



**March 2014**

## **Changes Coming in Illinois Deer Management**

There has been a lot of discussion in Illinois about deer management in the aftermath of a 2013-14 hunting season in which the deer harvest declined. Illinois was not alone, as other Midwestern and Great Lakes region states reported lower harvests for firearm seasons and/or all deer seasons.

Biologists cited a number of factors for the declines, including adverse weather, herd reductions to achieve management goals and, in some locations, deer mortality due to outbreaks of epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD).

Our deer management in Illinois seeks to balance hunters' desires to see more deer with the wishes of landowners and others who believe the size of the deer herd ranges from "just right" to "too large."

Each year, IDNR analyzes data on deer harvest, deer mortality, and survey results from hunters and non-hunters in determining deer management strategies, including details on deer seasons.

Based on a two-year review of our deer management program, and some of the data already in from the 2013-14 deer seasons, some changes are coming.

In 2009, IDNR implemented the recommendations of the General Assembly's Joint Task Force on Deer Population Control, intended to reduce the herd from peak levels by about 14 percent. Illinois hunters have been moving the state's deer herd toward that goal.

IDNR manages its deer population on a county-by-county basis. As individual counties reach their deer population objective, IDNR adjusts permit quotas and hunting seasons so deer populations can stabilize. As a result, when population objectives were reached during the past two years, 11 counties were closed to the Late Winter deer season.

For 2014-15, IDNR has identified 41 more counties for which we can adjust deer season regulations and permit quotas to allow an increase in deer population goals.

We are also asking deer hunters to provide input, through an online survey, on a proposal to end the recent practice of selling remaining firearm deer permits over-the-counter through the end of the firearm season, except for youth under age 16.

The IDNR manages deer by county and state population goals, and we're making changes for many counties to adjust our strategy from deer herd reduction to maintaining or increasing the deer population in some cases.

I am committed to professional management of our wildlife, and as always, we want to hear from hunters, landowners, and other stakeholders on our deer management program.

*Marc Miller is director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources*