



2006 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS

STATEWIDE FORECAST

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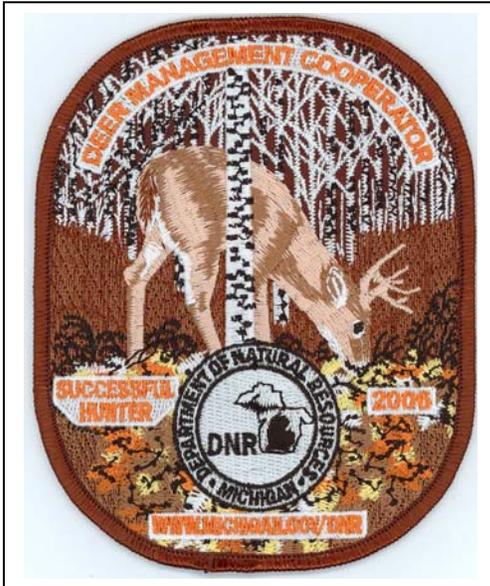
The number of deer expected to be harvested during the 2006 deer hunting season is anticipated to be similar to last year's estimated harvest of 415,000 deer. An expected 725,000 individuals will purchase at least one deer license in 2006. Hunters will spend more than 10 million days enjoying deer hunting recreation during the archery, firearm, and muzzleloading seasons combined.* This is more days spent deer hunting than in any other state or Canadian province. Deer hunters will contribute more than \$500 million to the Michigan economy through the purchase of such items as food, lodging, transportation, and equipment.

Biologists estimate Michigan's statewide fall whitetail population to be very similar to the estimated 2005 deer population. The deer herd is dynamic and not evenly distributed across the state. In the last decade, the southern half of the Lower Peninsula has contained an increasing proportion of the statewide deer population. For the last four years, the estimated southern Michigan deer harvest exceeded 50 percent of the statewide harvest. Last year 60 percent of all deer taken were taken in southern Michigan. This trend is expected to continue in 2006. Deer distribution also varies within every Deer Management Unit (DMU). Most deer are found on private land.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides about 90 deer check stations around the state to help evaluate and monitor the harvest of Michigan's deer herd. The location and scheduled hours of operations for all deer check stations are available on the DNR web site, www.michigan.gov/dnr. Hunters are encouraged to bring in their deer or deer head, to share valuable information with the DNR and receive a 2006 Deer Management Cooperator patch.

Biologists will be collecting deer heads from hunters wishing to cooperate in the ongoing statewide surveillance for bovine tuberculosis (TB).

* Archery deer hunting season is open from October 1 through November 14 and December 1 through January 1. Firearm season is November 15 through 30, and the muzzleloading season is December 1 through 10 in Zone 1, December 8 through 17 in Zone 2, and December 1 through December 17 in Zone 3. Late antlerless firearm season is December 18 through January 1, on private land only in 24 Deer Management Units in the Lower Peninsula.



STEWARDSHIP

The DNR is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use, and enjoyment of the state's natural resources for current and future generations. This commitment includes managing white-tailed deer in a sustainable manner to yield healthy fawns, does, and bucks, without negatively impacting habitat, other wildlife species, or creating undue hardship to private interests.

Today, deer live in every county of the state. The whitetails' reproductive capability and their ability to adapt to the variety of habitats across the state have resulted in a Michigan deer herd

estimated to be over 1.6 million animals. This is exciting to citizens who enjoy hunting or observing deer, but is problematic to the habitat and the overall ecosystem. Deer in most parts of Michigan have a higher birth rate than death rate each year. The number of deer in an area impacts the quality and quantity of habitat, deer productivity, and deer/human conflicts. Harvesting deer through hunting helps keep the deer herd in balance with the habitat. A regulated hunter-harvest of both sexes is necessary to maintain a healthy and thriving deer population.

Antlerless deer license quotas are established for each DMU to achieve a desired harvest of antlerless deer for that unit. Where an increased deer population is desired, no antlerless deer licenses are offered. The 2006 statewide harvest is expected to be approximately an equal number of antlered and antlerless deer. In southern Michigan, the DNR would like to see the antlerless harvest exceed the antlered harvest.

Hunters are reminded that a one dollar donation to Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger may be made when purchasing your deer license. This donation will be used to process venison for families in need.

