To: Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR)
Re: Proposed Black Bear Management Rule – Extension of the Late Bear Hunting Season

Dear Members of the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules:

I am writing to express concern regarding the proposed extension of Vermont's late black bear hunting season through the end of the December muzzleloader deer season (approximately mid-December). After reviewing the records produced by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department in response to my public records request (Appendix A), I am concerned that the Department has not provided its reason for substantially expanding its original recommendation for the season extension. I am also concerned that the proposed extension raises questions about whether the requirements and intent of 10 V.S.A. § 4082(a) have been adequately addressed.

In a brief PowerPoint presentation titled *BGT Meeting: Black Bear Project*, dated September 17, 2025, a bear hunting season extension is discussed. The slide states:

"Purpose: Increase harvest to reduce population within objective

- Extend the Late Season to run through Deer Rifle Season
    - Add 7 days - include 1 additional weekend and Thanksgiving.
    - Recent survey results indicate most bear hunters are opportunistic.
    - Males will likely be most vulnerable.
    - Climate change and valley hunting may make this more influential than in the past.
    - Is this enough? Should we go longer…muzzleloader, earlier?" (Appendix B, p. 27).

On February 18, 2026, the Department presented its proposed changes to the bear management rule to the Fish and Wildlife Board and recommended extending the late bear hunting season by seven days, adding one weekend and Thanksgiving. (Appendix B, p. 10, 126). The September 2025 presentation indicates that the Department had considered whether a longer extension might be warranted. And importantly, its February 2026 recommendation was limited to seven additional days. The stated goal of the extension was to "increase opportunity to address population trend," and the Department cited results from two hunter surveys. (Appendix B, p. 10). Its written recommendation included an analysis of harvest data, hunter participation, and the anticipated effects of the proposed extension. The Department acknowledged that natural food availability and the onset of

winter affect bear vulnerability to harvest and anticipated that the seven-day extension would result in a conservative increase in harvest. (Appendix B, p. 125–147).

On April 1, 2026, Bert Saldi and Kevin Lawrence, former Fish and Wildlife Board Chair submitted a petition requesting, among other changes, that the bear hunting season be extended through the second Sunday in December. The petition provided no supporting analysis or explanation for why an extension through mid-December was necessary. The explanation for the request was simply, "All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board[,] go into [e]ffect the 2027 Season. I believe there's no reason this can't happen….." (Appendix B, p. 151).

On May 20, 2026, the Department reversed course and subsequently recommended extending the late season through the end of the December muzzleloader deer season. The records I received do not explain why the Department's original recommendation of a seven-day extension was no longer sufficient or why a substantially longer extension was necessary. (Appendix B, p. 263).

In response to my request for "[a]ll records pertaining to the decision to change the recommendation for the extension of the bear hunting season from one week to one month," the Department produced a set of records that mostly included Fish and Wildlife Board meeting minutes. Although these records contain the Department's original recommendation, the petition, and the Department's subsequent response, they do not demonstrate why the Department changed its recommendation from a seven-day extension to a season extending into mid-December.

The Department's stated rationale for the extension is that it would provide additional hunting opportunity and a conservative increase in bear harvest. However, these same benefits were also anticipated under the original seven-day extension. A rule may be arbitrary if the agency fails to provide a reasoned basis for choosing one alternative over another when both serve the same stated purpose. The Department has provided no evidence in the records produced to explain why the original seven-day extension was insufficient, what evidence supported extending the season by several additional weeks, or what analysis informed the decision to adopt a substantially longer season than the Department initially recommended.

This lack of explanation is particularly concerning in light of 10 V.S.A. § 4082(a), which governs the adoption of Vermont Fish and Wildlife Regulations. The

statute provides that the Board's rules "shall be designed to maintain the best health, population, and utilization levels of the regulated species and of other necessary or desirable species that are ecologically related to the regulated species." It further requires that the rules "shall be supported by investigation and research conducted by the Department on behalf of the Board." Although hunting opportunity and harvest levels may be relevant management considerations, the proposed extension should be supported by investigation and research sufficient to explain why the particular season length is appropriate in light of the statutory requirements.

I recognize that the Department may have legitimate reasons to pursue changes to bear hunting regulations. My concern is that the records provided do not demonstrate a reasoned basis for the specific change in season length. A petition by two hunters requesting a particular outcome is not, by itself, an explanation of why that outcome is warranted.

As LCAR reviews the proposed rule, I respectfully ask the Committee to object to the extended bear hunting season as arbitrary on the basis that the record provided does not demonstrate a reasoned basis for the extension and object on the basis that the record does establish how the proposed season length aligns with the requirements and intent of 10 V.S.A. § 4082(a).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Vanessa Kranz

Bethel, Vermont

Appendix A

Gmail V <nessa.kranz@gmail.com>

September 19, 2026 Records Request

Vanessa Kranz <nessa.kranz@gmail.com> Wed, Oct 7, 2026 at 6:52 PM
To: Abigail Connolly <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov>

Hi Abigail,
I haven't received these. Can you please provide what you have gathered so far tomorrow morning?

Best,
Vanessa

> On Sep 25, 2026, at 2:46 PM, Connolly, Abigail <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov> wrote:
>
> Good afternoon,
>
> We are in receipt of your records request. We are extending the response date to October 7, 2026, 10 business days after the date of your request, 1 V.S.A. § 318 (b)(5).
>
> Sincerely,
>
> **Abigail Connolly** (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
>
> Department of Fish & Wildlife
>
> 1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
>
> 802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell
> www.vtfishandwildlife.com
>
> *Support Vermont's wildlife with a Habitat Stamp!*
>
> *Written communications to and from state employees regarding state business are considered public records and may be subject to public scrutiny.*
>
> ---
>
> **From:** Vanessa Kranz <nessa.kranz@gmail.com>
> **Sent:** Wednesday, September 23, 2026 4:04 PM
> **To:** Connolly, Abigail <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov>
> **Subject:** Re: September 19, 2026 Records Request
>
> **EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.**

Yes that's correct - apologies for the typo

On Sep 23, 2026, at 3:28 PM, Connolly, Abigail <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov> wrote:

Good afternoon,

Do you mean the extension of the bear hunting season from one week to three weeks? The bear hounding season is not changing with the proposed rule language.

Thank you,

Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner

Department of Fish & Wildlife

1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620

802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

Support Vermont's wildlife with a Habitat Stamp!

Written communications to and from state employees regarding state business are considered public records and may be subject to public scrutiny.

From: Vanessa Kranz <nessa.kranz@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 22, 2026 3:43 PM
To: Connolly, Abigail <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov>
Subject: Re: September 19, 2026 Records Request

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Hi Abigail,

Thanks. All records pertaining to the decision to change the recommendation for the extension of the bear hounding season from one week to one month.

Thank you,

Vanessa

On Sep 22, 2026, at 10:32 AM, Connolly, Abigail <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov> wrote:

Good morning,

I am writing to acknowledge your request and to advise you that you will be charged for any work on your public document request that exceeds 4 hours of staff time.

I am also writing to clarify the scope of your request. Are you requesting all documents related to the bear population that helped staff develop the recommendation to extend the bear season? This would include extensive records including historic harvest records, the population model data, the big game plan, and public surveys. Or are you looking for the materials provided to the Board during the current discussions around the proposed season extension? This would include presentations and materials sent to the Board.

Once we are clear on what documents you are requesting, we will provide you with a cost estimate.

Sincerely,

Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner

Department of Fish & Wildlife

1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620

802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

Support Vermont's wildlife with a Habitat Stamp!

Written communications to and from state employees regarding state business are considered public records and may be subject to public scrutiny.

From: vkranz <nessa.kranz@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, September 19, 2026 8:26 AM
To: Connolly, Abigail <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov>
Subject: September 19, 2026 Records Request

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Hi Abigail,

I would like to make the following records request:

Please provide all records relied on in making the decision to extend the bear hunting season to the last day of deer hunting season.

Please confirm receipt, give an approximate cost, if any, and approximate date the records will be delivered. Thank you!

Best,

Vanessa Kranz

Gmail V <nessa.kranz@gmail.com>

Fish & Wildlife Public Records Request

1 message

abigail.connolly@vermont.gov <abigail.connolly@vermont.gov> Thu, Oct 8, 2026 at 9:57 AM
To: nessa.kranz@gmail.com

One or more files have been sent to you.
Visit the Workspace to retrieve files.
You may be prompted to register an account if authentication is required.
This link will expire on 10/15/2026 1:55:39 PM

Good morning,

Please see the records responsive to your request for “all records pertaining to the decision to change the recommendation for the extension of the bear hounding season from one week to one month.”

Sincerely,
Abigail Connolly

Appendix B

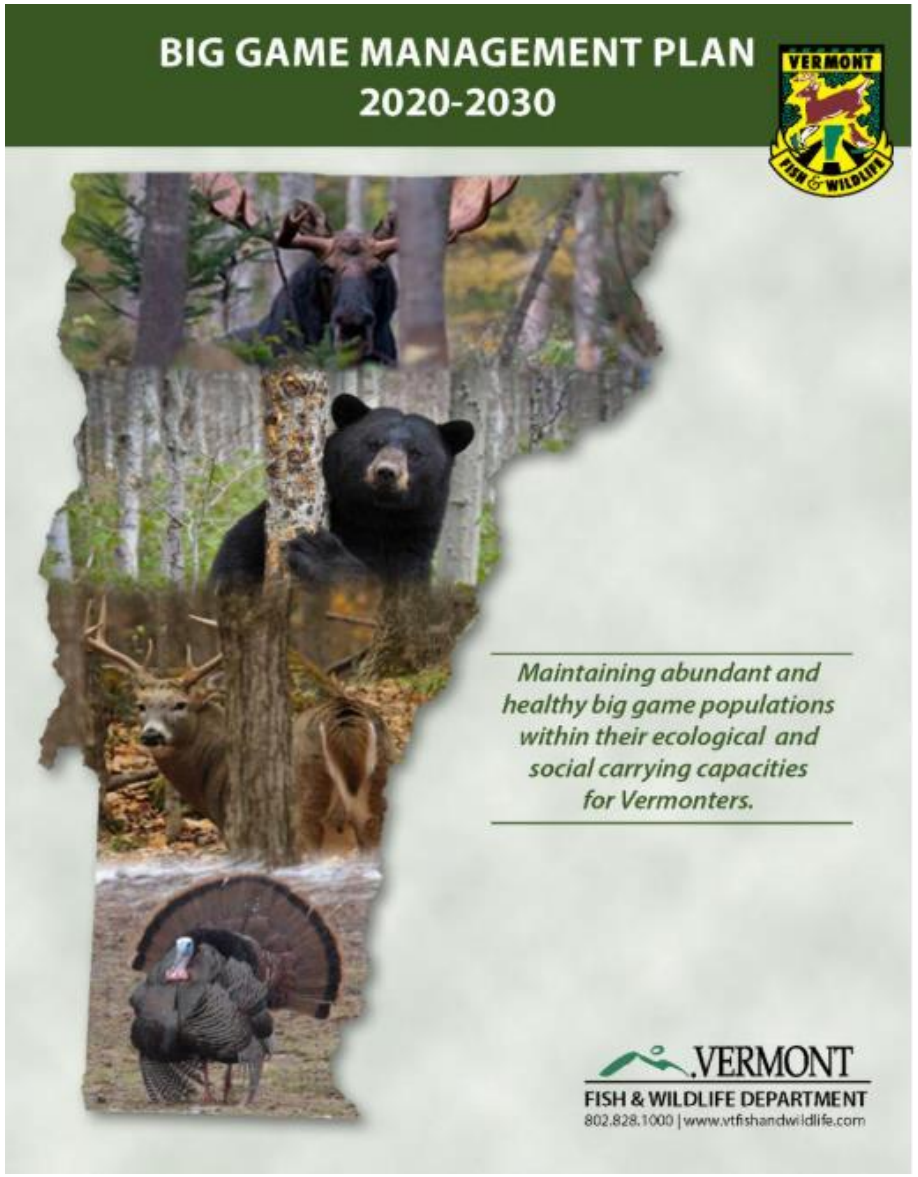


Black Bear Proposed Rule Change Recommendations

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

Jaclyn Comeau

02/18/26

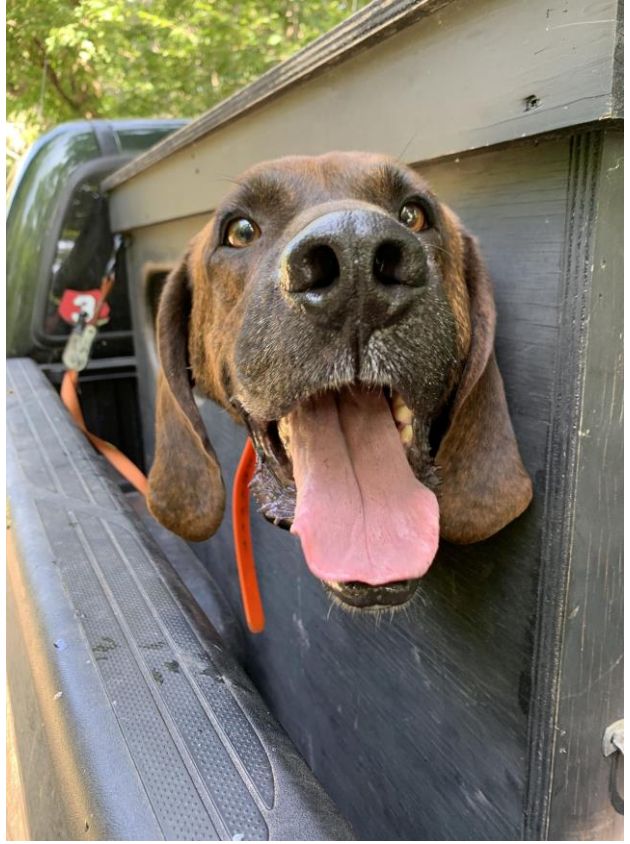


- GOAL: Maintain bear population at ecologically sustainable levels, while minimizing human conflicts.
  - Population objective: 3,500 – 5,500.
  - Use hunting length as primary method.
  - Consider regional management.

- GOAL: Optimize hunting opportunity for the utilization of bears for food and other uses, ensure hunter satisfaction within biologically sustainable regulations, and continue to use hunting to meet black bear population objectives.

- GOAL: Minimize negative interactions occurring between bears and humans to achieve acceptable levels of human safety.









Living With Bears

- Protect/manage bear habitat
- Sustainably manage the number of bears
- Change people behavior
- Try to manage bear behavior



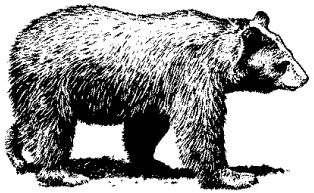


Vermont's Bear Population Model:

Population Reconstruction Model

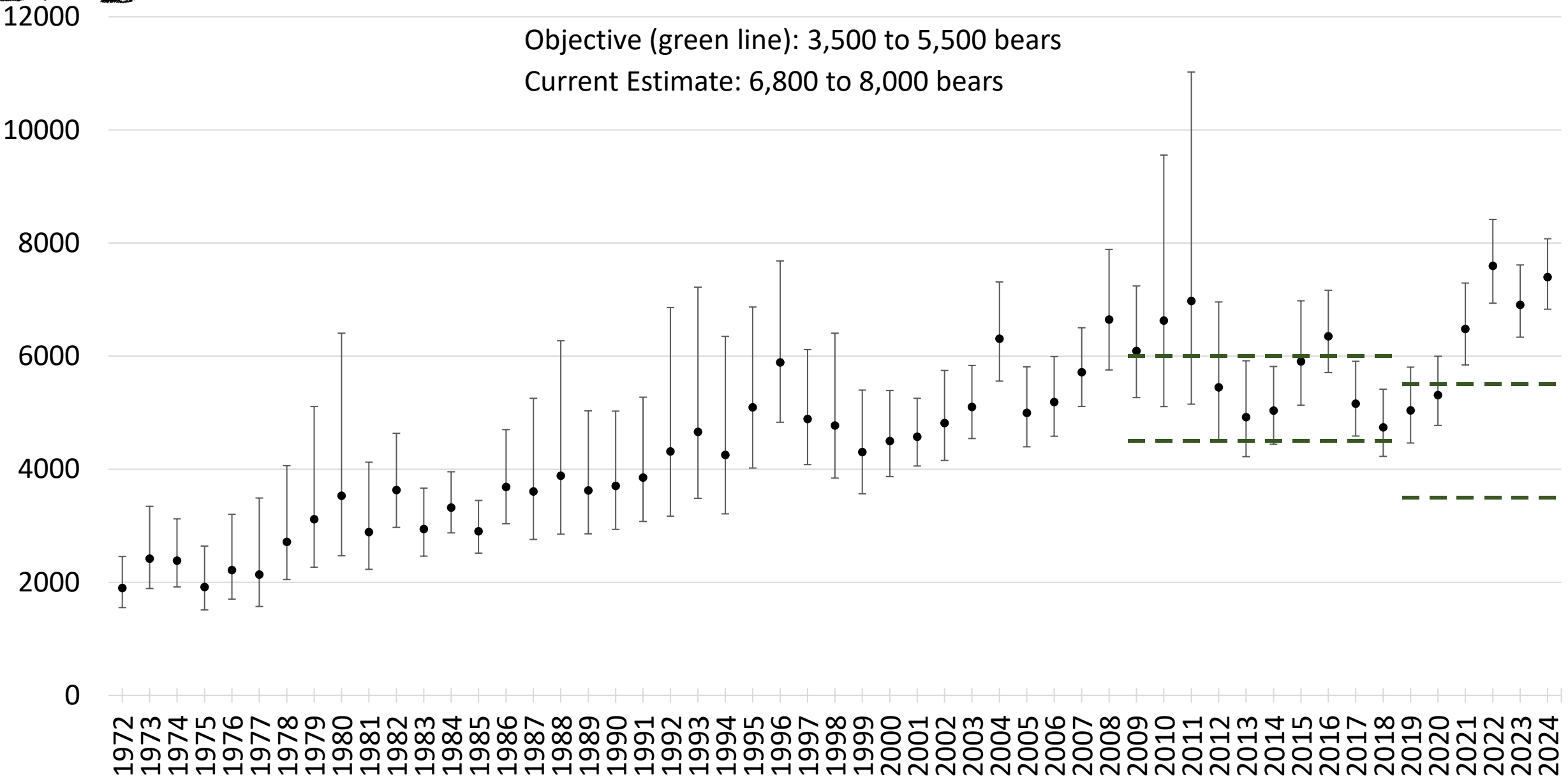
Dead bears are used as a representative sample to estimate Vermont's bear population

1. Hunting Mortality Data
   - Count and age of females
   - Count and age of males
   - Total count
2. Non-Hunting Mortality Data
   - Total count

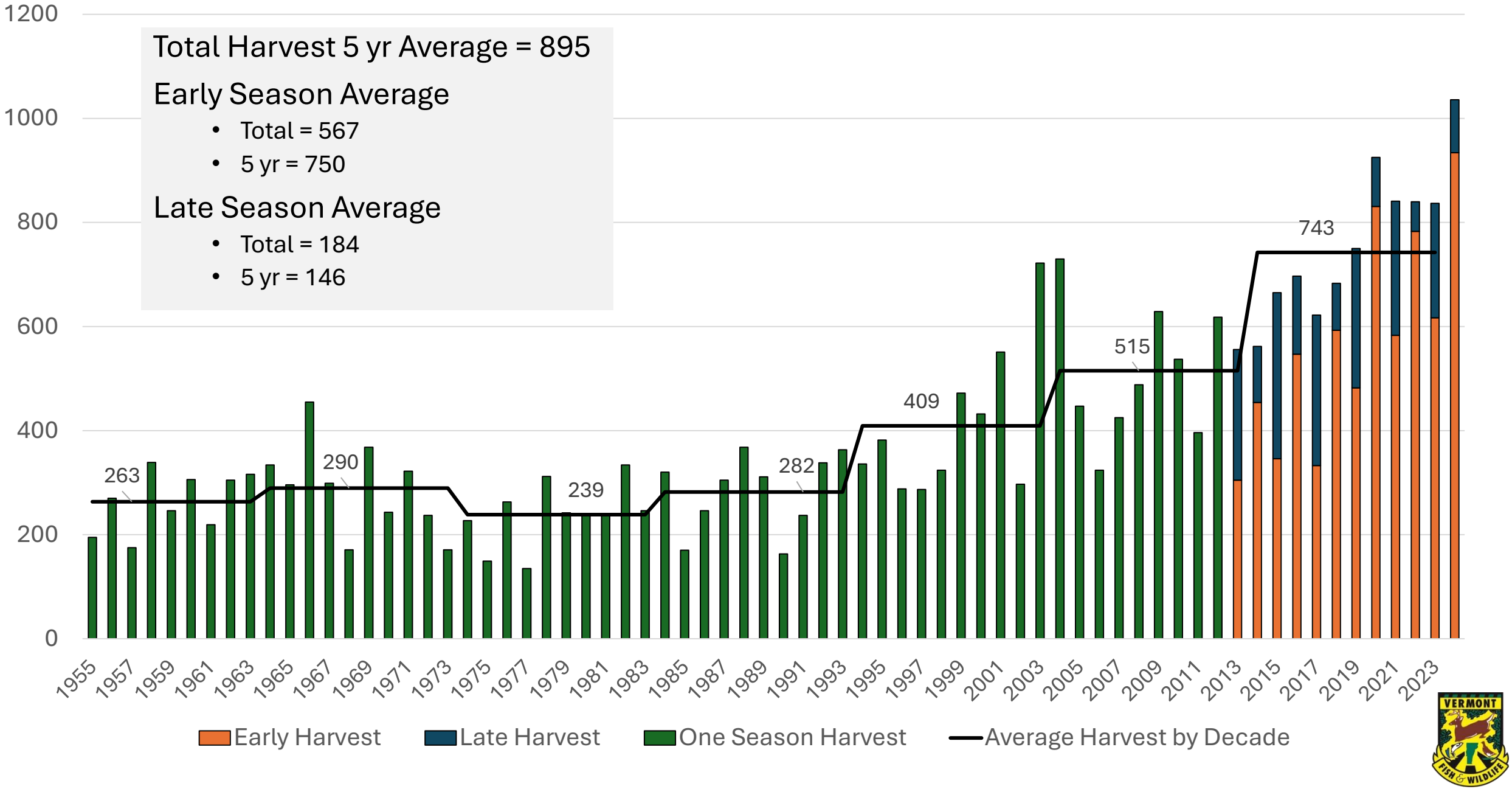


Vermont's Black Bear Population Estimate, 1972-2024

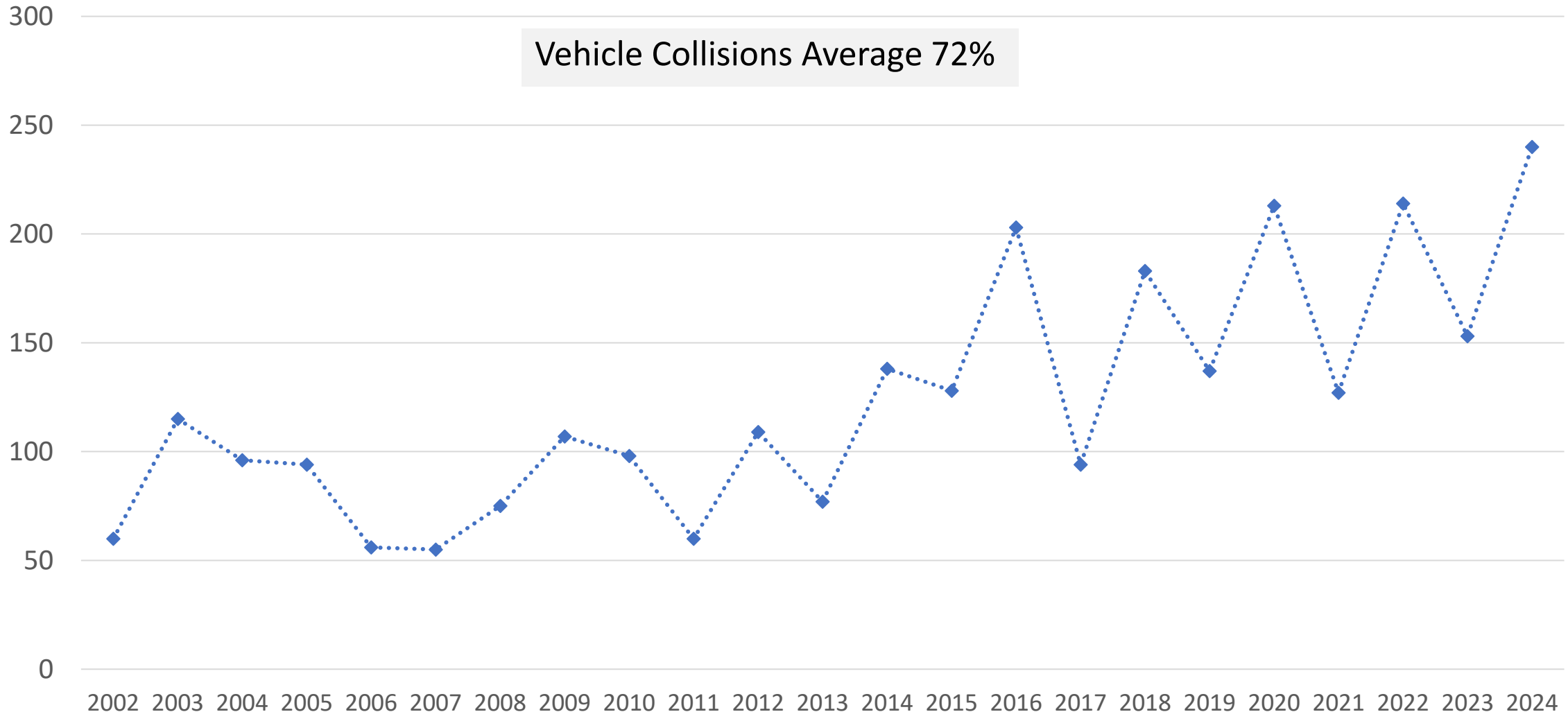
mean ±80% confidence intervals



Vermont Bear Harvest by Season, 1955 - 2024



Reported Non-Hunting Mortalities, 2002 – 2024

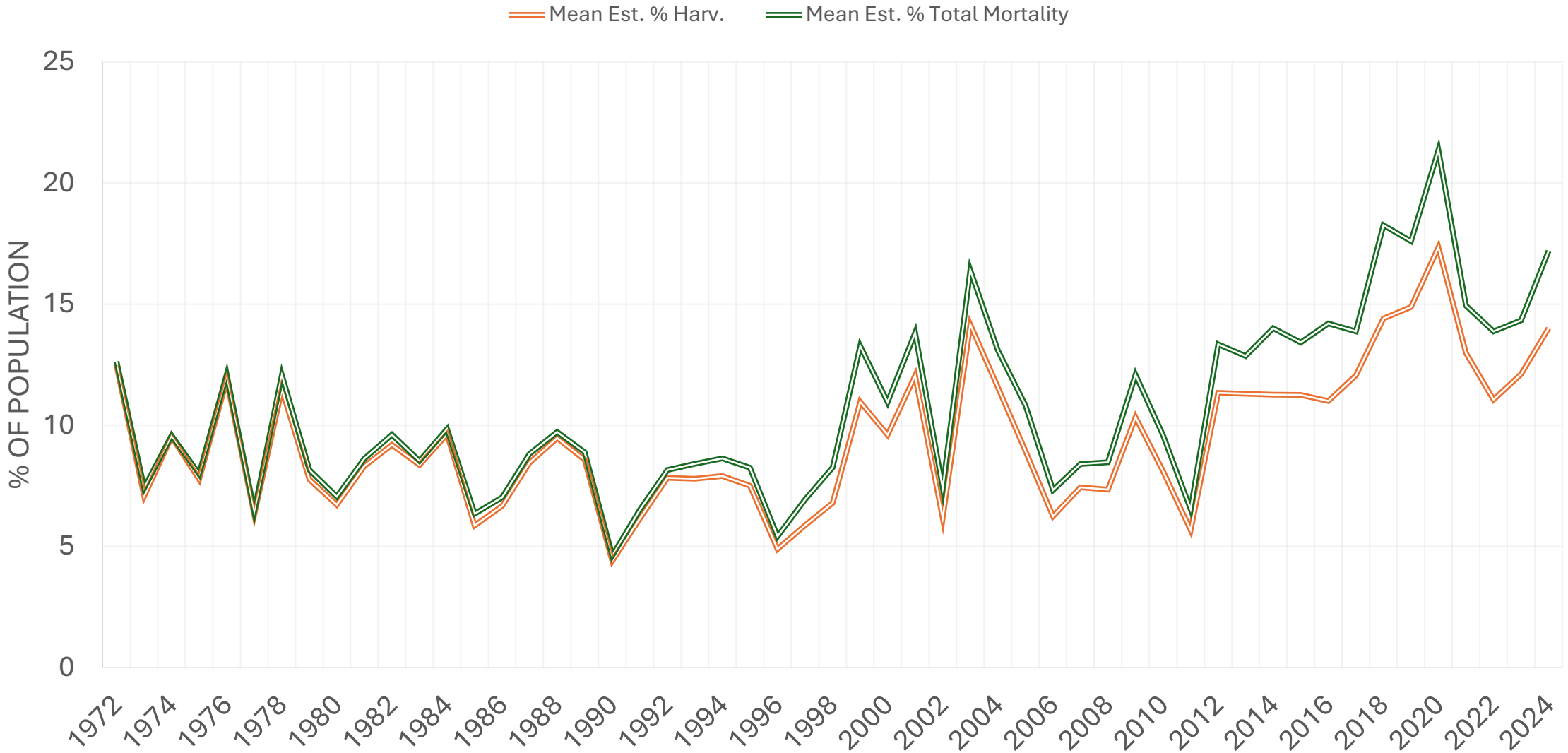


10-yr Average:

Harvest = 12 – 15% of population

All Mortality = 14 – 18% of population

PERCENT OF POPULATION SUBJECT TO MORTALITY



Current Black Bear Hunting Seasons

Early Bear Season	75 days, Sept. 1 – Day Before Regular Deer
Late Bear Season	9 days, First 9 days of Regular Deer Season
Bear Hound Hunting	Resident = 75 days, Early Bear Season Non-Resident = 60 days, Sept. 15 – End of Early Bear

Recommendation #1: Extend the Late Bear Season Through Regular Deer Season

— Goal: Increase Opportunity to Address Population Trend

Increase the season by 7 days: add 1 weekend and Thanksgiving

- 2024 hunter survey: 54% of successful bear hunters reported they primarily incidentally hunt bear and 79% hunted during the late bear season.
- 2018 hunter survey: 85% strong support for extending the length of the bear season.

Recommendation #2: Allow a Two Bear Bag Limit in Designated WMUs

Goal: Increase Opportunity to Address Population Trend and Create Ability for Regional Management

Increase the number of bears that a successful hunter can harvest

- 2024 survey found that meat is the dominant reason hunters hunt bear.
- 2018 survey found 38% of hunters supported a second bear tag.
- Other jurisdictions report limited number of hunters take 2 bears.
  - NH has seen less than 50 additional bears harvested across 4 WMUs.

Recommendation #3: Prohibit the Intentional Harvest of Female Bears with Cubs

— Goal: Improve Awareness

- Cubs are dependent until their second spring – premature orphaning can have cascading effects.
- 84% of black bear hunting jurisdictions prohibit the harvest of females accompanied by cubs.

Why Now?

- 2024 survey found 12% not taking necessary precautions and 13% reported not being aware of the Department's recommendation.
- Increasing harvest opportunity.
- Broad public support in jurisdictions that recently added this regulation.

Recommendation #4: Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit

Goal: Clarify Commissioner authority to revoke a bear dog permit

Potential Reciprocity Requirement or Restrict Use Of Out-Of-State Dogs For Hunting Bears.

Goal: Explore Commissioner's authority to establish a reciprocity requirement for non-resident bear hound hunting.

Discuss limiting Department Registered Dogs to those kept in Vermont and owned by residents, unless non-resident's jurisdiction allows Vermonters to hunt bear with dogs.

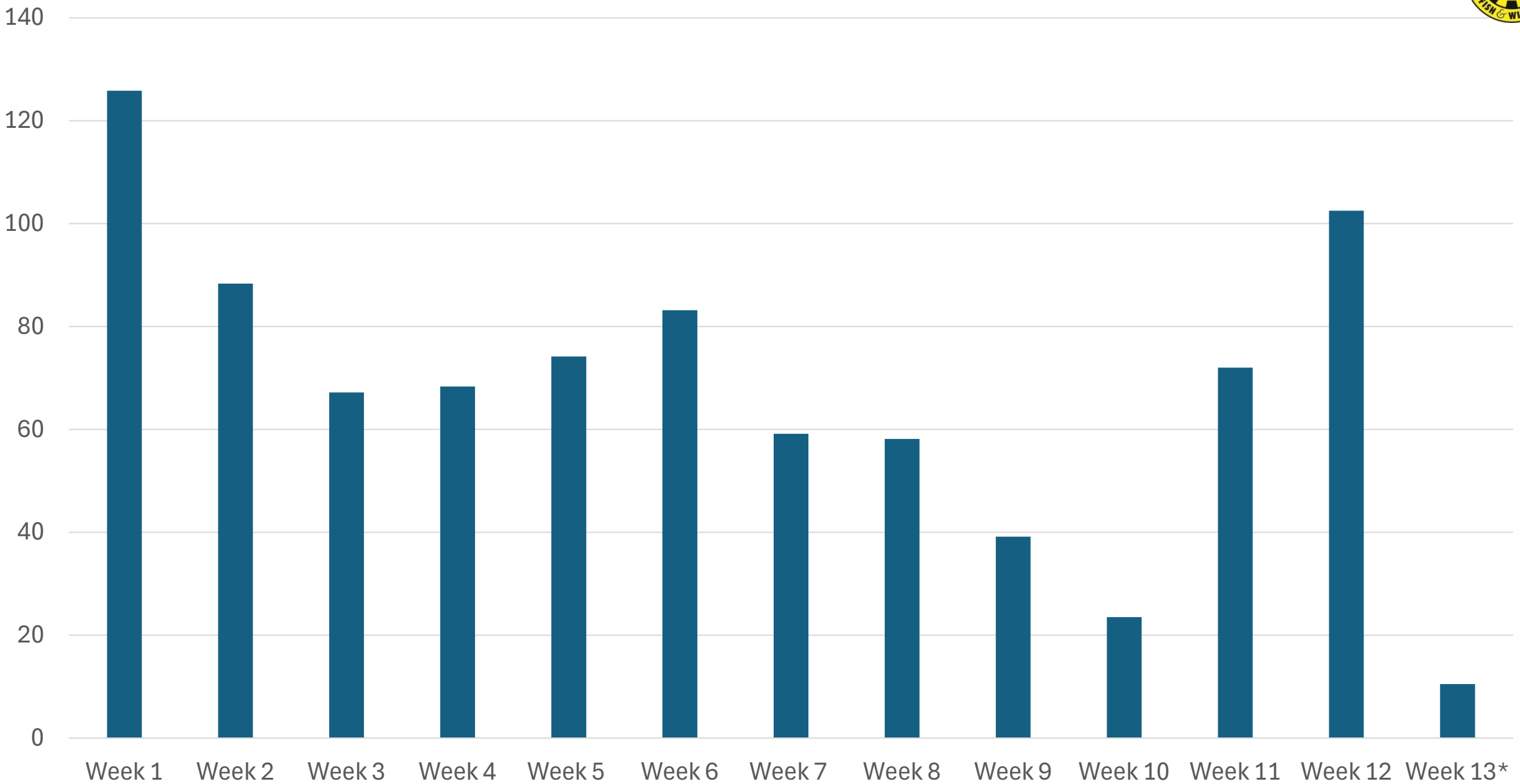
Summary of Recommended Changes

1. Extend the late bear season through the regular deer season.
2. Allow for a second bear to be harvested in select WMUs.
3. Prohibit the intentional harvest of females accompanied by cubs.
4. Clarify Commissioner's authority to revoke bear dog permit.
5. Discuss restricting use of out-of-state dogs for bear hunting from jurisdictions where Vermonters can't hunt bear with dogs.

Additional Approaches Considered

- ❑ Establish a spring bear hunting season
- ❑ Establish a bear baiting season
- ❑ Extending the early bear season into August
- ❑ Registration of individual dogs on a bear dog permit
- ❑ Establish bag limits for bear dog permits
- ❑ Allow online reporting of harvested bears

Average Bear Harvest by Week, 2019-2024





Black Bear Proposed Rule Change Recommendations

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
Jaclyn Comeau
06/17/26

Approaches Considered

- ❑ Establish a spring bear hunting season
- ❑ Establish a bear baiting season
- ❑ Extending the early bear season into August
- ❑ Registration of individual dogs on a bear dog permit
- ❑ Establish bag limits for bear dog permits
- ❑ Reciprocity for non-resident bear dog permits
- ❑ Allow online reporting of harvested bears
- ❑ Prohibit the intentional harvest of females accompanied by cubs

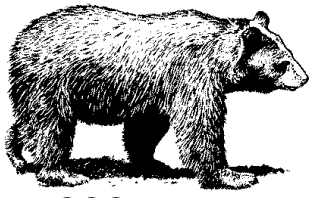
Recommended Regulation Changes

1. Extend the late bear season
   - Last day of regulated deer seasons (currently archery)
2. Allow for a second bear to be harvested
   - By WMU
   - Purchase additional tag
3. Combine Early and Late bear into one continuous season
   - Bear tag $5



BGT Meeting: Black Bear Project

9/17/25



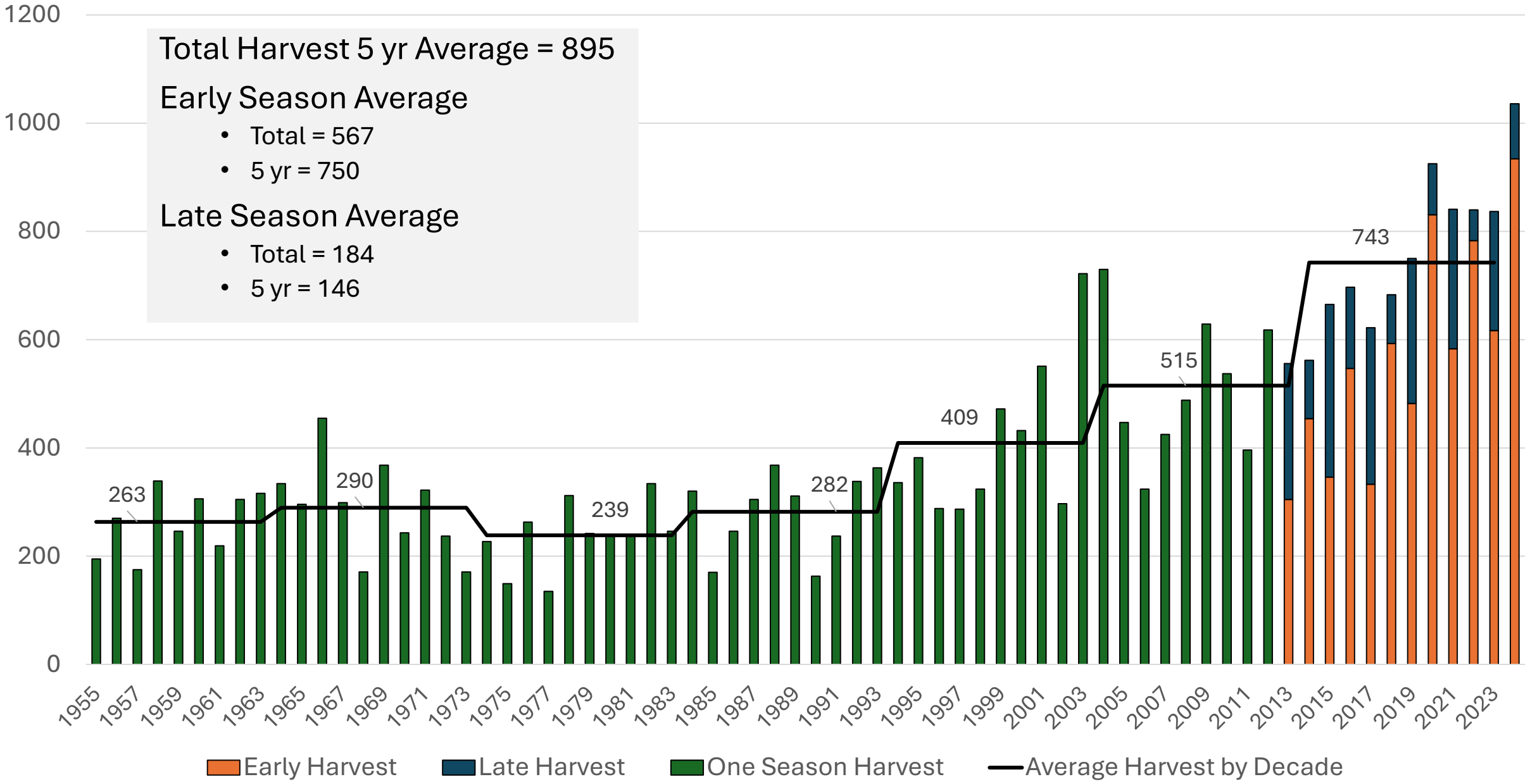
Vermont's Black Bear Population Estimate, 1972-2024

mean ±80% confidence intervals

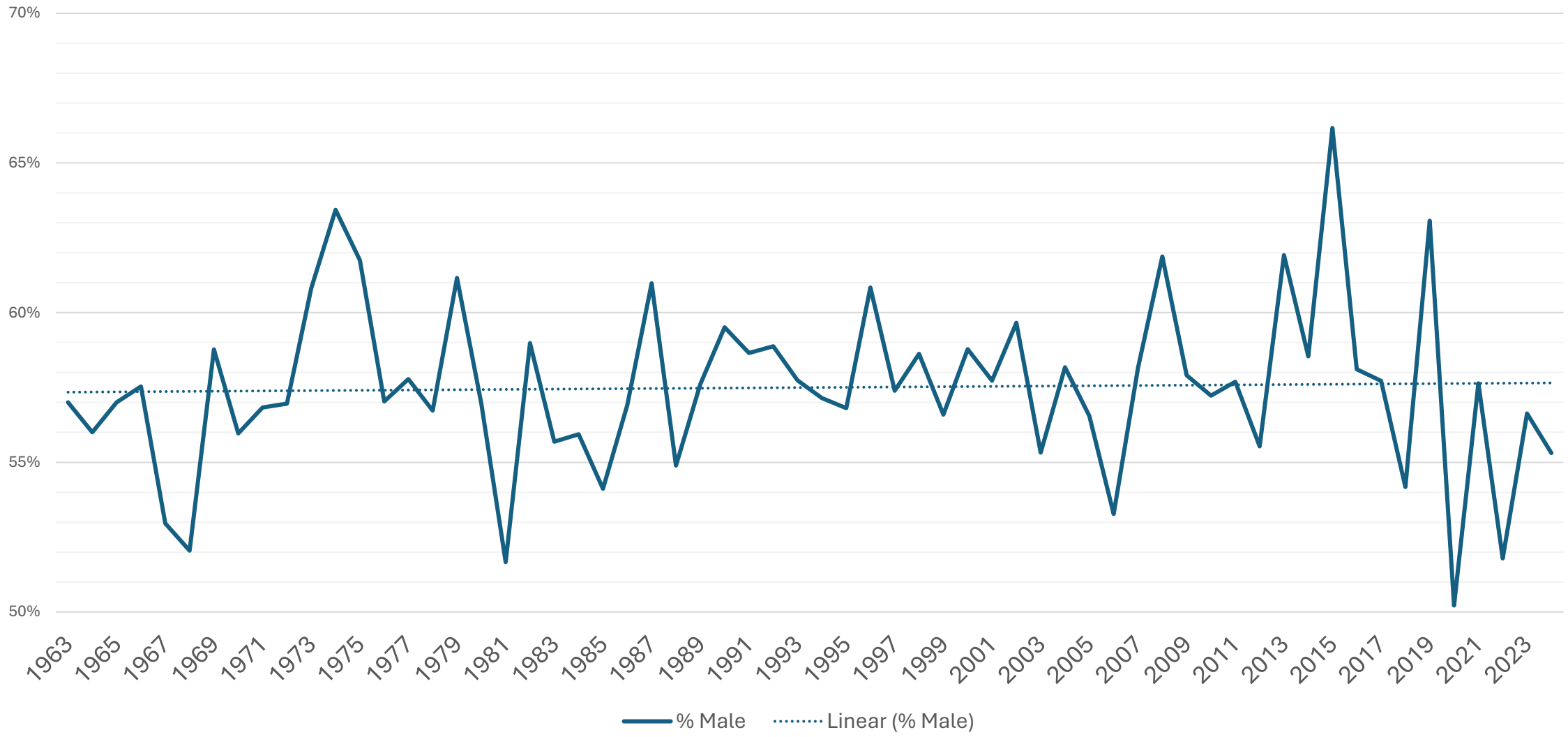
Objective (green line): 3,500 to 5,500 bears

Current Estimate: 6,800 to 8,000 bears

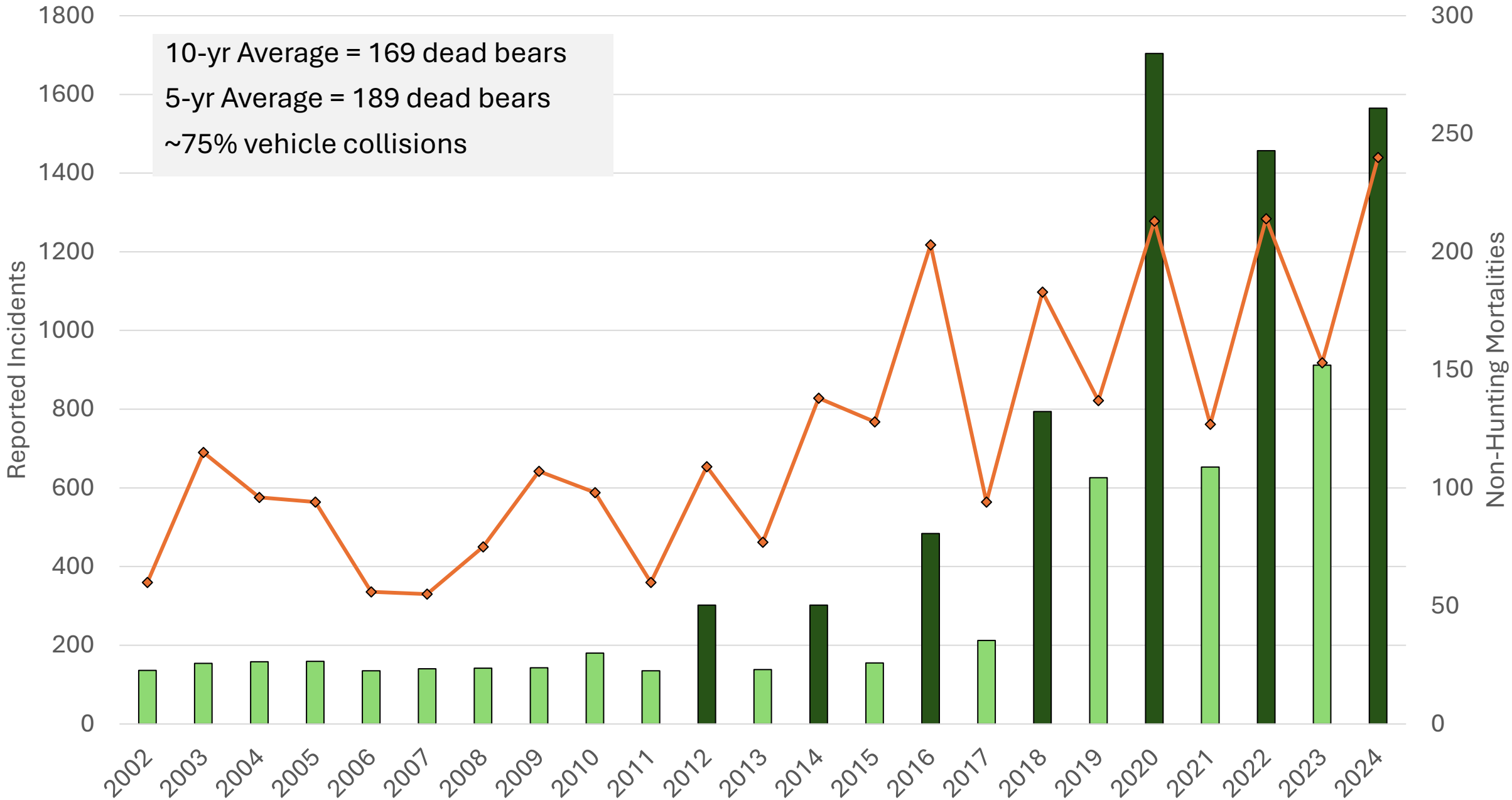
Vermont Bear Harvest by Season, 1955 - 2024



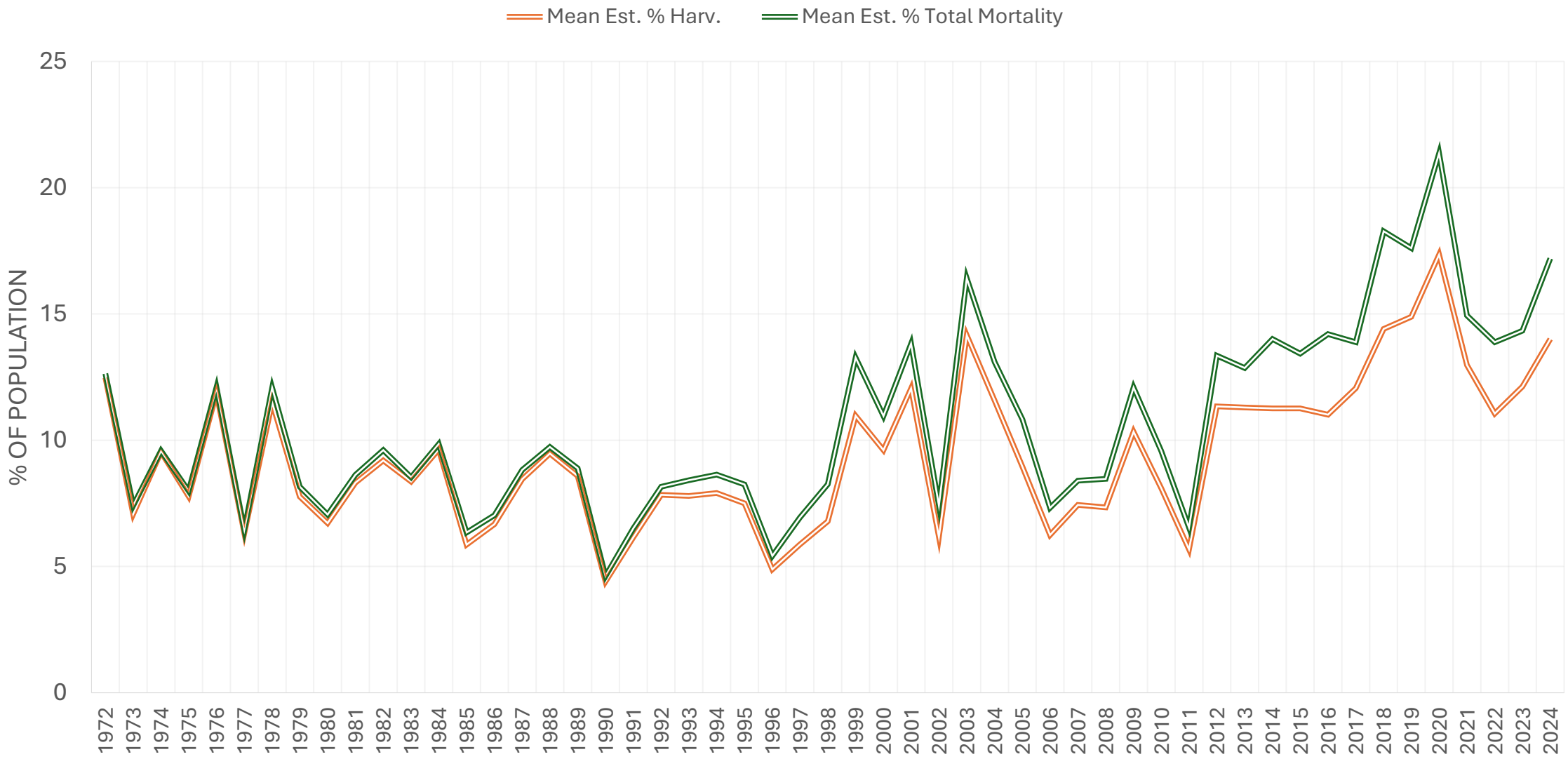
Bear Harvest Male Component, 1963-2024



Vermont Reported Human-Bear Incidents and Non-Hunting Mortalities



PERCENT OF POPULATION SUBJECT TO MORTALITY



Season Extensions:

Purpose: Increase harvest to reduce population within objective

- Extend the Late Season to run through Deer Rifle Season
  - Add 7 days – include 1 additional weekend and Thanksgiving.
  - Recent survey results indicate most bear hunters are opportunistic
  - Males will likely be most vulnerable.
  - Climate change and valley hunting may make this more influential than in the past.
  - Is this enough? Should we go longer…muzzleloader, earlier?

Fish and Wildlife Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, February 18, 2026, in the National Life Dewey Conference Room, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620. A recording of the meeting is available on the department's YouTube channel.

Agenda

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (January 21, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. Vermont Bowhunters Association Petitions
    - Youth and Novice Archery Season
    - Regulated Black Bear Baiting Season
4. Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential Re-Vote
5. 2026 Migratory Game Bird Season Preview – Preliminary Approval
6. 2026 Moose Season Recommendation – Preliminary Approval
7. Preliminary Discussion on Proposed Changes to the Bear Regulations
8. Commissioner's Update

Board Members Present: Nicholas Burnham, Jeffrey Corey, Richard Craig, Beth Deimling, Allison Frazier, Neal Hogan, Ryan Kilborn, Paul Noel (Acting Chair), Robert Patterson, Jon Valsangiacomo, Martin Van Buren

Virtual: Linda Hook, Brad Ferland (Chair)

Absent: David Deen

Department Staff Present: Commissioner Jason Batchelder, Chief Operating Officer Andrea Shortsleeve, General Counsel Hannah Smith, Wildlife Division Director John Austin, Deer and Moose Project Leader Nick Fortin, Black Bear Project Leader Jaclyn Comeau, Migratory Game Bird Project Leader Andrew Bouton, Game Warden Colonel Justin Stedman, Game Warden Major Jenna Reed, Wildlife Management Program Manager David Sausville, Sr. Game Warden Dustin Snyder, Game Warden John Truong, Game Warden Chase Reagan, Principal Assistant Abigail Connolly

Virtual: Director of Outreach Alison Thomas, Information Program Manager Megan Duni, Information Specialist John Hall, Wildlife Specialist Nicole Dickan

Members of the Public Present: Rod Coronado, Sarah Gorsline, Chris Pritchard, Charles Palmer, Rocky Bunnell, Fred Schroeder, Justin Lindholm, Nancy Fitzpatrick, Maureen Dwyer, Mike Frisbee, Bill Hickok

Virtual: Mike Kolsun, Elizabeth Blair, Brad Herring, Bob Galvin, Leisa George, Matthew Bouffard, B Felitti, Katie Nolan, Mark Green

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Board Member Patterson moved to approve the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes with one change that he attended the meeting virtually instead of in-person. Board Member Hogan seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes (13-0).

Public Comment Period

Justin Lindholm, Chittenden, regarding bear baiting and H.276, an act relating to the designation of State wildlands
Maureen Dwyer, Barre Town, regarding bear baiting
Rod Coronado, Orange, regarding the State Wildlife Action Plan and the bear baiting petition
Fred Schroeder, Bristol, regarding the changes to the Fish Management Rule
Sarah Gorsline, Grand Isle, regarding bear hunting and the State Wildlife Action Plan
Bob Galvin, Bolton, regarding the bear baiting petition
Katie Nolan, Bolton, regarding the bear baiting petition
Mike Kolsun, Brighton, regarding the Fish & Wildlife Board

The recording of the public comments and the meeting can be viewed here.

Vermont Bowhunters Association Petitions

- **Youth and Novice Archery Season**
- **Regulated Black Bear Baiting Season**

Bill Hickok presented the youth and novice archery season petition, which is included below. The Board Members asked questions about if crossbows would be included, the timing of the weekend, participation in the rifle season, and data on youth archery hunters.

Bill Hickok presented the regulated black bear baiting season petition, which is included below. Rocky Bunnell discussed bear baiting in other states. The Board Members asked questions about the amount of land needed to hunt bear with bait, if there are any overlaps with bear hunting with dogs, drawing other animals in, and potential disease risks. Bill Hickock, Rocky Bunnell, and Charles Palmer responded to the questions.

Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential Re-Vote

Board Member Craig presented revised language to the Board for consideration, changing reference from “arrowhead” to “broadhead.” The Board discussed why the language was framed in the negative, the timing of passing the rule, and consistency throughout statutes. The Board

asked General Counsel Smith to draft language and agreed to take it up again later in the meeting.

2026 Migratory Game Bird Season Preview – Preliminary Approval

David Sausville introduced Andrew Bouton and explained that after the preliminary approval by the Board there will be public hearings in March and a final vote by the Board in April. Andrew Bouton reviewed the management of migratory game birds and surveys and presented the 2026 migratory game bird season recommendations. The recommendations and presentation are included below. The Board Members asked questions about if there were any changes from last year, the Atlantic Brant harvest, the term "blue geese," and the timing of the Snow Goose season.

Board Member Frazier moved to approve the 2026 migratory game bird seasons as recommended by the department. Board Member Van Buren seconded the motion. The Board voted (13-0) to approve the motion.

David Sausville provided the dates for the public hearings: March 10, 2026, Senior Citizens Building at the Whitehall Recreation Center, 28 Williams Street, Whitehall, New York 12887, and March 12, 2026, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, Act 250 Conference Room, 111 West Street, Essex Junction, Vermont 05452-4695. Board Member Patterson conveyed feedback that waterfowl hunters would appreciate Board Member presence at the hearings.

Chair Ferland asked about next steps for the petitions and General Counsel Smith responded that the process typically involves presentation of the petition, and the Department will provide a recommendation followed by further Board discussion at the next meeting.

The Board recessed at 6:22 pm and returned at 6:48 pm.

2026 Moose Season Recommendation – Preliminary Approval

David Sausville explained that the public hearings will be held in March after the preliminary approval by the Board. Nick Fortin reviewed the 2025 harvest, the population objectives, impacts on the moose population and health, health measures, and the recommended 2026 harvest. The recommendation and presentation are included below. The Board Members asked questions about the permits issued last year, winter tick impact, and the rationale for the reduction in permits.

Board Member Van Buren moved to accept the 2026 moose season recommendation as presented by the department. Board Member Patterson seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the motion (13-0).

Preliminary Discussion on Proposed Changes to the Bear Regulations

Commissioner Batchelder introduced the presentation and Jaclyn Comeau. Jaclyn Comeau reviewed the management and goals for big game, efforts for living with bears, population estimates, and harvest data. Jaclyn Comeau then presented the proposed changes to the bear rule from the department for discussion by the Board. The recommendations and presentation are included below.

The Board asked about the enforceability of prohibiting the intentional taking a female bear with cubs and the education/training put in place by the department to prevent the taking of a female bear with cubs. The Board discussed considering not allowing other species to be hunted when rearing their offspring, considerations for using the word intentional in a law, and whether the recommended changes allow for enough of a reduction in the bear population to meet the population goals. The Board asked about whether there were enough teeth being collected, details around allowing a second bear harvest, timing of the bear season, identifying cubs by weight, the rationale for not recommending a spring season or bear baiting, the intention for recommending adding the authority to revoke a bear dog permit and for registering dogs, NH's reciprocity requirement for requirement for out-of-state bear hunters with dogs, non-resident bear hunters with dogs in Vermont, and the hunter survey data from 2018. The Board discussed the possible impacts of expanding the bear hunting season, if there could be changes to the allowance of farmers taking nuisance bears with depredation permits, how the unintentional taking of a female bear with cubs would be handled, and other educational opportunities.

Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential Re-Vote

General Counsel Smith presented the revised language: "A person hunting big game with a bow and arrow or crossbow must use an arrow or bolt with a broadhead that measures at least seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point and has at least two sharp cutting edges."

Board Member Craig moved to accept the revised language to 10 App. V.S.A. § 5 Bow and arrow and crossbow standards. Board Member Hogan seconded the motion. The Board voted (13-0) to approve the motion.

Acting Chair Noel thanked Board Member Frazier and Chair Ferland for their service on the Fish & Wildlife Board, whose terms are ending in February 2026.

Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Batchelder announced a legislative mixer happening on February 25, 2026 at the Statehouse and a commemoration of the restoration of wild turkeys happening on April 18, 2026 in Pawlet. Commissioner Batchelder provided updates about legislative bills and testimony.

Motion To Adjourn:

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 pm.

The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting consideration by the Fish and Wildlife Board to create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

We know that the current Youth and Novice Gun Seasons for deer, turkey, and waterfowl are great opportunities to bring in young and new hunters to the outdoors sports. Creating a Youth and Novice Archery Season will not only encourage youngsters and new hunters to learn archery but enable them to hunt in a less pressurized environment.

The VBA suggests a two-day season, being the last full weekend in September. While this is after the start of the Expanded Archery Deer Season, we feel that the zones included in that season are relatively small and many archers either live too far from one or might not have access to those private lands outlined in the zones. Also, the weather is usually warm and conducive to longer stays on the stand. The end of September is the end of the summer feeding season for deer, but before the cooler weather sets in and the onset of the beginning of the breeding time. This timing helps make deer a bit more predictable, so new archers can more readily pattern the deer and get in close.

The overall rules for this special season could be adapted by the current gun season models.

We feel that a Youth and Novice Archery Season will offer a welcoming atmosphere to new archers as they learn from their mentors and open the door for them to a lifetime of enjoying Vermont's natural beauty and resources. We hope you will see the benefits of this special season.

Thank you,
Vermont Bowhunters Association

523 Westminster West Rd, Putney, Vermont 05346 – 802-579-8471
info@vermontbowhuntersassociation.org
www.vermontbowhuntersassociation.org

The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting the creation of a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont. Our intent is to support the Department's long-term bear management objectives, improve harvest selectivity, and reduce human–bear conflicts while upholding the high standards of ethical and science-based wildlife management.

Vermont's black bear population continues to expand in both numbers and distribution throughout the state, creating challenges for landowners, farmers, and communities. Traditional hunting methods remain important but often fall short of harvest objectives, especially in years of abundant natural foods. The proposed season would provide Vermont's bear management team with a precise and predictable tool to manage goals while ensuring sustainability and accountability. New Hampshire has a carefully structured baiting season in place that has been very successful in meeting their management goals.

It should be noted that while the VBA is submitting this petition, it is not asking that this be considered as an archery-only season but rather be open to all legal bear hunting implements.

Benefits of a Regulated Bear Baiting Season

1. A baiting season allows hunters to be in **close proximity** so they can more readily identify bears before harvest. This would reduce the likelihood of taking sows with cubs and provide a better opportunity for the best shot placement to provide a swift harvest. This supports Vermont's commitment to ethical, selective, and responsible wildlife management.
2. It is an effective tool for **population management**. In heavy mast years, traditional hunting methods often struggle to meet harvest objectives. Baiting provides a consistent, reliable method for achieving management goals across wildlife management units.
3. It can help reduce **human–bear conflicts** by targeting harvest in areas with recurring property damage, agricultural damage, and other nuisance bear activities, supporting the Department's conflict mitigation strategies.

Framework to Be Considered

Everyone participating in the baiting season must obtain a mandatory Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Permit. Permit numbers can be limited by Wildlife Management Units to ensure population sustainability, prevent overcrowding and overharvesting, and help the Department meet management objectives. The applications for the Permit should include:

1. Written landowner permission.
2. Map(s) showing the exact location of bait sites.
3. Names and contact information for each hunter that will be allowed to hunt the sites.
4. Fee for the Permit, to be determined by the Department.
5. Types of bait that may be used or not used (e.g., any form of cocoa or chocolate because of its toxicity to bears and other wildlife). Other restrictions may be added to prevent attraction of non-target species.
6. The season dates as set by the Department. The VBA suggests that a short pre-baiting period be added before the start of the hunting season. The actual season could be September 1–30, with all bait removed from the site at the end of the season.
7. If an application is accepted, copies of the Permit shall be given to the landowner and the Department, and a copy carried by each hunter.
8. Successful hunters will report the bears in the manner dictated by the Department regulations.

The Vermont Bowhunters Association believes a well-regulated fall bear baiting season built on proven regional models and guided by Vermont's strong conservation ethic would provide the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department with an effective and responsible tool for managing our growing bear population. We respectfully request that the Board consider initiating rulemaking to establish such a season.

Thank you,
Vermont Bowhunters Association

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2026
Migratory Game Bird Season Recommendations

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

2026 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON PREVIEW

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

The majority of Vermont's waterfowl season is driven by the federal framework for the Atlantic Flyway. Below are a few issues that must be decided for the 2026 hunting season. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) would like the Board to consider the following recommendations:

- Hold the liberal season allowed under the federal framework related to season lengths and daily bag limits.
- For the 2026 Duck Season.
    - Open the 2026 duck season on Saturday, October 10.
        - Interior Zone: October 10 and run through December 8.
        - Lake Champlain Zone: October 10 – Nov. 1 and Nov. 21 - Dec. 27
- For the 2026 Goose Seasons
    - Open the resident Canada goose season September 1st and continue through September 25.
    - Open the migratory Canada goose season on October 10 and run through November 23.
    - Open the late resident Canada goose season on December 1, 2026 and run through January 4 2027. Allow a five-bird daily bag limit within the Lake Champlain and Interior zones.
    - Open the Snow goose season on October 1 and run through December 31, 2026 and February 24 through March 10, 2027.
- Hold youth hunting weekend during September 26 and 27.
- Open the Atlantic Brant season on Oct. 10 and run through Nov. 8
- Open the woodcock and snipe season September 26 and run through November 9.
- Remove the Conservation Order for the Snow Geese 2027 period.

2026 Waterfowl and Migratory Game Bird Season Proposals:

The Department offers these 2026 migratory game bird hunting season recommendations based on results from the 2024 Waterfowl Hunters survey, comments received from waterfowl hunters in recent years, data collected on availability of various waterfowl species in Vermont, including eBird, internal discussions among Vermont Wildlife Biologists, USFWS refuge Biologists, and State Game Wardens, and frameworks provided by the USFWS.

Table 1.

2026-2027 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

LAKE CHAMPLAIN ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	6	18
SCAUP*	Split Hybrid	40 Days	Oct. 10–Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 7	1	3
		20 Days	Dec. 8 – Dec. 27	2	6
MERGANSERS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	5	15
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 - Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1 – Jan. 4	5	15
Snow Geese *	Split	105 Days	Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026 Feb. 24 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Includes blue geese.

Table 2.

2026-2027 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

VERMONT INTERIOR ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	6	18
SCAUP*	Straight	40 Days	Oct. 10 – Oct. 18	1	3
		20 Days	Oct. 19 – Dec. 8	2	6
MERGANSERS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	5	15
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 - Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1 – Jan. 4	5	15
Snow Geese *	Split	105 Days	Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026 Feb. 24 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Includes blue geese.

Table 3.

2026-2027 VERMONT MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASONS
(regulations in effect September 1, 2026 through April 13, 2027)

Species	Lake Champlain Zone	Interior Vermont Zone	Connecticut River Zone
Ducks, Coots and Mergansers	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 1** **Nov. 21 – Dec. 27**	**Oct. 10 – Dec. 8**	**Oct. ? – Nov. ?** **Nov. ? – Dec. ?**
Canada Geese	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 10 – Nov. 23** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 4**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 10 – Nov. 23** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 4**	**Sept. ? – Sept. ?** **Oct. ? – Nov. ?** **Nov. ? – Dec. ?**
Snow Geese **(includes blue geese)**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2027**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2027**	**Oct. ? – Dec. ?**
Brant	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 8**	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 8**	**Oct. ? – Oct. ?**
Woodcock	**Statewide**	**Sept. 26 – Nov. 9**	
Snipe	**Statewide**	**Sept. 26 – Nov. 9**	

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Weekend – September 26 & 27

BAG LIMITS

The daily bag limit is the maximum number of birds of each species that any person may take (or possess in the field) during any one day. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit for all waterfowl species except snow geese.

Species	Daily Limit	Possession Limit
Ducks *	6	18
Mergansers	5	15
Coot	15	45
Canada Geese		
September season		
Lake Champlain Zone	8	24
Interior Vermont Zone	8	24
Connecticut River Zone	5	15
Oct. - Nov. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	3	9
Interior Vermont Zone	3	9
Connecticut River Zone	2	6
Dec. – Jan. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	5	15
Interior Vermont Zone	5	15
Snow Geese	25	No limit
Brant	1	3
Woodcock	3	9
Snipe	8	24

* The daily limit of 6 ducks may include no harlequin, and no more than 4 mallards (only 2 of which may be hens), 2 black ducks, 3 wood ducks, 3 pintail, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 2 or 1 scaup depending on dates, 3 Sea ducks including no more than 3 scoters, 3 eiders (1 of which may be a hen), and 3 long-tailed duck.

Background On Waterfowl Season Setting and Management:

Migratory game bird managers currently base the migratory bird population estimates and recommendations on predictions derived from long-term biological information and harvest strategies instead of current year surveys. In 2018, the Atlantic Flyway region implemented a Multi-Stock Adaptive Harvest Management Strategy based on a suite of four duck species that represent the population dynamics and various habitat types used by waterfowl throughout the flyway, in lieu of relying solely upon the status of eastern mallards. The four species include green-winged teal, common goldeneye, ring-necked ducks, and wood ducks. These species compose more than 40% of the harvest within the flyway and supply a sufficient time series of estimates of annual abundance, harvest rates and harvest to monitor population trends. Previously, data on mallard populations was used to set the annual hunting regulations for all species of ducks. Using a single species like the mallard to represent the population dynamics of numerous other duck species was proving problematic. Within this system, species of concern such as mallard and black duck are evaluated separately with an assessment under the adaptive harvest management strategies developed for the target species. The objectives are to sustain duck populations for all species and to allow harvest where appropriate. Current estimates allow for a liberal season of 60 days with a 6-bird bag limit. Species specific bag limits follow their respective harvest strategies, with the majority of species bag limits being the same as last year.

Tables 4 and 5 provide background information on past migratory game bird hunting seasons. Table 4 shows the hunting seasons approved during 2025 and is provided as a reference while considering bag limits and the seasons frameworks for 2026. Appendix A provides the history, 1942-2025, of Vermont's waterfowl seasons broken down into season type, season length, dates, and bag limits. This information informs how Vermont arrived at our current zones and season types.

Table 5 provides a historic look at waterfowl hunter participation and estimated harvest levels, Vermont waterfowl stamps sold, and the number of individuals that registered with the Harvest Information Program (HIP). HIP is a method used to generate more reliable estimates of hunting activity and number of all migratory game birds harvested. The HIP program numbers include youth and adult waterfowl hunters, woodcock, and snipe hunters. Only adult waterfowl hunters, 16 years of age and older, are required to purchase the state waterfowl stamp. The Department will populate the remaining portions of the table this summer after the USFWS examines wings collected randomly from last season's hunters and harvest estimates are completed.

Vermont currently has three waterfowl zones (Figure 1):

- Lake Champlain Zone that is shared with New York. Vermont sets the dates for this zone and New York adopts the same dates.
- Interior Zone that is entirely within Vermont.
- Connecticut River Zone that is shared with New Hampshire. New Hampshire sets the dates for this zone as an extension of their inland zone and Vermont adopts those dates.

Under Vermont's current three zones, we can split any zone once to create two hunting segments. Vermont currently has sixty days to divide between the two segments in an effort to accommodate the diverse desires of the variety of Vermont waterfowl hunters. The zones were

also set up to take into consideration the differences in the physiographic regions of the state and the climatic differences each has. Federal regulations allow for zone and split changes every five years. Vermont's next opportunity to adjust zone boundaries and splits is in 2031. Any changes to zone boundaries will take effect in the 2031-2036 seasons and be in effect for 5-years.

2026 Migratory Game Bird Seasons:

Tables 6 and 7 provide the expected USFWS season frameworks for the 2026 duck and goose seasons, respectively, the latter including other migratory game birds as well. The 2025 hunting seasons are shown on Table 4 for comparison.

2026 Duck Season: The 2026 duck season options allow the opportunity to utilize a 60-day season within the dates of September 26, 2026 to January 31, 2027. The allowed daily bag limit is six birds, with species specific limits listed on Table 6. Vermont may allow a possession limit of 18 ducks total. The Board may be more restrictive on the length of the season and bag limits if desired, but the Board cannot set regulations more liberal. The Department recommends taking the liberal hunting option allowed under the federal framework.

The Board has also traditionally held the youth waterfowl weekend the last weekend in September. The Department has withheld any fishing tournament permits for that weekend to reduce conflicts between anglers and youth waterfowlers. The youth weekend must be within 14 days of either end of the federal framework dates.

2026 Goose, Brant, Mergansers, Coots. Snipe, and Woodcock Seasons: Table 7 lays out the season options for geese, brant, mergansers, coots, snipe, and woodcock. The available season lengths, outside dates for the seasons, daily bag limits and possession limits are broken down by species.

We often receive requests to open the migratory Canada goose season in early October. We are not allowed to open the season on migratory Canada geese until October 10th to reduce hunting pressure on the Atlantic population that is flying through the state. Prior to 2010 we were unable to open the season until October 20th. This change came about because of efforts pursued by Vermont and some other New England states. Breeding pairs in 2025 totaled 150,000, increasing from 2024's total of 89,000 an increase of 68%. The integrated population model predicts that breeding pairs will increase to 163,500 in 2026.

The Brant Hunt Plan and Harvest Strategy were revised in 2020. The revised plan uses an Integrated Population Model (IPM) to generate a prediction of the brant population. This model prediction will be used in place of the mid-winter survey estimate to determine the annual hunting season recommendation. Advantages of the IPM are that the population estimate is available in the summer, prior to the regulatory flyway meeting and federal register framework publication. In addition, estimates provided by the IPM are less variable than the MWS and will likely result in fewer changes to hunting packages over time. The model prediction for 2026 is 115,000 brant, which puts the population on the threshold of a restrictive 30/1 package (100,000-115,000) and standard 50/2 package (115,000-150,000). The technical committee voted to stay in

the restrictive package, recommending a 30-day season with a 1-bird daily bag limit, which has not changed from last year.

The Greater snow goose population estimate for 2025 was 428,000 which is below the target of 500,000 to allow for a conservation order (CO) season in the spring of 2027. The USFWS has not officially suspended the conservation order but the state biologists in partnership with Canadian biologists agreed to not hold a spring CO season in 2027 unless the 2026 population estimate came back above 500,000 in September 2026. This opportunity has been virtually nonexistent in Vermont over the last 5 years due to very few snow geese stopping in Vermont during spring migration. During the 2024 spring CO, one person reported harvesting one snow goose. Under the language of the existing Board rule (10 App. V.S.A. § 23a, Spring Snow Goose Conservation Order), the CO is an open season and cannot be amended by the board unless they go through the rulemaking process. Therefore, the department would like the board to recommend a closed season, and the department will subsequently request that the governor suspend the season for 2027. The department also recommends that the Board amend the language of the rule so that the Snow Goose season can be set annually during the waterfowl season setting procedure in the future.

2026 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: The Department and Board may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days", in addition to the regular duck seasons. The days must be held outside any regular duck season on a weekend, holiday, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck-season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season, or within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limits may include ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots, and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season. Flyway species and area restrictions would remain in effect.

States are allowed to use their established definition of age for youth hunters. However, youth hunters may not be 18 years of age or older. In addition, an adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other seasons that are open on the special youth day. Youth hunters 16 years of age and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp). In 2016 Vermont changed the youth waterfowl hunters age to 17 and younger. Vermont also requires all hunters 16 years of age and older to have a state duck stamp. In some years, the end of the resident Canada goose season overlaps the youth waterfowl hunting weekend. This will not occur in our proposal for 2026 Youth Hunting Weekend, Saturday and Sunday, September 26th and 27th.

Special Falconry Regulations: Falconry is a permitted means of taking migratory game birds in any State meeting Federal falconry standards in 50 CFR 21.29. These States may select an extended season for taking migratory game birds in accordance with the following:
Extended Seasons: For all hunting methods combined, the combined length of the extended season, regular season, and any special or experimental seasons must not exceed 107 days for any species or group of species in a geographical area. Each extended season may be divided into a maximum of 3 segments. Framework Dates: Seasons must fall between September 1 and March 10.

Daily Bag Limits: Falconry daily bag limits for all permitted migratory game birds must not exceed 3 birds, singly or in the aggregate, during extended falconry seasons, any special or experimental seasons, and regular hunting seasons in all States, including those that do not select an extended falconry season.

Regular Seasons: General hunting regulations, including seasons and hunting hours, apply to falconry in each State listed in 50 CFR 21.29. Regular season bag limits do not apply to falconry. The falconry bag limit is not in addition to gun limits.

Vermont has traditionally run the falconry season during any open migratory game bird season. Last year falconers had the opportunity to begin on September 1st with the resident Canada goose season and hunt through January 19th. A three-bird daily bag limit was in effect.

In summary, the proposed 2026 waterfowl and migratory bird hunting regulations were made based on the following information:

- Decide when to open the season. Based on comments from previous years, many hunters prefer the season to open earlier when the temperatures are warmer, and they can still pursue early migrating species like blue-winged teal.
- Decide which zones to propose for splits and in which seasons. Goose hunters preferred a straight season. Duck hunters in the Lake Champlain zone, regardless of residency, chose split seasons more than straight seasons. For the Interior Vermont zone, hunters chose straight seasons most commonly for duck and goose seasons.
- Decide on the length of the Lake Champlain Zone split. In comments from previous years and responses to the survey, many hunters preferred to run the season later in the year which results in a longer split between segments.
- Decide when to have the split for the Lake Champlain Zone. Based on feedback from 2025's public meetings hunters preferred a more even split between early and late season opportunities.

<u>Legal Framework for Hunting Season Decision</u>

Beginning in 2015 the Board was given authority by the Legislature to set the migratory bird hunting regulations by procedure instead of rule. Part of Title 10 § 4082 reads:

(b)(1) Except as provided for under subdivision (2) of this subsection, the Board annually may adopt rules relating to the management of migratory game birds and shall follow the procedures for rulemaking contained in 3 V.S.A. chapter 25. For each such rule, the Board shall conduct a hearing but, when necessary, may schedule the hearing for a day before the terms of the rule are expected to be determined.

(2) Beginning with the 2015 hunting season, the Board may set by procedure the daily bag and possession limits of migratory game birds that may be harvested in each Waterfowl Hunting Zone annually without following the procedures for rulemaking contained in 3 V.S.A. chapter 25. The annual daily bag and possession limits of migratory game birds shall be consistent with federal requirements. Prior to setting the migratory game bird daily bag and possession limits,

the Board shall provide a period of not less than 30 days of public notice and shall conduct at least two public informational hearings. The final migratory game bird daily bag and possession limits shall be enforceable by the Department under its enforcement authority in part 4 of this title.

Eastern Mallard Collaborative Research Project:

Atlantic Flyway states are conducting a regional study of the eastern mallard population. Vermont is participating and deployed 1 geolocator and 2 GSM/GPS transmitters in 2026. The project aims to deploy GSM/GPS units and geolocators on female mallards in Eastern Canada and the Northeastern United States to answer several important questions about mallard movements, productivity, and biases within our banded sample. Specifically, the project proposes the following objectives:

1) Quantify and compare reproductive metrics such as reproductive attempts, full-term incubation, and brood-rearing between mallards in the Northeastern US and Eastern Canada, and the extent to which behavior and weather explains variation in reproductive metrics.
    a. Use proportion of stationary behavior from ACC data and daily displacement from GPS data to infer nesting attempts and success
    b. Develop detailed time activity budgets of mallard behavior throughout the annual cycle at the sub-population scale
    c. Explore the extent to which behavior and weather patterns (precipitation, temperature, winter severity) influence reproductive success both directly and through cross-seasonal effects
2) Estimate seasonal survival rates of female mallards in Eastern Canada vs. Northeastern US
3) Quantify and compare female mallard movements and habitat use and selection throughout the annual cycle in the Northeastern US and Eastern Canada
    a. Understand mallard movements during the pre-season banding window to better inform implications for pre-season banding data analyses.
4) Characterize habitat-use and selection of mallards and black ducks throughout the annual cycle.

New York and Pennsylvania secured internal funding to support much of the project but solicited in-kind and financial support from other flyway states, federal and Canadian partners to reach marking sampling goals/distribution and fully fund the project. The project has begun deployments of GSM and geolocator units during the winter of 2025-2026, coinciding with the American black duck joint venture project.

During the 2024-2025 capture period Vermont deployed 17 geolocators attached to colored tarsal bands at two locations within the Champlain Valley from February 1st to March 15th.

Public Input and Outreach:

The Department, in conjunction with the Board, is currently planning to hold two public hearings in 2026. Meetings are planned for March 10th in Whitehall, and March 12th at the Essex Junction

District office conference room, as well as a recording to be posted on the Department website, beginning at 6:30pm. During the hearings, the Department will review the season options, recommendations, current biological information, answer questions, and record public comments for the Board. The public will be encouraged to submit comments through email or a recorded phone line. Hearing times and website posting locations will be advertised on the Department website and through news releases.

After the Board approves final season dates and bag limits (scheduled for April 1, 2026 Board meeting), the Department will submit selections to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by April 30th and the information will be sent to a printer for production of the 2026 syllabus of state and federal hunting regulations. The early decision deadlines allow the Department to have the syllabus available to the public in print version by August 1st, a full month prior to any migratory bird hunting season. Approved seasons will be placed on the Department's website within days after the Board's vote.

The Department conducted a survey of waterfowl hunters in Vermont (statewide) and New York (those that hunt the Lake Champlain Zone) during summer/fall of 2024. This survey was sent to a broad spectrum of waterfowl hunters in hopes of obtaining an accurate representation of all waterfowl hunters. The goal of this survey was to obtain preferences and opinions about waterfowl seasons for use in the season setting process.

Table 4. 2025 Migratory Bird Hunting Seasons

2025-2026 VERMONT MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASONS
(regulations in effect September 1, 2025 through April 24, 2026)

Species	Lake Champlain Zone	Interior Vermont Zone	Connecticut River Zone
Ducks, Coots and Mergansers	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 2** **Nov. 22 – Dec. 28**	**Oct. 11 – Dec. 9**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26**
Canada Geese	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 11 – Nov. 9** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 19**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 11 – Nov. 9** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 19**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26** **Dec. 27 – Jan. 15**
Snow Geese **(includes blue geese)**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2025** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2026** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2025** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2026** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026** **(applies to land, not CT River waters)**
Brant	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 9**	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 9**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11**
Woodcock	**Statewide**	**Sept. 27 – Nov. 10**	
Common Snipe	**Statewide**	**Sept. 27 – Nov. 10**	

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Weekend – September 27 & 28

BAG LIMITS

The daily bag limit is the maximum number of birds of each species that any person may take (or possess in the field) during any one day. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit for all waterfowl species except snow geese.

Species	Daily Limit	Possession Limit
Ducks *	6	18
Mergansers	5	15
Coot	15	45
Canada Geese		
September season		
Lake Champlain Zone	8	24
Interior Vermont Zone	8	24
Connecticut River Zone	5	15
Oct. - Nov. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	1	3
Interior Vermont Zone	1	3
Connecticut River Zone	2	6
Dec. – Jan. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	5	15
Interior Vermont Zone	5	15
Connecticut River Zone	5	15 (Vermont land portions only)
Snow Geese	25	No limit
Mar. 11 – Apr. 24, 2026	15	No limit
Brant	1	3
Scaup*		
Lake Champlain Zone		
Oct. 11 – Nov. 2 & Nov. 22 - Dec. 8	1	3
Dec. 9 - Dec. 28	2	6
Interior Vermont Zone		
Oct. 11 – Nov. 19	1	3
Nov. 20 - Dec. 9	2	6
Connecticut River Zone		
Oct. 13 - Nov. 11	1	3
Nov. 27 - Dec. 26	1	3
Woodcock	3	9
Common Snipe	8	24

* The daily limit of 6 ducks may include no harlequin, and no more than 4 mallards (only 2 of which may be hens), 2 black ducks, 3 wood ducks, 3 pintail, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 2 or 1 scaup depending on dates, 4 sea ducks (including no more than 3 scoters, 3 eiders {1 of which may be a hen}, and 3 long-tailed ducks)..

Table 5. Vermont Waterfowl Hunting and Harvest Data Comparisons (Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Combined)

	Federal Duck Stamp Sales	Vermont Duck Stamp Sales	Vermont HIP Registration	No. of Active Adult Duck Hunters	Average Seasonal Duck Bagged Per Hunter	Total Season Estimated Duck Harvest	Total Season Estimated Canada Goose Harvest	Total Season Estimated Snow Goose Harvest
1999	4,542	6,320		1,600	11.9	25,000	4,100	1,700
2000	4,741	5,418		1,700	10.4	17,700	3,600	4,200
2001	4,824	5,685		1,700	10.4	17,600	4,300	2,200
2002	5,201	5,722		2,600	9.6	26,800	7,100	1,300
2003	5,242	6,012		1,300	12.6	16,300	3,600	3,400
2004	4,723	6,242		2,600	9.3	24,300	7,100	1,700
2005	4,956	5,682		2,400	10.6	25,400	9,300	400
2006	3,391	5,581		2,000	9.9	19,600	7,800	100
2007	3,193	6,137		2,300	9.2	16,700	6,300	500
2008	3,391	5,746	⇧$5-$7.50	2,900	11.9	34,800	12,300	2,100
2009	not available	6,051		2,400	10.7	25,500	11,500	90
2010	not available	6,065 Last Stamp	5,404***	2,700	8.5	22,900	9,600	0
2011	not available	4,872 First Tag	4,949***	2,600	9.0	23,000	8,300	134
2012	not available	5,882	6,283***	2,100	10.0	20,500	8,600	34
2013	not available	6,436	8,719***	4,000	8.0	31,900	9,600	0
2014	not available	6,635	9,913***	2,600	6.8	17,800	12,300	46
2015	not available	6,244	11,122***	2,600	5.8	14,700	6,733	0
2016	not available	6,016	18,598***	3,400	5.2	17,600	8,800	0
2017	not available	5,954	7,006***	2,500	7.9	19,900	15,900	0
2018	not available	5,725	10,541***	2,100	7.8	16,200	7,400	0
2019	not available	5,620	10,359***	3,000	6.1	18,100	5,600	0
2020	not available	6,089	10,123***	2,200	9.0	19,900	11,800	116
2021	not available	6,111	10,236***	2,000	6.4	12,700	6,182	0
2022	not available	5,956	10,088***	1,900	7.8	14,500	15,683	107
2023	not available	6,067	9,581***	3,600	7.2	26,100	12,900	119
2024	not available	6,197	9,809***	3,300	8.4	2,700	11,200	0
2025	not available	5,827						

*** Includes youth hunters and woodcock/snipe hunters

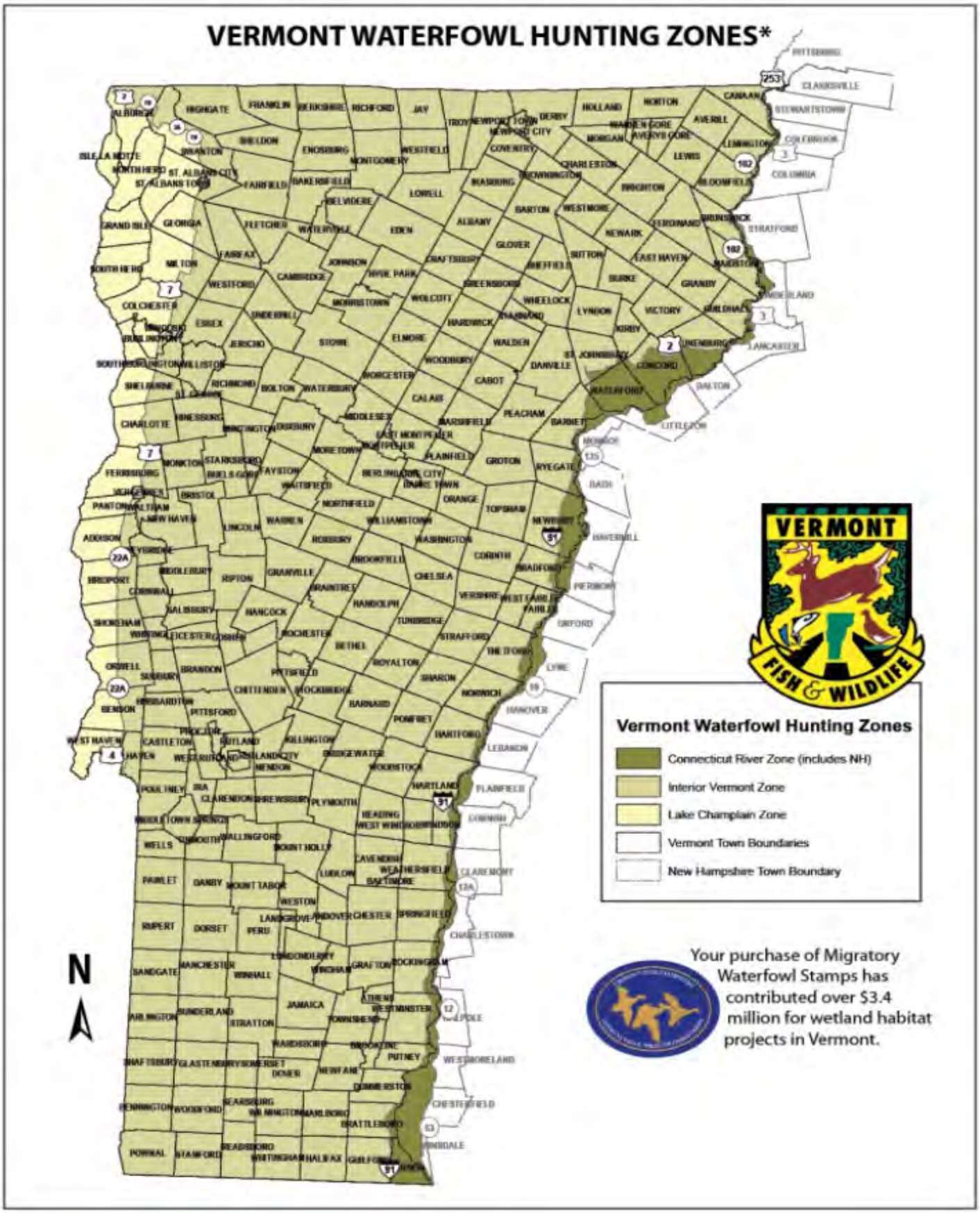


Figure 1. Vermont waterfowl hunting zones

Table 6. USFWS Framework for 2026 Duck Seasons*

LENGTH	OUTSIDE DATES	DAILY BAG	POSSESSION LIMIT**
60 Days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	6	18

SPECIES RESTRICTIONS -	Daily Bag
MALLARD	4 (only 2 hens)
WOOD DUCK	3
BLACK DUCK	2
PINTAIL	3
REDHEAD	2
SCAUP	2/day for 20-days 1/day for 40-days Or 1/day for 60-days
SCOTER	3
EIDERS	3 (only 1 hen)
LONG-TAILED DUCK	3
CANVASBACK	2
HARLEQUIN	CLOSED
MOTTLED DUCK	1
FULVOUS WHISTLING DUCK	1

* Apply to Lake Champlain, Interior Vermont, and Connecticut River Zones.

