

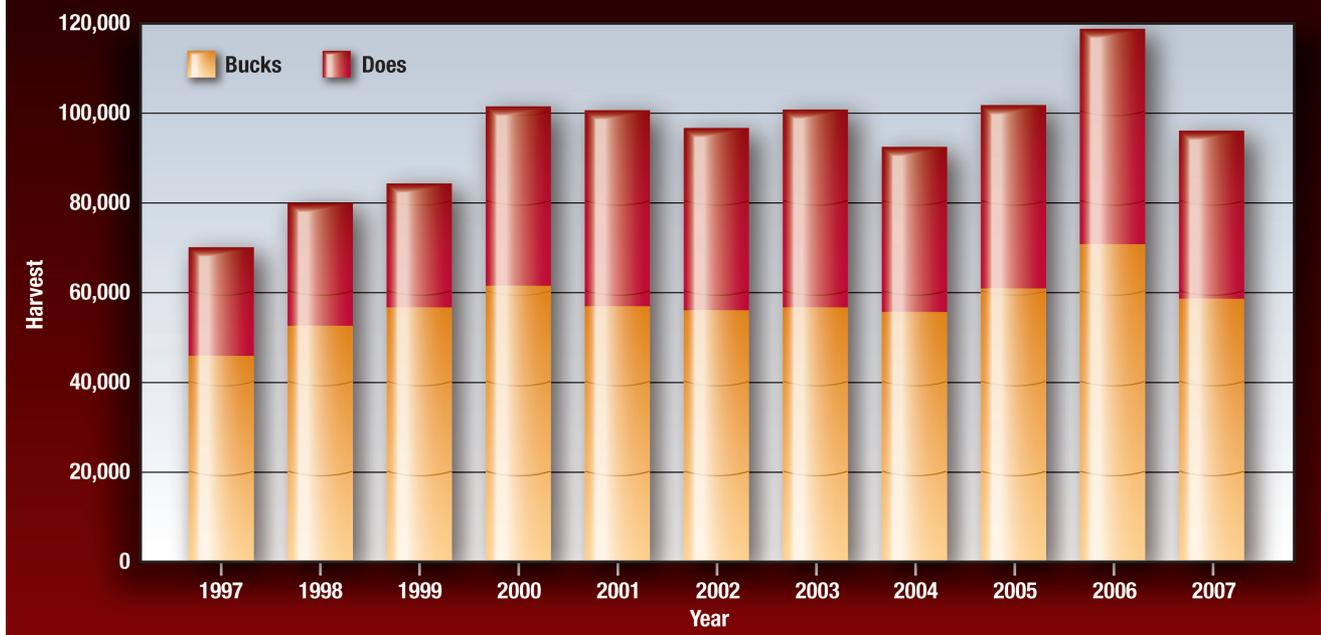
2008 Big Game Report

By Jerry Shaw, Big Game Biologist



RUSSELL GRAVES

FIGURE 1: HARVEST BY SEX, 1997-2007



2007-08 Deer Seasons

What a difference a year (and lots of rain) can make! For the past few years, deer hunters have entered into the deer seasons with habitat that was suffering from very long, very dry summers. Forage had been limited in both availability and the nutrition that it could provide. As a result, the deer tended to move much more than usual and many hunters had greater success. Then in the spring of 2007 the rains began to fall across most of the state. Throughout the summer we continued to see rain. As a result, the habitat was renewed, and deer had an abundance of quality foods and cover available. With food easy to find and thick vegetation to cover their movements, deer proved elusive targets for hunters this past season.

In spite of the tough hunting conditions, hunters this past season harvested a total of 95,891 deer. This total is substantially lower than the record-smashing 119,349 deer taken during the 2006 seasons. While many hunters might be concerned about the nearly 20 percent drop in harvest, the 2007 figures are fairly consistent with deer harvest levels since 2000. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the number of bucks and does taken in Oklahoma since 1997. Figure 2 depicts the 2007 harvest by season.

Antlered deer continue to make up the largest portion of the harvest, with 58,059 bucks passing through check stations this past year. An additional 37,832 antlerless deer were recorded, providing for a 40 percent doe harvest across all seasons combined. Although this is a decrease of over 9,000 antlerless deer from the 2006 harvest levels, it is important to note that the proportion of the harvest comprised of does remained unchanged.

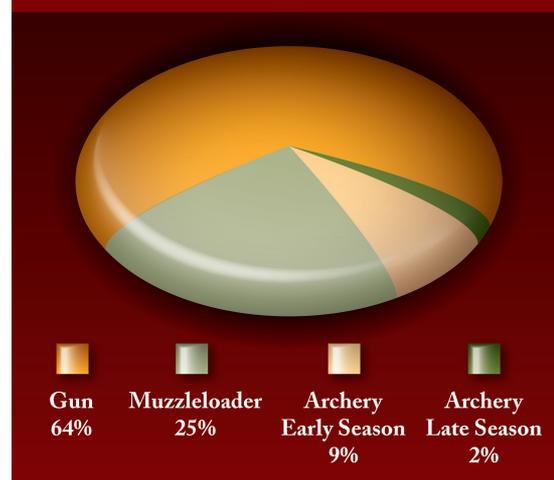
As usual, gun season showed the greatest level of hunter participation, with sportsmen and women tak-

ing full advantage of the 16-day season. Combining the regular gun season harvest with the youth-only and special holiday antlerless seasons, hunters using centerfire firearms were able to tag 60,868 deer in 2007. Hunters choosing to participate in the popular muzzleloading season added another 23,933 deer to the tally. Oklahoma archers continue to enjoy the longest of all our deer seasons, taking 11,090 deer in 2007.

