

# 2023-2024 Kentucky White-Tailed Deer Harvest and Population Report

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources



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## Introduction

The Deer Program is administered under the Wildlife Division of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR). It is overseen by a nine-member commission 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, and information and technology, public relations, customer service, and administrative professionals.

KDFWR funding is provided 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 opportunities while balancing the needs of consumptive and non-consumptive user groups. The Deer Program is comprised of the Program Coordinator, Joe McDermott, and two Deer Program Biologists, David Yancy and Tommy Apostolopoulos. Deer Program staff are based out of the KDFWR Headquarters in Frankfort.

## History of Deer in Kentucky

White tailed deer are native to Kentucky and were first reported by Dr. Thomas Walker in 1750 that the deer were "plentiful" in portions of what is now southeastern Kentucky. This report was corroborated in 1773 by explorer Robert McAfee, stating that the number of deer around Henry County was "astonishing." However, due to unregulated harvest, the deer population began to decline rapidly in subsequent years. By 1810, naturalist John James Audubon noted that the vast numbers of deer that once roamed the Ohio River valley of Kentucky had already "ceased to exist." In 1946, KDFWR (known then as the Division of Game and Fish) initiated a comprehensive 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 across the entire Commonwealth. Active restoration efforts concluded in March of 1999 and, 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 sixth for all-time Boone & Crockett buck production.

## General Information about the 2023-24 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	\$120
Bonus Antlerless Permit	\$15	\$15
Youth Deer Permit	\$10	\$15





## Season Dates and Bag Limits

	Early Season	Late Season
Archery	Sept. 2, 2023 – Jan. 15, 2024	
Youth/Senior Crossbow		
Crossbow	Sept. 16, 2023 – Jan. 15, 2024	
Youth-only Gun	Oct. 14 – 15, 2023	
Muzzle-loader	Oct. 21 – 22, 2023	Dec. 9 – 17, 2023
Modern Gun	Nov. 11 – 26, 2023	
Free Youth Weekend	Dec. 30 – 31, 2023	

	Antlerless Bag Limit	Antlered Bag Limit
Zone 1	Unlimited with statewide and additional deer permits	1 statewide
Zone 2	No more than 4 deer	
Zone 3	No more than 4 deer, no more than 1 antlerless with modern firearm	
Zone 4	No more than 2 deer, no antlerless with modern firearm	

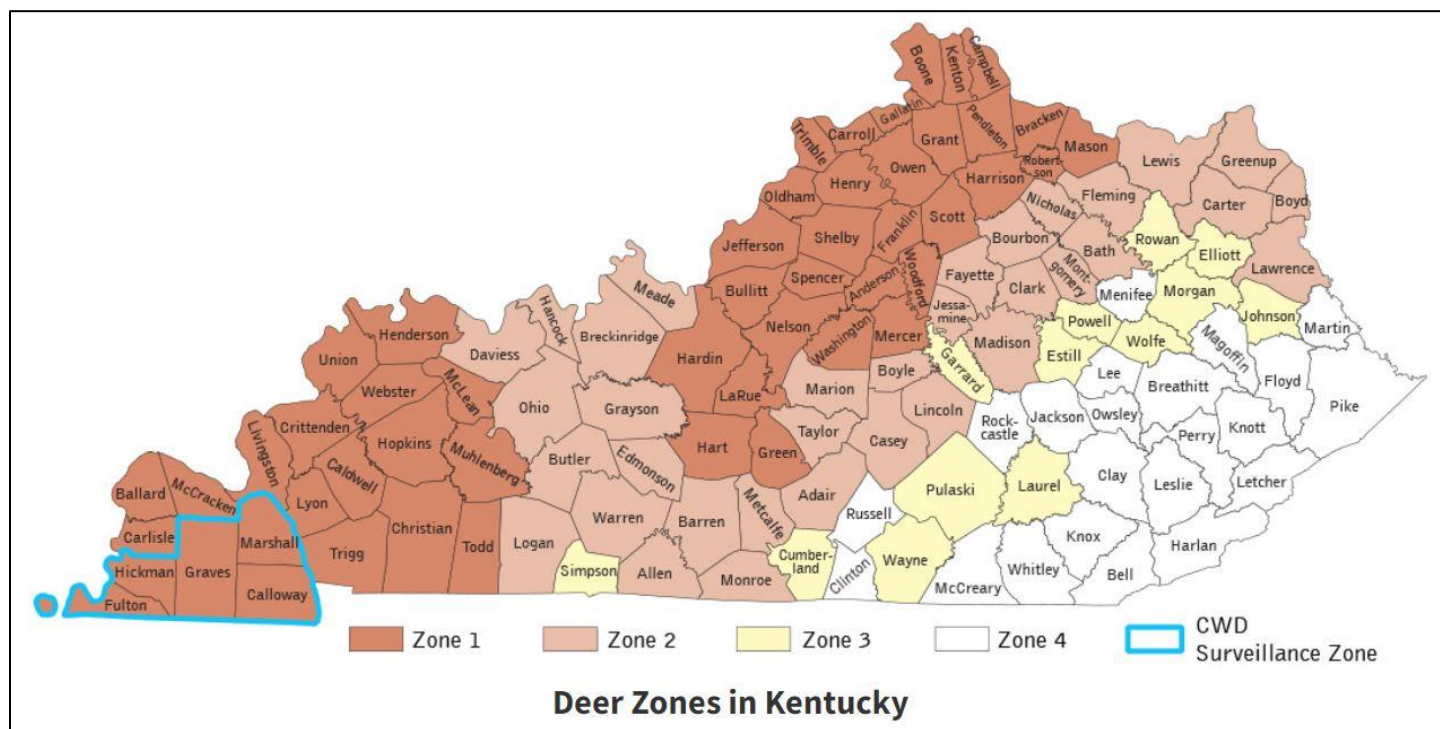


Figure 1

## Changes for the 2023-24 Season

- No zone changes occurred for the 2023-24 deer season. Simpson County's change to Zone 2 will be final by the 2024 season.

## Changes for the 2024-25 Season

- The December Antlerless-Only Quota Hunt on Veteran's Memorial WMA has been removed
- The 3-day January Firearms Open Hunt on West Kentucky WMA has been removed
- Language was clarified from "female" to "antlerless" deer that qualify for Preference Points on Ballard, Clay, Taylorsville Lake, and Veteran's Memorial WMA Quota Hunts
- The additional deer permit granted by the Commissioner to an applicant has been removed
- Tree stands on WMAs can now be labeled with the hunter's KDFWR Customer ID Number

## Population Status

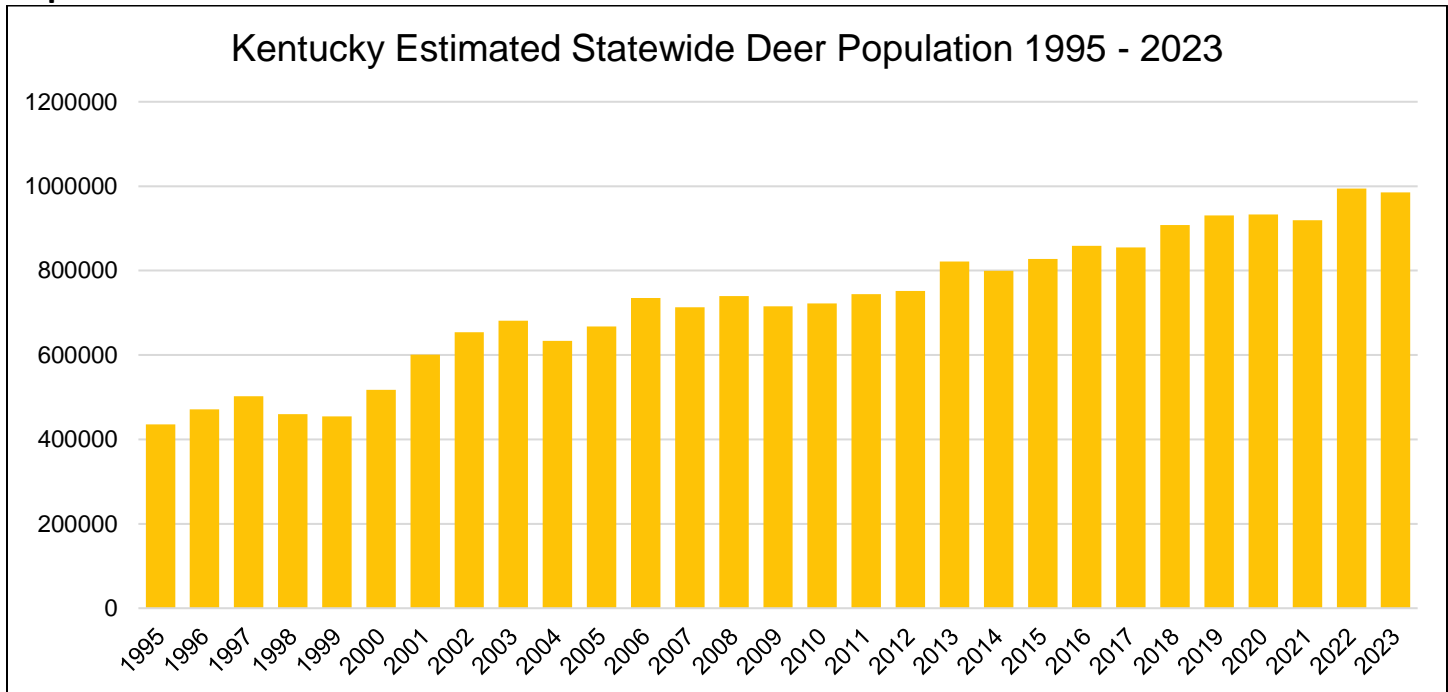


Figure 2

Overall, the statewide deer population estimate shows a stable to increasing trend (**Figure 2**). The 2023 statewide estimate was 985,386 deer at the start of the 2023-24 hunting season, which is a 1% decrease from 2022-23 (994,356). Though very little statewide, most of the population decline is in Zone 1 counties where deer densities are unsustainably high and the KDFWR's goal is to bring densities down to manageable levels. This population estimate is generated from harvest and age structure data, which is collected through tele-check reporting and by KDFWR staff.

It is important to note that the population reconstruction model employed by KDFWR is extremely conservative. It is also a retrospective model, meaning that it refines itself over time for years past. For example, the 2023 model shows there were nearly 1.4 million deer in the state in 2015. In 2015, however, the population for that year was projected at around 800,000.

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 and bag limits aim to maintain the densities present in those counties.

