataha (1,894) and Sequoyah (1,760).

Those who hunt in the westernmost parts of the state have a chance at a mixed bag. Mule deer prefer the wide-open spaces found in western Oklahoma. As with white-tailed deer, one county tops the mule deer harvest list every year, and this year was no exception. Cimarron County topped the list with 83. Beaver and Texas County tied at 30 each. Other counties that recorded mulies in their harvest total were Harper (12); Ellis (11); Woodward (10); Roger Mills (9); Beckham (4); Greer, Major and Woods (2 each); and Custer, Dewey and Grant (1 each). In total, 198 mule deer were harvested in Oklahoma in 2013-14.

Oklahoma is one of the most ecologically diverse states in the nation with nine different eco-regions found within its borders. It is safe to say that with this range of diversity, a "one-size-fits-all" approach to managing wildlife is not possible. For this and many other reasons, the Wildlife Department has divided the state into 10 separate management zones (Figure 4). These areas of similar herd and habitat variables allow for greater flexibility in setting regulations. Even with the differences among the 10 separate management zones, they are all managed with a continued emphasis on achieving and maintaining an adequate harvest of antlerless deer balanced with the conditions found within each zone.

All parts of Oklahoma are open to antlerless deer harvest to one degree or another. Some areas had liberal "doe days," while a more conservative approach was taken in other areas. Depending upon the management zone hunted, sportsmen and sportswomen had the chance to harvest antlerless deer during archery, muzzleloader and rifle seasons. Again in 2013, October youth season hunters younger than 18 accompanied by an adult were allowed to harvest antlerless deer, and a special holiday antlerless season was offered in December.

Hunters continue to take advantage of the antlerless opportunities available to them. This past year, 38,091 antlerless deer (including button bucks) were taken in our state. While this is less than the 2012-13 total, the percentage of antlerless deer is up slightly. It is also important to note that the harvest of antlerless deer has remained above 40 percent for the past five years. Hunters must remain diligent in their doe harvest efforts. Sport hunting remains the single best method available for managing population growth, maintaining healthy buck-to-doe ratios, and safeguarding herd and habitat health.

The combined season limit for all deer archery, primitive, gun and youth-only seasons was no more than six deer per individual. Of the six deer allowed, no more than two of them could be antlered bucks. Any deer taken by hunters participating in the special holiday antlerless season or deer taken through the Wildlife Department's Controlled Hunts Program were considered "bonus deer" and would not count toward the hunter's limit of six deer.

Youths Get a Shot Before Regular Deer Gun Season

Youngsters will have the first shot at harvesting a deer during the Youth Deer Gun Season on Oct. 17-19.

Young Oklahoma hunters will have a chance to harvest a buck and a doe before the rush of the regular deer season. The three-day Youth Deer Gun Season will take place Oct. 17-19.

"We want to attract youth to the sport of hunting, because they are the future of the sport and the future of conservation in Oklahoma. Giving them their own deer gun season is a great way to get them involved and out in the field with a mentor," said Colin Berg, education supervisor for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

During the Youth Deer Gun Season, hunters 17 or younger with the required licenses are allowed to harvest two deer, but only one of them may be antlered.

"We are always working to provide better hunting opportunities to sportsmen, and setting up the season so that youth can harvest a buck or a doe during youth deer gun season makes for a better chance at harvesting a deer and brings more excitement to the hunt," Berg said.

Youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult age 18 or older. Youths who are hunting with an apprentice-designated license must be accompanied by a licensed hunter age 21 or older who is hunter education-certified or exempt.

Oklahoma resident youngsters who are 15 or younger are exempt from buying a hunting license. Resident youths 16 or 17 years old can buy a youth combination hunting and fishing license for $9 or a youth hunting license for $5.

All youths who participate in the Youth Deer Gun Season are required to buy a $10 Youth Antlered Deer Gun License and/or a $10 Youth Antlerless Deer Gun License. Resident youths who hold a lifetime hunting or combination license are exempt from the $10 licenses. Nonresident youth hunters must possess a nonresident deer license.

Youth hunters who do not harvest a deer during the Youth Deer Gun Season may use their unfilled Youth Deer Gun License during the regular Deer Gun Season. Hunters who harvest a deer during Youth Deer Gun Season may buy another Youth Deer Gun License and harvest a deer during the regular gun season. Deer taken by hunters in the Youth Deer Gun Season are included in the hunter's combined season limit but do not count as part of the regular Deer Gun Season limit.

For complete information on the apprentice-designated hunting license, youth season regulations and season dates, pick up a free copy of the current "Oklahoma Hunting" regulations guide or go online to wildlifedepartment.com.

For Oklahoma residents 10 and older who do not have hunter education certification, the Wildlife Department offers the course and certification test online at wildlifedepartment.com. Students who pass the online test will be able to print their hunter education certification immediately.

