



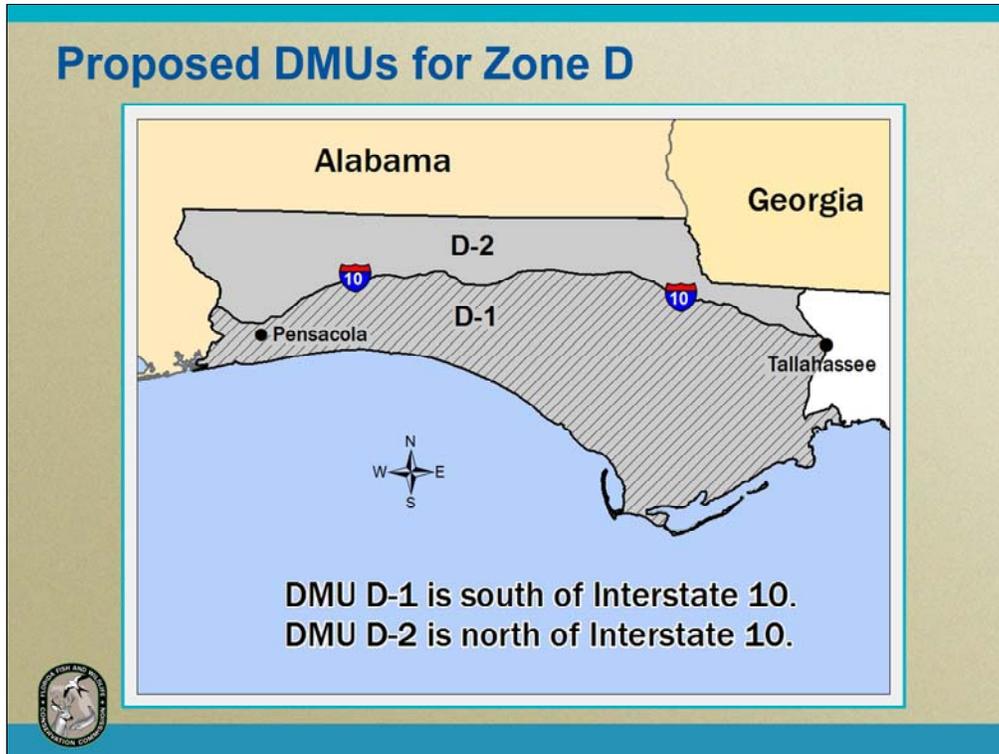
Proposed Changes to Deer Hunting
Regulations in Zone D
Update
February 2014
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Hunting and Game Management



The FWC worked with stakeholders to develop proposed rule amendments to hunting regulations that would implement greater antler regulations and change the number and timing of the antlerless deer days (“doe days”) for Zone D. These proposals are part of a larger project aimed at managing deer on a smaller geographic scale with greater stakeholder involvement using Deer Management Units (DMUs).

Draft rules were presented at the November 2013 Commission meeting and Commissioners requested an update at the February Commission meeting before final rules are considered at the April 2014 Commission meeting in Tallahassee. Therefore, this report is being provided as an update on the proposed rule amendments. Go to MyFWC.com/Deer for more detailed information on the DMU project.

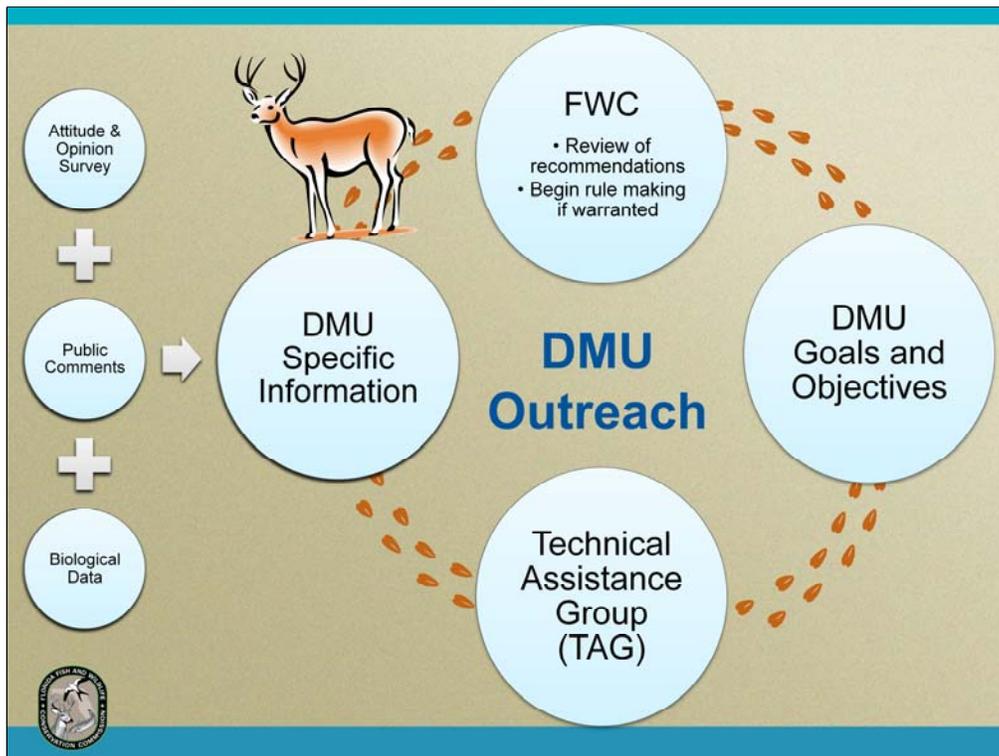
Author: Cory R. Morea
Report Date: January 13, 2014



