

**Background Report**  
**Big Cypress WMA – Stairsteps Unit**  
**Consent Agenda Item 3**  
**June 27, 2012**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) staff have continued to monitor the deer population in the Stairsteps Unit of Big Cypress. In response to low numbers of deer observed during surveys, the taking of deer was prohibited during the 2010-2011 hunting season in Zones 3 and 4. For the 2011-2012 season, the taking of deer was again prohibited in Zone 4 and a forked-antler restriction was implemented in Zone 3 along with a reduction in the annual bag limit from 2 to 1 deer.

Recent aerial surveys indicate that deer are rare in Zone 4 and that there is a lower than desired density in Zone 3. Based on these findings, FWC and BCNP staff are recommending that last season's special regulations for the Stairsteps Unit be continued for the 2012-13 hunting season.

Results of aerial deer surveys conducted by FWC staff for Zones 2 and 4 of the Stairsteps Unit of Big Cypress WMA from 2010 through 2012.				
Year	Zone	Average # of Deer Observed Per Flight	# of Flights	Total # of Deer Observed
2010	2	3	3	9
2011	2	17	3	52
2012	2	19	3	56
2010	4	7	5	35
2011	4	3	6	16
2012	4	0.3	3	1

**Staff Recommendations**

- Allow deer hunting in Zones 1-3 of the Stairsteps Unit under the current season lengths that include 30-day archery, 16-day muzzleloading gun, and 47 to 53-day general gun seasons.
- Retain the annual bag limit for Zone 3 of the Stairsteps Unit at 1 deer per year.
- Retain a forked-antler regulation for Zone 3.
- Continue the prohibition on taking deer in Zone 4.

Staff recommends implementing changes by Executive Order with Commission approval for the upcoming 2012-2013 season. These recommendations are intended to allow traditional opportunities on the area without limiting the ability of the deer population to rebound if conditions allow. However, we anticipate that any rebound in the population would likely take an extended period of time due to generally poor habitat conditions and low recruitment rates.