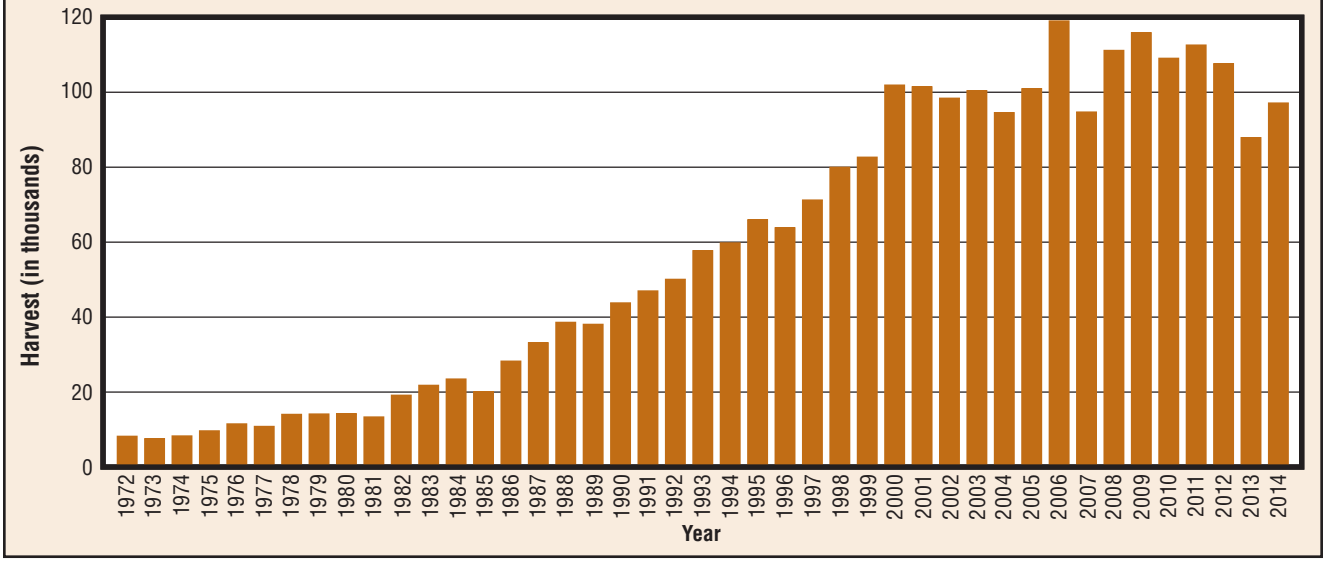
DAVID JAMESON

2014 BIG-GAME REPORT

By Erik Bartholomew, Big-Game Biologist
and Emily Clark, Big-Game Technician

FIGURE 1 Total Deer Harvest

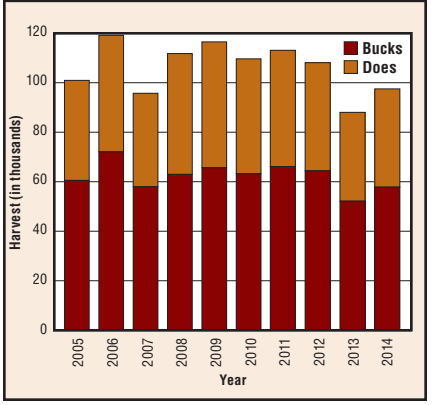


2014-15 Deer Season

As this Big-Game Report is being written, the weather in Oklahoma has been wet! Looking at the Oklahoma Mesonet data, there is not a single station in the state with less than 5 inches of rain in the past 30 days. This is great news for the drought-stricken western half of the state. For the first time in several years, western rivers are flowing and lakes are filling. This is certainly good news for farmers, hunters and land managers statewide as wildlife habitats recover from drought.

The 2014 deer season total harvest was 97,265. While that was no record-breaker in terms of total harvest, it was a record-setting season for archery. Archery harvest was the highest it has ever been in Oklahoma. It is no wonder: For the second year in a row, more archery hunters were afield this past season than ever. Oklahoma also saw its first statewide elk season in 2014. With good summer weather the past couple of years, deer numbers are beginning to recover across much of Oklahoma.

FIGURE 2 10 Year Deer Harvest Trend, All Seasons Combined



Once all the deer had been tallied, Oklahoma hunters took home 97,265 deer last year. This is 9,256 more deer than were taken in the 2013-14 season.

As in years past, Figure 2 shows bucks made up the bulk of the harvest with 57,660 male deer being checked. Doe harvest came in at 39,605, making up 41 percent of the total harvest.

Table 1 depicts the deer harvest by county, season and sex. Table 2 is the same information but showing only the deer taken off of the wildlife management areas (WMAs) and other areas managed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) and our partners.

Gun hunters again took home the bulk of the harvest at 58 percent of all deer taken. When all gun seasons were combined (general gun, youth and holiday antlerless), hunters bagged 56,692 deer in 2014. Muzzleloader hunters added 14,832 deer to the total. Similar to previous years, archery hunters harvested more deer than muzzleloader hunters, taking home 25,741 deer in 2014. To see the individual seasons and their respective harvests take a look at Figure 3.

Looking at Table 1, you will see a listing of deer harvest by county, perhaps noticing a large disparity in the numbers of deer taken. This is influenced by the size of the county, the amount of suitable deer habitat, hunter access, and many other factors. Some counties have WMAs and others do not, therefore Table 1 reflects deer harvest totals with the WMAs removed. The perennial leader, Osage County, leads the Top 10 again with 4,106 deer harvested in 2014. Atoka County came in second with 3,227. Pittsburg County edged out Creek County, with 2,819 and 2,798 respectively. The other counties that made the Top 10 were Craig (2,613), Cherokee (2,408), McCurtain (2,230), Pushmataha (2,171), Delaware (2,169) and Sequoyah (1,906).

