

ALTERNATIVE DEER

MANAGEMENT PLAN

FOR

GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS

**12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 16A, 45A, 45B, 45C, and White-tailed Deer
Units**

Arizona Game and Fish Department

April 4, 2006

INTRODUCTION

In 1995, the Arizona Game and Fish Department developed their *Wildlife 2000* Strategic Plan. Through this document, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission directed the Department to manage Game Management Units 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 36B, 45A, 45B, and 45C for ". . . buck hunting opportunities that emphasize harvest of older age class animals, reduced hunter densities, and higher hunt success." This management emphasis was reaffirmed in January 2001 with the approval and adoption of the *Wildlife 2006* Strategic Plan. The units managed under this philosophy have changed over time based on subsequent Commission direction, and this document addresses alternative deer management in Units 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 16A, 45A, 45B, 45C, and white-tailed deer units.

This operational plan describes how the Department will meet these objectives. In addition, objectives for the Unit 16A late juniors-only muzzleloader and late white-tailed deer hunts are included since they come under the direction of alternative deer management. This plan will be reviewed and revised, if needed, when the Strategic Plan is updated. Annual edits have been made since 1996 to reflect Commission actions.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

1. Manage for a harvest consisting of mature bucks (3+ years old) in the following percentages:

45-65% in 45A, 45B, and 45C
55-75% in 12A and 12B
65-80% in 13A and 13B

In addition, manage for a harvest consisting of older mature bucks (5+ years old) in the following percentages:

20-30% in 12A and 12B
45-55% in 13A and 13B

2. Manage for a ratio of at least 20 bucks per 100 does during the post-hunt surveys for 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 45A, 45B, and 45C.
3. Offer 5-10% of the white-tailed deer hunting opportunity in the late season structure.
4. Offer 5% of the deer hunt opportunity in Unit 16A during a late juniors-only muzzleloader season.
5. Manage for a hunt success of:

40-50% in 16A (juniors-only muzzleloader deer)
20-30% in 45A, 45B, and 45C

50-70% in 12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B
40-50% for late white-tailed deer hunts

6. Manage for an average hunter density not to exceed 0.5 hunters per square mile during the General Seasons in 13A, 13B, 45A, 45B, and 45C, and during the late General Season in 12A and 12B.
7. Evaluate permit adjustments in Unit 12A when fawn:doe ratios are less than 60:100.
8. Manage deer populations to avoid adverse impacts to the habitat.

MONITORING

To meet Objective 1: Use hunter check stations (Units 12A), field checks of hunters during the hunts (all units), and collection of incisors from harvested deer (Units 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B, 45A, 45B, and 45C) to provide age structure and other biological data.

To meet Objective 2: Conduct standard post-hunt surveys in accordance with Species Management Guidelines.

To meet Objectives 3 and 4: Allocate the necessary permits to the late white-tailed deer hunts for all white-tailed deer hunt units and to the late season juniors-only muzzleloader for Unit 16A during the annual hunt recommendation process with the Regions.

To meet Objectives 5 and 6: Use the hunter questionnaire program to estimate hunt success and hunter density.

To meet Objective 7: Conduct standard post-hunt surveys in accordance with Species Management Guidelines.

To meet Objective 8: Forage use by ungulates will be monitored, where appropriate, to assess the population level in relation to the carrying capacity of the habitat. Monitoring will be conducted as follows:

1. In 12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B, establish browse transects in key winter range areas. Monitor browse use of current year's growth in early March. If browse use exceeds 50%, coordinate with the responsible land management agency to determine: (a) if overall use is acceptable to maintain browse health; (b) whether excess use is attributed to wildlife, livestock, or both; and (c) whether deer population reduction is needed.
2. In 12A, use yearling buck weights as a measure of summer range conditions. If yearling buck weights average less than 90 pounds, coordinate with the U.S. Forest Service to assess if summer grazing is excessive and whether deer and livestock numbers should be evaluated.

HUNT STRUCTURE

12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B

Archery: An archery season may be offered each year. The early any antlered deer season would occur in Units 12A, 12B, and 13A.

Juniors-only and Muzzleloader: A muzzleloader season may be offered each year in either Unit 12AE or 12B. Due to public input no juniors-only antlered deer seasons will be offered in a unit north of the Colorado River. A juniors-only antlerless season for 12A West will be offered if there is a recommendation for antlerless permit-tags.

General Season: Offer both an early and late general season in 12A and 12B. The early hunts will be used to maintain population objectives and buck:doe ratios. The late hunts will be used to provide a high quality hunt experience. In Units 13A and 13B, current low deer populations do not require an early hunt to manage overall population levels. The single general season is intended to meet the late hunt quality hunt objectives.

To address land management agency concerns about road damage, reduce human safety concerns from potential hazardous storms, and limit disturbance of deer herds on winter range, the late hunts will occur in late November.

16A

Juniors-only Muzzleloader: In addition to the regular deer season structure in Unit 16A, an October juniors-only general season and a late juniors-only muzzleloader deer season will be offered with ≤5% of permits for the unit allocated to these hunts. The early hunt will provide a specific opportunity for juniors. The late hunt will provide a limited opportunity for juniors using primitive weapons to have better observation rates of bucks and increased hunt quality and success.

45A, 45B, and 45C

Archery: An archery hunt will be held starting January 1, after bighorn sheep and juniors-only hunts are complete.

Juniors-only: A juniors-only hunt may be considered with a limited number of permits. This hunt should be timed to minimize conflicts with bighorn sheep hunters.

General Season: A single general firearms hunt should be held in early November. October weather is generally too warm and a late November or December hunt would conflict with bighorn sheep transplants and hunts. Multiple (stratified) general firearms hunts should not be considered, as they would conflict with the Refuge management objectives.

White-tailed Deer Units

Late White-tailed Deer Hunts: In addition to early season hunts, a late white-tailed deer hunt season will be offered in all white-tailed deer units during which 5-10% of the white-tailed deer hunting opportunity will occur. This season structure will provide limited opportunity for hunters to have better observation rates of bucks and increased hunt quality and success, and at the same time shift and increase overall whitetail deer hunt opportunity during the early whitetail deer seasons.

ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

12A, 12B, 13A, and 13B

Early General Season, Juniors-only, and Muzzleloader: A decrease in permits is indicated when buck:doe ratios are below 20:100 and an increase in permits is indicated when buck:doe ratios exceed 30:100.

Late General Season: A decrease in permits is indicated when less than 45% of the late season harvest is 3+ years old and hunt success is less than 50%. An increase in permits is indicated when more than 65% of the late season harvest is 3+ years old and hunt success exceeds 70%.

Antlerless: Antlerless hunts should be considered when browse use on winter range by deer has exceeded 50% before mid-March. In Unit 12A, antlerless hunts may be considered if yearling buck weights drop below an average of 90 pounds.

16A

Late Juniors-Only Muzzleloader: Limit permits to no more than 5% of the available general deer hunt opportunity in 16A and manage for hunt success of 40-50%.

45A, 45B, and 45C

General Season: A decrease in permits is indicated when buck:doe ratios are below 25:100, when less than 45% of harvested bucks are 3+ years old, and/or when hunt success is less than 20%. An increase in permits is indicated when buck:doe ratios exceed 35:100, when more than 65% of the harvested bucks are 3+ years old, and/or when hunt success exceeds 30%. Coordinate harvest strategies with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

White-tailed Deer Units

Late White-tailed Deer Hunts: Limit permits to 5-10% of the available general deer hunt opportunity in a unit and manage for hunt success for 40-50%.