WADE FREE

ARCHERY SEASON

Whether with stick and string, a compound bow or a crossbow, archery continues to grow in popularity in Oklahoma. According to the latest Game Harvest Survey, 96,778 hunters headed to their stands during archery season this past year. This number is up 7,500 hunters from last year! During the 2013-14 season, archers took home 21,440 deer. This number is 1,768 less than the 2012-13 harvest. This trend can be clearly seen in Figure 11, while Figure 12 shows the buck and doe harvest each week of the season. Figure 13 shows the percent success by season type. Archers still had a high rate of success, at 22 percent this past season. The average individual archer's harvest rate is shown in Figure 6.

The 2013-14 archery season opened Oct. 1 and continued through Jan. 15. The bag limit was six deer, which could include no more than two bucks. To keep with tradition, the archery season harvest is shown in two segments in Figure 3. The first "split" of the season ran from opening day to Nov. 22. The second segment was from Nov. 23 to the end of the season.

MUZZLELOADER SEASON

The 2013 muzzleloader season began Oct. 26 and continued through Nov. 3 statewide. There were no changes in the bag limit; however, antlerless opportunities were expanded in Zone 10 during muzzleloader season. Hunters there went from six days to all nine days with the opportunity to harvest a doe. According to the Game Harvest Survey, 85,283 muzzleloader hunters took to the fields (Figure 14), a sharp decrease from 2012 with 5,367 fewer "smokepole"

FIGURE 6: Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Archery Season 2001-2013

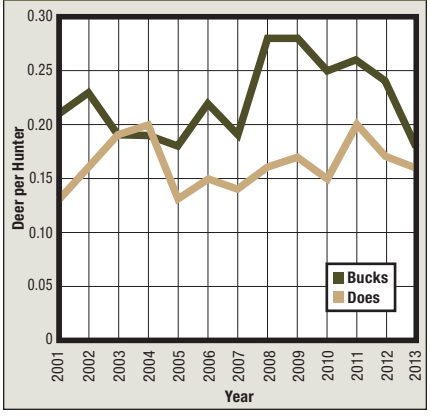


FIGURE 7: Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Muzzleloader Season 2001-2013

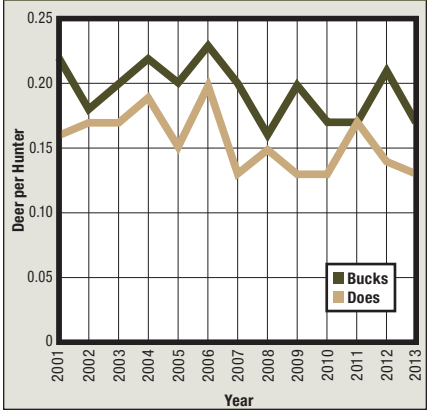


FIGURE 8: Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Gun Season 2001-2013

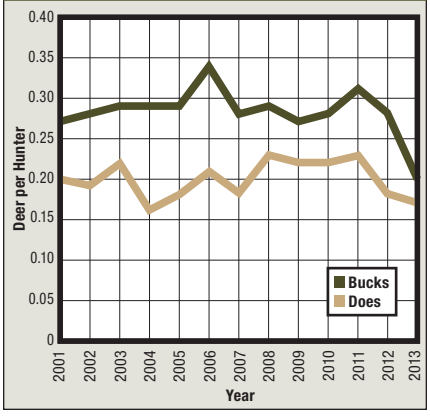


FIGURE 9: Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Youth Season 2001-2013

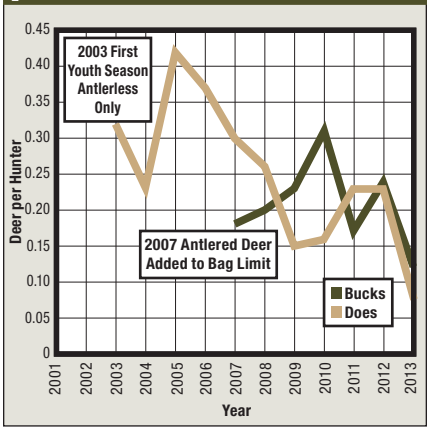


FIGURE 10: Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Holiday Season 2001-2013

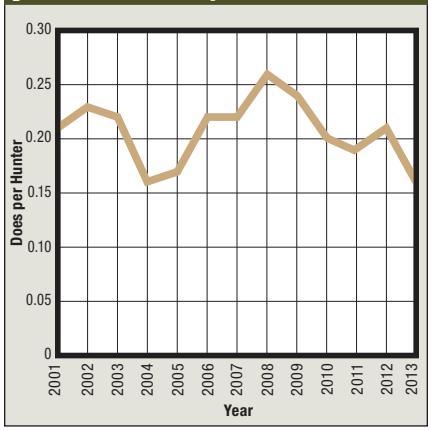
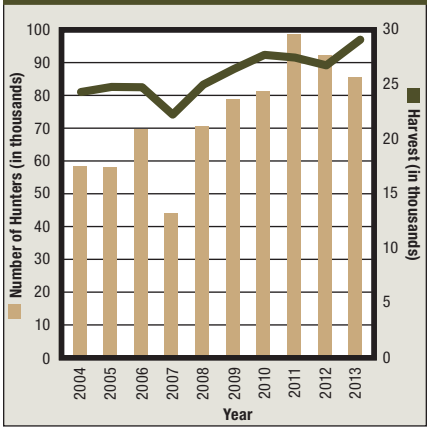