Some counties have a decided edge when it comes to determining the highest deer harvest. Their large size, abundance of deer habitat, hunter access, and high hunter participation help to propel these counties to the top of the list each year. As a result, this year's list of top producing counties looks very similar to many lists of the past. In fairness to those counties that do not have a wildlife management area within their borders, all WMA harvest data have been removed from these tallies.

The data presented in Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the entire 2007 harvest organized by county, season, and sex. From that table we can see that Osage County remained the top deer producing county with 4,122

FIGURE 2: 2007 DEER HARVEST BY SEASON TYPE



deer when all seasons are combined. Cherokee County (3,471 deer) moved up one spot on the list to take the number two spot away from this year's third place Pittsburg County (2,531 deer). Sequoyah County was not too far behind in fourth place with hunters taking 2,347 deer from within its borders. Delaware County claims fifth place with its harvest of 2,297 deer. Other counties making the "top ten" list are Creek (2,044), Atoka (1,943), Adair (1,935), Woodward (1,932) and Mayes (1,916). In spite of some difficult hunting conditions, 41 separate counties recorded harvests of more than 1,000 animals.

While the majority of Oklahoma deer hunters have their sights set on tagging a whitetail, our state is home to a small but healthy population of mule deer. Located in the short-grass areas of the panhandle and mixed grass plains of far western Oklahoma, these mammals provide a small number of hunters the opportunity to harvest a species of deer more commonly found outside of our state. Hunting pressure and harvest levels remain fairly stable from year to year due to the relatively small number of acres of suitable habitat and limited hunter access.

Year after year, Cimarron County sits at the top of the mule deer harvest list. This year is no different, with 103 "mulies" falling to hunters within its borders. Beaver and Texas counties tied for the number two position with a harvest of 37. Woodward County and Harper County were each in double digits with 15 and 14 mule deer respectively. Other counties recording mule deer in the check station books were Ellis (nine), Woods (four), Major (three), Grant (two), Greer (two), Harmon (one), and Alfalfa (one).

Anyone who has traveled around Oklahoma will no doubt appreciate the variety of terrain types, different land use practices, and even different weather patterns found across our state. And because our state is so diverse, a "one-size-fits-all" approach to how deer are managed simply will not work. For these and other reasons, the Wildlife Department utilizes a framework of 10 separate management zones. These areas of similar herd and habitat variables allow for greater flexibility in setting regulations. What works well in the Panhandle might not be applicable to the Ouachita Uplift area in far eastern Oklahoma. Using these management zones, we can address those differences. Additionally, greater accuracy can be obtained when analyzing data. For example, comparing fawn weights from the agriculture rich area of northwestern Oklahoma to fawns from the closed canopy forests of eastern Oklahoma would be similar to comparing apples to oranges. Even with the vast differences between the 10 different management zones, they are all managed with a continued emphasis on achieving and maintaining an adequate harvest of antlerless deer that is in balance with the conditions found within each zone.

To varying degrees, all parts of Oklahoma were open for antlerless hunting. Some areas had very liberal "doe days" while others offered more conservative opportuni-

ties. Depending upon the management zone hunted, sportsmen and women were given antlerless hunting opportunities in archery, muzzleloader and rifle seasons. Additionally, special antlerless seasons were again offered in December as well as the youth deer gun season. In an effort to further increase doe harvest across the north-central part of our state, the antlerless bag limit was increased to two does for both the muzzleloading and gun seasons.

Hunters continue to take advantage of the antlerless opportunities available to them. This past year, 37,832 antlerless deer were taken from our state. While this number is greatly reduced from last year's record doe harvest of over 47,000, it is important to note that the percentage of the harvest comprised of antlerless deer has remained stable at 40 percent for the past three years. While the lack of a proportional decline is notable, hunters must remain diligent in their doe harvest efforts. Sport hunting remains the single best method available for managing population growth, maintaining healthy buck: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 holiday antlerless seasons or deer taken through the Wildlife Department's controlled hunts process are considered "bonus deer" and would not count towards the hunter's limit of six deer.

Archery Season

Archery season holds a special magic for many Oklahomans. For many hunters using modern firearms, the challenge of deer hunting is distilled down to the task of locating and seeing deer. If they can see them, chances are very high that they will be able to harvest them. This is not the case with hunters taking to the woods with "stick and string." Archery hunting demands that the hunter be in close quarters to the prey. And if getting close to deer is not difficult enough, they still must manage to draw their bow, aim, and release, all without being located. Only then can the rewards of hours of backyard practice pay off.

The annual Game Harvest Survey indicated that in 2007, an estimated 74,194 hunters took to the woods to try their hand at taking an Oklahoma deer with a bow. Patience and practice were rewarded for many of these hunters, with 11,090 deer falling to arrows this past year.

Archery hunters had their first chance to be in the woods when their season opened on Oct. 1. The season continued, uninterrupted, through Jan. 15, 2008. The bag limit remained at four deer total, with no more than two of the deer carrying antlers. The period from Jan. 1-15 was restricted to the harvest of antlerless deer only.

