



The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is considering a voluntary Private Lands Deer Management Permit program for landowners or their lessees that would provide greater flexibility in deer herd and harvest management and would promote habitat conservation and hunting heritage efforts.

We will discuss background information including a project overview, the rule development process and staff recommendations for moving forward.

Background

- Proposed by private landowners
- Want more flexibility with deer season timing, method of take and harvest management
- Similar to Texas program, which has engaged private landowners in conducting wildlife habitat management and conservation
- Would require an annual permit



A voluntary Private Lands Deer Management Permit program was originally proposed by private landowners to the Deer Management Technical Assistance Group (DMTAG) in 2007. While the original proposal was discussed at several DMTAG meetings, consideration was withheld at the time because the Strategic Plan for Deer Management in Florida (2008) was nearing completion and it was unknown how projects associated with the plan's implementation would be impacted by the proposal. That is no longer a concern.

Goal

- Voluntary program
- Flexibility in harvest and herd management
- 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 habitat 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.

Benefits of Participation

- Could use any legal method of take
- Participant 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



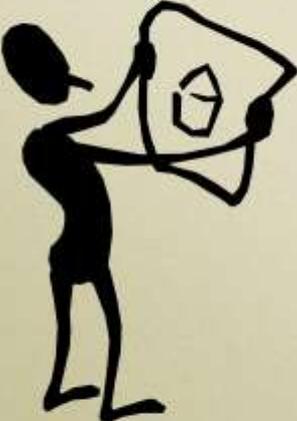
The Private Lands Deer Management Permit program would allow participants to use any legal method of take during the 128 zonal deer season. For example, rifles could be used during the zonal archery, crossbow or muzzleloading gun season in addition to the regular antlered deer season. Zone A has an extra 33 day closed period within the zonal start and end dates that could be included in 128 day season and the permittee would select which 128 days would be included in Zone A that they would utilize.

Program Description - The Private Lands Deer Management Program would require a minimum of 10,000 contiguous acres and would promote wildlife management on private lands by providing benefits to landowners or hunt clubs that develop and implement wildlife management plans and gather and provide deer population and harvest data. The plans would include habitat management and/or hunting heritage efforts. 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, provide data related to deer management and provide recreational hunting opportunities.

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

Program Requirements

- A written Wildlife Management Plan developed or approved by a Certified Wildlife Biologist (certified by The Wildlife Society)
- Annually conduct 3 approved conservation practices of which 1 could be a conservation-related activity for youth (For example, host a Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network event)





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**Florida Youth Conservation
Centers Network**

The Private Lands Deer Management Permit program would require a permit annually from the FWC, similar to the Antlerless Deer Permit program. 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. A written wildlife management plan developed or approved by a Certified Wildlife Biologist (certified by The Wildlife Society) would be required to participate in the program. The permittee would be required to conduct 3 approved conservation practices annually of which 1 could be a conservation-related activity for youth (For example, host a Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network event). The approved conservation practices must have a positive impact on 10% or more of the permitted land. For example, the permittee of a 10,000 acre parcel could conduct prescribed burns on 900 acres, plant food plots on 100 acres and conduct an organized youth hunt to meet the program requirements for that year.

See additional 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. We looked at other certification programs, but they don’t have the high standards provided by the TWS certification program that was desired to provide the level of accountability needed for this type of program to be successful.

Program Requirements, continued



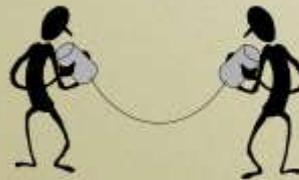
- Minimum size of 10,000 contiguous acres (cooperatives allowed)
- Annual deer surveys conducted under the guidance of a Certified Wildlife Biologist
- Limit on the number of antlered and antlerless deer that may be taken during the season
- All harvested deer would be tagged and harvest reported

A property of 10,000 contiguous acres or more would qualify for the Private Lands Deer Management Permit program. Annual deer surveys would be required to estimate deer densities, and these estimates would be used to guide harvest recommendations for the number of antlerless and antlered deer that may be harvested on the permitted property. A set number of antlered and antlerless deer tags would be issued based on the harvest recommendations (not to exceed 1 antlerless and 1 antlered deer per 150 acres without adequate justification), and all deer taken on the property under the Private Lands Deer Management Permit would be tagged. No additional harvest of deer would be allowed on the permitted property, except 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 on or before April 1.

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

Staff Review and Public Input

- Initial draft of proposal developed with staff and stakeholder input, including DMTAG
- Multiple waves of review by staff and stakeholders, including DMTAG, with significant changes incorporated
- Email blast to 50,000+ hunters with link to online comment form
- Survey of antlerless deer permittees



FWC staff developed a Private Lands Deer Management Permit program proposal based on input received 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. The survey was sent to 1207 lessees and 606 landowners and was completed by 183 lessees and 59 landowners. The survey results will not be fully summarized until shortly before the February Commission meeting. Some preliminary results are listed below.

Lessee Survey Results

95% of respondents were in Zone C or D

91% of respondents leased fewer than 10,000 acres

Responses concerning the benefits of flexibility on method-of-take: 44% indicated that it would be beneficial; 32% indicated no; and 24% were undecided.

Landowner survey results

92% of respondents were in Zones C and D

81% of respondents had less than 10,000 acres

Responses concerning the benefits of flexibility on method-of-take: 47% indicated that it would be beneficial; 29% indicated no; and 24% were undecided.

Program Advantages

- Promote wildlife habitat management and conservation on private lands
- Promote hunting heritage programs, in particular, youth hunts
- Improve hunter satisfaction among participants
- Provide flexibility for permittee to meet harvest goals



Through the process of staff review and public input, benefits of the program were identified.

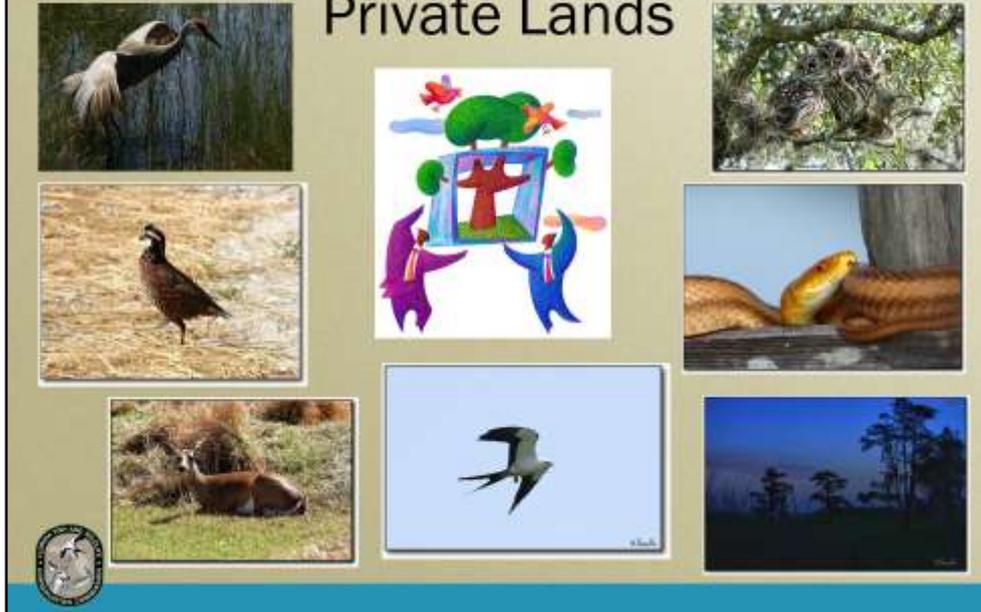
Stakeholder Concerns

- Minimum property size requirement
- Program costs (surveys, management plan, Certified Wildlife Biologist)
- 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 among neighboring hunters that are not participating in the program.

Promoting Conservation on Private Lands



The Private Lands Deer Management Permit program would promote habitat conservation, allow deer harvest flexibility and increase cooperation between FWC and private landowners. We are interested in learning more about conservation practices being conducted on private lands, and this program could assist in documenting the benefits that private landowners offer to statewide conservation efforts.

Requested Action

- Approval to advertise the proposed rule to establish a voluntary Private Lands Deer Management Permit program that would promote conservation practices on private lands 10,000 acres or more in size by providing incentives to landowners or hunt clubs that develop and implement wildlife management plans and gather and provide deer population and harvest data.
- Commission staff will continue to work with stakeholders to refine and develop the proposal for final consideration at the April Commission meeting.

Go to
MyFWC.com/Deer
for updates.



Requested Commission action is to approve the proposal for advertising and final public hearing at the April 2013 Commission meeting.

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