

Arkansas Deer History



White-tailed Deer in Arkansas: Where have we come from with proper management?

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How important is deer hunting in Arkansas?

282,000 deer hunters (resident and nonresidents).

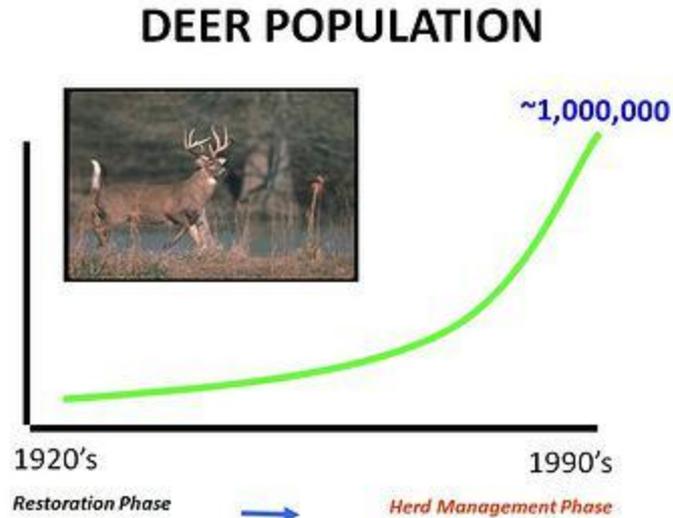
\$373 million in expenditures.

Arkansas' State Mammal

Overall Deer resources are very important to the State of Arkansas.

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This slide graphically demonstrates the deer herd growth, over time. Market hunting was alive and well in the 1920s. In addition, habitat destruction was increasing with the construction of railroad lines, logging, agricultural explosion, and urban developments.



The first organized effort to regulate hunting was in 1916 with a season of 61 days for deer, turkeys, and bear. In 1916, the deer population was estimated to be only 2000 statewide.

The deer population continued to decline. By 1930, the Arkansas deer population was estimated 500 animals statewide.

The turning point was the establishing federal game refuges in 1926 and state game refuges in 1927. Wildlife could live in safety, and acted as a source for restocking. By 1950, deer were reestablished in 71 of the state's 75 counties and population estimated at 31,500. By 1975, estimated 450,000 deer; 1985 – 500,000. Today we estimate approximately 1 million deer, but we must be honest and state this is strictly an estimate.

Growing a deer is easy, protect the females, managing a deer herd is more difficult. Today, we are in the herd management phase. Management strategies are focused on maintaining a deer herd that is well balanced and productive while trying to reach hunter desires.

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Statewide Deer Harvest (1938-2012)

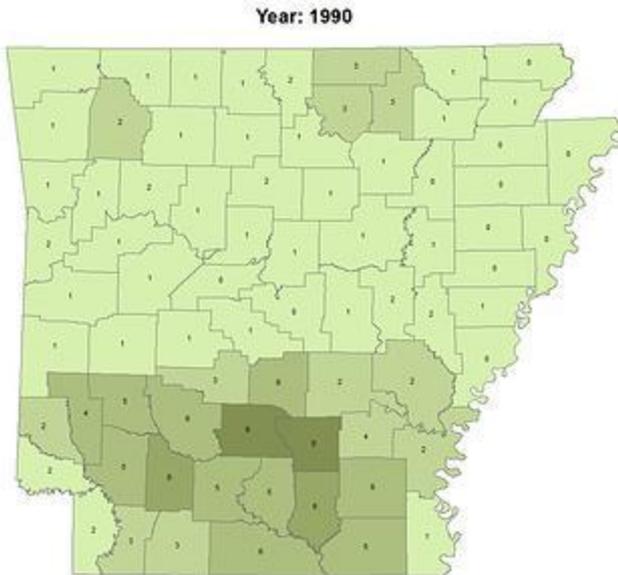


These are actual harvest figures (number of deer checked) by year. Notice we have harvest data going back to 1938. This upward trend line very closely following the previous graph and accurately represents our increased deer population over time. Point out that this past year's harvest (2012) was a record year with slightly over 212K deer being checked.

The decline in 2004 was a result in conservative harvest regulations and reduced deer population. Previous liberal harvest strategies, primarily in the Ozarks, coupled with a conservative harvest strategy resulted in a sharp decline in harvested deer in 2004. Since the low of 108K deer being checked, we have gradually increased with a stair-step strategy of liberalizing harvest strategies.

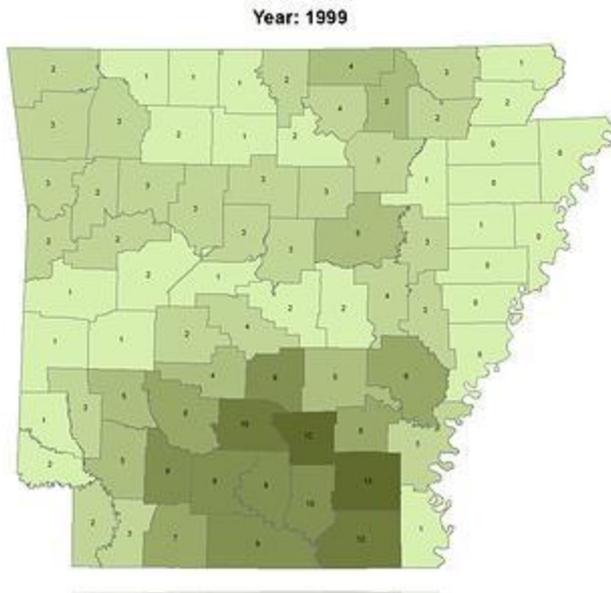
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This slide graphically demonstrates harvest density (deer/sq. mile) by county. The year is 1990, and the total deer harvest was 90,910. The harvest density focused on south Arkansas with limited harvest taking place in north Arkansas. Dallas county harvested 9 deer per square mile. Overall, Arkansas' deer hunting centered on south Arkansas. Our statewide deer harvest was completely driven by south Arkansas.

