

Louisiana Deer Report

July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

LDWF Deer Program

Prepared: August 2024

Introduction

White-tailed deer are an abundant and sustainable wildlife resource and are the most pursued game species in Louisiana. White-tailed deer are found in every habitat type in Louisiana. 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*). Federal and state managed public areas within Louisiana have 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 digitally and 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 are 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 collected through the Annual Hunter Harvest Survey which is covered later in this report.

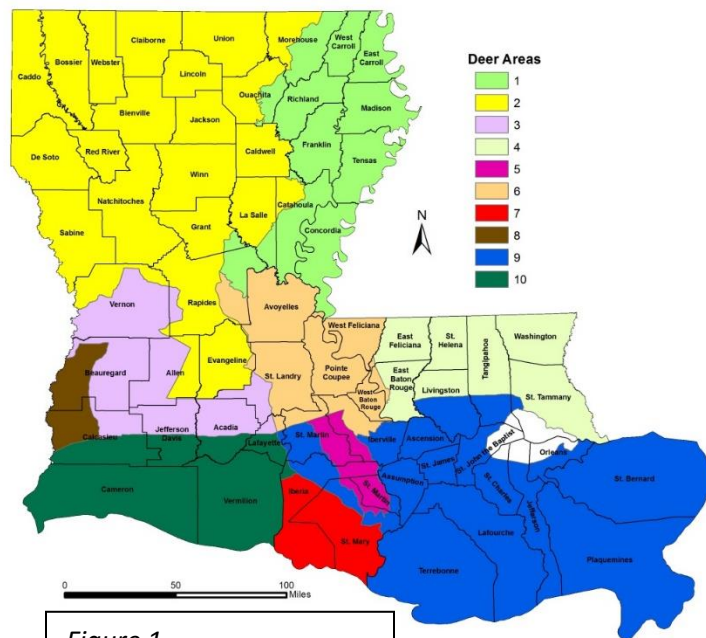


Figure 1.

2023 - 2024 Research Update

1) Environmental Monitoring as Early Sentinel Warning for Presence of CWD

Louisiana became the 29th state to detect Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in January, 2022. CWD is a neurodegenerative disease that is transmissible and 100% fatal to deer. Due to the many challenges presented by the disease, Louisiana is participating in a research project with 8 other states evaluating environmental monitoring as an early sentinel warning for the presence of CWD prions. The collaborative project is under the direction of Mississippi State University and Minnesota Center for Prion Research and Outreach. The project is being funded through an USDA Grant dedicated for research and management of CWD. This novel research has the potential to better inform conventional surveillance which will lead to earlier detections, while reducing the cost and time associated with conventional surveillance.

2) Deer Telemetry and Movement Study in the Mississippi Delta region of northeastern Louisiana in cooperation with of the University of Georgia

- Describe basic movement ecology of white-tailed deer of all age classes, including annual and seasonal home range sizes relative to water inundation.
- Identify dispersal events, excursions, and atypical movements of juvenile male white-tailed deer and determine age of dispersal, dispersal distances, and dispersal directions relative to water inundation.
- Identify dispersal events, excursions, and atypical movements of juvenile female, adult male, and adult female white-tailed deer relative to water inundation.
- Describe the influences of landscape cover, flooding, and other factors on characteristics of dispersal events, excursions, and atypical movements relative to water inundation.

In February of 2024, white-tailed deer were targeted for capture. Capture efforts were focused more heavily on juvenile males given their higher propensity to disperse. Since most of the study area is within the current CWD Control Area, capture technique shifted away from conventional drop nets, which require the use of bait. Nets deployed by helicopter net gunners were utilized for the first time in bottomland hardwood habitat of Louisiana. This approach negated the need for capture bait sites. After two days of scheduled helicopter captures, 10 juvenile males, 5 juvenile females, 10 adult males, and 10 adult females were successfully captured and fitted with GPS collars. Captures occurred across approximately 93 square miles of private



