

2020-2021 Kentucky White-Tailed Deer Harvest and Population Report

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources



Photo Credit: Joe Lacefield, District Biologist



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Introduction

The Deer Program is administered by the Wildlife Division of Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR). The KDFWR is an agency of the Kentucky Tourism, Arts & Heritage Cabinet. This agency is overseen by a nine-member board of commissioners who are nominated by Kentucky’s sportsmen and sportswomen and appointed by the Governor. The department employs about 450 full-time staff, which includes conservation officers, wildlife and fisheries biologists, conservation educators, as well as information, technology, public relations, customer service and administrative professionals.

The KDFWR is funded primarily by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, boating registration fees and federal funds, including grants based on the number of licenses sold in the state.

The Deer Program is tasked with managing the white-tailed deer herd in the state to provide ample hunting opportunity while balancing the needs of consumptive and non-consumptive user groups. The Deer Program is comprised of one Acting Program Coordinator, John Hast, and two Deer Program Biologists, David Yancy and Kyle Sams. Deer Program staff are based out of the KDFWR Headquarters in Frankfort.

Deer in Kentucky

Deer are native to Kentucky and were present since Dr. Thomas Walker first reported in 1750 that the deer are “plentiful”. However, due to unregulated harvest, the deer population began to decline rapidly in subsequent years. In 1946, the Division of Game and Fish initiated a three-pronged white-tailed deer project to facilitate the restoration of this important species. Components of this project consisted of refuge establishment, trapping and translocation of live deer, and habitat improvement work. Active restoration efforts concluded in March of 1999. After 52 years of trapping and translocation, 10,096 white-tailed deer had been stocked around the state. Kentucky now has a high quality deer population and ranks in the top five for all time Boone & Crockett buck production.

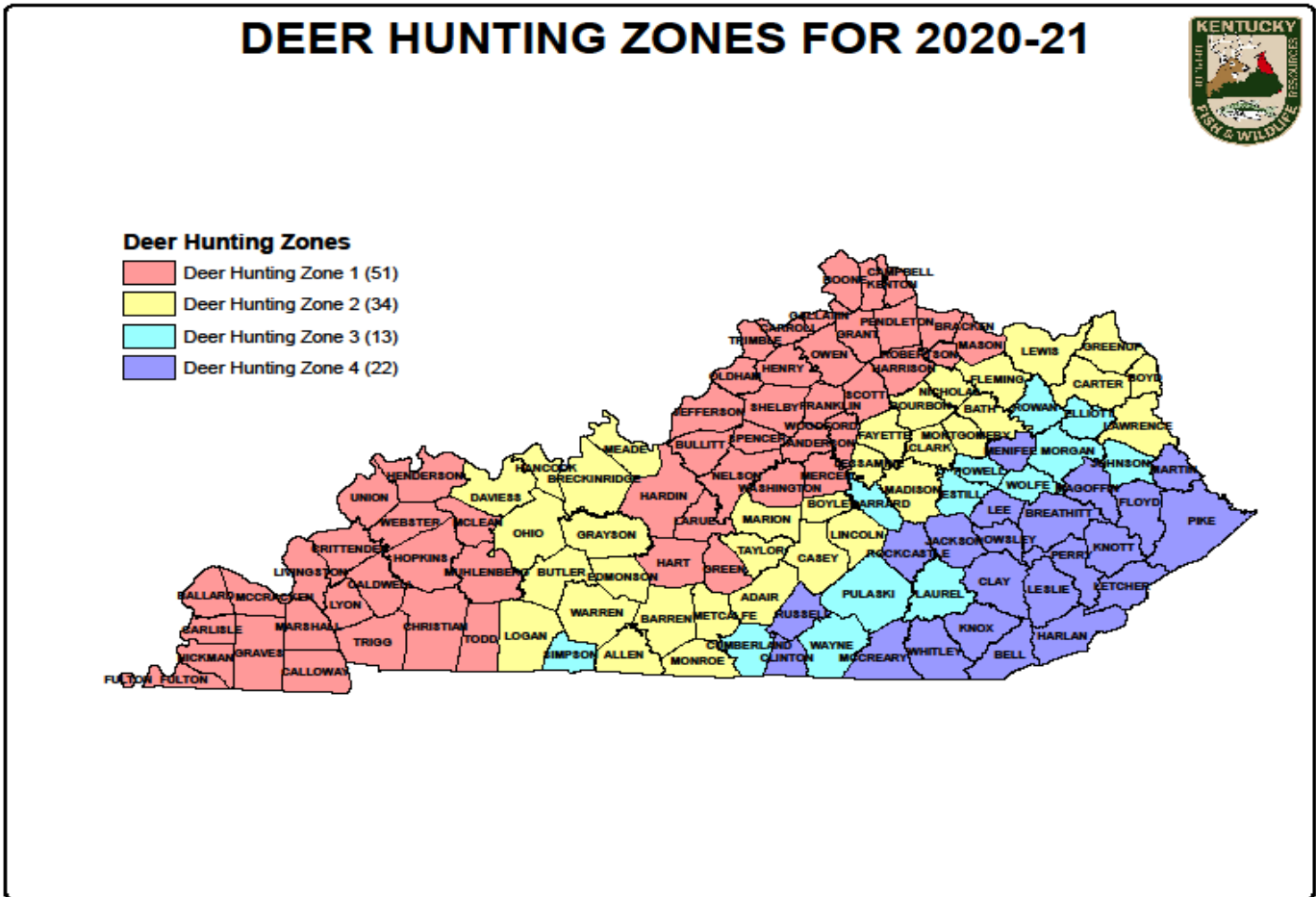
General Information about the 2020-21 Season

License and Permit Fees

License	Resident	Nonresident
Annual Hunting License	\$27	\$150
Senior/Disabled License	\$12	N/A
Sportsman’s License	\$95	N/A
Youth Sportsman’s License	\$30	N/A
Statewide Deer Permit	\$35	\$185
Bonus Antlerless Permit	\$15	\$15
Youth Deer Permit	\$10	\$15
Annual Youth Hunting License	\$6	\$10

Season Dates and Bag Limits

	Statewide	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4
Modern Firearm	Nov 9 – Nov 24				
Archery	Sept 7 - Jan 20				
Crossbow	Sept 21 - Jan 20				
Early Muzzleloader	Oct 19-20				
Late Muzzleloader	Dec 14-22				
Youth-Only Firearm	Oct 12-13				
Free Youth Weekend	Dec 28-29				
Antlered Bag Limit	1				
Antlerless Bag Limit	Based upon zone	Unlimited	Up to 4	Up to 4, only 1 deer with a firearm	Only 1 antlerless deer may be harvested during archery season, crossbow season, youth gun season, or the last three days of the late muzzleloader season.



Changes for the 2020-21 Season

- No changes occurred for the 2020-21 deer season

Population Status

Overall, the statewide deer population estimate shows a stable to slightly increasing trend. The 2020 statewide estimate is 933,089 deer at the start of the 2020-21 hunting season, which is <1% increase from 2019-20 (930,613). However, the 2020 population estimate was 13.6% above the 10-year average (821,608). This population estimate is generated from harvest and age structure data, which is collected through tele-check reports and by KDFWR staff.

