



**Private Lands Deer Management Permits  
Final Rule  
April 2013**



**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Division of Hunting and Game Management**

Version 2

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has proposed a voluntary Private Lands Deer Management Permit program to assist landowners with deer management. Advertised rules would provide greater flexibility in deer herd and harvest management for landowners or their lessees and would encourage wildlife and habitat conservation and hunting heritage efforts. The program is being considered for the 2013-2014 season.

As of April 4, 2013, updates to this background report included changes to the previous version's slides 6, 9, and 11. A new slide 7 was added, and subsequent slides renumbered, so that the updates are described in slides 6, 7, 10 and 12. The changes allow for management plans that are developed by FWC's Landowner Assistance Program to satisfy the requirements for the management plan. This would provide a free option, in addition to the option of having a private Certified Wildlife Biologist develop or approve the management plan.

# Background

- Proposed by private landowners and developed with their input
- Provides more flexibility with deer season timing, method of take and harvest management
- Similar to Texas program, in which private landowners conduct wildlife habitat management and conservation



A voluntary Private Lands Deer Management Permit program was originally proposed by private landowners to the Deer Management Technical Assistance Group (DMTAG) in 2007. The Commission directed staff in September 2012 to work with landowners and stakeholders to develop this program proposal for implementation in 2013.

# Goal

- Assist private landowners in their goals for deer management and hunter satisfaction through a voluntary program
- Provide flexibility in harvest and herd management
- Promote habitat conservation and hunting heritage
- For parcels large enough to successfully implement herd and other wildlife management and to reduce concerns of hunters on adjacent properties



## Goal

To develop a voluntary deer management program for landowners or their lessees that provides greater flexibility in herd and harvest management and promotes conservation and hunting heritage efforts. The program would be for parcels of sufficient size to successfully implement herd and wildlife management measures and to reduce potential concerns of hunters on adjacent properties where management programs differ. Approved harvest and herd management activities will support FWC's responsibilities to manage all wildlife for current and future generations.

# Benefits to Participating Landowners

## Harvest Flexibility, Hunter Satisfaction

- Could use any legal method of take during entire season
- Participants would designate 128-day season in Zone A within the zonal start and end dates with one break allowed
- Participants in Zones B, C and D would not need to designate dates since season is continuous



Benefits to enrollment in this program would include greater flexibility in deer hunting seasons and deer harvest opportunities to enhance land managers' ability to reach deer herd management goals. The permit would allow participants to use any legal method of take during the 128-day zonal deer season. For example, rifles could be used during the zonal archery, crossbow or muzzleloading gun season in addition to the regular antlered deer season. The permittee may designate the 128 hunting days in Zone A within the zonal start and end dates, with one break allowed. (Zone A has a 33-day break in the season that could be included in the 128 hunting days selected by the permittee.) Permittees in zones B, C, and D would have 128 hunting days, consistent with the respective zonal season dates.

See additional background document "Private Lands Deer Management Program Summary" for additional information.

# Public Trust Benefits

## Conservation, Heritage, Data

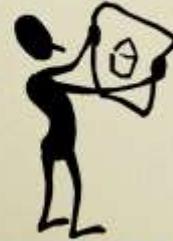
- Increase wildlife habitat management and conservation on private lands
- New opportunities for youth involvement in fish and wildlife activities
- Additional data on deer harvest



The benefits of the program to all of the people of Florida include (1) more and better wildlife habitat management on private lands, benefitting a host of wildlife species, (2) additional data on deer harvest to increase understanding of deer management in Florida, and (3) new opportunities to get youth involved in hunting and other fish and wildlife related programs.

