



Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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Illinois Department of Natural Resources 2013 Deer Management Open House Summary

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) held five open houses from 3 June to 11 June, 2013: Barry ($n = 17$), Carterville ($n = 26$), Champaign ($n = 11$), Rockford ($n = 44$), and St. Charles ($n = 19$). Attendees were given the opportunity to identify whether they were representing deer hunters or non-hunters upon entering and then filled out the corresponding survey; a total of 105 attendees (97 hunters, 8 non-hunters) completed a survey. Given these low sample sizes, and the biases associated with hunters attending open houses, it is important to understand the following results are not representative of Illinoisans. A true measure of how Illinois hunters and non-hunters “feel” regarding IDNR deer management can only be determined based on random scientific surveys, such as those recently conducted by the Illinois Natural History Survey. The following data are based on the most interested and vocal stakeholders.

Importance of Various Factors in Setting Deer Population Goals & Agency Trust

Most hunters and non-hunters responded that the IDNR must consider the amount of disease and overall health of the deer herd when setting deer population goals. Thirty-four percent of hunters had an “average” level of trust in IDNR’s deer management program whereas 41% had a “low” to “very low” level of trust.

Perceived Local Deer Population in 2011-2012

It is a reality that statewide deer populations have been decreased from record highs, resulting in lower rates of deer-vehicle accidents and reduced hunter harvest; the majority of hunters perceived the deer population last deer season was too low. Yet when hunters were asked how they felt about the statewide deer harvest last season, 87% of hunters wanted harvest levels to stay the same or to increase, and the same percentage wanted the proportion of does in the harvest to remain the same or to increase. Respondents' desire to maintain or increase harvest is not compatible with their wish to have higher numbers of deer in the population, since high harvests will have a regulating effect on population size.

Perceived Effectiveness of IDNR CWD Management and Sharpshooting

Results of the Open House survey indicated there were competing views of CWD management; however, most hunters and non-hunters did not support sharpshooting. The majority of hunters and non-hunters favored the use of more hunters and hunting opportunities instead of sharpshooting to control the spread of CWD. Moreover, most hunters and non-hunters perceived sharpshooting any deer in known CWD locations was unacceptable. The strongest opposition to sharpshooting was reported at open houses located in counties known to be affected by CWD or adjacent counties. Stakeholders responding from open houses located in counties affected by CWD or adjacent counties were more likely to favor using existing hunting seasons alone to manage CWD, whereas hunters farthest from the CWD zone were in favor of using all methods necessary to manage CWD.

Responses from hunters and non-hunters indicated they understand CWD is a problem in the Illinois deer population. Most hunters and non-hunters agreed the disease needs to be managed, but they did not agree that sharpshooting is the answer. Hunters would like to be involved with reducing the deer population through the harvest of more deer, especially in areas that have an over-abundant population and currently restrict hunting. Hunters reported it was acceptable to add additional days to the firearms deer hunting season and to increase hunting in urban areas, forest preserves, and state parks to reduce deer abundance. Unfortunately, using deer hunting alone to control CWD has not been successful in any state to date.