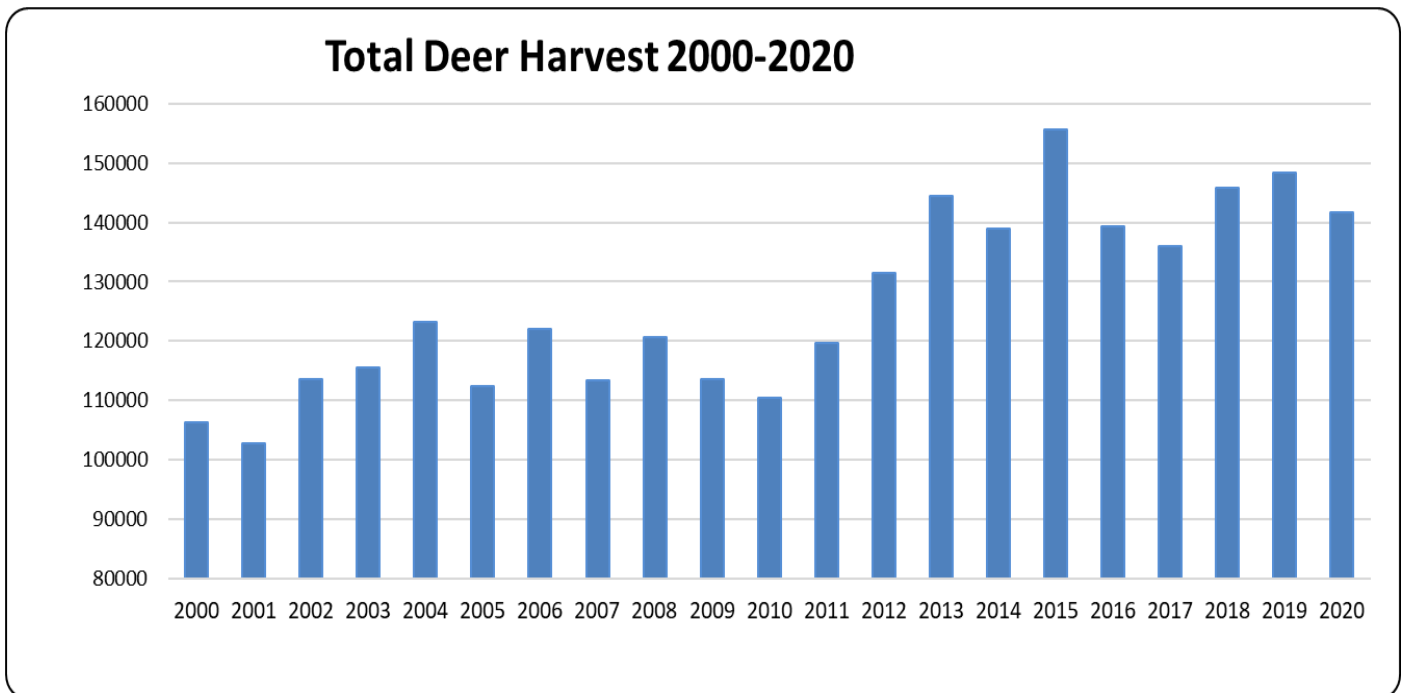
Deer management techniques have varied greatly across the state over the last decade. Of the 120 counties in Kentucky, 51 are designated as zone 1, 34 as zone 2, 13 as zone 3, and 22 as zone 4. Zone 1 counties have the highest deer densities in the state, are considered reduction zones, and have an unlimited bag limit on antlerless deer. At the other end of the spectrum are zone 4 counties where the deer densities are the lowest and antlerless take is very limited. Zone 2 and 3 counties are at or near population goals.

Statewide and county deer population trends are important; however, it is also important to acknowledge that deer populations can vary considerably within a region and even within a county. Regional and local diversity in deer numbers can be a result of differences in land cover and use, harvest regulations,

hunter objectives, hunter density, and disease events. Therefore, statewide and county information should be considered as a starting point when evaluating deer populations within a localized area.

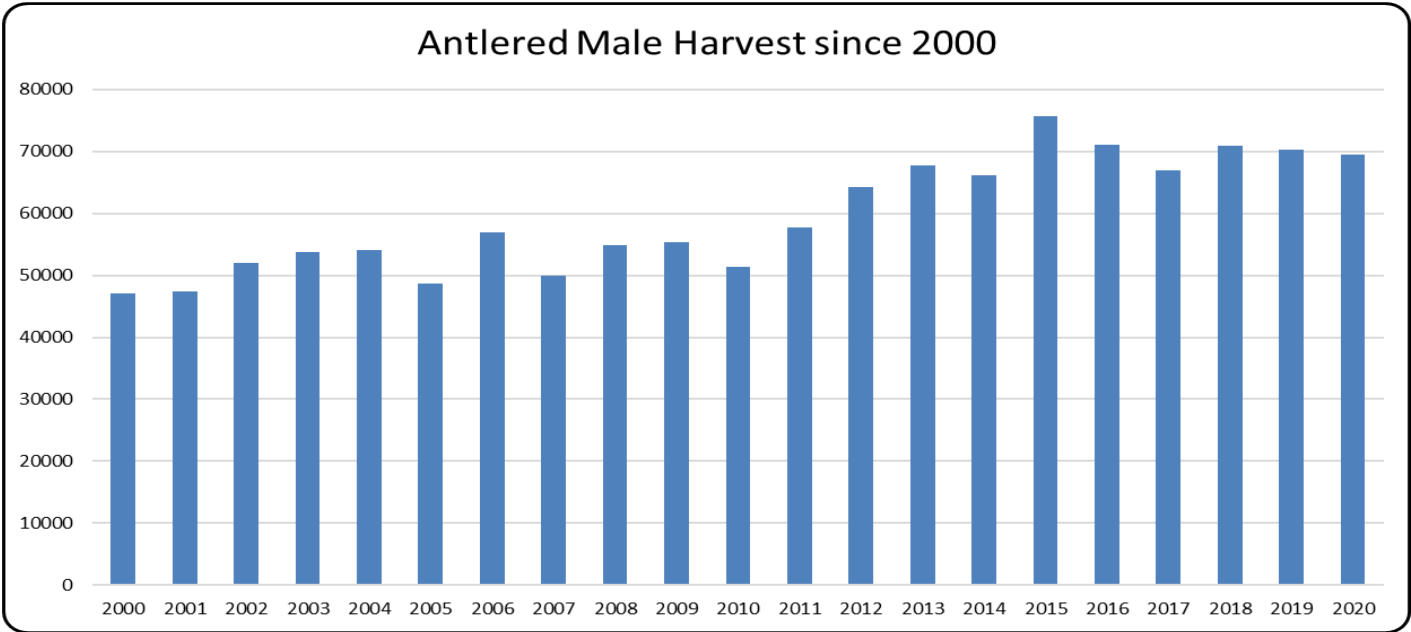
2020-21 Total Harvest Summary

The total number of deer harvested during the 2020-21 deer season was 141,620, which is the fifth highest harvest on record. We observed a 5% decrease from the 2019-20 season (148,385) and the 2020-21 season is 3.7% above the 10-year average (137,005). The 2020-21 deer season experienced highs and lows like many deer seasons do. However, the coronavirus pandemic may have contributed to the record breaking success our hunters saw in September, as many hunters were excited to get in the woods. In addition, hard mast surveys indicated oak production was average to poor statewide. In preparation for the winter months, deer seek out high quality food sources such as white oaks and will travel more frequently when acorn (white and red oak families) production is poor to average, which may have contributed to the early success our hunters saw during September. See the Monthly Harvest Rates sections for more details (page 9).