Figure 2. Collared Research Buck

land in Tensas, Madison, and Concordia parishes. Participating properties included land both inside the batture and west of the levee. Helicopter captures were supplemented with the ground capture of two additional juvenile males outside of the current CWD Control Area but within the Mississippi River batture. Monitoring of daily movements is ongoing. Collars are transmitting multiple locations per day and fitted with a drop off mechanism that will be triggered at a programmed time. Additional collar deployments are planned for early 2025 and 2026. Movement will be monitored for a period of 5 years pending successful deployment of additional collars in subsequent years. The project is ongoing and final results will not be available until the project ends in June, 2028. This project would not be possible without the support of landowners along the Mississippi River in northeast Louisiana.

Major Changes 2023-24

There were no other significant deer regulation and licensing changes for the 2023-24 season. Changes reflected in the 2023-24 Louisiana Hunting and WMA Regulations included the renaming of Camp Beauregard WMA, Fort Polk WMA and Peason Ridge WMA to Esler Field WMA, Fort Johnson WMA and Fort Johnson North WMA, respectively. Either-sex firearm days for deer returned on Joyce, Maurepas-Swamp and Salvador/Timken WMAs.

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 first established in 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 Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission action, making it a permanent addition to the regulations pertaining to deer hunting in Louisiana. The prohibition of natural deer urine is aimed at preventing further spread of CWD through disease contaminated deer urine.

Due to the detection of CWD in Tensas Parish, LDWF has imposed a baiting and deer carcass export ban for Tensas Parish as well as portions of East Carroll, Franklin, Madison and Concordia parishes. Hunters are encouraged to refer to the LDWF website for CWD Control Area regulation updates for the 2024-25 deer season.

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. Hog populations may affect deer condition 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 hunter harvest survey, the estimated 2023 - 24 feral hog harvest was 500,900 (+107,900). While the most recent harvest estimate is an increase from the previous year, estimates of approximately 500,000 hogs harvested have been reported in recent years.

Hunter Harvest Survey

The 2024 Louisiana Big and Small Game Harvest Survey was sent to randomly selected hunters, including senior and lifetime license holders (youth not included), by email. This was the 5th year the email survey was used exclusively. A combination of mail and email surveys were utilized 3 years prior to the exclusive email survey to measure the compatibility between the two methods. The hunter harvest survey dates back to 1970. The trends observed over the past 54 years have been integral in monitoring harvest and participation. The 2024 hunter survey revealed an estimated 227,500 (-2.5%) hunters harvested 262,400 (+20.5%) deer (Figure 3.) The sex ratio of the harvest remains almost unchanged with 55% bucks compared to 45% does each of the past four seasons. The estimated number of days hunters spent deer hunting was 5 million (+13%), which is 2nd highest number of estimated efforts in the past ten years. Hunters using modern firearms were most successful with 57% harvesting a deer, compared to 21% using primitive firearms, and 18% using archery equipment. Similar to past years, less than 2% of hunters harvested more than 4 deer, with the majority of successful hunters only harvesting 1. Hunters in pursuit of deer accounted for 68% of all hunting days afield. In addition to hunter effort, weapon and harvest data, special questions are introduced each year to gain insight into hunter behavior. One such question focused on antlered buck selection by deer hunters. Seventy-one (71%) of hunters on private land indicated they pass on antlered bucks due to antler size or estimated age. Of those hunting public lands, 53% indicated that they passed on antlered bucks due to antler size or estimated age. Prior to the 2021-22 hunting season, a decline in deer hunter numbers was observed for the previous 8 seasons

(Figure 3). Hunter participation numbers have increased and remained stable since that time. Note, the sharp increase in 2012 was influenced by senior hunters being included in the survey for the first time.