Analysis of this longest of our deer seasons has typically divided the season into two portions. The "early

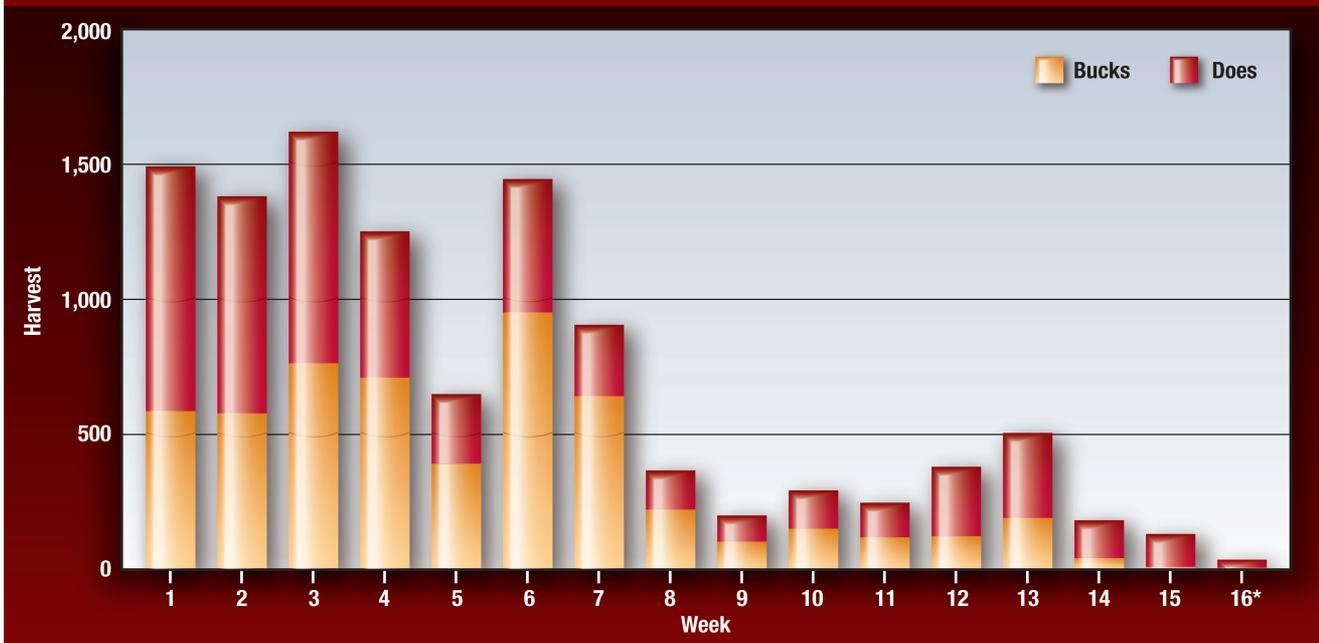
TABLE 1: 2007 COUNTY AND AREA SUMMARY OF DEER KILLS BY HUNT TYPE

County	Archery Bucks	Archery Does	Gun Bucks	Gun Does	Muzzleloader Bucks	Muzzleloader Does	Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
Adair	107	91	636	445	486	170	1,229	706	1,935
Alfalfa	99	131	602	569	158	164	859	864	1,723
Atoka	110	104	640	383	533	173	1,283	660	1,943
Beaver	25	21	413	221	62	29	500	271	771
Beckham	52	44	527	314	67	68	646	426	1,072
Blaine	38	41	412	234	63	59	513	334	847
Bryan	52	113	249	208	135	56	436	377	813
Caddo	87	92	727	482	186	121	1,000	695	1,695
Canadian	48	52	310	245	63	57	421	354	775
Carter	52	45	385	210	146	64	583	319	902
Cherokee	230	260	1,061	857	729	334	2,020	1,451	3,471
Choctaw	72	109	418	218	270	130	760	457	1,217
Cimarron	11	1	124	10	18	0	153	11	164
Cleveland	73	66	250	165	146	74	469	305	774
Coal	58	41	321	261	242	91	621	393	1,014
Comanche	20	17	180	98	50	31	250	146	396
Cotton	16	22	126	98	31	28	173	148	321
Craig	85	95	643	528	272	125	1,000	748	1,748
Creek	104	98	707	535	405	195	1,216	828	2,044
Custer	31	30	353	169	42	46	426	245	671
Delaware	143	147	823	688	318	178	1,284	1,013	2,297
Dewey	34	54	529	318	81	76	644	448	1,092
Ellis	42	41	583	351	78	64	703	456	1,159
Garfield	45	35	341	272	83	71	469	378	847
Garvin	28	43	227	132	117	34	372	209	581
Grady	35	41	358	251	92	47	485	339	824
Grant	57	78	650	568	180	156	887	802	1,689
Greer	34	49	330	216	52	63	416	328	744
Harmon	27	29	299	229	41	46	367	304	671
Harper	34	48	421	278	72	63	527	389	916
Haskell	101	95	432	321	358	105	891	521	1,412
Hughes	72	43	446	292	284	102	802	437	1,239
Jackson	46	61	301	213	48	32	395	306	701
Jefferson	32	20	223	110	64	22	319	152	471
Johnston	63	64	461	305	205	78	729	447	1,176
Kay	56	47	499	390	146	114	701	551	1,252
Kingfisher	49	50	339	272	106	59	494	381	875
Kiowa	22	30	208	159	35	38	265	227	492
Latimer	51	32	324	110	306	99	681	241	922
LeFlore	98	52	407	232	376	143	881	427	1,308
Lincoln	80	74	559	362	249	134	888	570	1,458
Logan	66	81	415	323	164	128	645	532	1,177
Love	43	38	237	135	78	32	358	205	563
Major	72	82	695	507	181	121	948	710	1,658
Marshall	31	34	172	155	67	39	270	228	498
Mayes	109	131	595	509	391	181	1,095	821	1,916
McClain	27	25	151	118	55	40	233	183	416
McCurtain	104	73	522	181	354	90	980	344	1,324
McIntosh	63	43	330	222	206	84	599	349	948
Murray	25	26	206	138	87	27	318	191	509
Muskogee	101	89	454	262	239	116	794	467	1,261
Noble	47	59	396	350	132	81	575	490	1,065
Nowata	63	51	585	428	215	116	863	595	1,458
Okfuskee	54	44	392	239	221	90	667	373	1,040
Oklahoma	88	78	180	115	69	25	337	218	555
Okmulgee	69	72	303	198	228	80	600	350	950
Osage	155	162	1,820	1,059	620	306	2,595	1,527	4,122
Ottawa	77	66	450	375	229	123	756	564	1,320
Pawnee	52	51	451	303	183	86	686	440	1,126
Payne	53	51	412	363	151	89	616	503	1,119
Pittsburg	180	163	854	408	721	205	1,755	776	2,531
Pontotoc	84	76	425	265	233	86	742	427	1,169
Pottawatomie	47	39	375	267	195	106	617	412	1,029
Pushmataha	106	85	609	250	580	164	1,295	499	1,794
Roger Mills	44	57	753	510	80	67	877	634	1,511
Rogers	158	151	466	421	298	131	922	703	1,625
Seminole	68	41	314	211	188	83	570	335	905
Sequoyah	161	150	705	560	554	217	1,420	927	2,347
Stephens	70	65	354	183	77	35	501	283	784
Texas	9	27	192	52	37	0	238	79	317