Hunters who seek deer in the westernmost parts of the state might 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 leads the list every year. This year was no exception, with Cimarron County topping the list with 60 mule deer harvested. Beaver County had 30, and Texas County had 18. Other counties that recorded "mulies" in their harvest total were Ellis with 16; Harper, 12; Roger Mills, 10; Woodward, 4; Beckham, 4; Major, 3; Greer and Harmon, 2 apiece; and Blaine, Custer, Dewey,

FIGURE 3 2014 Deer Harvest by Season Type

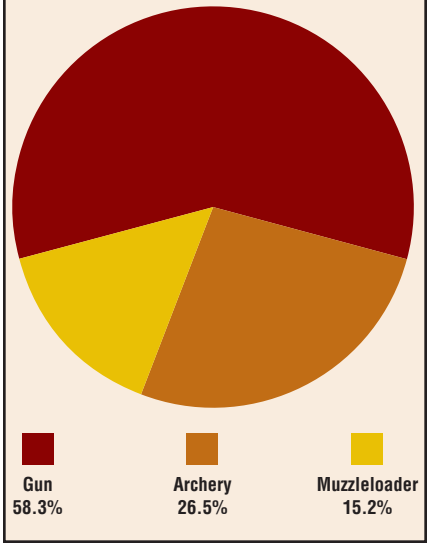
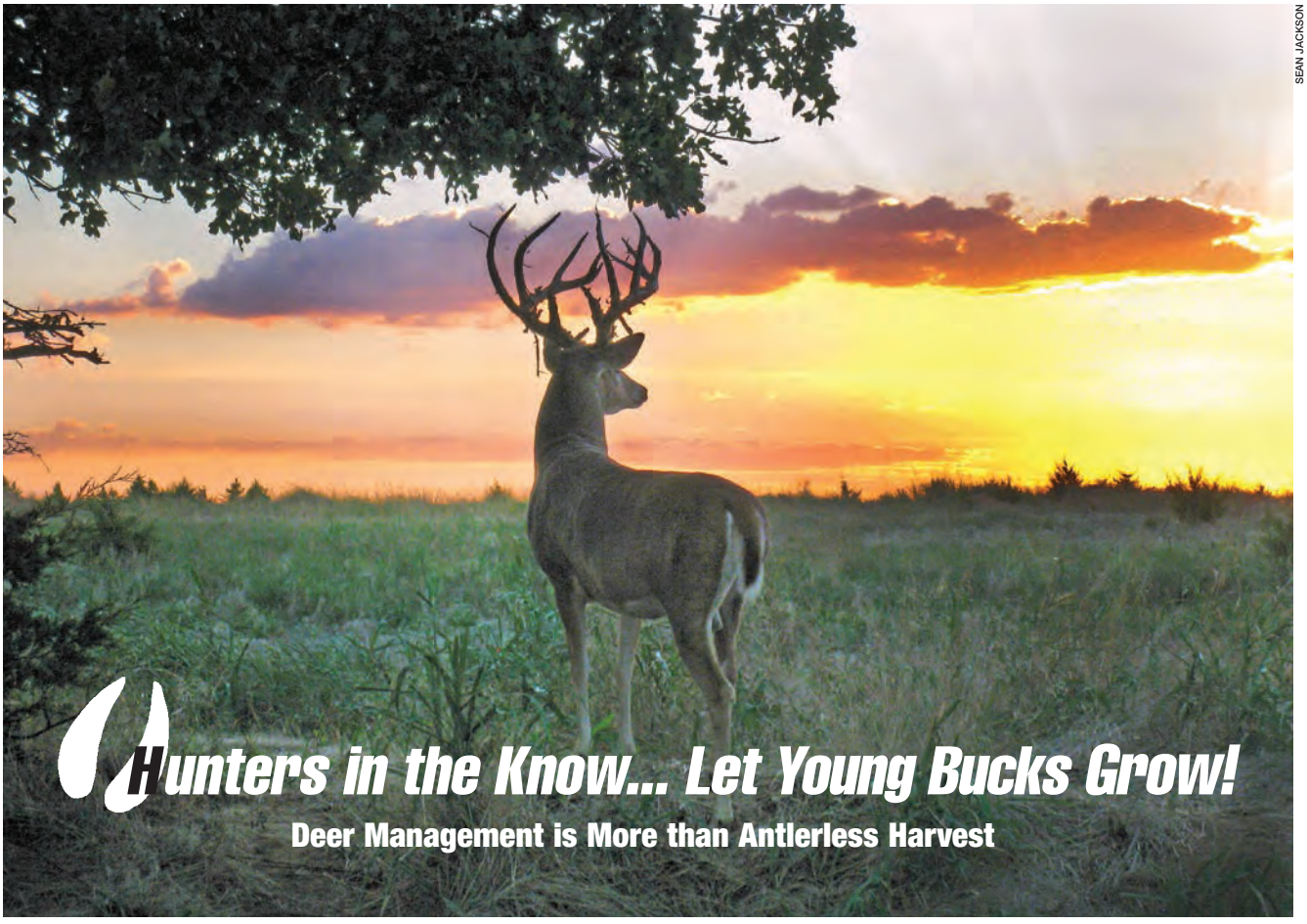


TABLE 1 2014 Deer Kill By County, Season, and Sex (WMAs not included in county totals)