As a reminder, the DMU management model is more than just lines on a map. It is about managing deer according to stakeholder preferences within each DMU and managing deer on a more local level while increasing hunter satisfaction. Deer hunting season timing would remain linked to zones, but harvest regulations and other management issues may vary at the DMU level. 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. This effort will continue to other zones and DMUs in Florida over the next 2 years.

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 a single DMU, Zone D contains 2 DMUs and Zone C has 6.



To begin the public outreach process, the FWC contracted with Mark Duda of Responsive Management, to conduct a scientifically designed phone survey of hunters, farmers and residents to assess opinions and attitudes of deer management issues in Florida

We then contracted with Normandeau Associates, a consulting firm in Gainesville, to facilitate 3 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 Duda 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.

Draft Rule Proposal: Antlerless Deer 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:** Distribute antlerless deer days over more of the hunting season to increase odds 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 (only 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 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.

Draft Rule Proposal: Antler Point Regulations (APRs)

- **DMU D-1:** 2 points on one side (“forked antler”).
- **DMU D-2:** 3 points on one side
- **Youth exemption:** Hunters under 16 years of age would be exempt from the APRs
- **Wildlife Management Areas:** APRs would apply to all WMAs within each DMU
- **Purpose:** increase buck population, increase number of bucks to does, increase chances of seeing and harvesting larger-bodied and larger-antlered deer



The draft 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 regulation for DMU D-2 (north of Interstate 10).

To encourage youth participation in hunting, hunters under 16 years of age would be exempt from any APRs (antler point 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 APRs 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 APRs.

Public Input on Proposed Rules

- **Antlerless deer days:** Support is high among online respondents for DMU D-2 (68% support); less support in DMU D-1 (48% support)
- **APRs:** Support is high among online respondents in both DMU D-1 (77% support) and D-2 (66% support)
 - Dog hunters in Blackwater WMA have expressed opposition to a 3 points on one side APR in favor of a 2 points on a side APR



An online poll (as of January 2, 2014) on FWC's website indicates a high level of support among respondents (mostly hunters) for the APRs in both DMU D-1 (south of Interstate 10) (77% support, 18% oppose; N=1,257) and DMU D-2 (north of Interstate 10) (66% support, 29% oppose; N=1,249).

The online poll indicates support among respondents who say they hunt Blackwater WMA regularly (53% support 41% oppose; N=391). However, dog hunters in Blackwater WMA have expressed opposition to a 3 points on a side APR in favor of a 2 points on a side APR.

The online poll indicates a high level of support among respondents for the antlerless deer day proposal for DMU D-2 (67% support, 24% oppose; N=807) while there is less support in DMU D-1 (48% support, 40% oppose; N=848).

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 online poll will remain open through April.

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

- Provide direction or guidance for staff as we continue working with the public
- Go to MyFWC.com/Deer for more detailed information and to participate in the online poll



This report is an update. The online poll will remain active up until the April Commission meeting. Final rules will be presented in April. If adopted in April, the proposed rule amendments would apply to the 2014-2015 season.

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



Draft Rule Proposal: Antler Point Regulations (APRs)

- **Purpose:** increase buck population, increase proportion of bucks to does, increase chances of seeing and harvesting larger-bodied and larger-antlered deer
- Percent of each age class that would be protected from harvest by the proposed APRs (based on data collected from WMA check stations within each DMU):

DMU	Proposed APR	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%



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 APRs. 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 APRs 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

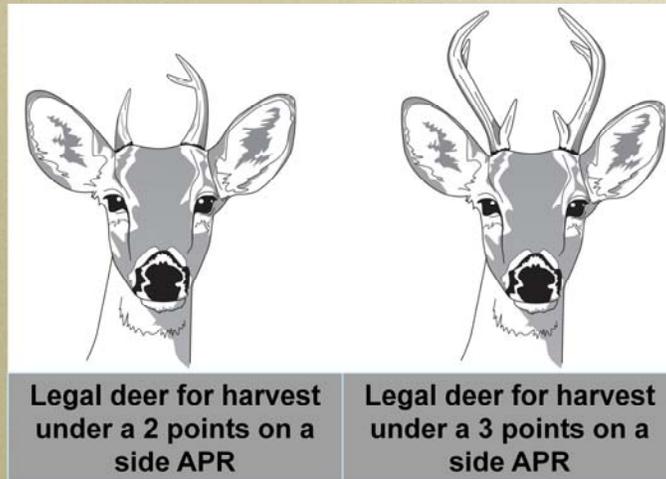
- **Goal:** Maintain or slightly increase the overall deer population in DMUs D-1 and D-2 of Zone D
 - **Objective:** Implement antler and antlerless harvest restrictions designed to achieve a healthy balance of age structure and sex ratio
- **Goal:** Increase hunter satisfaction through improved chances 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 APR be implemented to protect most 1.5-year old bucks from harvest while allowing the harvest of most 2.5-year old and older buck.

