NELS RODEFELD

2010 BIG GAME REPORT

By: Jerry Shaw, Big Game Biologist and Gary Keller, Wildlife Research Technician

As a long, extremely hot summer lessens its grip on Oklahoma, giving way to the cooler temperatures of fall, it is time again to reflect back on the previous year's deer seasons. This year's Big Game Report (BGR) marks a turning point of sorts. As I prepared to summarize the 2010-11 deer seasons, I began looking back through the historical reports I have in my office. The first thing that I noticed was their brevity. For example, the 1955 Deer Season Report (as they were called at the time) contained only four pages of double spaced text and tables, and one of those pages was a listing of the season regulations! There were an additional three pages that consisted of a map showing the state with all the county boundaries marked. A mark was placed on the map showing the approximate location of each and every one of the deer taken that year. Talk about time consuming! But then again, the 1955 deer harvest tallied 1,344 deer. Imagine trying to complete that map with last year's harvest of 109,314 deer!

Looking at that map reminded me of the saying "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Just like the graphical representation of the deer harvest shown on that map from 1955, this year's Big Game Report presents data visually through charts and graphs to help you effectively use the information. If you are a long-time follower of the annual Big Game Report, you will notice that there are several new charts, some of which provide new information never included in prior reports. Other sections of the report are improved as well. Just as my counterpart in the 1950s worked to find the best way to share information with his readers, it is my hope that you find this updated Big Game Report informative, engaging and user-friendly. And as always, best of luck this coming season!

—Jerry Shaw, big game biologist

2010-2011 Deer Season

With the 2011-12 deer season just a few short weeks away, it is the perfect time to look back at the 2010-11 harvest. State hunters faced very hot and very dry conditions for most of last year's seasons. If the dry woods did not make hunting tough enough, gusty winds plagued most of the muzzleloader season, adding an extra degree of difficulty in filling a deer license. While early in the growing season it appeared that Oklahoma would see an excellent acorn crop, lack of rain hampered the acorns from maturing. Other forages also suffered from the dry conditions. With those challenges in mind, it is a testament to deer hunting in our state that we were able to tally the fourth highest deer harvest ever recorded for Oklahoma.

When all of the deer hunting was done, hunters brought home 109,314 deer. This number was 5.9 percent below last year's near record harvest of 116,175 and just over 10,000 fewer than the all-time harvest record set in 2006. Forty-two percent (46,000 deer) of the harvest was comprised of does with the remaining 63,314 being bucks. Table 1 details the harvest by county, season, and sex of the deer while Table 2 presents the same information for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Wildlife Management Areas, or more simply WMA's. Figure 1 shows the total annual deer harvest dating back to 1972 with Figure 2 detailing buck and doe harvest over the past decade. The 2010-11 harvest fell well within the 104,877 deer average harvest calculated over the past 10 years.

Looking at season categories, the combined rifle seasons (youth, holiday antlerless, and regular rifle) accounted for 63 percent of the deer taken in 2010 (displayed in Figure 3). As mentioned above, hunting was extremely difficult during muzzleloader season. Additionally, archers set a new harvest record taking 20,480 deer this past year. As a result, for probably the first time since before Oklahoma became a state, archers contributed a greater percentage of the total harvest than did muzzleloader hunters. Archers added

Figure 1: Total Deer Harvest, 1972-2010

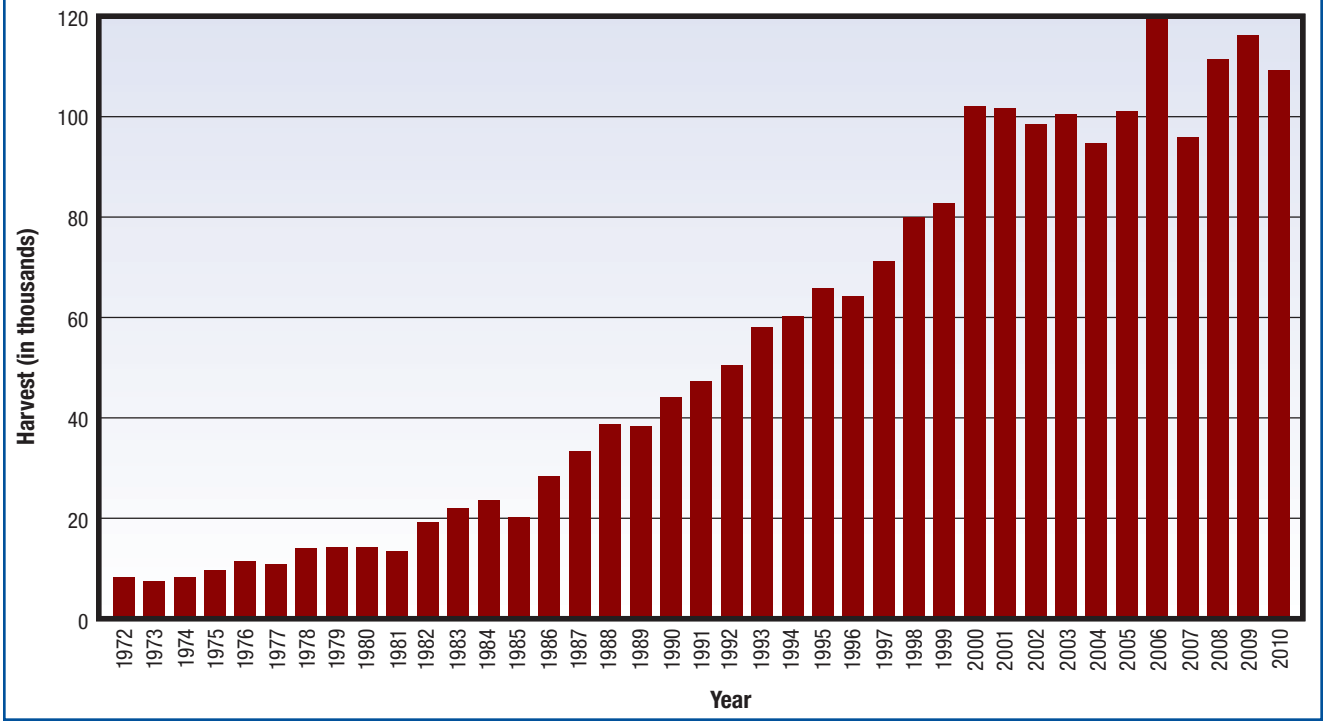


Figure 2: 10 Year Harvest Trend

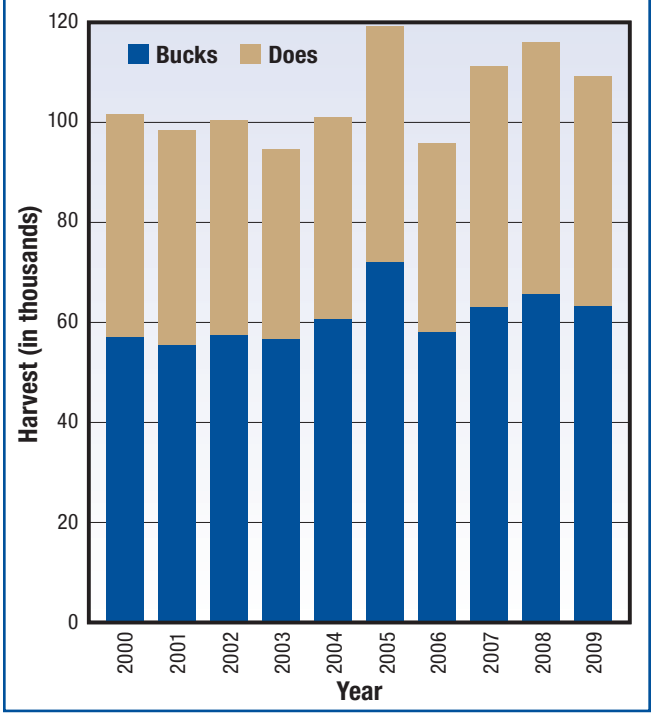
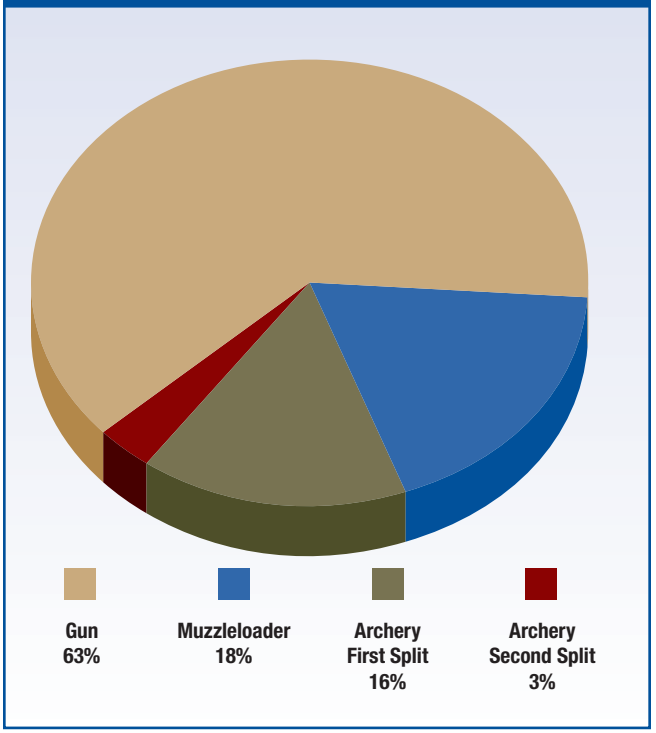


Figure 3: 10 Year Harvest Trend



18.74 percent of the total harvest compared to the 18.42 percent attributed to muzzleloaders.