UPPER PENINSULA (UP)

Last winter started early and severely, with a major snow storm on November 16. However, winter abated by mid-January. Winter losses were minimal and fawn recruitment is expected to be normal across the UP. The highest deer numbers will be seen in the south-central part of the UP (Menominee, Delta, Dickinson, Iron, and southern Marquette counties). The UP buck population is expected to be slightly above last year. Antlerless deer hunting opportunities on private farm lands will help reduce the deer population in counties that have more deer than desired. Remember, only public land antlerless licenses are valid on Commercial Forest Act (CFA) lands. In addition, DMUs 152, 155, and 252 do not have QDM regulations this year.

EASTERN UP MANAGEMENT UNIT (EUP)

Chippewa, east Alger, Luce, Mackinac, and Schoolcraft Counties

Rex Ainslie, Supervisor: 906-293-5131

Last winter was relatively mild, resulting in higher than average survival of yearlings and good fawn production this spring. It is anticipated that the EUP will see a fall deer population slightly higher than 2005. However, distribution of deer will not be uniform with agricultural areas having higher deer densities, and public land and heavily forested areas with fewer deer than average. Likewise, the southern portion of the EUP will have higher deer numbers, with the deer densities decreasing farther north. Previously harsh winters (2004-05) resulting in poor fawn survival those years, will likely produce fewer available adult bucks in 2006. A higher proportion of yearling bucks are expected in the harvest this year.

The availability of antlerless licenses has been reduced in most areas of the EUP with a corresponding reduction in antlerless harvest anticipated. However, hunters are encouraged to scout private agricultural lands and check with farmers who may desire fewer deer on their lands.

Berry and nut production has been variable across the EUP. Drought conditions persisted over most of the growing season with good production observed in only lowland and moist areas and this situation may influence where deer can be found.

Hunters on Drummond Island, DMU 117, are reminded that they are permitted to take an antlered deer only if it has at least one antler with two or more antler points, each one more than one inch long. Also, the DNR will be conducting voluntary check-in on the island. Notices will be posted at local businesses to encourage participation.

Unit Biologists:

East Alger, Schoolcraft Counties and Garden Peninsula:
Terry Minzey, 906-452-6236

Chippewa, Luce and Mackinac Counties:
Kristie Sitar, 906-293-5024

WESTERN UPPER PENINSULA MANAGEMENT UNIT (WUP)

Baraga, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, and west Alger Counties

Robert Doepker, Supervisor: 906-228-6561

Deer numbers across the WUP Management Unit will be higher compared to last year. Deer densities are highest in the agricultural areas of Delta, Dickinson, and Menominee Counties, compared to the more northern, primarily forested areas. The severity of winter weather is a major factor determining the number, physical development, and productivity of deer in the WUP. Deer in the southern areas of the WUP experience milder winter conditions and, consequently, are more mobile and require shelter for shorter periods of time during winter. The WUP experienced average or below average

winter severity during the winter of 2005-06, thus over-winter deer survival was high. High fawn production and over-winter survival of the 2005 fawn class will result in good numbers of yearling bucks during 2006. Yearling males generally represent the majority of the buck segment of the herd, and in the buck harvest. Heavy, wet snowfall in the early part of the 2005 firearm deer season resulted in reduced hunting effort and altered deer movement patterns. In combination, both factors served to reduce the buck harvest and will result in older bucks in the herd in 2006. Antler development should be above average. Antlerless permits have been reduced in some DMUs in the WUP due to deer populations being below goal.

Deer fared better in medium snowfall areas, where sustained warmth resulted in a Winter Severity Index about 20 percent below the previous winter. Estimated deer numbers increased about eight percent since 2005, based on deer pellet group survey data. Improved fawn survival last winter will result in higher numbers of yearling deer in the fall population. Mild winter weather will also result in above average antler development, especially in yearling bucks.

Fawn production was good to excellent in most portions of the Baraga Area. Hunters will see a strong start to the cohort of deer they will begin to harvest in 2007. Antlerless licenses were available only for private, non-Commercial Forest Reserve (CFR) lands in DMUs 127 and 031. The limited numbers of antlerless licenses (400 and 700, respectively) have already sold out. Deer and deer hunters will find acorns in short supply.

Deer in northeast Iron and northern Dickinson counties continue to gradually increase and should show moderate increases again this year. Highest concentrations of deer are found in southern Dickinson and southern Iron counties. Northwest Iron County continues to support moderate numbers of deer and a more stable deer population over time. Antler development should be average to slightly above with good fawn survival, due to an early warm-up in April and above average temperatures throughout the summer and into the fall. These temperatures resulted in an extended growing season.