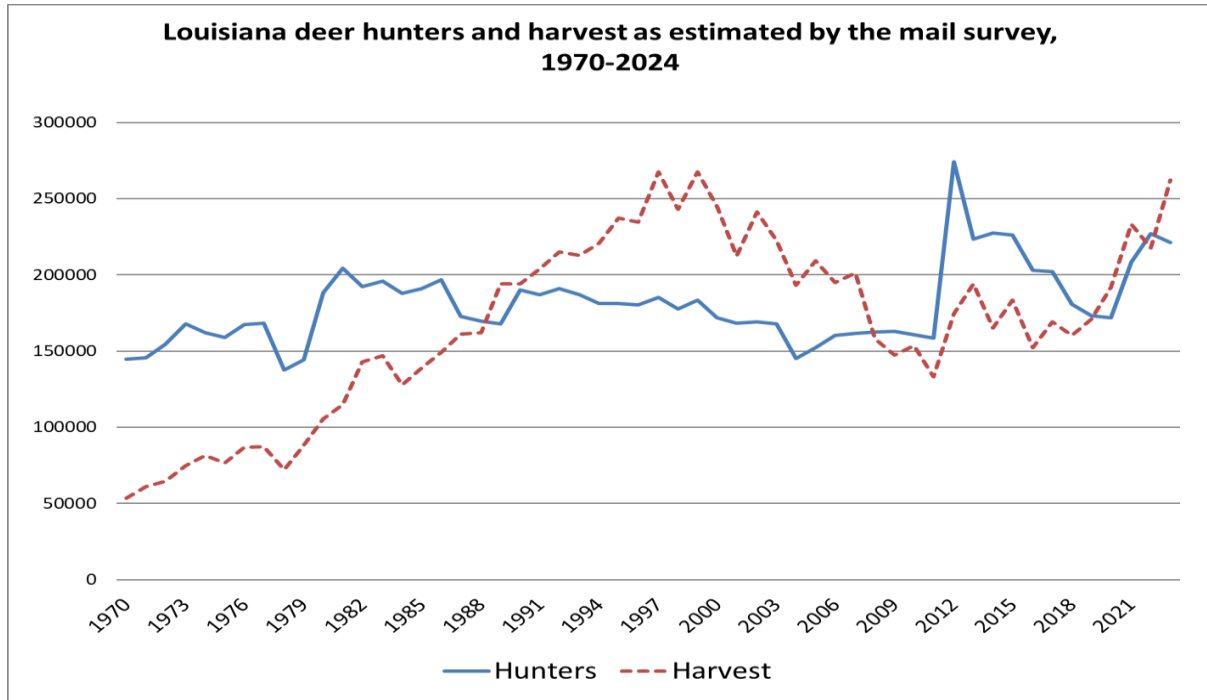


Figure 3. Hunter harvest survey estimate of Louisiana deer hunters and deer harvested, 1970-2024. 2012 mail survey forward estimates for hunters and harvest include senior hunters (hunters >60).

