



Proposed Changes to Deer  
Hunting Regulations in Zone D  
April 2014



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

FWC staff are working to implement components of the agency’s Strategic Plan for Deer Management that entail managing deer on a smaller geographic scale with greater stakeholder involvement using Deer Management Units (DMUs).

FWC staff worked extensively with stakeholders to develop proposed rule amendments to hunting regulations that would implement additional antler regulations and change the number and timing of the antlerless deer days (“doe days”) for Zone D. These proposals are intended to address goals and objectives developed by stakeholders.

Draft rules were presented at the November 2013 and February 2014 Commission meetings. Final rules are being presented during the April 2014 Commission meeting in Tallahassee.

Go to [MyFWC.com/Deer](http://MyFWC.com/Deer) for more detailed information on the DMU project.

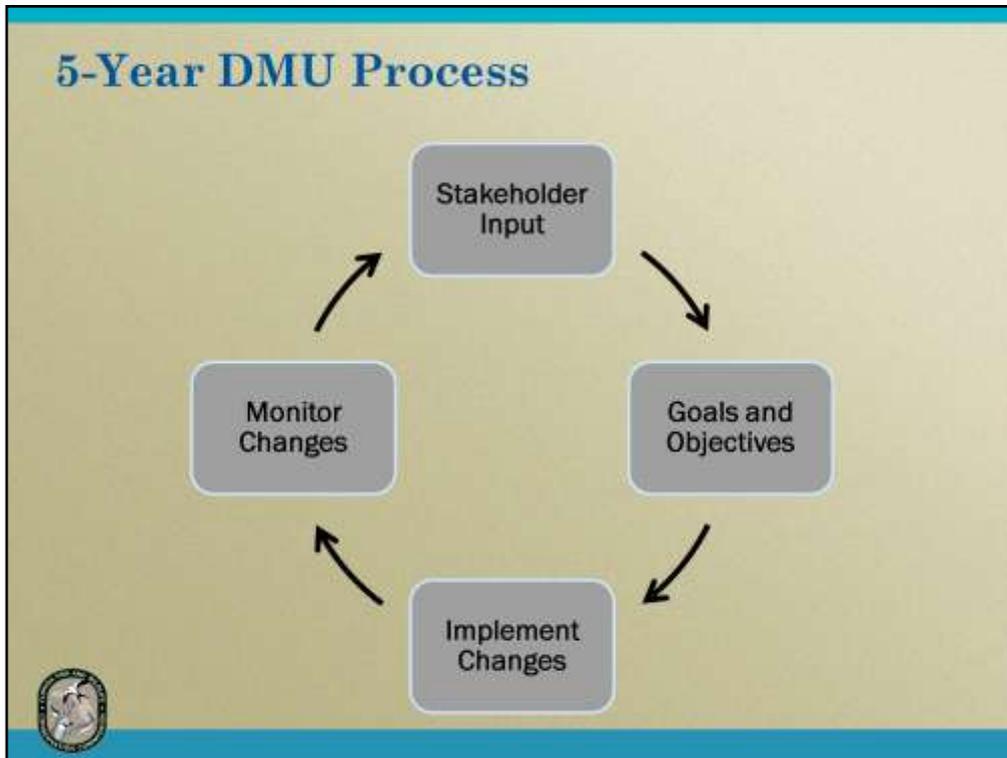
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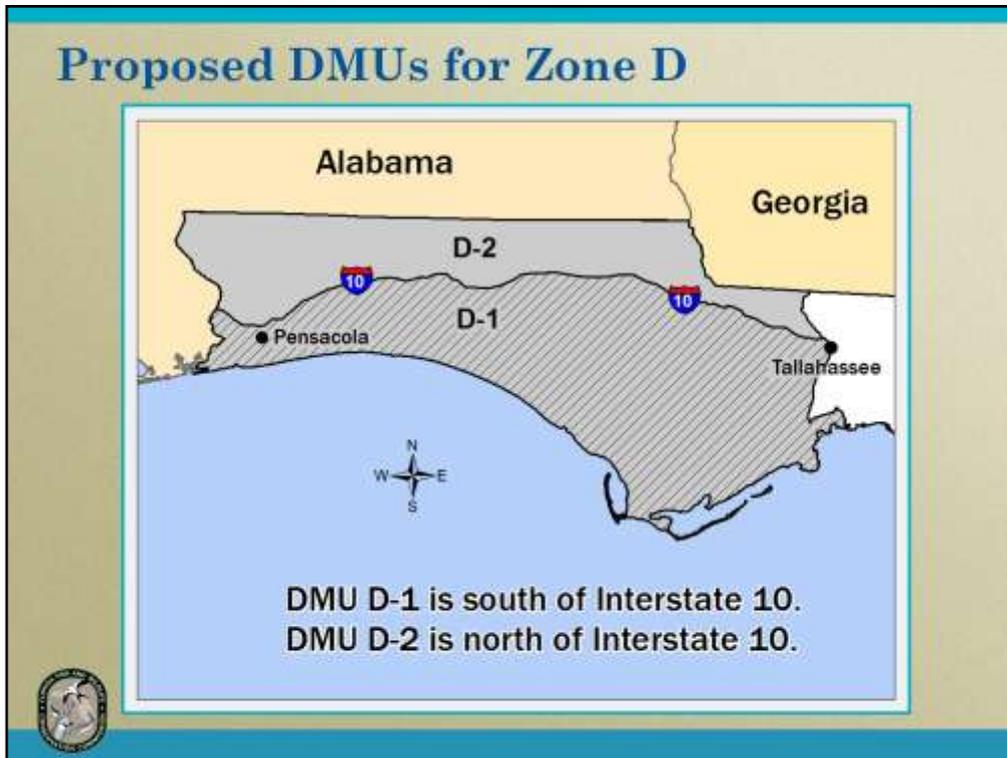
Currently, harvest regulations for deer are generally the same through out the state. This includes legal to take antlered deer, number of antlerless deer days and bag limits. Deer hunting season timing (start and end dates) is linked to zones. Florida is a very diverse state with great differences in deer densities, productivity and social preferences. This project is about creating smaller units to allow us to manage deer on a more local level while increasing hunter satisfaction. This will allow us to customize harvest regulations such as legal to take antlered deer, antlerless deer take opportunities and bag limits by DMU based on stakeholder preferences and to address other management issues that may vary at the DMU level.