Tillman	20	36	211	168	30	18	261	222	483
Tulsa	55	29	131	99	46	29	232	157	389
Wagoner	64	89	285	254	178	81	527	424	951
Washington	56	34	413	230	108	54	577	318	895
Washita	5	24	194	146	31	35	230	205	435
Woods	87	68	771	573	172	97	1,030	738	1,768
Woodward	63	76	855	652	129	157	1,047	885	1,932
County Subtotal	5,095	5,072	24,517	23,548	14,922	7,158	54,534	35,778	90,312

TABLE 2: 2007 WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA SUMMARY OF DEER KILLS BY HUNT TYPE

WMA	Archery Bucks	Archery Does	Gun Bucks	Gun Does	Muzzleloader Bucks	Muzzleloader Does	Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
Altus-Lugert WMA	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Atoka WMA	2	2	27	8	11	3	40	13	53
Beaver River WMA	1	3	37	10	7	0	45	13	58
Black Kettle WMA	16	10	133	113	41	45	190	168	358
Blue River WMA	3	0	2	0	0	0	5	0	5
Canton WMA	12	39	47	13	20	17	79	69	148
Cherokee GMA	4	3	16	10	13	6	33	19	52
Cherokee PHA	12	14	35	1	52	16	99	31	130
Chickasaw NRA	1	3	21	8	6	4	28	15	43
Cookson Hills WMA	10	5	16	14	4	3	30	22	52
Cooper WMA	2	2	20	8	2	0	24	10	34
Copan WMA	12	4	31	1	14	12	57	17	74
Deep Fork WMA	0	0	0	1	3	5	3	6	9
Ellis County WMA	1	0	30	4	3	6	34	10	44
Eufaula WMA	1	0	0	2	4	1	5	3	8
Fobb Bottom WMA	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	3
Fort Cobb SP	0	0	0	0	4	21	4	21	25
Fort Cobb WMA	3	2	1	3	0	0	4	5	9
Fort Gibson WMA	25	25	26	6	28	19	79	50	129
Fort Gibson WR	6	3	0	0	11	32	17	35	52
Fort Sill MR	21	20	72	37	34	35	127	92	219
Fort Supply WMA	11	11	23	8	6	0	40	19	59
Gruber WMA	4	3	43	9	30	21	77	33	110
Heyburn WMA	2	0	5	8	8	2	15	10	25
Hickory Creek WMA	1	1	21	13	5	4	27	18	45
Honobia Creek WMA	19	12	132	52	138	49	289	113	402
Hugo WMA	7	7	26	29	25	7	58	43	101
Hulah WMA	4	9	45	2	31	40	80	51	131
James Collins WMA	26	27	20	9	0	0	46	36	82
Kaw WMA	24	23	129	91	66	50	219	164	383
Keystone WMA	19	13	26	8	19	11	64	32	96
Lexington WMA	8	0	34	18	13	0	55	18	73
Little River NWR	1	1	1	2	1	0	3	3	6
Little River SP	4	3	0	0	0	0	4	3	7
Love Valley WMA	0	1	14	8	6	3	20	12	32
McAlester AAP	90	72	1	22	0	0	91	94	185
McCurtain Co. WA	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	3
McGee Creek WMA	2	1	15	3	10	1	27	5	32
Okmulgee GMA	0	0	13	2	0	0	13	2	15
Okmulgee PHA	1	2	3	0	3	0	7	2	9
Oologah WMA	1	1	13	9	0	1	14	11	25
Optima NWR	0	6	0	1	1	0	1	7	8
Optima WMA	4	7	1	1	2	0	7	8	15
Osage-R. Creek WMA	0	0	13	0	6	1	19	1	20
Osage-W. Wall WMA	0	1	6	1	3	4	9	6	15
Ouachita WMA	18	10	111	31	110	52	239	93	332
Ouachita-McCurtain Unit	2	1	20	6	32	5	54	12	66
Packsaddle WMA	4	3	32	15	5	1	41	19	60
Pine Creek WMA	3	1	12	4	13	2	28	7	35
Pushmataha WMA	4	4	12	3	16	3	32	10	42
Salt Plains NWR	1	3	57	72	10	10	68	85	153
Sandy Sanders WMA	1	3	3	5	5	2	9	10	19
Sequoyah NWR	0	0	0	0	11	57	11	57	68
Skiatook WMA	0	0	8	1	5	0	13	1	14
Spavinaw GMA	17	20	21	11	2	4	40	35	75
Spavinaw PHA	1	0	5	4	7	1	13	5	18
Stringtown WMA	1	0	2	0	1	0	4	0	4
Three Rivers WMA	58	50	423	151	318	113	799	314	1,113
Tishomingo NWR	1	1	7	10	3	3	11	14	25
Tishomingo WMA	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	3	4
Washita Arm WMA	2	1	7	3	4	3	13	7	20
Washita NWR	0	1	15	71	0	0	15	72	87
Waurika WMA	3	6	0	0	0	0	3	6	9
Wichita Mts NWR	0	0	31	11	0	0	31	11	42
Wister WMA	0	0	4	0	3	0	7	0	7
Yourman WMA	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
WMA SUBTOTAL	478	445	1,869	934	1,178	675	3,525	2,054	5,579
GRAND TOTAL	5,573	5,517	36,386	24,482	16,100	7,833	58,059	37,832	95,891

