

Louisiana Deer Report

July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

LDWF Deer Program

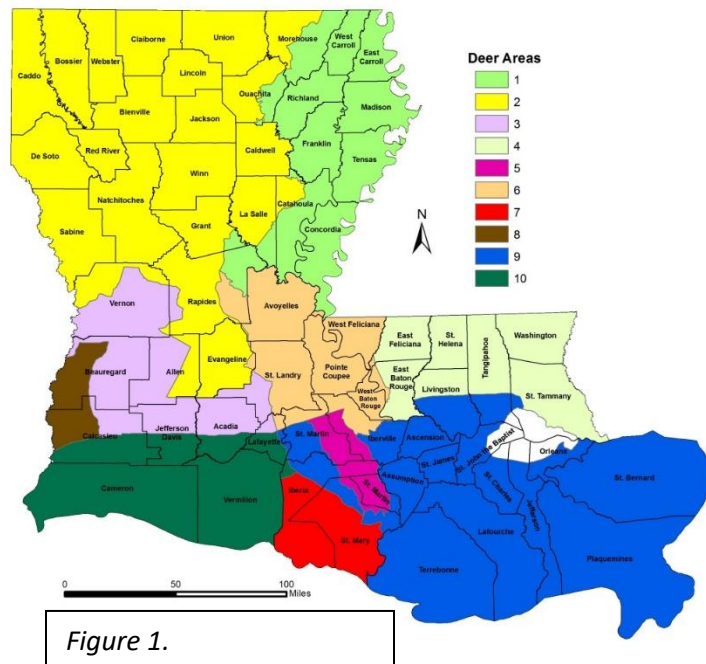
Prepared: July 2022

Introduction

White-tailed deer are an abundant and sustainable wildlife resource, and are the most pursued game species by Louisiana hunters. White-tailed deer are found in every forested habitat type in Louisiana as well as coastal marshes. Their adaptability allows them to thrive, despite changing environments and habitat conditions. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Deer Program is administered by the Office of Wildlife and implemented through 6 Field Offices where wildlife biologists and technicians perform research and management on public and private lands. Season dates and bag limits for private lands are divided into 10 Deer Areas (*Figure 1.*). In addition, most public land within Louisiana has independent season dates and regulations. A schedule of dates on public and private lands is included in the annual Hunting and WMA Regulations which is available both digitally and in paperback.

Seasons are set according to general breeding periods, biological indices, habitat productivity, and landscape features. The statewide deer limit is 6 per season, not to exceed 3 antlered or 4 antlerless deer per season, except Deer Areas 4 and 10 with a 3 deer limit/season (not to exceed 2 antlered or 2 antlerless deer). Antlerless deer may be taken during the entire season in all deer areas except 5 & 9 where antlerless harvest is limited to designated days. Daily bag limits are 1 antlered and 1 antlerless when legal.

All deer harvested in Louisiana must be reported through either the license tag reporting system or the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). Harvest data is instrumental in the development of deer season regulations. The harvest reporting system records male and female harvest numbers for each parish and Deer Area. Additional harvest and participation data is gathered through the Annual Hunter Harvest Survey which is covered later in this report.



2021 - 2022 Update

Louisiana was directly impacted by a major hurricane for the second consecutive year. Hurricane Ida made landfall in southeast Louisiana as a Category 4 hurricane on August 29th, 2021. Due to the intensity of Hurricane Ida, the path of destruction effected Louisiana residents far removed from the coast. In addition to the effect on residents and communities, there was extensive habitat damage in southeast Louisiana. While it is difficult to immediately assess impacts to deer, past research in Louisiana revealed that most deer survive major storms. However, accelerated erosion from storm surge can impact available acres of habitat as well as plant species composition. North of the coastal marshes, strong winds caused the majority of damage. In the short term, canopy openings promote the growth of forest plants that provide added forage and cover for deer. Forest impacts are influenced by storm intensity, stand age, hydrology, tree species composition, and past forest management practices.

The 2021-22 deer season opened with new electronic tagging and reporting options through the LDWF web portal, LA Wallet, and Text-to-tag. While the LDWF web portal and LA Wallet require internet access, Text-to-tag provides an option where cellular service may be used to complete the tagging and reporting process. Many hunters quickly adopted the new electronic methods for tagging and validating harvest.

