WHITE-TAILED DEER FORECAST

PHOTO: LINDA FRESHWATERS ARNDT
2017 DEER HUNTS

**THE ARCHERY AND CROSSBOW SEASON**  
Sept. 16 – Jan. 7, 2018

**YOUTH DEER SEASON**  
Oct. 7 – 8

**GUN DEER HUNT FOR HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES***  
Oct. 7–15

**TRADITIONAL NINE-DAY GUN DEER SEASON**  
Nov. 18 – 26

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**MUZZLELOADER SEASON**  
Nov. 27 – Dec. 6

**DECEMBER STATEWIDE FOUR-DAY ANTLERLESS-ONLY SEASON**  
Dec. 7–10

**ANTLERLESS-ONLY HOLIDAY HUNT** **  
Dec. 24 – Jan. 1, 2018

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*On sponsored properties only  
**Select DMUs (see page 44 for details)
With another mild winter, a very wet summer, and reports of increased sighting, deer collisions, and other measurable data throughout the state, all indicators point toward high expectations for an excellent deer hunting season in 2017. Hunters continue to settle into the many rule changes that were put in play during the past few years, including tagging changes for this year. We are hoping hunters will feel comfortable with the rules and can focus on the highly anticipated tradition of the upcoming Wisconsin deer season.

For a complete overview of all deer hunting rules including changes for this season, please check the **2017 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations** available online or at any hunting license vendor or DNR Service Center. For additional information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “deer.” There, you will find an abundance of helpful information including FAQs, maps, resources to help find a place to hunt and more.

**COUNTY DEER ADVISORY COUNCILS AND ANTLERLESS TAGS**

County Deer Advisory Councils were formed in 2014 to increase local involvement in deer management. Councils are comprised of representatives from local hunting or conservation clubs, forestry, agriculture, tourism and local governmental interests. Each council is led by local Wisconsin Conservation Congress delegates, while a team of three liaisons from the DNR’s wildlife, forestry and law enforcement programs attend CDAC meetings to present data and offer professional perspectives. Each of Wisconsin’s 71 councils (Menominee County chose not to have a council) directly participate in reviewing and setting population objectives, DMU boundary reviews, antlerless harvest quotas and antlerless tag levels. They also provide recommendations on various season structure elements that will affect the 2017 deer seasons. These include whether junior antlerless tags may be filled in a specific county and whether to implement the Dec. 24-Jan. 1 antlerless-only “Holiday Hunt”.

During the fall of 2014, councils reviewed county deer herd metrics and solicited public input to develop three-year population objective recommendations to increase, decrease or maintain herd levels in each county. Once these population objectives were approved in early 2015, the CDACs immediately began forming antlerless quotas and antlerless tag recommendations, relying on deer herd data and public feedback. They again met in the spring of 2016 and 2017 to recommend antlerless harvest quotas, antlerless tag levels and certain season options that will guide the upcoming season.

For more information regarding County Deer Advisory Councils, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “CDAC.”

**DEER MANAGEMENT ZONES AND UNITS**

Wisconsin’s four Deer Management Zones and 76 Deer Management Units (DMUs) have not changed in 2017, but will be under review by CDACs this fall. DMUs follow county boundaries in most cases, and nine DMUs are split by zone boundaries.
This is the second year since the DNR introduced the new Go Wild licensing and registration system to deer hunters. Through Go Wild, hunters are able to purchase their deer hunting licenses, select their antlerless tag(s) and print them all from the convenience of home at no cost. There are still over 1,000 license agents that hunters can visit to purchase licenses. To find a license agent, hunters may visit dnr.wi.gov, and search keywords “license agent.”

With licenses and tags being printed on plain paper, there are changes to the forms of proof for hunting licenses. Hunters may present, as proof of license, a paper copy of their license printed from Go Wild, their authenticated Wisconsin driver’s license, a department-issued Conservation Card or a department-approved PDF of the license displayed on a mobile device. Deer tags will be printed on plain paper and a hunter may only hold a single copy of any individual tag when afield. Read more about Go Wild at gowild.wi.gov.

DEER TAGS AND TAGGING IN 2017

As of September 2017, hunters are no longer required to validate or attach tags to harvested deer. However, hunters must still carry proof of their tags; forms of proof include an original paper tag, a reprint, a Go Wild Conservation Card, an authenticated Wisconsin driver’s license or a digital file displayed on an electronic device. Hunters can continue to use paper tags that they have already printed, and should keep in mind that they will need to use their unique tag number to register deer.

To replace a paper tag, the easiest option, with no cost, is to go onto their Go Wild account and reprint a lost deer tag from home. Having a deer tag printed at a DNR service center is also free, but there is a $2 processing fee for having a tag reprinted at a license agent.

If using a paper tag, hunters should keep the tag intact in order to maintain the tag number in legible condition. A plastic zip-top bag is recommended to keep tags intact.

ELECTRONIC HARVEST REGISTRATION IN 2017

More than 316,000 deer were registered electronically by phone or online in 2016. While some expressed concern during the previous two seasons, Wisconsin deer hunters have adapted to the new method. Hunters experienced few problems with 97 percent managing to register their deer with no assistance during the opening weekend of the gun deer season. The other 3 percent were provided assistance by talking directly to a Customer Service agent.

Hunter compliance was measured using several different methods. Results showed that 90 to over 93 percent of hunters complied and registered their deer in 2016. This range is estimated to be similar to compliance rates when registering in person.

NEW FOR 2017

- GoWild will be reprogrammed to create a deer tag template that will no longer require validation or tag attachment. The Department will honor all deer carcass tags previously issued with validation stubs, even though the hunter will no longer need to remove the stub or attach the tag to the deer.
- The deer tag number will be connected to the customer’s profile for harvest registration purposes. The unique tag number will continue be used for deer harvest registration purposes.
- While hunting, the deer hunter may use a DNR issued Conservation Card, a GoWild validated WI driver’s license, a GoWild digital file or a paper tag to prove compliance. The Department will not require customers to remove the validation stub on previously issued 2017 deer tags or for the tag to be attached to the animal.
- All deer must be registered by 5 p.m. the day after harvest. Confirmation numbers will be issued at the completion of registration. However, the confirmation number is no longer required to be written on the validated carcass tag.
- North of Highway 64, ground blinds and tree stands may be left out overnight on DNR-managed lands; see requirements on page 34 or visit dnr.wi.gov and search “hunting regulations”.
- Oconto County is now closed to baiting and feeding deer.
- Baiting and feeding regulations have changed in select counties. See “Baiting & Feeding in Wisconsin” on page 47.
was required. Successful deer hunters in 2017 will register their deer online (fastest and easiest method) or by phone. They also have the option of registering electronically at a participating walk-in registration station. For a list of participating businesses offering walk-in registration, search keyword “registration stations.” To register a deer electronically, hunters will visit gamereg.wi.gov or call 1-844-426-3734 (1-844-GAME-REG). To start, the electronic registration system will prompt hunters to enter the unique deer tag number for the tag they have filled and their date of birth. Then, harvest information such as location of kill, age (adult or fawn) and sex (buck or doe) of the deer and weapon type used to harvest the animal will be collected. Once hunters have provided this information, they will receive a unique 10-character confirmation number. This number no longer is required to be written on the deer tag. All deer harvested during any deer season must be registered by 5 p.m. the day after harvest. For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “electronic registration.”

DEER HUNTING SEASONS

The archery and crossbow season will run concurrently. Hunters are reminded to purchase a crossbow license or archer/crossbow upgrade to hunt with a crossbow. Season runs Sept. 16 to Jan. 7, 2018.

The gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities runs Oct. 7 to Oct. 15 on sponsored properties only.

The Youth gun season runs Oct. 7 to Oct. 8.

The traditional nine-day gun deer season starts the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Season runs Nov. 18 to Nov. 26. The muzzleloader season runs 10 days immediately following the nine-day gun season. Season runs Nov. 27 to Dec. 6.

