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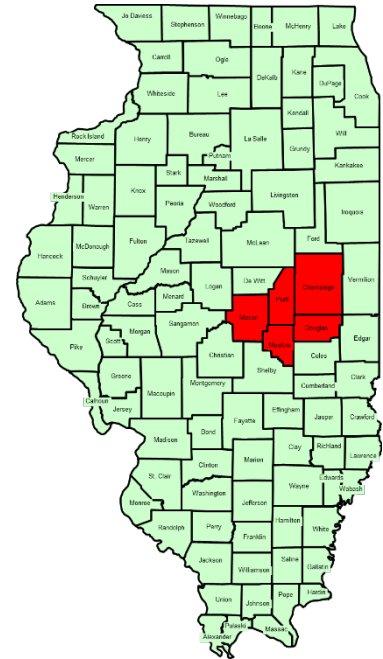
Regulating Archery Deer Harvest in Select Illinois Counties

In highly agricultural east-central Illinois counties, medium to large towns such as Champaign and Decatur serve as a source of significant numbers of deer hunters targeting a limited number of deer. Small amounts of forest cover (<5%) support relatively small deer populations, and also tends to limit the amount of firearm deer hunting access. As a result, archery deer harvest comprises a very significant proportion of the total deer harvest, often >50%.

Management of appropriate deer harvest levels for individual counties is normally accomplished through manipulation of deer permit quotas that limit the availability of both either-sex and antlerless-only permits during the firearm and muzzleloader deer seasons (as well as opening/closing the antlerless-only Late Winter Firearm Season).

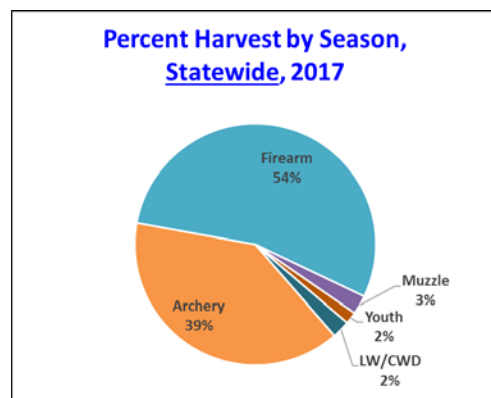
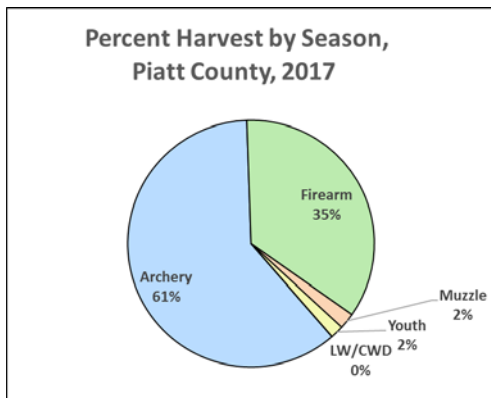
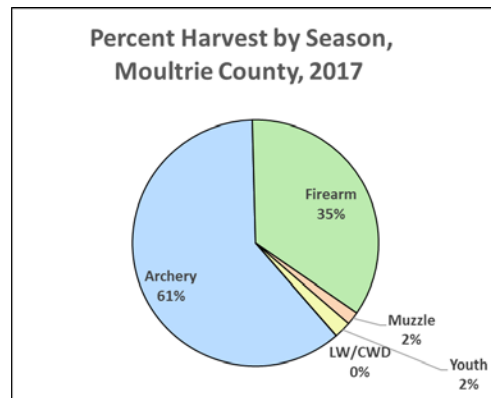
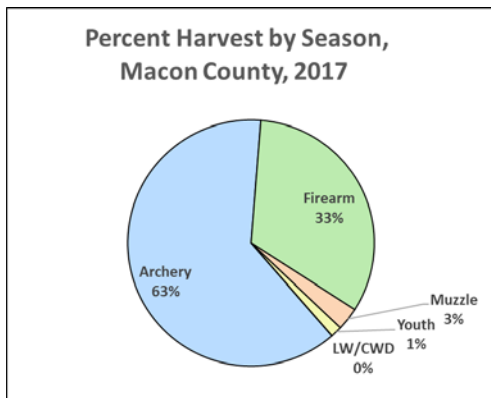
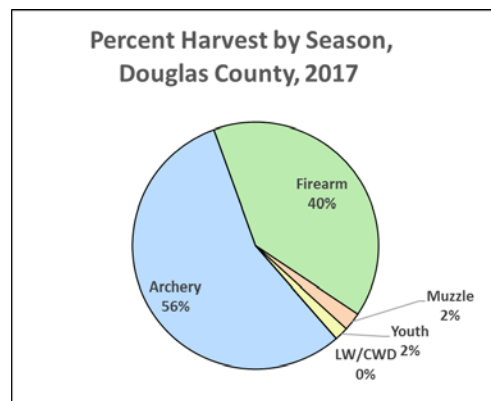
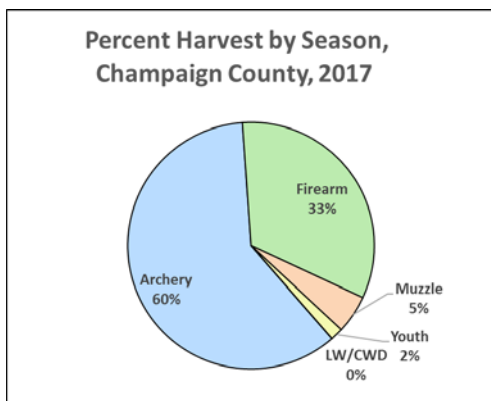
Archery deer harvest is generally self-regulating at acceptable levels because of the limitations of the equipment, the proficiency of most participants, and also because the more successful hunters typically only want to harvest a limited number of animals.

