



**Strategic Plan for Deer Management in
Florida – Commission Update
February 2013**



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

The purpose of this Commission update is to present progress-to-date on the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Deer Management in Florida that was approved by the Commission in 2008. This 10-year plan that runs through 2018 provides guidance for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff for deer management priorities.

Outline

- Background information
- Progress-to-date
- Moving forward



We will discuss background information including how the strategic plan was developed, goals and objectives identified in the plan, progress made so far in accomplishing priority objectives and how staff is planning to accomplish more of the objectives in the plan.

Strategic Plan: a Roadmap for Deer Management

- Sets a framework for deer management tasks and priorities during 2008-2018
- Informs the public of the direction FWC intends to go toward managing deer populations and deer-related recreation
- Focuses existing resources on priority management issues



In a world of possibilities a strategic plan is important in determining direction toward achievement of long-term goals.

Deer Management in Florida is Unique

		
Soil Fertility	Low	High
Reproductive Rate	Low	High
Deer Harvest	Low (3/ sq. mi.)	High (9.5/ sq. mi.)
Deer Size	Smaller	Larger
Deer Density	Low	High
Deer-Vehicle Collisions (11-12)	Low (1 in 991)	High (1 in 151)



Deer management in Florida is different from most other southeastern states. In many states, the most pressing challenge facing management of this species is overpopulation. Florida, however, does not share this problem to any great extent. Except for a few of the northern tier counties in the panhandle, deer populations in Florida are comparatively low. This is evidenced by the fact that while among adjoining states Florida has the most liberal deer harvest seasons and bag limits, its annual harvest is considerably less than its neighbors. Florida typically ranks 15th among the 16 southeastern states in deer harvested per square mile of habitat.

We often hear from hunters that are familiar with the hunting season structure in Georgia, “Why don’t we do what Georgia has done?” In particular, hunters often ask why we don’t allow more liberal take of antlerless deer, consider a more conservative buck bag limit or implement antler restrictions within a portion or all of Florida. While all of these can be complicated issues from a hunter-preference standpoint, the ecological characteristics of deer in Florida, as a whole, illustrate that management generally needs to be viewed differently from other parts of the U.S. For instance, taking an increased number of antlerless deer, particularly does, in many parts of Florida could reduce the deer population to levels that hunters and other stakeholders would not support.

Strategic Plan Development



The strategic plan was developed with input from FWC staff and stakeholders. The draft plan was presented at the September 2007 and February 2008 Commission meetings and public comments were allowed.

The FWC Deer Working Group (Deer Team) is composed of FWC staff that represent virtually every facet of the FWC. Subject matter action teams are temporary teams of experts assembled by the Working Group to develop specific proposals or research specific issues. The Deer Management Technical Assistance Group (DMTAG), is a self-constituted voluntary association of individuals, organizations and entities sharing a common interest in the management and conservation of white-tailed deer and their associated habitat. This group discusses issues, explores common interests, evaluates scientific information, reviews and provides information related to proposals for regulations, management activities and research of white-tailed deer.



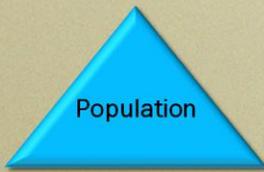
The Strategic Plan for Deer Management in Florida describes the history and current status of deer management in Florida and outlines a 10-year strategic direction through a series of goals, objectives and strategies. The plan is a collaborative effort between the FWC and its stakeholders, designed to provide a “big picture” view of deer management in Florida. Its purpose is to aid in navigating around the day-to-day challenges of deer management toward our collective goal of a robust deer population that meets the public’s desires for recreation while protecting property and ensuring the long-term welfare of the species.

Goal—What we hope to accomplish, a desired future condition.

Objective—A measureable "milepost" along the strategically chosen path toward the goal

Strategy—Specific actions chosen to accomplish objectives.

Strategic Plan Goals



Ensure the existence of robust deer populations that meet the public's desires for recreational opportunities and protection of property while ensuring the long-term welfare of the species



Ensure a high degree of public satisfaction with deer management in Florida



Manage deer habitats consistent with ecosystem health, deer population goals, and customer satisfaction goals



The plan's goals are three-fold, (1) ensure the existence of robust deer populations that meet the public's desire for recreational opportunities and protection of private property while ensuring the long-term welfare of the species, (2) ensure a high degree of public satisfaction with deer management in Florida, and (3) manage deer habitats consistent with ecosystem health, deer population goals, and customer satisfaction goals.

Strategic plan goals, objectives and strategies begin on Page 16. You may find the strategic plan online at www.myfwc.com/deer.

Plan Priorities

In Priority Order



- Develop a Deer Management Unit (DMU) Approach to Managing Deer Harvest
- Explore the feasibility of a mandatory tag and check system to determine how many and where deer are harvested in Florida each year
- Conduct research necessary to ensure that the deer population model is science based and data-driven
- Continue monitoring for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and other important diseases



After the Strategic Plan was approved, the Deer Management Technical Assistance Group (DMTAG) and the Deer Team ranked plan strategies to determine the priority strategies for plan implementation. The top 8 priorities include developing a Deer Management Unit (DMU) management model, the exploration of a tag and reporting system, developing a science based deer population model, continuing to monitor for Chronic Wasting Disease and other disease threats, improve and expand deer hunting opportunities on public lands, evaluate a more comprehensive harvest survey, conducting a deer habitat model and developing a method to determine public preferences for deer management.