This fall we expect deer numbers in the south-central UP to be larger than in the recent past. However, the increase in deer is likely to be modest because timber harvest intensity has been declining in this region, reducing the quality of summer range and quantity of winter food supplies (felled tree tops).

Deer will again be most plentiful on the agricultural landscape of southern Menominee and western Delta counties. However, this land is privately owned and permission is required for hunting access. Private land antlerless deer licenses are still available in the agricultural DMUs, and they can be purchased at a rate of one per day (with a maximum of two per year) until the quota is reached. These antlerless licenses are valid during all seasons with appropriate equipment to match the season.

Extensively forested areas usually have fewer deer than agricultural areas, particularly heavily-hunted sectors of state and national forest land. Consequently, quotas for public land antlerless deer licenses are usually smaller than for private land and they sell out more quickly. The highest deer numbers on state land are in west Menominee County and on scattered small parcels in west Delta County. Deer numbers will be

lower on CFA lands in northern Menominee County and on Hiawatha National Forest lands in east Delta County. Hunter density will also be lower, which some hunters desire.

Hunters will likely observe normal or above-average numbers of fawns and yearling bucks. Two-year-old bucks (generally six to eight pointers) will be depressed in number due to poor fawn production in 2004. The largest bucks (heaviest and best antlers) typically come from agricultural areas, but some nice bucks are also taken from forested country where access is limited and they have an opportunity to grow older.

There is a strong interest on the part of many hunters in this area to bypass young bucks so these deer can grow older and larger. Instead of harvesting a spike-horn or fork-horn buck, they choose to use an antlerless license to acquire venison. Mandatory quality deer management regulations (QDM) are no longer in effect in DMUs 152, 155, and 252. These units are within portions of Dickinson, Delta, Marquette, and Alger Counties.

Mild winter conditions for 2005 - 2006 allowed for good over-winter fawn survival in Marquette and West Alger Counties, so hunters should see a stronger yearling age class this year. Deep snows during the opening of the 2005 season caused many hunters to leave camp early and head home empty handed last season. This will result in a few more deer in the woods this fall. Early snowmelt this spring, combined with a quick green-up, helped deer recover from their over winter energy deficit. Does entered into the spring birthing season in good shape, which resulted in a healthy fawn crop this summer.

DMUs 152 and 252 are no longer QDM areas. Antlerless licenses are only available for DMU 252 this year.

In summary, hunters should expect a season that is similar to, or better than last year.

Unit Biologists:

Gogebic, Ontonagon, Baraga, Keweenaw, and Houghton Counties:

Rob Aho, 906-353-6651

Iron and Dickinson Counties:

Douglas Wagner, 906-875-6622

Delta and Menominee Counties:

Craig Albright, 906-786-2351

Marquette and West Alger Counties:

Terry McFadden, 906-228-6561

NORTHERN LOWER PENINSULA (NLP)

The deer herd in the NLP is anticipated to be similar to 2005. Buck harvest is expected to be similar to last year and the antlerless deer harvest is expected to be down. The deer herd remains over goal in the DMUs bordering southern Michigan, but is at or below goal in the remaining DMUs. There are fewer DMUs open to the harvest of antlerless deer on public land than in 2005. Antlerless licenses are not available for

Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Lake, or Wexford Counties. However, to help eradicate bovine TB in deer, antlerless deer licenses in the bovine TB positive counties will be available. Leftover public land antlerless licenses in these seven-county special regulations units will be sold over the counter until the quota is reached.

NORTHEAST MANAGEMENT UNIT (NE)

Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Oscoda Crawford, Emmet, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Otsego, Presque Isle, and Roscommon Counties

Glen Matthews, Supervisor: 989-732-3541

The NE Management Unit will begin the fall season with a deer population slightly larger than 2005. The deer population remains above goal in only a few areas. Reduced antlerless harvests and a bumper acorn crop in 2005, along with a good fawn crop in 2006, have resulted in a modest increase in deer numbers. A buck harvest somewhat higher than the 2005 number is anticipated. With a fairly good carryover of bucks from 2005, a good percentage of two and one half year old and older bucks will be taken. The private land antlerless license quota continues to be liberal in many DMUs, though lower than 2005; the public land antlerless licenses are fewer in several DMUs. Overall, the lower number of available licenses will result in an antlerless deer kill below 2004 and 2005.