** Possession limit is equal to three times the daily bag limit for these species.

*** Three total sea ducks in aggregate, with species specific limits, (no more than 3-scoters, 3-eiders (1hen), or 3-long tailed ducks)

SHOOTING HOURS - ½ HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE TO SUNSET (all days – all species)

Table 7. USFWS Framework for 2025 Geese, Brant, Merganser, Coot, Snipe, and Woodcock Seasons

SPECIES	SEASON LENGTH	OUTSIDE DATES	DAILY BAG	POSSESSION LIMIT**
Canada Geese (No more than 107 days combined)				
Resident	25 days	Sept. 1 – Sept. 25	15	45
Regular	45 days	Oct. 10 – Feb. 5	3	9
Resident	77 days	Dec. 1 – Feb. 15	5	15
Snow & Blue Geese	107 days	Oct. 1 – Mar. 10	25	NONE
Brant	30 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	1	3
Mergansers*	60 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	5	15
Coots**	60 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	15	45
Snipe	107 days	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	8	24
Woodcock	45 days	Sept. 13 – Jan. 31	3	9

* Season length for mergansers equals season option chosen for ducks. Mergansers may be included as part of the daily duck bag, in which case the limit would be 6 mergansers/day.

** Season length for coots equals season option chosen for ducks.

SHOOTING HOURS - ½ HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE TO SUNSET (all days – all species)

APPENDIX A

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons

YEAR	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	SEASON DATES	GENERAL BAG LIMIT
1942	Straight	70	Sept. 26 – Dec. 4	10-20
1943	Straight	70	Sept. 25 – Dec. 3	10-20
1944	Straight	80	Sept. 20 – Dec. 8	10-20
1945	Straight	80	Sept. 20 – Dec. 8	7-14
1946	Straight	45	Oct. 5 – Nov. 18	7-14
1947	Straight	30	Oct. 21 – Nov. 19	3-6
1948	Straight	30	Oct. 15 – Nov. 13	3-6
1949	Straight	40	Oct. 21 – Nov. 29	3-6
1950	Straight	40	Oct. 20 – Nov. 28	3-6
1951	Straight	45	Oct. 12 – Nov. 25	3-6
1952	Straight	55	Oct. 7 – Nov. 11	3-6
1953	Straight	60	Oct. 5 – Dec. 3	3-6
1954	Straight	60	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	3-6
1955	Straight	70	Oct. 5 – Dec. 13	3-6
1956	Straight	70	Oct. 5 – Dec. 13	3-6
1957	Straight	70	Oct. 10 – Dec. 18	3-6
1958	Straight	60	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	3-6
1959	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	3-6
1960	Straight	50	Oct. 7 – Nov. 25	3-6
1961	Straight	40	Oct. 14 – Nov. 22	3-6
1962	Straight	40	Oct. 12 – Nov. 20	3-6
1963	Split	45	Oct. 11 – Oct. 27 / Nov. 11 – Dec. 8	3-6
1964	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	3-6
1965	Straight	50	Oct. 16 – Dec. 4	3-6
1966	Straight	55	Oct. 8 – Dec. 1	3-6
1967	Split	45	Oct. 7 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 10	3-6
1968	Straight	50	Oct. 12 – Nov. 30	3-6
1969	Straight	50	Oct. 11 – Nov. 29	3-6
1970	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	4-8
1971	Straight	50	Oct. 9 – Nov. 27	4-8
1972	Split	50	Oct. 7 – Oct. 15 / Oct. 28 – Dec. 7	4-8
1973	Split	45	Oct. 6 – Oct. 21 / Nov. 3 – Dec. 1	4-8
1974	Straight	50	Oct. 9 – Nov. 27*	4-8
1975	Straight	50	Oct. 8 – Nov. 26*	4-8
1976	Straight	50	Oct. 6 – Nov. 24*	4-8
1977	Straight	50	Oct. 5 – Nov. 23*	4-8
1978	Straight	50	Oct. 4 – Nov. 22*	4-8
1979	Split	50	Oct. 3 – Oct. 14 / Oct. 27 – Dec. 3*	4-8
1980	Straight	50	Oct. 8 – Nov. 26*	4-8
1981	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28*	4-8

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons – Page 2

YEAR	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	SEASON DATES	GENERAL BAG LIMIT
1982	Split	50	Oct. 2 – Oct. 10 / Oct. 16 – Nov. 25*	5-10
1983	Split	50	Oct. 8 – Oct. 16 / Oct. 22 – Dec. 1*	5-10
1984	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28*	5-10
1985	Zoned**	40	Oct. 9 – Oct. 13 / Oct. 26 – Nov. 29 (LCZ)* Oct. 9 – Nov. 17 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1986	Zoned**	40	Oct. 8 – Oct. 12 / Oct. 25 – Nov. 28 (LCZ)* Oct. 8 – Nov. 16 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1987	Zoned**	40	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 24 – Nov. 27 (LCZ)* Oct. 7 – Nov. 15 (IVZ)	4-8 4-8
1988	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 8 – Oct. 23 / Nov. 24 – Dec. 7 (LCZ)* Oct. 8 – Oct. 30 / Nov. 24 – Nov. 30 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1989	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 11 – Oct. 29 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 3 (LCZ) Oct. 11 – Nov. 5 / Nov. 23 – Nov. 26 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1990	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 10 – Oct. 21 / Nov. 15 – Dec. 2 (LCZ) Oct. 10 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 22 – Nov. 25 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1991	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 12 – Oct. 27 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 6 (LCZ) Oct. 12 – Nov. 3 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 1 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1992	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Nov. 7 – Dec. 1 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Nov. 1 / Nov. 26 – Nov. 29 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1993	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 20 – Nov. 7 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 5 (LCZ) Oct. 13 – Nov. 7 / Nov. 25 – Nov. 28 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1994	Zoned/Split	40	Oct. 15 – Nov. 6 / Nov. 19 – Dec. 5 (LCZ) Oct. 8 – Nov. 9 / Nov. 21 – Nov. 27 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1995	Zoned/Split	50	Oct. 11 – Oct. 22 / Nov. 4 – Dec. 11 (LCZ) Oct. 4 – Nov. 12 / Nov. 18 – Nov. 27 (IVZ)	4-8 4-8
1996	Zoned/Split	50	Oct. 9 – Oct. 20 / Nov. 2 – Dec. 9 (LCZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 11 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 1 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1997	Zoned**	60	Oct. 4 – Oct. 19 / Oct. 25 – Dec. 7 (LCZ) Oct. 4 – Dec. 2 (IVZ)	4-8*** 4-8***
1998	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 17 – Dec. 10 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Dec. 5 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
1999	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 23 – Dec. 15 (LCZ) Oct. 6 – Dec. 4 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
2000	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 7 – Oct. 9 / Oct. 21 – Dec. 16 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Nov. 12 / Nov. 18 – Dec. 10 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
2001	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 10 – Oct. 14 / Oct. 20 – Dec. 13 (LCZ) Oct. 10 – Dec. 8 (IVZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 21 – Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2002	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 9 – Oct. 13 / Oct. 22 – Dec. 15 (LCZ) Oct. 9 – Nov. 14 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 15 (IVZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 5 / Nov. 27 – Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons – Page 3

YEAR	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	SEASON DATES	GENERAL BAG LIMIT
2003	Zoned**	60	Oct. 11 - Oct. 13 / Oct. 25 - Dec. 20 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 11 - Dec. 9 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 7 - Nov. 9 / Nov. 26 - Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-12
2004	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6 - Oct. 10 / Oct. 23 - Dec. 16 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 6 - Dec. 4 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 5 - Nov. 14 / Nov. 24 - Dec. 12 (CRZ)****	6-12
2005	Zoned**	60	Oct. 5 – Oct. 10 / Oct. 26 – Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 5 – Dec. 3 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 4 – Nov.13/ Nov. 23 - Dec. 11 (CRZ)****	6-12
2006	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7- Oct. 15/ Oct. 25 - Dec. 14 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 7 - Dec. 5 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 3 - Nov. 5/ Nov. 22 - Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-12
2007	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10- Oct. 14/ Oct. 27 - Dec. 20 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 10- Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 3- Nov. 4/ Nov. 21 - Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-12
2008	Zoned**	60	Oct. 8- Oct. 12/ Oct. 25 - Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 8- Dec. 6 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 2- Nov. 2/ Nov. 23 - Dec. 20 (CRZ)****	6-12
2009	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10- Oct. 13/ Oct. 24 - Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 10- Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 6- Nov. 8/ Nov. 25 - Dec. 20 (CRZ)****	6-12
2010	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6-Oct. 10/Oct. 23 - Dec. 16 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 6-Dec. 4 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 5-Nov. 7/ Nov. 24 – Dec. 19 (CRZ)	6-12
2011	Zoned**	60	Oct. 12-Oct. 16/Oct. 29 - Dec. 22 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 12-Dec 10 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 23- Dec. 18 (CRZ)****	6-12
2012	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 17/Oct. 27 - Dec. 20 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 13-Dec 11 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 2-Nov. 4/Nov. 21- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-12
2013	Zoned**	60	Oct. 9-Oct. 13/Oct. 26 - Dec. 19 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 9-Dec 7 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 3/Nov. 19- Dec. 15 (CRZ)****	6-18
2014	Zoned**	60	Oct. 8-Oct. 12/Oct. 25- Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 8-Dec. 6 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 2/Nov. 16- Dec. 13 (CRZ)****	6-18
2015	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Oct. 14/Oct. 24- Dec. 17 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 6-Nov. 5/Nov. 15- Dec. 13 (CRZ)****	6-18
2016	Zoned**	60	Oct. 12-Oct. 16/Oct. 29- Dec. 22 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 12-Dec. 10 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 22- Dec. 22 (CRZ)****	6-18
2017	Zoned**	60	Oct. 11-Oct. 15/Nov. 7 - Dec. 31 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 11-Dec. 9 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 3-Nov. 5/Nov. 22- Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-18

2018	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 21/Nov. 10 - Dec. 30 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Dec. 11 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 4/Nov. 21- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-18
2019	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Nov. 1/Nov. 23 - Dec. 29 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 3/Nov. 20- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-18
2020	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Nov. 1/Nov. 21 - Dec. 27 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 6-Nov. 8/Nov. 17- Dec. 12 (CRZ)****	6-18
2021	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 17/Oct. 30 - Dec. 23 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Dec. 11 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 5-Nov. 7/Nov. 24- Dec. 19 (CRZ)****	6-18
2022	Zoned**	60	Oct. 15-Oct. 23/Oct. 29 – Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 15-Dec. 13 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 23 – Dec. 8 (CRZ)****	6-18
2023	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7-Oct. 11/Nov. 4 – Dec. 28 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 7-Dec. 5 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 5-Nov. 3/Nov. 22 – Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-18
2024	Zoned **	60	Oct. 12-Nov. 3/Nov. 23 – Dec. 29 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 12-Nov. 10/Nov. 23 – Dec. 22 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 9-Nov. 11/Nov. 27 – Dec. 22 (CRZ)****	6-18
2025	Zoned **	60	Oct. 11-Nov. 2/Nov. 22 – Dec. 28 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 11-Dec. 9 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Nov. 11/Nov. 27 – Dec. 26 (CRZ)****	6-18

* Regular season was followed by a 16-day special goldeneye/scaup season – 3-bird bag

** Lake Champlain Zone – Split Season
Interior Vermont Zone – Straight Season

*** Two teal (either blue-winged or green-winged) allowed in addition to regular bag limit

**** Connecticut River Zone set by New Hampshire Fish and Game Commission, same as NH Inland Zone



2026 Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons and Bag Limit Recommendations

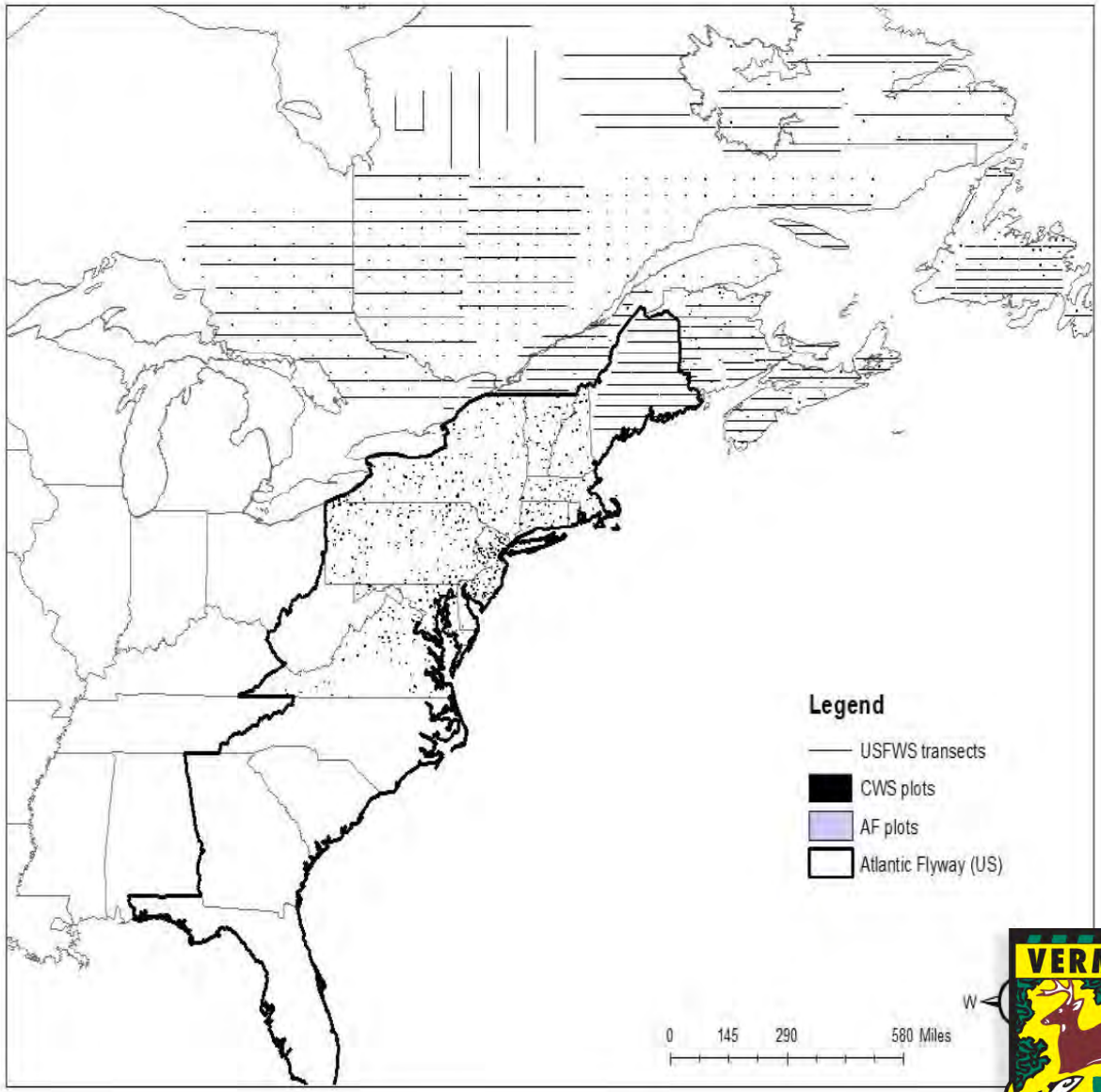
How are Migratory Game Birds Managed?

- Migratory in nature managed by the USFWS with input from states and stakeholders
- Four Flyways in the US
- Atlantic Flyway
    - Eastern States and Provinces including Vermont

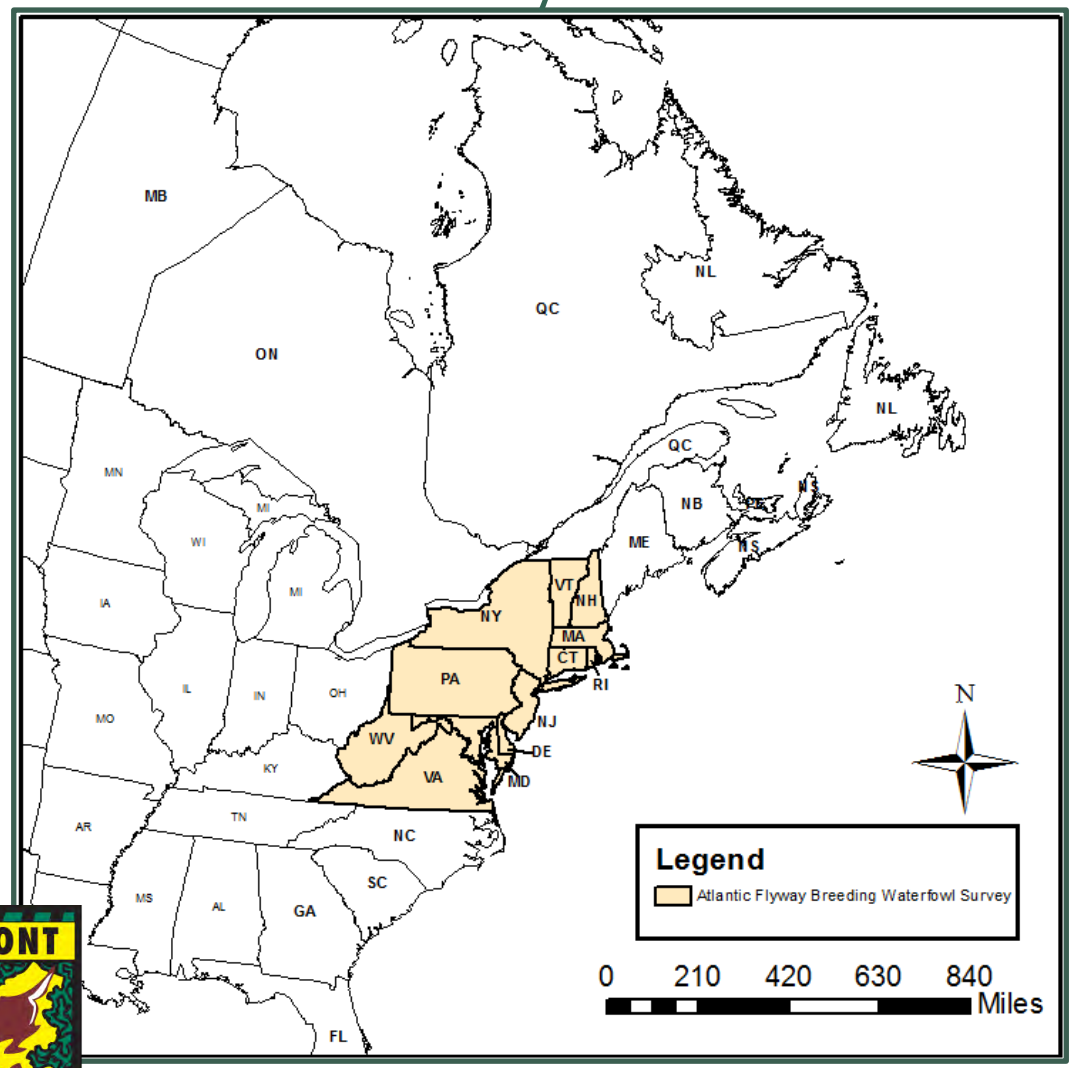


How do we Understand Populations?

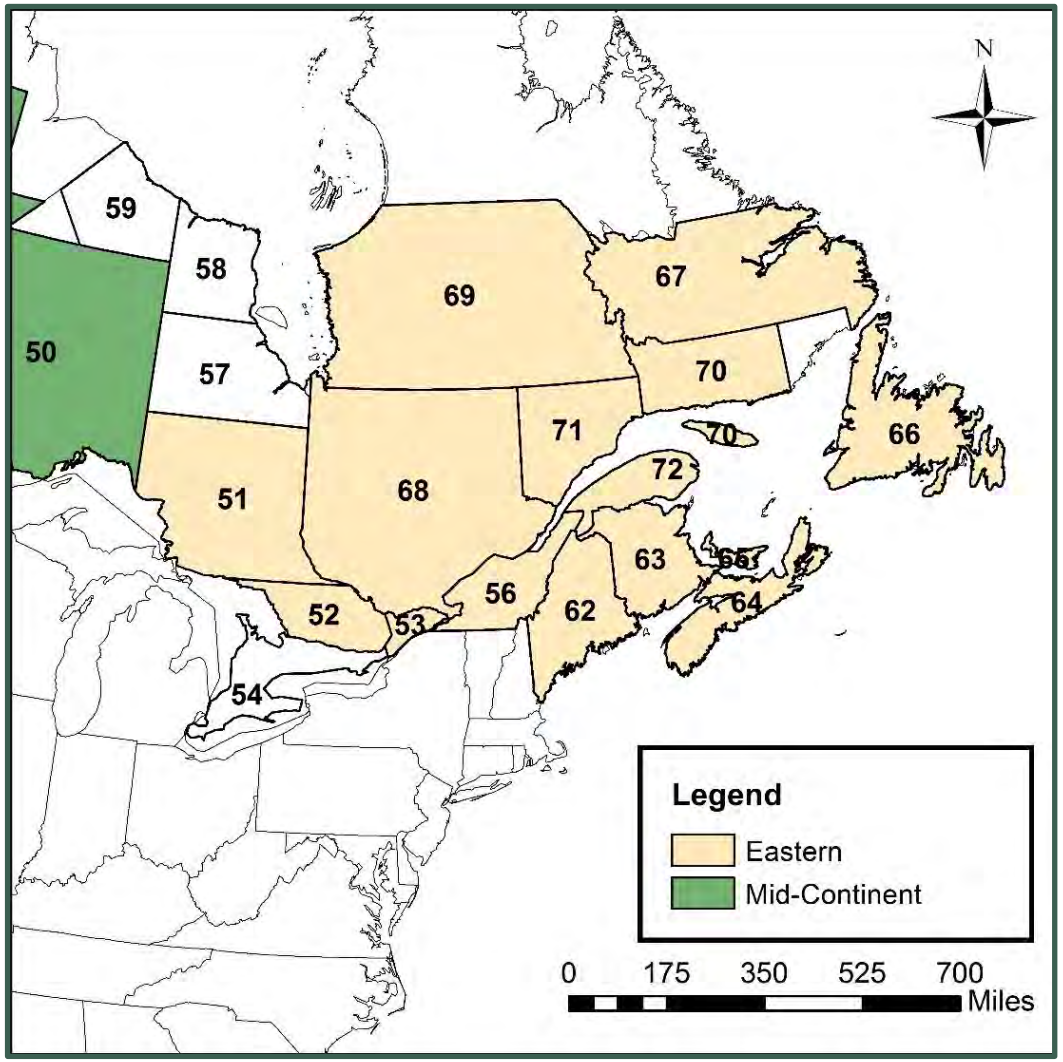
- Breeding surveys provide the best estimate of waterfowl abundance



Atlantic Flyway Breeding Waterfowl Survey Area



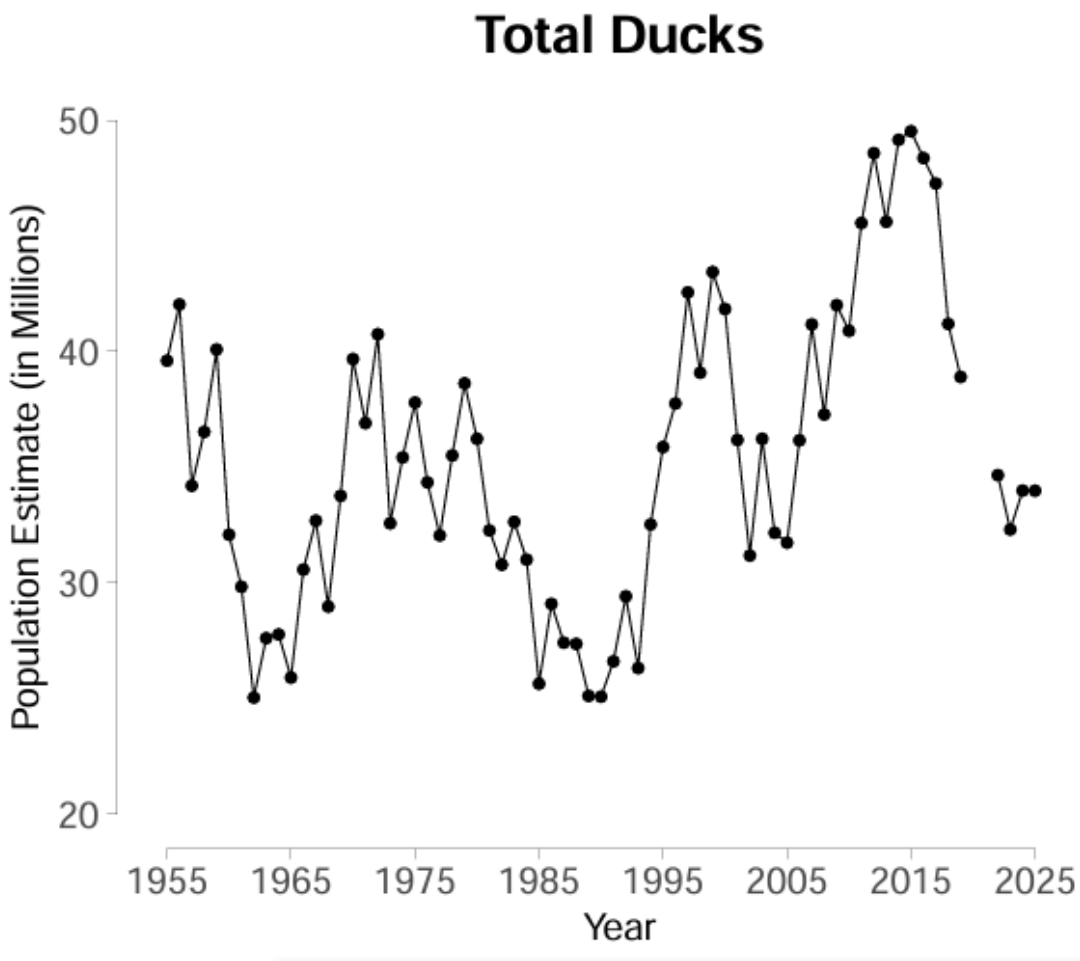
Eastern Survey Area



VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE

Duck Breeding Populations in Eastern Survey Areas

- 2025 breeding habitat conditions ranged from poor to excellent
- Mallard breeding pop. in AF remained about 10% below long-term avg. at 1,137,000
- Total duck breeding pop. est. was similar to 2024 and remains 4% below the long-term avg. in the traditional survey area.



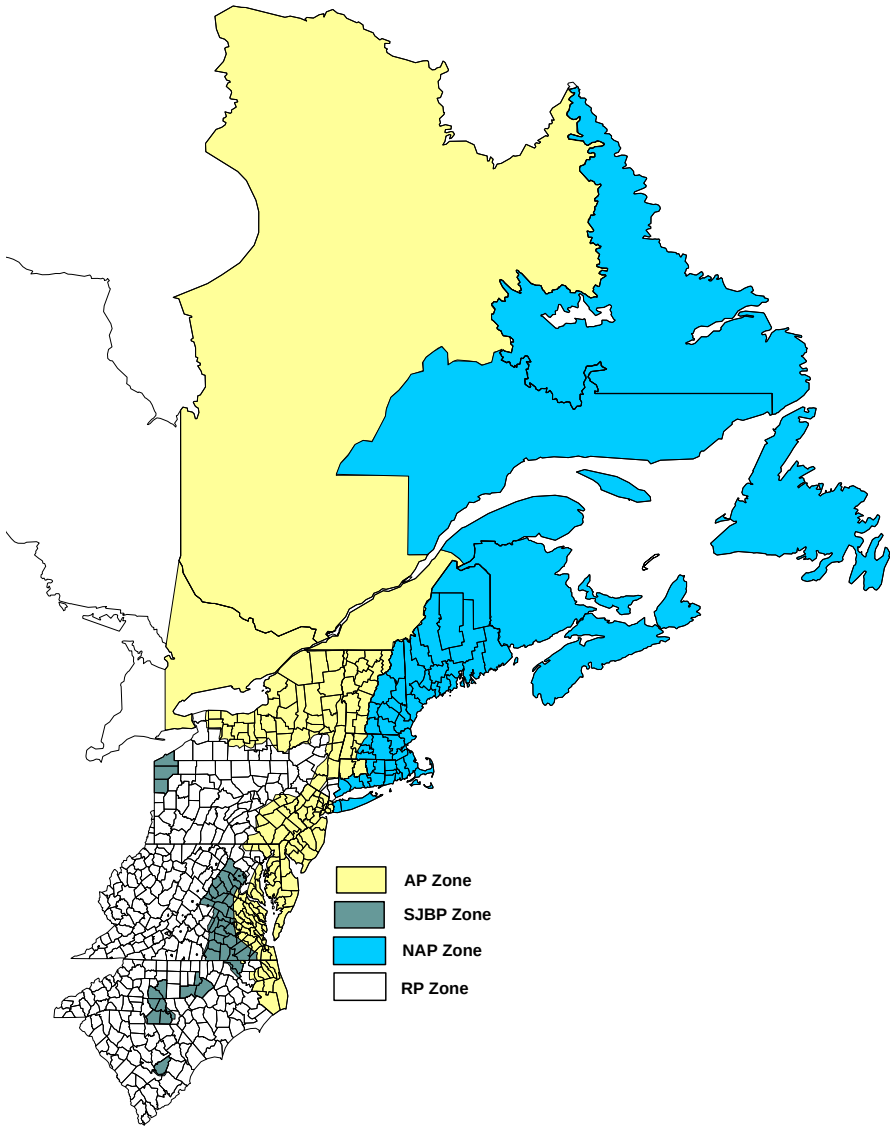
Vermont Waterfowl Production 2025

- Banding efforts and survey results indicated that the resident goose population was stable
- Overall duck production was good with good brood rearing cover in early spring, heavy rains in spring and early summer that turned to drought in late summer and early fall.
- Fall duck banding was successful at 4 banding sites (over 1300 total new bands)

Canada Goose Harvest Zones in the Atlantic Flyway

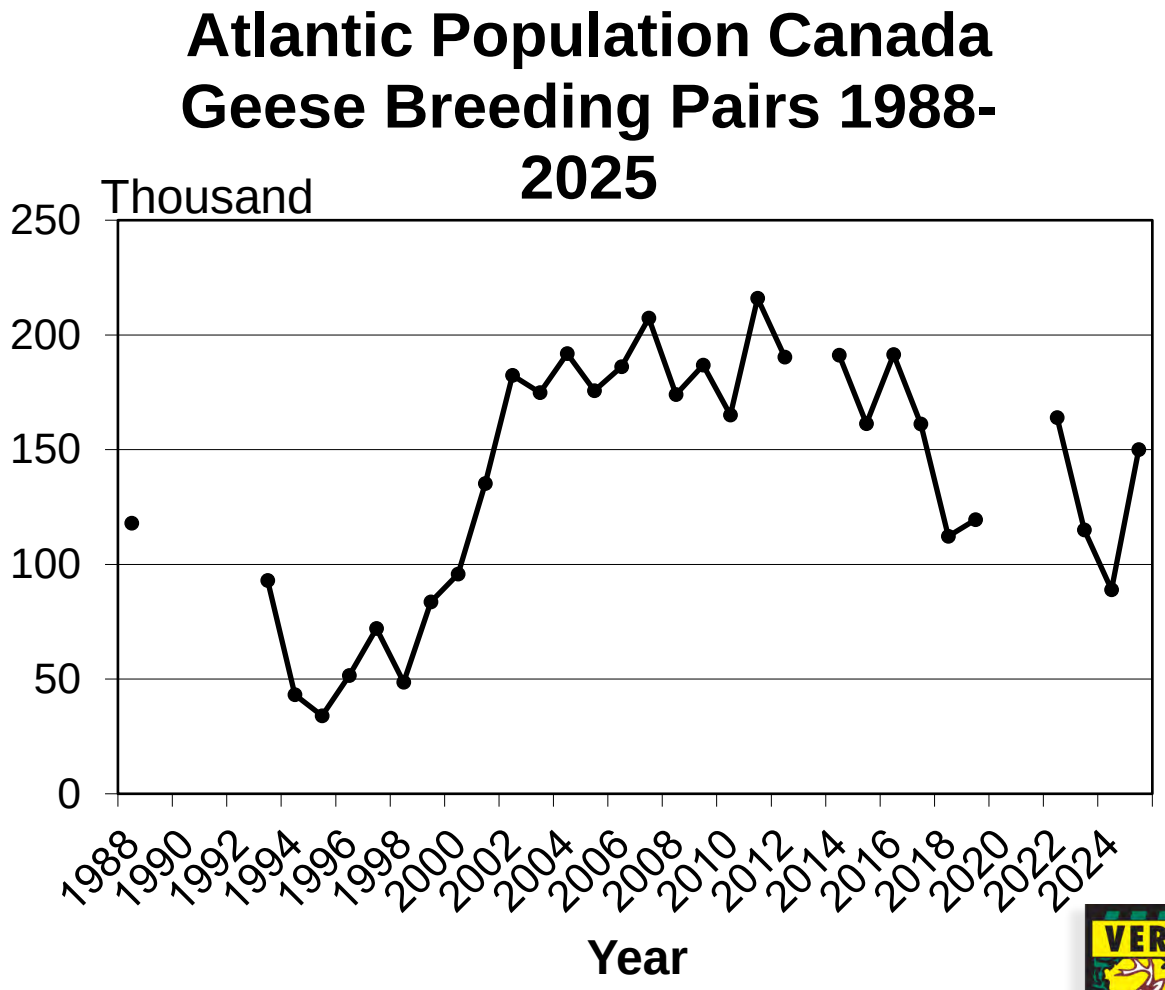
Three Subpopulations in VT

- Atlantic Population
- North Atlantic Population
- Resident



Atlantic Population Canada Geese Breeding pairs 1988-2025

~150,000 Breeding Pairs



Hunter Harvest Estimates

Three main methods of data collection

- Harvest Information Program
- Parts Collection Survey
- Hunter Diaries

Harvest Information Program (HIP)

Hunt

White-tailed Deer
Black Bear
Moose
Wild Turkey
Small Game
Upland Game Birds
Waterfowl
Harvest Information Program (HIP)
Furbearers and Trapping
Seasons
Hunter Education
Hunting Regulations
Youth Hunting
Find A Place To Hunt
Shooting Ranges

Quick Links

Buy a License
Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations

Federal law requires migratory bird hunters to register with the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP). Migratory game birds include: ducks, geese, brant, coots, snipe, and woodcock.

How do I register?



Registering is easy. You will be asked for your name, address, date of birth and a brief summary of last year's hunting activity. There is **no charge** for a HIP registration number.

There are two ways to get a HIP registration number:

1. Get your HIP number by registering online.
2. Call 1-877-306-7091 Monday Friday, 7:45 am to 4:30 pm EST. A live operator will give you a HIP registration number.

You must write the HIP registration number in the Harvest Information Program section of your hunting license.

Permanent or lifetime license holders should print the response form with your HIP registration number and carry it with you while hunting migratory birds.

Please remember Vermont and federal migratory waterfowl stamps are also needed to hunt ducks or geese, if you are 16 years old or older.

Hunters must re-register annually.

Forgot your HIP registration number?

look up your h.i.p. registration number

Vermont Waterfowl Hunting and Harvest Data Comparisons[64]

	No. of Active Adult Duck Hunters	Average Seasonal Duck Bagged Per Hunter	Total Season Estimated Duck Harvest	Total Season Estimated Canada Goose Harvest	Total Season Estimated Snow Goose Harvest	Vermont Duck Stamp Sales
2013	4,000	8.0	31,900	9,600	0	6,436
2014	2,600	6.8	17,800	12,300	46	6,635
2015	2,800	5.8	14,700	6,733	30	6,244
2016	3,400	5.2	17,600	8,800	0	6,016
2017	2,500	7.9	19,900	15,900	0	5,954
2018	2,100	7.8	16.200	7,400	0	5,725
2019	3,000	6.1	18,100	5,600	0	5,620
2020	2,200	9.0	19,900	11,800	116	6,089
2021	2,000	6.4	11,500	5,600	0	6,111
2022	1,900	7.8	14,500	15,683	107	5,956
2023	3,600	7.2	26,100	12,900	119	6,067
2024	3,300	8.4	27,500	11,200	0	5,827

Controlled Hunting Areas 2026

Mud Creek Controlled Hunt Area

- Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday
- First two hunting days by lottery and blinds will be assigned
- Self registration after first two days

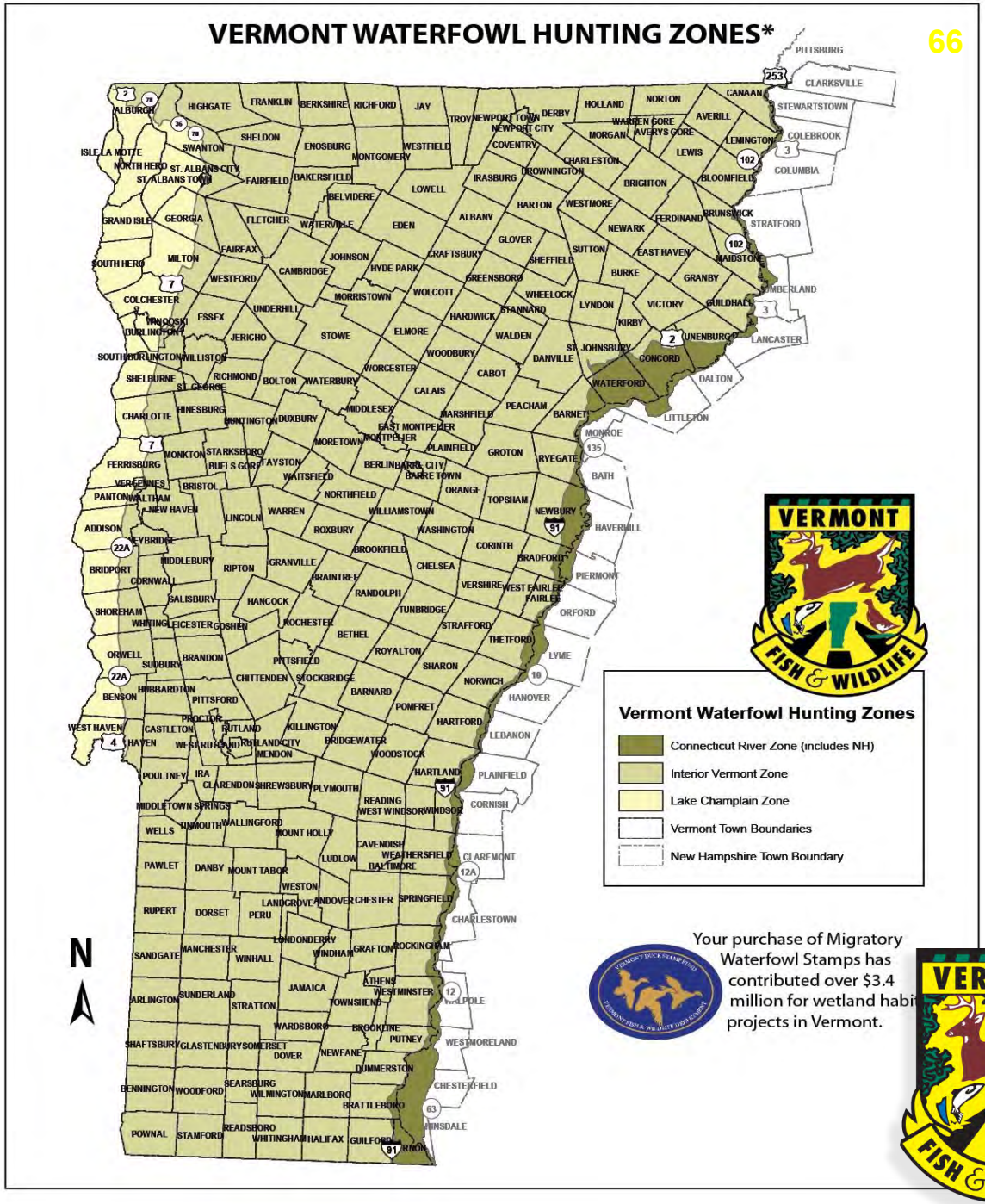
Dead Creek Goose Management Area

- Tuesdays and Thursdays (and One Friday for youth hunters)
- 4/5 Hunting Zones?
- Hunters supply their own blinds
- All sites are by lottery and zones will be assigned
- All hunting is self registration beginning 1.5 hours prior to shooting
- Currently reviewing potential changes



Vermont Waterfowl Hunting Zones

- Lake Champlain Zone (LCZ)
  - Shared with NY set by VT
- Interior Vermont Zone (IVZ)
  - Entirely in VT
- Connecticut River Zone (CRZ)
  - Shared with NH set by NH





2026 Hunting Seasons and Bag Limit Recommendations

Woodcock Season Recommendation

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 45 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 13- Jan. 31
Daily Bag limit: 3/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 45 days
Dates: Sept. 26 – Nov. 9
Daily Bag Limit: 3/day



Snipe Season Recommendation

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 107 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 1- Jan. 31
Daily Bag Limit: 8/day

Recommendation:

Length: 45 days
Dates: Sept. 26 – Nov. 9
Daily Bag Limit: 8/day



Gettyimages: Gerald Corsi

September Early Resident Canada Goose Hunting Season Recommendations

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 25 days

Outside Dates: Sept 1-25

Limit: 15/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 25 days

LCZ, IVZ and CRZ

Dates: Sept. 1 - 25

Daily Bag Limit: 8/day LCZ and IVZ

5/day CRZ



Migratory AP Canada Goose Hunting Season

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 45 days
Outside Dates: Oct. 10 – Feb. 5
Daily Bag Limit: 3/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 45 days
LCZ and IVZ
Dates: Oct. 10 – Nov. 23
Daily Bag Limit: 3/day
Will know more in a week, but may have to revert to last years seasons



Late Resident Canada Goose Hunting Season Recommendations

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 77 days
Outside Dates: Dec. 1 – Feb. 15
Daily Bag Limit: 5/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 35 days
LCZ and IVZ
Dates: Dec. 1 – Jan. 4
Daily Bag Limit: 5/day LCZ and IVZ



Greater Snow Goose Hunting Season

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 107 days
Outside Dates: Oct. 1 – March 10
Daily Bag Limit: 25/day

Recommendation:

Dates: Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026 (92 days)
Feb. 26 – Mar. 10, 2027 (13 days)
Daily Bag Limit: 25/day Regular
Possession limit: No limit
No CO in 2027 due to population <500,000
Will require Governors signature
Eventually change wording of board rule



Atlantic Brant Hunting Season Recommendation

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 30 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 23 – Jan. 31
Daily Bag Limit: 1/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 30 days
LCZ and IVZ
Dates: Oct. 10 – Nov. 8
Daily Bag Limit: 1/day



Jim McKnight

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 2 days
Outside Dates: Within 2 weeks of either end of the allowable hunting days

Recommendation:

Season Length: 2 days
LCZ, IVZ, and CRZ
Dates: Sept. 26 & 27
Legal Species: Ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots.

Other Requirements:

Youth hunter must be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old, Adult may assist in calling, setting decoys, retrieving downed birds



Duck Hunting Season Recommendations

Federal Frameworks:

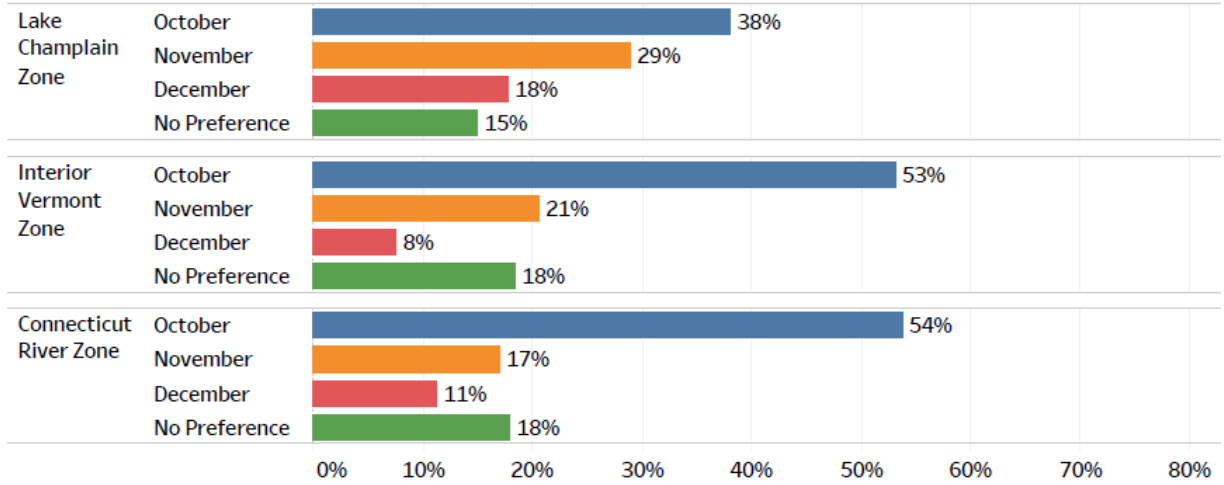
Season length: 60 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 21 – Jan. 31
Daily Bag Limit: 6/day

Recommendation:

Season Dates:
IVZ: Oct. 10 – Dec. 8 (60 days)
LCZ: Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 (23 days)
Nov. 21 – Dec. 27 (37 days)
Daily Bag Limit: 6/day

Daily bag may include no more than, 4 Mallards (2 hens), 3 Wood Ducks, 2 Canvasback, 2 Redheads, 1/40 & 2/20 Scaup, 3 Pintail, 2 Black Duck, 3 Sea Ducks (No more than 3 Scoters, 3 Eiders (1 hen), 3 Long-tailed duck, and no Harlequin).

Figure 15b: Preferred month to have the most duck hunting days open - By Zone Hunted In



Merganser Hunting Season Recommendations

Federal Frameworks:

Season length: 60 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 21 – Jan. 31
Daily Bag Limit: 5/day

Recommendation:

Season Dates:
IVZ: Oct. 10 – Dec. 8 (60 days)
LCZ: Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 (23 days)
Nov. 21 – Dec. 27 (37 days)
Daily Bag Limit: 5/day



Falconry Season

Recommendation:

Season Dates: Coincides with established seasons for each migratory bird species.

Legal Species: All legal migratory game bird species which have a current open season in Vermont (woodcock, snipe, ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots)

Shooting Hours: Same as established open seasons for each migratory game bird species.

Bag Limit: Three (3) migratory game birds; singly or in an aggregate of species, but not to exceed established restrictions which currently exist.



Questions?



2026
Moose Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks. The Department recommends issuing 85 moose hunting permits distributed between WMUs E1 and E2 to stabilize the moose population in that region. No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, because moose densities remain below established objectives. The recommended permit allocation is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

The number of moose in WMU E has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that are negatively affecting moose health and survival. Winter ticks are a host-dependent parasite with moose being the primary host responsible for major fluctuations in winter tick densities. Therefore, reduction in moose population density decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Maintaining a lower-density moose population will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

Reducing winter tick numbers directly, either by treating moose or the landscape with some form of acaricide or fungal pathogen, is not currently a viable option. Research in this area is ongoing, but the realities of treating an entire landscape or a sufficient portion of the moose population make it unlikely that this will be a practical option soon. Importantly, this approach would not address the cause of high winter tick abundance, which is high moose population density.

Maintaining a lower-density moose population should reduce the abundance of winter ticks and improve overall moose health in WMU E, consistent with the Department's established objective of managing for a healthy moose population. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the northeast, they do not significantly impact moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose population densities that limit tick abundance. Instead, moose in these areas are primarily limited by the lack of young forest habitat and internal parasites like brainworm.

Summary of Key Points

- The moose population remains stable or slowly declining in most of Vermont, but may be declining in WMU E (E1 & E2), as intended, due to recent moose harvests.

- Results of moose research and ongoing monitoring in WMU E indicate health of moose is poor in that region.
    - Adult survival remains relatively good, but detrimental health impacts of winter ticks have caused birth rates to be low.
    - Heavy winter tick loads can cause more than half of moose calves to die in late winter.

- Moose density in WMU E remains above the objective of 1 moose per square mile established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.
    - Moose densities greater than 1 moose per square mile are uncommon in North America, occurring in less than 10% of moose range.
    - In Vermont, no WMU outside the Northeast Kingdom ever had a moose density of 1/mi^2.
    - Moose densities greater than 1/mi^2 support high numbers of winter ticks that negatively impact the health of moose.
    - Moose densities below 0.75/mi^2 support relatively few winter ticks that do not impact moose populations. This is the case in most of Vermont – winter ticks are present, but do not cause population level impacts.

- Increased moose harvests in recent years appear to be effectively reducing moose numbers, as intended, in WMU E. The population is approaching the objective of 1 moose per square mile.

- The Department recommends 85 moose hunting permits (65 either sex and 20 antlerless only) be allocated in WMU E to stabilize moose numbers near the objective.
    - This is expected to result in a harvest of approximately 42 moose, or about 6% of the current estimated population in WMU E.

- No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, which cover 93% of Vermont, because moose densities remain below objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Goals

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in WMUs E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks.

Management Objectives

Moose population objectives for each WMU were established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. These objectives aim to maintain healthy regional moose populations at levels that are socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable.

Moose density objectives throughout most of moose range in Vermont have been set at 0.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 1**). This objective is a carryover from earlier moose management plans and reflects peak moose densities in these regions during the early 2000s.

In WMUs D2, E1, and E2, density objectives reflect higher historical densities and the impact of winter ticks on the size and health of the region's moose population. Research has found reduced frequency of winter tick epizootics (where more than 50% of calves die from winter tick infestations) at moose densities near 1/mi^2 and no tick epizootics at densities below 0.75/mi^2 (Samuel 2007, Jones 2016). The Department will initially try to maintain moose densities at or below 1/mi^2 to reduce winter tick abundance and the frequency of epizootics and improve the health of the moose population. However, if tick impacts are not reduced, the moose density may need to be reduced to 0.75/mi^2. Ultimately, the goal is to have healthy moose, with fewer calves dying each year from heavy winter tick loads and healthier cows with higher birth rates.

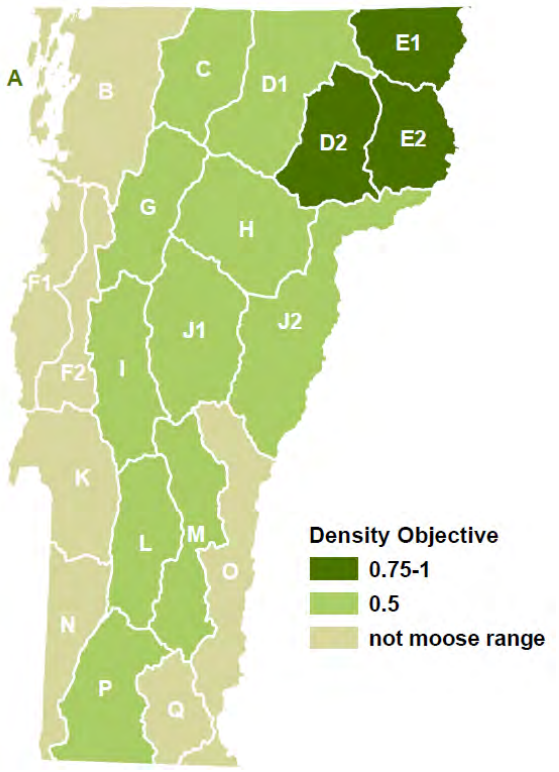


Figure 1. Moose density objectives (moose per square mile of moose habitat) established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Hunting thresholds have also been established for each WMU at 75% of the density objective (**Table 1**). The Department will only consider hunting moose when densities exceed this threshold for two consecutive years. This ensures the other values of moose are maximized at these lower densities.

Moose and Winter Ticks

Studies in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine have concluded that winter ticks are the primary cause of moose mortality across their core range in New England (Musante et al. 2007, 2010, Bergeron et al. 2013, Dunfey-Ball 2017, Jones et al. 2017, Ellingwood et al. 2019, Jones et al. 2019, DeBow et al. 2021), with some moose hosting an astonishingly high number of ticks (>50,000/individual; Jones et al. 2019).

Core moose range in New England extends from northeastern Vermont through northern New Hampshire and western and northern Maine. This part of the region has a colder climate with longer winters, low deer densities, large blocks of forest, and an abundance of young forest created by commercial timber management which allows it to sustain higher densities of moose than more peripheral parts of their range. Population-level effects of winter ticks have only been observed in the region's core moose range, where moose densities have been high enough to support large numbers of winter ticks.

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the region, they have little impact on moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range in the northeast, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose densities which limit tick abundance. Moose numbers outside of the Northeast Kingdom have declined from their peak in the early 2000s, but the main cause of that decline was not winter ticks. It was primarily due to a combination of declining quantity of young forest, increased parasite loads (particularly brainworm linked to increasing deer densities), and fewer moose in core moose range to migrate out to these other regions. These factors continue to limit moose abundance across much of Vermont.

Vermont Research

During 2017–2019, 126 moose (36 adult cows and 90 calves) were fitted with GPS radio collars in WMU E to monitor survival and birth rates. Results of this research clearly showed that chronic, high winter tick loads caused the health of moose in WMU E to be poor. Birth rates were low and overwinter calf survival was poor (49%; DeBow et al. 2021). Although adult female survival remained relatively good, it was lower than expected for a population without major predators. Survival of breeding age females has significant influence on population trends in long-lived species like moose.

Fieldwork associated with the survival study concluded in 2019; however, the Department continued to monitor survival and calf recruitment in the remaining collared cows through 2024. Additionally, the large amounts of data collected during this study allowed University of Vermont researchers to analyze other aspects of moose and winter tick ecology (*see* Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Blouin et al. 2021*b*, Rosenblatt et al. 2021, Rosenblatt et al. 2023). Other related research at UVM assessed the effect of various fungal pathogens on survival of winter tick larvae (*see* Sullivan et al. 2021 and Sullivan et al. 2022).

The Department is currently partnering with multiple northeastern universities and state and federal agencies on regional research efforts focused on non-invasive monitoring of moose and winter ticks. A component of this involves deployment of hundreds of long-term camera monitoring stations that will hopefully allow for better monitoring of moose health and population trends, particularly in parts of the region with little or no moose harvest.

Population Status

Regional Population Estimates

Regional moose densities in Vermont are estimated from moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters during the November rifle season. This approach, originally developed by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, relates sighting rates to moose densities determined by aerial surveys (Bontaites et al. 2000). Aerial surveys conducted in Vermont allowed the Department to modify this model to better fit Vermont sighting data (Millette et al. 2011). Sighting rates often vary from year to year due to factors other than the number of moose (e.g., weather conditions), so a 3-year rolling average is used to smooth out some of this variation.

Using this approach, the 2025 (2023–2025 rolling average) density estimates for WMUs E1 and E2 are 1.32 and 1.09 moose/mi^2, respectively, which remain above the density objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. Moose population densities in all other WMUs except WMU C remain below established hunting thresholds (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Moose density estimates based on sighting rates by deer hunters and density objectives and hunting thresholds established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, by WMU. Density estimates are based on average sighting rates during 2023–2025.

WMU	Habitat (mi^2)	Density (moose/mi^2)			Population Estimate	
		Objective	Hunting Threshold	Current Estimate	N	(80% CI)
A	35	n/a	n/a	0.02	1	(1–1)
B	420	n/a	n/a	0.02	10	(8–11)
C	351	0.5	0.38	0.41	145	(122–168)
D1	449	0.5	0.38	0.09	39	(30–49)
D2	346	0.75-1	0.56	0.24	82	(63–100)
E1	306	0.75-1	0.56	1.32	403	(357–449)
E2	326	0.75-1	0.56	1.09	355	(297–413)
F1	108	n/a	n/a	0.04	5	(3–6)
F2	158	n/a	n/a	0.02	3	(3–3)
G	363	0.5	0.38	0.05	17	(11–23)
H	466	0.5	0.38	0.19	88	(72–104)
I	407	0.5	0.38	0.09	35	(26–44)
J1	464	0.5	0.38	0.04	18	(14–23)
J2	633	0.5	0.38	0.10	65	(54–77)
K	359	n/a	n/a	0.04	14	(8–19)
L	346	0.5	0.38	0.08	27	(17–36)
M	424	0.5	0.38	0.18	77	(55–98)
N	275	n/a	n/a	0.02	6	(6–6)
O	478	n/a	n/a	0.05	25	(13–37)
P	447	0.5	0.38	0.11	49	(34–65)
Q	219	n/a	n/a	0.05	12	(7–16)
STATE	**7380**				**1474**	**(1201–1748)**

Moose density in WMU C exceeded the hunting threshold in 2024 and 2025, meaning permits could now be considered in this WMU according to the guidelines of the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. However, since the current density is only slightly above the hunting threshold, typical year-to-year fluctuations in density estimates make it unlikely that this status will be maintained. Therefore, the Department recommends that no permits be issued in WMU C in 2026.

The Department continues to receive interest in moose hunting in areas outside WMU E, and some local areas could likely sustain a limited moose harvest. However, the uneven distribution of functional moose habitat (and therefore moose) in much of Vermont is a challenge for management. The Department is reevaluating moose habitat mapping and regional population objectives based on recent research efforts in the northeast (e.g., Pearman-Gilman et al. 2020, Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Peterson et al. 2022) This will allow for setting more appropriate population objectives that reflect current habitat limitations, and calculating more meaningful estimates of moose density in WMUs with less homogeneous moose habitat.

Moose Population Trends in WMU E

In WMU E, moose were overabundant in the early 2000s and the Department intentionally worked to reduce moose numbers. Since population reduction efforts ended in 2010, moose density has remained relatively stable in WMU E near 1.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 2**). Importantly, the density of moose over that time has been high enough to support problematic numbers of winter ticks. The population may now be declining, as intended, as a result of higher moose harvests in recent years.

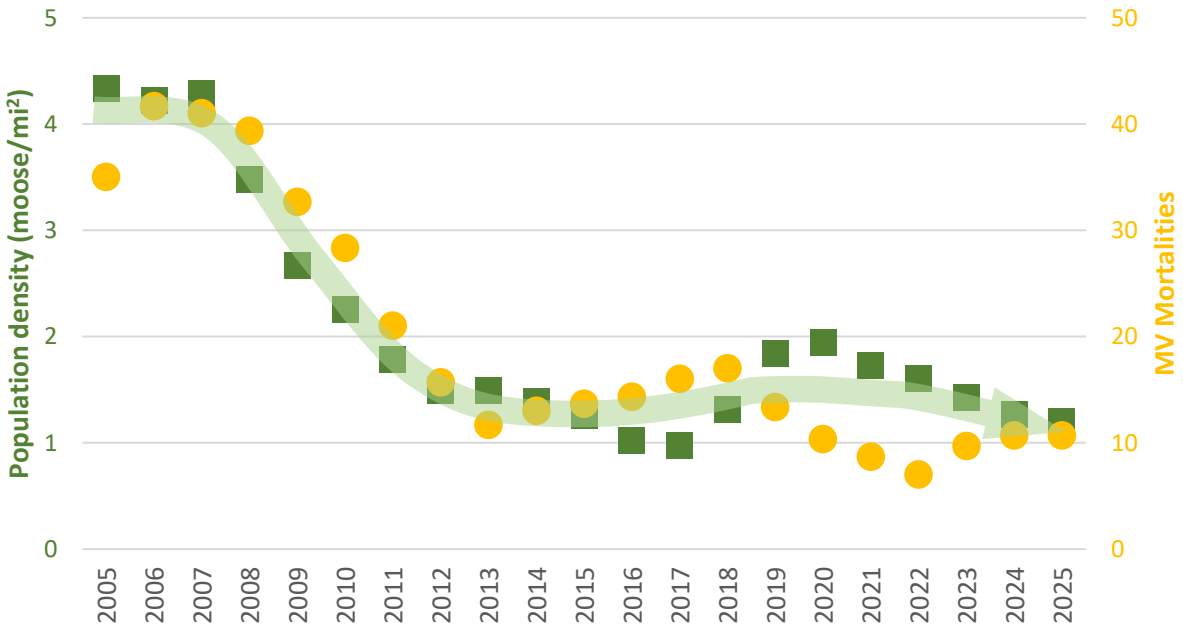


Figure 2. Moose density estimates (green squares) and moose mortalities from motor vehicle collision (yellow circles) in WMU E during 2005–2025. Both metrics are three-year rolling averages. Density estimates are based on moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters. The light green line shows general population trend.

Recent Winter Tick Impacts in WMU E

The severity of annual tick infestations is dependent not only on moose density, but also on climate, including temperature, humidity, wind, and snow. Annual variation in climate conditions results in variation in winter tick loads on moose. Vermont has not collared moose calves to directly monitor overwinter survival since 2019. As a result, the Department relies on other sources of information to estimate winter tick impacts since that time.

One useful measure is counts of winter ticks on bull moose harvested in October (**Figure 6**). This measure provides an indication of tick abundance on the landscape, but final tick loads on moose are largely determined by the length of the questing period. The questing period is typically ended by weather conditions (e.g., persistent snow or freezing conditions) that kill questing winter tick larvae.

Persistent snow arrived in early November in WMU E, resulting in a shorter questing period than in many recent years. However, the higher average winter tick counts in 2025 (**Figure 6**) still suggest a greater likelihood of high calf mortality in the spring of 2026.

Occasional increases in winter tick abundance are expected, even as moose density is reduced. However, these high winter tick years will be less frequent at lower moose density. Winter tick counts were also higher in New Hampshire and Maine in 2025, indicating this increase was driven by annual climate variation, not moose abundance.

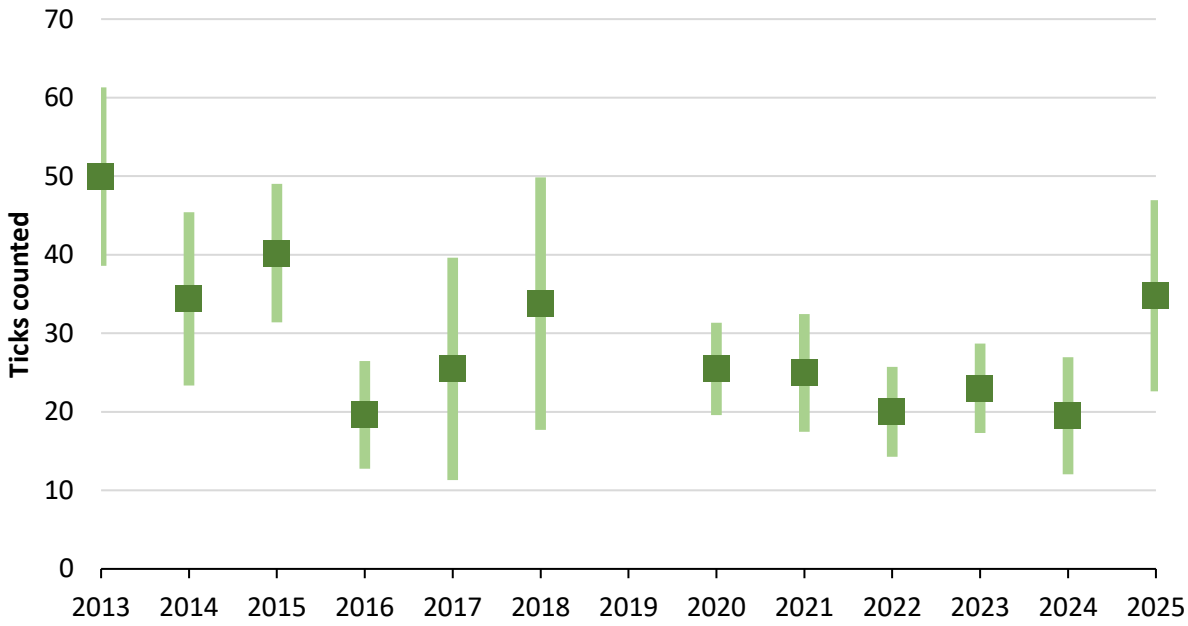


Figure 6. Winter tick counts on bull moose harvested in Wildlife Management Unit E, 2013–2025.

Population Health in WMU E

In the early 2000s, moose were overabundant in WMU E. They were causing significant damage to forest regeneration, and their physical condition was declining as habitat quality declined. The Department actively reduced the moose population in this area to bring it into balance with the habitat and to improve the health of moose. By 2011, the population had been reduced to a level the habitat could support; however, health measures did not improve (**Figures 7** and **8**).

Moose body condition and reproductive rates have remained poor since 2011 due to the impacts of chronic high winter tick loads. Moose are not currently limited by habitat quality in the core part of their range, including WMU E (Dunfey-Ball 2017). However, habitat quality can influence the distribution of moose on the landscape (i.e., higher densities of moose in areas with the highest quality habitat), which can influence local winter tick abundance and impacts on moose health (Healy et al. 2019, Blouin et al. 2021*a* and *b*).

Body condition and reproductive rates have shown signs of improvement in recent years (**Figures 7** and **8**). However, body weights, particularly for yearling moose, declined sharply in 2024 and 2025 (**Figure 7**). The cause of this decline is unknown, but it is likely due to something other than winter ticks. Ultimately, we hope to see sustained improvement in these metrics.

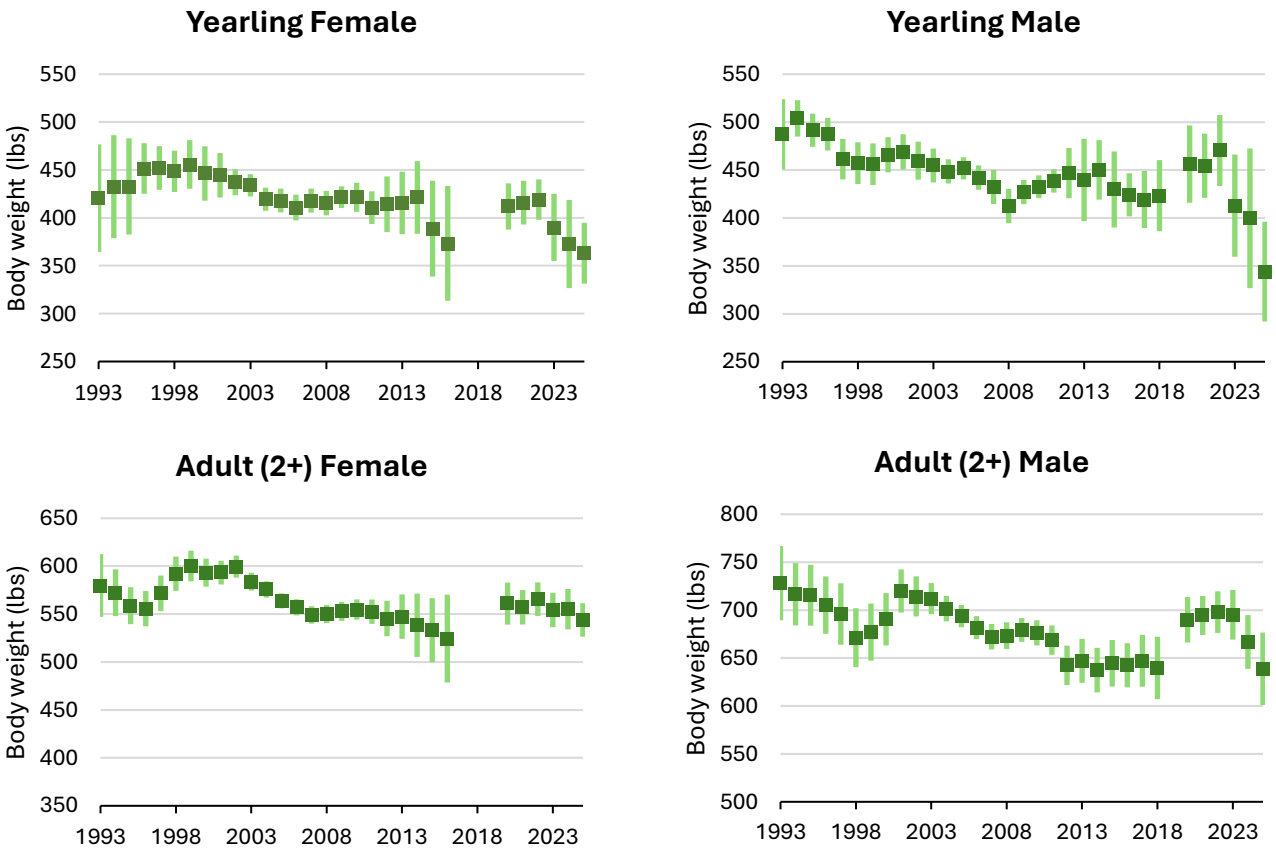


Figure 7. Field-dressed body weights of moose harvested during the regular season in Wildlife Management Unit E, 1993–2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages with 95% confidence intervals.

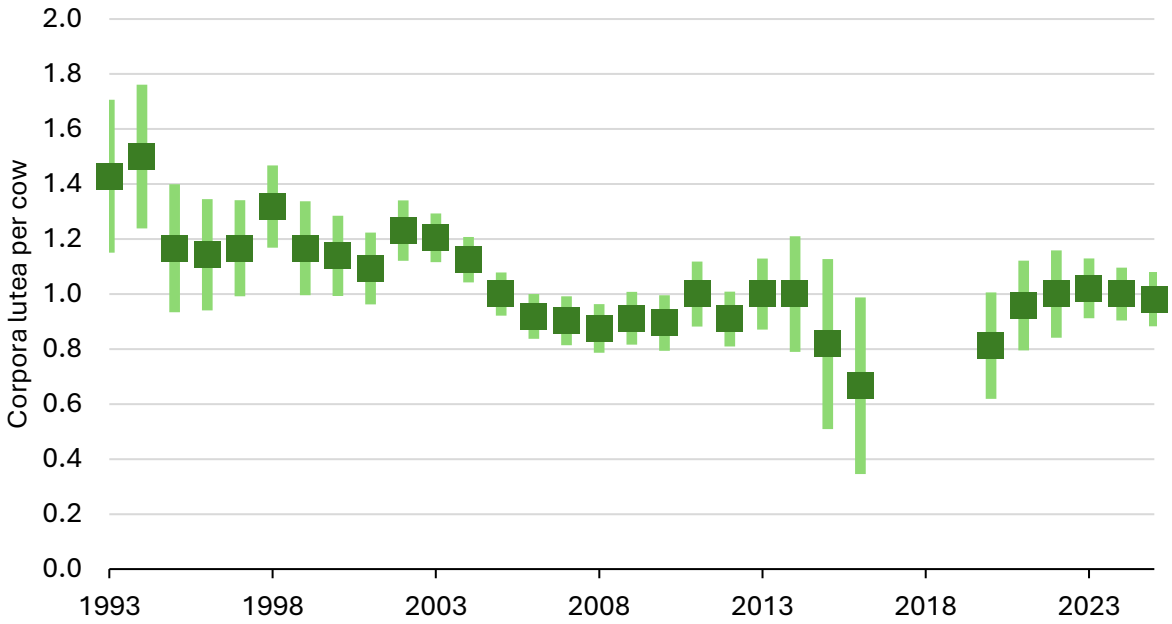


Figure 8. Ovulation rate of prime-aged (≥3 years old) cow moose in WMU E, 1993-2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages from counts of corpora lutea in ovaries collected from hunter-harvested moose.

Harvest Recommendation

The Department recommends harvesting approximately 10-12 adult cow moose (~3% of the cow population) and approximately 30 adult bull moose (~15% of the bull population) in WMU E during the 2026 moose hunting seasons. The Department further recommends that this be accomplished through the issuance of 65 either-sex hunting permits and 20 antlerless-only hunting permits. This is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025. No permits are recommended in the other 19 WMUs.

Permit breakdown by season, type, WMU, and special allocation is provided below in **Table 2**. Given recent success rates and sex-age composition of the harvest for each season and permit type, this allocation is expected to result in the harvest of approximately 42 moose with an expected breakdown of 29 bulls, 11 cows, and 2 calves.

Approximately 55% of permits are recommended to be allocated to WMU E1 due to higher moose density in that WMU. Since most auction and special opportunity permit winners choose to hunt WMU E1, this will result in approximately 65% of permits being assigned to that WMU.

The recommended allocation to the archery season is 25% of either-sex permits, based on the percentage of total applications that were for this season in recent years and the need to obtain sufficient biological data during the regular season. Allocations to the auction, special opportunity, and veterans are the same as prior years and are limited by statute and regulation.

Table 2. Recommended 2026 moose hunting permit allocations and expected harvest by season, permit type, and WMU.

	Permits			Expected Harvest	
	E1	E2	Total		
Archery Season					
Either-sex	7	8	15	8	*(6–10)*
Regular Season[1]					
Either-sex	24	20	44	24	*(20–30)*
Antlerless-only	11	9	20	7	*(6–10)*
Auction[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
Special Opportunity[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
TOTAL			**85**	**42**	*(32–56)*

[1] *Veteran permits are a priority draw for the first 5 regular season permits.*

[2] *Auction and Special Opportunity Permits are either sex and allow choice of season and WMU.*

The results of the moose study and continued monitoring of moose clearly show that the density of moose in WMU E over the past decade has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that negatively affect moose health and survival. Research has shown that winter tick abundance is directly related to moose population density. Reducing the density of moose decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Reducing the moose population and maintaining it at lower density will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

The Department is committed to achieving a healthy moose population in WMU E by meeting the population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. The proposed permit allocation and resulting cow harvest should allow the population to stabilize near the objective of 1 moose/mi^2 (632 moose in WMU E) within the next few years.

In practice, the moose population and winter tick impacts are dynamic, and management must remain adaptive. Actual permit allocations and harvest will be adjusted annually based on new information as it becomes available. Importantly, the Department's primary goal is to improve the health of moose in WMU E. If health does not improve at 1 moose/mi^2, moose density may need to be reduced even further.

Maintaining a healthy, stable, and sustainable moose population requires action to improve moose health. Without management action to reduce the moose population and maintain it at a lower density, high tick loads will continue to impact the health of moose in WMU E. The resulting chronic stress, low birth rates, and high calf mortality will make the population less resilient to diseases, parasites, and environmental variation, which could cause the population to destabilize. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

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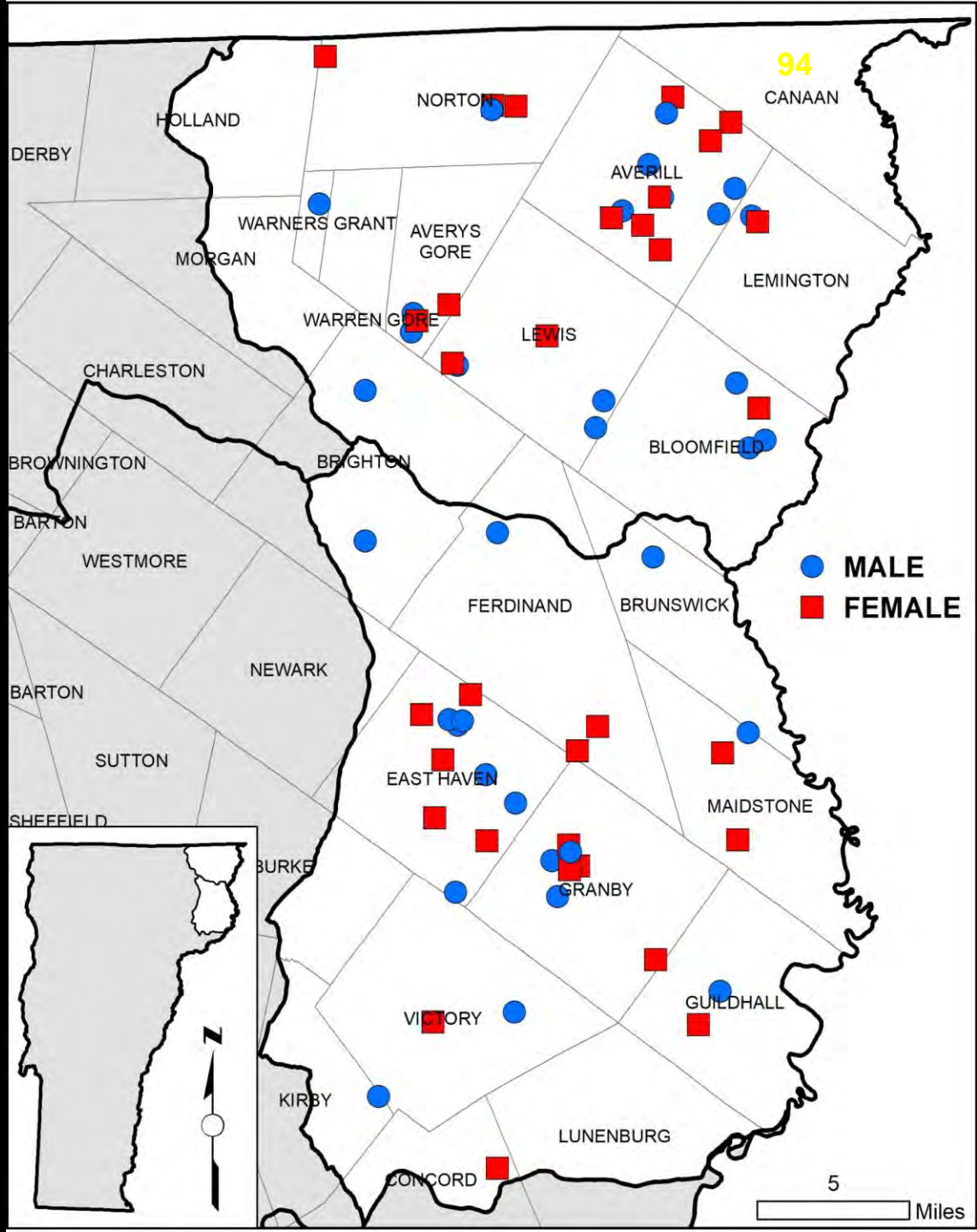
2026 Moose Harvest Recommendation

2025 Moose Harvest

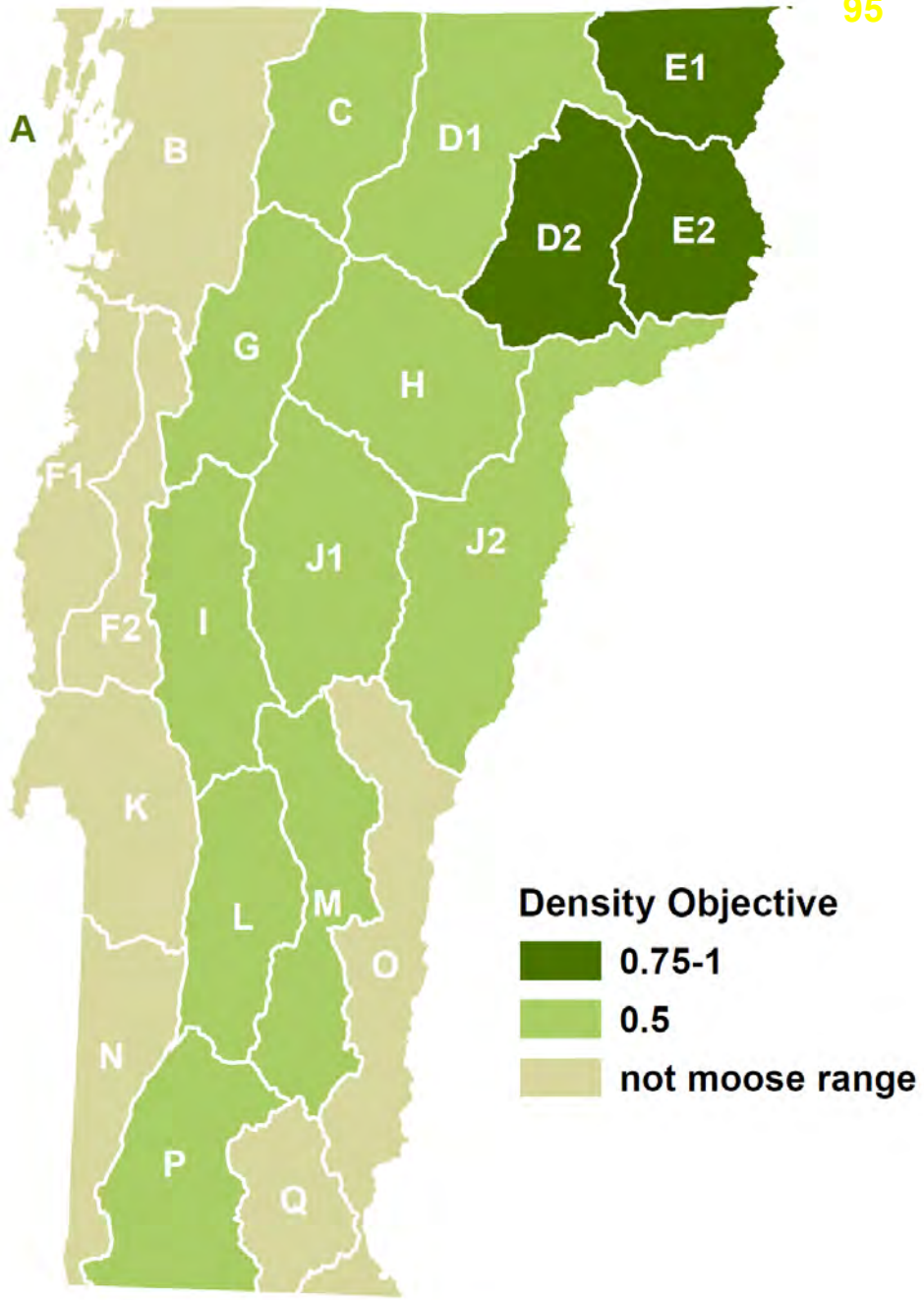
Archery Season:
15 moose
(all bulls)
65% success rate (15/23)

Special Opportunity Season:
1 bull – 33% success rate (1/3)

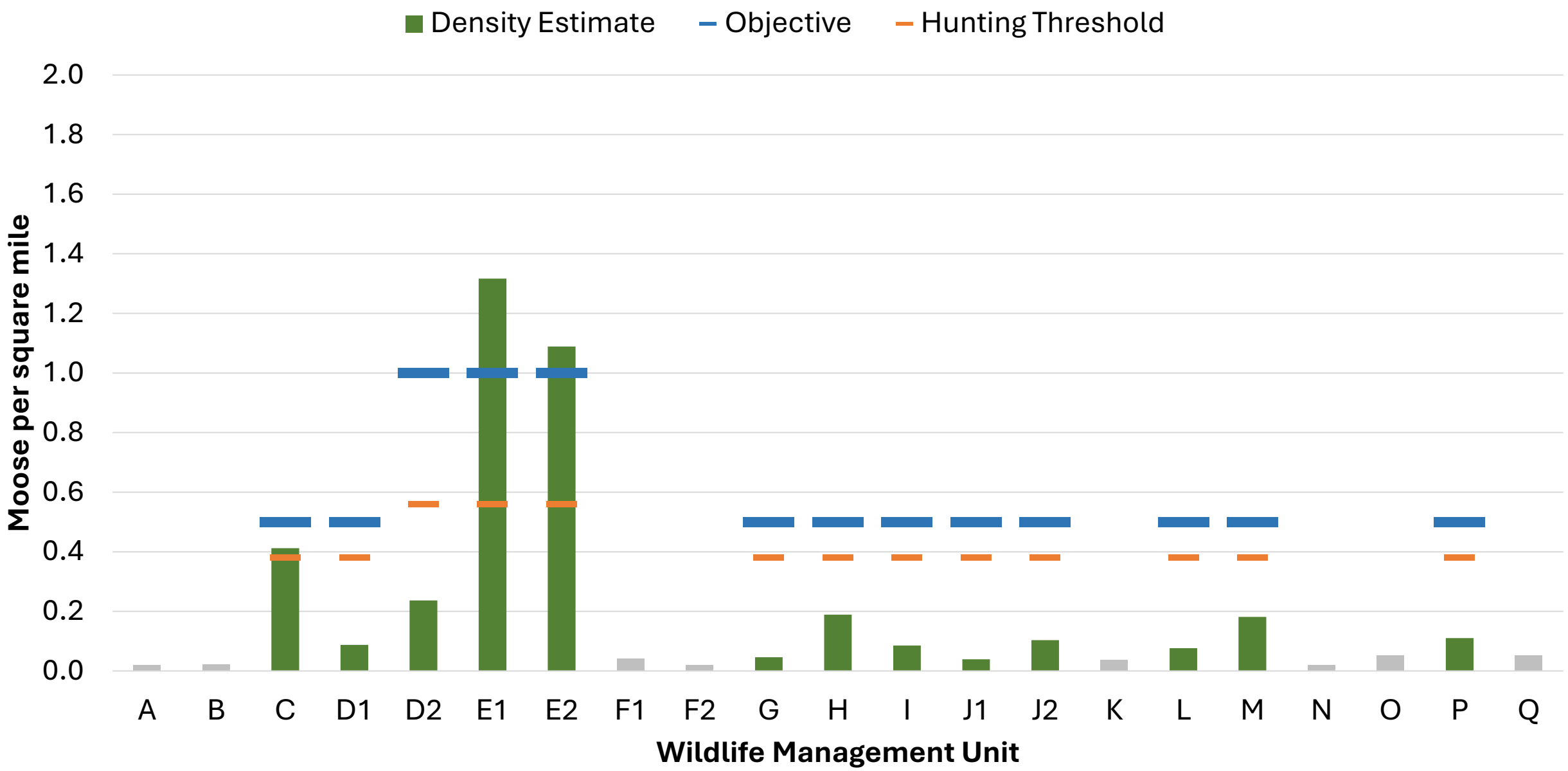
Regular Season:
52 moose
(18 bulls/29 cows/5 calves)
47% ES success rate (25/53)
27% AO success rate (27/99)