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

## 2023 - 2024 Total Harvest Summary

The total number of deer harvested during the 2023-24 deer season (**Figure 3**) was 140,811 which is the seventh highest harvest on record. We observed a 6.3% decrease from the record 2022-23 season (144,493) and the 2023-24 season was nearly 2,000 deer over the 10-year average (142,345). Despite an above-average white oak mast and bumper red oak mast drop coupled with less-than-desirable hunting weather during most of the season, the season boasted a great harvest that is in line with years past. Over 100,000 hunters saw success during the 2023-24 season.

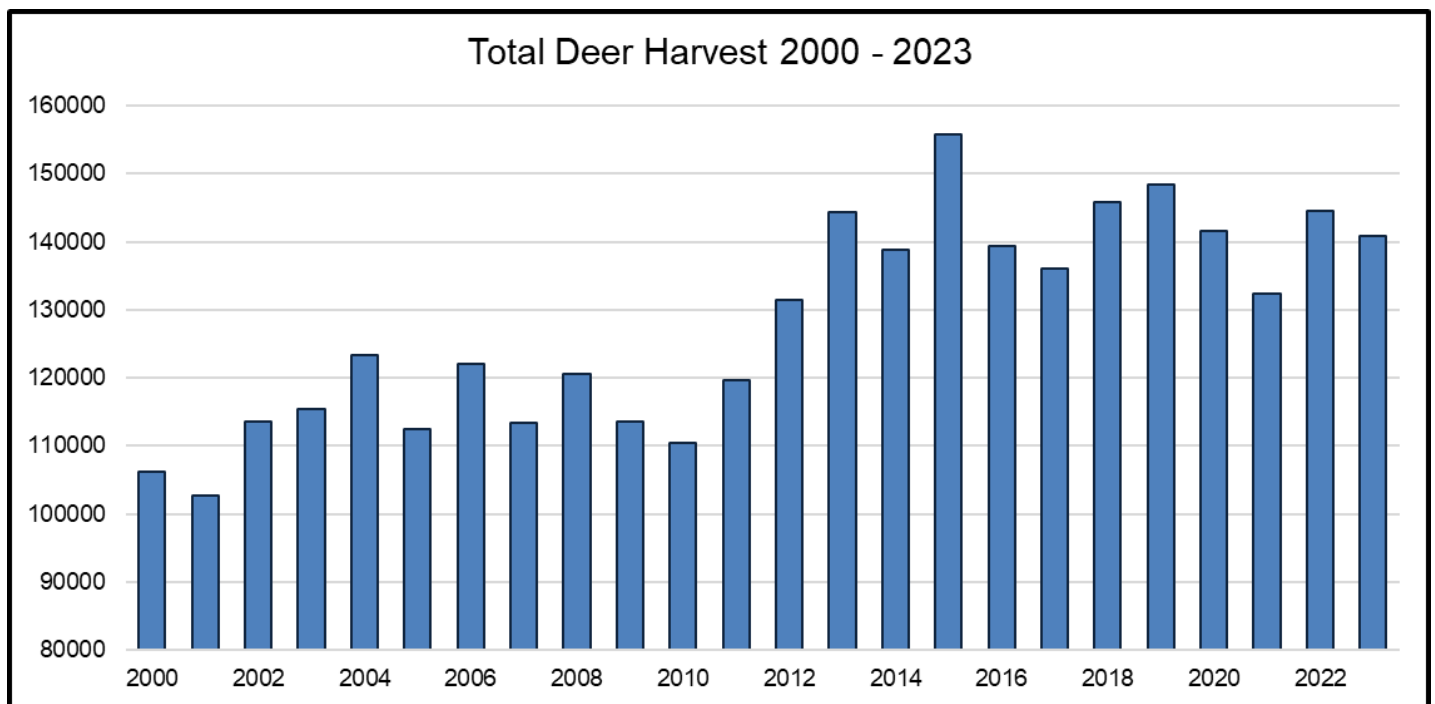


Figure 3

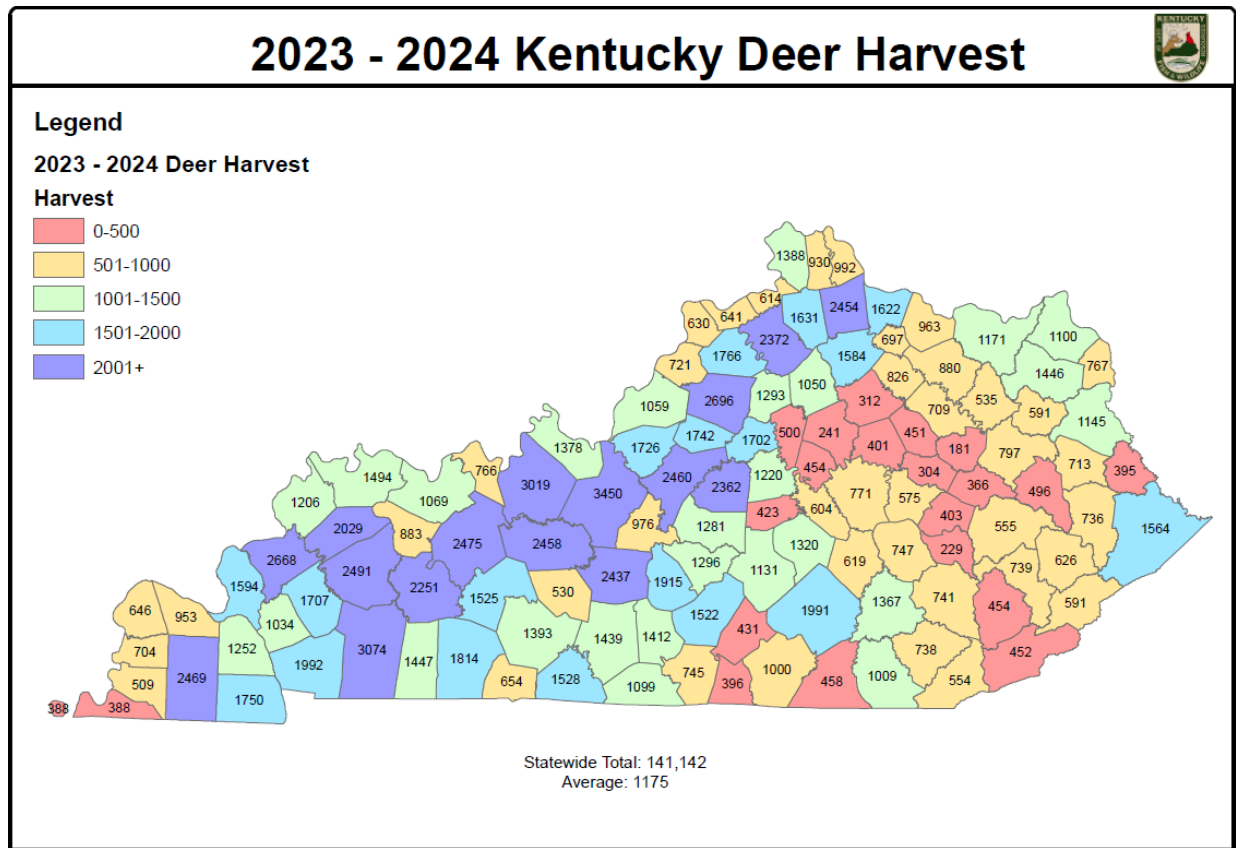


Figure 4

#### Antlered Buck Harvest

The total antlered deer harvest (**Figure 5**) was 72,521 during the 2023-24 season, which is 4% above the ten-year average (69,753) and the second highest antlered buck harvest on record. Although the season harvest total being nearly 4,000 deer less than last year's, antlered buck harvest rose for the second time in three years. When comparing antlered deer harvested per square mile of habitat, Spencer County (4.26 antlered deer/sq. mi.) harvested the most antlered bucks with Anderson County (4.20 antlered deer/sq. mi.) coming in second, and Washington County (3.67 antlered deer/sq. mi.) coming in third. Fayette County (0.59 antlered deer/sq. mi.) harvested the fewest antlered bucks per square mile during the 2023-24 season (**Figure 6**).

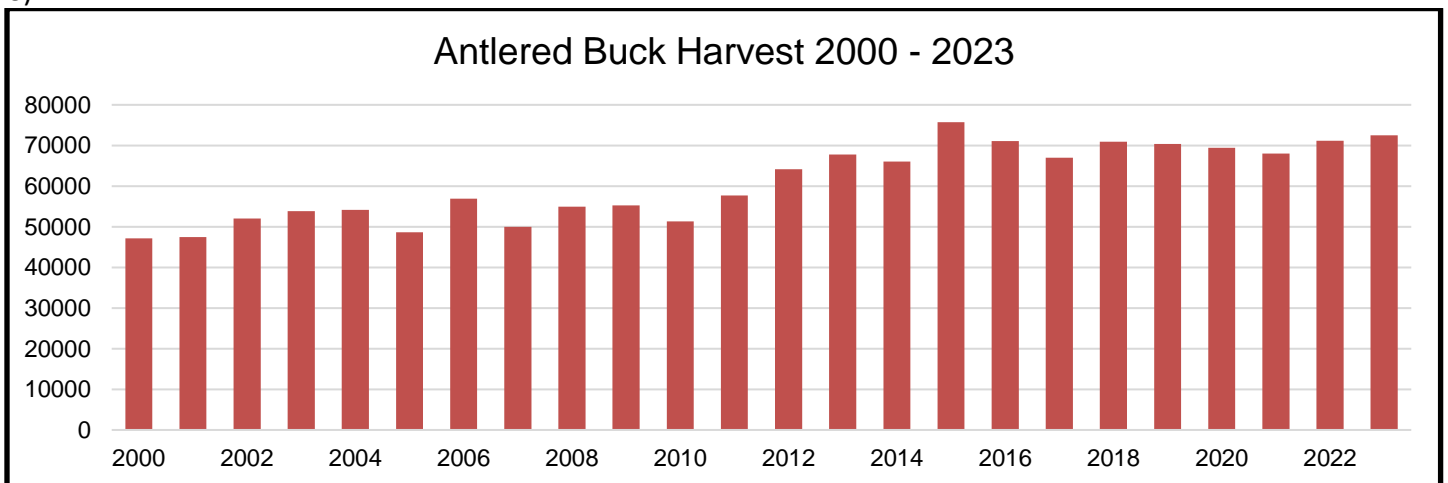


Figure 5

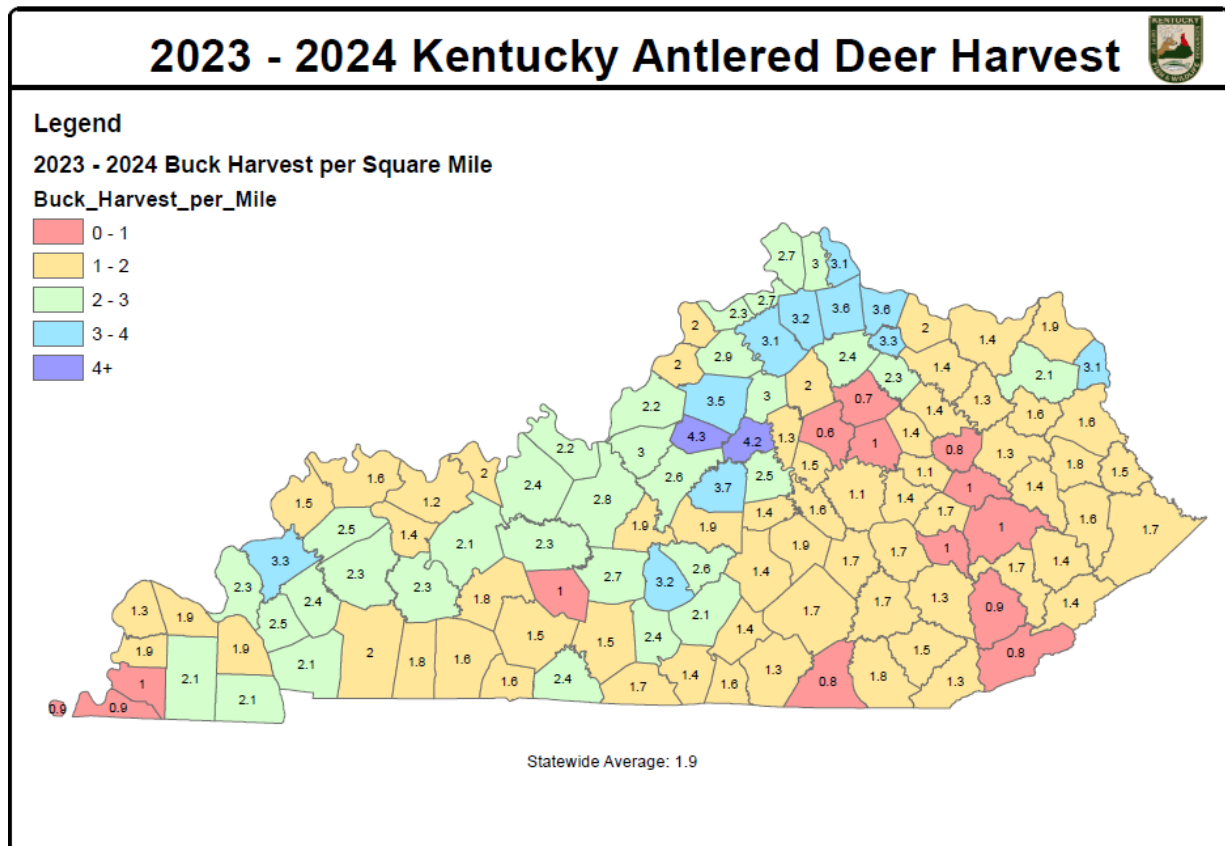


Figure 6

## Female Harvest

The total number of female deer harvested (**Figure 7**) during the 2023-24 season was 61,216 deer. This is 4.4% below the ten-year average and a 6% decrease from the 2022-23 season (65,334). However, the percentage of female deer harvested has been relatively stable over the last decade (**Figure 7**). When comparing female deer harvested per square mile of habitat, Pendleton County (4.81 female deer/sq. mi.) harvested the most female deer followed by Spencer County (4.55 female deer/sq. mi.) and Anderson County (4.00 female deer/sq. mi.). Menifee County (0.11 female deer/sq. mi.) harvested the fewest female deer per square mile during the 2022-23 season (**Figure 8**).

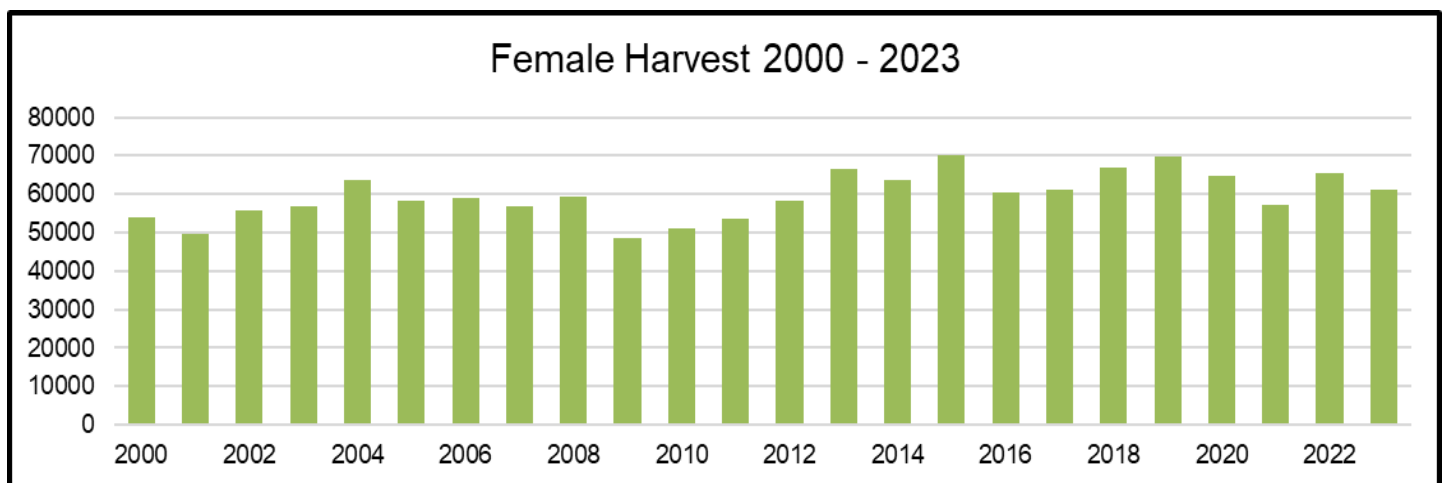


Figure 7



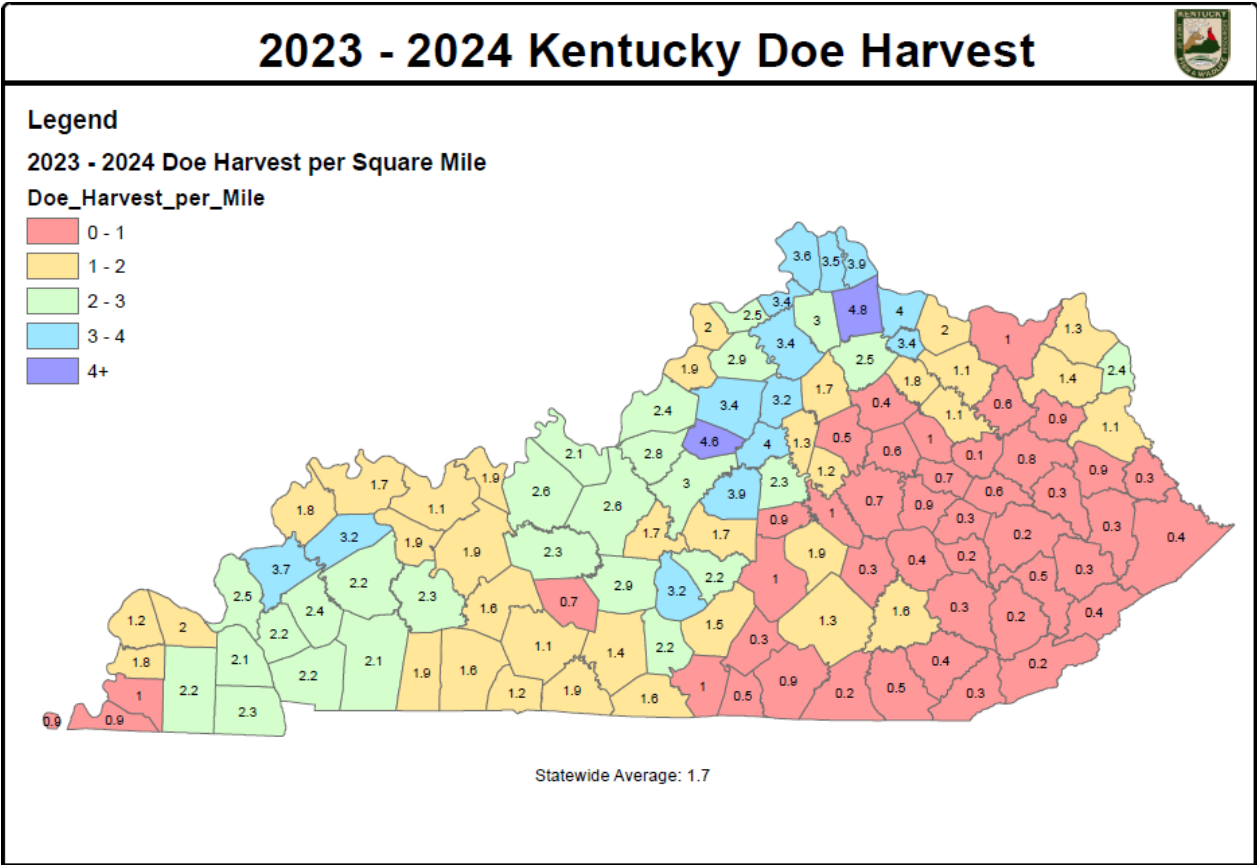


Figure 8

Male Fawn Harvest

The total male fawn harvest (**Figure 9**) was 7,074 during the 2023-24 season which is 12.6% below the ten-year average. The harvest in 2023-24 saw an 11.7% decrease from the 2022-23 season (8,015), but the percentage of the harvest that male fawns make up has remained relatively stable (around 5.5%) for the last decade. When comparing male fawn deer harvested per square mile of habitat, Spencer County (0.74 male fawns/sq. mi.) harvested the most male fawns with Bracken County (0.63 male fawns/sq. mi.) coming in second, and Campbell County (0.58 male fawns/sq. mi.) coming in third. Behind Meniffee and Owsley who had none reported, Breathitt County saw the lowest number of male fawns reported harvested during the 2023-24 season (0.01 male fawns/ sq. mile).