Unfortunately, Louisiana became the 29th state to detect Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). CWD is a neurodegenerative disease that is transmissible and 100% fatal to deer. The results from the positive 8.5 year old Tensas Parish buck were reported on January 28th, 2022. Those results were confirmed a week later by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa. Due to the positive detection, the LDWF CWD response plan was activated. More information about the threats of CWD and response to the initial detection of the disease will be covered in the Deer Health section of the report.

Major Changes 2021 – 22

The 2021-22 season included a new format for licenses and deer tags. Deer tags were not printed on the traditional water-proof perforated stock that has been used in past seasons. Instead, tags were printed on 8.5" x 11" paper, which required an additional step in separating and attaching tags. The electronic options provided through the LDWF web portal, LA Wallet, and Text-to-tag allowed hunters to electronically tag deer for the first time along with electronic validation.

Upcoming License Changes 2022-23

A new LDWF license structure was initiated June 1st, 2022. There are several new changes for 2022 that hunters will need to review in advance of the 2022 hunting season. Licenses will be valid for 365 days however deer tags are only valid for the season they are issued, as they expire at the close of the respective season. Also, there will no longer be archery and primitive licenses for deer, hunters will now possess a deer license in addition to basic hunting which will include all methods of take for deer. While tags have always been required for youth, a new youth license is required in addition to tags.

Deer Regulation Reminders Concerning Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

Regulations have been established in recent years to restrict the spread of CWD in deer. Similar regulations have been established in other states. Hunters traveling across state lines should check the regulations for the states along their route.

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission amended Cervid carcass import regulations in the spring of 2019 to include Louisiana lands east of the Mississippi River in East Carroll, Madison and Tensas parishes. Cervid carcass import regulations were established in March 2017 to reduce the potential introduction of CWD into Louisiana from other states by prohibiting the importation of deer carcasses from outside of Louisiana. The regulation includes all members of the family *Cervidae* including but not limited to white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose, caribou, fallow deer, axis deer, sika deer, red deer and reindeer. Exceptions include deboned meat, packaged meat, quarters without any part of the head or backbone, antlers, clean skull plates with antlers, cleaned skulls without tissue attached, capes, tanned hides, finished taxidermy mounts and cleaned cervid teeth.

It is prohibited to use scents or lures that contain natural deer urine or other bodily fluids while taking, attempting to take, attracting or scouting wildlife; except natural deer urine products produced by manufacturers or entities that are actively enrolled and participating in the Archery Trade Association Deer Protection Program or the Responsible Hunting Scent Association (RHSA) Deer Protection Program, which has been tested using real-time quaking induced conversion (RT-QuIC) and certified that no detectable levels of CWD are present and is clearly labeled as such. The emergency rule was first enacted September 1, 2019. The rule was later memorialized through Commission action, making it a permanent addition to the regulations pertaining to deer hunting. The prohibition of natural deer urine is aimed at preventing further spread of Chronic Wasting Disease.

Due to the detection of CWD in Tensas Parish. LDWF has imposed a baiting and deer carcass export ban in Franklin, Madison and Tensas parishes through Declaration of Emergency. Hunters are encouraged to refer to the LDWF website for CWD Control Area regulation updates for the 2022-23 deer season in the parishes listed. Rules were not yet final at the completion of this report.

Please visit the LDWF website for additional information. <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/hunting/deer>

Feral Hogs

Feral hogs continue to be a major concern across Louisiana and the southeast. Hog populations affect deer numbers through direct competition for food resources, social stress, and disease transmission. Feral hogs carry infectious diseases which are transmissible to humans and other wildlife species. Based on the annual email survey, the estimated 2021 - 22 feral hog harvest was 498,100. Harvest estimates in recent years are the highest on record.

Hunter Harvest Survey

The 2022 Louisiana Big and Small Game Harvest Survey was sent to randomly selected hunters, including senior and lifetime license holders (unlicensed youth not included), by email. This was the third year email was exclusively used for the survey. A combination of mail and email surveys were utilized the 3 years prior to measure the compatibility between the two methods. The hunter harvest mail survey dates back to 1970. The trends observed over the past 52 years have been integral in monitoring harvest and participation. The 2022 hunter survey revealed an estimated 208,200 (+21%) hunters harvested 233,400 (+21.5%) deer (*Figure 2.*) The sex ratio of the harvest was 55% bucks and 45% does for the second consecutive year. The estimated number of days hunters spent deer hunting was 5.1 million (+13%), accounting for 76% of all hunting days afield.