# Program Elements

- Submit a Wildlife Management Plan
  - Developed or approved by a Certified Wildlife Biologist (certified by The Wildlife Society), or
  - Developed through FWC's Landowner Assistance Program (new option)
    - **Note.** This option is an addition to the rule proposed in February
    - No-cost option to encourage participation
    - Establishes relationships between FWC and landowners to increase interest in and support for wildlife conservation on private lands
    - Monitoring of conservation practices, wildlife, and plants by FWC staff



Participants in the Private Lands Deer Management Permit program would receive a permit annually from the FWC, similar to the Antlerless Deer Permit program. A written wildlife management plan developed or approved either by a Certified Wildlife Biologist (certified by The Wildlife Society) or by FWC's Landowner Assistance Program would be required to participate in the program. This second (and new) option allows for management plans that are developed for landowners who are enrolled in FWC's Landowner Assistance Program to satisfy the requirements for the management plan required by the rule. For the properties to become enrolled in the Landowner Assistance Program, a landowner would agree to a conservation partnership with FWC. In addition to receiving and implementing the management plan, landowners would allow FWC staff to monitor the conservation practices and to collect data on plants and wildlife occurring on the property. The benefits are that (1) landowners would have a no-cost option for obtaining a management plan, which should help encourage participation, (2) FWC builds relationships with landowners so that they may become interested in other incentive programs for wildlife conservation and (3) FWC has access to these private conservation lands to collect valuable scientific information.

See background document "Private Lands Deer Management Permit Program Summary" for additional information.

The Wildlife Society is an organization for natural resource professionals. The Wildlife Society (TWS) has a professional accreditation program that is nationally recognized (<http://www.wildlife.org/certification/program>). Their mission is to represent and serve the professional community of scientists, managers, educators, technicians, planners, and others who work actively to study, manage, and conserve wildlife and habitats worldwide.

# Program Elements-continued

- Annually conduct 4 conservation practices; 1 could be a conservation-related activity for youth (For example, host a Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network event)
  - **Note:** The number of practices required was increased from 3, as proposed in February
- Season permits required



Florida Youth Conservation  
Centers Network

The permittee would conduct 4 approved conservation practices annually, 1 of which may be a conservation-related activity for youth (for example, hosting a Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network event). Note: The number of approved conservation practices is proposed to be increased from 3, which was proposed at the February Commission meeting, to 4. The approved conservation practices would have a positive impact on 10% or more of the permitted land. For example, the permittee of a 5,000-acre parcel may conduct prescribed burns on 450 acres, plant food plots on 50 acres, conduct deer population surveys and submit the data to FWC and conduct an organized youth hunt to meet the program requirements for that year. Hunters on the permitted property would be required to have season permits (archery, crossbow or muzzleloading gun permits) when hunting during times that coincide with those zonal seasons.

See background document “Private Lands Deer Management Permit Program Summary” for additional information.

## Program Elements-continued



- Minimum size of 5,000 contiguous acres (cooperatives allowed)
- Surveys to monitor deer populations (for harvest recommendations greater than 1 antlered or 1 antlerless deer per 150 acres)
  - First 2 consecutive years and alternate years thereafter
  - If required, survey data used to determine the number of antlered and antlerless deer to be taken during the season
- All harvested deer would be tagged and harvest reported

A property of 5,000 contiguous acres or more would qualify for the Private Lands Deer Management Permit program. Deer surveys would only be required during the first two years and in alternate years thereafter when harvest recommendations exceed either 1 antlered deer per 150 acres or 1 antlerless deer per 150 acres. No deer population survey is required for approval of the harvest of a maximum of one (1) antlered and one (1) antlerless deer per 150 acres. If required, surveys would estimate deer densities and these estimates would guide harvest recommendations for the number of antlerless and antlered deer that would be harvested on the permitted property. Tags for antlered and antlerless deer would be issued based on the harvest recommendations, and all deer taken on the property under the Private Lands Deer Management Permit would be tagged. The property would remain eligible for deer depredation permits. After the end of the deer season, a deer harvest summary would be submitted to FWC staff.

See background document "Private Lands Deer Management Permit Program Summary" for additional information.