The statewide December four-day antlerless-only hunt is once again an annual component of the season framework. Season runs Dec. 7 to Dec. 10. Only antlerless deer may be harvested with any weapon type during this season; buck harvest is not allowed in any zone, DMU or land type throughout the state.

The antlerless-only Holiday Hunt will be offered in select DMUs and will run from Dec. 24 to Jan. 1, 2018. DMUs offering the holiday hunt in 2017 are: Adams (Farmland Zone portion only), Brown, Buffalo, Crawford, Door, Dunn, Iowa, Kewaunee, Marinette (Farmland Zone portion only), Milwaukee, Oconto, Polk, Richland, Sauk, Waukesha, Waupaca and Waushara. Only antlerless deer may be harvested with any weapon type during this season, in the listed DMUs. Buck hunting is allowed by archery and crossbow hunters in any DMU not included in the holiday hunt.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO KNOW FOR 2017

BUCK-ONLY DEER MANAGEMENT UNITS IN 2017

Four county DMUs, in whole or in part, are designated as buck-only units. All buck-only units are restricted to the Northern and Central Forest zones and include Ashland, Iron, Vilas and Eau Claire (Central Forest Zone) counties. Buck tags may not be used to tag a buck during any antlerless-only season. Bonus antlerless tags are not available for purchase in buck-only DMUs.

METRO SUB-UNITs

Six metropolitan areas are designated as sub-units to provide additional hunting opportunity, including extended gun, archery and crossbow seasons. Hunters wishing to pursue antlerless deer in a metro sub-unit must do so using a valid antlerless deer tag designated for the zone, DMU and land type within the sub-unit where they intend to hunt. Some local municipalities may have weapons restrictions – hunters are encouraged to check local ordinances before hunting in metro sub-units.

Certain metro sub-units offer, at no cost, a Metro Sub-unit Antlerless Deer Tag. A metro sub-unit tag(s) will be issued upon request to any hunter who purchases a deer hunting license. These metro sub-unit tags are only valid within the zone, DMU, metro sub-unit and land type specified on the tag.

Also, select metro sub-units are offering Bonus Metro Sub-unit Antlerless Deer Tags for the same price as regular bonus antlerless tags. Bonus metro sub-unit antlerless tags are only valid for harvesting an antlerless deer in the zone, DMU, metro sub-unit and land type designated on the tag. These metro sub-unit tags will go on sale using the same schedule as normal Bonus Antlerless Deer Tags. The dates and times of sale are listed in a previous section.

DEER MANAGEMENT ZONES AND DEER MANAGEMENT UNITS

Deer management zones and units remain unchanged from last year. However, deer hunters should be familiar with the zone, DMU and land type (public access or private) in which they plan to hunt. Hunters will need this information for their Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tag(s) and any Bonus Antlerless Tags that they purchase. All antlerless tags must be filled only in the zone, DMU and land type designated on the tag.

For registration purposes, it is important that hunters properly enter the information regarding where they harvested the deer. For example, if a hunter shot an antlerless deer in Taylor County, the deer would be registered in the Northern Forest (Zone 1), the Taylor DMU and the land type where the deer was shot (public or private).

TRANSPORTATION

While afield, no person may possess or transport another hunter’s deer, even after it has been registered, unless accompanied by the person for whom the deer tag was issued. However, anyone may transport another person’s registered deer on a public road or possess it at a residence, camp or business.

USE OF BOWS AND CROSSBOWS

All hunters using a crossbow to hunt deer must purchase a crossbow license or a crossbow upgrade after purchasing an archer license. Hunters may also hunt with a bow or crossbow under the authority of a gun deer license, but only during a firearm season. Laws regulating the use of bows and crossbows for hunting within cities or villages may have changed. Check with city or village authorities for local ordinance restrictions.

PUBLIC ACCESS LANDS

Public lands include state, federal or county properties open to hunting, stewardship and utility properties, Managed Forest Law and Forest Crop Law lands (in whole or in part) designated as open for public hunting, and Voluntary Public Access lands leased for public hunting. Private lands include all lands not listed above. It is important to remember that hunters must have permission to access all private lands.

Check out the Public Access Lands Atlas!

dnr.wi.gov, keyword “Maps”
Aside from the traditional archer, crossbow, nine-day gun deer and muzzleloader seasons, the following hunts will be offered in 2017:

**ANTLERLESS-ONLY HOLIDAY HUNT**

The antlerless-only Holiday Hunt will run Dec. 24 – Jan. 1, 2018. This hunt is only occurring in select Farmland (Zone 2) DMUs including: Adams (Farmland Zone portion only), Brown, Buffalo, Crawford, Door, Dunn, Iowa, Kewaunee, Marinette (Farmland Zone portion only), Milwaukee, Oconto (Farmland Zone portion only), Polk, Richland, Sauk, Waupaca and Waushara. Hunters must possess an antlerless deer tag valid for the zone, DMU and land type in which they choose to hunt during this season. No antlered deer can be harvested, with any weapon type, in a DMU where a holiday hunt is in progress. All hunters within the area of this hunt, with the exception of waterfowl hunters, are required to meet highly visible clothing (blaze orange or florescent pink) requirements during this hunt.

**DECEMBER STATEWIDE FOUR-DAY ANTLERLESS-ONLY SEASON**

The four-day December antlerless-only deer season will once again be a statewide hunt, occurring in all DMUs (antlerless tag availability will limit participation), and will run Dec. 7–10. The season is restricted by antlerless tag availability, and no antlered bucks can be harvested, with any weapon type, in a DMU. Therefore, all hunters must possess (or be in a group with someone that possesses) an antlerless deer tag valid for the zone, DMU and land type in which they choose to hunt. All hunters with the exception of waterfowl hunters are required to meet highly visible (blaze orange or florescent pink) clothing requirements during this hunt.

**YOUTH DEER SEASON**

The youth gun deer season will be held Oct. 7 – 8. This special hunt was established to provide youth hunters with an opportunity to hunt with the guidance of a mentor. The youth season will be held in all DMUs statewide. Resident and non-resident youth hunters ages 10 – 15 who possess a valid gun deer hunting license may participate. It is important to note that youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult parent or guardian during this hunt, even if the youth hunter holds a hunter education certificate. Qualified youth hunters may harvest one buck deer with their Gun Buck Deer Tag and one antlerless deer to fill their statewide Junior Antlerless Deer Tag. Youth hunters may harvest additional antlerless deer through the purchase of Bonus Antlerless Deer Tag(s), where available, or with a Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tag included with a license. Note these tags are not valid statewide and are specific to the zone, DMU and land type on the tag.

Youth hunters must be within arm's length of an adult mentor. No more than two youth hunters may be accompanied by a single mentor. Supervising adults may not hunt deer with a firearm while accompanying or mentoring a youth deer hunt. All statewide deer, turkey and small game hunters, with the exception of waterfowl hunters, are required to meet blaze orange requirements during the youth gun deer hunt.

**GUN DEER HUNT FOR HUNTERS WITH DISABILITIES**

The gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities will be held Oct. 7–15. This special hunt was established to provide more opportunities for hunters with disabilities to participate in Wisconsin’s deer hunting traditions. Disabled hunters with a valid Class A, C or D disabled permit, or a Class B permit that is issued for longer than one year (and authorizes hunting or shooting from a stationary vehicle) may participate. The gun deer hunt for hunters with disabilities is not a state-wide season. Individuals participating in this hunt will have the opportunity to harvest a buck using a gun and/or archery buck tag in any statewide unit. They will also have the ability
to harvest one antlerless deer in any statewide unit with a Farmland (Zone 2) antlerless deer tag, including buck only units. Please see the 2017 deer hunting regulations for more details. This special hunt is only authorized on lands specifically enrolled in the disabled hunt program. Landowners or managers interested in sponsoring lands for the 2018 hunt must submit an online application before June 1, 2018. Qualified disabled hunters are encouraged to contact sponsors before Sept. 1. For a list of sponsors for the 2017 season, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords “disabled deer hunt.”