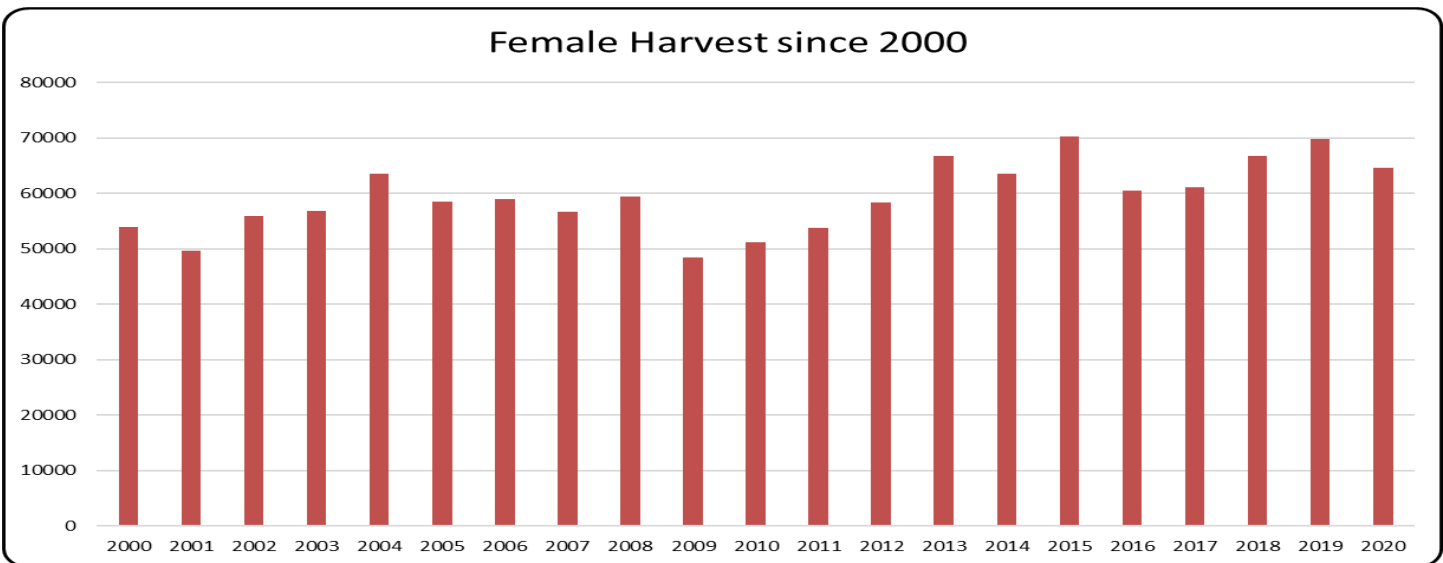
Antlered Buck Harvest

The total antlered buck harvest was 69,441 during the 2020-21 season, which is 2.2% below the five-year average, but the fifth highest antlered buck harvest on record. When comparing antlered deer harvested per square mile of habitat, Pendleton County (4.0 antlered deer/sq. mi.) harvested the most antlered bucks with Spencer County (3.9 antlered deer/sq. mi.) coming in second, and Bracken County (3.6 antlered deer/sq. mi.) coming in third. Fayette County (0.5 antlered deer/sq. mi.) harvested the fewest antlered bucks per square mile during the 2020-21 season.



Female Harvest

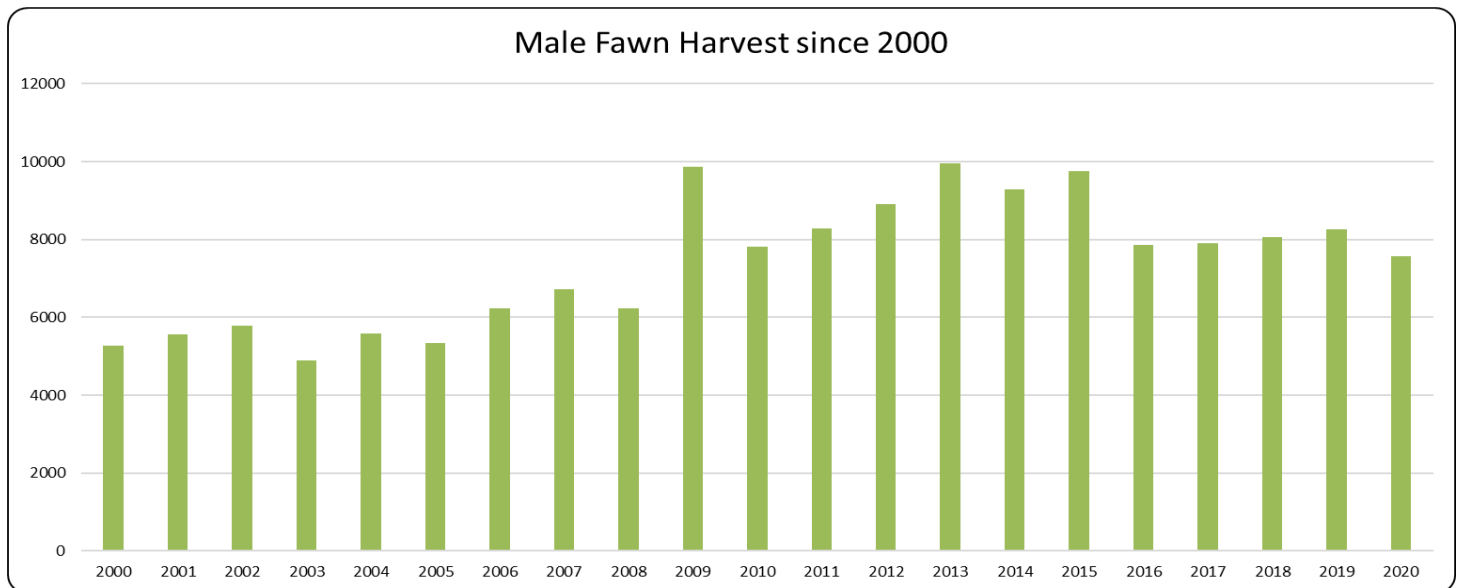
The total female harvest was 64,599 in the 2020-21 season, which is 1.7% below the five-year average, but a 4.8% decrease from the 2019-20 season (69,762). When comparing female deer harvested per square mile of habitat, Pendleton County (5.3 female deer/sq. mi.) harvested the most female deer followed by Bracken County (5.1 female deer/sq. mi.) and Spencer County (4.9 female deer/sq. mi.). Menifee County (0.1 female deer/sq. mi.) harvested the fewest female deer per square mile during the 2020-21 season.



Male Fawn Harvest

The total male fawn harvest was 7,580 during the 2020-21 season, which is 9.4% below the five-year average, an 8.2% decrease from the 2019-20 season (8,261). When comparing male fawn deer harvested per square mile of habitat, Spencer County (0.76 male fawns/sq. mi.) harvested the most male fawns with Gallatin

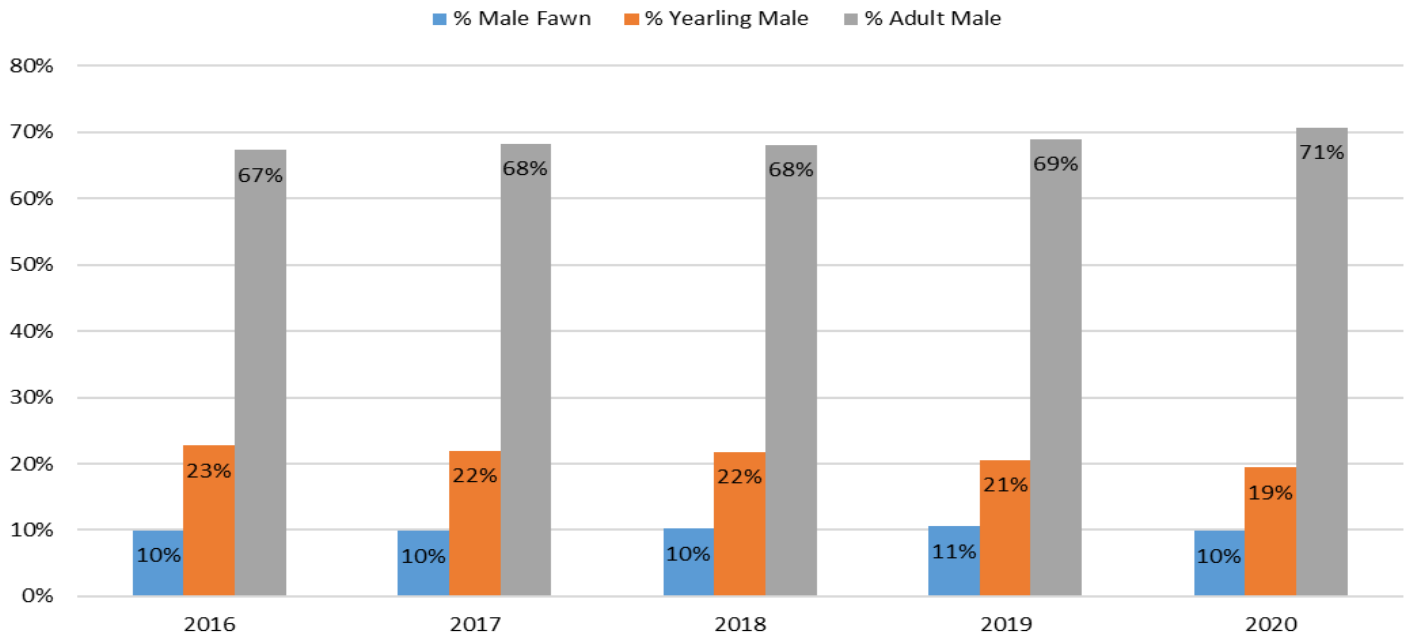
County (0.64 male fawns/sq. mi.) coming in second, and Pendleton County (0.64 male fawns/sq. mi.) coming in third. Harlan County (0.01 male fawns/sq. mi.) harvested the fewest male fawns per square mile during the 2020-21 season. It is worth noting the majority of the male fawn harvest occurred during the modern gun season (69%), at a time when male fawns become increasingly difficult to differentiate between does. Since 2013, the percentage of male fawns in the total antlerless harvest has been slightly decreasing, even after the expansions of the statewide crossbow season and modern gun season in zones 3 and 4. Opportunity has increased in much of the state, with the exception in zone 4 counties. Zone 4 counties saw a reduction in the antlerless bag limit during the 2018 season after the HD outbreak that occurred in the southeast and northeast regions during late summer 2017. As a result, male fawn harvest numbers are down a bit. Regardless, hunters seem to do a great job of identifying both male fawns and yearling males in hopes of getting them into the higher age classes by letting them walk.