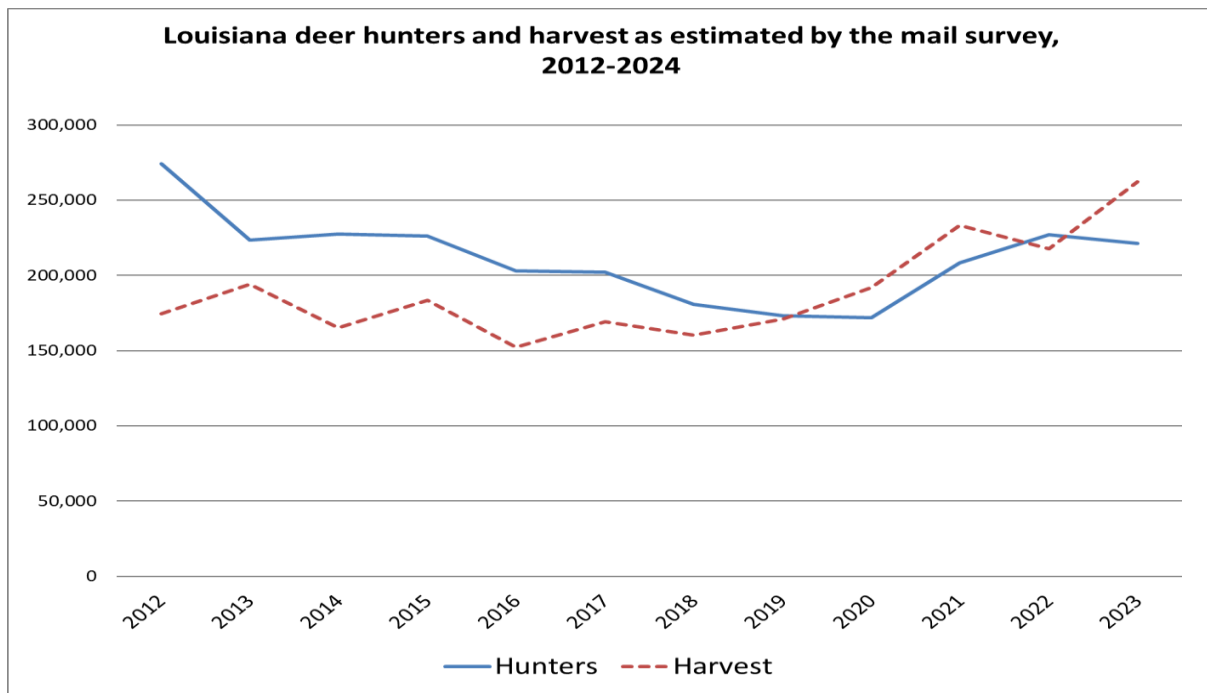


Figure 4. Deer hunter and harvest trend since senior hunters were included in the estimate.

The harvest allocation by weapon type (Table 1.) reveals that modern firearm is 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 2024 hunter harvest survey.

Weapon	Harvest	Percentage
Modern Firearm	208,600	79.5%
Primitive Firearm	31,500	12%
Bow and Arrow	14,300	5.5%
Crossbow	8,000	3%
All Weapons (Total)	262,400	

Reported Harvest

The total reported harvest for the 2023-24 season was 136,163 (+17%). 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. Last season was the 4th consecutive season in which a new ten year high in reported harvest was recorded. Harvest has been trending up under standard reporting methods over the same period.

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
2022-23	89,583	14,719	**	12,185	116,487
2023-24	105,882	16,245	**	14,036	136,163

*Combined private and public land reporting.