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Hunters are encouraged to check out the Frequently Asked Questions page for additional information. The FAQ feature provides brief responses to a wide variety of deer hunting questions, ranging from DMU boundaries to antlerless tags. To help deer hunters prepare for the seasons, the department will host an online chat with wildlife and regulations experts in November. For more information and to view a schedule of upcoming chats, search keyword “chat.”

GET INVOLVED IN WISCONSIN’S DEER MANAGEMENT

There are many opportunities available to play an active role in the management of white-tailed deer in Wisconsin:

DEER HERD FORUMS AND ONLINE PUBLIC INPUT OPPORTUNITIES

Beginning in 2015, annual deer herd forums were combined with spring County Deer Advisory Council quota and permit meetings. These meetings are open to the public, and comments are gathered during the public comment period of these meetings. CDAC meetings provide an opportunity to interact with DNR wildlife biologists and learn more about deer biology and management, population objectives, and harvest statistics in each county. Those interested in providing feedback on preliminary quota and bonus antlerless permit recommendations can also comment online. To provide input, search keyword “CDAC.”

CONSERVATION CONGRESS SPRING HEARINGS

Annual Wisconsin Conservation Congress meetings, held in each county statewide on the second Monday in April, give citizens the opportunity to comment and vote on proposed fish and wildlife rule changes and submit resolutions for future rule changes. This opportunity is unique to Wisconsin and helps play a significant role in determining how you enjoy your time in the outdoors. For more information regarding spring hearings, search keywords “spring hearings.”

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL BIOLOGIST

Wildlife biologists are available to speak with you and to answer questions, address any concerns you have and to gather input when setting the upcoming deer season framework. To get in touch with your local wildlife biologist, search keyword “contact.”

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress gives citizens the unique opportunity to influence the state’s conservation policies.
CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Tami Ryan, DNR wildlife health section chief, 608-266-3143, tamara.ryan@wisconsin.gov

Wisconsin has monitored chronic wasting disease (CWD) for 15 years. Between 2002 and March 2016, the department tested over 199,500 free-ranging deer, of which over 3,500 have tested positive for CWD. There are currently 43 CWD-affected counties. A county is included if a wild or captive animal has been tested and confirmed to be positive for CWD in the county or if a portion of the county is within a 10-mile radius of a wild or captive animal that has been tested and confirmed to be positive for CWD.

CWD MONITORING IN WISCONSIN

During the 2016 deer season, DNR sampled 6,097 deer statewide. Of these, 447 tested positive. Sampling strategies were aimed at detecting new locations and prevalence trends. Monitoring plans focused surveillance on adult deer (the age group most likely to have CWD).

Once again, hunter cooperation was outstanding. DNR staff continue to work to make testing easier for hunters through the use of self-serve kiosks and enhanced communication and outreach efforts in 2016. Kiosks provide a 24/7 drop-off option for hunters to help enhance sampling numbers, provide for ease of use, and increase options in the world of electronic registration. Overall feedback from hunters during the 2016 deer season reflected an appreciation for the kiosk option.

With more samples collected in 2016, the turnaround time for hunters receiving test results also improved. The average statewide turnaround time during the 2016 deer season for test results was just over nine days (weekends included), compared to just under 14 days in 2015. The department will continue efforts to lower the turnaround time by becoming more efficient with cost and time.

Following the 2012 discovery of a CWD-positive adult doe near Shell Lake, 2016 marked the fifth year of surveillance efforts in Washburn County. Following recommendations from a local community action team, local landowners and hunters helped the department sample over 2,000 deer in the area since the initial detection. No new positives have been detected. Based on five years of sampling, all information has indicated CWD is not widespread in the Washburn area, and occurs at a very low prevalence rate.

The 2012 discovery of CWD in wild deer in Juneau, Adams and Portage counties prompted the 2013 surveillance effort in a 10-mile radius surrounding the positives. There are currently 16 total CWD positive wild deer detections in the three county area. Surveillance was also conducted surrounding CWD-positive captive deer facilities in Marathon and Eau Claire counties, with no wild CWD deer detected. New for 2016, wildlife staff sampled wild deer in Oneida and Oconto counties and the surrounding area where CWD-positive deer were discovered on captive deer facilities.

CWD PREVALENCE IN WISCONSIN

CWD prevalence has changed over time. Since 2002, CWD prevalence within our western monitoring area has shown an overall increasing trend in all sex and age classes. During the past 15 years, the trend in prevalence in adult males has risen from 8-10 percent to over 30 percent and in adult females from about 3-4 percent to nearly 15 percent. During that same time, the prevalence trend in yearling males has increased from about 2 percent to over 10 percent and in yearling females from roughly 2 percent to about 9 percent. Despite yearly fluctuations, overall prevalence in the endemic area of southern Wisconsin has doubled across all sex and age classes of deer.
2017 CWD SAMPLING IN WISCONSIN
During the 2017 deer hunting season, DNR will continue to sample deer within the Southern Farmland Zone and at select locations in the CWD-affected area. The department will also sample deer around CWD positive deer locations in Washburn, Adams, Juneau and Portage counties, as well as in the wild deer herd surrounding CWD positive captive deer facilities in Marathon, Eau Claire, Oneida and Oconto counties. Exact sampling locations will be available on the department’s website prior to the 2017 archery and crossbow season opener.

Weighted surveillance will continue to play a key role in attempts to further increase the efficacy and efficiency of CWD surveillance efforts. Weighted surveillance focuses collection and sampling efforts on select age and sex classes of harvested deer that are most likely to have the disease. Since CWD is found at higher prevalence rates in adult males than in other demographic groups of harvested deer, they are at the highest CWD risk and represent the most valuable group of harvested animals to test for CWD detection in areas where the disease has not previously been found. For 2017, weighted surveillance will begin in Dodge, Washington, Ozaukee, Sheboygan and Fond du Lac counties. In 2016, taxidermists in Marquette and Green Lake counties provided samples that tested negative.

BAITING & FEEDING IN WISCONSIN
Under state statute 29.336, Wis. Stats, DNR is required to prohibit baiting and feeding of deer when one of three criteria is found to exist. These criteria include a county within a designated CWD control zone, a CWD or Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) positive wild or captive deer within the county, or a portion of a county is within a 10-mile radius of the positive location of a wild or captive deer. The department determines a county meets at least one of these three criteria and issues a Secretaries order designating that county as a county where baiting and feeding deer is prohibited.

In August 2017, an Act signed into law to amend current state statute did the following:

- Remove deer baiting and feeding prohibitions in counties where 36 months have passed since any confirmed positive test for chronic wasting disease or bovine tuberculosis within the county; and
- Remove deer baiting and feeding prohibitions in adjacent counties where 24 months have passed since any confirmed positive test for chronic wasting disease or bovine tuberculosis within a 10-mile radius of the county.

With this new legislation, of the 43 CWD affected counties there are 15 counties for which baiting and feeding bans are lifted: Barron, Burnett, Calumet, Clark, Dodge, Jackson, Kenosha, Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Polk, Racine, Sheboygan, Washburn, Washington and Waushara. Twenty-eight CWD affected counties will continue to have baiting and feeding bans. No additional counties will be lifted from the ban during any of the 2017 deer season. The 24/36 month period would start over again with each new positive test result as they are confirmed. Please check the baiting and feeding webpage frequently for updates, as new baiting and feeding bans may be enacted in 2017.

dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/bait.html

CWD IN NORTH AMERICA
As of 2017, 23 states and provinces have identified CWD within free-ranging herds of deer, elk and/or moose. In some of these states, CWD has been detected in only a handful of animals, while in others vast geographic areas and large numbers of deer are affected.