Certain counties in Oklahoma have a distinct advantage when it comes to the number of deer killed within their borders. The size of the county, the amount of suitable deer habitat, the amount of that habitat that is open to hunter access, the number of hunters residing in that county, and a host of other factors all play a role in the number of deer that will be harvested from that county. These variables allow a small handful of counties to perennially be the top producing counties in terms of the amount of deer taken. The 2010 harvest followed that trend with nine of the top 10 counties from 2009 continuing their role as top 10 deer producers. As not all counties have WMA's within their borders, comparisons were made after WMA harvested deer were removed from the tallies. Table 1 lists the county harvest with WMA harvested deer removed and Table 2 lists the harvest for each area open to public hunting.

Looking at Table 1 shows that Osage County retained its title of top county with 4,205 deer taken. Just as has happened in the past three years, Cherokee and Pittsburg Counties have again alternated in the number two and three slots. This past year saw Pittsburg County pass Cherokee County with harvest totals of 3,517 and 3,073 deer respectively. Rounding out the top 5 positions were Pushmataha County with 3,027 deer and LeFlore County with 2,890. In descending order, the remaining "Top Ten" are Atoka (2,751), McCurtain (2,520), Sequoyah (2,326), Craig (2,281) and representing Western Oklahoma, and the only non-repeat from 2009, Roger Mills with 2,094 deer checked.

Many people not familiar with our state and its incredible diversity are amazed to learn of the opportunity to hunt mule deer in Oklahoma. The extreme northwest corner of our state is home to a stable population of these deer. The wide open spaces and short-grass prairie habitat found there provide a unique opportunity to hunters. The 2010 season closed with a total harvest of 201 mule deer. Cimarron County always has the highest mule deer harvested and last year was no different. Hunters in this County, situated at the very western-most reach of the Panhandle, bagged 98 mule deer. Beaver County was a distant second place with 41 "mulies." Other counties recording mule deer harvest are Harmon (22), Texas (15), Woods (8), Harper (8), Beckham, Ellis, and Greer each with 2, and Major, Roger Mills, and Woodward Counties with one each.

Adequate antlerless harvest is vital to the proper management of a deer resource. Oklahoma utilizes two main tools to help manipulate the doe harvest. The first tool is the number of days available to hunters to pursue antlerless deer and the second is the number of antlerless deer allowed in the bag limit.

During the 2010-11 seasons, all of Oklahoma was open for antlerless harvest for the entire length of archery season. Additionally, all of the state was open for antlerless harvest during the youth firearms season. With the exceptions of the far northwest panhandle and the southeast corner of the state, hunters afield during the muzzleloader and rifle season saw antlerless days stretch the entirety of those seasons. Antlerless opportunity was expanded in 2010 with the extension of the Holiday season. This season was open for most of the state with only the panhandle and southeast regions of the state being closed. For the first time this formerly two-weekend season ran for a full 10 days in December.

The deer bag limit was unchanged for 2010 with the combined total of no more than six deer per hunter. This limit included no more than two bucks. Hunters hunting in the high deer density management zones 2, 7, and 8 had the increased opportunity to take two antlerless deer during the muzzleloader and rifle seasons. A map showing the management zones and their associated

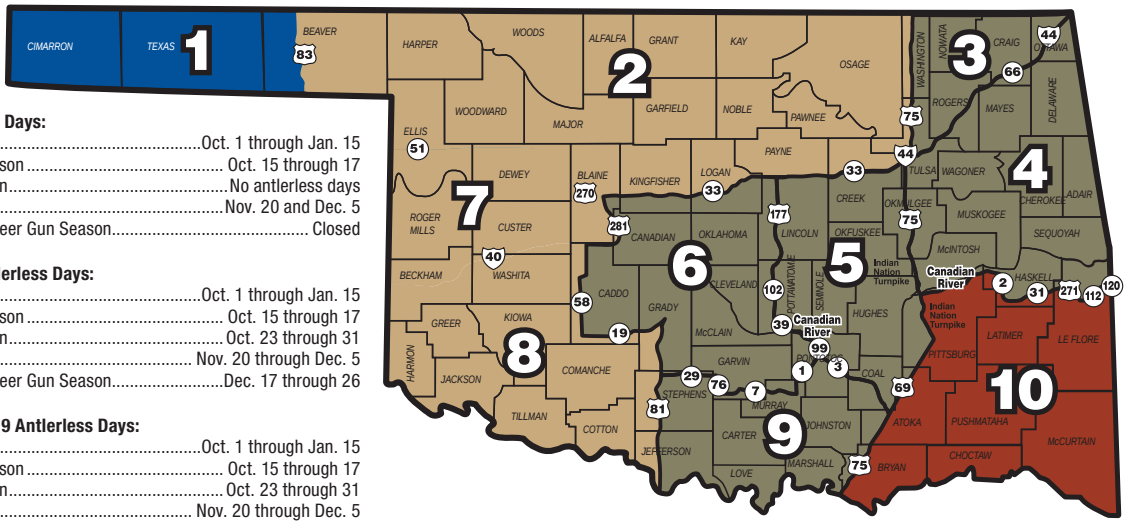
Table 1: 2009 County Summary of Deer Harvest by Hunt Type

County	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does			
Adair	150	95	425	383	298	114	873	592	1,465
Alfalfa	137	126	644	511	108	97	889	734	1,623
Atoka	274	318	870	633	442	214	1,586	1,165	2,751
Beaver	37	32	411	198	54	55	502	285	787
Beckham	81	65	606	380	92	60	779	505	1,284
Blaine	61	64	458	319	53	59	572	442	1,014
Bryan	125	183	363	321	110	61	598	565	1,163
Caddo	144	150	841	515	128	107	1,113	772	1,885
Canadian	88	59	334	217	50	44	472	320	792
Carter	107	99	430	304	104	53	641	456	1,097
Cherokee	314	354	820	811	514	260	1,648	1,425	3,073
Choctaw	144	165	544	296	224	132	912	593	1,505
Cimarron	10	5	149	8	11	0	170	13	183
Cleveland	121	147	266	240	124	81	511	468	979
Coal	104	140	500	390	212	106	816	636	1,452
Comanche	57	50	263	166	39	35	359	251	610
Cotton	28	34	167	156	26	21	221	211	432
Craig	193	169	870	679	222	148	1,285	996	2,281
Creek	197	172	703	557	216	160	1,116	889	2,005
Custer	52	52	394	254	48	46	494	352	846
Delaware	215	214	599	539	294	158	1,108	911	2,019
Dewey	56	59	596	342	77	81	729	482	1,211
Ellis	76	72	623	421	73	95	772	588	1,360
Garfield	77	52	438	301	60	52	575	405	980
Garvin	84	57	326	213	95	45	505	315	820
Grady	100	77	480	302	66	50	646	429	1,075
Grant	118	109	765	619	122	134	1,005	862	1,867
Greer	60	75	328	206	52	52	440	333	773
Harmon	56	68	336	231	54	66	446	365	811
Harper	52	42	433	243	57	38	542	323	865
Haskell	228	188	531	407	320	117	1,079	712	1,791
Hughes	125	134	541	373	207	98	873	605	1,478
Jackson	92	78	373	224	47	60	512	362	874
Jefferson	60	43	275	109	42	38	377	190	567
Johnston	105	127	434	335	125	66	664	528	1,192
Kay	96	112	583	547	94	113	773	772	1,545
Kingfisher	65	68	317	209	75	56	457	333	790
Kiowa	46	39	280	178	38	33	364	250	614
Latimer	206	162	654	307	347	131	1,207	600	1,807
LeFlore	309	252	921	530	611	267	1,841	1,049	2,890
Lincoln	144	146	691	453	156	133	991	732	1,723
Logan	167	151	547	426	116	104	830	681	1,511
Love	61	45	234	151	64	36	359	232	591
Major	135	125	794	540	128	98	1,057	763	1,820
Marshall	62	70	235	155	59	34	356	259	615
Mayes	203	178	453	378	244	147	900	703	1,603
McClain	54	53	174	111	33	30	261	194	455
McCurtain	255	259	836	438	489	243	1,580	940	2,520
McIntosh	119	75	281	200	145	64	545	339	884
Murray	59	73	234	148	58	38	351	259	610
Muskogee	205	160	481	334	197	125	883	619	1,502
Noble	75	96	494	334	72	54	641	484	1,125
Nowata	84	73	437	304	111	60	632	437	1,069
Okfuskee	92	78	377	190	118	68	587	336	923
Oklahoma	149	122	155	126	51	34	355	282	637
Okmulgee	86	113	350	198	127	65	563	376	939
Osage	296	324	1,729	1,254	321	281	2,346	1,859	4,205
Ottawa	124	122	444	338	143	66	711	526	1,237
Pawnee	71	79	415	325	78	76	564	480	1,044
Payne	92	95	462	376	91	71	645	542	1,187
Pittsburg	416	475	1,143	638	608	237	2,167	1,350	3,517
Pontotoc	174	149	453	287	136	75	763	511	1,274
Pottawatomie	124	107	520	332	136	82	780	521	1,301
Pushmataha	277	330	968	557	627	268	1,872	1,155	3,027
Roger Mills	100	110	958	700	110	116	1,168	926	2,094
Rogers	239	202	545	474	165	121	949	797	1,746
Seminole	73	102	350	278	122	73	545	453	998
Sequoyah	248	235	639	609	430	165	1,317	1,009	2,326
Stephens	137	115	401	249	85	47	623	411	1,034
Texas	16	15	164	44	30	0	210	59	269
Tillman	50	52	292	198	36	24	378	274	652
Tulsa	95	85	162	127	39	35	296	247	543
Wagoner	107	126	307	204	103	58	517	388	905
Washington	99	83	460	279	74	55	633	417	1,050
Washita	28	20	270	139	23	33	321	192	513
Woods	141	110	735	550	141	99	1,017	759	1,776
Woodward	115	130	825	547	130	111	1,070	788	1,858
SUBTOTAL	**9,622**	**9,390**	**38,906**	**26,965**	**11,727**	**7,029**	**60,255**	**43,384**	**103,639**