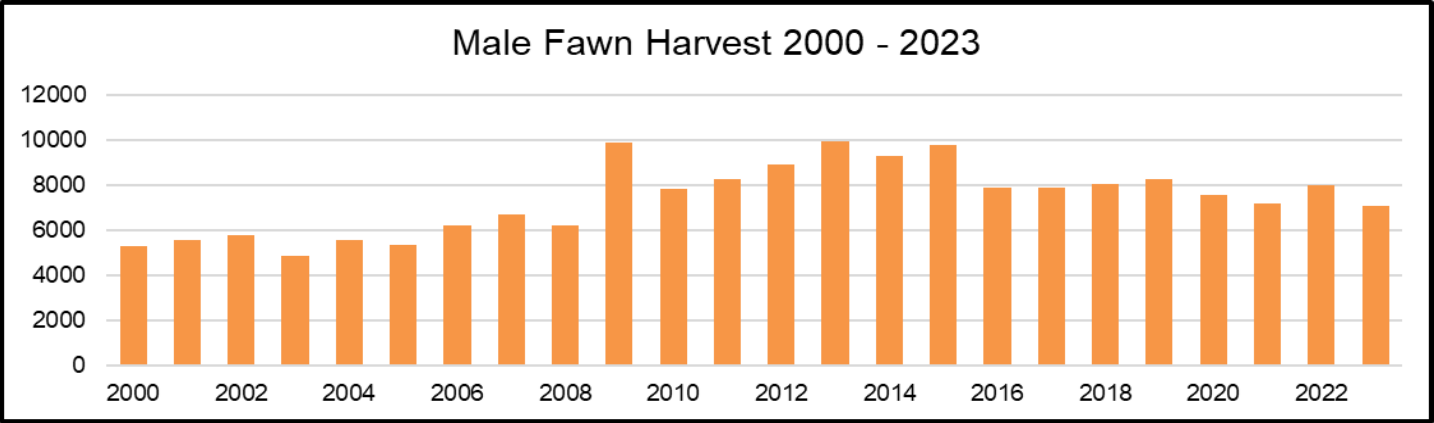


Figure 9

## Male Age Class Comparison

Deer hunters have been asked to include whether the outside spread of their antlered deer is greater or less than 11 inches when checking their deer since 2016. Male fawn information was already being collected, but yearling and adult male information was needed to better understand the distribution of the varying age classes of males within the total harvest (**Figure 11**). In addition to providing this information to hunters, these data strengthen our population model and improve trend data used to manage deer populations. Hunters do a great job of letting younger age class males walk in hopes of seeing them reach their antler potential in older age classes.

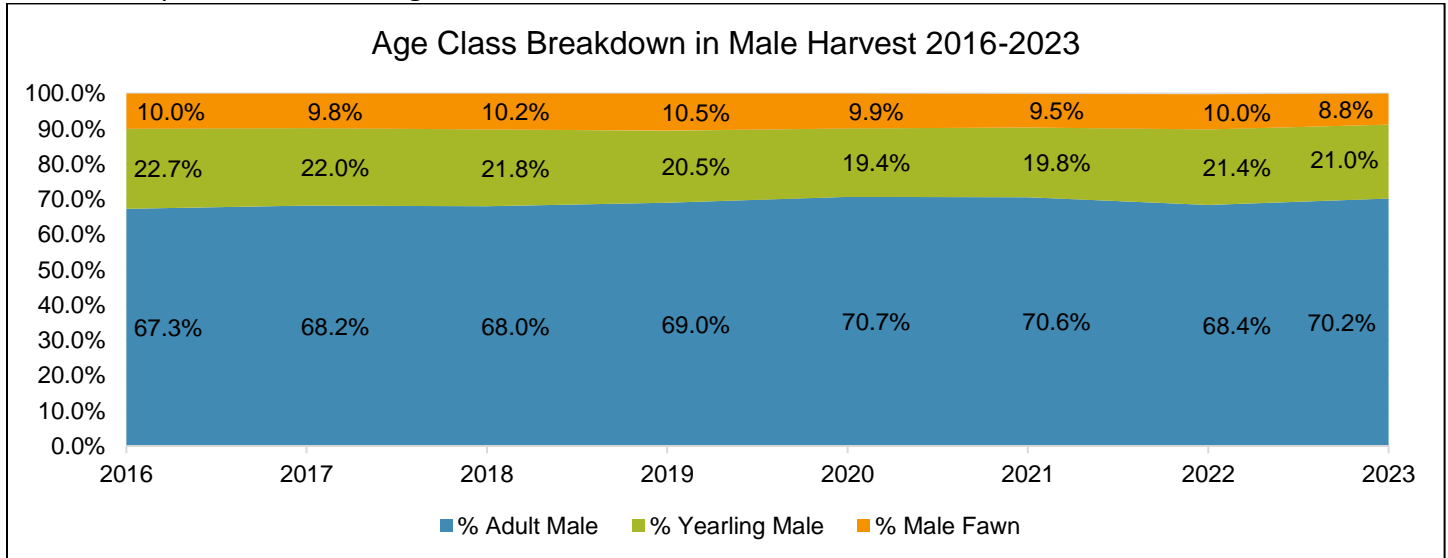


Figure 11

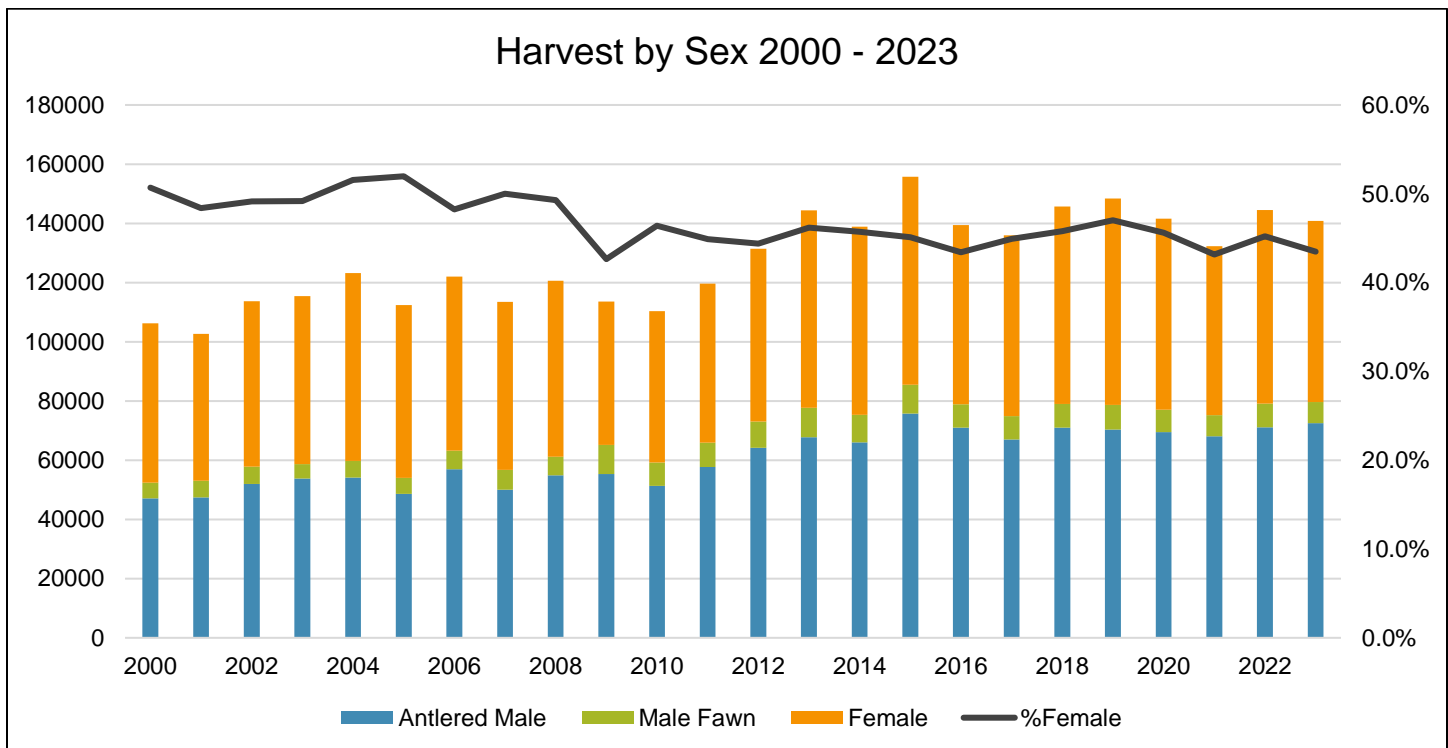


Figure 12

## Harvest Summary by Weapon Type

Weapon	Female	Male Fawn	Male	Total
Archery	8,074	498	6,387	14,959
Crossbow	6,426	546	5,389	12,361
Firearm	40,762	5,162	57,392	103,316
Muzzle-loader	5,954	732	3,353	10,175
<b>Total</b>	<b>61,216</b>	<b>7,074</b>	<b>72,521</b>	<b>140,811</b>

Table 1

Despite a statewide bag limit that allows hunters to shoot more than one deer per year statewide, there appears to be a limit on the number of deer that hunters are willing to, or able to harvest, as 75.1% (77,320) of all successful hunters only harvested one deer. A smaller percentage of successful hunters (24.8%) harvested two deer, and only 10.1% harvested three or more deer. Of the 102,901 total successful hunters in the 2023-24 season, the average hunter harvested 1.37 deer, which was a slight decrease from last season (1.40). However, this rate usually does not fluctuate statewide between years and has remained stable over time despite the deer population growing consistently since the 1990s.