In Colorado and Wyoming, where CWD has been present for several decades, recent studies have documented high prevalence rates of 20-40 percent. In Wyoming, high prevalence rates at roughly 35 percent have been identified across extensive geographic areas encompassing more than 4,000 square miles. Research suggests CWD is reducing deer numbers in these populations. Examining CWD in other states will help the department anticipate future impacts of CWD in Wisconsin. If you hunt in other states, know the rules for carcass transportation.

Successfully managing CWD will require a sustained effort for many years, and will require cooperation and communication among the department, hunters, agricultural agencies, landowners, farmed cervid producers, and the many citizens of the state who benefit from a healthy deer herd.

DNR game managers are grateful to hunters and other conservationists for their role in assisting with CWD surveillance during the past 15 years. Wisconsin is fortunate to have citizens with such a great conservation ethic and high appreciation for the natural world. For information regarding CWD in Wisconsin, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “CWD.”
There is a variety of interesting and exciting deer research taking place in Wisconsin that included opportunities for hunters and volunteers to get involved. However, opportunities, outcomes and project specifics are changing regularly. Please visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/research/whitetaileddeer.html for current information.

In addition, fall 2016 marks the beginning of the largest and most comprehensive deer research project ever undertaken in Wisconsin: The Southwest Wisconsin CWD, Deer and Predator Study. This initiative stems from Governor Scott Walker’s commitment to reevaluating chronic wasting disease in Wisconsin. The goal of this project is to comprehensively examine factors that could impact deer survival and deer population growth in southern Wisconsin. Those include Chronic Wasting Disease, predation, habitat suitability and hunter harvest. Simultaneous studies will take place in areas with differing rates of CWD infection, which will help the agency better understand how CWD may or may not be interacting with other factors that ultimately impact the deer herd. Uniquely, this study will directly estimate the abundance and distribution of deer predators (bobcats and coyotes) within the study areas, and will examine their impact on deer survival and behavior. If you harvest a deer with a radio collar it is vital that you call the number on the radio collar so the research staff can record that deer’s information and re-use the collar. To get involved in the project visit “CWD Research.” For specific questions contact Daniel Storm, ungulate research scientist, (715)-365-4712 Daniel.Storm@Wisconsin.gov
## 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

### ARCHERY TOTALS

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### GUN TOTALS

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<td>30</td>
<td>228,726</td>
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Wildlife biologists are optimistic about deer hunting opportunities for the 2017 deer hunting seasons across the 19-county DNR West Central District. As deer hunters may recall, the Deer Trustee Report led to numerous deer hunting regulations and deer management strategy changes in 2014, with deer management units now realigned to coincide with county boundaries. The WCD lies within three distinct deer management zones: Southern Farmland Zone, Central Farmland Zone, and Central Forest Zone. Each deer management unit has a specific three-year objective to increase, decrease, or stabilize the deer population. The 2015-2017 objective in all WCD farmland units, except for Buffalo, Chippewa, and Trempealeau Counties, is to stabilize deer populations, while the objective in all central forest units is to increase deer populations. The goal in Buffalo County calls for a decrease in deer numbers, while Chippewa and Trempealeau Counties desire to increase deer numbers. Season structure and antlerless deer permit numbers in each county deer management unit are the strategies used to achieve these objectives, and local County Deer Advisory Councils or CDACs suggest them.

Generally speaking, from St. Croix County in the north to Crawford County in the southern end of the district, deer in the WCD’s Farmland Zones are doing well, and hunters can expect an increase in deer numbers from those experienced in 2016. Deer numbers in the WCD’s Central Forest Zone, while lower overall than those in the Farmland Zones, have improved from 2016 levels. Although growing season conditions have been excellent over the last few summers, with ample moisture and heat, 2016 saw poor mast crops across much of the area due to a severe late spring freeze. Deer responded by shifting to alternate food sources. Food availability heading into the 2017 should be exceptional, resulting in plump deer, healthy fawns, and bucks reaching their maximum antler growth potential.
Hunters with the ability to do so should adjust their hunting locations as deer feeding behaviors change seasonally. For example, green soybean leaves may be an important deer food during the early bow season, while corn and soybeans are often most attractive during November and December. Alfalfa fields, oak stands with acorns and young clearcuts may be hunted successfully throughout the entire fall. Key in on these food sources or travel routes between bedding and feeding locations to have more success this fall. Be flexible and do not be afraid to adapt to changing or different local conditions.

Wildlife biologist for St. Croix and Pierce counties, Ryan Haffele, summarized the reasons for continued optimism shared by his fellow wildlife biologists throughout the WCD Farmland Zones by stating, “Several mild winters in a row, good to excellent spring fawn production and survival and conservative antlerless permit issuance over the past several years have boosted deer populations. The increased populations should lead to ample hunter opportunity to see deer in the field. Both counties increased the number of free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags issued with each deer license to two in hopes of increasing the antlerless harvest.”

Jess Carstens, wildlife biologist for Dunn and Pepin counties, shares similar thoughts and notes, “Deer numbers are strong in both counties, and there should be ample hunting opportunities for archers and gun hunters. While deer are plentiful in both counties, hunters will continue to battle the irregular distribution of deer across the landscape, with isolated pockets in each county that have little habitat and fewer deer.” Carstens further notes that, unlike last year, the Pepin County CDAC elected to not participate in the 2017 Holiday Hunt, and two free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags will be issued with the purchase of each deer hunting license with 900 private land bonus antlerless tags and 150 public land bonus antlerless tags available for sale. Dunn County, on the other hand will participate in the 2017 Holiday Hunt and offer one free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tag with each deer hunting license sold and an additional 2600 bonus antlerless tags, 2100 for private land and 500 for public land. The seven-day antlerless Holiday Hunt runs from Dec. 24 – Jan. 1.

Buffalo and Trempealeau counties, well known areas for producing large-antlered bucks, again possess a strong deer population according to wildlife technician Gary Wolf. He also remarks that landowners are reporting high numbers of does with multiple fawns, a lot of daytime deer activity, and trail camera photos showing bucks with good antler growth, including many bragging-sized bucks. An additional observation shared by Wolf is that landowners who have completed young forest habitat improvement projects are seeing more deer in those areas, reinforcing the connection between quality habitat and healthy deer. Wildlife biologist Mark Rasmussen comments, “While both counties have strong numbers of deer, hunting regulations in the two counties differ because the three-year population objectives established by the respective CDACs differ.” Attempting to decrease Buffalo County deer numbers, each deer hunting license purchased includes three free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags, an additional 1500 bonus antlerless tags are available for private land and 250 for public land, and the county will participate in the Holiday Hunt. Trempealeau County, having a three-year goal to increase deer numbers, has one Farmland Antlerless Deer Tag available for each purchased deer hunting license and 1000 bonus antlerless tags for private land. There are no bonus antlerless permits for Trempealeau County public lands.

Marathon County deer hunters can expect greater numbers of deer, according to wildlife biologist Brandon Stefanski who is stationed in Wausau. As elsewhere around the district, several mild winters in a row have aided fawn survival, resulting in increased deer numbers. Stefanski cautions, however, that increased deer numbers have increased urban and suburban nuisance deer complaints. “Deer can cause lots of damage to landscaping plants and gardens. Hunters can help curb deer population growth and minimize property damage by harvesting antlerless deer in and around communities where hunting is allowed.”
This year marks the second consecutive year that free farmland zone antlerless tags will not be available in Chippewa County. Hunters wishing to harvest an antlerless deer in Chippewa County will need to do so with a bonus tag. Members of the Chippewa CDAC were concerned about antlerless harvest on the Chippewa County Forest and voted to issue 5,000 bonus antlerless tags on private land only. “I recommend that folks buy their bonus tags early this year,” advises Bill Hogseth, wildlife biologist for Chippewa and Eau Claire counties.