Table 2. 2009 Management Area Summary of Deer Harvest by Hunt Type

WMA	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does			
Altus-Lugert WMA	8	10	2	0	1	0	11	10	21
Atoka WMA	7	25	54	17	7	1	68	43	111
Beaver River WMA	1	1	40	4	11	10	52	15	67
Black Kettle WMA	20	27	206	159	46	84	272	270	542
Blue River WMA	2	6	4	0	0	0	6	6	12
Broken Bow WMA	0	1	3	3	1	1	4	5	9
Camp Gruber JMTC	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2
Candy Creek WMA	0	1	0	0	2	10	2	11	13
Canton WMA	17	54	30	13	11	23	58	90	148
Cherokee GMA	3	9	26	15	14	12	43	36	79
Cherokee PHA	12	10	23	0	13	5	48	15	63
Chickasaw NRA	0	1	0	5	0	1	0	7	7
Chouteau WMA	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	3
Cimarron Bluff WMA	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	2
Cimarron Hills WMA	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	2
Cookson Hills WMA	2	2	17	11	5	8	24	21	45
Cooper WMA	0	0	41	5	6	4	47	9	56
Copan WMA	11	14	8	7	15	6	34	27	61
Deep Fork NWR	8	6	0	1	14	15	22	22	44
Deep Fork WMA	2	4	0	1	4	2	6	7	13
Drummond Flat WMA	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Ellis County WMA	6	5	30	2	5	11	41	18	59
Eufaula WMA	3	7	3	4	6	4	12	15	27
Fobb Bottom WMA	2	3	5	2	0	0	7	5	12
Fort Cobb SP	0	0	0	14	0	7	0	21	21
Fort Cobb WMA	4	11	3	0	0	2	7	13	20
Fort Gibson WMA	43	39	42	14	28	15	113	68	181
Fort Gibson WR	2	1	0	0	9	25	11	26	37
Fort Sill MR	31	22	64	39	24	31	119	92	211
Fort Supply WMA	12	16	18	7	5	10	35	33	68
Gary Sherrer WMA	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Gruber WMA	3	4	53	8	10	11	66	23	89
Heyburn WMA	3	1	5	0	1	2	9	3	12
Hickory Creek WMA	0	0	8	8	3	0	11	8	19
Honobia Creek WMA	25	10	66	41	55	29	146	80	226
Hugo WMA	8	16	38	42	23	10	69	68	137
Hulah WMA	3	6	40	3	9	10	52	19	71
James Collins WMA	57	51	28	2	1	1	86	54	140
Kaw WMA	25	34	65	52	19	26	109	112	221
Keystone WMA	18	24	16	14	12	4	46	42	88
Lexington WMA	3	3	74	33	2	0	79	36	115
Little River NWR	2	3	23	7	0	0	25	10	35
Little River SP	11	7	0	0	0	0	11	7	18
Love Valley WMA	7	3	12	8	2	2	21	13	34
McAlester AAP	109	128	4	21	0	0	113	149	262
McCurtain Co. WA	3	3	1	4	6	2	10	9	19
McGee Creek WMA	12	8	12	7	9	4	33	19	52
Mountain Park WMA	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Okmulgee GMA	2	2	22	14	0	0	24	16	40
Okmulgee PHA	1	2	4	0	5	0	10	2	12
Oologah WMA	7	9	12	15	5	3	24	27	51
Optima NWR	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Optima WMA	4	5	14	4	2	0	20	9	29
Osage Rock Creek WMA	3	1	14	1	9	5	26	7	33
Osage-W. Wall WMA	2	2	9	2	1	0	12	4	16
Ouachita WMA	13	11	41	14	18	6	72	31	103
Ouachita(McCurt. Unit)	1	3	9	9	13	6	23	18	41
Packsaddle WMA	5	5	64	3	11	14	80	22	102
Pine Creek WMA	3	5	7	5	6	4	16	14	30
Pushmataha WMA	11	18	34	22	22	14	67	54	121
Robbers Cave WMA	2	0	2	0	1	0	5	0	5
Robert S. Kerr WMA	1	1	7	3	0	0	8	4	12
Salt Plains NWR	0	3	75	104	7	17	82	124	206
Sandy Sanders WMA	6	5	5	7	7	1	18	13	31
Schultz WMA	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	2
Sequoyah NWR	2	0	2	2	20	111	24	113	137
Skiatook WMA	1	1	4	8	1	1	6	10	16
Spavinaw GMA	16	24	30	21	8	5	54	50	104
Spavinaw PHA	1	1	4	4	1	1	6	6	12
Stringtown WMA	1	3	0	0	2	0	3	3	6
Tenkiller WMA	0	0	3	4	1	1	4	5	9
Three Rivers WMA	77	65	236	231	124	103	437	399	836
Tishomingo NWR	0	0	2	27	2	8	4	35	39
Tishomingo WMA	1	3	2	0	4	3	7	6	13
Washita Arm WMA	3	2	4	10	1	0	8	12	20
Washita NWR	1	4	2	0	4	1	7	5	12
Waurika WMA	14	24	1	2	3	2	18	28	46
Webbers Falls WMA	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	2	4
Wichita Mts NWR	0	0	15	22	0	0	15	22	37
Wister WMA	12	10	11	9	12	11	35	30	65
Yourman WMA	0	1	2	2	1	0	3	3	6
WMA SUBTOTAL	**680**	**788**	**1,707**	**1,122**	**672**	**706**	**3,059**	**2,616**	**5,675**
COUNTY SUBTOTAL	**9,622**	**9,390**	**38,906**	**26,965**	**11,727**	**7,029**	**60,255**	**43,384**	**103,639**
GRAND TOTAL	**10,302**	**10,178**	**40,613**	**28,087**	**12,399**	**7,735**	**63,314**	**46,000**	**109,314**

Figure 4: 2010 Antlerless Days and Bag Limits



Zone 1 Antlerless Days:
- Archery Season .....Oct. 1 through Jan. 15
- Youth Deer Gun Season ..... Oct. 15 through 17
- Muzzleloader Season.....No antlerless days
- Deer Gun Season .....Nov. 20 and Dec. 5
- Holiday Antlerless Deer Gun Season..... Closed

Zone 2, 7 & 8 Antlerless Days:
- Archery Season .....Oct. 1 through Jan. 15
- Youth Deer Gun Season ..... Oct. 15 through 17
- Muzzleloader Season..... Oct. 23 through 31
- Deer Gun Season..... Nov. 20 through Dec. 5
- Holiday Antlerless Deer Gun Season.....Dec. 17 through 26

Zones 3, 4, 5, 6 & 9 Antlerless Days:
- Archery Season .....Oct. 1 through Jan. 15
- Youth Deer Gun Season ..... Oct. 15 through 17
- Muzzleloader Season..... Oct. 23 through 31
- Deer Gun Season..... Nov. 20 through Dec. 5
- Holiday Antlerless Deer Gun Season.....Dec. 17 through 26

Zone 10 Antlerless Days:
- Archery Season .....Oct. 1 through Jan. 15
- Youth Deer Gun Season ..... Oct. 15 through 17
- Muzzleloader Season..... Oct. 23 through 25 and Oct. 29 through 31
- Deer Gun Season.....Nov. 20, 27 and Dec. 5
- Holiday Antlerless Deer Gun Season..... Closed

Zones 2, 7 and 8 have a two (2) antlerless deer limit for deer muzzleloader season and a two (2) antlerless deer limit for deer gun season.

Seasons on **public lands** may vary. Consult the Public Lands section.

The harvest of **antlerless mule deer** is prohibited during the youth deer gun, deer gun and the holiday antlerless deer gun seasons.

antlerless days and bag limits is shown in Figure 4. For areas open for the special holiday antlerless season, any antlerless deer taken during that time did not count against the hunters combined season bag limit. New to the Big Game Report this year are graphics depicting the average annual deer harvest per hunter. Figures 5-11 use data collected during the Department's annual Game Harvest Survey to calculate how many deer the average deer hunter takes home each year. On average, each Oklahoma hunter harvests one deer per year.

Hunters utilized the excellent antlerless hunting opportunities Oklahoma affords by taking a total of 46,000 does in 2010. This number was 8.8 percent less than the record setting doe harvest in 2009 but still accounted for 42 percent of the total deer kill last year. This is one percentage point below the 2009 harvest. An additional 2,717 button-bucks brings the entire antlerless harvest to 48,717. Button-bucks are part of the antlerless bag limit as they do not possess the three-inch or longer antlers required to meet the definition of an "antlered deer." While under ideal conditions the harvest of button bucks would be curtailed, this level of harvest is acceptable and somewhat expected, especially during the later portions of the gun season and then again during the special holiday season. Hunters often encounter these young bucks late in the year when their body size is approaching that of a young doe. Their size and precocious habit of being the first to step out onto a field or clearing often leads a hunter to think that they are an adult doe.

Archery Season

A major change in archery season saw its inaugural year in 2010. Last year marked the first time that crossbows were permitted as a legal means of take for any archery hunter. Prior to 2010, the use of these bows was restricted to persons certified by a physician as unable to draw and fire a conventional bow. This change was met with both skepticism and excitement. While some hunters were glad to have the opportunity to utilize these tools, other hunters feared that the woods would become full with new bow hunters.