Previous to past season, a decline in hunters was observed for the past 8 seasons (*Figure 2.*). The sharp increase in 2012 was influenced by senior hunters being included in the survey for the first time.

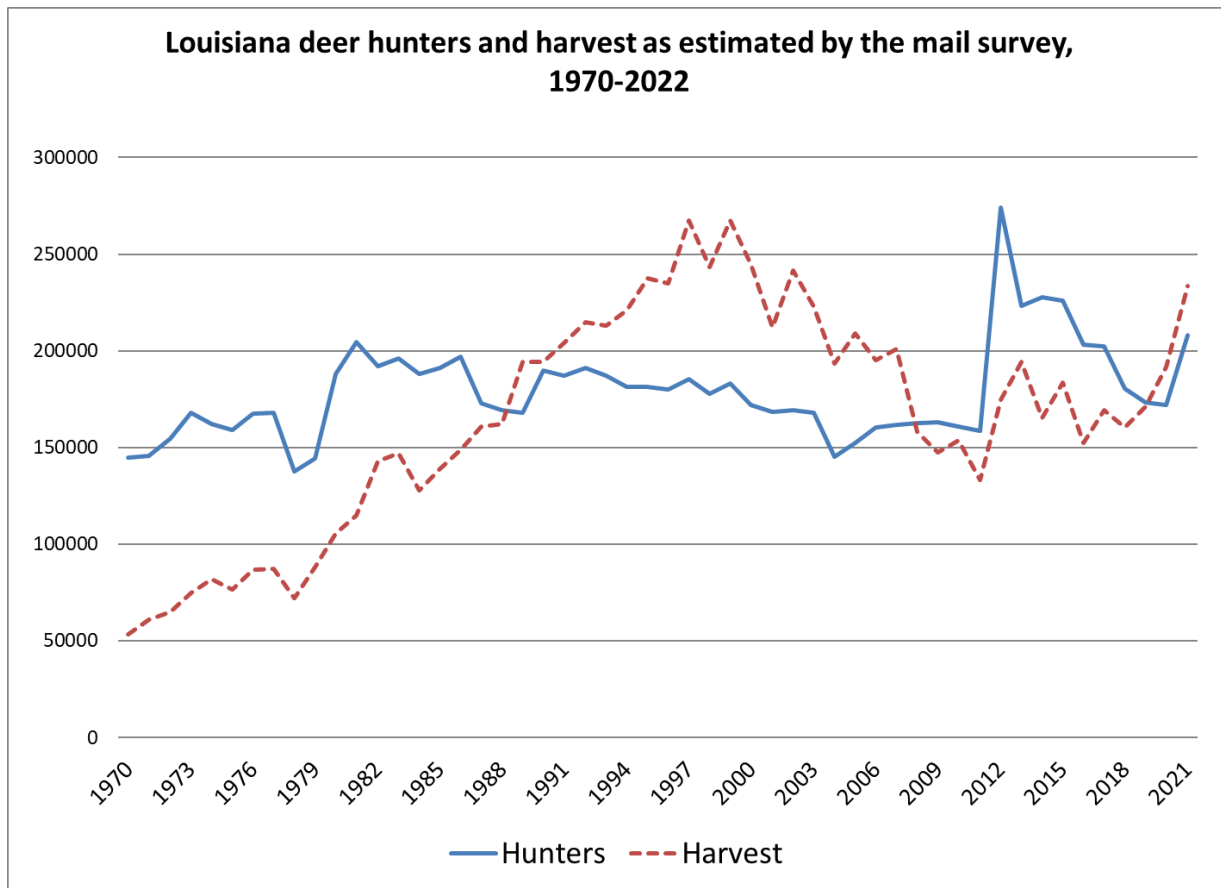


Figure 2. Hunter harvest survey estimate of Louisiana deer hunters and deer harvested, 1970-2022. 2012 mail survey forward estimates for hunters and harvest include senior hunters (hunters >60).

The harvest allocation by weapon type (*Table 1*) reveals that modern weapons are still the most popular harvest method in Louisiana. In general, modern firearm harvest accounts for approximately 80% of the total deer harvest each season.

Table 1. Louisiana Deer harvest by weapon, based on 2020 – 21 email survey.

