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## Quality deer management is good for deer, hunters

IN RECENT YEARS, there has been increased interest in the concept of antler restriction regulations for quality deer management purposes in many states. E.W. Grimes, director and president of the Maryland State Chapter of Quality Deer Management Association thinks hunters harvest too many bucks before their prime in Maryland.

"We have a relatively healthy deer herd; we just don't have enough yearling bucks getting into the next age class and every hunter that harvests a whitetail deer is making a management decision," Grimes said. "There is nothing wrong with the current system of deer management. We are just extending the quality of the system up."

Grimes points to the Maryland Annual Deer Report on the antlered deer harvest in Frederick County during the 2008-2009 hunting season. "Of the 2,853 antlered deer checked in, approximately 75 percent were yearling buck," Grimes said.

His organization would like to see the yearling buck harvest in Maryland decrease from 75 percent to 45 percent. A yearling antlered deer is approximately 1½ years old and typically has an antler spread of less than 14 inches.

The Maryland State Chapter of QDMA advocates for the "15-inch rule" as the best way for hunters to identify adult male white-tailed deer in the field.

A deer's ears consistently measure between 14½ and 15 inches. The 15-inch rule is a reliable method that uses the width of a deer's ears as a measurement system when the deer is looking toward the hunter. If the deer offers only a side view, the length of the antler's main beam can identify an adult white-tailed male deer. If the main beam extends beyond the front of the eye,



Photo illustration by Dan Neuland

The Maryland State Chapter of Quality Deer Management Association advocates for the "15-inch rule" as the best way for hunters to identify adult male white-tailed deer in the field. Voluntarily following this rule would increase the quality of the deer herd in Maryland.



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### For information on quality deer management:

- Maryland State Chapter QDMA – [www.marylandqdma.com](http://www.marylandqdma.com)
- 2008-2009 Deer Project Annual Report – [www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/deerhunting.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/deerhunting.asp)

the deer is at least 2½ years old. Both of these approaches to identifying adult deer are not 100 percent accurate; but, they are dependable and more accurate and faster than counting the number of antler points.

Currently, the chapter supports voluntary quality deer management in Maryland. "If this was mandated, there would be a lot of unhappy hunters," Grimes said.

## Maryland's 'good deer herd'

Brian Eyler, Deer Project

"We have a really good deer herd in Maryland as it is ... great soils, good genetics, and a good sex ratio/age structure," Eyler said. "Probably the biggest concern we have is potentially alienating hunters opposed to such regulations. Basically, we need all of the deer hunters we can get, and it's a question of whether an antler restriction regulation is worth losing any hunters over."

Interestingly, for the first time, DNR staff collected outside antler-spread measurements for yearling and adult white-tailed deer during the 2008-2009 hunting season. Preliminary results revealed that 94 percent of yearling male deer in Maryland have maximum outside antler spreads of less than 14 inches. Conversely, 78 percent of adult (2½ plus years) male white-tailed deer

in Maryland have outside antler spreads 14 inches or greater. DNR will continue to collect antler spread measurements in coming years to evaluate long-term trends. This data will be useful in the future if DNR considers implementing antler restriction regulations for quality deer management purposes.

Under traditional deer management, bucks of any age or antler quality may be harvested and antlerless deer harvest is regulated to produce an abundant deer herd and/or to maximize total buck harvest. Under this approach, most

## Improving deer herds

Quality deer management is a management philosophy/practice that unites landowners, hunters and resource managers in a common goal of producing healthy deer herds with balanced adult sex ratios and age structures. It typically involves protecting young bucks while harvesting an appropriate number of female deer to maintain herds within existing environmental and social constraints.

The QDMA's primary focus has always been on education, research and on-the-ground deer management. This is evident by the rapidly increasing implementation of quality deer management practices on both private and some public lands. Maryland quality deer management co-ops formed

throughout the state are having a positive effect not only with increased hunter satisfaction but also with farmers and property owners starting to see crop yields improvements. Many landowners and hunters also receive great satisfaction from increased involvement with their deer herds that quality deer management offers.

My friend Bob Marchio is a fellow outdoors writer who lives in Hanover, Pa. Marchio explained to me that antler restrictions have been in place in Pennsylvania for three or

"We were shooting a lot of spike bucks. Now, since the antler restrictions have been in place, we are seeing bigger racks on the bucks. Basically, deer are allowed to grow a year or two older," Marchio said. "At our camp last season we harvested three racked bucks — a 10-, an eight- and a nine-pointer — with eight hunters in the field. We are still not seeing as many deer as in the past, but are seeing bigger bucks."

The Maryland State Chapter of QDMA's message to Maryland hunters is that it's your hunting area and you (the hunters) are the ones that are making decisions that will affect the future of white-tailed deer hunting in your area. This all starts with individuals voluntarily participating in quality deer management.

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