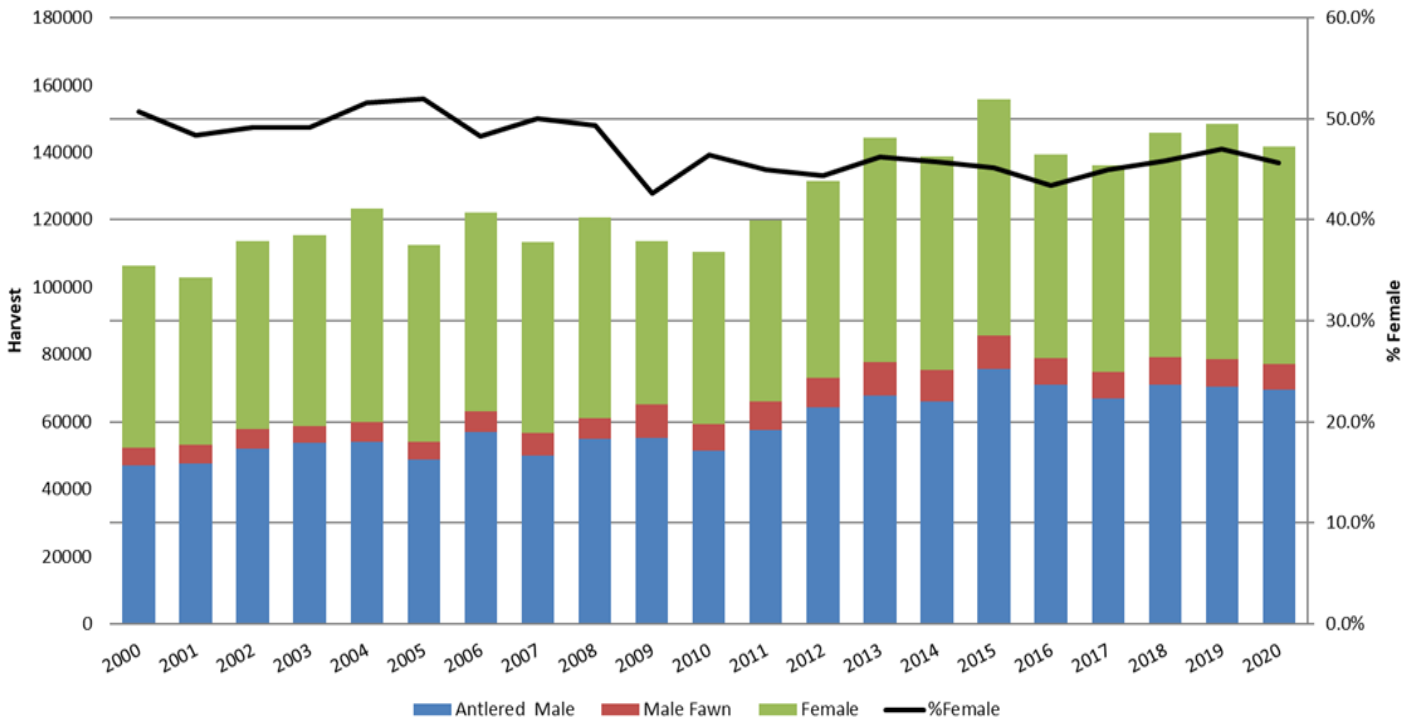
Male Age Class Breakdown

Since 2016, deer hunters have been asked when checking their deer, to include whether the outside spread of their antlered deer is greater or less than 11 inches. Since male fawn information was already being collected, yearling male and adult male information was needed to break out age classes in the total male harvest. In addition to providing this info to hunters, it is useful information for deer biologists to incorporate into the population estimate model that will improve trend data used to manage deer populations. As stated previously, hunters do a great job of letting younger age class males walk in hopes of seeing them reach their potential as they grow older.

Age Class Breakdown in the Total Male Harvest



Kentucky Harvest Breakdown by Sex



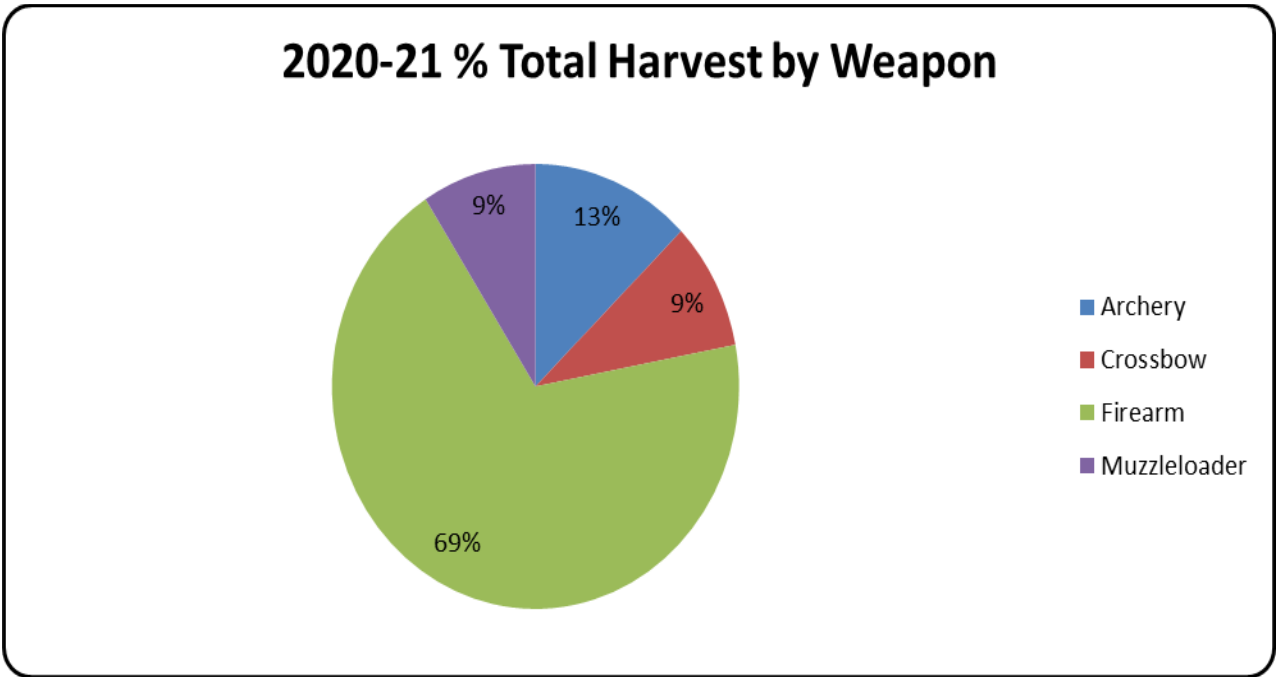
Weapon Type Harvest Summary

Weapon	Female	Male Fawn	Male	Total
Archery	10,252	729	7,008	17,989
Crossbow	7,179	838	5,154	13,171
Firearm	39,157	5,213	53,240	97,610
Muzzle-loader	8,013	808	4,040	12,861
Total	64,601	7,588	69,442	141,631

Despite a statewide bag limit that allows hunters to shoot more than one deer per year, there appears to be a limit on the number of deer that hunters are willing to or able to harvest, as 77% (81,746) of all successful hunters only harvest one deer. A smaller percentage of successful hunters (23%, 24,370) harvested two or more deer. Of the 106,116 total successful hunters in the 2020-21 season, the average hunter harvested 1.3 deer, which was a slight decrease from last season. However, this rate usually does not fluctuate statewide between years and has remained stable over time.

There were no significant changes in the percentage of the 2020-21 harvest by weapon type compared to the 2019-20 season with the exception of the crossbow harvest. Crossbow harvest increased 34.6% (13,171) from the 2019-20 season (9,784) and was 138.7% above the five-year average (5,518). Nine percent of the total deer harvested in the 2020-21 season came from hunters using crossbows.