While it is true that the number of archery hunters (as calculated using data collected through the Game Harvest Survey) showed an increase to the highest number of archery hunters ever recorded in Oklahoma, the amount of increase was only

Figure 5: Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter, 2001-2010

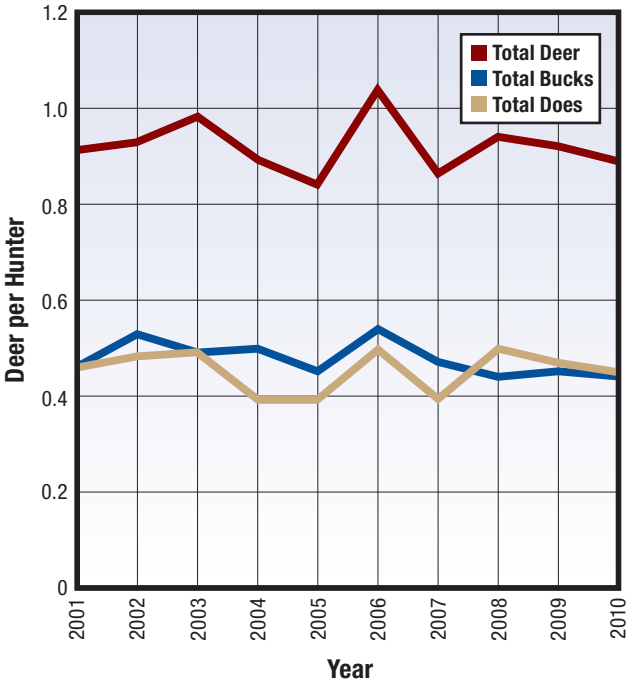


Figure 6: Average Annual Harvest per Hunter, Archery Season 2001-2010

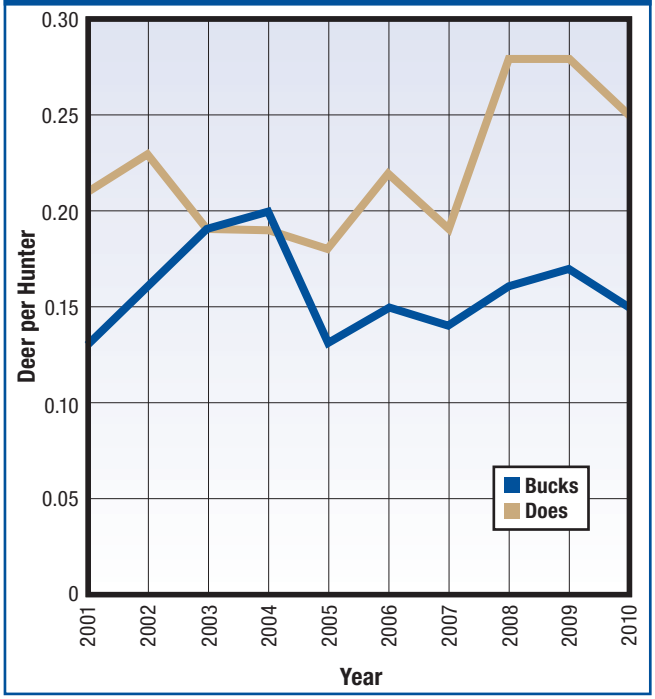
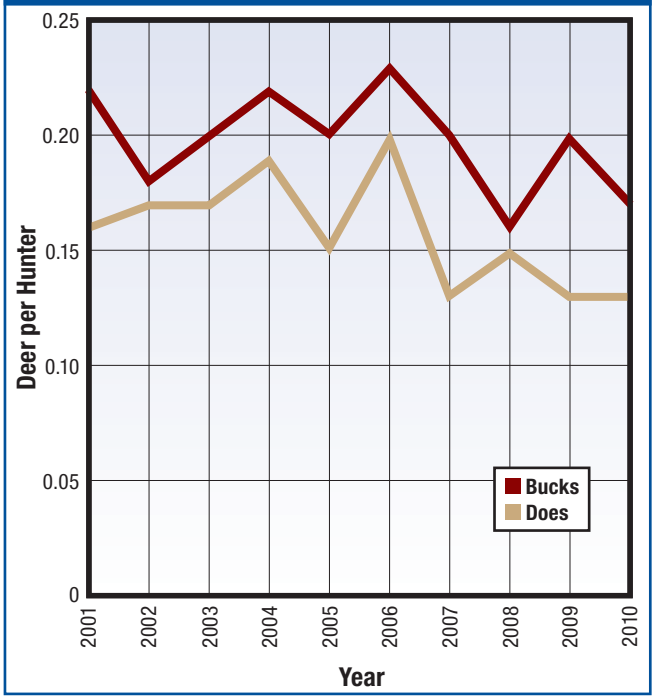


Figure 7: Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter, Muzzleloader Season 2001-2010



4.9 percent. The number of archers grew by a greater margin from 2008 to 2009 (5.7 percent). Oklahoma did set a new record for participation in archery season the year crossbows were legalized for all hunters, but we also set new records in three of the five years prior to this rule change (2005, 2008, and 2009). In fact, the growth in the number of archery hunters in 2010 is only 4.6 percent higher than was recorded in 2002. It would appear that the addition of this method of take did not bring the massive increase in archery hunters that many crossbow objectors feared.

Concern and opposition to crossbows also focused on the fear that archery harvest would increase substantially. Again, as with the level of archer participation, we also saw a record archery harvest in 2010. Bow hunters checked in 20,480 deer last year, a three percent increase over 2009. Just as with bow hunter numbers, the setting of new harvest records was very prevalent prior to crossbows becoming a legal means of take. In the past decade a new archery record has been set 6 different times. And many of those records were much more substantial than the three percent post-crossbow increase. The 2009 record was 12 percent higher than the 2008 record. The record set in 2006 was 20 percent higher than the record harvest set two years prior. Figure 11 is new to this year's Big Game Report and shows archery hunter numbers and archery harvest over the past 10 years. Figure 12 depicts the buck and doe harvest broken down by the week of the season. Another new chart in this year's report can be seen as Figure 13, which illustrates the percent success by season type. As shown in this chart, hunters in 2010 had a success rate slightly below that shown from 2009. Figure 6 also depicts the average annual harvest by bow hunters.

(Continues on page 34)

Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs: A Place for Deer Hunters

Believe it or not, the deer archery season is only about two months away and now is the perfect time to do a little preseason scouting. For hunters looking for a great place to go this fall, look no further than the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Areas (WMA's) in southeast Oklahoma. Together the WMAs offer more than 280,000 acres of publicly accessible land and that's not all. During last year's hunter survey, 99 out of 117 hunter camps rated the quality of bucks on the WMAs as good to excellent. And just how many deer are present on the WMAs? Well, back when the WMAs were first established in the late 1990's, deer surveys produced an average of 3.4 deer observed per night. During the 2010 surveys the average number of deer observed per night was 35.0. Great numbers and great quality, a perfect combination for hunters who trophy hunt and hunters who just like to see deer.

For more great information about deer hunting opportunities on the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers Wildlife Management Areas, be sure to visit www.wildlifedepartment.com. By visiting the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers area descriptions on the Department's website, hunters may read articles about the great hunting opportunities available on the WMAs as well as see up-to-date game camera photos of deer from the WMAs.

Accessing the Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs requires the purchase of a Land Access Fee permit, which is $40 per calendar year for Oklahoma residents between the ages of 18 and 64 and $85 for non-residents. The revenue from each permit sold is used to help keep the WMAs open to the public for hunting and fishing recreation and to manage the WMAs for the benefit of hunters and anglers. For maps of the WMAs, contact the area biologist at 918-527-5308. Recent trail camera pictures from the area can be viewed online at wildlifedepartment.com

Figure 8: Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter, Gun Season 2001-2010

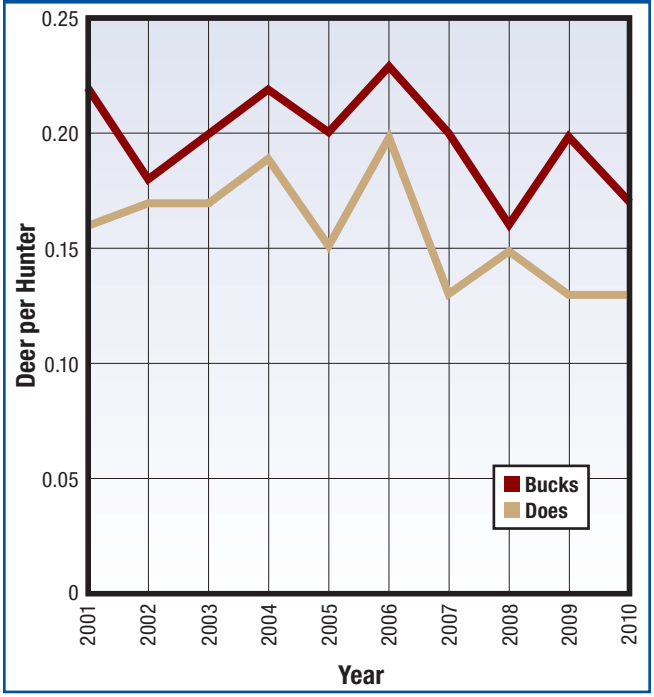
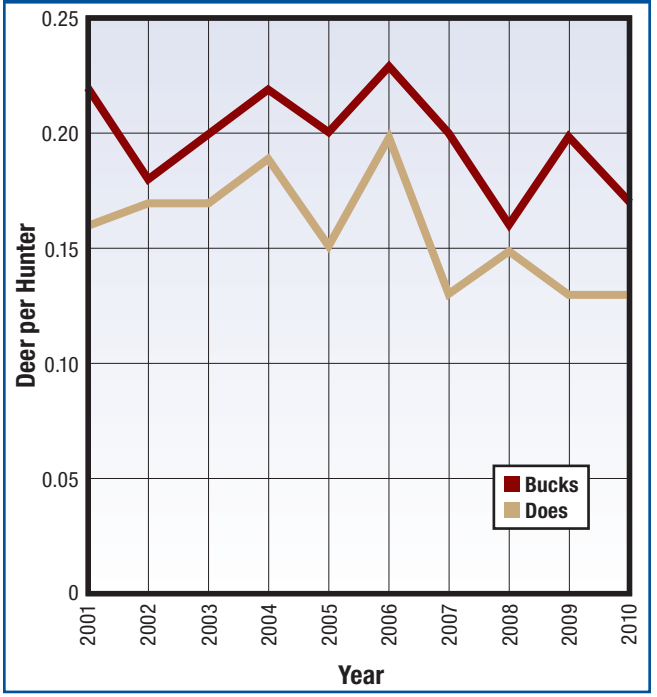