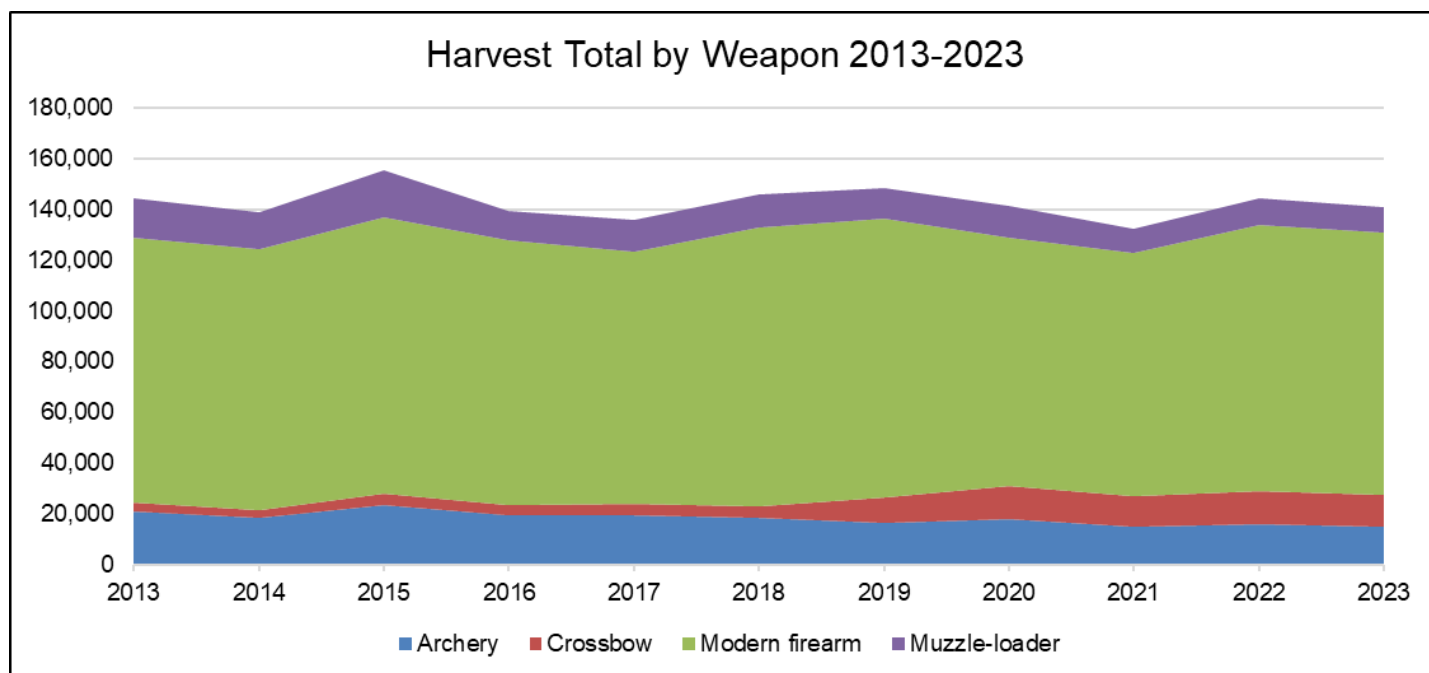


Figure 13

There were significant changes in the percentage of the 2023-24 harvest by weapon type (**Table 1; Figures 13 - 14**) compared to the 2022-23 season. The archery harvest was 11% of the total harvest, identical when compared to the last three seasons, but 8.6% below the five-year average (likely due to the increased popularity of crossbow hunting). The muzzleloader harvest (10,175) was 7% of the total harvest, which decreased 4.8% from the 2022-23 season (10,684). Crossbows represented 9% of the 2023-24 total deer harvest (12,361), which decreased 6.8% from the 2022-23 season (13,266) but was 2% above the five-year average. Crossbow harvest has steadily increased in the last decade, particularly after crossbow season was liberalized in 2018. In the past 10 years, the average crossbow harvest has increased 52%. Interestingly, more antlerless deer were taken with crossbows, muzzle-loaders, and archery equipment than antlered males. The modern gun harvest (103,315) saw a 1.5% decrease from the 2022-23 season (104,876) and was within 0.5%

of the five-year average (103,635). Seventy-one percent of the overall harvest occurred during the modern gun season (**Figure 14**) when most Kentucky deer hunters go afield. On average, 15% of the total harvest occurs on the opening day of modern gun season (**Table 2**).

Modern Gun Season Harvest by Day				
Date	Day	Harvest	% of Modern Gun Harvest	% of Deer Season Harvest
11-Nov	Sat	21095	21%	15%
12-Nov	Sun	13912	14%	10%
13-Nov	Mon	7319	7%	5%
14-Nov	Tue	5430	5%	4%
15-Nov	Wed	4175	4%	3%
16-Nov	Thu	3332	3%	2%
17-Nov	Fri	3037	3%	2%
18-Nov	Sat	8702	9%	6%
19-Nov	Sun	6707	7%	5%
20-Nov	Mon	2424	2%	2%
21-Nov	Tue	1907	2%	1%
22-Nov	Wed	3091	3%	2%
23-Nov	Thu	3568	4%	3%
24-Nov	Fri	5131	5%	4%
25-Nov	Sat	5935	6%	4%
26-Nov	Sun	4262	4%	3%
Total		100,027	100%	71%

Table 2

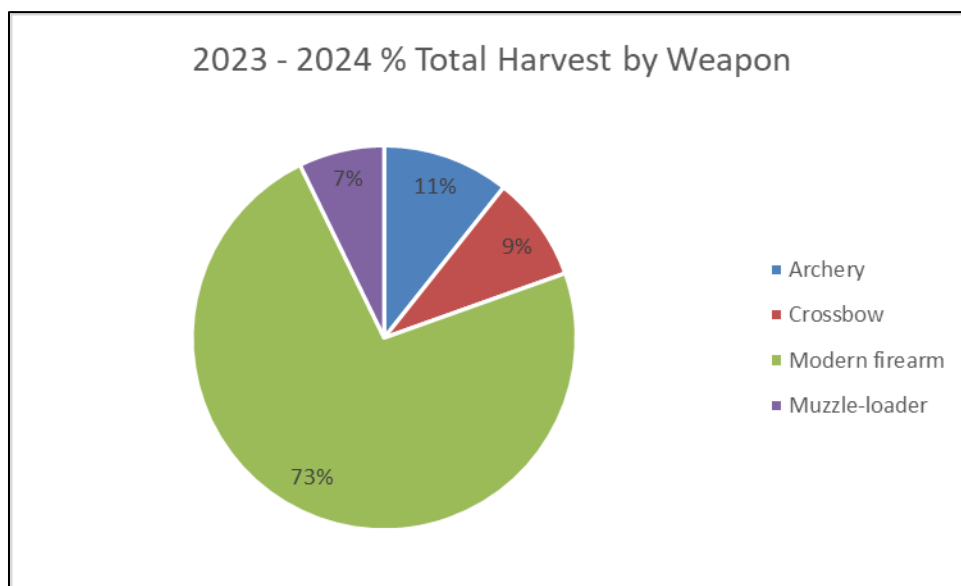


Figure 14

## Monthly Harvest Results

The 6,686 deer harvested in September is the third-highest harvest for September since 2014. Forty-nine percent (3,268) of the deer harvested in September were female, and this year's September harvest was over 500 animals higher than the 10-year average. October saw a harvest of 14,805 deer with 3,674 taken during Kentucky's Youth Firearms season (Oct. 14-15) and 3,455 during the following weekend's Early Muzzle-loader season. Hunters harvested 106,725 deer during November, most of which occurred during the statewide modern gun season (100,027). December's harvest remained strong for the second year in a row with 10,205 deer reported harvested. Contrarily, January's harvest (2,621) declined from the 2021-22 record for the second year and fell back in line with the 10-year average (2,662).

## 2023-24 Harvest Results by Permit Type

The percentage of deer telechecked by permit type (**Figure 15**) has remained stable over the years. However, with the increasing number of senior/disabled licenses sold, we would expect to see the senior/disabled harvest increase and the statewide permit harvest to decrease over time. 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. Deer control tags are used to mitigate deer damage issues and have remained stable over the past six years.

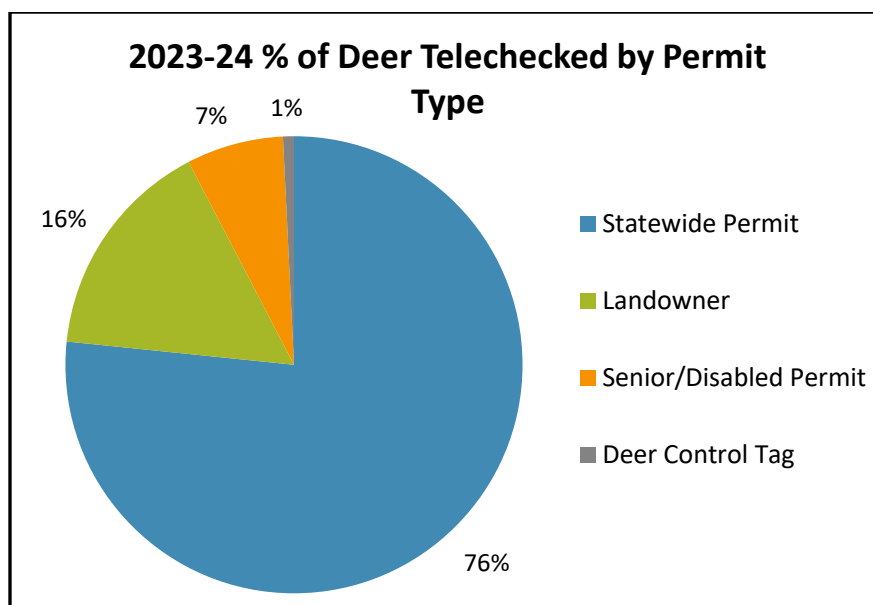


Figure 15

## Public Land Deer Harvest

KDFWR owns, leases, or manages more than 120 Wildlife Management Area's (WMA), Hunting Access Areas (HAA), and Outdoor Recreation Areas (ORA) across the state for public use (**Table 3**). Exceptions exist on some properties, but most 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. The number of deer harvested on public land in Kentucky has been stable to increasing over the last decade, except for the Southeast Region (**Figure 16**) where the harvest has been stable to slightly decreasing. Deer numbers in the southeast region are on the rebound from the 2017 hemorrhagic disease outbreak after KDFWR reduced the antlerless bag limit to one deer via archery/crossbow



season or the last three days of late muzzleloader season. However, because southeastern Kentucky is predominately forested, population growth is expected to be slower in this less-productive, mast-driven area.

