

# 2010 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS

## THE STATEWIDE FORECAST

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### Statewide

Deer are not evenly distributed across the state. There are considerable differences in habitat and deer numbers across Michigan's three regions; the Upper Peninsula (UP), Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP), and Southern Lower Peninsula (SLP). In addition to this regional variability, every year hunters only a few miles apart have very different experiences observing and harvesting deer. For those looking for a place to hunt, there is no substitute for personally scouting areas in advance of a hunting trip. Maps and computer-based tools are also increasingly available to narrow in on the best locations to focus scouting efforts, including the new Mi-HUNT interactive web application available at [www.michigan.gov/mihunt](http://www.michigan.gov/mihunt). With preparation, attention to safety, and awareness of current hunting regulations, hunters can be ready to head into the field to enjoy the 86<sup>th</sup> modern Michigan deer season.

Deer populations in both northern regions have come through a mild 2009-2010 winter, but are still recovering from two relatively severe prior winters. All indications point to deer populations being mostly below goal in the UP, at or below goal in the western portion of the NLP, and above goal throughout nearly all of the SLP. Within the eastern portion of the NLP, bovine tuberculosis (TB) prevalence continues to show a declining trend over the long-term, but no detectable change has occurred over the previous five years. Goals and hunting regulations in the eastern NLP are therefore driven more by the objective to continue to reduce TB prevalence than by numbers of deer in this region. In many units within the UP and NLP, indications are that there is an overabundance of deer on private land, but lower than desired populations on public land. Special antlerless seasons and private land license quotas are used in some units to target these numbers on private land even if abundant sign and sightings do not occur on public land. Additional details regarding regional deer trends are provided below.

An important change in deer hunting regulations for 2010 is the modification to crossbow regulations. Crossbows are now legal to use:

- During any season in which a firearm may be used, for both big and small game, except that deer hunters in the Upper Peninsula (UP) may not use a crossbow during the Dec. 3-12 muzzleloader season without a disability permit.
- By anyone 10 years of age or older throughout the archery deer season in the Lower Peninsula.
- By any hunter age 10 and older during the Oct. 1-Nov. 14 archery deer season in the UP.
- By any hunter who has obtained a crossbow permit because of a disability, including within the Dec. 1-Jan. 1 archery season and Dec. 3-12 muzzleloader season in the UP.

A free crossbow stamp, available from all license agents or online by following the "Hunting and Fishing Licenses" link at [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting), is required in addition to a valid hunting

license. From that page, hunters may also find more information on crossbows under the “Hot Hunting Topics” section.

Hunters must be aware that it is illegal to hunt deer over bait throughout the Lower Peninsula. Chronic wasting disease (CWD), an always fatal neurological disease of deer and elk, was confirmed in a privately-owned cervid (deer) facility in Kent County in August of 2008. In 2002, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) and Michigan Department of Agriculture adopted the *Michigan Surveillance and Response Plan for Chronic Wasting Disease of Free-Ranging and Privately-Owned Cervids*. The CWD plan requires a ban on all feeding and baiting of cervids within the peninsula where CWD is documented. This baiting ban is a prudent measure to help prevent the potential spread of CWD. The DNRE is continuing heightened surveillance for CWD in Kent County. All deer harvested in the nine-township CWD surveillance area must be taken to a DNRE check station and have the deer head submitted for testing.

Those hunting within the UP and the multi-county Deer Management Unit (DMU) 487 in the bovine tuberculosis (TB) zone must decide, before purchasing their deer license, if they wish the opportunity to take one or two antlered deer. Those desiring the opportunity to shoot two bucks must purchase a combination license. Both bucks have antler point restrictions. One buck must have one antler with at least three (3) antler points; the other buck must have one antler with at least four (4) antler points. Those choosing to purchase a firearm deer license and/or an archery deer license are limited to taking only one buck from within these areas during all seasons combined. Within most of the areas, a deer must have just one antler three (3) or more inches in length, but point restrictions remain in place for some individual DMUs as well. These include DMU 117 (Drummond Island) and DMU 122 (southern Iron County, along the Wisconsin border) in the UP, and one small DMU (DMU135 in Iosco County) in the TB zone. In DMU 117, bucks must have at least one forked antler. In DMU 122, bucks must have at least one three-point antler. And in DMU 135, bucks must have at least one forked antler to be legal. Finally, within DMU 487 ONLY, hunters may harvest an antlerless deer with a firearm or combination license within the Nov. 15-30 firearm season or the Dec. 10-19 muzzleloader season. See the 2010 Hunting and Trapping Digest at [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting) for additional information on these regulations.

Hunters should also keep in mind that reductions in funding have forced the DNRE to operate a reduced number of deer check stations with limited dates and times of operation for the past few seasons. For a list of deer check stations operating Nov.15-24 and Nov. 29-30 during the 2010 Regular Deer Firearm Season, please visit [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting). During all other deer seasons, deer can be checked at the DNRE Operations Service Centers (OSC) 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday (except state holidays), or by appointment. In the nine-township CWD surveillance zone in Kent County, where deer check is mandatory, there will be several locations open for deer check throughout the deer seasons.

Finally, hunters are reminded that private land antlerless licenses in some areas in the Lower Peninsula are available only through multi-county DMUs. This includes DMUs 486 (most of southern Michigan except Kent, St. Clair, Macomb, Wayne, and Monroe Counties) and 487 (Presque Isle, Montmorency, Alpena, Oscoda, Alcona, and Iosco Counties). Please refer to the 2010 Hunting and Trapping Digest, available at DNRE OSCs, license vendors, and online at [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting), for a map of these and other DMUs.