**Combined with public land reporting.

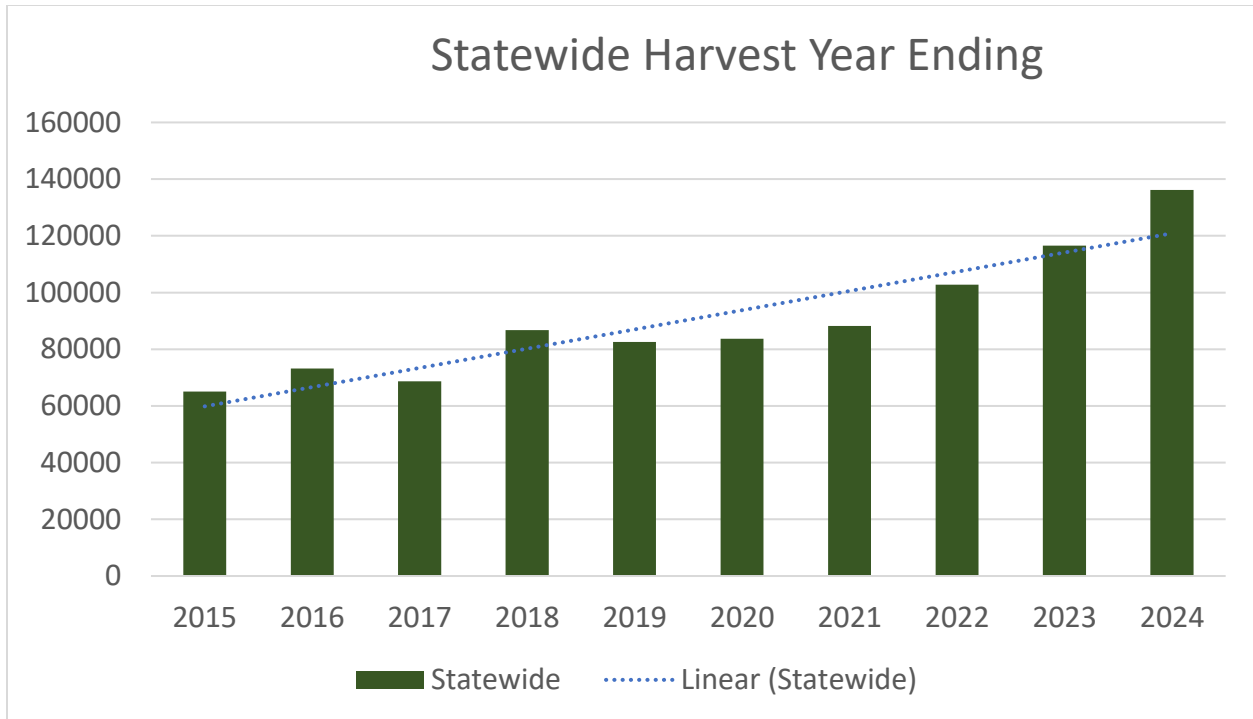


Figure 5. (Above) Statewide reported harvest over the past 10 seasons.

Table 3. Top 20 harvest parishes in Louisiana derived from total reported deer harvest, 2023-24.

Rank	Parish	Harvest	Rank	Parish	Harvest
1	Vernon	6122	11	Catahoula	3620
2	Union	5924	12	Sabine	3573
3	Bienville	5263	13	Grant	3558
4	Claiborne	4874	14	Beauregard	3403
5	Winn	4768	15	Webster	3403
6	Natchitoches	4761	16	La Salle	3356
7	Rapides	4387	17	Ouachita	2999
8	Jackson	3942	18	Avoyelles	2971
9	Bossier	3761	19	St. Landry	2906
10	Tensas	3649	20	Caldwell	2823

Table 4. Top 20 deer harvest per forested acre parishes from total reported harvest, 2023-24.

Rank	Parish	Acres / deer	Rank	Parish	Acres / deer
1	Richland	40	11	Morehouse	74
2	Franklin	42	12	Jackson	80
3	E. Carroll	45	13	Union	81
4	Tensas	47	14	Pt. Coupee	81
5	Catahoula	51	15	Ouachita	83
6	St. Landry	58	16	Webster	84
7	W. Carroll	60	17	Concordia	84
8	Madison	64	18	W. Baton Rouge	85
9	Avoyelles	66	19	Lincoln	86
10	W. Feliciana	71	20	Bienville	86

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.

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, 2012-2024.

Year	Reporting system (all sources)	% Change from previous season	Estimated hunter harvest survey	% Change from previous season
2012/13	63,278		174,700*	
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%
2022/23	116,487	13%	217,700	-9%
2023/24	136,163	17%	262,400	20.5%

*Hunter harvest survey includes senior hunters for the first time. Due to change in estimated harvest methodology, only the years since are presented.

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 for deer are offered 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 cases, 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 6). The 2015 season is an example of this variation. That particular year was effected by adverse weather conditions. 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 6).