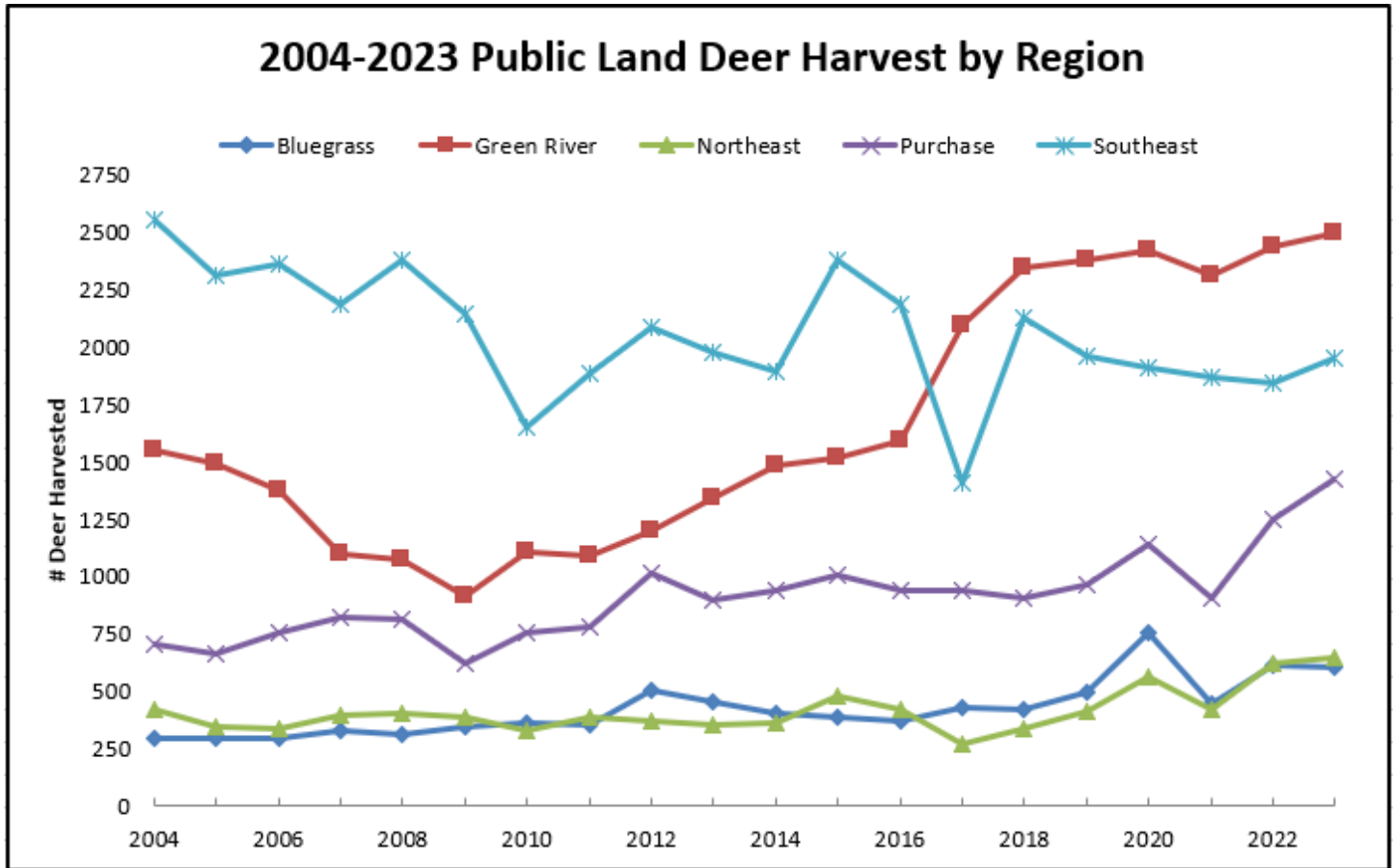


Figure 16

Acres of Public Hunting Areas by Wildlife Region	
Wildlife Region	Public Land Hunting Acres
Bluegrass	83,715
Green River	171,827
Northeast	267,324
Purchase	222,624
Southeast	868,601

Table 3



## Deer Quota Hunts

KDFWR offers 38 deer quota hunts on Kentucky WMAs. Any resident or nonresident hunter may apply for a deer quota hunt in Kentucky, but only the persons successfully drawn for quota hunt may participate. The application period for KDFWR deer quota hunts is the month of September when applicants can apply online at <https://fw.ky.gov/Hunt/Pages/Quota-Hunts.aspx>. 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. The non-refundable fee is \$3 per hunter to apply. Each hunter who applies correctly, but is not selected, will receive a preference point that increases the odds of being drawn the next 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 on non-residents to be 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 hunters. If this is the case, then no member of that party will be drawn.

7,153 hunters applied for the 3,926 available spots at the 38 KDFWR deer quota hunts held in the 2023-24 season. Fifty percent of applicants were drawn for a Kentucky quota deer hunt but drawing success varied from 9% to 93% depending on the property. There are quota hunts for general hunters (i.e., residents or non-residents with a statewide license), mobility impaired hunters, archery/crossbow hunters, and youth hunters. There are at least two deer quota hunts in each of the five wildlife regions across the state.

2023 Quota Deer Hunts	Harvest		Deer Seen/ Hour Hunted	Observed Antlered Deer:
	Female	Male		Antlerless Deer Ratio
Ballard WMA	42	26	0.92	1: 1.75
Beaver Creek WMA	0	7	0.11	1: 3.8
Big Rivers WMA and State Forest #1	8	4	*	*
Big Rivers WMA and State Forest #2	4	27	0.81	1: 1.1
Clay WMA	36	31	0.28	1: 1.8
Dale Hollow Lake State Resort Park	9	18	*	*
Dewey Lake WMA	6	12	0.36	1: 3.1
Fishtrap Lake WMA	12	12	0.16	1: 2.0
Greenbo Lake State Resort Park	6	3	*	*
Green River Lake and Dennis-Gray WMA	41	48	0.47	1: 2.1
Green River Lake and Dennis-Gray WMA				
Mobility-impaired	0	0	1.6	1: 4.3
Green River Lake State Park	1	6	*	*
Higginson-Henry WMA #1	6	5	*	*
Higginson-Henry WMA #2	4	14	0.50	1: 2.1
Kenlake State Resort Park	3	1	*	*
Kentucky River WMA	9	11	0.39	1: 1.9
Kincaid Lake State Park	3	2	*	*
Kleber and Rich WMA #1	12	19	0.26	1: 2.3
Kleber and Rich WMA #2	9	6	0.20	1: 5.3
Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area	1	1	0.4	1: 8.5

Paintsville Lake WMA	9	20	0.25	1: 1.7
Pennyrile State Forest and Tradewater WMA	8	20	0.29	1: 1.4
Taylorsville Lake WMA #1	51	49	0.36	1: 1.2
Taylorsville Lake WMA #1 Mobility-impaired	0	1		
Taylorsville Lake WMA #2	15	10	0.17	1: 3.7
Taylorsville Lake WMA #2 Mobility-impaired	**			
Twin Knobs Mobility-impaired	0	0	0.07	0: 2.0
Veterans Memorial WMA #1	0	6	0.11	1: 0.94
Veterans Memorial WMA #2	0	0	0.06	1: 4
West Kentucky WMA	7	7	0.4	1: 2.1
West Kentucky WMA Youth Mentor	0	1	0.45	1: 2.3

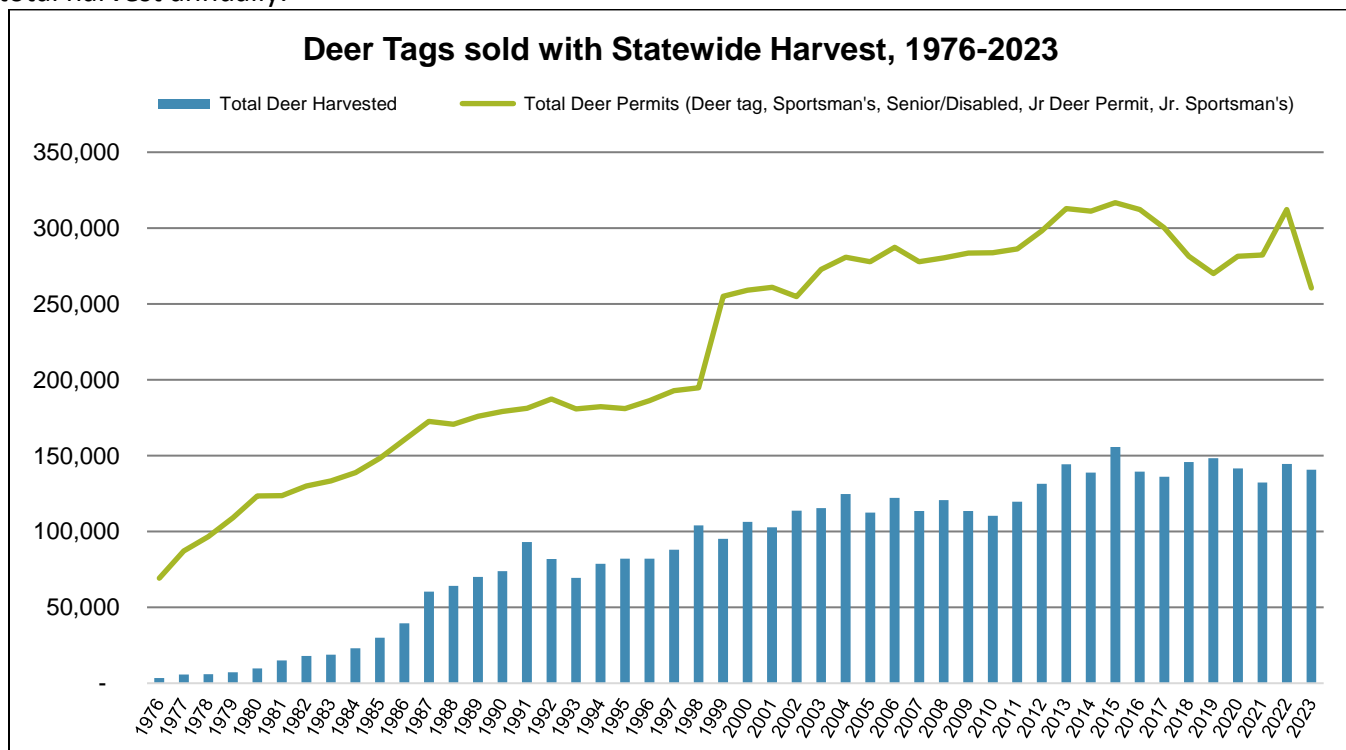
**Table 3**

\* Hunters not required to submit a check card during these hunts.

\*\* Data compiled with the main (i.e., Taylorsville 1 and 2) hunts since they operate concurrently.

## Deer Permit Sales

The number of deer permits sold has been declining since its peak in 2015 (**Figures 17-18**). The 2023-24 season saw a dramatic decrease in total deer permits sold (87,662) compared to the 2022-23 season (97,797). When looking at the recent harvest history of deer hunting in Kentucky, the 2023-24 season is 5% below the 10-year average (92,276). 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 2023-24 season (266,070) is 9% below the 10-year average (293,355; **Figure 17**). No information is available regarding how many landowners hunted deer, as they are not required to purchase a permit if hunting on their property. However, deer harvested by private landowners on their property make up 15-20% of the total harvest annually.