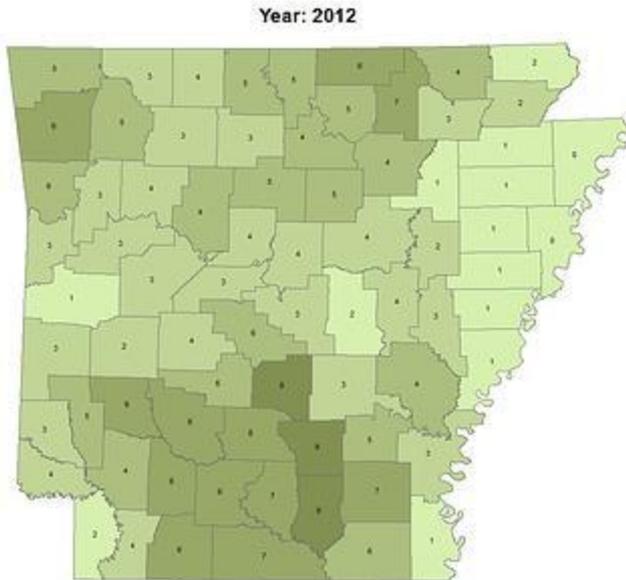


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1999 was the previous record harvest of 194,687 deer. One will notice that the deer harvest density is highly focused on south Arkansas, but with increase harvest rates starting to appear in north Arkansas. Drew county harvested 13 deer/sq mile. At this time bag limits were liberalized. This was also the year following the implementation of the 3-point rule statewide in 1998.



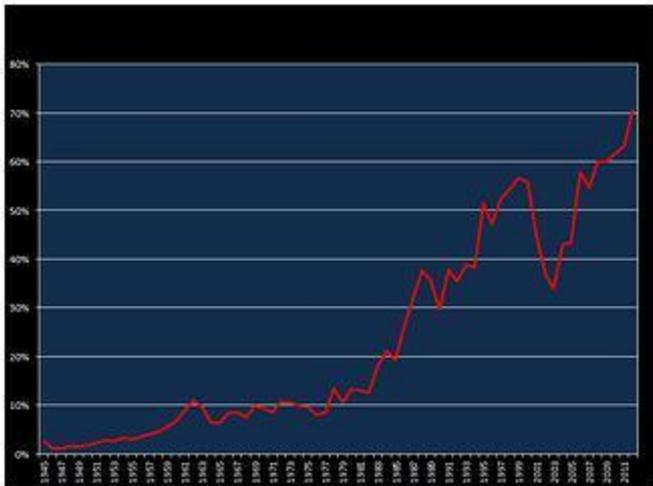
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This slide demonstrates the 2012 deer harvest density by county. The item I want to point out is that harvest densities for north Arkansas. Notice that some counties in north Arkansas harvest at the same rate, or higher, than counties in south Arkansas. Washington, Fulton, and Sharp counties are comparable to Drew, Ashley, Ouachita, and Union counties. Deer harvest today is not focused on south Arkansas, but statewide, with the exception of some delta counties in eastern Arkansas and Scott county in the Ouachitas. Deer populations have increased, deer hunting opportunities have increased, and hunters should be enjoying the resource.

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Hunter Success Rates (1945-2012)



This slide shows the increase in deer harvest success rates as a reflection of the number of hunting licenses purchased divided by the total number of deer harvested for each year. Today we have nearly 70% chance of harvesting a deer compared to 3% in 1945. This relates back to season structure, population, and opportunity.

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Statewide Harvest Sex Ratios
(2000-2012)



This slide demonstrates our harvest ratios. In 2003, we harvested nearly 2.5 bucks for every one doe. Since that time, we have been able to liberalize the female harvest to ensure proper harvest of both males and females. Buck harvest rates, compared to females, can be a problem with such a demand placed on the buck segment. The AGFC's Deer Program focuses on a "Total Deer Herd Management" approach. We do place a great degree of emphases on the buck segment (i.e. 3-point rule, age structure, etc), but our approach focuses on the entire population. We should place the same amount of emphases on the females as we do the males. The males are an over exploited segment of the herd in Arkansas, but we have made great advances in balances harvest sex ratios that ensure a healthy, productive, balanced, deer herd.

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Summary Points

We have come a long way from the days of market hunting.

Deer herd has expanded in all counties providing for liberal harvest strategies in nearly every part of the state.

Management efforts will continue to ensure herd is fully productive, balanced, and free of disease.

Hunting will continue being the primary tool for managing our deer population.

The last point is crucial in that hunters are the biggest, most important tool in the toolbox regarding deer management. Hunters are the ones in the field, making the decision on which deer to harvest and being wise stewards of the resource.