Plan Priorities, continued

In Priority Order



- Seek to improve and expand deer hunting opportunities on public lands
- Evaluate the feasibility of developing a more comprehensive harvest survey
- Conduct an inventory and assessment of deer habitat quality
- Identify and develop effective methods for determining the preferences of the public necessary to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction with regard to deer management



The strategic plan provides guidance for how we progress with deer management, but we opportunistically implement other projects that would benefit goals and objectives found in the strategic plan.

Progress: 2008-2012

- Completed or made significant progress on 7 of the 8 priority strategies
- Enabled by additional budget provided through the deer permit revenues – paid by deer hunters



We are 5 years into a 10-year strategic plan. Thanks to the guidance of the Commission, input and support from stakeholders, and funding provided by hunters, staff has made much progress toward the plan's goals and objectives, addressing or completing seven of the eight priority strategies.

Progress - Population

- Deer Management Unit project currently underway to allow FWC to manage for local conditions and stakeholder preferences
- First survey recently completed to determine public attitudes and opinions regarding deer management
- New deer harvest survey implemented in 2012 to measure harvest and hunter effort
- Continued monitoring for diseases—no CWD found



We are currently working on establishing Deer Management Units (DMUs) in Florida to allow us to better manage deer at a more local level than is possible with the statewide or zone structure. A statewide survey to determine public attitudes and opinions at the DMU level was finished in December and included over 4400 total responses from hunters, farmers and other members of the public. We have 3 public meetings scheduled at the end of January (see specifics below) where we will discuss what DMUs will be used for and to get additional public input on deer management preferences. A temporary technical assistance group (TAG) will be formed and will meet in February and March to review survey and public meeting results and develop recommendations for the 2 DMUs within Zone D. FWC's Deer Team will review the TAG recommendations to determine how to proceed with possible changes for the DMUs within Zone D. We will then assess how the public input process went for Zone D to determine how to proceed with other zones, but we plan to move quickly to begin the process in another part of the state. Since we have 4 zones, the process may last till the end of 2014 with rule making possible into 2015.

Meeting Dates

January 29, 2013, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. CST at the Jackson County Agricultural Conference Center, 2741 Pennsylvania Avenue, Marianna, Fla. 32448

January 30, 2013, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. EST at the Burns Building Auditorium, Florida Department of Transportation, 605 Suwannee Street, Tallahassee, Fla. 32399-0450.

January 31, 2013, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. CST at the University of West Florida, Commons Auditorium, 11000 University Parkway, Pensacola, Fla. 32514.

Progress - Customer Satisfaction

- Continual effort to expand deer hunting opportunities

Examples:

- 32 new WMAs added totaling more than 141,000 acres since 2005
- Crossbow season increased from 5 to 30 days
- Allowed guests to hunt with quota permittees on WMAs
- Continually expanding hunting opportunities for youth



Progress - Customer Satisfaction

- Deer Management Unit project currently being implemented to better meet the needs and desires of customers
- Recently completed first survey to determine public attitudes and opinions...part of DMU project
- Developed a deer website for the public...www.MyFWC.com/Deer
- Adjusted deer zones and seasons and WMA seasons based on hunter preferences to better align with the rut and other preferred times to hunt



Progress - Habitat

- Manage public lands using a variety of habitat management practices that benefit deer
- Provide technical assistance to private landowners and influence other public agencies to do good habitat management that also benefits deer
- Developing a private lands deer management program that would encourage active habitat management to benefit deer and other species



Stay Tuned...

- Exciting time for deer management in Florida
- Focus is understanding stakeholder desires for deer management and getting them more involved
- Lots of progress made in the past 5 years and lots more to come in the next 5 years



Go to
MyFWC.com/Deer
for updates.

We still have much to do over the next 5 years. The strategic plan helps us to focus deer management efforts. We plan to give more regular updates to the Commission regarding strategic plan progress.

Please continue to monitor MyFWC.com/Deer for updates.

The following slides are considered
backup material and are not anticipated
to be part of the Commission meeting
presentation



Population Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Manage deer populations on a local level.
- **Objective 2:** Develop an ongoing capability to efficiently and accurately quantify public desires regarding target deer population levels.
- **Objective 3:** Establish quantifiable deer population objectives for lands within the Wildlife Management Area System.
- **Objective 4:** Develop and implement a method for reliably determining how many (and where) deer are harvested annually in Florida.
- **Objective 5:** Ensure early detection and prompt response to diseases that threaten Florida's deer populations.



Objectives under the Population Goal of the plan.

Customer Satisfaction Objectives

- **Objective 1:** Maximize access to deer hunting opportunities and advocate for expanding those opportunities.
- **Objective 2:** Solicit and utilize human dimension data to develop and continually improve customer satisfaction.
- **Objective 3:** Manage deer-related impacts at an acceptable level.
- **Objective 4:** Develop a white-tailed deer information portal.



Objectives under the Customer Satisfaction Goal of the plan.

Habitat Objectives



- **Objective 1:** Assess the amount and relative quality of deer habitat throughout Florida by DMU
- **Objective 2:** Promote deer habitat management practices that are compatible with the needs of diverse native wildlife species, and humans on private and public lands.



Objectives under the Habitat Goal of the plan.