**Figure 17**

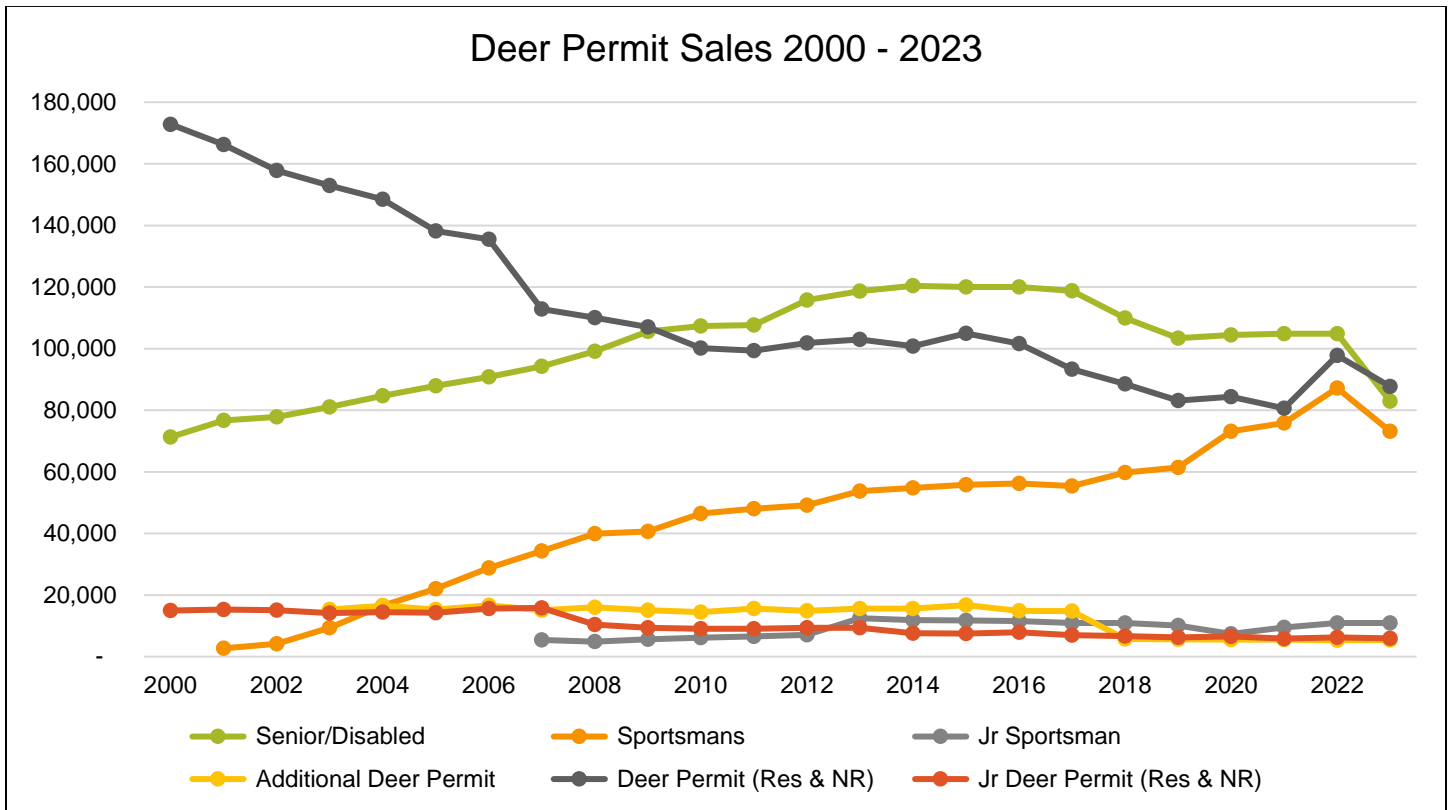


Figure 18

Upon further examination of license sales (**Figure 19**), most deer permits are purchased by senior/disabled hunters (32%) followed closely by Sportsman License (28%) and resident deer permit buyers (20%). Although senior/disabled permit holders make up the majority of deer permits purchased, only 7% of the total deer harvest is made by senior/disabled hunters. This is likely because most senior/disabled permit holders are primarily purchasing this license type to fish and choose not to hunt deer or are not deer hunters.

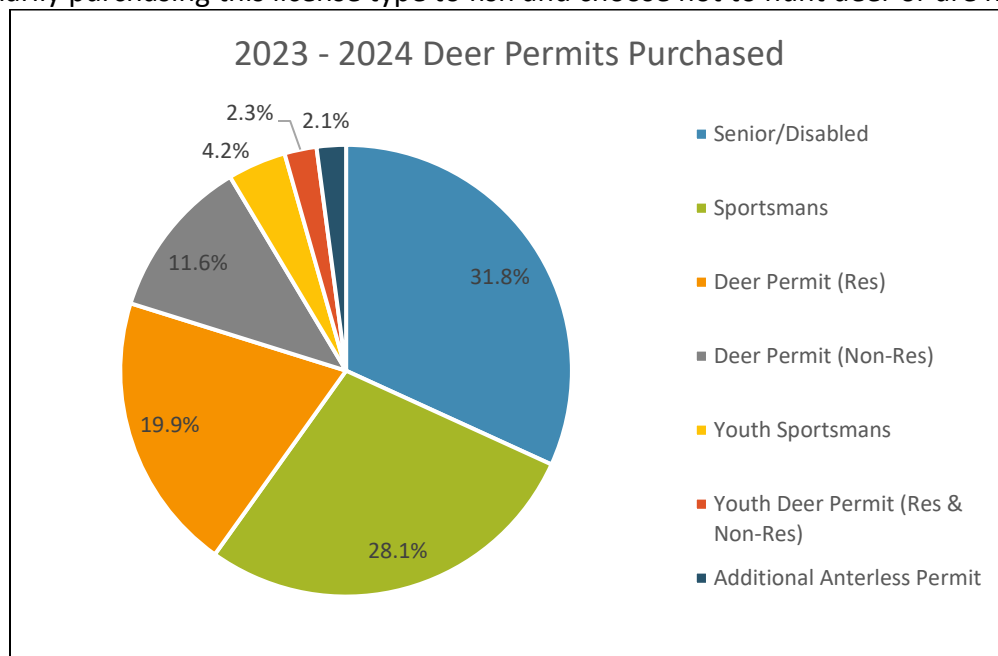


Figure 19

## Habitat Management

The Department's East Kentucky Habitat Initiative (EKHI) entered its third year during the fall of 2023. This initiative utilizes prescribed fire and other practices to help reduce exotic and invasive species from overtaking the open areas of reclaimed mine land. Specifically, KDFWR focused efforts on large blocks of reclaimed mine areas on public and private lands where autumn olive has begun to completely overtake the grassland community. In addition, prescribed fire was utilized in the adjacent woodlands to reduce non-desirable species and stimulate oak regeneration. These habitat practices will benefit many species, including deer and elk, by allowing a more diverse grassland and forb community to flourish, increasing nutrition along with creating more productive bedding and fawning cover for deer in these areas. More than 3,200 acres were burned during the winter/spring of 2024 and KDFWR has a 4,000-acre goal for the 2025 burn season. Across the Commonwealth, KDFWR staff burned over 10,000 acres in 2023-24.

## 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 diseases. 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 sometimes this framework alone may not be enough to curtail the issues that some stakeholders experience. Deer populations can outgrow what their habitat can reasonably sustain, known as exceeding ecological 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 in a given area. KDFWR staff can offer their assistance once this threshold has been reached in an area (see Contacts map on page 22). A local Regional 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, but 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 (DCTs), Deer Destruction Permits, and the use of KRS 150.170 (**Table 4**).

Deer Control Tags Used in 2023				Destruction Permit Use from 2023			
Region	DCT's Issued	DCT's Used	% Used	Region	DDPs	DDPs Used	% Used
BG	1332	170	13%	BG	675	309*	46%
GR	1679	448	27%	GR	203	9*	4%
NE	110	47	43%	NE	0	0	0%
PR	509	119	23%	PR	0	0	0%
SE	1352	300	22%	SE	0	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3607</b>	<b>1084</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>318*</b>	<b>47%</b>
*DDP use data were not complete at the time of publication							

Table 4



## 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 and had significant impacts on the deer population. Many of those areas continue to experience lower deer numbers primarily due to the habitat type in east Kentucky being predominately forested, where deer populations exhibit a much slower growth rate. In 2023, KDFWR biologists had 94 suspected HD deer reported throughout the state. When possible, KDFWR will test animals that have died of apparent HD. Only 9 deer from mostly central and western Kentucky were clinically diagnosed to be HD positive, but positive deer were found in several areas of the state (Fayette, Butler, Hart, Logan, Calloway, Graves, Marshall, Pike counties; **Figure 20**). Estimated EHD mortality in Kentucky's deer herd was estimated to be 100-500 deer.

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 was just detected for the first time in Kentucky.

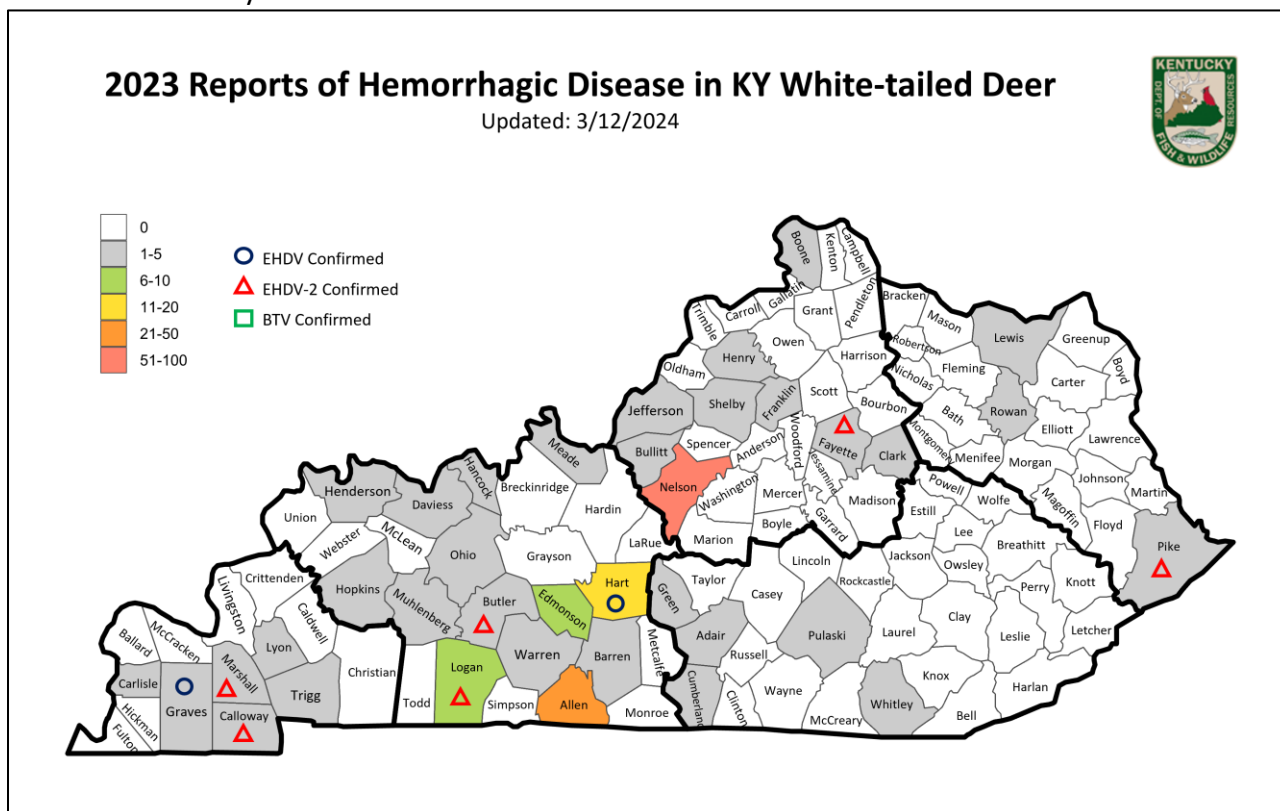


Figure 20

### 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 that includes “mad cow” disease in cattle, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans, and scrapie in sheep and goats. CWD has been detected in 32 states, 4 Canadian provinces, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and South Korea. All seven states that border Kentucky have CWD present (West Virginia, Virginia, Missouri, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Tennessee). CWD was first detected in Kentucky in December 2023. The sick deer was a 2.5-year-old buck harvested by a hunter in Ballard County.

