

# Louisiana Deer Report

July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

LDWF Deer Program

Prepared: August 2023

## 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 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 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 gathered through the Annual Hunter Harvest Survey which is covered later in this report.

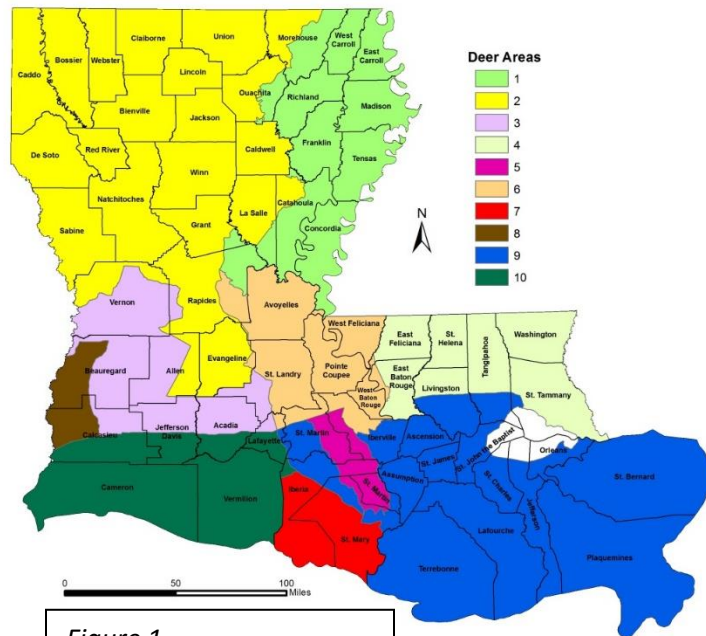


Figure 1.

## **2022 - 2023 Update**

Louisiana became the 29<sup>th</sup> state to detect Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in January, 2022. CWD is a neurodegenerative disease that is transmissible and 100% fatal to deer. Louisiana's index case was an 8.5 year old symptomatic buck in Tensas Parish. Upon disease confirmation, the LDWF CWD response plan was activated. More information about the threats of CWD, subsequent detections, surveillance efforts and disease mitigation will be covered in the Deer Health section of the report.

Deer hunters were able to utilize electronic deer 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. Plans to offer a mobile app for the 2023 season will allow hunters to tag and validate without internet service. Once internet connection is restored, the data will be uploaded to the system. This new feature will allow hunters to utilize electronic tagging regardless of network availability.

## **Major Changes 2022-23**

A new LDWF license structure was initiated June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022. There were several new changes for 2022 hunting season. Licenses are now valid for 365 days, however deer tags may only be used for the season in which they are issued. Also, previous gear licenses for archery and primitive firearm have been eliminated, hunters will now possess a deer license in addition to basic hunting which will include all methods of take for deer. As before, lifetime license hunters and senior hunt/fish license holders will be able to acquire deer tags at no charge. While tags have always been required for youth, a new (\$5) 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 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 Franklin, Madison and Concordia parishes. Hunters are encouraged to refer to the LDWF website for CWD Control Area regulation updates for the 2023-24 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 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 2022 - 23 feral hog harvest was 393,000 (-105,100).

### **Hunter Harvest Survey**

The 2023 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 4th 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 mail survey dates back to 1970. The trends observed over the past 53 years have been integral in monitoring harvest and participation. The 2023 hunter survey revealed an estimated 227,500 (+9%) hunters harvested 217,700 (-7%) deer (*Figure 2*.) The sex ratio of the harvest remains almost unchanged each season with 55.5% bucks compared to 44.5% does last season compared to 55% bucks and 45% does the two previous seasons. The estimated number of days hunters spent deer hunting was 4.4 million (-14%) which is down from the previous ten-year high recorded the previous season. Deer hunters in pursuit of deer accounted for 66% of all hunting days afield.

Prior to the 2021-22 hunting season, a decline in deer hunters was observed for the previous 8 seasons (*Figure 2*). The 2022-23 hunter harvest survey measured the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive increase in deer hunter numbers. Note, the sharp increase in 2012 was influenced by senior hunters being included in the survey for the first time.

