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STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING



KEITH CREAGH
DIRECTOR

SUBMITTED: May 12, 2014
RESUBMITTED: June 16, 2014

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MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
(ASSISTANT TO THE COMMISSION)

MEMORANDUM TO THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Subject: Antlerless Deer License Quotas 2014-2016
Wildlife Conservation Order Amendment No. 9 of 2014

Authority:

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, authorizes the Director and the Commission to issue orders to manage wild animals in this state.

Discussion and Background:

This amendment establishes the public land antlerless deer license quota and private land antlerless deer license quota for each deer management unit (DMU) in the state. Compared to 2013 quotas, the recommended antlerless deer license quotas for 2014-2016 would result in a net decrease in public land antlerless licenses in each management region and a net decrease in private land antlerless licenses in all except the southeast management region. It is recommended that no public land antlerless licenses be available in the Upper Peninsula (UP), and that a total of 7,000 private land antlerless licenses be available (down from 18,800 in 2013). It is recommended that 32,300 public land antlerless licenses be available in the Northern Lower Peninsula (down from 35,900 in 2013), and that a total of 117,900 private land antlerless licenses be available (down from 119,100 in 2013). It is recommended that 9,100 public land antlerless licenses be available in the Southwest Lower Peninsula (down from 11,350 in 2013), and that a total of 144,100 private land antlerless licenses be available (down from 179,500 in 2013). It is recommended that 18,500 public land antlerless licenses be available in the Southeast Lower Peninsula (down from 18,800 in 2013), and that a total of 166,000 private land antlerless licenses be available (identical to 2013). Overall, these recommendations would result in 10,650 fewer public land antlerless licenses and 48,400 fewer private land antlerless licenses available statewide during the 2014-2016 seasons in comparison to last year.

The recommended decreases reflect a response to severe winter conditions that are expected to reduce deer populations in many areas within Michigan's northern regions (particularly the UP), and that deer population estimates and indices in both southern regions have stabilized or declined over approximately the past decade. Sufficient antlerless licenses would still be offered to allow for recreational opportunity at a sustainable level of harvest and to provide for harvest to address concerns over agricultural damage and forest regeneration.

Preliminary harvest estimates from the 2013 season were not yet available prior to submission of antlerless license quota recommendations. However, to accompany 2014-2016 regulations

recommendations, field staff has prepared narrative documents reporting and analyzing multiple-year trends in data and deer management issues in each DMU. These documents are available separately for review to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and will be available to the public soon. Summaries of conditions by management region are provided below.

Upper Peninsula Region

Biological

The deer population in the UP peaked in the early 1990s. Deer numbers, as indexed by buck harvest and reported deer-vehicle collisions, have generally been lower since that time. The UP region varies significantly in capability of habitat to support deer, winter impacts on deer, predator populations, and other factors that influence deer numbers.

The winter of 2013-14 resulted in high snow depths and harsh winter conditions. This is the second consecutive winter of conditions that are expected to result in low over-winter survival and low fawn production this spring. The potential impact of the past 2 winters on deer in the UP can be better understood by examining preliminary results from a long-term study of deer, winter weather, predators, and habitat being conducted by researchers from the DNR and Mississippi State University. The study currently is located in the peninsula's medium snowfall zone within DMU 036 in Iron, Baraga, and Marquette counties. Following the difficult winter of 2012-13, researchers documented several cases of weak or still-born fawns born to radio-collared does followed by very high mortality of fawns during their ensuing months of life, largely due to predation. Of 45 adult does radio-collared during winter 2014, 42% had died by mid-April. Starvation and predation were implicated in most deaths. This year's fawn crop will be assessed beginning with births in late May. Although study results are preliminary and not necessarily indicative of deer mortality patterns in other areas of the UP, the study helps to describe the potential serious impacts of the past two winters on deer populations, and the reason our recommendations for antlerless harvesting are highly conservative.

Social

Units in which only one to two bucks are harvested per square mile tend to produce low deer sighting rates and hunter satisfaction, and antlerless harvest is generally highly restricted or unavailable in these areas. Deer Management Units in the south-central UP typically provide outstanding deer hunting with buck kills exceeding five per square mile. In these units, antlerless licenses may be issued to manage the population and to provide additional recreational opportunity.

Economic

Due to consecutive severe winters, we expect fewer concerns over agricultural crop damage and tree regeneration compared to 2013, particularly among large commercial forest landowners. However, antlerless harvest opportunities will continue to be important in DMUs in the south-central UP to address agricultural crop damage and forest regeneration concerns.

Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) Region

Biological

Winter is a primary driver of deer populations in the NLP. This is evidenced by drops in harvest, yearling beam diameters and deer vehicle collisions in the year or two following one or more severe winters. Across the NLP, impacts of winter will vary depending on local conditions.