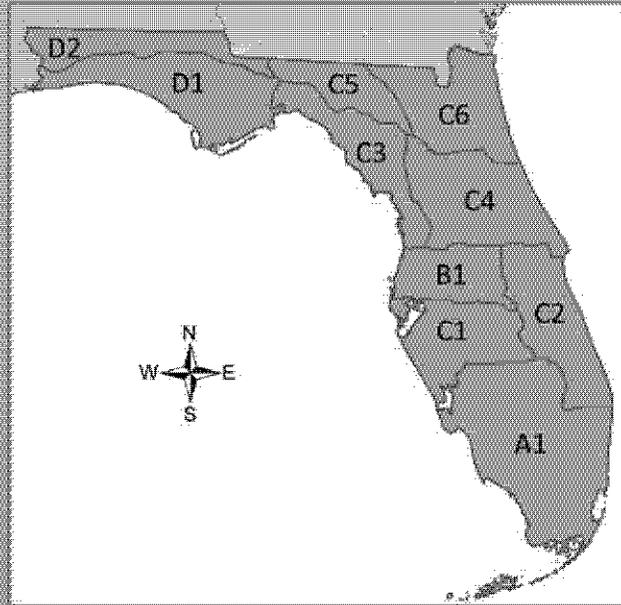
Other goals and objectives will be considered as part of the FWC's nonregulatory efforts to manage deer at the DMU level.

Examples of Harvestable Deer Under the Proposed APRs

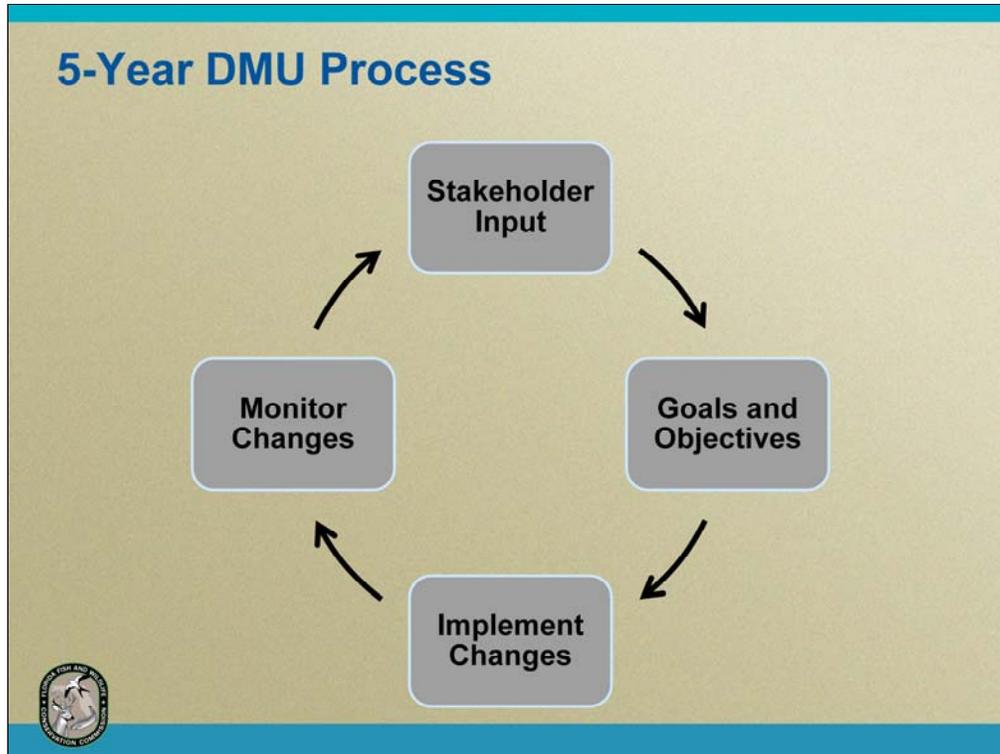


Here are examples of different legal to take antlered deer under the proposed APRs.

Proposed Deer Management Units



5-Year DMU Process



The plan is to gather stakeholder preferences for deer management within each DMU and then develop goals and objectives for each DMU. Changes implemented to accomplish the goals and objectives developed from stakeholder preferences would be monitored 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.