FIGURE 11: Archery Season Hunter Numbers and Harvest, 2004-2013



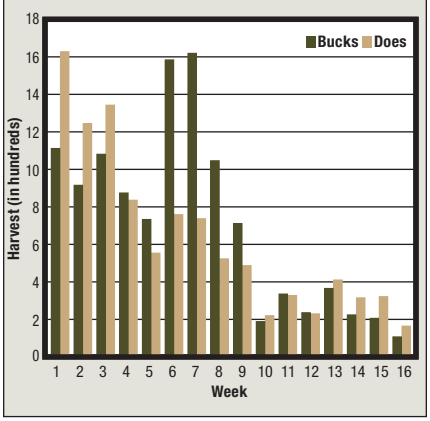
hunters heading to the woods. The success rate of 18 percent was the lowest since 2007 (Figure 13). With fewer hunters heading to the woods, it is no surprise that the total muzzleloader harvest of 14,981 was down 30.7 percent from last year. The average individual muzzleloader hunter success rate is shown in Figure 7.

The bag limit remained unchanged from 2012; however, more antlerless days were available in Zone 10. Hunters could kill one antlered and two antlerless deer, provided at least one of the antlerless deer came from Management Zone 2, 7 or 8. Figure 15 charts the muzzleloader harvest by day and sex.

GUN SEASON

Gun season again leads the method-of-take category for hunters. This season drew 190,874 hunters into the field carrying a modern firearm. While the number was down about 10,500 hunters from 2012, several factors likely contributed to that reduced hunter effort. With major winter weather events falling on the opening and closing weekends, and fog and high temperatures in between, hunter success and participation, and deer movement were certainly affected by the wild swings in the weather. Figure 13 shows hunter success rates were down this past year.

FIGURE 12: 2013 Archery Harvest by Week



COURTESY OF DANNY ROBBINS

FIGURE 13: Percent Success by Season Type, 2004-2013

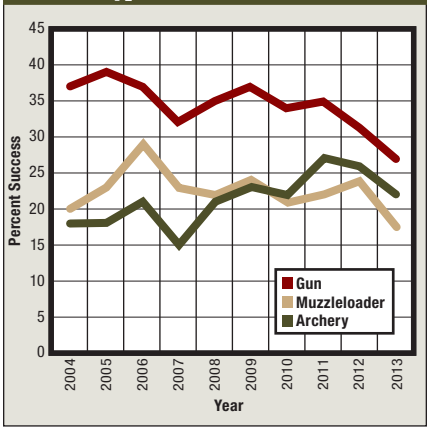
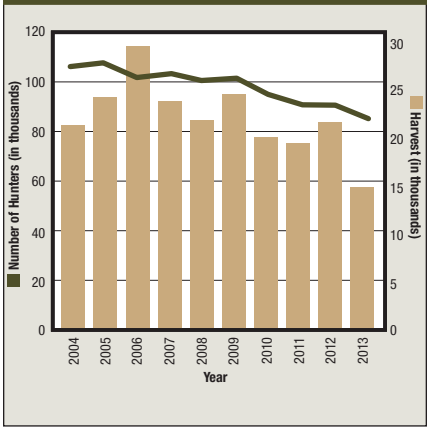


FIGURE 14: Muzzleloader Season Hunter Numbers and Harvest, 2004-2013



With more opportunities available for youths with the apprentice license, reduced license and permit costs, and a special youth season, youth hunters had the first chance at a deer with a rifle during youth season. A total of 9,688 hunters younger than 18 took to the woods. Youth season started Oct. 18 and ran through the weekend, ending on Oct. 20. Compared to last year, 1,400 fewer youths were out during youth season this past fall. The season was open statewide and had a bag limit of one antlered and one antlerless deer. To see how well youth hunters have been doing, see Figure 9.

The next chance for hunters to pursue deer with a modern rifle started Nov. 23, the Saturday before Thanksgiving, and ran uninterrupted for 16 days, ending Dec. 8. In 2013, the Game Harvest Survey indicated 147,710 hunters headed to their stand for the modern gun season. Opening weekend had the highest participation again this year (Figure 17), and 33 percent of the 42,531 deer harvested with a modern firearm were taken the first two days of the season. Bag limits remained unchanged from the 2012 season, with hunters having the chance to harvest three deer, with no more than one antlered and two antlerless per hunter. Zone 10 did see an increase in the number of doe days: eight in the 2013 season compared with three days in previous seasons. If taking two antlerless, one of those must have been taken from Management Zones 2, 7 or 8.