FIGURE 3: 2007 ARCHERY HARVEST BY WEEK (INCLUDES SPECIAL HUNTS)



* partial week

season” spans from the season opener to the beginning of gun season, which this year opened on Nov. 17. This period saw the harvest of 8,826 deer, or 80 percent of the total archery season harvest. The “late season” began on Nov. 18 and continued through the season’s end on Jan. 15. This second season accounted for an additional 2,264 deer. An abundant acorn crop, dense ground cover, and leaves remaining on the trees until late in the fall all played a role in archers’ success. Combining the two recording periods and comparing it to the number of hunters participating in 2007 gave an

estimated success rate of 15 percent.

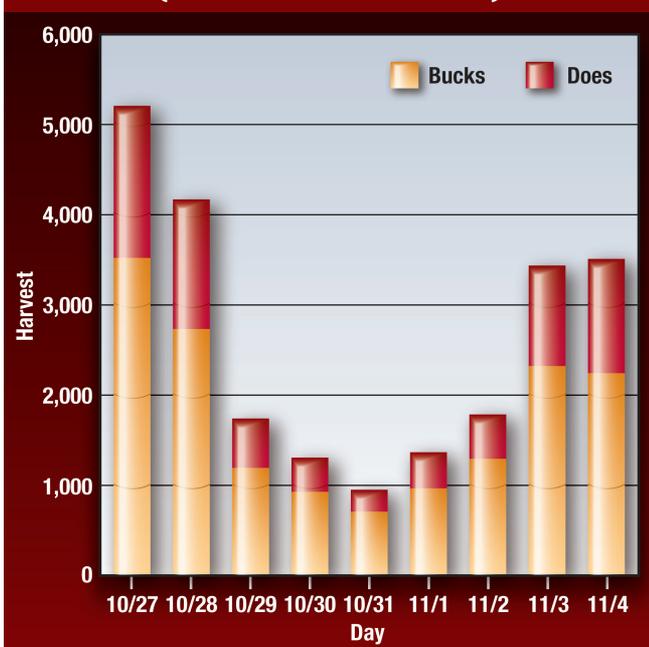
A breakdown of the harvest by season, sex, county and wildlife management area is shown in Table 2. Figure 3 shows the number of bucks and does harvested during each week of the archery season.

Muzzleloader Season

Muzzleloader season is often ushered in by crisp, cold evenings and beautiful fall foliage. Combine that with some of the year’s best deer movement and it is no wonder that an estimated 103,319 hunters took the opportunity to be afield for this popular nine-day season.

The season opened on Oct. 27 and continued through Nov. 4. The bag limit for most of the state was two deer, only one of which could be antlered. However, for the first time, hunters could take an additional antlerless deer from management zone 2, located across much of north-central Oklahoma and extending west through parts of Beaver County. Statewide, muzzleloader hunters had a success rate of 23 percent and added 23,933 deer to the overall 2007 total. Figure 4 charts the primitive season harvest by day and sex.

FIGURE 4: 2007 MUZZLELOADER HARVEST BY DAY (INCLUDES SPECIAL HUNTS)



Gun Season

Imagine an annual sporting event that would have more participants than the entire populations of Norman and Stillwater combined. It is hard to believe, but each year that number of people or more participate in the Oklahoma deer gun season. This past year, Game Harvest Survey data indicated that an estimated 153,650 hunters attempted to harvest a deer during gun season. An esti-

mated 31,651 sportsmen and women participated in the holiday antlerless seasons.