A DMU is a sub-division within Florida that has a unique combination of: deer population characteristics, deer habitat, land-use patterns and deer stakeholder interests. Major roads or water features delineate DMU boundaries so they can be clearly identified in the field. Zones A and B are proposed to be single DMUs, Zone D two DMUs and Zone C six DMUs.

This effort will continue to other zones and DMUs in Florida over the next 2 years.



The DMU management model is dependent on extensive stakeholder engagement and includes a stakeholder technical assistance group to develop goals and objectives for each DMU. We will work to address the goals and objectives identified by stakeholders by rule amendments and non-regulatory means. Changes implemented to accomplish the goals and objectives would be monitored through deer harvest and hunter satisfaction surveys to measure success. After 5-years, the stakeholder input process would be repeated to determine opinions on the previous 5-years and gather preferences for the next 5-years. This cycle would be repeated approximately every 5-years.



This slide shows the two proposed DMUs within Zone D. DMU D-1 is located south of Interstate 10 and DMU D-2 is located north of Interstate 10. This report addresses recommendations relating solely to these DMUs in Zone D.

To begin the public outreach process, the FWC had a scientifically designed phone survey of hunters, farmers and residents done in 2012 to assess opinions and attitudes of deer management issues throughout Florida

We then had 3 professionally facilitated public meetings (Tallahassee, Marianna and Pensacola), 2 online webinars, an online presentation and online survey to gain addition input on stakeholder preferences for deer management.

Stakeholders could apply at the public meetings or online to be a part of a stakeholder Technical Assistance Group (TAG). The Zone D TAG had 23 members, comprised of hunters and farmers, and were tasked with developing goals and objectives for Zone D's 2 DMUs while considering the phone survey, online poll, public meeting information and harvest data. FWC staff then reviewed the goals and objectives and developed proposals intended to accomplish some of the goals and objectives developed by the TAG. Other goals and objectives will be addressed by non-regulatory means.