County	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does			
Adair	265	158	512	361	312	85	1,089	604	1,693
Alfalfa	143	114	484	402	66	55	693	571	1,264
Atoka	446	519	1,002	721	364	175	1,812	1,415	3,227
Beaver	18	13	174	70	9	12	201	95	296
Beckham	86	65	429	268	58	36	573	369	942
Blaine	71	49	303	185	29	28	403	262	665
Bryan	235	264	447	333	123	65	805	662	1,467
Caddo	167	136	659	377	83	57	909	570	1,479
Canadian	113	88	263	203	36	25	412	316	728
Carter	250	208	535	350	113	54	898	612	1,510
Cherokee	372	354	668	488	383	143	1,423	985	2,408
Choctaw	231	249	561	338	155	104	947	691	1,638
Cimarron	17	5	90	3	6	1	113	9	122
Cleveland	213	145	301	215	95	52	609	412	1,021
Coal	236	158	546	335	146	73	928	566	1,494
Comanche	75	65	233	137	24	17	332	219	551
Cotton	37	31	167	109	34	13	238	153	391
Craig	333	272	954	676	246	132	1,533	1,080	2,613
Creek	392	334	996	697	251	128	1,639	1,159	2,798
Custer	38	34	259	153	16	23	313	210	523
Delaware	326	321	597	529	263	133	1,186	983	2,169
Dewey	48	39	260	163	19	22	327	224	551
Ellis	55	28	318	156	18	24	391	208	599
Garfield	121	85	373	278	63	37	557	400	957
Garvin	171	137	448	265	89	39	708	441	1,149
Grady	122	105	427	256	53	28	602	389	991
Grant	122	122	478	408	73	88	673	618	1,291
Greer	64	42	189	125	23	22	276	189	465
Harmon	57	54	208	196	24	14	289	264	553
Harper	33	20	183	99	15	10	231	129	360
Haskell	263	185	435	336	239	106	937	627	1,564
Hughes	236	189	708	349	164	58	1,108	596	1,704
Jackson	40	50	149	114	26	23	215	187	402
Jefferson	66	50	216	109	32	19	314	178	492
Johnston	173	151	395	336	75	73	643	560	1,203
Kay	134	109	457	382	82	57	673	548	1,221
Kingfisher	71	68	249	182	40	35	360	285	645
Kiowa	50	39	200	151	17	15	267	205	472
Latimer	236	208	394	230	217	89	847	527	1,374
LeFlore	228	174	429	300	311	119	968	593	1,561
Lincoln	286	217	674	444	164	91	1,124	752	1,876
Logan	217	161	438	280	95	65	750	506	1,256
Love	101	100	202	128	34	23	337	251	588
Major	89	84	427	236	47	41	563	361	924
Marshall	105	100	189	127	31	20	325	247	572
Mayes	256	258	467	324	233	98	956	680	1,636
McClain	86	51	204	108	44	23	334	182	516
McCurtain	336	267	713	401	380	133	1,429	801	2,230
McIntosh	87	79	237	157	71	36	395	272	667
Murray	108	113	240	162	46	35	394	310	704
Muskogee	290	222	542	323	207	84	1,039	629	1,668
Noble	88	99	373	311	69	47	530	457	987
Nowata	217	184	679	405	137	64	1,033	653	1,686
Okfuskee	165	131	443	241	99	63	707	435	1,142
Oklahoma	166	145	138	87	28	13	332	245	577
Okmulgee	170	140	383	249	161	52	714	441	1,155
Osage	488	381	1,629	1,090	326	192	2,443	1,663	4,106
Ottawa	177	131	329	256	148	56	654	443	1,097
Pawnee	74	95	274	231	57	30	405	356	761
Payne	178	124	578	392	95	76	851	592	1,443
Pittsburg	466	418	882	458	453	142	1,801	1,018	2,819
Pontotoc	221	182	478	338	143	75	842	595	1,437
Pottawatomie	202	143	390	232	141	58	733	433	1,166
Pushmataha	262	318	615	478	340	158	1,217	954	2,171
Roger Mills	75	50	508	315	43	39	626	404	1,030
Rogers	347	304	506	396	149	68	1,002	768	1,770
Seminole	151	162	502	303	127	71	780	536	1,316
Sequoyah	249	234	526	448	326	123	1,101	805	1,906
Stephens	137	122	395	198	74	39	606	359	965
Texas	8	3	62	13	5	1	75	17	92
Tillman	46	42	154	115	16	17	216	174	390
Tulsa	133	110	136	97	32	16	301	223	524
Wagoner	154	142	256	169	107	46	517	357	874
Washington	106	93	348	217	70	27	524	337	861
Washita	18	20	118	87	6	9	142	116	258
Woods	94	49	365	190	48	29	507	268	775
Woodward	68	42	347	163	27	19	442	224	666
County Subtotal	12,775	10,953	32,443	21,554	8,971	4,468	54,189	36,975	91,164
WMA Subtotal	994	1,019	1,674	1,021	803	590	3,471	2,630	6,101
Grand Total	**13,769**	**11,972**	**34,117**	**22,575**	**9,774**	**5,058**	**57,660**	**39,605**	**97,265**