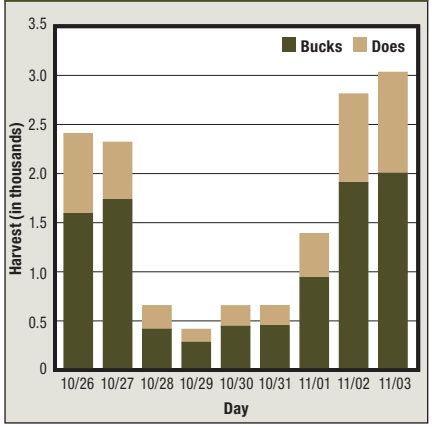
The special holiday antlerless season closed out hunters' chances to chase white-tails with a gun in eight of the 10 management zones. The holiday season opened Dec. 20 and closed Dec. 29. This year, 33,476 hunters took advantage of this last chance to put some meat in the freezer. The bag limit remained one antlerless deer. As an added incentive to participate in the season, this deer did not count against the hunter's combined season bag limit of six deer. Figure 10 illustrates the average annual harvest for hunters participating in this popular season.

ELK

Oklahoma elk hunting is mostly restricted to those fortunate enough to draw a permit through the Wildlife Department's Controlled Hunts Program. The majority of the permits issued through the drawing process are for the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Oklahoma. Again this year, permit numbers were reduced as a result of compounding factors from an ice storm several years ago, continued drought, and major wildfires through most of the elk range. This year, 47 hunters with a coveted bull tag harvested

COLLIN BERG

FIGURE 15: 2013 Muzzleloader Harvest by Day*



*Graph depicts deer taken during the 9-day season. Additional deer were taken with ML equipment but are not included in this graph.

FIGURE 16: Gun Season Hunter and Harvest 2004-2013 (includes Holiday Antlerless and Youth Seasons)

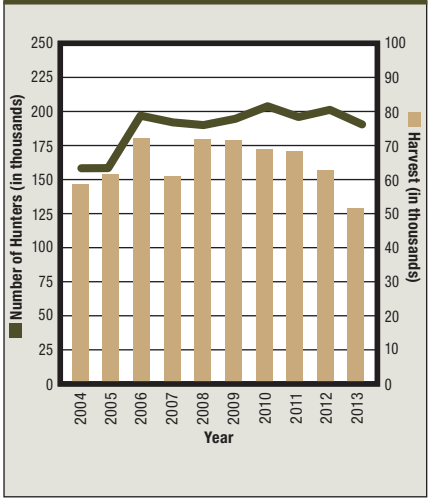
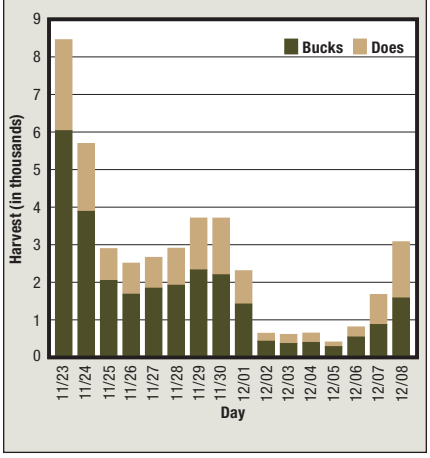


FIGURE 17: 2013 Gun Harvest by Day*



* Graph depicts only deer taken during the 16-day regular rifle season. Additional deer were taken with firearms but not included in this graphic

41 branch-antlered bulls, while 32 cow hunters took home 19 antlerless elk. The overall success rate for Wichita Mountains elk hunters was 76 percent.

Other controlled hunt permits were available on two Wildlife Department areas: Pushmataha WMA and Cookson WMA. Both permits were either-sex. Both hunters bagged nice bull elks on their WMA controlled hunts.

While the majority of elk permits are issued through the draw, some parts of the state also offer the opportunity to chase elk on private lands. Those hunters with landowner permission can hunt elk in the rolling hills north of the Wichita Mountains in Caddo, Comanche and Kiowa counties. To effectively manage the elk in this part of the state, two hunting zones were established. The Granite Hills/West Zone was situated west of State Highway 115. The bag limit for this zone was established at one elk of either sex. On the opposite side of the highway, hunters were allowed two elk (one of which must have been antlerless) in the Slick Hills/East Zone. Including elk taken off the Fort Sill military installation, 23 bulls and two cows were taken by archers, and an additional 83 bulls and 79 cows were taken by gun hunters. This brought the Southwest Region total, including the Wichita Mountains harvest, to 187 total elk in 2013.