Last year, bonus tags in Chippewa County sold out after only two weeks. If you want the opportunity to harvest a doe, do not wait until the last minute to get a bonus tag. Deer hunters in Crawford, Vernon, La Crosse and the farmland portions of Monroe, Adams and Juneau counties should likewise encounter strong deer populations this fall. Some of the stronger deer numbers in the WCD continue to reside in Vernon County. “Like most counties in the driftless area, Vernon County’s rugged topography and small amount of public land leads to challenging deer hunting within a remarkable deer habitat matrix,” remarks Viroqua DNR wildlife technician, Anna Jahns. She further explains that these two factors, however, play vital roles in the county’s notoriety for producing large-antlered bucks. Two Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags are included at no cost with the purchase of each deer hunting license in Crawford and Vernon counties. There are 100 public land and 1200 private land bonus antlerless tags available this year in Vernon County, while Crawford County has no public land and 2800 private land bonus antlerless tags, and Crawford County will again participate in the Holiday Hunt,” he says.

La Crosse DNR wildlife biologist Ron Lichte points out that the La Crosse Metro Sub-unit and Hudson Metro Sub-unit have extended archery and gun deer seasons again this year in an effort to help control deer numbers. Please see the 2017 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations for Metro Unit hunting season dates and DNR website [dnr.wi.gov/topic/Hunt/documents/2017_Metro_Sub-Unit_Tag_Information.pdf](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Hunt/documents/2017_Metro_Sub-Unit_Tag_Information.pdf) for tag availability.

Hunters who traditionally hunt the Central Forest Zone areas of Eau Claire, Clark, Jackson, Wood, Adams, Juneau and Monroe counties should notice more deer this year. The DNR’s Black River Falls wildlife biologist Scott Roepke comments, “Mild winters and reduced antlerless tag permit numbers have allowed deer numbers to rebound significantly in Jackson and Clark counties. Summer deer observations do not necessarily equate to more deer sightings during the fall deer hunting seasons, particularly the gun deer season. Hunters are encouraged to scout new hunting locales annually and adjust their techniques based upon their observations and discoveries. Be flexible and willing to try new areas – you may be pleasantly surprised.” Roepke also encourages deer hunters to take advantage of the various deer hunting opportunities throughout the fall. Explore opportunities during early archery or crossbow, muzzleloader, or late archery seasons to realize the full potential of what Wisconsin deer hunting offers. For the first time in four years, deer numbers in the Jackson County Central Forest Zone have rebounded to level that will support a small antlerless harvest, providing increased hunter opportunity to put meat in the freezer while allowing continued deer population growth. Therefore, 375 bonus antlerless tags are available for both public and private lands. Permit numbers have also increased in Jackson County’s Central Farmland Zone in an effort to maintain the population due to crop damage and deer-vehicle collision concerns. In the Central Farmland Zone of Clark County, antlerless permits have also increased over their 2016 levels to address rising deer numbers, while permit numbers were maintained at their 2016 levels in the Central Forest Zone of the county.

Roepke reminds hunters that elk reintroduction efforts continue in the Central Forest Zone of Jackson County, and deer hunters are reminded that elk are currently a protected species. As always, hunters must exercise the basic principles of hunter safety, and deer hunters in this area should be particularly mindful to be sure of their target and what lies beyond. The deer population in the Central Forest Zone is generally not as productive as in the Farmland Zones and is slower to increase, but deer quantity and quality have improved for 2017. Long-time Central Forest Zone wildlife biologist, Wayne Hall, forecasts deer numbers and deer hunting opportunities throughout the Central...
Forest Zone to be improved from 2016 because of three mild winters in a row and increased fawn recruitment. Antler development is likewise looking very good throughout the area. Hall further notes that for the second year in a row, adequate and timely spring and summer moisture has vegetation in excellent, lush conditions. Blueberries, huckleberries, and blackberries all have abundant fruits highly sought by deer.

The Central Forest Zone area of Eau Claire County features a buck-only season for the first time in many years. “Because some members of the Eau Claire CDAC felt strongly that previous years’ herd growth was not adequately meeting their objective to increase the deer population in that area, they chose to limit antlerless harvest to only youth, disabled and veteran hunters,” says wildlife biologist Bill Hogseth. CWD testing will continue to be available in the area surrounding Fairchild, where a captive deer tested positive on a deer farm in 2015.

Darren Ladwig, wildlife biologist for Adams and Juneau counties, states, “As with much of Wisconsin, abundant rainfall this spring and summer has provided exceptional vegetation growth for fawning cover as well as deer browse. That being said, if increased precipitation continues into fall, deer will most likely be utilizing the sandy oak ridges which border extensive swamps more frequently than during a year with average rainfall.” Deer numbers in the Central Forest Zone portion of Adams and Juneau counties have increased roughly 25 percent over the last several years. Deer numbers in the Central Farmland Zone portion of these two counties remain strong too. The Adams County Central Farmland Zone will hold a Holiday Hunt in an effort to increase the antlerless harvest and provide more recreational hunting opportunity for deer hunters.

Fortunately, large blocks of public lands exist in the Central Forest Zone. These extensive areas offer opportunities for dedicated hunters to find areas that receive low hunting pressure, especially during the early archery season, which can result in enjoyable and successful experiences. Similar observations have also been noted for the Eau Claire County and Clark County areas of the Central Forest Zone. Ladwig further points out that timber harvests on public lands in Adams and Eau Claire Counties over the past several years are regenerating aspen and oak, creating ideal deer habitat that will have positive impacts on deer for years to come.

Deer hunters should be aware that the free Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags are deer management unit (county) and land type (public or private) specific. Some counties – St. Croix, Pierce, Pepin, Buffalo Vernon, and Crawford - offer multiple Farmland Antlerless Deer Tags with the purchase of each deer hunting license. Marathon County wildlife biologist Brandon Stefanski remarks that all hunters purchasing deer hunting licenses in the Southern Farmland or Central Farmland Zones have the option to declare the free antlerless tag(s) issued at the time of purchase for public or private land. There are no limits to tags issued in this manner for either land type. Hunters who hunt both private and public land types should think carefully before declaring their free tag land choice. Limited quantities of bonus antlerless tags are available in most farmland units.
More information about bonus antlerless tags is available at [dnr.wi.gov/Permits/bonusavailability.html](http://dnr.wi.gov/Permits/bonusavailability.html).

Many counties within the Central and Southern Farm Zones have abundant deer populations, and hunters will find great opportunities to put some meat in the freezer this fall if they are able to spend some time scouting and find areas that deer are consistently using. Deer are in their summer patterns right now, and hunters can key in on those movements and have great success the first couple of weeks of the archery season. Bucks will likely be in bachelor groups yet and can be very visible and predictable in late August into mid-September. Wildlife biologist, Ron Lichtie advises early season archery hunters to pay close attention to the mast crops where they hunt. This year’s favorable growing season has set the stage for copious soft and hard mast crops. These food sources may influence wildlife movements and behaviors until the foods are depleted. Hunters should pay particular attention to areas with concentrations of white and bur oak. When white and bur oaks start dropping their acorns, deer will key in on this vital food resource and their movement patterns will change accordingly.

Hunters are reminded that many counties in the area are CWD affected counties. Carcass movement and baiting restrictions are in place to minimize the spread of CWD if it is present within the county. Although CWD sampling is not mandatory, hunters are encouraged to submit samples within both counties in an effort to help detect the disease if it is present. Hunters can find out where to sample their deer by visiting the DNR website and searching “registration stations.” Select the county you are interested in and make sure to check one of the CWD testing options under deer registration type.