TABLE 2 2014 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	8	10	8	1	4	6	20	17	37
Arcadia Conservation Ed. Area	14	25	—	—	—	—	14	25	39
Atoka WMA	17	18	26	12	11	5	54	35	89
Beaver River WMA	—	2	3	—	5	2	8	4	12
Black Kettle WMA	13	10	136	110	21	19	170	139	309
Blue River WMA	9	2	3	—	—	—	12	2	14
Broken Bow WMA	3	3	11	6	13	3	27	12	39
Camp Gruber JMTA	12	12	43	1	31	10	86	23	109
Candy Creek WMA	2	—	1	—	—	3	3	3	6
Canton WMA	16	28	33	9	10	12	59	49	108
Cherokee GMA	14	14	40	19	—	—	54	33	87
Cherokee PHA	18	20	16	6	25	21	59	47	106
Chickasaw NRA	4	5	16	10	7	2	27	17	44
Cimarron Bluff WMA	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1
Cimarron Hills WMA	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Cookson Hills WMA	19	14	14	9	4	7	37	30	67
Cooper WMA	1	3	4	—	1	1	6	4	10
Copan WMA	11	24	24	1	14	10	49	35	84
Cross Timbers WMA	39	45	12	16	3	3	54	64	118
Deep Fork NWR	16	16	—	—	15	24	31	40	71
Deep Fork WMA	8	8	2	—	3	6	13	14	27
Dewey County WMA	2	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
Drummond Flat WMA	3	1	—	—	—	—	3	1	4
Ellis County WMA	6	—	21	4	1	5	28	9	37
Eufaula WMA	15	23	23	16	5	7	43	46	89
Fobb Bottom WMA	7	10	7	4	2	1	16	15	31
Fort Cobb SP	—	—	1	3	—	—	1	3	4
Fort Cobb WMA	14	24	9	5	—	—	23	29	52
Fort Gibson WMA	50	62	52	13	57	15	159	90	249
Fort Gibson WR	2	2	—	—	18	19	20	21	41
Fort Sill Military Reservation	37	33	68	64	34	32	139	129	268
Fort Supply WMA	9	15	21	7	6	7	36	29	65
Gary Sherrer WMA	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	1
Gist WMA	2	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
Grady County WMA	3	—	3	—	—	1	6	1	7
Hackberry Flat WMA	1	1	—	—	—	1	1	2	3
Heyburn WMA	6	7	11	8	1	3	18	18	36
Hickory Creek WMA	1	2	11	9	3	—	15	11	26
Honobia Creek WMA	19	11	57	44	40	20	116	75	191
Hugo WMA	19	41	30	19	21	15	70	75	145
Hulah WMA	16	20	60	8	25	20	101	48	149
James Collins WMA	35	32	31	6	1	—	67	38	105
John Dahl WMA	—	—	1	2	—	1	1	3	4
Kaw WMA	43	34	109	79	41	38	193	151	344
Keystone WMA	25	24	25	11	4	4	54	39	93
Lexington WMA	14	14	43	10	24	12	81	36	117
Little River NWR	8	7	25	10	—	—	33	17	50
Little River SP	44	36	—	—	—	—	44	36	80
Love Valley WMA	8	4	22	14	1	1	31	19	50
Lower Illinois River WMA	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	5	5
M-K Robert S. Kerr	8	5	13	12	4	2	25	19	44
Major County WMA	1	—	4	—	—	—	5	—	5
McAlester AAP	105	98	—	17	—	—	105	115	220
McGee Creek WMA	6	7	10	7	2	3	18	17	35
Okmulgee GMA	5	3	12	7	—	—	17	10	27
Okmulgee PHA	6	3	6	—	9	—	21	3	24
Oologah WMA	37	20	66	49	22	21	125	90	215
Optima NWR	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Optima WMA	1	2	8	1	—	—	9	3	12
Osage-Rock Creek	1	1	12	3	6	1	19	5	24
Osage-W. Wall WMA	9	8	5	—	2	—	16	8	24
Ouachita WMA-Leflore Co.	12	11	49	28	59	26	120	65	185
Ouachita WMA-McCurtain Co.	12	10	32	20	42	13	86	43	129
Ozark Plateau WMA	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	1	2
Packsaddle WMA	2	3	36	6	2	13	40	22	62
Pine Creek WMA	4	3	12	8	11	5	27	16	43
Pushmataha WMA	7	5	18	8	6	2	31	15	46
Red Slough WMA	6	9	—	—	—	—	6	9	15
Rita Blanca WMA	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1
Robbers Cave WMA	1	—	1	—	—	—	2	—	2
Salt Plains NWR	1	3	70	64	2	8	73	75	148
Sandy Sanders WMA	8	3	—	—	4	—	12	3	15
Schultz WMA	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Sequoyah NWR	2	3	—	—	11	54	13	57	70
Sequoyah SP	4	11	—	—	3	15	7	26	33
Skiatook WMA	4	2	7	1	5	2	16	5	21
Sparrowhawk WMA	—	—	1	2	—	—	1	2	3
Spavinaw GMA	30	44	25	21	7	2	62	67	129
Spavinaw PHA	4	1	7	10	8	8	19	19	38
Stringtown WMA	—	1	2	1	2	1	4	3	7
Tenkiller WMA	5	2	5	1	1	—	11	3	14
Texoma/Washita Arm WMA	11	8	25	15	9	1	45	24	69
Three Rivers WMA	50	55	157	115	103	56	310	226	536
Tishomingo NWR	—	—	4	29	1	5	5	34	39
Tishomingo WMA	3	2	3	2	1	2	7	6	13
Waurika WMA	27	25	—	2	3	2	30	29	59
Wichita Mts NWR	—	—	29	36	—	—	29	36	65
Wister WMA	7	7	29	13	24	12	60	32	92
Yourman WMA	—	1	1	1	2	—	3	2	5
WMA SUBTOTAL	994	1,019	1,674	1,021	803	590	3,471	2,630	6,101
COUNTY SUBTOTAL	12,775	10,953	32,443	21,554	8,971	4,468	54,189	36,975	91,164
GRAND TOTAL	**13,769**	**11,972**	**34,117**	**22,575**	**9,774**	**5,058**	**57,660**	**39,605**	**97,265**



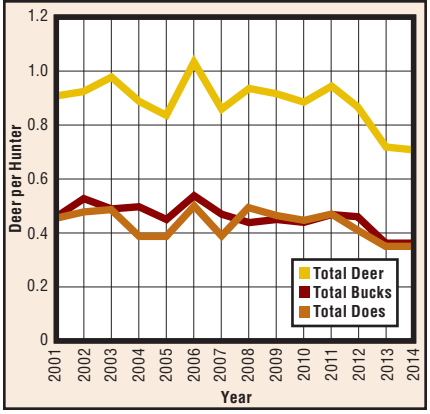
Hunters in the Know... Let Young Bucks Grow!

Deer Management is More than Antlerless Harvest

Grant, Jackson and Washita, 1 apiece. In total, 167 mule deer were harvested in Oklahoma in 2014.

Oklahoma is one of the most ecologically diverse states in the nation with nine different ecoregions found within its borders. It is safe to say with that level of diversity a "one-size-fits-all" approach to managing wildlife is not possible. For this and many other reasons, the state is broken up 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 between the 10 separate zones, they are all managed with a continued emphasis on achieving and maintaining an adequate harvest of antlerless deer balanced with the herd conditions and habitat conditions found within each zone.

FIGURE 5 Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter



All parts of Oklahoma are open to antlerless deer harvest to one degree or another. Some areas had liberal "doe days," while others offered a more conservative approach. Depending upon the management zone hunted, sportsmen and sportswomen had the chance to harvest antlerless deer during archery, muzzleloader and modern gun seasons. Again in 2014, October youth season hunters under age 18 accompanied by an adult were allowed to harvest antlerless deer, and a special holiday antlerless season in December was offered to all hunters, as well.