Figure 9: Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter, Youth Season 2001-2010



KIM HART

Figure 8: Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter, Gun Season 2001-2010

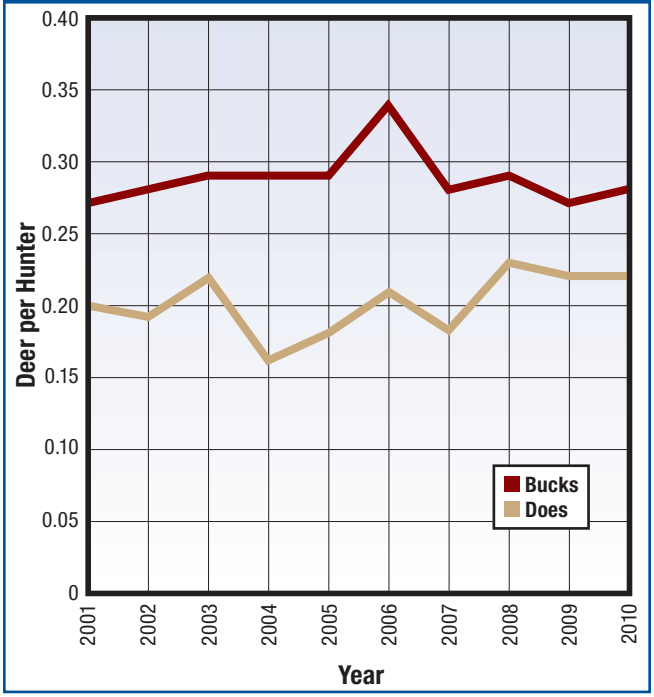
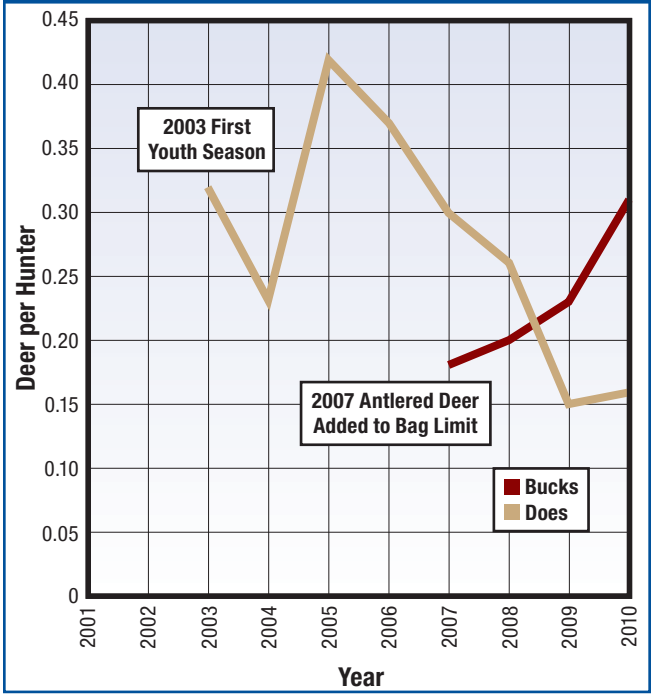


Figure 9: Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter, Youth Season 2001-2010



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The archery season opened on Oct. 1 and continued uninterrupted until Jan. 15. The bag limit was 6 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 Oct. 1 through Nov. 20. The second session was from Nov. 21 to the end of the season on Jan. 15.

Muzzleloader Season

As was mentioned in the opening paragraphs, the 2010 muzzleloading season was difficult for most Oklahoma hunters. Most hunters taking advantage of the season that began on Oct. 23 and concluded on Oct. 31 found the weather unseasonably warm and the Oklahoma winds in full effect. Perhaps the weather was too much for many hunters as the 2010 hunter numbers showed the lowest participation level in over a decade (Figure 14). Survey data calculated that 94,905 hunters went afield during this season. Those that did brave the winds and heat faced a tough hunt as shown by low rate of success (Figure 14) taking home 20,134 deer for their efforts. In total, the muzzleloader harvest was down 18 percent from 2009 levels. While doe success remained unchanged from 2009 levels, the average annual harvest of bucks dropped (Figure 7).

The bag limit and antlerless opportunity remained unchanged from 2009. Hunters could kill one antlered and two antlerless deer, provided at least one of the antlerless deer were taken from Management Zones 2,7, or 8. Figure 15 charts the muzzleloader harvest by day and sex.

Gun Season

As muzzleloader season came to a close, stories of bucks chasing does began to circulate in locations where hunters tend to congregate and on online message boards. The disappointment many felt over the less than ideal muzzleloader season was replaced in large measure by optimism and excitement of hearing that deer were starting to move. Hunters who may have been reluctant to sit in a treestand and put up with the heat and high winds, perhaps redoubled their efforts during rifle season. Whatever the cause, a record number of hunters hunted under deer gun license in 2010. With youth hunters, holiday season, and general gun season hunters

Figure 10: Average Annual Deer Harvest per Hunter, Holiday Season 2001-2010

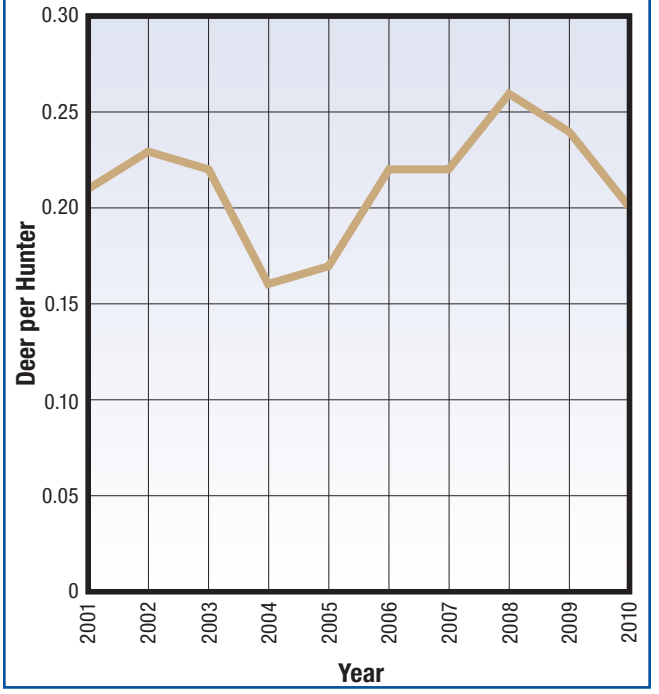
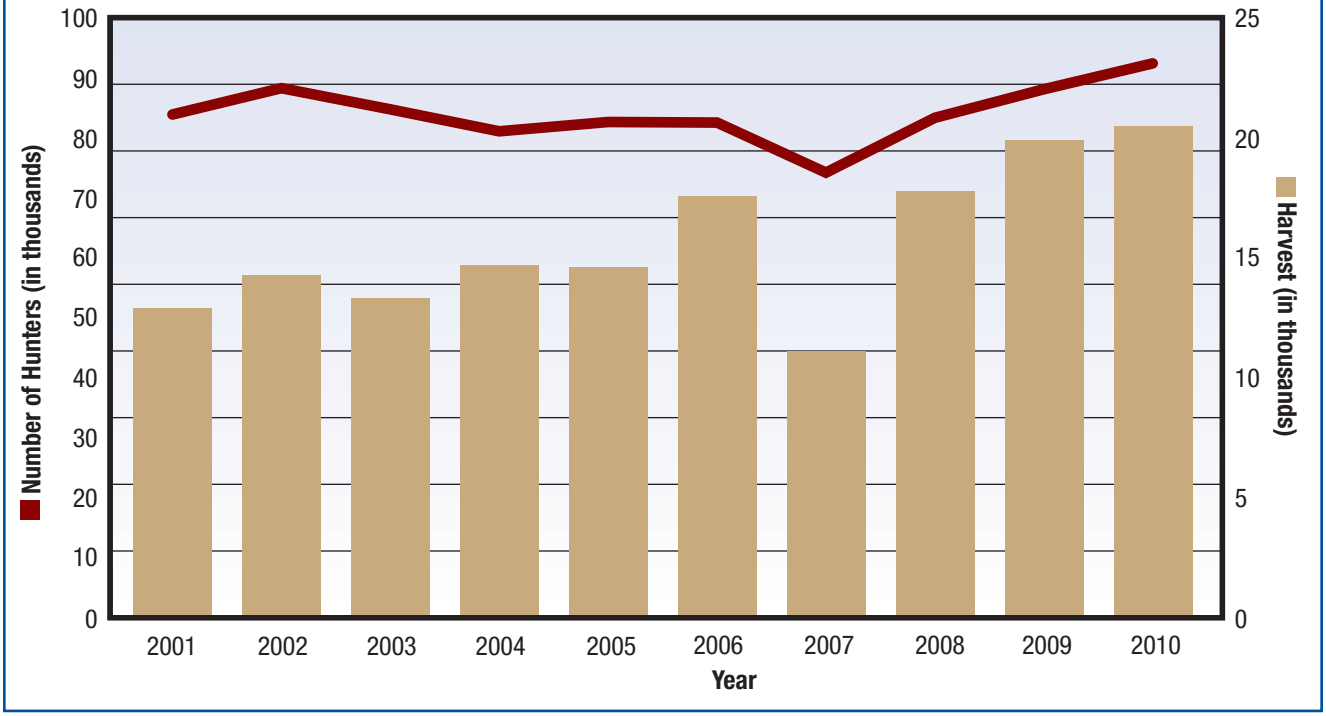


Figure 11: Archery Season Hunter Numbers and Harvest, 2001-2010



combined, a total of 203,915 hunters took to the deer woods last year (Figure 16). To a large degree their efforts were rewarded resulting in a total harvest of 68,700 deer, a four percent drop from 2009. Figure 13 shows the success rate of gun hunters at 34 percent, just slightly below the 10-year average.