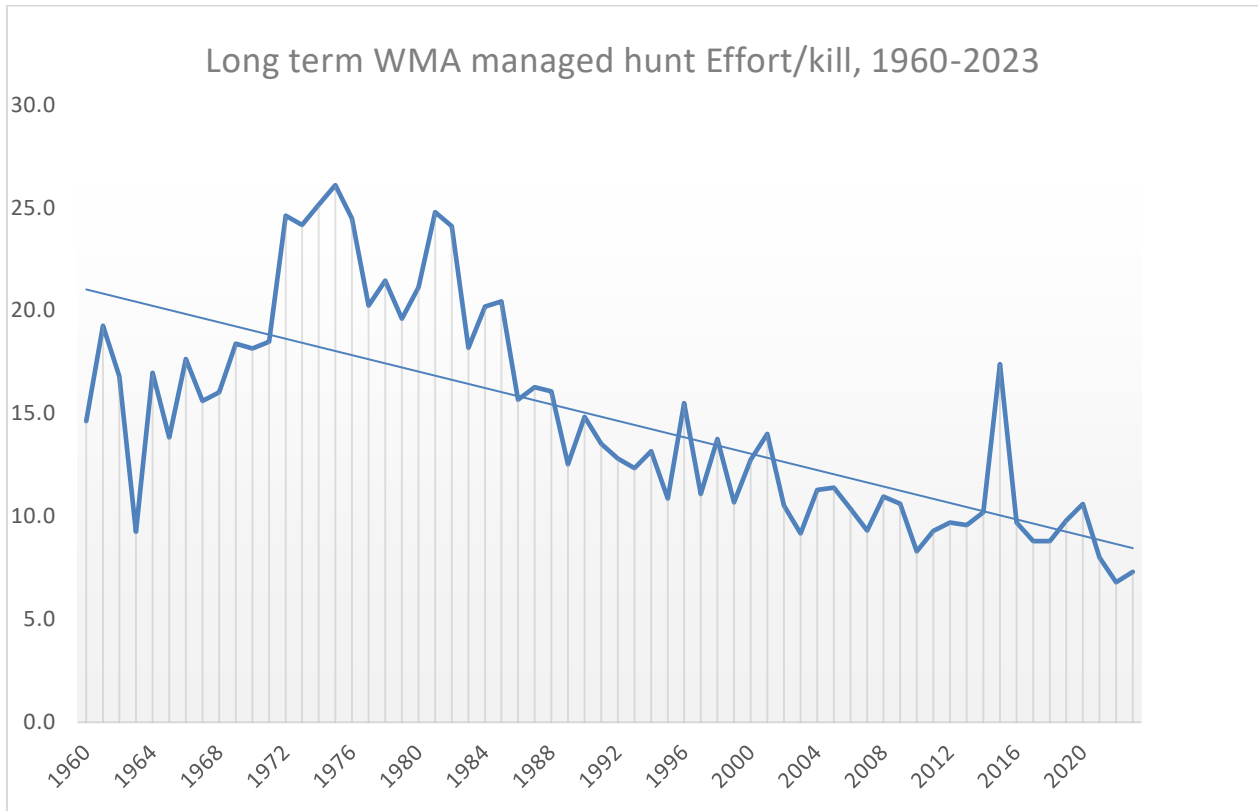


Figure 6. Long term WMA managed hunt efforts per deer harvested.

The recorded harvest for WMA either-sex managed deer hunts was 1,940 deer in 2023 (Table 6). WMA managed deer hunts had an average hunter success rate of 7.3 efforts per deer harvested, which is the 2nd best on record following the record set in 2022(Figure 6). 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 49% buck and 51% doe. The ratio remains around 50% for both bucks and does each season.

Table 6. 2023 WMA Managed Hunt Results.