Hunters continue to take advantage of the antlerless opportunities available to them. This past year, 42,065 antlerless deer (including button bucks) were taken statewide. That was 3,974 more antlerless deer than the total in 2013, making the percentage of antlerless deer in the harvest 43 percent. While we would like to see that number closer to 50 percent, hunters are maintaining a good effort in their doe harvest.

It is important to note that the harvest of antlerless deer has remained above 40 percent for the past seven years. 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 a youth-only season was no more than six deer per individual. Of the six deer allowed, no more than two of them could be antlered deer. Any deer taken by hunters participating in the special holiday antlerless season or deer taken through the ODWC controlled hunts process were considered "bonus deer" and would not count toward the hunter's limit of six deer.

Archery Season

A record number of deer was harvested with archery equipment in 2014. According to the Game Harvest Survey (GHS), 96,901 hunters headed to their stand during archery season this past year. This is only 113 more hunters than last year, but enough to establish a new record for participation.

During the 2014-15 season, archers took home a record 25,741 deer. This number is up 4,301 deer from the 2013 harvest. This trend can be

FIGURE 4 2014 Deer Management Zones

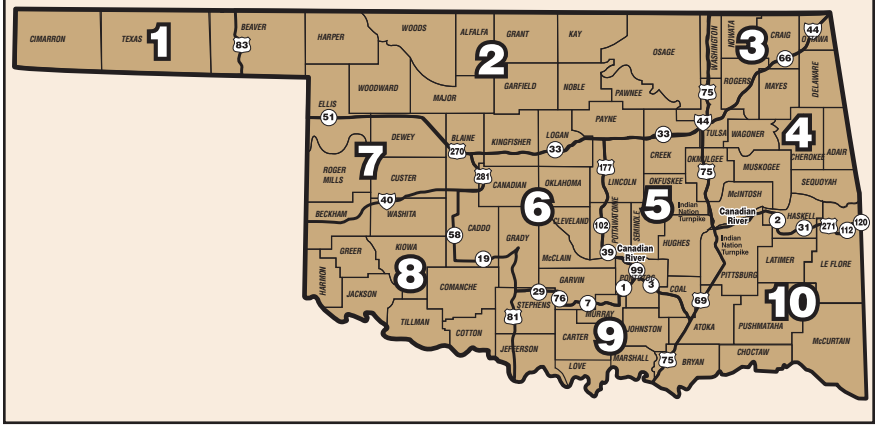


FIGURE 11 Archery Season Hunter Numbers and Harvest

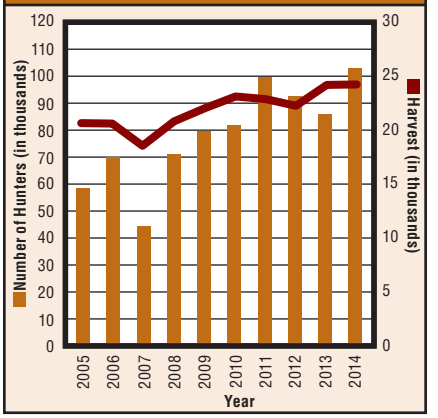


FIGURE 12 2014 Archery Harvest by Week

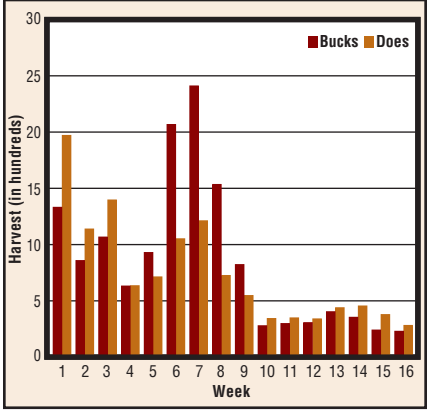


FIGURE 13 Percent Success by Season Type

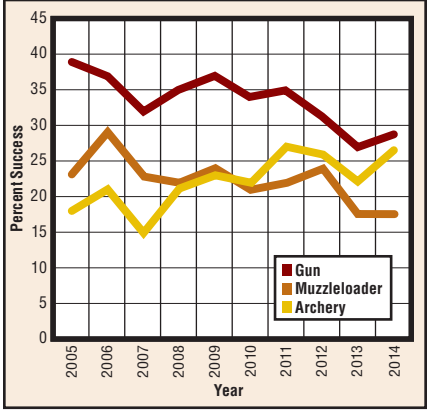
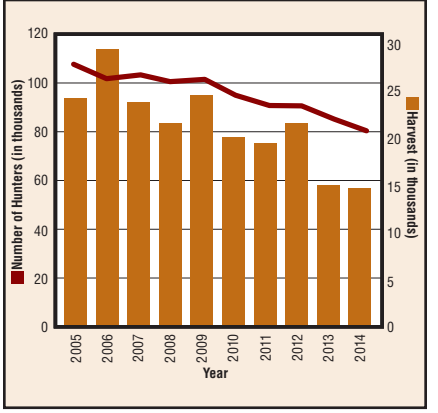


FIGURE 14 Muzzleloader Season Hunter Numbers and Harvest



clearly seen in Figure 11, while Figure 12 shows the buck and doe harvest each week of the season. Figure 13 shows the percent of success by season type. Archers had a success rate of 27 percent this past season. The average individual archer's harvest rate is shown on Figure 6.

The 2014-15 archery season opened Oct. 1 and continued uninterrupted until Jan 15. The bag limit was six deer, which could include no more than two antlered deer. Figure 3 shows that archery made up 26.5 percent of the harvest.

Muzzleloader Season

The 2014 muzzleloader season began Oct. 25 and continued through Nov. 2 statewide. There were no changes in the bag limit. According to the GHS, 80,366 muzzleloader hunters took to the field (Figure 14). For the past several years, participation in muzzleloader season has declined, and 2014 was no different with 4,917 fewer hunters. The 18 percent success rate tied the low of last year (Figure 13). Although there were nearly 5,000 fewer muzzleloader hunters who headed to the woods, harvest changed very little, with only 149 fewer deer harvested. The average individual muzzleloader hunter success rate is shown in Figure 7.

The bag limit remained unchanged from 2013. Hunters could harvest 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.