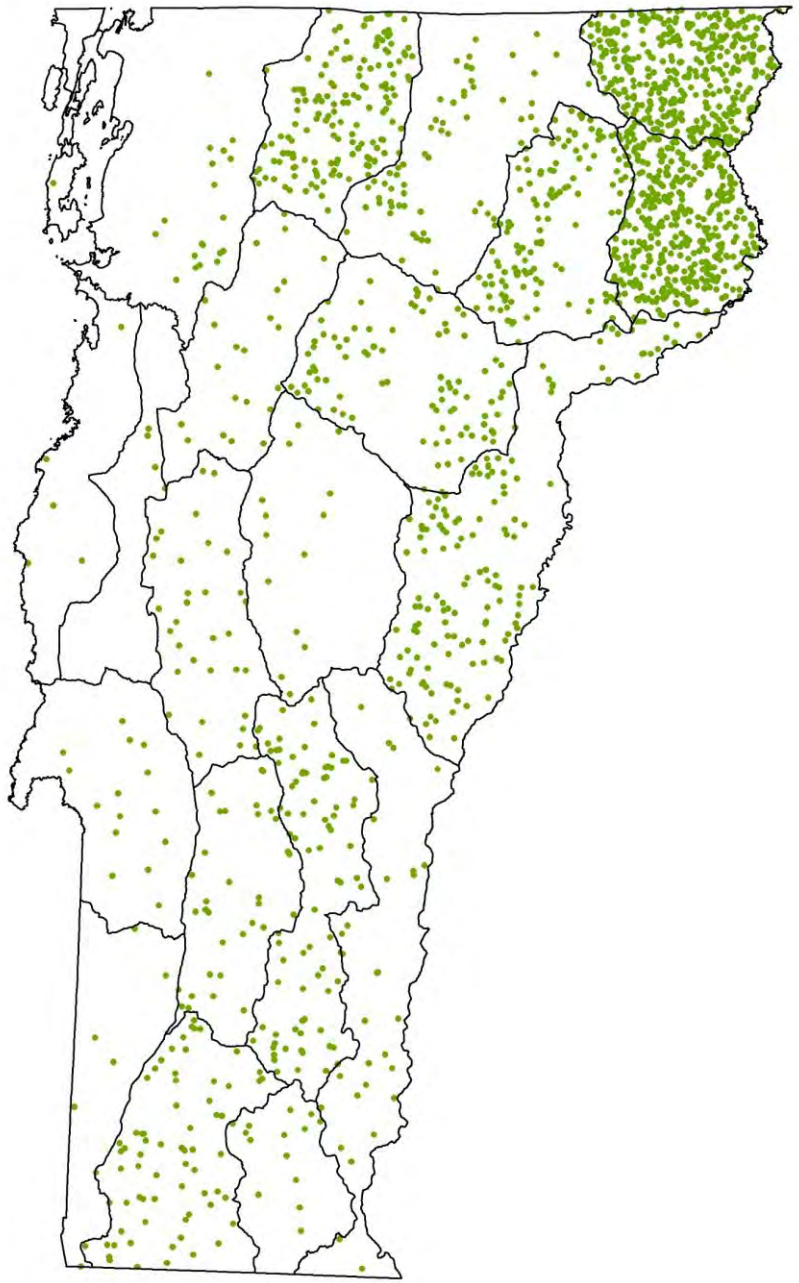


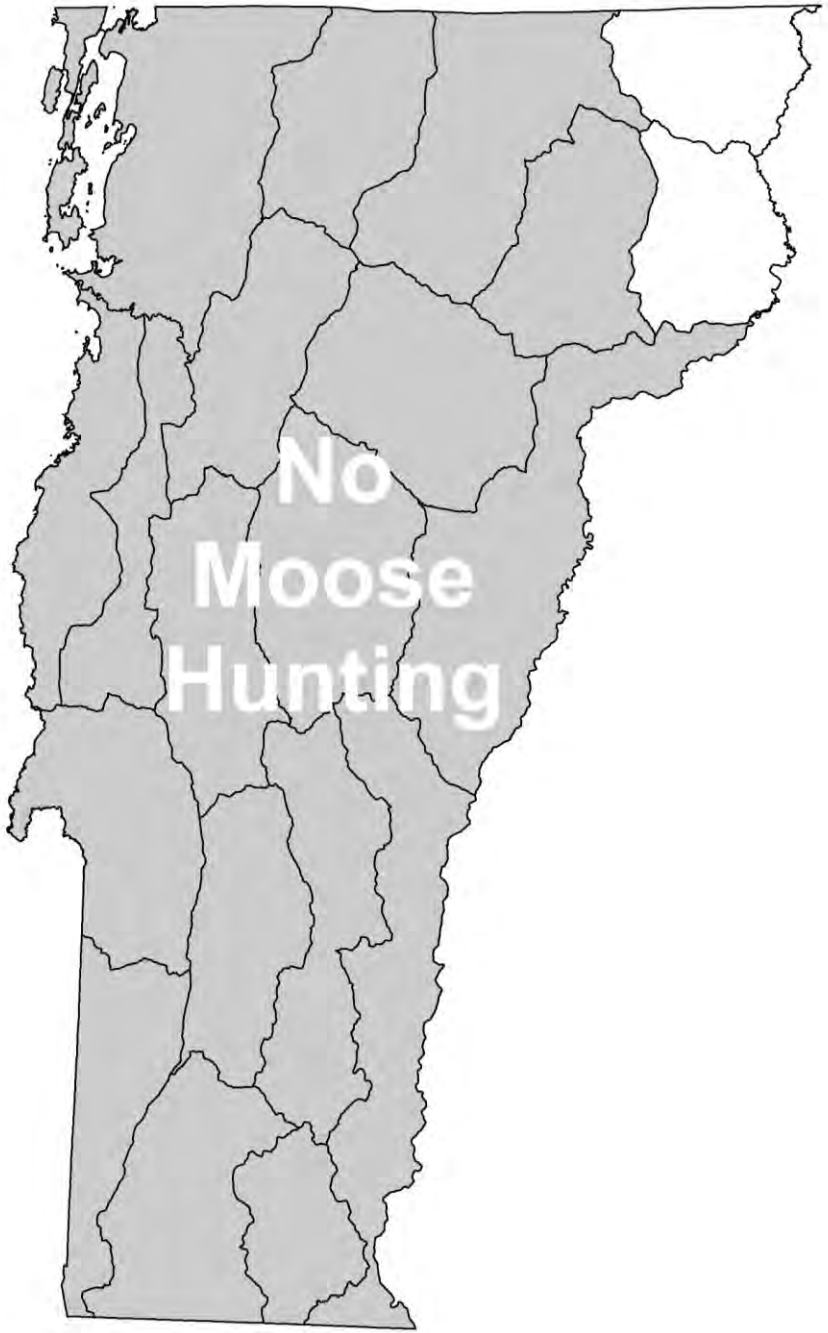
Moose Population Objectives

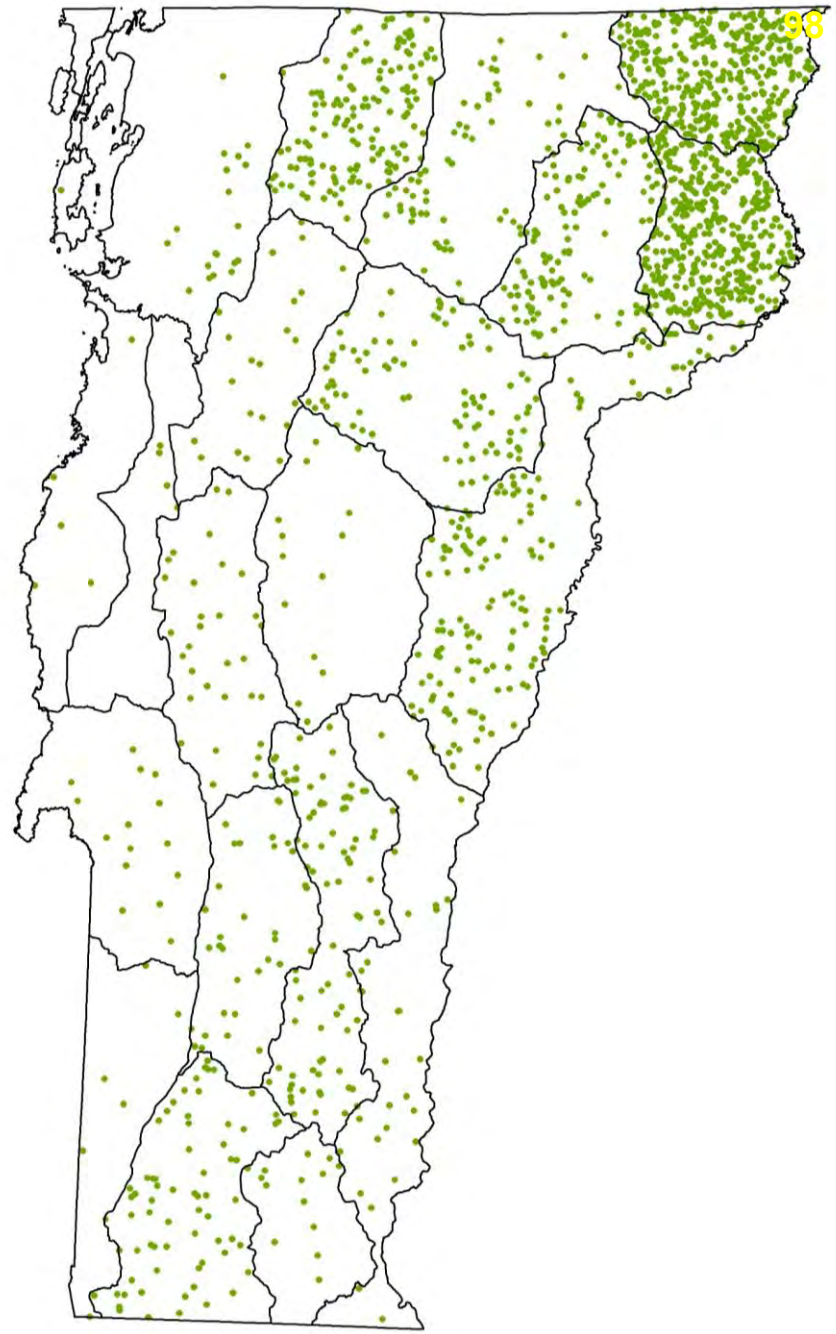


Moose Distribution in Vermont





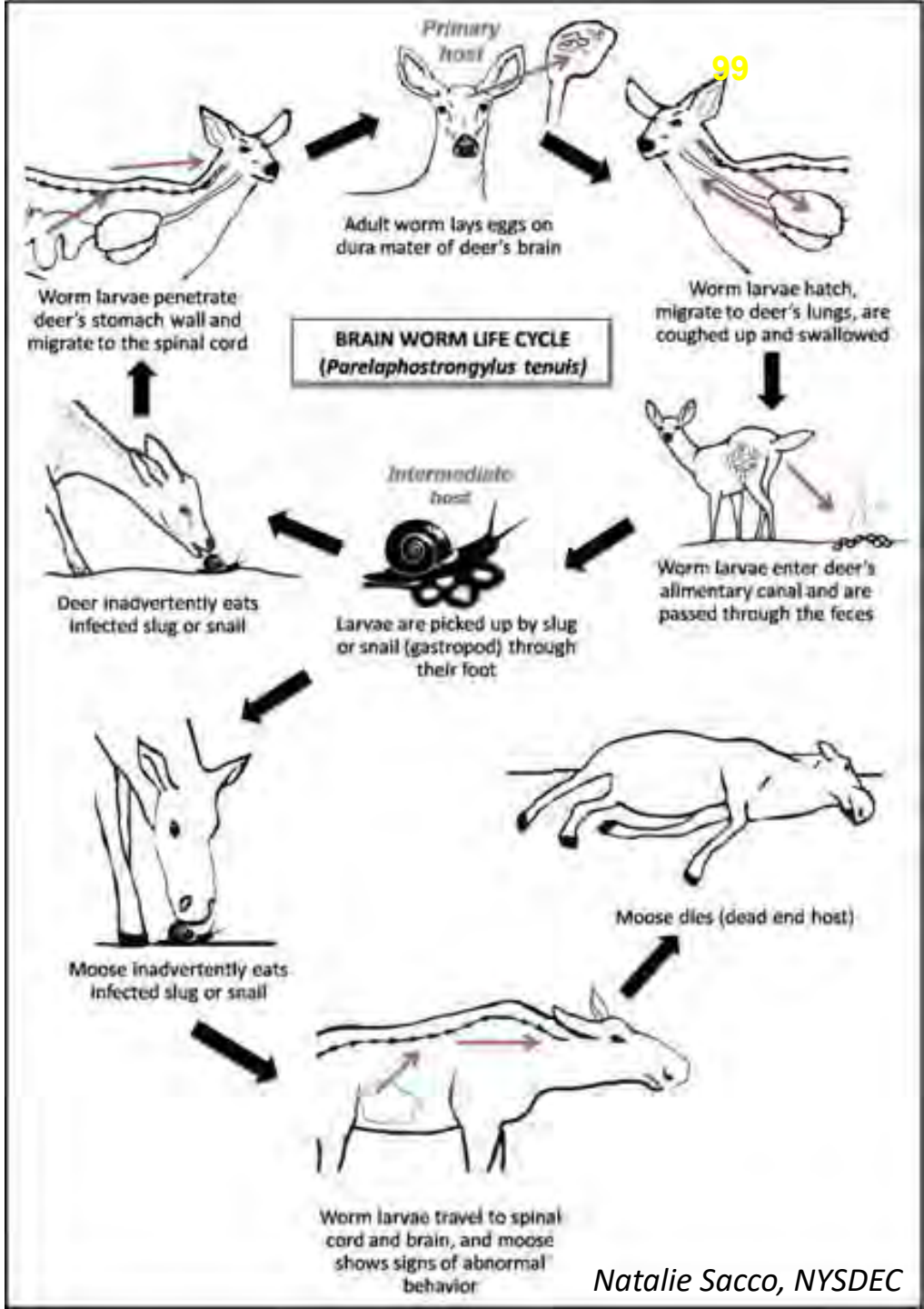

No
Moose
Hunting


96

Brainworm





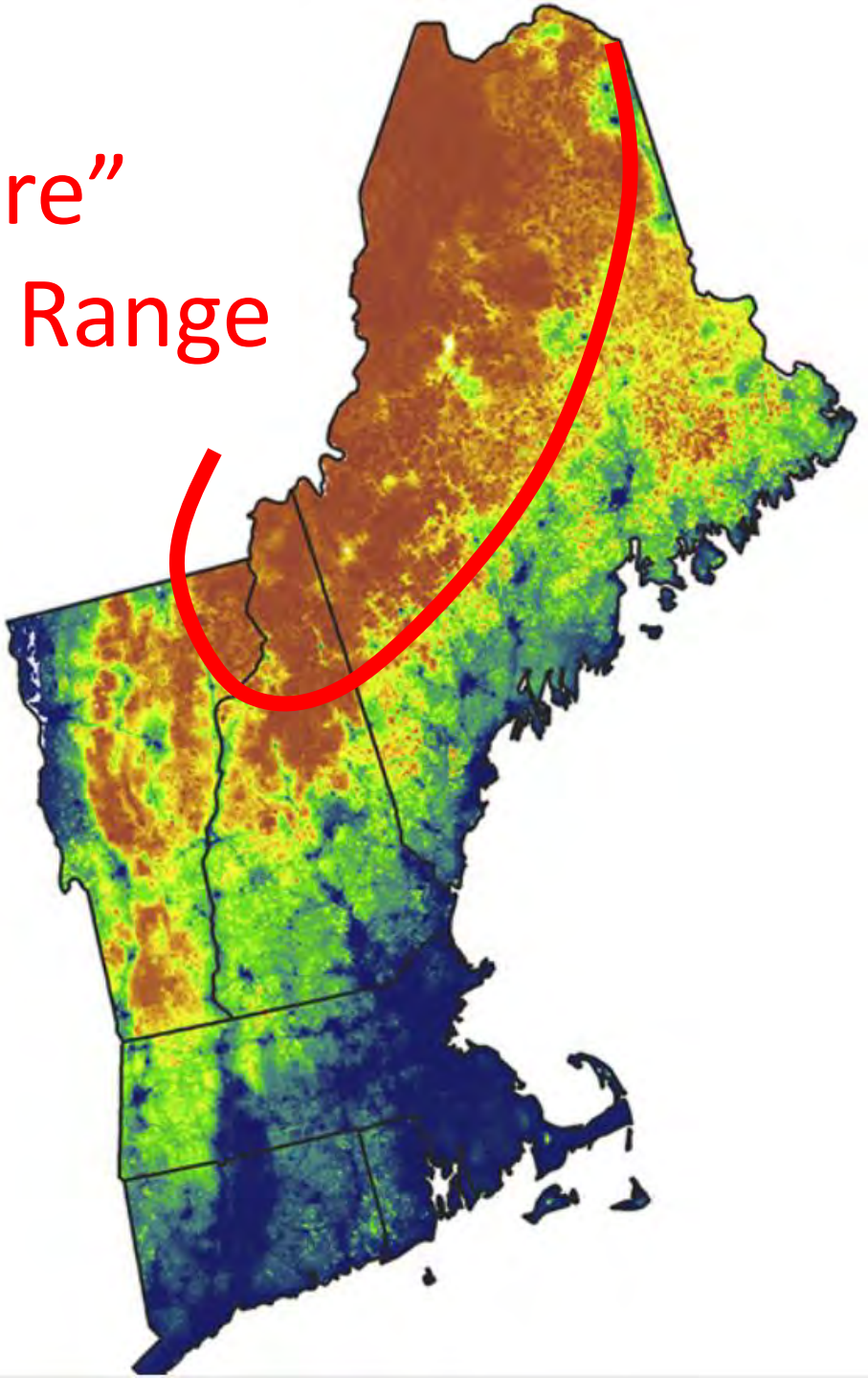


Natalie Sacco, NYSDEC

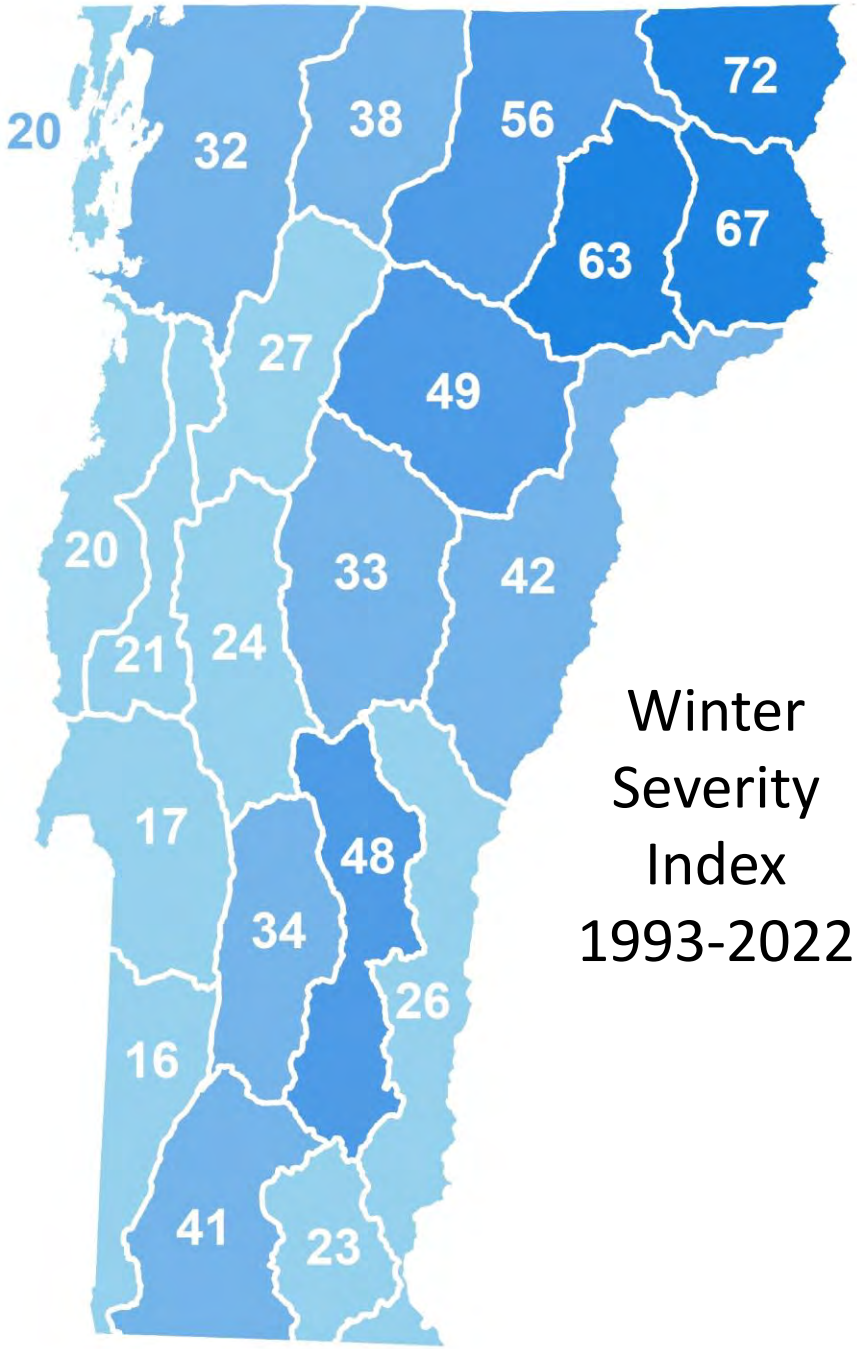
Loss of Young Forest Habitat



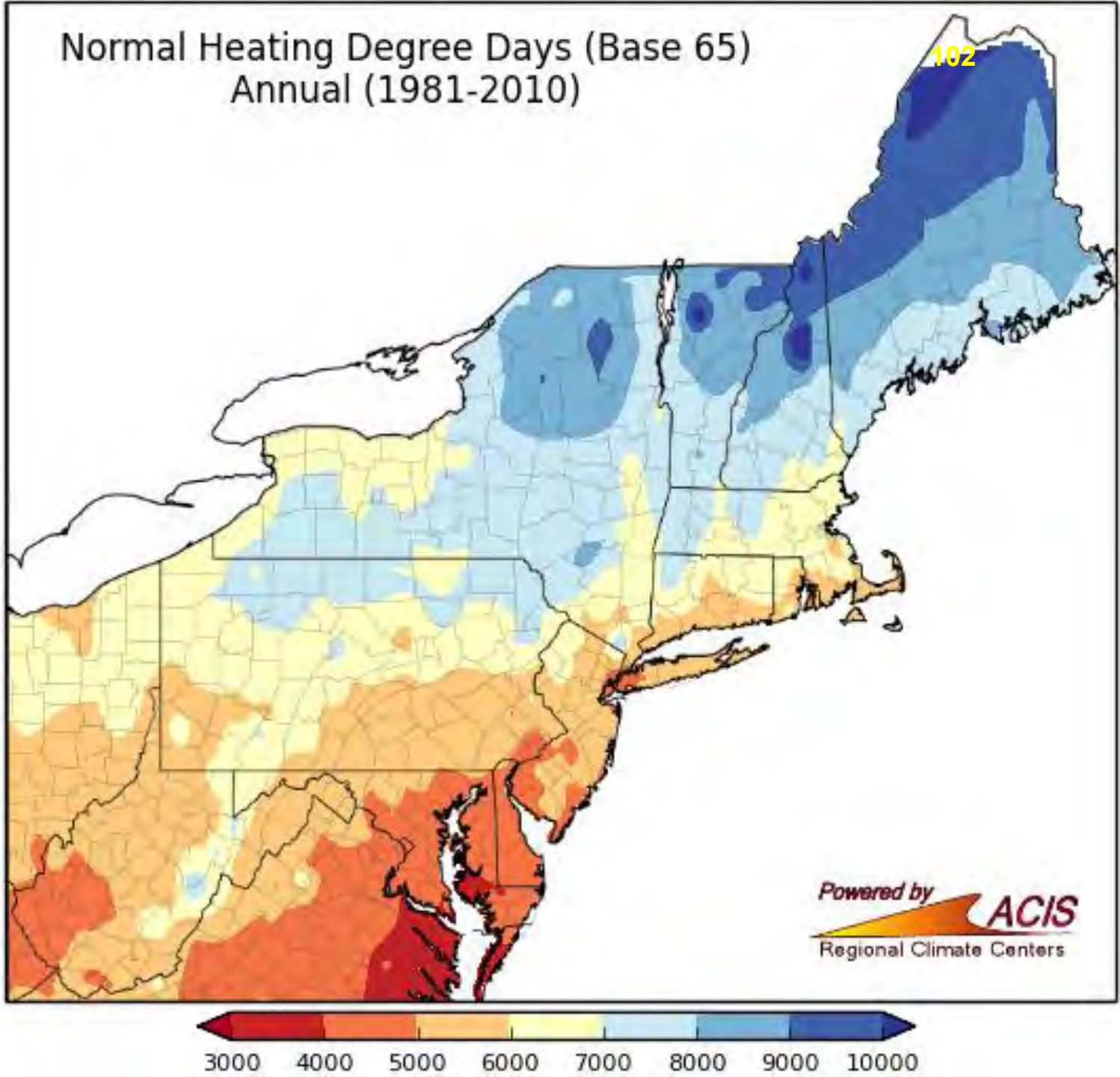




Probability of moose occurrence
Pearman-Gillman et al. 2020

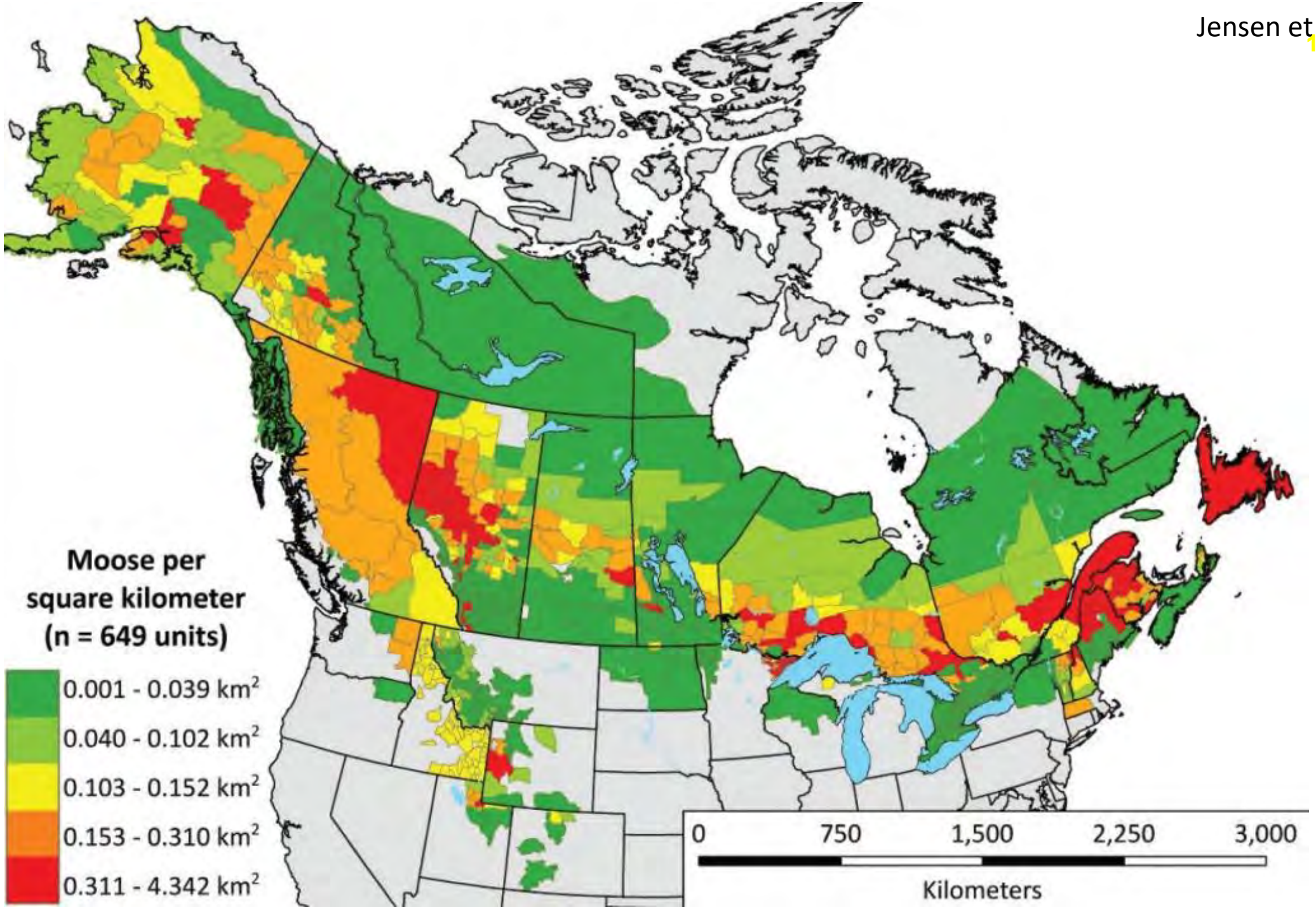


Winter Severity Index 1993-2022

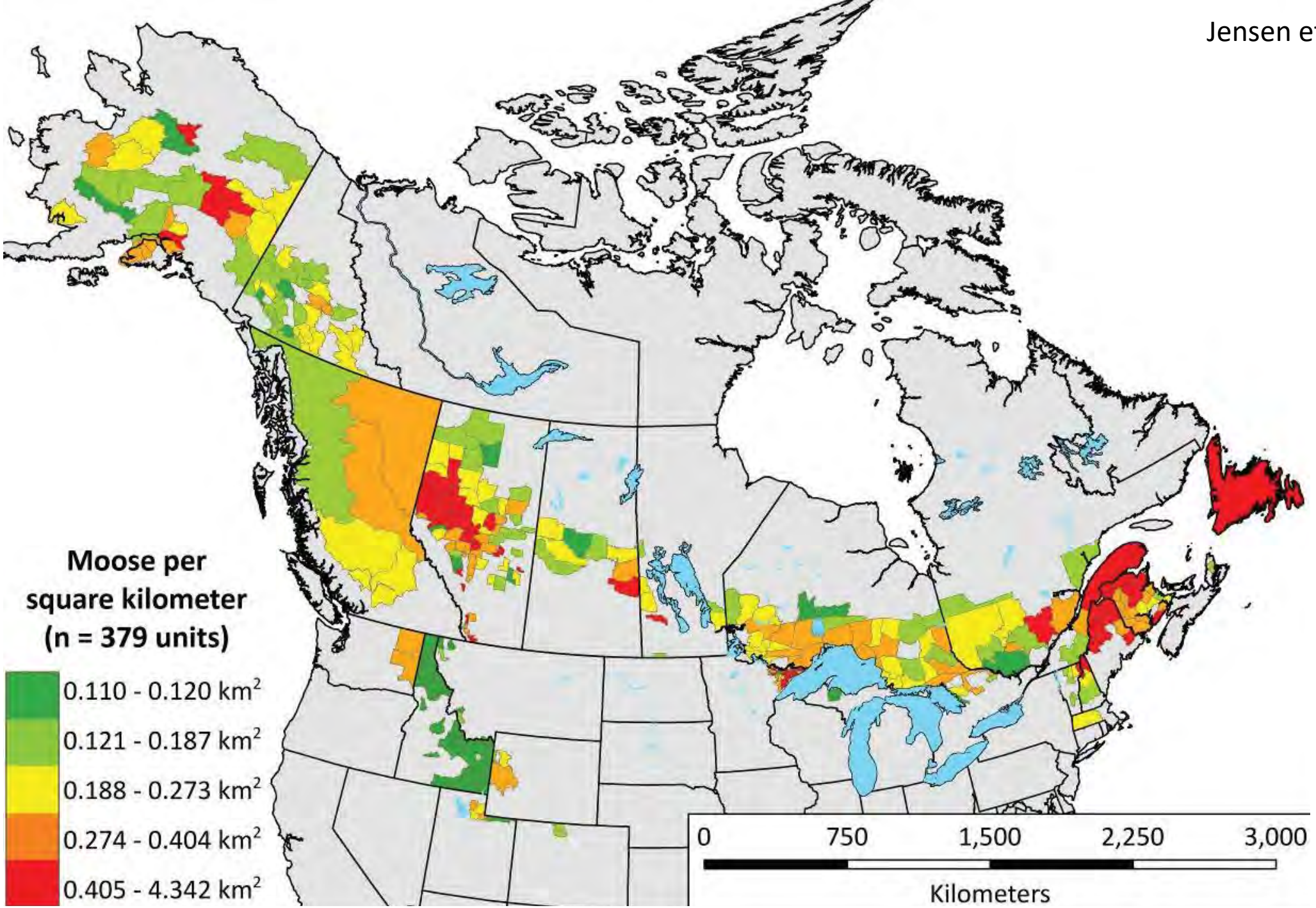




Jensen et al. 2018



Jensen et al. 2018



Winter Tick

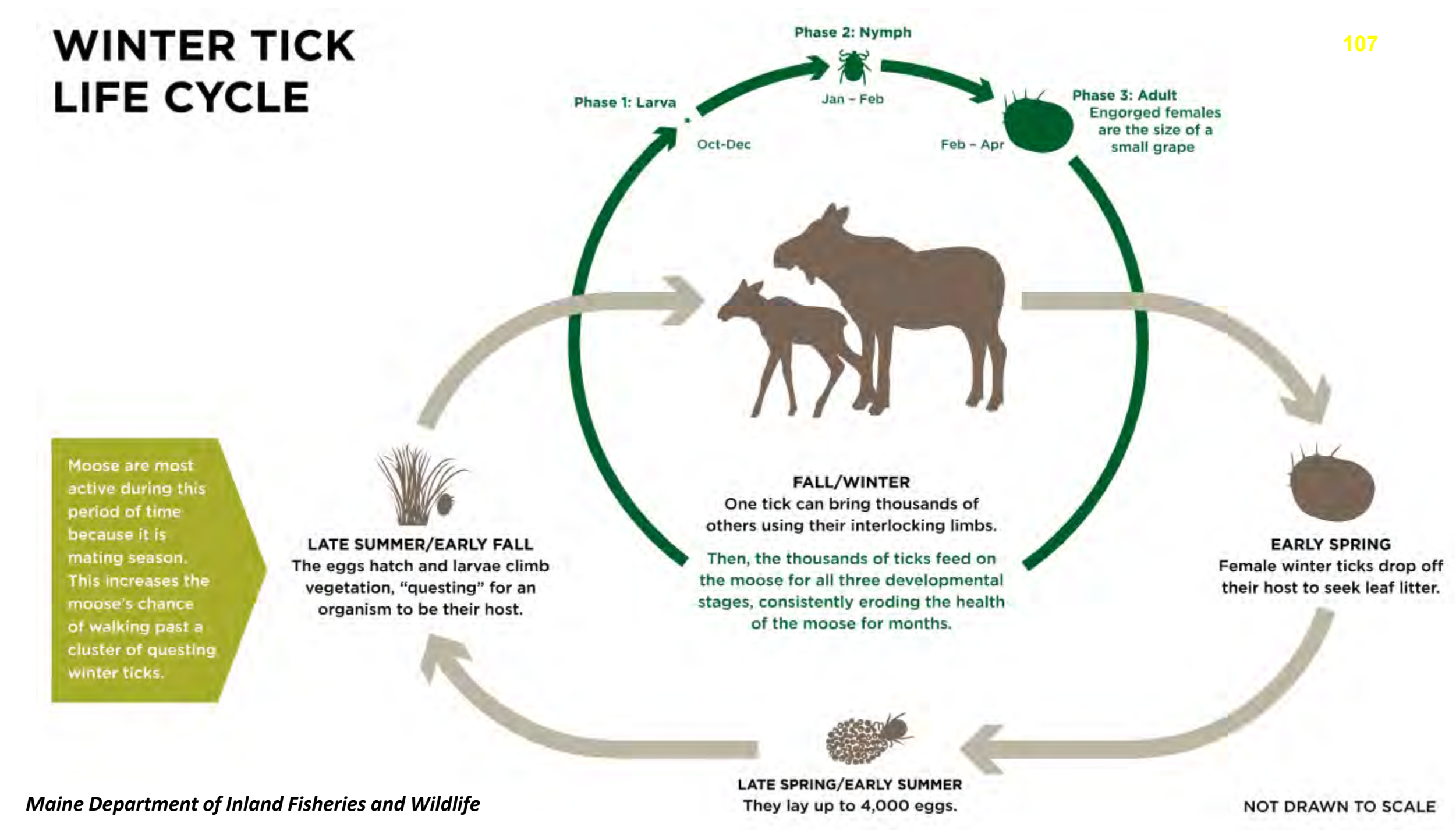








WINTER TICK LIFE CYCLE



Moose are most active during this period of time because it is mating season. This increases the moose's chance of walking past a cluster of questing winter ticks.

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife



Photo by Cheryl Sullivan

WINTER TICK LIFE CYCLE





FALL/WINTER
One tick can bring thousands of others using their interlocking limbs.

Then, the thousands of ticks feed on the moose for all three developmental stages, consistently eroding the health of the moose for months.



LATE SUMMER/EARLY FALL
The eggs hatch and larvae climb vegetation, "questing" for an organism to be their host.



EARLY SPRING
Female winter ticks drop off their host to seek leaf litter.

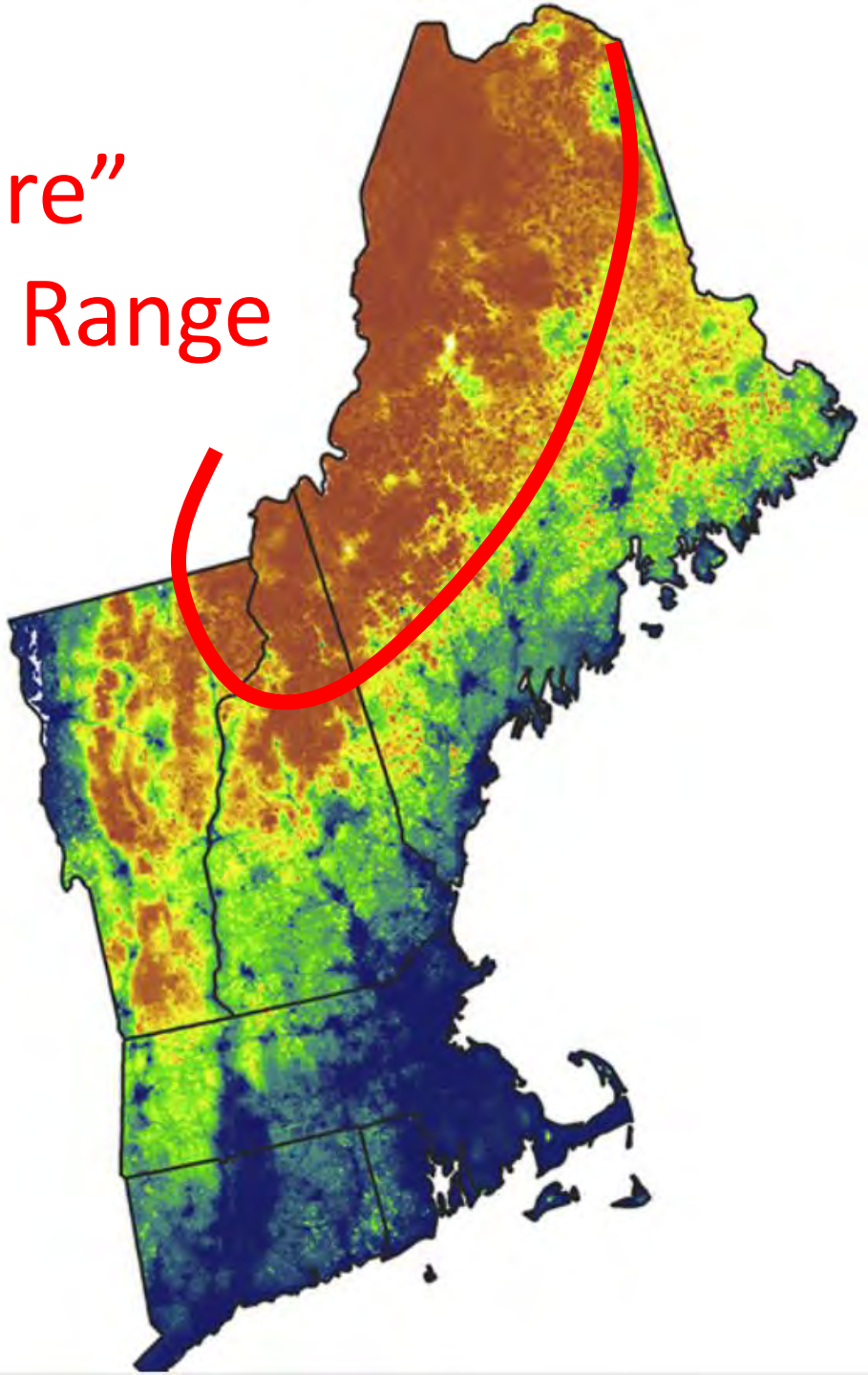


LATE SPRING/EARLY SUMMER
They lay up to 4,000 eggs.

Moose are most active during this period of time because it is mating season. This increases the moose's chance of walking past a cluster of questing winter ticks.

NOT DRAWN TO SCALE

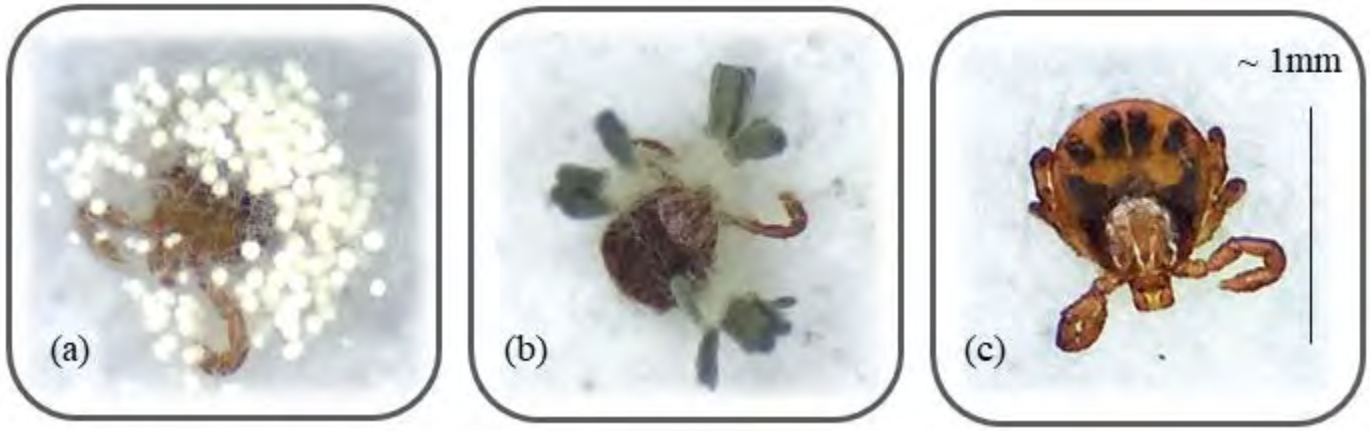
Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife



Probability of moose occurrence
Pearman-Gillman et al. 2020

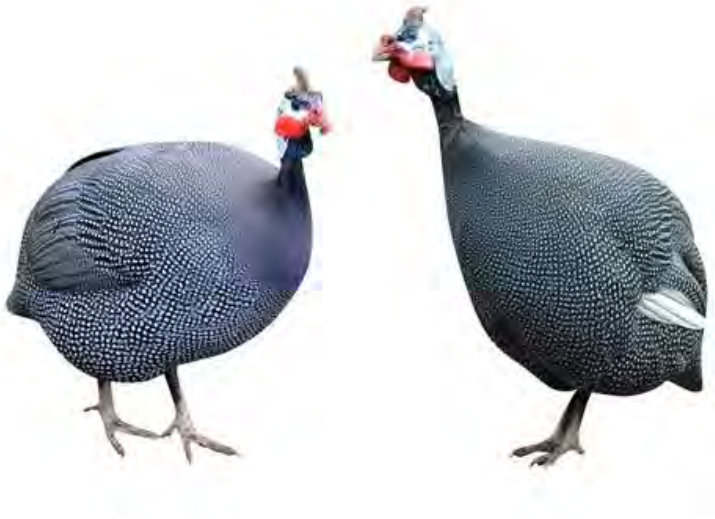
Our Goal: Healthy Moose!







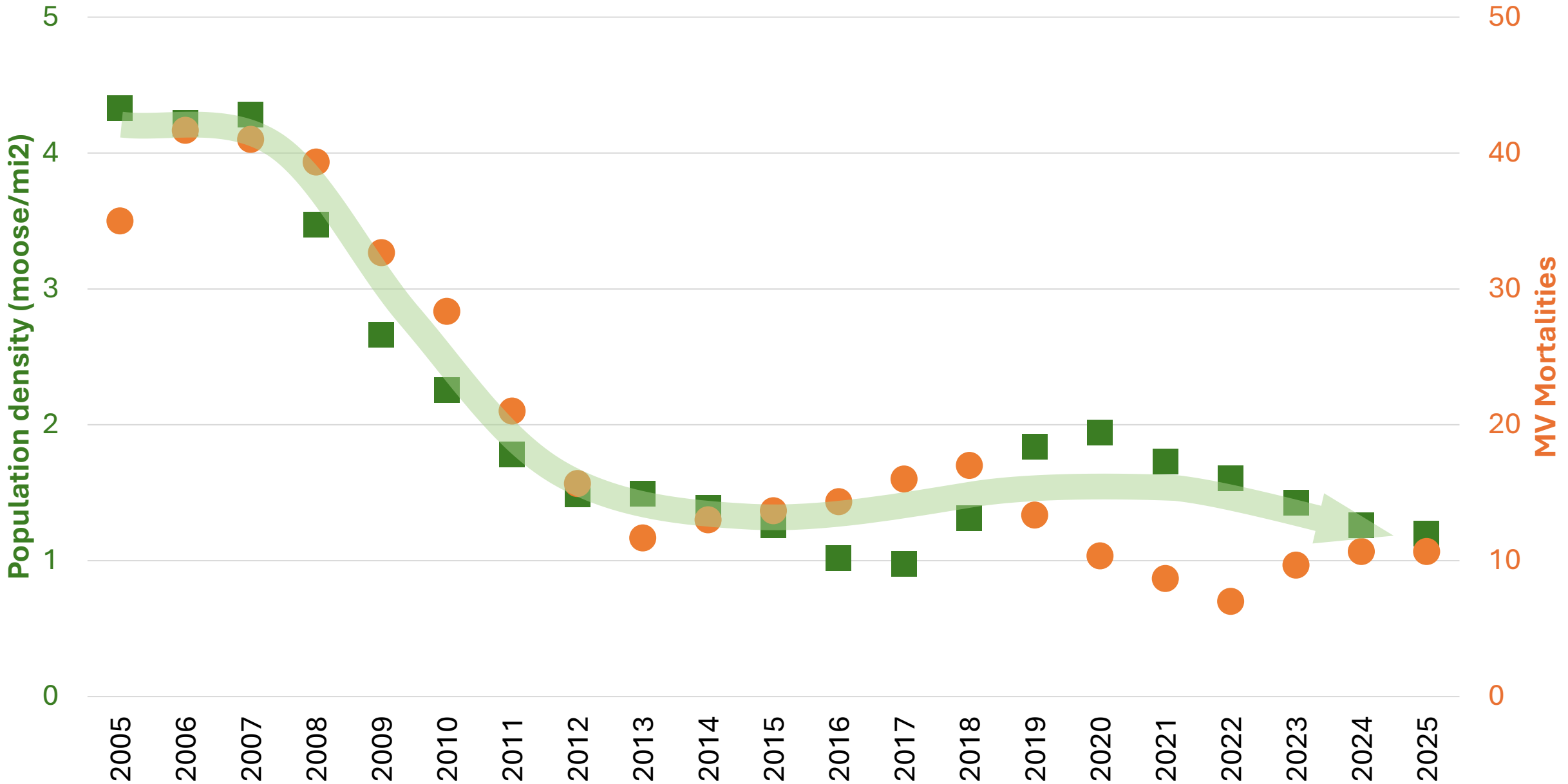
We Can't Manage Winter Ticks Directly



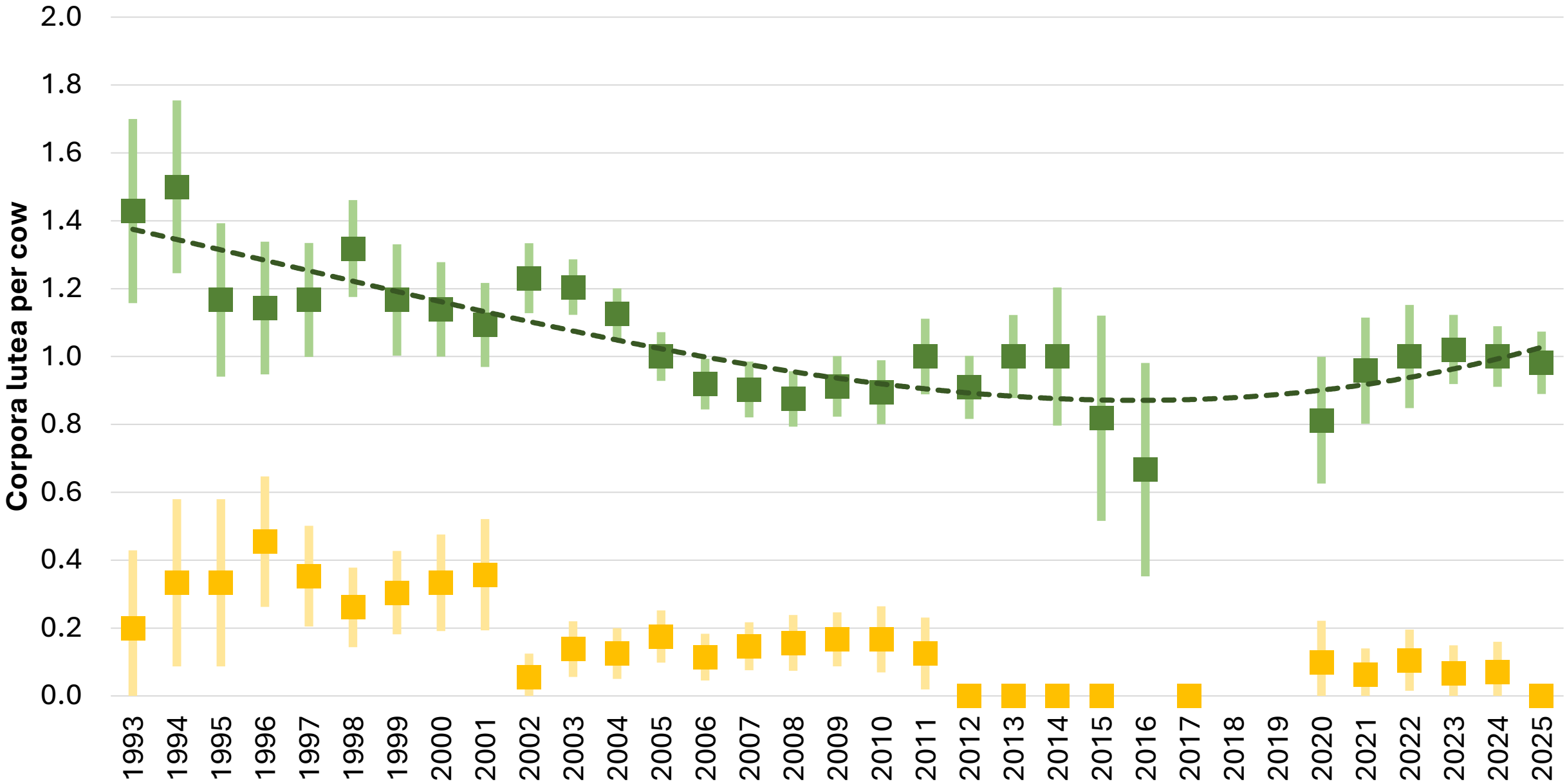




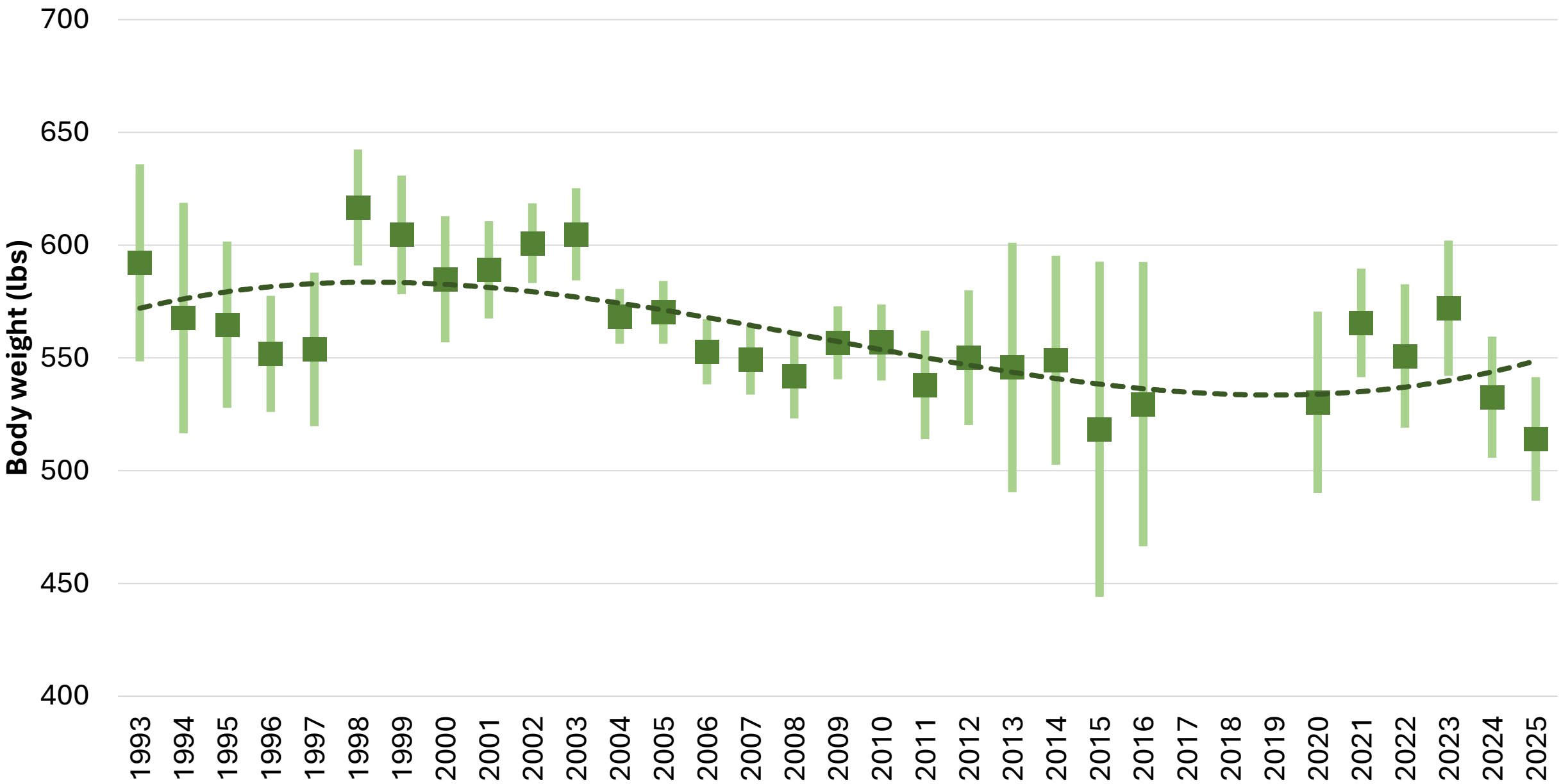
Population Trend in WMU E



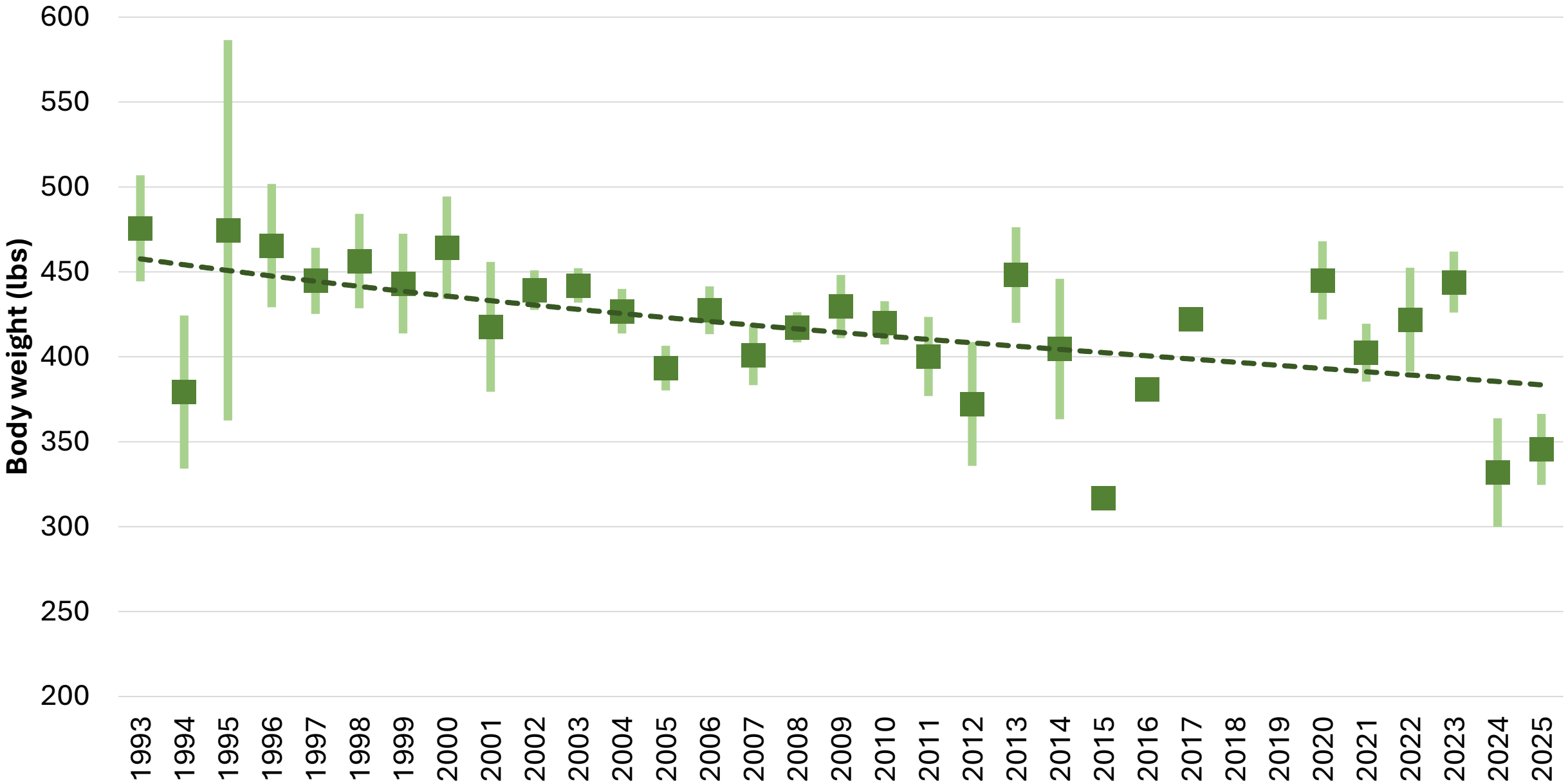
Health Measures: Ovulation Rate



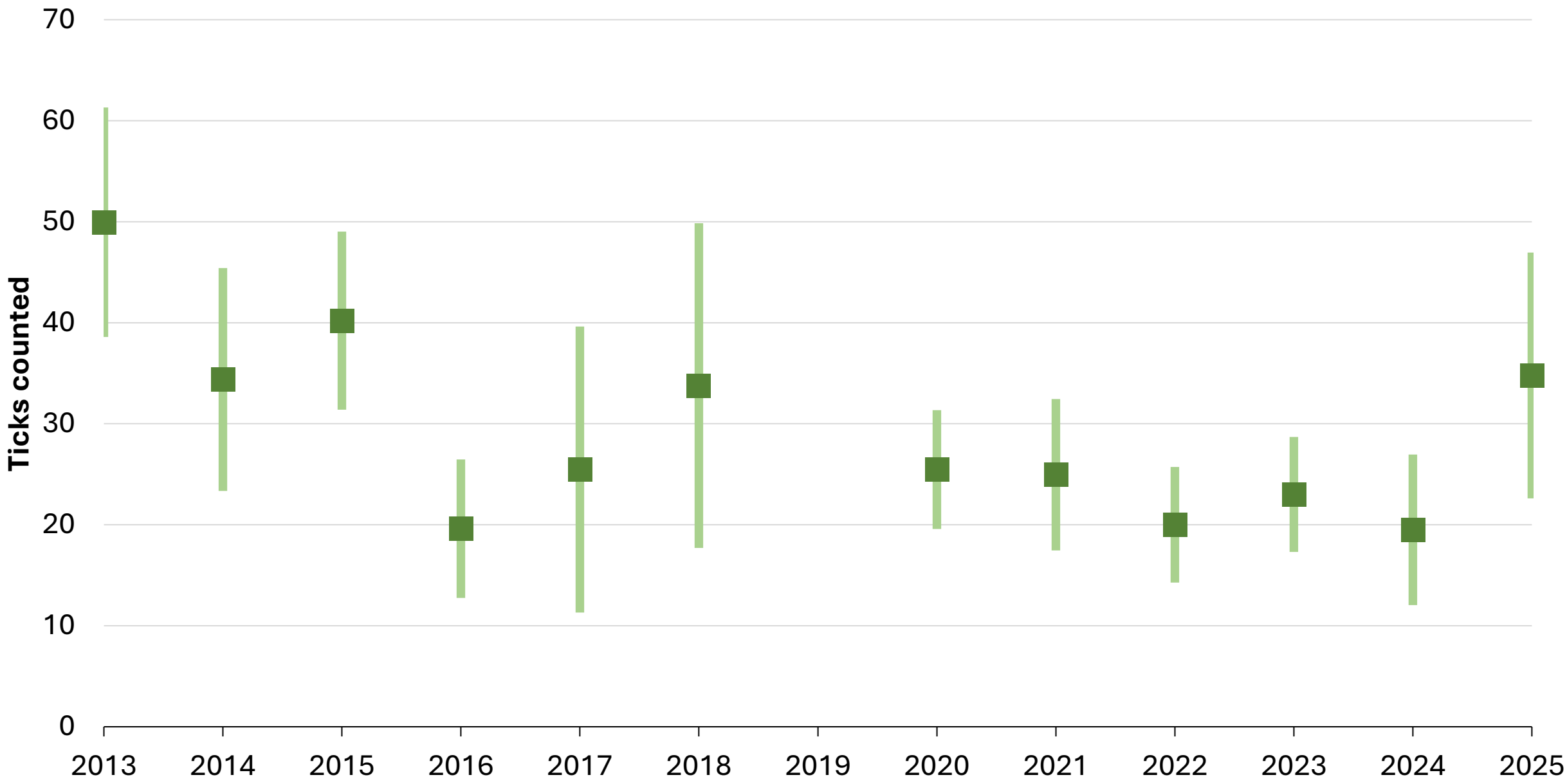
Health Measures: Adult Female Weight



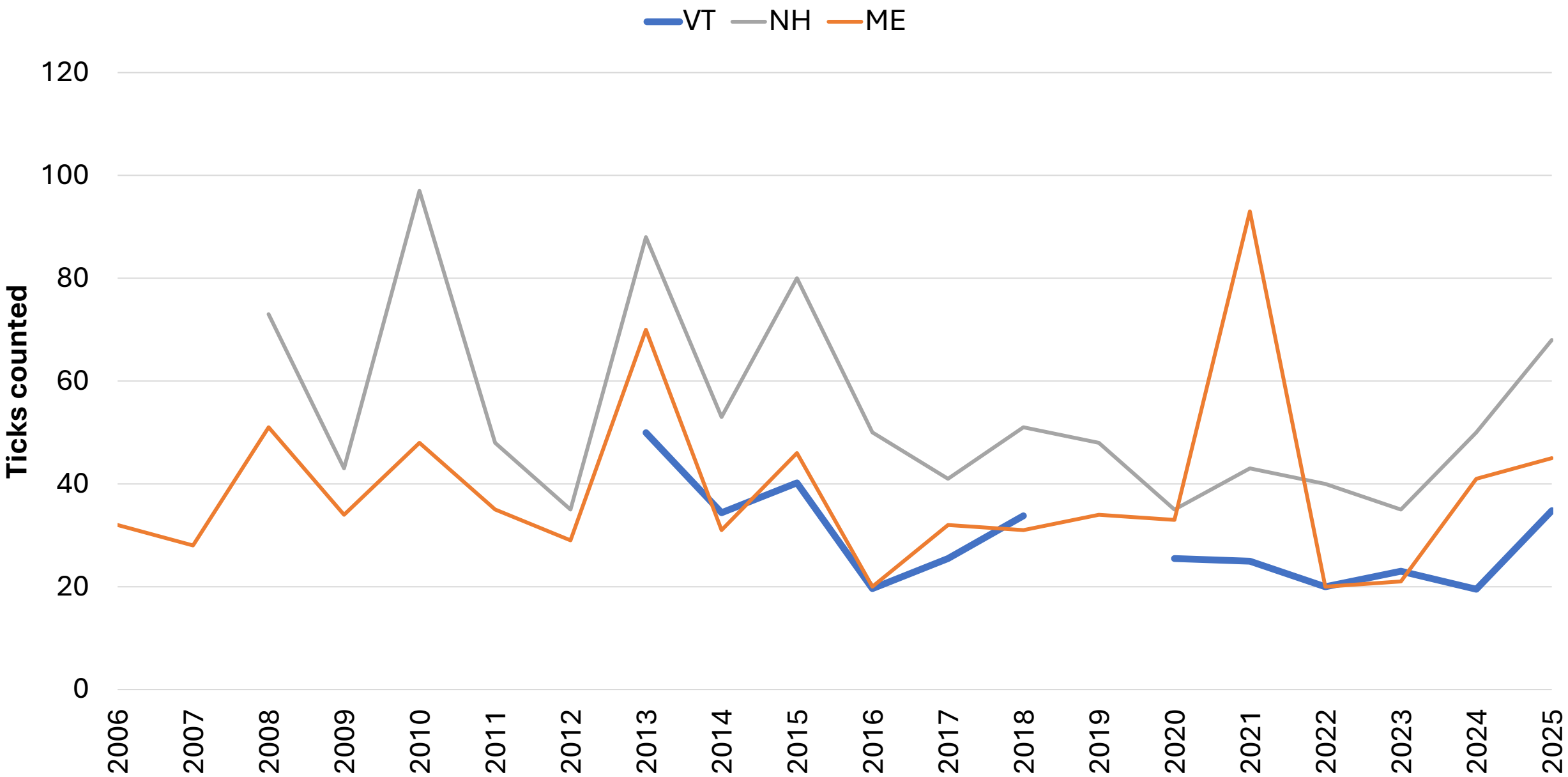
Health Measures: Yearling Female Weight



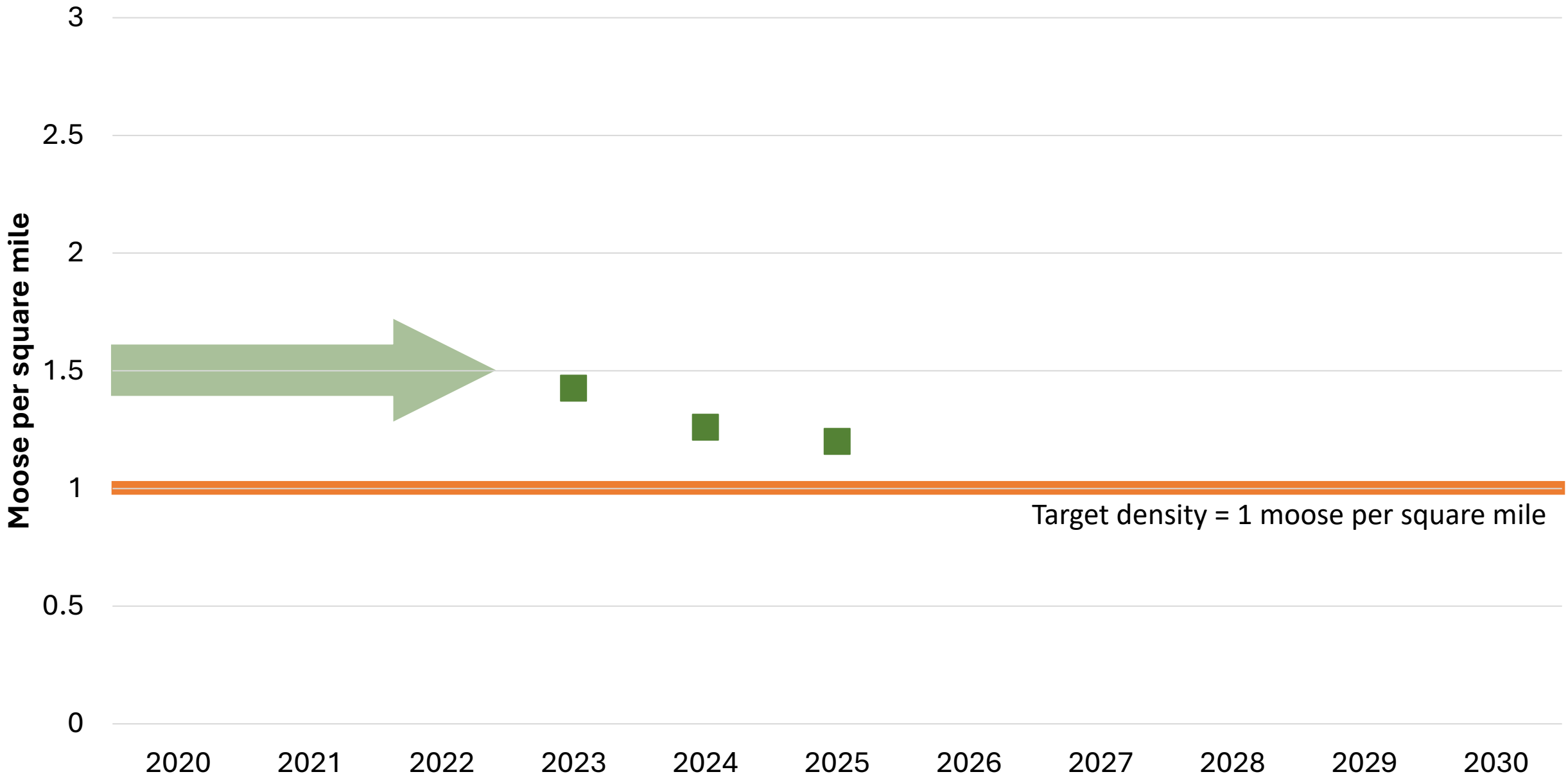
Tick Counts on Harvested Bull Moose



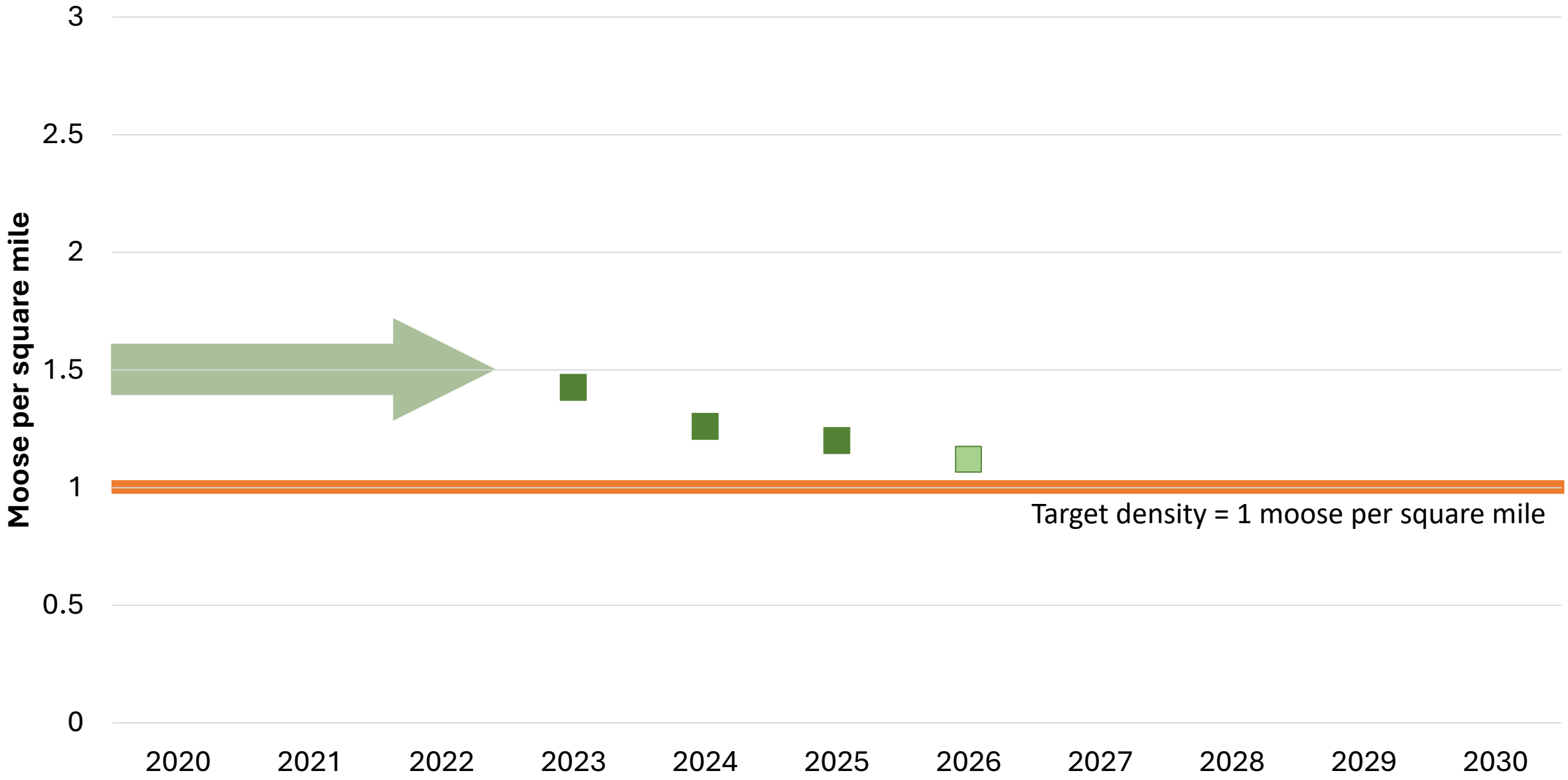
Tick Counts on Harvested Bull Moose



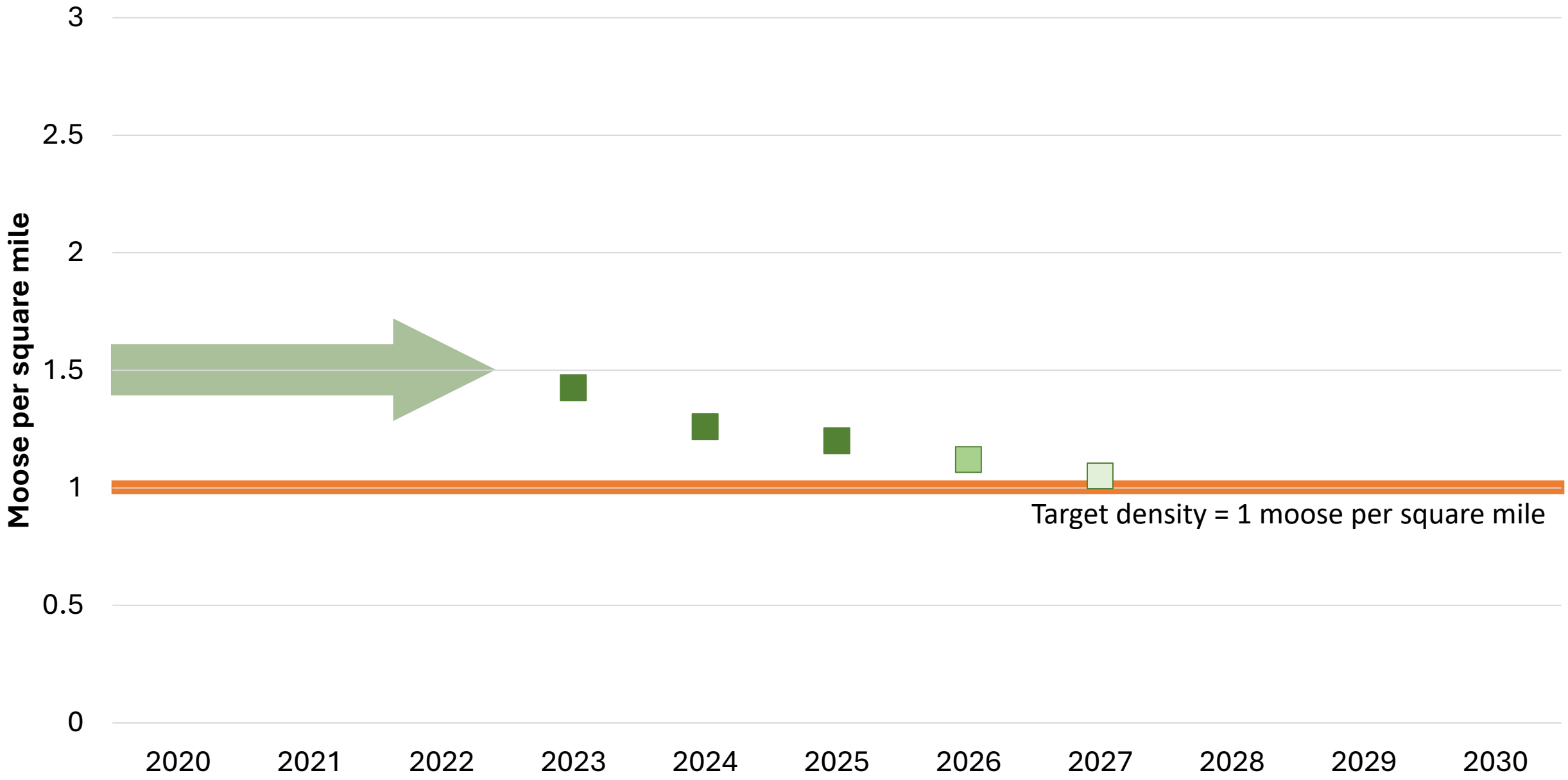
Population Projection in WMU E



Population Projection in WMU E



Population Projection in WMU E



Permit Recommendation

	Permits			Expected Harvest
	E1	**E2**	**Total**	
Archery Season				
Either-sex	7	8	15	8 *(6-10)*
Regular Season				
Either-sex	24	20	44	24 *(20-30)*
Antlerless-only	11	9	20	7 *(6-10)*
Auction	*choice*		3	2 *(0-3)*
Special Opportunity	*choice*		3	2 *(0-3)*
TOTAL			**85**	42 *(32-56)*

Next Steps

Tonight

- Presentation to Board
- Preliminary Approval
  (vote on what is presented to public for comment)

Public Comment

- Public Hearings
  - 3/16 – Brattleboro
  - 3/18 – St. Johnsbury
  - 3/19 – St. Albans
  - Presentation & recommendation available online
- Public comments by email

April 1st

- F&W Board Final Vote

Questions?

Big Game
Black Bear
Proposed Rule Change Recommendations

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

February 18, 2026

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

Summary of Recommended Changes

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (4.1) (b) – Bear Seasons

- Adjust the late bear season to run until the end of regular deer season, resulting in a seven-day extension.

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (5.3) – Yearly Bag Limit

- Allow for a second bear to be harvested in select wildlife management units, when deemed necessary by the board with recommendations from the department, approved on an annual basis as needed.

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (7.6) – Prohibit Intentional Harvest of Female Black Bear with Cubs

- Prohibit the intentional taking of a female black bear that is accompanied by one or more cubs.

3 V.S.A. § 814 – Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit

- Clarify authority to revoke a bear dog permit.

Potential Reciprocity Requirement on Out of State Residents to Obtain a Permit to Hunt Bear with Dogs or Restrict use of out-of-state dogs for hunting bear with dogs

- Explore the Commissioner's authority to establish a reciprocity requirement for out of state bear hound hunting whereby if the state of residence doesn't allow Vermont hunters to use dogs, then they can't get a permit to use hounds in Vermont.

- Discuss the possibility of limiting Department Registered Dogs to dogs that are kept in Vermont and owned by Vermont residents, unless the jurisdiction of residence also allows hunting bear with dogs.

Background

Fifty years ago, Vermont's bear population was estimated to be less than 1,500. Over the past thirty years the population has fluctuated from approximately 4,000-6,500 bears. Population estimates for recent years indicate the population may have increased beyond this range. The robust bear population is the result of habitat conservation and hunting regulations designed for a sustainable harvest of black bears. The *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* established a population objective of 3,500-5,500 bears. The mean estimated population has been above objective since 2021 and has ranged from a mean estimate of 6,500 (2021) to 7,600 (2022). The most recent mean estimate for 2024 was 7,400 bears (Figure 1). During this time Vermont's annual black bear harvests have exceeded 800 bears including harvests in 2024 and 2025 that exceeded 1,000 bears (Figure 2). These harvests have removed an average range of 11 – 14% of the population annually (2021-2024). Incidents of human-bear interactions, bear-vehicle collisions, and bear-caused property damage have increased, including in areas where few bears existed twenty years ago. Despite the sustained increases in annual black bear harvest and vehicle collision mortalities, Vermont has not attained a decrease in the bear population required to meet current population objectives.

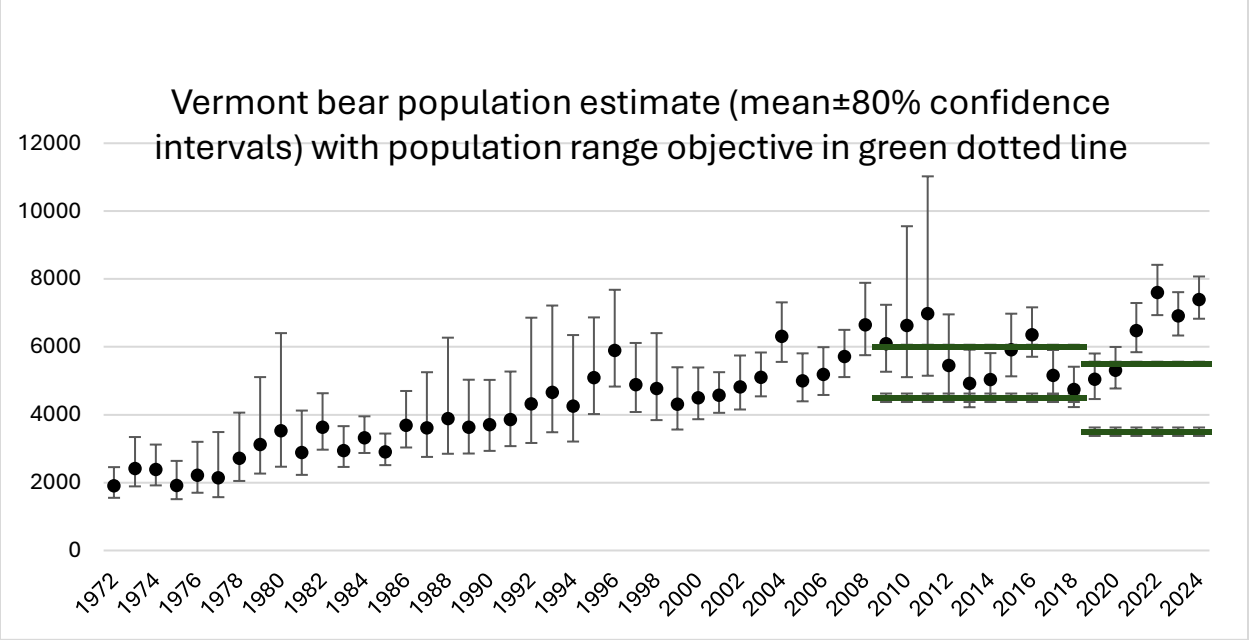


Figure 1. Vermont black bear population estimates (80% C.I.), 2000-2024. The green horizontal lines identify the population objective.

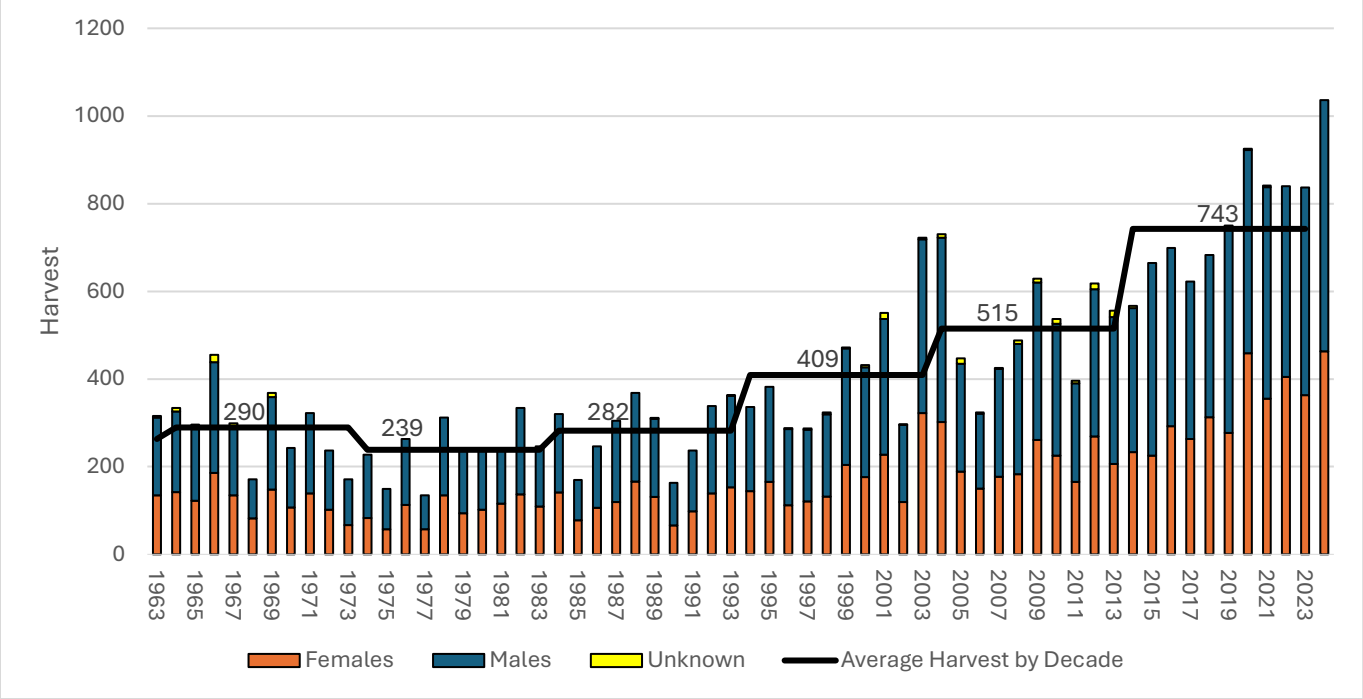


Figure 2. Vermont annual black bear harvest with rolling ten year average, 1963-2024.

App. V.S.A. § 7 – Bear Management Rule

Extend the Late Bear Season
The Department recommends extending the late bear season until the final day of the regular deer season.

Currently hunters may harvest bear during the late season from the first Saturday of the regular deer season until the Sunday of the second weekend, providing a nine-day season. The extension to the end of the regular deer season would provide seven additional days, making a 16-day late bear season. This recommendation would provide additional hunting opportunities.

An average of 184 bears are harvested during the current late season, which makes up on average 26% of the overall harvest. However, natural food availability and the onset of winter conditions cause this number to vary greatly from year to year, and this harvest has ranged from a low of 57 bears (2022) to a high of 319 bears (2015). The last full week of the bear late season has averaged just over 100 bears harvested annually over the past six years.

A recent survey of bear hunters in Vermont revealed that slightly more than half (54%) primarily incidentally hunt bear while hunting for other species and 79% of bear hunters hunted during the late bear season in 2023. A 2018 survey of Vermont hunters revealed high support (85%) for extending the length of the bear season. These results indicate that a significant number of hunters would likely participate in this proposed season expansion. However, by late November many bears have entered winter dens, limiting the availability of bears for harvest. The Department anticipates this expansion will likely result in a conservative increase in harvest.

Allow Hunters to Take a Second Bear
The Department recommends allowing hunters to take one additional bear, with the purchase of a second tag. The second bear may only be taken in WMUs annually designated by the board. The availability of the second bear tag would also be approved annually by the board.

Currently, hunters may only harvest one bear annually either in the early or late season. Hunters must purchase the privilege of hunting during the early season. All hunters receive a late season bear tag when they purchase a hunting or combination hunting and fishing license. This recommended change allowing hunters to take a second bear would provide additional bear harvest opportunities for hunters and allow the direction of hunting pressure into WMUs with elevated bear-vehicle collisions, incidents of human-bear conflicts, and strong bear hunting participation.

A 2018 survey of Vermont hunters revealed that 38% of hunters would support increasing the annual bag limit on black bears from one bear a year to two bears a year. However, the mean bear population estimate in 2018 was approximately 4,700 bears – the lowest it has been since the early 2000s. A 2024 survey of Vermont's bear hunters found that meat was by far the dominant reason why they hunt bear (58%); however, population control was the top motivation for hunters who have recently increased their targeted bear hunting (55%). Although Vermont's bear hunters have not been directly asked if they would try to harvest two bears in a year, these survey results indicate participation would be limited and therefore would result in a conservative increase in the overall harvest.

New Hampshire's experience introducing a two-bear bag limit in four of their WMU's supports the Department's expectation that this proposed expansion will result in a modest increase to Vermont's bear harvest. Despite approximately 1,200 hunters purchasing a second bear tag in 2024 only 46 hunters harvested a second bear. Preliminary results from NH's 2025 bear season indicate that less than 50 hunters harvested two bears. The contribution from a second bear in jurisdictions that have a two-bear bag limit is typically 4-5% of the overall harvest.

Not Allow Hunters to Intentionally Take a Female Bear with Cubs

The Department recommends not allowing hunters to intentionally take a female bear with visible cubs. Black bear cubs are dependent on sows through their first fall and don't typically become independent until their second spring when they are approximately 16-18 months old. When conditions are favorable, it is possible for cubs to survive when they are separated or orphaned prematurely; however, the Department receives reports every year of starving orphaned cubs and yearlings who would not survive without intervention. These starving bears are typically found near homes attempting to access human-created foods. Conflicts with people, vehicle collisions, and hunting are all potential causes for these orphaning events. It is important that hunters take precautions to avoid harvesting sows accompanied by cubs.

Vermont's bear hunters generally do not intentionally harvest female bears accompanied by dependent cubs. In a recent survey of Vermont's bear hunters, 97% reported that they would not harvest a bear with cubs while 1% said that they would and another 2% reported that they were unsure. However, when asked if they assess whether a bear is in a group or with cubs before shooting, 88% reported that they regularly take this precaution while the remaining 12% reported either never or only occasionally taking this step. Further, 13% of hunters reported that they were not aware of the Department's recommendation that hunters avoid harvesting females accompanied by cubs.

Of the 44 jurisdictions in North America with black bear hunting seasons, 37 (84%) have regulations prohibiting the harvest of female bears accompanied by cubs. This includes three states that have initiated new black bear hunting seasons in the past five years. As part of a previous Department assessment of a petition related to this subject, we reached out to some of the jurisdictions with this type of regulation to better understand the specific language they use and how it is enforced. Jurisdictions reported that this regulation is widely supported by both hunters and the non-hunting public. Some regulations are written with specific size parameters defining cubs that hunters must follow while others are written so that it is only a violation if a

hunter knowingly harvests a female bear with cubs present. In both cases, jurisdictions reported that citations are rarely issued as it can be difficult to prove. In fact, one jurisdiction reported written violations related to this regulation were often from self-reporting by hunters who didn't see cubs until after the bear was harvested. The Department's intention is not to punish hunters who mistakenly harvest sows when cubs are not immediately present. Instead, our intention is to create a regulation that only applies to situations where a hunter knowingly harvests a sow with cubs present. Since a similar petition related to this subject was proposed, there have been a couple situations where this regulation could have potentially been applied.

Currently, the Department is recommending regulation changes to increase bear hunting opportunities. Anticipating that these changes will increase the number of bears harvested each year in Vermont, now is an appropriate time to take precautionary steps and increase protection for female bears with dependent young and encourage additional awareness among hunters.

Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit
The Department recommends clarifying authority for the Commissioner to revoke bear dog permits. The Commissioner has broad authority to revocation permits pursuant to 3 V.S.A. 814, which establishes an administrative process for revocation of permits and licenses. The Commissioner currently can choose not to issue a new hound permit. The Department will need to establish criteria that must be met before the Commissioner signs a permit.

Revocation is more complicated since the statute does not clearly establish the Commissioner's ability to revoke permits, and statute requires certain due process before a permit can be revoked (a contested-case hearing before a hearing officer). Currently, permits can be revoked based on violations resulting in the accumulation of points.

Reciprocity Requirement on Out of State Residents to Obtain a Permit to Hunt Bear with Dogs
The Department would like to discuss establishing a reciprocity requirement for non-resident bear hound hunting whereby if the jurisdiction of residence doesn't allow Vermont hunters to use dogs, then they can't receive a bear dog permit to hunt bears in Vermont.

Current examples of situations Vermont hunters encounter include the inability to use their hounds in New York that has a hound training season but no hunting season where hounds are allowed. New York hunters may hunt in Vermont with their dogs if they obtain a bear dog permit. Out-of-state hound permits are limited to no more than 10% of the previous year's resident permit numbers. New Hampshire does not allow out of state hunters to use their dogs during their bear hound season, but New Hampshire hunters commonly obtain non-resident bear dog permits to hunt during Vermont's bear hound season.

Other Topics Vetted by the Big Game Management Team Included:

- Baiting season
- Spring season
- Registering all dogs in ownership on a bear dog permit application
- Extending the season into August
- Establishing bag limits for bear dog permits
- Allow online reporting of harvested bears



Black Bear Proposed Rule Change Recommendations

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
Jaclyn Comeau
02/18/26

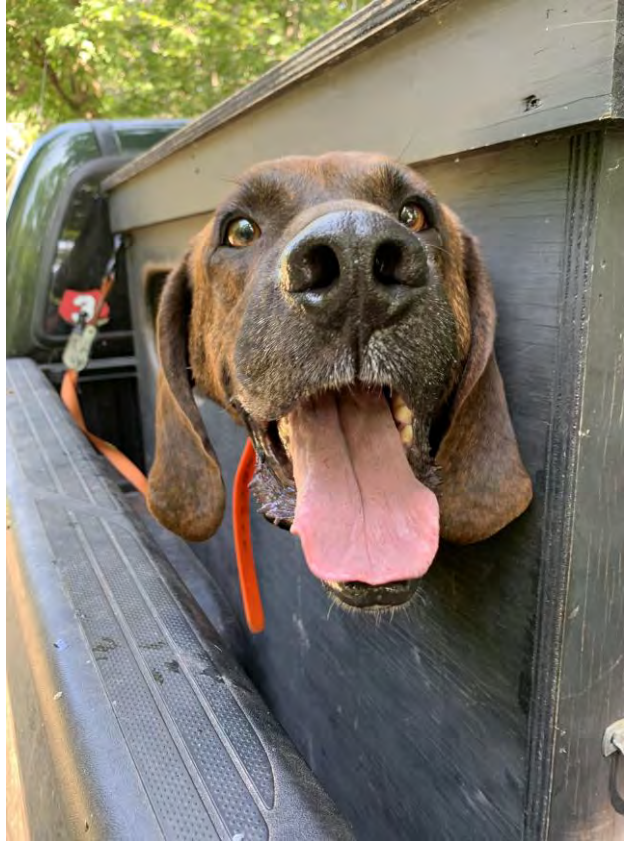


- GOAL: Maintain bear population at ecologically sustainable levels, while minimizing human conflicts.
  - Population objective: 3,500 – 5,500.
  - Use hunting length as primary method.
  - Consider regional management.