Best success rates will be experienced in the mixed agricultural and forest land areas of Iosco, Ogemaw, and western Antrim, and Charlevoix Counties. Alpena, Montmorency, and Alcona County hunters will have good success rates, but lower than historical levels. Public lands in Alcona, Crawford, Montmorency, and Oscoda Counties will provide good deer hunting opportunities.

Acorn production appears to be light and scattered and will not affect deer distribution. A number of areas with beech are reporting a decent beechnut crop and these areas will hold deer, especially during October and November archery periods. Old orchards and wild apple trees are not nearly as attractive as in 2005, but may be good hunting spots in a few locations. Deer will be foraging on the ground in open areas, farm fields, and lowlands until snow cover.

There is a continuing need for deer samples for the bovine TB surveillance effort. Deer hunters are urged to locate a check station and submit their deer head for testing. During the firearm season, all stations that were open last year will be operating.

Very few elk are accidentally shot by deer hunters, however, those coming to the elk range in southern Cheboygan, northern Otsego, southwest Presque Isle, and Montmorency Counties are reminded to be careful and avoid the unintended shooting of an elk.

Unit Biologists:

Alcona, Oscoda, and Crawford Counties:

Elaine Carlson, 989-826-3211

Alpena, Montmorency, and Presque Isle Counties:

Vacant (contact Gaylord DNR Office 989-732-3541)

Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Emmet, and Otsego Counties:

Brian Mastenbrook, 989-732-3541

Iosco, Ogemaw, and Roscommon Counties:

Mark Boersen, 989-275-5151

NORTHWEST MANAGEMENT UNIT (NW)

Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Lake, Leelanau, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Wexford Counties

Mike Donovan, Acting Supervisor: 231-775-9727

Deer numbers in the northern counties, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau, are currently below goal for their DMUs. This year, antlerless deer licenses on private lands are not available in Benzie, Grand Traverse, and Kalkaska Counties, and are reduced in Leelanau County. Antlerless deer licenses for use on public lands are not available in these DMUs. Deer numbers in these counties are expected to be similar to 2005, with better opportunities existing on private lands in southwest Grand Traverse and Kalkaska counties. Better deer hunting opportunities also exist in portions of Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Benzie counties where cherry and apple orchards predominate. Reduced antlerless deer licenses will result in fewer does and fawns in the harvest, but archery pressure on either sex remains about the same as last year on public lands close to the Traverse City area.

Leelanau County enters its fourth season under QDM harvest regulations, limiting buck harvest to animals with three or more points on at least one antler. Acorn production was exceptional in 2005 in many parts of these counties where mature oaks are found. This food source is a major attraction to deer, facilitating weight gain prior to winter, and positively affecting antler development. Acorn production in 2006 is minimal, but deer were able to use last year's bounty throughout the winter and into the spring. Beechnut production is spotty, but will attract and benefit deer where available. The best hunting opportunities typically occur on or near private property where agricultural lands attract the most deer, and in locations where hard mast is available.

Manistee County has more fertile soils, milder winters, more acres in agricultural use than its northern neighbors, and therefore has a larger and more productive deer herd. Antlerless deer licenses are offered for private lands only in Manistee County in 2006. The number of antlerless deer licenses has been reduced since 2005, because the population in this DMU has dropped below its management goal. The buck harvest is expected to be similar to last year with the best hunting opportunities being on private land. State and federal lands are extensive in this county and can also provide good hunting opportunities where natural foods are present. This year, acorn production is more limited in Manistee County than it was in 2005. However, antler development in 2006 should exceed what was seen in 2005. Similar to northern counties, best hunting

opportunities will be on private lands near farm fields and orchards, and in forested locations where hard mast is available.

Deer survival last winter was above average for the central counties (Osceola, Lake, Wexford, Missaukee, and Mason Counties). Mild winter conditions coupled with a smaller deer population and a very large acorn crop brought deer through the winter in very good condition. Fawn production in the spring of 2006 appears to be very good with many twins reported. Antler development appears to be a little better than last year. This year's acorn crop is much less than last year. Some red oaks and some pin oaks have a few acorns, and probably will not last long into the fall. The locations of any producing trees are very scattered. Beech trees have a very abundant crop. There are a few wild apples in some places but some trees have very few to none. The corn crop will most likely be chopped or harvested by the opening of the firearm season.