FIGURE 6 Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Archery Season

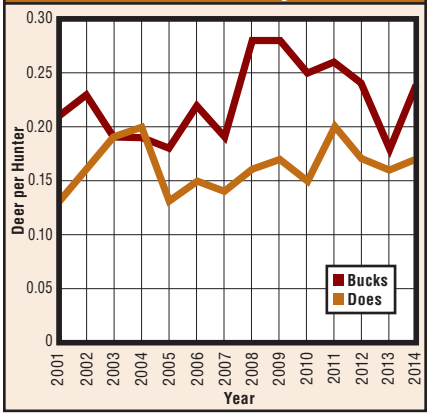


FIGURE 7 Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Muzzleloader Season

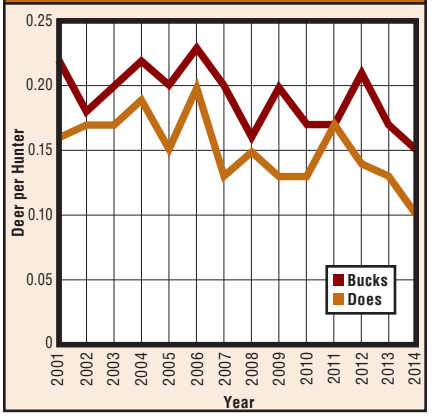
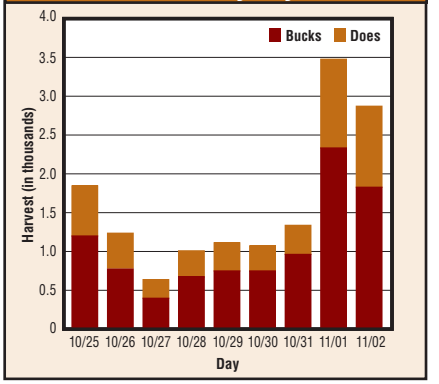


FIGURE 15 2014 Muzzleloader Harvest by Day*



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

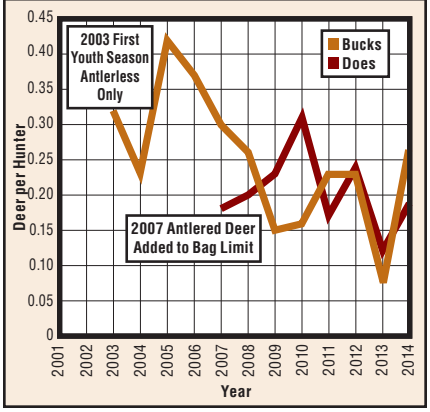

CARMON BRIGGS

Gun Season

Gun season continues to remain Oklahoma's most popular time to hunt deer. This season saw 197,712 hunters afield with a modern firearm. That number was up 6,838 hunters from 2013. Figure 13 shows gun hunter success rate was up 2 percent this past year to 31 percent.

Youths had more opportunities available with the apprentice license, reduced license and permit costs, and a special season. Youth hunters had the first chance to take deer with a rifle during youth season, when 8,585 hunters younger than 18 took to the woods. Youth season started Oct. 17 and ran through the weekend, ending Oct. 19. Compared with 2013, 1,000 fewer youths were out this past fall. The season was open statewide and had a bag limit of one antlered and one antlerless deer. Youth hunters bagged 4,129 deer in three days, and their success rate was an impressive 48 percent. This is a testament to mentors making sure youths have an opportunity for success. Figure 9 shows youth season harvest and success rates.

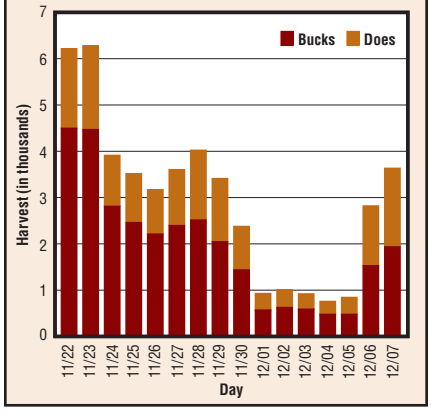
FIGURE 9 Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Youth Season



The next chance for hunters to pursue deer with a modern rifle started Nov. 22, the Saturday before Thanksgiving, and ran uninterrupted for 16 days, ending Dec. 7. In 2014, the GHS indicated 153,660 hunters headed afield for the modern gun season. Opening weekend had the highest success again this year (Figure 17) with 26 percent of the 47,414 deer harvested with a modern firearm falling on the first two days of the season. Bag limits remained unchanged from the 2013 season; hunters could harvest three deer, with no more than one antlered and two antlerless deer per hunter. If taking two antlerless, one had to be taken from Management Zone 2, 7, or 8.

The special holiday antlerless season offered the last chance for hunters to chase whitetails with a gun in eight of the 10 management zones. The holiday season opened Dec. 19 and ran for 10 days, closing Dec. 28. This year, 35,476 hunters took advantage of this last-minute opportunity to put some meat in the freezer. The bag limit remained at 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.

FIGURE 17 2014 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*

FIGURE 8 Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Gun Season

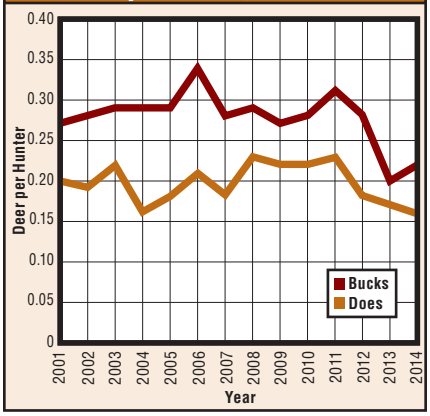
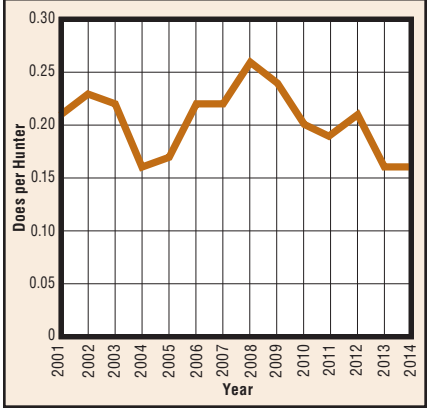


FIGURE 10 Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Holiday Season




TIM CARR

Elk

Oklahoma saw the first statewide elk season in 2014. The state was broken into seven zones and managed under a quota system. The traditional elk hunting zone surrounding the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Oklahoma remained as it had been in the recent past. The rest of the state was broken up by Interstates 35 and 40, with the three Panhandle counties making up another zone. Within the northwest zone was a special zone with unique regulations and bag limits. To see the quota and bag limit for each zone, see Table 3.