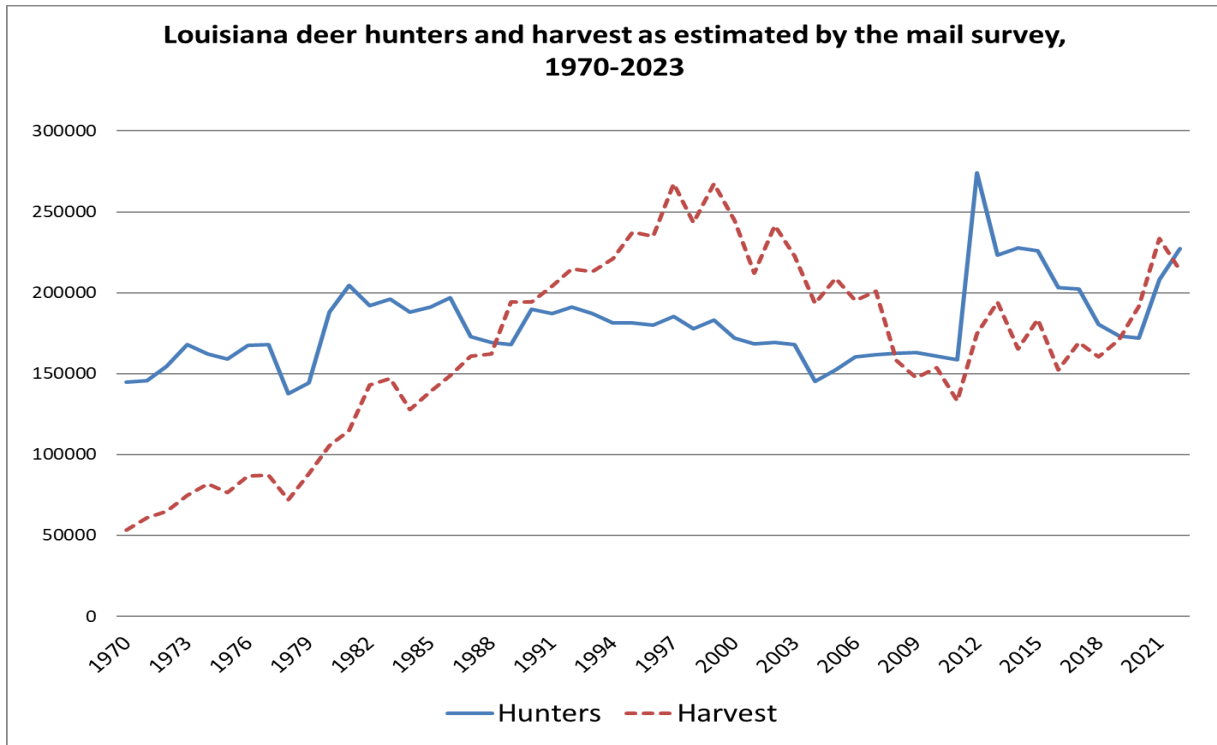


Figure 2. Hunter harvest survey estimate of Louisiana deer hunters and deer harvested, 1970-2023. 2012 mail survey forward estimates for hunters and harvest include senior hunters (hunters >60).

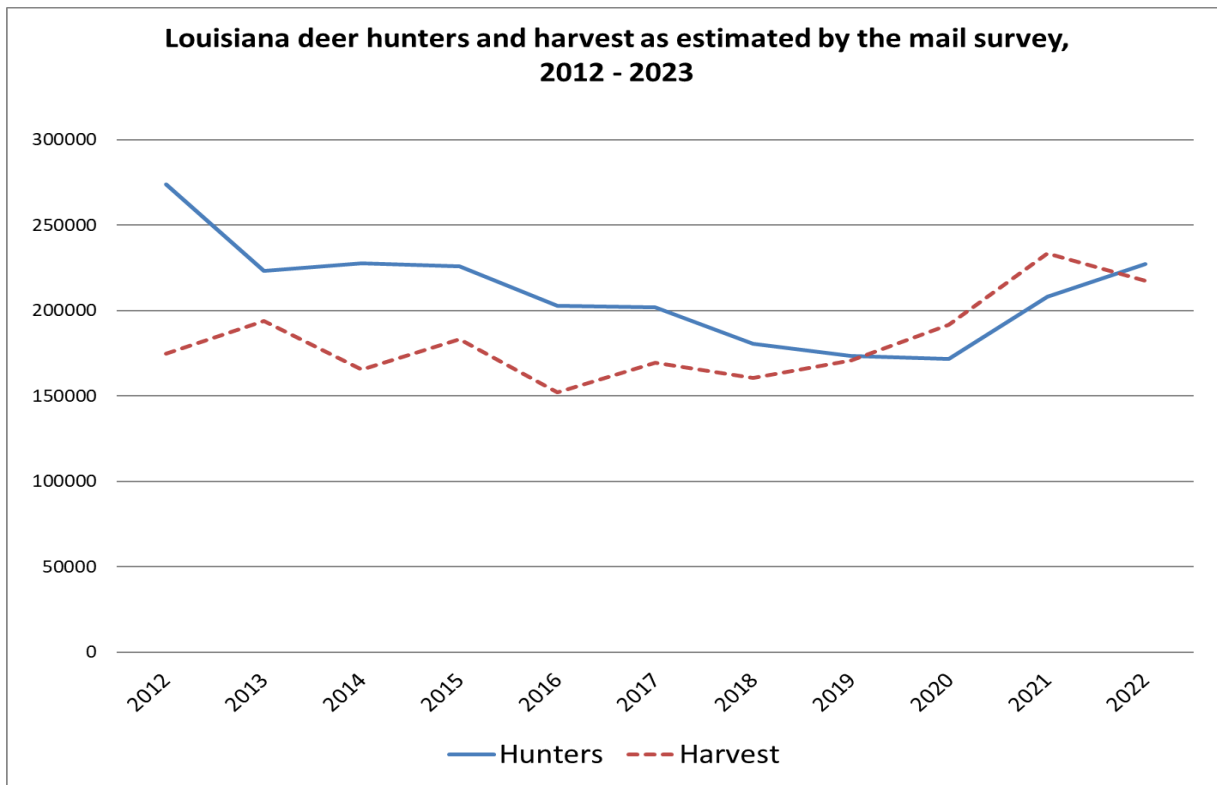


Figure 3. Deer hunter and harvest trend since senior hunters were included in the estimate.

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 2023 email survey.*

Weapon	Harvest	Percentage
<b>Modern Firearm</b>	171,900	79%
<b>Primitive Firearm</b>	26,800	12%
<b>Bow and Arrow</b>	12,700	6%
<b>Crossbow</b>	6,100	4%
<b>All Weapons (Total)</b>	217,500	

### **Reported Harvest**

The total reported harvest for the 2022-23 season was 116,487 (+13%). 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 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive season in which a new ten year high in reported harvest was recorded.

*Table 2. Combined reporting data from all sources.*

Year	Private	Public	WMA managed	DMAP	Total
<b>2008-09</b>	87,237	8,481	2,877	17,976	116,571
<b>2009-10</b>	78,444	9,035	2,335	17,641	107,455
<b>2010-11</b>	74,346	9,742	3,004	17,740	104,832
<b>2011-12</b>	53,860	5,596	2,526	14,396	76,378
<b>2012-13</b>	46,814*	na	2,425	14,039	63,278
<b>2013-14</b>	51,319*	na	2,713	14,956	68,988
<b>2014-15</b>	41,563	6,735	2,655	14,128	65,081
<b>2015-16</b>	50,634	7,845	1,279	13,416	73,174
<b>2016-17</b>	46,237	6,952	2,544	13,096	68,639
<b>2017-18</b>	62,021	8,480	2,344	13,744	86,779
<b>2018-19</b>	57,843	10,389	1,952	12,624	82,599
<b>2019-20</b>	60,537	10,904	1,390	10,865	83,696
<b>2020-21</b>	65,154	10,957	**	12,145	88,256
<b>2021-22</b>	79,145	11,471	**	12,140	102,756
<b>2022-23</b>	89,583	14,719	**	12,185	116,487

\*Combined private and public land reporting.

\*\*Combined with public land reporting.

## Statewide Harvest Year Ending

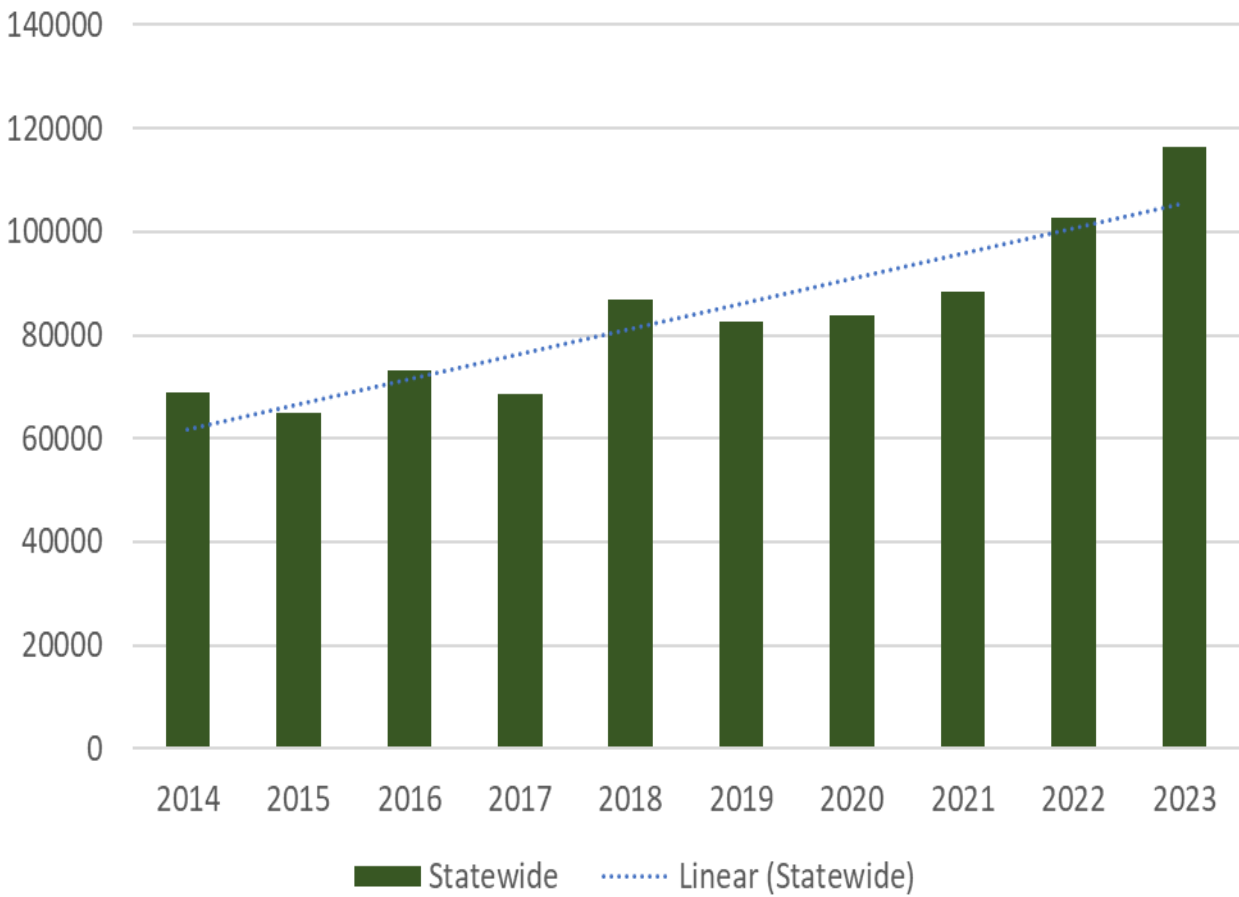


Figure 4. (Above) Statewide reported harvest over the past 10 seasons.

Table 3. Top 20 harvest parishes in Louisiana derived from total reported harvest, 2022-23.

Rank	Parish	Harvest	Rank	Parish	Harvest
1	Vernon	5563	11	Bossier	3089
2	Union	4641	12	Sabine	2973
3	Bienville	4254	13	Beauregard	2967
4	Natchitoches	4052	14	Webster	2875
5	Winn	4044	15	Grant	2857
6	Claiborne	3990	16	La Salle	2776
7	Rapides	3898	17	Madison	2647
8	Tensas	3494	18	Avoyelles	2630
9	Jackson	3330	19	Ouachita	2613
10	Catahoula	3244	20	St. Landry	2473

Table 4. Top 20 harvest per forested acre parishes from total reported harvest, 2022-23.

Rank	Parish	Acres / deer	Rank	Parish	Acres / deer
1	Richland	40	11	Pointe Coupee	86
2	E. Carroll	43	12	W. Baton Rouge	92
3	Franklin	46	13	W. Feliciana	93
4	Tensas	49	14	Concordia	93
5	Catahoula	56	15	Jackson	94
6	Madison	64	16	Ouachita	96
7	W. Carroll	65	17	Webster	100
8	St. Landry	68	18	Union	103
9	Avoyelles	75	19	Bienville	106
10	Morehouse	75	20	Caldwell	107

### **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, 2008-2023.

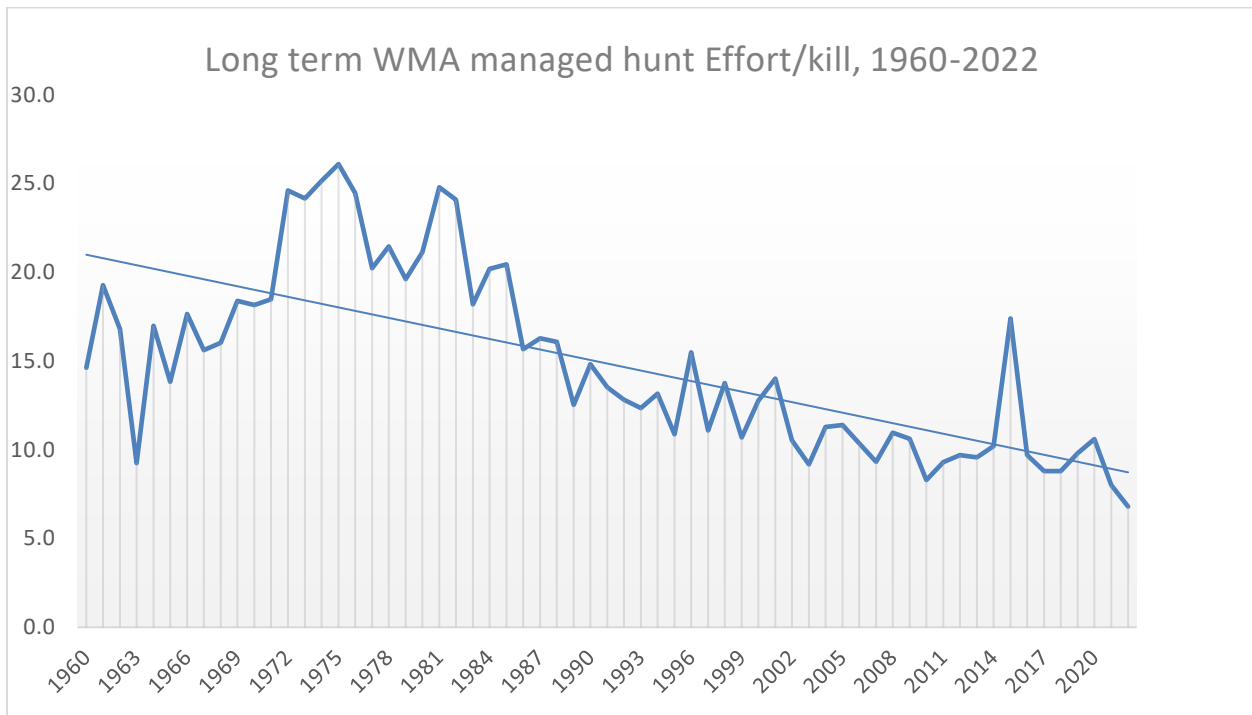
Year	Reporting system (all sources)	% Change from previous season	Estimated hunter harvest survey	% Change from previous season
2008/09	116,571	na	158,300	-21%
2009/10	107,455	-8%	147,300	-7%
2010/11	104,832	-2%	153,500	4%
2011/12	76,378	-27%	133,000	-13%
2012/13	63,278	-17%	174,700*	31%
2013/14	68,988	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%
2022/23	116,487	13%	217,700	-9%

\*= 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 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 5*). 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 5*).



*Figure 5. Long term WMA managed hunt efforts per deer harvested.*

The recorded harvest for WMA either-sex managed deer hunts was 1,966 deer in 2022 (*Table 6*). WMA managed deer hunts had an average hunter success rate of 6.8 efforts per deer harvested, which is the best on record (*Figure 5*). 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 52% buck and



48% doe. The ratio remains around 50% for both bucks and does each season. WMA deer harvest with a firearm on Maurepas and Joyce was limited to bucks only for the second consecutive season. Either-sex deer harvest opportunities will return on both areas for segments of the 2023 WMA firearm season.

Table 6. 2022 WMA Managed Hunt Results.

2022 WMA Managed Hunts	Hunter efforts	Total harvest	Bucks	Does	Efforts per deer
WMA					
Alexander State Forest (Oct.)	177	20	10	10	8.9
Alexander State Forest (Nov.)	141	13	9	4	10.8
Attakapas *	85	1	0	1	85.0
Bayou Macon **	122	20	8	12	6.1
Big Lake **	360	45	21	24	8.0
Bodcau	224	32	21	11	7.0
Boeuf **	542	91	46	45	6.0
Buckhorn **	216	25	13	12	8.6
Camp Beaugard	352	64	41	23	5.5
Clear Creek (Oct.)	733	121	73	48	6.1
Clear Creek *	466	137	68	69	3.4
Dewey Wills	974	159	61	98	6.1
Fort Polk (Oct.)	400	121	73	48	3.3
Fort Polk	1269	137	68	69	9.3
Grassy Lake **	290	44	17	27	6.6
JC Sonny Gilbert*	88	6	4	2	14.7
Joyce* ^	46	3	3	0	15.3
Loggy Bayou	188	35	22	13	5.4
Maurepas Swamp ** ^	131	1	1	0	131.0
Pearl River *	133	2	2	0	66.5
Peason Ridge (Oct.)	579	154	93	61	3.8
Peason Ridge	1072	169	75	94	6.3
Pomme de Terre**	220	38	20	18	5.8
Richard K. Yancey**	1073	171	72	99	6.3
Russell Sage**	563	87	53	34	6.5
Sandy Hollow *	120	7	3	4	17.1
Sherburne **	687	70	29	41	9.8
Spring Bayou *	185	15	5	10	12.3
Thistlethwaite	490	21	14	7	23.3
Tunica Hills ** (Nov.)	51	1	1	0	51.0
West Bay (Oct.)	1140	147	88	59	7.8
West Bay *	287	9	4	5	31.9
2022 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	13404	1966			6.8
2021 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	13957	1750			8.0
2020 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	10016	948			10.6
2019 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	13583	1390			9.8
2018 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	17192	1952			8.8
2017 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	21080	2393			8.8
2016 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	22862	2357			9.7
2015 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	22650	1233			18.4
2014 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	25814	2473			10.4
2013 Managed Either-Sex Deer Hunts	24682	2542			9.7
10 yr. AVERAGE	19735	1911			10.3
*= self clearing only					
**= combined mandatory check and self clearing					
^bucks only					

## **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 inform harvest recommendations for participants tailored to current habitat conditions and herd densities.

The 2022 – 23 DMAP harvest was 12,372 deer, with a harvest rate of one deer per 126 acres compared to one deer per 121 acres the previous season. In 2022-23, there were 425 clubs (1,139,301 acres) enrolled in DMAP Tiers 1 and 2 in which cooperators provided full harvest data. An additional 308 clubs (412,394 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 second consecutive year. Buck age structure on DMAP clubs remains at all-time highs with approximately 78% of antlered bucks harvested reaching 3.5 years or older. That percentage was 2<sup>nd</sup> best in the nation as reported in the 2023 National Deer Association Annual Deer Report. Similarly, the percentage of 1.5 year old bucks harvested on DMAP lands in Louisiana was the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest among states reporting white-tailed deer harvest. These harvest results were produced through voluntary efforts of participating DMAP cooperatives.

## **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.

Twelve new records were included in the 2022 – 23 recognition list as well as 6 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).

In 2022, Louisiana became the 29<sup>th</sup> 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, 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 positive are used to delineate the boundary. Currently, Tensas Parish and portions of Concordia, Franklin and Madison parishes are included in the CWD control area. The control area expansion into northeast Concordia occurred in 2023 due to the recent detections 5 miles south of the index case.

The 2022 – 23 deer season was the first 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. 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 2,370 CWD samples in 2022-23 (16,141 since 2002). Eleven of the 2,370 samples were positive for CWD. All 12 CWD detections from the last two 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. In addition, an effort to incentivize sampling through a prize promotion was sponsored for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year 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 found. In addition to the efforts mentioned, 7 drop off coolers were placed within the CWD control area. Hunters submitted 240 deer heads for diagnostic sampling at the drop off sites. Due the use

within the CWD control area, 6 additional sites will be added for the 2023 deer season. CWD sample drop off sites are listed on the LDWF website.

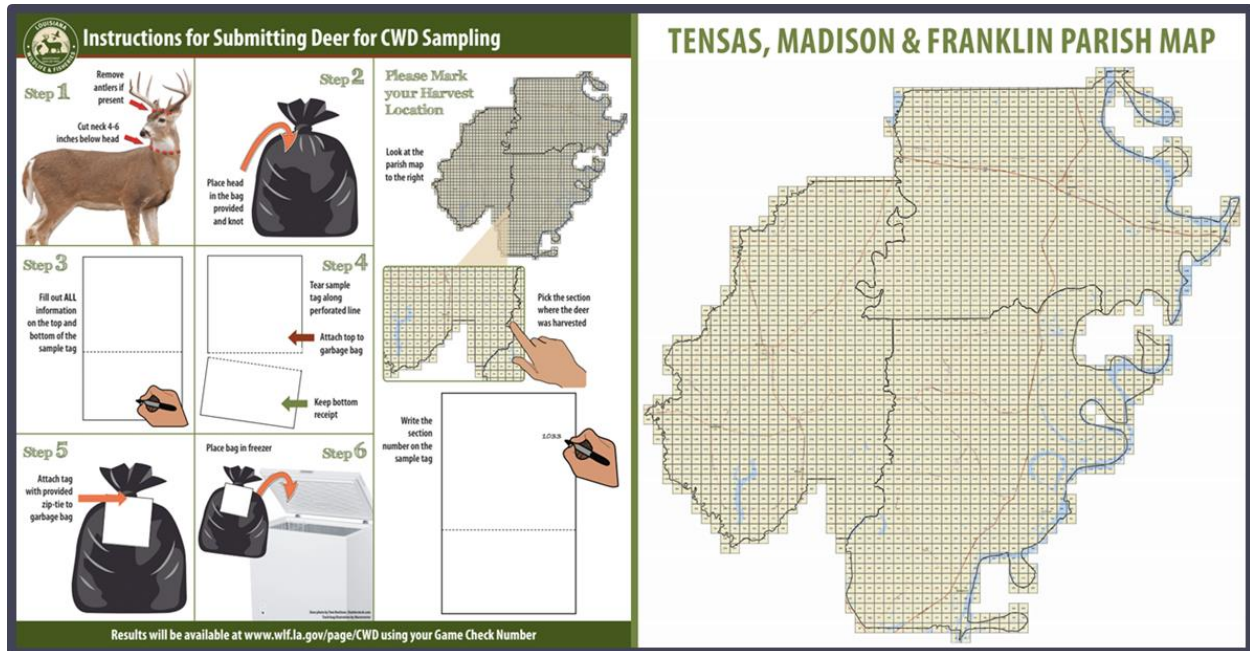


Figure 6. Drop off cooler instructions and parish grid map example from 2022 season. The grid number is used to assign an approximate location to the sample submitted.

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](http://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 will be available outside of the CWD control area in Concordia, Catahoula, Morehouse 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>.