- GOAL: Optimize hunting opportunity for the utilization of bears for food and other uses, ensure hunter satisfaction within biologically sustainable regulations, and continue to use hunting to meet black bear population objectives.

- GOAL: Minimize negative interactions occurring between bears and humans to achieve acceptable levels of human safety.









Living With Bears

- Protect/manage bear habitat
- Sustainably manage the number of bears
- Change people behavior
- Try to manage bear behavior





Vermont's Bear Population Model:

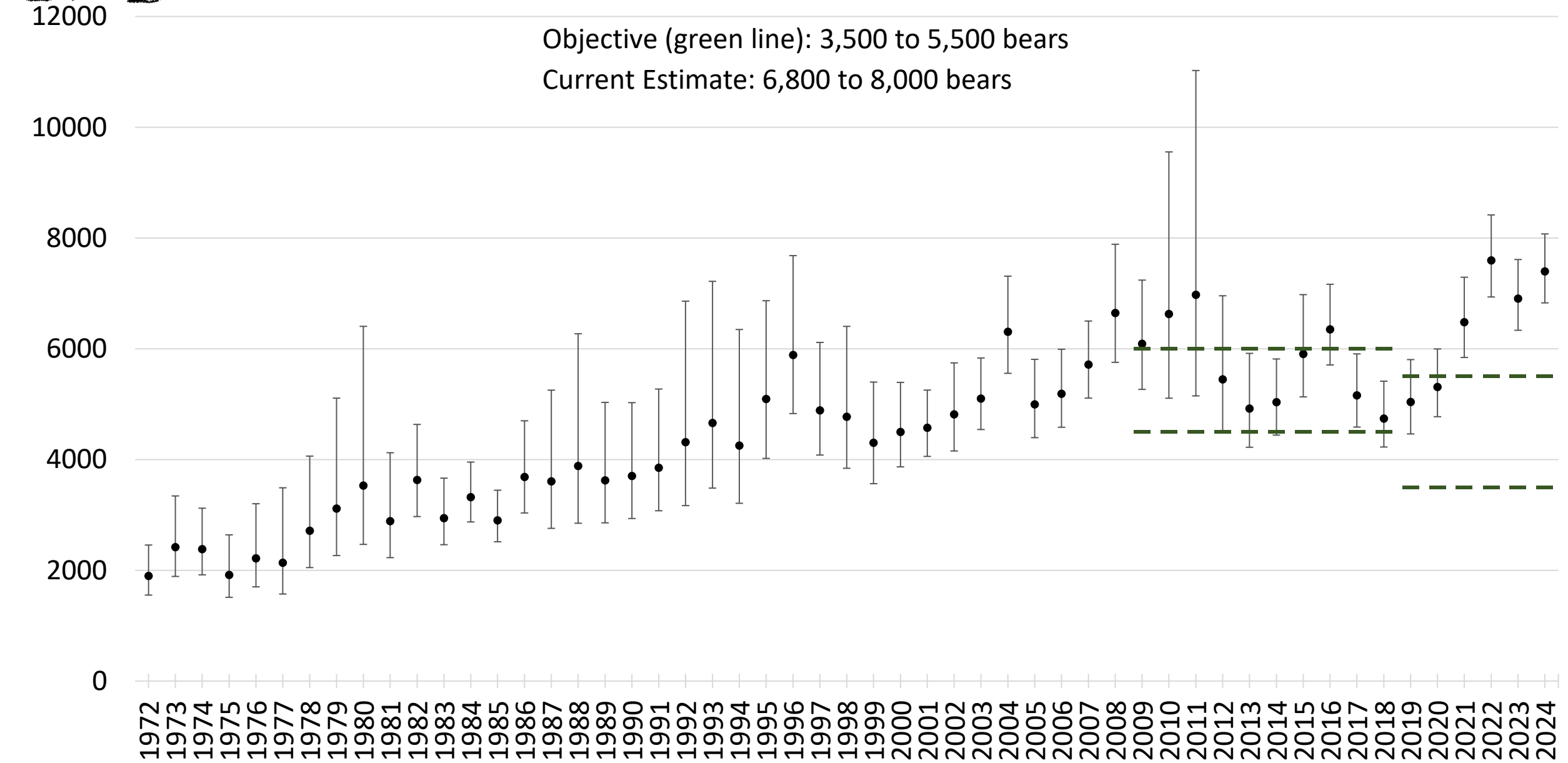
Population Reconstruction Model

Dead bears are used as a representative sample to estimate Vermont's bear population

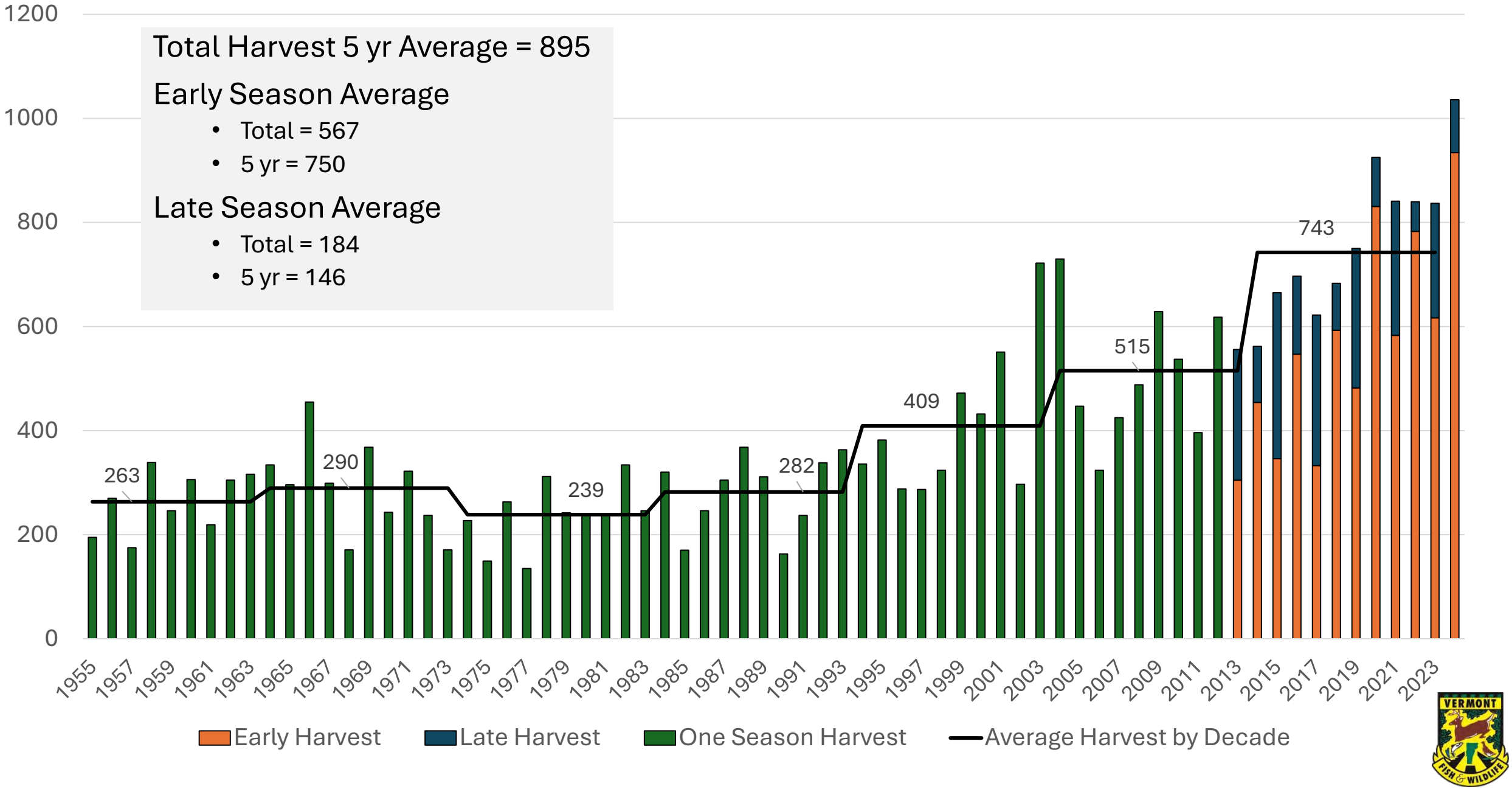
1. Hunting Mortality Data
   - Count and age of females
   - Count and age of males
   - Total count
2. Non-Hunting Mortality Data
   - Total count

Vermont's Black Bear Population Estimate, 1972-2024

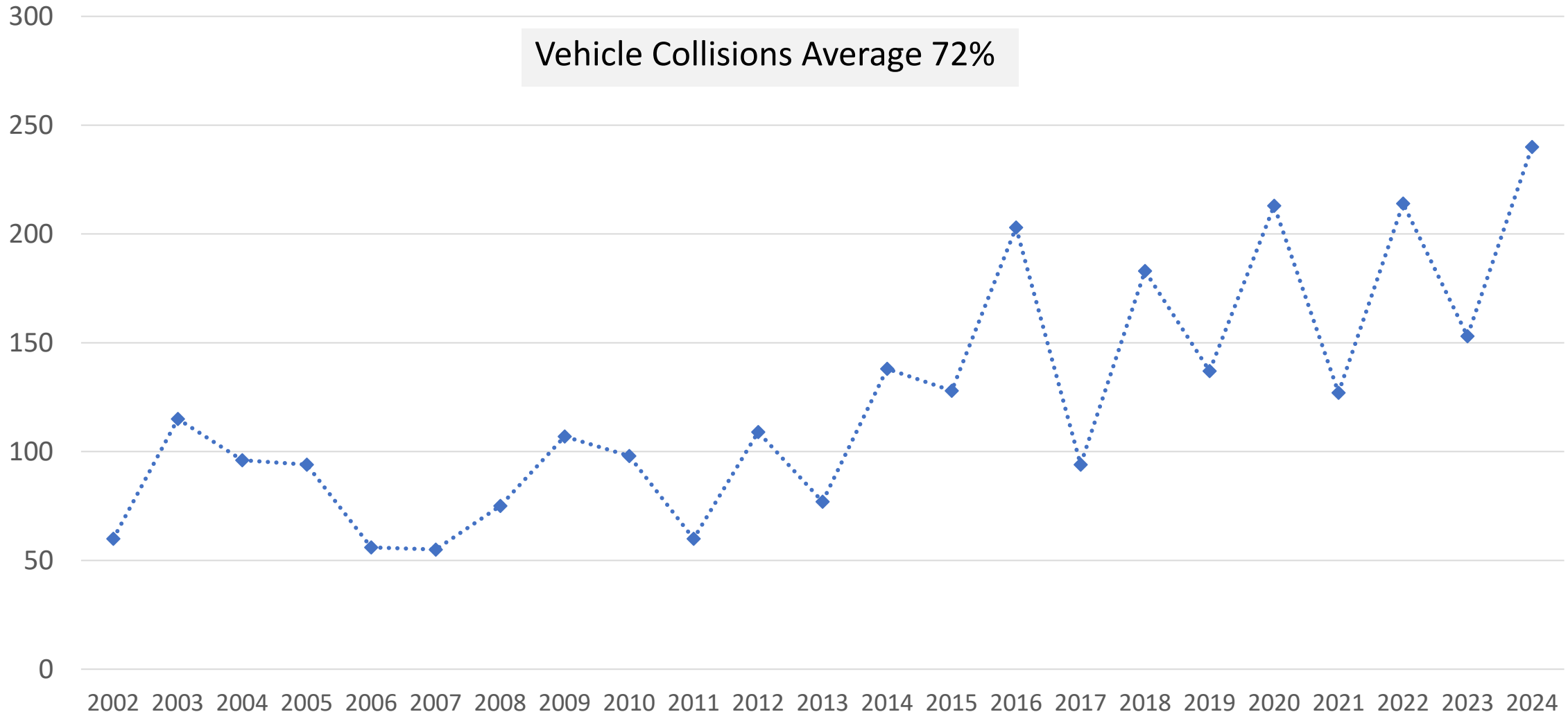
mean ±80% confidence intervals



Vermont Bear Harvest by Season, 1955 - 2024



Reported Non-Hunting Mortalities, 2002 – 2024



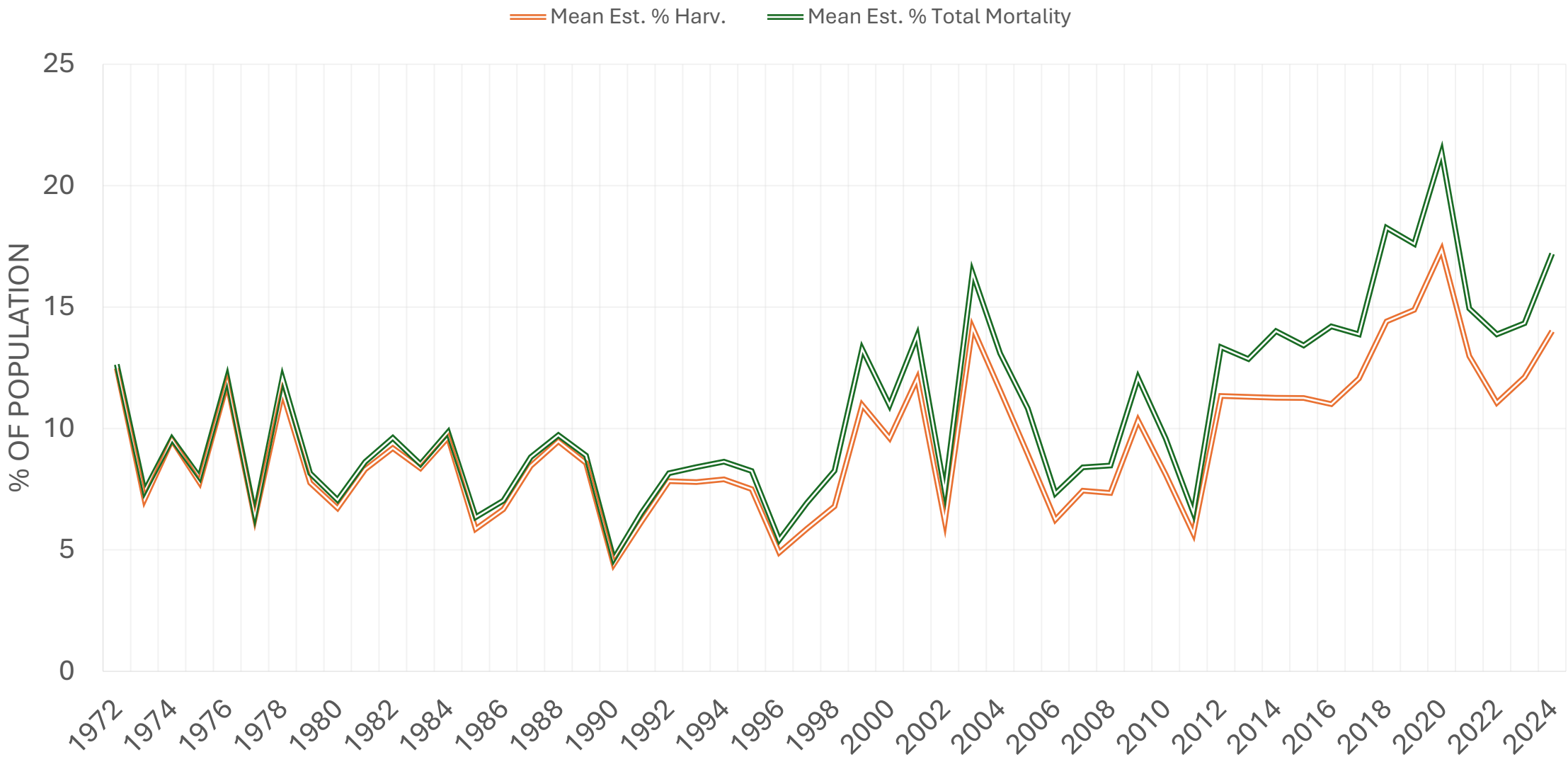
10-yr Average:

138

Harvest = 12 – 15% of population

All Mortality = 14 – 18% of population

PERCENT OF POPULATION SUBJECT TO MORTALITY



Current Black Bear Hunting Seasons

Early Bear Season	75 days, Sept. 1 – Day Before Regular Deer
Late Bear Season	9 days, First 9 days of Regular Deer Season
Bear Hound Hunting	Resident = 75 days, Early Bear Season Non-Resident = 60 days, Sept. 15 – End of Early Bear

Recommendation #1: Extend the Late Bear Season Through Regular Deer Season

— Goal: Increase Opportunity to Address Population Trend

Increase the season by 7 days: add 1 weekend and Thanksgiving

- 2024 hunter survey: 54% of successful bear hunters reported they primarily incidentally hunt bear and 79% hunted during the late bear season.
- 2018 hunter survey: 85% strong support for extending the length of the bear season.

Recommendation #2: Allow a Two Bear Bag Limit in Designated WMUs

Goal: Increase Opportunity to Address Population Trend and Create Ability for Regional Management

Increase the number of bears that a successful hunter can harvest

- 2024 survey found that meat is the dominant reason hunters hunt bear.
- 2018 survey found 38% of hunters supported a second bear tag.
- Other jurisdictions report limited number of hunters take 2 bears.
  - NH has seen less than 50 additional bears harvested across 4 WMUs.

Recommendation #3: Prohibit the Intentional Harvest of Female Bears with Cubs

— **Goal: Improve Awareness**

- Cubs are dependent until their second spring – premature orphaning can have cascading effects.
- 84% of black bear hunting jurisdictions prohibit the harvest of females accompanied by cubs.

Why Now?

- 2024 survey found 12% not taking necessary precautions and 13% reported not being aware of the Department's recommendation.
- Increasing harvest opportunity.
- Broad public support in jurisdictions that recently added this regulation.

Recommendation #4: Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit

Goal: Clarify Commissioner authority to revoke a bear dog permit

Potential Reciprocity Requirement or Restrict Use Of Out-Of-State Dogs For Hunting Bears.

Goal: Explore Commissioner's authority to establish a reciprocity requirement for non-resident bear hound hunting.

Discuss limiting Department Registered Dogs to those kept in Vermont and owned by residents, unless non-resident's jurisdiction allows Vermonters to hunt bear with dogs.

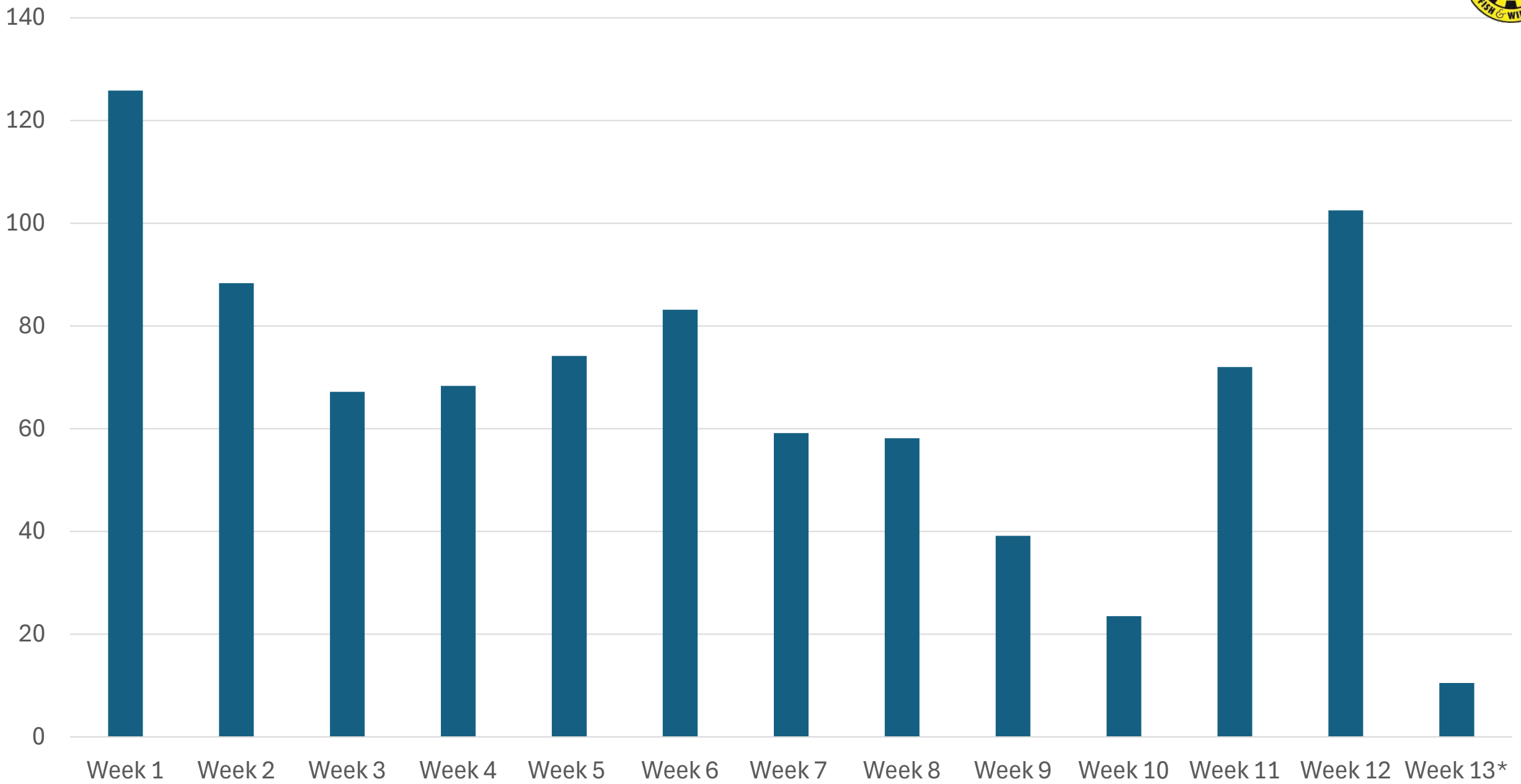
Summary of Recommended Changes

1. Extend the late bear season through the regular deer season.
2. Allow for a second bear to be harvested in select WMUs.
3. Prohibit the intentional harvest of females accompanied by cubs.
4. Clarify Commissioner's authority to revoke bear dog permit.
5. Discuss restricting use of out-of-state dogs for bear hunting from jurisdictions where Vermonters can't hunt bear with dogs.

Additional Approaches Considered

- ❑ Establish a spring bear hunting season
- ❑ Establish a bear baiting season
- ❑ Extending the early bear season into August
- ❑ Registration of individual dogs on a bear dog permit
- ❑ Establish bag limits for bear dog permits
- ❑ Allow online reporting of harvested bears

Average Bear Harvest by Week, 2019-2024



Fish and Wildlife Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, April 1, 2026, in the National Life Dewey Conference Room, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620. A recording of the meeting is available on the department's YouTube channel.

Agenda

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (February 18, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. Black Bear Season Regulations Petition- Presentation by Petitioners
4. 2026 Migratory Game Bird Season – Final Vote
5. 2026 Moose Season – Final Vote
6. Moose Lottery Bonus Points
7. Commissioner's Update

Board Members Present: Nicholas Burnham, Richard Craig, Beth Deimling, Neal Hogan, Ryan Kilborn, Paul Noel (Acting Chair), Robert Patterson, Jon Valsangiacomo, Martin Van Buren

Virtual: David Deen
Absent: Jeffrey Corey

Department Staff Present: Commissioner Jason Batchelder, Chief Operating Officer Andrea Shortsleeve, General Counsel Hannah Smith, Wildlife Division Director John Austin, Deer and Moose Project Leader Nick Fortin, Migratory Game Bird Project Leader Andrew Bouton, Game Warden Colonel Justin Stedman, Game Warden Lieutenant Mike Scott, Principal Assistant Abigail Connolly

Virtual: Black Bear Project Leader Jaclyn Comeau, Information Specialist John Hall

Members of the Public Present: Kevin Lawrence, Bert Saldi, Nancy Fitzpatrick, Chris Pritchard, Rod Coronado, Bill Hickok, Garrett Henderson, Mike Stoddard, Bob Galvin, Brent Gadapee

Virtual: Wildlife Watch, Brad Herring, Mark Green, Leisa George, Sarah Gorsline, Katie Nolan, Catherine Gott

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Board Member Van Buren moved to approve the February 18, 2026 meeting minutes. Board Member Patterson seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes (8-0-1), with Board Member Deen abstaining.

Public Comment Period

Nancy Fitzpatrick, Barre Town, regarding bear baiting
Rod Coronado, Orange, regarding the mountain lion webinar hosted by the department and bear baiting
Bill Hickock, Westminster, regarding follow-up to the Vermont Bowhunters Association petitions
Bob Galvin, Bolton, regarding bear baiting

The recording of the public comments and the meeting can be viewed here.

Black Bear Season Regulations Petition- Presentation by Petitioners

Kevin Lawrence and Bert Saldi presented the petition, which is included below. The petition asks the Board to extend the black bear hunting season until the second Sunday in December, allow for a second bear tag, develop a bear baiting season similar to New Hampshire, and implement these changes by 2027. The Board Members asked the petitioners questions about the bear baiting season in New Hampshire. General Counsel Hannah Smith clarified the process for petitions and rulemaking.

2026 Migratory Game Bird Season – Final Vote

Andrew Bouton explained that there was not a lot of public feedback received and there were no proposed changes to the 2026 migratory game bird season from the department after the public comment period and public hearings. Andrew Bouton explained language that was included about the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The recommendation and public comments are included below.

Board Member Van Buren moved to accept the 2026 migratory game bird season as presented by the department. Board Member Valsangiacomo seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the motion (10-0).

2026 Moose Season – Final Vote

Nick Fortin presented that there are no proposed changes to the 2026 moose season from the department after the public comment period and public hearings. Nick Fortin reported that many of the Board Members were able to attend the hearings, there was light participation from the public, very few written public comments were received. The recommendation and public

comments are included below. Board Member Hogan asked if there was any consideration of whether bow only permits for moose would be issued in other WMUs.

Board Member Van Buren moved to accept the 2026 moose season as presented by the department. Board Member Deen seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the motion (10-0).

Moose Lottery Bonus Points

Commissioner Batchelder explained that after feedback was received from Fred Schroeder about moose lottery bonus points at a Board Meeting, the department will be changing internal policy next year. The change will allow someone to keep their moose lottery bonus points if they miss one year of submission. If they miss two years in a row, the bonus points will be lost.

Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Batchelder provided a legislative update and thanked the Board and the public for their participation in the Board Meetings.

Board Member Hogan spoke about his support for the fish culture stations. Board Member Deimling spoke about the State of the Lake Meeting hosted the previous Saturday. Board Member Patterson asked about the upcoming Board Member appointments. Commissioner Batchelder announced that Board Member Linda Hook resigned from the Board.

Board Member Patterson spoke about his support for a bear baiting season and the information he gathered.

Board Member Valsangiacomo asked about the specifics of H.723 (an act relating to posting of land).

Motion To Adjourn:

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 6:06 pm.

From: [redacted]
To: Batchelder, Jason; Austin, John; Sausville, David; Comeau, Jaclyn; ANR - FW Board Caledonia; ANR - FW Board Addison; ANR - FW Board Bennington; ANR.FWBoardChttenden@vermont.gov; ANR - FW Board Lamoille; ANR - FW Board Orange; ANR - FW Board Orleans; ANR - FW Board Rutland; ANR - FW Board Essex; ANR - FW Board Franklin; ANR - FW Board GrandIsle; ANR - FW Board Washington; ANR - FW Board Windham; ANR - FW Board Windsor; Kevin Lawrence
Subject: Bear petition.....
Date: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 9:09:34 AM

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Please accept the petition to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board.
Regarding bear hunting season:
1) Extend the current bear hunting season from September 1st to the second Sunday in December.
2) Allow hunter's to purchase a second bear tag with an annual limit of two bears per hunter.
3) Incorporate a bear Baiting Season similar to current Bear Baiting season in Maine and New Hampshire.

All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board ,go into Effect the 2027 Season.
I believe there's no reason this can't happen.....

Please Reach out to confirm receipt.
To: Kevin Lawrence, Former Board Chair. At [redacted]

Bert Saldi at [redacted]

Thank you...
The Vermonter
Bert Saldi

2026-2027 WATERFOWL SEASONS RECOMMENDATIONS

APRIL 1, 2026

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3905

Executive Summary

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department proposes the same recommendations the Board approved by straw vote on February 18, 2026. The Department makes these recommendations based on the following:

The majority of public comments from both public meetings (NY- 1 citizen and VT- 18 citizens) were happy with the recommendations and there was no consensus for change. The majority of the comments from people attending the public meetings and emails were that the proposed season dates were good and no changes needed to be made. We also received a few comments about different zone configurations in the future.

Justifications for Recommendations Discussed through Public Input Sources

The Department does not recommend making any changes to the recommendations presented in February.

In review, these are the actions the Department requests that the Board takes tonight for the 2026-2027 migratory game bird seasons: Setting the 2026 duck, goose, merganser, coot, brant, woodcock and snipe season dates and daily bag limits, setting the 2026 youth waterfowl hunting weekend dates, and setting the 2026-27 falconry regulations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 - 2026 Lake Champlain Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons: That the 2026-2027 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Lake Champlain zone run from October 10 to November 1 and November 21 to December 27, 2026. Within the chosen dates, we recommend the 60-day season with a daily bag limit of no more than 6 ducks (with species restrictions) and 15 coots.

Recommendation 2 – 2026 Interior Vermont Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons: That the 2026-2027 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Interior Vermont zone run from October 10 to December 8, 2026. Within the chosen dates, we recommend the 60-day season with a daily bag limit of no more than 6 -ducks (with species restrictions) and 15 coots.

Recommendation 3 – 2026 September Resident Canada Goose Season: That the September resident Canada goose season run from September 1-25, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 8 birds per day and a possession limit of 24 birds within the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones. New Hampshire plans to offer the same dates within the Connecticut River zone, but with a daily bag limit of 5 birds per day and a possession limit of 15 birds.

Recommendation 4 – 2026 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Migrant Canada Goose Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the migrant Canada goose season to run from October 10 to November 23, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 3 birds per day and a possession limit of 9 birds

- If the federal season promulgation process does not go through we seek conditional approval to submit the following dates: October 10 to November 8, 2026 with a daily bag limit of 1 bird per day and a possession limit of 3 birds.

Recommendation 5 – 2026 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Snow Goose Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the snow goose season to run from October 1st to December 31, 2026 and February 26 to March 10, 2027, with a daily bag limit of 25 birds per day and no possession limit.

Recommendation 6 – 2026 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Brant Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the brant season to run from October 10 to November 8, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 1 bird per day and a possession limit of 3 birds.

Recommendation 7 - 2025 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: That the youth waterfowl hunting weekend occur on Saturday and Sunday, September 26 & 27, 2026, within all Vermont zones.

Recommendation 8- 2026 Falconry Season: A person possessing a valid falconry permit may take migratory game birds only during open seasons and within designated shooting times. The daily bag limit shall be a maximum of three legal migratory game birds, singly or in the aggregate, not to exceed restrictive daily bag limits for certain species as listed herein. Possession limit shall be equal to three times the daily limit.

Recommendation 9 – 2026 Woodcock Season: That the woodcock season run from September 26 to November 9, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 3 birds per day and a possession limit of 9 birds, statewide.

Recommendation 10 – 2026 Snipe Season: That the snipe season run from September 26 to November 9, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 8 birds per day and a possession limit of 24 birds, statewide.

Recommendation 11 – Hybrid Scaup Season: Provide a hybrid season on scaup that allows for a 20-day segment with a two-bird daily bag limit and a 40-day segment that allows for a one bird daily bag limit. The 20-day and two bird daily limit should be placed on the last twenty days within the Lake Champlain and Interior Zone seasons of Vermont. All remaining days of the seasons will be a one bird daily limit.

Recommendation 12 – December Resident Canada Goose Season: That the December resident Canada goose season run from December 1, 2026 to January 4, 2027

- If the federal season promulgation process does not go through we seek conditional approval to submit the following dates: December 1, 2026 to January 19, 2027, with a daily bag limit of 5 birds per day and a possession limit of 15 birds, statewide.

Background

Vermont currently has three waterfowl hunting zones (Figure 1):

- Lake Champlain Zone that we share with New York. Vermont sets the dates for this zone.
- Interior Zone that is entirely within Vermont.
- Connecticut River Zone that we share with New Hampshire. New Hampshire sets the dates for this zone as an extension of their Inland Zone.

Under Vermont's three zones, Vermont can split any zone once to create two hunting segments. Vermont currently has sixty days to divide between the two duck hunting segments to accommodate the diverse desires of the variety of Vermont waterfowl hunters. Migrant Canada goose season currently has 45-days to utilize but may have to revert to 30 days depending on the federal government. The zones were also set up to take into consideration the differences in the physiographic regions of the state and the climatic differences each has.

2026 Duck Season: The Board has traditionally held the youth waterfowl weekend the last weekend in September. The Department has withheld any fishing tournament permits for that weekend to reduce conflicts between anglers and youth waterfowlers.

2026 Goose, Brant, Mergansers, and Coots Seasons: Resident Canada geese have a 25-day season option and may run from September 1st to the 25th. The migrant Canada goose season may not open prior to October 10th. Migrant Canada geese have a 45-day season option with a three-bird daily bag limit. Atlantic brant have a 30-day season option with a one-bird daily bag limit. The Board traditionally has run the merganser and coot seasons concurrently with the duck season. December resident Canada geese have 35 days allowed for the 2026-2027 season to use between December 1st and February 15th.

2026 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: The Department may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as ''Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days," in addition to the regular duck seasons. The days must be held outside any regular duck season on a weekend, holiday, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck-season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season, or within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limits may include ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots, and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season.

The age of youth hunter eligibility was changed in 2016 at the federal level. That same year the Board changed the youth waterfowl hunter age to 17 years of age or younger. In addition, an adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other seasons that are open on the special youth day. Youth hunters 16 years of age and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp). Vermont also requires all hunters 16 years of age and older to have a state duck stamp. All hunters regardless of age are required to have a HIP number. Within the Connecticut River Zone, youth must be 15 years of age or younger to participate during the youth weekend.

Special Falconry Regulations: Falconry is a permitted means of taking migratory game birds in any State meeting Federal falconry standards in 50 CFR 21.29. These States may select an extended season for taking migratory game birds in accordance with the following:

Extended Seasons: For all hunting methods combined, the combined length of the extended season, regular season, and any special or experimental seasons must not exceed 107 days for any species or group of species in a geographical area. Each extended season may be divided into a maximum of 3 segments.

Daily Bag Limits: Falconry daily bag limits for all permitted migratory game birds must not exceed 3 birds, singly or in the aggregate, during extended falconry seasons, any special or experimental seasons, and regular hunting seasons in all States, including those that do not select an extended falconry season.

Regular Seasons: General hunting regulations, including seasons and hunting hours, apply to falconry in each State listed in 50 CFR 21.29. Regular season bag limits do not apply to falconry. The falconry bag limit is not in addition to gun limits.

Vermont has traditionally run the falconry season during any open migratory game bird season. Last year falconers had the opportunity to begin on September 1st with the resident Canada goose season and ended their season on January 19th when the late resident Canada goose season closed. The falconry season reopened on February 26, 2026. A three-bird daily bag limit was in effect.

Public Input and Outreach: The Department, in conjunction with the Board, held two public meetings in 2026. Meetings occurred on the evenings of March 10 and 12 and began at 6:30 pm. Comments received at the public meetings and the number of attendees is provided within the accompanying document.

After the Board approves final season dates and bag limits, the Department will submit season selections to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by April 30th and the information will be sent to a printer for production of the 2026 syllabus of state and federal hunting regulations. The early decision deadlines will allow the Department to have the syllabus available to the public in print version by August a full month prior to any migratory bird hunting season. The seasons will be placed on the Department's website within days of approval. This year the printed syllabus will not contain dates for the migratory October/November Canada goose season or the late resident December/January Canada goose season. Instead, it will point hunters to the department website. This will allow us to revert to a more restrictive season package if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not able to complete the new season promulgation process in time.

Tally of Public Comments

The Department received a total of 5 emails containing comments on the proposed migratory game bird seasons. Nineteen citizens attended the two public meetings hosted by the Board and Department. Comments made during the meetings are captured on the attached documents.

Below are the main comments received from all sources with the number of individuals that commented.

1. Happy with seasons as proposed (17)
2. Bring back Wednesday openers (3)
3. South of the Champlain Bridge in Addison/Crown Point should be moved to the interior zone (2)
4. Late Resident Canada Goose season is too late (1)
5. Start duck season on a fixed date annually (1)
6. Lake Champlain Zone is closed too long in November (1)
7. Woodcock season opens too early (1)
8. Lake Champlain Zone should close October 25, and reopen November 14 (1)
9. Split Interior Zone into North and South Zones (1)
10. Interior split into 2 segments (1)
11. Lake Champlain Zone and Northeast NY zone should not open on the same day (1)
12. Should allow hunting at Mud Creek on the first Sunday (1)

Figure 1.

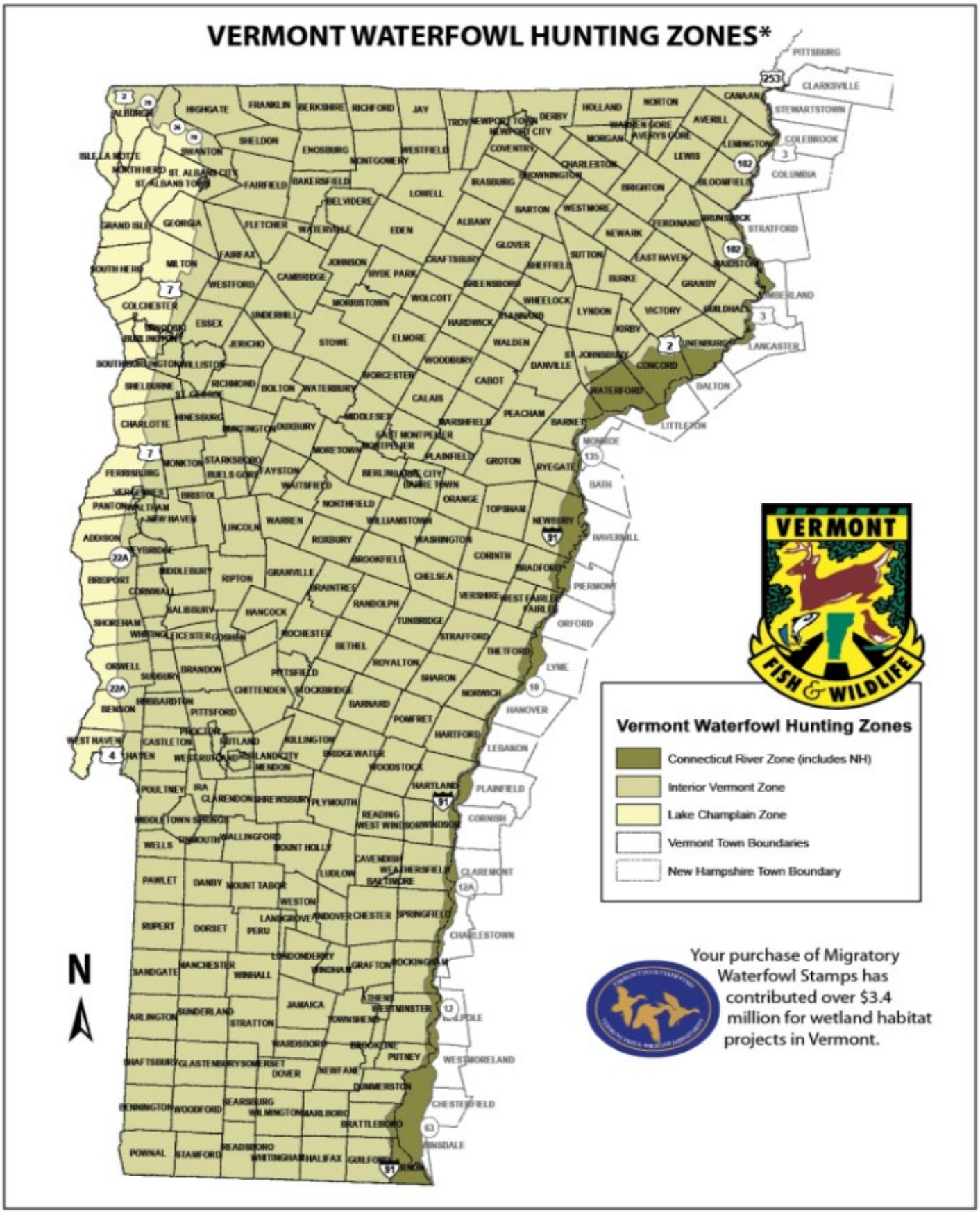

VERMONT WATERFOWL HUNTING ZONES*
VERMONT
FISH & WILDLIFE
Vermont Waterfowl Hunting Zones
Connecticut River Zone (includes NH)
Interior Vermont Zone
Lake Champlain Zone
Vermont Town Boundaries
New Hampshire Town Boundary
N
Your purchase of Migratory Waterfowl Stamps has contributed over $3.4 million for wetland habitat projects in Vermont.

Table 1.

2026 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

LAKE CHAMPLAIN ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 27	6	18
MERGANSERS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 27	5	15
Scaup*	Split	40 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 7	1	3
	Hybrid	20 Days	Dec. 8 – Dec. 27	2	6
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 27	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 – Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1, 2026 – Jan. 4, 2027	5	15
Snow Geese **	Straight	107 Days	Oct. 1 – Dec. 31, 2026	25	NONE
	Split		Feb. 26 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Federal species restrictions apply.
** Includes blue geese also.

Table 2.

2026 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

VERMONT INTERIOR ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	6	18
MERGANSERS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	5	15
SCAUP*	Split	40 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 18	1	3
	Hybrid	20 Days	Nov. 19 – Dec. 8	2	6
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 – Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1, 2026 – Jan. 4, 2025	5	15
Snow Geese **					
	Straight	107 Days	Oct. 1 – Dec.31, 2026	25	NONE
			Feb. 26 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Federal species restrictions apply.
** Includes blue geese also.

Appendix A
2026 FALL CALENDAR
Lake Champlain Zone

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
SEPTEMBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30			
OCTOBER					1	2	3
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
NOVEMBER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30					
DECEMBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30	31		

Proposed Lake Champlain Zone season

2026 FALL CALENDAR
Interior Vermont Zone

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
SEPTEMBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30			
OCTOBER					1	2	3
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
NOVEMBER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30					
DECEMBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30	31		

Proposed Interior Vermont Zone season

18 pub
163
3 board

ATTENDANCE ROSTER

PUBLIC WATERFOWL MEETING – ESSEX JUNCTION, VT – MARCH 12, 2026

PLEASE PRINT

NAME	ADDRESS	EMAIL
Doug Dezotell	[redacted]	[redacted]
Bill Sladgett		
Shane Libby		
COLIN KEENAN		
Eric Greenwood		
Jordan Markarian		
MATTHEW MAYO		

~~@~~ 3 VT staff
1 NY staff
3 board members

ATTENDANCE ROSTER

PUBLIC WATERFOWL MEETING – ESSEX JUNCTION, VT – MARCH 12, 2026

PLEASE PRINT

NAME	ADDRESS	EMAIL
ANDY DEZOTELLE	[redacted]	[redacted]
Addison Dezotelle		
Colton Desrochers		
JASON MCHAYA		
Robert Frohock		
Ron DeVincenzi		
GREG OLES		
Drew Desrochers		

2 Board members
3 NY staff
2 VT staff

ATTENDANCE ROSTER

PUBLIC WATERFOWL MEETING – Whitehall, NY – MARCH 10, 2026

PLEASE PRINT

NAME	ADDRESS	EMAIL
C. J FRANKIEWICZ	[redacted]	[redacted]
M. Bargiboj		
L. Brogan		

Don Rivers:

Move split earlier: Close October 25 reopen November 14. Reduce COGO bag limits. Wednesday opener at a minimum every 3rd year.

Michael Gardner:

Andrew,

I thought I would follow-up from my previous email and share some data with you. We conducted a survey on the VT Waterfowlers FB page last year. Some answers had clear winners, others, not so much.

1. Do you support moving the Lake Champlain Zone Boundary to encompass the entire lake? 51.35% in favor, 48.65% against
2. Do you support an Interior Zone Split? (North/South) 70% in favor, 30% against
3. Do you support a 60 day consecutive season for the proposed Northern Interior Zone? 84% in favor, 16% against
4. Do you support a split season for the proposed Southern Interior Zone? 76% in favor, 24% against
5. Do you support a hunter survey as part of the HIP program? 89% in favor, 11% against.

I'm happy to connect when it is convenient for you

Thanks

Mike Gardner

Andrew and David,

My name is Michael Gardner, I'm the current state chairman for Ducks Unlimited and an avid waterfowl hunter. It was my intent to reach out a few weeks ago after chatting with Commissioner Batchelder, but I wanted to get some additional feedback from a large fundraiser that happened last Saturday night.

I hope you're both doing well. I'm not sure I've had the pleasure of meeting you both in person, but I was fortunate to meet Andrew at our DU event in Barre, and David, I thank you for your leadership on waterfowl before Andrew stepped in. I wasn't sure who best to reach out to regarding the proposed interior season dates, but having come from a fundraiser Saturday night on Lake Bomoseen with 100+ duck hunters in the room, in the heart of Vermont's interior zone I knew I had to reach out. The general consensus in the room was that the surveys don't seem to be reaching actual migratory bird hunters, and that F+W might not be getting the feedback from the survey program in helping to make the very tough decision on season dates. There was even consensus that trying to please everyone in a long skinny state poses some challenges.

The #1 proposal from hunters both North and South is that the survey should be required to be completed to get your HIP number. Simple, easy, and you are targeting the people being impacted. It should be clear that the results impact the decision making on season dates.

Conversations beyond the HIP idea ranged in perspective. In a perfect world, we would have 2 interior zones, and it's my understanding that we can't make more zones without Federal approval. In the past we were required, apparently, to maintain 60 consecutive days but in the 2024 season we had a split, so it seems that might have changed. While the folks way up North seem to like a 60 day consecutive season, anyone mid state down, or anyone who enjoys hunting migrators on the rivers and larger lakes really gets left out with a 60 day consecutive season. Having traveled the state to attend every DU banquet and nearly every conservation project I hear it from both sides, including the guys that hunt Missisquoi bay and worry about getting frozen out. All of that said I think it might be a good idea, assuming we can't split the state, to propose some sort of alternating framework, where we have an interior split one year, and then 60 days consecutive the next, and articulate that since we can't please all of the people, all of the time, we are at listening intently.

While we only did it once, we held a waterfowl meeting in Bennington, at the firehouse 10+ years ago and it was VERY well attended. Whether I'm in the northern part of the state or the southern, people aren't going to meetings like they once did because they feel like they aren't being heard. We all know the incredible irony in that assumption, because if you don't show up you definitely aren't going to be heard, but it's the most frequent feedback I get.

If it helps you at all I'd be happy to host a listening meeting, or 2 meetings (one north, one mid state), email blast all the Vermont DU members, and advertise on social media to put it together. Alternatively I'd be thrilled to hop on a call with either of you, or both at almost any time.

Lastly, I think there is a tremendous banding opportunity at the Vermont Veterans home in Bennington VT. If that is something of interest I can wrangle some volunteers.

On a personal note, I strongly favor the split, it's really tough to hunt divers on Lake Bomosseen when the season is closed, and my favorite birds are those late season black ducks and mallards, but those birds arrived on the Battenkill and Walloomsac on December 5th this year....

Respectfully,

Michael Gardner
Vermont State Chairman Ducks Unlimited.

C. J. Frankiewicz:
March 17, 2026

Andrew:

Here's my Migratory Game Bird Questions and Comments from the Waterfowl Meeting in Whitehall, NY on March 10.

First 4. No questions.

5. I think the VF&W Board should consider reclassifying some portion of the Lake Champlain Zone south of the Champlain Bridge to the Interior Zone. This southern portion of LC is substantially shallower than the portion of LC north of the bridge and therefore freezes much faster than the deeper north portion.

With the LCZ season closure at December 27, many hunting days are lost due freeze-up (which certainly varies each year) of the southern portion of LC. And, there is already a loss of 19 hunting days due to the split season in the LCZ.

Thus, this southern portion of LC experiences very much less hunting pressure due to both the interim closure and freeze-up. Give us more hunting days by reclassifying some portion of the LCZ south of the Champlain Bridge to the Interior Zone. This would enable this southern portion of LC to have close to the same number of real hunting days as everywhere else in the State of Vermont.

I understand that it will be some years before this could take effect, and further understand that it must be considered with New York DEC.

Please ask the VF&W Board to consider this proposal.

Sincerely,

C. J. Frankiewicz

Jake Kehaya:

Andrew, last night was the most civil meeting I've ever attended for duck regs. You should be commended for that.
I still believe an October 10 opener every year (like Turkey opening on May 1) would be a good compromise. A 5 year trial would be in order of course but by then how many of us rabid duck hunters will still be slogging through the marsh.
Thanks, Jake

Michael Pond:

Gentleman,

How many people participated in the obtained feedback ?

I've been hunting duck since I was 14.... now 68. I can tell you that in NY to have both Champlain and Northeast open at the same time really limits opportunity. I hunted approximately 10 days in both zones this year.. Never killed more than one duck or even saw more than 20 out of range. Clearly it wasn't even worth getting up to go out.

The first season opening in Lake Champlain... I did not have a single duck within range and shot one snipe at Ausable point. This year, for the second season opener, I'll bet if you combined everybody who hunted's bag ..the total bag limit would not even have been six ducks. The first shot was fired 45 minutes after legal shooting time! Never have seen that in my life. We used to limit out within the first half hour.

I am a NY Hunter Safety Instructor and Waterfowl Identification Course Instructor. So I've been very active and follow waterfowl closely. And I can tell you that since youth and Veterans Day started we have not had an opening day in either zone that was actually worth hunting. The Ducks are completely blown out by the regular opening. Actually , it used to be the only good days were the opening days. Those opening days would have been the only possible days to limiting out. That is not the case anymore. I've been hunting in the same places since 1986... The first 20-25 years were great... Now it's hardly worth going even for opening day . In the northeast zone I have hunted the same place in the Adirondacks since 1974.... Used to be great now if you shoot one duck it's amazing. Something's wrong.

I understand you may not want to "put pressure on the waterfowl" but it would be nice to actually have some shooting. And another possible problem is that I guarantee our brethren across the border do a lot of shooting.. I have hunted in Canada... They put a lot of pressure on. They shoot earlier and more... By the time the birds cross the St Lawrence and get to the United States they are totally skittish.

Oh and by the way... the drivers just showed up... Starting December 28th and now at Ausable Point they are there by the thousands.. a day or two after the season closed. This is happening year after year now. You can add these comments to your public comments and I realize I'm only a voice of one but something's clearly wrong.

Respectfully,
Michael

Hi Michael,

Based on surveys of waterfowl hunters from New York and Vermont and public comments from the public hearings that we conduct annually in both New York and Vermont the overall preference was for the duck season to open the second weekend of October in the Lake Champlain zone. If you have any other questions regarding the Lake Champlain zone feel free to reach out.

Thanks,
Andrew

Good morning Michael,

Sorry for the delayed response. This inbox isn't monitored much during the season.

Opening dates for the Lake Champlain Zone are actually set by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board. Federal regulations require our seasons on Lake Champlain to be the same.

While I understand your desire to have multiple opening days, the intent of zoning is to capture the varied migration of waterfowl within each zone. The purpose is not to expose ducks to additional opening days and additional pressure. I've looped in the Vermont waterfowl biologist who may be able to shed more light on how/why the Vermont board set the dates they did for this duck season.

Josh

To whom it may concern,
I know there's a committee that decides opening dates in New York... does this comment get sent there and who makes up that committee?
I would just like to point out that I live in the Adirondacks and duck coming is really limited to opening days... So I really disagree with opening Champlain and the Northeastern Zone at the same time. This really cuts down on the ability to enjoy two opening days. Now that there's a youth day in a Veteran's Day the regular season open day is essentially blown out and ruined. I really can't imagine why this was done(other than for preventing people to hunt or limiting the shooting) ? Can you explain it?

Thank you,
Michael Pond

Sid Harmon:

My name is Sid Harmon of Essex Vt - I have hunted the Missisquoi and Mud Creek area for years. Historically the waterfowl season opens on a Wednesday or a Saturday. Mud creek allows hunting on Tuesday , Thursday , and Saturday with the exception of no hunting allowed on opening day. If it lands on a Saturday - parties have to wait until Tuesday. If it starts on a Wednesday, parties can hunt on Thursday. I propose that hunting be allowed on Sunday if the season opens on a Saturday. This exception would apply to just that one Sunday . By waiting until Tuesday most prime hunting has occurred and many parties have left town because they have returned to work after opening weekend. This change would still allow rest periods between hunting days.
Thanks for your consideration ---
Sid Harmon -

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  TO LATE

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  OK

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  KEEP SAME

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Jason Kulbeya

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  FINE

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone? NONE AS LONG AS ITS A STRAIGHT 60 DAYS

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  FINE

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season? N/A

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

START DUCK SEASON OCT 10 OR REGARDLESS OF DAY OF WEEK 15

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  dont hunt

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

Dont hunt

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

GOOD

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

GOOD

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

GOOD

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

DON'T HUNT

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone? OK
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone? OK
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  OK
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season? none
- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  no

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  OK / Baiting

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  OK

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  Think they are good

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  Good

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  do not change

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?*** ____

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone? closed to long in November
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone? very good
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?
- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  Fine

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  also fine

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  opinions seems early. Full vegetation still

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  South of Champlain bridge to whitehall often marshes are froze out by dec 1.. can opportunities be addressed?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  OKAY

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  OKAY

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  OKAY

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  OKAY

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  NO CHANGE

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  N/A

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  No

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

2026
Moose Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

The Fish & Wildlife Department recommends the same moose hunting permit allocation adopted by the Board by straw vote on February 18, 2026. During the public comment period, which started immediately after the Board meeting on February 18, the Department did not receive any new or additional information to justify changes to the initial recommendation.

The following is the same text the Department submitted to the Board for its February meeting.

All public comments received are provided in the appendices.

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks. The Department recommends issuing 85 moose hunting permits distributed between WMUs E1 and E2 to stabilize the moose population in that region. No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, because moose densities remain below established objectives. The recommended permit allocation is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

The number of moose in WMU E has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that are negatively affecting moose health and survival. Winter ticks are a host-dependent parasite with moose being the primary host responsible for major fluctuations in winter tick densities. Therefore, reduction in moose population density decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Maintaining a lower-density moose population will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

Reducing winter tick numbers directly, either by treating moose or the landscape with some form of acaricide or fungal pathogen, is not currently a viable option. Research in this area is ongoing, but the realities of treating an entire landscape or a sufficient portion of the moose population make it unlikely that this will be a practical option soon. Importantly, this approach would not address the cause of high winter tick abundance, which is high moose population density.

Maintaining a lower-density moose population should reduce the abundance of winter ticks and improve overall moose health in WMU E, consistent with the Department's established objective of managing for a healthy moose population. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the northeast, they do not significantly impact moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose population densities that limit tick abundance. Instead, moose in these areas are primarily limited by the lack of young forest habitat and internal parasites like brainworm.

Summary of Key Points

- The moose population remains stable or slowly declining in most of Vermont, but may be declining in WMU E (E1 & E2), as intended, due to recent moose harvests.

- Results of moose research and ongoing monitoring in WMU E indicate health of moose is poor in that region.
    - Adult survival remains relatively good, but detrimental health impacts of winter ticks have caused birth rates to be low.
    - Heavy winter tick loads can cause more than half of moose calves to die in late winter.

- Moose density in WMU E remains above the objective of 1 moose per square mile established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.
    - Moose densities greater than 1 moose per square mile are uncommon in North America, occurring in less than 10% of moose range.
    - In Vermont, no WMU outside the Northeast Kingdom ever had a moose density of 1/mi^2.
    - Moose densities greater than 1/mi^2 support high numbers of winter ticks that negatively impact the health of moose.
    - Moose densities below 0.75/mi^2 support relatively few winter ticks that do not impact moose populations. This is the case in most of Vermont – winter ticks are present, but do not cause population level impacts.

- Increased moose harvests in recent years appear to be effectively reducing moose numbers, as intended, in WMU E. The population is approaching the objective of 1 moose per square mile.

- The Department recommends 85 moose hunting permits (65 either sex and 20 antlerless only) be allocated in WMU E to stabilize moose numbers near the objective.
    - This is expected to result in a harvest of approximately 42 moose, or about 6% of the current estimated population in WMU E.

- No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, which cover 93% of Vermont, because moose densities remain below objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Goals

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in WMUs E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks.

Management Objectives

Moose population objectives for each WMU were established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. These objectives aim to maintain healthy regional moose populations at levels that are socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable.

Moose density objectives throughout most of moose range in Vermont have been set at 0.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 1**). This objective is a carryover from earlier moose management plans and reflects peak moose densities in these regions during the early 2000s.

In WMUs D2, E1, and E2, density objectives reflect higher historical densities and the impact of winter ticks on the size and health of the region's moose population. Research has found reduced frequency of winter tick epizootics (where more than 50% of calves die from winter tick infestations) at moose densities near 1/mi^2 and no tick epizootics at densities below 0.75/mi^2 (Samuel 2007, Jones 2016). The Department will initially try to maintain moose densities at or below 1/mi^2 to reduce winter tick abundance and the frequency of epizootics and improve the health of the moose population. However, if tick impacts are not reduced, the moose density may need to be reduced to 0.75/mi^2. Ultimately, the goal is to have healthy moose, with fewer calves dying each year from heavy winter tick loads and healthier cows with higher birth rates.

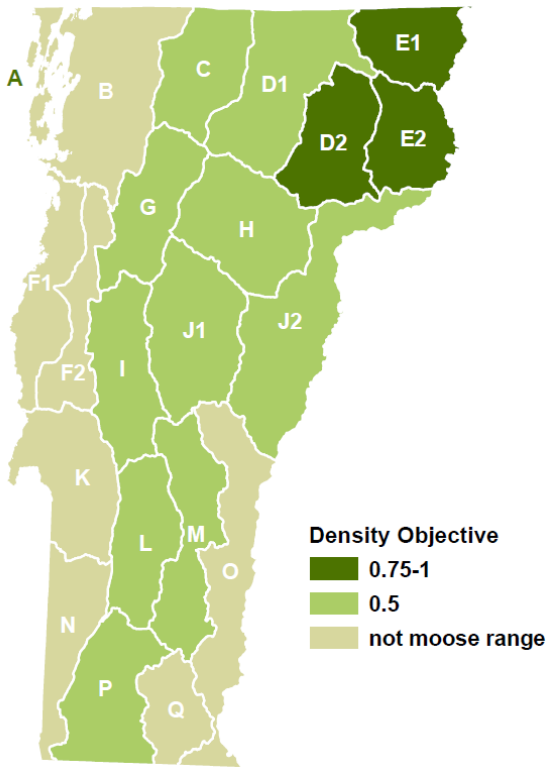


Figure 1. Moose density objectives (moose per square mile of moose habitat) established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Hunting thresholds have also been established for each WMU at 75% of the density objective (**Table 1**). The Department will only consider hunting moose when densities exceed this threshold for two consecutive years. This ensures the other values of moose are maximized at these lower densities.

Moose and Winter Ticks

Studies in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine have concluded that winter ticks are the primary cause of moose mortality across their core range in New England (Musante et al. 2007, 2010, Bergeron et al. 2013, Dunfey-Ball 2017, Jones et al. 2017, Ellingwood et al. 2019, Jones et al. 2019, DeBow et al. 2021), with some moose hosting an astonishingly high number of ticks (>50,000/individual; Jones et al. 2019).

Core moose range in New England extends from northeastern Vermont through northern New Hampshire and western and northern Maine. This part of the region has a colder climate with longer winters, low deer densities, large blocks of forest, and an abundance of young forest created by commercial timber management which allows it to sustain higher densities of moose than more peripheral parts of their range. Population-level effects of winter ticks have only been observed in the region's core moose range, where moose densities have been high enough to support large numbers of winter ticks.

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the region, they have little impact on moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range in the northeast, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose densities which limit tick abundance. Moose numbers outside of the Northeast Kingdom have declined from their peak in the early 2000s, but the main cause of that decline was not winter ticks. It was primarily due to a combination of declining quantity of young forest, increased parasite loads (particularly brainworm linked to increasing deer densities), and fewer moose in core moose range to migrate out to these other regions. These factors continue to limit moose abundance across much of Vermont.

Vermont Research

During 2017–2019, 126 moose (36 adult cows and 90 calves) were fitted with GPS radio collars in WMU E to monitor survival and birth rates. Results of this research clearly showed that chronic, high winter tick loads caused the health of moose in WMU E to be poor. Birth rates were low and overwinter calf survival was poor (49%; DeBow et al. 2021). Although adult female survival remained relatively good, it was lower than expected for a population without major predators. Survival of breeding age females has significant influence on population trends in long-lived species like moose.

Fieldwork associated with the survival study concluded in 2019; however, the Department continued to monitor survival and calf recruitment in the remaining collared cows through 2024. Additionally, the large amounts of data collected during this study allowed University of Vermont researchers to analyze other aspects of moose and winter tick ecology (*see* Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Blouin et al. 2021*b*, Rosenblatt et al. 2021, Rosenblatt et al. 2023). Other related research at UVM assessed the effect of various fungal pathogens on survival of winter tick larvae (*see* Sullivan et al. 2021 and Sullivan et al. 2022).

The Department is currently partnering with multiple northeastern universities and state and federal agencies on regional research efforts focused on non-invasive monitoring of moose and winter ticks. A component of this involves deployment of hundreds of long-term camera monitoring stations that will hopefully allow for better monitoring of moose health and population trends, particularly in parts of the region with little or no moose harvest.

Population Status

Regional Population Estimates

Regional moose densities in Vermont are estimated from moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters during the November rifle season. This approach, originally developed by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, relates sighting rates to moose densities determined by aerial surveys (Bontaites et al. 2000). Aerial surveys conducted in Vermont allowed the Department to modify this model to better fit Vermont sighting data (Millette et al. 2011). Sighting rates often vary from year to year due to factors other than the number of moose (e.g., weather conditions), so a 3-year rolling average is used to smooth out some of this variation.

Using this approach, the 2025 (2023–2025 rolling average) density estimates for WMUs E1 and E2 are 1.32 and 1.09 moose/mi^2, respectively, which remain above the density objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. Moose population densities in all other WMUs except WMU C remain below established hunting thresholds (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Moose density estimates based on sighting rates by deer hunters and density objectives and hunting thresholds established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, by WMU. Density estimates are based on average sighting rates during 2023–2025.

WMU	Habitat (mi^2)	Density (moose/mi^2)			Population Estimate	
		Objective	Hunting Threshold	Current Estimate	N	(80% CI)
A	35	n/a	n/a	0.02	1	(1–1)
B	420	n/a	n/a	0.02	10	(8–11)
C	351	0.5	0.38	0.41	145	(122–168)
D1	449	0.5	0.38	0.09	39	(30–49)
D2	346	0.75-1	0.56	0.24	82	(63–100)
E1	306	0.75-1	0.56	1.32	403	(357–449)
E2	326	0.75-1	0.56	1.09	355	(297–413)
F1	108	n/a	n/a	0.04	5	(3–6)
F2	158	n/a	n/a	0.02	3	(3–3)
G	363	0.5	0.38	0.05	17	(11–23)
H	466	0.5	0.38	0.19	88	(72–104)
I	407	0.5	0.38	0.09	35	(26–44)
J1	464	0.5	0.38	0.04	18	(14–23)
J2	633	0.5	0.38	0.10	65	(54–77)
K	359	n/a	n/a	0.04	14	(8–19)
L	346	0.5	0.38	0.08	27	(17–36)
M	424	0.5	0.38	0.18	77	(55–98)
N	275	n/a	n/a	0.02	6	(6–6)
O	478	n/a	n/a	0.05	25	(13–37)
P	447	0.5	0.38	0.11	49	(34–65)
Q	219	n/a	n/a	0.05	12	(7–16)
STATE	**7380**				**1474**	**(1201–1748)**

Moose density in WMU C exceeded the hunting threshold in 2024 and 2025, meaning permits could now be considered in this WMU according to the guidelines of the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. However, since the current density is only slightly above the hunting threshold, typical year-to-year fluctuations in density estimates make it unlikely that this status will be maintained. Therefore, the Department recommends that no permits be issued in WMU C in 2026.

The Department continues to receive interest in moose hunting in areas outside WMU E, and some local areas could likely sustain a limited moose harvest. However, the uneven distribution of functional moose habitat (and therefore moose) in much of Vermont is a challenge for management. The Department is reevaluating moose habitat mapping and regional population objectives based on recent research efforts in the northeast (e.g., Pearman-Gilman et al. 2020, Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Peterson et al. 2022) This will allow for setting more appropriate population objectives that reflect current habitat limitations, and calculating more meaningful estimates of moose density in WMUs with less homogeneous moose habitat.

Moose Population Trends in WMU E

In WMU E, moose were overabundant in the early 2000s and the Department intentionally worked to reduce moose numbers. Since population reduction efforts ended in 2010, moose density has remained relatively stable in WMU E near 1.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 2**). Importantly, the density of moose over that time has been high enough to support problematic numbers of winter ticks. The population may now be declining, as intended, as a result of higher moose harvests in recent years.

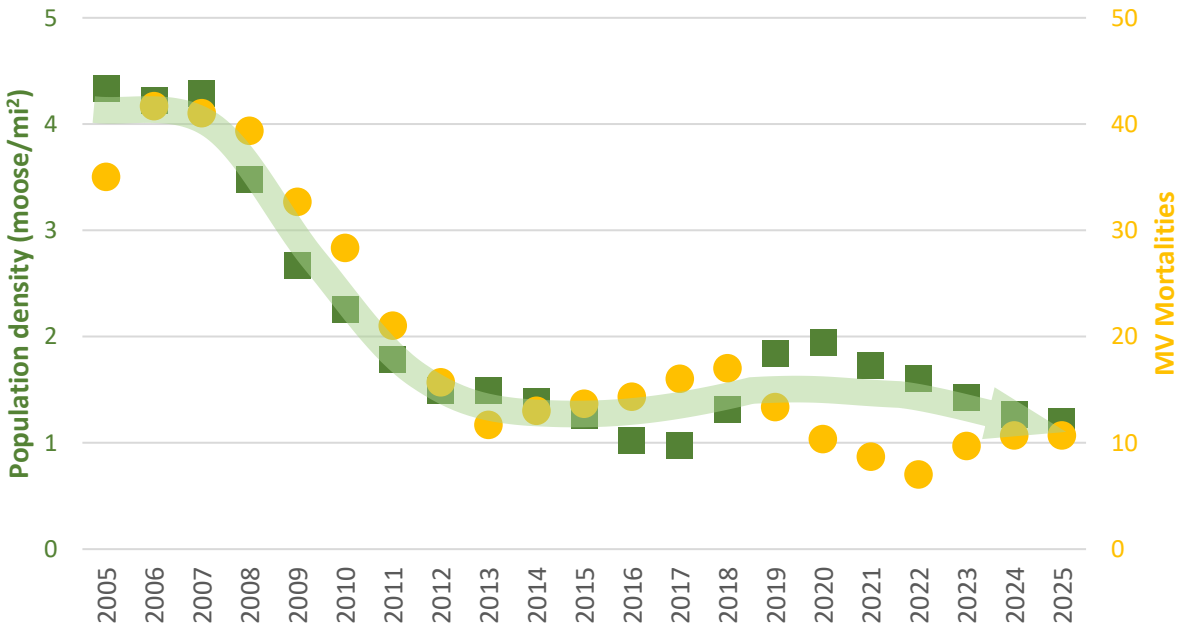


Figure 2. Moose density estimates (green squares) and moose mortalities from motor vehicle collision (yellow circles) in WMU E during 2005–2025. Both metrics are three-year rolling averages. Density estimates are based on moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters. The light green line shows general population trend.

Recent Winter Tick Impacts in WMU E

The severity of annual tick infestations is dependent not only on moose density, but also on climate, including temperature, humidity, wind, and snow. Annual variation in climate conditions results in variation in winter tick loads on moose. Vermont has not collared moose calves to directly monitor overwinter survival since 2019. As a result, the Department relies on other sources of information to estimate winter tick impacts since that time.

One useful measure is counts of winter ticks on bull moose harvested in October (**Figure 6**). This measure provides an indication of tick abundance on the landscape, but final tick loads on moose are largely determined by the length of the questing period. The questing period is typically ended by weather conditions (e.g., persistent snow or freezing conditions) that kill questing winter tick larvae.

Persistent snow arrived in early November in WMU E, resulting in a shorter questing period than in many recent years. However, the higher average winter tick counts in 2025 (**Figure 6**) still suggest a greater likelihood of high calf mortality in the spring of 2026.

Occasional increases in winter tick abundance are expected, even as moose density is reduced. However, these high winter tick years will be less frequent at lower moose density. Winter tick counts were also higher in New Hampshire and Maine in 2025, indicating this increase was driven by annual climate variation, not moose abundance.

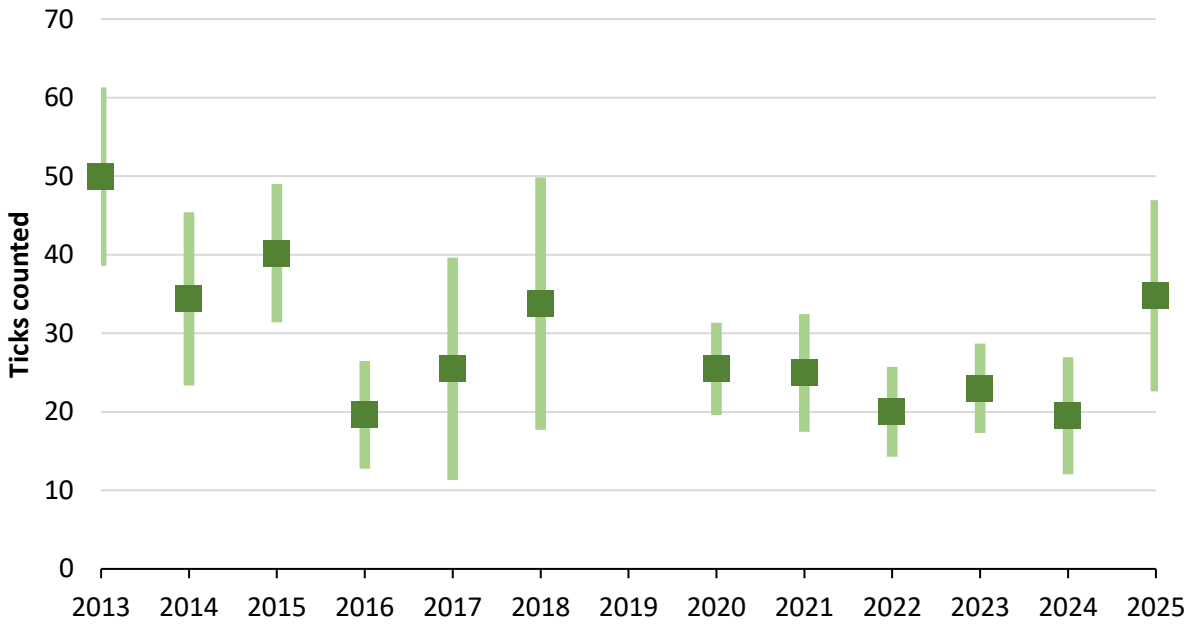


Figure 6. Winter tick counts on bull moose harvested in Wildlife Management Unit E, 2013–2025.

Population Health in WMU E

In the early 2000s, moose were overabundant in WMU E. They were causing significant damage to forest regeneration, and their physical condition was declining as habitat quality declined. The Department actively reduced the moose population in this area to bring it into balance with the habitat and to improve the health of moose. By 2011, the population had been reduced to a level the habitat could support; however, health measures did not improve (**Figures 7** and **8**).

Moose body condition and reproductive rates have remained poor since 2011 due to the impacts of chronic high winter tick loads. Moose are not currently limited by habitat quality in the core part of their range, including WMU E (Dunfey-Ball 2017). However, habitat quality can influence the distribution of moose on the landscape (i.e., higher densities of moose in areas with the highest quality habitat), which can influence local winter tick abundance and impacts on moose health (Healy et al. 2019, Blouin et al. 2021*a* and *b*).

Body condition and reproductive rates have shown signs of improvement in recent years (**Figures 7** and **8**). However, body weights, particularly for yearling moose, declined sharply in 2024 and 2025 (**Figure 7**). The cause of this decline is unknown, but it is likely due to something other than winter ticks. Ultimately, we hope to see sustained improvement in these metrics.

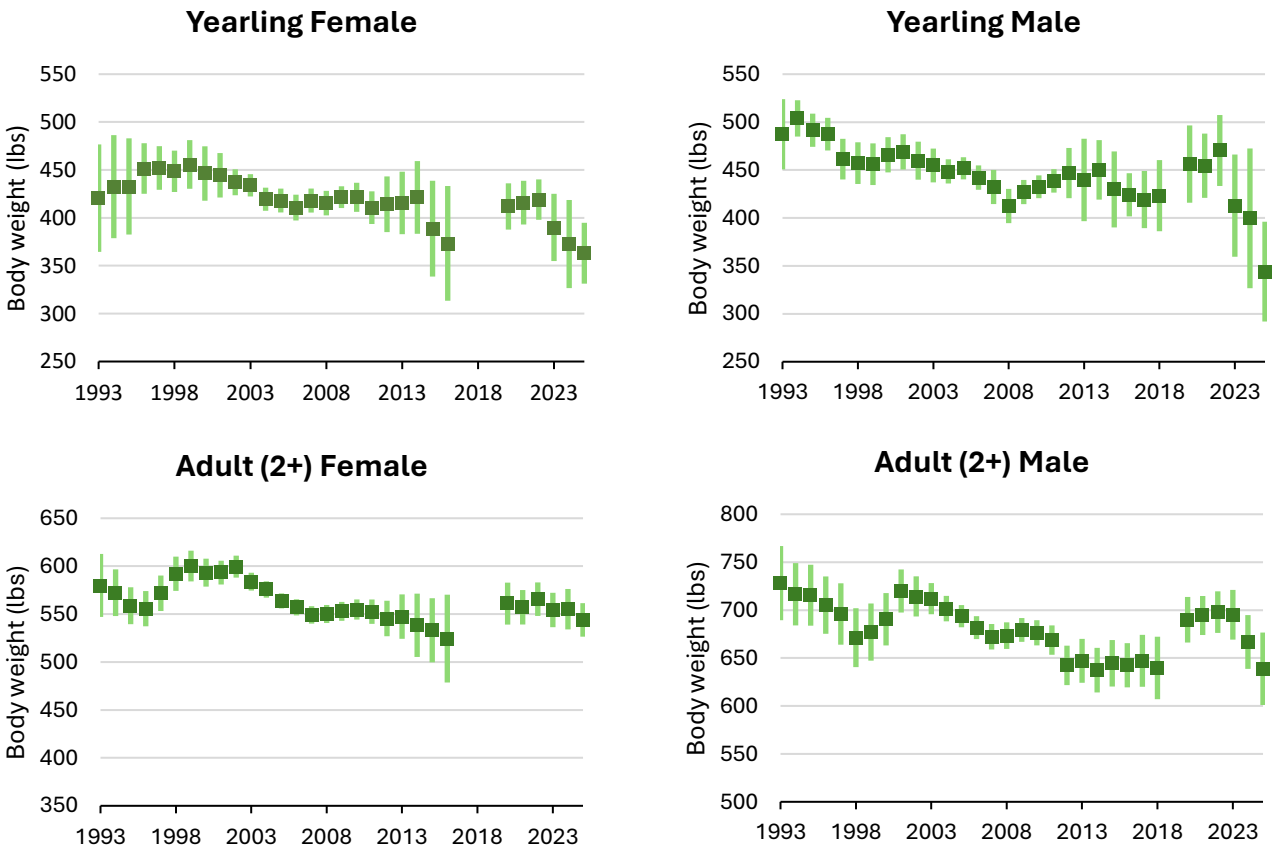


Figure 7. Field-dressed body weights of moose harvested during the regular season in Wildlife Management Unit E, 1993–2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages with 95% confidence intervals.

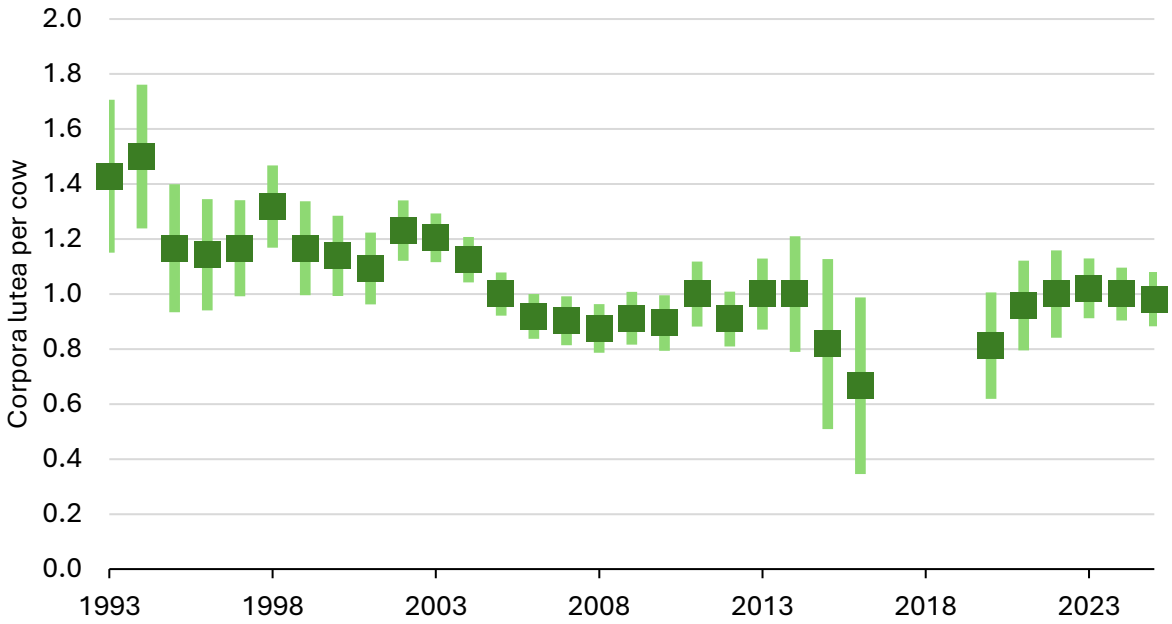


Figure 8. Ovulation rate of prime-aged (≥3 years old) cow moose in WMU E, 1993-2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages from counts of corpora lutea in ovaries collected from hunter-harvested moose.

Harvest Recommendation

The Department recommends harvesting approximately 10-12 adult cow moose (~3% of the cow population) and approximately 30 adult bull moose (~15% of the bull population) in WMU E during the 2026 moose hunting seasons. The Department further recommends that this be accomplished through the issuance of 65 either-sex hunting permits and 20 antlerless-only hunting permits. This is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025. No permits are recommended in the other 19 WMUs.

Permit breakdown by season, type, WMU, and special allocation is provided below in **Table 2**. Given recent success rates and sex-age composition of the harvest for each season and permit type, this allocation is expected to result in the harvest of approximately 42 moose with an expected breakdown of 29 bulls, 11 cows, and 2 calves.

Approximately 55% of permits are recommended to be allocated to WMU E1 due to higher moose density in that WMU. Since most auction and special opportunity permit winners choose to hunt WMU E1, this will result in approximately 65% of permits being assigned to that WMU.

The recommended allocation to the archery season is 25% of either-sex permits, based on the percentage of total applications that were for this season in recent years and the need to obtain sufficient biological data during the regular season. Allocations to the auction, special opportunity, and veterans are the same as prior years and are limited by statute and regulation.

Table 2. Recommended 2026 moose hunting permit allocations and expected harvest by season, permit type, and WMU.

	Permits			Expected Harvest	
	E1	E2	Total		
Archery Season					
Either-sex	7	8	15	8	*(6–10)*
Regular Season[1]					
Either-sex	24	20	44	24	*(20–30)*
Antlerless-only	11	9	20	7	*(6–10)*
Auction[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
Special Opportunity[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
TOTAL			**85**	**42**	*(32–56)*

[1] *Veteran permits are a priority draw for the first 5 regular season permits.*

[2] *Auction and Special Opportunity Permits are either sex and allow choice of season and WMU.*

The results of the moose study and continued monitoring of moose clearly show that the density of moose in WMU E over the past decade has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that negatively affect moose health and survival. Research has shown that winter tick abundance is directly related to moose population density. Reducing the density of moose decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Reducing the moose population and maintaining it at lower density will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

The Department is committed to achieving a healthy moose population in WMU E by meeting the population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. The proposed permit allocation and resulting cow harvest should allow the population to stabilize near the objective of 1 moose/mi^2 (632 moose in WMU E) within the next few years.

In practice, the moose population and winter tick impacts are dynamic, and management must remain adaptive. Actual permit allocations and harvest will be adjusted annually based on new information as it becomes available. Importantly, the Department's primary goal is to improve the health of moose in WMU E. If health does not improve at 1 moose/mi^2, moose density may need to be reduced even further.

Maintaining a healthy, stable, and sustainable moose population requires action to improve moose health. Without management action to reduce the moose population and maintain it at a lower density, high tick loads will continue to impact the health of moose in WMU E. The resulting chronic stress, low birth rates, and high calf mortality will make the population less resilient to diseases, parasites, and environmental variation, which could cause the population to destabilize. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

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Appendix A. Summary of comments from 2026 moose hearings

Note: comments are arranged from most common to least common. Approximately 52 members of the public attended these three hearings.

30 individuals left this question blank or indicated "no comment."

Agree/Looks Good/Support
Similar comments were received from 8 individuals.

When scouting last year I saw plenty of sign but saw few moose. My overall opinion is that the moose are healthy and have a decent age structure. The proposal numbers seem appropriate.

I believe we achieved the density already that we are looking for.
The moose we are seeing seem very healthy / some of the bulls are Maine/Alaska quality.
I would like to see no more than 40 permits issued.

The population of the moose herd I believe are a [sustainable?] rate, however 2%-5% increase in permits would keep the harvest at a manageable herd size.

I think there should be some selective moose hunting in other populated areas. Steam Mill Brook in D2 has a growing population that could use some limited harvesting.

I think the moose have been studied adequately so I think the moose proposal is spot on.

It seems you have a good plan in place, hopefully the tick are down.

Would it be feasible to tranquilize and treat moose to reduce tick infestation in the NEK?

I would agree with the decision to drop the number of antlerless permits.
Would it be beneficial to have a separate cow only season?

I would love to see a push to expand moose habitat so we can see more than 85 tags available.

Support continued efforts to reduce density in E1/E2. Don't particularly like that 3 permits are auctioned to highest bidder. Don't like that those non-residents who participate bypass lottery system residents have to apply for. Also think funds from auction should be used for moose research.

Hopefully this plan works and the health of the moose improves.

Moose management is on point, but there should be a few statewide permits (Gov. tag) with a 60 day season.

Don't even put in for a permit – never got one so I stopped.

Shut down the season for one year.

Appendix B. Moose public comment emails

Sent: Thursday, February 19, 2026 7:59 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Moose Hunting

Moose hunting should stop completely. Instead of hunting, the F&G should spend energy on controlling ticks by spraying areas were moose frequent. This is a little more common sense. If you're going to issue moose hunting permits, they should be $1000.00 each.

Sent: Saturday, February 21, 2026 2:57 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 moose proposal

I'm writing to the board in favor of the proposed moose permit number. If there's been a reduction then there must be a reason why Nick has made that decision and the number of permits. I hope that this proposal will go forward and those number of permits will be issued if the information that is being used is stable throughout this year. Thank you for your time, Jeremy Ayotte

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Sent: Saturday, March 7, 2026 8:34 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: No Moose permits for 2026

The Vermont Moose population is dramatically down. I support no moose hunting season in 2026. Thank you, Ginny Callan

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Sent: Friday, March 13, 2026 6:40 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: moose hearings

i am surprised you aren’t having a hearing in island pond since that is where moose are hunted.

Fish and Wildlife Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 20, 2026

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, May 20, 2026, in the National Life Davis Building, Floor 2, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620. A recording of the meeting is available on the department's YouTube channel.

Agenda

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (April 22, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. 2026 Antlerless Deer Permits and Youth Season – Final Vote
4. Tagging Rule – Potential Vote
5. Department Recommendation: Youth and Novice Archery Season Petition – Potential Vote
6. Department Recommendations: Black Bear Regulations Petitions – Potential Vote
7. Black Bear Rule – Department Presentation, Board Discussion, Potential Vote
8. Commissioner's Update

Board Members Present: Nicholas Burnham, Jeffrey Corey, Richard Craig, Beth Deimling, Heather Furman, Neal Hogan, Ryan Kilborn, Paul Noel (Acting Chair), Robert Patterson, Jon Valsangiacomo, Martin Van Buren

Virtual: David Deen

Department Staff Present: Commissioner Jason Batchelder, Chief Operating Officer Andrea Shortsleeve, General Counsel Hannah Smith, Wildlife Division Director John Austin, Black Bear Project Leader Jaclyn Comeau, Wildlife Specialist Nicole Dickan, Game Warden Colonel Justin Stedman, Wildlife Management Program Manager David Sausville, Planner & Analyst Christopher Saunders, Public Information Officer Joshua Morse, Game Warden Lieutenant Mike Scott, Game Warden Sergeant Jeffrey Whipple, Game Warden Trainee Ryan O'Neill, Principal Assistant Abigail Connolly

Virtual: Deer and Moose Project Leader Nick Fortin, Director of Outreach Alison Thomas, Information Program Manager Megan Duni, Information Specialist John Hall

Members of the Public Present: Pam Perry, Nipa Wheatly, Alexia Voitle, Robin Voitle, Fern Lickfield, Sophie Bowater, Sarah Gorsline, Kevin Carney, Linda Cacupardo, Bill Hickok, Mark Green, Vanessa Kranz, Brent Gadapee, Charles Palmer, Rocky Burnell, Fred Schroeder, Anne Jameson, Sarah Moos, Jacob Moorby, Rod Coronado, Steve Niederhauser, Dennis Fournier, Shelah Vogel, Kevin Lawrence, Bert Saldi, Davis McCarthy, Ben Isley, Butch Spear, Jamie Shaw, Brian Fitzgerald, Dylan Machitchie, Aidan Fletcher, Justin Beaudet, Mark Moran, Maureen Dwyer, Nancy Fitzpatrick, Chris Pritchard, William Fitzpatrick, Diane Reynolds, Eric Messier, Paul Campbell, Andy Phelan, Dan Carr

Virtual: Jane Fitzwilliam, Catherine, Barbara Felitti, Alisa Bernat, Linda Andrews, Brad Herring, Chris Bradley, Bruce, Jennifer Lovett, Linda Huebner, Devin Brennan, Gabriella Miller, Bob Galvin, Master of Coin, Laura Ireland, Tara Miller, John Aberth, Tyler, Marilyn Ganahl, Patricia Hunt, Jean, Vanessa Kranz, Benjamin Breen

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 pm

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Board Member Patterson moved to approve the April 22, 2026 meeting minutes. Board Member Van Buren seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes (11-0).

Public Comment Period

Pam Perry, Plainfield, regarding black bear baiting
Alexia Voitle, Orange, regarding black bear baiting
Fern Lickfield, Worchester, regarding black bear baiting and the extension of the black bear hunting season
Sophie Bowater, Middlesex, regarding black bear baiting, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and a second bear tag
Sarah Gorsline, Grand Isle, regarding Project Coyote's petition to adjust the bear hound training season which would require legislative action, black bear baiting, bear proof dumpsters, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Kevin Carney, Lyndon, regarding the extension of the black bear hunting season
Linda Cacupardo, Sheffield, regarding black bear baiting
Bill Hickok, West Minster, regarding the Vermont Bowhunter's Association petition to create a regulated black bear baiting season
Vanessa Kranz, Bethel, regarding black bear baiting, the extension of the black bear hunting season, a second bear tag, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Charles Palmer, Danville, regarding black bear baiting
Rocky Burnell, regarding black bear baiting
Fred Schroeder, Bristol, regarding the panfish regulations
Anne Jameson, Marshfield, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Sarah Moos, Randolph, regarding black bear baiting and the bear hound training season
Rod Coronado, Orange, regarding black bear baiting, prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs, and the extension of the black bear hunting season
Shelah Vogel, East Charleston, regarding black bear baiting
Kevin Lawrence, Newbury, regarding the timing of the Board's vote and rules of decorum that the Board could adopt
Davis McCarthy, Orange, regarding black bear baiting and the black bear population estimates
Butch Spear, Newbury, regarding black bear baiting
Jamie Shaw, Worcester, regarding black bear baiting
Brian Fitzgerald, South Duxbury, regarding black bear baiting
Aidan Fletcher, regarding black bear baiting
Justin Beaudet, regarding black bear baiting

Maureen Dwyer, Barre Town, regarding black bear baiting
Nancy Fitzpatrick, Barre Town, regarding black bear baiting
Chris Pritchard, Pawlet, regarding black bear baiting and support for the Department
Diane Reynolds, Huntington, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Eric Messier, Randolph, regarding black bear baiting and the bear hound training season
Andy Phelan, Fayston, regarding his petition from 2023 to prohibit the intentional harvest of sows with cubs and black bear baiting
Linda Huebner, Halifax, regarding black bear baiting, a second bear tag, the extension of the black bear hunting season, shortening the bear hound training season, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Bob Galvin, Bolton, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Barbara Felitti, Huntington, regarding the black bear petition, black bear baiting, a second bear tag, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Alisa Bernat, regarding prohibiting the intentional hunting of sows with cubs
Jennifer Lovett, Starksboro, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Devin Brennan, South Royalton, regarding black bear baiting
Gabriella Miller, White River Junction regarding black bear baiting
Mike Savillas, Bethel, regarding black bear baiting, prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs, and a second bear tag
Marilyn Ganahl, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Jane Fitzwilliam, Putney, regarding black bear baiting, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and a second bear tag
Catherine, Lamoille County, regarding black bear baiting

The recording of the public comments and the meeting can be viewed here.

2026 Antlerless Deer Permits and Youth Season – Final Vote

John Austin spoke about the cautious approach the department recommends taking with the antlerless deer permits due to the recent changes to the deer rule and allowing the harvest of antlerless deer during rifle season. Nick Fortin explained that there was light attendance at the public hearings and there are no changes to the original recommendation presented to the Board on April 1, 2026. The department recommendation and the summary of public comments are included below.