Elk seasons on private land ran concurrently with established deer seasons, except in the Special Southwest Zone. Gun hunters took home the most elk, harvesting 56 cows and 36 bulls. Archery hunters were the next highest, taking 10 cows and 25 bulls. And finally, muzzleloader hunters bagged 1 cow and three bulls. Elk hunters on private land harvested a total of 131 elk in 2014. Of that total, 64 were bulls and 67 were cows. For a breakdown of the harvest for each zone, see Table 4.

Other elk hunts were available for those with access to Fort Sill Military Reservation, where 24 elk were killed. Archery hunters took 11 of those, and gun hunters took 13. The Fort Sill harvest was equally split: 12 bulls and 12 cows.

Oklahoma hunters who do not have access to private land to hunt elk may enter the drawing for hunts through the Wildlife Department's controlled hunts program. The majority of the permits issued through the draw process are for the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge near Lawton. 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, 37 hunters with a coveted bull tag harvested 30 branch-antlered bulls, while 41 cow hunters took home 29 antlerless elk. The overall success rate for Wichita Mountains elk hunters was 76 percent.

Other controlled hunt permits were available on two ODWC areas: Pushmataha WMA and Cookson WMA. Both permits were either-sex. Both hunters bagged bull elk on their WMA controlled hunt.

The statewide elk limit was set at two elk for all elk zones combined. In total, 216 elk were taken statewide during the 2014 seasons.

TABLE 3 Elk Private Land Zone Quota and Bag Limit

Zone	Quota	Bag Limit
Panhandle	60	2
Northwest	8	1
Special Northwest	2	1
Northeast	20	1
Southwest	5	1
Special Southwest	None	2
Southeast	5	1

TABLE 4 Elk Private Land Zone Harvest by Method

Zone	Archery	Gun	Muzzleloader	Total Harvest
Panhandle	9	9	3	21
Northwest	0	1	1	2
Special Northwest	2	0	0	2
Northeast	4	2	0	6
Southwest	2	3	0	5
Special Southwest	13	77	0	90
Southeast	5	0	0	5
Total	**35**	**92**	**4**	**131**

JOHN R. FORD

Pronghorn Antelope

Even though the Panhandle saw some rainfall in 2014, it was not enough to increase populations affected by the drought. Permits offered through the Wildlife Department's controlled hunts program were unchanged from 2013. With reduced populations available to hunters, harvest also was down for the second year in a row. Over-the-counter archery permit holders killed 19 pronghorn (14 bucks and five does).

Those hunters lucky enough to draw a once-in-a-lifetime pronghorn permit through the Wildlife Department's controlled hunts program harvested 11 bucks and 14 does. The remaining pronghorn taken this year were through landowner permits, with an additional eight bucks and 19 does harvested. The total number of pronghorn bagged in 2014 was 71.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each year for the past several decades, natural resource students have been hired from selected state universities to collect deer jaws at different locations across the state. This data is coupled with jaws collected from cooperators enrolled in the Wildlife Department's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP), and deer harvested on selected wildlife management areas.

Also this year, ODWC debuted an online jaw submission opportunity, in which hunters could enter their E-check information and then submit two photos of the jaw, one from the top and one from the side. These jaws provide information about the herd age structure that is needed for informed management decisions. During the 2014 season, 3,009 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 is 3.1 percent of the total number of deer harvested in 2014. 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. While this might seem odd, just remember that fawns are born in spring, and when hunting season arrives, that deer is 6 months (or a half-year) old.

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 190 yearling bucks examined in 2014, 63 percent had four or more points (Figure 18). This is an increase from the 2013 season data. However, this is no surprise, as range conditions were considerably better in the summer of 2014 than during the two previous summers.

FIGURE 16 Gun Season Hunter and Harvest (includes Holiday Antlerless and Youth Seasons)