The youth gun season continues to be popular with 8,130 participants in 2010. Hunters under the age of 18 were again the first gun hunters in the woods when their season opened on Oct. 15. The three-day season, open statewide, had a bag limit of one antlered and one antlerless deer. Figure 9 represents the average annual harvest of these young hunters.

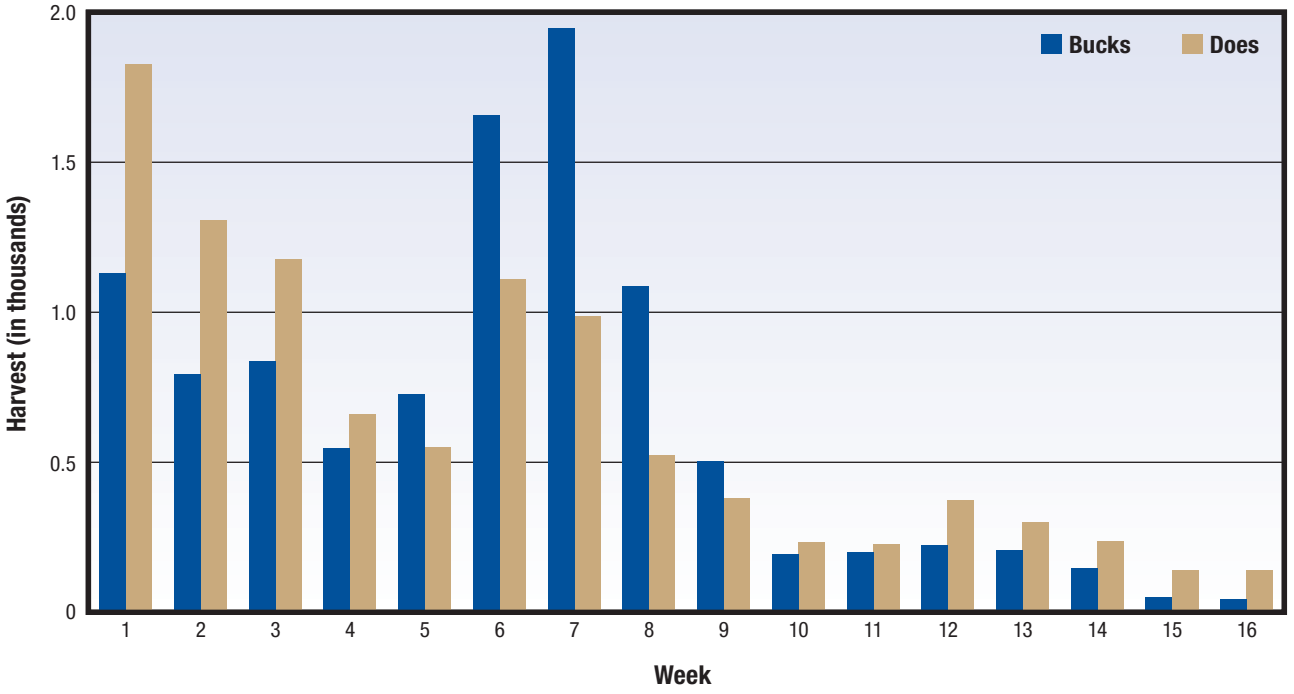
As is tradition in Oklahoma, the regular rifle season opened the Saturday before Thanksgiving and continued for 16 days (Nov. 20-Dec. 5). Survey data indicated that 156,180 hunters put on blaze orange and took to the woods and fields sometime during that window of opportunity. Figure 8 shows the average number of deer taken per hunter during the general gun season. When viewed by day of the season (Figure 17), the weekends continue to show the majority of the harvest, with opening day accounting for 23 percent of the total season harvest. Bag limits remained unchanged for 2010 with a possible three deer being taken, with no more than one antlered and two antlerless deer allowed per hunter. Those taking two antlerless must have taken at least one of them from management zones 2, 7, or 8.


TIM CARR

The final opportunity for gun hunters took place in 8 of the state's 10 management zones during the end of December. The special holiday antlerless season opened Dec. 17 and ran for 10 days, closing on Dec. 26. This season saw 39,605 hunters take a break from the Christmas fanfare and take to the woods for one last chance to put some venison in the freezer. A good number of those hunters were successful with 4,377 deer being checked during that season. The bag limit remained at 1 antlerless deer. As an added incentive to participate in this season, this deer did not count against the hunters combined season bag limit of six deer. Figure 10 illustrates the average annual harvest for hunters participating in this popular season.

KIM HART

Figure 12: 2010 Archery Harvest by Week



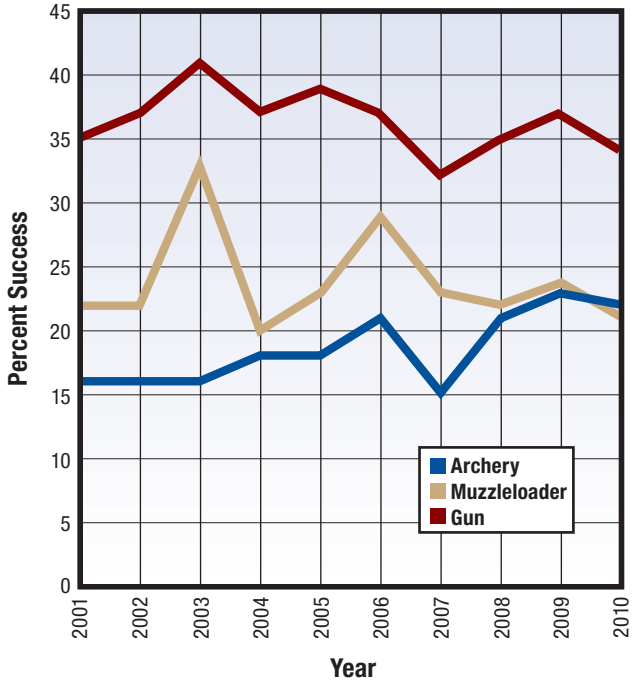
Elk

Perhaps no other day sees more internet traffic coming into the Department's web server than the day that the controlled hunt drawing results are posted. It is on that day that thousands of hopefuls log on with anticipation. For most, the day will be a disappointment. But for a very lucky few, it might be the beginning of a hunting story that they will tell for the rest of their life.

If you are a hunter in Oklahoma (and several other states for that matter) and you are participating in the controlled hunt process, odds are you apply for one of the coveted elk permits. The permits are so difficult to draw that it has been limited to a "once in a lifetime" opportunity. Once you are drawn, you can never be drawn again.

The overwhelming majority of the elk permits issued through the draw process are for access to the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge located in southwest Oklahoma. This past year 309 permits were issued, a decline from the 324 permits issued in 2009, the result of habitat damage caused by a history making ice storm. Sixty-six "either-sex" and 258 "cow-only" permits were drawn. There were nearly 33,000 applications for those permits. Of the lucky hunters drawn, 60 of the either-sex permit holders and 212 of the cow-only permit holders attended the hunt. Of the 60 either-sex hunters 54 tagged a bull and with one hunter taking a cow. The cow-only hunters bagged an additional 125 animals for a total Wichita Mountains NWR elk harvest of 180 for 2010. Success rates for cow and either sex hunters was 59 percent and 92 percent respectively.

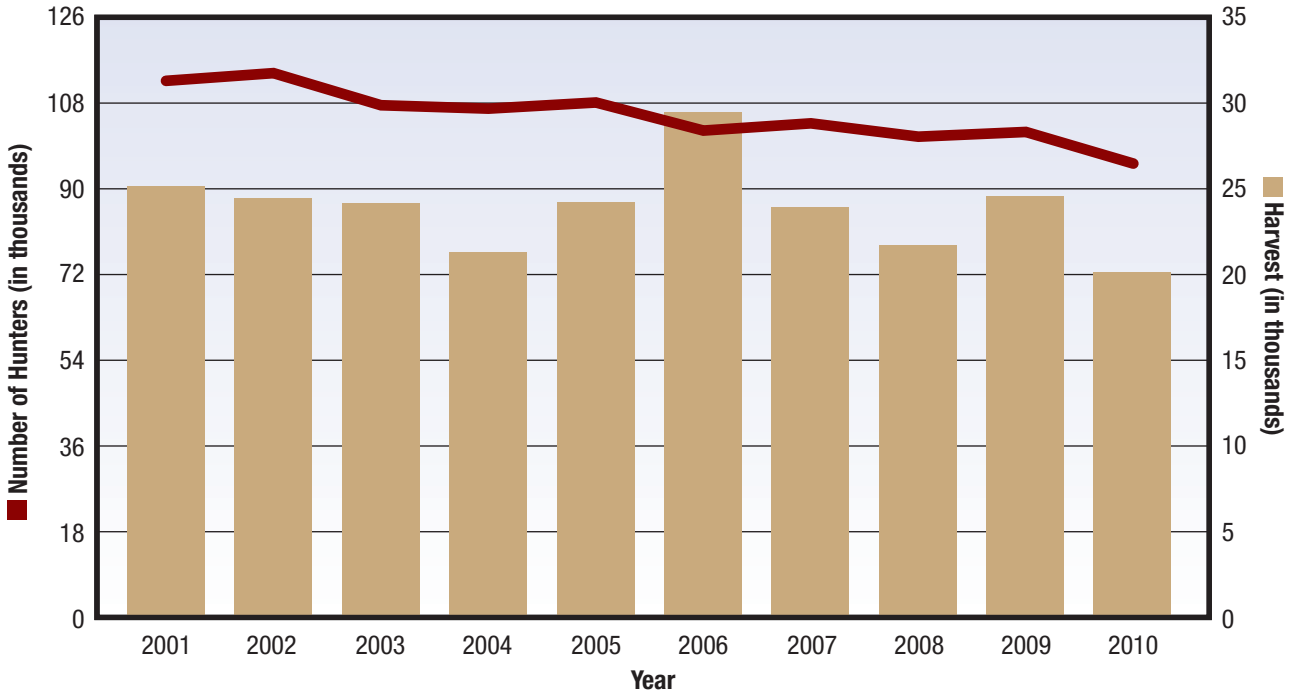
Figure 13: Percent Success by Season Type, 2001-2010



