

**Background Report**  
**Big Cypress WMA – Stairsteps Unit**  
**Consent Agenda Item 2**  
**June 11, 2013**

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. Since the 2011-2012 season, the taking of deer has been prohibited in Zone 4 and a forked-antler regulation was implemented in Zone 3 along with a reduction in the annual bag limit from 2 to 1 deer.

Based on the number of deer observed during the past 4 years (Table 1), FWC and BCNP staff are recommending that the special regulations for the Stairsteps Unit be continued for the 2013-14 hunting season and beyond.

Table 1. 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 2013.				
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
2013	2	13	3	40
2010	4	7	5	35
2011	4	3	6	16
2012	4	0.3	3	1
2013	4	0	2	0

**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 these regulations by Executive Order with Commission approval for the upcoming 2013-2014 season and having them remain in effect until rescinded by subsequent order or rule. These regulations 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.