Interestingly, more female deer were taken with crossbows and archery equipment (17,431) than antlered-males (12,162). The modern gun harvest (97,607) saw an 11% decrease from the 2019-20 season (110,130) and was 8.5% below the five-year average (106,652). Sixty-nine percent of the overall harvest occurred during modern gun season, which is when the majority of Kentucky deer hunters go afield. We observed an 8.3% increase in the archery harvest from 2019-20 (16,609) to the 2020-21 season (17,989), but a 7% decrease from the five-year average (19,349). The 2020-21 muzzleloader harvest (12,861) increased by 8.3% when compared to the 2019-20 season (11,872) and was 5% below the five-year average (13,541).



Monthly Harvest Rates

The 7,981 deer harvested in September is the highest harvest on record for that month. The increased harvest in September could likely be a result of the coronavirus pandemic and how it restricted indoor gatherings, thus, causing people to increase their outdoor activities. In addition, hunters experienced cooler than average weather during the entire month of September, which was also likely a contributing factor to the record harvest. Fifty-six percent of the 7,891 deer taken in September were female.

October’s harvest of 16,187 deer was the fourth-highest October harvest on record. The 2020-21 season’s October harvest is 3% above the 10-year average (15,671).

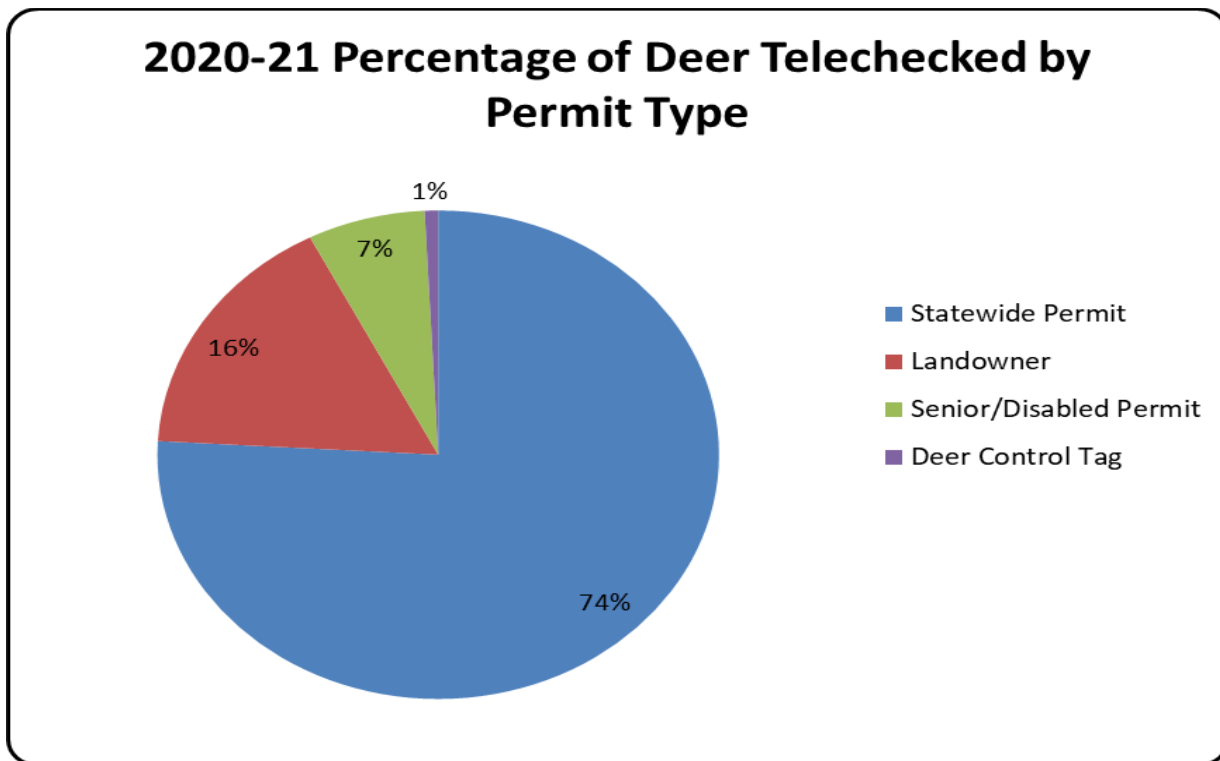
Hunters harvested 101,760 deer during November, most of which occurred during the statewide modern gun season. This ranks as the eighth highest November harvest on record. Kentucky’s deer harvest is strongly correlated with weekend weather conditions during the modern firearms season. We experienced two poor weather days on the first and second Sundays of the season, which is reflected in the reported deer harvest on those weekends.

December’s harvest was the fourth-highest harvest during that month with 12,470 deer reported, and increased 6.7% above the 10-year average (11,685).

January’s harvest was 26% above the 10-year average at 3,201, which was the second highest harvest on record for the month of January. Above average weather conditions likely increased human activity afield.

2020-21 Harvest Results by Permit Type

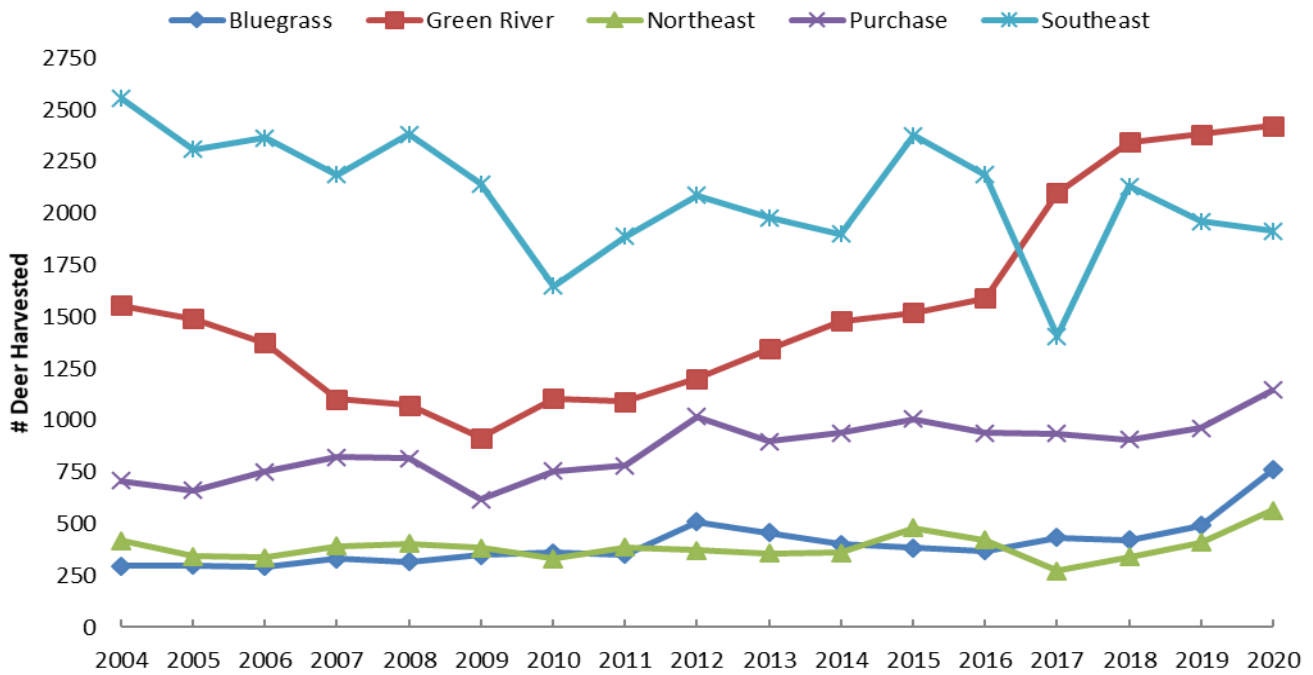
The percentage of deer telechecked by permit type has remained stable over the years with negligible fluctuations. Deer control tags are used to mitigate deer damage issues and have remained stable over the past six years. Senior/disabled permits have been decreasing over the past 5 years, as well as the numbers of deer harvested by disabled/senior hunters. This may indicate some of our senior/disabled hunters are unable to hunt due to age or disability. The largest portion of telechecked deer are from hunters who purchase a statewide permit. Landowners are not required to purchase a hunting license or deer permit if they are hunting deer on their own property but are still required to telecheck any harvested deer.



