

Proposed Changes to Deer Hunting Regulations



Draft Rules
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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This presentation covers the major proposed statewide rule changes related to deer hunting. Full summaries of all proposed rule changes are included in the additional background material.

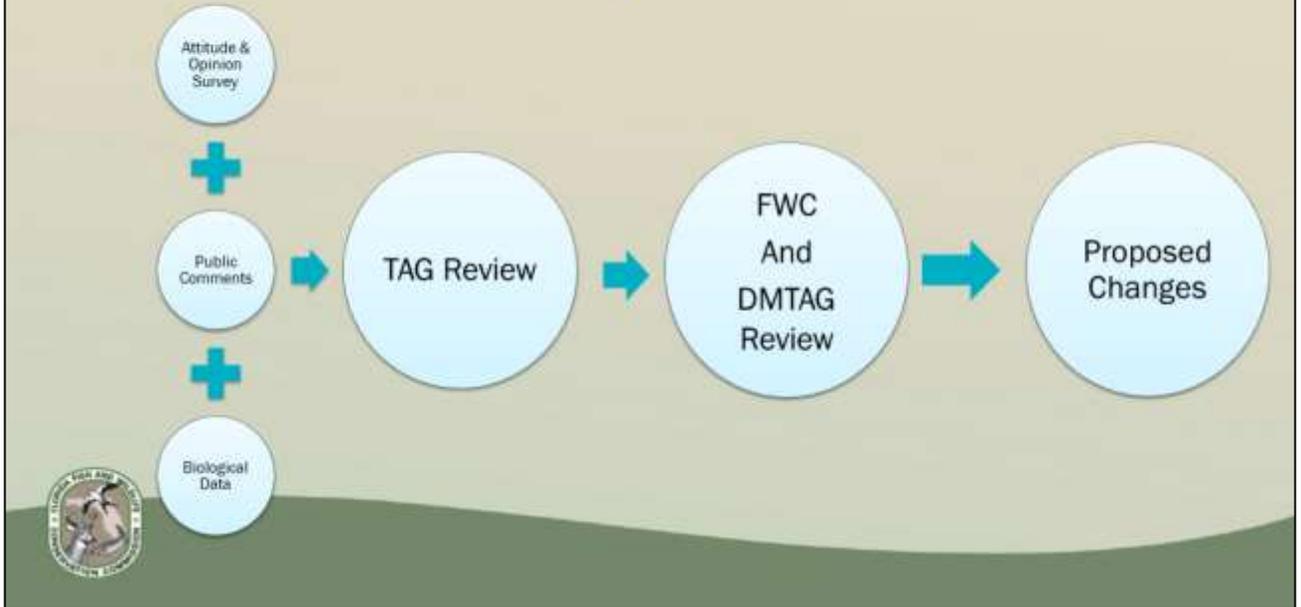
Division: Hunting and Game Management

Author: Cory R. Morea

Contact Phone Number: 850-354-7984

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Rule Development Process



FWC staff is implementing the Commission-approved strategic plan for deer management by proposing regulations that have been developed through intensive collaboration with staff and stakeholders. This adaptive approach to deer management is intended to improve hunting opportunities and help maintain a healthy and reasonably balanced deer herd.

To begin the public outreach process, the FWC contracted with Responsive Management, Inc., in 2012 to conduct a scientifically designed phone survey of hunters, farmers and residents to assess opinions and attitudes of deer management issues in Florida. There were 4,872 completed surveys statewide, including approximately 200 hunters, 100 farmers, and 100 residents in each DMU.

In 2013 and 2014, Normandeau Associates facilitated public outreach via 14 public meetings around the state, online webinars, an online presentation and online survey. The online survey could be accessed by anyone through the internet and was intended to get stakeholder input on preferences for deer management.

Interested individuals could apply at the public meetings or online to be a part of a stakeholder Technical Assistance Group (TAG) to develop goals and objectives for DMUs while considering all public input. TAG members had experiences hunting on private and public lands. The TAGs included still hunters and hunters who had experience using dogs to pursue deer. A private consulting firm facilitated the TAG meetings, where goals and objectives for managing the deer population within each DMU were developed. The TAGs also provided input on other topics, such as antler regulations and bag limits. FWC staff and DMTAG reviewed all stakeholder input and developed rule proposals intended to accomplish preferences of stakeholders.

As a result from all of these past efforts, significant changes have been made to “modernize” deer hunting regulations in Florida. DMUs have been established, hunting zones have been adjusted, antler regulations have been adjusted, antlerless deer harvest opportunities have been adjusted, a Private Lands Deer Management Permit Program was established and crossbow hunting opportunities have been expanded. The rule proposals included in this report are a continuation of these efforts to update deer hunting regulations.

