

1. Current population trend or estimate - and proximity to management objectives:

Currently we estimate the pre-fawning population at about 670,000. The trend is variable between deer herds, some are going up, some stable, and some down. Based on the management objectives in the herd plans drafted in the early 1980's, very few herds are close to their population objective. We are currently redrafting the management objectives of our deer herds to more closely reflect the realities within California.

2. 1992 Hunting season statistics:

Harvest

Type/length of season:

Highly variable. Earliest season was an archery season that opened in early July (July 11), and the latest was an additional special hunt that closed the end of January, 1993 (January 31).

of hunters afield:
191,000

of hunter days: % success:
approx. 1,500,000 13%(reported),22%(estimated take)

Harvest:

The reported harvest was 28,891 (39,000 estimated) antlered deer and 1,168 (1,600 estimated) antlerless deer.

3. Method used to estimate harvest:

We determine reported kill through mandatory tag return for successful hunters. Our estimated harvest is based on the estimates non-reporting rate of successful hunters. This is determined through a survey of game processing facilities (meat lockers, butchers etc.).

4. Do you limit hunters to one season (rifle, archery or muzzleloader)?

No. Hunters are allowed a maximum of 2 deer tags, which may be almost any combination of a general method tag (permitting the use of rifles, muzzleloaders, and archery equipment), additional hunt tags (available in archery only, muzzleloader only, and general methods depending on the specific hunt), or an archery only tag. The only restriction is that hunters may not acquire more than 1 X zone tag in any 1 year.

5. Do your deer seasons extend into the breeding season? If so, how far?

In general, no. There are a few limited entry public hunts and some Private Lands Management areas that do hunt into the rut.

6. How many deer can a hunter legally take per year?

A maximum of 2.

7. Do you use antler-point restriction regulations? If so, what is the purpose of this regulation and is the objective being met? How do you assess hunter compliance - illegal kill?

Yes. The existing forked horn or better law (made spike bucks illegal to kill in California) was passed in 1919 to protect a pool of bucks to do the breeding. The only assessment of compliance is based on the number of citations written for illegally taken spike bucks. To date, few citations are written for killing spike bucks. This law is biologically inappropriate and we will attempt to repeal it.

8. Do you have regulations to limit or distribute hunters? What type of regulations and are they working?

Yes. the state is divided into 44 zones and a similar number of "additional hunt opportunities". For each zone a limited number of deer tags are available, and hunters are allowed to hunt only the zone for which the tag was issued. The regulations have been effective at limiting and distributing hunters. Some hunters find the system unfair, confusing, and intimidating, and may have prompted some to give up deer hunting altogether.

9. Do you use access (road) management to regulate hunter distribution? What is the hunting public's reaction? Who is responsible for enforcement of closures etc.?

Yes, to a limited degree. The public's reaction is mixed. Some like the reduced number of hunters generally found in these access restricted areas, others feel it discriminates against those who are not as mobile or physically fit. In most cases the responsibility is shared between the landowner (usually private or federal) and the Department.

10. Do you use a system such as "preference points" to distribute the opportunity to draw big game permits? If yes, what has been your experience with such a system?

No, we use a pure lottery system (one random number per person with equal odds for all that enter).

11. In what ways do you believe hunting impacts your deer populations (ie. compensatory/additive mortality, total population size, genetics, behaviour, etc.)? What data do you have to support this?

California's largely buck-only hunting appears to have no effect on the size of deer populations. Hunting significantly reduces the buck segment of the population (up to 75% of the bucks are killed annually). It is believed that most of the herds in California are habitat (forage mostly) limited, as evidenced by low fawn recruitment and fair to poor body condition. It is also believed that hunting mortality is compensated by both reduced mortality and increased recruitment where habitat conditions permit. The evidence for this comes from numerous cases where a local population was significantly reduced in size, and was followed by significant increases in fawn recruitment and improved body condition.

12. What do you feel are the major factor(s) limiting the deer populations, and what evidence is this based on?

Habitat conditions (forage quality and quantity) and the factors that affect it (decadent vegetation, drought, over-grazing, development, etc.) are believed to be the primary limiting factor for most of the deer herds. Severe winters, predation and disease are also believed to be important factors for some herds. Poor body condition and fawn survival are common consequences of poor habitat condition. Research on the North Kings and Round Valley deer herds indicate that predation by mountain lions can be substantial. Large blue tongue die-offs occur periodically.

13. Do you make any attempts to model deer populations? If so, please describe the model. Identify any problems.

Herd composition and buck harvest data are collected and used with CIR and population reconstruction (KILLVARY) models to estimate abundance and follow trends. We are currently planning to adopt POP II where appropriate. The most important problem for some herds is lack of sufficient data and the cost of acquiring it.

14. What is your state or province's approach to manipulating habitat to benefit deer?

We provide funds and are active cooperators in deer management. Success has been varied in these efforts.

15. Primary deer research efforts underway at this time (please list):

1) Testing habitat capability models used by federal agencies. 2) Livestock-deer interactions. 3) Population assessment methodology. 4) ORV-deer interactions. 5) Physiological response to wildfire. 6) Methodology for evaluating physiological condition in the field. 7) Developing new population models that are less data intensive and more robust than models currently in use.