Deer populations in some of east-central Illinois counties are below goal in spite of significant reductions in gun permit quotas, and in some cases a declining population trend continues (see Table below).



County	Population Status in Relation to Goal (past three year average)
Champaign	35% below goal
Douglas	28% below goal
Macon	18% below goal
Moultrie	14% below goal
Piatt	12% below goal

In these 5 counties, biologists have reduced antlerless gun quotas until they were eliminated (i.e., quota = 0), while either-sex quotas are virtually the same as the number of individual hunters applying for their first permit (i.e., first and second lottery applicants). Any further cuts to gun permit quotas would result in some firearm deer hunters being unable to obtain even one either-sex permit, and thus being unable to hunt. Since archery harvest comprises the majority of the total deer harvest, any further harvest restrictions necessary to accomplish population objectives should focus on the archery season. The charts below show the proportion of the total 2017 deer harvest accounted for by the various seasons in the counties identified (a statewide average is included for comparison).



Evaluating Strategies for Controlling Archery Harvest

IDNR biologists have decades of harvest data and hunter success data to guide their decisions, and have examined the projected impacts of many different types of regulation changes. Our preferred approach is simple: allow only the harvest of antlered bucks during the first 15 days of the archery season (Oct. 1-15), which will reduce doe harvest by 25-30%. After that period, regulations for the remainder of the season would be the same as they've always been. This should be enough of a reduction to move populations back toward goal. If it turns out that we need to reduce harvest more than that (which is unlikely), we can simply adjust the number of days for which the restriction is in effect. For instance, one month of antlered-only hunting at the beginning of the season would decrease overall doe harvest by 50%. A similar regulation was in effect for many of these counties in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and performed exactly as projected.

While we have received a lot of suggestions that focus on bag limits, the large number of deer taken by archery hunters is due to a lot of hunters. It's not because of significant numbers of hunters taking multiple deer. As a result, there is no bag limit that would give us the level of reduction that the change described above would accomplish.

Other Changes That Were Considered and Evaluated

Shortening Season Length. Shortening the length of the archery season (i.e., having an earlier ending date) could be used to reduce harvest, but it would impact the harvest of both bucks and does, and would be a highly unpopular approach to take from the viewpoint of hunters because of the total loss of recreational opportunity (i.e., days afield). In addition, since harvest is so heavily skewed toward the beginning of the archery deer season, shortening the season by removing days at the end of the season would be ineffective unless a very large number of days were removed. For example, the season must close about a month early in order to accomplish a 10% harvest reduction, and ~65 days must be removed in order to reduce doe harvest by 20%. A much lesser impact would be realized (in terms of number of days) if the season simply opened later, but October and November are the most popular parts of the season.

Bag Limits. Bag limits typically have no measurable effect on harvest rates unless the limit is so strict that few hunters would support it. We evaluated the potential effects of bag limits upon harvest during the archery deer season in the 5 counties we have identified, using harvest data from the past five years (2013-2017). A bag limit of 2 does would have a maximum potential impact of reducing harvest by only 4%, which would not elicit any real change in population status. It's possible that such a bag limit might actually increase doe harvest, because bag limits are often viewed as "targets" by hunters (i.e., a goal to be achieved). A bag limit of 1 doe would reduce harvest by about 18%, but would be more of an obstacle than other approaches to landowners/land managers trying to control localized overabundances of deer on properties in the 5-county area (and these do occur).

Projected Impacts of Regulation Changes on Doe Harvest (Based on 2015-2017 Data)

