



# QUALITY DEER MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 160 • 170 Whitetail Way • Bogart, GA 30622  
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Date: 7 February 2012  
To: Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service  
From: E.W. Grimes, Maryland State Chapter President  
Kip Adams, Director of Education and Outreach  
Re: Deer Management

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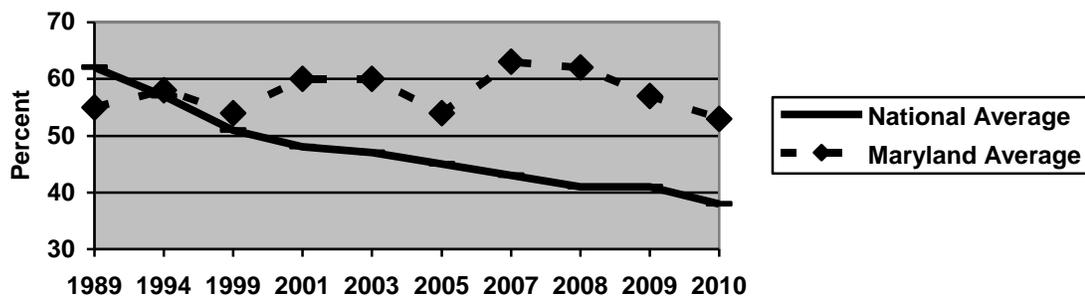
On behalf of the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) and the Maryland State Chapter we appreciate the opportunity to provide input on Maryland's 2012-13 deer season. The QDMA is an international nonprofit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to ensuring the future of white-tailed deer, wildlife habitat, and our hunting heritage. The QDMA has nearly 50,000 members nationwide and our membership includes hunters, landowners and numerous natural resource professionals.

We would like to commend the Department on many facets of your deer management program. Maryland deer seasons provide abundant recreational opportunities and our liberal bag limits provide abundant antlerless harvest opportunities. These opportunities enable hunters to spend additional time afield and are necessary to balance deer herds with their habitats and maximize youth hunter recruitment and retention.

To add to a successful deer management program, we offer the following suggestions:

- Establish regulations to protect the majority of yearling bucks in Maryland. The percentage of yearling bucks in the antlered harvest has steadily declined from a national average of 62 percent in 1989 to 38 percent in 2010 (see graph below). Unfortunately, the percentage of yearling bucks in the antlered harvest in Maryland is above the national average.

**Percent Yearling Bucks in the Antlered Harvest**



Yearling bucks can be protected through antler point or spread restrictions, earn-a-buck programs, or by numerous other techniques. With regard to antler restrictions, we prefer antler spread restrictions in Region B. Antler spread restrictions involve establishing a minimum width of spread a buck must have to be eligible for harvest. The premise of a width restriction is few yearling bucks attain an outside antler spread of more than 15-16 inches. Hunters can estimate a buck's spread by viewing where the antlers are in relation to the animal's forward pointed ears. Ear tip to tip distance is approximately 15-16 inches for northern deer and slightly less for southern deer. Therefore, if a buck's antlers are as wide

as or wider than his ears, there is a good chance he is at least 2.5 years old. The advantage of a spread restriction is it is a much better predictor of whether a buck is 1.5 or 2.5 years old or older and therefore can do a better job protecting yearlings. Disadvantages of a spread restriction include it is slightly more difficult to determine the legal status of a buck in the wild (vs. antler point restrictions), it can be more difficult for state agencies to enforce, and some mature bucks can have tall, narrow racks that are less than 16 inches wide.

In 2011, three states (Delaware, Kentucky and West Virginia) used antler spread restrictions and three more states (Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas) used antler spread as one criterion for their combination restrictions. None employed them statewide, but each used them for at least a portion of their bag limit and/or in at least one area of the state. Regardless of the strategy, the Maryland State Chapter and Branches lend our support to help the Department promote the benefits to hunters and the deer herd of protecting the majority of yearling bucks.

- Continue pursuing avenues to harvest additional antlerless deer in Region B where deer density is negatively impacting native habitat. These avenues may be additional days (longer seasons and/or additional Sundays), seasons or other innovative measures. One suggestion would be to add Sunday hunting to early Muzzleloader Season in counties that allow Sunday Deer Hunting.
- Continue seeking ways to provide additional recreational opportunities that will help meet the Department's deer management goals. One potential opportunity would be to add an early bow season in Region B where hunters were required to harvest an antlerless deer prior to harvesting an antlered buck.
- Encourage hunters and the general public to participate in educational events to increase their knowledge on deer biology and deer and habitat management. Topics such as harvesting bucks based on age or a combination of age/antler spread are advantageous to creating more knowledgeable hunters and better stewards of our natural resources. The Maryland QDMA State Chapter and Branches will conduct numerous educational seminars, workshops and field days on an annual basis.