Public Land Deer Harvest

KDFWR owns, leases, or manages more than 124 Wildlife Management Area’s (WMA), Hunting Access Areas (HAA), and Outdoor Recreation Areas (ORC) across the state for public use. Exceptions exist on some properties, but the majority of Kentucky’s public areas are open to public hunting through quota hunts or under statewide regulations. The public areas are separated between five wildlife regions and are managed by regional staff in the Wildlife Division. Over the last decade, the number of deer harvested on public land in Kentucky has been increasing with the exception of the Southeast Region where the harvest was stable until the 2017 HD outbreak. Deer numbers in the southeast region are on the rebound. However, because southeastern Kentucky is predominately forested, population growth is expected to be slower in this less-productive mast-driven area.

2004-20 Public Land Deer Harvest by Region



Public Land Harvest by County Info

Acres of Public Hunting Areas by Wildlife Region

Wildlife Region	Public Land Hunting Acres
Bluegrass	84,648
Green River	167,803
Northeast	317,579
Purchase	225,343
Southeast	869,605

Available Public Land and Public Land Deer Harvest 2020-21

Wildlife Region	County	Number of Public Hunting Areas	Public Land Hunting Acres	Square Miles of Public Land	2020 Public Land Deer Harvest	Public Land Deer Harvested per Square Mile of Public Land
Bluegrass	Anderson	1	1,983	3.1	47	15.2
Bluegrass	Boone	1	635	1.0	21	21.2
Bluegrass	Bourbon	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Boyle	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Bullitt	3	37,616	58.8	96	1.6
Bluegrass	Campbell	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Carroll	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Clark	1	1	0.001	-	-
Bluegrass	Fayette	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Franklin	2	840	1.3	16	12.2
Bluegrass	Gallatin	1	398	0.6	4	6.4
Bluegrass	Garrard	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Grant	2	1,107	1.7	29	16.8
Bluegrass	Harrison	1	746	1.2	31	26.6
Bluegrass	Henry	1	2,316	3.6	33	9.1
Bluegrass	Jefferson	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Jessamine	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Kenton	1	258	0.40	10	24.8
Bluegrass	Madison	3	16,364	25.6	6	0.2
Bluegrass	Marion	1	1,341	2.1	10	4.8
Bluegrass	Mercer	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Nelson	3	2,071	3.2	31	9.6
Bluegrass	Oldham	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Owen	4	7,310	11.4	113	9.9
Bluegrass	Pendleton	1	479	0.7	22	29.4
Bluegrass	Scott	2	2,498	3.9	55	14.1
Bluegrass	Shelby	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Spencer	2	8,687	13.6	320	23.6
Bluegrass	Trimble	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Washington	0	-	-	-	-
Bluegrass	Woodford	0	-	-	-	-

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Wildlife Region	County	Number of Public Hunting Areas	Public Land Hunting Acres	Square Miles of Public Land	2020 Public Land Deer Harvest	Public Land Deer Harvested per Square Mile of Public Land
Green River	Allen	1	3,285	5.1	52	10.1
Green River	Barren	1	5,450	8.5	86	10.1
Green River	Breckinridge	2	9,331	14.6	93	6.4
Green River	Butler	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	Daviess	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	Edmonson	1	1,695	2.6	15	5.7
Green River	Grayson	2	4,560	7.1	37	5.2
Green River	Hancock	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	Hardin	3	58,813	91.9	89	1.0
Green River	Hart	1	1,713	2.7	31	11.6
Green River	Henderson	2	8,226	12.9	156	12.1
Green River	Hopkins	3	6,461	10.1	70	6.9
Green River	Larue	1	2,108	3.3	29	8.8
Green River	Logan	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	McLean	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	Meade	2	16,542	25.8	120	4.6
Green River	Metcalfe	1	1,449	2.3	13	5.7
Green River	Monroe	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	Muhlenberg	1	20,284	31.7	532	16.8
Green River	Ohio	2	15,855	24.8	244	9.8
Green River	Simpson	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	Todd	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	Union	3	11,972	18.7	221	11.8
Green River	Warren	0	-	-	-	-
Green River	Webster	1	60	0.09	11	117.6

Wildlife Region	County	Number of Public Hunting Areas	Public Land Hunting Acres	Square Miles of Public Land	2020 Public Land Deer Harvest	Public Land Deer Harvested per Square Mile of Public Land
Northeast	Bath	10	20,418	31.9	53	1.7
Northeast	Boyd	0	-	-	-	-
Northeast	Bracken	0	-	-	-	-
Northeast	Carter	3	7,235	11.3	51	4.5
Northeast	Elliott	2	3,170	5.0	29	5.9
Northeast	Fleming	4	3,995	6.2	33	5.3
Northeast	Floyd	11	24,976	39.0	10	0.3
Northeast	Greenup	2	3,365	5.3	9	1.7
Northeast	Johnson	3	9,831	15.4	27	1.8
Northeast	Lawrence	2	15,197	23.7	85	3.6
Northeast	Lewis	3	715	1.1	5	4.5
Northeast	Magoffin	1	1,421	2.2	5	2.3
Northeast	Martin	5	40,977	64.0	29	0.5
Northeast	Mason	1	982	1.5	45	29.3
Northeast	Menifee	2	46,769	73.1	23	0.3
Northeast	Montgomery	0	-	-	-	-
Northeast	Morgan	2	18,257	28.5	13	0.5
Northeast	Nicholas	2	6,775	10.6	150	14.2
Northeast	Pike	12	49,429	77.2	44	0.6
Northeast	Robertson	1	452	0.7	4	5.7
Northeast	Rowan	3	63,616	99.4	99	1.0

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Wildlife Region	County	Number of Public Hunting Areas	Public Land Hunting Acres	Square Miles of Public Land	2020 Public Land Deer Harvest	Public Land Deer Harvested per Square Mile of Public Land
Purchase	Ballard	4	16,872	26.4	137	5.2
Purchase	Caldwell	2	3,549	5.5	52	9.4
Purchase	Calloway	3	3,326	5.2	52	10.0
Purchase	Carlisle	4	4,832	7.5	39	5.2
Purchase	Christian	3	26,793	41.9	79	1.9
Purchase	Crittenden	1	5,087	7.9	28	3.5
Purchase	Fulton	2	4,103	6.4	4	0.6
Purchase	Graves	2	1,970	3.1	37	12.0
Purchase	Hickman	2	2,526	3.9	18	4.6
Purchase	Livingston	2	3,695	5.8	99	17.1
Purchase	Lyon	2	42,174	65.9	161	2.4
Purchase	Marshall	3	8,620	13.5	105	7.8
Purchase	McCracken	2	9,514	14.9	128	8.6
Purchase	Trigg	4	92,283	144.2	255	1.8

Wildlife Region	County	Number of Public Hunting Areas	Public Land Hunting Acres	Square Miles of Public Land	2020 Public Land Deer Harvest	Public Land Deer Harvested per Square Mile of Public Land
Southeast	Adair	3	13,103	20.5	97	4.7
Southeast	Bell	12	69,394	108.4	129	1.2
Southeast	Breathitt	4	4,035	6.3	15	2.4
Southeast	Casey	0	-	-	-	-
Southeast	Clay	9	83,362	130.3	15	0.1
Southeast	Clinton	3	8,557	13.4	86	6.4
Southeast	Cumberland	4	6,319	9.9	31	3.1
Southeast	Estill	4	5,706	8.9	29	3.3
Southeast	Green	0	-	-	-	-
Southeast	Harlan	16	21,184	33.1	8	0.2
Southeast	Jackson	2	59,256	92.6	88	1.0
Southeast	Knott	4	10,334	16.1	41	2.5
Southeast	Knox	6	11,991	18.7	15	0.8
Southeast	Laurel	2	63,375	99.0	159	1.6
Southeast	Lee	5	11,896	18.6	21	1.1
Southeast	Leslie	20	96,895	151.4	111	0.7
Southeast	Letcher	6	21,270	33.2	37	1.1
Southeast	Lincoln	2	1,197	1.9	17	9.1
Southeast	McCreary	11	174,284	272.3	149	0.5
Southeast	Owsley	1	16,668	26.0	14	0.5
Southeast	Perry	5	6,160	9.6	70	7.3
Southeast	Powell	2	16,299	25.5	16	0.6
Southeast	Pulaski	10	51,478	80.4	198	2.5
Southeast	Rockcastle	1	16,948	26.5	20	0.8
Southeast	Russell	2	12,917	20.2	32	1.6
Southeast	Taylor	4	10,172	15.9	86	5.4
Southeast	Wayne	3	13,785	21.5	60	2.8
Southeast	Whitley	2	46,384	72.5	85	1.2
Southeast	Wolfe	1	16,636	26.0	6	0.2