Areas within the “snow belt” (e.g. Kalkaska and Otsego counties) will see far greater impacts from a severe winter than areas that are farther south (e.g. Gladwin and Clare Counties). For several years prior to 2013-2014, the NLP experienced relatively mild winters and staff observed deer populations steadily increase. Although the winter of 2013-2014 has proven to be a very severe winter, the recent increase in deer population size should buffer the declines experienced following this winter. Thus quotas overall are recommended to decrease in the NLP, though all DMUs within the region are recommended to be open for antlerless licenses on both private and public land during 2014-2016.

Social

There is currently a 3-point on a side antler restriction in 13 DMUs in the northwest NLP. As part of this antler point restriction, biologists are aiming to have a one:one harvest of bucks to does in order to achieve a more balanced buck-to-doe ratio. Adequate quotas are necessary to achieve this goal, which can have a biological impact but has also been driven by hunter preference for implementing regulations to achieve a more satisfying deer hunting experience.

Economic

Issues with agricultural crop damage can be highly variable in the NLP, even within given DMUs. Distinct private and public land antlerless quotas and the availability of early and late antlerless seasons on private land provide the opportunity to make tools available to private landowners experiencing damage as a result primarily of concentrations of deer where numbers are not excessive overall. Economic impacts also result from the presence of bovine tuberculosis in the eastern NLP, and eradication efforts require continued availability of antlerless licenses in these DMUs.

Southwest (SWR) and Southeast (SER) Lower Peninsula Region

Biological

For approximately the past decade, deer population estimates and indices (including deer/vehicle collisions, crop damage complaints, and observations of deer by the hunting community and field staff) in the southern Lower Peninsula have stabilized or declined. Department management efforts were intended to reduce deer densities throughout most of the region over this period, but some areas have also experienced repeated outbreaks of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) that have had greater impacts on localized deer populations, particularly in the SWR. Thus, reduced quotas are being recommended in a number of DMUs, primarily in the SWR, to stabilize or slow the decline in deer numbers.

Social

Based on comparison to antlerless license sales in years prior to creation of the large multi-county southern Michigan DMU 486 and during the 2013 season under the reconfigured DMUs, most recommended private land antlerless quotas are still expected to exceed hunter demand for the recreational opportunity offered through antlerless harvest. However, recommended quotas in several units are close to or slightly below past license sales figures, and so private land antlerless licenses could sell out in some areas before the end of the 2014 season at these recommended quota levels.

Economic

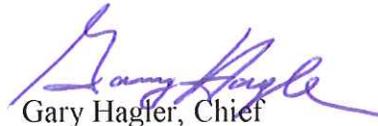
Where local deer abundance continues to contribute to incidence of agricultural damage, additional antlerless harvest within DMUs otherwise constrained by antlerless quotas will be possible through field staff efforts to work with property owners to provide Deer Management Assistance Permits. An increasing number of suburban communities in which hunting is still feasible have taken advantage of this opportunity, and the Department is working statewide to more efficiently address these needs that are often driven by community concerns regarding economic impacts from deer browsing and deer-vehicle collisions.

Recommendation:

This order was submitted for information on June 12, 2014, at the Natural Resources Commission Meeting. This item appeared on the Department's May 2014 calendar and may be eligible for approval on July 10, 2014.



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Bill O'Neill, Chief
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William E. Moritz, Ph.D.
Natural Resources Deputy

I have analyzed and discussed these recommendations with staff and concur as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Keith Creagh, Director

Date

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER

Amendment No. 9 of 2014

By authority conferred on the Natural Resources Commission and the Director of the Department of Natural Resources by sections 40107 and 40113a of 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.40107 and 324.40113a, it is ordered that effective July 11, 2014, the following section(s) of the Wildlife Conservation Order shall read as follows:

3.105 Antlerless-only license quotas.

Sec. 3.105 (1) The director, in consultation with and concurrence of the chair or vice chair of the natural resources commission, may make appropriate minor changes to antlerless deer quotas established in 3.105(2) to meet disease control, population goal, or other management objectives.

(2) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, the antlerless deer license quotas are as shown in table 3:

TABLE 3
Deer Management Unit (DMU) License Quotas

DMU	DMU Name	Public licenses	Private licenses	Total licenses
001	Alcona County	5,000	0	5,000
003	Allegan County	200	5,000	5,200
004	Alpena County	2,000	0	2,000
005	Antrim County	200	5,200	5,400
006	Arenac County	500	7,000	7,500
007	Big Bay Unit	0	0	0
008	Barry County*	0	0	0
009	Bay County	200	3,000	3,200
010	Benzie County	100	1,400	1,500
011	Berrien County*	0	0	0
012	Branch County*	0	0	0
013	Calhoun County*	0	0	0
014	Cass County*	0	0	0
015	Charlevoix County	200	3,600	3,800
016	Cheboygan County	100	100	200
017	Sault Ste. Marie Unit	0	0	0
018	Clare County	900	8,000	8,900
019	Clinton County*	0	0	0
020	Crawford County	700	900	1,600
021	Manistique Unit	0	0	0
022	Crystal Falls Unit	0	0	0
023	Eaton County*	0	0	0
024	Emmet County	200	800	1,000
025	Genesee County	0	8,500	8,500
026	Gladwin County	1,200	8,000	9,200
027	Watersmeet Unit	0	0	0
028	Grand Traverse County	100	1,800	1,900
029	Gratiot County*	0	0	0
030	Hillsdale County	400	12,000	12,400
031	Nissula Unit	0	0	0
032	Huron County*	0	0	0
033	Ingham County*	0	0	0
034	Ionia County	400	6,000	6,400
035	Iosco County	700	0	700
036	Amasa/Michigamme Unit	0	0	0
037	Isabella County	100	11,000	11,100
038	Jackson County	1,600	17,000	18,600
039	Kalamazoo County*	0	0	0
040	Kalkaska County	100	400	500

041	Kent County*	0	0	0
042	Keweenaw Unit	0	0	0
043	Lake County	100	2,900	3,000
044	Lapeer County	2,000	15,000	17,000
045	Leelanau County	100	1,400	1,500
046	Lenawee County	400	9,000	9,400
047	Livingston County	2,000	15,000	17,000
048	Newberry Unit	0	0	0
050	Macomb County	200	4,000	4,200
051	Manistee County	100	3,000	3,100
053	Mason County	100	4,900	5,000
054	Mecosta County*	0	0	0
055	Menominee County	0	5,000	5,000
056	Midland County	1,500	7,500	9,000
057	Missaukee County	400	3,200	3,600
058	Monroe County	100	1,000	1,100
059	Montcalm County*	0	0	0
060	Montmorency County	5,000	0	5,000
061	Muskegon County*	0	0	0
063	Oakland County	2,500	7,000	9,500
064	Oceana County*	0	0	0
065	Ogemaw County	700	6,000	6,700
066	Ontonagon County	0	0	0
067	Osceola County	300	5,600	5,900
068	Oscoda County	5,000	0	5,000
069	Otsego County*	100	100	200
070	Ottawa County*	0	0	0
071	Presque Isle County	3,000	0	3,000
072	Roscommon County	400	1,000	1,400
073	Saginaw County	200	6,500	6,700
074	St. Clair County	700	9,500	10,200
075	St. Joseph County*	0	0	0
076	Sanilac County*	0	0	0
078	Shiawassee County*	0	0	0
079	Tuscola County*	0	0	0
080	Van Buren County*	0	0	0
081	Washtenaw County	1,500	15,000	16,500
082	Wayne County	100	1,200	1,300
083	Wexford County	1,000	3,700	4,700
115	Beaver Island	200	300	500
117	Drummond Island	0	0	0
121	Bay De Noc	0	0	0
122	Norway Unit	0	500	500
127	Ironwood Unit	0	0	0
131	Twin Lakes Unit	0	0	0
135	Tawas Unit	100	0	100
145	North Manitou Island	0	0	0
149	Round/Bois Blanc Island	100	100	200
152	Gwinn Unit	0	0	0
155	Gladstone Unit	0	1,500	1,500
162	South Newaygo County*	0	0	0
174	St. Clair Flats	400	300	700
245	South Fox Island	0	0	0
249	Trout Lake Unit	0	0	0
252	Rock Unit	0	0	0
255	LaBranche Unit	0	0	0
262	North Newaygo County*	0	0	0
273	Shiawassee Unit	1,000	0	1,000
308	Bellevue Unit (Barry - Calhoun - Eaton)	1,100	25,000	26,100
311	Keeler Unit (Berrien - Cass - Van Buren)	700	10,000	10,700

312	Sherwood Unit (Branch - Kalamazoo - St. Joseph)	1,000	16,000	17,000
319	Laingsburg Unit (Clinton - Gratiot - Ingham - Shiawassee)	3,400	36,600	40,000
332	Greenleaf Unit (Huron - Sanilac - Tuscola)	5,200	42,000	47,200
341	Sparta Unit (Kent - Muskegon south - Ottawa)	1,350	22,500	23,850
349	Engadine Unit	0	0	0
354	Lakeview Unit (Mecosta - Montcalm)	1,200	20,000	21,200
361	Fremont Unit (Muskegon north - Newaygo - Oceana)	100	8,000	8,100
452	TB Core Area	2,000	0	2,000
486	Southern Multi-County	0	0	0
487	Northern Multi-County	0	30,000	30,000
	Total	59,900	435,000	494,900

License quotas for these individual units are reflected as part of multi-county units.

Issued on this 10th day of July, 2014.

Approved as to matters over which the Natural Resources Commission has authority.

J. R. Richardson, Chairman
Natural Resources Commission

Approved as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Keith Creagh
Director