West Central District wildlife management staff encourages all deer hunters to enjoy safe, fun, and successful 2017 deer hunting seasons. Additionally, deer hunters may contact local DNR wildlife staff for further deer hunting information. A DNR staff directory is located here: [dnr.wi.gov/staffdir/_newsearch/contactsearchext.aspx](http://dnr.wi.gov/staffdir/_newsearch/contactsearchext.aspx).
Mike Zeckmeister, DNR Northern District wildlife supervisor, 715-635-4090, mike.zeckmeister@wisconsin.gov

With contributions from Northern District DNR wildlife biologists

There is no question that the overall deer herd in Northern Wisconsin is in a growth stage due in part to three back-to-back mild winters, conservative antlerless quotas and great spring-summer conditions. The rate of growth may vary from area-to-area and may not be observed on each hunting parcel due to varying degrees of habitat quality. In Northern Wisconsin, typical of the Upper Midwest, deer thrive in brushy and young forest habitats. Generally speaking, if you can see a long distance in the woods where you are hunting you are not in good deer habitat. This is especially true in the Northern Forest of Wisconsin. The key is to focus your scouting in areas that have a diverse age class of trees and don’t overlook marshy/brushy edges. The most successful hunters hunt in “funnels” and where edges of different habitat types come together. Hunting near recent timber sales and aspen clear cuts provide all of these key elements.

Last year, we predicted to see excellent antler development due to the milder winter. This was proved correct based on field reports during the hunting season and our deer aging survey conducted from hunter-harvested deer. The estimates from this survey indicated that the percentage of bucks with forked antlers in 2016 were slightly-to-substantially higher than the five-year means in the Northern Forest counties. The largest increase occurred in the Northwest Forest counties, which was 35 percent above the five-year mean and nearly double the yearling forked-antler percent in 2014. The extremely mild winter in 2016-17 will yield similar results this coming fall for antler development and fawn recruitment. In addition, an early spring green-up, and the absence of a late spring frost really boosted vegetation growth and this was all positive for deer. We had regular rains during the summer that also contributed to ample vegetation growth. In summary, deer are going into the fall and early winter in excellent shape.

We are now nearing the end of seeing the impact of the very severe winter of 2013-14 on deer age classes. This winter resulted in an especially weak 2013 age-class (bucks that would have been 3.5 years during the 2016 hunting season). The many deer that made it through this winter will be 4.5 years-old in the 2017 hunting season. For the upcoming season, we should see strong 2 ½ and 3 ½ age classes of bucks and they will have respectable antler development due to the mild winter. This may not apply to counties that have had zero to very low antlerless quotas because some hunter harvest has shifted to bucks resulting in negatively skewing the buck age structure (yearlings and mature bucks are the only deer that can be harvested in those counties).

Predation on deer in Northern Wisconsin is always a popular topic and often used as a reason to explain why fewer deer are seen on a particular hunting parcel. Habitat quality is the key for deer to prosper, and if you do not hunt in quality deer habitat it is unlikely you will see many deer...with or without predators. Predator populations do play a role in changes in deer populations; however, our research using collared deer shows that predation increases when deer are in poor nutritional condition. In addition, thick brushy habitat provides not only good forage, but also very good escape cover.

Jenna Kosnicki, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Iron County reports, “The 2017 deer hunting season should bring great hunting opportunities this year in Iron County. No antlerless tags were allotted in Ashland, Iron and Vilas counties in 2015 and 2016 (not including special hunts), and we’re continuing to see the effects of that. More deer are being seen in the wild and along roadsides. Deer populations seem to be rising with healthy fawn recruitment present; several cases of does with multiple fawns
have been spotted in Iron County. The 2017 season will bring another round of no antlerless tags in and around Iron County (not including special hunts) with the hopes of continuing this population trend. Herd health assessments conducted early this spring indicated a healthy herd with fat reserves still available to individual deer. With the back-to-back mild winters and deer with strong fat reserves, hunters could see larger bucks with greater antler development this fall and winter.

Bob Hanson, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Burnett County reports, “Deer numbers are strengthening in Washburn, Burnett, and Douglas counties. Weather plays an intricate role in the sustainability of the deer population. A mild winter paired with ample growing season rains has created plenty of food and minimal winter die off for deer, even in the sandy soils. Healthy deer lead to more fawns, and early indications show very good fawn production heading into fall 2017. Deer and deer sign are being seen more frequently than in past years, and optimism runs high for this hunting season.”

Despite a general increase in deer numbers, deer are still not evenly distributed across the landscape. Some hunters scouting areas for better deer activity have found new “hot spots” when old haunts lack deer sign. Hunters looking for new traditions are now looking differently at our vast Northwest Wisconsin deer range. Large blocks of public or public access lands managed for young forest deer habitat exist in this part of the state. Public land managers in the past few years have reported less hunting pressure.

Not only are deer numbers strengthening, but decreased pressure can help bucks move into the more mature age classes. Scouting for a new hot spot on public land can be an adventure in itself, but the effort might be very rewarding.

Janet Brehm, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Lincoln County reports, “Deer hunting this fall in Langlade and Lincoln counties looks to be very promising for both archers and gun hunters. In speaking with many members of the public as well as area foresters, both are acknowledging seeing higher deer numbers. Many deer are being seen throughout both counties, even in areas thought to carry lower numbers. Does with a fawn or even twins, are not a rare sight. We’ve had three mild winters in a row, according to our Winter Severity Index, especially the winters of 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. Combined with several good growing seasons of lush browse, deer are projected to be in good health this coming fall. The acorn crop is looking to be an average year, so that will only add to the abundant food supply. Deer numbers projections have been on the rise for several years, now they’re getting verified on the ground. This year, Lincoln County has 6,000 antlerless tags available (600 public, 5,400 private lands) and Langlade County has 5,725 antlerless tags available (1,150 public, 4,575 private lands), an increase over that last several years. Overall, hunting in both Lincoln and Langlade Counties will be very exciting because of higher deer numbers and greater availability of antlerless tags.”

Derek Johnson, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Price County reports, “2017 is shaping up to be a great year for hunters in North Central Wisconsin. Conservative antlerless harvest quotas the past few years have noticeably increased the deer herd in Price, Rusk, Sawyer and Taylor counties. With a few relatively mild winters, we are strongly rebounding from the brutal winter of 2014. These mild winters will aid in fawn recruitment and that seems to be true since DNR staff have received many reports of does with fawns, even many sets of twins and a few triplets. The numbers on public land are also up across the area; whether it’s county, state or federal properties, hunters should be seeing more deer. Over 2,000 antlerless tags for private land are available in each county this fall, while 425, 1,025, 550 and 0 antlerless tags for public-access land, are available respectfully, in Price, Rusk, Sawyer and Taylor counties.”

Todd Naas, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Ashland County reports, “The deer population has responded positively to a managed effort to rebuild it by significantly limiting antlerless harvest opportunities the past several years. Early fawn observations appear good, and there appears to be excellent carry-over of last year’s fawn population. There was strong public support to continue to grow the herd
again this year in Ashland County, and antlerless harvest will only
be available to youth, disabled and qualified military personnel. If we
experience another mild to moderate winter this year, we can expect
another significant increase to the overall population in 2018. If this
happens, it will likely result in an overall decline in deer habitat due
to over-browsing and in the long-term will reduce the land’s ability to
sustain a healthy deer population.

It is important to understand that deer habitat and deer den-
sities vary throughout Ashland County, and that is natural in
the northern forest. A once productive stand of forest does not
always remain productive. Habitat quality declines as forests
mature. The greatest densities of deer are found in and near
the agricultural areas of the county, and in areas where the for-
est is actively managed with good distribution of young forest
throughout. Large blocks of mature forest hold some deer, but
at low density, making it difficult to observe deer consistently,
or at all. People who hunt mature forest need to put in their time
scouting ahead of season, exercise patience and be prepared
to move to alternative hunting locations for the best chance of
harvesting a deer.”