Weapon	Harvest	Percentage
Modern Firearm	185,700	79%
Primitive Firearm	27,800	12%
Bow and Arrow	12,500	5%
Crossbow	7,400	4%
All Weapons (Total)	233,400	

Reported Harvest

The total reported harvest for the 2021-22 season was 102,756 (+16%). The table below illustrates the total reported harvest since mandatory harvest reporting began in 2008. The total number of deer reported per parish, and the number of forested acres per deer harvested for the top 20 parishes is illustrated in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 2. Combined reporting data from all sources.

Year	Private	Public	WMA managed	DMAP	Total
2008-09	87,237	8,481	2,877	17,976	116,571
2009-10	78,444	9,035	2,335	17,641	107,455
2010-11	74,346	9,742	3,004	17,740	104,832
2011-12	53,860	5,596	2,526	14,396	76,378
2012-13	46,814*	na	2,425	14,039	63,278
2013-14	51,319*	na	2,713	14,956	68,988
2014-15	41,563	6,735	2,655	14,128	65,081
2015-16	50,634	7,845	1,279	13,416	73,174
2016-17	46,237	6,952	2,544	13,096	68,639
2017-18	62,021	8,480	2,344	13,744	86,779
2018-19	57,843	10,389	1,952	12,624	82,599
2019-20	60,537	10,904	1,390	10,865	83,696
2020-21	65,154	10,957	**	12,145	88,256
2021-22	79,145	11,471	**	12,140	102,756

*Combined private and public land reporting.

**Combined with public land reporting.

Table 3. Top 20 harvest parishes in Louisiana derived from total reported harvest, 2021-22.

Rank	Parish	Harvest	Rank	Parish	Harvest
1	Bienville	4455	11	Bossier	3100
2	Vernon	4394	12	Sabine	2728
3	Union	4360	13	Madison	2586
4	Claiborne	3961	14	Ouachita	2527
5	Natchitoches	3648	15	La Salle	2465
6	Winn	3552	16	Catahoula	2437
7	Jackson	3352	17	St. Landry	2374
8	Tensas	3266	18	Grant	2358
9	Rapides	3192	19	Avoyelles	2335
10	Webster	3104	20	Beauregard	2304

Table 4. Top 20 harvest per forested acre parishes from total reported harvest, 2021-22.

Rank	Parish	Acres / deer	Rank	Parish	Acres / deer
1	E. Carroll	46	11	W. Baton Rouge	92
2	Richland	52	12	Webster	92
3	Tensas	52	13	Jackson	94
4	Franklin	55	14	Pt. Coupee	97
5	Madison	66	15	W. Feliciana	99
6	St. Landry	70	16	Ouachita	99
7	Catahoula	75	17	Bienville	101
8	W. Carroll	82	18	Union	110
9	Avoyelles	84	19	Claiborne	110
10	Morehouse	85	20	Lincoln	116

Hunter Harvest Survey vs. Reported Harvest

The hunter harvest survey estimated deer harvest is consistently higher than the total reported harvest. The reported harvest is considered a minimum number of deer harvested compared to the estimate generated by the hunter harvest survey. The total reported harvest consists of the DMAP harvest and deer reported through the license tag reporting system. The total reported harvest was up 16%, while hunter harvest survey respondents reported a 21.5% increase (Table 5). The increases were 10 year highs for each.

Both sources of data serve important and complimentary roles. The hunter harvest survey is used to monitor harvest, participation and method trends over time. It utilizes consistent format and sampling distribution. However, it has limited application at the parish level due to sample size. Conversely, the deer tag reporting system provides percent buck and doe harvest at the parish level. It also reveals the

number of successful hunters harvesting between 1 and 6 deer. When used in combination, trends can be assessed for the state, parish and deer area.

Table 5. Reporting harvest vs. mail survey index, 2008-2020.

Year	Reporting system (all sources *)	% Change from previous season	Estimated harvest mail survey	% Change from previous season
2008/09	116,571	na	158,300	-21%
2009/10	107,455	-8%	147,300	-7%
2010/11	104,832	-2%	153,500	4%
2011/12	76,378	-27%	133,000	-13%
2012/13	63,278	-17%	174,700**	31%
2013/14	68,988	9%	194,100	11%
2014/15	65,081	-6%	165,300	-15%
2015/16	73,174	12%	183,400	11%
2016/17	68,639	-6%	152,200	-17%
2017/18	86,779	26%	169,400	11%
2018/19	82,599	-5%	160,400	-5%
2019/20	83,696	1%	171,000	7%
2020/21	88,256	5%	192,000	12%
2021/22	102,756	16%	233,400	21.5%