## Final Rule Proposal: Antlerless Deer Season

- **Current format:** 7 days (1 weekend) of general gun season
- **DMU D-1 proposal:** 2 weekends (4 days) of general gun season
- **DMU D-2 proposal:** 3 weekends (6 days) of general gun season and 1 weekend (2 days) of muzzleloading gun season
- **Purpose:** Spread out antlerless deer days to increase chances of hunters being able to hunt 1 or more days



The antlerless deer season for Zone D is currently 7 consecutive days from December 26 through January 1 and only includes 1 weekend. The proposed amendments to the antlerless deer season for DMU D-1 (south of Interstate 10) would include 4 days spread out over 2 holiday weekends during general gun season - the first weekend of the season (Saturday and Sunday after Thanksgiving) and the first weekend after Christmas. For DMU D-2 (north of Interstate 10), the proposal would spread the antlerless deer season out over 4 weekends - the first and third weekends of general gun season, the first weekend after Christmas, and the first weekend of muzzleloading gun season. Antlerless deer harvest regulations on WMAs will continue to be set by area specific regulation.

Other antlerless deer take opportunities will continue. During the archery and crossbow seasons, antlered and antlerless deer may be taken. Antlerless deer may also be taken by antlerless deer permit, private land deer management permit and with deer depredation permits.

## Final Rule Proposal: Antler Regulations

- **Current:** 5 inch antler
- **DMU D-1:** 2 points one side (“forked antler”)
- **DMU D-2:** 3 points one side **OR 10” main beam**
- **Youth:** under 16 exempt
- **Wildlife Management Areas:** apply to all WMAs in DMU unless a more restrictive limit already exists
- **Purpose:**
  - increase buck population
  - increase number of bucks to does
  - increase chances of seeing and harvesting larger-bodied, larger-antlered deer



The rule amendments would implement a 2 points on a side regulation for DMU D-1 (south of Interstate 10) and a 3 points on a side or 10 inch main beam regulation for DMU D-2 (north of Interstate 10). The proposal was amended based on input from stakeholders and Commissioners at the February Commission meeting and now includes a 10 inch or longer main beam length criteria for DMU D-2. This provides a second selection criteria that accomplishes the objectives of protecting 1.5 year old bucks.

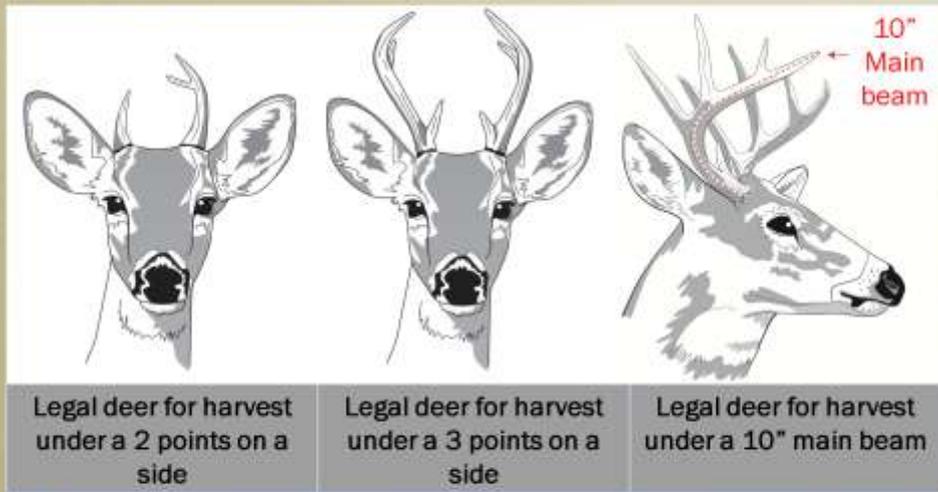
To encourage youth participation in hunting, hunters under 16 years of age would be exempt from the proposed antler regulations unless otherwise indicated by a WMA specific rule.