Kevin Morgan, DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Barron County
reports, “Three mild winters in a row in these Central Farmland
counties means high survival and high productivity. It also
means good antler development as bucks can put their saved
energy reserves right into antler growth. Even in normal winters
Barron and Polk counties produce trophy bucks and provide en-
tries every year in the Pope and Young and Boone and Crocket
record books. Approximately 40 percent of the registered bucks
are 2 ½ years or older so even if they do not make the record
book, with abundant food, fertile farmland soils, and good ge-
netics, bucks this age are quality deer in anyone’s book.

Along with quality bucks, these counties produce good numbers
of deer for those that want to fill the freezer. Polk County is con-
sistently in the top 10 statewide for total harvest and was in the
top five for both gun and bow harvest in 2016. The mild winter
allowed adult does to be in excellent condition coming into the
spring and fawn production appears to be excellent. There is
also evidence that fawns from the year before are contributing
to the population with fawns of their own. Deer condition as-
sessments on car killed deer found three doe fawns from Barron
and Polk counties out of seven examined would have given birth
to one fawn of their own this spring.

With productive adult does and even some doe fawns from the
year before producing young as well, managing the population
in balance with the environment and social factors will require a
substantial antlerless harvest. In Polk County, two free antlerless
tags will be issued per license. In Barron County, one free antler-
less tag will be issued per license. There will also be additional
antlerless permits that can be bought over the counter.

Some may be concerned about over harvest with these large
numbers of antlerless permits available. However, along with
population estimates which show growing populations in both
counties, other independent indicators also show a growing
deer population. There has been a substantial increase in vehi-
cle collisions in Barron County, which amounted to one per day
documented in January through March. The amount of nuisance
complaints in regard to grazing on ornamental flowers, shrub-
bery, and gardens has increased. In addition, forest regener-
ation is starting to be affected in some areas. Managing deer
populations for these factors as well as for the well-being of
deer themselves is important. Before this string of mild winters,
these two counties experienced one of the most severe win-
ters ever, with 20 inches of snow on the ground into the first
week of April. There were some deer losses as well as reduced
fawn production. Maintaining a deer population in balance with
the habitat allows deer to survive severe winters like that one.
Overall, it looks like a great fall for hunting in Barron and Polk
counties for whatever kind of deer that interests you, whether
you are a buck hunter or just like to fill the freezer.”

Michele Woodford, DNR wildlife biologist stationed Vilas County
reports, “With three back-to-back mild winters in a row, deer came
through this past winter in fine shape. We had reports in February of
bucks still retaining their antlers late into the winter. Bucks tend to
drop their antlers early when they are stressed or lacking food and
nutrients; this was not the case in the winter of 2016-2017. Bucks
this summer are showing nice antler development and managers
have seen 8- and 10-point bucks out foraging in local agricultur-
al fields in the Rhinelander area. Vilas County continues the 2017
season with a bucks-only season structure; expect to see more
antlerless deer and yearling bucks than last year, but the same or
fewer mature bucks (males over two years old). Vilas, Oneida, Forest
and Florence counties are having good fawn crops this year; we still
depend heavily on the public to report fawn numbers through the
“Operation Deer Watch” program. Reports of twin fawns are encour-
aging; triplet fawn sightings were reported in Woodruff, Rhinelander,
and Eagle River areas. Fawn sizes appear to be back on track this
year; too; there have been no reports of really small fawns. With an
increase in deer sightings managers have also seen an increase in
car-deer collisions this summer. Deer have been active all summer
and deer car accidents are higher than the past three years.
There is good reason to be optimistic going into the 2017 deer hunting season. Another extremely mild winter has allowed for strong fawn production across the district, and reports are coming in from all areas that travelers on Northeast Wisconsin roads are seeing a lot of deer. Very good fawn production and survival the previous two years means there will be more adult bucks available for harvest this fall and predicted buck harvests for this year are higher in every Northeaster Wisconsin county. Marinette and Oconto counties are each split into two Deer Management Units by the boundary of the Northern Forest and Central Farmland Zones. In both Northern Forest Units, the buck kill is expected to increase this fall, especially in Marinette. Antlerless tags have been increased from 875 in 2016 to 1675 this year for Marinette Northern Forest, but held steady at 550 for Oconto. Bonus tags for these Northern Forest portions of the counties are likely to sell out quickly, so if you are purchasing tags, make sure to be aware which side of the line you hunt on. Bonus tags will likely be available during the season for the Central Farmland portions of the counties, but they cannot be used in the Northern Forest Zone. Buck harvest increases are expected in the Central Farmland units of both Marinette and Oconto as well, but the County Deer Advisory Councils and DNR are really looking for increases in antlerless deer harvest. Both counties are issuing two antlerless tags with each license as well as providing additional hunting opportunity during the Holiday Hunt in the Central Farmland Zone. Wildlife biologist Dave Halfmann from Peshtigo says he can’t recall seeing more deer on the landscape than he has this spring and summer over the nine years he’s worked in the area.
Wrapping around the bay of Green Bay, Wildlife biologist Joshua Martinez is working with County Deer Advisory Councils in Brown, Kewaunee and Door that are all concerned about achieving an adequate antlerless harvest. The deer herd continues to grow above healthy levels despite a harvest objective to maintain or decrease the size of the herd in these counties over the past three years. As a result, all three counties are offering multiple antlerless tags with each license and the antlerless-only Holiday Hunt firearm season. Door County is issuing an unprecedented five antlerless tags with each license, recognizing that most hunters will not fill that many tags, but allowing those that have access to high deer density areas the ability to take a significant number of deer. The deer donation program is very active in this area and will put any extra deer to good use in the community.

A similar situation exists for many other Central Farmland counties in the Northeast District. Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara, Green Lake, Marquette, Outagamie and Manitowoc counties all expect higher buck harvests than 2016 and need to keep up with herd productivity by encouraging hunters to take more antlerless deer. Each of these counties are issuing two or three antlerless tags with each license (as well as additional bonus tags for sale), however only Waupaca and Waushara are utilizing the antlerless only Holiday Hunt. Even in these high deer productivity counties, deer are unevenly distributed on the landscape and not all areas are equally good deer habitat. Preseason scouting for deer sign and habitat conditions, as well as landowner contacts will increase hunter’s chances of being in the right place at the right time. Unlike 2016, the corn crop will not be coming off early in 2017.

The group of counties around Lake Winnebago tends to have strong deer numbers in places, but the habitat is more patchy and fragmented, and hunting pressure is relatively high for the available cover. As a result, overall deer numbers across the county aren’t as robust and hunters in Calumet, Fond du Lac and Winnebago counties are limited to one free antlerless tag with each license, and a very limited number of bonus tags are available for sale. Sheboygan County also tends to maintain a relatively stable deer population and provides one antlerless tag per license.

Chronic wasting disease has not been detected in free-ranging deer in the Northeast District, but it is at our borders around the southwest corner of the district, and present in one Oconto County captive deer farm. An important strategy for minimizing risk of disease spread is maintaining a healthy deer population in balance with the habitat. Most of our counties near locations of known CWD have deer populations considered too high to be in healthy balance with the land. Hunters are encouraged to read and follow their County Deer Advisory Council recommendations for antlerless deer harvest in consideration of long term deer herd sustainability. Visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/cdac.html for more information.