Oklahoma also has an elk hunting zone in the northeastern portion of the state in Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, Mayes, Muskogee and Sequoyah counties. The seasons were concurrent with the established deer seasons and had a one elk bag limit. Eight elk were checked in from this region. Two bulls were killed by archers. Five bulls and one cow were killed by gun hunters.

The combined elk limit was set at two elk for all elk zones combined. In total, 197 elk were taken statewide during the 2013 seasons.

New for 2014: Elk season will be expanded statewide! The state will be divided into zones, and each zone will have a separate harvest quota. Once the quota for a particular zone has been met, that zone will close for elk hunting the remainder of the season. Elk seasons, outside of the Special Southwest Zone, will run concurrent with established deer hunting seasons.

PRONGHORN ANTELOPE

Even though the Panhandle saw some rainfall in 2013, it was not enough to overcome the severe drought. Pronghorn populations continue to be affected by low rainfall. These "speed goats" of the prairie rely on rainfall to produce the resources they need to survive and reproduce. With reduced populations available to hunters, harvest was also down. Over-the-counter archery hunters harvested 13 (12 bucks and 1 doe) of these unique animals.

COURTESY OF CARLOS GOMEZ

Those hunters lucky enough to draw a once-in-a-lifetime pronghorn permit through the Department's Controlled Hunts Program harvested 23 bucks and 37 does. The remaining pronghorns harvested this year were through landowner permits, accounting for an additional 10 bucks and 29 does harvested, bringing the total number of animals harvested in 2013 to 112.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Each year for the past few decades, natural resources students from selected state universities are employed to collect deer jaws at different locations across the state. This data, coupled with jaws collected from cooperators enrolled in the Department's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP), and deer harvested on selected WMAs, defines the herd age structure that is needed to make informed management decisions. During the 2013 season, 2,988 individual jaws were removed and analyzed using the tooth wear and eruption method to determine the age of the deer at the time of harvest. This sample size was 3.4 percent of the total number of deer harvested in 2013. This valuable data, collected at deer processors across the state, is summarized in Figure 19 and Figure 20. The ages given in these figures are divided into half-year increments. This might seem odd, but remember that fawns are born in spring, and when hunting season arrives, those deer are 6 months old, or a half-year of age.

Yearling bucks (those that are 1.5 years old) are especially good barometers of a herd's physical condition. Their high vulnerability to harvest usually ensures a large sample size, and, more importantly, these young bucks have the burden of growing their first set of antlers when body growth is not complete. This makes them especially sensitive to prevailing range conditions. When yearlings have well-developed antlers with many points and large beam diameters, the herd can be considered healthy. Of the 198 yearling bucks examined in 2013, 59 percent had four or more points (Figure 18). This is an increase from the 2012 season. However, this is no surprise with range conditions considerably better in the summer of 2013 than during the two previous summers.

Figure 19 shows the 2013 adult buck age structure. While the number of harvested yearling bucks increased from 2012 levels (19.7 percent), this is still below the average of 23 percent since 2007.

The age structure for adult antlerless deer is shown in Figure 20. The doe harvest is a telling sign of our herd structure. Since does do not have antlers, the harvest pressure on does is fairly level across the board. This is the second year that hunters harvested a nearly equal percentage of yearling does and yearling bucks, continuing the pressure on antlerless deer and leaving young bucks to mature!