The proposal would apply to all WMAs within each DMU. Some WMAs currently have more restrictive antler regulations in place, which would remain.

Stakeholders, particularly hunters, communicated that they wanted to see more bucks and have a better chance to harvest larger bucks. Hunters also wanted to increase the number of bucks to does by increasing the number of bucks in the deer population (improve the buck to doe ratio). While there are a number of ways to achieve these results, support was greatest for antler point regulations.

This alternative approach **is not** trophy deer management which generally entails protecting bucks from harvest until they reach their maximum antler potential around 4.5 to 6.5 years of age.

## Examples of Harvestable Deer Under the Proposed Antler Regulations



Here are examples of different legal to take antlered deer under the proposed antler regulations.

## Public Input on Proposed Rules

- **Antlerless deer days:** Online Poll: DMU D-2 (67% support); DMU D-1 (47% support)
- **Antler regulations:** Online Poll: DMU D-1 (77% support) and D-2 (66% support)
- **Antler regulations for D-2 with 10" alternative:**  
To be updated after close of online poll.



Since an online poll was initiated during the summer of 2013, we have received many responses and support for the proposals continues. An online poll (as of February 10, 2014) on FWC's website indicates a high level of support among respondents (mostly hunters) for the proposed antlerless deer day proposal for DMU D-2 (67% support change, 24% prefer current antlerless deer season; 1,454 respondents) while there is less support in DMU D-1 (47% support change, 42% prefer current antlerless deer season; 1,283 respondents).

The online poll indicates a high level of support among respondents for the antler regulations in DMU D-1 (south of Interstate 10) (76% support, 20% oppose; 2,233 respondents) and DMU D-2 (north of Interstate 10) (66% support, 29% oppose; 2,109 respondents).

The online poll is being amended to include the second selection criterion of a 10 inch main beam for DMU D-2 and responses will be included in the Commission meeting presentation.

Note: This is an open online poll and is reflective of individuals that have an interest in the proposals and have taken the time to participate. It is not a scientifically designed survey.

The process of developing DMU proposals for Zone D has gone very well, with good coordination between staff and stakeholders. There seems to be widespread public support for this project, and hunters are requesting other improvements to deer management in Florida, consistent with the DMU process identified in FWC's deer management strategic plan.

## Requested Action

- Approve the proposed rule amendments for Zone D's DMUs to:
  - Spread out antlerless deer days
  - Implement additional antler regulations to protect young bucks
- If approved, make rules effective July 1, 2014.



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



The following slides are considered back up material and are not anticipated to be part of the actual presentation to the Commission



## Final Rule Proposal: Antler Regulations

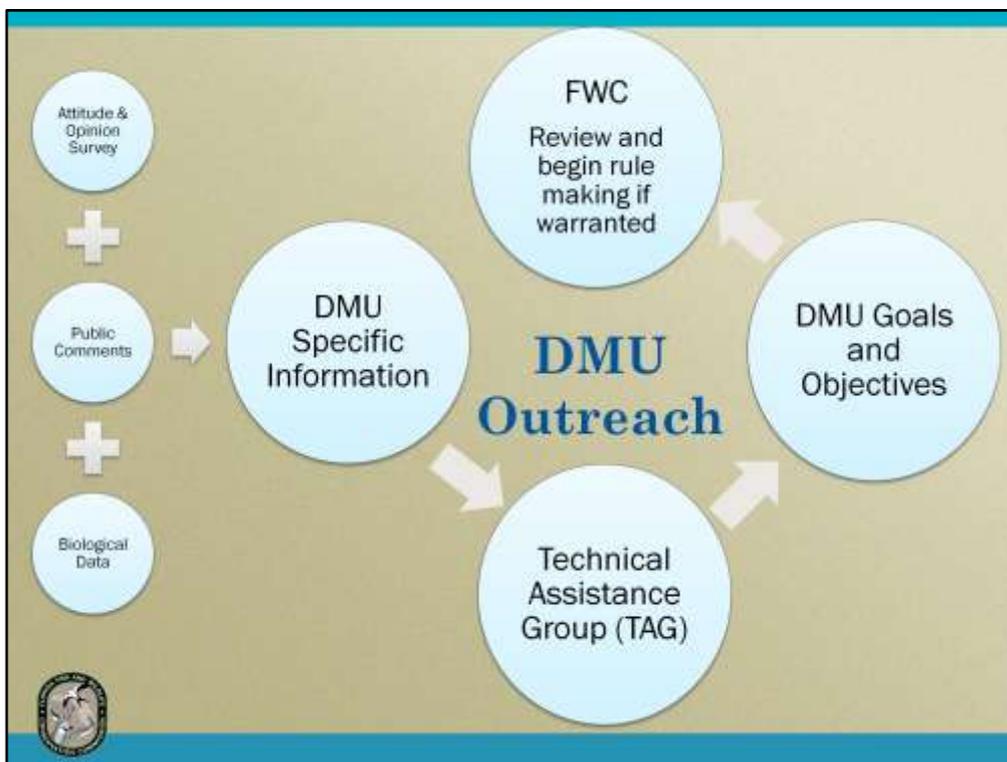
- Percent of each age class that would be protected from harvest by the proposed antler regulations (based on data collected from within each DMU):