WMA	Hunter efforts	Total harvest	Bucks	Does	Efforts per deer
Alexander State Forest (Oct.)	229	40	16	24	5.7
Alexander State Forest (Nov.)	157	24	17	7	6.5
Attakapas *	101	17	6	11	5.9
Bayou Macon **	154	35	23	12	4.4
Big Lake **	506	62	25	37	8.2
Bodcau	213	16	8	8	13.3
Boeuf **	709	175	106	69	4.1
Buckhorn **	310	41	16	25	7.6
Clear Creek (Oct.)	534	28	14	14	19.1
Clear Creek *	507	42	22	20	12.1
Dewey Wills	814	169	59	110	4.8
Esler Field	248	80	41	39	3.1
Fort Johnson (Oct.)	702	79	45	34	8.9
Fort Johnson	955	116	43	73	8.2
Fort Johnson North (Oct.)	592	56	29	27	10.6
Fort Johnson North	1220	169	78	91	7.2
Grassy Lake **	289	66	26	40	4.4
JC Sonny Gilbert*	89	4	4	0	22.3
Joyce*	79	12	4	8	6.6
Loggy Bayou	223	64	49	15	3.5
Maurepas Swamp **	325	64	30	34	5.1
Pearl River *	282	16	11	5	17.6
Pomme de Terre**	192	42	21	21	4.6
Richard K. Yancey**	1274	221	105	116	5.8
Russell Sage**	770	116	70	46	6.6
Sandy Hollow *	126	2	0	2	63.0
Sherburne **	764	45	17	28	17.0
Spring Bayou *	152	19	9	10	8.0
Thistlethwaite	442	24	10	14	18.4
Tunica Hills ** (Nov.)	92	5	1	4	18.4
West Bay (Oct.)	558	55	31	24	10.1
West Bay *	584	36	19	17	16.2
2023 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	14192	1940	955	985	7.3
2022 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	13404	1966			6.8
10 yr. AVERAGE	17475	1840			9.5
*= self clearing only					
**= combined mandatory check and self clearing					

Deer Management Assistance Program (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 the 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 help tailor harvest recommendations informed by current habitat conditions and herd densities.

The 2023 – 24 DMAP harvest was 14,155 deer, with a harvest rate of one deer per 113 acres compared to one deer per 126 acres the previous season. In 2023-24, there were 432 clubs (1,155,795 acres) enrolled in DMAP Tiers 1 and 2 in which cooperators provided full harvest data. An additional 328 clubs (448,139 acres) were enrolled in DMAP Tiers 3 & 4, which does not require the collection of age specific data. Enrollment has remained stable in recent years. The DMAP sex-ratio for harvested deer was 36% bucks and 64% does for the third consecutive year. Buck age structure on DMAP clubs remains at all-time highs with approximately 77% of antlered bucks harvested reaching 3.5 years or older. That percentage was 2nd best in the nation as reported in the 2024 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 were produced through voluntary efforts of participating DMAP cooperatives.

Louisiana 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 Louisiana Big Game 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.

19 (+7 from previous year) new records were included in the 2023 – 24 recognition list as well as 12 (+6 from previous year) new records for the all-time records list. Of note, 6 of the 19 new records were harvested on LDWF Wildlife Management Areas.

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).

In January 2022, Louisiana became the 29th state to detect Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). CWD is a neurodegenerative disease that is transmissible and 100% fatal to deer. After the initial positive detection in Louisiana, the LDWF CWD response plan was activated. Mitigation measures established through regulation, include the prohibition of bait and deer carcass export restrictions. These measures are prescribed for the CWD Control Area, which consists of the immediate area of the detection as well as a buffer area around the known positives. Major roadways at a minimum distance of 25 miles from a Louisiana positive are used to delineate the boundary. Currently, Tensas Parish and portions of East Carroll (east of MS River), Concordia, Franklin and Madison parishes are included in the CWD control area. The control area expansion into northeast Concordia occurred in 2023 due to CWD detections 5 miles south of the index case.

The 2023 – 24 deer season was the second season in which baiting was prohibited for the CWD Control Area. The parishes within the CWD Control Area reported a ten year high in harvest for the second consecutive year. In the case of Tensas Parish, the highest reported harvest since tagging began was recorded. Population management is critical within areas of known detection, as disease transmission rates may be amplified under higher deer densities.