## Upper Peninsula

The 2009-2010 winter was significantly milder than the previous two winters, leading to a reduction in over-winter mortality. Deer sightings should be increased throughout much of the UP due to increased adult and fawn survival, but many areas still remain below goal. Antlered buck numbers should be similar to last year, though the 2010 increase in fawn production should lead to greater antlered buck numbers in 2011. Considering the prior two winters' negative impacts on the deer herd, fewer antlerless tags were made available for this fall. Antlerless permits are only available in units covering Crystal Falls, Menominee, Norway, Gladstone, Drummond Island, and LaBranche counties for 2010. The buck hunting regulations established in 2008 remain in effect for 2010. Please refer to the 2010 Hunting and Trapping Digest, available at DNRE OSCs, license vendors, and online at [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting), for a map of DMUs and other regulations details.

The production of mast (fruit and nuts) in the UP appears to be good this year. The plentiful mast, where available, will help concentrate deer and provide excellent nutrition for the upcoming winter. Hunters targeting these areas should have good success. The largest bucks (heaviest and largest antlers) typically come from agricultural areas, but nice bucks are also taken from forested areas where access is limited and they have an opportunity to grow older.

More deer will be found in the Southern UP near Lake Michigan, with fewer in the Northern UP near Lake Superior. Distribution of deer will not be uniform with agricultural areas having higher deer densities, and public land and heavily forested areas containing fewer deer than the average for these areas. In general, hunters should expect to see more deer than last season. However, the increase will be comprised primarily of fawns.

### **Northern Lower Peninsula**

Remember, baiting is not allowed throughout the NLP. Buck harvest regulations have changed in DMU 487. Within DMU 487 ONLY, hunters may harvest an antlerless deer with a firearm or combination license within the Nov. 15-30 firearm season or the Dec. 10-19 muzzleloader season. Please refer to the 2010 Hunting and Trapping Digest, available at DNRE OSCs, license vendors, and online at [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting), for a map of DMUs and other regulations details.

The deer population for the NLP is expected to be slightly higher than in the last few years. The winter was less harsh than the previous two and over-winter mortalities were not significant. Deer in the western NLP are at or slightly below goal, while management in the eastern LP is largely driven by the need to address the persistence of TB. The number of antlerless deer licenses has been increased in eastern NLP multi-unit area DMU 487, while no antlerless permits were made available in three counties (Cheboygan, Otsego, and Kalkaska).

Hard mast production is reportedly strong in much of the NLP. In agricultural areas, the majority of crops should be harvested well before modern firearm season, unlike last year when standing corn offered protective cover for deer. This should result in increased visibility of deer in areas dominated by agriculture and nearby forested habitat.

Bovine tuberculosis continues to be a concern in the northeast corner of the NLP. Ongoing TB management efforts require a large sample of deer heads from northeast Michigan to assess the distribution and rate of infection of this disease. The DNRE is operating under reduced deer check station hours and staffing in 2010 due to budget shortfalls. Staffing levels and hours will be similar to last year, so patience may be necessary when checking deer due to long lines. Slow, but important progress is being made in the effort to control TB in deer and it is important for hunters to continue to observe the ban on baiting and feeding and to harvest at least as many antlerless deer as bucks.

## **Southern Lower Peninsula**

Remember, baiting is not allowed throughout the SLP.

The deer population in southern Michigan is expected to be similar to the last few years. Abundant food and cover in the form of agricultural crops and scattered swamps and woodlots provide very good habitat across the southern Michigan landscape. This high quality habitat, combined with relatively mild winter conditions, results in an abundant and productive deer population. Deer populations generally exceed DNRE goals, and fawns generally come in sets of twins and triplets. High numbers of antlerless permits are available again this year with the continued flexibility to use private land permits throughout most of the multi-county DMU 486 in the SLP. Please refer to the 2010 Hunting and Trapping Digest, available at DNRE OSCs, license vendors, and online at [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting), for a map of this and other DMUs. Hunters are encouraged to harvest antlerless deer, especially on private land, to bring populations closer to goal and to help address concerns of excessive crop damage and deer-vehicle collisions.

The amount of corn standing in the SLP always impacts deer hunting. An abnormal amount of corn was standing at the beginning of the firearm season in 2009. This had a negative impact on deer sightings and harvest. Conversely, the majority of crops should be harvested well before the gun season in 2010. Deer should be more visible than last year and, barring poor weather, harvest numbers should rebound. Hunters should focus their efforts on woodlots and swamps as the corn harvest progresses.

## **Local Management Unit Contacts**

Additional information on expectations and hunting conditions may be available from field staff throughout the state. Hunters are reminded, however, that reductions in funding have left many Management Units short-staffed, creating difficulties in responding to requests for detailed information. Please remember all staff are working hard in the field to manage wildlife habitats and populations.

### **WESTERN UPPER PENINSULA MANAGEMENT UNIT**

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

Bob Doepker: 906-228-6561

### **EASTERN UPPER PENINSULA MANAGEMENT UNIT**

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

Terry Minzey: 906-293-5131

### **NORTHWESTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT**

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

231-775-9727

### **NORTHEASTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT**

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

Tim Reis: 989-732-3541

### **SAGINAW BAY MANAGEMENT UNIT**

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

Rex Ainslie: 989-684-9141

### **SOUTHWESTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT**

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

Sara Schaefer: 269-685-6851

### **SOUTH CENTRAL MANAGEMENT UNIT**

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

Rex Ainslie: 517-641-4903

### **SOUTHEASTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT**

Genesee, Lapeer, St. Clair, Oakland, Macomb, Wayne, Monroe Counties

Tim Payne: 248-359-9040