Deer Quota Hunts

KDFWR offers 38 deer quota hunts on Kentucky WMA's. Any resident or nonresident hunter may apply for a deer quota hunt in Kentucky, but only the persons successfully drawn for the quota hunt may actively hunt. The application period for KDFWR deer quota hunts is the month of September. Interested hunters can apply online at fw.ky.gov. Applicants will be given the option to pick a first and second hunt choice, but may be drawn to participate in only one quota hunt. A non-refundable fee of \$3 per hunter is required to apply. Each hunter who applies correctly, but is not selected, will receive a preference point which increases his/her odds of being drawn the following year. Unselected hunters who do not apply the following year will lose all previously credited preference points. Applicants are selected based on individual preference points. Up to five people can apply together, but individuals within the group will have their preference points averaged (total number of points divided by total number of applicants). However, there is a 10% maximum allowance of non-residents drawn for each quota hunt. If any one of the group's Social Security numbers is drawn, the others in the group are automatically drawn. The exception applies to hunt parties that have one or more non-resident applicants and where the quota hunt may have already reached the 10% maximum limit of non-resident hunter. If this is the case, then no member of that party will be drawn.

Hunters who were drawn for the 2020-21 deer quota hunts experienced a different system overall due to the coronavirus pandemic. Specifically, drawn hunters were not required to physically check in at the check station, but instead were required to print a hang-tag and place it in the window while they were hunting. In addition, drawn hunters who were successful were not required to bring their harvested deer to the check station, but were required to tele-check their deer remotely. Hunters were required to submit the number of deer seen and the number of hours hunted to KDFWR staff via drop boxes located on the property.

7,403 hunters applied for the 4,077 available spots at the 38 KDFWR deer quota hunts held in the 2020-21 season. Fifty-five percent of applicants were drawn for a Kentucky quota deer hunt but drawing success varied from 11% to 100% depending on the property. There are quota hunts for general hunters (i.e., residents or non-residents with statewide license), mobility impaired hunters, archery/crossbow hunters, and youth hunters. Each of the five wildlife regions across the state have deer quota hunts.

Damage Issues

An overpopulation of deer can have a negative impact on the environment and humans alike. Overabundant deer populations may result in agricultural and landscape damage, be detrimental to forest health and regeneration, pose safety risks due to deer-vehicle collisions, and serve as vectors for the transmission of tick-borne illnesses. State, local and private groups all have a role in helping to manage the state's deer population. The primary tool for deer management in Kentucky is hunting, but hunting within the season framework alone may not be enough to curtail the issues that some stakeholders experience. Deer populations have the ability to outgrow what their habitat can reasonably sustain, or surpass what is known as the environmental carrying capacity. However, a much less understood issue in modern deer management is social carrying capacity, which is essentially the number or density of deer that is socially acceptable. KDFWR staff can offer their assistance once this threshold has been reached (see Contacts map on page 21). The local Biologist or Conservation Officer will schedule an on-site visit to document the damage and provide technical guidance on potential solutions. Technical guidance can be offered in many ways; however, the best damage mitigation strategy is a dedicated, long-term hunting regiment. In addition to hunting, assistance from KDFWR may come in the form of Deer Control Tags, Destruction Permits, and the use of KRS 150.170.

Deer Control Tags Used in 2020			
Region	DCT's Issued	DCT's Used	% Used
BG	1139	208	8%
GR	1201	389	16%
NE	81	37	11%
PR	769	222	8%
SE	971	243	15%
Total	4161	1099	26%

Destruction Permit Use from 2020		
Region	Destruction Permits Issued	Destruction Permits Used
BG	949	270
GR	52	0
NE	0	0
PR	335	0
SE	31	0
Total	1367	270

Disease Surveillance

Hemorrhagic Disease (HD)

Hemorrhagic disease (HD), which is a vector-borne disease of white-tailed deer, is caused by two related orbiviruses: epizootic hemorrhagic disease virus (EHDV) and bluetongue virus (BTV). HD viruses are considered the most important viral agents affecting deer populations in the United States. The virus is transmitted from animal to animal through the bite of an infected midge which is active in the late summer and early fall. Severe outbreaks are often associated with drought conditions because drought creates an increased amount of breeding habitat for the midges. The midges die off for the year after a hard freeze, eliminating new cases of HD.

HD is reported in localized areas from at least a few counties nearly every year in Kentucky, although outbreaks can be considerably large and widespread. In 2017, a large HD outbreak occurred in the eastern portion of Kentucky. Many of those areas continue to experience lower deer number primarily due to the habitat type in east Kentucky being predominately forested, where deer populations exhibit a much slower growth rate. In 2020, KDFWR biologists had 57 suspect HD deer reported. The majority of the suspected HD deer were from central Kentucky (24) and southeastern Kentucky (18). When possible, KDFWR will test animals that have died of apparent HD. Only three deer from southeast Kentucky were clinically diagnosed to be HD positive (Bell, Harlan, Laurel counties).

While HD does cause mortality among white-tailed deer, there are also animals that survive and produce protective antibodies, which can be passed to offspring. This is an important distinction when discussing this disease compared to chronic wasting disease, which is always fatal and has not been detected in Kentucky.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

CWD is a fatal, neurological disease in white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose, and caribou. It causes a characteristic spongy degeneration of the brains of infected animals resulting in emaciation, abnormal behavior, loss of bodily functions, and ultimately death. CWD is categorized as a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE), a group of neurological diseases that includes “mad cow” disease in cattle, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans, and scrapie in sheep and goats. CWD has been detected in 26 states, 4 Canadian provinces, Norway, and South Korea. Six states that border Kentucky have CWD present (West Virginia, Virginia, Missouri, Ohio, Illinois, and Tennessee). CWD has not been detected in Kentucky.

To detect CWD should it arrive in Kentucky, KDFWR adopted a CWD monitoring plan in 2002. That plan is a three-part monitoring program to test: 1) a random sample of hunter-harvested deer, 2) target or suspect animals (i.e., animals that appear ill), and 3) a year round random sample of roadkill deer. KDFWR works closely with hunters, taxidermists, meat processors, and others to sample and test for CWD. Most samples are taken from hunter-harvested deer. In 2006, KDFWR adopted a contingency plan to deal with CWD if it was ever found in Kentucky. Since 2002, more than 35,000 deer and 805 elk have been tested. During the 2020-21 CWD sampling season, 2,907 deer and 46 elk were submitted for CWD testing, and CWD was not detected.