DMU	Proposed	Age Class			
		1.5	2.5	3.5	4.5+
D-1	2 on a side	83%	24%	9%	7%
D-2	3 on a side	89%	32%	10%	8%
D-2	10" main beam	95%	31%	12%	7%



The purpose of the proposed antler point regulations are to increase the buck population, increase the number of bucks to does, and increase chances of seeing and harvesting larger-bodied and larger-antlered deer. After antler point regulations are implemented, buck harvest will be less for a few years as the buck population builds up, then the buck harvest should increase to levels at or near previous harvest levels.

This table shows the percent of each buck age class that would be protected from harvest by the proposed antler regulations. Remember, the TAG's goal was to implement an antler regulation that protects the majority of 1.5-year-old bucks while allowing harvest of bucks at least 2.5 years old. As you can see from these data, the proposed antler regulations would accomplish this objective.



## Zone D Goals

1. Maintain or increase hunter acceptance and support of white tailed deer management regulations in Zone D
2. Maintain or slightly increase the overall deer population in DMUs 10 and 11 of Zone D
3. Increase hunter satisfaction through improved chances of seeing more bucks and harvesting larger bucks
4. Maintain or increase the doe population while allowing equity among hunters to harvest antlerless deer
5. Manage deer depredation to ensure that both farmers' and hunters' needs are considered
6. Maintain broad support of the deer hunting heritage



Here are the goals developed by the Zone D Technical Assistance Group (TAG) comprised of stakeholders interested in deer management. Proposed harvest regulation changes for Zone D by Deer Management Unit (DMU) are intended to accomplish the goals 2-4. An objective for goal 3 is “Implement an antler restriction that protects the majority of 1.5-year-old bucks while allowing harvest of bucks at least 2.5 years old.”

Other goals and objectives will also be considered as part of the Commission’s efforts to manage deer at the DMU level using guidance provided during the outreach process.

## TAG Goals and Objectives

- **Goal:** Maintain or slightly increase the overall deer population in DMUs D-1 and D-2 of Zone D
  - **Objective:** Implement antler and antlerless harvest restrictions designed to achieve a healthy balance of age structure and sex ratio
- **Goal:** Increase hunter satisfaction through improved chances of seeing more bucks and harvesting larger bucks
  - **Objective:** Implement an antler restriction that protects the majority of 1.5-year-old bucks while allowing harvest of bucks at least 2.5 years old
- **Goal:** Maintain or increase the doe population while allowing equity (distributing the harvest) among hunters to harvest antlerless deer
  - **Objective:** Increase flexibility in days for access to antlerless deer hunting without negatively impacting the doe population



Here are the goals and objectives that are the basis for the proposed rules. TAG members thought it was important that antlerless deer days be spread out time-wise over the season without increasing doe harvest and that an antler regulation be implemented to protect most 1.5-year old bucks from harvest while allowing the harvest of most 2.5-year old and older bucks.

Other goals and objectives will be considered as part of the FWC's nonregulatory efforts to manage deer at the DMU level.