The deer population in Osceola County is about the same as last fall. The fall 2005 buck harvest and reported car/deer accidents were down slightly from the previous year. Deer numbers continue to be low on public land with deer numbers on private land variable. The buck harvest for 2006 is expected to be about the same with the antlerless harvest being lower, due to a reduced number of antlerless deer licenses being available in 2006.

In Lake County, the deer population continues to be below goal. Deer numbers are increasing slowly, despite having no firearm antlerless permits in 2005. The 2005 buck harvest and reported car/deer accidents were up slightly. Deer numbers on public land remain low. Fawn production has been good this spring so hunters should see a few more deer than last year. The buck harvest for 2006 is expected to be up slightly. There were no antlerless deer licenses issued for Lake County this year.

In Missaukee County, the deer population remains below goal. The 2005 buck harvest continued to drop. Reported car/deer accidents for 2005 were up, but the results of the 2005 fall shining routes showed the estimated deer population down dramatically. The buck harvest is expected to be about the same as last year. There will be fewer antlerless deer harvested as there was a decrease in antlerless deer licenses available for 2006.

In Mason County, deer numbers will be about the same as last year. With lower deer numbers than in previous years, deer numbers are spotty on private land. Some private landowners report less deer while some claim no change or more deer. There has been a very good fawn crop there this year. Deer numbers remain low on public land. The 2005 reported buck harvest was up but other indicators, reported car/deer accidents and shining routes indicated deer populations were down for 2005. The buck harvest and antlerless harvest should be about the same this fall.

In Wexford County, the deer population will be up slightly from 2005, but remains well below goal. The 2005 buck harvest and reported car/deer accidents dropped from 2004. Deer numbers remain low on public land. The buck harvest for 2006 should be up slightly. There are no antlerless deer licenses available for Wexford County again this fall.

In the southern counties, Oceana, Newaygo, and Mecosta, there will be no antlerless deer licenses available for public land. Both red and white acorns are spotty, with the white oaks seeming to have small nuts this year. Beechnuts are abundant. Wild apple trees have about average fruit crops. Grey dogwood, elderberry, and autumn olive berries are average. Blackberry and black cherry production is poor this year. Thornapples seem to be producing above average crops. Abundant July rains kept the wooded vegetation lush and green all summer.

In Oceana County, deer numbers have been declining slightly during the past five years. The DMU is slightly below goal. Crop damage complaints are down 20 percent from last year. Deer are well distributed throughout the county. The interface of orchards and vegetable crop fields with forests will provide the best hunting. This type of habitat is scattered in all townships of the county except the extreme southeast corner, which is primarily forested and federally owned.

In Newaygo County, deer numbers have been steady or declining slightly for the past three years. The county is "at goal" overall, however the distribution is not uniform. Biologists received 10 percent fewer crop damage complaints than last year. The best hunting will be found in the southern third of the county, roughly between Grant and Fremont. This area contains most of the agriculture in the county. The forested portion of the county along the M-37 corridor has sandy soils and much of the land is in federal ownership. This area does not hold as many deer as the southern portion, but hunters should see more does as antlerless harvest has been restricted to private lands.

Deer numbers in Mecosta County are still above goal. The harvest, both bucks and antlerless deer, has declined gradually for the last five years, with the 2005 harvest numbers well below 2004. Despite this downward trend, this DMU still has a high deer population. Crop damage complaints are similar or a bit higher than in 2005. Hunters on private land are being encouraged to harvest antlerless deer. The highest numbers of deer reside along the M-66 corridor in the east portion of the county. The lowest numbers are on the west edge of the county. There are almost 13,000 acres of state game area open to public hunting in Mecosta County. These areas have had many timber regeneration cuttings and other habitat improvement practices completed in the last few years and provide excellent hunting opportunities. Camping is permitted during the fall with the posting of a Free Camping Permit. Hunters using these lands should concentrate along young stands of aspen and wetland areas. Much of the area has been closed to motor vehicles and provides wonderful walk-in hunting for those willing to make the effort.