FIGURE 18: Yearling Buck Antler Point Distribution, 2013

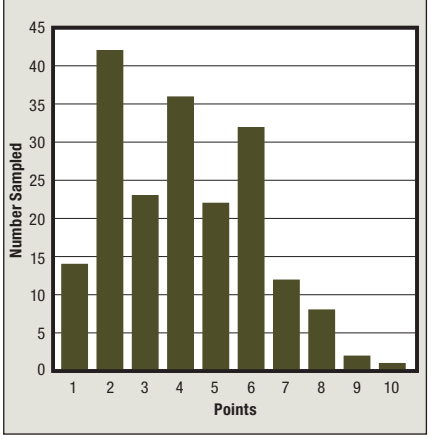


FIGURE 19: 2013 Adult Buck Age Distribution

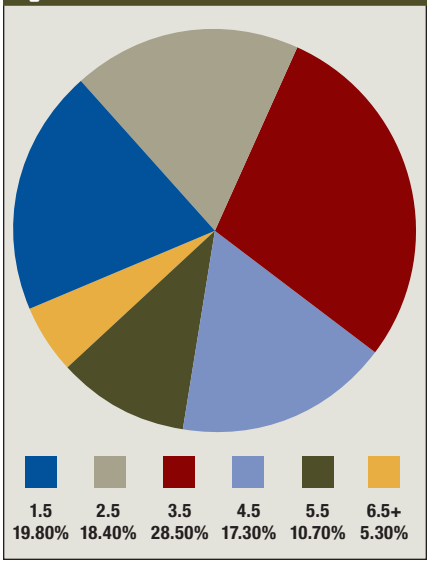
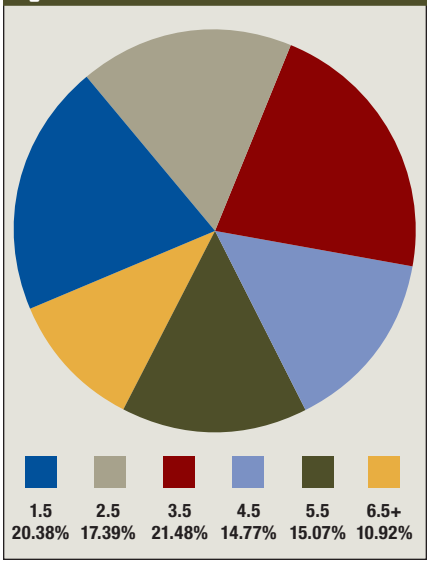


FIGURE 20: 2013 Adult Doe Age Distribution



WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

Wildlife Department-managed lands might account for only 3 percent of the state's land area, but they were responsible for producing 5.8 percent of the 2013 harvest. Hunters continue to take advantage of these public lands. Some of the areas are open to deer hunting with the same dates and bag limits as the general statewide seasons, while others have special regulations to help manage hunter numbers and deer populations, and some are only available to hunters fortunate enough to draw a permit through the Controlled Hunts Program. This past year, 5,064 deer were taken from these Department-managed properties. Of the deer taken, 42.3 percent were does. Table 2 represents a harvest summary for each area by season and sex.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2013-14 deer seasons were down across the board in terms of hunter participation, success and harvest. Inclement weather during gun season certainly contributed to fewer hunters participating this past year. In the eastern half of the state, it was pretty difficult to see deer with all the natural vegetation in such great shape. Archery continues to gain in popularity and has seen an increase in participation the past several seasons, with the highest participation ever coming in 2013-14.

Deer harvest will always ebb and flow with periods of high harvest and periods of low harvest. Much of harvest is tied to weather, habitat conditions and hunter participation. Since we cannot control the weather, we must take it as it comes. We can improve habitat by working with local biologists or resource professionals. Finally, the important thing is to get out there, spend time in the woods and enjoy a break from the daily grind!

(Hunter Education intern Kalie Meyer was associate editor for this report.)

Cy Curtis Awards Program Adds Searchable Online Database

For decades, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Cy Curtis Awards Program has recognized deer hunters who harvest a trophy buck in Oklahoma. Those hunters who harvest a white-tailed or mule deer buck that meets the minimum score for antler size are eligible for a Cy Curtis Award.

Details about the deer, the hunter and the location of harvest are added to the Cy Curtis record book, published annually by the Wildlife Department.

Now, all of the Cy Curtis Award entries through 2013 are accessible in an online database at wildlifedepartment.com/cycurtis/view.aspx. The database has a custom search feature, which allows hunters to specify the data they want to see, such as results for a particular county or the highest-scoring bucks for a particular year.

The Cy Curtis program is similar to national recognition programs operated by the Boone and Crockett, and the Pope and Young organizations. The Cy Curtis Award, named in honor of the man most responsible for the restoration of white-tailed deer in Oklahoma, was established in 1975 to recognize trophy deer taken throughout the state. A native of Stilwell, Curtis (1912-82) was a wildlife biologist with the Wildlife Department.

The searchable online Cy Curtis database is currently divided into four sections: typical white-tailed deer, nontypical white-tailed deer, typical mule deer and nontypical mule deer.