Board Member Van Buren moved to approve the 2026 antlerless deer permits and youth season as recommended by the department. Board Member Corey seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

Tagging Rule – Potential Vote

Hannah Smith explained that the Board voted on the tagging rule earlier in the year but there were suggested changes from Board Member Patterson that were substantial enough to require another first vote by the Board. The Board Members asked Hannah Smith and Justin Stedman questions about the Importation Rule and its requirements. The proposed Tagging Rule language is included below.

Board Member Patterson moved to accept the revised Tagging Rule language. Board Member Corey seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

The Board recessed at 6:49 pm and returned at 7:22 pm.

Department Recommendation: Youth and Novice Archery Season Petition – Potential Vote

John Austin explained that the intent of the petition is appreciated by the department, but that the timing of the petition is not ideal because the Board just revised the deer rule last year. The deer rule is usually revised every four to five years, and at least three years of data is helpful before opening the deer rule again. The department recommendation is included below. The Board Members discussed early season archery zones, youth shooting compound bows versus crossbows, the timing of the current youth season, and youth participation numbers.

Board Chair Noel moved to reject the petition to a later date. Board Member Deimling seconded the motion. Board Member Craig suggested putting the motion in the affirmative. Board Chair Noel moved to accept the petition and move into rulemaking. Board Member Craig seconded the motion. Board Member Hogan expressed that it would be acceptable if the season was statewide except for the early season archery zones, otherwise he would reject the petition as written. The Board voted to deny the motion (12-0). Board Chair Noel expressed that the Board is not against the petition, just does not want to move forward with it at this time.

Department Recommendations: Black Bear Regulations Petitions – Potential Vote

John Austin reviewed the content of the two black bear regulations petitions received and the historical context. John Austin reviewed the department recommendations to establish a second

bear tag and extend the bear season into December and the department's concerns about establishing a bear baiting season. The department's recommendations are included below.

The Board Members discussed the second bear tag being for the whole state or by WMU. The Board Members discussed the process for accepting or denying the petitions/the concepts in the petitions and advancing into rulemaking. Board Member Deen emphasized that the statutory obligation on the Board is to initiate rulemaking, amend an existing rule, or deny the petition, the primary obligation being that the Board consider and respond to the petition.

Board Member Van Buren moved to advance the second bear tag proposal to the rulemaking process. Board Member Hogan seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

Board Member Furman moved to advance the extension of the black bear hunting season proposal to the rulemaking process. Board Member Burnham seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

The Board discussed black bear baiting. Board Member Patterson indicated he would like to hear more about the nuisance bear issues the game wardens are dealing with, what diseases New Hampshire and Maine might be dealing with due to bear baiting, and whether allowing bear baiting would result in a significant decrease in the bear population. Board Member Deimling asked Jackie Comeau about black bear ranges and spoke about using electric fences to deter bears, whether baiting could increase the bear population, humans creating issues with compost and garbage, and the public comment received. Board Member Hogan expressed that he would like to move forward with extending the bear hunting season and a second bear tag before allowing bear baiting.

Board Member Hogan moved to not develop a black bear baiting season. Board Member Van Buren seconded the motion. Board Member Furman expressed the desire to explore tools to manage the black bear population that does not put extra burden on the department. The Board voted to approve the motion (11-1), with Board Member Patterson voting no.

Hannah Smith reminded the Board that the petition from Bert Saldi and Kevin Lawrence requested that the changes be made for the 2027 black bear hunting season and that there is a deadline for any changes made to the black bear regulations to go into the hunting digest.

Black Bear Rule – Department Presentation, Board Discussion, Potential Vote

Jaclyn Comeau gave a presentation on the big game management population objectives for black bear, the black bear population estimate over time, what is driving human bear conflicts over time, strategies for reducing human bear conflicts, the current black bear hunting season, the department recommendations to extend the bear hunting season to the end of deer muzzleloader

season and to allow a second bear to be harvested by Wildlife Management Unit (WMU), and the additional approaches that were considered by the department.

Board Chair Noel asked about the approach to allow a second bear tag by WMU instead of statewide and Jaclyn Comeau responded.

Board Member Valsangiacomo asked why the department wasn't moving forward with recommending prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs. Commissioner Batchelder responded and asked the Board to have a larger discussion about it. Board Member Hogan spoke about enforceability, wanting protocols when it is not intentional, and education. Board Member Burnham asked about the frequency of it occurring.

Board Member Corey asked about the number of bears taken by hounders and the possible impact of allowing a second bear tag. Board Member Patterson spoke about the small impact the second bear tag had in New Hampshire. Board Member Kilborn asked about the process for farmers to get a depredation permit for nuisance bears. Jaclyn Comeau and Lieutenant Scott responded.

Board Chair Noel asked about the determining of WMUs for the second bear tag and David Sausville explained that the intent was to come to the Board annually to propose WMUs and numbers of tags similar to what the department already does for antlerless deer permits.

The Board Members discussed the implications of prohibiting the harvest of sows with cubs.

Board Member Hogan asked about the additional stressors on black bears and why they aren't impacting the black bear population numbers. Jaclyn Comeau discussed how beech leaf disease is spreading but hasn't had a significant impact on the black bear food sources yet.

The Board Members asked about permanent and lifetime licenses and the early bear season with the second bear tag change.

Hannah Smith walked through the department's recommended changes to the black bear rule. The language is included below.

The Board Members discussed extending the bear hunting season to the end of muzzleloader season versus to the end of archery season. Board Member Valsangiacomo moved to amend the language to have the black bear hunting season end on the last day of archery deer season. Board Member Craig seconded the motion. The Board discussed the timing of the seasons. Board Member Valsangiacomo withdrew his motion. Board Member Burham moved to extend the bear hunting season to December 15. Board Member Corey seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the motion (12-0).

The Board Members discussed continuing the conversation about prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs and whether to have the first vote on the black bear rule. Board Member Craig moved to table the conversation and first vote until the next meeting. Board Member Valsangiacomo seconded the motion. Board Member Patterson asked about whether the

black bear rule changes could be included in the 2027 hunting guides and John Austin and Joshua Morse responded. The Board voted to approve the motion (12-0).

Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Batchelder provided a legislative update, including H.723 (an act relating to posting of land) which was signed by the Governor, H.928 (an act relating to technical corrections to fish and wildlife statutes), and a bill to remove the department's ability to create an area license.

Board Member Corey asked about the cost of a second buck tag and Hannah Smith responded.

Board Member Van Buren asked about when the antlerless deer lottery will be available and the department answered it would be Thursday, May 21, 2026.

Motion To Adjourn:

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:46 pm.

2026
Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

The Fish & Wildlife Department recommends the same antlerless harvest regulations accepted by the Board by straw vote on April 22, 2026. During the public comment period, which started immediately after the Board meeting on February 18, the Department did not receive any new or additional information to justify changes to the initial recommendation.

The following is the same text the Department submitted to the Board for its April 22nd meeting.

All public comments received are provided in appendices at the end of this document.

Summary of Key Points

- The effects of new hunting regulations on antlerless harvests is a key component of this recommendation. It aims to demonstrate our continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest by maintaining antlerless harvests at or below levels achieved in recent years.

- Due to uncertainty around the level of impact these changes will have, relatively substantial increases in archery and youth/novice antlerless harvests and antlerless permit success rates have been incorporated in this recommendation. As a result, antlerless harvest targets may not be achieved in many areas.

- Antlerless harvests can be adjusted as needed in future years once the impact of the new regulations is understood and harvests are more predictable.

- The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2026 was near or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, only minor changes in deer numbers are expected.

- Yearling antler beam diameters, fawn weights, and other physical condition metrics continue to be below optimal levels in many areas, indicating that deer numbers have exceeded the level their habitat can support long-term.

- The recommended permit allocations are expected to result in the harvest of 3,041 antlerless deer during the October muzzleloader season, regular season, and December muzzleloader season. This would result in an estimated total antlerless harvest from all seasons of approximately 7,598 antlerless deer.

Executive Summary

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department estimates there will be approximately 138,000 white-tailed deer on the Vermont landscape prior to the start of the 2026 deer hunting seasons. This represents a decrease of five percent from the retrospective 2025 pre-hunt estimate. The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2026 was near or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, only minor changes in deer numbers are expected.

For deer to be healthy and productive, deer populations must be kept below the carrying capacity of the habitat through the regulated harvest of antlerless deer. Biological information collected annually by the Department, including reproductive data, fawn and yearling body weights, and yearling antler size, indicate that deer populations have exceeded the level the habitat can support long-term in some parts of Vermont. Deer populations must be reduced or maintained below the limits of their habitat or physical condition will continue to decline, habitat damage will increase, and populations will become unstable and susceptible to substantial winter mortality.

Deer densities, habitat conditions, and winter severity can vary substantially from one part of Vermont to another. Additionally, these factors and the effects of historical deer densities have resulted in deer in some regions being in better physical condition than others. This results in variable deer population dynamics across the state; therefore, deer management prescriptions are made at the WMU level rather than statewide. Harvest management strategies that account for regional differences in deer density are essential to the health and proper management of Vermont's deer herd.

This recommendation aims to maintain antlerless harvests at previous levels while incorporating the uncertain effects of new deer hunting regulations. To account for this uncertainty and demonstrate a continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest, the Department has assumed relatively substantial impacts which may not be achieved. Antlerless harvests can be adjusted as needed in future years once the impact of the new regulations is understood and harvests are more predictable.

The Department recommends the harvest of 7,598 antlerless deer during the 2026 hunting seasons. The Department recommends that antlerless harvest be authorized during the archery and youth/novice seasons in all WMUs. After accounting for expected archery and youth/novice season harvests, the Department recommends that 3,041 antlerless deer be harvested, by permit, during the regular and muzzleloader seasons. Achieving this harvest, given expected increases in permit fill rates, requires the issuance of 12,050 WMU-specific antlerless permits distributed among 19 of Vermont's 21 WMUs. This is 49 percent fewer permits than the 23,400 allotted in 2025.

Three public hearings were held on March 16, 18, and 19, 2026 to gather comments on the deer herd. Approximately 52 members of the public participated in these hearings. Two additional public hearings will be held May 5 and 7, 2026.

2026 Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Pursuant to 10 V.S.A. §§4081, 4082, 4084 and 4742a, and 10 V.S.A. Appendix §37, hereafter is the Department's 2026 antlerless deer harvest recommendation. Based on population estimates, a harvest of 7,598 antlerless deer is recommended during the 2026 hunting seasons. This includes 4,557 antlerless deer harvested during the archery, youth, and novice seasons, and 3,041 antlerless deer harvested, by permit, during the regular season and the October and December muzzleloader seasons. Adult females are typically 84 percent of the total antlerless deer harvest, so harvesting this number of antlerless deer would yield approximately 6,346 adult does.

Population Status

The buck harvest during the 2025 deer hunting seasons was one percent more than the previous 3-year average (see *2025 Vermont White-tailed Deer Harvest Report* for more information). Nine WMUs had retrospective population estimates in 2025 that exceeded their respective population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* by more than two deer per square mile. The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2025 was close to or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, small declines in deer numbers are expected in some northern and central WMUs, with little change expected in most other areas.

Winter Severity 2026

The Department has long recognized the influence that winter weather can have on Vermont's deer herd and has been collecting winter severity data since 1970. Between December 1 and April 15, one winter severity index (WSI) point is tallied for each day with at least 18 inches of snow on the ground, and one point for each day the temperature reaches 0°F or below. These data have proven useful to describe deer population dynamics; however, how well deer survive winter depends largely on three factors: 1) body condition of deer as winter begins, 2) availability of quality deer wintering habitats, and 3) the timing of snow in the fall and snowmelt in spring. Snow cover that remains late into spring can cause significant negative impacts by delaying spring green up and, consequently, reducing fawn survival.

The winter of 2025 was near, or slightly above, normal in most areas, with a state-wide average WSI of 46 points (**Figure 1**). This was slightly above the 30-year median of 36 and above the 10-year median of 30. As is typically the case, winter severity varied considerably among WMUs, ranging from 21 in WMU K to 73 in WMU P (**Figure 2**). The pattern of variation in WSI was consistent with long term averages. Importantly, snow depths were minimal across most of the state until mid-January. Conditions were relatively severe from late January to early March, with deep snow confining deer to areas of quality winter cover. However, the snow melted quickly, and snow-free conditions arrived earlier than normal in most areas. The length of time deer are confined to wintering areas is perhaps the most important factor affecting survival rates. Since severe conditions only lasted for about 6 weeks, overwinter survival is expected to be relatively good.

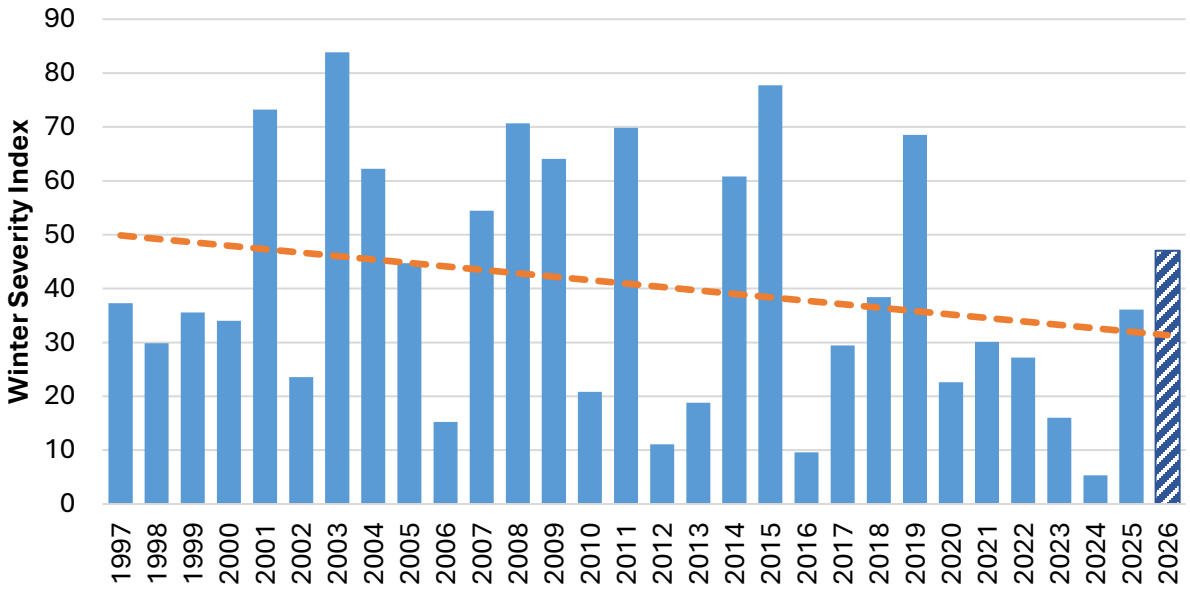


Figure 1. Statewide winter severity index (WSI), 1997–2026. The dashed line shows the 30-year trend.

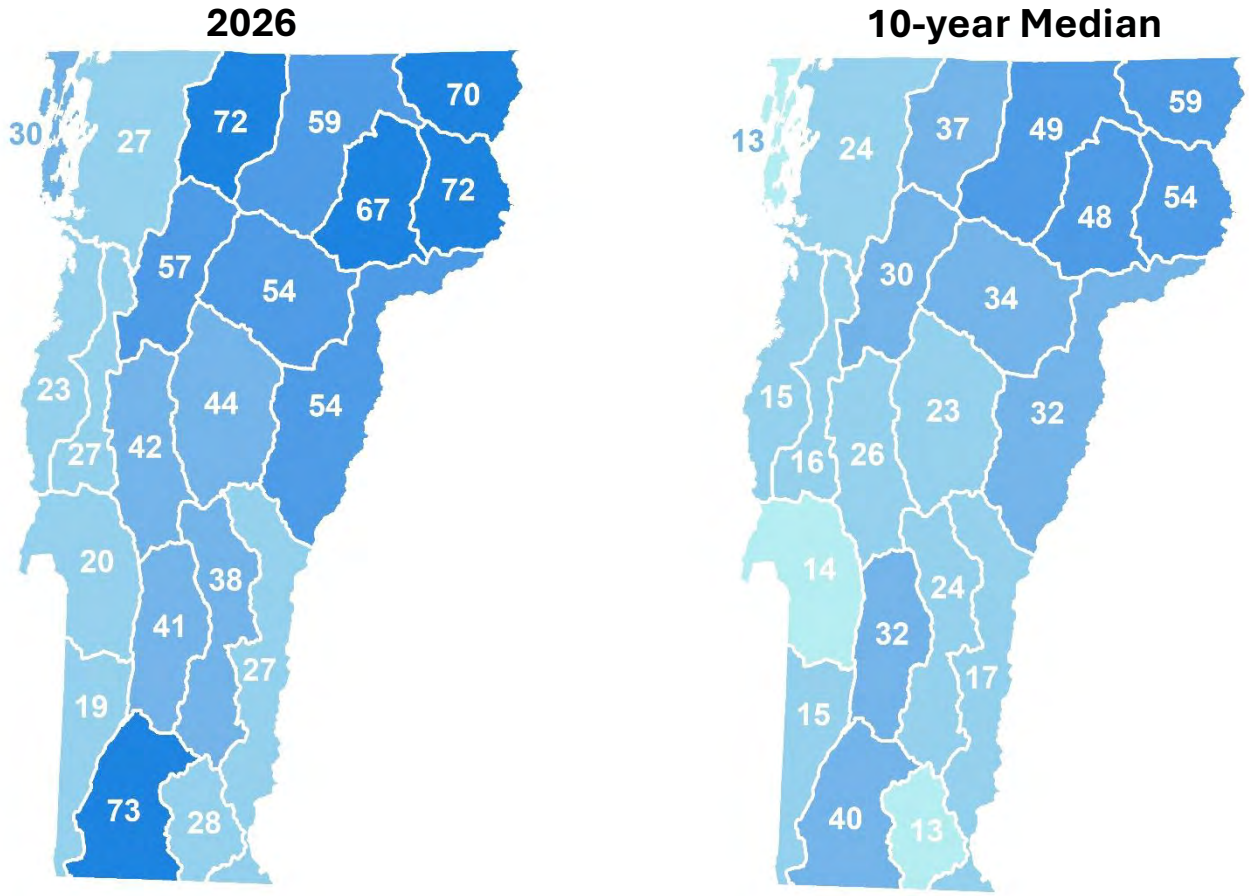


Figure 2. Winter severity index by Wildlife Management Unit in 2026 and the 10-year median.

Population Health

Biological information collected annually by the Department, including reproductive data, fawn and yearling body weights, and yearling antler size, indicate that deer populations have exceeded the level the habitat can support long-term in some parts of Vermont (**Figure 3**, see **Appendix A** for individual WMU information). In many cases, this does not appear to be a new problem. Instead, this appears to be a subtle but chronic problem that may have occurred for decades in some areas. Declines in measures like yearling antler beam diameter have been slow (**Figure 3**); therefore, it takes many years of data to separate the trend from normal annual variation.

Health concerns are evident in many parts of Vermont (see **Appendix A** for more detail). In most cases, the Department believes the primary driver of declines in physical condition was not a recent increase in deer abundance, but rather a slow, steady decline in the quality of deer habitat. Deer abundance has been relatively stable during the past 30 years. However, Vermont's forests are aging and the amount of young forest (less than 20 years old), which provides critical forage for deer, is declining. Other factors, including hunter access to private land, proliferation of invasive plants, and climate change are also important, and make the problem and any solutions more complex. The simple result, however, is that the habitat cannot support the number of deer it used to, and carrying capacity may continue to decline in some areas as forests get older. Deer populations must be reduced below the limits of their habitat or physical condition will continue to decline, habitat damage will increase, and populations will become unstable and more susceptible to disease and substantial winter mortality.

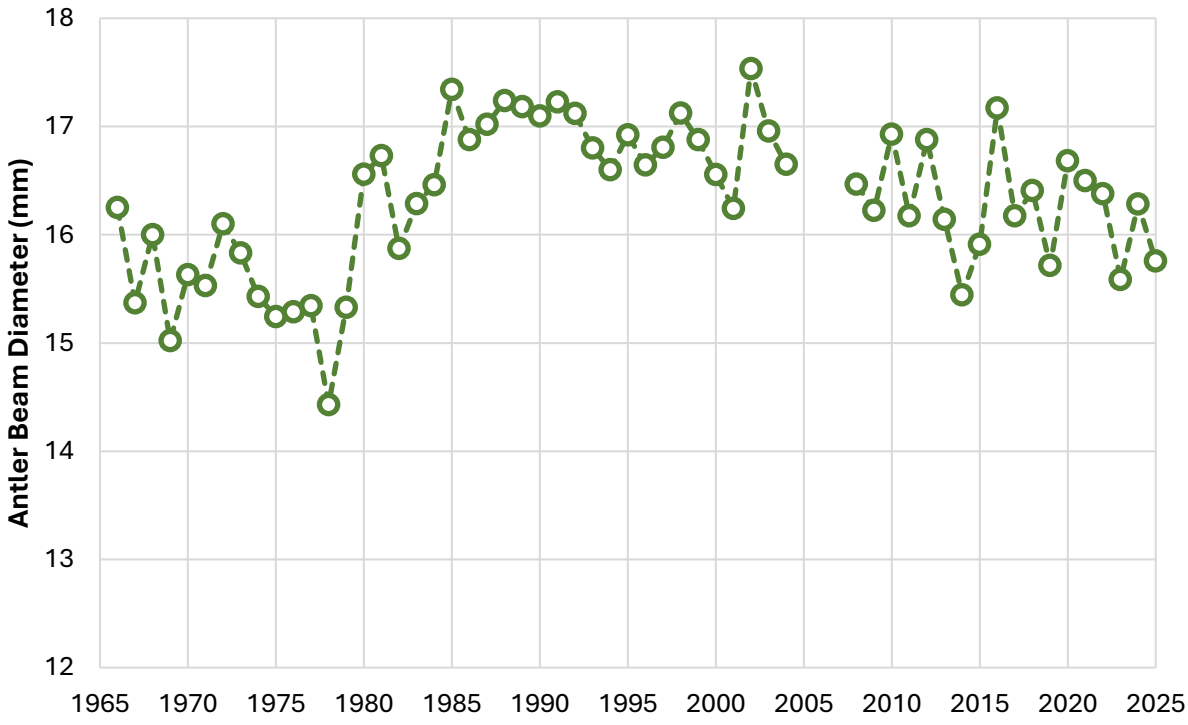


Figure 3. Antler beam diameter of yearling bucks in Vermont, 1965–2025. Data are from deer examined at biological check stations.

Population Projections and Management Objectives

Antlerless deer harvests in 2025 were close to objectives in most WMUs. Considering 2025 retrospective population estimates, 2025 antlerless harvests, and 2026 winter severity, little change in deer numbers is expected in most areas, with small declines possible in northern and east-central WMUs. Importantly, deer densities remain above population objectives in several WMUs, and recent management efforts have not been sufficient to reduce deer numbers. To provide healthy habitats and thereby keep deer healthy and productive, deer densities must be kept at established objectives (**Figure 8**). Maintaining a healthy deer herd is the best way to mitigate the potential effects of winter weather and provide a stable population over the long term.

Based on analysis of herd demographic data, hunter effort, deer sighting rates (**Figure 4**), buck harvests (**Figure 5**), antlerless deer harvests, and winter severity data (**Figure 2**), the Department expects deer numbers to decline slightly in northern and east-central WMUs and remain relatively stable in most other WMUs (**Figures 6 and 7**). Seven WMUs will have deer densities that exceed their respective population objectives by more than 2 deer per square mile (**Figures 8 and 9**), and the Department's intent is to reduce deer densities in those areas. Other WMUs will have deer densities that are within two deer per square mile of their population objective, and the intent is to stabilize those populations at or near their current level.

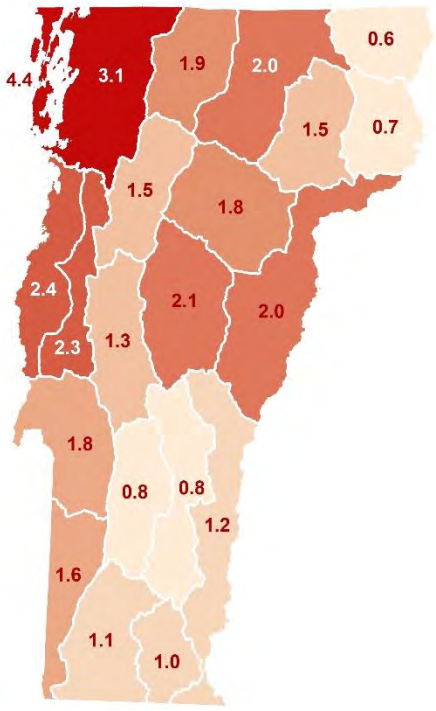


Figure 4. Deer seen per 10 hours of hunting by regular season deer hunters, 2023–2025.

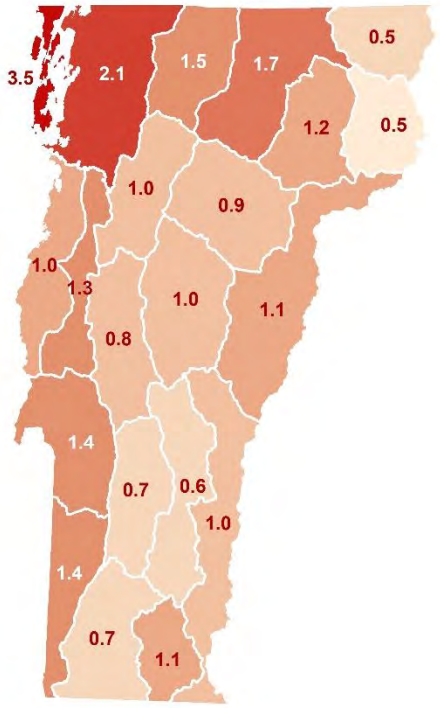


Figure 5. Adult buck harvest per square mile during the 2025 deer seasons. Buck harvest rate is affected by antler restrictions in some WMUs.

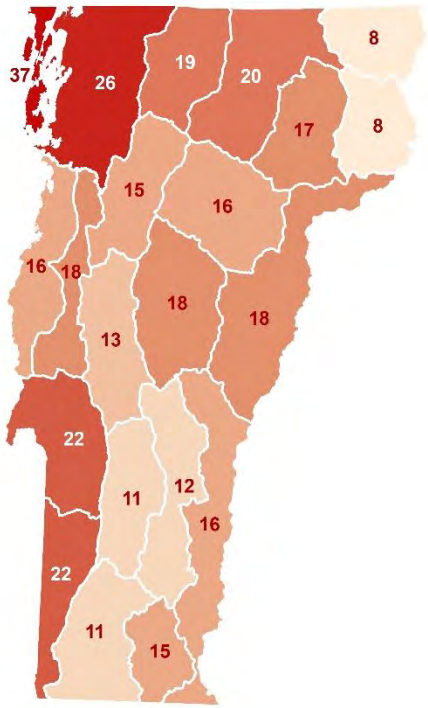


Figure 6. 2025 estimated deer density (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

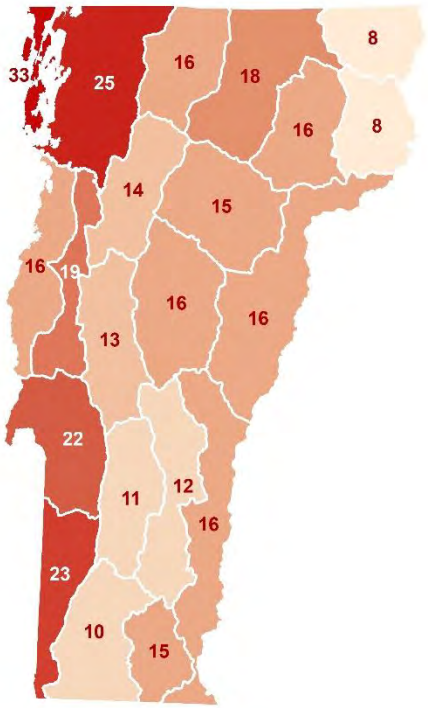


Figure 7. 2026 predicted deer density (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

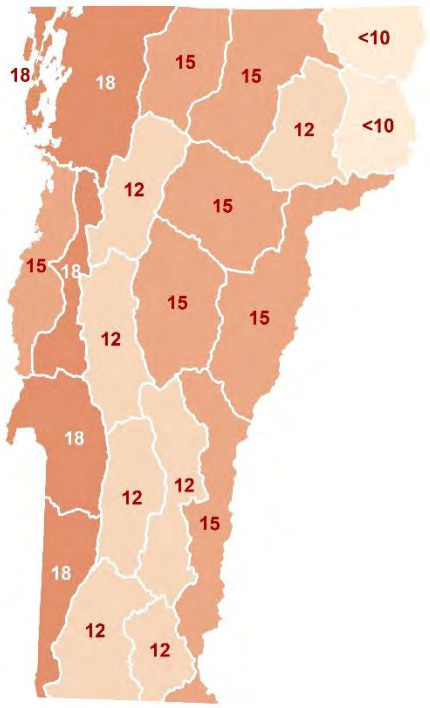


Figure 8. Deer density objectives (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

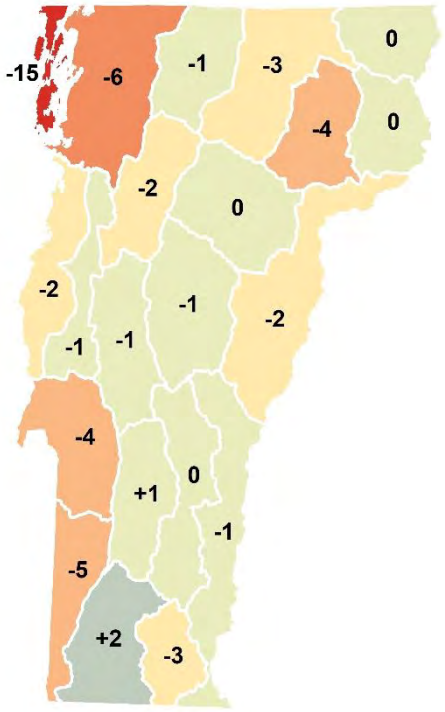


Figure 9. Desired change in deer density, by WMU, to reach density objectives.

Effects of New Hunting Regulations

Several new or updated deer hunting regulations will take effect in 2026 and are expected to impact antlerless deer harvests. To account for these changes and their uncertain impact on antlerless harvests, the following adjustments have been made to this recommendation. These changes in antlerless harvest are plausible, but it is more likely that antlerless harvests will be lower than what is recommended. The Department is intentionally taking a conservative approach to demonstrate our continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest under these new regulations. If antlerless harvests need to be increased in the future, these regulations allow for that.

To account for the addition of Expanded Archery Zones and the extension of archery season through the regular season, the expected archery antlerless harvest has been increased by 10 percent. That much increase is unlikely, but this also creates a buffer in the overall antlerless harvest to allow for typical annual variation and/or higher harvest related to the novelty of the new regulations.

To account for changing the timing of the youth/novice weekend, the expected youth/novice antlerless harvest has been increased by 20 percent. This is equivalent to the observed decline in the youth weekend harvest after the season was moved two weeks earlier in 2020.

Lastly, to account for antlerless permits being used during the regular season and 5 days being added to the December muzzleloader season, the expected fill rate on antlerless permits has been increased by 10 percent in each WMU. This results in a statewide average fill rate of 25%, which is higher than antlerless permit fill rates observed in most other northeastern states. Expected WMU-specific fill rates range from 22% to 30% (**Table 3**).

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

Archery Season

The Department recommends that all WMUs be open to the taking of antlerless deer during the 2026 archery season. Antlerless harvest in archery season is a key component in deer population management in Vermont. Archery hunters tend to focus their hunting effort and harvest in areas with higher deer numbers. As a result, archery antlerless harvest has little or no impact in areas with fewer deer. Importantly, archery harvest allows hunters to better regulate local deer herds in areas with high deer densities, particularly areas where firearm hunting is limited.

Youth and Novice Season

The Department is strongly committed to recruiting new hunters into Vermont's deer hunting heritage. Based on this commitment and the importance of harvesting an adequate number of female deer each year, the Department recommends that youth and novice season hunters be allowed to take any deer in all WMUs. This would include antlerless deer or any buck, regardless of antler characteristics. This will provide these hunters with additional opportunity to harvest a deer and the opportunity to help properly manage Vermont's deer herd. It is critical that spike-antlered bucks be taken during this season so the Department can obtain important biological information (e.g., weight, antler measurements) from this portion of the yearling buck population. This is the primary reason Department biologists examine deer during this season each year. This will have no impact on buck age structure management, as the buck harvest during this season is typically about four percent of the overall buck harvest.

Antlerless Permits

Antlerless permits are recommended for 19 of the state's 21 WMUs in 2026. These permits may be filled during the antlerless-only October muzzleloader season, during the regular season, or during the December muzzleloader season. The Department recommends that a total of 12,050 antlerless permits be issued (49 percent fewer than the 23,400 approved for distribution in 2025). A decrease in antlerless permits is recommended in all WMUs due to the expected increase in fill rates resulting from new hunting regulations (**Figure 10**).

These recommendations are intended to move populations toward WMU-specific deer density and physical condition objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* (see **Appendix A** for additional detail). This permit allocation is expected to result in the harvest of an additional 3,041 antlerless deer above those harvested during the archery and youth/novice seasons.

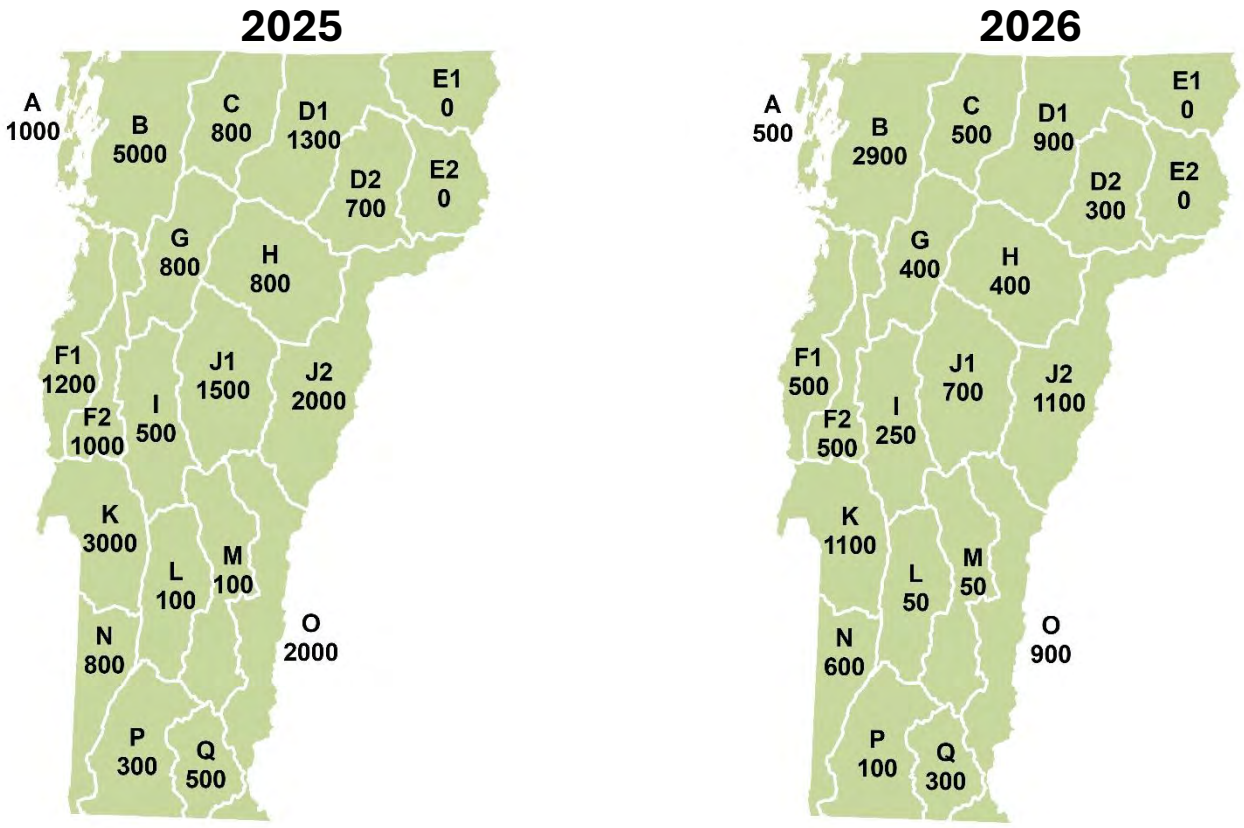


Figure 10. Antlerless permit allocations by wildlife management unit for 2025 and 2026 (proposed).

Public Comments

Three public hearings were held on March 16, 18, and 19, 2026 to gather comments on the deer herd. Approximately 52 members of the public participated in these hearings. Two additional public hearings will be held on May 5 and 7, 2026.

Table 1. Estimated deer densities and predicted antlerless deer harvests during the 2026 deer hunting seasons, by wildlife management unit.

	Deer per mi²			Antlerless Permits			Other Antlerless					
WMU	Objective	2025	2026	Permits	Fill Rate	Harvest	Archery	Youth/ Novice	2026 Total Antlerless	% of Doe Population Harvested	Doe Harvest per Mi²	Doe Harvest per 100 Bucks[a]
A	18	37	33	500	25%	125	154	19	297	22%	3.54	117
B	18	26	24	2,900	26%	763	728	146	1638	19%	2.22	116
C	15	19	16	500	30%	152	251	41	444	12%	0.96	73
D1	15	20	18	900	29%	258	345	109	711	12%	1.03	72
D2	12	17	16	300	30%	89	155	38	281	8%	0.60	57
E1	<10	8	8	0	-	0	27	7	34	2%	0.09	19
E2	<10	8	8	0	-	0	28	7	36	2%	0.09	22
F1	15	16	16	500	24%	121	136	27	284	9%	0.75	73
F2	18	18	19	500	24%	120	111	27	257	9%	0.80	69
G	12	15	14	400	23%	192	140	13	246	7%	0.53	56
H	15	16	15	400	25%	101	294	42	438	9%	0.71	76
I	12	13	13	250	25%	62	110	8	181	5%	0.36	49
J1	15	18	16	700	25%	173	239	43	455	9%	0.72	75
J2	15	18	16	1,100	26%	290	369	75	734	10%	0.87	88
K	18	22	22	1,100	23%	249	185	49	482	8%	0.92	64
L	12	11	11	50	26%	13	58	14	85	3%	0.19	28
M	12	12	12	50	22%	11	40	8	59	2%	0.11	18
N	18	22	23	600	23%	136	97	34	266	6%	0.68	52
O	15	16	16	900	22%	197	183	21	401	8%	0.62	65
P	12	11	10	100	24%	24	87	10	120	4%	0.22	37
Q	12	15	15	300	22%	65	77	6	148	7%	0.54	52
STATE				**12,050**	**25%**	**3,041**	**3,813**	**743**	**7,598**			

[a] *In WMUs with an antler restriction, which reduces buck harvest, this number will be higher than a comparable area with no antler restriction.*

Table 2. Muzzleloader antlerless permit history by WMU, 2018–2025, and recommended permit allocation for 2026. Numbers in parentheses are the number of permits actually distributed.

WMU	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	1100 (720)	1100 (939)	1000	500	800	1000 (855)	1000 (650)	1000 (647)	**500**
B	5500	5500	4500	3500	4000	5000	6000 (4651)	5000 (4707)	**2900**
C	800	300	500	500	500	500	1000	800	**500**
D1	1200	500	1000	800	800	1000	1800	1300	**900**
D2	800	300	500	300	200	200	800	700	**300**
E1	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	**0**
E2	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	**0**
F1	1000 (900)	1000	1000	1300	1500 (1453)	1800 (1145)	1800 (864)	1200 (837)	**500**
F2	1300	1300	1300	1000	1000	1000	1300 (994)	1000	**500**
G	300	300	700	700	700	700	1000	800	**400**
H	1100	400	300	300	300	500	1000	800	**400**
I	300	300	500	500	500	500	500	500	**250**
J1	1200	800	1500	1200	800	1000	1500	1500	**700**
J2	2500	2000	2000	1800	1500	1500	2000	2000	**1100**
K	4000 (2446)	4000 (2440)	3000	3000 (2795)	2500	3000 (2222)	3000 (2007)	3000 (2064)	**1100**
L	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	100	**50**
M	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	100	**50**
N	2000 (1487)	2000 (1462)	2000	1800 (1642)	1500	1500 (1378)	1500 (1163)	800	**600**
O	2600 (2300)	2000	2000	1500	1500	1500	2300 (2128)	2000	**900**
P	0	0	100	100	100	100	300	300	**100**
Q	700 (604)	600	500	600	600	600	700 (642)	500	**300**
STATE	**27000** (24057)	**23000** (20741)	**23000**	**20000** (19637)	**19400** (19353)	**22000** (20300)	**28300** (23799)	**23400** (21455)	**12050**

Table 3. Antlerless permit fill rate by WMU, 2018–2025, and expected fill rate for 2026.

WMU	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	19%	13%	17%	14%	11%	13%	13%	18%	**25%**
B	19%	14%	18%	15%	14%	14%	15%	19%	**26%**
C	33%	24%	23%	20%	20%	21%	18%	20%	**30%**
D1	29%	24%	23%	19%	18%	22%	19%	18%	**29%**
D2	21%	21%	20%	17%	18%	22%	18%	21%	**30%**
E1							9%		
E2							16%		
F1	16%	13%	17%	13%	12%	12%	12%	18%	**24%**
F2	19%	12%	17%	11%	10%	11%	12%	18%	**24%**
G	28%	14%	17%	12%	12%	13%	12%	14%	**23%**
H	20%	18%	21%	18%	16%	18%	16%	14%	**25%**
I	24%	15%	19%	14%	10%	13%	13%	15%	**25%**
J1	26%	19%	18%	14%	17%	14%	16%	14%	**25%**
J2	23%	17%	21%	16%	18%	17%	17%	16%	**26%**
K	18%	14%	16%	11%	12%	10%	12%	15%	**23%**
L	31%	15%	17%	13%	9%	15%	13%	16%	**26%**
M	24%	13%	17%	13%	17%	12%	14%	12%	**22%**
N	18%	11%	13%	11%	11%	9%	12%	13%	**23%**
O	20%	11%	13%	13%	16%	12%	13%	12%	**22%**
P			17%	13%	14%	14%	14%	15%	**24%**
Q	18%	10%	13%	9%	11%	8%	11%	13%	**22%**
STATE	**21%**	**14%**	**17%**	**14%**	**14%**	**13%**	**15%**	**16%**	**25%**

Appendix A: Population Status by WMU

Deer densities, habitat conditions, and winter severity can vary substantially from one part of Vermont to another. Additionally, these factors and the effects of historical deer densities have resulted in deer in some regions being in better physical condition than others. This results in variable deer population dynamics across the state; therefore, deer management prescriptions are made at the WMU level rather than statewide.

The Department is aware that deer densities (and other factors) vary within each WMU, sometimes substantially. Unfortunately, managing deer at a smaller scale than a WMU is not currently feasible given the structure of hunting regulations and the Department's ability to collect enough data. However, hunters generally do a good job of targeting areas of higher deer density within a WMU if they have sufficient access.

Description of data provided for each WMU

Area of deer habitat: Deer habitat is all land that is not developed.

Physical Condition of Deer: Antler beam diameter and body weights are from deer examined by biologists at youth/novice weekend check stations. Adult birth rate (fetuses per doe) is from examinations of incidentally killed deer during February-May. All metrics show the average for the most recent five years of data. Sample size is shown in parentheses. Minimum acceptable levels for each metric, established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, are also shown.

Deer Density: Estimated pre-hunt deer density over the past 10 years based on retrospective population modelling and the projected density in fall 2026. The density objective established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* is represented by a dashed green line in the figure. The shaded green area shows ±2 deer per square mile – a range that accounts for typical year-to-year variation in deer abundance and uncertainty around density estimates.

Red Numbers: Numbers are red when a metric does not meet the objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Harvest: The total buck and antlerless deer harvests during all seasons during the past 10 years. The proposed antlerless harvest for 2026 is shown by the dotted red line.

Harvest per 100 Adult Bucks: The number of antlerless deer and adult does harvested for every 100 adult bucks harvested over the previous 3 years. This provides a useful indicator of antlerless harvest rate.

Harvest Age Composition: The age composition of the adult buck and doe harvests over the previous 3 years. Ages are from cementum annuli analysis. Sample size is shown at the bottom, in parentheses. The proportion of harvested deer in older age classes is a useful indicator of harvest rate. Generally, when more than 40% of does are 4 ½-plus years old, it suggests the population may be under-harvested.

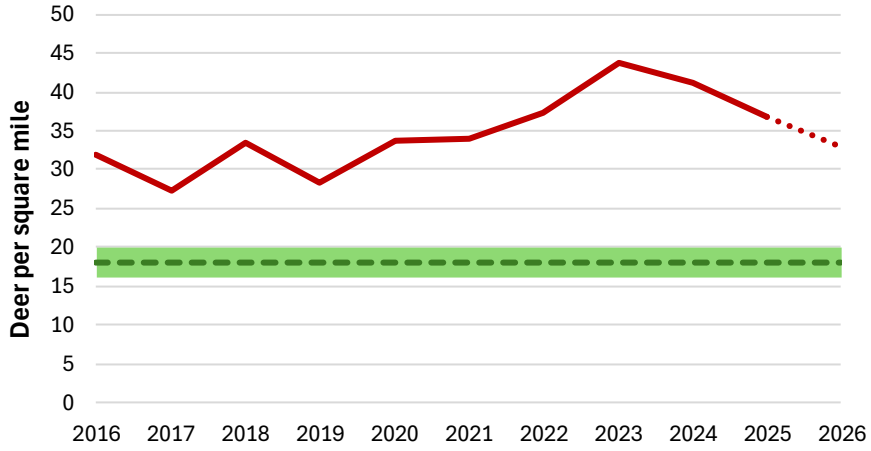


Wildlife Management Unit A

71 *mi² of deer habitat – 46% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(13)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**121.5** *(21)*	118
Fawn Weight	**57.9** *(10)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.25** *(4)*	1.60

Deer Density



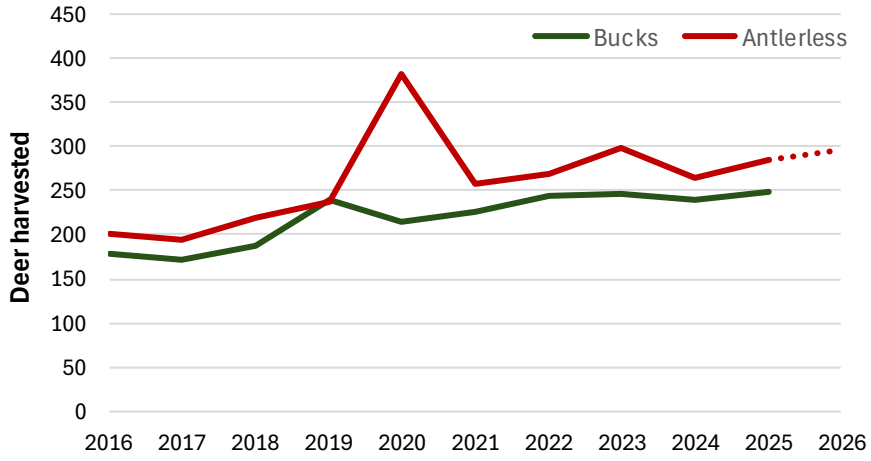
2026 Estimate

33 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
116	94

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	26%	40%
2.5	55%	13%
3.5	16%	27%
4.5+	3%	20%
no. deer aged	*(143)*	*(15)*

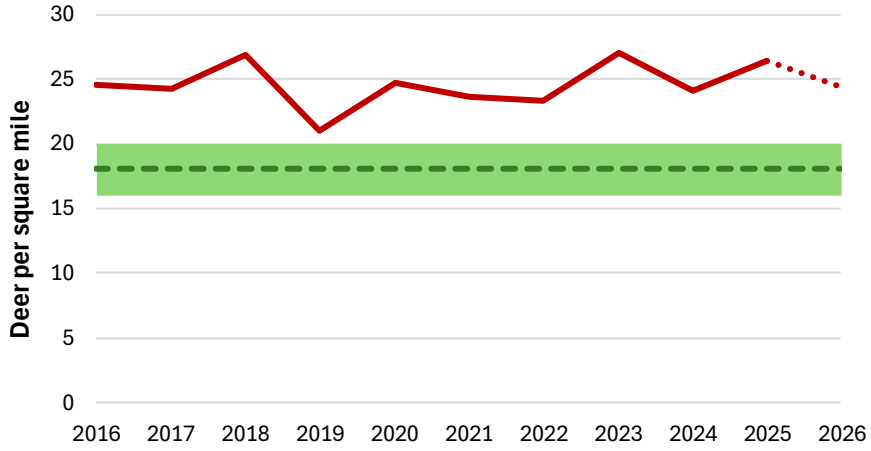


Wildlife Management Unit B

***616** mi² of deer habitat – 66% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.8** *(154)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**116.3** *(165)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.1** *(126)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.93** *(15)*	1.60

Deer Density



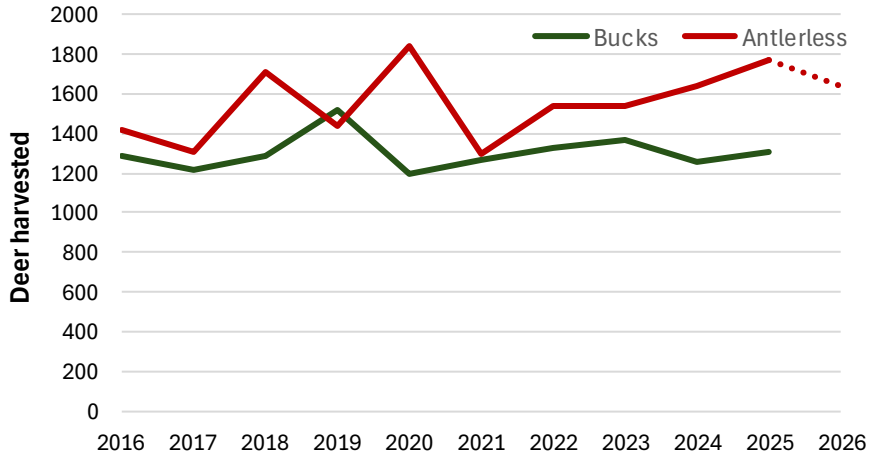
2026 Estimate

24 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
126	102

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	17%	22%
2.5	61%	17%
3.5	16%	19%
4.5+	6%	41%
no. deer aged	*(781)*	*(138)*

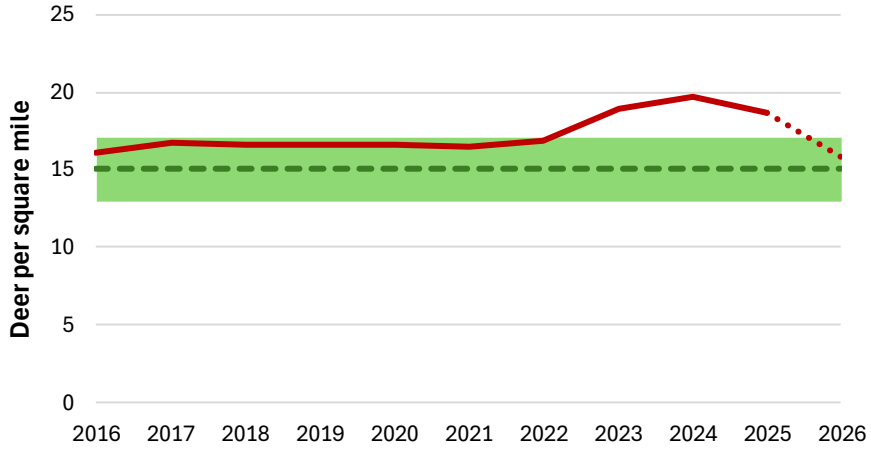


Wildlife Management Unit C

386 *mi² of deer habitat – 90% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.6** *(42)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**113.0** *(45)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.2** *(32)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.29** *(7)*	1.60

Deer Density



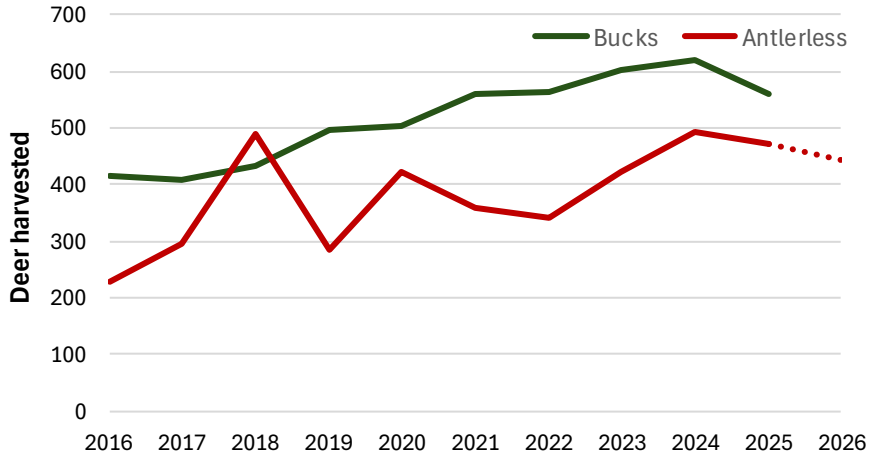
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
78	63

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	39%	22%
2.5	40%	27%
3.5	14%	9%
4.5+	8%	42%
no. deer aged	*(511)*	*(45)*

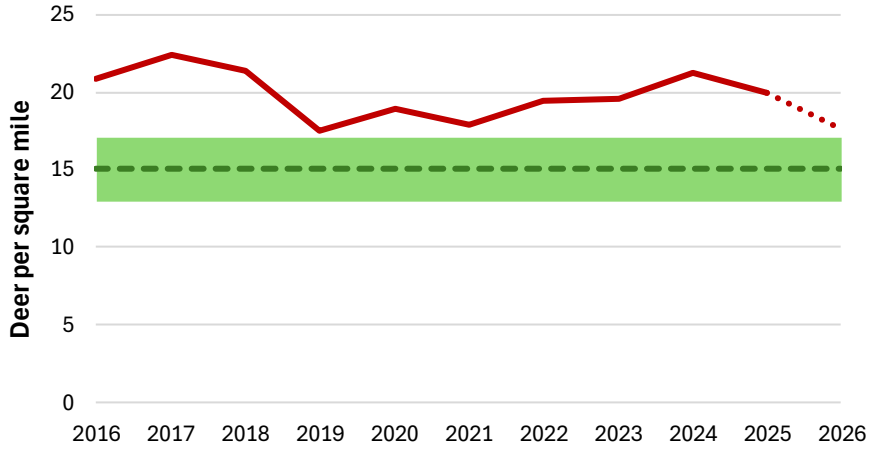


Wildlife Management Unit D1

570 *mi² of deer habitat – 78% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(80)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**117.2** *(82)*	118
Fawn Weight	**60.2** *(49)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.68** *(19)*	1.60

Deer Density



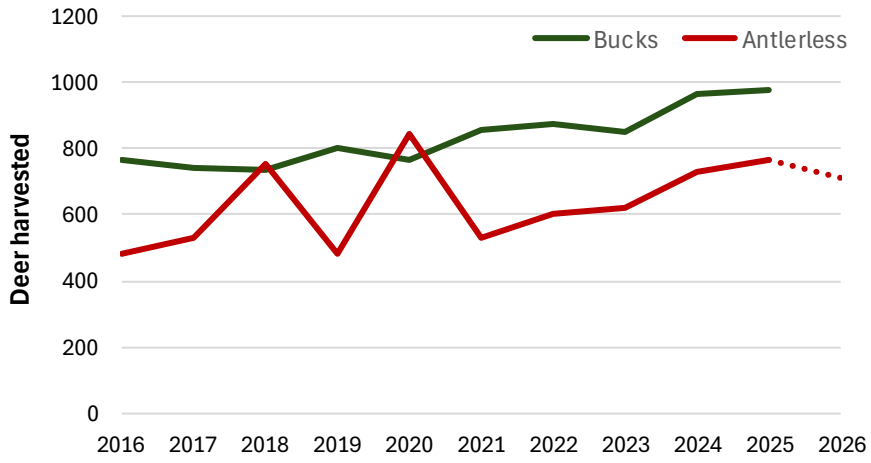
2026 Estimate

18 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
76	64

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	47%	24%
2.5	38%	21%
3.5	9%	10%
4.5+	6%	45%
no. deer aged	*(695)*	*(87)*

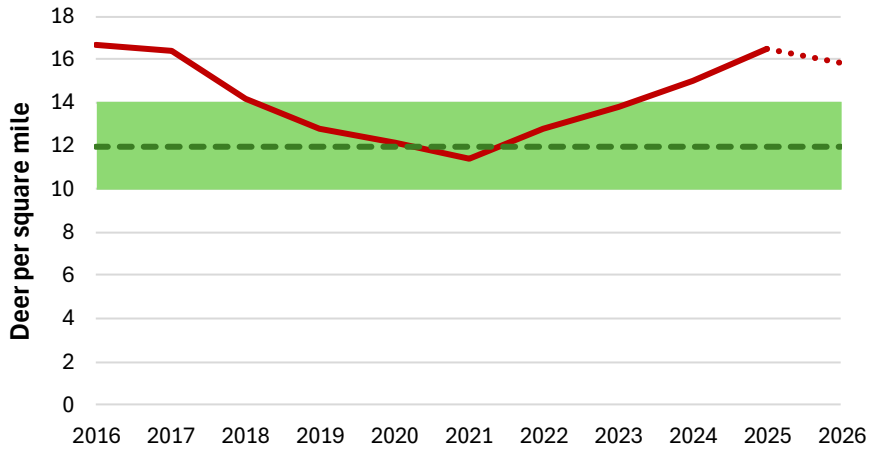


Wildlife Management Unit D2

387 *mi² of deer habitat – 89% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.3** *(23)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**116.0** *(24)*	118
Fawn Weight	**59.4** *(13)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.83** *(12)*	1.60

Deer Density



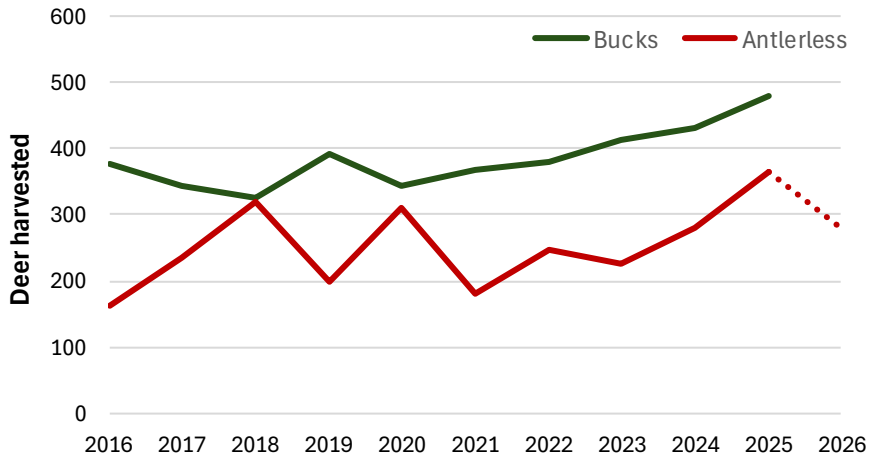
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
66	54

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	44%	24%
2.5	32%	16%
3.5	15%	14%
4.5+	8%	46%
no. deer aged	*(385)*	*(37)*

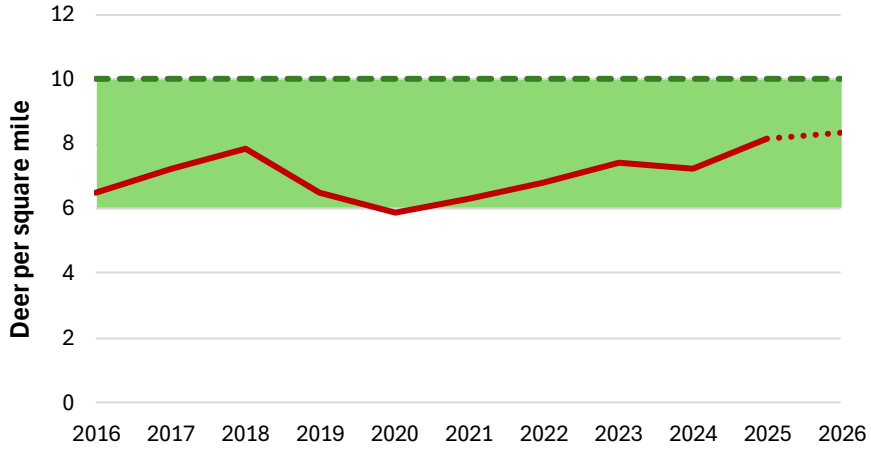


Wildlife Management Unit E1

***648** mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**20.3** *(5)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**120.8** *(6)*	118
Fawn Weight	**57.0** *(2)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.00** *(2)*	1.60

Deer Density



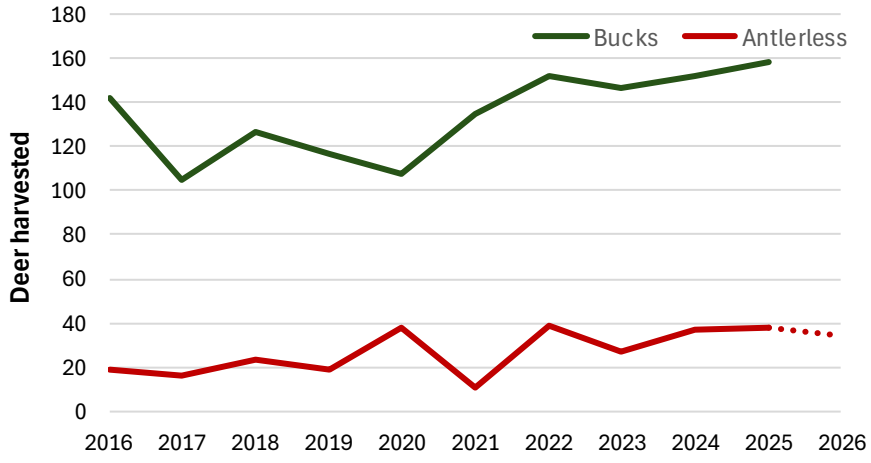
2026 Estimate

8 deer/mi2

Objective

<10

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
22	19

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	28%	10%
2.5	39%	20%
3.5	19%	0%
4.5+	13%	70%
no. deer aged	*(109)*	*(10)*

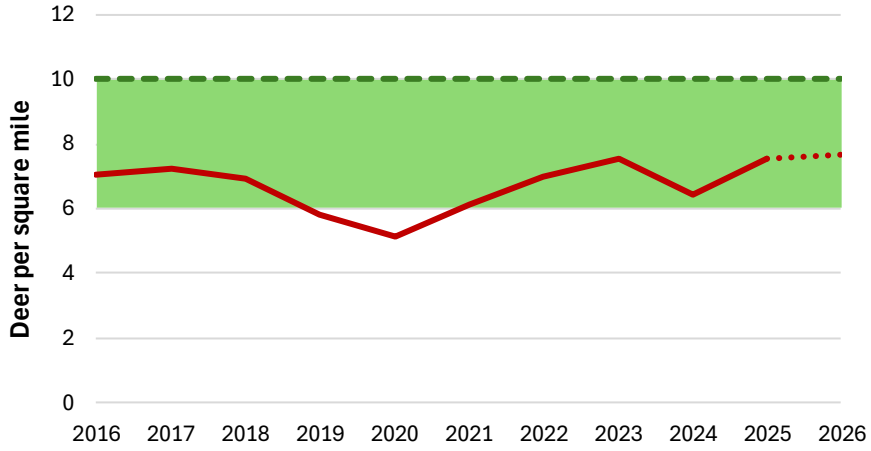


Wildlife Management Unit E2

***648** mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**19.2** *(6)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**119.6** *(8)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.8** *(3)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.00** *(2)*	1.60

Deer Density



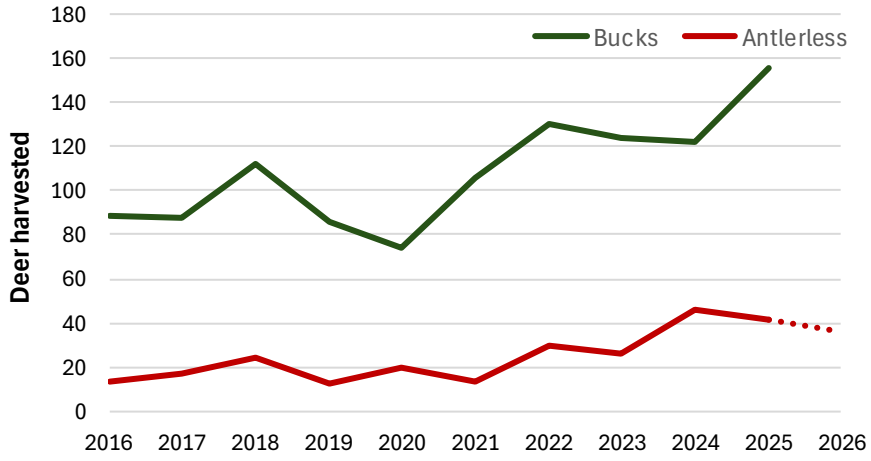
2026 Estimate

8 deer/mi2

Objective

<10

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
28	20

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	34%	67%
2.5	28%	0%
3.5	19%	0%
4.5+	20%	33%
no. deer aged	*(80)*	*(3)*

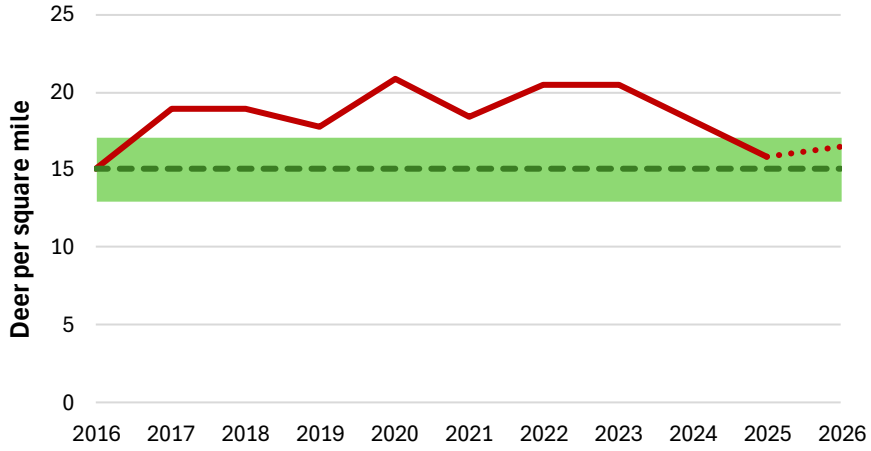


Wildlife Management Unit F1

***316** mi² of deer habitat – 33% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.1** *(29)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**119.7** *(31)*	118
Fawn Weight	**59.0** *(13)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.33** *(6)*	1.60

Deer Density



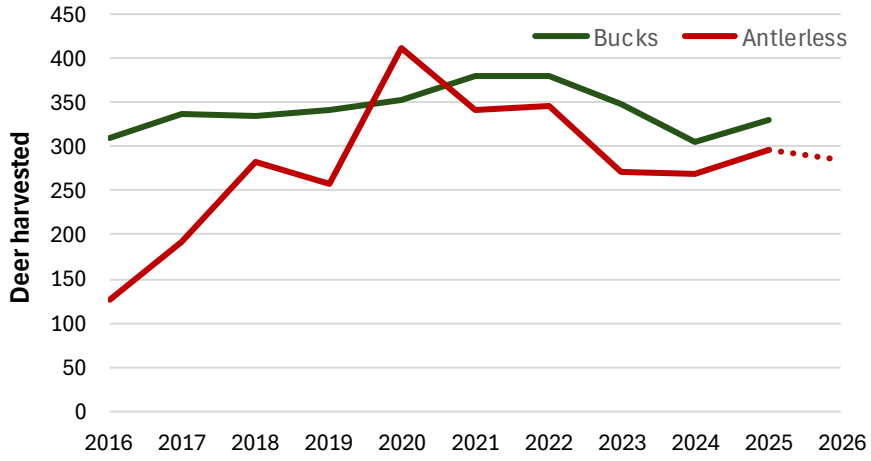
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
85	75

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	18%	24%
2.5	49%	10%
3.5	24%	41%
4.5+	8%	24%
no. deer aged	*(233)*	*(29)*

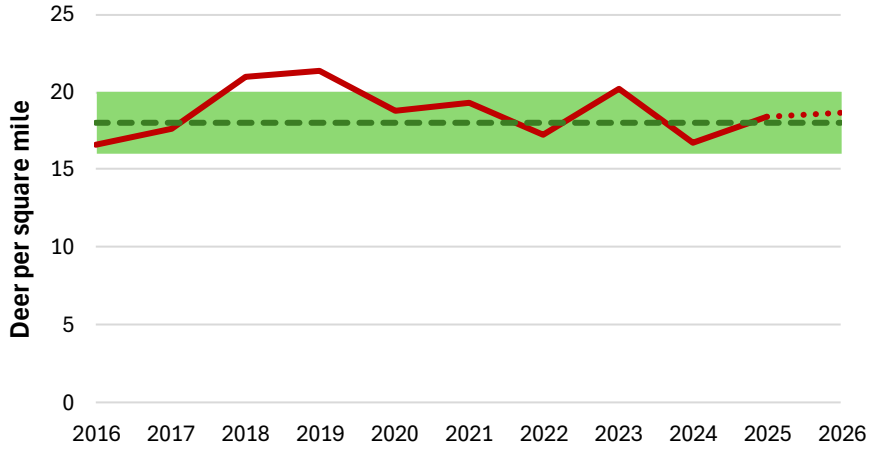


Wildlife Management Unit F2

286 *mi² of deer habitat – 57% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.6** *(22)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**117.1** *(24)*	118
Fawn Weight	**60.0** *(21)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.71** *(8)*	1.60

Deer Density



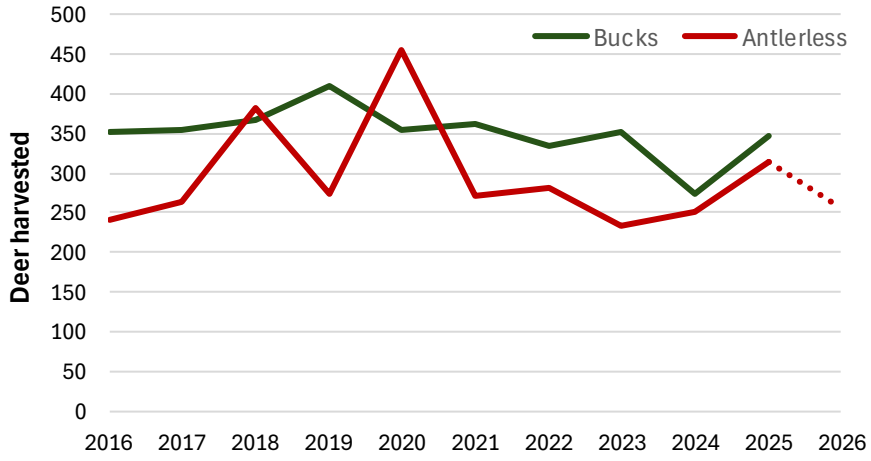
2026 Estimate

19 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
82	70

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	19%	10%
2.5	50%	7%
3.5	20%	23%
4.5+	11%	60%
no. deer aged	*(234)*	*(30)*

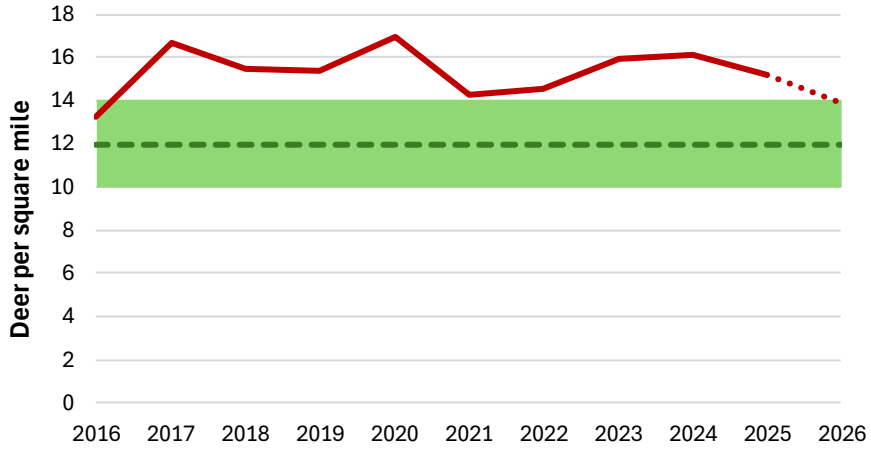


Wildlife Management Unit G

388 *mi² of deer habitat – 93% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.9** *(14)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**115.8** *(14)*	115
Fawn Weight	**60.5** *(2)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.20** *(5)*	1.60

Deer Density



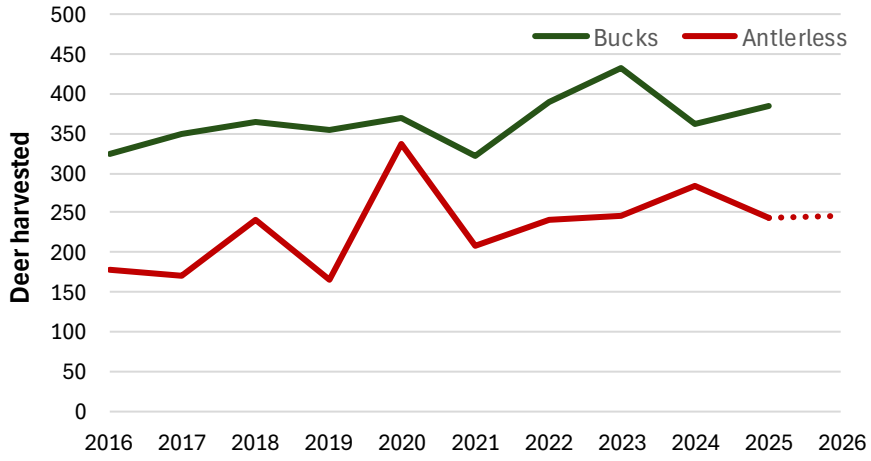
2026 Estimate

14 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
65	53

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	27%	42%
2.5	42%	8%
3.5	17%	8%
4.5+	14%	42%
no. deer aged	*(406)*	*(12)*

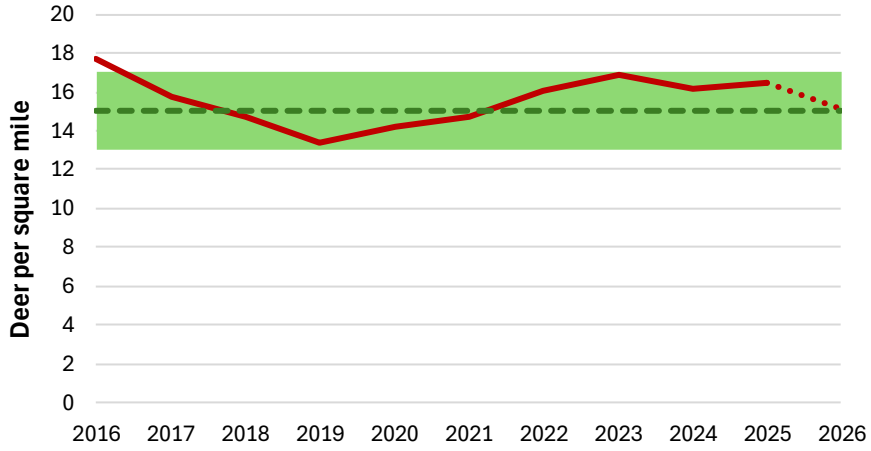


Wildlife Management Unit H

518 *mi² of deer habitat – 90% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**14.9** *(30)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**109.1** *(32)*	115
Fawn Weight	**58.8** *(23)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.21** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



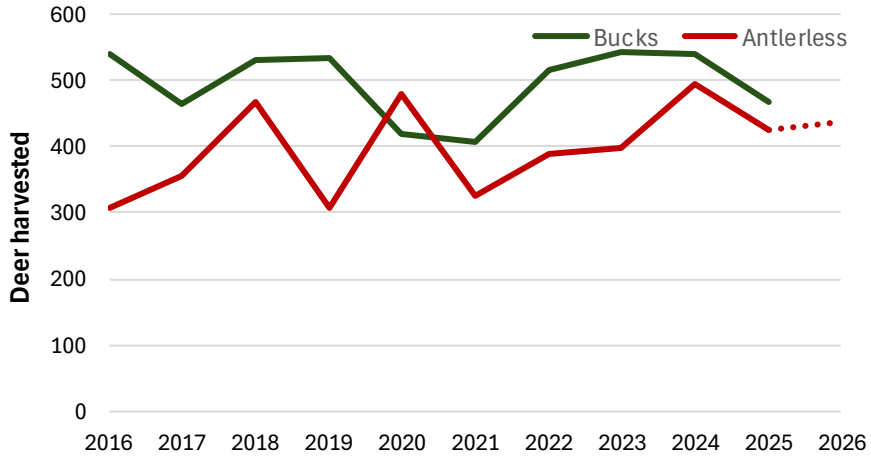
2026 Estimate

15 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
85	73

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	11%	18%
2.5	51%	23%
3.5	25%	9%
4.5+	13%	50%
no. deer aged	*(522)*	*(56)*

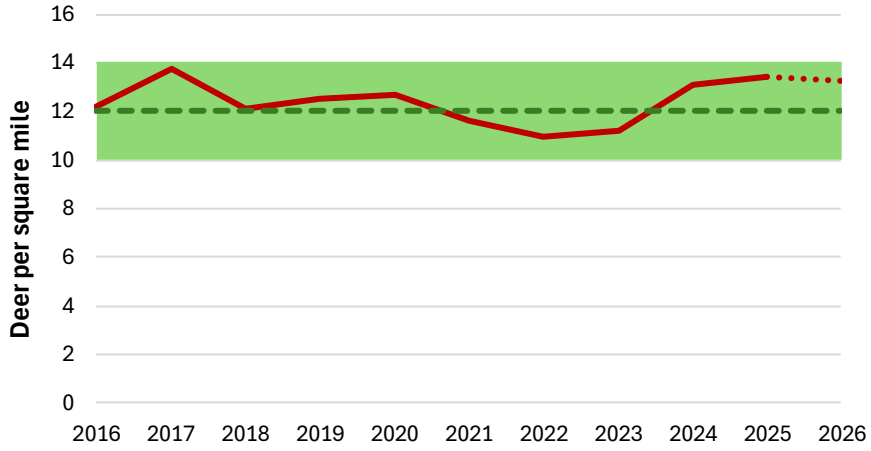


Wildlife Management Unit [redacted]

424 *mi² of deer habitat – 96% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.0** *(10)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**117.7** *(11)*	115
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(8)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.80** *(5)*	1.60

Deer Density



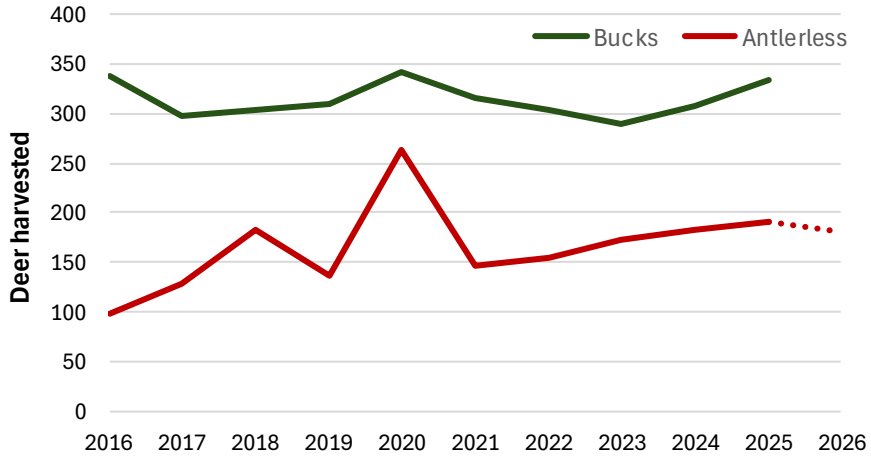
2026 Estimate

13 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
59	49

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	24%	0%
2.5	41%	0%
3.5	18%	0%
4.5+	18%	100%
no. deer aged	*(335)*	*(4)*

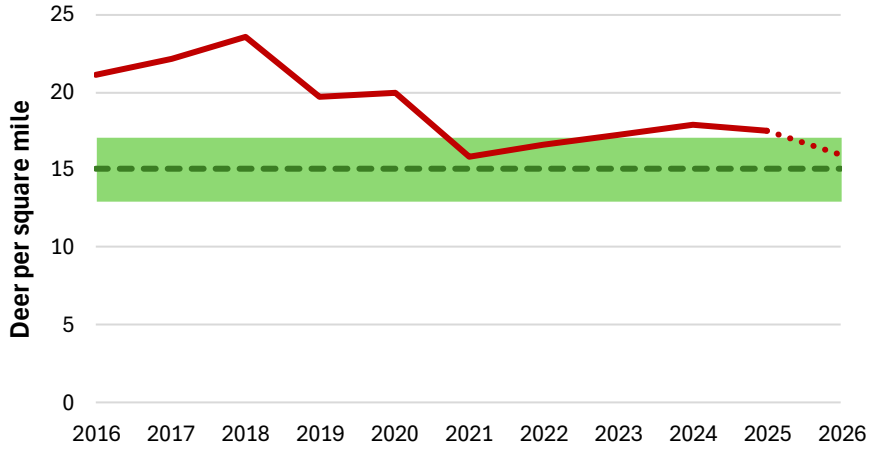


Wildlife Management Unit J1

***528** mi² of deer habitat – 87% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.1** *(18)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**116.5** *(20)*	115
Fawn Weight	**62.3** *(16)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.78** *(23)*	1.60

Deer Density



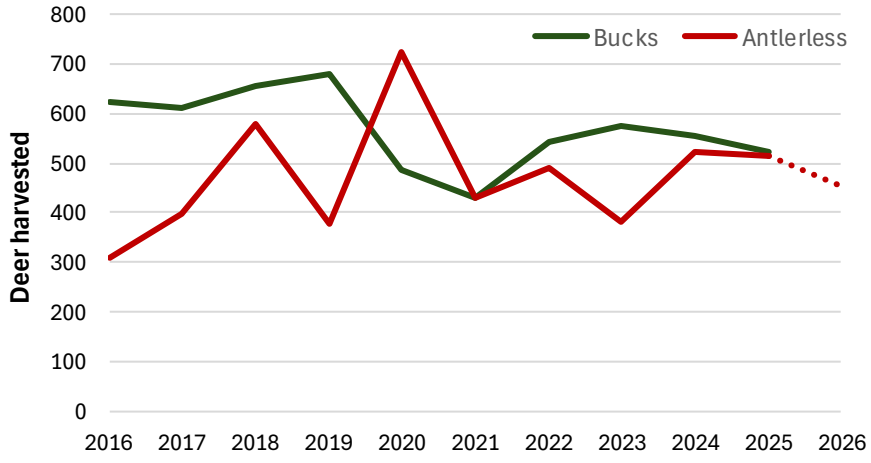
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
86	74

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	13%	18%
2.5	51%	21%
3.5	22%	11%
4.5+	13%	50%
no. deer aged	*(741)*	*(28)*

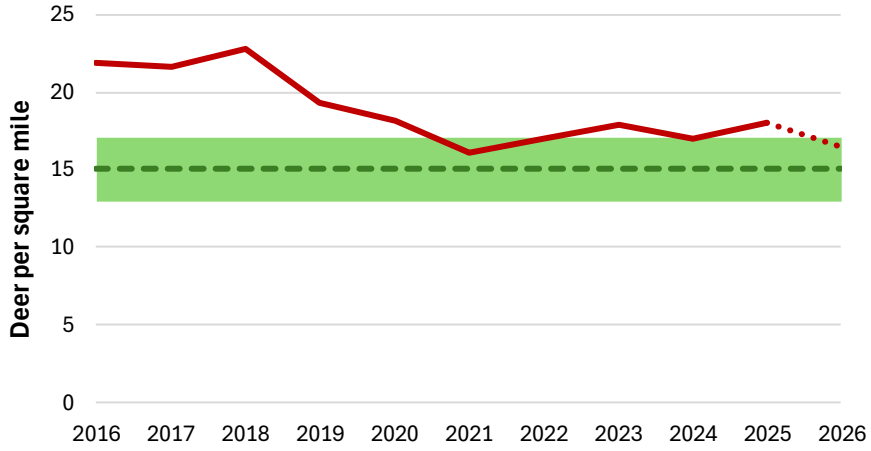


Wildlife Management Unit J2

705 *mi² of deer habitat – 89% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.5** *(41)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**109.5** *(42)*	115
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(55)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.67** *(24)*	1.60

Deer Density



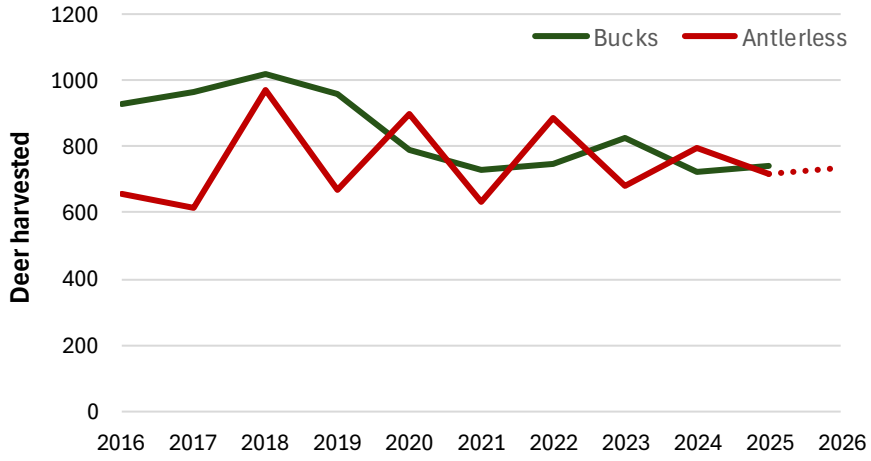
2026 Estimate

17 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
96	80

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	11%	20%
2.5	51%	16%
3.5	24%	14%
4.5+	14%	49%
no. deer aged	*(732)*	*(85)*

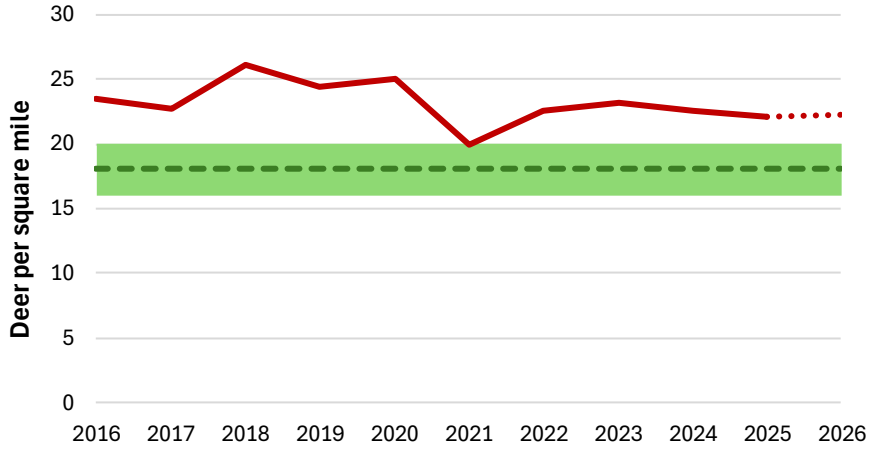


Wildlife Management Unit K

438 *mi² of deer habitat – 81% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(34)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**110.8** *(39)*	115
Fawn Weight	**59.1** *(38)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.65** *(17)*	1.60

Deer Density



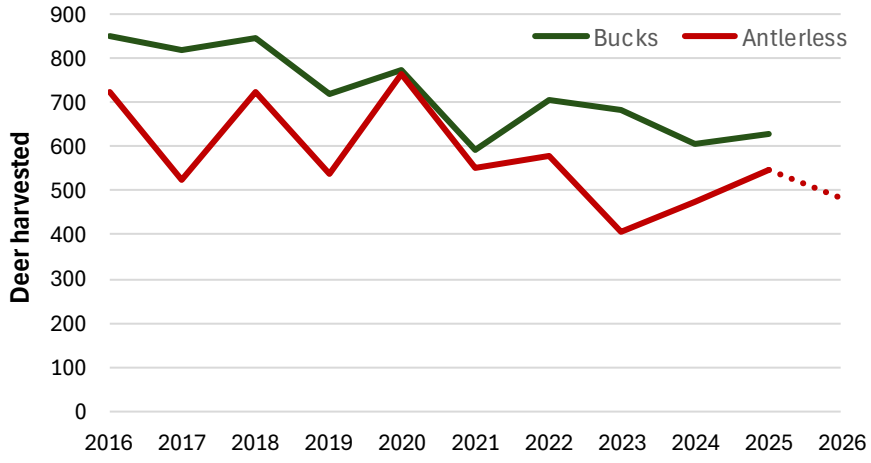
2026 Estimate

22 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
75	62

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	12%	16%
2.5	56%	10%
3.5	24%	10%
4.5+	8%	63%
no. deer aged	*(470)*	*(68)*

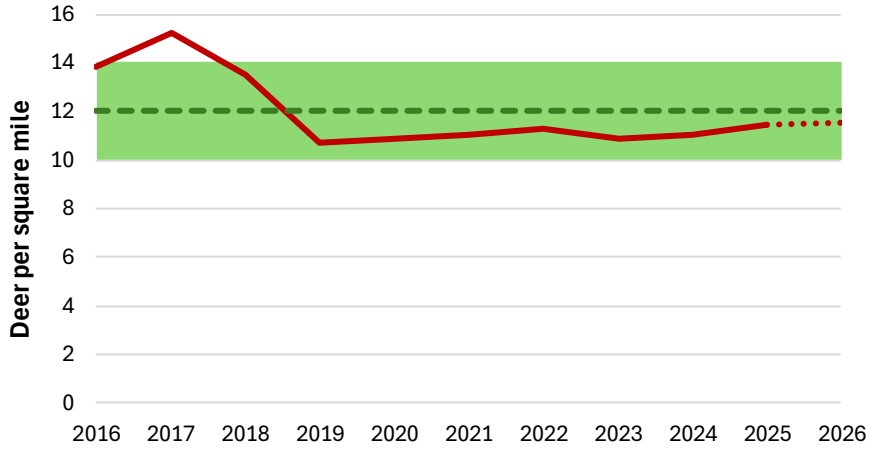


Wildlife Management Unit L

365 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.6** *(4)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**108.5** *(4)*	110
Fawn Weight	**49.6** *(7)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.63** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