Two Department Wildlife Management Areas also provided limited elk hunting opportunities. One either sex permit was offered at the Pushmataha WMA and one was drawn for the Cookson WMA. Both permits were filled with hunters taking fine bull elk.

Oklahoma again offered elk hunting opportunity on private lands in both the southwest and northeast corners of the state. In the southwest, elk hunting was available to persons obtaining written landowner permission in Caddo, Comanche, and Kiowa counties. To better manage these elk, they were divided

Figure 14: Muzzleloader Season Hunter Numbers and Harvest, 2001-2010



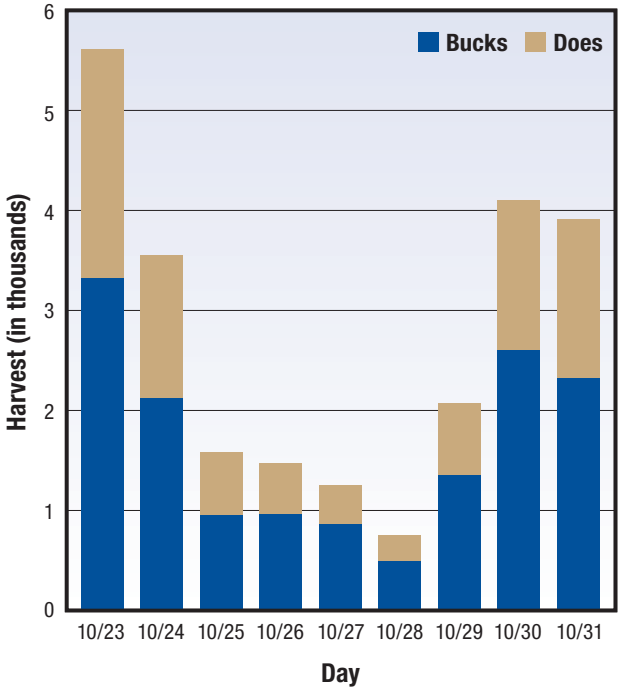
into two zones with different seasons dates and bag limit restrictions. The Granite Hills/West zone was located west of State Highway 115. The bag limit for this zone was established at 1 elk of either sex. On the opposite side of the highway, hunters were allowed two elk (one of which must have been antlerless) in the Slick Hills/East zone. Including elk taken of the Fort Sill military installation, nine males and five females were taken by archers with an additional 47 males and 49 females being killed by gun hunters. This brought the southwest region total, including the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge harvest, to 290 total elk in 2010.

BILL NEWMAN

Northeast Oklahoma also allowed elk hunting opportunities in Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, Mayes, Muskogee, and Sequoyah Counties. The seasons ran concurrent with the established deer seasons and had a one elk bag limit. Archers in this zone tagged one cow elk and gun hunters tagged two bulls.

The combined season elk limit was set at two elk for all elk zones combined. In total 295 elk were taken during the 2010 seasons.

Figure 15: 2010 Muzzleloader Harvest by Day*



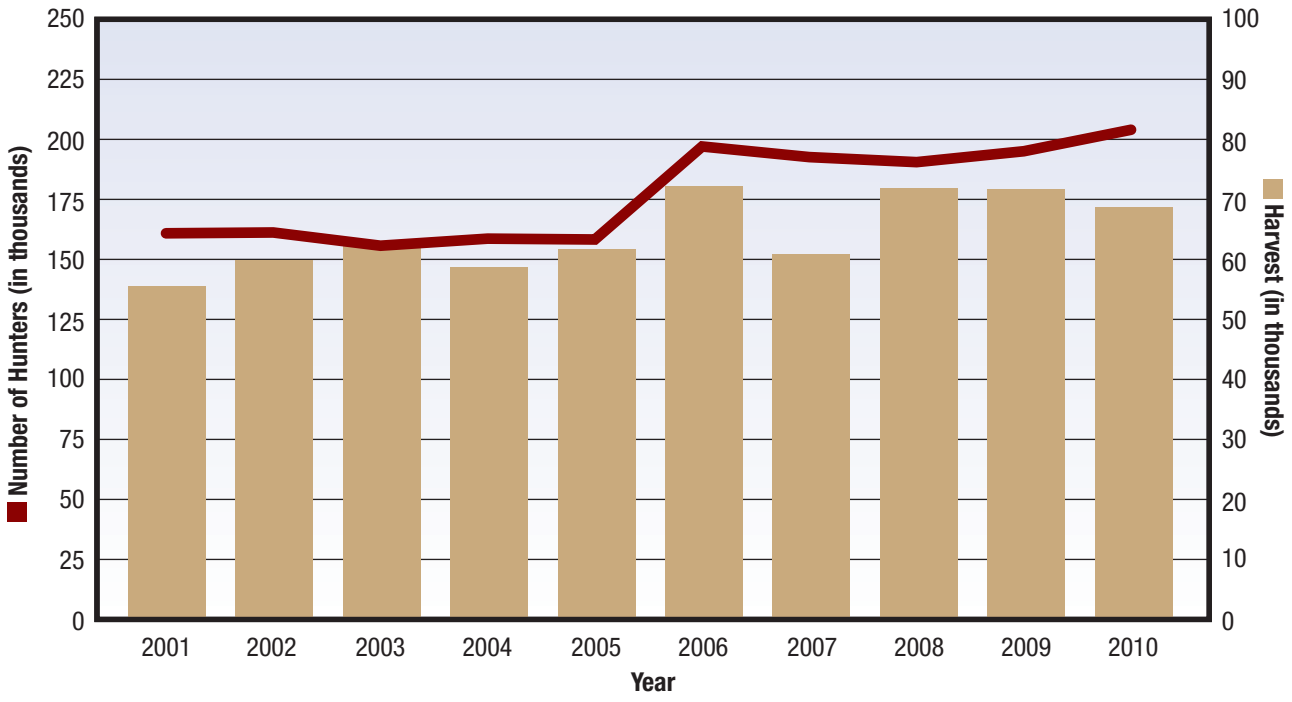
*Graph depicts deer taken during the 9-day season. Additional deer were taken with ML equipment but are not included in this graph.

Pronghorn Antelope

For only the second year, over-the-counter archery only pronghorn permits were available for Cimarron County and that part of Texas County west of Hwy 136. Archers took advantage of this unique hunting opportunity and managed to increase their harvest over 2009 levels. In total, 49 bucks and 12 does were taken by bow hunters.

While the archery permits were available over-the-counter, gun hunting permits were issued through the Depart-

Figure 16: Gun Season Hunter and Harvest 2001-2010 (Includes Holiday Antlerless and Youth Seasons)



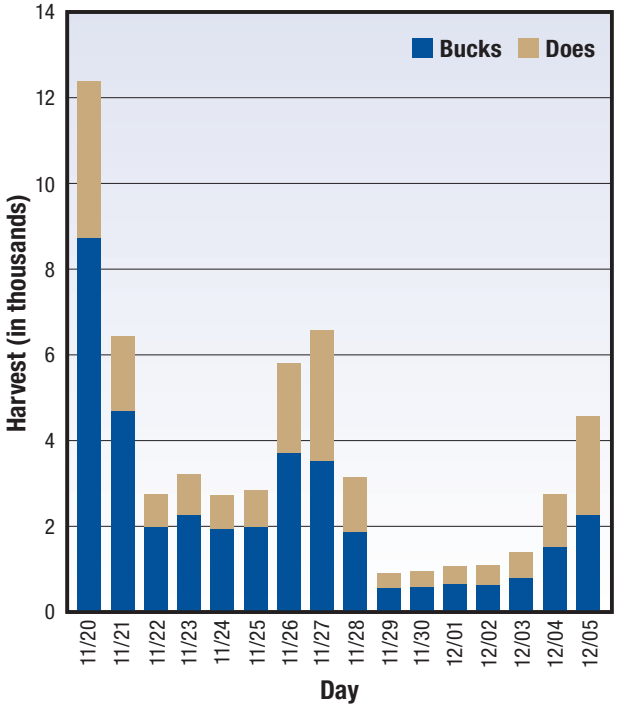
ment's controlled hunts process. A total of 8,874 people applied for the 65 either-sex and 200 doe only permits. Of those hunters drawn, 55 collected bucks and 62 took home a doe. An additional number of permits were made available to landowners in the area. In total, 253 pronghorn were checked in Oklahoma in 2010.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each year for the past few decades, 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 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), the student-pulled jaws provide the herd age structure data that is needed for informed management decisions. During the 2010 season, 4,374 individual jaws were removed and 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 over four percent of the total number of deer harvested in 2010 and is 679 (18 percent) more jaws than were aged in 2009. This valuable data, collected at check stations across the state, is summarized in Figures 19 and 20. 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, when hunting season arrives, that deer is six months 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 insures 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 298 yearling bucks examined in 2010, 54.1 percent had four or more points (Figure 18).