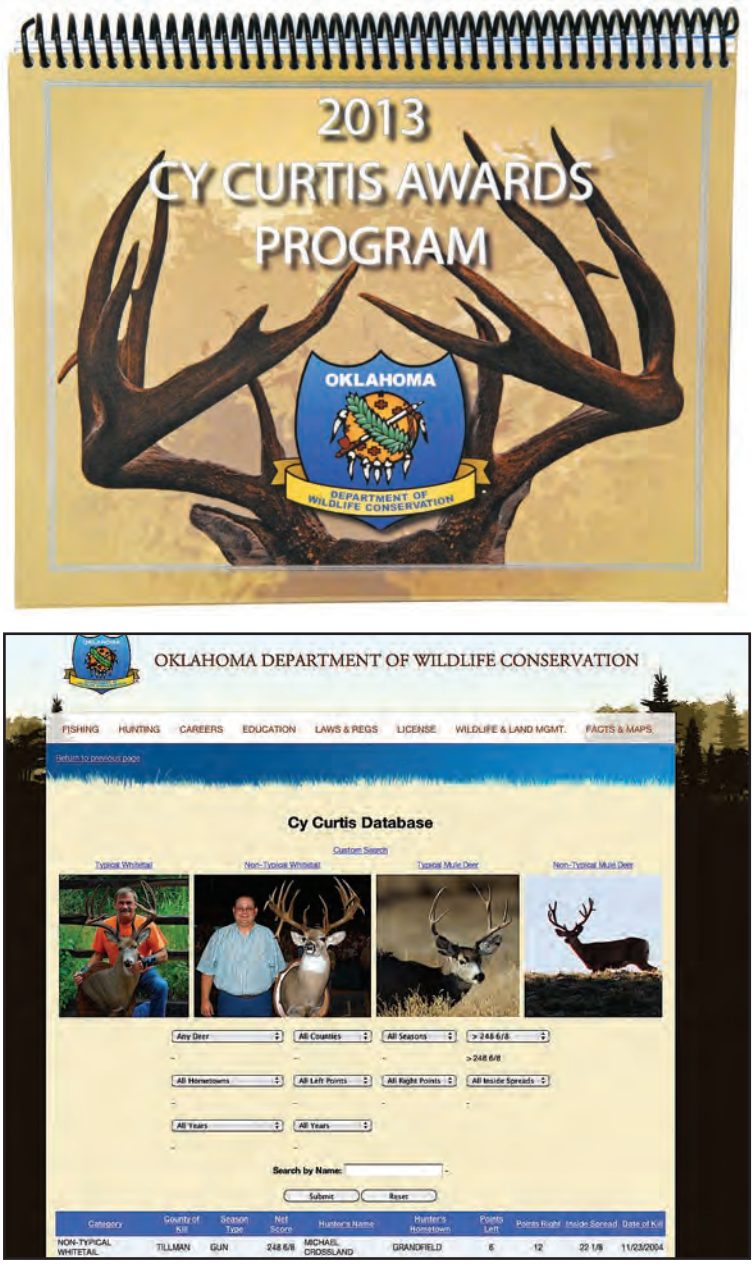
Jerry Shaw, research programs supervisor for the Wildlife Department, said the minimum scores that will qualify for the Cy Curtis record book will generally fall between the scores required by Pope and Young and those required by Boone and Crockett. He said this allows more hunters to be recognized for Oklahoma animals that might not qualify for the national record books.

The online database isn't the only change that the Cy Curtis Awards is undergoing. Soon, hunters who bag a trophy elk, black bear or pronghorn antelope in Oklahoma also will be able to collect a Cy Curtis Award.

"If you would've asked me when I started 20 years ago if we would ever be putting black bears in our Cy Curtis book, I would have said no. But here we are!" Shaw said, alluding to the many successes of the Department's wildlife management programs over the past several decades.

All Cy Curtis Award applicants must still have their entries scored by an official scorer employed by the Wildlife Department, or a certified scorer for either the Boone and Crockett or Pope and Young organizations.

The online Cy Curtis database is designed to offer more convenience to hunters in accessing information about trophy bucks in Oklahoma. The Wildlife Department plans to continue publishing the familiar Cy Curtis Awards record book each year.



The Wildlife Department's annual Cy Curtis Awards record book compiles information about trophy bucks harvested in Oklahoma. Now, a searchable online database is available for added convenience.

MICHAEL BERGIN

Up the Odds for Your Public Land Black Bear Hunt

EDITOR'S NOTE: Even though most bear hunting in Oklahoma occurs on private land, several public hunting areas offer hunters the chance to pursue bears. Among them are the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Areas in southeastern Oklahoma.

By Kyle Johnson, Wildlife Biologist

Harvesting a black bear on public hunting land can be difficult. Nearly all black bear hunting in the United States employs the use of bait including molasses, honey, grease, sardines, corn, and so on. But on public land in Oklahoma, including the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Areas, baiting of black bears is prohibited.

But just because bait cannot be used on WMAs doesn't make harvesting a bear there impossible. It does mean that scouting, strategy, patience and a good understanding about black bear biology are even more important.

Hunting black bears, perhaps more than any other game species in Oklahoma, requires a thorough knowledge of the animal. In Oklahoma, the black bear hunting season begins for archery hunters Oct. 1. The black bear mating season occurs from late spring into early summer. By Oct. 1, bears are beginning to prepare for hibernation, and searching for suitable den sites consumes much of their time. But they are also spending considerable time fattening up for hibernation, often 18 to 20 hours per day, and this is the key to finding a bear during the hunting season.

The most important food item for bears during the fall is acorns. Even when black bears are being baited with goodies such as bacon grease and powdered sugar, the bears quickly turn their attention to falling acorns, which are high in energy and digestibility. For this reason, hardwood-dominated areas should be scouted during the summer months to determine the presence or absence of a good acorn crop.

Because black bears prefer relatively undisturbed large forest areas, the best hardwood-dominated areas to scout would be those that are some distance from any road traffic. Steep and rough areas, year-round walk-in only areas, and habitats with limited or no vehicle access are great areas to scout first.