The 2007 deer gun season began Nov. 17 and for the fifth consecutive year, ran for 16 days, closing Dec. 2. The gun season bag limit was expanded to allow for the harvest of an additional doe, provided that one of the does was taken in management zone 2. This additional antlerless deer brought the season total to three deer, only one of which could be antlered. In addition to the regular gun season limit, hunters could elect to participate in the special holiday antlerless only season. The bag limit for that season was one antlerless deer. This deer did not count toward the regular gun season limit or the overall combined deer limit of six.

Hunters under the age of 18 had an additional opportunity with the youth-only gun season. This season was held Oct. 19-21. Bag limits for these hunters were one antlerless deer and for the first time, one antlered deer. Any deer taken during the youth-only season were applied toward the hunter's combined season limit of six deer.

Combining all of the gun seasons (regular gun, holiday antlerless and youth-only), Oklahoma hunters managed to tag 60,868 deer in 2007. Of the 192,525 hunters that attempted to harvest a deer during gun season, 32 percent of them were successful.

Once again opening weekend of rifle season shows the greatest percentage of the number of bucks harvested. Opening day accounted for 22 percent of the antlered deer taken. An additional 15 percent of the buck harvest occurred on the opening Sunday. All totaled, 37 percent of the gun bucks were taken in the initial two days of the season. Buck harvest slowed substantially during the week, but picked up again the following weekend. The final week of the season saw an additional 5,660 (17 percent of the total gun buck harvest) bucks added to the check station books. Figure 5 details the adult buck harvest by day for the entire 16-day rifle season. A graphical representation of the number of bucks and does harvested during rifle season is shown in Figure 6.

The special holiday antlerless seasons continue to provide an excellent opportunity for hunters to be afield with friends and family. In 2007, hunters across most of Oklahoma were afforded opportunities to bag a doe during the month of December. From Dec. 21-23 and again Dec. 28 – 30, hunters in management zones 2-9 participated in an antlerless only hunt. The bag limit was set at one antlerless deer which would not be counted towards the hunter's overall six deer combination limit. Records show that 31,651 hunters

took advantage of these opportunities and brought home 4,330 antlerless deer.

Elk Hunts

"Once in a lifetime" describes the majority of elk hunting in Oklahoma. In fact, for those using the Wildlife Department's controlled hunts process to gain access to these magnificent animals, once you have been successfully selected for an elk hunt, you cannot apply again. Two hundred and twelve hunters were given that

FIGURE 5: 2007 PERCENTAGE OF ANTLERED GUN BUCK HARVEST BY DATE

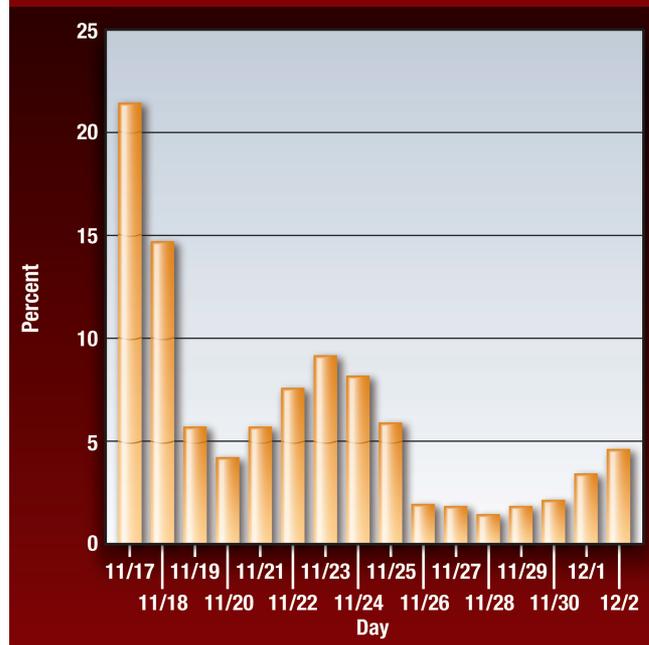
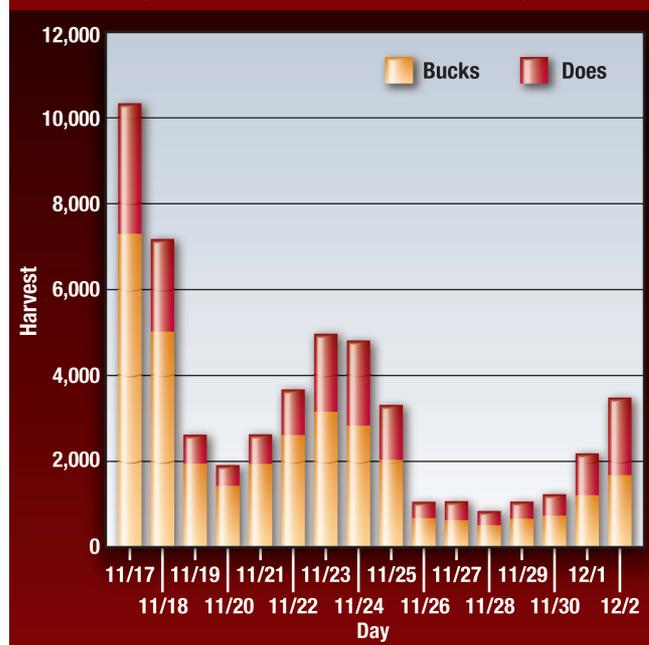


FIGURE 6: 2007 GUN HARVEST BY DAY (INCLUDES CONTROLLED HUNTS)





RUSSELL GRAVES

From a distance, a button buck can be mistaken for a doe. For hunting purposes, button bucks are considered “antlerless deer” and are fair game for hunters licensed to hunt antlerless deer.