*= DMAP, WMA managed hunts, public and private reporting system total

**= mail survey includes senior hunters for the first time

Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)

LDWF manages and provides deer hunting opportunity on over 1,500,000 acres. WMA deer seasons vary in length and timing based on management strategies and breeding chronology. Hunters may utilize modern firearms, primitive firearms and archery weapons when allowed. Youth and handicapped hunts are also available on many areas. Bucks only seasons provide extended hunting opportunity and coincide with the rut on most areas. WMA harvest rates vary by WMA depending on deer physiographic region, habitat conditions, and hunter efforts. In some years, WMA harvest rates equal or surpass intensively managed DMAP properties within the same parish. On other WMAs, harvest rates are low due to habitat type, forest conditions, accessibility, or other management objectives. In general, WMA deer herds are managed in a way that helps ensure long term forest regeneration, diversity, sustainability, and a healthy deer herd.

Hunter success and harvest vary, sometimes substantially, from year to year (*Figure 3*). The 2015 season is an example of this variation. The long term trend for WMA managed hunt participation illustrates fewer hunter efforts. While hunter participation has trended down, harvest success per effort has increased (*Figure 3*).

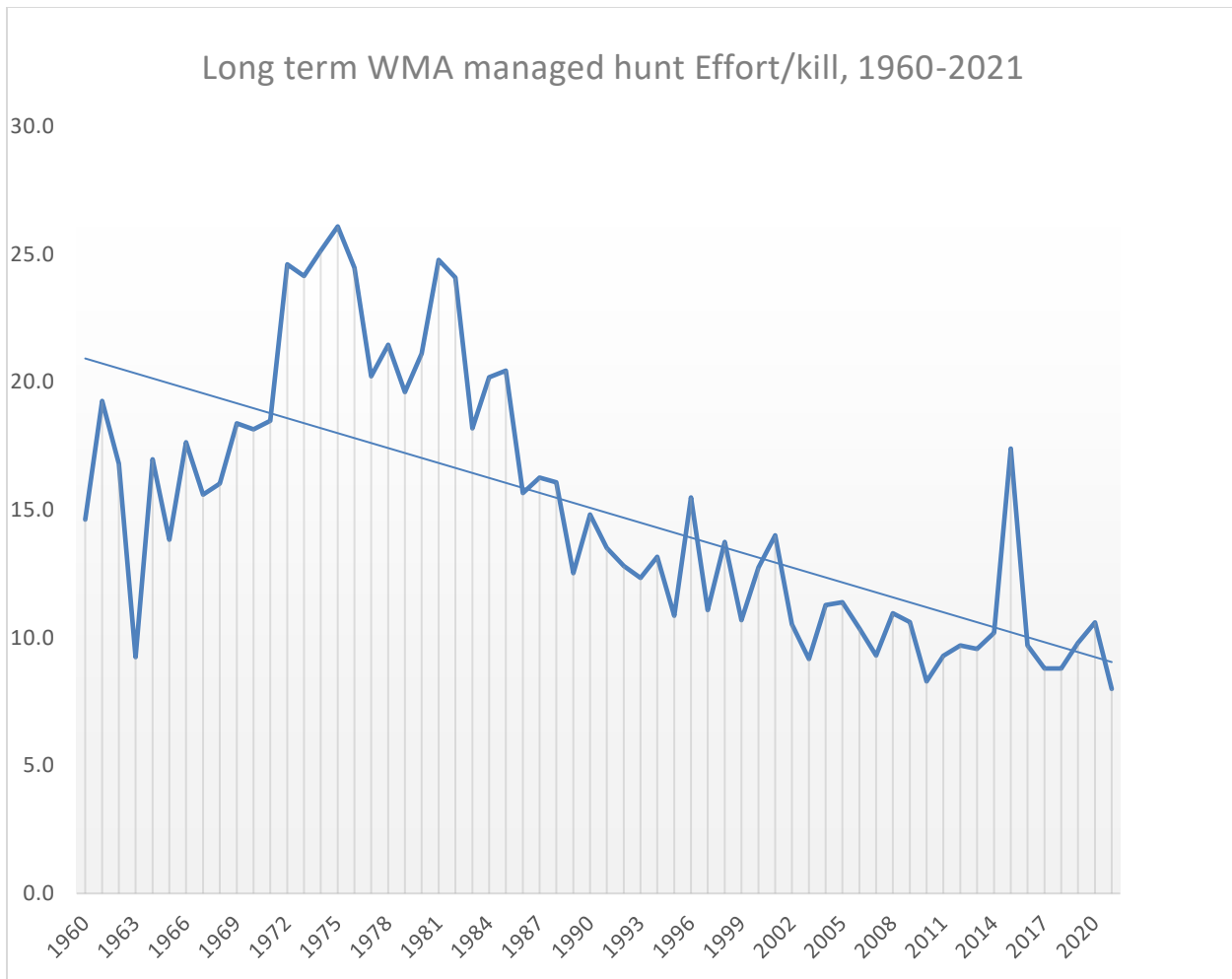


Figure 3. Long term WMA managed hunt efforts per deer harvested.

The recorded harvest for WMA either-sex managed deer hunts was 1,750 deer in 2021 (Table 6). WMA managed deer hunts had an average hunter success rate of 8.0 efforts per deer harvested, which is the best on record (Figure 3). Fewer efforts per deer harvested equals a greater percentage of hunters going home with a deer. The sex ratio for the WMA managed either-sex hunt harvest was 51% buck and 49% doe. The ratio has hovered around 50% for both bucks and does in recent years. While the harvest per effort comparison is still relevant, already declining participation numbers were amplified over the past 3 years by temporary closures on Peason Ridge WMA and Fort Polk WMA for military training. These closures accounted for approximately 4,000 less hunter efforts. Portions of Peason Ridge WMA were open to deer hunting this past season. In addition, Fort Polk WMA was open for one of the two managed deer hunt weekends in 2021. Additional participation and WMA season allowances were influenced by Hurricane Ida. Salvador/Timken WMA, Maurepas WMA and Joyce WMA were limited to bucks only during primitive and modern-firearm deer hunts.