KDFWR adopted a CWD monitoring plan in 2002 to detect CWD and manage the disease when it arrived to Kentucky. That plan is a three-part monitoring program to test: 1) a random sampling 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 CWD response plan to address the disease if it was ever found in Kentucky. Since 2002, more than 48,300 deer and 965 elk have been tested for the disease and CWD has been found in only one animal.

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources encourages hunters who encounter deer acting strangely or that look sick to contact your local regional biologist and complete a sick deer reporting form [online](#) (Figure 23).

### 2023 CWD Response

Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 deer hunting season, the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) reported the discovery of a CWD positive deer eight miles from the southern border of Calloway County, KY. Tennessee has since reported positive deer in two counties that lie within 30 miles of our border. Due to the CWD-positive deer being within 15 miles of the Kentucky border, the Department initiated the beginning steps of the CWD Response Plan. The response plan dramatically increased the CWD sampling efforts within the surveillance zone (Figure 21, Calloway, Fulton, Graves, Hickman, and Marshall counties). During the 2023-24 statewide CWD sampling effort, a total of 5,390 deer and 125 elk were submitted for CWD testing. In 2023, 1,715 of those deer were tested from within the surveillance zone. KDFWR has now sampled 8,555 deer inside of the surveillance zone since enacting its response plan.

After the first detection of CWD in Ballard County in December 2023, KDFWR’s Commission has voted to extend the CWD Surveillance Zone to include Ballard, Carlisle, and McCracken counties. The special regulations outlined in KDFWR’s CWD Response Plan are now active in all 8 counties west of the Tennessee River and Kentucky Lake.



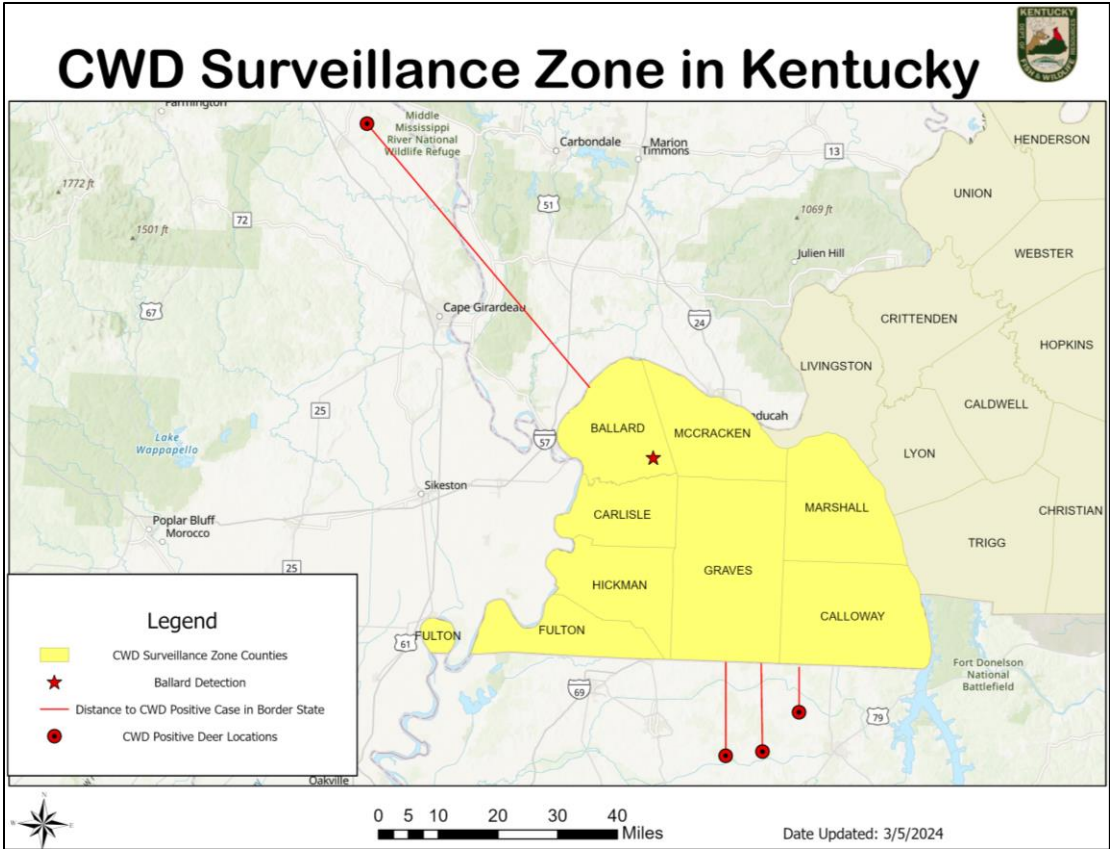


Figure 21

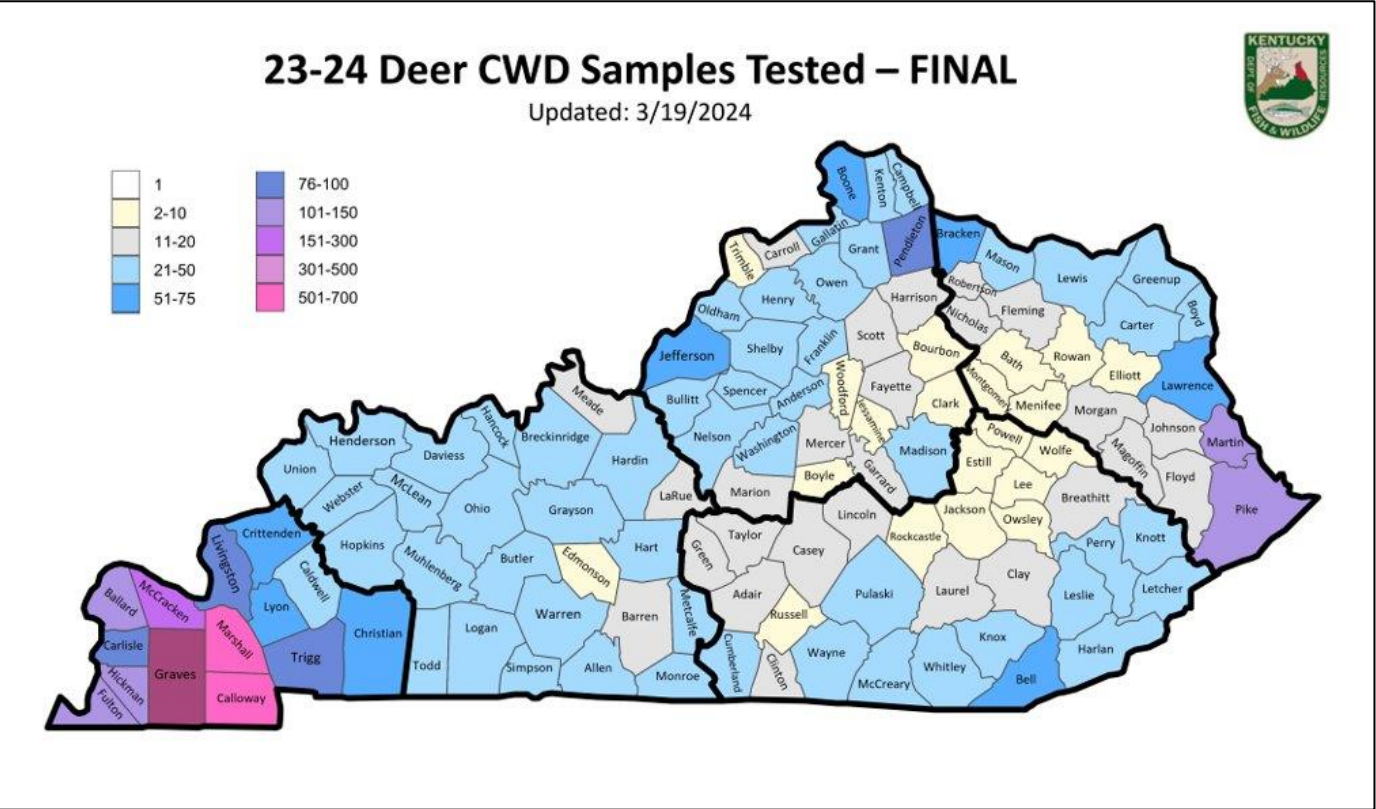


Figure 22

### CWD Regulations

Due to the discovery of CWD close to the Kentucky border, the following regulations were put into effect for the surveillance zone in 2021 and remained in place for the 2023-24 season (**Figure 21**; Calloway, Fulton, Graves, Hickman, and Marshall counties). The purpose of these emergency regulations is to provide the Department the ability to conservatively manage and prevent CWD from entering the state of Kentucky for as long as possible. In addition, by requiring the mandatory checking of harvested deer, the Department can utilize the data collected to inform and guide future deer management decisions.

Beginning in the 2024-25 season and due to the CWD detection in Ballard County, Ballard, Carlisle, and McCracken counties will be added to the CWD Surveillance Zone and will have the same regulations as seen below.

- No baiting or wildlife feeding
  - Prohibited:
    - Feeders holding or distributing foods or attractants for wildlife ingestion
    - Grain, salt, or mineral shall not be used
  - Allowed:
    - Normal agricultural practices (including mineral blocks in active cattle pastures)
    - Food plots for wildlife
    - Hanging bird feeders used within the curtilage of the home
    - Scents and deer urine-based products
- Mandatory deer check stations
  - During the 2022-23 mandatory check there were 13 check stations
- Carcass tag requirement for all cervids moving through the surveillance zone
- Carcass transportation restrictions
  - Prohibited: Entire carcasses, uncleaned skulls, spines, or bone-in quarters of deer harvested within the 5-county surveillance zone may not be taken outside of the zone, unless in transit to a Kentucky Fish and Wildlife-authorized CWD check station.
  - Allowed: De-boned meat, antlers, antlers attached to a clean skull plate, a clean skull, clean teeth, hides, and finished taxidermy products may be taken out of the surveillance zone. Carcasses of deer or elk harvested elsewhere in Kentucky may be transported into the surveillance zone.

### 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 debone meat



## Contacts

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. KDFWR's Private Lands Program performed technical guidance visits on over 500 private properties in 2023.

Contact your local private lands biologist for assistance with wildlife management on your property.