In Oklahoma, an antlered deer is defined as any deer, regardless of sex, with at least three inches of antler length above the natural hairline on either side. Therefore, “button bucks” are fair game for hunters looking to fill an antlerless deer tag.

Each year, the Wildlife Department’s Big Game Report provides the previous hunting season’s harvest records for bucks and does, and some sportsmen have voiced concern that these numbers may be skewed since button bucks are considered antlerless deer in the field.

Officials with the Wildlife Department want to assure hunters that although button bucks are checked in as and considered antlerless deer for hunting purposes, they are still counted as bucks in the Big Game Report and in data used by the Wildlife Department to set deer hunting regulations.



“once in a lifetime” opportunity in 2007. That was the total number of hunting permits that were offered for Cookson Hills WMA, Pushmataha WMA and the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife refuge. A total of 33,330 people applied for the available permits giving a hunter a daunting one in 157 chance of drawing a tag.

The hunter drawing the Cookson Hills WMA cow-only permit, and the Pushmataha WMA hunter with his either-sex permit, both managed to go home with a freezer full of venison, continuing the incredible successful streak for these hunts.

The Wichita Mountains NWR provided Oklahoma hunters 210 elk permits issued through our Department’s controlled hunts process. Twenty-eight bull permits and 182 cow tags were up for grabs. All of the bull hunters that were drawn made it to hunt the area of rugged mountains located outside of Lawton. With the exception of one hunter, all managed to fill their permit, a remarkable 96 percent success rate. As is typical, the cow hunters had a more difficult time. Of the 182 permits drawn, 139 hunters made it to the hunt. Half of those hunters bagged their elk, taking 70 cows from the Refuge.

Over the years, elk have expanded off of the Wichita Mountains NWR and have taken up residence

in the surrounding counties. In an effort to increase hunter opportunity and to help alleviate instances of crop and fence damage, elk hunting was again permitted on private lands in Caddo, Comanche and Kiowa counties. Persons wishing to participate in this hunt were required to obtain written landowner permission and present it to Wildlife Department officials at either the Manning State Fish Hatchery in Medicine Park, the Wildlife Department Headquarters building in Oklahoma City, or the field office in Jenks. Hunters were given a 10-day archery season and eight days for gun hunting. The bag limit was one elk per hunter. Archery hunters were issued either sex permits while gun hunters were limited to a specific sex depending on the date and location of their hunt site. Seventy-seven elk were taken from private lands — 29 bulls and 48 cows. Fort Sill added an additional 29 elk, bringing the statewide 2007 harvest to 205.

Antelope Hunts

The second “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity afforded Oklahoma hunters via the controlled hunts process is the chance to hunt pronghorn antelope in the Pan-

handle. Although very limited by habitat requirements, these unique mammals continue to populate this area of our state in numbers large enough to allow limited hunting opportunities to those fortunate enough to draw one of the coveted permits. This past year 200 doe-only and 65 either-sex permits were offered. Of the hunters drawn for the hunt, 144 made the trip to the Panhandle to participate in the hunts, taking 48 males and 66 females. An additional limited number of permits were made available to landowners in the area.

Data Collection And Analysis

Oklahoma's landscape is more varied than that of many other states. Perhaps only Texas is comparable in terms of the variety and diversity of deer habitat available within its borders. A deer hunter's choices could include the cypress swamps of the far southeastern coastal plain, the mixed hardwood-pine forests of Ouachita mountains, expansive tall grass prairies in the northeast counties, wheat and alfalfa fields in the northwest, the mesa country of the panhandle, mesquite scrub of the southwest or the extensive post oak-blackjack Crosstimbers which dominates the central interior of the state.

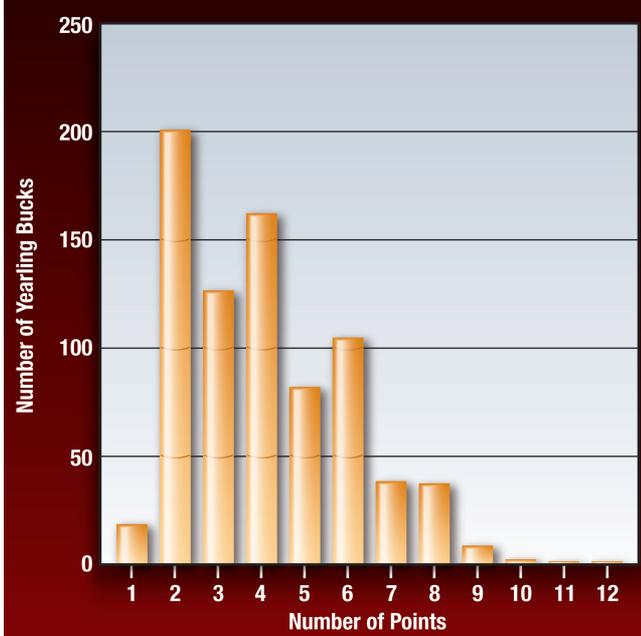
In addition to influencing the tactics and techniques a hunter must use in pursuing Oklahoma whitetail and mule deer, these major differences in habitat exert an overwhelming influence on the number of deer the land can support as well as the physical characteristics of the animals themselves.