# Review and Input

- Initial draft of proposal developed with staff and stakeholder input
- Multiple waves of review by staff and stakeholders, including landowners and DMTAG, with significant changes incorporated
- Multiple email blasts to approximately 50,000 hunters with link to online comment form
- Survey of antlerless deer permittees
- Public input and Commission direction provided during the February Commission meeting, with resulting revisions



FWC staff developed the proposal for the Private Lands Deer Management Permit program based on input from staff, private landowners and the DMTAG. We then sent a survey to antlerless deer permittees to solicit feedback on the proposal and then presented the draft proposal to DMTAG. Multiple email blasts were sent to nearly 50,000 hunters to inform them of the proposed program and to encourage them to submit comments. The last email blast occurred after the February Commission meeting to inform hunters of recent modifications to the proposal. Changes were made based on public input and Commission direction provided during the February Commission meeting.

## Stakeholder Concerns

- Minimum property size requirement - *Update: Minimum property size reduced from 10,000 acres to 5,000 acres*
- Program costs (surveys, management plan, Certified Wildlife Biologist) - *Update: Surveys would be required only during first 2 years and alternate years thereafter, and only for harvest recommendations greater than 1 antlered or 1 antlerless deer per 150 acres. The option of conducting surveys may now be 1 of the 4 required conservation practices. Management plans may now be developed at no charge by FWC's Landowner Assistance Program.*
- Perceived fairness
- Potential for conflicts among neighboring hunters



Some of the concerns we heard from stakeholders were related to the required minimum size of the property (some want it higher and others lower), costs to the permittee associated with the program (surveys, development of a management plan, Certified Wildlife Biologist), perceived fairness with allowing the use of any legal method of take during more primitive seasons, allowing permittees in Zone A to hunt during the closed portion of the deer season, and the potential for conflicts with neighboring hunters who would not be participating in the program.

In response to these concerns, the minimum acreage requirement to participate in this proposed program was lowered from 10,000 acres to 5,000 acres. In addition, instead of requiring deer surveys every year, deer surveys would only be required during the first two years and in alternate years thereafter when harvest recommendations exceed either 1 antlered deer per 150 acres or 1 antlerless deer per 150 acres. No deer population survey is required for approval of the harvest of a maximum of one (1) antlered and one (1) antlerless deer per 150 acres. Further, an option was added to allow the required, written wildlife management plan to be prepared at no cost to the landowner through enrollment in FWC's Landowner Assistance Program.

# Promoting Conservation on Private Lands



The Private Lands Deer Management Permit program would benefit participants by allowing flexibility in deer harvest management and increasing hunter satisfaction on participating properties. The program would increase cooperation between FWC and private landowners and assist in documenting the benefits that private landowners offer to statewide conservation efforts. Other public benefits include providing more data to inform deer management and valuable contributions to involving Florida's youth in fish and wildlife recreation, including passing on the hunting heritage.

## Requested Action

- Approval to advertise the 3 changes described in this presentation to the proposed rule as advertised:
  - Require 4 conservation practices (instead of 3)
  - Require deer surveys only for harvest recommendations greater than 1 antlered or 1 antlerless deer per 150 acres.
  - Allow for management plan to be developed through FWC's Landowner Assistance Program
- Adopt the proposed rule as changed.

*Upon completion of the advertisement period, the rule would become effective June 1.*



[MyFWC.com/Deer](http://MyFWC.com/Deer)

Staff is requesting the Commission to adopt the proposed rule, with 3 recommended changes, which would be effective for the 2013-2014 hunting season. If approved, staff will file a "Notice of Change" to advise the public of the changes to the language in 13.004, as described in this presentation, which would increase the number of required conservation practices from 3 to 4, and require deer surveys only if harvest recommendations are greater than 1 antlered or 1 antlerless deer per 150 acres.

Please continue to monitor [MyFWC.com/Deer](http://MyFWC.com/Deer) for updated information on deer management.