Unit Biologists:

Mason, Lake, Osceola, Wexford, and Missaukee Counties:

Larry Smith, 231-745-4651

Oceana, Newaygo, and Mecosta Counties:

Jeff Greene, 231-832-5520

Manistee, Benzie, Leelanau, Grand Traverse, and Kalkaska Counties:

Rich Earle, 231-922-5280

SOUTHERN LOWER PENINSULA (SLP)

The southern Michigan deer herd appears to be stabilizing in some areas, and 2006 deer hunters should see deer numbers and deer harvest similar to 2005. However, the 2006 herd remains above the desired levels in most areas, and the number of deer in much of southern Michigan is exceeding public tolerance for damage. The DNR is responding to concerns of too many deer in this part of the state with significant numbers of antlerless deer licenses for hunting on private lands. The SLP should produce some of the best white-tailed deer hunting in the nation for both antlered and antlerless deer. With landowner permission, hunting in or near standing corn can be productive. Sixteen counties are open in the SLP to the late antlerless only firearm season this year. Check the 2006 Hunting and Trapping Guide for the open counties.

SAGINAW BAY MANAGEMENT UNIT (SBMU)

Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Sanilac, and Tuscola Counties

Tim Reis, Supervisor: 989-684-9141

In the SBMU, the highest deer densities will be found in Clare, Gladwin, and Arenac counties. Public land hunters will find the greatest hunting opportunities in these northern counties. Deer numbers in the Thumb-area remain above goal and should provide good hunting this firearm season. Deer densities in Bay, Saginaw, Isabella, and Midland counties remain near population goals.

Deer hunting on public lands of the Shiawassee Flats in Saginaw County is by permit only. For information about deer hunting on the Shiawassee River State Game Area, call the St. Charles Field Office, at 989-865-6211; and for information about hunting opportunities on the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, call the refuge headquarters, at 989-777-5930.

Deer population levels remain at or slightly above goal in Arenac and Gladwin Counties, while numbers are slightly above the desired level in portions of Clare County. Noticeable differences in the distribution of deer can be observed on private vs. state lands. Hunters should expect a similar harvest as experienced during the 2005 season.

Mast crops appear spotty throughout the area. Areas with good beechnuts and acorns will likely concentrate deer and improve hunters' odds.

An average fawn crop was observed this summer. However, exceptional fawn recruitment in 2005 may result in a greater harvest of yearling deer this fall.

Deer populations in Midland, Isabella, Saginaw, and Bay counties are at or above goal. Antlerless licenses have been reduced in Isabella and Midland counties. Private land licenses for Midland County could possibly sell out.

Mast production is good this year and should be sufficient to provide for deer in forested areas.

There are slightly more deer on the Shiawassee Flats this hunting season compared to last year and the population is at goal. Most of the crops should be harvested by the

firearm opener. Hunters should find deer in permanent cover. Acorn production appears very good, as does apple production.

Fawn recruitment was very good in 2005 and should result in good numbers of yearling deer this season.

Firearm deer hunting at the Shiawassee River State Game Area is by pre-registered hunts, as they have been in the past.

The Thumb-area will have an abundance of deer again this fall. Huron, Sanilac, and Tuscola Counties will have deer numbers very similar to last year. Antlerless license quotas are unchanged; however, leftover public land antlerless licenses will be available for the first time in several years. Sanilac and Tuscola Counties will be open to the late antlerless season again this year, but Huron County will not have a late antlerless season.

Normal to above normal numbers of fawns were observed this summer. Many sets of triplets were observed, which indicates that there is a strong potential for the herd to grow.

Like 2005, unseasonably warm weather this summer will result in an early corn harvest. Most, if not all, of the corn will be gone by November 15. This will likely concentrate deer into brush and forest areas where deer will find a bumper crop of acorns, apples, and other natural foods.

Deer hunters are encouraged to shoot adult does in all of the Thumb counties to assist in maintaining a healthy deer herd in balance with the habitat.

Unit Biologists:

Clare, Gladwin, and Arenac Counties:

Richard Shellenbarger, 989-426-9205, Ext 7630

Isabella, Midland, Bay, and Saginaw Counties:

Adam Bump, 989-684-9141

Shiawassee River State Game Area (Saginaw County):

Barbara Avers, 989-865-6211

Huron, Tuscola, and Sanilac Counties:

Arnie Karr, 989-872-5300

SOUTHEAST MANAGEMENT UNIT (SEMU)

Lapeer, Macomb, Genesee, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, and Wayne counties

Tim Payne, Supervisor: 248-359-9040

Our goal in deer management is to maintain a quality, healthy herd that is in balance with the habitat. Agriculture predominates in the outer areas of Monroe, St. Clair, Lapeer, and Genesee counties, with the Tri- County and Flint area being heavily developed. Between these areas and in and around suburbs, are pockets of habitat where deer do survive. Most of these areas are not opened to hunting by local ordinances; however, those that are can provide good opportunity. Throughout the

management unit, deer are in good physical condition with good fawning rates observed. Winter conditions rarely affect deer within the unit.