Although information collected at the county level is often useful to sportsmen, biologists are more concerned with tabulation and analysis of deer kills in small areas called Deer Kill Location Units or "DKLs" and aggregations of these DKLs known "Harvest Units"



DENVER BRYAN

FIGURE 7: 2007 YEARLING BUCK ANTLER POINTS



(Figure 8). Harvest Units are regions that, by virtue of similar habitat and herd conditions, lend themselves to being managed as separate units with specific management objectives. Harvest Units with similar habitats have the inherent capability of supporting deer populations of similar qualities and densities. Trends in weight and antler characteristics can be examined to determine which units are most likely to produce the density or quality of animals desired.

Yearling bucks are especially good barometers of a herd's physical condition. Their high vulnerability to harvest usually insures a large sample to examine, and these deer 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 793 yearling bucks examined in 2007, 56 percent had four or more points (Figure 7). Differences in biological potential, range condition and deer density are reflected in Table 5. Data collected at deer check stations in 2007 continued to show the relationship between habitat conditions and the physical condition of the deer in our state. The Harvest Units in the northwestern quadrant of our state (Units 1, 2, 4 and 5) are typified by deeper, more fertile soils and an abundance of agricultural activity. As a result, we typically see heavier, better nourished deer from this area when compared to other, lower quality habitats around the state. In contrast, Harvest Units 9 and 10 exhibit rocky, shallow soils that support more closed canopy forest than agriculture. With this reduction in the quality of habitat comes a reduction in deer body size and antler growth, as shown in Table 5 (although there are exceptions; see new state record whitetail on p.35).

As hunter success rates increase, more and more hunters are beginning to shift their focus to selecting for quality or trophy bucks. While many different factors influence deer antler development, one of the most important is buck age. Older deer will typically have larger racks than younger deer if the amount and quality of forage are equal. Additionally, age data gathered on the doe segment of the herd can provide much needed information about herd status and hunting pressure. For these reasons, natural resources students are hired from selected state universities to collect deer jaws at different check stations across the state. Together with data collected from cooperators enrolled in the Department's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP), and deer harvested on

TABLE 3: 2007 STATEWIDE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF YEARLING BUCK ANTLER POINTS

Number of Points	Number of Deer Sampled	Percent
1	19	2.4
2	203	25.6
3	128	16.1
4	164	20.7
5	83	10.5
6	106	13.4
7	39	4.9
8	38	4.8
9	9	1.1
10	2	0.3
11	1	0.1
12	1	0.1

TABLE 4: 2007 STATEWIDE DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT DEER AGES

Age in Years	Sex			
	Bucks		Does	
	Number Sampled	Percent	Number Sampled	Percent
1.5	801	38.6	476	24.8
2.5	704	34	648	33.8
3.5	345	16.6	366	19.1
4.5	146	7	174	9.1
5.5	57	2.7	142	7.4
6.5	10	0.5	43	2.2
7.5	7	0.3	41	2.1
8.5	3	0.1	23	1.2
9.5	0	0	6	0.3
10.5	0	0	1	0.1

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), the student-pulled jaws provide the herd age structure data that is needed for management decisions.

During the 2007 season, 4,765 individual jaws were analyzed using the tooth wear and eruption method to determine the age of the deer at the time it was harvested. This sample size is slightly less than five percent of the total number of deer harvested. This valuable data, collected at check stations across the state, is shown in Table 4 and Figures 9 and 10. The ages given in these figures are divided into half-year increments. While this might seem odd, if you remember that fawns are born in the spring, the first opportunity they have at being harvested is roughly six months, or half a year later. If that fawn survives its first hunting season, at the end of the next hunting season it would be 1½

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TABLE 5: PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF YEARLING AND ADULT DEER BY HARVEST UNIT (INCLUDES WMA STATISTICS)

Harvest Unit	Yearling Bucks			Adult Bucks		Adult Does	
	Average Weight ¹	Antler Points	Percent Spikes	Average Weight	Average Age	Average Weight	Average Age
1	110 (1)	5	0	151 (27)	3.7	98 (61)	3.5
2	92 (12)	3.9	25	138 (85)	3.4	91 (171)	3.9
3	108 (1)	6	0	145 (33)	3.2	101 (76)	3.4
4	100 (60)	4	23.3	121 (139)	2.4	100 (141)	3
5	101 (24)	4.9	16.7	118 (48)	2.3	89 (74)	2.8
6	88 (250)	4.2	22.4	104 (553)	2.4	87 (366)	3.1
7	84 (75)	4.9	8	111 (258)	2.7	84 (238)	3.1
8	94 (129)	4	25.6	110 (245)	2.2	85 (211)	2.7
9	78 (176)	4.1	29	96 (408)	2.5	74 (272)	3.1
10	86 (63)	3.7	38.1	105 (241)	2.9	79 (140)	3.3
11	82 (10)	3.2	30	106 (36)	2.5	84 (170)	2.9

¹ all weights hog-dressed, sample size shown in parentheses