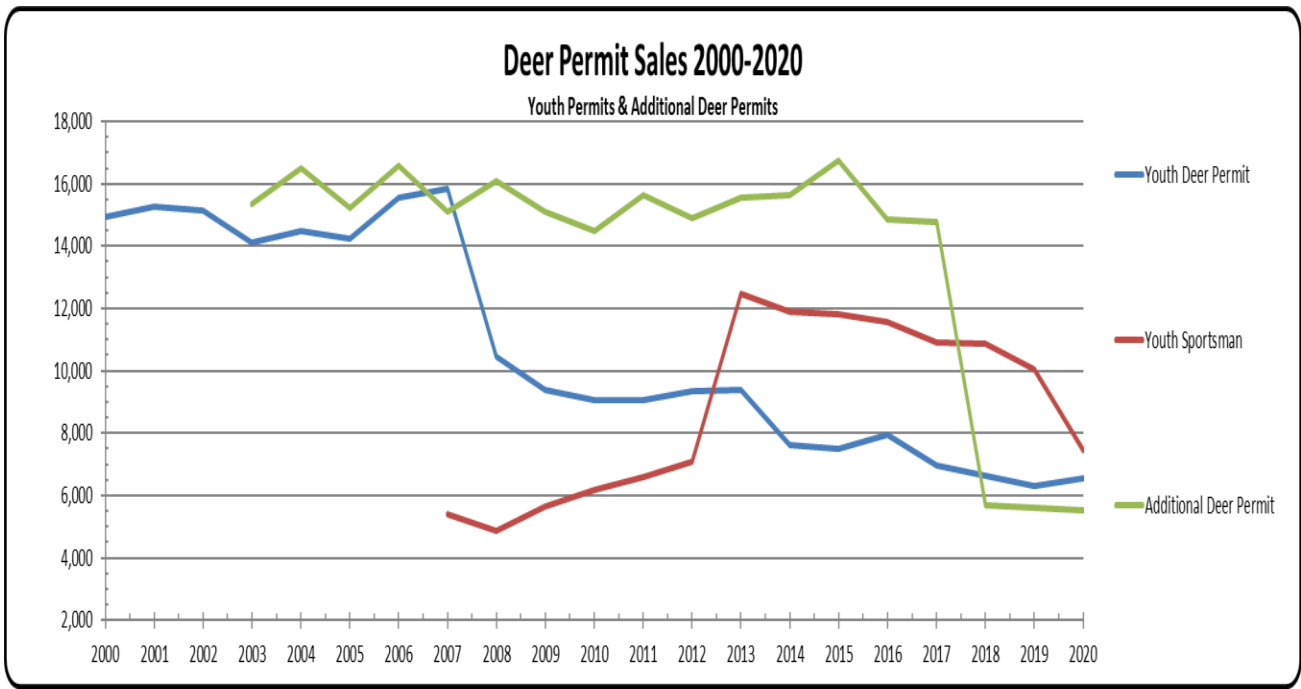
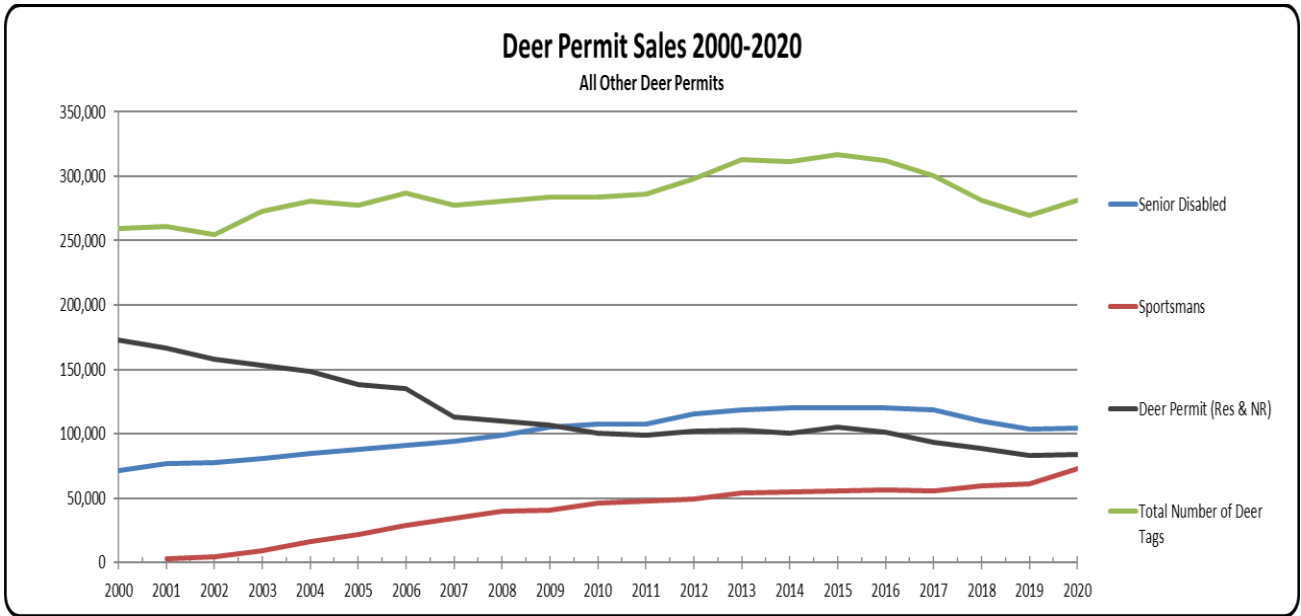
Carcass Importation Law

In reference to 301 KAR 2:095: a person shall not import a cervid carcass or carcass parts that has any part of the spinal column or head. A person importing a legally taken cervid carcass or carcass parts may possess the items listed below:

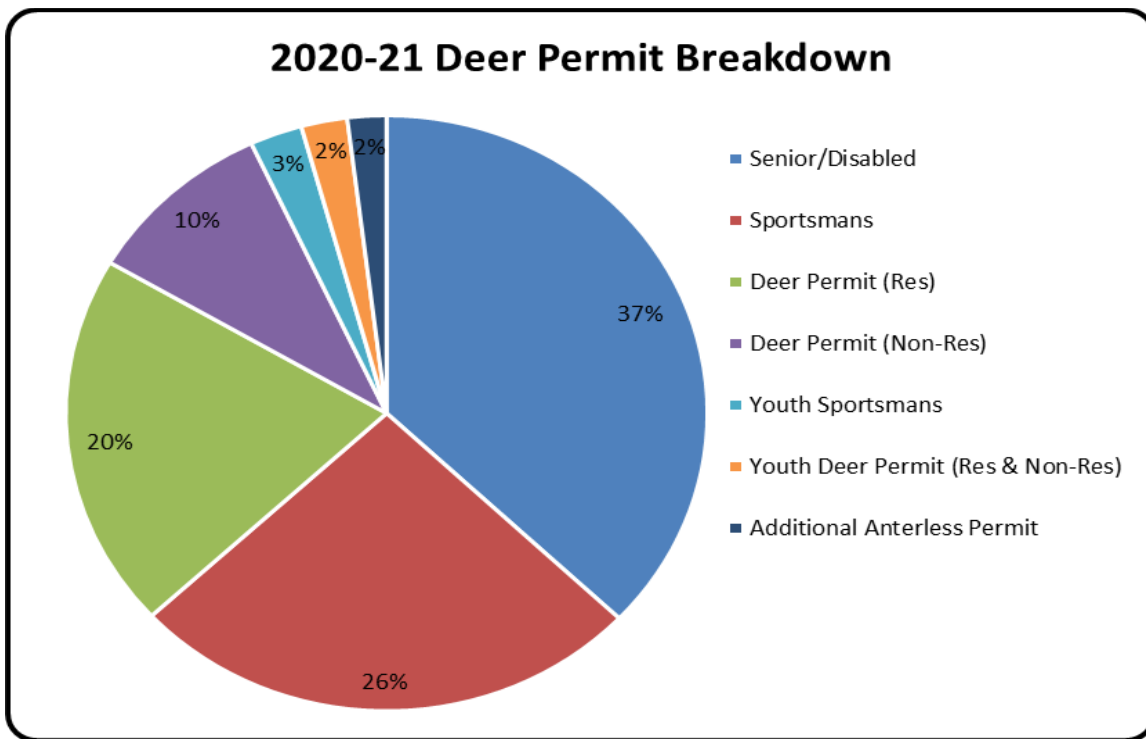
- Antlers
- Antlers attached to a clean skull plate
- A clean skull
- Clean upper canine teeth
- Finished taxidermy products
- The hide
- Quartered or deboned meat

Deer Permit Sales

In recent years, the number of deer permits sold has been declining. However, in the 2020-21 season (84,386) there was an increase in deer permits sold compared to the 2019-20 season (83,179). When looking at the long-term outlook on deer hunting permits in Kentucky, the 2020-21 season is 13.6% below the 10-year average (97,657). When including the license bundles (Sportsman’s, Jr. Sportsman’s, Jr. Deer Permit, Resident and Non-Resident Deer Permit, and Additional Deer Permit) in the total deer permit numbers, the 2020-21 season (281,503) is 5.3% below the 10-year average (297,249). No information is available regarding how many landowners hunted deer, as they are not required to purchase a permit if hunting on their own property.



Upon further examination of license sales, the majority of deer permits are purchased by senior hunters (37%) followed closely by Sportsman License (26%) and resident deer permit (20%) buyers. Over the last few years, there has been a steady decrease in the number of senior/disabled licenses sold, with the exception of the 2020-21 season where we saw a <1% increase from the previous year.



Contacts

If you have questions about the deer herd or deer hunting opportunities, please visit the deer webpage at fw.ky.gov/Hunt/Pages/Deer-Hunting-Regs.aspx or call the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Info Center at 1-800-858-1549 or contact one of the Deer Program Biologists listed below.

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Approximately 95% of Kentucky is privately owned. To successfully manage our wildlife resources, the KDFWR works cooperatively with Kentucky’s private landowners. One of the essential ingredients in conserving Kentucky’s wildlife resources is habitat improvement. Wildlife biologists are available to work with interested individuals or groups on properties that they own or have management rights on. To contact your local wildlife biologist for assistance with wildlife management on your property see the map below.

