

# Proposed Changes to Deer Hunting Regulations



Final Rules  
February 2019



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.

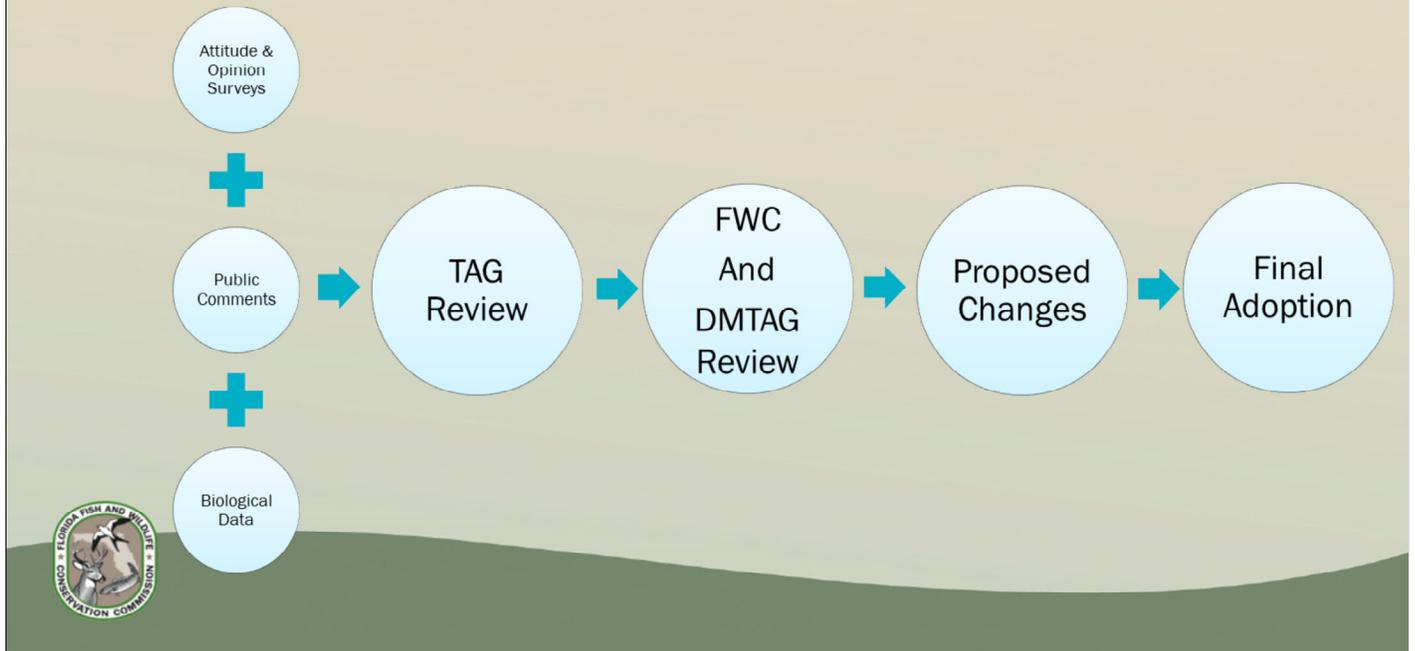
Division: Hunting and Game Management

Author: Cory R. Morea

Contact Phone Number: 850-354-7984

Report date: January 17, 2019

# Rule Development Process



FWC staff is implementing the Commission-approved strategic plan for deer management by proposing regulations that have been developed through extensive 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 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), which was tasked with developing goals and objectives for DMUs while considering all public input. TAG member experiences included hunting on private and public lands, still hunting, and 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 the Deer Management Technical Assistance Group (DMTAG) reviewed all stakeholder input and developed rule proposals intended to achieve stakeholders preferences and conservation goals.

As a result of these past efforts, significant changes have been made to deer hunting regulations in Florida. DMUs have been established; hunting zones, antler regulations, and antlerless deer harvest opportunities have been adjusted; a Private Lands Deer Management Permit Program has been established; and crossbow hunting opportunities have been expanded. The rule proposals included in this report are a continuation of efforts to improve hunting opportunities and help maintain a healthy and reasonably balanced deer herd.

# Youth-Related Rule Proposals

- **Antlered Deer Exemption Adjustment**
  - Would limit youth to 1 antlered deer annually not meeting DMU antler regulations
- **Youth Hunting Weekend Proposal**
  - Establishes youth hunting weekend on private lands coinciding with the first or second weekend of muzzleloading gun season
  - Youth would be allowed to use any method of take legal for deer (which includes use of dogs to pursue deer)



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. The antlered deer exemption adjustment would continue to promote youth participation in hunting while limiting the overuse of this special youth exemption.

During the youth hunting weekend, 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. Any method of take legal for deer would be allowed\*. This proposal 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.

\*Staff is proposing a change from what the Commission approved in December to allow the use of dogs to pursue deer during the youth hunting weekend. Only youth would be allowed to take deer with a gun if dogs are used.

# Antlerless Deer Permit Program Adjustments

- **Require Antlerless Deer Permittees to Report Harvest**
  - Would 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 program permittees receive a set number of antlerless deer tags that allows them to harvest antlerless deer. In addition, antlerless deer also may be taken when allowed by DMU regulations. This can result in overharvest of antlerless deer (particularly females). 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.

# Harvest Reporting Proposal

- Telephone and internet system for reporting deer harvest
- Available 24 hours a day
- Paper or smartphone harvest log 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 smartphone. Options would be made available to hunters with no access to cellular or internet connections within 24 hours of harvest.

# Annual Bag Limits Proposal



- 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 improve hunting opportunities and help maintain a healthy and reasonably balanced deer herd while being responsive to hunter preferences. The proposal is not a biological necessity but rather a response to stakeholder input. Stakeholders that support proposed bag limits believe they would increase the number of bucks in the population, improve buck to doe ratios and allow more hunters to harvest a deer.

A bag limit of 3 antlered deer would protect approximately 5,600 deer (9% of the statewide buck harvest) from harvest or shift the harvest to other hunters while only impacting approximately 2.5% of hunters.

Deer harvested by a hunter under the deer depredation permit program, Private Lands Deer Management Permit Program and antlerless deer permit program would not count towards a person's annual bag limit. Private lands enrolled in these permit programs need flexibility in harvesting more deer per individual to achieve management objectives.

# 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 10,400 responses



Summaries of all rule proposals were made available to the public online for commenting beginning August 24<sup>th</sup>. The opportunity to comment was publicized 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 10,400 responses to date.

## Staff Recommendation



- Approve amendments to F.A.C. Rules 68A-12.003 and 68A-12.004 as advertised
- Approve the amendments to F.A.C. Rule 68A-13.004 previously discussed and modified today for advertising and then authorize staff to file for adoption as soon as possible.



Approved rule amendments would take effect July 1, 2019.