

# Deer Management Unit (DMU) Public Outreach and Interaction Final Report

Zone D–DMUs 10 and 11

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*This report is dedicated to the memory of Jamie Hall, Technical Assistance Group member, farmer, hunter, and father.*

**May 20, 2013**

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

DEP	Department of Environmental Protection
DMTAG	Deer Management Technical Assistance Group
DMU	Deer Management Unit
FWC	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
TAG	Technical Assistance Group
WMA	Wildlife Management Area

## Executive Summary

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) implemented a public outreach and input process during the first three months of 2013 in management Zone D that focused on private lands in the Florida Panhandle west of Tallahassee. The goal of this process was to present the concept of Deer Management Units (DMUs) to hunters, farmers, and the general public and to receive comments about deer management preferences for the two DMUs located in Zone D (DMU 10 is located south of Interstate 10, and DMU 11 is located north of Interstate 10). Normandeau Associates assisted FWC by marketing, coordinating, and facilitating the meetings and coordinating collection of the comments.

The process resulted in the following goals and objectives:

### Overarching Goal

To ensure a healthy and reasonably balanced deer herd in DMUs 10 and 11 of Zone D (the Florida Panhandle) while maintaining or increasing satisfaction of hunters, farmers, and citizens.

**Goal 1:** Maintain or increase hunter acceptance and support of white-tailed deer management regulations in Zone D.

#### *Objectives*

- Implement a marketing and public information campaign about procedures to develop the plan, details of the plan, and the plan's expected benefits.
- Collect and publish harvest data to support the management plan and drive management plan improvement.
- Design regulations that have significant stakeholder support.
  - Simplify rules as much as possible.
  - Continuously collect feedback from stakeholders.

**Goal 2:** Maintain or slightly increase the overall deer population in DMUs 10 and 11 of Zone D.

#### *Objectives*

- Implement antler and antlerless harvest restrictions designed to achieve a healthy balance of age structure and sex ratio.
- Stakeholder survey results will indicate an increased satisfaction with deer population.

**Goal 3:** Increase hunter satisfaction through improved chances of seeing more bucks and harvesting larger bucks.

#### *Objectives*

- Implement an antler restriction that protects the majority of 1.5-year-old bucks while allowing harvest of bucks at least 2.5 years old.
- Institute a reasonable annual buck bag limit that reduces buck harvest and helps to balance sex ratios.
- Implement a hunter education plan to explain the reasons behind the harvest restrictions.

**Goal 4:** Maintain or increase the doe population while allowing equity among hunters to harvest antlerless deer.

***Objectives***

- Maintain the number of days available for hunters to harvest antlerless deer.
- Increase flexibility in days for access to antlerless deer hunting without negatively impacting the doe population.
  - Add weekend hunts to correspond with holidays for an 8-day season.
  - Eliminate the 7 consecutive day format
  - Eliminate 2 antlerless per day opportunities

**Goal 5:** Manage deer depredation to ensure that both farmers' and hunters' needs are considered.

***Objectives***

- Encourage land management practices that draw deer away from agricultural lands.
  - Encourage warm season food plots on private lands
- Increase hunter education on habitat management.
- Implement a system that allows hunters to help execute the farmer's permits without liability to the farmer.
  - Encourage youth hunts or other hunts that increase hunter recruitment and diversity.

**Goal 6:** Maintain broad support of the deer hunting heritage.

***Objectives***

- Implement sound hunter recruitment and retention programs.
- Initiate a public relations campaign that informs stakeholders about the reasons and goals for deer management.

These goals and objectives were formulated via consensus by a stakeholder Technical Assistance Group (TAG), the members of which were chosen based on an open and public application process. The TAG considered public comments and online and statewide survey results over the course of two in-person meetings and one web-based meeting. Public comment on deer management preferences for the proposed DMUs in Zone D was collected during three public meetings (Tallahassee, Marianna, and Pensacola) with about 250 attendees as well as two webinars with 25 participants. Public comment was also collected from an online survey hosted on the FWC website. An online presentation was available for viewing if someone was unable to attend the public meetings or webinars. In addition, a statewide survey was conducted during the latter part of 2012, which measured public opinions on the Florida deer population, deer management, and hunting preferences.

## 1 Introduction and Project Purpose

*White-tailed deer management in Florida and throughout the U. S. is certainly an example of a “great American success story.” From near extinction in the 1930s deer populations and deer harvests have soared to record highs in Florida. Almost 85% of Florida’s 226,000 hunters hunt deer (U.S. Department of the Interior, et al. 2001) making them the most popular game animal in the state. White-tailed deer are also one of a few species of wildlife whose over-abundance can seriously degrade its own habitat as well as the habitat of other wildlife, and inflict serious damage on agricultural crops and ornamental plantings. It should be recognized and celebrated, therefore, that deer harvest management will likely continue to be a necessary and desirable practice in Florida for many years to come.—from Strategic Plan for Deer Management in Florida 2008–2018*

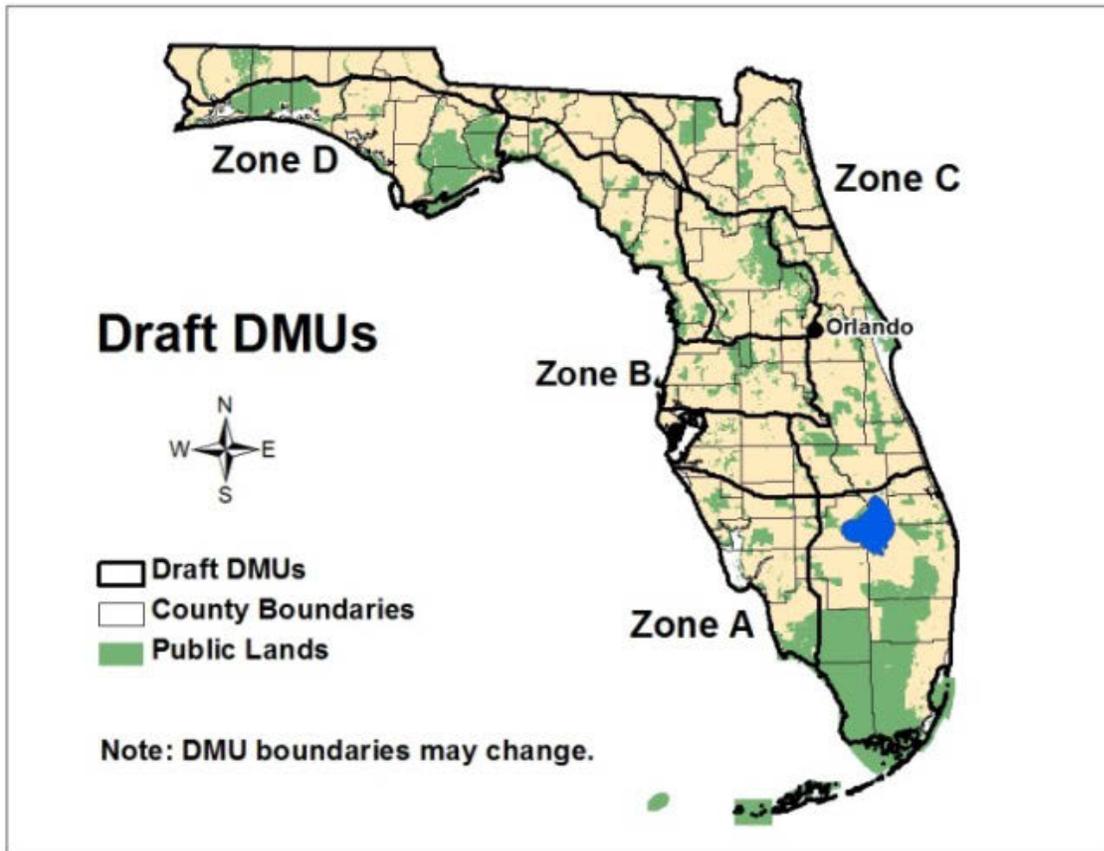
The purpose of this pilot project was to help the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff plan, coordinate and facilitate public outreach and interaction related to the development of new proposed Deer Management Units (DMUs) in management Zone D, the Florida Panhandle. Zone D represents all of the Florida Panhandle west of Tallahassee. The FWC plans to divide Zone D into two DMUs—DMU 10 and DMU 11 (Figure 2–1 and Figure 2–2).

Three public meetings, two webinars, two in-person stakeholder Technical Assistance Group (TAG) meetings, and one TAG conference call were held to collect input from stakeholders on deer management and hunting heritage suggestions for DMUs 10 and 11. While the focus was on DMUs 10 and 11, some possible action items identified by the TAG could be applied statewide. Two surveys were included as part of the outreach—an online survey developed by Normandeau available through the FWC DMU website for collecting public comment, and a statewide telephone survey conducted by Responsive Management in late 2012.

The purpose of these meetings and outreach was to collect input from stakeholders representing hunters, farmers, and the general public on deer management preferences for DMUs 10 and 11. Input was collected on the status of the deer population, bag limits, antlerless harvest, antler regulations, and deer depredation permits. Additionally, stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide input on local issues of concern including agricultural depredation, wildlife management area issues, predation on deer, etc.

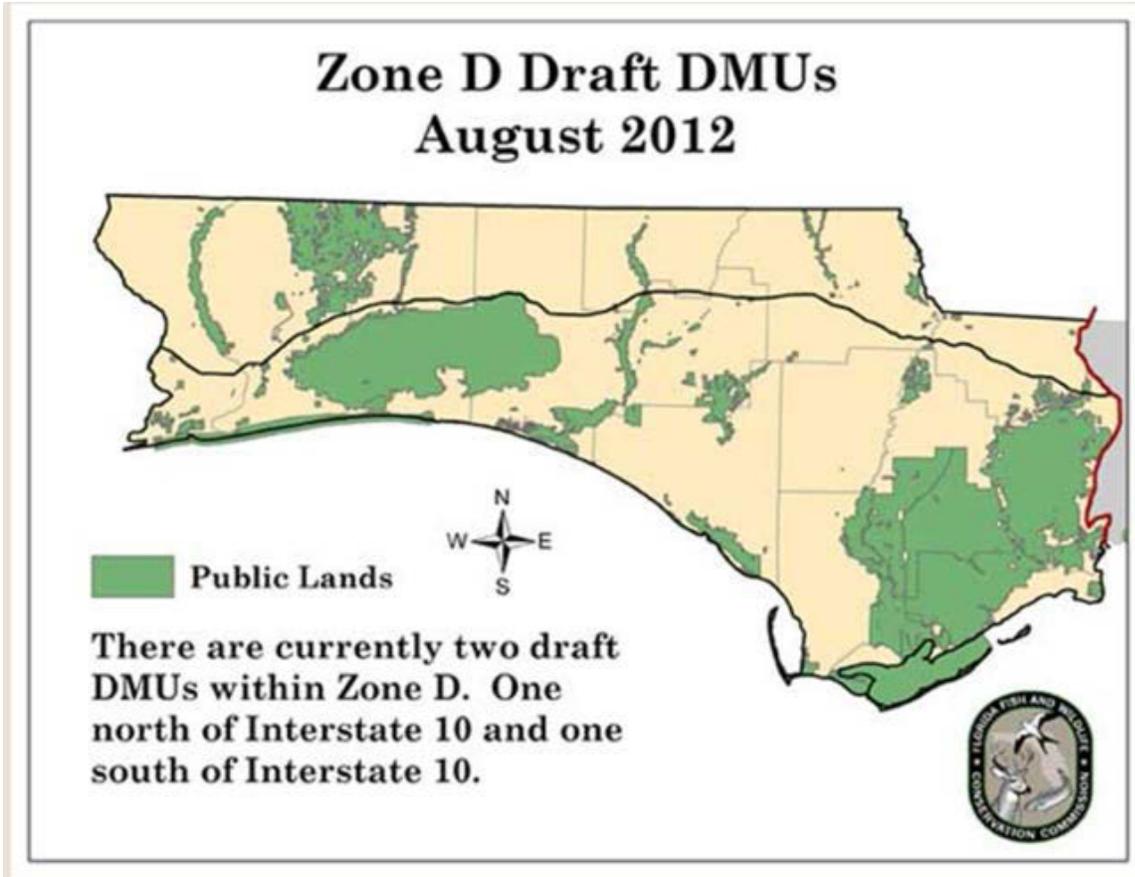
## 2 Project Background

There are 11 DMUs proposed for Florida as shown in Figure 2–1. The public input process discussed in this report focused on Zone D, which is shown in Figure 2–2



**Figure 2–1. Proposed Deer Management Units (DMUs) for Florida.**

FWC would like to integrate more flexibility into its management of deer by dividing the existing management regions into smaller Deer Management Units (DMUs). This adaptive approach to deer management is intended to improve hunting opportunities and help to maintain a healthy and reasonably balanced deer herd. The rationale behind the new proposed DMUs is that Florida’s deer population varies throughout the state. The productivity of deer in Florida is limited due to low quality habitat linked to poor quality soils, which in turn limits the population compared to neighboring states where soils are more fertile. Deer breeding chronology (commonly known as the rut) also varies widely statewide, making the management of deer challenging and likely to be less effective if a one-size-fits-all set of regulations is applied.



**Figure 2–2. Proposed Deer Management Units (DMUs) in Zone D.**

The timing of the rut varies quite dramatically within Florida. The rut in Zone A ranges from June through October, while the rut in Zone D can range from December through early March. In general, deer in Florida are smaller than in other states, and there is also considerable difference in size within Florida with larger deer in the north and smaller deer in the south.

The Florida deer population has risen over the last half century resulting in an increased deer harvest of time (Figure 2–3). This increase is most likely due to a combination of harvest regulations, improved habitat and wildlife management practices, and effective law enforcement. Additionally, the screw-worm which was considered responsible for limited deer herd growth in South Florida was eradicated in 1958.

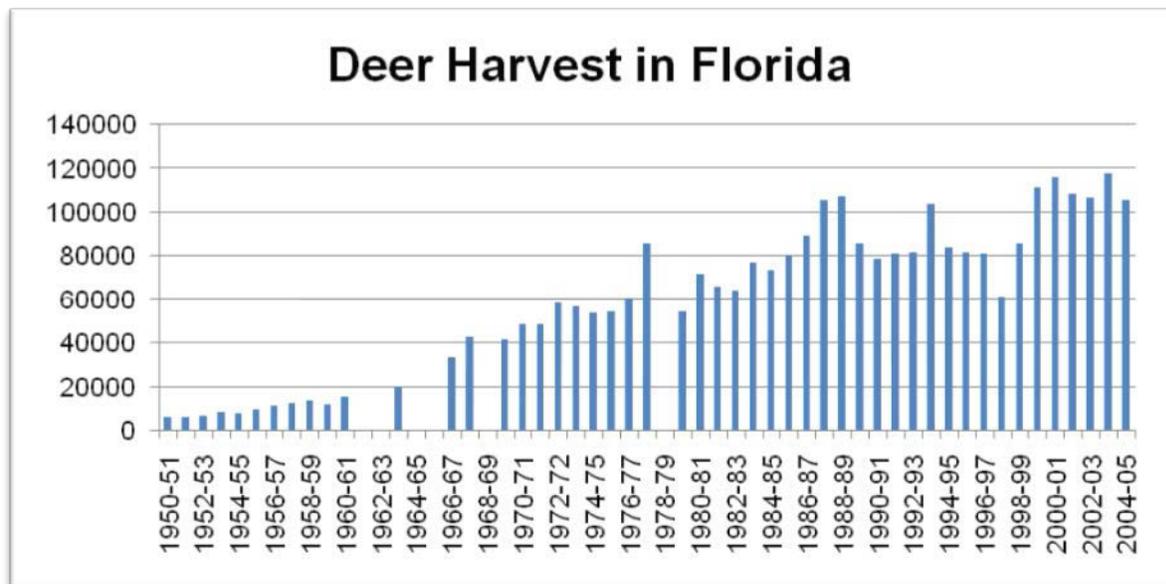


Figure 2–3. Estimated annual deer harvest in Florida since 1950.

### 3 Methods:

The DMU Outreach project used a multipronged approach to collect public input and then synthesize the information into suggested goals and objectives related to deer management in Zone D of Florida. The following section outlines the methods used for project outreach.

#### 3.1 Website

A web page was designed for the project and posted on the FWC website ([www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu](http://www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu)). The page has information on the program, links to a PowerPoint presentation, the online survey, and an opportunity to register to join an email list to receive future updates on deer management issues (Figure 3–1).

#### 3.2 Statewide Opinion Survey

FWC contracted with Responsive Management, a professional survey company specializing in natural resource management issues, to conduct a statewide survey to determine the opinions of hunters, farmers, and residents about the deer population in Florida and the management of deer. In addition, the survey collected information from hunters to estimate deer harvest at the statewide, zone, DMU, and county level for the 2011–2012 hunting season. Hunter effort (days hunted) was also estimated. The survey was conducted in November and December of 2012 via phone.

### **3.3 Online Survey**

An online survey was developed using Survey Monkey software and made available on the FWC DMU website. The online survey was designed to collect feedback, ideas, and input from stakeholders. The survey can be found in Appendix 2.

### **3.4 Public Meetings**

Three public meetings were held on 29, 30, and 31 January 2013 in Marianna, Tallahassee, and Pensacola, respectively. Considerable efforts were made to advertise the meeting dates and locations for 2 to 3 weeks prior to the scheduled meetings.

### **3.5 Webinars**

Two webinars were held on 11 February (6 pm) and 12 February 2013 (12 pm). The purpose of the webinars was to allow additional opportunities for the public to learn about the proposed DMUs, ask questions, and provide comments. The webinars consisted of a PowerPoint presentation explaining the DMU process along with a method to submit questions and comments to the FWC. Twenty five participants attended the webinars.

### **3.6 Technical Assistance Group (TAG)**

A Technical Assistance Group (TAG) was assembled to consider all public comments and input collected from public meetings, webinars, and surveys, and then develop goals and objectives for DMUs 10 and 11. TAG participation in the process included two in-person meetings, one webinar, and review of documents between meetings. TAG member selection was based on subject knowledge, group represented, willingness to represent other stakeholders, willingness to have open discussion about the issues, and availability for meetings.

### **3.7 Outreach**

Extensive outreach was conducted to garner the participation and input needed for the project. Outreach efforts were designed to increase participation at the public meetings and webinars, to inform the public of the DMU stakeholder participation process, to provide information on proposed DMUs, to solicit TAG membership applications, and to promote the availability of the online public survey. Outreach and methods included the following:

- Emails to the FWC deer management distribution list (approximately 47,000 emails primarily comprised of hunters)
- Postings on FWC's Facebook and Twitter sites
- Press releases (Appendix 1) to multiple news outlets in the Panhandle
- Outreach to all IFAS extension agents and their contacts in the Panhandle
- Direct mail to all relevant hunting-related businesses in the FWC database (flyer in Appendix 1)
- Direct contact (calls and emails) with hunting organizations statewide
- Direct calls to land managers, state agencies, and wildlife managers

The screenshot shows the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Ask FWC, About, Contact, News, Calendar, Get Involved, Home, and a search box. Below this is the FWC logo and the text "Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission". A secondary navigation bar lists: Fishing, Boating, Hunting, Licenses & Permits, Wildlife Viewing, Wildlife & Habitats, Research, Education, and Conservation.

The main content area is titled "Deer Management Units (DMUs)". On the left is a sidebar with a "By Species" section listing: Alligator, Deer, private lands, DMUs, Dove Hotline, Quail, Small Game, Turkey, Waterfowl/Duck, Wild Hog, Outta' the Woods, Youth Opportunities, Misc. Hunting Links, Opened/Closed Areas, and WMA Harvest Reports.

The main content area features a survey question: "Would you like a say in how White-tailed Deer populations are managed in Florida?". Below this is a paragraph explaining that the FWC is developing a framework for DMUs based on Florida's four hunting zones and similar habitat characteristics.

A map titled "Proposed DMUs for Zone D" shows two units, DMU 10 and DMU 11, in the Florida Panhandle. The map includes labels for various locations like Blackwater WMA, De Funiak Springs, Bonifay, Chipley, Marianna, Quincy, Tallahassee, Apalachicola, and Port St. Joe. A legend indicates "Proposed DMUs" (yellow), "County Boundaries" (black), and "Public Lands" (green). A note states: "Note: DMU boundaries may change." Below the map is a link for "Draft Statewide DMU Map".

Below the map is a section titled "Zone D DMU Pilot" which states: "The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is currently piloting the DMU process in Zone D. Once we have completed and evaluated the process in Zone D we will begin implementation of DMUs throughout the rest of the state."

Next is a section titled "Public Input Process for Deer Management Units in Zone D: The Florida Panhandle" which states: "FWC is providing interested stakeholders with an opportunity to share their opinions on deer management within the two proposed Deer Management Units in Zone D of the Florida Panhandle. Stakeholder input is important in designing DMU management goals and objectives and your input is needed and valued. Specifically, FWC is looking for feedback on:"

- Deer population management
- Antlerless deer take opportunities
- Antler regulations
- Bag limits
- Other local deer issues

At the bottom, it mentions: "Normandeau Associates, Inc., of Gainesville, FL, has been contracted to work with FWC to facilitate stakeholder meetings and input. We have created a diverse system for public..."

Figure 3–1. Pilot project web page on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) website.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Statewide Opinion Survey Results

Responsive Management conducted phone surveys during November and December of 2012 and collected a total of 4,872 completed responses. Of this total, 2,519 were completed by hunters, 1,183 by farmers, and 1,170 by residents (non-hunting, non-farming members of the public). Some key findings from the survey are presented below:

- There was general satisfaction with deer management among all three groups—hunters 65% (25% dissatisfied), farmers 56% (14% dissatisfied), and residents 42% (8% dissatisfied).
- Among hunter motivations, time spent outdoors and with family and friends ranked highest. Seeing deer was also ranked as a higher motivation than harvesting deer.
- There was opposition to bag limits being imposed for the number of bucks that can be harvested—78% oppose a 1-buck bag limit and 54% oppose a 2-buck bag limit. As higher bag limits were suggested, the level of opposition and support began to even out.
- The vast majority of hunters practice still hunting with firearms (over 90%), while close to two-thirds hunt with archery equipment and muzzleloaders. Only about one-fifth of hunters use crossbows or dogs.
- Farmers and residents are generally supportive of hunting as an effective population control tool for deer.

The majority of hunters in Zone D are still hunters, and most hunt on public land. Participation in hunting in DMUs 10 and 11 based on hunting methods and the ownership of lands being hunted is shown in Table 4–1.

**Table 4–1. Hunting Participation in Deer Management Units (DMUs) 10 and 11 in Zone D (Florida Panhandle)\***

		DMU 10	DMU 11
Hunting Method	Still Hunting	93%	99%
	Dog Hunting	23%	10%
Land Type	Private	55%	66%
	Public	27%	18%
	Both	18%	17%

\*Numbers do not add to 100% as hunters could select more than one option.

Table 4–2 shows the estimated deer harvest as broken down by DMU. The data in Table 4–2 indicate that DMUs 10 and 11 are the most productive for hunters for bucks and does and for the overall harvest per hunter. For DMUs 10 and 11 combined, bucks per hunter averaged 0.785, does per hunter averaged 0.505, and total harvest per hunter averaged 1.29. Statewide the

estimate was 0.65 bucks per hunter, 0.35 does per hunter, and an overall success rate of 0.99 deer per hunter.

**Table 4–2. Estimated number of deer harvested per hunter: 2011–2012 Responsive Management Statewide Deer Harvest Survey.**

DMU	Total Buck Per Hunter	Total Doe Per Hunter	Total Harvest Per Hunter
Hunted in DMU 1	0.39	0.22	0.61
Hunted in DMU 2	0.36	0.15	0.51
Hunted in DMU 3	0.54	0.31	0.84
Hunted in DMU 4	0.45	0.24	0.68
Hunted in DMU 5	0.38	0.13	0.52
Hunted in DMU 6	0.56	0.30	0.86
Hunted in DMU 7	0.42	0.19	0.60
Hunted in DMU 8	0.64	0.33	0.97
Hunted in DMU 9	0.61	0.36	0.97
Hunted in DMU 10	0.65	0.37	1.02
Hunted in DMU 11	0.92	0.64	1.56
Not sure which DMU hunted in	0.34	0.20	0.54
Statewide	0.65	0.35	0.99

Table 4–3 shows the estimated number of bucks harvested statewide. The estimate column indicates that over 47,000 bucks were likely harvested during the 2011–2012 hunting season.

**Table 4–3. Number of bucks harvested statewide by hunters: 2011–2012 Responsive Management Statewide Deer Harvest Survey.**

Number of Bucks Harvested	Estimated Number of Deer Hunters		
	Estimate	Lower Bound (95% CI)	Upper Bound (95% CI)
Did not harvest any bucks	88,490	86,705	90,275
1 buck	27,274	25,783	28,765
2 bucks	11,970	10,915	13,024
3 bucks	4,900	4,207	5,594
4 bucks	2,013	1,564	2,462
5 bucks	1,086	755	1,416
6 bucks	442	230	653
7 bucks	213	66	360
8 bucks	338	152	523
9 bucks	95	0	193
10 or more bucks	146	24	268
Statewide	136,966	135,151	138,781

Table 4–4 shows the estimated number of bucks harvested in DMU 10 by hunters during the 2011–2012 hunting season. The data indicate that the vast majority of hunters either did not harvest a buck or harvested just one or two. The total number of bucks harvested in DMU 10 was estimated at approximately 4,300 with an approximate range from 3,100 to 5,500.

**Table 4–4. Number of bucks harvested in Deer Management Unit (DMU) 10 by hunters: 2011–2012 Responsive Management Statewide Deer Management Survey.**

Number of Bucks Harvested	Estimated Number of Deer Hunters		
	Estimate	Lower Bound (95% CI)	Upper Bound (95% CI)
Did not harvest any bucks	6,587	6,072	7,101
1 buck	2,678	2,224	3,131
2 bucks	1,017	710	1,324
3 bucks	252	94	411
4 bucks	217	70	365
5 bucks	50	0	120
6 bucks	52	0	124
7 bucks	26	0	77
8 bucks	0	0	0
9 bucks	0	0	0
10 or more bucks	0	0	0
DMU 10 Total	10,878	9,869	11,887

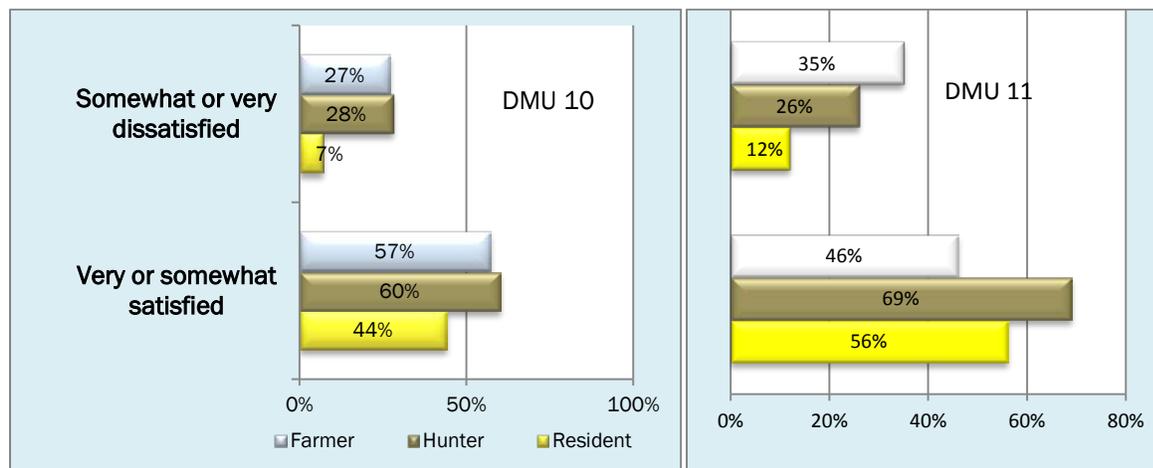
Table 4–5 shows the estimated number of bucks harvested in DMU 11 by hunters during the 2011–2012 hunting season. The data indicate that the vast majority of hunters either did not harvest a buck or harvested just one. The total number of bucks harvested in DMU 11 was estimated at approximately 4,600.

**Table 4–5. Number of bucks harvested in Deer Management Unit (DMU) 11 by hunters: 2011–2012 Responsive Management Statewide Deer Harvest Survey.**

Number of Bucks Harvested	Estimated Number of Deer Hunters		
	Estimate	Lower Bound (95% CI)	Upper Bound (95% CI)
Did not harvest any bucks	5,311	4,808	5,813
1 buck	2,557	2,117	2,998
2 bucks	898	610	1,187
3 bucks	576	340	811
4 bucks	316	140	493
5 bucks	158	32	284
6 bucks	51	0	122
7 bucks	27	0	79
8 bucks	0	0	0
9 bucks	0	0	0
10 or more bucks	51	0	122
DMU 11 Total	9,945	8,976	10,913

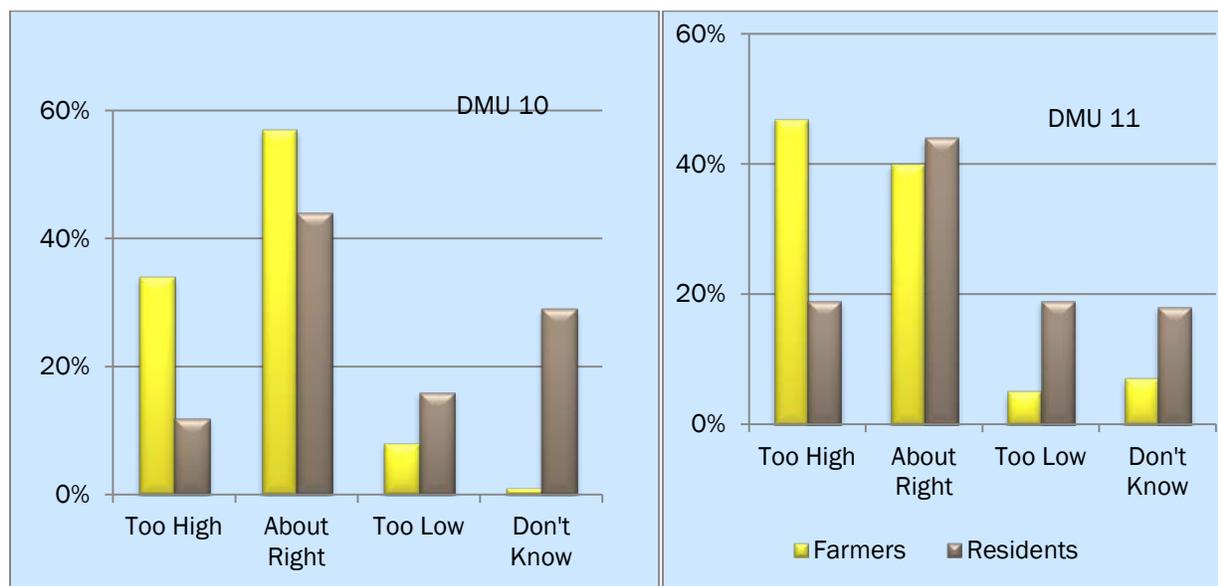
Results of the statewide survey show that 57% of farmers in DMU 10 and 46% of farmers in DMU 11 were satisfied with the current status of the deer population and deer management; 27% and 35% were dissatisfied in DMUs 10 and 11, respectively. The level of satisfaction in DMUs 10 and 11 differs somewhat from the rest of the state. Hunters and farmers were less satisfied as a whole, and residents were more satisfied (Figure 4–1).

Satisfaction outweighs dissatisfaction, but close to one-third of farmers reported dissatisfaction. The primary reasons given for satisfaction included plenty of deer, no problems with deer, and the opinion that FWC is doing a generally good job with deer management. The primary reasons given for dissatisfaction included that there are too many deer, depredation problems, and the buck to doe ratio was not acceptable.



**Figure 4–1. Level of satisfaction in Zone D among farmers, hunters, and residents.**

The majority of farmers in DMU 10 perceive that the deer population is about the right size, while only 45% of residents felt the population is about the right size. In DMU 11 less than a majority of both farmers and residents perceive the deer population is about right. These results are summarized in Figure 4–2.



**Figure 4–2. Opinions on the deer population based on where participants live or farm.**

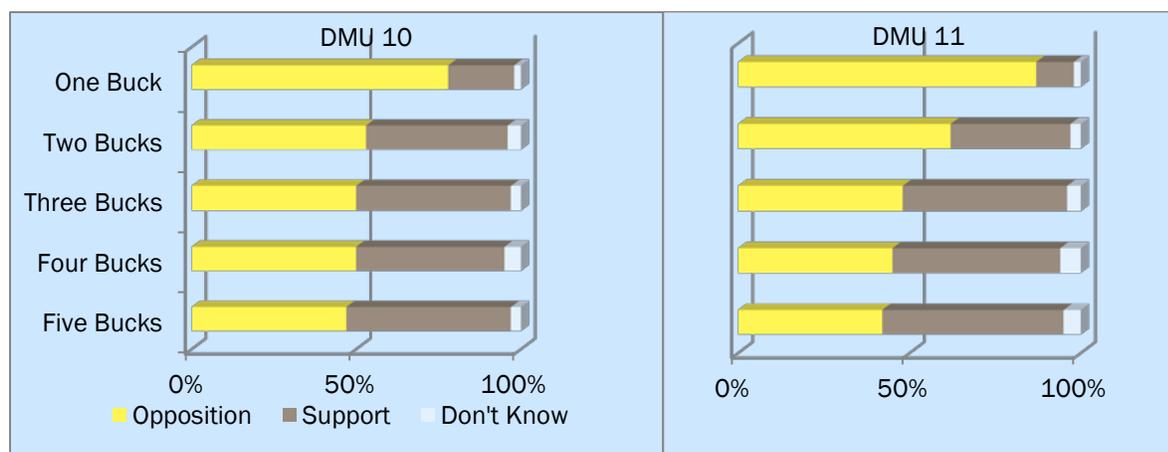
Opinions differ among hunters, farmers, and residents on whether FWC should work to increase the deer herd, keep it the same, or decrease it; and they also differ on the same topic between DMUs 10 and 11 (Figure 4–3). More hunters in DMU 11 want to see the deer population

decreased than increased. Four times as many farmers in DMU 11 want to see the deer population decreased rather than increased, while more than double the number of farmers in DMU 10 want to see the deer population decreased. Very few residents in DMU 10 want to see the herd decreased, while about half the residents want to see the herd decreased in DMU 11.



**Figure 4–3. Opinions of hunters, residents, and farmers on how they would like to see the deer population trend in next five years.**

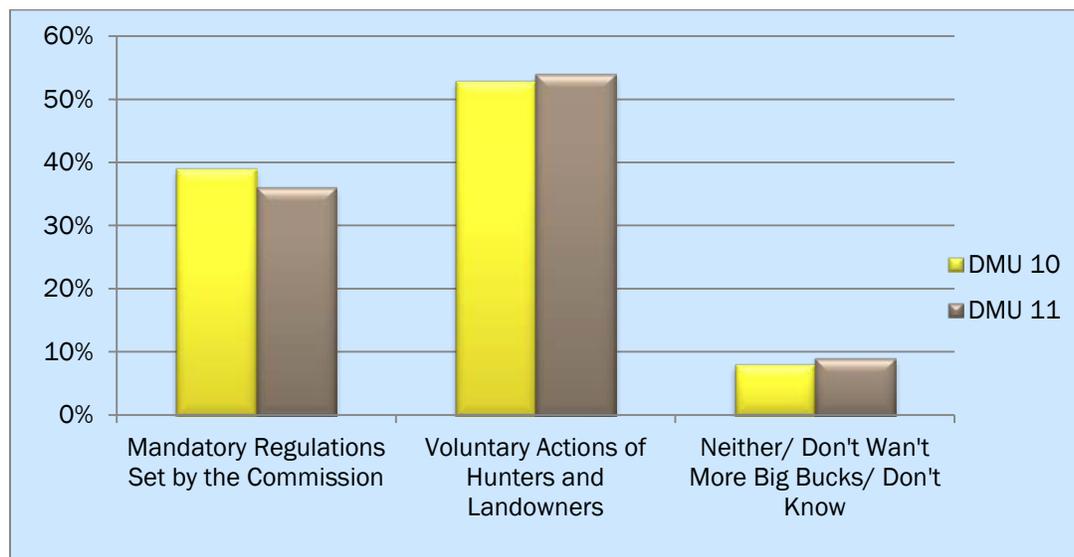
**Hunters were asked about bag limits for bucks and what they would support and oppose.** Figure 4–4 shows that there is significant opposition to imposing a 1-buck bag limit in both DMUs, but that above 1 buck the opposition is about 50% all the way up to a bag limit of 5 bucks in both DMUs with a steady decrease in opposition as the limit gets higher.



**Figure 4–4. Support and opposition among hunters for buck bag limits**

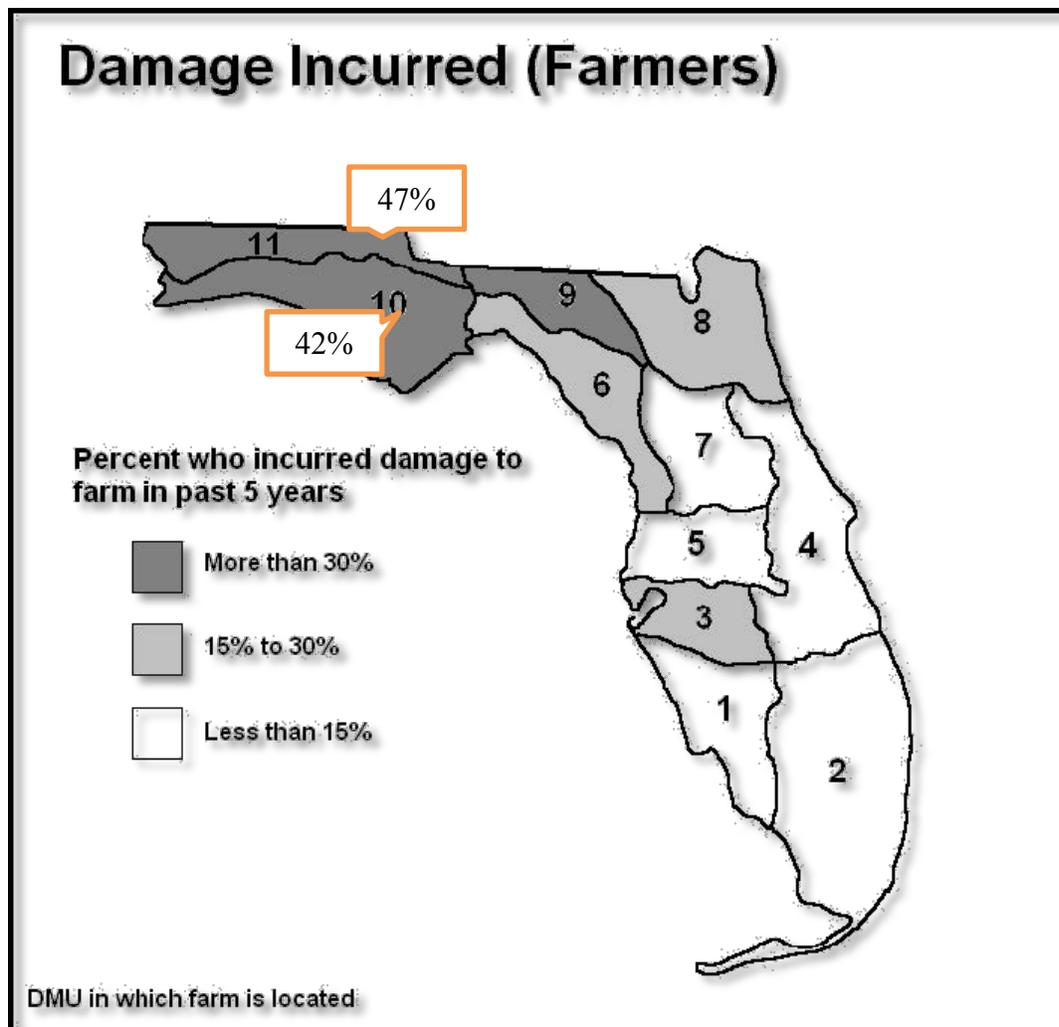
Hunters were also asked if they would support antler point regulations designed to increase the number of large bodied, large antlered bucks. In DMU 10, 82% of hunters supported this idea, while 77% supported it in DMU 11. Only 14% opposed the idea in DMU 10, and 17% opposed it in DMU 11. To follow up on this question, hunters were asked if they would prefer mandatory

regulations or voluntary actions. There was significantly more support for voluntary actions in both DMUs as shown in Figure 4–5.



**Figure 4–5. Hunter preference for mandatory regulations (such as antler point regulations) versus voluntary actions to increase the numbers of larger bucks.**

The deer depredation permit program was introduced in the late 1970s as a tool for farmers to help minimize crop losses caused by deer depredation. As the deer population increased, farmers experienced crop depredation (losses from deer eating crops) and needed a system to prevent large financial losses. A depredation permit allows hunters to take (kill) deer that are on croplands. In 2006, FWC issued more than 325 permits to farmers for deer depredation on 154,178 acres. Deer depredation is an issue of concern in DMU 11, where there is a significant amount of agricultural land and deer populations may be higher than in other portions of the state. Forty-seven percent of farmers in DMU 11 reported incurring damage from deer crop depredation (Figure 4–6).



**Figure 4–6. Crop depredation incurred by farmers**

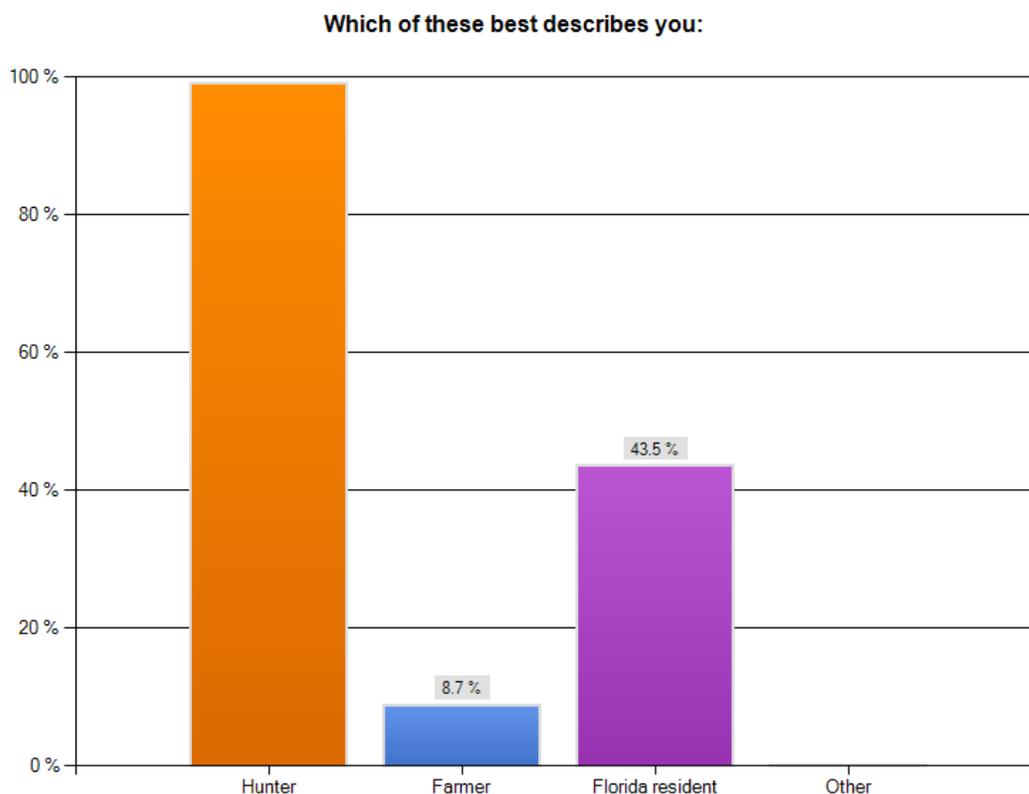
The statewide survey elicited information about deer and vehicle collisions among residents and farmers in DMUs 10 and 11. On a scale of 0 to 10, farmers indicated a concern of 6.22, and residents indicated a concern of 5.37. The same respondents indicated the number of deer and vehicle collisions they had experienced: 21% of the farmers reported a collision with a deer within the last 5 years, and 9% of the residents reported a collision within the last 5 years.

According to accident statistics received from the Florida Highway Patrol, collisions with animals (no separate entry for deer) represent a minor cause of vehicle accidents. For statewide data for 2010, there were three fatalities (0.1% of total fatalities), 272 injuries (0.11% of total injuries), and 289 instances of accidents that only involved property damage (0.25% of total accidents). There may be many more accidents involving animals on the highways that go unreported. Motorists choose to report these types of accidents primarily to law enforcement and insurance companies based on calls for assistance and claims for property damage. Where neither is needed, the accident is likely to go unreported.

According to information posted online by State Farm Insurance, out of 50 states, Florida ranked 47th and 48th in 2010–2011 and 2011–2012, respectively for the likelihood of vehicle collisions with deer. This likely reflects the fact that Florida’s deer population is smaller than in most other states. State Farm also projected the level of risk for 2011–2012 at 14,082 deer-related collisions in Florida, with the individual risk of any particular motorist hitting a deer being close to 1 in 1,000.

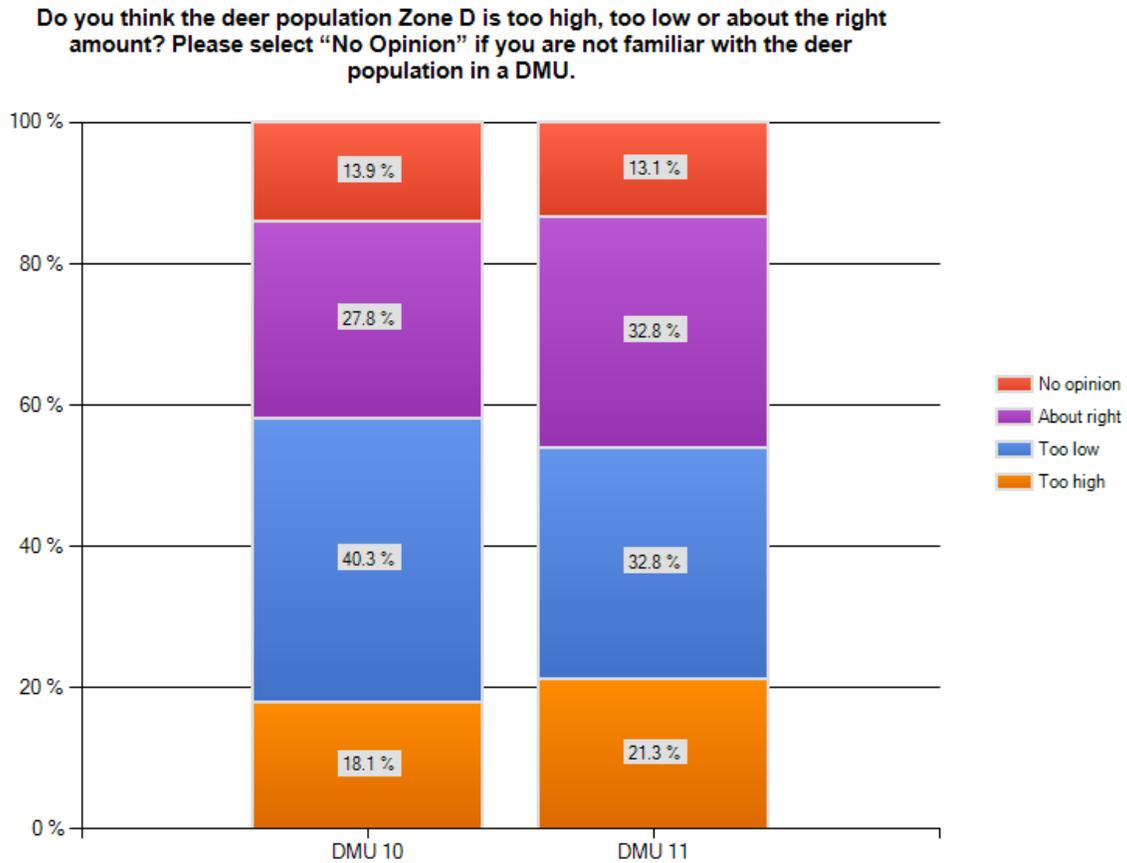
## 4.2 Online Survey Results

An online survey to collect public input was designed by Normandeau and provided on the DMU website. References to the availability of the survey were made in all printed materials and during all meetings and webinars. Over 91 people participated in the survey over a 6-week period. The majority of participants (98%) were hunters. Only 8.7% were farmers; and 43.5% identified themselves as Florida residents. Although only 43.5% identified themselves as Florida residents. This number is most likely misleading since many respondents only gave one answer to the question (e.g., identified themselves as hunters), and some gave more than one answer (e.g., identified themselves as hunters and residents). Percentages add up to more than 100 because respondents could indicate more than one affiliation (Figure 4–7).



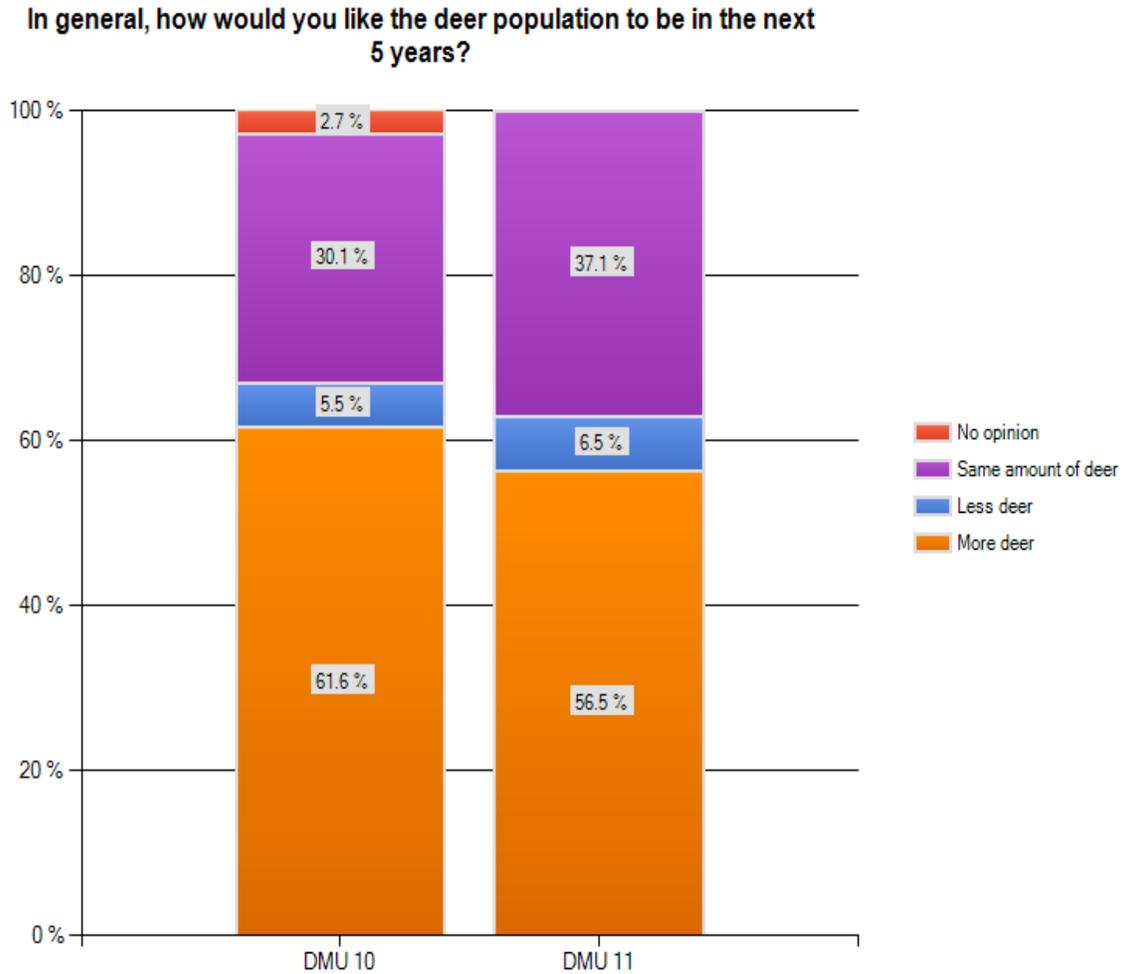
**Figure 4–7. Percentage of hunters, farmers, and residents who answered the online survey.**

Respondents were asked about how they felt about the deer population in DMUs 10 and 11. In DMU 10, 27.8% and 32.8% in DMU 11 felt it was just right; 40.3% and 32% felt it was too low, respectively; and 18.1% and 21.3%, respectively, felt it was too high (Figure 4–8).



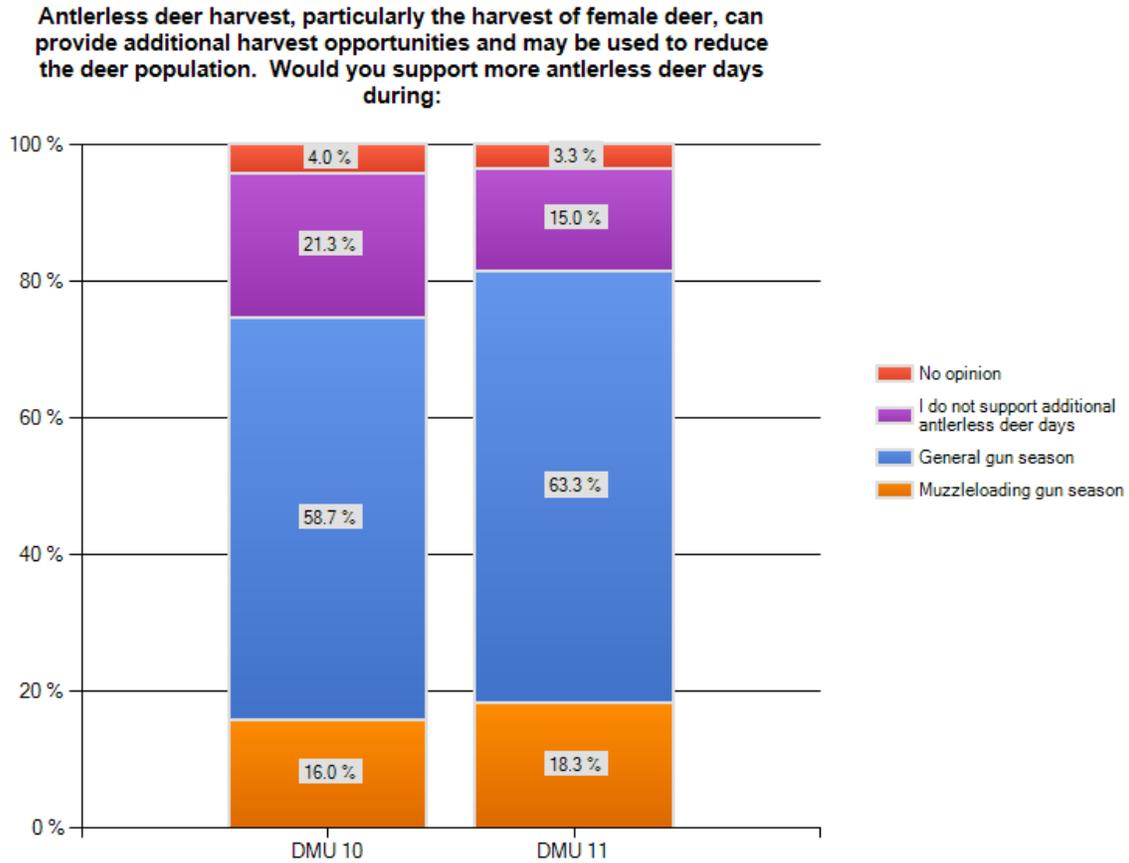
**Figure 4–8. Participant responses about the deer population in DMUs 10 and 11.**

When asked how they would like to see the deer population to be in the next five years, the majority (61.6% in DMU 10 and 56.5% in DMU 11) felt they would like to see more deer. About a third of respondents (30.1% DMU 10 and 37.1% DMU 11) wanted to see the same amount of deer (Figure 4–9).



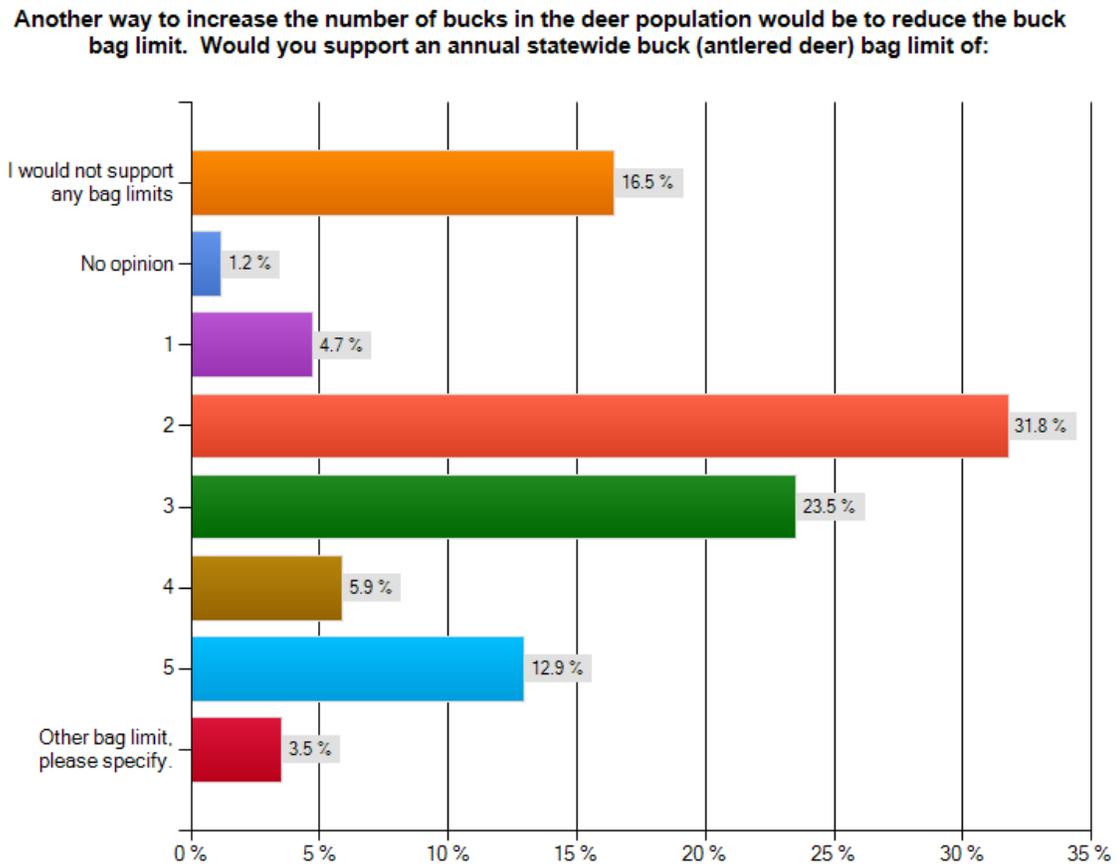
**Figure 4–9. Participant responses when asked how they would like to see the deer population in DMU 10 and 11 in the next 5 years.**

When asked if they would support additional antlerless deer harvest days during the general gun or muzzleloading gun seasons, the majority (58.7% DMU 10 and 63.3% in DMU 11) would support additional antlerless opportunities during general gun season with much less support for antlerless deer harvest days during the muzzleloading gun season (16.0% DMU 10 and 18.3% DMU 11); 21.3% in DMU 10 and 13.3% in DMU 11 do not support additional antlerless deer days (Figure 4–10).



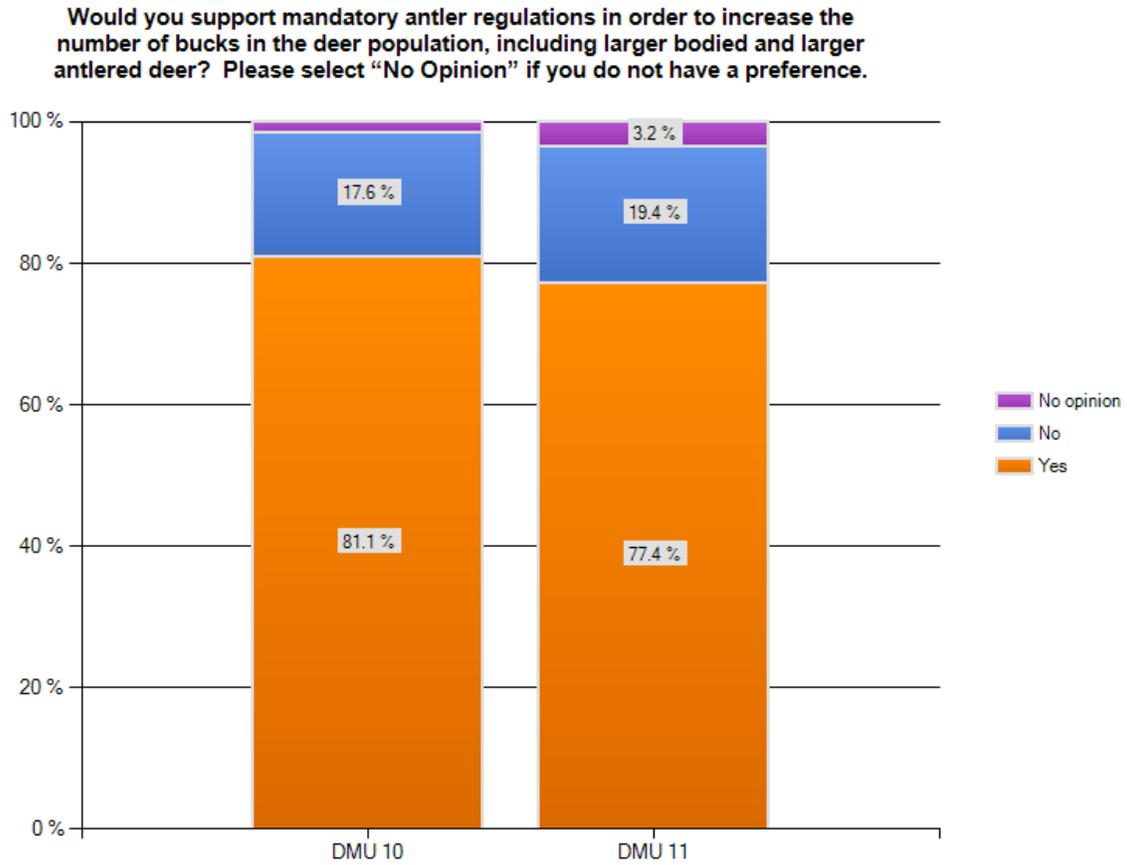
**Figure 4–10. Participant support of additional antlerless deer harvest days during general gun or muzzleloading gun seasons.**

When asked about support for buck bag limits, over 54% of respondents say that they would support bag limits of two or three deer; and 16% would not support any bag limits (Figure 4–11).



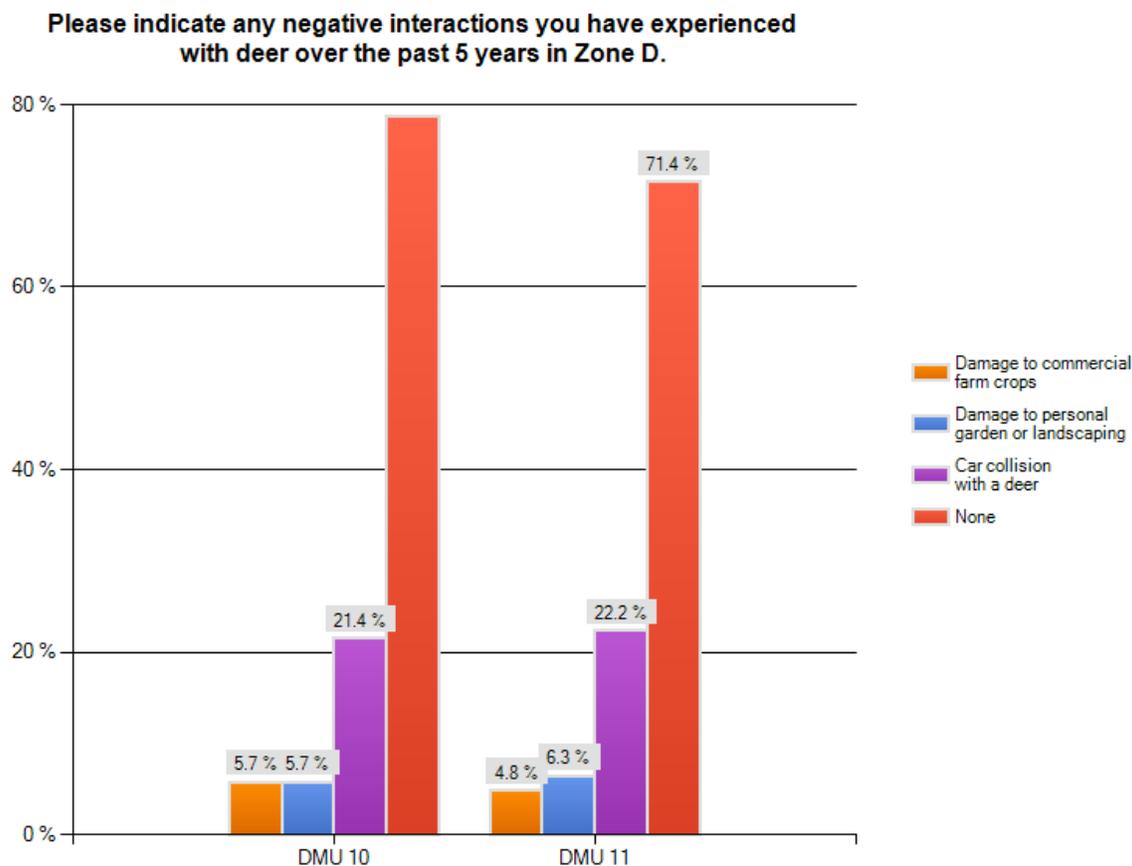
**Figure 4–11. Participant support of buck bag limits.**

Mandatory antler regulations received wide support from respondents. Over 80% in DMU 10 and over 75% in DMU 11 supported antler regulations (Figure 4–12).



**Figure 4–12. Participant support of mandatory antler regulations that would increase the number of bucks in the deer population.**

The majority of respondents had not had any negative interactions with deer as a result of crop depredation, damage to vehicles, or damage to yards and gardens. Over 20% of respondents in both DMUs reported a car collision with a deer over the past 5 years (Figure 4–13).



**Figure 4–13. Participants’ negative deer interactions over the past 5 years in Zone D.**

### 4.3 Public Meeting Results

The public meetings were very successful, with over 250 people attending the three meetings. Participants were enthusiastic and engaged in active dialogue about deer management. The majority of attendees were hunters, and there were some farmers and representatives of the farming community present at all the meetings. Many of the farm community representatives were also hunters.

The largest meeting was in Marianna with just over 120 people. Each meeting began with introductions followed by a presentation from FWC Deer Management Program Coordinator Cory Morea about the strategic plan for deer management in Florida and the purpose of the proposed DMUs in helping the FWC to better manage deer at a more local level based on public preferences within acceptable biological sideboards. Following this presentation, Christine Denny of Normandeau Associates summarized the findings from Responsive Management’s statewide phone survey of hunters, farmers, and residents. Following this presentation, Peter

Colverson, also of Normandeau, facilitated the collection of public comments. The agenda for the public meetings can be viewed in Appendix 1.

Each public meeting was organized to ensure maximum input from attendees through the use of rotational breakout groups (a methodology also known as World Café). Tables representing key topics (e.g., antler restrictions, bag limits, antlerless deer harvest, deer damage issues, and local issues) were placed around the room. An FWC staff member was stationed at each table to record stakeholder comments on note cards. Cards were collected from each public meeting for compilation and analysis by Normandeau staff.

All attendees had the opportunity to join four separate breakout group tables and provide comments. After the breakout group portion of the meeting, all attendees had the opportunity to provide public comments and ask questions at a microphone. All attendees also had the opportunity to fill out a TAG membership application.

The rotational breakout group methodology used generated many comments. A summary of these comments are presented below in Table 4–6, which is organized based on the different topic areas that attendees were discussing in the different breakout groups. Comments were grouped based on similarity, and the number of comments received expressing that same idea is presented in the last column.

**Table 4–6. Summarized Comments from Public Meetings for Deer Management Units (DMUs) 10 and 11**

Location *	Topic	Comment	Number
	Deer Population	Need to educate public on how to determine a deer's age	2
Apalachicola, New Holt, Wakulla, Jackson	Deer Population	Deer population low	12
Gadsden, Liberty, Jackson, Wildlife Management Areas, Marianna	Deer Population	Doe population high	12
	Deer Population	Doe population low	4
Gadsden	Deer Population	Deer population okay	7
	Deer Population	Deer population high	5
	Deer Population	Buck population low	3
	Deer Population	Buck population high	1
Santa Rosa, Marianna, Jackson	Deer Population	Doe to buck ratio too high	24
Okaloosa, Santa Rosa	Deer Population	Farmers should control population	2
	Deer Population	Hunters should control population	11
	Deer Population	Protect yearlings	5
Gadsden, Bay	Deer Population	DMU issues, polices will be important	21

<b>Location *</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Number</b>
Washington, Jackson	Deer Population	Issues with letting deer lay on ground after being shot- not using meat or picking up.	8
Holmes, Upper Chipola	Deer Population	Season issues: dates, burning, baiting	8
Liberty, Santa Rosa	Deer Population	Regulations should be consistent	8
	Deer Population	Public and private regulations should be separate	3
	Deer Population	Habitat issues	18
	Deer Population	Public lands, private lands, all Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), need to be able to hunt does by any means including during general gun season	5
	Deer Population	Increase acreage for tags	1
Jackson, Quincy, Gadsden, Santa Rosa, Holmes, WMAs	Antlerless harvest	Need doe tags with license	79
Escambia, Gadsden, Santa Rosa	Antlerless harvest	Increase doe days and doe harvest	18
	Antlerless harvest	Doe tags instead of doe days with a maximum number of tags	21
Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Holmes, Jackson, Washington, Gadsden	Antlerless Harvest	Issues with doe week—too short, during holidays, during full moon, schedules conflict with times, during rut, areas to harvest, equipment used to kill, ability to take all season, increased take, too early, Needs to be like Alabama/Georgia	92
Jackson	Antlerless Harvest	Reduce acreage requirements for doe tags	14
	Antlerless Harvest	Doe permits instead of doe week	3
Escambia	Antlerless Harvest	Set a limit on does taken	14
	Antlerless Harvest	Open general gun—doe day in Blackwater	4
	Antlerless Harvest	Kill as many does as you can— at least one per day	2
Jackson	Bag Limits	Bag limit, bag limit 2 to 5, bag limits with youth exceptions	34
Gadsden	Bag Limits	Buck bag limit, buck bag limit 2 to 4, buck bag limit with antler restrictions, forked-horn bag limits	25
Jackson, Holmes, Leon	Bag Limits	Bag limits, bucks 2 to 7, does 2- to 10, exceptions for youth	38
Liberty	Bag Limits	No bag limits	2

<b>Location *</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Number</b>
Holmes	Bag Limits	Limit buck take with permits and depredation permits	9
	Bag Limits	Tagging will not work	1
	Bag Limits	Do a trial period at one day and see what happens	2
Jackson, Gadsden, Liberty, Holmes	Antler Restrictions	Antler restrictions, forked antler, exceptions for youth,	63
Liberty, Chipola River, Jackson, Gadsden, Bay, Calhoun, Marianna, Walton	Antler Restrictions	3 points/side, 6 points	49
Jackson, Holmes, Washington, Compass Lake Area,	Antler Restrictions	4 points/side, 8 points	28
	Antler Restrictions	Against progressive antler point regulations (APR), antler criteria no good	5
Walton	Antler Restrictions	Careful with APRs as to not discourage youth	1
	Antler Restrictions	Regulate by age not APR	2
Bay	Antler Restrictions	Minimum spread	3
Calhoun	Antler Restrictions	Issues counting points, spread, and age	2
Santa Rosa, Bay	Crop Depredation	Too many farmers exaggerating crop losses	9
	Crop Depredation	Farmers and FWC should work with hunt clubs to issue depredation permits	3
Jackson, Blackwater, Holmes, Jackson, Bay	Crop Depredation	Crop depredation issues are important	30
	Type of Harvest	Primitive weapons should be allowed for harvest of either sex	5
Gadsden	Other	Meat and hide opportunities	2
Holmes, Jackson, Bay	Other	Bear population issues	13
	Other	Bring back skinning shed on Blackwater River WMA	2
	Other	Water management areas at least 3 tags	6
	Other	Solicit recommendations, cooperation between entities and different hunting groups	9

Location *	Topic	Comment	Number
	Other	Ability to drive down closed roads to pick up harvested animals only Blackwater River WMA	6
	General	Current regulations/opportunities okay— bag limits, season, APRs	16
	Car Accidents	Issues with deer on highway	3

\* Blank cells in the location column reflect the fact that sometimes comments were directed at specific locations and others were not.

Some conclusions can be made based on the public comments collected.

- Many feel the doe to buck ratio is too high (too few bucks in relation to the number of does observed).
- Rules and policies to address specific issues within each DMU will be important.
- Habitat issues are important.
- There is support for doe tags being issued with hunting licenses.
- There is support for increasing the doe harvest.
- There is support for an extended doe hunting season.
- There is support for buck bag limits, with limits of 2 and 3 receiving the most support.
- There is support for antler point regulations to increase the number of bucks in the deer population.
- There was support for allowing exceptions for youth hunters.
- There is support for taking crop depredation seriously and assisting farmers.

#### 4.4 Technical Assistant Group (TAG) Results

There were 40 TAG membership applications, and 23 people were chosen to serve, representing hunters and farmers. The list of TAG members is presented in Table 4–7. Selection was based on subject knowledge, group represented, willingness to represent other stakeholders, willingness to have open discussion about the issues, and availability for meetings. One member was selected from the statewide Deer Management Technical Assistance Group (DMTAG) to provide input and act as a liaison between the DMU TAG and the DMTAG. Most applications came from attendees at the three public meetings, and some were received online from the FWC website. The two in-person TAG meetings were held on 20 February and 6 March 2013 from 10:00 am to 3:30 pm in Marianna at the Marianna Public Library and at the Jackson County Extension Center, respectively. A third webinar-based meeting was held on 25 March 2013.

The purpose of the first TAG meeting was to consider and discuss public comments received at the three public meetings as well as the findings from the two surveys, and to assist in formulating deer population and other deer management/hunting heritage goals for managing the DMUs. The TAG members were enthusiastic and discussion was respectful and productive. After lunch, Normandeau facilitated a summary discussion to capture the key points made in the more general discussion in the morning. During the last session of the day, TAG members wrote goals for deer management in DMUs 10 and 11. The process used allowed TAG members to

develop their own goals, combine them with the goals of others, and then come to consensus with the whole group before the end of the meeting.

The result of the meeting was a list of draft goals, which were sent to TAG members for review prior to the second TAG meeting.

The second TAG meeting was designed to finalize goals and draft objectives for managing DMUs 10 and 11. At the second meeting, the goals were presented to the TAG members for further discussion and assistance in refining them. FWC staff was available at the meeting to answer questions and provide guidance. Once a final set of goals was developed, the TAG divided into breakout groups to consider objectives that would be needed to achieve each goal. Each two- to four-member breakout group focused on one goal. Each TAG member selected the goal he or she wanted to focus on. Each breakout group deliberated for about 30 minutes to develop objectives, and then presented their objectives to the entire group. During presentations, the group made recommendations for modifications or additions. All decisions on goals and objectives were made via consensus from the entire group.

**Table 4–7. Members of the Technical Assistance Group (TAG)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>County</b>
Jason Law	Hunter/ private landowner	Jackson
Nathan Stukey	Hunter	Bay
Rusty McKeithen	Florida Dog Hunters and Sportsman's Association	Wakulla
Jennifer Bearden	IFAS extension	Okaloosa
Shep Eubanks	IFAS extension / farmer	Holmes, Gadsden
Steve Glenn	Hunter/ forester	Jackson (live, hunt) Liberty (hunt)
Terry Scott Lindsey	Outdoor writer/ News Herald	Bay
Shane Fuller	The St Joe Company	Manages 540,000 acres of hunt clubs across Panhandle
Jason Love	Forester/ Hunter	Gadsden
Bud Cates	Myrtlewood land restoration and management	Leon, Wakulla, Jefferson
Ronald McLane	River Junction Hunt Club	Gadsden
Jimmy McClendon	Hunter	Liberty
Larry Surles	Rio Chiquito Hunt Club	Leon, Gadsden
Jamie Hall	Resource Management Service LLC / Farmer	Escambia
Ross Price	La Floresta Perdido, Inc.	Escambia

Name	Affiliation	County
George McKinney	Pond Creek Hunt Club	Santa Rosa
Jim Deason	Hunter (dog and still) and land manager	Liberty
Nick Patronis	Farmer and hunter	Bay
Keith Free	Farm Bureau staff and hunter	Okaloosa
Allen Scheffer	Farm Bureau staff in Marianna	Jackson
Joey Fisinick	Hunter	Holmes
David Gunter	Hunter and land owner	Santa Rosa
Steve Leavins	Hunter	Santa Rosa

Some TAG members provided feedback about the stakeholders they contacted to get input on deer management issues in Zone D (Table 4–8).

**Table 4–8. External Technical Assistance Group (TAG) feedback**

Name	Stakeholders Contacted for Discussions
Jason Law	Discussed the issues with many hunters at the public meeting in Marianna. Was careful to listen to all people speaking and also spoke with 15 to 20 hunters that didn't attend the public meeting, some of whom are also land owners. Strong preference for a tag system similar to the ones they have in many other states. Clear desire to see deer population maintained at current levels, to see larger bucks (with harvest restrictions) and to have a more equitable doe harvest.
Jennifer Bearden	Considerable contact with both hunters and farmers. Hunters were receptive to any changes that would improve the quality of the deer herd. Farmers are concerned that not enough attention is being paid to crop depredation, especially in the Blackwater Forest area. Some concern that some farmers may decide to go to court for satisfaction.
Shane Fuller	Spoke with 20 to 30 of the bigger hunt clubs. Most people want more deer and particularly larger bucks with larger antlers. However, people had mixed ideas about the best ways to make this happen. Only minor concern about antlerless tags, but major concerns about bag limits and antler restrictions being imposed.
George McKinney	Spoke with 20 hunters in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. Six of these were members of the Pond Creek Hunting Club. 90% in favor of antler restrictions to increase the size and antler size of bucks. 90% favored a 5-buck limit (with 4-on-one-side restriction for two of the bucks) 60% favored a 3-buck limit (with 4-on-one-side restriction on one of the bucks). Planning to submit a candidate article to the <i>Pensacola News Journal</i> on the TAG process.

## 5 Summary of First Deer Management Unit TAG Meeting

The first TAG meeting was held on 20 February 2013 at the Marianna Public Library from 9 am to 3:00 pm (agenda in Appendix 3). The results are presented below.

### 5.1 Meeting Format

The TAG meetings followed a four-part format.

- Part 1 Presentations of the results of the statewide phone survey, Zone D online survey, and public meeting comments.
- Part 2 General discussion of public input and general discussion of deer management issues.
- Part 3 Discussion of major topics/ issues that arose in Part 2. Develop consensus on key topics to begin goal development process.
- Part 4 Discuss and draft deer management goals for DMUs 10 and 11 in Zone D.

### 5.2 Key Points from Morning Discussion

**Discussion Notes**—The following are the notes recorded from the initial morning discussion (Part 2) about deer management (Q = participant question A = FWC response C = comment).

Q: Tagging system: Does FWC have the ability to do it? Do they have manpower, capabilities to issue doe tags?

A: Lot of complications to tag issuance, not something that we could do easily. It is very expensive, the logistics and cost are not really conducive to tagging being a great option.

Q: Are doe tags issued with hunting licenses off the table?

A: No, not necessarily, but we need to be aware of the complications, etc. Resource heavy (expensive), problematic for licensing system.

Q: Transaction cost?

A: There is a cost per document. Could be around \$1 so to get permits to 150,000 hunters would cost \$150,000 roughly.

Q: Can they be issued with licensees? Maybe alternatives?

A: Can't tie permits to a license mainly because licenses are good for 1 year from date of purchase. Would need to be valid for a set time period like 1 July through 30 June for permits to be linked to license.

C: Issue with survey results, may be reflective of older established hunters, not a lot of younger folks, smaller land acreage, average age of hunter is 44. Need to promote youth hunting better.

C: Redesigned harvest reports, deer program, biologists, LE, L&P direct input or knowledge regarding deer management.

C: What was wrong with the system that we have for getting doe tags? Land size, is it right? Getting doe tags for smaller areas. Designee? Flexibility or restructuring in doe tags.

Q: Does FWC have number of does killed within each proposed DMU?

A: Yes, however we just have 1 year of data, we will get multiple years of the harvest data as we move forward.

C: Issue one doe tag with license? Lifetime license issues? Money could be an issue; it would be popular to have doe tags.

C: Harvest regulations need to be changed, how long has it been? Now we have doe week, used to be doe weekend, but that changed about 10 years or so back. The 1960s were done with deer tags, no doe season. Could tags be issued at the county (Tax Collector) offices?

C: Survey participants may not understand the consequences of their answers; there is not enough detail to be answering the questions. Do we have information for the entire area proposed? DMU management should be more localized.

C: On the survey, population estimates were based on perspectives of the individual not necessarily what is actually happening so there could be bias.

C: There are big discrepancies between private lands versus wildlife management areas (WMAs). We do not have enough information to discuss goals; the goal should be to get more information to base things on. Better understanding.

A: We are not at biological carrying capacity, and we don't want deer populations to be at extremely low densities. We want to be somewhere in between based on stakeholder preferences. We need to find the sweet spot.

C: Deer population, sex ratios, don't see enough big bucks, meaningful decisions, don't generalize, the TAG needs more information. Adaptability for TAG. Happy medium? Decisions need to be made.

C: Deer tags to private land owners, used to require information be returned to FWC, now an automated process with no return data. May want to set up a goal to get information from deer clubs. Sign in and sign out sheet. Hunt clubs should record more harvest information for FWC. This may be any opportunity to gather information from large landowners, clubs, etc. Doe sightings, yearlings, antler points and size. Buck to doe ratio is big issue. Perhaps a missed opportunity for FWC to get more information.

C: More doe hunting opportunity, when, who, etc., need more flexibility.

C: Move forward with any new regulations at moderate speed, step by step, nothing drastic. Increase quality of bucks to at least 2 points on each side, (decrease doe herd) more doe days during general gun season. Different needs for different areas.

C: Could allow antlerless deer take during the month of December? Actual dates open are not flexible enough. Why stop the hunting after four days, hunting should not stop. Hunters do not like the break after Thanksgiving, etc.

- C: Definition of antlerless, should spike bucks be included? Killing of spike bucks will decrease the number of larger bucks. Five-inch rule is more about visibility than biology.
- C: FWC staff comment—regarding comparison between Florida and Alabama regulations. Alabama has had aggressive doe take for years to reduce deer population. Their deer populations are down. Florida has unique conditions and about one-ninth the number of deer and vehicle collisions.
- C: Antlerless deer days could be month of December or extend thru New Year's? Would you have to issue doe tags to clubs, etc.? May be cost effective for FWC. Overharvest issues.
- C: Possibly overharvest does if you extend the days. A doe bag limit could be used. Convenience? Still have deer depredation permits. Don't pick an arbitrary number for antler restrictions. Have strict guidelines on the definition of a buck. Skip a year of age; 2 to 3-year age limit, establish a middle ground and realize that you will not make everyone happy.
- C: Buck bag limits—three bucks, at least one has to have four on one side, older age class deer, with stipulations. You will not increase buck population until you limit harvest and size limit. Remember this is for private lands, not just clubs. Enforcement issues? Antler point restriction would reduce buck harvest initially. Start out liberal on private lands. Antler restrictions will slow down bucks being killed.

### **5.3 Open Discussion—Developing Deer Population Goals for DMUs 10 and 11**

**Discussion Notes**—The following are the notes recorded from the discussion (Part 2) designed to begin developing goals for DMUs 10 and 11.

- C: Big picture, deer population stays the same or slightly increases. Buck population needs to increase as well as quality of deer. Overall deer population, healthy herd that has balanced sex ratios, can't have a blanket statement for the entire state.
  - C: In DMU 11 the deer population is higher, and perceived higher, recommend staying the same and slightly increase overall population. Special area of Blackwater WMA—local issues—could have skewed some results. It is all WMA related, we need to focus on private land goals. Hunting success is the highest in DMU 11.
  - C: Large tract of landowners manage the way they want, harvest data, etc.
- Note: For doe populations group thinks that the doe population is high. A couple of folks do not agree. Most likely doe population is out of balance with bucks due to heavy harvest of bucks.

Note: Distinction of population versus sex ratio: They feel the doe to buck ratio is off, not necessarily too many does, may be too few bucks due to overharvest.

C: FWC staff comment—Bucks are the offspring of doe deer, but many hunters want to liberalize doe take opportunities. We are currently operating below carrying capacity at this point, so no biological need to take more does. Non-native forage (such as corn) can increase deer production in some areas, but our native forage is lower quality than other states and cannot support the same production levels (number of fawns per adult doe). In attempting to better balance the sex ratio, we don't want to make the does just as scarce as bucks. Perceived overpopulation could be because of overharvest of bucks and, in general, is a misconception. It is reflective of hunting patterns.

Note: There is a difference between DMU 10 and DMU 11, 11 has more agricultural area.

C: May want to harvest the same number of does, just spread it out giving folks a longer opportunity to hunt. Consideration of altering the antlerless season.

C: Tags— Being issued with the license, specific to tag issue, it would be a resource issue for FWC, Alabama has a self-printing system. Honor system? Models of various types of tag systems that can be looked at from other states.

### ***Antlerless Harvest***

Note: General issues: Length of the harvest system, definition of antlerless deer, season length (adjustment to season, to make it longer).

C: Overall bag limits, equalize it more, season length, you can take one doe during any season. Population couldn't support that. No tags. Regulations need to be flexible to local conditions. Longer season with a limit, and more flexibility but with a limit.

C: Could consider antlerless deer days between the day after Thanksgiving until general gun, has to be some type of harvest limit. One doe limit restricts the number of does someone could take.

### ***Antler Restrictions***

Note: Majority are supportive of antler restrictions. Reasons are to improve the buck to doe ratio, increase the number of visible bucks, intensify the rut, produce older deer, larger antlered and bodied deer, push deer to older age class.

C: We have to do more than we are doing now. Have to increase the age structure of bucks in Florida.

Note: Bag limits—buck bag limits, majority are in favor. Overall goal is to have healthy populations.

C: Buck bag limit could be applied to one particular DMU or a zone or statewide.

C: Buck bag limits may be better received if changes are made to increase antlerless deer take opportunities. Season wide bag limits, how are we going to know without tags? Honor system, like turkey. We have to have public and hunter buy-in for management scenarios to work. Have to have hunter support.

## **5.4 Draft Goals for Deer Management Units 10 and 11**

Subsequent to the discussions, TAG members drafted goals for the deer populations in DMUs 10 and 11. Each person was asked to write their own set of goals that they thought were needed based on the earlier discussion, public comments, and the survey. Following this exercise, a consensus-driven discussion followed that allowed TAG members to combine their individual goals to produce a list that the whole group could agree on.

The goals were finalized at the end of the meeting as follows with, in most cases, qualifying statements beneath:

### ***Overarching Goal:***

To ensure a healthy and reasonably balanced deer herd in DMUs 10 and 11 in Zone D (the Florida Panhandle).

### ***Management Goals:***

- Design hunting regulations that have the support of the majority of hunters in Zone D
  - Achieve 85% satisfaction with FWC regulations, groundswell of support
  - Strive to make hunting regulations easier to understand in communications with hunters (hunter handbook)
  - Develop framework for continuously data driven (biological and social preference data) deer management in the future
  
- Maintain or slightly increase the overall deer population in DMUs 10 and 11 in Zone D
  - Increase or maintain deer herd in DMU 11
  - Include sex ratio and age structure in population balance for health
  - Increase the deer population in DMUs 10 and 11 on 30 Sept 2015 equal to 100% to 125% of population on 30 September 2012
  
- Increase the number and age structure of bucks in the population
  - Increase antler restrictions to increase and improve herd
  - Increase opportunities to harvest bucks 2.5 years +
  - More bucks with larger body and antler size
  - Keep overall deer population the same, with a larger and older buck population overall, through sensible bag limits and or antler regulations
  - Minimum of 75% of bucks be 1.5 year old on 30 September 2014, survive to become 2.5 years old on 30 September 2015
  - Institute reasonable bag limits that help to balance sex ratios and populations of deer
  
- Increase the opportunity for antlerless harvest, while maintaining the doe population.
  - Doe harvest: by 2015 have an antlerless deer system that is perceived fair by 80% of landowners and hunters

- Allow more people to harvest does, without allowing more overall doe harvest
- Review the deer depredation permit system to ensure that it balances the needs of farmers and hunters.
  - Have area-specific options to address agricultural depredation
  - Limit depredation to antlerless only?
  - Control depredation permits
  - Area-specific depredation permits, balance hunter and farmer needs when issuing permits (public relations campaign)
- Promote hunter recruitment programs.
  - Increase diversity in hunting, promote more female, youth, and disabled (at minimum maintain stability) hunter recruitment
  - Promote growth or at a minimum maintain stability in the number of hunters (recruitment)

NOTE: After the meeting, FWC and Normandeau staff discussed the goals and qualifying statements in preparation for the second TAG meeting. This discussion triggered a desire to open the second TAG meeting with further discussion of the goals and the suggested changes that had been made.

## 6 Summary of Second Deer Management Unit TAG Meeting

The meeting began with discussion of the goals produced during the first TAG meeting (agenda in Appendix 3). Goals were refined and accepted via consensus by the TAG through facilitated discussion.

### 6.1 Goals

#### ***Overarching Goal***

To ensure a healthy and reasonably balanced deer herd in DMUs 10 and 11 of Zone D (the Florida Panhandle) while maintaining or increasing satisfaction of hunters, farmers, and citizens.

#### ***Management Goals***

- 1) Maintain or increase hunter acceptance and support of white-tailed deer management regulations in Zone D.
- 2) Maintain or slightly increase the overall deer population in DMUs 10 and 11 of Zone D.
- 3) Increase hunter satisfaction through improved chances of seeing more bucks and harvesting larger bucks.
- 4) Maintain or increase the doe population while allowing equity among hunters to harvest antlerless deer.
- 5) Manage deer depredation to ensure that both farmers' and hunters' needs are considered.
- 6) Maintain broad support of deer hunting heritage.

### 6.2 Objectives

Once the goals were finalized, the members of the TAG broke up into small groups to discuss objectives needed to implement each goal. Each breakout group had 45 minutes to come up with their list of suggested objectives. Groups presented their objectives to the TAG, and then participated in a facilitated discussion. All decisions were made based on group consensus.

**Goal 1**—Maintain or increase hunter acceptance or support of white-tailed deer management regulations in Zone D.

#### **Suggested Objectives**

- Implement a marketing and public information campaign about the management plan and the plan's expected benefits.
- Collect and publish harvest data to support the management plan and drive management plan improvement.
- Design regulations that have the support of stakeholders.
  - Simplify rules as much as possible.
  - Continuously collect feedback from stakeholders.

**Goal 2**—Maintain or slightly increase the overall deer population in DMUs 10 and 11 of Zone D.

### **Suggested Objectives**

- Implement antler and antlerless harvest restrictions that ensure a healthy balance of sex ratio and age structure.
- Have hunter survey results indicate an increased satisfaction with deer population.

**Goal 3**—Increase hunter satisfaction through improved chances of seeing more bucks and harvesting larger bucks.

### **Suggested Objectives**

- Implement an antler restriction that protects the majority of 1.5 year old bucks while allowing harvest of bucks at least 2.5 years old.
- Institute a reasonable annual buck bag limit that reduces buck harvest and helps to balance sex ratios.
- Implement hunter education plan to explain the reasons behind the harvest restrictions.

**Goal 4**—Maintain the doe population while allowing equity among hunters to harvest an antlerless deer.

### **Suggested Objectives**

- Maintain the number of days available for hunters to harvest antlerless deer.
- Increase flexibility in days for access to antlerless deer hunting without impacting the doe population.
  - Add weekend hunts to correspond with holidays for an 8-day season.
  - Eliminate the 7-consecutive-day format
  - Eliminate 2 antlerless per day opportunities

**Goal 5**—Manage deer depredation to ensure that both farmers' and hunters' needs are considered.

### **Suggested Objectives**

- Encourage land management practices that draw deer away from agricultural lands.
  - Encourage warm season food plots on private lands
- Increase hunter education on habitat management.
- Implement a system that allows hunters to help execute the farmer's permits without liability to the farmer.
  - Encourage youth hunts or other hunts that increase hunter recruitment and diversity.

**Goal 6:** Maintain broad support of the deer hunting heritage.

### **Suggested Objectives**

- Provide increased opportunities for youth hunting.
- Encourage increased diversity in hunting by promoting programs for minorities.
- Initiate an outreach campaign that informs both hunters and non-hunters about the reasons and goals for deer management.

## 7 Summary of Technical Assistance Group (TAG) Conference Call

A conference call was held on 25 March 2013 with FWC staff, a Normandeau facilitator, and TAG members. The group discussed the goals and objectives and came to consensus on the following final suggested goals and objectives for FWC:

### ***Overarching Goal***

To ensure a healthy and reasonably balanced deer herd in DMU 10 and DMU 11 of Zone D (the Florida Panhandle) while maintaining or increasing satisfaction of hunters, farmers, and citizens.

**Goal 1**—Maintain or increase hunter acceptance and support of white tailed deer management regulations in Zone D.

### **Objectives**

- Implement a marketing and public information campaign about procedures to develop the plan, details of the plan, and the plan's expected benefits.
- Collect and publish harvest data to support the management plan and drive management plan improvement.
- Design regulations that have significant stakeholder support.
  - Simplify rules as much as possible.
  - Continuously collect feedback from stakeholders.

**Goal 2**—Maintain or slightly increase the overall deer population in DMUs 10 and 11 of Zone D.

### **Objectives**

- Implement antler and antlerless harvest restrictions designed to achieve a healthy balance of age structure and sex ratio.
- Stakeholder survey results will indicate an increased satisfaction with deer population.

**Goal 3**—Increase hunter satisfaction through improved chances of seeing more bucks and harvesting larger bucks.

### **Objectives**

- Implement an antler restriction that protects the majority of 1.5-year-old bucks while allowing harvest of bucks at least 2.5 years old.
- Institute a reasonable annual buck bag limit that reduces buck harvest and helps to balance sex ratios.
- Implement a hunter education plan to explain the reasons behind the harvest restrictions.

**Goal 4**—Maintain or increase the doe population while allowing equity among hunters to harvest antlerless deer.

**Objectives**

- Maintain the number of days available for hunters to harvest antlerless deer.
- Increase flexibility in days for access to antlerless deer hunting without negatively impacting the doe population.
  - Add weekend hunts to correspond with holidays for an 8-day season.
  - Eliminate the 7-consecutive-day format
  - Eliminate 2 antlerless per day opportunities

**Goal 5**—Manage deer depredation to ensure that both farmers’ and hunters’ needs are considered.

**Objectives**

- Encourage land management practices that draw deer away from agricultural lands.
  - Encourage warm season food plots on private lands
- Increase hunter education on habitat management.
- Implement a system that allows hunters to help execute the farmer’s permits without liability to the farmer.
  - Encourage youth hunts or other hunts that increase hunter recruitment and diversity.

**Goal 6**—Maintain broad support of the deer hunting heritage.

**Objectives**

- Implement sound hunter recruitment and retention programs.
- Initiate a public relations campaign that informs stakeholders about the reasons and goals for deer management.

## 8 Conclusions

The process for providing outreach and generating input about FWC's current plans for deer management in Zone D was very successful. It represented a pilot program for gathering public input for all 11 proposed DMUs throughout the state. Comments were received from over 250 people that attended public meetings as well as more detailed preferences from the 23 people who were selected to serve on the TAG. In addition, Normandeau received 91 responses to our online survey, 4,872 responses to the statewide phone survey conducted by Responsive Management, and 25 people attended the project webinars. Additionally we received feedback from four members of the TAG about outreach that they had done personally with their contacts (estimated at approximately 100 people). Public meetings in the evenings were all well attended and were clearly an effective way to receive public comments compared to the less successful webinars which attracted only 25 people. The TAG was composed of a very enthusiastic group who willingly volunteered two full days of their time and engaged in lively discussion about deer management. Thanks to all TAG members for being very respectful of the opinions of others, which reflects well on the ground rules established for the meetings and agreed to by all at the beginning. FWC staff members who assisted with the meetings were all very effective and added greatly to the project by assisting with collection of public comments and assisting members of the public and the TAG members with information on an as needed basis.

### **Some Recommendations to Be Considered for Future Deer Management Unit (DMU) Public Outreach and Input Efforts**

- Shorten the opening discussion held by the TAG during the first meeting by applying some more definitive outcomes to guide the discussion. Suggestions for outcomes include:
  - Determine the key findings of the public meetings with respect to management of the deer population, and
  - Determine key preferences that will come out of those key findings.
- Provide TAG members with very clear instructions at the beginning of the process to ensure that they all know exactly what the final outcome of the TAG meetings will be.
- Ensure that all meetings are arranged for locations that are easy to find and that provide facilities well suited to the purposes of the meetings.

## Appendices

- Appendix 1      Agenda for Public Meetings  
                     Flier for Public Meetings  
                     Draft Press Release
  
- Appendix 2      Online Survey
  
- Appendix 3      Agendas for Technical Assistance Group (TAG) Meetings
  
- Appendix 4      Comments from Technical Assistance Group Members

## Appendix 1: Agenda for Public Meetings, Flier, Press Release

# Deer Management in the Florida Panhandle Public Meetings Agenda

*Presented by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*

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Jan 29, 6:30 pm: Jackson County Agricultural Conference Center, Marianna  
Jan 30, 6:30 pm: Burns Auditorium, Florida Department of Transportation, Tallahassee  
Jan 31, 6:30 pm: University of West Florida, Commons Auditorium, Pensacola

- 6:30 pm Welcome and introductions
- 6:40 pm PowerPoint presentation on proposed Deer Management Units and results from the recent Deer Management Survey
- 7:00 pm Public comments
- 8:15 pm Summary comments from FWC
- 8:30 pm Adjourn





Find more information at [www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu](http://www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu)

## Public Input Needed for Deer Management

### MEETING TIMES AND LOCATIONS

- Jan. 29, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. CST  
Jackson County Agricultural  
Conference Center  
2741 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Marianna, FL 32448
- Jan. 30, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. EST  
Burns Building Auditorium  
Florida Department of  
Transportation, 605 Suwannee St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399
- Jan. 31, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. CST  
University of West Florida  
Commons Auditorium  
11000 University Parkway  
Pensacola, FL 32514

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Cory Morea  
FWC Deer Program Coordinator  
850-617-9487



The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is hosting a series of public meetings to help shape the future of deer management in the Florida Panhandle. Meetings will include:

- Information on proposed Deer Management Units (DMUs)
- Results of a recent 4,500 person survey
- Public comment opportunities
- FWC staff to answer questions

Additional opportunities are available to provide input. Go to [www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu](http://www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu) for details.