2021 WMA Managed Hunts

WMA	Hunter efforts	Total harvest	Bucks	Does	Efforts per deer
Alexander State Forest (Oct.)	139	9	3	6	15.4
Alexander State Forest (Nov.)	140	18	10	8	7.8
Attakapas *	65	8	4	4	8.1
Bayou Macon **	142	23	8	15	6.2
Big Lake **	571	64	24	40	8.9
Bodcau	261	41	22	19	6.4
Boeuf **	685	134	73	61	5.1
Buckhorn **	226	20	8	12	11.3
Camp Beauregard	278	51	36	15	5.5
Clear Creek (Oct.)	684	106	71	35	6.5
Clear Creek *	561	29	17	12	19.3
Dewey Wills	1186	225	102	123	5.3
Fort Polk (Oct.)	closed				closed
Fort Polk	1415	156	75	81	9.1
Grassy Lake **	252	59	29	30	4.3
JC Sonny Gilbert**	118	14	7	7	8.4
Joyce*	47	2	0	2	23.5
Loggy Bayou	251	77	51	26	3.3
Maurepas Swamp **	188	3	3	0	62.7
Pearl River *	236	6	4	2	39.3
Peason Ridge (Oct.)	493	109	63	46	4.5
Peason Ridge	971	160	66	94	6.1
Pomme de Terre**	269	37	13	24	7.3
Richard K. Yancey**	1467	155	79	76	9.5
Russell Sage**	590	77	48	29	7.7
Sandy Hollow *	112	1	1	0	112.0
Sherburne **	912	34	14	20	26.8
Spring Bayou *	195	16	6	10	12.2
Thistlethwaite	500	22	9	13	22.7
Tunica Hills **	95	4	2	2	23.8
West Bay (Oct.)	515	70	38	32	7.4
West Bay *	393	20	10	10	19.7

Self-clearing Permit Only*

Check station and self-clearing permit combined**

Closed: Peason Ridge WMA and Fort Polk WMA were temporarily closed for military training.

Table 6. 2021 WMA Managed Hunts.

DMAP

DMAP continues to be the most important source of biological information LDWF has on private lands and we encourage hunters and managers to continue their participation in this program. Efforts to increase site visits and other services for participants continues to be a priority.

Participants receive detailed reports on their specific habitat conditions and deer herd. Harvest data collected greatly increases our ability to monitor deer and habitat conditions across the state while monitoring trends in deer quality and productivity on a local level. In addition, site visits and browse surveys allow biologists to set harvest recommendations for participants tailored to current habitat conditions and herd densities.