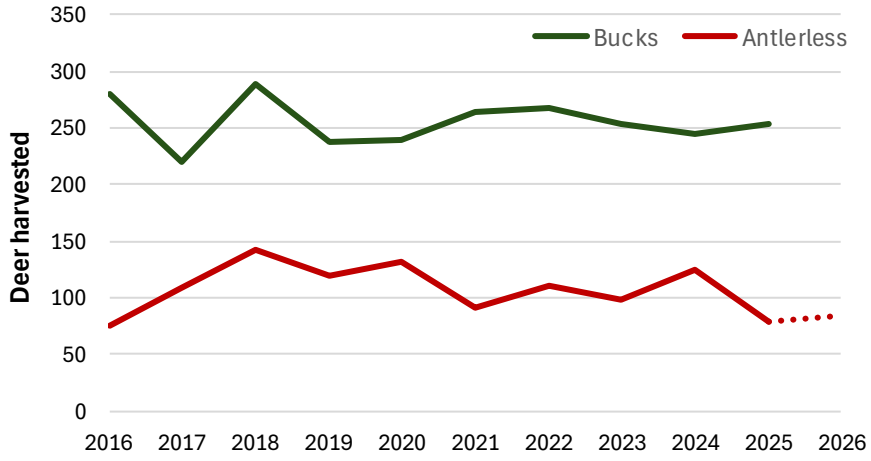
2026 Estimate

12 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
40	33

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	21%	21%
2.5	35%	0%
3.5	27%	21%
4.5+	17%	57%
no. deer aged	*(126)*	*(14)*

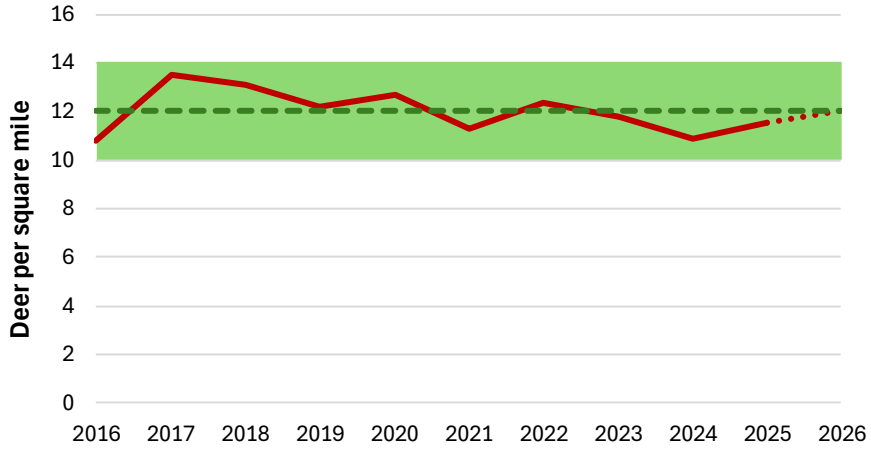


Wildlife Management Unit M

451 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.8** *(3)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**109.7** *(3)*	110
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(3)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.73** *(12)*	1.60

Deer Density



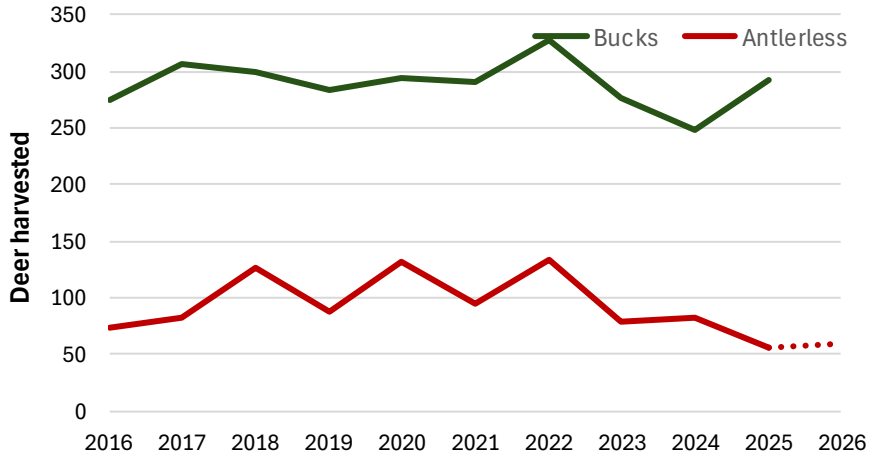
2026 Estimate

12 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
26	23

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	21%	0%
2.5	36%	0%
3.5	20%	25%
4.5+	23%	75%
no. deer aged	*(185)*	*(4)*

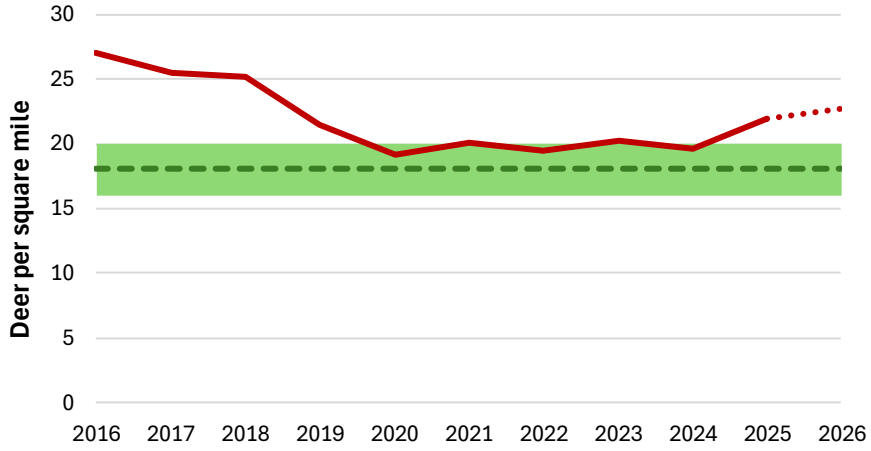


Wildlife Management Unit N

323 *mi² of deer habitat – 85% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**17.1** *(18)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**111.6** *(20)*	110
Fawn Weight	**57.5** *(28)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.56** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



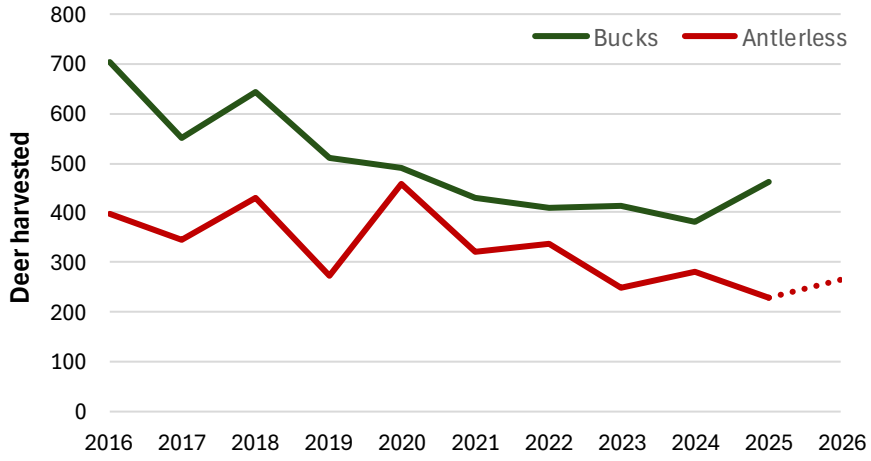
2026 Estimate

23 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
60	49

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	20%	22%
2.5	47%	17%
3.5	21%	11%
4.5+	12%	50%
no. deer aged	*(378)*	*(36)*

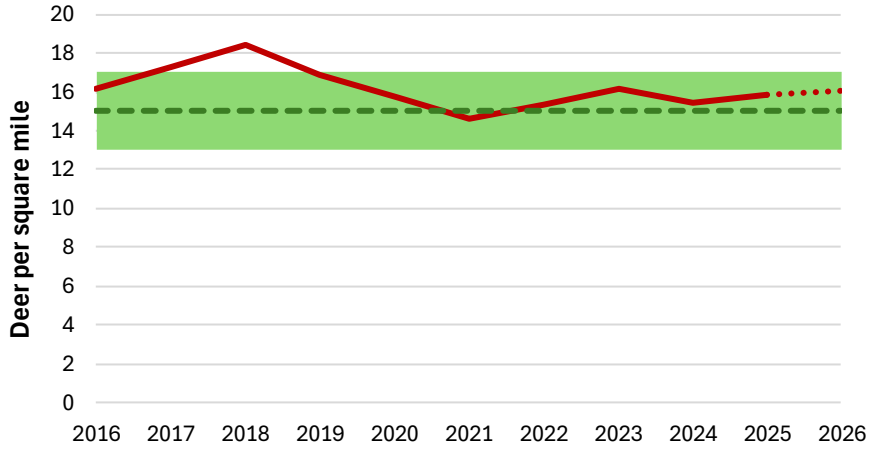


Wildlife Management Unit O

548 *mi² of deer habitat – 87% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.9** *(15)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**115.5** *(15)*	110
Fawn Weight	**56.0** *(12)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.78** *(18)*	1.60

Deer Density



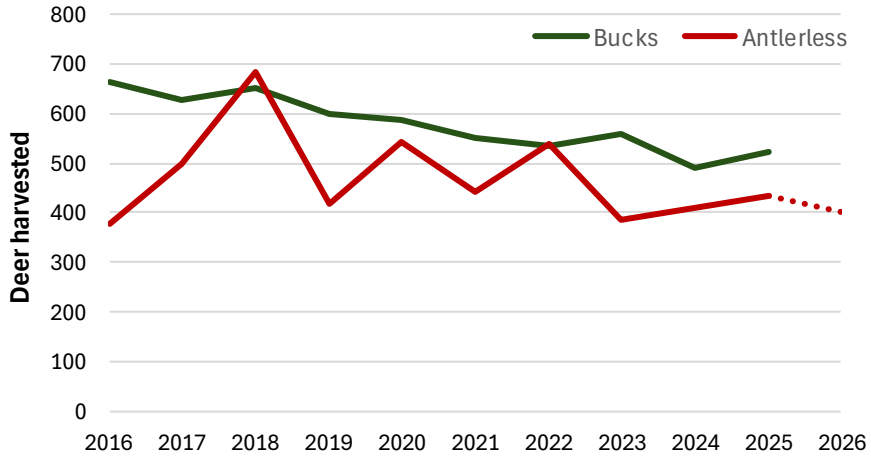
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
78	65

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	19%	19%
2.5	45%	6%
3.5	21%	13%
4.5+	15%	63%
no. deer aged	*(476)*	*(16)*

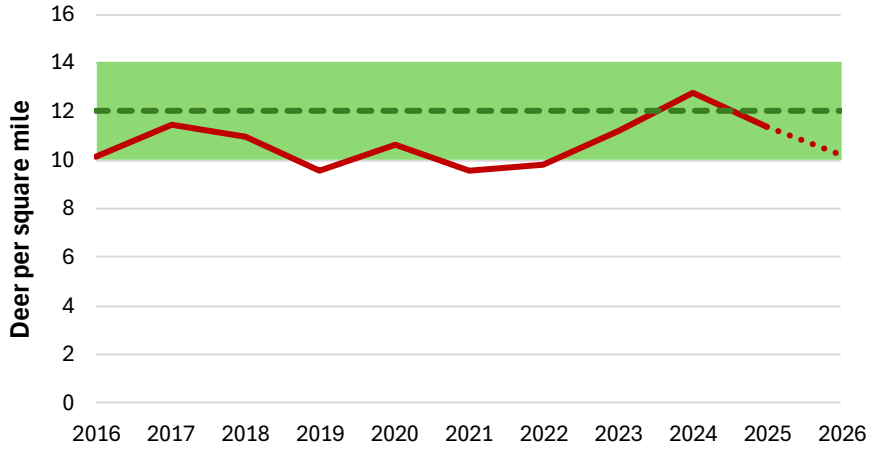


Wildlife Management Unit P

455 *mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**14.6** *(8)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**104.1** *(10)*	110
Fawn Weight	**59.8** *(6)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.46** *(13)*	1.60

Deer Density



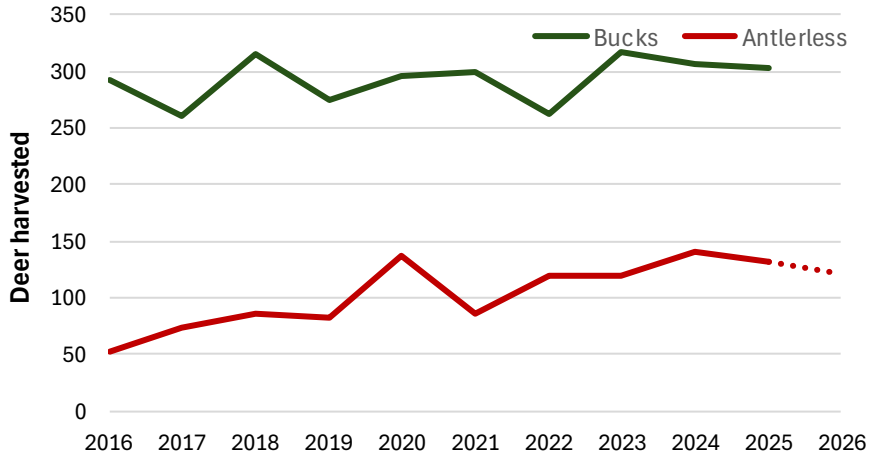
2026 Estimate

10 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
42	34

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	26%	40%
2.5	37%	0%
3.5	20%	20%
4.5+	17%	40%
no. deer aged	*(286)*	*(5)*

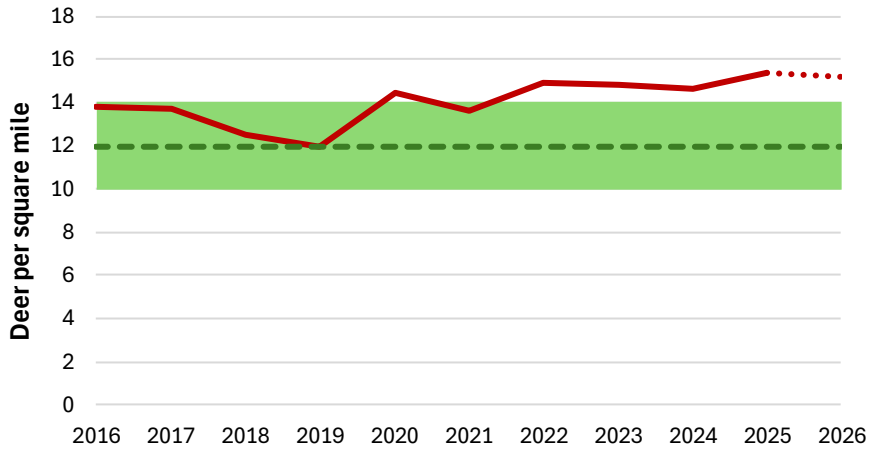


Wildlife Management Unit Q

233 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	*no data* *(0)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	*no data* *(0)*	110
Fawn Weight	*no data* *(0)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.11** *(10)*	1.60

Deer Density



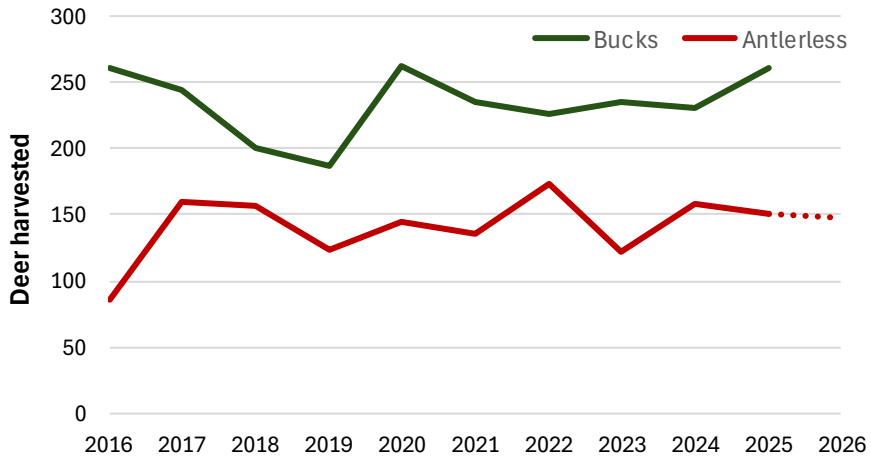
2026 Estimate

15 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
59	48

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	29%	0%
2.5	33%	0%
3.5	24%	0%
4.5+	14%	0%
no. deer aged	*(182)*	*(0)*

Appendix B: Comments from 2026 deer public hearings.

Brattleboro – March 16, 2026 (public attendance: 9)

Status of deer population

- I feel the deer herd is doing well and can stand a bit more in the way of harvest.
- I think the deer we have are healthy. I certainly don't see the numbers I used to, but that seems to be the objective. Looking forward to the expanded opportunities.
- Logging needs to be increased on private land. Changes to the UVA program.
- Winter seemed a little worse than average, but the snow had no crust, which kept coyotes from moving around and the powder snow insulated the bodies of deer laying down.
- I feel the deer pop is good. I feel land access is a big issue in achieving the correct deer numbers.
- I feel like we really need these changes for the improvement of the deer herd.
- Good. (x2)
- Our winter was very cold, but lack of crust in Windham County was big plus for deer herd. I see no need for 2 buck tags. Where are all the young hunters? We need to have access to more land in Halifax, Guilford area, there are tons of posted land in areas we hunt.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Maybe the number of nonresident hunters coming into our area needs to be considered in all this. We see a fair number of NH hunters in our woods and on our roads from mid Oct-mid Dec, Brattleboro/Dummerston area.
- I see no reason to restrict the antlerless opportunities during archery or youth/novice season. I sounds like the Department is being conservative with the permits, which I agree with.
- Cut antlerless lottery permits at least in half overall but don't cut back at all during youth/novice seasons because we need to encourage new hunters.
- Antlerless should def. be harvested during archery/novice especially novice/youth. Once again, land access should be considered. A lot of the higher density areas have too much restricted/posted land.
- That people will most likely with new changes be more gung-ho for at least the first year and will most likely have a higher success rate.
- Over 70 years of age gets doe permit.
- Give more doe permits.
- Be cautious with this. I saw what happened in the '80's. I do think you are the right track with this action you are taking.

St. Johnsbury – March 18, 2026 (public attendance: 25)

Status of deer population

- Support increasing archery opportunities w/ zones in pop. areas.
- So far the deer we have been seeing have been in good shape barring any bad storms late in the season. We just need more work reducing the predator populations.
- I'm interested to see what the success rates look like with rifle hunting does. I do not think it will increase the amount of deer killed in Chittenden County. We need to encourage sustainable logging and expanding habitat.
- Population is at a good number but agree that to increase the herd a lot of habitat work needs to be done.
- I've definitely noticed a drop in the body weight of rifle season bucks in my area, but does not so much.
- Population is good. 2 buck is false will not happen. Permits for this will not be going to general hunter all permits will go to landowner only.
- The status of our deer population seems good now, but always take into account how different we are in the Kingdom (snowfall/cold) and winter kill.
- This past winter we had more below zero days than the past 10 years combined. If this contributed to higher deer kills, do you have a way to reduce permits?
- Reinstate clearcutting first and foremost, especially in D1 and D2, it's a sterile wasteland.
- I am still gravely concerned that we may be falling into the same trap as in the '80's, which were my early years of Vermont deer hunting. I hope you are right, but I'm afraid you are not.
- All good.
- Antlerless increase this year was long overdue. (thank you).

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Support conditional take of antlerless before a second buck can be taken.
- Our group does not harvest antlerless deer anyway so any permits we get is to save a doe's life. We also do not harvest spikes. Save them for the grandkids.
- Antlerless should be harvested in archery and youth season.
- Plan for high success rate. Keep working to expand habitat and hunting areas.
- Definitely assume high harvest rate so good idea to limit permits to see how things shake out this 2026 season.
- I would take into account the older people that will buy a permit to "save a doe."
- Archery will take does as in past. When cutting permits will go to landowner only because not enough of them.
- I agree with all of the proposals and you folks are on point w/ managing the herd for herd health and being conservative.
- Winter deer kill.
- The number of illegally killed deer will go way up. I would like to know how this is being addressed by F&W.
- It will be interesting how it turns out. It may change where people normally hunt, and increase pressure in certain areas.
- Keep antlerless in archery and youth – plan for a 30% fill rate.
- J2 is too big – not in area but length and diversity. Working in Tunbridge and driving to St. J daily, I can see the night and day population difference. I own 150 acres in Waterford (prime habitat) and I don't

hunt it due to population. I drive south or just go to NH. The orientation of the unit should be considered.
- Only 2 per year and no more.

St. Albans – March 19, 2026 (public attendance: 18)

Status of deer population

- We don't have the amount of deer you think we do. Farmers nowadays are much bigger and they now use liquid shit and spread on grassland every 30 days and that alone turns a deer nose off and they don't deed in hay fields like they used to.
- Fair but some areas need more deer. Some need less.
- It seems we are seeing bigger bucks and healthier deer harvested in recent years.
- I believe we have a healthy herd! But don't agree with the extended muzzleloader season. The does are already bred at that point! So you are killing 3 deer instead of 1!
- I think we don't have the deer population we used to.
- Our population on our properties = B+C are very healthy and plentiful. Friends and family took 7 deer between the 2 properties, 3 buck/4 doe.
- The deer health in my area seem to be good!

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Again here at least in Franklin County we don't have the doe we use to have.
- Some units can't afford antlerless hunting. WMU C is one.
- PA permits are different than VT. Doe can only be shot if you get a permit… VT is open doe harvest all bow season.
- Winter severity impacts. Need to drastically reduce # of permits if allowing rifles.
- My belief is we need to equal our the buck to doe ration and I believe the new changes will help except the 2 buck rule!
- Yes – I feel archery should include antlerless also.
- Not to overdo it like in the early '80s.

Montpelier – May 5, 2026 (public attendance: 14)

Status of deer population

- Buck to doe ratio needs to improve.
- Seem to be seeing less and less deer in our area – J1. Despite managing many food plots etc…, however, the mature forest probably plays a big role. The fawn kill is much more than in years past due to increase in black bear. I think there should be more incentive to kill more bear. Have a drop center for people who don't want the meat? Same with coyotes.
- It is much lower than the 1990-2000.
- The state has pockets of deer. Landowners need to do a better job of selective harvests of the wildlife. It's the hunters choice to harvest or not to harvest.
- Legislature needs to pass laws to open up more cutting to allow public land hunters a higher success. Our woods are awful compared to other states.
- How could we shape the population to be stronger and healthier? Is it about how we maintain our ecosystems and woods or having less of them?
- Needs to be more focus on improving habitat perhaps more encouragement of policy to do through UVA enrolled land and WMUs to increase regenerative forestry practices.
- Too many deer in areas that are posted. The deer in Northfield seemed to have had a good winter, but not a lot of deer.
- High elevation in zone H, Cabot, very few doe. Ratio 4-1, 4 bucks to 1 doe. Yes, but don't tell anyone. Do see only 1 fawn to adult doe. Hard to fill an antlerless tag.
- They seem healthy in J2 area. There are plenty around where I hunt.
- Sounds like we also need to work on habitat.
- I am optimistic it will be good.
- Deer populations in some areas need reducing, not in all units.
- In our area of J1, the northwest corner of Williamstown, the deer are healthy enough but there has been a steady decline in the population. That concerns me a lot.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Way too many changes all at once even though I see the intended goal.
- I'm not sure that will help our situation at this time. We need to start seeing more doe than we do now. Some of these areas might need to be micromanaged if possible.
- Taking doe if needed in a specific unit it should be targeted to a smaller specific area not always the entire zone.
- It comes down to choice. Hunters know the deer population for where they are hunting. Yes, some areas need to be thinned while others don't.
- Open up suburban hunting early but allow buck to be shot.
- I believe it's a very good idea and way to take more advantage of more traditional hunting.
- Sounds reasonable. I would expect the percentage of successful harvests to increase with centerfire rifles.
- Glad to see the reduction in permits to be better balanced with mostly likely a higher success rate.
- Less if you can shoot them during rifle season. The last time they shot doe during rifle season there were lots of small deer left dead in the woods.
- 2nd buck is a good idea. Will still be difficult to find antlerless deer. I have hunted Montpelier, more deer, but also more interference from non-hunters, such a hiking trails in large tracts of woods.
- More rules and regs but I don't dislike them and will stay legal and follow the rules.
- Look forward to seeing how they work out.

- I am OK with what I heard tonight.
- It sounds like too many antlerless deer will be taken.
- Cut the permits in half for a couple of years to see if we can bring the herd back to what it should be.

Castleton – May 7, 2026 (public attendance: 8)

Status of deer population

- I feel the current trend with a 1 buck rule has started to produce decent deer in my area. I agree we need a better buck/doe ratio and an increase in urban antlerless kill would be ideal. I live in Rutland area and know the urban hunting situation well – everything is inaccessible unless you're walking in from Rte 3. Most of surrounding Rutland Town is posted. I think you will have no problem achieving your antlerless kill with permits being filled with rifle. It's just not going to always target the deer you want. Just outside of town there is much lower deer density, those permits will significantly effect those small herds.
- After the easy winter, prospects are good.
- The powdery snow without a thick crust was tougher on coyote and domestic dogs who chase deer and that powdery snow helped insulate deer when bedded down.
- All deer I saw over the winter and spring looked to be in great condition. I think 2026 season will be a good one.
- Seems to be about the same as it has been. Some unknowns with the changes.
- I do think the winter was easy and fast green up in the spring will make good antler growth this year.
- Good health. Prospects for 2026 season low.
- I would like to see the population in my area grow some (K – Wells). Our winters have been very mild and predation has increased with the coyotes and bear numbers increasing. I question your fawn recruitment numbers and how we count our population of deer.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- One antlerless permit per hunter.
- Well thought out by WMU
- Adding 7 different ways to take deer will help give more of a chance to those hunters who don't have as much time to hunt because of their busier schedules in life.
- It is good that we are being conservative with the doe permits this first year of all these extra chances of harvesting deer.
- I would like to see more permits but I am happy with just one.
- Not sure if reducing the permits that much is going to give you a bigger harvest.
- I think more people will harvest a doe to be able to shoot a second buck. Archery thru rifle I don't believe will make a difference, but harvesting a doe with a rifle will. May reduce buck kill due to many bucks go nocturnal from more shooting.
- Could the doe be pregnant?
- I will never agree to shooting does with a rifle, but I glad to see you cut the permit numbers and are being careful moving forward.

Appendix C: Written public comments.

Sent: Monday, April 20, 2026 8:56 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearings

For what it's worth: How do you propose to "Manage" Vermont,'s deer herd especially in Orange county or other counties that have much posted land. The owners of the land don't care what the department of fish and game wants, they only care about saving deer from hunters! Plus, they are not going to spend their money on improving the habitat on THEIR land so hunters can shoot THEIR deer. So much land is posted that it concentrates hunters on unposted land and makes hunting much more difficult.

Capt. Tom Malanchuk
(16 year Veteran hunter safety instructor both bow and rifle).

Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2026 4:25 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Allocation

The state of Vermont needs to lower the deer limit to 2 deer. One buck and then one doe across all means of harvest. 4 deer a year is ridiculous. Most land owners are posting their private property because of deer mismanagement. All bucks harvested should be required to have at least 3 pts on one side, except for junior hunters.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:45 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Anterless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Good afternoon,

There are 3 of us that currently hunt private property in zone Q. (roughly 375 acre) We have many cameras out and yearly we generally see 3 to 4 different Does.

If we harvest the Does that we are allowed to we would be eliminating the heard in our area. So I believe that the proposed changes would not be a good idea.

Thanks for your time,
Matt Horton

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:07 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Management

Dear Wildlife Board,

I won't be able to attend either meeting.

I wanted to express satisfaction with the VT Fish and Wildlife's management of the deer herd with the emphasis of harvesting more anterless deer. As a forester and after reading Quality Whitetails, it is clear to me that it is best for the landscape to keep the numbers well below the carrying capacity. The quality of the habitat, the amount of posted land, and simple differences in geography and its inherent differences in winter severity are out of everyone's control. As a hunter, I am more than satisfied with the number of animals I see and the health of the animals I am able to harvest. I have no issues with changes coming. Nick Fortin and his team have my trust.

Thank you,
Markus Bradley

PS - I do think the State of Vermont needs to consider taking more bear. My historic average is 1 sighting per year. In 2024 I saw 17, 8 in 2025, and already 2 this year.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:09 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Deer Harvest Recommendations

The biggest obstacle VT is facing is the rising amount of posted property. I would say in the past 10 – 15 years, 70% of the land I hunted for over 30 years has now been posted and doesn't allow hunting. I'm talking thousands of acers. Talking to land owners this year, a lot more land is going to be posted because they are opposed to hunters being able to take does with a rifle.

I wonder if VT Fish and Wildlife went back to the 70s when you could take does with a rifle with a permit. I suspect the success rate was pretty high. As a person who hunted back then I found it very unsettling and dangerous especially the opening weekend. Hunters were shooting at anything that moved. What did I see out of all those doe rifle seasons was the deer population was obliverated. I remember going onto large plots of land with snow on the ground and finding no deer tracks. It became very hard to see any deer. People who hunted back in that time period are very concerned about VT the same thing again and wiping out the deer herd.

Why not start out a bit conservative. I think with permits you are suggesting its really going to impact the deer herd. I think more land is going to be posted. I think we will hear of shooting incidents. Overall, VTs biggest problem is all the posted land. We all know that deer go to where they can escape pressure. Posted land is a great place to hide and they know it. Also, around houses is another great place. You want to see some deer head to a couple of those locations.

Thanks,

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:10 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: What deer

Can't believe you want to kill off more does. When you only see ONE deer in the entire season. When you only see ONE deer all summer, when there are NO tracks in the usual deer yards all winter it's time to stop

killing doe's. I know the Dumbercrats in VT want to ban all guns and if you keep killing off all the does no one will be hunting any longer because there won't be anything to hunt. Your not going to make much money on just fishing, especially since you don't stock much of anything except ponds anymore.
G Despart

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:22 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe seasons

Good afternoon,
I believe that smaller management zones would allow for more precise control over doe permit allocation. I reside in Wildlife Management Unit J2, and in my experience, the doe population is not consistent across the entire unit. For example, conditions in Norwich differ significantly from other areas within J2.
One of the primary challenges in Norwich, as well as throughout much of the state, is the prevalence of posted land, which limits access for hunters and complicates population management efforts. I understand the importance of managing the doe population and actively contribute to that effort; however, I am selective about where within J2 I choose to do so, based on local conditions.
I recognize that the board faces a difficult task and that it is not possible to satisfy all perspectives. I simply wanted to share my observations and viewpoint for consideration.
Thank you for your time.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:29 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer plan comment

I think we should be trying to maximize permit numbers even if that means shorter seasons.

It would be a shame to shrink the hunting community because some people can’t get a tag.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:51 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Anterless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Good day,

I have never been part of a board or complained about rules and regulations. That said, my hunting property is in Montgomery and during rifle season over the past 2 years; I have seen a total 2 deer while in the woods. I hunt about an average of 70 hours during the 2-week period. PLEASE put anterless hunting within certain wildlife areas, not across the whole state. You can't compare Franklin county to Chittenden, Rutland or Winsor as there is no comparison.

Sincerely,
Randy Cutter

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 8:23 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer management rule change

I live 2 hours away from the closest public hearing site. I would like to participate. Since there is no convient way for me to be able to attend I am unable.

I am against the rule change. There is no way to manage posted property in this state and this rule is moot. Causing more costs to an already over expensed state. There is no way that is will work.

Causing extreme fluctuation in the deer population making it harder to manage the deer poulation. Causing more stress on an already stressed wildlife department.

At the same time causing dissatisfied hunters where there is non posted land because there will be even less deer in those areas since those are the areas which will be over hunted and over harvested with the new rule.

However the posted property will have the opposite effect. Under hunted and over populated since deer will be housed on these properties.

This will have a chain effect causing more hunters to violate laws and trespass onto posted property. Causing upset hunters and land owners of posted property. Wardens will be overwhelmed. Causing chaos and more harm then good for the public.

Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 8:04 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearing Opinion

Hi,

I can't attend the hearing and wanted to voice my opinion. I am a 70 year old lifelong Vermont deer hunter with an M.S. in Biology. I have been retired for almost 10 years and hunt at least 45 days in state every season. I can't remember the last time I didn't get a buck with my bow and continue to hunt every day after my tag is filled because I love to.
My biggest concern is that I see declining deer populations every season and yet the state continues to relax bag limits. I recognize that there are large populations of deer in urban areas and probably other parts of the state. In the areas that I hunt, zone B and the foothills of the mountains, the population of accessible deer is quite low. Land access is extremely limited and so the density of Hunters is high compared to game. The antler restriction has helped a lot combined with the 1 buck limit.

Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 8:18 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearing, continued

I just sent an opinion before completing so here's a follow-up.
I am strongly opposed to increasing the bag limits and adding a second buck tag generally across the state. Perhaps in selected areas with high population density AND adequate land access, this is necessary but generally I see it depleting an already limited resource. Many people are giving up hunting VT for nearby out

of state opportunities because the experience is so much better. Not because there are more animals, but because access to hunting and hunter density is lower. I am expecting our state to get better as people give up hunting here when the population is even more depleted. We hunters see the deer hunting as more revenue oriented than resource oriented. Thanks,
Stephen Mongeon

Sent: Saturday, April 25, 2026 9:13 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Antlerless Deer Season Changes

I fully support the 2026 updated deer season regulations related to antlerless deer. As a consulting forester I see first hand the impacts on the health of our forests from an increasing deer population. The impacts to tree regeneration quality and quantity caused by elevated deer numbers represent a long-term threat to forest health and productivity.

As a hunter I am excited at additional opportunities to harvest wild game.

Thanks to V F&W for using science to inform policy updates and public communications.

-R

Rick Morrill

Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2026 9:30 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment

I'm writing to inform the fishing game board that I am concerned with the number of permits that are being issued this year for "doe permits". While I definitely was pushing for doe permits to be used in November; I was and still are concerned about the number of does that may be taken during the bow season since you're allowed to use bows for doe also during the rifle season. There's so many different variables that are going to go into this season and the unknowns. How many people will refuse ; how many people will buy them and not use them ; how many people etc etc etc. I think decreasing to half was a great idea but would it really hurt to decrease it another 10 to 15 percent or the board should consider having a provision that if numbers are getting out of control with the number harvest that the fishing game board can halt seasons objectives regarding doe. I appreciate all the hard work the biologists at the fishing game department. Nick for his dedication. Thank you for your time Sincerely Jeremy Ayotte

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Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2026 3:52 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendations

To Whom It May Concern,

I am 63 years old and have been hunting in Vermont since I was 13. I am deeply concerned about and strongly against regulation changes aimed at harvesting more antlerless deer in 2026.

I was told by a F&W Program Manager at the Yankee Sportsman's Classic that a survey was sent to solicit feedback on antlerless permits during rifle season. We have 9 people at our deer camp and 5 other camps around us with up to 5 people each and none of us (a) received a survey or (b) knows of anyone who received one.

The last time that F&W issued antlerless permits in Vermont the herd suffered severely; especially along the spine of the Green Mountains. As a young hunter it would be nothing to see up to 10 deer a day and where I hunt in WMU G it would take 5 years to see 10 deer...if you're lucky.

I've been hearing that our forests are old and the deer habitat has been declining since John Buck was the State deer biologist. What is being done to support habitat and improve it so that more deer can be sustained, hunting success rates can be increased and hunting revenue could possibly increase as well. There was a time when I hunted in Pittsfield, VT where people came from all over New England to hunt whitetail deer. Those days are long gone since the last antlerless harvest during rifle season. I fear that history is going to repeat itself and if so even fewer people will hunt the state further impacting F&W's declining revenue stream. I already know alot of Vermonters who travel out of state for their deer hunting because the success rate here is in the tank.

I do believe there are areas like the Champlain Valley and the Lake Champlain Islands where deer are abundant and a doe harvest is needed. Crop damage, deer/car incidents and bad genes are prominent. I've seen several buck shot in the island with under developed antlers and lower body weight.

It's time that hunters and F&W band together to work on deer habitat to preserve a long and history-filled tradition of deer hunting in Vermont.

Mark Manley

Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2026 4:27 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe permits

I do not agree with giving these permits. I also believe we should go back to the 3 points on 1 side rule. The population is not great as I did not see as many deer as I have within past 5 years. They are not getting enough time to be bucks in the area.

Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2026 8:11 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Comment on antlerless harvest recommendations

I am a landowner in the Town of Calais (Wildlife Mgt Unit H) and my property is not posted. Most adjoining acreage is hunted. I have almost no advanced tree regeneration in the understory except for red spruce (a species not preferred by deer). More than half of my property is softwoods (cedar, spruce, pine) or mixed forest and about 30% is northern hardwoods. I have only found 1 seedling of cedar that is under 6' tall and there is no cedar foliage under 6'. Sugar maple are not regenerating on my property.

I understand that you have to make management decision based upon the mgt unit (518 sq miles) and that my local conditions may not be representative of the WMU. However, I would note that every single metric you are using to make management decisions is below goal:
yearling male antler beam diameter - 14.9 with a minimum goal of 16
yearling male weight - 109.1 with a minimum goal of 115
fawn weight - 58.8 with a minimum goal of 60
adult birth rate 1.21 with a minimum goal of 1.60

Yet despite the fact that you are not meeting your deer mgt goals, your proposed mgt decision is to keep deer density stable. If this will be your decision then I suggest you need to provide landowners with tools to harvest additional antlerless deer on their property.

Your deer mgt plan recognizes that the amount of early successional forest is declining in Vermont. As a landowner with substantial acreage of forestland, I can assure you that if you maintain deer densities in WMU H at your stated 15 deer/sq mile I will not be cutting any timber as I will not be able to regenerate my forest stands.

I am writing to request that you increase antlerless permits available in WMU H. If not, then I strongly suggest you implement a program to allow landowners to harvest additional antlerless deer to meet their forest management objectives. Otherwise, you will not be able to meet your stated deer management objectives for WMU H.

Sincerely,

Duane R. Diefenbach

Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2026 8:52 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Antlerless deer harvest recommendatino

To whom it may concern,

I am a landowner in Randolph Center, Vermont and also a State of Vermont County Forester. My farm and forest in Randolph Center is suffering significantly from excessive deer browse pressure which is limiting regeneration success in recent timber harvest areas (approximately 22 acres of overstory removal conducted in historic softwood plantations in the fall of 2022). Deer browse pressure has forced me to spend thousands of dollars to supplement insufficient natural regeneration through tree planting. In addition to planting oaks (protected by tree shelters), I have planted hybrid larch throughout. Although hybrid larch is usually a less desirable browse species to deer, they are even browsing that species. I have had to replant areas two years in a row.

The way that the antlerless harvest regulations and tag availability are structured, I have found it impossible to harvest enough antlerless deer to make any discernible difference. Continued browse damage and expense has been the result.

Please consider increasing the allocation of antlerless deer tags for wildlife management zone J1 to give landowners the tools to preserve the ecological health and productivity of their forests.

I would be happy to host Fish and Wildlife representatives for a site visit to discuss this problem further.

Thank you!

Robert Nelson

Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2026 10:05 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe season

Hi my name is Scott Smith and i would like to give you my opinion on the new regs on doe season in rifle. I deer hunt in the spine of the Green Mountains in area G. I'm against having doe season with rifles. I was hunting when the last time we had doe season during rifle and thought the impact in our area was drastic! I do realize that there are areas in Vermont that are over populated with deer like area A and B. The area we hunt is mostly state forest where we don't have many deer plus anyone has access to hunt there. The areas that are over populated usually are the areas where most people can't get on to hunt. That being said people will go to state land where we are and shoot anything that is Brown! I'm not against taking does but not with rifles. I'm concerned if they take to many does in our area it will really affect us. I believe last time they did it they said they wouldn't have a doe season with rifles again. Please re consider your decision about does with rifles! Thanks for your time! Best! Scott

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Sent: Tuesday, May 12, 2026 9:25 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Comments to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department - Proposed Changes to the 2026 Deer Hunting Regulations

To whom it may concern –

Provided at the attachment are my thoughts and questions to be entered into the Public Comment regarding the changes proposed by the VT Fish and Wildlife Department 2026 Deer Hunting Rules and Regulations.

I disagree with the changes as proposed. As a fourth generation Vermont deer hunter I consider the proposed take limits excessive and do not reflect an overpopulation alleged by the VFWD in my area and SMU.

Due to family commitments, I was unable to attend the public hearing at the Kehoe Conservation Camp on 7 May 2026 but instead am sending written comments prior to the 15 May 2026 deadline.

I look forward to your comments and feedback regarding your concerns.

Sincerely,

Lindsey C. Waterhouse

Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 2026 2:43 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: anterless deer harvest Bethel

We have had this 100 acre parcel in Bethel 40 years
and are avid deer hunters. Our presence on the property in all 4 seasons of the year allows a carefull look at deer population here. Covering alot of ground and Tracks in the snow reveal very few deer here. We are very aware of the larger than usual coyote and bear populations and the impact that has on the deer herd. As an avid bow hunter in Bethel, I will not take a Doe in this area. Every Doe harvested worsens the outlook for seeing any deer at all. I hope the doe hunting and permit allocation is reduced or eliminated until the population show significant changes.

Tom, Concerned land owner.

10 App. V.S.A. § 2a. Big game; tagging

(a) A person taking big game, as defined by 10 V.S.A. § 4001~~(31)~~, pursuant to the seasons provided by law or regulation of the Fish and Wildlife Board, shall immediately tag the big game carcass upon taking with the applicable tag or permit information for that animal, which shall include the person's name and tag or permit number. The tag shall be placed on the big game carcass in a location that is open to view. Such tag shall remain on the big game carcass during possession and transportation and until such time that the animal is ~~cut up~~processed for consumption.

(b) Landowners taking big game on their property pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4253 shall affix a tag to the big game animal taken on their property with their name and the address where the animal was taken, and the applicable permit number if a permit is required for the taking of that animal.

(c~~b~~) A person shall not transport parts of a big game animal prior to being processed for consumption ~~that has been processed for consumption~~ unless the parts or ~~package~~ container containing them are marked with the name ~~and address~~ of the person who ~~killed~~ harvested the big game.

(d~~c~~) A person may transport into and possess in this state big game legally taken in another state or country provided such person shall retain the tag required to be attached to the carcass by the state or country where taken. ~~and mark each package of meat with the name of the person who took the animal, tag number, date, and state or country of origin.~~

Recommendation Related to a Request for a Youth and Novice Archery Season

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

April 1, 2026

Public request to develop a youth and novice archery season on the last weekend of September.

Recommendation

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

February 18, 2026, the Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) requested that the Board create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

(1) VBA suggests a two-day season, on the last full weekend in September to allow for hunting beyond the September expanded archery zones, prior to the regular archery season

(2) The overall rules for this special season could be adapted from the current youth/novice firearm season model

Department Recommendation:

The Department recommends not establishing a youth/novice archery hunting weekend at this time.

Department Response to Proposal:

Comment/Question**:** **"**The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting consideration by the Fish and Wildlife Board to create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

We know that the current Youth and Novice Gun Seasons for deer, turkey, and waterfowl are great opportunities to bring in young and new hunters to the outdoors sports. Creating a Youth and Novice Archery Season will not only encourage youngsters and new hunters to learn archery but enable them to hunt in a less pressurized environment.

The VBA suggests a two-day season, being the last full weekend in September. While this is after the start of the Expanded Archery Deer Season, we feel that the zones included in that season are relatively small and many archers either live too far from one or might not have access to those private lands outlined in the zones. Also, the weather is usually warm and conducive to longer stays on the stand. The end of September is the end of the summer feeding season for deer, but before the cooler weather sets in and the onset of the beginning of the breeding time. This timing helps make deer a bit more predictable, so new archers can more readily pattern the deer and get in close.

The overall rules for this special season could be adapted by the current gun season models. We feel that a Youth and Novice Archery Season will offer a welcoming atmosphere to new archers as they learn from their mentors and open the door for them to a lifetime of enjoying Vermont's natural beauty and resources. We hope you will see the benefits of this special season."

Response:

1) The Department implemented extensive changes to deer hunting regulations in 2026 and will need to evaluate the effects of these changes over the next several years.
2) The Department would prefer to review and update deer hunting regulations on a five-year cycle to allow for several years of data to be collected after changes are made. The Department and Board could consider this proposal during the next review period around 2030.
3) The current archery season is 76 days long (October 1 through December 15), or 92 days if you include the new expanded archery zones/season. Late sunsets during the early part of the season also allow time for hunting after school or work. This provides substantial opportunity for mentoring new hunters.
4) Youth participation in archery season appears to be relatively high, so it seems unlikely that this change would result in a substantial increase in participation. The percentage of archery deer taken by youth age 15 and under (3.9%) is almost the same as the percentage of regular season deer taken by youth (4.5%).

5) The only other state the Department is aware of with a youth archery season is New Jersey, where firearm discharge is restricted in much of the state and most of their deer harvest occurs by archery.

Other Information to Consider:

Concerns include:

- Increased regulatory complexity and administrative burden with minimal potential increase in participation.
- Competition with the current youth waterfowl season which occurs the same weekend.
- Competition with the recently created expanded archery zones, potentially reducing their effectiveness. Also, potential enforcement issues since expanded archery zones/season only allow the harvest of antlerless deer.

Potential benefits include:

- Potentially increasing youth participation in archery hunting.

Recommendations Related to Requests for a Regulated Black Bear Baiting Season, Season Extension and Increase of Annual Bag Limit

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

May 20, 2026

Public requests to develop a regulated black bear baiting season, extend hunting season, and increase annual bag limit in Vermont.

Recommendation

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

On February 18, 2026, the Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) submitted a petition requesting that the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board (Board) create a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont that would occur during the early black bear hunting season in September. The petition is summarized as follows:

1) VBA requests the development of a black bear baiting season in Vermont, similar to what is currently allowed by regulation in New Hampshire.

2) The framework for the season would include a permitting system that outlines conditions by which a hunter would be allowed to use bait to attract black bears for hunting purposes.

3) The suggested season would run from September 1st -30th.

On April 1, 2026, Bert Saldi and Kevin Lawrence submitted a similar request to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board to create a black bear baiting season, extend bear hunting until the second Sunday in December, and to allow for a second bear to be harvested by any hunter statewide. The second petition is summarized as follows.

1) Extend the current bear hunting season from September 1st to the second Sunday in December.

2) Allow hunters to purchase a second bear tag with an annual limit of two bears per hunter.

3) Incorporate a bear baiting season similar to current bear baiting season in Maine and New Hampshire.

4) All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board, go into effect the 2027 Season.

Department Recommendation:

The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) recommends that the Board,

1. Not develop a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont.
2. Extend the late season black bear hunting season until the end of the December muzzleloader deer season.

3. Allow for a second bear tag within annually approved wildlife management units, not to exceed two bears annually per hunter.

These recommendations are supported by the information presented below.

Comment/Question**:** Petition received on February 18, 2026

"The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting the creation of a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont. Our intent is to support the Department's long-term bear management objectives, improve harvest selectivity, and reduce human–bear conflicts while upholding the high standards of ethical and science-based wildlife management.

Vermont's black bear population continues to expand in both numbers and distribution throughout the state, creating challenges for landowners, farmers, and communities. Traditional hunting methods remain important but often fall short of harvest objectives, especially in years of abundant natural foods. The proposed season would provide Vermont's bear management team with a precise and predictable tool to manage goals while ensuring sustainability and accountability. New Hampshire has a carefully structured baiting season in place that has been very successful in meeting their management goals.

It should be noted that while the VBA is submitting this petition, it is not asking that this be considered as an archery-only season but rather be open to all legal bear hunting implements.

Benefits of a Regulated Bear Baiting Season

1. A baiting season allows hunters to be in **close proximity** so they can more readily identify bears before harvest. This would reduce the likelihood of taking sows with cubs and provide a better opportunity for the best shot placement to provide a swift harvest. This supports Vermont's commitment to ethical, selective, and responsible wildlife management.
2. It is an effective tool for **population management**. In heavy mast years, traditional hunting methods often struggle to meet harvest objectives. Baiting provides a consistent, reliable method for achieving management goals across wildlife management units.
3. It can help reduce **human–bear conflicts** by targeting harvest in areas with recurring property damage, agricultural damage, and other nuisance bear activities, supporting the Department's conflict mitigation strategies.

Framework to Be Considered

Everyone participating in the baiting season must obtain a mandatory Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Permit. Permit numbers can be limited by Wildlife Management Units to ensure population sustainability, prevent overcrowding and overharvesting, and help the Department meet management objectives. The applications for the Permit should include:

1. Written landowner permission.
2. Map(s) showing the exact location of bait sites.
3. Names and contact information for each hunter that will be allowed to hunt the sites.
4. Fee for the Permit, to be determined by the Department.

5. Types of bait that may be used or not used (e.g., any form of cocoa or chocolate because of its toxicity to bears and other wildlife). Other restrictions may be added to prevent attraction of non-target species.
6. The season dates as set by the Department. The VBA suggests that a short pre-baiting period be added before the start of the hunting season. The actual season could be September 1–30, with all bait removed from the site at the end of the season.
7. If an application is accepted, copies of the Permit shall be given to the landowner and the Department, and a copy carried by each hunter.
8. Successful hunters will report the bears in the manner dictated by the Department regulations.

The Vermont Bowhunters Association believes a well-regulated fall bear baiting season built on proven regional models and guided by Vermont's strong conservation ethic would provide the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department with an effective and responsible tool for managing our growing bear population. We respectfully request that the Board consider initiating rulemaking to establish such a season."

Comment/Question**:** Petition received on April 1, 2026

"Please accept the petition to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board.
Regarding bear hunting season:
1) Extend the current bear hunting season from September 1st to the second Sunday in December.
2) Allow hunters to purchase a second bear tag with an annual limit of two bears per hunter.
3) Incorporate a bear Baiting Season similar to current Bear Baiting season in Maine and New Hampshire.

All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board, go into Effect the 2027 Season.
I believe there's no reason this can't happen.....
Please Reach out to confirm receipt.
To: Kevin Lawrence, Former Board Chair.

Thank you...
The Vermonter
Bert Saldi"

Department Response to Proposal:

1) The Department does not recommend that the Board establish a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont for the month of September for the following reasons:
    a. It is uncertain that a bear baiting season will significantly increase harvest to a level that will improve Vermont's ability to manage the bear population. For reference, New Hampshire does not harvest a larger portion of their bear

population in comparison to Vermont despite over 60% of their harvest occurring with bait. Over the past decade, Vermont's bear hunting seasons take on average 12-15% of Vermont's bear population. In comparison, New Hampshire's bear hunting seasons also take on average 12-15% of that state's population (https://www.wildlife.nh.gov/hunting-nh/hunting-reports-harvest-summaries). Even with bear baiting, New Hampshire, struggles to meet their population objectives in most bear management zones (https://www.wildlife.nh.gov/hunting-nh/bear-hunting-new-hampshire) and therefore liberalized hunting regulations in 2024 by extending still hunting season dates (WMUs L and M) and adding a second bear tag (WMUs C1, D2, E, F).

b. It is unlikely that a bear baiting season will allow consistent harvests across years of varying natural food availability. Many states with bear baiting seasons report smaller harvests over bait during times of abundant natural foods. Many factors influence bear harvest susceptibility and hunter effort, for example very cold weather may cause bears to den earlier if food supplies are low, while also causing hunters to be in the field less.
c. It is unlikely that a bear baiting season will allow hunters to target food conditioned bears to help mitigate human-bear conflicts. Food conditioned and non-food conditioned bears will be mixed at bait sites, making it difficult to target one over the other. By September, the Department sees a dramatic reduction in human-bear conflict reports. This is likely due, in large part, to increased natural food availability across the landscape during this period. By September most food conditioned bears have shifted their foraging to the same food sources non-food conditioned bears are targeting. States that have bear baiting seasons do not experience proportionally less human-bear conflicts than states without bear baiting seasons.
d. The addition of another permitting system will be burdensome on the bear project, permit administrative personnel, and licensing staff.

2) The Department recommends that the Board consider allowing a second bear harvest tag for hunters and extending the bear hunting season, consistent with proposed rule changes that will be presented following deliberation of these petitions based on the following considerations:
    a. The Department is currently in the process of developing extensive proposed bear season regulation revisions, which align with the petitioner's requests related to season length (including extending the bear season until the end of the December deer muzzleloader season) and increasing the annual harvest limit to two bears annually within approved wildlife management units.
    b. Season extension may provide additional hunter opportunity.

c. A second tag may provide additional harvest pressure in areas with higher bear occurrence, incompatible land use pressure such as development or agriculture, higher reports of crop damage, and hunter participation.
d. Improve ability for hunters to target bears depredating on corn.
e. Based on past experience, the department expects these changes will result in a modest increase in black bear harvest, while still maintaining a healthy bear population across the Vermont landscape.

3) Public input will occur over calendar year 2026, in which at least two public meetings will be held and a minimum of 30-days of comment period will be open.

Other Information to Consider:

Concerns include:

- Establishment of hunter ownership of a baited parcel of land, limiting hunter access, which may create additional posted lands and/or conflicts between hunters.
- Conflict between bait and non-bait hunters.
- Placing additional human-based foods on the landscape would artificially increase food availability for bears and potentially increase opportunity to condition bears to human food sources. This is also in direct conflict with Department recommendations regarding not placing food and attractants out near an individual's property. (Appendix A)
- Placing concentrations of human-based foods will attract species other than bears including deer, turkeys, coyotes, rodents, and corvids. This could create an opportunity for illegal harvest of non-target species.
- Transmission of disease between bears and non-target species. Specific diseases and parasites of concern include chronic wasting disease, rabies, sarcoptic mange, and distemper.
- Baiting will not necessarily target bears in conflict areas.
- Increased enforcement issues with bait sites on the landscape.

Potential benefits include:

- Potentially increasing bear hunting opportunity.
- Potential future regional targeting of populations where additional hunting pressure is needed to reduce populations. Currently, the Department does not have regional population management goals for black bears but rather manages the population at the statewide scale.
- Potential recruitment and retention of bear hunters.
- Potentially increasing opportunity for selectivity and shot placement by hunters when bear hunting.

Appendix A.

Title 10 : Conservation and Development

Chapter 113 : Game

Subchapter 004 : WILD ANIMALS DOING DAMAGE

(Cite as: 10 V.S.A. § 4827a)

- **§ 4827a. Feeding bear; prohibition**

(a) A person shall not knowingly feed a bear and shall not knowingly give, place, expose, deposit, distribute, or scatter any bait, food, or other edible material in a manner intended to lure a bear to feed except:

(1) under a license or permit issued under section 4152 of this title by the Commissioner for bona fide scientific research, mitigation of wildlife damage, nuisance problems, or wildlife population reduction program;

(2) by planting, cultivating, or harvesting of crops directly associated with bona fide agricultural practices, including planted wildlife food plots; or

(3) by distribution of feed material for livestock directly associated with bona fide agricultural practices.

(b) A person who has intentionally placed bait, food, or other edible material, including placing food within a bird feeder, to lure wildlife, as that term is defined to include birds and other animals under subdivision 4001(15) of this title, onto the property within the past 30 days shall be prohibited from taking a bear doing damage under the authority set forth in section 4827 of this title. The Commissioner or his or her designee may issue an order requiring a person to remove or contain the bait, food, or edible material if the placing of bait or food results in the feeding of a bear.

(c) As used in this section, “bait, food, or other edible material” means fruit, grain, salt, grease, garbage, or other materials intended to feed or lure wildlife. (Added 2013, No. 78, § 17.)

(https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/10/113/04827a)

Annotated

10 V.S.A. App. § 7. Bear Management Rule

1.0 Authority

1.1 This rule is adopted pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4081(a). In adopting this rule, the Fish and Wildlife Board is following the policy established by the General Assembly that the protection, propagation, control, management, and conservation of fish, wildlife and fur-bearing animals in this state is in the interest of the public welfare and that the safeguarding of this valuable resource for the people of the state requires a constant and continual vigilance.

1.2 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4082, this rule is designed to maintain the best health, population and utilization levels of the black bear population.

1.3 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4084, this rule establishes season and possession limits for black bear and prescribes the manner and means of taking black bears.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this regulation is to establish seasons for the taking of black bear, to establish legal means or methods of taking black bears, and to establish limits on the number of black bears to be taken annually.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 "Accompany" for the purposes of hunting bear with dogs means that:

a) A Sub-permittee engaged in the control, handling, transporting or intercepting of Department registered dogs while hunting with dogs, shall be under the under the express direction of the permit holder, and

b) A Sub-permittee who harvests a black bear shall be under the direct control and supervision of the bear dog permit holder, including the ability to see and communicate with each other without the aid of artificial devices such as radios or binoculars, except for medically necessary devices such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.

3.2 “Bait” means ~~as~~ any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any other wildlife.

Annotated

3.3 “Baited area" means an area where any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any wildlife, has been placed or deposited including, but not limited to, bird feeders.

3.4 “Bear Dog Permit” or “Permit” means a permit issued by the Commissioner to a person who wishes to hunt, pursue or take black bear with the aid of dogs.

3.5 “Commissioner” means the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.6 “Control of Dog/Dogs” means the transportation, loading or unloading of dogs from vehicle(s); the handling, catching, restraining or releasing dogs; and the use of telemetry/GPS to locate or track dogs.

3.7 “Department” means the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.8 "Department Registered Dog" means a dog bearing a numbered identification dog-tag (Department Registration Dog-Tag) approved or issued by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~, with the permit holder’s bear dog permit number and a number one through six.

3.9 “Hunting with Dogs” for the purposes of this rule means that one or more dog(s) with Department ~~Registered~~ Registration Dog-Tags are on the ground whether in pursuit of a black bear or not.

3.10 “Legal means” or “Legal method” means the taking of a black bear by muzzleloader, rifle, handgun, archery equipment, or crossbow when authorized.

3.11 “Pack of Dogs” means one to six dogs, acting as a unit during the pursuit of black bear.

3.12 “Sub-Permittee” means any person with a valid Vermont hunting license designated by the bear dog permit holder to assist or take a bear with the aid of dogs, in accordance with written authorization issued by the Department.

3.13 “Relaying Dogs/Packs” means the removal and replacement of one or more ~~dog or~~ dogs to the trail of a bear to the original pack of dogs once the pursuit has begun. If the hunting or pursuit of a black bear commences with fewer than six dogs in the original Pack of Dogs, the addition of a dog or dogs shall not be considered relaying, provided that no more than the same six dogs are

Annotated

part of a single Pack of Dogs during the hunting, pursuing or taking of a black bear.

3.14 "Bear Tag" means a document issued by the Department authorizing the taking of a black bear in the current season.

3.15 "Unregistered Dog" means a dog that does not have a valid Department Registration Dog-Tag as described in 3.8.

4.0 Seasons and Shooting Hours

4.1 Early and Late Season

a) **Early Season:** For Vermont Residents: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.
For Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.
For Non-resident Bear Dog Permit Holders: The early black bear season shall be open to Non-Resident bear dog permit holders on September 15 and not before.

b) **Late Season**: For Vermont Residents and Nonresidents: The first day of the Regular Deer season through the ~~second Sunday of the Regular Deer Season~~last day of the December muzzleloader season, as defined in 10 App. V.S.A. § 37.

4.2 Shooting hours: One half hour before sunrise until one half hour after sunset.

5.0 Tags and Bag Limit

5.1 To take a black bear during the Early Season, a person must, in addition to having a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license, possess an Early Season Bear Tag issued separately by the Department.

5.2 To take a black bear during the Late Season, a person must have a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license.

5.3 A person shall not harvest more than one black bear per calendar year, not to include animals taken pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4827, unless the Board determines a second bear may be taken during the calendar year within specified WMUs, based on the recommendations of the Department. To take a second bear, a person must purchase a Second Bear Tag issued by the

Annotated

Department. A second bear may be taken during either the early or late season, and only within the WMUs specified by the Board.

6.0 **The taking of bear with the aid of dogs**

6.1 Licenses and Permits

Any person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting License, use only Department Registered Dogs and possess ~~a~~ valid Department-issued bear tags. In addition, the person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid bear dog permit or accompany a bear dog permit holder. The permit shall be carried at all times by the permittee while hunting with dogs or taking black bear and exhibited to a game warden, landowner, or law enforcement officer upon demand.

6.2 A person shall not take a black bear into his/her actual possession except by killing the bear by legal means or methods.

a) A person taking black bear with the use of a bow and arrow or crossbow shall, upon demand of a game warden or other law enforcement personnel, show proof of having a prior archery license, or of having passed a bow hunter education course in Vermont, another state or a province of Canada approved by the Commissioner.

6.3 Dogs and Packs

a) A person shall not take black bear with the aid of dogs unless the person is in control of the dog or dogs.

b) No person shall take a black bear with the aid of any Unregistered Dog. No person shall have an Unregistered Dog in his or her possession while hunting, pursuing or taking a black bear.

c) A person hunting ~~with dogs~~, pursuing, and taking black bear with the aid of dogs shall attach a Department Registration Dog-Tag and a metal identification name plate with the person's name, address and telephone number to the dog's collar.

d) A person taking a black bear with the aid of dogs shall only take a black bear with a Pack of Dogs as defined in this rule. No person shall pursue, hunt, or take black bear by Relaying Dogs/Packs.

Annotated

e) Two or more permit holders may hunt together and combine Department Registered dog(s) to form a Pack of Dogs. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not take black bear with the aid of more than six dogs combined forming a single Pack of Dogs. Once hunting with dogs commences, dogs not on the hunt shall be restrained in the dog box or inside the vehicle. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not possess any Unregistered Dogs while hunting, pursuing or taking black bear.

7.0 Prohibitions

7.1 No person shall knowingly place bait to attract black bear for the purposes of allowing a bear dog to catch/strike the scent of a black bear. No person shall take bear by knowingly using bait or a baited area.

7.2 A person shall not advertise, barter, exchange goods or services, or otherwise sell the use of a dog or dogs for the purpose of taking any black bear.

7.3 While hunting with dogs, no person shall have in their possession an Unregistered Dog while possessing Department Registered dogs.

7.4 It shall be a violation for a Vermont resident to apply for a bear dog permit for the purpose of allowing a nonresident bear dog owner to take bear in Vermont with the aid of dogs.

7.5 No person shall hunt black bear with a bow and arrow or crossbow if the arrow or bolt has an arrowhead that measures less than seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point or that has less than two sharp cutting edges.

8.0 Reporting

8.1 The black bear carcass shall be field dressed prior to reporting.

8.2 Upon request of a Game Warden, the person harvesting the bear and the permit holder shall show and return to the kill site with a Game Warden.

8.3 All bear harvests shall be reported to a game warden, official Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~ Reporting Station, or a person designated by the Commissioner within 48 hours. If a bear is taken with the aid of dogs, ~~T~~the person who harvested the bear and the bear dog permit holder must both be present to legally report the harvest. ~~If the bear dog permit holder harvested the bear, only he or she must be present when reporting the harvest.~~

Annotated

8.4 It shall be unlawful to provide false information when reporting a black bear taken with the aid of dogs.

8.5 The fine, points and any other penalty for any violation of this subsection 8 shall be assessed to the violator and in addition, to the permit holder if the violator is not the permit holder.

9.0 Biological Collection

9.1 Any person who harvests a black bear shall collect a premolar tooth and submit the tooth to a game warden, official Fish and Wildlife Department Reporting Station, or to a person designated by the Commissioner to receive the biological collection, within 48 hours of taking the bear.

9.2 Unless otherwise specified by statute, the failure to collect and submit a black bear tooth shall not result in license suspension points and shall be considered a minor violation subject to a civil fine.

Fish and Wildlife Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, June 17, in the VTrans Dill Building, 2178 Airport Rd, Barre, VT 05641. A recording of the meeting is available on the department's YouTube channel.

Agenda

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (May 20, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. Petition from Andrew Phelan Re Prohibiting Taking of Sow with Cubs
4. Black Bear Rule – Department Comments, Board Discussion, Potential First Vote
5. Commissioner's Update

Board Members Present: Nicholas Burnham, Jeffrey Corey, Richard Craig, Beth Deimling, Heather Furman, Ryan Kilborn, Paul Noel (Chair), Robert Patterson, Jon Valsangiacomo, Martin Van Buren

Virtual: David Deen, Neal Hogan

Department Staff Present: Commissioner Jason Batchelder, Chief Operating Officer Andrea Shortsleeve, General Counsel Hannah Smith, Wildlife Division Director John Austin, Black Bear Project Leader Jaclyn Comeau, Game Warden Colonel Justin Stedman, Wildlife Management Program Manager David Sausville, Planner & Analyst Christopher Saunders, Public Information Officer Joshua Morse, Game Warden Lieutenant Mike Scott, Senior Game Warden Ethan Coffey, Perennial Intern Maddie Tencza, Principal Assistant Abigail Connolly

Virtual: Information Program Manager Megan Duni, Information Specialist John Hall

Members of the Public Present: Chris Pritchard, Kevin Lawrence, Sarah Gillen, Dennis Fournier, Pat Rayta, Bert Sali, Sophie Bowater, Camilla Bowater, Katie Bearmart, Michael Bowater, Pam Perry, Linda Cacupardo, Fran Mckensey, Andy Phelan, Rod Coronado, Nancy Milholland, Sarah Shrewe, Dennis Boggs, Fred Schroeder, Aidan Fletcher, Sarah Gorsline, Maddie Tencza, Mary Brown, Mike Covey

Virtual: Brenna Galdenzi, Lisa Jablow, Rocky Bunnell, Ann McCann, Bruce, Alyssa Bernett, David Kelley, Barbara Felitti, Vanessa Kranz, Devin Brennan, Paul Collodi, Jordan Schroeder, Chanda, Madeline Motta, Karen C, N. Norland, Mary Richards, Beth, M. E. Lawlor, Jonas Schroeder, Daniel Solomon, Lisa Vear, Lance Polya, Patricia Hunt, Bob Galvin, Karen McKnight, Maya Balassa, Kristen Cameron, Patricia Hunt, Al Crist

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Board Member Patterson moved to approve the May 20, 2026 meeting minutes. Board Member Van Buren seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes (12-0).

Public Comment Period

Kevin Lawrence, Newbury, regarding his black bear petition, the Department of Fish & Wildlife, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and a second bear tag
Sarah Gillen, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs and a second bear tag
Bert Saldi, Barre, regarding the black bear regulations
Sophie Bowater, Middlesex, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and a second bear tag
Pam Perry, Plainfield, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs and protecting hibernating bears
Linda Cacupardo, Sheffield, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs and the extension of the black bear hunting season
Andy Phelan, Fayston, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Rod Coronado, Orange, regarding the Fish & Wildlife Board, the extension of the black bear hunting season, a second bear tag, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Sarah Shrewe, regarding educating the public and hunters and hounds scenting bears in dens
Dennis Boggs, regarding killing bears in dens and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Fred Schroeder, Bristol, regarding bears in dens, the early bear season, and the panfish regulations
Sarah Gorsline, Grand Isle, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs, the extension of the black bear hunting season, a second bear tag, bears denning in late November, and addressing human-bear conflicts by changing human behavior and legislation for bear proof dumpsters
Pat Rayta, Barre, regarding bear baiting, the extension of the black bear hunting season, a second bear tag, and protecting sows with cubs with bear baiting
Mike Covey, regarding a second bear tag, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Dennis Hill, Middlesex, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Barbara Felitti, Huntington, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs and the extension of the black bear hunting season
Lisa Jablow, Brattleboro, regarding the extension of the black bear hunting season and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Vanessa Kranz, Bethel, regarding the Board's decision on not introducing a bear baiting season, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs, and that there is no prohibition on killing bears in dens
Devin Brennan, South Royalton, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Mary Richards, Cornwall, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs and the extension of the black bear hunting season
Bruce, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs, a second bear tag, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and that there is no prohibition on killing bears in dens

Jordan Schroeder, Bristol, regarding the Fish & Wildlife Board Member Deen's comment at the May 2026 meeting in response to statements made by a citizen during the public comment period, and expressing the opinion that Board Member Deen's comment was inappropriate and he should be removed from the Board. Mr. Schroeder also commented on the panfish regulations
Bob Galvin, Bolton, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs, a second bear tag, and consideration for other options for addressing human-bear conflicts
Madeline Motta, Lamoille County, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Kristen Cameron, Burlington, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and a second bear tag
Jonas Schroeder, regarding the extension of the black bear hunting season and not allowing bears to be hunted in dens
Karen C, Hyde Park, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Alyssa Bernett, Lamoille County, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs and protecting denning bears
Maya Balassa, Burlington, regarding the extension of the black bear hunting season, a second bear tag, prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs, and education
David Kelley, Greensboro, regarding prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs

The recording of the public comments and the meeting can be viewed here.

Petition from Andrew Phelan Re Prohibiting Taking of Sow with Cubs

Andrew Phelan presented on his petition advocating for the regulation of taking sows with cubs. He addressed concerns that have been raised about prohibiting the taking of a sow with cubs. His petition is included below. Board Member Valsangiacomo asked Andrew Phelan about using the words "intentionally" or "knowingly" in the rule language, and Board Member Hogan commented on how this type of regulation could be effective.

Black Bear Rule – Department Comments, Board Discussion, Potential First Vote

John Austin thanked the Board for their work and discussions on this topic, asked for feedback and any opportunities for support from the department that the Board identifies, explained that the department had gathered and provided the Board information on regulations prohibiting the hunting of a sow and/or cubs in other states and provinces, detailed what the department had presented to the Board in February 2026, summarized what occurred at the last Board meeting in May 2026, and summarized what the department will offer to the Board at the current meeting.

Jackie Comeau reviewed the two primary recommendations from the department after considering many regulatory options carefully: to extend the black bear hunting season to the end of the regulated deer season and to allow the harvesting of a second bear in certain WMUs to be decided by the Board each year. The department recommended combining the early and late bear

seasons (that run consecutively), requiring a bear tag for the combined season, and a second bear tag in the approved WMUs. Jackie Comeau provided background on why an early bear season was created and the need to track how many people participate in bear hunting. The presentation is included below.

The Board Members asked questions about the proposed black bear season, when to allow hunters to purchase a second bear tag, the date the black bear hounding season ends and whether it goes into rifle season, the Commissioner's authority to set the black bear hounding season dates in the permits, and the dates of the early and late bear seasons. The Board Members discussed the pros and cons of charging for a five-dollar bear tag during a combined season. The Board Members asked Jackie Comeau questions about when bears hibernate, what happens with hounds and denning bears, what percentage of the bears are harvested by hunters with hounds, whether bears go back to the same dens, how long a bear's scent can be detected by a hound, how long the extension of the black bear season is proposed for, and whether bears will stayed denned.

The Board recessed at 7:10 pm and returned at 7:38 pm.

General Counsel Hannah Smith reviewed the proposed black bear rule language from the department and the highlighted changes from the May 2026 meeting. The proposed language is included below. The Board Members asked questions about the second bear tag.

The Board Members discussed the bear hounding permits with the dates of the bear hounding season authorized by the Commissioner per statute and whether to set a date in the black bear rule.

Board Member Van Buren moved to end the black bear hounding season nine days into the regular deer rifle season, which is the second Sunday of the regular deer season. Board Member Patterson seconded the motion. Board Member Furman made a friendly amendment to add a date certain. The Board discussed. Board Member Furman retracted the amendment. General Counsel Hannah Smith clarified that the motion is to end the bear hounding season the second Sunday after the start of deer rifle season. The Board voted to approve the motion (11-1), with Board Member Valsangiacomo voting no.

The Board Members and department discussed combining the early and late bear season and how the tags would work. Board Member Corey moved to approve the proposed language in Section 4.1 which defines the black bear hunting season dates: For Vermont Residents and Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1st through the last day of the regulated deer hunting season. Board Member Hogan seconded the motion. General Counsel Hannah Smith clarified that this would eliminate the early and late season and extend the combined season. Board Member Deen expressed opposition to extending the black bear hunting season. The Board voted to approve the motion (9-2), with Board Members Deen and Deimling voting no.

The Board Members and department discussed allowing for a second bear tag, including the fee to be charged for a second tag, and that the WMUs it would be allowed in would be approved by the Board yearly. Board Member Martin Van Buren moved to charge five dollars for the first bear tag and five dollars for the second bear tag and approve the proposed language in Sections 5.1 and 5.3: 5.1 To take a black bear during the Bear Season, a person must, in addition to having a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license, possess a Bear Tag issued separately by the Department. 5.3 A person shall not harvest more than one black bear per calendar year, not to include animals taken pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4827, unless the Board determines a second bear may be taken during the calendar year within specified WMUs, based on the recommendations of the Department. To take a second bear, a person must purchase a Second Bear Tag issued by the Department. A second bear may be taken during either the bear season, and only within the WMUs specified by the Board. Board Member Corey seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

Chris Saunders presented information gathered on regulations in other states and provinces prohibiting the shooting of sows with cubs and/or cubs. The spreadsheet and presentation are included below. Colonel Justin Stedman shared some anecdotal information about what other warden services have experienced. The Board Members discussed protentional language for prohibiting the intentional hunting of a sow with cubs, how it would be enforced, when bears move in groups, the prosecution process, and public input in the rulemaking process. Board Member Deen moved to approve the prohibition in section 7.6: Except as permitted pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4827, no person shall intentionally take a sow accompanied by a cub or cubs. Board Member Valsangiacomo seconded the motion. The Board Member discussed different language for the word “accompanied.” The Board voted to approve the motion (12-0).

Board Member Valsangiacomo moved to approve the first vote on the Black Bear Rule and move forward with the rulemaking process. Board Member Burnham seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the motion (12-0).

General Counsel Hannah Smith reviewed the next steps for the rulemaking process.

Commissioner’s Update

Commissioner Batchelder announced that the Governor’s Office will be announcing the two new Board Members soon. General Counsel Hannah Smith reviewed the recent Vermont Supreme Court decision in the appeal of the Furbearer Rule (10 App. V.S.A. Sec. 44). The Court upheld the rule as adopted by the Board, and it remains in effect. Board Member Burnham asked that the previous Board Members who worked on the Furbearer Rule be notified of the decision. John Austin gave an update about the delay from the Federal Government on the waterfowl seasons framework and the risk that if it is not in place Vermont may not be able to have waterfowl hunting this year. Commissioner Batchelder gave an update about the miscellaneous tax bill, congratulated Board Member Paul Noel on being appointed as the new Chair of the Board, and announced that James Brady is the new Fisheries Director for the department.

Board Member Valsangiacomo spoke about the recent article on the VT ANR Lands Management Planning Rule.

Chair Paul Noel spoke about opening the Furbearer Rule to correct an error in the language regarding the use of baited body grip traps on land.

General Counsel Hannah Smith and the Board spoke about having a special meeting in July to hold a second vote on the four rules that will be open for public comment: Reporting Big Game, Tagging Big Game, Bow and Arrow and Crossbow Standards, and Leashed Tracking Dogs.

Motion To Adjourn:

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:11 pm.

Date: June 2, 2026
From: Andy Phelan, Fayston, VT
To: Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board ("Board") - sent to each Member's ANR email address
Cc: Vermont Dept. of Fish & Wildlife ("DFW"): J. Batchelder, *Comm.*, J. Comeau, *Black Bear Proj. Leader*, J. Austin, *Wildlife Div. Dir.*, D. Sausville, *Wildlife Mgmt. Program Mngr*
Subject: **Petition to be Heard by the Board on Pending Proposed Change to the Bear Regulations to Prohibit the Deliberate Harvest of Female Black Bears With Cub(s)**

This Petition requests a brief period – just 15 minutes – to present to the Board at its June 17 meeting (and at the Board's discretion, any additional time to answer Board member questions before a vote on the issue), the main points of my 2023 Petition, DFW's response, and responses to the several concerns that DFW and some Board members have raised – or that the Board may want to raise going forward – concerning adoption of a regulation that prohibits the intentional harvest of female black bears with cubs.

The basis for this request is simple. It can help the Board thoroughly and thoughtfully address this issue, which is of significant public and wildlife management importance to the DFW, the Board, and the people of Vermont (hunters and non-hunters). The significance and importance of this issue was made very clear at the May 20 Board meeting, and came in the form of numerous comments from the public (in writing and submitted electronically), from the in-person and online attendance at that meeting of an extremely and unusually large number of constituents, and from comments made by Board members and DFW officials.

I started this discussion in 2023, became well-informed about it through extensive research and thought, and submitted detailed information about it, and remain informed on the issue. My 2023 and 2026 submittals identify the principle issues and anticipate and answer the few reservations usually raised about such a rule change. I invite questions so the issues can be thoroughly examined.[1]

The two-minute public comment period provided for general comments in ordinary circumstances is simply not enough to address this issue adequately and fairly, as shown by the detail in my submissions. Nor does it allow for the Board members to pose questions to me about that detail. Indeed, at the May 20 Board meeting, two directors mentioned my petition directly – and me by name. But I had no opportunity to correct or explain points that I believe would resolve concerns I heard, including answers in the submissions themselves. I have no problem with such questions or even warranted criticism, but it is only fair to allow the petitioner to respond, whether to clarify, correct, or even acknowledge a point.

The issue right now before the Board in 2026 is the same as raised and thoroughly addressed in my 2023 Petition and in DFW's October 2023 and 2026 submissions to the Board. DFW has been given more than ample time to address it, and kicking it down the road for later assessment is unwarranted. There is no reason for delay or putting this issue off again – perhaps for years, as almost happened late in the 4-hour May 20 meeting. The only difference this time is that it was DFW in February 2026 that essentially raised my the

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[1]The Commissioner's Office wrote on May 19 that it had distributed to each Board member my May 18, 2026 distillation memo along with (1) my 3/3/2023 Petition; (2) DFW's 10/18/2023 Recommendation/Response to that Petition; and (3) my 10/18/2023Response to the DFW's Recommendation.

exact same substance as my petition before DFW inexplicably (to many, including the public) attempting to abandon it. But several Board members moved and voted to keep alive and discuss the sow/cubs rule change.

Nothing material about the issue has changed since I submitted it in 2023 and the DFW responded to it, except that in 2026 DFW acknowledged that the education efforts adopted instead of the rule change failed in the three hunting seasons since the Board denied my petition.

One thing that has changed, and materially, is the constitution of the Board. Only six (6) of the fourteen (14) Board members who heard and voted for education instead of for my Petition remain on the Board. More than a 50% turnover. Six new members and two vacant seats provide an additional and significant reason to grant this petition for me to be heard. It is only fair to all Vermonters – hunters and non-hunters alike, all of whom are the Board's constituents – that the Board members who joined after October 2023 have the opportunity to fully and fairly determine this important issue DFW raised in 2026 that is virtually identical to what was raised in 2023.

Of the hundred or more public comments sent to DFW and Board members, and of the 2-minute comments made by in-person and virtual attendees during the May 20 Board meeting, every single one that addressed DFW's recommendation to prohibit the intentional harvest of female black bears with cub(s) supported it. Yet DFW tried to drop that recommendation.

When a Board member asked DFW to explain whether and why it was dropping the recommendation, the Commissioner's answers only underscore the need for the Board to address it, now. (His comments appear on the video at hour/tape-counter 03:10 to 03:19.) Among the Commissioner's words were the following, with which I fully agree:

- The intentional harvest of sows with cubs is "unconscionable."
- "A lot of people are looking for leadership around this issue."
- "There is a significant portion of our credibility as a Department and the Board that relies on how people perceive our ability to manage something that might not be a biological need" that we do for "social reasons" such as we do socially for spike horns.
- The Department feels pressures "from the legislature … the hunters, the non-hunters, the advocates, the wildlife lovers, that is Vermonters in general. That is probably most important."
- "I know that the Department could likely manage it."
- "I know that there is a significant portion of society that would love to see this. I feel like we could manage it"

In his statements, the Commissioner raised, but did not address, issues that I have addressed in my petition submittals and am fully prepared to respond to the Board about. These include:

- The erroneous notion that a well-intended hunter who mistakenly shoots a sow bear with cubs is a "terrible person" or even a target of the rule change.

- That deliberately killing sow bears with cubs so that the cubs will die is not a desired or acceptable form of responsible population management.

- That hunters feed families with bear meat; true and fine, but it should not deliberately include the meat of sows with cubs any more than a deer hunter would harvest a doe with a speckled fawn.

I am also prepared to address and respond to concerns raised by Board members at the May 20 Board meeting. These include the following, and anything else Board members might ask:

- That wardens and Vermont should be able to prosecute hunters like the one in Stowe last October who worked in a condo development where everyone saw a mother with multiple cubs (as many as 5) all summer, then about the first week of hunting season, he brought his rifle to work and shot her, posting the kill a short time later on social media.

- Wardens should have the tools – a law prohibiting killing female bears with cubs – to prosecute hunters like the one in the Mad River Valley unwittingly captured on a security camera shooting a mother bear near a house in the presence of her cubs, one of which was found dead from exposure and starvation just weeks later.

- Honest mistakes are not the target and will not be prosecuted. The rule would not be "feel good" – it would be enforced through the discretion of trained law enforcement (wardens) exercising their discretion on such "intent" determinations virtually every day on the job. The fact that 37+ states and 9 Canadian provinces have such rules against killing mother bears with cubs and have enforced them for many decades demonstrates that there is no enforcement problem.

- That there is a problem that needs to be addressed, that it has near-universal support, and that the mere passage of the rule change will have the salutary effect of preventing ethical and law-abiding hunters from deliberately shooting female bears with cubs – all consistent with DFW's existing educational efforts that recommend that female bears with cubs not be harvested – in direct conflict with the existing Vermont law that makes such killings legal.

[End – June 2026 Phelan Petition to be Heard/Bear Reg/IntHarvFemCub]

Date: March 8, 2023

To: Board of Directors, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

From: Andrew C. Phelan

Cc: Catherine Gjessing, General Counsel, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept.
Christopher Herrick, Commissioner, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept.
Jaclyn Comeau, Black Bear Project Leader, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept.
Andrew Timmins, Game Programs Supervisor, Bear Project Leader, NH Fish & Game
Ben Kilham, Kilham Bear Center, Lyme, New Hampshire

Subject: **Petition For the Department to: (1) Pass a Regulation that Prohibits the Deliberate Killing of black bear Sows with Cubs; and (2) Require Bear Education for Hunters As a Condition to Obtain a Bear Hunting License**

Introduction

On an October evening in 2022, a video camera on a front porch in the Mad River Valley captured a black bear mother with two cubs, about 8 months old, as they crossed a field to feed under an apple tree. They fed for a while, the cubs played. Close together, they were clearly a family group. Something caused the sow to try to take her cubs to safety. Together, they moved off-screen to the left. A hunter entered from the right, crouching and stalking them. On video, he shot the mother bear and dragged her body away behind his truck. Three weeks later, a neighbor walking in nearby woods found one of her cubs starved to death near a stream, with no signs of dismemberment or injury. When she returned several days later, its body had been moved and scavenged. By the time I was shown the site a month later, all that remained were tufts of fur and black hair. The other cub was never seen again and likely suffered the same fate.

I do not oppose ethical and humane hunting. What happened here was neither. Deliberately killing a mother with cubs is cruel. In most cases, and as clearly demonstrated here, it leaves the orphaned cubs extremely vulnerable to suffering a prolonged and painful death from exposure, starvation, or predators. A regulation that bars deliberately killing mother bears with cubs, together with mandatory bear education that includes cub dependence and other salient bear/cub information would, every year: (1) spare dozens of helpless cubs the cruelty and pain the cub here suffered; (2) require no substantial expenditure of money or time; and (3) likely have broad support across Vermont, from both hunters and non-hunters alike.

Discussion

A. The Department's "recommendation" against killing mothers with cubs does not protect vulnerable cubs.

Assuming this killing was unlawful, I researched the topic. Although numerous states prohibit the deliberate killing of mothers with cubs, Vermont is not one of them. The Department's statements and literature, however, already seem to support a prohibition against killing sows with cubs. A heading in Vermont's 2022 bear hunting pamphlet said, "Don't Shoot Sows With Cubs," followed by text that the Department

> "recommends not shooting sows accompanied by cubs or a bear that is part of a group of bears as bears seen together in the fall are most likely a female accompanied by her cubs."

Other text urges hunters to be ethical and humane, including to spare sows because the "cubs are still dependent on their mothers this time of year and will stay with her until the following spring." These recommendations, however, are readily disregarded by hunters. The Mad River Valley hunter showed nothing but contempt for the Department's recommendations and appeal to humane hunting. As long as it remains legal, such hunters will continue these killings.

The Department has no idea how many other hunters deliberately kill mothers with cubs each year or how many cubs suffer the same fate as the Mad River Valley cub. The Department does not track that information and likely has no reliable way to do so. It happens far more frequently that any of us would like to admit. Numerous publications across the country, year after year, identify hunter killings as either the top or a top cause of orphaned cubs, often followed by vehicle strikes, dispatch of nuisance bears, and den disruption.

The Board can and should pass a hunting regulation to prohibit these killings. The Department is responsible for humanely managing Vermont's wildlife for all Vermonters. It should not cede this key responsibility by leaving the killing of mother bears to the discretion of hunters. Passing this regulation would also correct an omission necessary to ensure compliance with Vermont's bear quota. Vermont law allows hunters to kill only one bear per year. Allowing hunters to deliberately kill mothers with cubs sanctions violations of this limit. A cub is a bear. Killing the mother makes it very likely that her cubs will also die. Killing the mother causes not just her death, but the death of two or more bears, depending on the size of her litter. That the hunter did not also shoot the cubs does not render them any less dead. Killing the mother directly caused each additional cub's death.

B. The proposed regulation would have immediate effect and require no significant resources or time.

The Department's black bear hunting reports note that, in 2020 and 2021, Vermont hunters killed 459 and 355 sow bears, respectively, for an average of 407 per year. Even conservatively assuming that just 15% of the sows had first-year litters of only 2 cubs each, means more than 120 cubs every year (on average) are exposed to suffering the same fate as the Mad River Valley cub. Sparing these cubs that cruelty would require no new, expensive, or time-consuming initiative. It may even save resources spent rescuing even the few cubs that Vermonters find orphaned after their mothers were shot. Most of those orphans will die alone and unnoticed off in the woods. The regulation would also save resources of rehabilitators like the Kilham Bear Center, which are already swamped by too many orphaned cubs.

Saving so many cubs annually would be achieved simply by passing the regulation. This is because the vast majority of law-abiding hunters will comply. In recent years, the Department has issued more than 12,000 bear-specific hunting permits and 80,000 general hunting permits that allow "opportunistic" bear hunting while targeting other species. Spread out across Vermont, it is inevitable that these many thousands of hunters will find many mother bears with cubs. With the regulation in place, the vast majority of these hunters, knowing it is illegal, will not kill those mother bears and will take more care to look for cubs nearby. All those cubs, left to be raised by their mothers, will enhance the diversity and health of the Vermont bear population by learning how to survive in the wild from their wild mothers and be less likely to become nuisance bears.

C. By passing the regulation, Vermont will join numerous other states, likely even a majority, that ban this practice.

The requested regulation is far from extreme. Indeed, it seems that Vermont is one of the few states that allows killing mother bears. Even in the limited time I had to survey other states, I found ten with long hunting traditions that explicitly prohibit killing mother bears with cubs: Montana, Idaho, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, West Virginia, California, Wisconsin, and Oregon. Alaska also prohibits these killings in most parts of the state. From this research, it appears that a majority of states, perhaps even most states that allow black bear hunting, prohibit the cruel practice of killing mothers with cubs. Vermont should join them.

D. Most Vermonters, hunters and non-hunters, likely would support this regulation.

I spoke with dozens of people from many walks of Vermont life while researching this petition and after publishing commentaries on the Mad River Valley killing in VTDigger, Front

Porch Forum, and the Valley Reporter. Without exception, every person with whom I spoke or who responded expressed disgust at the cruelty and lack of ethics this killing demonstrated. Significantly, many were hunters, including a member of this Department's Board. Without exception, every hunter told me that neither he nor any hunter he knew would have killed the sow. Even the owner of the business that hosts the game reporting station where this killing was reported told me he would support a regulation that bars deliberately killing mother bears with cubs. Sightings of mother bears with cubs are favored wildlife sightings for many Vermonters. They create lasting memories. Hunters are not immune from that reaction either. In researching this petition, I came across numerous blogs across the country where hunters wrote that, when they spotted a sow with cubs, they did not pull the trigger and, instead, took some time to enjoy watching the bear family, relieved that they had not fired. The only people who might oppose the regulation are the unethical hunters, whose input I trust the Department would not credit.

E. In tandem with the regulation, the Department should require bear-specific education in order to obtain any license that would allow targeted or opportunistic hunting of bears.

Hunters who are informed of the important reasons behind a regulation are more likely to comply with it and, importantly, will then be equipped to share that information and persuade other hunters to comply as well. This education will be useful in many ways, including to correct erroneous notions that most first-year orphaned cubs can survive without their mothers. It would help hunters avoid adverse bear interactions, by, for example, providing tips for safe interactions when hunters come across a sow with cubs (e.g., not getting between them; leaving the bears an escape route, etc.). It would provide training on specific things a prudent hunter does to check for cubs before shooting. It could include what Andrew Timmins, New Hampshire's Game Programs Supervisor and Bear Project Leader, recently told me: hunters spotting cubs should not be a significant problem, as some people may claim. By the time fall hunting season begins, the cubs are weaned and eat on their own, rather than suckling. So they are no longer stashed in trees while the sow goes off to feed. Rather, the family groups typically stay close together and feed together. This proximity was clearly displayed with the Mad River Valley bear and cubs on video. The hunter shot the sow with her cubs by her side.

F. Available facts, studies, expertise, and common sense indicate that most orphaned first-year cubs will die without their mothers.

As a matter of black bear biology and evolutionary development, cubs stay with their mothers for 18 months before separating. There is a natural reason that bears have evolved this

way: this period is needed for the cubs to grow and learn to survive while being protected from predators. Born in February at less than a pound, cubs need extended guidance and protection. They need time to learn to forage for food in different seasons, including when soft- or hard-mast is scarce. They need to learn how to avoid human food sources and traffic, how to build up fat reserves needed to survive hibernation, how to den, how to hibernate, and, critically, they need protection and help in their depleted condition when they emerge from their first hibernation and must find scarce early-spring food to survive.

As noted earlier, the Department's hunting pamphlet and website recognize first-year bear cubs' reliance on their mothers until their second spring. A Department bear biologist, Forrest Hammond, also recognized in a published study that black bear cubs need their mothers to survive through their first hibernation. Having tracked 17 mother/cub litters in this study over an extended period, Hammond noted that any black bear cubs that were "not present in the den with their mothers as yearlings were assumed to have died."[1]

Significant current knowledge about orphaned black bears and their survival capabilities comes from extensive hands-on work with orphaned bear cubs at the Kilham Bear Center ("**Kilham**") in New Hampshire.[2] For the past 30 years, Kilham has rehabilitated, and released orphaned black bear cubs from Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Kilham has released over 500 orphaned cubs back to the wild. Kilham does not return first-year cubs to the wild for the simple reason that they are not ready and would be unlikely to survive. Kilham releases them at about 18 months, in the spring after their first successful hibernation and after they have bulked up from hibernation depletion. This release age is no coincidence: it is the same age at which, in the wild, they are ready to live independently and separate from their mothers.[3]

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[1]Hammond, Forrest M., *Stratton Mountain black bear Study, The Effects of Resort and Residential Development on black bears in Vermont,* Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife Final Report (November 2002) at 11.