There is a good production of nut and fruit bearing trees and shrubs.

Deer in Macomb and St. Clair Counties appeared to have over-wintered in good shape due to the abundance of natural food and milder winter conditions. Although the spring was somewhat cool, it did not appear to impact productivity; in fact, expect to see more fawns in 2006. With another exceptional crop of nut and fruit bearing trees, and shrubs and agricultural crops, deer are headed into the 2006 season in good to excellent condition. Early fall conditions are a little wetter than in 2005, so fall crop harvest may be a little later this year.

Macomb County is primarily private land hunting with the six northern townships providing hunters with the best opportunities to see and harvest deer. To access private lands, hunters will have to spend a great deal of time making the proper contacts and checking local ordinances. Overall deer numbers in Macomb County are up slightly from 2005 with some localized higher and lower density areas.

Deer numbers in St. Clair County are expected to be a little improved over 2005. However, localized deer densities may be higher or lower than last year. Overall the highest deer densities in St. Clair County are in the northern half of the county. Buck harvest should meet or exceed the 2005 harvest. The Port Huron State Game Area and the St. Clair Flats Wildlife Area provide hunters with good public hunting opportunities and support good deer numbers

The deer population in Monroe County has been slightly below goal for the past two years. Liberal antlerless regulations in recent years have brought the deer herd closer to the desired deer population goal. Due to the dry fall conditions and early plantings, agricultural crop harvest should occur early this year. This will increase deer visibility during the firearm seasons. Overall deer numbers in Monroe County are similar to 2005.

There are limited state lands in Wayne County, so most deer hunting efforts will take place on private lands. The highest deer population exists in the southwestern portion of Wayne County. Respecting the property rights of others is the best way to ensure future hunting privileges for yourself and others. Do not hunt on lands of another without their permission. Deer population levels in Wayne County are similar to last year.

The DNR goal in Monroe and Wayne Counties is to maintain a quality herd that is in balance with the habitat to yield healthy fawns, does, and bucks.

The deer population continues to be stable in Oakland County. Fawn production appears good with most adults having twins. The highest deer population exists in the northern three tiers of townships, with highest deer numbers seen in northeast Oakland County. This is also the area of the greatest agricultural lands. Mast production is good. Much of this county is closed to firearm hunting, but archery hunting opportunities still exist, especially on private land, so be sure to check local ordinances.

Hunters who have access to private land should find good deer hunting. There are several state parks and recreation areas open to hunting, but expect high hunting pressure on public land during the first few days of the firearm season.

In Genesee County, overall deer populations are similar, slightly down from last year. However, populations remain above the long-term goal. There are no state lands in Genesee County. Deer in the county are healthy with good antler development. For those that have access to private land, hunting opportunities should be good.

The deer population in Lapeer County is stable to down slightly from last year. Fawn recruitment appears very good this year. The population is still at a level above the long-term goal. Hunting opportunity should be good for those that have access to private lands. For those who hunt public land, the Lapeer State Game Area is over 8,000 acres and supports a stable deer herd. Lapeer County has a lot of agricultural activity, and deer crop damage to farmers often occurs. The mast crop appears very good this year. The recent wet weather may delay crop harvesting. When this happens, particularly when much corn is still standing, deer hunting conditions get difficult.

Unit Biologists:

Macomb and St. Clair Counties:

Ernie Kafcas, 586-465-7214

Monroe and Wayne Counties:

Joe Robison, 734-379-9692

Oakland, Genesee, and Lapeer Counties:

Julie Oakes, 248-328-8113

SOUTH CENTRAL MANAGEMENT UNIT (SCMU)

Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Ingham, Ionia, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Montcalm, Shiawassee, and Washtenaw counties

David Dominic, Supervisor: 517-641-4903

The SCMU deer population continues to be well above desired levels due to excellent habitat, mild weather conditions, above average agricultural conditions, and parcels where hunting does not occur. Weather conditions this past spring and summer were great for fawn survival, growth, and development and this should result in a very good recruitment year for deer. In addition to high numbers of deer throughout the region, agricultural crops are similar to or slightly less than last year's excellent production and harvest. Corn and bean progress is only slightly behind last year's growth and production, but well ahead of the five year average. A significant portion of the corn will be harvested by November 15 and an early corn harvest will concentrate deer in a more vulnerable forested and brushy habitat. Deer harvest should be similar to last year or increased due to population size and lack of escape cover provided by the standing corn.

