



Maryland Bag Limits

I would like to start by commending the DNR and Wildlife & Heritage Service on their deer management program. The last 10 year deer plan has put Maryland on the cutting edge of deer management. I'm looking forward to working with and using science in the next 10 year Deer Management Plan.

Hunting seasons and limited bag limits of years ago prohibited the taking of antlerless (doe) deer in order to allow for growth and expansion of restocked deer. More recent deer seasons and bag limits encourage the harvest of antlerless deer while at the same time offering much more hunting opportunities and enabling hunters to spend additional time a field.

These regulations are necessary to balance deer herds with their habitat and to manage populations. Suburban deer populations are the most difficult because of lack of hunting access.

Now that the next two years regulations and bag limits have been finalized with no major changes in Region B, however in Region A, in an effort to improve junior total bag limits, an extra day has been added to junior antlerless or antlered firearm season. Also, with a reduction of total bag limit of antlerless deer on public lands to two, it's going to be interesting to see what if any difference this will have on public land harvest totals.

Getting to the meat of this editorial, it has taken good management science to support the way the bag limits currently are. Part of the last 10 year deer plan goals was to stabilize population growth and reduce deer population as needed. Antlered harvest state wide has been stable from 2004 at 34,639, 2005 at 32,837, 2006 at 33,114 and the last 07-08 season 32,221. What about state wide antlerless harvest totals? (2004 at 59,229,

2005 at 61,215, 2006 at 58,816 and 2007 at 59,987) These harvest trends are stable because of existing regulations and bag limits. This harvest data shows that science is working. Does this mean the goals from the last 10 year deer plan have been achieved? This means we have a great start and need to continue in the right direction. Most areas still need more doe harvest to control over population and other areas to maintain population levels.

“We are not even seeing deer” or “No one needs to harvest 10 or more does” statements and others like these are what we hear at events we attend and seminars we hold. Some of the most unique ones come from chat rooms, expressing opinions and statements related to other states regarding the need to lower the buck bag limits. I would ask, where is the data and/or science that support your opinions? As far as other states, do they have an adult buck age structure in their herd and is QDM implemented there? If so why? Most the time yes, and they restrict buck harvest by age and harvest does to control their populations (science).



Public hunting areas are much harder to manage than private land. Harvest data shows state wide more antlerless deer are harvested than antlered except in Region A on public land. However the total harvest for Region A shows more antlered deer are harvested than antlerless with totals for seasons 2005-2006 at 8,559, 2006-2007 at 9,259 and 2007-2008 at 9,004. By taking a look at the yearling buck harvest data for the last 3 years, the yearling buck harvest in all seasons has been as high as 87% and low as 71% of total antlered harvest. This works out to be about 4,000 yearling bucks each year. It's not

just Region A, Region B has also showed increases in yearling harvests. It should be noted that the sample collection protocol was modified in 2006-2007 to increase the accuracy of samples. Half of the samples were collected during early muzzleloader season and half during two week firearm season. Results suggest that early-season harvest (bow and muzzleloader) contains a high percentage of yearlings being harvested.

The harvest data collected in the past years indicate that the antlerless bag limits will continue having a positive effect on managing our deer herd. At the same time, our yearling harvest percentage is and will have a negative effect on the deer herd.

Current deer seasons and bag limits encourage the harvest of antlerless (doe) deer in order to manage deer populations. These regulation and bag limits also encourage hunters (in all seasons) to be more selective when harvesting antlered deer. Is there a need to decrease bag limits antlered or antlerless? "NO"

Decreasing buck bag limit will take additional hunting opportunities away from hunters and will not effect the population management. Antlerless (doe) harvest will control populations and decreasing percentage of yearling buck harvest will improve adult sex ratio. Many



property owners, hunting leases and hunters have embraced the QDM philosophy with awesome results. Not just in the eastern shore counties but across Maryland, yes, even hunting clubs and property owners in western counties. These Marylanders are getting great satisfaction from the

increased involvement with managing their areas for the deer. What about public land hunters, how can they improve their hunting area? The message is the same,

support more QDM measures on public land. Encourage others to reduce the harvest of young bucks while continue harvesting doe. QDMA membership will help increase your knowledge of deer biology and active participation in management.

Some suggestions we may add to DNR's successful regulation and bag limits:

- **QDM program aimed at educating Maryland hunters on benefits of voluntary passing yearling bucks.**
- **In region B after harvesting two doe, the second buck harvested in all seasons has to have 15" outside spread (QDM buck).**

The take home message:

- **Support our DNR scientific management regulations and bag limits.**
- **Support voluntary restraint of harvesting yearling bucks.**
- **Support implementation of QDM practices on both public and private land.**
- **Maximize youth hunter recruitment and retention.**
- **Hunt Safe.**
- **Get a QDMA branch started in your area.**

Selected references in this article can be found in Maryland Annual Deer Report from Wildlife & Heritage Service and Quality Deer Management Association.

Sincerely,

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