[2]Link: kilhambearcenter.org. Of particular interest is a recent (October 2022) New Hampshire Union Leader article on Kilham, which details the work of that Center and current orphan cub statistics, and identifies coordination efforts with the Department's bear and other wildlife staff.

[3]Bear cub rehabilitators are scarce. New England is fortunate to have Kilham, which grew out of Ben Kilham's concern for orphaned cubs. His Center survives on private donations. Food alone for each cub costs up to about $2,500. This figure does not include the substantial labor performed by the Kilham family. https://forestsociety.org/forest-journal-column/orphan-bear-cubs. Kilham can take in only a fraction of cubs orphaned each year. It already has too much work and too few resources to handle the volume of orphaned cubs in need, which in 2022 was projected to be over 100 orphaned cubs.

G. The notion that most orphaned first-year black bear cubs can survive without their mothers is based on flawed articles from decades ago that continue to be cited today, often inaccurately.

A common rationalization for the failure to prohibit killing mother bears with cubs is the flawed notion that most orphaned first-year black bear cubs 5 to 8 months of age readily survive on their own in the wild after they lose their mothers. For ease of reference, I will refer to this as the "**Broad Survival Notion.**" Although I looked for them, I found no recent or modern studies that support this Notion, apparently because such survival is very hard to study.

Recent orphaned black bear survival studies do exist, but they focus not on any release of first-year cubs, but, rather, on release of yearlings. Yearlings are cubs in their second year: they have come through their first full winter hibernation and are released at about 18 months. This appears to be the modern view and focus: that survival is far more likely for orphans released as yearlings and not in their first-year. *See* J. Clark, M. Pelton, B. Wear, D. Ratajczak, *Survival of Orphaned Black Bears Released in the Smoky Mountains* (2002); W. Smith, P. Pekins, A. Timmins, B. Kilham, *Short-term fate of rehabilitated orphan black bears released in New Hampshire* (2016).

With no recent study on the survivability of first-year cubs to fill the void, many people, including some wildlife authors, continue to rely on the same very old authorities as supposedly supporting the Broad Survival Notion. Two principal articles are cited time and again: A. Erickson, *The Age of Self-Sufficiency in the Black Bear* (1959) ("**1959 Erickson**"); and G. Alt & J. Beecham, *Reintroduction of Orphaned Black Bear Cubs in the Wild* (1984) ("**1984 Alt & Beecham**"). A third article is also often cited: N. Payne, *Unusual Movements of Newfoundland Black Bears* (1975) ("**1975 Payne**"). None of these articles, however, says that most orphaned black bear cubs will survive, nor do I think that their authors expected them to be so interpreted. But that seems to be what has happened. This has probably resulted from the fact that these articles, in the absence of anything more recent, have been cited time and time again without the people who cite them going back to carefully read these original works. As a result, they cite them, often innocently but nevertheless carelessly, as supposed proof for the Broad Survival Notion that most if not all 5 to 8 month first-year orphaned cubs can survive in the wild without their mothers.[4] The more these articles have been cited, the more widespread the Broad Survival

[4]An oft-cited publication by a Vermont bear biologist also repeats the Broad Survival Notion. C. Willey, *The Vermont Black Bear* (1976). Of course, he cites the 1959 Erickson article. *Id*. at 7 & 63. His recitation of this Notion is by rote, like so many other authors. Willey asserted the Notion of first-year orphan survivability from a mere 5 months of age as purported fact because he relied, innocently but erroneously, on the Erickson article. Willey is also incorrect in asserting that cubs as small as 18 pounds readily survive. He also bases this entirely on Erickson's article. Perhaps it can survive for 14 days

Notion has become despite its inaccuracy. But repeating a faulty Notion, no matter how many times, does not make it true.[5]

I do not claim to know more about bears than biologists or experienced wildlife professionals. But, as a lawyer who, for decades, handled litigation matters for the Justice Department and in private practice, a significant part of my work has involved assessing numerous expert reports prepared by professionals in various fields in order to determine whether what they did supported the opinions they asserted. I applied the same approach to a careful review of the three articles and found it clear that, in them, their own authors did not assert the Broad Survival Notion and the data they compiled also does not support that Notion. In Appendix A to this petition, I explain in detail my analysis of these articles. I summarize the salient parts of each and then explain how they do not support the Broad Survival Notion.

It is not disputed that some remarkable orphaned first-year cubs can survive on their own. For this to happen, however, requires the rare confluence of numerous favorable events, including: (1) a remarkable cub, the older and larger at the time it is orphaned the better; (2) readily available natural food, preferably with bumper crops of soft- and hard-mast; (3) unusual luck in avoiding or escaping predators, vehicles, and humans (including their trash); (4) the instinct to divine how and where to safely den to survive their first winter in hibernation; and (5) skills and luck to avoid predators and find scarce early-spring food when the cub emerges from hibernation in depleted physical condition. Because the confluence of all of these is so rare, the vast majority of orphaned first-year cubs die the same kind of death suffered by the Mad River Valley by a stream last October, mere weeks after the hunter killed its mother.

Conclusion

In only one sense can something positive come from the Mad River Valley hunter's killing the mother bear and dooming her cubs to suffer and die. He was unwittingly captured on video clearly and deliberately killing the mother bear in the immediate presence of her cubs and a Vermonter walking in nearby woods just a short time later happened across the dead, starved cub. Most hunting kills take place out in the woods where nobody sees them and only the hunter

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(Erickson's standard) or even somewhat longer, but modern bear experts can confirm that survival of such a small cub is extremely unlikely. Such small cubs are easy prey for Vermont carnivores like adult bears, coyotes, fisher cats, dogs, and even bobcats or large raptors, to say nothing of their greater likelihood to succumb to starvation or failed hibernation. Willey's publication contains a wealth of detailed, useful, and accurate black bear information, but his assertions about the likely survivability of most orphaned 5-7 month black bear cubs are incorrect.

[5]Some, such as unethical hunters or those who favor completely unrestricted hunting, have no interest in accuracy and will continue claiming, falsely, that these articles support the Broad Survival Notion.

knows what actually happened. And when hunters kill mothers with cubs, the fate of those cubs remains unknown but shrouded behind the Notion that first-year cubs readily survive on their own. The stark facts here contradict both aspects and identify a blind spot in our law that we should and must clear. Hunters do deliberately kill mothers with cubs. That is a fact. And most of their orphaned first-year cubs will die as a direct result. That also is a fact.

We now have the opportunity – really, the obligation – to re-examine both the failure to prohibit killing mothers with cubs and the validity of the flawed articles that have been used for decades to justify or rationalize that failure. Rote reliance on, or even exaggerated expansions of, these decades-old articles should end. Modern knowledge of black bear cub development among wildlife biologists and extensive and direct experience among cub rehabilitators contradicts the Broad Survival Notion and demonstrates that most first-year cubs need 18 months to grow and learn to survive independently.

The only rationale I can think of that would prompt the Board to not pass the requested regulation here is that the it does not consider cruel deaths each year of dozens of orphaned first-year cubs by predators, exposure, and prolonged starvation to be a sufficiently important public interest to address as part of its obligation to humanely manage wildlife for all Vermonters. If that is the case, it is very troubling and disappointing where the suffering and deaths of orphaned cubs is so easily preventable and results directly from activity that the Department currently endorses by allowing hunters to kill sows with cubs.

I hope that the Department considers this issue an important one. The 18 months that cubs need is unfortunate (for the cubs) and inconvenient (for the hunters inclined to deliberately kill their mothers) because this period will always span one bear-hunting season. But it is a minor inconvenience. The cubs really are helpless. They cannot fend for themselves and need protection. The least we should do as regulators charged with humanely managing vulnerable wildlife, is to prohibit these deliberate killings. This regulation can protect countless helpless and vulnerable cubs from the senseless suffering that we know the Mad River Valley cubs here experienced, and that uncounted others will experience as well.[6]

A.C.P.

[6] In Appendix B below, I respond to several potential other objections that some might raise to the proposed regulation. If those or any others appear to the Board to have significant merit that I have not addressed, please let me know. I am available to discuss this issue further.

APPENDIX A

Analysis of 1959 Erickson, 1985 Alt & Beecham, and 1975 Payne Articles

1. Summary of the Three Articles.

The 1959 Erickson Study. Erickson stated that the purpose of his study was to "report[] experiments to determine whether black bear cubs 5 to 8 months old can survive by themselves in Michigan's Upper Peninsula when released from steel traps … or when orphaned by hunters." He noted that, a "hunting season which permits killing the mother before the young become self-reliant necessarily results in the loss of her young as well." The standard for his opinion on survivability (he called it "self-reliance"), was whether the cubs survived for at least 14 days after release. He said, "Recoveries [i.e., killings or re-trappings] 2 weeks or longer after release were considered adequate evidence of self-sufficiency." The data upon which he based his opinion was as follows: he released 20 orphaned cubs and compared their "survival" against a control group of 12 cubs released with their mothers. Of the 20 orphaned cubs, 13 were never seen again, only 1 overwintered (shot at 391 days), 1 was re-trapped after 17 days and 5 were shot within 47, 54, 88, 102, and 117 days. Of the 12 control group cubs, 8 were never seen again, 3 were shot within 95 days and one was retrapped 348 days later.[7]

In addition, Erickson released one 5.25 month cub and one 6.5 month cub, each on a small uninhabited island (one had a Coast Guard station). A third cub released on one of the islands was shortly thereafter killed by a trapper. Erickson described the islands as having relatively poor natural food sources for bears and no other bears. When he returned to the islands the next July, he found recent evidence of the bear cubs on both islands, indicating that they had overwintered but one was shot that month as a nuisance to the Coast Guard station.

The 1984 Alt & Beecham Study. Alt and Beecham studied various ways to save orphaned cubs. These included, for example, rehabilitating cubs until they were 15-18 months before release and efforts to get other sows to foster orphans (such as by tossing them near or into natal dens, treeing natural cubs and adding the orphan to the tree before the mother returned). Relevant here, they also tried releasing first-year orphaned black bear cubs into the wild. Specifically, 23 cubs were held in captivity for 2-3 months before being released at "≥ 5 months of age." Given the stated release dates of June 17 and August 22, and using February 1

[7]Looking at these figures with so many orphaned first-year cubs being shot makes it clear that another significant danger orphaned cubs face is being mistaken for adult bears because, as orphans, they will move not as a family group and be recognizable as such and not shot – at least by ethical hunters, but as single bears more prone to be shot.

as the approximate birth date, the cubs must have ranged between 5.5 and 7 months at release. The authors defined success/survivability as follows:

> "Reintroductions of pen-reared orphans were classified as failures if cubs were found dead or if they became a chronic nuisance. They were classified as successful if the orphans were recaptured in non-nuisance situations after 30 days."

Of the 23 cubs: 14 were never seen again; 5 were deemed "successful" and 4 were deemed "failures." The "4 failures included 3 recoveries in nuisance situations soon after release and one that died of unknown causes within a week after release." The authors do not explain anything about the 5 they deemed "successful," such as the number of days before recapture, so we assume that, per the definition, that they were recaptured in non-nuisance situations after 30 days. They did not identify any that survived for any extended length of time, let alone any that survived overwintering to become yearlings.

The 1975 Payne Article. Payne did not conduct a study. Rather, he wrote a brief article on "unusual" travel by several black bears in Newfoundland. Two were caught and shipped to an island a considerable distance away but returned to the capture site. A third bear, with three cubs, also traveled a very long distance to return to her capture site, but returned with only two of her cubs. She was killed, presumably as a nuisance. Payne wrote that this sow's two cubs were recaptured a year later after again traveling great distances and observed that, as first-year orphans, they had successfully evaded predators, denned, and overwintered.

2. Observations about the Erickson, Alt & Beecham, and Payne Articles.

a. Defining "survival" or "self-sufficiency" as staying alive for merely 14 or 30 days is meaningless because it fails to account for the actual survival gauntlet that orphaned black bear cubs face from the time they are orphaned through their emergence from overwintering.

Successful "survival" is not reasonably or reliably projected by the fortuity that, for periods as short as 14 or 30 days, a few cubs can manage to find some food and avoid predators. Survivability must be examined for a much longer period because orphaned cubs must overcome many challenging obstacles to survival over the course of the many months into the spring after their first overwintering. These diverse and challenging obstacles do not last a mere 14-30 days. They last until an orphaned cubs would normally leave its mother naturally at 15-18 months. Alone with no guidance or protection, orphaned cubs must survive the starvation-exposure-carnivore gauntlet. For this entire time – not just 14-30 days, or even for a couple of months – orphans must forage for sufficient food to gain weight. They must do so across

increasingly difficult seasons: summer, fall, early winter (before hibernation) and early spring. They must do so in both high and low-mast years, and switch between foods in times of scarcity. For all those months while they search for food, they must also avoid carnivores (e.g., bears, coyotes, fisher cats, even unleashed dogs), vehicles, and human foods. Critically, they must gain sufficient mass and fat to hibernate successfully, so their food requirements are high. They must build functional dens that avoid collapse, flooding, etc., and stay warm through hibernation and avoid rapid energy depletion without the obvious benefit of their bulky mother's shared body heat. Then, upon emerging from hibernation in depleted physical condition, they must find scarce early spring food while again avoiding or fighting off hungry predators. Bear biologists recognize the early spring as "undoubtedly the most difficult time of year" for the cubs. C. Willey, *The Vermont black bear* (1976) at 9. None of this is captured by the almost nonsensical notion that survivability can be judged by survival for a mere 14 or 30 days. The role of the mother is to help her cubs through this lengthy survival gauntlet. An orphaned cub must survive that entire period alone.

Significantly, the Alt & Beecham article admits the critical need to survive overwintering. People who cite them for the Broad Survival Notion that cubs survive from a mere 5 months overlook that the authors explicitly recommended that orphaned cubs <u>not</u> be released before 15-18 months due to concern that, without their mothers, they would not be able effectively to forage for sufficient food. They made the following specific recommendation:

> "If releases are to be in remote areas, we recommend holding pen-reared bears until they are 15-18 months old, especially if there is a poor supply of natural foods during the summer and fall that they are cubs."

They do not define "remote" or say how it differs from other release sites. The only explanation I can think of for this is that they could mean that, in remote locations, human food sources will not be available to supplement natural forage. Well, all cub releases should be in "remote" locations because the last thing anyone wants is for them to (artificially) survive on human food, which will likely cause them to later require destruction as "nuisance" bears. In all events, it is very significant that, despite asserting that they would deem releases of bears at 5 months to be "successful" if those cubs were survived for a mere 30 or more days in non-nuisance situations, the authors explicitly recommend holding pen-reared cubs until they are 15-18 months old. Well, this recommendation trumps their "success" assertions at younger ages. After all, pen reared cubs at least have humans to help care for them. Orphaned cubs in the wild have nothing but themselves: no mothers and no humans.

Alt and Beecham's 15-18 month pre-release recommendation also not only identifies the extreme importance of good natural food supplies for survival, it also spans the overwintering period (usually month 12 to month 15 or 16), and the early-spring bulk up period, ending only at the 18th month at which non-orphaned black bears normally separate from their mothers. All of this further negates the Broad Survival Notion of cubs as young as 5-7 months and highlights the need to measure survivability through the age when cubs would normally leave their mothers at 18 months.[8]

b. If the correct survivability measuring period runs from each orphan's loss of its mother through overwintering, then both studies utterly fail to provide any basis for the Broad Survival Notion: across those two studies only a single cub survived that long.

In Erickson's mainland orphan cub study, there was only evidence that 1 of the 20 cubs overwintered. This yields a proven survival rate of just 5%. Even if we disregard the unknown fates of the 13 cubs, only 1 cub overwintered and the remaining 6 were shot or captured before winter, for a survival rate of a mere 14%. In their study, Alt & Beecham reported no evidence that any of the original 23 cubs, or even any of the 9 cubs that they deemed to be "successful" or "failures" ever overwintered. Whether we assess all 23 or just the 9, Alt & Beecham demonstrated an overwinter survival rate of 0%.

c. The unknown fates of numerous orphaned cubs in both the Erickson and Alt & Beecham studies undermine the assertion that those studies support the Broad Survival Notion.

Erickson did not know the fates of 65% (13 of 20) of the mainland orphaned cubs. Alt & Beecham did not know the fates of 60% (14 of 23) of the orphaned cubs. This may be because digital tracking was not available or not economical. Whatever the reason, it substantially undermines those studies. The unknown fates of so many missing cubs in studies where their

[8]This need to measure survivability through the overwintering months was also noted by a more recent first-year orphan black bear study. *See* L. Rogers, *Aiding the Wild Survival of Orphaned Bear Cubs,* USDA Forest Service (1992). In this study, Rogers claimed "successful overwinter survival" where 9 of 14 orphaned cubs older than 7-months survived their first full winter. The author readily admitted, however, that a "confounding factor in the high survival" rate in his study was the fact that all the cubs, even after being orphaned, "had access to supplemental food." In fact, they accessed the same human food sources that prompted the destruction of their mothers as nuisance bears. This negated his "survival" rate because, as he admitted, the cubs were far better able to survive because, due to the human food, they "grew more rapidly than cubs with mothers" and were not "wild" because they were essentially human-fed and not self-sufficient. They also were likely doomed as nuisance bears by their habituation to people and trash. Rogers' work did confirm a very important point: to accurately assess first-year survivability requires us to account for the period through overwintering.

fates were so critically important for the study itself, shows the methodologies wanting. After all, the only purpose of the studies was to see if the orphans could survive death from starvation, exposure, and predation without their mothers. But 27 cubs across the two studies simply disappeared. Common sense and the laws of probability given the myriad risks that faced these orphans would indicate that the most likely reason they went missing is because they died from the gauntlet of risks they faced all alone – risks that the control group cubs with their mothers did not face. In all events, that an equal percentage of cubs went missing from the control group is meaningless for proving any aspect of survivability.

d. Evidence that some first-year orphans overwintered shows that some can survive without their mothers, but does not even remotely support the Notion that most could survive

In his article, Payne identified two Newfoundland first-year orphaned cubs that overwintered and survived. This demonstrates that some first-year cubs can survive. Payne did not, however, extrapolate from this that such survivability is or could even be expected to be widespread. Further, combining Payne's 2 observed cubs with the ones shown to have overwintered in Erickson (3 of 22, including the two island cubs) and Alt & Beecham (0 of 23), yields a total of 5 cubs for which there is proof of overwintering from a combined group of 47, for an extremely low successful overwintering rate of just 10%, which does not support at all the Broad Survival Notion.

Payne's article is also useful in underscoring key capacities that must be learned or demonstrated in order to survive. He observed that the two cubs were able to build suitable dens, overwinter, and avoid mortality from encounters with grown bears and other predators. Two of those occur during the 12-15th month of a cub's life (denning and overwintering) the third occurs throughout all 18 months until the orphan would normally have left its mother. These observations from a wildlife biologist further support the notion that survivability assessments must measure survival capacity through overwintering into early spring.

Regarding Ericksons' two surviving overwintering cubs on the two islands, several survivability points are worth mentioning that weaken even that "proof" of survivability. The environments into which he placed them were artificial and lacked significant risks orphans face in the wild. First, both islands had no bears and, further, Erickson made no mention of any other potential predators. Adult bears are the prime predation danger to unrelated cubs. Second, the absence of other bears also meant that these cubs, each on a separate island, had no competition for any bear forage. Third, Erickson admitted that one of the cubs had to be killed as a yearling in early summer (July) as a nuisance to the Coast Guard station. This raises significant concern

that human food artificially contributed to the cub's survival through early spring. Erickson said that the Coast Guardsmen may have fed the bear, but he did not think so. Attraction to human food, however, is the principal reason bears become nuisances and need to be destroyed. Erickson did not disclose what made this bear a nuisance, but it likely was the most common reason: acclimation to human food sources.

A.C.P.

APPENDIX B

Responses to Other Potential Objections

Objection 1: We need to control the number of bears, there are too many.

Response: If the bear population is a problem, the solution is to adjust some other aspect of adult bear hunting, not to visit on helpless cubs prolonged and inhumane suffering and death from starvation, the elements, or predation.

Objecton 2: Hunter education is enough, there is no need to prohibit killing mothers with cubs.

Response: Education alone is not enough. The current law makes it legal to kill a mother with cubs. No amount of education will prevent unethical hunters from deliberately killing sows with cubs where that killing is legal and therefore permitted by the Department. The education is important as a supplement to the prohibition because it explains the rationale for the prohibition, which encourages compliance, and will teach ethical hunting, including the responsibility to check for cubs. It will also likely persuade previously uninformed hunters of the valid reasons for sparing the mothers and those hunters will spread that information to other hunters.

Objection 3: Most hunters would not kill a mother with cubs, so this is not needed.

Response: There are several responses to this. First, there is no data to support this assertion. The Department does not know, and cannot know, the number of mothers who are killed or the number of their cubs that starve or die from starvation, exposure, or predators.

Second, if killing a mother with cubs is wrong for all the reasons stated in the body of the petition, then there is no legitimate reason why such killings should not be illegal. If the Department continues to permit the deliberate killing of mothers, hunters will kill them.

Objection 4: The Department does not get reports of such killings so it is not a problem.

Response: First, all such killings – even if it were just a few each year – should be prohibited because they are cruel and unethical and cause the cubs painful suffering and death.

Second, the Department does not know how often this happens. Of the 814 sows taken by hunters in 2020 and 2021 combined, the Department has no idea how many were mothers or how many cubs were orphaned and died as a result. By the same token I have no data to prove exactly how often it happens or how many cubs suffered and died. We delude ourselves, however, if we say it is not a problem. With hundreds of sows harvested every year in Vermont coupled with the fact that hunters through the present know it is perfectly legal to kill mother bears, it is baseless, even reckless, to turn a blind eye and deny that it

happens far more frequently than we all would like. The killings are most often hidden from view off in the woods with no witnesses. The chance of again capturing such a killing on video, as we did here, and followed quickly by the discovery of the dead, starved cub is remote at best. But we have it now and that video, hopefully, has highlighted for all of us a blind spot in our hunting laws and management that we should now correct.

Objection 5: The cubs were big enough to survive, they were yearlings, they were all adults even though they were together.

Response: As explained in detail above, black bear cubs need to stay with their mothers for about 18 months for the protection and learning needed to survive. The no-kill prohibition needs to be black and white. It cannot leave gray areas for some hunters, who are about to take the shot, to rationalize the killing and kill the sow based on their own actual or feigned conception of cub survivability. A blurry and weak prohibition that leaves open the decision to shoot the sow based on one or another "exception" would substantially reduce the effectiveness of the regulation in protecting vulnerable cubs.

Objection 6: It could be too hard to enforce in individual cases, so it is not worth it.

Response: As explained at the start of the petition, the focus of the requested regulation is not enforcement in individual cases. It is much more far-reaching and important than the much narrower enforcement focus. The principal focus is to save cubs by the immediate impact the regulation will have on the thousands of Vermont hunters who come across mother bears with cubs. They will not take that shot because they are law-abiding and know that such killing is unlawful.

Even as to enforcement in individual cases, this objection fails. First, in some cases it would be very easy to enforce – the Mad River Valley hunter's killing of the mother clearly with her cubs was captured on videotape, for example. An illegal and gruesome killing of a mother bear and her cubs in their den was captured on wildlife video in Alaska recently, leading to convictions of both hunters. Second, the enforcement of that regulation will be no more difficult or different than the situation presented to game wardens and law enforcement every day as they enforce countless other laws. Exercising their discretion based on their investigation and the facts presented is what they are trained to do. Allowing such a cruel, unethical, and painful practice to continue against vulnerable cubs just because enforcing it might at times be inconvenient or difficult fails to pursue ethical and humane wildlife management.

A.C.P.



Black Bear Proposed Rule Change Recommendations

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
Jaclyn Comeau
06/17/26

Approaches Considered

- ❑ Establish a spring bear hunting season
- ❑ Establish a bear baiting season
- ❑ Extending the early bear season into August
- ❑ Registration of individual dogs on a bear dog permit
- ❑ Establish bag limits for bear dog permits
- ❑ Reciprocity for non-resident bear dog permits
- ❑ Allow online reporting of harvested bears
- ❑ Prohibit the intentional harvest of females accompanied by cubs

Recommended Regulation Changes

1. Extend the late bear season
   - Last day of regulated deer seasons (currently archery)
2. Allow for a second bear to be harvested
   - By WMU
   - Purchase additional tag
3. Combine Early and Late bear into one continuous season
   - Bear tag $5

Annotated

10 V.S.A. App. § 7. Bear Management Rule

1.0 Authority

1.1 This rule is adopted pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4081(a). In adopting this rule, the Fish and Wildlife Board is following the policy established by the General Assembly that the protection, propagation, control, management, and conservation of fish, wildlife and fur-bearing animals in this state is in the interest of the public welfare and that the safeguarding of this valuable resource for the people of the state requires a constant and continual vigilance.

1.2 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4082, this rule is designed to maintain the best health, population and utilization levels of the black bear population.

1.3 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4084, this rule establishes season and possession limits for black bear and prescribes the manner and means of taking black bears.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this regulation is to establish seasons for the taking of black bear, to establish legal means or methods of taking black bears, and to establish limits on the number of black bears to be taken annually.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 "Accompany" for the purposes of hunting bear with dogs means that:

a) A Sub-permittee engaged in the control, handling, transporting or intercepting of Department registered dogs while hunting with dogs, shall be under the under the express direction of the permit holder, and

b) A Sub-permittee who harvests a black bear shall be under the direct control and supervision of the bear dog permit holder, including the ability to see and communicate with each other without the aid of artificial devices such as radios or binoculars, except for medically necessary devices such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.

3.2 “Bait” means ~~as~~ any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any other wildlife.

Annotated

3.3 “Baited area" means an area where any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any wildlife, has been placed or deposited including, but not limited to, bird feeders.

3.4 “Bear Dog Permit” or “Permit” means a permit issued by the Commissioner to a person who wishes to hunt, pursue or take black bear with the aid of dogs.

3.5 “Commissioner” means the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.6 “Control of Dog/Dogs” means the transportation, loading or unloading of dogs from vehicle(s); the handling, catching, restraining or releasing dogs; and the use of telemetry/GPS to locate or track dogs.

3.7 “Department” means the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.8 "Department Registered Dog" means a dog bearing a numbered identification dog-tag (Department Registration Dog-Tag) approved or issued by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~, with the permit holder’s bear dog permit number and a number one through six.

3.9 “Hunting with Dogs” for the purposes of this rule means that one or more dog(s) with Department ~~Registered~~ Registration Dog-Tags are on the ground whether in pursuit of a black bear or not.

3.10 “Legal means” or “Legal method” means the taking of a black bear by muzzleloader, rifle, handgun, archery equipment, or crossbow when authorized.

3.11 “Pack of Dogs” means one to six dogs, acting as a unit during the pursuit of black bear.

3.12 “Sub-Permittee” means any person with a valid Vermont hunting license designated by the bear dog permit holder to assist or take a bear with the aid of dogs, in accordance with written authorization issued by the Department.

3.13 “Relaying Dogs/Packs” means the removal and replacement of one or more ~~dog or~~ dogs to the trail of a bear to the original pack of dogs once the pursuit has begun. If the hunting or pursuit of a black bear commences with fewer than six dogs in the original Pack of Dogs, the addition of a dog or dogs shall not be considered relaying, provided that no more than the same six dogs are

Annotated

part of a single Pack of Dogs during the hunting, pursuing or taking of a black bear.

3.14 "Bear Tag" means a document issued by the Department authorizing the taking of a black bear in the current season.

3.15 "Unregistered Dog" means a dog that does not have a valid Department Registration Dog-Tag as described in 3.8.

4.0 Seasons and Shooting Hours

4.1 For Vermont Residents and Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1st through the last day of the regulated deer hunting season. For Non-Resident bear dog permit holders, the season shall begin no earlier than September 15th. ~~Early and Late Season~~

~~a) **Early Season:** For Vermont Residents: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.~~

~~For Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.~~

~~For Non-resident Bear Dog Permit Holders: The early black bear season shall be open to Non-Resident bear dog permit holders on September 15 and not before.~~

~~b) **Late Season**: For Vermont Residents and Nonresidents: The first day of the Regular Deer season through the second Sunday of the Regular Deer Season.~~

4.2 Shooting hours: One half hour before sunrise until one half hour after sunset.

5.0 Tags and Bag Limit

5.1 To take a black bear during the ~~Early~~ Bear Season, a person must, in addition to having a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license, possess a ~~an Early Season~~ Bear Tag issued separately by the Department.

~~5.2 To take a black bear during the Late Season, a person must have a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license.~~

5.3 A person shall not harvest more than one black bear per calendar year, not to include animals taken pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4827, unless the Board

Commented [HS1]: This language is intended to ensure the season aligns with the deer seasons.

Annotated

determines a second bear may be taken during the calendar year within specified WMUs, based on the recommendations of the Department. To take a second bear, a person must purchase a Second Bear Tag issued by the Department. A second bear may be taken during either the bear season, and only within the WMUs specified by the Board.

6.0 **The taking of bear with the aid of dogs**

6.1 Licenses and Permits

Any person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting License, use only Department Registered Dogs and possess ~~a~~ valid Department-issued bear tags. In addition, the person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid bear dog permit or accompany a bear dog permit holder. The permit shall be carried at all times by the permittee while hunting with dogs or taking black bear and exhibited to a game warden, landowner, or law enforcement officer upon demand. The permittee shall comply with all bear dog permit conditions, including the effective dates of the permit.

6.2 A person shall not take a black bear into his/her actual possession except by killing the bear by legal means or methods.

a) A person taking black bear with the use of a bow and arrow or crossbow shall, upon demand of a game warden or other law enforcement personnel, show proof of having a prior archery license, or of having passed a bow hunter education course in Vermont, another state or a province of Canada approved by the Commissioner.

6.3 Dogs and Packs

a) A person shall not take black bear with the aid of dogs unless the person is in control of the dog or dogs.

b) No person shall take a black bear with the aid of any Unregistered Dog. No person shall have an Unregistered Dog in his or her possession while hunting, pursuing or taking a black bear.

c) A person hunting ~~with dogs~~, pursuing, and taking black bear with the aid of dogs shall attach a Department Registration Dog-Tag and a metal identification name plate with the person's name, address and telephone number to the dog's collar.

Annotated

d) A person taking a black bear with the aid of dogs shall only take a black bear with a Pack of Dogs as defined in this rule. No person shall pursue, hunt, or take black bear by Relaying Dogs/Packs.

e) Two or more permit holders may hunt together and combine Department Registered dog(s) to form a Pack of Dogs. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not take black bear with the aid of more than six dogs combined forming a single Pack of Dogs. Once hunting with dogs commences, dogs not on the hunt shall be restrained in the dog box or inside the vehicle. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not possess any Unregistered Dogs while hunting, pursuing or taking black bear.

7.0 Prohibitions

7.1 No person shall knowingly place bait to attract black bear for the purposes of allowing a bear dog to catch/strike the scent of a black bear. No person shall take bear by knowingly using bait or a baited area.

7.2 A person shall not advertise, barter, exchange goods or services, or otherwise sell the use of a dog or dogs for the purpose of taking any black bear.

7.3 While hunting with dogs, no person shall have in their possession an Unregistered Dog while possessing Department Registered dogs.

7.4 It shall be a violation for a Vermont resident to apply for a bear dog permit for the purpose of allowing a nonresident bear dog owner to take bear in Vermont with the aid of dogs.

7.5 No person shall hunt black bear with a bow and arrow or crossbow if the arrow or bolt has an arrowhead that measures less than seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point or that has less than two sharp cutting edges.

8.0 Reporting

8.1 The black bear carcass shall be field dressed prior to reporting.

8.2 Upon request of a Game Warden, the person harvesting the bear and the permit holder shall show and return to the kill site with a Game Warden.

8.3 All bear harvests shall be reported to a game warden, official Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~ Reporting Station, or a person designated by the Commissioner within 48 hours. If a bear is taken with the aid of dogs, ~~T~~the person who harvested the bear and the bear dog permit holder must both be

Annotated

present to legally report the harvest. ~~If the bear dog permit holder harvested the bear, only he or she must be present when reporting the harvest.~~

8.4 It shall be unlawful to provide false information when reporting a black bear taken with the aid of dogs.

8.5 The fine, points and any other penalty for any violation of this subsection 8 shall be assessed to the violator and in addition, to the permit holder if the violator is not the permit holder.

9.0 Biological Collection

9.1 Any person who harvests a black bear shall collect a premolar tooth and submit the tooth to a game warden, official Fish and Wildlife Department Reporting Station, or to a person designated by the Commissioner to receive the biological collection, within 48 hours of taking the bear.

9.2 Unless otherwise specified by statute, the failure to collect and submit a black bear tooth shall not result in license suspension points and shall be considered a minor violation subject to a civil fine.

Jurisdiction	Entity	Regulation Summary	Regulation	Regualtion Language	Additional Definitions	Definition
Alabama	State	No regulated bear season				
Alaska	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs, with exceptions	5 AAC 92.260	A person may not take a cub bear or a female bear accompanied by a cub bear, except that a black bear cub or a female black bear accompanied by a cub bear may be taken by a resident hunter (1) under customary and traditional use activities at a den site (A) from October 15 through April 30 in (i) Unit 19(A); (ii) Unit 19(D), that portion of the Kuskokwim River drainage upstream from the Selatna and Black river drainages; (iii) Units 21(B), 21(C), and 21(D); and (iv) Unit 24; and (B) from December 1 through the last day of February in Unit 25(D); and (2) from July 1 through November 30 and March 1 through June 30 in Unit 25(D).	5 AAC 92.990. Definitions	(20) "cub bear" means a brown/grizzly bear in its first or second year of life, or a black bear (including the cinnamon and blue phases) in its first year of life;
Arizona	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Hunt Guidelines for the 2023-2024 through 2027-2028 Hunting Seasons Bear: Commission Order 9	4. The legal bear will be any bear except cubs and sows with cubs.		
Arkansas	State	No restrictions				
California	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	14 CA ADC § 365	(c) Bag and Possession Limit: One adult bear per hunting license year. Cubs and females accompanied by cubs may not be taken. (Cubs are defined as bears less than one year of age or bears weighing less than 50 pounds.)		
Colorado	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Code of Colorado Regulations Title 22 - Chapter W-02	#241 – Special Restrictions B. No cubs shall be killed nor shall any black bear accompanied by one (1) or more cubs be killed. As used herein a "cub" shall mean any black bear less than one (1) year of age.		
Connecticut	State	No regulated bear season				
Delaware	State	No regulated bear season				
Florida	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Fla. Admin. Code Ann. R. 68A-12.002	(7) The taking of fawn deer, cub bear, bear with at least one cub bear, panther or swimming deer is prohibited.	Fla. Admin. Code Ann. R. 68A-1.004	(25) Cub bear – A bear that is less than 100 pounds whole (ungutted) or less than 75 pounds eviscerated (gutted) weight.
Georgia	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r. 391-4-2-.22 Bear	(6) It is unlawful to kill a female with cubs or kill a cub having a live weight of less than 75 pounds.		
Hawaii	State	N/A				
Idaho	State	Sows with cubs only	IDAPA 13.01.08	300. (RESERVED) IDENTIFICATION OF ANIMALS THAT LEGALLY MAY BE TAKEN. 01. (3-31-22) Big Game Animals of Either Sex. Big game animals of either sex may be taken, except the following may not be taken: b.Black Bear. Females accompanied by young.		
Illinois	State	No regulated bear season				
Indiana	State	No regulated bear season				
Iowa	State	No regulated bear season				
Kansas	State	No regulated bear season				
Kentucky	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	301 KAR 2:300	Section 6. Hunter Restrictions. (1) A person shall not: (d) Harvest: 1. A female bear that has a cub; or a bear weighing less than seventy-five (75) pounds;		
Louisiana	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	La. Admin. Code tit. 76, § XIX-109	4. Harvest of cubs and females with cubs is prohibited. A cub is defined as any bear 75 pounds or less.		
Maine	State	No restrictions				
Maryland	State	No restrictions				
Massachusetts	State	No restrictions				
Michigan	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	The Wildlife Conservation Order: 3.205	3.205 Bear; unlawful acts. (5) It shall be unlawful to take a cub bear. “Cub bear” means a bear less than 42 inches in length from the tip of nose to the base of tail. It shall be unlawful to divide any bear in a manner that does not keep one part of the bear intact to allow it to be measured in a straight line from the tip of the nose to the base of the tail. It shall be unlawful to take a female bear accompanied by a cub bear.		
Minnesota	State	Cubs only	Minnesota Administrative Rules: 6232.2800	GENERAL REGULATIONS FOR TAKING BEARS. Subpart 1. Bag Limit: a person may not take more than one bear in quota areas and two bears in no-quota areas during any calendar year whether by firearm or archery. Bears taken may be of either sex or any age except that bear cubs may not be taken.	6232.2600 DEFINITIONS	"Bear cub" means a bear less than one year of age.
Mississippi	State	No regulated bear season				
Missouri	State	In the presence of one or more bears	Rules of Department of Conservation Division 10—Conservation Commission Chapter 7—Wildlife Code: Hunting: Seasons, Methods, Limits: 3 CSR 10-7.900	(10) Only lone black bears may be taken. No person shall take a black bear they know or reasonably should have known is in the presence of one (1) or more other bears, including female black bears with cubs.		
Montana	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Fish & Wildlife Commission Rule	Black Bear Specific Regulations (CR) • It is unlawful to harvest/take black bear cubs. Cubs are defined as bears less than one year old. • It is unlawful to harvest/take a female black bear with cubs.		
Nebraska	State	No regulated bear season				
Nevada	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	NAC 502.373	5. It is unlawful for any person to: (a) Kill a female black bear that is accompanied by a black bear cub; or (b) Kill or posses a black bear cub. As used in this subsection "black bear cub" means any black bear which is less than 1 year of age or less than 50 pounds.		
New Hampshire	State	No restrictions				
New Jersey	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	New Jersey Administrative Code Title 7, Chapter 25:SUBCHAPTER 5. 2023-2024 GAME CODE	Bag limit: One bear of either sex and any age with a live weight greater than 75 pounds or a dressed weight greater than 50 pounds may be harvested per permit. No adults accompanying cubs under 75 pounds may be taken.		

New Mexico	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Title 19 Natural Resources and Wildlife: 19.031.0011	19.31.11.10 BEAR AND COUGAR ZONE CLOSURES, BAG LIMITS AND RESTRICTIONS: B.Bag limit: The bag limit for bear is one; the bag limit for cougar is two. It is unlawful to kill a bear sow with cub(s) or any bear cub less than one year old, or to kill a spotted cougar kitten or any female cougar accompanied by spotted kitten(s)		
New York	State	Cubs and bears in a group, with exceptions	N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. Tit. 6 § 1.31	(7) Except in the Northern Zone, it is unlawful for any person to knowingly shoot a cub or shoot a bear that such person knows or should have known to be a cub.(8) In the Southern bear range, it is unlawful for any person to shoot or take a bear from any group of bears.		
North Carolina	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	15A NCAC 10B .0107	It is unlawful to take or possess a female bear with a cub or cubs at its side, or to take or possess a cub bear, unless authorized by a valid captivity license, depredation permit, or scientific collection license issued by the Commission. For the purpose of this Rule, cub bear is defined as specified in G.S. 113-291.7(b).	G.S. 113-291.7(b)	§ 113 291.7. Regulation of bears; limited retention of local acts closing bear seasons. (b) Any rule adopted by the Wildlife Resources Commission that regulates the taking of female bears with cubs or that regulates the taking or possession of cub bears shall define cub bears as bears weighing less than 75 pounds.
North Dakota	State	No regulated bear season				
Ohio	State	No regulated bear season				
Oklahoma	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Okla. Admin. Code § 800:25-7-66	(7) Prohibited activities. (B) Shooting females with cubs is prohibited. (D) Shooting cubs is prohibited.		
Oregon	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	2026 Oregon Big Game Hunting Regulations	Bag Limit: One bear per tag, except it is unlawful to take cubs less than one year old or sows with cubs less than one year old.		
Pennsylvania	State	No restrictions				
Rhode Island	State	No regulated bear season				
South Carolina	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Title 50 - FISH, GAME AND WATERCRAFT CHAPTER 11: Protection of Game ARTICLE 1 General Provisions	(E) It is unlawful to: (4) take or attempt to take a sow bear with cubs SECTION 50-11-435. Weight restriction on bear taken; penalties.It is unlawful to take or attempt to take a bear of less than one hundred pounds. A person violating this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined not more than five hundred dollars or imprisoned not more than thirty days, or both. In addition, each person convicted of a violation of this section may be required to pay restitution to the department of not more than one thousand five hundred dollars for each bear that is taken in violation of this section.		
South Dakota	State	No regulated bear season				
Tennessee	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	TENNESSEE FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION PROCLAMATION 26-11	B. Bear Bag Limits and Season Dates 1. Bag Limits Unless special hunt regulations apply, the bag limit for any person participating in the statewide hunt, or Bear Party-Dog Hunts or both shall not exceed one (1) bear per license year. Cubs or female bears with cub(s) at side may not be taken at any time. A cub is defined as any bear weighing less than seventy-five (75) pounds.		
Texas	State	No regulated bear season				
Utah	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Utah Admin. Code R657-33	(a) A person may not take or pursue a cub, or a sow accompanied by cubs.(b) Any bear, except a cub or a sow accompanied by cubs, may be taken during the prescribed seasons.	Utah Admin. Code R657-33-2 - Definitions	(h) "Cub" means a bear less than one year of age.
Vermont	State	No restrictions				
Virginia	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	4VAC15-50	It shall be unlawful to kill a bear of less than 100 pounds live weight or less than 75 pounds dressed weight (entrails and internal organs removed). It shall be unlawful to take or kill a female bear accompanied by a cub.		
Washington	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Wash. Admin. Code § 220-415-090	It is unlawful to kill or possess a cub (less than one year old) or a female bear accompanied by cub(s).		
West Virgina	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	West Virginia Code §20-2-22a.	(d) It is unlawful: (4) To shoot at or kill:(A) A bear weighing less than seventy-five pounds live weight or fifty pounds field dressed weight, after removal of all internal organs; (B) Any bear accompanied by a cub; or (C) Any bear cub so accompanied, regardless of its weight;		
Wisconsin	State	Sows with cubs only	Wis. Admin. Code Department of Natural Resources NR 10.101	(1) Prohibited methods. No person may: Non-adult bears. Shoot, shoot at or kill a bear that is accompanied by a bear that is not an adult bear.	NR 10.001 Definitions.	(1h) “Adult bear” means a bear measuring 42 inches or greater measured in a straight line from the tip of the nose to the base of the tail.
Wyoming	State	Both sows with cubs and cubs	040-3 Wyo. Code R. §§ 3-7	(a) Hunting Regulations. Hunters may take any black bear except dependent young and female black bears with dependent young at side.		(e) “Dependent young” means any black bear cub of the year or yearling black bear traveling with an adult female black bear.
Alberta	Province - Territory	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Alta Reg 143/1997	5. The open seasons for the hunting of big game do not apply: (c) to the hunting of a black bear under the age of 1 year,(e) to the hunting of a female black bear accompanied by a black bear under the age of 1 year,		
British Columbia	Province - Territory	Yearlings and cubs only	B.C. Reg. 190/84	(1) A person commits an offence where the person takes or kills any of the following: (b) a black bear less than 2 years old or a black bear in the company of it;		
Manitoba	Province - Territory	Sow with cubs only	M.R. 165/91	Hunting of female bear with a cub prohibited. 26(1) No person shall kill or attempt to kill a female bear while she is accompanied by a cub.		26(2) In this section, "cub" means a black bear weighing 20.5 kg or less.
New Brunswick	Province - Territory	Sow with cubs only; spring season only	Fish and Wildlife Act .2004-85	6(3)No person shall shoot or kill a female bear from the third Monday in April until the last day in June, inclusive, in any year, if she is accompanied by a cub or cubs.		
Newfoundland and Labrodor	Province - Territory	Both sows with cubs and cubs	Subsection 5(2) of the Black Bear Hunting and Trapping Order, Newfoundland and Labrador	(2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the following shall not be taken by shooting: (a) a female black bear accompanied by cubs under one year of age; and (b) a black bear cub under one year of age.		

Northwest Territories	Province - Territory	Both sows with cubs and cubs	BIG GAME HUNTING REGULATIONS R-019-92	9. No person shall hunt a black bear cub or a black bear that is accompanied by a cub. Aboriginal harvester in harvester's traditional areas are excluded.		(a) A black bear cub has a hide measuring less than 1.2 m from tip of the nose to the end of the tail when fresh, and less than 1.6 m when stretched and dried.
Nova Scotia	Province - Territory	Sow with cubs only	Bear Harvesting Regulations	[Prohibition—female bear with cubs] 7A Despite Section 5 and subsection 7(1), no person who holds a Bear Hunting License shall take, hunt or kill or attempt to take, hunt or kill a female bear that is accompanied by one or more cubs		
Nunavut	Province - Territory	No restrictions				
Ontario	Province - Territory	Both sows with cubs and cubs; springs season only	Ontario Regulation 665/98	55. (1) A person who holds a license to hunt bear or a trapping license shall not shoot or attempt to shoot a cub or a female bear that is accompanied by a cub during any part of an open season for bear specified in Table 2 of Ontario Regulation 670/98 (Open Seasons — Wildlife) made under the Act that falls within May or June in any year. O. Reg. 544/17, s. 6 (1).		
Prince Edward Island	Province - Territory	N/A	N/A			
Quebec	Province - Territory	No restrictions				
Saskatchewan	Province - Territory	Sow with cubs only	The Wildlife Regulations, 1981	Prohibitions: (2) No person shall, while hunting pursuant to the authority of a license, kill female black bears with young of the year cubs at heel.		

Regulations Related to the Taking of Sows with Cubs

US & Canada

6/17/26

Regulated Black Bear Hunting

US

- 35 states
- Newest: FL, LA, MO
- 28 (80%) restrict sows with cubs and/or cubs
- Most protect both
- 7 have no restrictions, including MA, ME, NH

Canada

- 11 provinces & territories
- PEI… no bears
- 9 (82%) restrict sows with cubs and/or cubs
- 2 are limited to spring season only
- 2 have no restrictions, including QC

Regulations Sows with Cubs and/or Cubs

Both sows with cubs and cubs are protected	26
Both sows with cubs and cubs; spring season only	1
Only sows in the presence of cubs protected	5
Only sows in the presence cubs; spring season only	1
Young bears protected only	2
Bears in a group	2

Regulations What is a “cub”?

No definition	8

One year or less	11
"Know or should have known to be a cub"	2
Two years or less	1
Dependent young traveling with sow	1
"At Heels" of sow	1

<100lbs (live weight; 75lbs gutted)	3
<50 lbs (live weight)	2

<42" (tip of nose to base of tail)	2
<1.2 meters (47 inches)	1
<20.5 kg (46lbs)	1

Regulations Exemptions & Exceptions

Most sow with cubs and/or cub protections are state/province-wide

- By zones (NY)
- “Customary and traditional” hunts
- First Nations/aboriginal
- Protections in spring season only

Questions?



From: Connolly, Abigail <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2026 4:02 PM
To: anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov
Subject: [ANR.FWBoard] FW: February 18 Board Meeting Agenda
Attachments: Board Meeting Agenda 2.18.26.pdf; Board_Meeting_Minutes_1.21.26_Unapproved.pdf; Youth and Novice Archery Season Petition.pdf; Black Bear Baiting Season Petition.pdf; 2026 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON BOARD PREVIEW FINAL.pdf; 2026 Moose Harvest Recommendation.pdf; ATT00001.txt

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Please see the 2026 moose harvest recommendation attached.

VERMONT
Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources | Fish & Wildlife Department
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell | abigail.connolly@vermont.gov
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

Support Vermont's wildlife with a Habitat Stamp!

Written communications to and from state employees regarding state business are considered public records and may be subject to public scrutiny.

From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2026 12:33 PM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov' <anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov>
Subject: February 18 Board Meeting Agenda

Good afternoon, Board Members,

Please see the agenda attached for the Board Meeting on Wednesday, February 18, 2026. Also attached are the unapproved minutes from January, the two petitions that will be presented by the Vermont Bowhunters Association, and the 2026 migratory game bird season recommendation.

We will send out additional materials this week.

Sincerely,

VERMONT
Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources | Fish & Wildlife Department
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802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell | abigail.connolly@vermont.gov
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

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Fish and Wildlife Board
Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, February 18, 2026
5:00 pm

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board will hold an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, February 18, 2026, the National Life Dewey Conference Room, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620.

To attend the meeting virtually, please use the following link: Join the meeting now
Meeting ID: 235 943 793 221 20 Passcode: QR7Cs3vb
Or call in (audio only): +1 802-828-7667,,251977334#
Phone Conference ID: 251 977 334#

Agenda:

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (January 21, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. Vermont Bowhunters Association Petitions
    - Youth and Novice Archery Season
    - Regulated Black Bear Baiting Season
4. Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential Re-Vote
5. 2026 Migratory Game Bird Season Preview – Preliminary Approval
6. 2026 Moose Season Recommendation – Preliminary Approval
7. Preliminary Discussion on Proposed Changes to the Bear Regulations
8. Commissioner's Update

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Fish and Wildlife Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 21, 2026

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, January 21, 2026, in the National Life Dewey Conference Room, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620. A recording of the meeting is available on the department's YouTube channel.

Agenda

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (December 17, 2025)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential First Vote
4. Review of 2025 Deer Hunting Season
5. Commissioner's Update

Board Members Present: Nicholas Burnham, Jeffrey Corey, Richard Craig, Beth Deimling, Allison Frazier, Neal Hogan, Ryan Kilborn, Paul Noel, Robert Patterson, Jon Valsangiacomo (Acting Chair), Martin Van Buren

Virtual: David Deen, Linda Hook, Brad Ferland (Chair)

Department Staff Present: Commissioner Jason Batchelder, Chief of Operations Andrea Shortsleeve, General Counsel Hannah Smith, Wildlife Division Director John Austin, Game Warden Colonel Justin Stedman, Game Warden Major Jenna Reed, Wildlife Management Program Manager David Sausville, Principal Assistant Abigail Connolly

Virtual: Deer and Moose Project Leader Nick Fortin, Director of Outreach Alison Thomas

Members of the Public Present: Rod Coronado, Sarah Gorsline, Bob Galvin, Chris Pritchard, Rob Steele, Brent Gadapee, Charles Palmer, Rocky Bunnell

Virtual: Zachary Pratt, Ethan Kelley, Brad Herring, Bob, Jeremiah Gracie

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Board Member Frazier moved to approve the December 17, 2025 meeting minutes. Board Member Hogan seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes (14-0).

Unapproved

Public Comment Period

Rob Steele, Bomoseen, regarding increasing agent fees for people who sell fishing and hunting licenses
Representative Chris Pritchard, Pawlet, regarding an invitation to attend the celebration of the historical reintroduction of turkeys in Vermont, taking place in Pawlet on April 18, 2026
Bob Galvin, Bolton, regarding the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation
Rod Coronado, Orange, regarding an article in the Vermont Sporting Journal
Sarah Gorsline, Grand Isle, regarding the benefits of coyotes
Zachary Pratt, Rutland, regarding the department's proposed conservation license

The recording of the public comments and the meeting can be viewed here.

Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential First Vote

General Counsel Hannah Smith reviewed the language change the Board requested at the last meeting to clearly include crossbows. The proposed language is included below.

Board Member Van Buren moved to approve Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards, as presented by the department. Board Member Noel seconded the motion. The Board discussed using the term broadhead instead of arrowhead. The Board voted to approve the motion (14-0).

Review of 2025 Deer Hunting Season

Nick Fortin reported that the 2025 deer hunting season was an average season. The December muzzleloader season was an exception, presumably because there was snow statewide for the whole season. The department is still receiving reports. The preliminary results are included below. The Board Members asked about the process for the special doe tags for this year and the percentage allocated for non-resident hunters, the expanded archery zones, and the early archery tag not being separated from the regular archery tag. Nick Fortin shared an anecdotal observation that it seems like there were a lot of larger bucks taken this year. The Board Members asked why there was a jump in the buck harvest in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) D1 and D2, the percentage of crossbows used in archery season, and whether there was a good sample of deer teeth during youth and opening weekends.

Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Batchelder expressed interest in starting the bear regulation discussion at the February 2026 meeting with the Board. Commissioner Batchelder provided updates about the legislative session, offered the Board the opportunity to have Josh Morse, Public Information

Unapproved

Officer, come in and talk about the social science of coyotes, and discussed the article sent by Board Member Deen called “Eat More Deer” in The Atlantic.

The Board Members discussed the timing of the potential bear regulation changes.

Board Member Valsangiacomo asked about the hunter orange survey that pops up when doing license renewals online.

David Sausville provided the dates and locations for the waterfowl, moose, and antlerless deer harvest public hearings.

Motion To Adjourn:

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 5:55 pm.

Unapproved

10 App. V.S.A. § 5. Bow and arrow and crossbow standards

No person shall hunt ~~deer~~ big game with a bow and arrow or crossbow if the arrow or bolt has an arrowhead that measures less than seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point or that has less than two sharp cutting edges.

(Added 1961, No. 119, § 2, eff. May 9, 1961; amended 1963, Fish and Game Board Reg. No.—, eff. Aug. 23, 1963.)

2025 Preliminary Deer Harvest Summary

(Estimated final numbers based on reports received through 1/13/26 – likely to change, but not by much)

TOTAL: 17,745

Bucks: 9,670
Up 3% from 9,356 in 2024
Up 1% from 2022-24 average (9,608)

Antlerless: 8,075
Up 1% from 7,956 in 2024
Up 6% from 2022-24 average (7,598)

BY SEASON:

Archery: 5,351
Up 3% from 5,213 in 2024
Same as 2022-24 average (5,351)

Youth: 1,015
Down 3% from 1,050 in 2024
Up 0% from 2022-24 average (1,010)

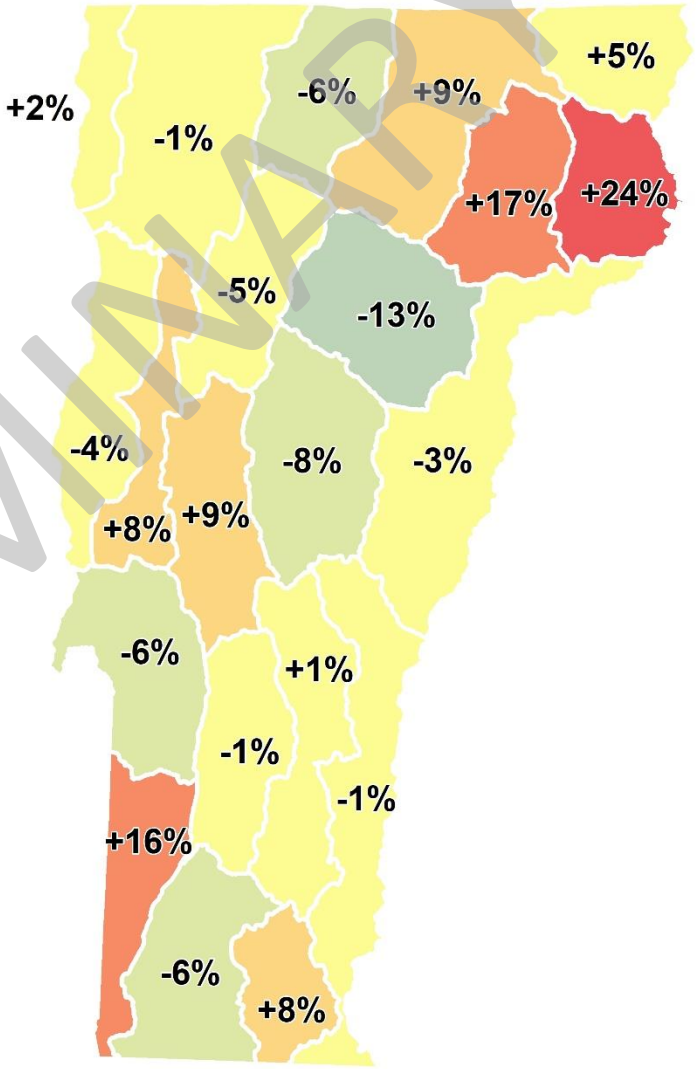
Novice: 46
Down 6% from 49 in 2024
Down 6% from 2022-24 average (49)

October Muzzleloader: 1,005
Down 9% from 1,103 in 2024
Down 1% from 2022-24 average (1,012)

Regular: 7,100
Up 4% from 6,844 in 2024
Down 2% from 2022-24 average (7,228)

December Muzzleloader: 3,225
Up 6% from 3,053 in 2024
Up 26% from 2022-24 average (2,557)

Change in Buck Harvest
from 2022-2024 Average



PRELIMINARY

The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting consideration by the Fish and Wildlife Board to create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

We know that the current Youth and Novice Gun Seasons for deer, turkey, and waterfowl are great opportunities to bring in young and new hunters to the outdoors sports. Creating a Youth and Novice Archery Season will not only encourage youngsters and new hunters to learn archery but enable them to hunt in a less pressurized environment.

The VBA suggests a two-day season, being the last full weekend in September. While this is after the start of the Expanded Archery Deer Season, we feel that the zones included in that season are relatively small and many archers either live too far from one or might not have access to those private lands outlined in the zones. Also, the weather is usually warm and conducive to longer stays on the stand. The end of September is the end of the summer feeding season for deer, but before the cooler weather sets in and the onset of the beginning of the breeding time. This timing helps make deer a bit more predictable, so new archers can more readily pattern the deer and get in close.

The overall rules for this special season could be adapted by the current gun season models.

We feel that a Youth and Novice Archery Season will offer a welcoming atmosphere to new archers as they learn from their mentors and open the door for them to a lifetime of enjoying Vermont's natural beauty and resources. We hope you will see the benefits of this special season.

Thank you,
Vermont Bowhunters Association

523 Westminster West Rd, Putney, Vermont 05346 – 802-579-8471
info@vermontbowhuntersassociation.org
www.vermontbowhuntersassociation.org

The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting the creation of a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont. Our intent is to support the Department's long-term bear management objectives, improve harvest selectivity, and reduce human–bear conflicts while upholding the high standards of ethical and science-based wildlife management.

Vermont's black bear population continues to expand in both numbers and distribution throughout the state, creating challenges for landowners, farmers, and communities. Traditional hunting methods remain important but often fall short of harvest objectives, especially in years of abundant natural foods. The proposed season would provide Vermont's bear management team with a precise and predictable tool to manage goals while ensuring sustainability and accountability. New Hampshire has a carefully structured baiting season in place that has been very successful in meeting their management goals.

It should be noted that while the VBA is submitting this petition, it is not asking that this be considered as an archery-only season but rather be open to all legal bear hunting implements.

Benefits of a Regulated Bear Baiting Season

1. A baiting season allows hunters to be in **close proximity** so they can more readily identify bears before harvest. This would reduce the likelihood of taking sows with cubs and provide a better opportunity for the best shot placement to provide a swift harvest. This supports Vermont's commitment to ethical, selective, and responsible wildlife management.
2. It is an effective tool for **population management**. In heavy mast years, traditional hunting methods often struggle to meet harvest objectives. Baiting provides a consistent, reliable method for achieving management goals across wildlife management units.
3. It can help reduce **human–bear conflicts** by targeting harvest in areas with recurring property damage, agricultural damage, and other nuisance bear activities, supporting the Department's conflict mitigation strategies.

Framework to Be Considered

Everyone participating in the baiting season must obtain a mandatory Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Permit. Permit numbers can be limited by Wildlife Management Units to ensure population sustainability, prevent overcrowding and overharvesting, and help the Department meet management objectives. The applications for the Permit should include:

1. Written landowner permission.
2. Map(s) showing the exact location of bait sites.
3. Names and contact information for each hunter that will be allowed to hunt the sites.
4. Fee for the Permit, to be determined by the Department.
5. Types of bait that may be used or not used (e.g., any form of cocoa or chocolate because of its toxicity to bears and other wildlife). Other restrictions may be added to prevent attraction of non-target species.
6. The season dates as set by the Department. The VBA suggests that a short pre-baiting period be added before the start of the hunting season. The actual season could be September 1–30, with all bait removed from the site at the end of the season.
7. If an application is accepted, copies of the Permit shall be given to the landowner and the Department, and a copy carried by each hunter.
8. Successful hunters will report the bears in the manner dictated by the Department regulations.

The Vermont Bowhunters Association believes a well-regulated fall bear baiting season built on proven regional models and guided by Vermont's strong conservation ethic would provide the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department with an effective and responsible tool for managing our growing bear population. We respectfully request that the Board consider initiating rulemaking to establish such a season.

Thank you,
Vermont Bowhunters Association

523 Westminster West Rd, Putney, Vermont 05346 – 802-579-8471
info@vermontbowhuntersassociation.org
www.vermontbowhuntersassociation.org

2026
Migratory Game Bird Season Recommendations

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

2026 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON PREVIEW

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

The majority of Vermont's waterfowl season is driven by the federal framework for the Atlantic Flyway. Below are a few issues that must be decided for the 2026 hunting season. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) would like the Board to consider the following recommendations:

- Hold the liberal season allowed under the federal framework related to season lengths and daily bag limits.
- For the 2026 Duck Season.
    - Open the 2026 duck season on Saturday, October 10.
        - Interior Zone: October 10 and run through December 8.
        - Lake Champlain Zone: October 10 – Nov. 1 and Nov. 21 - Dec. 27
- For the 2026 Goose Seasons
    - Open the resident Canada goose season September 1st and continue through September 25.
    - Open the migratory Canada goose season on October 10 and run through November 23.
    - Open the late resident Canada goose season on December 1, 2026 and run through January 4 2027. Allow a five-bird daily bag limit within the Lake Champlain and Interior zones.
    - Open the Snow goose season on October 1 and run through December 31, 2026 and February 24 through March 10, 2027.
- Hold youth hunting weekend during September 26 and 27.
- Open the Atlantic Brant season on Oct. 10 and run through Nov. 8
- Open the woodcock and snipe season September 26 and run through November 9.
- Remove the Conservation Order for the Snow Geese 2027 period.

2026 Waterfowl and Migratory Game Bird Season Proposals:

The Department offers these 2026 migratory game bird hunting season recommendations based on results from the 2024 Waterfowl Hunters survey, comments received from waterfowl hunters in recent years, data collected on availability of various waterfowl species in Vermont, including eBird, internal discussions among Vermont Wildlife Biologists, USFWS refuge Biologists, and State Game Wardens, and frameworks provided by the USFWS.

Table 1.

2026-2027 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

LAKE CHAMPLAIN ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	6	18
SCAUP*	Split Hybrid	40 Days	Oct. 10–Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 7	1	3
		20 Days	Dec. 8 – Dec. 27	2	6
MERGANSERS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	5	15
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 - Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1 – Jan. 4	5	15
Snow Geese *	Split	105 Days	Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026 Feb. 24 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Includes blue geese.

Table 2.

2026-2027 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

VERMONT INTERIOR ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	6	18
SCAUP*	Straight	40 Days	Oct. 10 – Oct. 18	1	3
		20 Days	Oct. 19 – Dec. 8	2	6
MERGANSERS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	5	15
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 - Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1 – Jan. 4	5	15
Snow Geese *	Split	105 Days	Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026 Feb. 24 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Includes blue geese.

Table 3.

2026-2027 VERMONT MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASONS
(regulations in effect September 1, 2026 through April 13, 2027)

Species	Lake Champlain Zone	Interior Vermont Zone	Connecticut River Zone
Ducks, Coots and Mergansers	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 1** **Nov. 21 – Dec. 27**	**Oct. 10 – Dec. 8**	**Oct. ? – Nov. ?** **Nov. ? – Dec. ?**
Canada Geese	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 10 – Nov. 23** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 4**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 10 – Nov. 23** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 4**	**Sept. ? – Sept. ?** **Oct. ? – Nov. ?** **Nov. ? – Dec. ?**
Snow Geese **(includes blue geese)**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2027**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2027**	**Oct. ? – Dec. ?**
Brant	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 8**	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 8**	**Oct. ? – Oct. ?**
Woodcock	**Statewide**	**Sept. 26 – Nov. 9**	
Snipe	**Statewide**	**Sept. 26 – Nov. 9**	

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Weekend – September 26 & 27

BAG LIMITS

The daily bag limit is the maximum number of birds of each species that any person may take (or possess in the field) during any one day. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit for all waterfowl species except snow geese.

Species	Daily Limit	Possession Limit
Ducks *	6	18
Mergansers	5	15
Coot	15	45
Canada Geese		
September season		
Lake Champlain Zone	8	24
Interior Vermont Zone	8	24
Connecticut River Zone	5	15
Oct. - Nov. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	3	9
Interior Vermont Zone	3	9
Connecticut River Zone	2	6
Dec. – Jan. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	5	15
Interior Vermont Zone	5	15
Snow Geese	25	No limit
Brant	1	3
Woodcock	3	9
Snipe	8	24

* The daily limit of 6 ducks may include no harlequin, and no more than 4 mallards (only 2 of which may be hens), 2 black ducks, 3 wood ducks, 3 pintail, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 2 or 1 scaup depending on dates, 3 Sea ducks including no more than 3 scoters, 3 eiders (1 of which may be a hen), and 3 long-tailed duck.

Background On Waterfowl Season Setting and Management:

Migratory game bird managers currently base the migratory bird population estimates and recommendations on predictions derived from long-term biological information and harvest strategies instead of current year surveys. In 2018, the Atlantic Flyway region implemented a Multi-Stock Adaptive Harvest Management Strategy based on a suite of four duck species that represent the population dynamics and various habitat types used by waterfowl throughout the flyway, in lieu of relying solely upon the status of eastern mallards. The four species include green-winged teal, common goldeneye, ring-necked ducks, and wood ducks. These species compose more than 40% of the harvest within the flyway and supply a sufficient time series of estimates of annual abundance, harvest rates and harvest to monitor population trends. Previously, data on mallard populations was used to set the annual hunting regulations for all species of ducks. Using a single species like the mallard to represent the population dynamics of numerous other duck species was proving problematic. Within this system, species of concern such as mallard and black duck are evaluated separately with an assessment under the adaptive harvest management strategies developed for the target species. The objectives are to sustain duck populations for all species and to allow harvest where appropriate. Current estimates allow for a liberal season of 60 days with a 6-bird bag limit. Species specific bag limits follow their respective harvest strategies, with the majority of species bag limits being the same as last year.

Tables 4 and 5 provide background information on past migratory game bird hunting seasons. Table 4 shows the hunting seasons approved during 2025 and is provided as a reference while considering bag limits and the seasons frameworks for 2026. Appendix A provides the history, 1942-2025, of Vermont's waterfowl seasons broken down into season type, season length, dates, and bag limits. This information informs how Vermont arrived at our current zones and season types.

Table 5 provides a historic look at waterfowl hunter participation and estimated harvest levels, Vermont waterfowl stamps sold, and the number of individuals that registered with the Harvest Information Program (HIP). HIP is a method used to generate more reliable estimates of hunting activity and number of all migratory game birds harvested. The HIP program numbers include youth and adult waterfowl hunters, woodcock, and snipe hunters. Only adult waterfowl hunters, 16 years of age and older, are required to purchase the state waterfowl stamp. The Department will populate the remaining portions of the table this summer after the USFWS examines wings collected randomly from last season's hunters and harvest estimates are completed.

Vermont currently has three waterfowl zones (Figure 1):

- Lake Champlain Zone that is shared with New York. Vermont sets the dates for this zone and New York adopts the same dates.
- Interior Zone that is entirely within Vermont.
- Connecticut River Zone that is shared with New Hampshire. New Hampshire sets the dates for this zone as an extension of their inland zone and Vermont adopts those dates.

Under Vermont's current three zones, we can split any zone once to create two hunting segments. Vermont currently has sixty days to divide between the two segments in an effort to accommodate the diverse desires of the variety of Vermont waterfowl hunters. The zones were

also set up to take into consideration the differences in the physiographic regions of the state and the climatic differences each has. Federal regulations allow for zone and split changes every five years. Vermont's next opportunity to adjust zone boundaries and splits is in 2031. Any changes to zone boundaries will take effect in the 2031-2036 seasons and be in effect for 5-years.

2026 Migratory Game Bird Seasons:

Tables 6 and 7 provide the expected USFWS season frameworks for the 2026 duck and goose seasons, respectively, the latter including other migratory game birds as well. The 2025 hunting seasons are shown on Table 4 for comparison.

2026 Duck Season: The 2026 duck season options allow the opportunity to utilize a 60-day season within the dates of September 26, 2026 to January 31, 2027. The allowed daily bag limit is six birds, with species specific limits listed on Table 6. Vermont may allow a possession limit of 18 ducks total. The Board may be more restrictive on the length of the season and bag limits if desired, but the Board cannot set regulations more liberal. The Department recommends taking the liberal hunting option allowed under the federal framework.

The Board has also traditionally held the youth waterfowl weekend the last weekend in September. The Department has withheld any fishing tournament permits for that weekend to reduce conflicts between anglers and youth waterfowlers. The youth weekend must be within 14 days of either end of the federal framework dates.

2026 Goose, Brant, Mergansers, Coots. Snipe, and Woodcock Seasons: Table 7 lays out the season options for geese, brant, mergansers, coots, snipe, and woodcock. The available season lengths, outside dates for the seasons, daily bag limits and possession limits are broken down by species.

We often receive requests to open the migratory Canada goose season in early October. We are not allowed to open the season on migratory Canada geese until October 10th to reduce hunting pressure on the Atlantic population that is flying through the state. Prior to 2010 we were unable to open the season until October 20th. This change came about because of efforts pursued by Vermont and some other New England states. Breeding pairs in 2025 totaled 150,000, increasing from 2024's total of 89,000 an increase of 68%. The integrated population model predicts that breeding pairs will increase to 163,500 in 2026.

The Brant Hunt Plan and Harvest Strategy were revised in 2020. The revised plan uses an Integrated Population Model (IPM) to generate a prediction of the brant population. This model prediction will be used in place of the mid-winter survey estimate to determine the annual hunting season recommendation. Advantages of the IPM are that the population estimate is available in the summer, prior to the regulatory flyway meeting and federal register framework publication. In addition, estimates provided by the IPM are less variable than the MWS and will likely result in fewer changes to hunting packages over time. The model prediction for 2026 is 115,000 brant, which puts the population on the threshold of a restrictive 30/1 package (100,000-115,000) and standard 50/2 package (115,000-150,000). The technical committee voted to stay in

the restrictive package, recommending a 30-day season with a 1-bird daily bag limit, which has not changed from last year.

The Greater snow goose population estimate for 2025 was 428,000 which is below the target of 500,000 to allow for a conservation order (CO) season in the spring of 2027. The USFWS has not officially suspended the conservation order but the state biologists in partnership with Canadian biologists agreed to not hold a spring CO season in 2027 unless the 2026 population estimate came back above 500,000 in September 2026. This opportunity has been virtually nonexistent in Vermont over the last 5 years due to very few snow geese stopping in Vermont during spring migration. During the 2024 spring CO, one person reported harvesting one snow goose. Under the language of the existing Board rule (10 App. V.S.A. § 23a, Spring Snow Goose Conservation Order), the CO is an open season and cannot be amended by the board unless they go through the rulemaking process. Therefore, the department would like the board to recommend a closed season, and the department will subsequently request that the governor suspend the season for 2027. The department also recommends that the Board amend the language of the rule so that the Snow Goose season can be set annually during the waterfowl season setting procedure in the future.

2026 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: The Department and Board may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days", in addition to the regular duck seasons. The days must be held outside any regular duck season on a weekend, holiday, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck-season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season, or within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limits may include ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots, and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season. Flyway species and area restrictions would remain in effect.

States are allowed to use their established definition of age for youth hunters. However, youth hunters may not be 18 years of age or older. In addition, an adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other seasons that are open on the special youth day. Youth hunters 16 years of age and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp). In 2016 Vermont changed the youth waterfowl hunters age to 17 and younger. Vermont also requires all hunters 16 years of age and older to have a state duck stamp. In some years, the end of the resident Canada goose season overlaps the youth waterfowl hunting weekend. This will not occur in our proposal for 2026 Youth Hunting Weekend, Saturday and Sunday, September 26th and 27th.

Special Falconry Regulations: Falconry is a permitted means of taking migratory game birds in any State meeting Federal falconry standards in 50 CFR 21.29. These States may select an extended season for taking migratory game birds in accordance with the following:
Extended Seasons: For all hunting methods combined, the combined length of the extended season, regular season, and any special or experimental seasons must not exceed 107 days for any species or group of species in a geographical area. Each extended season may be divided into a maximum of 3 segments. Framework Dates: Seasons must fall between September 1 and March 10.

Daily Bag Limits: Falconry daily bag limits for all permitted migratory game birds must not exceed 3 birds, singly or in the aggregate, during extended falconry seasons, any special or experimental seasons, and regular hunting seasons in all States, including those that do not select an extended falconry season.

Regular Seasons: General hunting regulations, including seasons and hunting hours, apply to falconry in each State listed in 50 CFR 21.29. Regular season bag limits do not apply to falconry. The falconry bag limit is not in addition to gun limits.

Vermont has traditionally run the falconry season during any open migratory game bird season. Last year falconers had the opportunity to begin on September 1st with the resident Canada goose season and hunt through January 19th. A three-bird daily bag limit was in effect.

In summary, the proposed 2026 waterfowl and migratory bird hunting regulations were made based on the following information:

- Decide when to open the season. Based on comments from previous years, many hunters prefer the season to open earlier when the temperatures are warmer, and they can still pursue early migrating species like blue-winged teal.
- Decide which zones to propose for splits and in which seasons. Goose hunters preferred a straight season. Duck hunters in the Lake Champlain zone, regardless of residency, chose split seasons more than straight seasons. For the Interior Vermont zone, hunters chose straight seasons most commonly for duck and goose seasons.
- Decide on the length of the Lake Champlain Zone split. In comments from previous years and responses to the survey, many hunters preferred to run the season later in the year which results in a longer split between segments.
- Decide when to have the split for the Lake Champlain Zone. Based on feedback from 2025's public meetings hunters preferred a more even split between early and late season opportunities.

<u>Legal Framework for Hunting Season Decision</u>

Beginning in 2015 the Board was given authority by the Legislature to set the migratory bird hunting regulations by procedure instead of rule. Part of Title 10 § 4082 reads:

(b)(1) Except as provided for under subdivision (2) of this subsection, the Board annually may adopt rules relating to the management of migratory game birds and shall follow the procedures for rulemaking contained in 3 V.S.A. chapter 25. For each such rule, the Board shall conduct a hearing but, when necessary, may schedule the hearing for a day before the terms of the rule are expected to be determined.

(2) Beginning with the 2015 hunting season, the Board may set by procedure the daily bag and possession limits of migratory game birds that may be harvested in each Waterfowl Hunting Zone annually without following the procedures for rulemaking contained in 3 V.S.A. chapter 25. The annual daily bag and possession limits of migratory game birds shall be consistent with federal requirements. Prior to setting the migratory game bird daily bag and possession limits,

the Board shall provide a period of not less than 30 days of public notice and shall conduct at least two public informational hearings. The final migratory game bird daily bag and possession limits shall be enforceable by the Department under its enforcement authority in part 4 of this title.

Eastern Mallard Collaborative Research Project:

Atlantic Flyway states are conducting a regional study of the eastern mallard population. Vermont is participating and deployed 1 geolocator and 2 GSM/GPS transmitters in 2026. The project aims to deploy GSM/GPS units and geolocators on female mallards in Eastern Canada and the Northeastern United States to answer several important questions about mallard movements, productivity, and biases within our banded sample. Specifically, the project proposes the following objectives:

1) Quantify and compare reproductive metrics such as reproductive attempts, full-term incubation, and brood-rearing between mallards in the Northeastern US and Eastern Canada, and the extent to which behavior and weather explains variation in reproductive metrics.
    a. Use proportion of stationary behavior from ACC data and daily displacement from GPS data to infer nesting attempts and success
    b. Develop detailed time activity budgets of mallard behavior throughout the annual cycle at the sub-population scale
    c. Explore the extent to which behavior and weather patterns (precipitation, temperature, winter severity) influence reproductive success both directly and through cross-seasonal effects
2) Estimate seasonal survival rates of female mallards in Eastern Canada vs. Northeastern US
3) Quantify and compare female mallard movements and habitat use and selection throughout the annual cycle in the Northeastern US and Eastern Canada
    a. Understand mallard movements during the pre-season banding window to better inform implications for pre-season banding data analyses.
4) Characterize habitat-use and selection of mallards and black ducks throughout the annual cycle.

New York and Pennsylvania secured internal funding to support much of the project but solicited in-kind and financial support from other flyway states, federal and Canadian partners to reach marking sampling goals/distribution and fully fund the project. The project has begun deployments of GSM and geolocator units during the winter of 2025-2026, coinciding with the American black duck joint venture project.

During the 2024-2025 capture period Vermont deployed 17 geolocators attached to colored tarsal bands at two locations within the Champlain Valley from February 1st to March 15th.

Public Input and Outreach:

The Department, in conjunction with the Board, is currently planning to hold two public hearings in 2026. Meetings are planned for March 10th in Whitehall, and March 12th at the Essex Junction

District office conference room, as well as a recording to be posted on the Department website, beginning at 6:30pm. During the hearings, the Department will review the season options, recommendations, current biological information, answer questions, and record public comments for the Board. The public will be encouraged to submit comments through email or a recorded phone line. Hearing times and website posting locations will be advertised on the Department website and through news releases.

After the Board approves final season dates and bag limits (scheduled for April 1, 2026 Board meeting), the Department will submit selections to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by April 30th and the information will be sent to a printer for production of the 2026 syllabus of state and federal hunting regulations. The early decision deadlines allow the Department to have the syllabus available to the public in print version by August 1st, a full month prior to any migratory bird hunting season. Approved seasons will be placed on the Department's website within days after the Board's vote.

The Department conducted a survey of waterfowl hunters in Vermont (statewide) and New York (those that hunt the Lake Champlain Zone) during summer/fall of 2024. This survey was sent to a broad spectrum of waterfowl hunters in hopes of obtaining an accurate representation of all waterfowl hunters. The goal of this survey was to obtain preferences and opinions about waterfowl seasons for use in the season setting process.

Table 4. 2025 Migratory Bird Hunting Seasons

2025-2026 VERMONT MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASONS
(regulations in effect September 1, 2025 through April 24, 2026)

Species	Lake Champlain Zone	Interior Vermont Zone	Connecticut River Zone
Ducks, Coots and Mergansers	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 2** **Nov. 22 – Dec. 28**	**Oct. 11 – Dec. 9**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26**
Canada Geese	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 11 – Nov. 9** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 19**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 11 – Nov. 9** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 19**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26** **Dec. 27 – Jan. 15**
Snow Geese **(includes blue geese)**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2025** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2026** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2025** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2026** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026** **(applies to land, not CT River waters)**
Brant	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 9**	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 9**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11**
Woodcock	**Statewide**	**Sept. 27 – Nov. 10**	
Common Snipe	**Statewide**	**Sept. 27 – Nov. 10**	

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Weekend – September 27 & 28

BAG LIMITS

The daily bag limit is the maximum number of birds of each species that any person may take (or possess in the field) during any one day. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit for all waterfowl species except snow geese.

Species	Daily Limit	Possession Limit
Ducks *	6	18
Mergansers	5	15
Coot	15	45
Canada Geese		
September season		
Lake Champlain Zone	8	24
Interior Vermont Zone	8	24
Connecticut River Zone	5	15
Oct. - Nov. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	1	3
Interior Vermont Zone	1	3
Connecticut River Zone	2	6
Dec. – Jan. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	5	15
Interior Vermont Zone	5	15
Connecticut River Zone	5	15 (Vermont land portions only)
Snow Geese	25	No limit
Mar. 11 – Apr. 24, 2026	15	No limit
Brant	1	3
Scaup*		
Lake Champlain Zone		
Oct. 11 – Nov. 2 & Nov. 22 - Dec. 8	1	3
Dec. 9 - Dec. 28	2	6
Interior Vermont Zone		
Oct. 11 – Nov. 19	1	3
Nov. 20 - Dec. 9	2	6
Connecticut River Zone		
Oct. 13 - Nov. 11	1	3
Nov. 27 - Dec. 26	1	3
Woodcock	3	9
Common Snipe	8	24

* The daily limit of 6 ducks may include no harlequin, and no more than 4 mallards (only 2 of which may be hens), 2 black ducks, 3 wood ducks, 3 pintail, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 2 or 1 scaup depending on dates, 4 sea ducks (including no more than 3 scoters, 3 eiders {1 of which may be a hen}, and 3 long-tailed ducks)..

Table 5. Vermont Waterfowl Hunting and Harvest Data Comparisons (Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Combined)

	Federal Duck Stamp Sales	Vermont Duck Stamp Sales	Vermont HIP Registration	No. of Active Adult Duck Hunters	Average Seasonal Duck Bagged Per Hunter	Total Season Estimated Duck Harvest	Total Season Estimated Canada Goose Harvest	Total Season Estimated Snow Goose Harvest
1999	4,542	6,320		1,600	11.9	25,000	4,100	1,700
2000	4,741	5,418		1,700	10.4	17,700	3,600	4,200
2001	4,824	5,685		1,700	10.4	17,600	4,300	2,200
2002	5,201	5,722		2,600	9.6	26,800	7,100	1,300
2003	5,242	6,012		1,300	12.6	16,300	3,600	3,400
2004	4,723	6,242		2,600	9.3	24,300	7,100	1,700
2005	4,956	5,682		2,400	10.6	25,400	9,300	400
2006	3,391	5,581		2,000	9.9	19,600	7,800	100
2007	3,193	6,137		2,300	9.2	16,700	6,300	500
2008	3,391	5,746	⇧$5-$7.50	2,900	11.9	34,800	12,300	2,100
2009	not available	6,051		2,400	10.7	25,500	11,500	90
2010	not available	6,065 Last Stamp	5,404***	2,700	8.5	22,900	9,600	0
2011	not available	4,872 First Tag	4,949***	2,600	9.0	23,000	8,300	134
2012	not available	5,882	6,283***	2,100	10.0	20,500	8,600	34
2013	not available	6,436	8,719***	4,000	8.0	31,900	9,600	0
2014	not available	6,635	9,913***	2,600	6.8	17,800	12,300	46
2015	not available	6,244	11,122***	2,600	5.8	14,700	6,733	0
2016	not available	6,016	18,598***	3,400	5.2	17,600	8,800	0
2017	not available	5,954	7,006***	2,500	7.9	19,900	15,900	0
2018	not available	5,725	10,541***	2,100	7.8	16,200	7,400	0
2019	not available	5,620	10,359***	3,000	6.1	18,100	5,600	0
2020	not available	6,089	10,123***	2,200	9.0	19,900	11,800	116
2021	not available	6,111	10,236***	2,000	6.4	12,700	6,182	0
2022	not available	5,956	10,088***	1,900	7.8	14,500	15,683	107
2023	not available	6,067	9,581***	3,600	7.2	26,100	12,900	119
2024	not available	6,197	9,809***	3,300	8.4	2,700	11,200	0
2025	not available	5,827						

*** Includes youth hunters and woodcock/snipe hunters

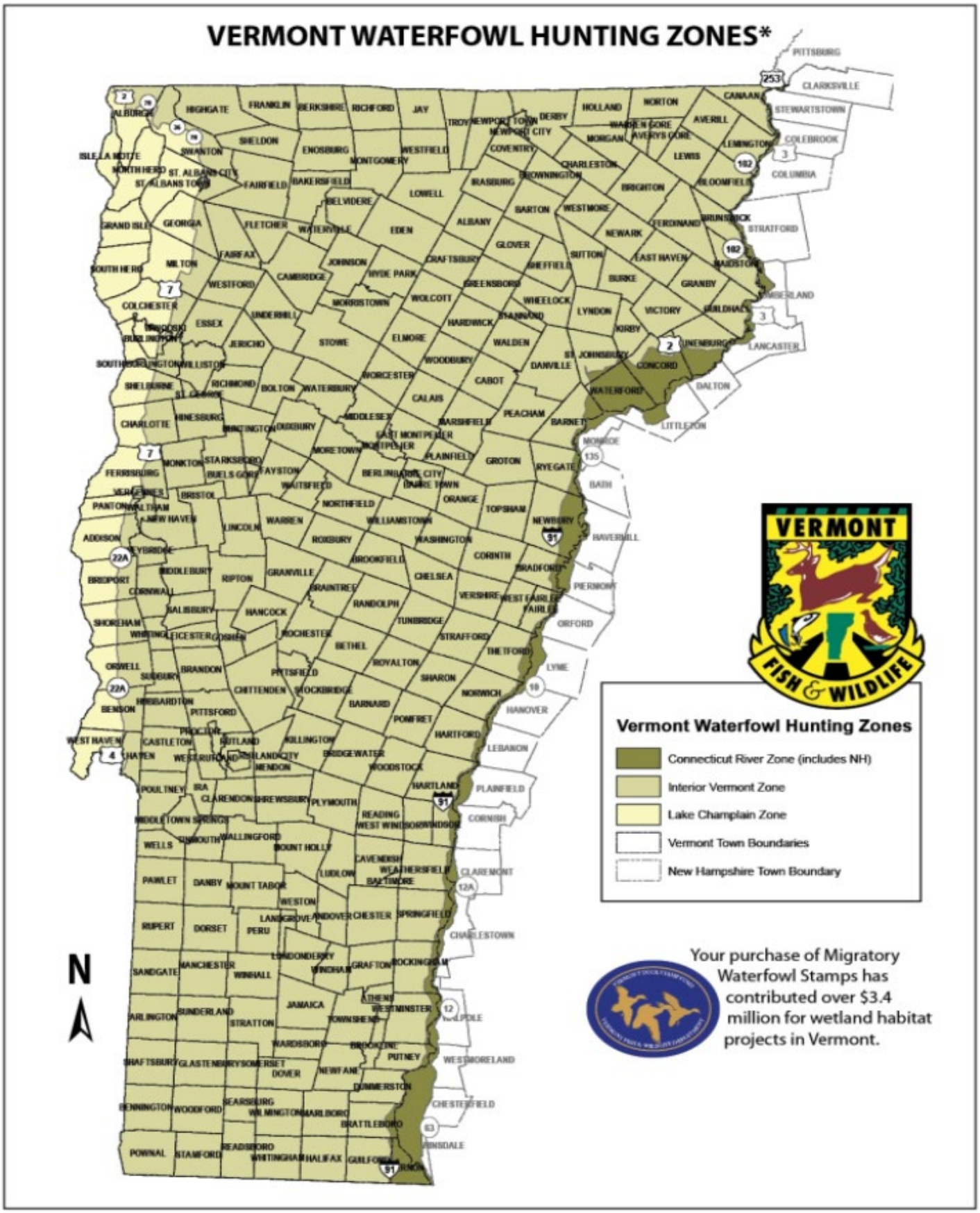


Figure 1. Vermont waterfowl hunting zones

Table 6. USFWS Framework for 2026 Duck Seasons*

LENGTH	OUTSIDE DATES	DAILY BAG	POSSESSION LIMIT**
60 Days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	6	18

SPECIES RESTRICTIONS -	Daily Bag
MALLARD	4 (only 2 hens)
WOOD DUCK	3
BLACK DUCK	2
PINTAIL	3
REDHEAD	2
SCAUP	2/day for 20-days 1/day for 40-days Or 1/day for 60-days
SCOTER	3
EIDERS	3 (only 1 hen)
LONG-TAILED DUCK	3
CANVASBACK	2
HARLEQUIN	CLOSED
MOTTLED DUCK	1
FULVOUS WHISTLING DUCK	1

* Apply to Lake Champlain, Interior Vermont, and Connecticut River Zones.

** Possession limit is equal to three times the daily bag limit for these species.

*** Three total sea ducks in aggregate, with species specific limits, (no more than 3-scoters, 3-eiders (1hen), or 3-long tailed ducks)

SHOOTING HOURS - ½ HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE TO SUNSET (all days – all species)

Table 7. USFWS Framework for 2025 Geese, Brant, Merganser, Coot, Snipe, and Woodcock Seasons

SPECIES	SEASON LENGTH	OUTSIDE DATES	DAILY POSSESSION BAG	LIMIT**
Canada Geese (No more than 107 days combined)				
Resident	25 days	Sept. 1 – Sept. 25	15	45
Regular	45 days	Oct. 10 – Feb. 5	3	9
Resident	77 days	Dec. 1 – Feb. 15	5	15
Snow & Blue Geese	107 days	Oct. 1 – Mar. 10	25	NONE
Brant	30 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	1	3
Mergansers*	60 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	5	15
Coots**	60 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	15	45
Snipe	107 days	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	8	24
Woodcock	45 days	Sept. 13 – Jan. 31	3	9

* Season length for mergansers equals season option chosen for ducks. Mergansers may be included as part of the daily duck bag, in which case the limit would be 6 mergansers/day.