Fruit crops suffered a slight setback with the August 23 storms, but those that were not affected are doing extremely well. Wild apples are doing great across the management unit. The expected buck and antlerless harvest should be similar to or slightly more

than the 2005 season; however local crop harvest, hunter pressure, and weather may influence hunting conditions and overall harvest rates.

The counties with the highest deer populations are Montcalm, Jackson, Ionia, and Gratiot. An adequate quota for private land antlerless deer licenses has been established in hopes of lowering the deer populations in problem areas. The goal is to lower the deer population throughout most of the SCMU and private land access is the key to being successful. Hunters need an early start to scouting and acquiring access to these lands. A major change in regulations for 2006 is that hunters are limited to three private land antlerless deer licenses, of which no more than two may be purchased for Zones 1 and 2 combined.

Hunters are encouraged to use antlerless licenses to harvest deer in all seasons, including the late firearm antlerless season on private land, which will be open in five of our twelve counties; Hillsdale, Ionia, Jackson, Lenawee, and Washtenaw. During this season, only antlerless deer on private lands may be taken with a firearm. Permission is required from the landowner or leaseholder, so obtaining this early will be to your advantage. Remember, archery season is also open during the late firearm antlerless season.

Hunters are encouraged to have their deer checked at one of the many Deer Check Stations throughout the state. A Michigan Deer Cooperator patch will be given to hunters that participate. Antlerless deer are of special interest.

Unit Biologists:

Eaton, Ionia, and Montcalm Counties:

John Niewoonder, 616-794-2658

Clinton, Gratiot, Ingham, Livingston, and Shiawassee Counties:

Earl Flegler, 517-373-9358

Jackson, Hillsdale, Lenawee, and Washtenaw Counties:

Vacant, 517-522-4097

Southwestern Management Unit (SWMU)

Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, St. Joseph, and Van Buren counties

Sara Schaefer, Supervisor: 269-685-6851

Deer populations remain generally stable in the unit, but most counties have deer populations above established goals. Deer numbers continue to be very high in Barry, Calhoun, and Kent Counties, especially on private lands. Deer are becoming increasingly numerous in suburban and residential habitat areas throughout southwestern Michigan. Legal deer hunting is an important aspect of deer management in these areas.

Crop harvest is projected to be at or slightly behind schedule this year due to cooler, wetter summer weather in most of the southwest. Acorn and soft mast production appears to be average heading into the fall season. As a result, deer distribution across

the landscape and among habitats will likely be variable. Deer should continue to be in excellent physical condition.

Antlerless licenses are allocated by quotas in all the southwest DMUs, and all units have private land antlerless deer licenses. However, in 2006, hunters may purchase no more than three private land antlerless licenses. In most southwest DMUs, there is no minimum acreage requirement. The exception is Muskegon County, where hunters may purchase no more than two private land antlerless licenses and must obtain permission from landowners having access to 40 or more contiguous acres of hunting property. Hunters are reminded that Branch, St. Joseph, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Barry, Kent, and Ottawa Counties are all open for the late firearm antlerless season, and are urged to take advantage of private land hunting opportunities in these counties.

2005 was an average harvest year throughout most of the southwest. In areas where deer populations remain above goal, the harvest of adult antlerless deer is an important part of responsible deer population management. Average fawn production in 2005 should also result in consistent numbers of yearling bucks in most units. Landowners and hunters both play a critical role in deer management. Working together we can support responsible antlerless deer harvest and reduce ecological damage, economic losses, and social concerns in areas with an over abundant deer herd. Hunters can contribute to Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger to process wild game for local families in need.

Access to private land is an important part of successful deer hunting and management in southwestern Michigan. Individual hunters can play important roles in maintaining hunting access. Please remember that courtesy, safety, and early pre-season contact with landowners are all vital parts of securing access to private hunting lands.

Unit Biologists:

Allegan, Berrien, Branch, Cass, St. Joseph, Kalamazoo (south), and Van Buren Counties:

Steve Chadwick, 269-685-6851

Allegan and Van Buren Counties:

John Lerg, 269-685-6851

Barry, Calhoun, and Kalamazoo (north) Counties:

Christine Hanaburgh, 269-795-3280

Kent, Muskegon, and Ottawa Counties:

Nik Kalejs, 231-788-5055