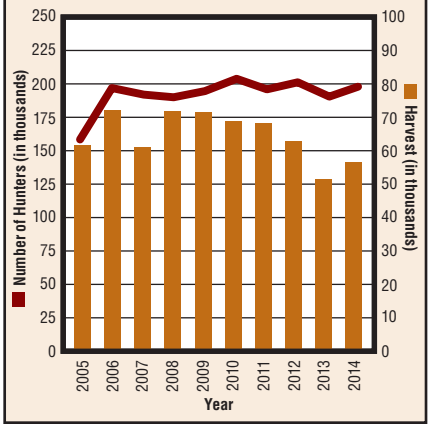


FIGURE 19 2014 Adult Buck Age Distribution

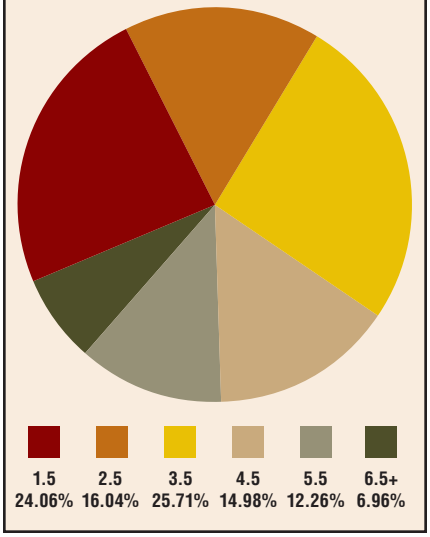


FIGURE 20 2014 Adult Doe Age Distribution

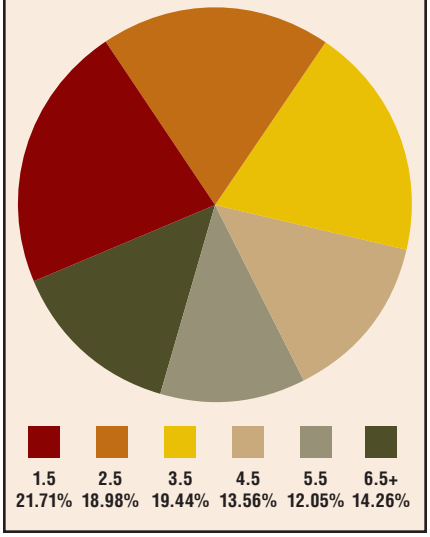


Figure 19 shows the 2014 adult buck age structure. The number of yearling bucks increased from 2013 levels, making up 24.1 percent of the harvest. This figure is up 4.3 percent, likely a result of two good summers of reproduction and increased fawn survival, which put more of those yearling bucks onto the landscape and made their proportion of the herd larger than it had been in previous years.

The age structure for adult does is shown in Figure 20. The doe harvest is a telling sign of Oklahoma's herd structure. Since does do not have antlers, the harvest pressure on does is fairly level across the board.

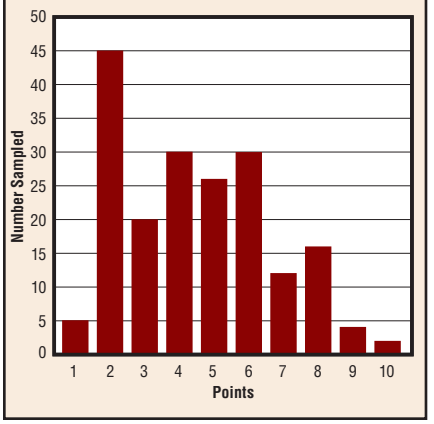
Wildlife Management Areas

Wildlife Department-managed lands account for only 3 percent of the state's land area, but they were responsible for producing 6.3 percent of the 2014 harvest. Hunters continue to take advantage of these public lands. Some of the areas are open to hunting the same as the general statewide dates and bag limits, some 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 ODWC controlled hunts program. This past year, 6,101 deer were taken from these Department-managed properties. Of the deer taken, 43.2 percent were does. Table 2 represents a harvest summary for each WMA by season and sex.

Conclusions

In terms of total deer harvested, the 2014 season was not a record-breaker. But it was a record-breaker in archery participation and archery harvest. The state also had its first statewide elk season. Total harvest saw a 10.5 percent rebound from a drought-affected low in 2013.

FIGURE 18 Yearling Buck Antler Point Distribution, 2014



E-check Not Affecting Compliance in Deer Harvest Reporting

Hunter compliance with requirements to check-in harvested deer has remained steady since 2013, when the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation transitioned to a fully online E-check system.

Analysis of deer harvest data from separate sources indicates that E-check has not created greater noncompliance in checking harvested deer, which was a criticism often put forth by opponents of the online check-in system. Many constituents praised E-check for its convenience, while others raised concerns that the automated process would make it easier for poachers to take deer illegally.

"We were able to assess this concern by validating the check data against another source of hunter harvest data, which we calculated from our annual Game Harvest Survey," said Corey Jager, responsive management specialist with the Wildlife Department.

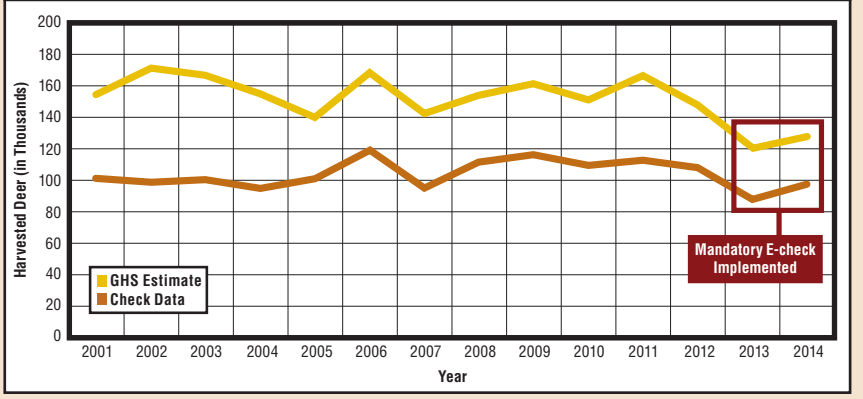
"The data from separate sources show that harvest numbers and E-check reports are trending together. If a significant number of people were not checking their deer after we switched to the E-check system, we would expect to see the trends diverging," Jager said.

"It does not appear that E-check is influencing people to not comply."

Jager said neither the E-check data nor the Game Harvest Survey numbers are probably 100 percent accurate accounts of the actual deer harvest. The survey may over-estimate harvest due to hunters having difficulty recalling their harvest, tendency to provide socially desirable answers, or a tendency to not receive responses from unsuccessful hunters, while E-check results may under-estimate due to noncompliance or human error. The true number of deer harvested probably lies somewhere between the two estimates, she said.

—Don P. Brown, managing editor

Statewide Deer Harvest Comparisons



Two summers of favorable weather likely contributed to the increase in the deer herd across most of the state.

Deer numbers will always ebb and flow on the landscape. Fortunately we have in place a management strategy that allows flexibility to respond to this dynamic deer population. When the rains do come and habitat responds, deer numbers will respond, as well. Hunters have the ability to respond also by harvesting additional does to maintain that important herd and habitat balance. Additionally, by asking hunters to let young bucks grow through voluntary restraint, buck age structure improves.

Oklahoma is unique in offering some of the most liberal deer hunting opportunities in the region while still maintaining an older age structure for bucks. It is only when hunters take on the role of deer managers that we can see these great levels of success. Through science-based regulations and active hunter participation, we are able to work toward deer herds balanced with local habitat conditions and healthy age structures for today's hunters and for future generations yet to come.

It is a great time to be a hunter in Oklahoma!