Hardwood habitats mixed with a variety of young pine plantations and cleared timber areas are regularly found within a bear's home range and should be given extra attention when located by any hunter scouting for the presence of black bears. Young clear-cut areas often provide an abundance of soft mast-producing plants including blackberries and pokeberries, which are favorite food sources during the summer months.

When black bears are eating as much as 20 hours in a single day, they will also have a need to visit a water-

ing hole more often. In areas lacking a permanent source of water, especially during drought years, scouting hard-to-find watering holes and small ponds can prove to be productive. Watering holes may be anything from creeks to small ponds or even standing water in low-lying holes. Don't overlook small springs, as bears seem to favor springs when available. Finding bear tracks at a watering hole is a good sign. A little extra scouting effort in and around the watering hole for food sources and trails will help indicate whether the area is regularly visited by black bears or just used on occasion.

In addition to learning the feeding habits of black bears, having knowledge about other biological aspects of the animal can improve a hunter's chances. Learning what black bear tracks look like as well as how an older bear's tracks compare in size to a younger bear's tracks will help in determining if a boar may be in the area. Studying photographs of younger versus older bears will help the ability to distinguish a cub or younger bear from an old boar. In general, boars will have a wider cranium than females, and the ears on a younger bear will look larger than on an older male. Bears usually grow into their ears at 3 years of age.

As in deer hunting, sometimes the little things that get overlooked can be the difference between having a chance to harvest a bear and not seeing one at all. Bears, in general, have relatively average eyesight but more than make up for it with smelling and hearing abilities. A black bear's sense of smell is 250 times better than that of a human's, which means even the smallest unnatural odor can ruin a hunt. Wearing cover scent, not smoking while in the tree stand or blind, and not wearing hunting clothes as everyday clothes are good ways to avoid those unnatural odors that can alert a bear to your presence.

Perhaps the greatest perk about hunting black bears in Oklahoma is that the black bear season runs concurrently with a large part of the deer archery season. Another perk is that probably the best location to encounter a bear during October is where acorns are available, which is where deer are likely to be encountered, as well. A deer archery hunter can buy a bear tag and have the bonus of having a great chance of harvesting both species. A strategy that has proved successful for many bear hunters is using a predator call. A distress call from a deer fawn or rabbit is likely to get the attention of any bears in the area, especially males that are generally more aggressive to responding to distress calls in search of a free meal.

With some time and effort learning about black bears, scouting areas for food and water sources, looking at aerial photographs to find those hard-to-reach spots, and hunting with persistence and patience, even a first-time bear hunter can improve the odds of possibly harvesting a bear for the dinner table. It may not be easy, but the joy of hunting doesn't just come from harvesting an animal, it comes from the whole experience. When the harvest is made, it just makes all the hard work and determination even sweeter.

The Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs are privately owned by timber companies but open to the public through cooperative agreements between the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and each timber company. Accessing the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs for any type of recreation requires each person to buy a Land Access Permit. The permit, $40 for Oklahoma residents ages 18 to 64, and $85 for nonresidents (no age exemptions for nonresidents), is good for one calendar year and is sold by all hunting and fishing license vendors statewide. Revenue from the Land Access Permit goes toward management of the WMAs and to pay the timber investment companies an annual lease fee to help keep the WMAs open for the public to enjoy.

Before planning your next hunting trip to Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs, contact biologist Dakota Christian at (918) 527-5308.

Black Bear Harvest Down for 2013

After a record harvest in 2012, Oklahoma's bear hunters found success much more elusive in 2013. Overall, 28 black bears were harvested in the most recent season, the second-lowest tally since the state established a bear hunting season in 2009. Archery hunters took 27 of the bears this past season.

Jeff Ford, biologist with the Wildlife Department, said a good mast crop in the southeastern part of the state helped keep the bear harvest down this past year. Conversely, a poor mast crop in 2012 led to a total harvest of 71 bears.

The quality of mast, the term for natural food items that are available to the bears, is a key to hunter success. Most bear hunting on private land occurs with the use of bait. When mast is scarce, bears will find and use bait sources more readily. But when mast is plentiful, bears are more likely to pass up bait. The use of bait on public hunting lands is illegal. About three-fourths of all bears harvested in Oklahoma are taken from private lands.

Ford said the mast crop this year doesn't look as plentiful as last year's crop, partly because of a late freeze in April. "It should be a good season for hunters that have bear in their area," he said.

Hunters wanting to pursue black bear in 2014 must buy either an archery or muzzleloader bear license before the opening dates of each season. Archery bear season will be Oct. 1-19 in Latimer, Le Flore, McCurtain and Pushmataha counties only, and there will be no season quota for archery. Muzzleloader bear season will be Oct. 25 to Nov. 2 in the same counties, and once the quota of 20 bears has been reached, the muzzleloader season will close. Muzzleloader hunters must check the bear quota status on the day of their hunt by calling (888) 901-3256. For more information, consult the "Oklahoma Hunting" guide.