Another important strategy for CWD management is to monitor our deer. Collection of deer heads for lymph node collection is again the focus for two areas in Shawano County and an adjacent portion of Oconto County. The areas target collection near CWD positive deer farms, but any sick deer is important to report to the DNR. Wildlife biologist Kay Brockman-Mederas says CWD collection sites in Shawano County are located in Cecil at the Lakeview Convenience Center and the DNR office on Lakeland Road in Shawano. Mama’s Place (Hwy 49/153 intersection) in Elderon is the collection site for the area in the southwest part of the county. In Oconto County, heads can be dropped off at the Underhill Town Hall or Gillett Shell station. Heads can also be dropped off for sampling at the DNR Services Centers in Green Bay and Peshtigo. Check the DNR CWD Sampling website for sampling locations, phone numbers and hours of availability. dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/registersample.html

Weighted CWD sampling will occur in Fond du Lac and Sheboygan counties for the next several years. Weighted sampling targets deer most likely to be carrying the disease if it exists in the area. This is accomplished by cooperating with taxidermists in the area and finding other opportunities to sample older age class deer.
Consecutive mild winters combined with reductions in antlerless harvest since 2014 are resulting in herd growth across the 18-county Southern District, all of which falls within the Southern Farmland Zone. Many DNR staff and the general public have reported seeing deer frequently this summer and a high number of fawns. With lower than historic antlerless harvest the past two years, hunters should see numbers slightly higher than last fall. However, it is important for hunters to keep in mind that there is great variation in the habitat type as well as the quality of the habitat across the landscape and as a result, the number of deer between individual properties can vary significantly.

Southern Farmland Zone County Deer Advisory Councils (CDACs) are offering, on average, more antlerless tags with each license in response to the expected increase in deer numbers. This was the third year of operation for the CDACs which encourage and provide opportunity for public involvement in deer management decisions. We encourage the public to be involved with their local CDAC in developing the deer season structure.

The Southern District encompasses a wide range of deer habitat types. They range from the high wooded ridges and coulees in the southwest to the flatter, agriculturally dominated landscape in Green, Rock and Walworth counties along the Illinois border. We also have the rolling southern kettles in the east and the extensive wetland and woodland areas of Dodge, Jefferson and Columbia counties. This high level of variation in habitat types and conditions results in local deer numbers that can vary dramatically from one square mile to the next.

Early season food sources appear to be doing well and should provide plenty of opportunities for hunters to locate deer taking advantage of the hard and soft mast produced during this time of year. In addition, agricultural crops are currently about 10 days behind due to a wetter than normal spring. If excessive rainfall continues into the growing season, hunters should expect that the corn and soybeans will be harvested later than normal which will impact deer movements. Hunters should keep in mind that once these seasonal food sources are no longer available, deer will start to expand their range looking for other food sources. In areas where deer numbers are the highest, you can expect to see the quality of habitat decrease, resulting in deer traveling further looking for other sources of food. This is where the appropriate habitat and herd management practices can assist in your success throughout the hunting season. I encourage people interested in learning more about habitat and herd management to sign up for the Deer Management Assistance Program at dnr.wi.gov, keyword “DMAP.”

Most Southern District deer are harvested on private property which makes up more than 90 percent of the landscape, but good deer hunting can also be found on the thousands of acres of county, state and federally owned lands open to deer hunting in southern Wisconsin. Nancy Frost, wildlife biologist in Sauk County mentions that Dell Creek Wildlife Area in northern Sauk County had some timber sales occur two winters ago, resulting in young forest vegetation that provides both cover and food sources. One area can be found on the west side of Town Hall Road north of North Avenue on the northern-most portion of DNR public land. The other timber sale area is on the east side of Town Hall Road, about a quarter of a mile in. Most timber sales will be occurring over the next two years on other areas of the property. Those looking for public land available for hunting can check out the DNR website at dnr.wi.gov, keywords “public hunting lands.” For hunters near Milwaukee, Wildlife biologist Dianne Robinson says that Big Muskego Lake Wildlife Area is a mix of grassland and oak woodland habitat great for deer hunting.
surrounding the shallow Big Muskego Lake, within minutes from greater Milwaukee. If you live near Milwaukee, new acquisitions off Ryan Road and North Cape Road (Muskego), or 116th St. (Franklin) make this a prime location for a quick bow hunting day trip after work or on weekends near home.

And if interested in hunting on private lands, hunters are advised to get out well in advance of deer season to meet with landowners and seek permission to hunt. Remember to get out early to scout the areas you plan to hunt throughout the fall. Keep an eye out for those natural food sources that will attract deer, and pattern their movements to and from those sources.

Another important aspect for Southern District deer hunters to keep in mind is that chronic wasting disease (CWD) continues to increase in the geographic area. Due to recent changes in baiting and feeding laws, hunters are expected to be able to bait and feed for white-tailed deer in Dodge, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine and Washington counties. Ozaukee County hunters will continue to be allowed to bait and feed, similar to previous years. With two years of electronic harvest registration under our belt, hunters interested in getting their deer tested for CWD will be able to go to one of the co-op CWD sample stations or self-service kiosks that will be posted on the DNR website prior to the season opener. Go to dnr.wi.gov and keyword search ‘CWD’.

Hunters in five counties within the Southern District will have the opportunity to enjoy the “Holiday Hunt” deer season during the winter holidays. Those counties include Milwaukee, Richland, Sauk, Iowa and Waukesha. The Holiday Hunt is an antlerless-only season that will take place Dec. 24 – Jan. 1, 2018.

Hunters in the Southern District will also receive one to four free Farmland (Zone 2) Antlerless Deer Tags with each deer hunting license. The number received will depend on the county of choice and the recommendations made by the CDACs. In the Southern District, all counties have Bonus Antlerless Deer Tags available for sale except Kenosha and Racine counties in the southeastern portion of the District.

We anticipate an excellent deer season in the Southern District in 2017. We wish everyone a safe and successful fall.
The Wisconsin Deer Management Assistance Program provides habitat and herd management assistance to landowners interested in managing their property for deer and other wildlife. The department assists landowners with the implementation of forest regeneration and deer hunting practices that will help achieve property goals while considering the ecological and social impacts of white-tailed deer.

In its first year, DMAP enrolled over 43,000 acres across the state, and by the close of the 2017 enrollment period the total acreage enrolled in DMAP approached 268,000 acres. In 2017, more than 450 landowners were surveyed to help gain insight into their experiences with the program. Most landowners sought to improve habitat for deer and other wildlife, including turkey, grouse, woodcock, small game, songbirds and other species.

Survey responses indicated that landowners enjoyed the simplicity of enrollment and were satisfied with additional resources provided through the department’s website. 94 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the site visit and working alongside a local DNR biologist and forester to achieve management goals, while over 87 percent were satisfied and said the site-specific management plan was useful. Ninety-six percent of DMAP enrolled landowners intend to implement at least some of the recommendations provided in their management plan. Overall, 80 percent of landowners gave the program a good or very good customer service rating. The program is currently working with nearly 1,200 landowners throughout Wisconsin and received a 94 percent re-enrollment rate from the first year participants.

Landowners can enroll in one of three levels:

- **Level 1**: No acreage requirement, no annual fee (ongoing enrollment);
- **Level 2**: 160-640 acres; $75/3 year commitment (annual enrollment deadline of March 1); or
- **Level 3**: 640+ acres; $150/3 year commitment (annual enrollment deadline of March 1).

DMAP participants receive (depending on their level of enrollment as outlined above):

- personal interaction with DNR staff and communication on land and herd management
- access to an online library of wildlife and habitat management resources
- invitations to a series of interactive workshops
- networking opportunities with other landowners with common goals
- property site visits from a wildlife biologist and forester
- written site-specific management plan; and
- reduced price antlerless tags.

Properties can be enrolled by an individual landowner or through a cooperative of landowners whose property boundaries are within one-half mile of each other. A group cooperative can be formed to qualify all landowners at a higher enrollment level.

DNR staff have worked hard to expand program offerings to DMAP cooperators, and 2017 marks the third year of workshops offered around the state to share information with enrolled landowners about cost-share program availability, invasive species management, timber harvest strategies, and deer research and herd health updates. Workshops include landowner-led tours of DMAP properties to share experiences and lessons learned in land management. In addition, DMAP cooperators are able to voluntarily participate in a mentored hunting and trapping program that may help them achieve their property management goals while providing novice hunters access to their property. For more information regarding Wisconsin’s Deer Management Assistance Program, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword “DMAP.”