We appreciate the good working relationship with the Department and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 deer regulations and bag limits. We look forward to discussing our suggestions with you and working on future deer issues.

Respectfully,

*E.W. Grimes*  
E.W. Grimes  
Maryland State Chapter President

*Kip Adams*  
Kip Adams  
Director of Education & Outreach



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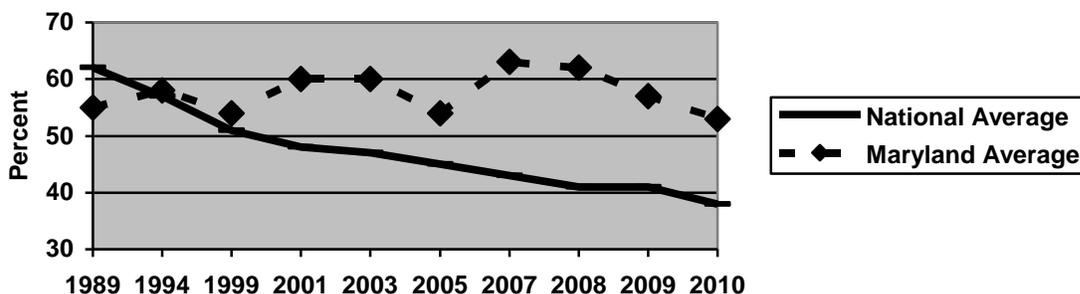
P.O. Box 160 • 170 Whitetail Way • Bogart, GA 30622  
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Date: 27 January 2012  
To: Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service  
From: A.J. Fleming, Mountain Maryland Branch President  
Kip Adams, Director of Education and Outreach  
Re: Deer Management

On behalf of the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) and the Mountain Maryland Branch we appreciate the opportunity to provide input on Maryland's 2012-13 deer season. The QDMA is an international nonprofit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to ensuring the future of white-tailed deer, wildlife habitat, and our hunting heritage. The QDMA has nearly 50,000 members nationwide and our membership includes hunters, landowners and numerous natural resource professionals.

**Purpose:** To improve the buck age structure in Region A. The percentage of yearling bucks in the antlered harvest has steadily declined from a national average of 62 percent in 1989 to 38 percent in 2010 (see graph below). Unfortunately, the percentage of yearling bucks in the antlered harvest in Maryland is above the national average. Yearling buck harvest has been especially high in Allegany and Garrett counties, and was 75 and 67 percent, respectively during the 2010-11 season. Thus, two of every three bucks in Garrett County and three of four bucks harvested in Allegany County were only 1.5 years old.

**Percent Yearling Bucks in the Antlered Harvest**



**Proposal:** We urge the Department to take steps to protect the majority of yearling bucks and improve the age structure of the buck population in Region A. Our Branch understands that there are different approaches to get a buck to reach his second birthday. While investigating a few such as antler point restrictions, width restrictions, and reducing the antlered bag limit, our Branch can find some merit with each option; however, after researching each management strategy there are clearly some benefits and draw backs of each.

**Antler Point Restrictions** – Antler point restrictions (APR) are a commonly-used technique and they involve establishing a minimum number of points a buck must have to be eligible for harvest.

Advantages of APRs include they are simple and easy to enforce. The disadvantage of APRs is the number of antler points is a poor predictor of animal age. Yearling bucks can have a rack ranging from short spikes to 10 or more points. Therefore it can be difficult with APRs to protect the majority of the yearling age class while still making other age classes available for harvest. Managers may unintentionally focus harvest pressure on yearlings with larger racks or protect older age classes. However, because of APRs simplicity and enforceability, they are the most common buck harvest restriction discussed and implemented by state agencies. Of the 22 states that employed antler restrictions in 2011, 15 employed APRs, and depending on the state, the number varied from one to four points on a single antler.

**Width Restrictions** – Antler spread restrictions involve establishing a minimum width of spread a buck must have to be eligible for harvest. The premise of a width restriction is few yearling bucks attain an outside antler spread of more than 15-16 inches. Hunters can estimate a buck's spread by viewing where the antlers are in relation to the animal's forward pointed ears. Ear tip to tip distance is approximately 15-16 inches for northern deer and slightly less for southern deer. Therefore, if a buck's antlers are as wide as or wider than his ears, there is a good chance he is at least 2.5 years old. The advantage of a spread restriction is it is a much better predictor of whether a buck is 1.5 or 2.5 years old or older and therefore can do a better job protecting yearlings. Disadvantages of a spread restriction include it is slightly more difficult to determine the legal status of a buck in the wild (vs. APR), it can be more difficult for state agencies to enforce, and some mature bucks can have tall, narrow racks that are less than 16 inches wide. In 2011, three states (Delaware, Kentucky and West Virginia) used antler spread restrictions and three more states (Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas) used antler spread as one criterion for their combination restrictions. None employed them statewide, but each used them for at least a portion of their bag limit and/or in at least one area of the state.

Although a very appealing quality deer management tactic, and one which would yield perhaps the quickest results, our Branch understands pitfalls of this technique as well. Clearly, the biggest benefit of this policy would be it undoubtedly would protect the vast majority of yearling bucks in Western Maryland. (That would be if all yearling bucks that had a minimum outside spread of fourteen inches or less were protected.) The biggest pitfall of this concept is the "HE" aspect. H stands for the Hunter and without an improved knowledge of whitetails the hunter has a challenging time determining a spread as the whitetail may present itself several hundred yards away. E stands for enforcement and this policy can be challenging to enforce.

**Reducing the Buck Bag Limit** – This tactic restricts the number - not the age or antler size - of bucks that get harvested. Buck bag limits are similar to what some states use to limit the antlerless harvest. Buck bag limits can be established on an area or hunter basis. For example, managers can set a limit on a county or region basis, or limit the number of bucks an individual hunter can harvest. An advantage of this technique is it can help prevent overharvest of bucks. A disadvantage is it can still allow an overharvest of yearling bucks, especially in areas with high hunter numbers.

It could be argued that this management method is more of a long term approach. Our Branch wouldn't necessarily view this (long-term) approach as being a negative concept. To counter that however; we could provide data from multiple states that have witnessed relatively short term results which seem to be holding consistent or even improving with each season under a reduced antlered bag limit management policy. This policy would potentially improve upon our existing buck herd by decreasing the number and/or percentage of the overall bucks harvested (in comparison to the bag limit of both sexes).

Clearly, one of the most appealing factors of this strategy is that it would not restrict any hunter who may be limited in terms of a physical handicap, age (be that a youth hunter or an elderly hunter) or a time restriction. In this management policy we do understand that there may be those who likely will harvest the first antlered buck available; however, we view this as a small piece of the overall puzzle and are very confident this management technique will most certainly yield, maintain, and grow results. Besides being a management technique which is potentially compatible to all hunters, benefits also include the following: over time improved buck age structure, more bucks surviving in the herd and, in conjunction with doe harvests, an improved ratio (which means a whole host of herd benefits), and finally improved hunter satisfaction.

***What Strategy Would our Branch Like to See Implemented?***

Our Branch recognizes the advantages and disadvantages of each strategy. We also recognize that hunter and landowner support is necessary for any proposal to succeed. Currently, there is more support for reducing the buck bag limit than any other option. Reducing the limit from three bucks to two bucks in Region A may be a great step toward protecting a larger proportion of the buck population and allowing hunters to witness the benefits of having more older bucks to view, photograph and hunt. This strategy may not protect the majority of yearling bucks, but it could be a valuable step in that direction.

If selected, our preference would be that both bucks must be taken with two different weapons of a hunters' choice to potentially increase the number of bucks in the population prior to the annual breeding season. However, we are aware that only eight percent of the bucks shot prior to firearms season in Garrett County are to hunters who took more than one buck, and of all the bucks shot during and after firearms season, only three percent are to hunters shooting more than one buck. One final note about this strategy is that it provides extreme flexibility by permitting hunters to have a "hunters' choice bow/early muzzleloader, ensuring hunting tradition by having a "firearm" buck as part of the harvest, and finally creating a scenario where hunters who failed to fill their antlered tag in the bow/early muzzleloader would have a second alternative with a late bow/late muzzleloader option.

***Youth Hunters*** – Our Branch is a strong advocate for youth opportunities, and would support the youth hunters' bag limit remaining at three antlered bucks. This total comes from the youth day bag limit. If the youth hunter harvests a buck on youth day, that buck will not count against his/her firearm bag limit. If that youth hunter failed to harvest an antlered buck on youth day, then he/she would still have the opportunity to harvest two antlered bucks.

We appreciate the good working relationship we have with the Department and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2012-13 deer season. We hope steps are taken to improve the age structure of the buck population in Region A and to maintain a biologically appropriate antlerless harvest. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Maryland's natural resources.

Respectfully,

*A.J. Fleming*

A.J. Fleming  
Mountain Maryland Branch President

*Kip Adams*

Kip Adams  
Director of Education & Outreach