

KDFWR Deer Program

Summary Data: 2026 September Harvest

6th October 2026



Summary

Despite the uncomfortably hot weather for most of September and with the help of the 4-day Antlerless Firearms Season in 21 CWD Zone counties, Kentucky hunters harvested a record 8,448 deer in the first month of the season. This year's harvest bested last year's record September by more than 300 deer (8,141) and was 1,623 deer higher than the 10-year average (6,825; Figure 1). Over 7,400 hunters found success early this season with a record 777 (10.4%) hunters harvesting at least two deer.

Of the 8,448 deer reported harvested during September, fifty-four percent of them were female (4,571), 44% were antlered bucks (3,679), and the remaining 2% were buck fawns (Figure 2). This proportion is typical of the early season with a high number of hunters choosing to conduct doe management prior to the rut. Of the antlered bucks harvested during September, 88% of them were 2.5 years old or older (3,250; Figure 3).

The percentage of deer harvested by nonresidents is typically higher in September due to Kentucky's season opening earlier than many of its neighbors. Twenty-seven percent of the opening weekend's harvest was from nonresident archery hunters, but that proportion dropped to 16% through the month of September. This is 4% lower than in the 2025 season and 3% lower than the 5-year average for the month (19%; Figure 4).

Nearly all public hunting areas across the Commonwealth are open to archery and crossbow hunting during the month of September, and Kentucky hunters took full advantage of the public land opportunities statewide this year. Eighty different public hunting areas saw at least one deer harvested during the month of September with a total statewide harvest of 539 deer (6% of the harvest). The state-maintained Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) that have been the most productive so far this season are Yellowbank (31), Big Rivers (29), Green River Lake (28), Lake Cumberland (25), and Taylorsville Lake (24) WMAs (Table 2).

Regionally, the Southeast Region saw the most deer harvested in the month of September for the first time on record. The Southeast harvested 2,126 deer (25% of statewide harvest), followed by the Bluegrass (2,023; 24%), Green River (1,996; 24%), Northeast (1,443; 17%), and Purchase (860; 10%). Breckinridge County is currently leading all other counties with 254 deer harvested during September, followed by Hardin (243), Pike (219), Pulaski (214), Laurel (190) and Washington (158) counties (Table 2; Figure 5).

Opening Weekend

In the first three days of Kentucky's archery season, high temperatures across the Commonwealth averaged nearly 96 degrees and topped triple digits in several areas. Despite this, Kentucky hunters braved the elements to harvest 1,980 deer to start the season. This is down from two years of record-breaking opening weekends of over 3,000 deer in 2024 and 2025, respectively. Sixty-four percent of harvested deer were antlered bucks (1,264) and 91% of them were 2.5 years old or older (1,152), while 36% were females (704). Only 1,904 hunters were successful in harvesting a deer during the first three days of the 2026 season, down from 2,304 in 2025 but surely correlated to the nearly 20-degree swing in average temperature from last year.

Special CWD Antlerless Season

Under Commissioner's Authority, hunters in Zone 1-3 counties inside a CWD Surveillance Zone (21 of 23 CWD SZ counties) had the opportunity to harvest antlerless deer with a firearm during a 4-day Special Antlerless Season that ran from September 25 – 28, 2026. This special season was developed by KDFWR's CWD Working Group in an effort to increase antlerless harvest and obtain additional CWD samples for surveillance early in the season. This time of the year was chosen because it has historically been the least likely time of the season that hunters harvest antlered bucks. In the four-day season this year, hunters in those 21 counties harvested a total of 1,294 deer with 92% of them being female deer (1,191) and the rest buck fawns.

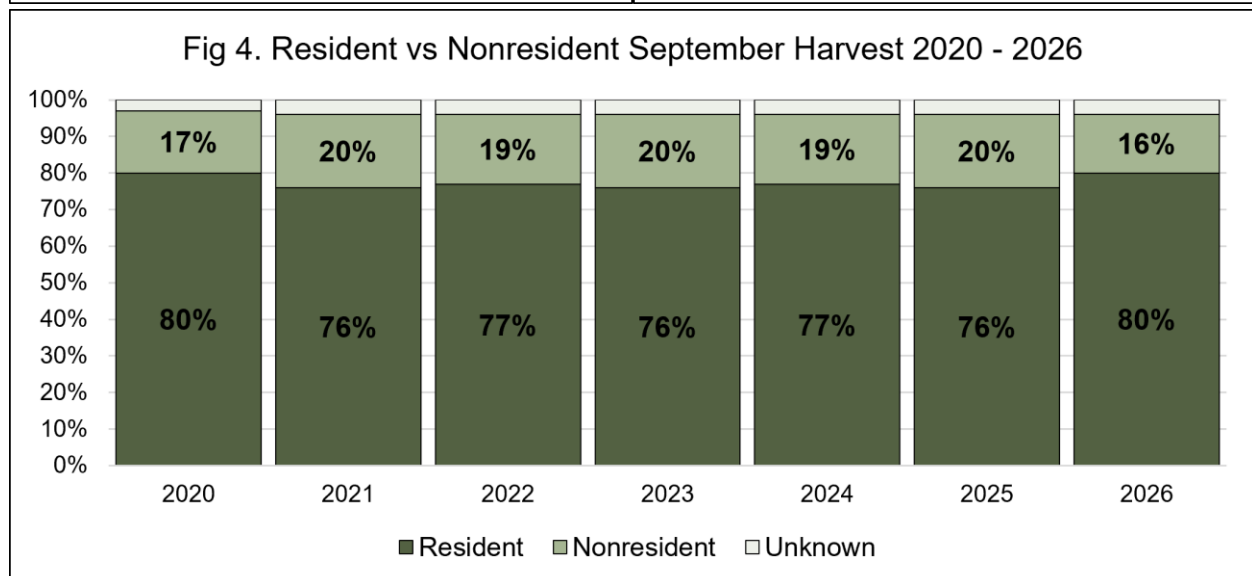
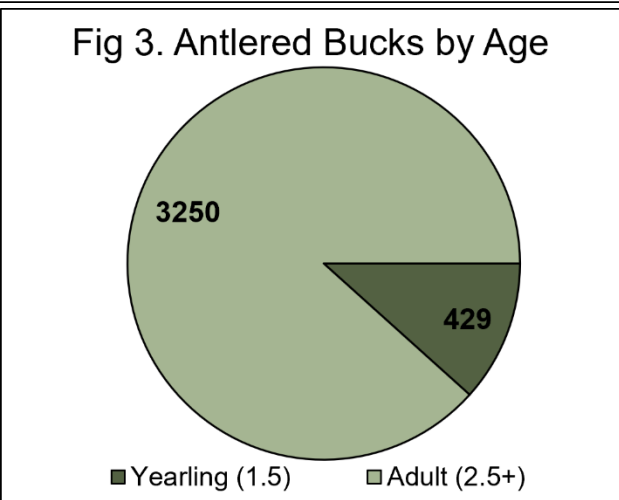
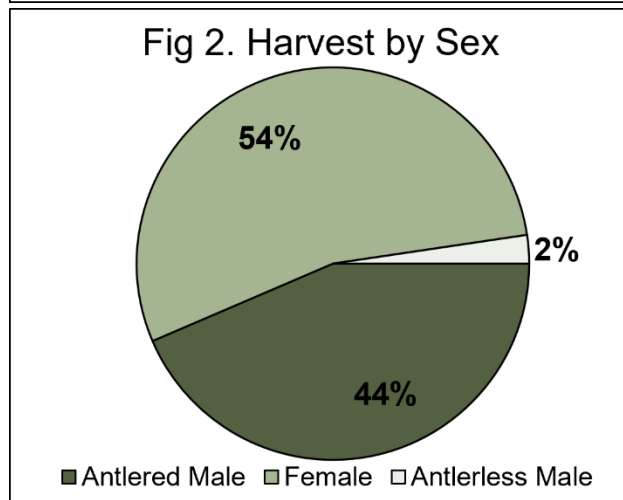
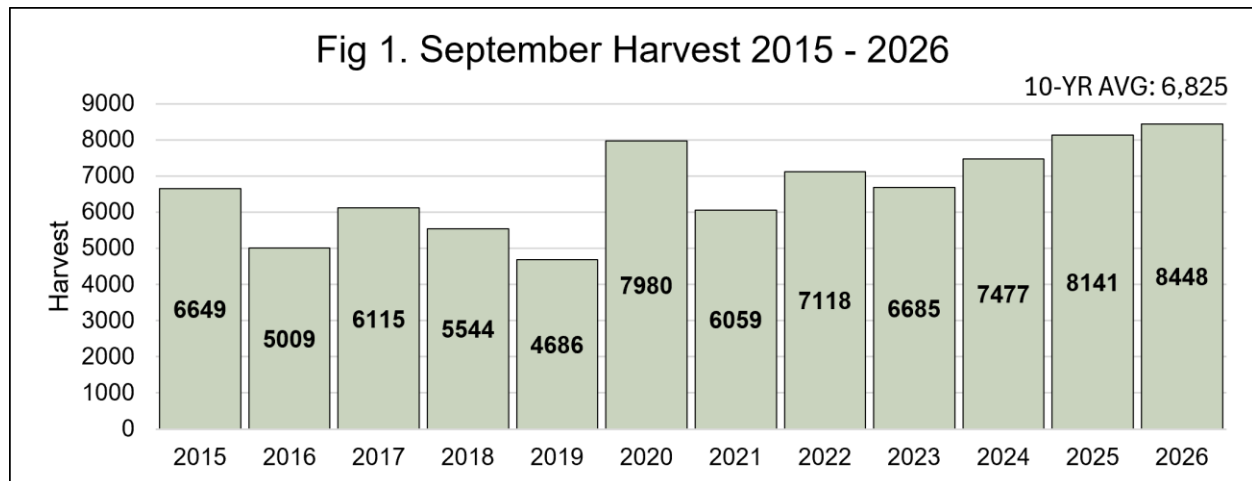
Four of the 21 counties participating in this season harvested over 100 deer (Breckinridge, Hardin, Graves, and Pulaski), with Breckinridge County harvesting as many deer as the entire Henderson-Union-Webster region (164; Table 1). Over 1,000 samples were tested for CWD with compliance rates ranging from 75% to 91% in different areas of the state.

Antlerless Harvest Goals

Deer managers across an increasing amount of the whitetail's range are calling on hunters, as the managers of the species, to harvest more antlerless deer in an effort to balance deer populations that have exceeded, reached, or are on the cusp of reaching, biologic and social carrying capacity. However, deer managers seldom tell hunters how many antlerless deer can and should be harvested to create a healthier, more robust, quality deer herd. Beginning in the 2025-2026 season, the KDFWR introduced antlerless harvest goals for all Zone 1 and 2 counties, where deer populations are at or approaching overabundance. The primary goal of this was to reduce population where applicable (e.g., Zone 1 counties) and maintain others where deer are at more appropriate levels (e.g., Zone 2). Only one county, Simpson, met the goal that the KDFWR set for it during the 2025-2026 season.

To maintain a deer population at the current level, hunters must harvest approximately 20% of the standing crop of females. To reduce a population to a more balanced level, hunters need to harvest >30% of the standing crop of females. In Kentucky, we generally harvest about 15% of the female standing crop in Zone 1 and 2 counties, which is insufficient in adequately managing

the population. Goals for each county are established by shooting to harvest 30% of the estimated adult standing crop of female deer. County progress through September is found in Figure 6 and Table 4 below.



County	Harvest	County	Harvest	County	Harvest
Ballard	12	Breckinridge	164	Casey	45
Calloway	73	Hardin	140	Laurel	88
Carlisle	20	Meade	58	Lincoln	78
Fulton	14	Subtotal	362	Pulaski	109
Graves	101			Rockcastle	55
Hickman	26	Henderson	40	Russell	33
Marshall	60	Union	37	Wayne	34
McCracken	20	Webster	87	Subtotal	442
Subtotal	326	Subtotal	164	Grand Total	1294

Table 1. County harvest during the four-day 2026 Special CWD Antlerless Season September 25-28.

Public Area	Harvest	Public Area	Harvest
Daniel Boone National Forest	79	Rough River Lake WMA	6
Fort Knox Military Reservation	33	Grayson Lake WMA	6
Yellowbank WMA	31	Griffith Woods WMA	6
Big Rivers WMA & State Forest	29	Boone Forestlands WMA	5
Green River Lake WMA	28	Lloyd WMA	5
Lake Cumberland WMA	25	Continental Hunting Access Area	5
Land Between The Lakes NRA	25	Livingston County WMA and SNA	5
Taylorsville Lake WMA	24	Clarks River NWR	5
Peabody WMA	22	Boatwright WMA	4
Higginson-Henry WMA	22	Ballard WMA	4
Wendell H. Ford RTC	19	Asher Hunting Access Area	4
Sloughs WMA	12	Kaler Bottoms WMA	4
Barren River Lake WMA	11	Rolling Fork WMA	4
Clay WMA	10	Yatesville Lake WMA	4
Pennyriple State Forest	7	Kentucky Lake WMA	4
Ping-Sinking Valley WMA	7	Legacy LLC WMA	4
<i>*all other areas <4 deer reported harvested</i>			

Table 2. Harvest by public hunting area, September 2026

Breckinridge	254	Wayne	103	Butler	76	Jefferson	63	Campbell	46	Woodford	26
Hardin	243	Greenup	102	Boyd	76	Henry	62	Martin	44	Simpson	26
Pike	219	Harrison	100	Lawrence	76	Mason	62	Rowan	44	Boyle	25
Pulaski	214	Hart	100	Franklin	74	Perry	62	Larue	43	Trimble	25
Laurel	190	Hopkins	99	Metcalfe	73	Mercer	60	Knott	43	Carlisle	24
Washington	158	Carter	99	Ohio	72	Henderson	60	Todd	42	Montgomery	23
Graves	142	Rockcastle	98	Lewis	72	Owen	57	Garrard	41	McLean	22
Anderson	136	Bullitt	96	Crittenden	71	Lyon	54	Bell	39	Wolfe	22
Pendleton	131	Spencer	96	Trigg	71	Clinton	54	Monroe	38	Carroll	21
Webster	128	Green	96	Floyd	69	Letcher	54	Leslie	38	Ballard	21
Muhlenberg	127	Taylor	94	Fleming	68	Cumberland	53	Powell	38	Fayette	20
Adair	125	Grayson	93	Scott	67	Oldham	52	Bath	37	Clark	19
Nelson	120	Casey	89	Russell	67	Barren	52	Caldwell	35	Gallatin	19
Shelby	120	Grant	87	Clay	66	Madison	51	Jessamine	34	Hancock	19
Lincoln	119	Marshall	87	Boone	65	Livingston	51	Nicholas	34	Harlan	18
Calloway	115	Bracken	86	Union	65	Robertson	50	Breathitt	34	Daviess	17
Christian	113	Marion	80	Warren	65	McCreary	50	McCracken	33	Owsley	15
Jackson	112	Allen	80	Magoffin	65	Elliott	48	Edmonson	32	Menifee	14
Whitley	107	Morgan	78	Kenton	64	Knox	48	Lee	31	Fulton	14
Meade	106	Johnson	77	Logan	64	Estill	47	Hickman	29	Bourbon	8

Table 3. Total Harvest by County, September 2026. Blue = Bluegrass Region, Green = Green River, Orange = Purchase, Yellow = Northeast, Purple = Southeast.

Fig 5. September Harvest by County 2026



Harvest

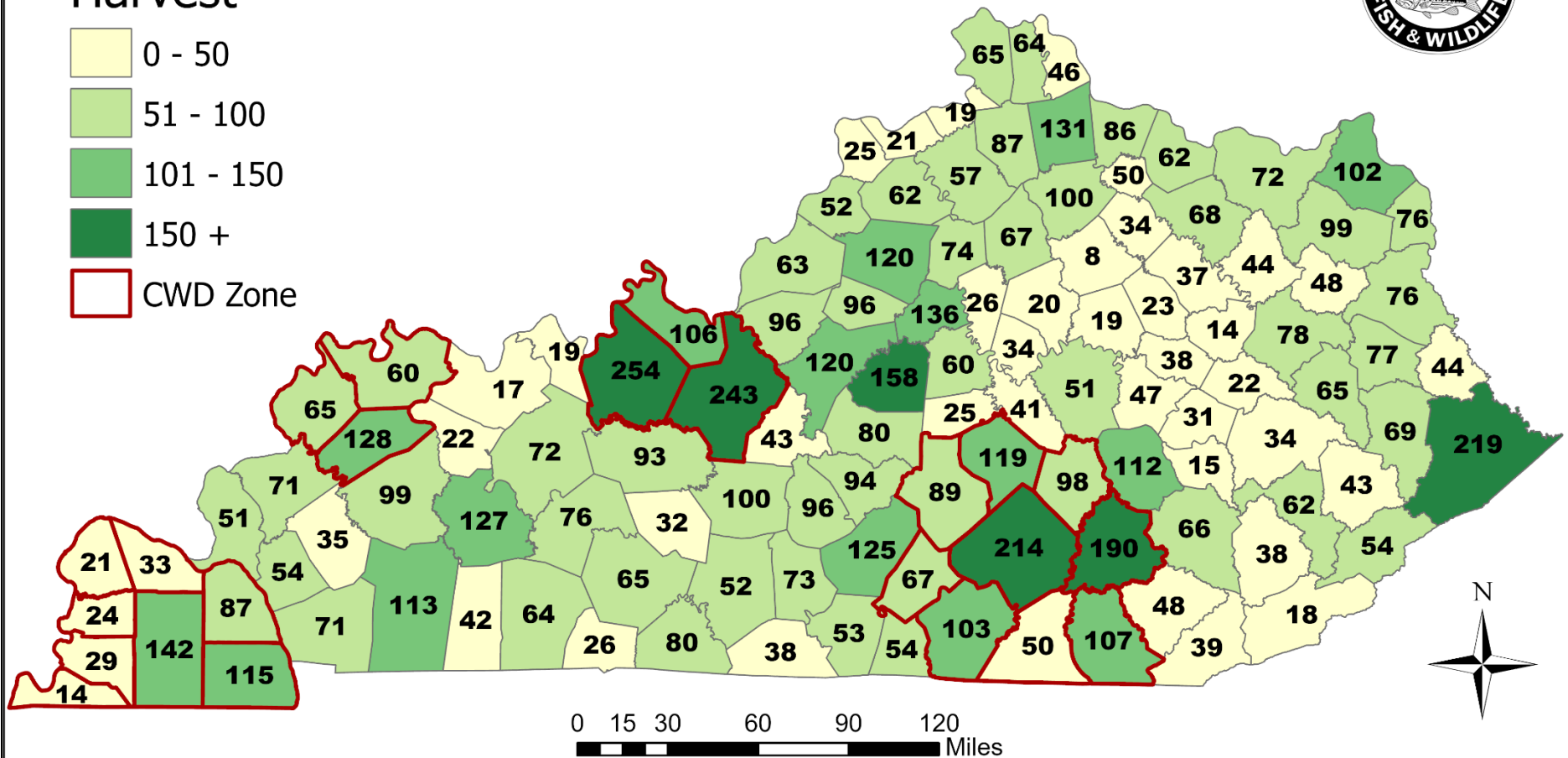
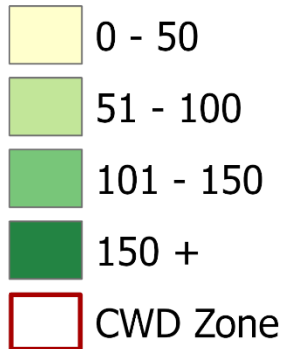


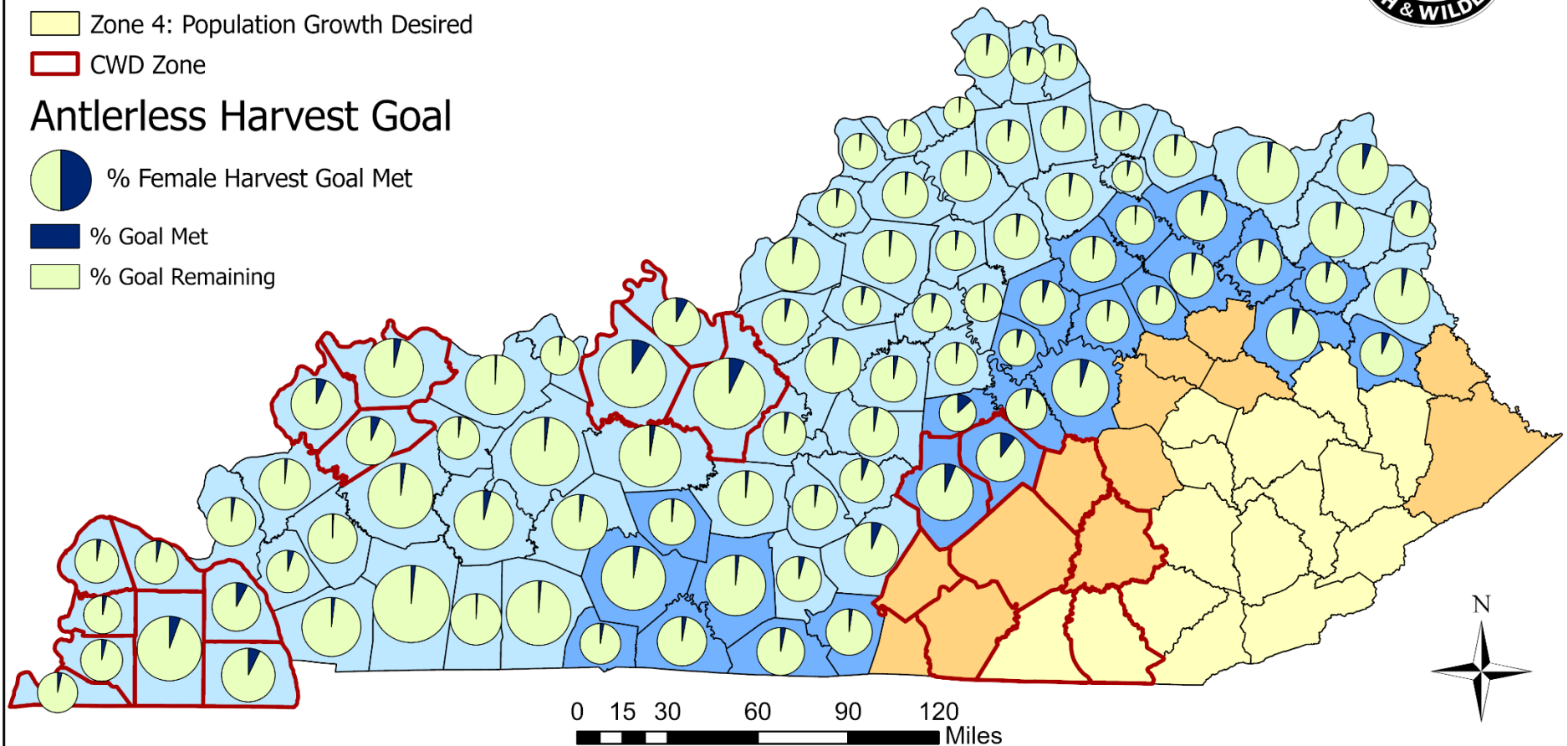
Fig 6. Female Harvest Goal Progress through September

Zones

- Zone 1: Population Reduction Desired
- Zone 2: Population Maintenance Desired
- Zone 3: Conservative Growth Desired
- Zone 4: Population Growth Desired
- CWD Zone

Antlerless Harvest Goal

- % Female Harvest Goal Met
- % Goal Met
- % Goal Remaining



Zone	County	Total Female Harvest Goal	Female Harvest	% Goal Met	Zone	County	Total Female Harvest Goal	Female Harvest	% Goal Met	Zone	County	Total Female Harvest Goal	Female Harvest	% Goal Met	Zone	County	Total Female Harvest Goal	Female Harvest	% Goal Met
1	Adair	1094	67	6%	1	Grayson	1741	47	3%	1	Mason	902	20	2%	2	Barren	994	19	2%
1	Anderson	1862	62	3%	1	Green	1410	34	2%	1	Meade	990	77	8%	2	Bath	576	16	3%
1	Ballard	554	17	3%	1	Greenup	1030	56	5%	1	Mercer	969	21	2%	2	Bourbon	219	4	2%
1	Boone	1746	47	3%	1	Hancock	575	12	2%	1	Metcalfe	1012	43	4%	2	Boyle	77	10	13%
1	Boyd	857	38	4%	1	Hardin	2507	176	7%	1	Muhlenberg	1626	67	4%	2	Casey	854	53	6%
1	Bracken	1759	36	2%	1	Harrison	1560	38	2%	1	Nelson	2185	68	3%	2	Clark	354	7	2%
1	Breckinridge	2124	183	9%	1	Hart	1897	34	2%	1	Ohio	1907	39	2%	2	Cumberland	721	17	2%
1	Bullitt	1469	56	4%	1	Henderson	1223	48	4%	1	Oldham	1061	26	2%	2	Edmonson	372	6	2%
1	Butler	1056	26	2%	1	Henry	1917	38	2%	1	Owen	3170	38	1%	2	Elliott	460	15	3%
1	Caldwell	1391	10	1%	1	Hickman	619	24	4%	1	Pendleton	2782	68	2%	2	Fayette	193	9	5%
1	Calloway	1365	98	7%	1	Hopkins	2027	50	2%	1	Robertson	726	24	3%	2	Fleming	718	30	4%
1	Campbell	1149	24	2%	1	Jefferson	1135	33	3%	1	Scott	1279	33	3%	2	Garrard	357	15	4%
1	Carlisle	568	19	3%	1	Kenton	910	34	4%	1	Shelby	2687	45	2%	2	Jessamine	369	15	4%
1	Carroll	833	14	2%	1	Larue	812	25	3%	1	Spencer	1747	59	3%	2	Johnson	599	37	6%
1	Carter	1389	36	3%	1	Lawrence	1421	44	3%	1	Taylor	905	48	5%	2	Lincoln	888	90	10%
1	Christian	2451	44	2%	1	Lewis	1020	25	2%	1	Todd	1220	13	1%	2	Madison	600	29	5%
1	Crittenden	2624	44	2%	1	Livingston	1466	37	3%	1	Trigg	1411	28	2%	2	Monroe	772	26	3%
1	Daviess	770	7	1%	1	Logan	1360	19	1%	1	Trimble	814	15	2%	2	Montgomery	322	9	3%
1	Franklin	1491	37	2%	1	Lyon	629	30	5%	1	Union	838	54	6%	2	Morgan	783	34	4%
1	Fulton	407	14	3%	1	McCracken	669	23	3%	1	Washington	2111	66	3%	2	Nicholas	668	9	1%
1	Gallatin	767	9	1%	1	McLean	868	19	2%	1	Webster	1768	110	6%	2	Rowan	489	16	3%
1	Grant	1947	51	3%	1	Marion	1256	36	3%	1	Woodford	668	13	2%	2	Simpson	364	10	3%
1	Graves	2301	128	6%	1	Marshall	894	69	8%	2	Allen	1080	31	3%	2	Warren	916	28	3%

Table 4. 2026-2027 Antlerless Harvest Goals and Progress Through September 2026.