Figure 17: 2010 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.

As shown in Figure 19, Oklahoma's buck age structure continues to improve. The percentage of yearling bucks in this year's sample was 23 percent. In 2009, that number was 30

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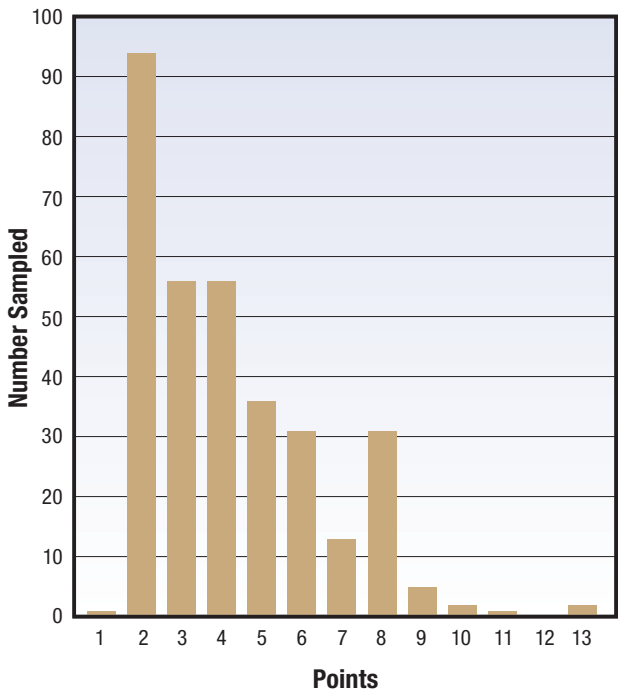
Figure 18: Yearling Buck Antler Point Distribution



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percent. It appears that the Department's past decisions to lower the buck bag limit from three to two, increase the length of the gun season, and liberalize antlerless hunting opportunities are combining with an increased awareness on the part of hunters about the need for balancing ages structures to show substantial dividends in terms of reducing the number of young bucks in the harvest. Hopefully the trend towards older aged bucks in the harvest will continue in future seasons.

Figure 20 demonstrates that Oklahoma is doing a fair job with doe harvest as a large percentage of the harvest is made up of younger does. What will bear watching is the number of does that are in the 6.5+ year category. A larger percentage of older does in the harvest is one of the symptoms of under-harvest of the doe segment of the population. In 2009, seven percent of the does sampled were six-and-a-half years old. In 2010, that segment had increased to nine percent. While one year's increase is not indicative of a looming problem, it will bear watching in future year's analyses.

Wildlife Management Areas

Department managed lands might account for only three percent of the state's land mass but they were responsible for producing 5.2 percent of the harvest. Amazingly, this figure is exactly the percentage that was recorded for WMA's in the 2009 harvest. A total of 5,675 deer came from WMA's with 46 percent being females. Table 2 presents a harvest summary for each area by season and sex.

Awards Program Deer

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife has its own deer recognition program designed to offer official recognition to hunters fortunate enough to harvest a large-antlered deer from within our borders. The Cy Curtis Awards Program was established in 1975 in honor of the man most responsible for re-establishing white-tailed deer throughout the state. Many Oklahoma hunters are unaware of the dire state our deer herds were in the not so distant past. In the early 1900 the total statewide white-tailed deer population was estimated to be fewer than 500 animals. Cy Curtis was the spearhead for the "trap and transplant" effort that moved deer from well-populated areas to those with suitable habitat, but lacking in deer. His efforts formed the groundwork for the deer hunting that Oklahomans enjoy today.

To qualify for a Cy Curtis Award, the buck must be measured by an Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation employee or an official measurer of the Boone and Crockett or Pope and Young programs. The Boone and Crockett system of measurement is used to judge the antlers. All deer legally harvested within Oklahoma from 1972 to the present are eligible. The minimum score for entry into the typical white-tailed deer category is 135 points and non-typical deer must score at least 150 points to be eligible. Minimum entry score for a typical mule deer is 155. Non-typical mule deer must score at least 185 points.

At the end of the recording period in June, at total of 219 deer had been added to the Cy Curtis record book. Figure 21 shows the number of entries added to the book each year since the program began in 1972.

The top three new entries for the typical and non-typical white-tailed deer are shown in the tables below.

Conclusions

In summary, Oklahoma's deer hunters had an excellent year in 2010. In spite of some tough hunting conditions and habitat that was less than optimal in many areas of the state, they were still able to take home the fourth highest deer harvest in state history. Along the way, the largest number of archery hunters ever in Oklahoma managed to bag the most deer ever for that season type. Muzzleloader season was down a significant amount, in large part to decreased hunter participation, but will bear watching in future years. The general rifle season was down slightly in terms of harvest, but showed a record number of participants. The youth and holiday antlerless season continue to be

Typical Whitetail Deer

Hunter	Net Score	County of Kill	Season	Antler Points
Wade Ward	188 4/8	Rogers	Archery	7x7
Troy Thompson	183 4/8	Beaver	Archery	8x7
Theresa Hendrix	170 6/8	Osage	Gun	7x6

Non-typical Whitetail Deer

Hunter	Net Score	County of Kill	Season	Antler Points
Michael Cole	221 2/8	Lincoln	Gun	16x12
Jarrett Orrell	220 2/8	Caddo	Gun	13x13
Kelsey McKay	200 7/8	Coal	Gun	10x9

Figure 19: 2010 Adult Buck Age Distribution

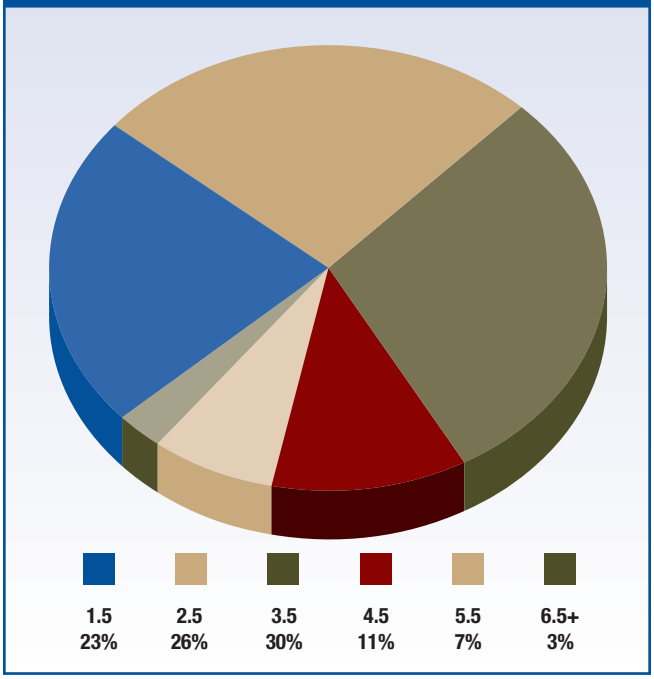
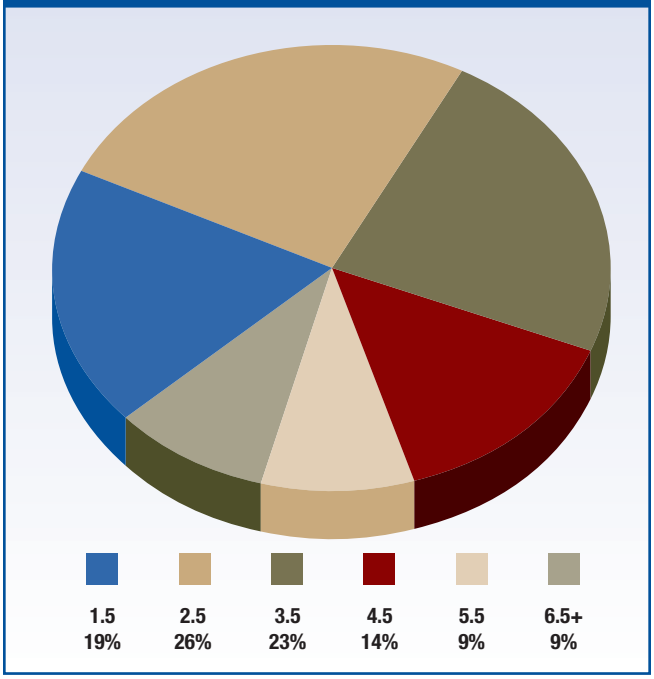


Figure 20: 2010 Adult Doe Age Distribution



popular and productive for those hunters electing to participate.

Buck age data shows continued improvements in the age structure of the harvested bucks. Doe harvest comprised 42 percent of the overall deer kill, a number that can be increased in many areas of the state, but nonetheless is acceptable. Significant numbers of deer qualified for the Department's recognition program. All in all, deer hunting continues to be a safe and enjoyable pursuit for over 200,000 people within our state.

The future of Oklahoma deer hunting continues to look bright. The deer population is in good health. Habitat across much of the state is suffering under an extreme drought, but will recover quickly when the rain returns. Regulations remain in place maximizing hunter opportunity. Bag limits are some of the most liberal in the region. Additional public hunting areas are being added in several locations. For these reasons and many more, Oklahoma hunters continue to have ample reasons to be proud of our state's progress and to celebrate the good things yet to come.

Cy Curtis Entries by Year, 1972-2010