



Illinois Department of Natural Resources

One Natural Resources Way Springfield, Illinois 62702-1271
<http://dnr.state.il.us>

Pat Quinn, Governor
Marc Miller, Director

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RESULTS FROM 2013 ONLINE ILLINOIS DEER MANAGEMENT SURVEY

IDNR constructed an online opinion survey about Illinois deer management issues and made it available so that interested persons would have an opportunity to provide input. It should be noted that participants in this survey are not representative of deer hunters (or the general public) as a whole, but will be biased toward those hunters or other constituents who are most opinionated regarding deer management.

The survey was completed by 7,477 individuals. Deer hunters comprised 96% of respondents, while non-hunters made up only 4%. Respondents were screened based on (1) whether they had attended one of the 2013 Open House meetings, and (2) whether they had completed one of the 2012 Deer Surveys administered by the Illinois Natural History Survey. Removing these individuals from the following summary prevented duplication of responses, since they had already participated in one of the input processes. This resulted in a total of 6,697 usable responses.

RESULTS FROM DEER HUNTERS

Respondent characteristics. Participating hunters were overwhelmingly male (98%) with a mean age of 50, and had a mean of 27 years of deer hunting experience. Sixty-four percent of hunters reported harvesting one or more deer during the 2012-13 Illinois deer seasons, considerably higher than the 42% success rate based on actual reported harvest for those seasons. Successful hunters also reported a higher rate of harvesting multiple deer (51%) than occurred in the statewide harvest (35%). Interestingly, 38% of hunters claimed to have harvested one or more trophy bucks (B&C or P&Y class) during their hunting careers, but 87% of those hunters indicated they did not enter any of their trophies into the record books.

Status of the herd. In spite of their high success rates, respondent hunters reported harvesting less deer (60%)

and seeing less deer (68%) than 5 years ago, and they described deer populations as "low" or "too low" (52%). However, hunters were divided as to whether current deer population goals were acceptable or not (43% "low" or "too low"; 40% "about right"; 17% "high" or "too high"). The most commonly selected reason for the decline in the deer herd was "EHD or Bluetongue" (41%), followed by "too many hunting permits issued" (36%), "loss of habitat" (29%), and "planned reduction to meet deer population goals" (27%). A plurality of hunters (48%) described the quality of deer as "average," with the remainder equally divided between below-average categories ("low" and "very low") and above-average categories ("high" and "very high"). The number one concern about the Illinois deer herd expressed by hunters was that there are not enough deer (31%), followed by "I have no concern" (20%).

Recommendations for change. By a wide margin, hunters considered the amount of disease in the deer herd and the overall health of the deer herd the most important considerations for IDNR when setting goals for the size of the deer population. Most hunters (61%) considered the current harvest sex ratios to be acceptable and recommended they remain the same, while 31% of hunters felt that female deer should make up an even higher percentage of the harvest. Likewise, 57% of hunters believed that current harvest levels were acceptable and should remain the same, with the remaining hunters relatively divided as to whether harvest should increase or decrease.

Chronic Wasting Disease. If scientists concluded that focused sharpshooting was the most effective method for controlling CWD, most hunters (61%) agreed that IDNR's sharpshooting program should stay as is or be increased. However, hunters were equally split as to whether sharpshooting actually **is** the most effective approach. In general, deer hunters say that they trust the IDNR's deer management program, that it is unacceptable to not manage CWD, and that we should use all methods necessary to manage CWD. On the other hand, they maintain that sharpshooting in known CWD locations is unacceptable and would prefer to manage CWD using only hunting. We do note, however, that there is no scientific evidence to date that any State has been successful in controlling CWD while using hunting programs as the only management tool.

RESULTS FROM NON-HUNTERS

Non-hunters that participated in the survey were generally male (76%) with a mean age of 54. They supported hunting as a population control tool (86%), and were likely to have been directly impacted by deer in the recent past. Forty-seven percent of respondents indicated damage from deer in the past 12 months, and 39% reported a deer-vehicle collision by themselves or a family member within the past 5 years.

Few non-hunters (29%) believed that the deer herd decreased during the past five years, and most (58%) described the deer population as "high" or "too high." A plurality of non-hunters (42%) believed that current deer population goals were about right. They did not place much importance on the number of deer desired by hunters, nor the number of trophy-sized bucks, as considerations when setting goals. Slightly more than half of respondents would like to see an increase in deer harvested in the future, and the #1 concern with the Illinois deer herd was "too many deer" (46%).

Compared to hunters, non-hunters believed more strongly that IDNR should use all methods necessary to manage CWD (68%), that sharpshooting was the most effective method for controlling CWD (75%), and they had a higher level of trust in the Department (79% chose "average" to "very high" trust).