### WHO SHOULD ATTEND

- Hunters
- Farmers
- Landowners
- Public with an interest in deer management

*Meetings are coordinated by Normandeau Associates of Gainesville, FL*



## Press Release

FWC seeks public input on Panhandle deer management

### News Release

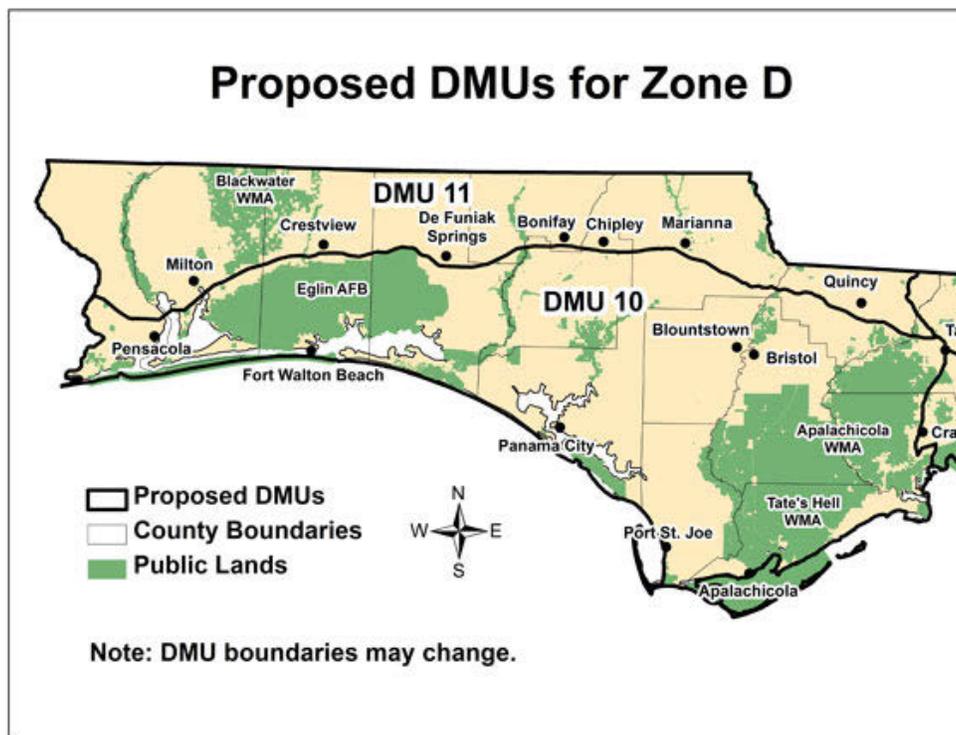
Thursday, January 10, 2013

Media contact: Stan Kirkland, 850-265-3676

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) will host a series of public meetings in late January to help shape the future of deer management in the Florida Panhandle. “We are working on an exciting project to establish deer management units (DMUs) throughout Florida,” said Cory Morea, the FWC’s Deer Management Program coordinator. He added, “We are looking at the Panhandle first, but we are moving to a new model of deer management in the state in which hunters and other stakeholders will have a greater impact on deer management decisions.”

DMUs will divide the state into smaller geographic areas where deer population characteristics are similar. Right now, the state is divided into four management zones that are used to set hunting season dates based on deer breeding chronology. As proposed, DMUs will be smaller units within zones and allow the FWC to manage deer on a more local level based on the preferences of hunters, farmers and other interested stakeholders.

Two DMUs are proposed for Zone D, which encompasses much of the Florida Panhandle region (western portions of Gadsden, Leon and Wakulla counties and all counties west of them). One unit would cover the area south of Interstate 10 and the other north of I-10.



The new DMUs are intended to allow the FWC more flexibility with deer management based upon the deer population, habitat conditions and public preference within each of the units. “We surveyed hunters, farmers and other members of the general public to determine attitudes and opinions regarding deer management, and we will be sharing the results of that survey at the public meetings. We will also present information on the DMU model and will be gathering public input on deer management preferences,” said Morea.

For people who cannot attend any of the meetings, there will be other opportunities to learn about this project and provide input. “We have information on our website and we will be accepting comments online,” said Morea, adding that public input will determine what changes may be made and that “no changes” is an option. “This project is about managing deer based on public preference.

“Of course, we wouldn’t do anything to risk the sustainability of this valuable public resource, but deer densities and other deer management preferences, such as antler regulations, can be better suited to public preferences using the DMU model.”

A technical assistance group (TAG), composed of members of the public, will be established to review all available public comments and make recommendations to the FWC on the two DMUs within Zone D. The public meetings and the TAG will be facilitated by a third-party vendor, Normandeau Associates, which will develop a summary report to the FWC.

Up to 25 TAG members will be chosen based upon their expertise, their representation of an important interest group and their willingness to dedicate some time to better deer management in Zone D. Anyone interested will be able to apply for TAG membership at the public meetings or on the FWC’s website.

[More information](#) about the proposed DMUs, the Technical Assistance Group and a meeting agenda is available online at [MyFWC.com/Hunting](http://MyFWC.com/Hunting); click on “By Species,” “Deer” and then “DMUs.”

### **Times and Locations:**

- **Jan. 29**, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. CST at the Jackson County Agricultural Conference Center, 2741 Pennsylvania Ave., Marianna, FL 32448;
- **Jan. 30**, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. EST at the Burns Building Auditorium, Florida Department of Transportation, 605 Suwannee St., Tallahassee, FL 32399;
- **Jan. 31**, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. CST at the University of West Florida, Commons Auditorium, 11000 University Parkway, Pensacola, FL 32514.

For more information, contact Cory Morea at 850-617-9487.

## Appendix 2: On-Line Survey

### FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Deer Management Unit

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is providing interested stakeholders with an opportunity to share their opinions on deer management within the two proposed Deer Management Units (DMU) in Zone D of the Florida Panhandle. Stakeholder input is important in developing DMU management goals and objectives and your input is needed. Specifically, FWC is looking for feedback on:

- § Deer population management
- § Antlerless deer take opportunities
- § Antler regulations
- § Bag limits
- § Negative interactions with deer
- § Other local deer issues

This survey is designed to collect feedback from the public on deer management in Zone D of the Florida Panhandle. Zone D is divided into 2 DMUs.

DMU 10 is located south of Interstate 10 and DMU 11 is located north of Interstate 10. Please make sure you correctly select which DMU your comments are directed. A map of the DMUs can be found at [www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu](http://www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu).

Your opinion is important. Thank you for taking the time to provide your input.

If you have questions, please contact Cory Morea, FWC Deer Management Program Coordinator, at (850) 617-9487.

**Name**

  
**Email address**  
**Telephone**  
**Which of these best describes you:**

Hunter

Farmer

Florida resident

Other

**What county do you live in?**

**FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Deer Management Unit**

**If the county you hunt in or farm in is different from where you live, please list it here.**

The following questions ask about your opinion about deer populations and management in Zone D - the Florida Panhandle. Zone D is divided into two deer management units- DMU 11 is located north of Interstate-10 and DMU 10 is located south of Interstate-10. A map of the DMUs can be found at [www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu](http://www.myfwc.com/deer/dmu).

**Do you think the deer population Zone D is too high, too low or about the right amount?**

**Please select "No Opinion" if you are not familiar with the deer population in a DMU.**

	Too high	Too low	About right	No opinion
DMU 10	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DMU 11	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you have.

**Antlerless deer harvest, particularly the harvest of female deer, can provide additional harvest opportunities and may be used to reduce the deer population. Would you support more antlerless deer days during:**

	Muzzleloading gun season	General gun season	I do not support additional antlerless deer days	No opinion
DMU 10	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DMU 11	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you have.

**FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Deer Management Unit**

**Would you support mandatory antler regulations in order to increase the number of bucks in the deer population, including larger bodied and larger antlered deer? Please select "No Opinion" if you do not have a preference.**

	Yes	No	No opinion
DMU 10	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DMU 11	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please add any comments you have.

**Another way to increase the number of bucks in the deer population would be to reduce the buck bag limit. Would you support an annual statewide buck (antlered deer) bag limit of:**

I would not support any bag limits

No opinion

1

2

3

4

5

Other bag limit, please specify.

**Please provide any comments you have about buck bag limits.**

**FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Deer Management Unit**

**Please indicate any negative interactions you have experienced with deer over the past 5 years in Zone D.**

	Damage to commercial farm crops	Damage to personal garden or landscaping	Car collision with a deer	None
DMU 10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DMU 11	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please list any other negative interactions and any comments you have.

**In general, how would you like the deer population to be in the next 5 years?**

	More deer	Less deer	Same amount of deer	No opinion
DMU 10	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
DMU 11	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any comments you have.

**Are there any specific recommendations you have for the FWC to manage deer populations in the next 5 years? Please specify if you are referring to DMU 10 or DMU 11 in your answer.**

**If you have any other comments you would like to make regarding deer and deer management in Zone D, please provide them here. Please specify if you are referring to DMU 10 or DMU 11.**

## Appendix 3: Agendas for Technical Assistance Group Meetings

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### Deer Management in Zone D Technical Assistance Group Agenda: 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting February 20<sup>th</sup> 2013

Jackson County Public Library, 2929 Green Street,  
Marianna, FL 32446. (850) 482-9631

Presented by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
Commission



- 
- 10:00 Welcome and introductions
- 10:15 Introduction to Zone D Technical Assistance Group (TAG) – Purposes and outcomes, Procedures and ground-rules, overview of agenda
- 10:25 Introduction to the summary report format that will result from the work of the TAG
- 10:35 Brief review of important features of the survey results
- 10:45 Review of public meeting results and comments
- 11:15 Discussion of survey results, public meeting results, and online comments  
Develop key questions and conclusions that need to be addressed by the TAG in order to develop goals and objectives for deer management in DMUs 10 and 11.
- 12:00 Lunch (Provided)- possibly working lunch if needed
- 1:45 Open discussion to develop goals for DMU 10 and DMU 11  
Topics:
1. Overall size of deer population
  2. Antlerless harvest
  3. Buck harvest
    - Buck bag limits
    - Antler restrictions
  4. Depredation of crops, car accidents, landscape damage
- 2:30 Break
- 2:45 Continue Open Discussion
- 3:20 Closing remarks
- 3:30 Adjourn

Homework: You will receive a compiled list of the draft goals to read and reflect upon prior to the next meeting on March 6<sup>th</sup> where the focus will be on developing objectives to achieve each goal. TAG members are encouraged to continue their discussions with each other prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

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# Deer Management in the Florida Panhandle

## Technical Assistance Group Agenda: 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting

### March 6<sup>th</sup> 2013

Jackson County Extension Center, 2741 Pennsylvania Ave,  
Marianna, FL 32448. (850) 482-9620

Presented by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
Commission in association with Normandeau Associates.

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- 10:00 Welcome and Re-Introductions
- 10:10 Summary of findings from the first meeting
- 10:20 Purposes and Outcomes for Meeting 2, Procedures and Ground-rules, Overview of Agenda
- 10:30 Re-consideration of Goals
- 11:30 Form 5 or 6 Breakout Groups  
Breakout Groups commence work on Objectives/Strategies to accomplish Goals  
Specify which DMU your Objective/Strategy applies to (if not both)
- 12:00 Lunch
- 12:45 Open Discussion of the objectives/Strategies for DMU 10 and DMU 11  
Each group will have up to 20 minutes for discussion of their preferences.  
Moderators will take notes based on audience comments and make changes based on consensus
- 2:15 Break
- 2:30 Continue Open Discussion
- 3:20 Closing remarks
- 3:30 Adjourn  
**Homework:** You will receive a compiled list of the goals and objectives/strategies to read and reflect upon prior to a conference call for final decision making.

## Appendix 4: Comments from Technical Assistance Group Members

The following comments were recorded during the call.

**Larry Surles:** I believe the goals statements reflect the ideas as decided in the meeting with possibly one exception:

The first bullet under Goal #6, "Provide more opportunities for youth hunters." overly restricts the idea to youngsters - FWC described the Youth Hunt Program already in place. I thought the discussion ended with FWC maybe developing more of an outreach or clearinghouse program to provide not just young people but also disabled and women with hunting opportunities. The idea being to help these hunters with limited access to hunting link up with hunt clubs and landowners willing to share the opportunity.

I am familiar with the Youth Hunt Program which works great. It is good for those it serves, but I would like to see FWC be more proactive with other organizations and groups who want to hunt.

Otherwise, I think the statements incorporate most of the ideas.

**Stephen Leavins:** I would only have a couple of comments to add...

An increase in antler restriction from the current 5" rule to something greater than that to protect the younger bucks is something that is long overdue, I think very few hunters would disagree with that change.

With regard to doe harvest: The hunters that I have spoken with that hunt private land were perfectly happy with doe harvest dates and opportunity that currently exist during the holidays, it was the hunters that were restricted to hunting public land that did not feel like they had enough chances to take antlerless deer.

And lastly, if the FWC decides to impose a bag limit of bucks per hunter, a liberal limit of five seems to be acceptable to most of the hunters I have spoken with including myself. Thank you and FWC for giving the public an opportunity to weigh in on these important issues.

**Ronald McLane:** I discussed our meetings and where we are in the discussion with 18 of our hunting club members at a club meeting last week. The group was in agreement with the objectives we laid out for protecting young bucks and recruiting more hunters.

An annual bag limit of five seemed to be the opinion of the majority. There was a lot of discussion about how to set a bag limit and enforce it without going to a tag system.

Reaction was mixed on the antlerless issue. If a vote had been taken, I think the week after Christmas would have narrowly won. The group liked the idea that kids were out for Christmas break and felt like a person has to plan his/her time accordingly no matter when the doe days are. License tags were the immediate response to how to make it better—I explained the cost and the complications with going to a tag system.

Depredation permits are a non-issue with our club.

**Bud Cates:** Christine: Sorry, I won't be able to make the TAG phone call. After review of the Meeting Notes, I think they generally capture the objective; although some clarification and specificity is still needed. Thank you for allowing me to participate! It was a very worthwhile experience. Bud Cates, CWB®