Annual Bag Limits for Deer



- Establishes an annual bag limit of 3 antlered deer and 2 antlerless deer per hunter
 - Hunters and other stakeholders have requested bag limits
 - Potential to help achieve DMU goals and objectives
 - Promotes harvest among more hunters
 - Promotes greater selectivity among hunters
 - Florida is the only state in the Southeast with no annual bag limits



Annual bag limits for deer have been discussed extensively in recent years with staff and stakeholders. The proposals are a continuation of efforts to update Florida's deer hunting regulations while being responsive to hunter preferences. Stakeholders that support proposed bag limits believe bag limits would increase the number of bucks in the population, improve buck to doe ratios and allow more hunters to harvest a deer.

Deer harvested by a hunter under the deer depredation permit program, Private Lands Deer Management Permit Program and the antlerless deer permit program would not count towards the annual bag limit. Lands enrolled in these permit programs are managed more intensively and flexibility in harvesting more deer per individual is needed.

Use of Deer Harvest Reporting

- Harvest data is important for wildlife agencies to make informed adjustments to regulations to achieve harvest goals and to meet management objectives
- Harvest reporting in Florida would:
 - support achieving management objectives by providing additional information to supplement annual hunter surveys
 - support compliance with proposed bag limits
- Hunters in over 40 states have to report deer harvest and half of those states use telephone and internet reporting



Harvest Reporting Proposal

- Telephone and internet system for reporting deer harvest
- Available 24 hours a day
- Paper or smart phone harvest log that would facilitate enforcement
- Annual and seasonal harvest numbers available for staff and the public



Hunters would be required to report their own harvest within 24 hours of harvest AND prior to transferring possession of the harvested deer. After using their telephone or any internet connection to report, hunters would receive a confirmation number to record on a paper harvest log (if used) or to be saved automatically on their smart phone.

Antlerless Deer Permit Program Adjustments

- Require antlerless deer permittees to report harvest
 - Would help supplement current survey data and validate numbers reported from annual hunter harvest survey
- Require tagging of all antlerless deer taken under the antlerless deer permit program
 - Intended to prevent overharvesting antlerless deer



Currently there is no reporting requirement for deer taken under the antlerless deer permit program. Antlerless deer may now be taken when allowed by DMU regulations. In addition, antlerless deer permittees receive a set number of antlerless deer tags that allows them to harvest more antlerless deer. This can result in an overharvest of antlerless deer (particularly does). The proposal would limit the number of antlerless deer allowed to be harvested on a permitted property to the number of tags issued through the antlerless deer permit program.

Youth Antlered Deer Exemption Adjustment

- Would limit youth to 1 antlered deer annually that has at least 1 antler 5-inches or more but falls short of meeting the DMU antler regulations
 - Would continue to promote youth participation in hunting
 - Limit overuse of this special youth exemption



Currently, youth 15 years of age and younger may harvest any antlered deer with at least 1 antler 5-inches or greater, and there is no bag limit.

Youth Hunting Weekend Proposal

- Establishes a youth deer hunt weekend on private lands
 - Youth 15 years of age and younger would be allowed to harvest any antlered or antlerless deer with a weekend bag limit of 1 that counts towards the annual bag limit
 - Would coincide with the first or second weekend of muzzleloading gun season
 - Youth would be allowed to use any method of take legal for deer



Proposed rule would provide youth hunting opportunities on private lands which would compliment existing youth-focused opportunities on public lands. The proposal is a continuation of R3 efforts to recruit new hunters.

Public Input

- Rule summaries made available online for commenting
- Stakeholders notified through email and social media
 - Sent to more than 155,000 email addresses
- Over 9,300 responses



Summaries of all rule proposals regarding hunting and FWC-managed areas were provided to the public online for commenting beginning August 24th (ongoing). The opportunity to comment was advertised and made available through FWC's HuntFlorida Facebook page and Hunting Hot Sheet. Additionally, an email blast was sent via GovDelivery (FWC's email news group service), resulting in emails to over 155,000 unique email addresses. These efforts have resulted in over 9,300 responses to date. The proposals will remain available for public comment until the February 2019 Commission meeting.

Staff Recommendation



- Approve proposed rule amendments for advertising in the Florida Administrative Register
- Provide direction or guidance to staff as we continue working with the public
- Consider for final adoption at February 2019 Commission meeting



If approved as final rules in February 2019, rules would take effect July 1, 2019.