The 2021-22 DMAP harvest was 12,152 deer (-1%), with a harvest rate of one deer per 121 acres compared to one deer per 115 acres the previous season. In 2021-22, there were 401 clubs (1,051,607 acres) enrolled in DMAP Tiers 1 and 2 in which cooperators provided full harvest data. An additional 262 clubs (398,241 acres) were enrolled in DMAP Tier 3, which does not require the collection of age specific data. Twenty-four properties (25,829 acres) were enrolled in Tier 4, designed for farmers experiencing crop herbivory. Enrollment has remained stable in recent years. The DMAP sex-ratio for harvested deer was 36% bucks and 64% does, compared to 41% bucks and 59% does the previous season. Buck age structure on DMAP clubs remains at all-time highs with more than 80% of antlered bucks harvested reaching 3.5 years or older. That percentage was 2nd best in the nation as reported in the 2022 National Deer Association Annual Deer Report. Similarly, the percentage of 1.5 year old bucks harvested on DMAP lands in Louisiana was the 3rd lowest among states reporting white-tailed deer harvest. These harvest results are produced through voluntary efforts.

Big Game Records

The Louisiana Big Game Records Program documents white-tailed deer and eastern wild turkeys exceeding the minimum measurements for each respective category. Whitetail deer are categorized by weapon type, typical antlers, and non-typical antlers. The records program includes a recognition program that recognizes deer and turkey meeting the minimum recognition criteria. Recognition entries are recognized for 3 years. The all-time records list includes deer and turkey that exceed the minimum measurements for the respective category. Both the all-time and recognition lists may be viewed on the LDWF website. <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/big-game-records>

Measurements are taken by Boone and Crockett measurers and LDWF-certified staff for the records program. Entries are submitted on an official score sheet and signed by the measurer. Net measurements are used for entry. There is no charge for measurements and entry into the records program.

Nineteen new records were included in the 2020 – 21 recognition list as well as 10 new records for the all-time records list.

Deer Health

The Wildlife Health Program is administered by the State Wildlife Veterinarian, Assistant State Wildlife Veterinarian, and Wildlife Health Biologist. The program conducts disease investigations when sick, injured, or deceased animals are observed by Department personnel or reported by the public. Herd health collections and managed hunts provide samples for statewide serosurveillance of white-tailed deer. The program conducts diagnostic testing through six laboratories which include: 1) Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) at the University of Georgia, 2) Louisiana Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (LADDL) at Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine, 3) Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL), 4) Mississippi Veterinary Research and Diagnostic Laboratory (MVRDL) at Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine, 5) USGS National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC), and 6) USDA APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL).

Unfortunately, Louisiana became the 29th state to detect Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). CWD is a neurodegenerative disease that is transmissible and 100% fatal to deer. The result from the positive 8.5 year old Tensas Parish buck was reported on January 28th, 2022. The diagnosis was confirmed a week later by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa. Due to the positive detection, the LDWF CWD response plan has been activated. Recommended mitigation measures include the prohibition of bait and deer carcass export restrictions. These measures are intended for the CWD Control Area, which consists of the immediate area of the detection as well as a buffer area around the known positive. At this time, parishes boundaries are utilized for CWD Control Area boundaries.

LDWF collected 1,602 CWD samples in 2021-22 and 13,551 since 2002. The bulk of samples are collected directly from hunters, but LDWF secured additional samples from deer hit by vehicles, taxidermists, processors and target deer which include symptomatic deer. In addition, an effort to incentivize sampling through a promotion was sponsored by the South Louisiana Branch of the National Deer Association. A \$1,000 gift card was given to the hunter with the winning entry. A second gift card for \$500 was issued to the winning taxidermist. Eligibility included the submission of a CWD sample from a Louisiana buck with a 10 inch or greater inside spread. The goal was to increase the number of 2.5 year and older bucks sampled. Adult bucks are priority samples based on their tendency for higher prevalence rates where the disease is endemic.

Hunters who would like to have their harvested deer tested for CWD are encouraged to visit the LDWF website at www.wlf.la.gov/page/cwd-testing and follow the steps outlined, or call the nearest LDWF Field Office for assistance. Surveillance efforts are necessary for early detection. Additional drop-off locations are planned for the CWD Control Area in 2022. Hunters will be able to bring deer heads to designated drop off sites within the Control Area for submission by following the instructions provided. Locations will be listed on the LDWF website. Proactive measures such as following recommended disposal practices as well as limiting the placement of bait on the landscape could help slow the spread

of CWD. More on CWD and current CWD Control Area regulations is available at <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/cwd>.