LDWF collected more than 2,300 CWD samples in 2023-24 (18,511 since 2002). Ten of the 2,370 samples were positive for CWD. All 22 CWD detections from the last three seasons have been collected in Tensas Parish. The bulk of samples were collected directly from hunters, additional samples were gathered from deer hit by vehicles, taxidermists, processors, and symptomatic deer reported by hunters. Six additional drop off coolers/CWD sample submission sites were added in 4 new parishes last deer season. This brings the total number of CWD sample drop off locations to 13. CWD sample drop off sites are listed on the LDWF website. In addition to CWD sample drop off coolers, a USDA grant for CWD management and outreach was awarded to LDWF. The grant covered the cost of promotional billboards in the parishes that have CWD sample drop off sites. Additional incinerators were also purchased through the grant to aid in sample and deer carcass parts disposal in response to CWD.

While highlighted in the research section of the report. Environmental monitoring as early sentinel warning for the presence of CWD was pursued in cooperation with Mississippi State University and Minnesota Center for Prion Research and Outreach. The project was initiated by MSU and included 9 participating states. The project is being funded through an USDA grant dedicated to CWD research and management. Results are preliminary but show great promise.

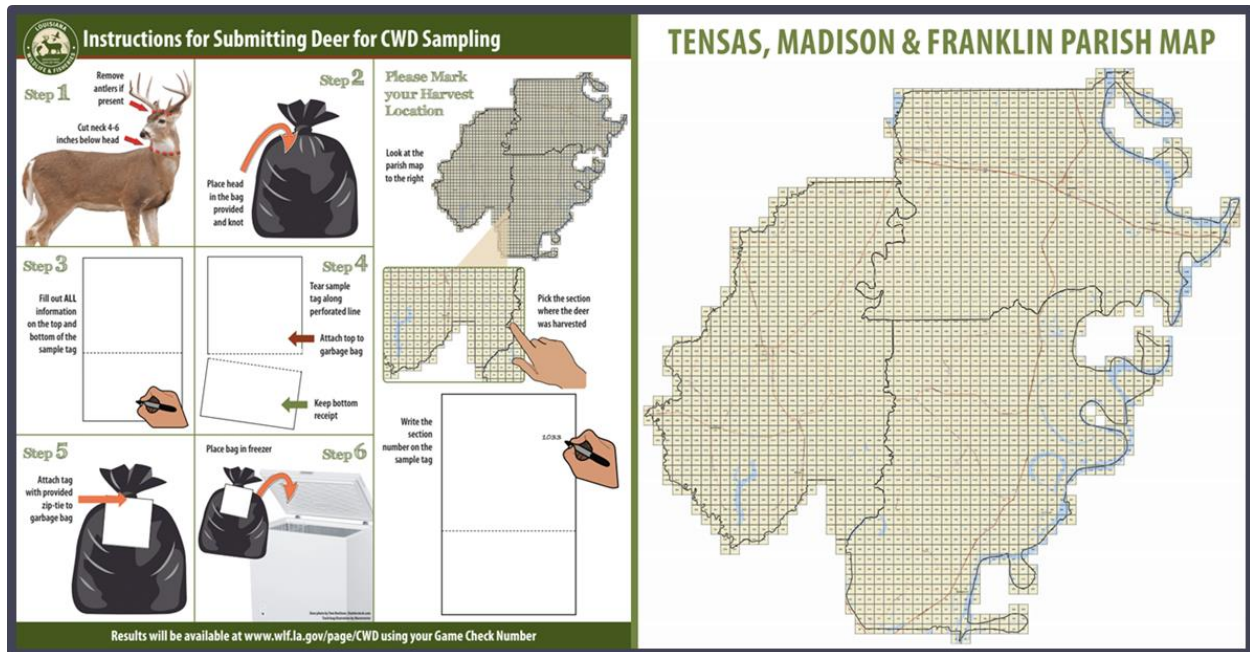


Figure 7. Drop off cooler instructions and parish grid map example from 2023 season. The grid number is used to assign an approximate location to the sample submitted.

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. CWD sample drop-off locations are located in Concordia, Catahoula, Franklin, Madison, Morehouse, Tensas and Union Parishes. Locations are listed on the LDWF CWD page (link below). 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>.