** Season length for coots equals season option chosen for ducks.

SHOOTING HOURS - ½ HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE TO SUNSET (all days – all species)

APPENDIX A

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons				
YEAR	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	SEASON DATES	GENERAL BAG LIMIT
1942	Straight	70	Sept. 26 – Dec. 4	10-20
1943	Straight	70	Sept. 25 – Dec. 3	10-20
1944	Straight	80	Sept. 20 – Dec. 8	10-20
1945	Straight	80	Sept. 20 – Dec. 8	7-14
1946	Straight	45	Oct. 5 – Nov. 18	7-14
1947	Straight	30	Oct. 21 – Nov. 19	3-6
1948	Straight	30	Oct. 15 – Nov. 13	3-6
1949	Straight	40	Oct. 21 – Nov. 29	3-6
1950	Straight	40	Oct. 20 – Nov. 28	3-6
1951	Straight	45	Oct. 12 – Nov. 25	3-6
1952	Straight	55	Oct. 7 – Nov. 11	3-6
1953	Straight	60	Oct. 5 – Dec. 3	3-6
1954	Straight	60	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	3-6
1955	Straight	70	Oct. 5 – Dec. 13	3-6
1956	Straight	70	Oct. 5 – Dec. 13	3-6
1957	Straight	70	Oct. 10 – Dec. 18	3-6
1958	Straight	60	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	3-6
1959	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	3-6
1960	Straight	50	Oct. 7 – Nov. 25	3-6
1961	Straight	40	Oct. 14 – Nov. 22	3-6
1962	Straight	40	Oct. 12 – Nov. 20	3-6
1963	Split	45	Oct. 11 – Oct. 27 / Nov. 11 – Dec. 8	3-6
1964	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	3-6
1965	Straight	50	Oct. 16 – Dec. 4	3-6
1966	Straight	55	Oct. 8 – Dec. 1	3-6
1967	Split	45	Oct. 7 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 10	3-6
1968	Straight	50	Oct. 12 – Nov. 30	3-6
1969	Straight	50	Oct. 11 – Nov. 29	3-6
1970	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	4-8
1971	Straight	50	Oct. 9 – Nov. 27	4-8
1972	Split	50	Oct. 7 – Oct. 15 / Oct. 28 – Dec. 7	4-8
1973	Split	45	Oct. 6 – Oct. 21 / Nov. 3 – Dec. 1	4-8
1974	Straight	50	Oct. 9 – Nov. 27*	4-8
1975	Straight	50	Oct. 8 – Nov. 26*	4-8
1976	Straight	50	Oct. 6 – Nov. 24*	4-8
1977	Straight	50	Oct. 5 – Nov. 23*	4-8
1978	Straight	50	Oct. 4 – Nov. 22*	4-8
1979	Split	50	Oct. 3 – Oct. 14 / Oct. 27 – Dec. 3*	4-8
1980	Straight	50	Oct. 8 – Nov. 26*	4-8
1981	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28*	4-8

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons – Page 2

YEAR	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	SEASON DATES	GENERAL BAG LIMIT
1982	Split	50	Oct. 2 – Oct. 10 / Oct. 16 – Nov. 25*	5-10
1983	Split	50	Oct. 8 – Oct. 16 / Oct. 22 – Dec. 1*	5-10
1984	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28*	5-10
1985	Zoned**	40	Oct. 9 – Oct. 13 / Oct. 26 – Nov. 29 (LCZ)* Oct. 9 – Nov. 17 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1986	Zoned**	40	Oct. 8 – Oct. 12 / Oct. 25 – Nov. 28 (LCZ)* Oct. 8 – Nov. 16 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1987	Zoned**	40	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 24 – Nov. 27 (LCZ)* Oct. 7 – Nov. 15 (IVZ)	4-8 4-8
1988	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 8 – Oct. 23 / Nov. 24 – Dec. 7 (LCZ)* Oct. 8 – Oct. 30 / Nov. 24 – Nov. 30 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1989	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 11 – Oct. 29 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 3 (LCZ) Oct. 11 – Nov. 5 / Nov. 23 – Nov. 26 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1990	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 10 – Oct. 21 / Nov. 15 – Dec. 2 (LCZ) Oct. 10 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 22 – Nov. 25 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1991	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 12 – Oct. 27 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 6 (LCZ) Oct. 12 – Nov. 3 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 1 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1992	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Nov. 7 – Dec. 1 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Nov. 1 / Nov. 26 – Nov. 29 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1993	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 20 – Nov. 7 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 5 (LCZ) Oct. 13 – Nov. 7 / Nov. 25 – Nov. 28 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1994	Zoned/Split	40	Oct. 15 – Nov. 6 / Nov. 19 – Dec. 5 (LCZ) Oct. 8 – Nov. 9 / Nov. 21 – Nov. 27 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1995	Zoned/Split	50	Oct. 11 – Oct. 22 / Nov. 4 – Dec. 11 (LCZ) Oct. 4 – Nov. 12 / Nov. 18 – Nov. 27 (IVZ)	4-8 4-8
1996	Zoned/Split	50	Oct. 9 – Oct. 20 / Nov. 2 – Dec. 9 (LCZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 11 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 1 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1997	Zoned**	60	Oct. 4 – Oct. 19 / Oct. 25 – Dec. 7 (LCZ) Oct. 4 – Dec. 2 (IVZ)	4-8*** 4-8***
1998	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 17 – Dec. 10 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Dec. 5 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
1999	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 23 – Dec. 15 (LCZ) Oct. 6 – Dec. 4 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
2000	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 7 – Oct. 9 / Oct. 21 – Dec. 16 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Nov. 12 / Nov. 18 – Dec. 10 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
2001	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 10 – Oct. 14 / Oct. 20 – Dec. 13 (LCZ) Oct. 10 – Dec. 8 (IVZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 21 – Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2002	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 9 – Oct. 13 / Oct. 22 – Dec. 15 (LCZ) Oct. 9 – Nov. 14 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 15 (IVZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 5 / Nov. 27 – Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons – Page 3

YEAR	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	SEASON DATES	GENERAL BAG LIMIT
2003	Zoned**	60	Oct. 11 - Oct. 13 / Oct. 25 - Dec. 20 (LCZ) Oct. 11 - Dec. 9 (IVZ) Oct. 7 - Nov. 9 / Nov. 26 - Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2004	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6 - Oct. 10 / Oct. 23 - Dec. 16 (LCZ) Oct. 6 - Dec. 4 (IVZ) Oct. 5 - Nov. 14 / Nov. 24 - Dec. 12 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2005	Zoned**	60	Oct. 5 – Oct. 10 / Oct. 26 – Dec. 18 (LCZ) Oct. 5 – Dec. 3 (IVZ) Oct. 4 – Nov.13/ Nov. 23 - Dec. 11 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2006	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7- Oct. 15/ Oct. 25 - Dec. 14 (LCZ) Oct. 7 - Dec. 5 (IVZ) Oct. 3 - Nov. 5/ Nov. 22 - Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2007	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10- Oct. 14/ Oct. 27 - Dec. 20 (LCZ) Oct. 10- Dec. 8 (IVZ) Oct. 3- Nov. 4/ Nov. 21 - Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2008	Zoned**	60	Oct. 8- Oct. 12/ Oct. 25 - Dec. 18 (LCZ) Oct. 8- Dec. 6 (IVZ) Oct. 2- Nov. 2/ Nov. 23 - Dec. 20 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2009	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10- Oct. 13/ Oct. 24 - Dec. 18 (LCZ) Oct. 10- Dec. 8 (IVZ) Oct. 6- Nov. 8/ Nov. 25 - Dec. 20 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2010	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6-Oct. 10/Oct. 23 - Dec. 16 (LCZ) Oct. 6-Dec. 4 (IVZ) Oct. 5-Nov. 7/ Nov. 24 – Dec. 19 (CRZ)	6-12 6-12 6-12
2011	Zoned**	60	Oct. 12-Oct. 16/Oct. 29 - Dec. 22 (LCZ) Oct. 12-Dec 10 (IVZ) Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 23- Dec. 18 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2012	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 17/Oct. 27 - Dec. 20 (LCZ) Oct. 13-Dec 11 (IVZ) Oct. 2-Nov. 4/Nov. 21- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2013	Zoned**	60	Oct. 9-Oct. 13/Oct. 26 - Dec. 19 (LCZ) Oct. 9-Dec 7 (IVZ) Oct. 2-Nov. 3/Nov. 19- Dec. 15 (CRZ)****	6-18 6-18 6-18
2014	Zoned**	60	Oct. 8-Oct. 12/Oct. 25- Dec. 18 (LCZ) Oct. 8-Dec. 6 (IVZ) Oct. 2-Nov. 2/Nov. 16- Dec. 13 (CRZ)****	6-18 6-18 6-18
2015	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Oct. 14/Oct. 24- Dec. 17 (LCZ) Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ) Oct. 6-Nov. 5/Nov. 15- Dec. 13 (CRZ)****	6-18 6-18 6-18
2016	Zoned**	60	Oct. 12-Oct. 16/Oct. 29- Dec. 22 (LCZ) Oct. 12-Dec. 10 (IVZ) Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 22- Dec. 22 (CRZ)****	6-18 6-18 6-18
2017	Zoned**	60	Oct. 11-Oct. 15/Nov. 7 - Dec. 31 (LCZ) Oct. 11-Dec. 9 (IVZ) Oct. 3-Nov. 5/Nov. 22- Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-18 6-18 6-18

2018	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 21/Nov. 10 - Dec. 30 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Dec. 11 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 4/Nov. 21- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-18
2019	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Nov. 1/Nov. 23 - Dec. 29 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 3/Nov. 20- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-18
2020	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Nov. 1/Nov. 21 - Dec. 27 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 6-Nov. 8/Nov. 17- Dec. 12 (CRZ)****	6-18
2021	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 17/Oct. 30 - Dec. 23 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Dec. 11 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 5-Nov. 7/Nov. 24- Dec. 19 (CRZ)****	6-18
2022	Zoned**	60	Oct. 15-Oct. 23/Oct. 29 – Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 15-Dec. 13 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 23 – Dec. 8 (CRZ)****	6-18
2023	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7-Oct. 11/Nov. 4 – Dec. 28 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 7-Dec. 5 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 5-Nov. 3/Nov. 22 – Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-18
2024	Zoned **	60	Oct. 12-Nov. 3/Nov. 23 – Dec. 29 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 12-Nov. 10/Nov. 23 – Dec. 22 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 9-Nov. 11/Nov. 27 – Dec. 22 (CRZ)****	6-18
2025	Zoned **	60	Oct. 11-Nov. 2/Nov. 22 – Dec. 28 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 11-Dec. 9 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Nov. 11/Nov. 27 – Dec. 26 (CRZ)****	6-18

* Regular season was followed by a 16-day special goldeneye/scaup season – 3-bird bag

** Lake Champlain Zone – Split Season
Interior Vermont Zone – Straight Season

*** Two teal (either blue-winged or green-winged) allowed in addition to regular bag limit

**** Connecticut River Zone set by New Hampshire Fish and Game Commission, same as NH Inland Zone

2026
Moose Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks. The Department recommends issuing 85 moose hunting permits distributed between WMUs E1 and E2 to stabilize the moose population in that region. No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, because moose densities remain below established objectives. The recommended permit allocation is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

The number of moose in WMU E has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that are negatively affecting moose health and survival. Winter ticks are a host-dependent parasite with moose being the primary host responsible for major fluctuations in winter tick densities. Therefore, reduction in moose population density decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Maintaining a lower-density moose population will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

Reducing winter tick numbers directly, either by treating moose or the landscape with some form of acaricide or fungal pathogen, is not currently a viable option. Research in this area is ongoing, but the realities of treating an entire landscape or a sufficient portion of the moose population make it unlikely that this will be a practical option soon. Importantly, this approach would not address the cause of high winter tick abundance, which is high moose population density.

Maintaining a lower-density moose population should reduce the abundance of winter ticks and improve overall moose health in WMU E, consistent with the Department's established objective of managing for a healthy moose population. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the northeast, they do not significantly impact moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose population densities that limit tick abundance. Instead, moose in these areas are primarily limited by the lack of young forest habitat and internal parasites like brainworm.

Summary of Key Points

- The moose population remains stable or slowly declining in most of Vermont, but may be declining in WMU E (E1 & E2), as intended, due to recent moose harvests.

- Results of moose research and ongoing monitoring in WMU E indicate health of moose is poor in that region.
    - Adult survival remains relatively good, but detrimental health impacts of winter ticks have caused birth rates to be low.
    - Heavy winter tick loads can cause more than half of moose calves to die in late winter.

- Moose density in WMU E remains above the objective of 1 moose per square mile established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.
    - Moose densities greater than 1 moose per square mile are uncommon in North America, occurring in less than 10% of moose range.
    - In Vermont, no WMU outside the Northeast Kingdom ever had a moose density of 1/mi^2.
    - Moose densities greater than 1/mi^2 support high numbers of winter ticks that negatively impact the health of moose.
    - Moose densities below 0.75/mi^2 support relatively few winter ticks that do not impact moose populations. This is the case in most of Vermont – winter ticks are present, but do not cause population level impacts.

- Increased moose harvests in recent years appear to be effectively reducing moose numbers, as intended, in WMU E. The population is approaching the objective of 1 moose per square mile.

- The Department recommends 85 moose hunting permits (65 either sex and 20 antlerless only) be allocated in WMU E to stabilize moose numbers near the objective.
    - This is expected to result in a harvest of approximately 42 moose, or about 6% of the current estimated population in WMU E.

- No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, which cover 93% of Vermont, because moose densities remain below objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Goals

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in WMUs E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks.

Management Objectives

Moose population objectives for each WMU were established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. These objectives aim to maintain healthy regional moose populations at levels that are socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable.

Moose density objectives throughout most of moose range in Vermont have been set at 0.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 1**). This objective is a carryover from earlier moose management plans and reflects peak moose densities in these regions during the early 2000s.

In WMUs D2, E1, and E2, density objectives reflect higher historical densities and the impact of winter ticks on the size and health of the region's moose population. Research has found reduced frequency of winter tick epizootics (where more than 50% of calves die from winter tick infestations) at moose densities near 1/mi^2 and no tick epizootics at densities below 0.75/mi^2 (Samuel 2007, Jones 2016). The Department will initially try to maintain moose densities at or below 1/mi^2 to reduce winter tick abundance and the frequency of epizootics and improve the health of the moose population. However, if tick impacts are not reduced, the moose density may need to be reduced to 0.75/mi^2. Ultimately, the goal is to have healthy moose, with fewer calves dying each year from heavy winter tick loads and healthier cows with higher birth rates.

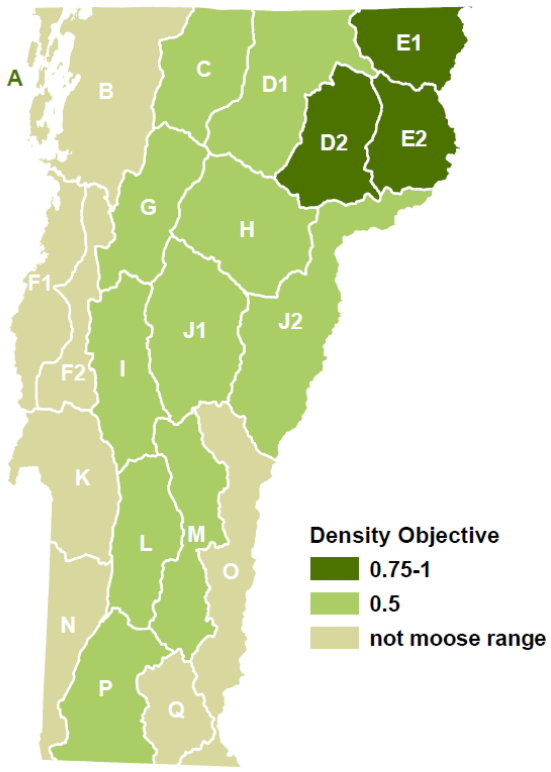


Figure 1. Moose density objectives (moose per square mile of moose habitat) established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Hunting thresholds have also been established for each WMU at 75% of the density objective (**Table 1**). The Department will only consider hunting moose when densities exceed this threshold for two consecutive years. This ensures the other values of moose are maximized at these lower densities.

Moose and Winter Ticks

Studies in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine have concluded that winter ticks are the primary cause of moose mortality across their core range in New England (Musante et al. 2007, 2010, Bergeron et al. 2013, Dunfey-Ball 2017, Jones et al. 2017, Ellingwood et al. 2019, Jones et al. 2019, DeBow et al. 2021), with some moose hosting an astonishingly high number of ticks (>50,000/individual; Jones et al. 2019).

Core moose range in New England extends from northeastern Vermont through northern New Hampshire and western and northern Maine. This part of the region has a colder climate with longer winters, low deer densities, large blocks of forest, and an abundance of young forest created by commercial timber management which allows it to sustain higher densities of moose than more peripheral parts of their range. Population-level effects of winter ticks have only been observed in the region's core moose range, where moose densities have been high enough to support large numbers of winter ticks.

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the region, they have little impact on moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range in the northeast, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose densities which limit tick abundance. Moose numbers outside of the Northeast Kingdom have declined from their peak in the early 2000s, but the main cause of that decline was not winter ticks. It was primarily due to a combination of declining quantity of young forest, increased parasite loads (particularly brainworm linked to increasing deer densities), and fewer moose in core moose range to migrate out to these other regions. These factors continue to limit moose abundance across much of Vermont.

Vermont Research

During 2017–2019, 126 moose (36 adult cows and 90 calves) were fitted with GPS radio collars in WMU E to monitor survival and birth rates. Results of this research clearly showed that chronic, high winter tick loads caused the health of moose in WMU E to be poor. Birth rates were low and overwinter calf survival was poor (49%; DeBow et al. 2021). Although adult female survival remained relatively good, it was lower than expected for a population without major predators. Survival of breeding age females has significant influence on population trends in long-lived species like moose.

Fieldwork associated with the survival study concluded in 2019; however, the Department continued to monitor survival and calf recruitment in the remaining collared cows through 2024. Additionally, the large amounts of data collected during this study allowed University of Vermont researchers to analyze other aspects of moose and winter tick ecology (*see* Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Blouin et al. 2021*b*, Rosenblatt et al. 2021, Rosenblatt et al. 2023). Other related research at UVM assessed the effect of various fungal pathogens on survival of winter tick larvae (*see* Sullivan et al. 2021 and Sullivan et al. 2022).

The Department is currently partnering with multiple northeastern universities and state and federal agencies on regional research efforts focused on non-invasive monitoring of moose and winter ticks. A component of this involves deployment of hundreds of long-term camera monitoring stations that will hopefully allow for better monitoring of moose health and population trends, particularly in parts of the region with little or no moose harvest.

Population Status

Regional Population Estimates

Regional moose densities in Vermont are estimated from moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters during the November rifle season. This approach, originally developed by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, relates sighting rates to moose densities determined by aerial surveys (Bontaites et al. 2000). Aerial surveys conducted in Vermont allowed the Department to modify this model to better fit Vermont sighting data (Millette et al. 2011). Sighting rates often vary from year to year due to factors other than the number of moose (e.g., weather conditions), so a 3-year rolling average is used to smooth out some of this variation.

Using this approach, the 2025 (2023–2025 rolling average) density estimates for WMUs E1 and E2 are 1.32 and 1.09 moose/mi^2, respectively, which remain above the density objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. Moose population densities in all other WMUs except WMU C remain below established hunting thresholds (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Moose density estimates based on sighting rates by deer hunters and density objectives and hunting thresholds established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, by WMU. Density estimates are based on average sighting rates during 2023–2025.

WMU	Habitat (mi^2)	Density (moose/mi^2)			Population Estimate	
		Objective	Hunting Threshold	Current Estimate	N	(80% CI)
A	35	n/a	n/a	0.02	1	(1–1)
B	420	n/a	n/a	0.02	10	(8–11)
C	351	0.5	0.38	0.41	145	(122–168)
D1	449	0.5	0.38	0.09	39	(30–49)
D2	346	0.75-1	0.56	0.24	82	(63–100)
E1	306	0.75-1	0.56	1.32	403	(357–449)
E2	326	0.75-1	0.56	1.09	355	(297–413)
F1	108	n/a	n/a	0.04	5	(3–6)
F2	158	n/a	n/a	0.02	3	(3–3)
G	363	0.5	0.38	0.05	17	(11–23)
H	466	0.5	0.38	0.19	88	(72–104)
I	407	0.5	0.38	0.09	35	(26–44)
J1	464	0.5	0.38	0.04	18	(14–23)
J2	633	0.5	0.38	0.10	65	(54–77)
K	359	n/a	n/a	0.04	14	(8–19)
L	346	0.5	0.38	0.08	27	(17–36)
M	424	0.5	0.38	0.18	77	(55–98)
N	275	n/a	n/a	0.02	6	(6–6)
O	478	n/a	n/a	0.05	25	(13–37)
P	447	0.5	0.38	0.11	49	(34–65)
Q	219	n/a	n/a	0.05	12	(7–16)
STATE	**7380**				**1474**	**(1201–1748)**

Moose density in WMU C exceeded the hunting threshold in 2024 and 2025, meaning permits could now be considered in this WMU according to the guidelines of the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. However, since the current density is only slightly above the hunting threshold, typical year-to-year fluctuations in density estimates make it unlikely that this status will be maintained. Therefore, the Department recommends that no permits be issued in WMU C in 2026.

The Department continues to receive interest in moose hunting in areas outside WMU E, and some local areas could likely sustain a limited moose harvest. However, the uneven distribution of functional moose habitat (and therefore moose) in much of Vermont is a challenge for management. The Department is reevaluating moose habitat mapping and regional population objectives based on recent research efforts in the northeast (e.g., Pearman-Gilman et al. 2020, Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Peterson et al. 2022) This will allow for setting more appropriate population objectives that reflect current habitat limitations, and calculating more meaningful estimates of moose density in WMUs with less homogeneous moose habitat.

Moose Population Trends in WMU E

In WMU E, moose were overabundant in the early 2000s and the Department intentionally worked to reduce moose numbers. Since population reduction efforts ended in 2010, moose density has remained relatively stable in WMU E near 1.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 2**). Importantly, the density of moose over that time has been high enough to support problematic numbers of winter ticks. The population may now be declining, as intended, as a result of higher moose harvests in recent years.

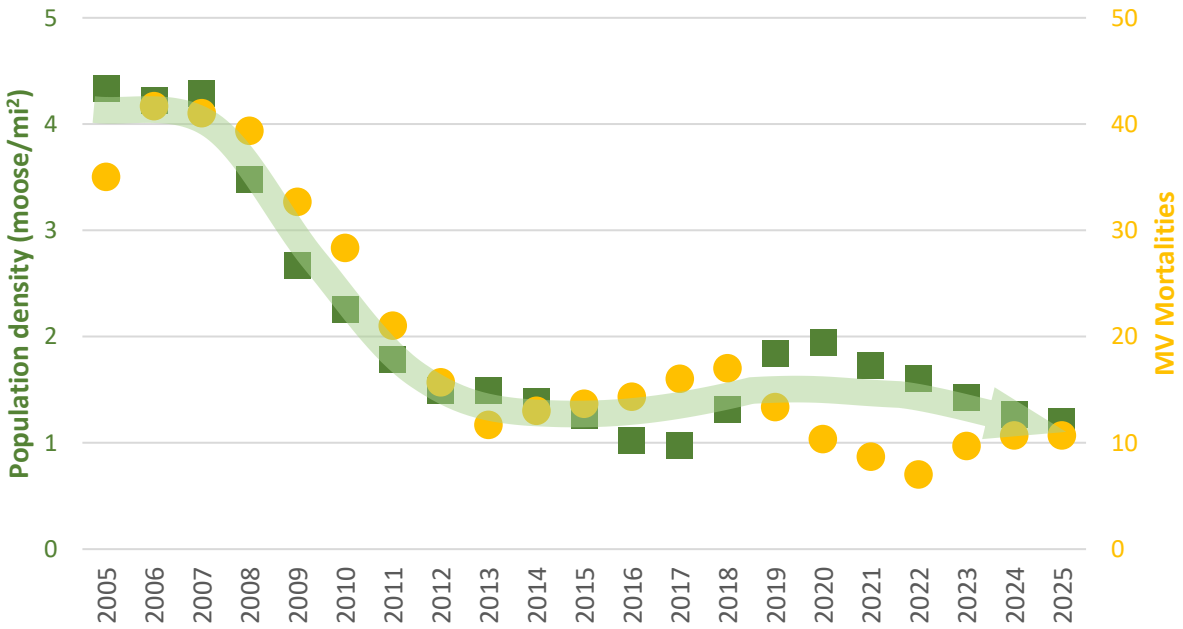


Figure 2. Moose density estimates (green squares) and moose mortalities from motor vehicle collision (yellow circles) in WMU E during 2005–2025. Both metrics are three-year rolling averages. Density estimates are based on moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters. The light green line shows general population trend.

Recent Winter Tick Impacts in WMU E

The severity of annual tick infestations is dependent not only on moose density, but also on climate, including temperature, humidity, wind, and snow. Annual variation in climate conditions results in variation in winter tick loads on moose. Vermont has not collared moose calves to directly monitor overwinter survival since 2019. As a result, the Department relies on other sources of information to estimate winter tick impacts since that time.

One useful measure is counts of winter ticks on bull moose harvested in October (**Figure 6**). This measure provides an indication of tick abundance on the landscape, but final tick loads on moose are largely determined by the length of the questing period. The questing period is typically ended by weather conditions (e.g., persistent snow or freezing conditions) that kill questing winter tick larvae.

Persistent snow arrived in early November in WMU E, resulting in a shorter questing period than in many recent years. However, the higher average winter tick counts in 2025 (**Figure 6**) still suggest a greater likelihood of high calf mortality in the spring of 2026.

Occasional increases in winter tick abundance are expected, even as moose density is reduced. However, these high winter tick years will be less frequent at lower moose density. Winter tick counts were also higher in New Hampshire and Maine in 2025, indicating this increase was driven by annual climate variation, not moose abundance.

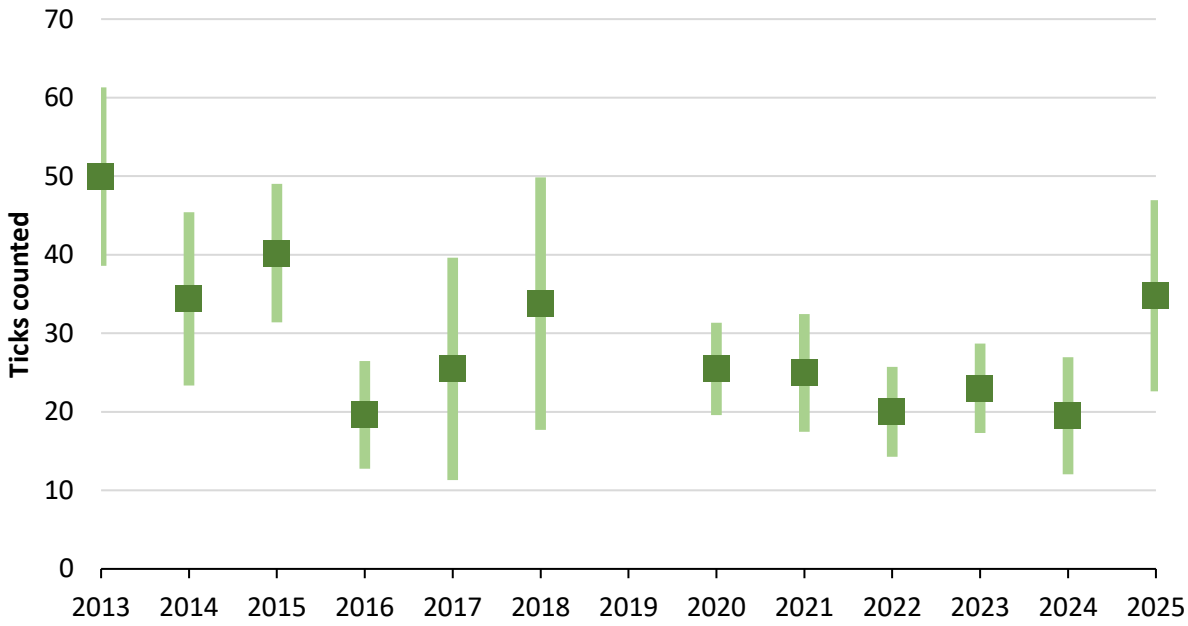


Figure 6. Winter tick counts on bull moose harvested in Wildlife Management Unit E, 2013–2025.

Population Health in WMU E

In the early 2000s, moose were overabundant in WMU E. They were causing significant damage to forest regeneration, and their physical condition was declining as habitat quality declined. The Department actively reduced the moose population in this area to bring it into balance with the habitat and to improve the health of moose. By 2011, the population had been reduced to a level the habitat could support; however, health measures did not improve (**Figures 7** and **8**).

Moose body condition and reproductive rates have remained poor since 2011 due to the impacts of chronic high winter tick loads. Moose are not currently limited by habitat quality in the core part of their range, including WMU E (Dunfey-Ball 2017). However, habitat quality can influence the distribution of moose on the landscape (i.e., higher densities of moose in areas with the highest quality habitat), which can influence local winter tick abundance and impacts on moose health (Healy et al. 2019, Blouin et al. 2021*a* and *b*).

Body condition and reproductive rates have shown signs of improvement in recent years (**Figures 7** and **8**). However, body weights, particularly for yearling moose, declined sharply in 2024 and 2025 (**Figure 7**). The cause of this decline is unknown, but it is likely due to something other than winter ticks. Ultimately, we hope to see sustained improvement in these metrics.

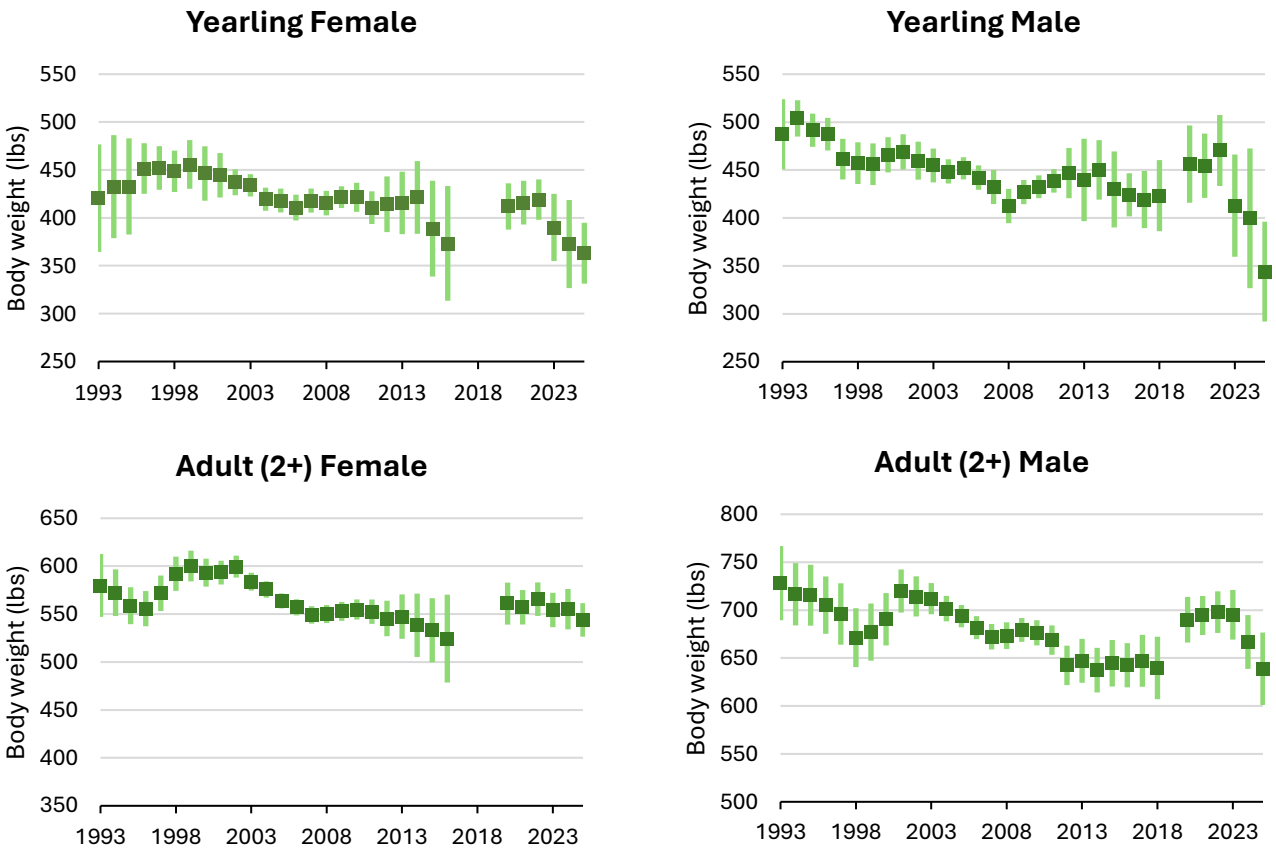


Figure 7. Field-dressed body weights of moose harvested during the regular season in Wildlife Management Unit E, 1993–2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages with 95% confidence intervals.

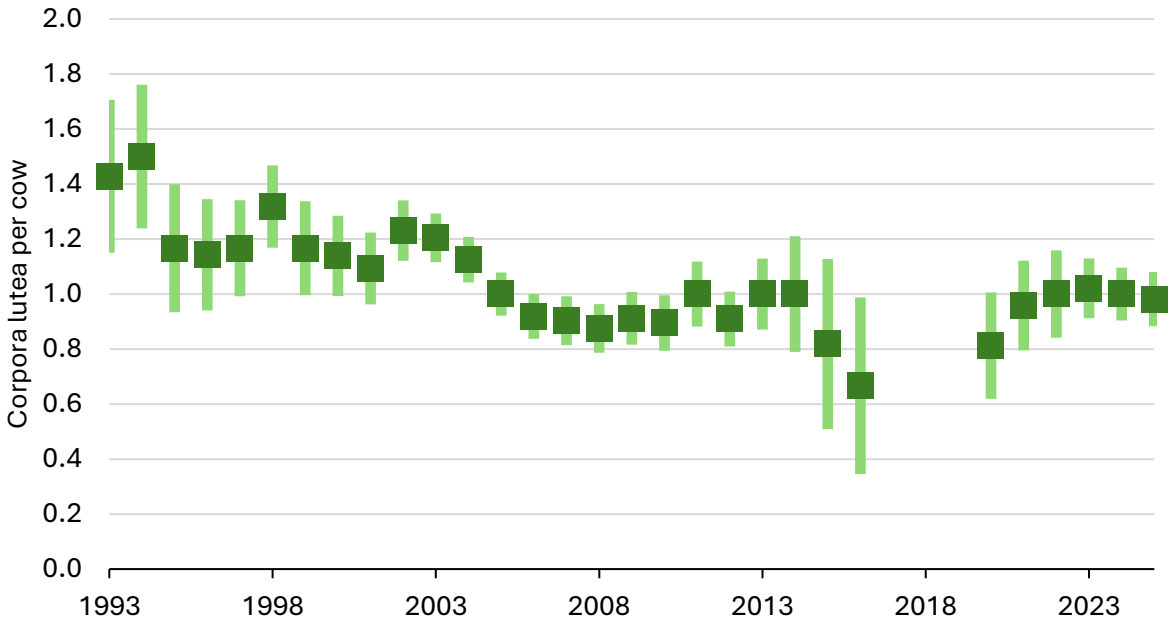


Figure 8. Ovulation rate of prime-aged (≥3 years old) cow moose in WMU E, 1993-2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages from counts of corpora lutea in ovaries collected from hunter-harvested moose.

Harvest Recommendation

The Department recommends harvesting approximately 10-12 adult cow moose (~3% of the cow population) and approximately 30 adult bull moose (~15% of the bull population) in WMU E during the 2026 moose hunting seasons. The Department further recommends that this be accomplished through the issuance of 65 either-sex hunting permits and 20 antlerless-only hunting permits. This is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025. No permits are recommended in the other 19 WMUs.

Permit breakdown by season, type, WMU, and special allocation is provided below in **Table 2**. Given recent success rates and sex-age composition of the harvest for each season and permit type, this allocation is expected to result in the harvest of approximately 42 moose with an expected breakdown of 29 bulls, 11 cows, and 2 calves.

Approximately 55% of permits are recommended to be allocated to WMU E1 due to higher moose density in that WMU. Since most auction and special opportunity permit winners choose to hunt WMU E1, this will result in approximately 65% of permits being assigned to that WMU.

The recommended allocation to the archery season is 25% of either-sex permits, based on the percentage of total applications that were for this season in recent years and the need to obtain sufficient biological data during the regular season. Allocations to the auction, special opportunity, and veterans are the same as prior years and are limited by statute and regulation.

Table 2. Recommended 2026 moose hunting permit allocations and expected harvest by season, permit type, and WMU.

	Permits			Expected Harvest	
	E1	E2	Total		
Archery Season					
Either-sex	7	8	15	8	*(6–10)*
Regular Season[1]					
Either-sex	24	20	44	24	*(20–30)*
Antlerless-only	11	9	20	7	*(6–10)*
Auction[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
Special Opportunity[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
TOTAL			**85**	**42**	*(32–56)*

[1] *Veteran permits are a priority draw for the first 5 regular season permits.*

[2] *Auction and Special Opportunity Permits are either sex and allow choice of season and WMU.*

The results of the moose study and continued monitoring of moose clearly show that the density of moose in WMU E over the past decade has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that negatively affect moose health and survival. Research has shown that winter tick abundance is directly related to moose population density. Reducing the density of moose decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Reducing the moose population and maintaining it at lower density will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

The Department is committed to achieving a healthy moose population in WMU E by meeting the population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. The proposed permit allocation and resulting cow harvest should allow the population to stabilize near the objective of 1 moose/mi^2 (632 moose in WMU E) within the next few years.

In practice, the moose population and winter tick impacts are dynamic, and management must remain adaptive. Actual permit allocations and harvest will be adjusted annually based on new information as it becomes available. Importantly, the Department's primary goal is to improve the health of moose in WMU E. If health does not improve at 1 moose/mi^2, moose density may need to be reduced even further.

Maintaining a healthy, stable, and sustainable moose population requires action to improve moose health. Without management action to reduce the moose population and maintain it at a lower density, high tick loads will continue to impact the health of moose in WMU E. The resulting chronic stress, low birth rates, and high calf mortality will make the population less resilient to diseases, parasites, and environmental variation, which could cause the population to destabilize. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

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ANR.FWBoard mailing list
ANR.FWBoard@list.vermont.gov
https://list.vermont.gov/mailman/listinfo/anr.fwboard

From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 4:40 PM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov'
Subject: FW: Board Meeting Agenda 4/1/26
Attachments: Board Meeting Agenda 4.1.26.pdf; Black Bear Regulations Petition.pdf; Board_Meeting_Minutes_2.18.26_Unapproved.pdf; 2026 Moose Harvest Rec with comments.pdf; 2026 Waterfowl Season Recommendations with comments.pdf

Good afternoon, Board Members,

Please see the 2026 moose season and 2026 migratory game bird season recommendations attached for your review.

Thank you,

VERMONT
Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources | Fish & Wildlife Department
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell | abigail.connolly@vermont.gov
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

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Written communications to and from state employees regarding state business are considered public records and may be subject to public scrutiny.

From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Tuesday, March 24, 2026 4:28 PM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov' <anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov>
Subject: Board Meeting Agenda 4/1/26

Good afternoon, Board Members,

Please see the agenda attached for the April 1, 2026 Board Meeting. Also attached is the petition that will be presented and the unapproved minutes from February for your review. We will follow up with the materials for the 2026 migratory game bird season and 2026 moose season this week.

Thank you,

VERMONT
Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources | Fish & Wildlife Department
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell | abigail.connolly@vermont.gov
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Fish and Wildlife Board
Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, April 1, 2026
5:00 pm

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board will hold an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, April 1, 2026, the National Life Dewey Conference Room, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620.

To attend the meeting virtually, please use the following link: Join the meeting now
Meeting ID: 282 535 999 934 4 Passcode: jr2FX2Dp
Or call in (audio only): +1 802-828-7667,,884135585#
Phone Conference ID: 884 135 585#

Agenda:

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (February 18, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. Black Bear Season Regulations Petition- Presentation by Petitioners
4. 2026 Migratory Game Bird Season – Final Vote
5. 2026 Moose Season – Final Vote
6. Moose Lottery Bonus Points
7. Commissioner's Update

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From: [redacted]
To: Batchelder, Jason; Austin, John; Sausville, David; Comeau, Jaclyn; ANR - FW Board Caledonia; ANR - FW Board Addison; ANR - FW Board Bennington; ANR.FWBoardChttenden@vermont.gov; ANR - FW Board Lamoille; ANR - FW Board Orange; ANR - FW Board Orleans; ANR - FW Board Rutland; ANR - FW Board Essex; ANR - FW Board Franklin; ANR - FW Board GrandIsle; ANR - FW Board Washington; ANR - FW Board Windham; ANR - FW Board Windsor; Kevin Lawrence
Subject: Bear petition.....
Date: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 9:09:34 AM

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Please accept the petition to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board.
Regarding bear hunting season:
1) Extend the current bear hunting season from September 1st to the second Sunday in December.
2) Allow hunter's to purchase a second bear tag with an annual limit of two bears per hunter.
3) Incorporate a bear Baiting Season similar to current Bear Baiting season in Maine and New Hampshire.

All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board ,go into Effect the 2027 Season.
I believe there's no reason this can't happen.....

Please Reach out to confirm receipt.
To: Kevin Lawrence, Former Board Chair. At [redacted]

Bert Saldi at [redacted]

Thank you...
The Vermonter
Bert Saldi

Fish and Wildlife Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 18, 2026

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, February 18, 2026, in the National Life Dewey Conference Room, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620. A recording of the meeting is available on the department's YouTube channel.

Agenda

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (January 21, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. Vermont Bowhunters Association Petitions
    - Youth and Novice Archery Season
    - Regulated Black Bear Baiting Season
4. Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential Re-Vote
5. 2026 Migratory Game Bird Season Preview – Preliminary Approval
6. 2026 Moose Season Recommendation – Preliminary Approval
7. Preliminary Discussion on Proposed Changes to the Bear Regulations
8. Commissioner's Update

Board Members Present: Nicholas Burnham, Jeffrey Corey, Richard Craig, Beth Deimling, Allison Frazier, Neal Hogan, Ryan Kilborn, Paul Noel (Acting Chair), Robert Patterson, Jon Valsangiacomo, Martin Van Buren

Virtual: Linda Hook, Brad Ferland (Chair)

Absent: David Deen

Department Staff Present: Commissioner Jason Batchelder, Chief Operating Officer Andrea Shortsleeve, General Counsel Hannah Smith, Wildlife Division Director John Austin, Deer and Moose Project Leader Nick Fortin, Black Bear Project Leader Jaclyn Comeau, Migratory Game Bird Project Leader Andrew Bouton, Game Warden Colonel Justin Stedman, Game Warden Major Jenna Reed, Wildlife Management Program Manager David Sausville, Sr. Game Warden Dustin Snyder, Game Warden John Truong, Game Warden Chase Reagan, Principal Assistant Abigail Connolly

Virtual: Director of Outreach Alison Thomas, Information Program Manager Megan Duni, Information Specialist John Hall, Wildlife Specialist Nicole Dickan

Members of the Public Present: Rod Coronado, Sarah Gorsline, Chris Pritchard, Charles Palmer, Rocky Bunnell, Fred Schroeder, Justin Lindholm, Nancy Fitzpatrick, Maureen Dwyer, Mike Frisbee, Bill Hickok

Virtual: Mike Kolsun, Elizabeth Blair, Brad Herring, Bob Galvin, Leisa George, Matthew Bouffard, B Felitti, Katie Nolan, Mark Green

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm

Unapproved

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Board Member Patterson moved to approve the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes with one change that he attended the meeting virtually instead of in-person. Board Member Hogan seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes (13-0).

Public Comment Period

Justin Lindholm, Chittenden, regarding bear baiting and H.276, an act relating to the designation of State wildlands
Maureen Dwyer, Barre Town, regarding bear baiting
Rod Coronado, Orange, regarding the State Wildlife Action Plan and the bear baiting petition
Fred Schroeder, Bristol, regarding the changes to the Fish Management Rule
Sarah Gorsline, Grand Isle, regarding bear hunting and the State Wildlife Action Plan
Bob Galvin, Bolton, regarding the bear baiting petition
Katie Nolan, Bolton, regarding the bear baiting petition
Mike Kolsun, Brighton, regarding the Fish & Wildlife Board

The recording of the public comments and the meeting can be viewed here.

Vermont Bowhunters Association Petitions

- **Youth and Novice Archery Season**
- **Regulated Black Bear Baiting Season**

Bill Hickok presented the youth and novice archery season petition, which is included below. The Board Members asked questions about if crossbows would be included, the timing of the weekend, participation in the rifle season, and data on youth archery hunters.

Bill Hickok presented the regulated black bear baiting season petition, which is included below. Rocky Bunnell discussed bear baiting in other states. The Board Members asked questions about the amount of land needed to hunt bear with bait, if there are any overlaps with bear hunting with dogs, drawing other animals in, and potential disease risks. Bill Hickock, Rocky Bunnell, and Charles Palmer responded to the questions.

Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential Re-Vote

Board Member Craig presented revised language to the Board for consideration, changing reference from “arrowhead” to “broadhead.” The Board discussed why the language was framed in the negative, the timing of passing the rule, and consistency throughout statutes. The Board

Unapproved

asked General Counsel Smith to draft language and agreed to take it up again later in the meeting.

2026 Migratory Game Bird Season Preview – Preliminary Approval

David Sausville introduced Andrew Bouton and explained that after the preliminary approval by the Board there will be public hearings in March and a final vote by the Board in April. Andrew Bouton reviewed the management of migratory game birds and surveys and presented the 2026 migratory game bird season recommendations. The recommendations and presentation are included below. The Board Members asked questions about if there were any changes from last year, the Atlantic Brant harvest, the term "blue geese," and the timing of the Snow Goose season.

Board Member Frazier moved to approve the 2026 migratory game bird seasons as recommended by the department. Board Member Van Buren seconded the motion. The Board voted (13-0) to approve the motion.

David Sausville provided the dates for the public hearings: March 10, 2026, Senior Citizens Building at the Whitehall Recreation Center, 28 Williams Street, Whitehall, New York 12887, and March 12, 2026, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, Act 250 Conference Room, 111 West Street, Essex Junction, Vermont 05452-4695. Board Member Patterson conveyed feedback that waterfowl hunters would appreciate Board Member presence at the hearings.

Chair Ferland asked about next steps for the petitions and General Counsel Smith responded that the process typically involves presentation of the petition, and the Department will provide a recommendation followed by further Board discussion at the next meeting.

The Board recessed at 6:22 pm and returned at 6:48 pm.

2026 Moose Season Recommendation – Preliminary Approval

David Sausville explained that the public hearings will be held in March after the preliminary approval by the Board. Nick Fortin reviewed the 2025 harvest, the population objectives, impacts on the moose population and health, health measures, and the recommended 2026 harvest. The recommendation and presentation are included below. The Board Members asked questions about the permits issued last year, winter tick impact, and the rationale for the reduction in permits.

Unapproved

Board Member Van Buren moved to accept the 2026 moose season recommendation as presented by the department. Board Member Patterson seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the motion (13-0).

Preliminary Discussion on Proposed Changes to the Bear Regulations

Commissioner Batchelder introduced the presentation and Jaclyn Comeau. Jaclyn Comeau reviewed the management and goals for big game, efforts for living with bears, population estimates, and harvest data. Jaclyn Comeau then presented the proposed changes to the bear rule from the department for discussion by the Board. The recommendations and presentation are included below.

The Board asked about the enforceability of prohibiting the intentional taking a female bear with cubs and the education/training put in place by the department to prevent the taking of a female bear with cubs. The Board discussed considering not allowing other species to be hunted when rearing their offspring, considerations for using the word intentional in a law, and whether the recommended changes allow for enough of a reduction in the bear population to meet the population goals. The Board asked about whether there were enough teeth being collected, details around allowing a second bear harvest, timing of the bear season, identifying cubs by weight, the rationale for not recommending a spring season or bear baiting, the intention for recommending adding the authority to revoke a bear dog permit and for registering dogs, NH's reciprocity requirement for requirement for out-of-state bear hunters with dogs, non-resident bear hunters with dogs in Vermont, and the hunter survey data from 2018. The Board discussed the possible impacts of expanding the bear hunting season, if there could be changes to the allowance of farmers taking nuisance bears with depredation permits, how the unintentional taking of a female bear with cubs would be handled, and other educational opportunities.

Section 5, Bow and Arrow Standards – Potential Re-Vote

General Counsel Smith presented the revised language: "A person hunting big game with a bow and arrow or crossbow must use an arrow or bolt with a broadhead that measures at least seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point and has at least two sharp cutting edges."

Board Member Craig moved to accept the revised language to 10 App. V.S.A. § 5 Bow and arrow and crossbow standards. Board Member Hogan seconded the motion. The Board voted (13-0) to approve the motion.

Acting Chair Noel thanked Board Member Frazier and Chair Ferland for their service on the Fish & Wildlife Board, whose terms are ending in February 2026.

Unapproved

Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Batchelder announced a legislative mixer happening on February 25, 2026 at the Statehouse and a commemoration of the restoration of wild turkeys happening on April 18, 2026 in Pawlet. Commissioner Batchelder provided updates about legislative bills and testimony.

Motion To Adjourn:

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 pm.

Unapproved

The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting consideration by the Fish and Wildlife Board to create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

We know that the current Youth and Novice Gun Seasons for deer, turkey, and waterfowl are great opportunities to bring in young and new hunters to the outdoors sports. Creating a Youth and Novice Archery Season will not only encourage youngsters and new hunters to learn archery but enable them to hunt in a less pressurized environment.

The VBA suggests a two-day season, being the last full weekend in September. While this is after the start of the Expanded Archery Deer Season, we feel that the zones included in that season are relatively small and many archers either live too far from one or might not have access to those private lands outlined in the zones. Also, the weather is usually warm and conducive to longer stays on the stand. The end of September is the end of the summer feeding season for deer, but before the cooler weather sets in and the onset of the beginning of the breeding time. This timing helps make deer a bit more predictable, so new archers can more readily pattern the deer and get in close.

The overall rules for this special season could be adapted by the current gun season models.

We feel that a Youth and Novice Archery Season will offer a welcoming atmosphere to new archers as they learn from their mentors and open the door for them to a lifetime of enjoying Vermont's natural beauty and resources. We hope you will see the benefits of this special season.

Thank you,
Vermont Bowhunters Association

523 Westminster West Rd, Putney, Vermont 05346 – 802-579-8471
info@vermontbowhuntersassociation.org
www.vermontbowhuntersassociation.org

The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting the creation of a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont. Our intent is to support the Department's long-term bear management objectives, improve harvest selectivity, and reduce human–bear conflicts while upholding the high standards of ethical and science-based wildlife management.

Vermont's black bear population continues to expand in both numbers and distribution throughout the state, creating challenges for landowners, farmers, and communities. Traditional hunting methods remain important but often fall short of harvest objectives, especially in years of abundant natural foods. The proposed season would provide Vermont's bear management team with a precise and predictable tool to manage goals while ensuring sustainability and accountability. New Hampshire has a carefully structured baiting season in place that has been very successful in meeting their management goals.

It should be noted that while the VBA is submitting this petition, it is not asking that this be considered as an archery-only season but rather be open to all legal bear hunting implements.

Benefits of a Regulated Bear Baiting Season

1. A baiting season allows hunters to be in **close proximity** so they can more readily identify bears before harvest. This would reduce the likelihood of taking sows with cubs and provide a better opportunity for the best shot placement to provide a swift harvest. This supports Vermont's commitment to ethical, selective, and responsible wildlife management.
2. It is an effective tool for **population management**. In heavy mast years, traditional hunting methods often struggle to meet harvest objectives. Baiting provides a consistent, reliable method for achieving management goals across wildlife management units.
3. It can help reduce **human–bear conflicts** by targeting harvest in areas with recurring property damage, agricultural damage, and other nuisance bear activities, supporting the Department's conflict mitigation strategies.

Framework to Be Considered

Everyone participating in the baiting season must obtain a mandatory Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Permit. Permit numbers can be limited by Wildlife Management Units to ensure population sustainability, prevent overcrowding and overharvesting, and help the Department meet management objectives. The applications for the Permit should include:

1. Written landowner permission.
2. Map(s) showing the exact location of bait sites.
3. Names and contact information for each hunter that will be allowed to hunt the sites.
4. Fee for the Permit, to be determined by the Department.
5. Types of bait that may be used or not used (e.g., any form of cocoa or chocolate because of its toxicity to bears and other wildlife). Other restrictions may be added to prevent attraction of non-target species.
6. The season dates as set by the Department. The VBA suggests that a short pre-baiting period be added before the start of the hunting season. The actual season could be September 1–30, with all bait removed from the site at the end of the season.
7. If an application is accepted, copies of the Permit shall be given to the landowner and the Department, and a copy carried by each hunter.
8. Successful hunters will report the bears in the manner dictated by the Department regulations.

The Vermont Bowhunters Association believes a well-regulated fall bear baiting season built on proven regional models and guided by Vermont's strong conservation ethic would provide the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department with an effective and responsible tool for managing our growing bear population. We respectfully request that the Board consider initiating rulemaking to establish such a season.

Thank you,
Vermont Bowhunters Association

523 Westminster West Rd, Putney, Vermont 05346 – 802-579-8471
info@vermontbowhuntersassociation.org
www.vermontbowhuntersassociation.org

2026
Migratory Game Bird Season Recommendations

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

2026 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON PREVIEW

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

The majority of Vermont's waterfowl season is driven by the federal framework for the Atlantic Flyway. Below are a few issues that must be decided for the 2026 hunting season. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) would like the Board to consider the following recommendations:

- Hold the liberal season allowed under the federal framework related to season lengths and daily bag limits.
- For the 2026 Duck Season.
    - Open the 2026 duck season on Saturday, October 10.
        - Interior Zone: October 10 and run through December 8.
        - Lake Champlain Zone: October 10 – Nov. 1 and Nov. 21 - Dec. 27
- For the 2026 Goose Seasons
    - Open the resident Canada goose season September 1st and continue through September 25.
    - Open the migratory Canada goose season on October 10 and run through November 23.
    - Open the late resident Canada goose season on December 1, 2026 and run through January 4 2027. Allow a five-bird daily bag limit within the Lake Champlain and Interior zones.
    - Open the Snow goose season on October 1 and run through December 31, 2026 and February 24 through March 10, 2027.
- Hold youth hunting weekend during September 26 and 27.
- Open the Atlantic Brant season on Oct. 10 and run through Nov. 8
- Open the woodcock and snipe season September 26 and run through November 9.
- Remove the Conservation Order for the Snow Geese 2027 period.

2026 Waterfowl and Migratory Game Bird Season Proposals:

The Department offers these 2026 migratory game bird hunting season recommendations based on results from the 2024 Waterfowl Hunters survey, comments received from waterfowl hunters in recent years, data collected on availability of various waterfowl species in Vermont, including eBird, internal discussions among Vermont Wildlife Biologists, USFWS refuge Biologists, and State Game Wardens, and frameworks provided by the USFWS.

Table 1.

2026-2027 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

LAKE CHAMPLAIN ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	6	18
SCAUP*	Split Hybrid	40 Days	Oct. 10–Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 7	1	3
		20 Days	Dec. 8 – Dec. 27	2	6
MERGANSERS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	5	15
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 - Dec. 27	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 - Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1 – Jan. 4	5	15
Snow Geese *	Split	105 Days	Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026 Feb. 24 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Includes blue geese.

Table 2.

2026-2027 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

VERMONT INTERIOR ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	6	18
SCAUP*	Straight	40 Days	Oct. 10 – Oct. 18	1	3
		20 Days	Oct. 19 – Dec. 8	2	6
MERGANSERS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	5	15
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 - Dec. 8	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 - Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1 – Jan. 4	5	15
Snow Geese *	Split	105 Days	Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026 Feb. 24 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Includes blue geese.

Table 3.

2026-2027 VERMONT MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASONS
(regulations in effect September 1, 2026 through April 13, 2027)

Species	Lake Champlain Zone	Interior Vermont Zone	Connecticut River Zone
Ducks, Coots and Mergansers	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 1** **Nov. 21 – Dec. 27**	**Oct. 10 – Dec. 8**	**Oct. ? – Nov. ?** **Nov. ? – Dec. ?**
Canada Geese	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 10 – Nov. 23** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 4**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 10 – Nov. 23** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 4**	**Sept. ? – Sept. ?** **Oct. ? – Nov. ?** **Nov. ? – Dec. ?**
Snow Geese **(includes blue geese)**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2027**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2027**	**Oct. ? – Dec. ?**
Brant	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 8**	**Oct. 10 – Nov. 8**	**Oct. ? – Oct. ?**
Woodcock	**Statewide**	**Sept. 26 – Nov. 9**	
Snipe	**Statewide**	**Sept. 26 – Nov. 9**	

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Weekend – September 26 & 27

BAG LIMITS

The daily bag limit is the maximum number of birds of each species that any person may take (or possess in the field) during any one day. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit for all waterfowl species except snow geese.

Species	Daily Limit	Possession Limit
Ducks *	6	18
Mergansers	5	15
Coot	15	45
Canada Geese		
September season		
Lake Champlain Zone	8	24
Interior Vermont Zone	8	24
Connecticut River Zone	5	15
Oct. - Nov. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	3	9
Interior Vermont Zone	3	9
Connecticut River Zone	2	6
Dec. – Jan. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	5	15
Interior Vermont Zone	5	15
Snow Geese	25	No limit
Brant	1	3
Woodcock	3	9
Snipe	8	24

* The daily limit of 6 ducks may include no harlequin, and no more than 4 mallards (only 2 of which may be hens), 2 black ducks, 3 wood ducks, 3 pintail, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 2 or 1 scaup depending on dates, 3 Sea ducks including no more than 3 scoters, 3 eiders (1 of which may be a hen), and 3 long-tailed duck.

Background On Waterfowl Season Setting and Management:

Migratory game bird managers currently base the migratory bird population estimates and recommendations on predictions derived from long-term biological information and harvest strategies instead of current year surveys. In 2018, the Atlantic Flyway region implemented a Multi-Stock Adaptive Harvest Management Strategy based on a suite of four duck species that represent the population dynamics and various habitat types used by waterfowl throughout the flyway, in lieu of relying solely upon the status of eastern mallards. The four species include green-winged teal, common goldeneye, ring-necked ducks, and wood ducks. These species compose more than 40% of the harvest within the flyway and supply a sufficient time series of estimates of annual abundance, harvest rates and harvest to monitor population trends. Previously, data on mallard populations was used to set the annual hunting regulations for all species of ducks. Using a single species like the mallard to represent the population dynamics of numerous other duck species was proving problematic. Within this system, species of concern such as mallard and black duck are evaluated separately with an assessment under the adaptive harvest management strategies developed for the target species. The objectives are to sustain duck populations for all species and to allow harvest where appropriate. Current estimates allow for a liberal season of 60 days with a 6-bird bag limit. Species specific bag limits follow their respective harvest strategies, with the majority of species bag limits being the same as last year.

Tables 4 and 5 provide background information on past migratory game bird hunting seasons. Table 4 shows the hunting seasons approved during 2025 and is provided as a reference while considering bag limits and the seasons frameworks for 2026. Appendix A provides the history, 1942-2025, of Vermont's waterfowl seasons broken down into season type, season length, dates, and bag limits. This information informs how Vermont arrived at our current zones and season types.

Table 5 provides a historic look at waterfowl hunter participation and estimated harvest levels, Vermont waterfowl stamps sold, and the number of individuals that registered with the Harvest Information Program (HIP). HIP is a method used to generate more reliable estimates of hunting activity and number of all migratory game birds harvested. The HIP program numbers include youth and adult waterfowl hunters, woodcock, and snipe hunters. Only adult waterfowl hunters, 16 years of age and older, are required to purchase the state waterfowl stamp. The Department will populate the remaining portions of the table this summer after the USFWS examines wings collected randomly from last season's hunters and harvest estimates are completed.

Vermont currently has three waterfowl zones (Figure 1):

- Lake Champlain Zone that is shared with New York. Vermont sets the dates for this zone and New York adopts the same dates.
- Interior Zone that is entirely within Vermont.
- Connecticut River Zone that is shared with New Hampshire. New Hampshire sets the dates for this zone as an extension of their inland zone and Vermont adopts those dates.

Under Vermont's current three zones, we can split any zone once to create two hunting segments. Vermont currently has sixty days to divide between the two segments in an effort to accommodate the diverse desires of the variety of Vermont waterfowl hunters. The zones were

also set up to take into consideration the differences in the physiographic regions of the state and the climatic differences each has. Federal regulations allow for zone and split changes every five years. Vermont's next opportunity to adjust zone boundaries and splits is in 2031. Any changes to zone boundaries will take effect in the 2031-2036 seasons and be in effect for 5-years.

2026 Migratory Game Bird Seasons:

Tables 6 and 7 provide the expected USFWS season frameworks for the 2026 duck and goose seasons, respectively, the latter including other migratory game birds as well. The 2025 hunting seasons are shown on Table 4 for comparison.

2026 Duck Season: The 2026 duck season options allow the opportunity to utilize a 60-day season within the dates of September 26, 2026 to January 31, 2027. The allowed daily bag limit is six birds, with species specific limits listed on Table 6. Vermont may allow a possession limit of 18 ducks total. The Board may be more restrictive on the length of the season and bag limits if desired, but the Board cannot set regulations more liberal. The Department recommends taking the liberal hunting option allowed under the federal framework.

The Board has also traditionally held the youth waterfowl weekend the last weekend in September. The Department has withheld any fishing tournament permits for that weekend to reduce conflicts between anglers and youth waterfowlers. The youth weekend must be within 14 days of either end of the federal framework dates.

2026 Goose, Brant, Mergansers, Coots. Snipe, and Woodcock Seasons: Table 7 lays out the season options for geese, brant, mergansers, coots, snipe, and woodcock. The available season lengths, outside dates for the seasons, daily bag limits and possession limits are broken down by species.

We often receive requests to open the migratory Canada goose season in early October. We are not allowed to open the season on migratory Canada geese until October 10th to reduce hunting pressure on the Atlantic population that is flying through the state. Prior to 2010 we were unable to open the season until October 20th. This change came about because of efforts pursued by Vermont and some other New England states. Breeding pairs in 2025 totaled 150,000, increasing from 2024's total of 89,000 an increase of 68%. The integrated population model predicts that breeding pairs will increase to 163,500 in 2026.

The Brant Hunt Plan and Harvest Strategy were revised in 2020. The revised plan uses an Integrated Population Model (IPM) to generate a prediction of the brant population. This model prediction will be used in place of the mid-winter survey estimate to determine the annual hunting season recommendation. Advantages of the IPM are that the population estimate is available in the summer, prior to the regulatory flyway meeting and federal register framework publication. In addition, estimates provided by the IPM are less variable than the MWS and will likely result in fewer changes to hunting packages over time. The model prediction for 2026 is 115,000 brant, which puts the population on the threshold of a restrictive 30/1 package (100,000-115,000) and standard 50/2 package (115,000-150,000). The technical committee voted to stay in

the restrictive package, recommending a 30-day season with a 1-bird daily bag limit, which has not changed from last year.

The Greater snow goose population estimate for 2025 was 428,000 which is below the target of 500,000 to allow for a conservation order (CO) season in the spring of 2027. The USFWS has not officially suspended the conservation order but the state biologists in partnership with Canadian biologists agreed to not hold a spring CO season in 2027 unless the 2026 population estimate came back above 500,000 in September 2026. This opportunity has been virtually nonexistent in Vermont over the last 5 years due to very few snow geese stopping in Vermont during spring migration. During the 2024 spring CO, one person reported harvesting one snow goose. Under the language of the existing Board rule (10 App. V.S.A. § 23a, Spring Snow Goose Conservation Order), the CO is an open season and cannot be amended by the board unless they go through the rulemaking process. Therefore, the department would like the board to recommend a closed season, and the department will subsequently request that the governor suspend the season for 2027. The department also recommends that the Board amend the language of the rule so that the Snow Goose season can be set annually during the waterfowl season setting procedure in the future.

2026 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: The Department and Board may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days", in addition to the regular duck seasons. The days must be held outside any regular duck season on a weekend, holiday, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck-season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season, or within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limits may include ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots, and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season. Flyway species and area restrictions would remain in effect.

States are allowed to use their established definition of age for youth hunters. However, youth hunters may not be 18 years of age or older. In addition, an adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other seasons that are open on the special youth day. Youth hunters 16 years of age and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp). In 2016 Vermont changed the youth waterfowl hunters age to 17 and younger. Vermont also requires all hunters 16 years of age and older to have a state duck stamp. In some years, the end of the resident Canada goose season overlaps the youth waterfowl hunting weekend. This will not occur in our proposal for 2026 Youth Hunting Weekend, Saturday and Sunday, September 26th and 27th.

Special Falconry Regulations: Falconry is a permitted means of taking migratory game birds in any State meeting Federal falconry standards in 50 CFR 21.29. These States may select an extended season for taking migratory game birds in accordance with the following:
Extended Seasons: For all hunting methods combined, the combined length of the extended season, regular season, and any special or experimental seasons must not exceed 107 days for any species or group of species in a geographical area. Each extended season may be divided into a maximum of 3 segments. Framework Dates: Seasons must fall between September 1 and March 10.

Daily Bag Limits: Falconry daily bag limits for all permitted migratory game birds must not exceed 3 birds, singly or in the aggregate, during extended falconry seasons, any special or experimental seasons, and regular hunting seasons in all States, including those that do not select an extended falconry season.

Regular Seasons: General hunting regulations, including seasons and hunting hours, apply to falconry in each State listed in 50 CFR 21.29. Regular season bag limits do not apply to falconry. The falconry bag limit is not in addition to gun limits.

Vermont has traditionally run the falconry season during any open migratory game bird season. Last year falconers had the opportunity to begin on September 1st with the resident Canada goose season and hunt through January 19th. A three-bird daily bag limit was in effect.

In summary, the proposed 2026 waterfowl and migratory bird hunting regulations were made based on the following information:

- Decide when to open the season. Based on comments from previous years, many hunters prefer the season to open earlier when the temperatures are warmer, and they can still pursue early migrating species like blue-winged teal.
- Decide which zones to propose for splits and in which seasons. Goose hunters preferred a straight season. Duck hunters in the Lake Champlain zone, regardless of residency, chose split seasons more than straight seasons. For the Interior Vermont zone, hunters chose straight seasons most commonly for duck and goose seasons.
- Decide on the length of the Lake Champlain Zone split. In comments from previous years and responses to the survey, many hunters preferred to run the season later in the year which results in a longer split between segments.
- Decide when to have the split for the Lake Champlain Zone. Based on feedback from 2025's public meetings hunters preferred a more even split between early and late season opportunities.

<u>Legal Framework for Hunting Season Decision</u>

Beginning in 2015 the Board was given authority by the Legislature to set the migratory bird hunting regulations by procedure instead of rule. Part of Title 10 § 4082 reads:

(b)(1) Except as provided for under subdivision (2) of this subsection, the Board annually may adopt rules relating to the management of migratory game birds and shall follow the procedures for rulemaking contained in 3 V.S.A. chapter 25. For each such rule, the Board shall conduct a hearing but, when necessary, may schedule the hearing for a day before the terms of the rule are expected to be determined.

(2) Beginning with the 2015 hunting season, the Board may set by procedure the daily bag and possession limits of migratory game birds that may be harvested in each Waterfowl Hunting Zone annually without following the procedures for rulemaking contained in 3 V.S.A. chapter 25. The annual daily bag and possession limits of migratory game birds shall be consistent with federal requirements. Prior to setting the migratory game bird daily bag and possession limits,

the Board shall provide a period of not less than 30 days of public notice and shall conduct at least two public informational hearings. The final migratory game bird daily bag and possession limits shall be enforceable by the Department under its enforcement authority in part 4 of this title.

Eastern Mallard Collaborative Research Project:

Atlantic Flyway states are conducting a regional study of the eastern mallard population. Vermont is participating and deployed 1 geolocator and 2 GSM/GPS transmitters in 2026. The project aims to deploy GSM/GPS units and geolocators on female mallards in Eastern Canada and the Northeastern United States to answer several important questions about mallard movements, productivity, and biases within our banded sample. Specifically, the project proposes the following objectives:

1) Quantify and compare reproductive metrics such as reproductive attempts, full-term incubation, and brood-rearing between mallards in the Northeastern US and Eastern Canada, and the extent to which behavior and weather explains variation in reproductive metrics.
    a. Use proportion of stationary behavior from ACC data and daily displacement from GPS data to infer nesting attempts and success
    b. Develop detailed time activity budgets of mallard behavior throughout the annual cycle at the sub-population scale
    c. Explore the extent to which behavior and weather patterns (precipitation, temperature, winter severity) influence reproductive success both directly and through cross-seasonal effects
2) Estimate seasonal survival rates of female mallards in Eastern Canada vs. Northeastern US
3) Quantify and compare female mallard movements and habitat use and selection throughout the annual cycle in the Northeastern US and Eastern Canada
    a. Understand mallard movements during the pre-season banding window to better inform implications for pre-season banding data analyses.
4) Characterize habitat-use and selection of mallards and black ducks throughout the annual cycle.

New York and Pennsylvania secured internal funding to support much of the project but solicited in-kind and financial support from other flyway states, federal and Canadian partners to reach marking sampling goals/distribution and fully fund the project. The project has begun deployments of GSM and geolocator units during the winter of 2025-2026, coinciding with the American black duck joint venture project.

During the 2024-2025 capture period Vermont deployed 17 geolocators attached to colored tarsal bands at two locations within the Champlain Valley from February 1st to March 15th.

Public Input and Outreach:

The Department, in conjunction with the Board, is currently planning to hold two public hearings in 2026. Meetings are planned for March 10th in Whitehall, and March 12th at the Essex Junction

District office conference room, as well as a recording to be posted on the Department website, beginning at 6:30pm. During the hearings, the Department will review the season options, recommendations, current biological information, answer questions, and record public comments for the Board. The public will be encouraged to submit comments through email or a recorded phone line. Hearing times and website posting locations will be advertised on the Department website and through news releases.

After the Board approves final season dates and bag limits (scheduled for April 1, 2026 Board meeting), the Department will submit selections to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by April 30th and the information will be sent to a printer for production of the 2026 syllabus of state and federal hunting regulations. The early decision deadlines allow the Department to have the syllabus available to the public in print version by August 1st, a full month prior to any migratory bird hunting season. Approved seasons will be placed on the Department's website within days after the Board's vote.

The Department conducted a survey of waterfowl hunters in Vermont (statewide) and New York (those that hunt the Lake Champlain Zone) during summer/fall of 2024. This survey was sent to a broad spectrum of waterfowl hunters in hopes of obtaining an accurate representation of all waterfowl hunters. The goal of this survey was to obtain preferences and opinions about waterfowl seasons for use in the season setting process.

Table 4. 2025 Migratory Bird Hunting Seasons

2025-2026 VERMONT MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING SEASONS
(regulations in effect September 1, 2025 through April 24, 2026)

Species	Lake Champlain Zone	Interior Vermont Zone	Connecticut River Zone
Ducks, Coots and Mergansers	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 2** **Nov. 22 – Dec. 28**	**Oct. 11 – Dec. 9**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26**
Canada Geese	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 11 – Nov. 9** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 19**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 11 – Nov. 9** **Dec. 1 – Jan. 19**	**Sept. 1 – Sept. 25** **Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26** **Dec. 27 – Jan. 15**
Snow Geese **(includes blue geese)**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2025** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2026** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026**	**Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2025** **Feb. 26 - Mar. 10, 2026** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11** **Nov. 27 – Dec. 26** **Mar. 11 – Apr 24, 2026** **(applies to land, not CT River waters)**
Brant	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 9**	**Oct. 11 – Nov. 9**	**Oct. 13 – Nov. 11**
Woodcock	**Statewide**	**Sept. 27 – Nov. 10**	
Common Snipe	**Statewide**	**Sept. 27 – Nov. 10**	

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Weekend – September 27 & 28

BAG LIMITS

The daily bag limit is the maximum number of birds of each species that any person may take (or possess in the field) during any one day. The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit for all waterfowl species except snow geese.

Species	Daily Limit	Possession Limit
Ducks *	6	18
Mergansers	5	15
Coot	15	45
Canada Geese		
September season		
Lake Champlain Zone	8	24
Interior Vermont Zone	8	24
Connecticut River Zone	5	15
Oct. - Nov. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	1	3
Interior Vermont Zone	1	3
Connecticut River Zone	2	6
Dec. – Jan. season		
Lake Champlain Zone	5	15
Interior Vermont Zone	5	15
Connecticut River Zone	5	15 (Vermont land portions only)
Snow Geese	25	No limit
Mar. 11 – Apr. 24, 2026	15	No limit
Brant	1	3
Scaup*		
Lake Champlain Zone		
Oct. 11 – Nov. 2 & Nov. 22 - Dec. 8	1	3
Dec. 9 - Dec. 28	2	6
Interior Vermont Zone		
Oct. 11 – Nov. 19	1	3
Nov. 20 - Dec. 9	2	6
Connecticut River Zone		
Oct. 13 - Nov. 11	1	3
Nov. 27 - Dec. 26	1	3
Woodcock	3	9
Common Snipe	8	24

* The daily limit of 6 ducks may include no harlequin, and no more than 4 mallards (only 2 of which may be hens), 2 black ducks, 3 wood ducks, 3 pintail, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 2 or 1 scaup depending on dates, 4 sea ducks (including no more than 3 scoters, 3 eiders {1 of which may be a hen}, and 3 long-tailed ducks)..

Table 5. Vermont Waterfowl Hunting and Harvest Data Comparisons (Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Combined)

	Federal Duck Stamp Sales	Vermont Duck Stamp Sales	Vermont HIP Registration	No. of Active Adult Duck Hunters	Average Seasonal Duck Bagged Per Hunter	Total Season Estimated Duck Harvest	Total Season Estimated Canada Goose Harvest	Total Season Estimated Snow Goose Harvest
1999	4,542	6,320		1,600	11.9	25,000	4,100	1,700
2000	4,741	5,418		1,700	10.4	17,700	3,600	4,200
2001	4,824	5,685		1,700	10.4	17,600	4,300	2,200
2002	5,201	5,722		2,600	9.6	26,800	7,100	1,300
2003	5,242	6,012		1,300	12.6	16,300	3,600	3,400
2004	4,723	6,242		2,600	9.3	24,300	7,100	1,700
2005	4,956	5,682		2,400	10.6	25,400	9,300	400
2006	3,391	5,581		2,000	9.9	19,600	7,800	100
2007	3,193	6,137		2,300	9.2	16,700	6,300	500
2008	3,391	5,746	⇧$5-$7.50	2,900	11.9	34,800	12,300	2,100
2009	not available	6,051		2,400	10.7	25,500	11,500	90
2010	not available	6,065 Last Stamp	5,404***	2,700	8.5	22,900	9,600	0
2011	not available	4,872 First Tag	4,949***	2,600	9.0	23,000	8,300	134
2012	not available	5,882	6,283***	2,100	10.0	20,500	8,600	34
2013	not available	6,436	8,719***	4,000	8.0	31,900	9,600	0
2014	not available	6,635	9,913***	2,600	6.8	17,800	12,300	46
2015	not available	6,244	11,122***	2,600	5.8	14,700	6,733	0
2016	not available	6,016	18,598***	3,400	5.2	17,600	8,800	0
2017	not available	5,954	7,006***	2,500	7.9	19,900	15,900	0
2018	not available	5,725	10,541***	2,100	7.8	16,200	7,400	0
2019	not available	5,620	10,359***	3,000	6.1	18,100	5,600	0
2020	not available	6,089	10,123***	2,200	9.0	19,900	11,800	116
2021	not available	6,111	10,236***	2,000	6.4	12,700	6,182	0
2022	not available	5,956	10,088***	1,900	7.8	14,500	15,683	107
2023	not available	6,067	9,581***	3,600	7.2	26,100	12,900	119
2024	not available	6,197	9,809***	3,300	8.4	2,700	11,200	0
2025	not available	5,827						

*** Includes youth hunters and woodcock/snipe hunters

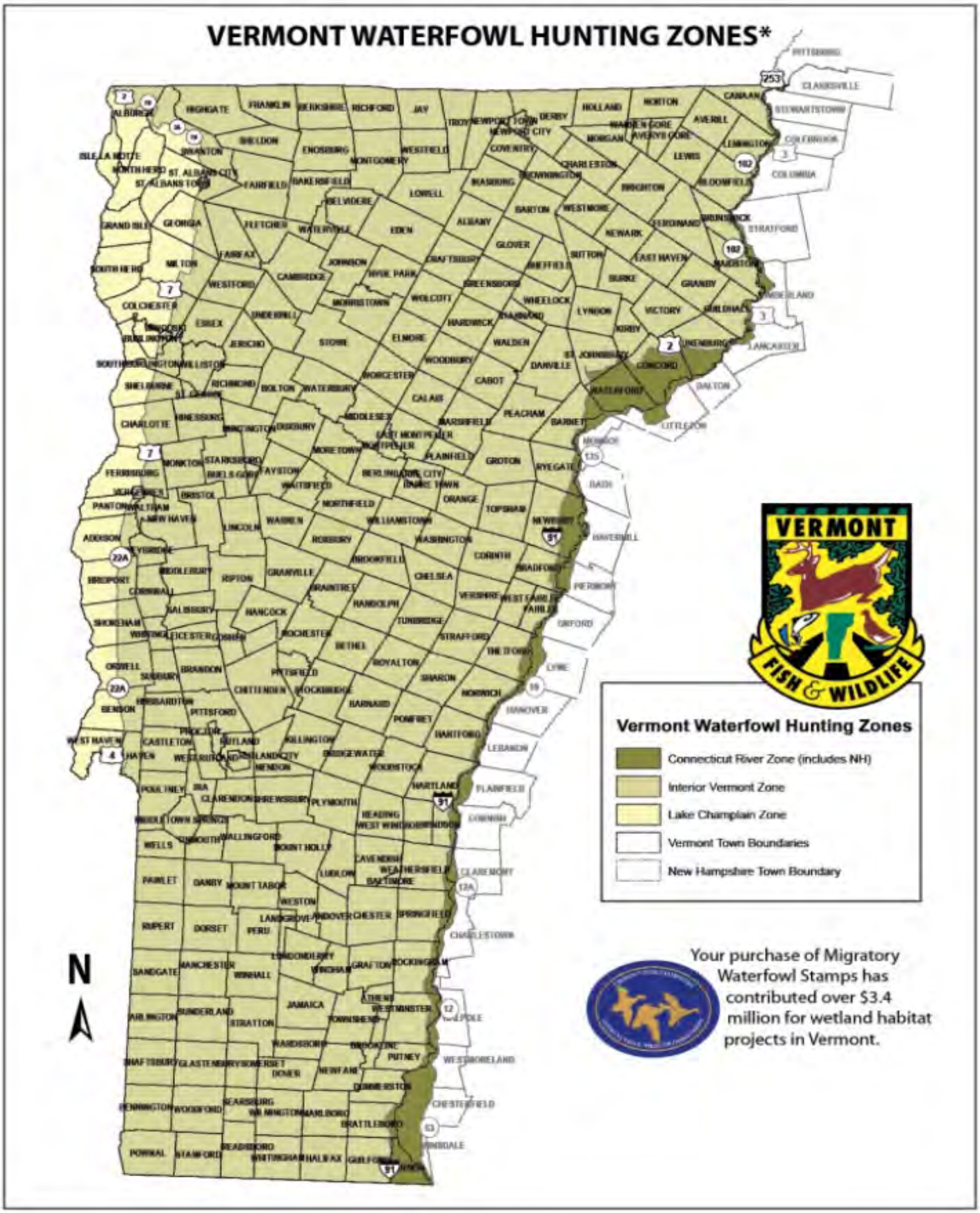


Figure 1. Vermont waterfowl hunting zones

Table 6. USFWS Framework for 2026 Duck Seasons*

LENGTH	OUTSIDE DATES	DAILY BAG	POSSESSION LIMIT**
60 Days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	6	18

SPECIES RESTRICTIONS -	Daily Bag
MALLARD	4 (only 2 hens)
WOOD DUCK	3
BLACK DUCK	2
PINTAIL	3
REDHEAD	2
SCAUP	2/day for 20-days 1/day for 40-days Or 1/day for 60-days
SCOTER	3
EIDERS	3 (only 1 hen)
LONG-TAILED DUCK	3
CANVASBACK	2
HARLEQUIN	CLOSED
MOTTLED DUCK	1
FULVOUS WHISTLING DUCK	1

* Apply to Lake Champlain, Interior Vermont, and Connecticut River Zones.

** Possession limit is equal to three times the daily bag limit for these species.

*** Three total sea ducks in aggregate, with species specific limits, (no more than 3-scoters, 3-eiders (1hen), or 3-long tailed ducks)

SHOOTING HOURS - ½ HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE TO SUNSET (all days – all species)

Table 7. USFWS Framework for 2025 Geese, Brant, Merganser, Coot, Snipe, and Woodcock Seasons

SPECIES	SEASON LENGTH	OUTSIDE DATES	DAILY BAG	POSSESSION LIMIT**
Canada Geese (No more than 107 days combined)				
Resident	25 days	Sept. 1 – Sept. 25	15	45
Regular	45 days	Oct. 10 – Feb. 5	3	9
Resident	77 days	Dec. 1 – Feb. 15	5	15
Snow & Blue Geese	107 days	Oct. 1 – Mar. 10	25	NONE
Brant	30 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	1	3
Mergansers*	60 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	5	15
Coots**	60 days	Sept. 26 – Jan. 31	15	45
Snipe	107 days	Sept. 1 – Jan. 31	8	24
Woodcock	45 days	Sept. 13 – Jan. 31	3	9

* Season length for mergansers equals season option chosen for ducks. Mergansers may be included as part of the daily duck bag, in which case the limit would be 6 mergansers/day.

** Season length for coots equals season option chosen for ducks.

SHOOTING HOURS - ½ HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE TO SUNSET (all days – all species)

APPENDIX A

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons				
YEAR	**SEASON TYPE**	**SEASON LENGTH**	**SEASON DATES**	**GENERAL BAG LIMIT**
1942	Straight	70	Sept. 26 – Dec. 4	10-20
1943	Straight	70	Sept. 25 – Dec. 3	10-20
1944	Straight	80	Sept. 20 – Dec. 8	10-20
1945	Straight	80	Sept. 20 – Dec. 8	7-14
1946	Straight	45	Oct. 5 – Nov. 18	7-14
1947	Straight	30	Oct. 21 – Nov. 19	3-6
1948	Straight	30	Oct. 15 – Nov. 13	3-6
1949	Straight	40	Oct. 21 – Nov. 29	3-6
1950	Straight	40	Oct. 20 – Nov. 28	3-6
1951	Straight	45	Oct. 12 – Nov. 25	3-6
1952	Straight	55	Oct. 7 – Nov. 11	3-6
1953	Straight	60	Oct. 5 – Dec. 3	3-6
1954	Straight	60	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	3-6
1955	Straight	70	Oct. 5 – Dec. 13	3-6
1956	Straight	70	Oct. 5 – Dec. 13	3-6
1957	Straight	70	Oct. 10 – Dec. 18	3-6
1958	Straight	60	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	3-6
1959	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	3-6
1960	Straight	50	Oct. 7 – Nov. 25	3-6
1961	Straight	40	Oct. 14 – Nov. 22	3-6
1962	Straight	40	Oct. 12 – Nov. 20	3-6
1963	Split	45	Oct. 11 – Oct. 27 / Nov. 11 – Dec. 8	3-6
1964	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	3-6
1965	Straight	50	Oct. 16 – Dec. 4	3-6
1966	Straight	55	Oct. 8 – Dec. 1	3-6
1967	Split	45	Oct. 7 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 10	3-6
1968	Straight	50	Oct. 12 – Nov. 30	3-6
1969	Straight	50	Oct. 11 – Nov. 29	3-6
1970	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28	4-8
1971	Straight	50	Oct. 9 – Nov. 27	4-8
1972	Split	50	Oct. 7 – Oct. 15 / Oct. 28 – Dec. 7	4-8
1973	Split	45	Oct. 6 – Oct. 21 / Nov. 3 – Dec. 1	4-8
1974	Straight	50	Oct. 9 – Nov. 27*	4-8
1975	Straight	50	Oct. 8 – Nov. 26*	4-8
1976	Straight	50	Oct. 6 – Nov. 24*	4-8
1977	Straight	50	Oct. 5 – Nov. 23*	4-8
1978	Straight	50	Oct. 4 – Nov. 22*	4-8
1979	Split	50	Oct. 3 – Oct. 14 / Oct. 27 – Dec. 3*	4-8
1980	Straight	50	Oct. 8 – Nov. 26*	4-8
1981	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28*	4-8

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons – Page 2

YEAR	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	SEASON DATES	GENERAL BAG LIMIT
1982	Split	50	Oct. 2 – Oct. 10 / Oct. 16 – Nov. 25*	5-10
1983	Split	50	Oct. 8 – Oct. 16 / Oct. 22 – Dec. 1*	5-10
1984	Straight	50	Oct. 10 – Nov. 28*	5-10
1985	Zoned**	40	Oct. 9 – Oct. 13 / Oct. 26 – Nov. 29 (LCZ)* Oct. 9 – Nov. 17 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1986	Zoned**	40	Oct. 8 – Oct. 12 / Oct. 25 – Nov. 28 (LCZ)* Oct. 8 – Nov. 16 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1987	Zoned**	40	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 24 – Nov. 27 (LCZ)* Oct. 7 – Nov. 15 (IVZ)	4-8 4-8
1988	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 8 – Oct. 23 / Nov. 24 – Dec. 7 (LCZ)* Oct. 8 – Oct. 30 / Nov. 24 – Nov. 30 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1989	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 11 – Oct. 29 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 3 (LCZ) Oct. 11 – Nov. 5 / Nov. 23 – Nov. 26 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1990	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 10 – Oct. 21 / Nov. 15 – Dec. 2 (LCZ) Oct. 10 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 22 – Nov. 25 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1991	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 12 – Oct. 27 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 6 (LCZ) Oct. 12 – Nov. 3 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 1 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1992	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Nov. 7 – Dec. 1 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Nov. 1 / Nov. 26 – Nov. 29 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1993	Zoned/Split	30	Oct. 20 – Nov. 7 / Nov. 25 – Dec. 5 (LCZ) Oct. 13 – Nov. 7 / Nov. 25 – Nov. 28 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1994	Zoned/Split	40	Oct. 15 – Nov. 6 / Nov. 19 – Dec. 5 (LCZ) Oct. 8 – Nov. 9 / Nov. 21 – Nov. 27 (IVZ)	3-6 3-6
1995	Zoned/Split	50	Oct. 11 – Oct. 22 / Nov. 4 – Dec. 11 (LCZ) Oct. 4 – Nov. 12 / Nov. 18 – Nov. 27 (IVZ)	4-8 4-8
1996	Zoned/Split	50	Oct. 9 – Oct. 20 / Nov. 2 – Dec. 9 (LCZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 11 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 1 (IVZ)	5-10 5-10
1997	Zoned**	60	Oct. 4 – Oct. 19 / Oct. 25 – Dec. 7 (LCZ) Oct. 4 – Dec. 2 (IVZ)	4-8*** 4-8***
1998	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 17 – Dec. 10 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Dec. 5 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
1999	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6 – Oct. 11 / Oct. 23 – Dec. 15 (LCZ) Oct. 6 – Dec. 4 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
2000	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 7 – Oct. 9 / Oct. 21 – Dec. 16 (LCZ) Oct. 7 – Nov. 12 / Nov. 18 – Dec. 10 (IVZ)	6-12 6-12
2001	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 10 – Oct. 14 / Oct. 20 – Dec. 13 (LCZ) Oct. 10 – Dec. 8 (IVZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 4 / Nov. 21 – Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12
2002	Zoned/Split	60	Oct. 9 – Oct. 13 / Oct. 22 – Dec. 15 (LCZ) Oct. 9 – Nov. 14 / Nov. 23 – Dec. 15 (IVZ) Oct. 2 – Nov. 5 / Nov. 27 – Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-12 6-12 6-12

Vermont Waterfowl Seasons – Page 3

YEAR	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	SEASON DATES	GENERAL BAG LIMIT
2003	Zoned**	60	Oct. 11 - Oct. 13 / Oct. 25 - Dec. 20 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 11 - Dec. 9 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 7 - Nov. 9 / Nov. 26 - Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-12
2004	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6 - Oct. 10 / Oct. 23 - Dec. 16 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 6 - Dec. 4 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 5 - Nov. 14 / Nov. 24 - Dec. 12 (CRZ)****	6-12
2005	Zoned**	60	Oct. 5 – Oct. 10 / Oct. 26 – Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 5 – Dec. 3 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 4 – Nov.13/ Nov. 23 - Dec. 11 (CRZ)****	6-12
2006	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7- Oct. 15/ Oct. 25 - Dec. 14 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 7 - Dec. 5 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 3 - Nov. 5/ Nov. 22 - Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-12
2007	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10- Oct. 14/ Oct. 27 - Dec. 20 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 10- Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 3- Nov. 4/ Nov. 21 - Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-12
2008	Zoned**	60	Oct. 8- Oct. 12/ Oct. 25 - Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 8- Dec. 6 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 2- Nov. 2/ Nov. 23 - Dec. 20 (CRZ)****	6-12
2009	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10- Oct. 13/ Oct. 24 - Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 10- Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 6- Nov. 8/ Nov. 25 - Dec. 20 (CRZ)****	6-12
2010	Zoned**	60	Oct. 6-Oct. 10/Oct. 23 - Dec. 16 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 6-Dec. 4 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 5-Nov. 7/ Nov. 24 – Dec. 19 (CRZ)	6-12
2011	Zoned**	60	Oct. 12-Oct. 16/Oct. 29 - Dec. 22 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 12-Dec 10 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 23- Dec. 18 (CRZ)****	6-12
2012	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 17/Oct. 27 - Dec. 20 (LCZ)	6-12
			Oct. 13-Dec 11 (IVZ)	6-12
			Oct. 2-Nov. 4/Nov. 21- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-12
2013	Zoned**	60	Oct. 9-Oct. 13/Oct. 26 - Dec. 19 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 9-Dec 7 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 3/Nov. 19- Dec. 15 (CRZ)****	6-18
2014	Zoned**	60	Oct. 8-Oct. 12/Oct. 25- Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 8-Dec. 6 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 2/Nov. 16- Dec. 13 (CRZ)****	6-18
2015	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Oct. 14/Oct. 24- Dec. 17 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 6-Nov. 5/Nov. 15- Dec. 13 (CRZ)****	6-18
2016	Zoned**	60	Oct. 12-Oct. 16/Oct. 29- Dec. 22 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 12-Dec. 10 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 22- Dec. 22 (CRZ)****	6-18
2017	Zoned**	60	Oct. 11-Oct. 15/Nov. 7 - Dec. 31 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 11-Dec. 9 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 3-Nov. 5/Nov. 22- Dec. 17 (CRZ)****	6-18

2018	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 21/Nov. 10 - Dec. 30 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Dec. 11 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 4/Nov. 21- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-18
2019	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Nov. 1/Nov. 23 - Dec. 29 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 2-Nov. 3/Nov. 20- Dec. 16 (CRZ)****	6-18
2020	Zoned**	60	Oct. 10-Nov. 1/Nov. 21 - Dec. 27 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 10-Dec. 8 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 6-Nov. 8/Nov. 17- Dec. 12 (CRZ)****	6-18
2021	Zoned**	60	Oct. 13-Oct. 17/Oct. 30 - Dec. 23 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Dec. 11 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 5-Nov. 7/Nov. 24- Dec. 19 (CRZ)****	6-18
2022	Zoned**	60	Oct. 15-Oct. 23/Oct. 29 – Dec. 18 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 15-Dec. 13 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 4-Nov. 6/Nov. 23 – Dec. 8 (CRZ)****	6-18
2023	Zoned**	60	Oct. 7-Oct. 11/Nov. 4 – Dec. 28 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 7-Dec. 5 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 5-Nov. 3/Nov. 22 – Dec. 21 (CRZ)****	6-18
2024	Zoned **	60	Oct. 12-Nov. 3/Nov. 23 – Dec. 29 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 12-Nov. 10/Nov. 23 – Dec. 22 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 9-Nov. 11/Nov. 27 – Dec. 22 (CRZ)****	6-18
2025	Zoned **	60	Oct. 11-Nov. 2/Nov. 22 – Dec. 28 (LCZ)	6-18
			Oct. 11-Dec. 9 (IVZ)	6-18
			Oct. 13-Nov. 11/Nov. 27 – Dec. 26 (CRZ)****	6-18

* Regular season was followed by a 16-day special goldeneye/scaup season – 3-bird bag

** Lake Champlain Zone – Split Season
Interior Vermont Zone – Straight Season

*** Two teal (either blue-winged or green-winged) allowed in addition to regular bag limit

**** Connecticut River Zone set by New Hampshire Fish and Game Commission, same as NH Inland Zone



2026 Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons and Bag Limit Recommendations

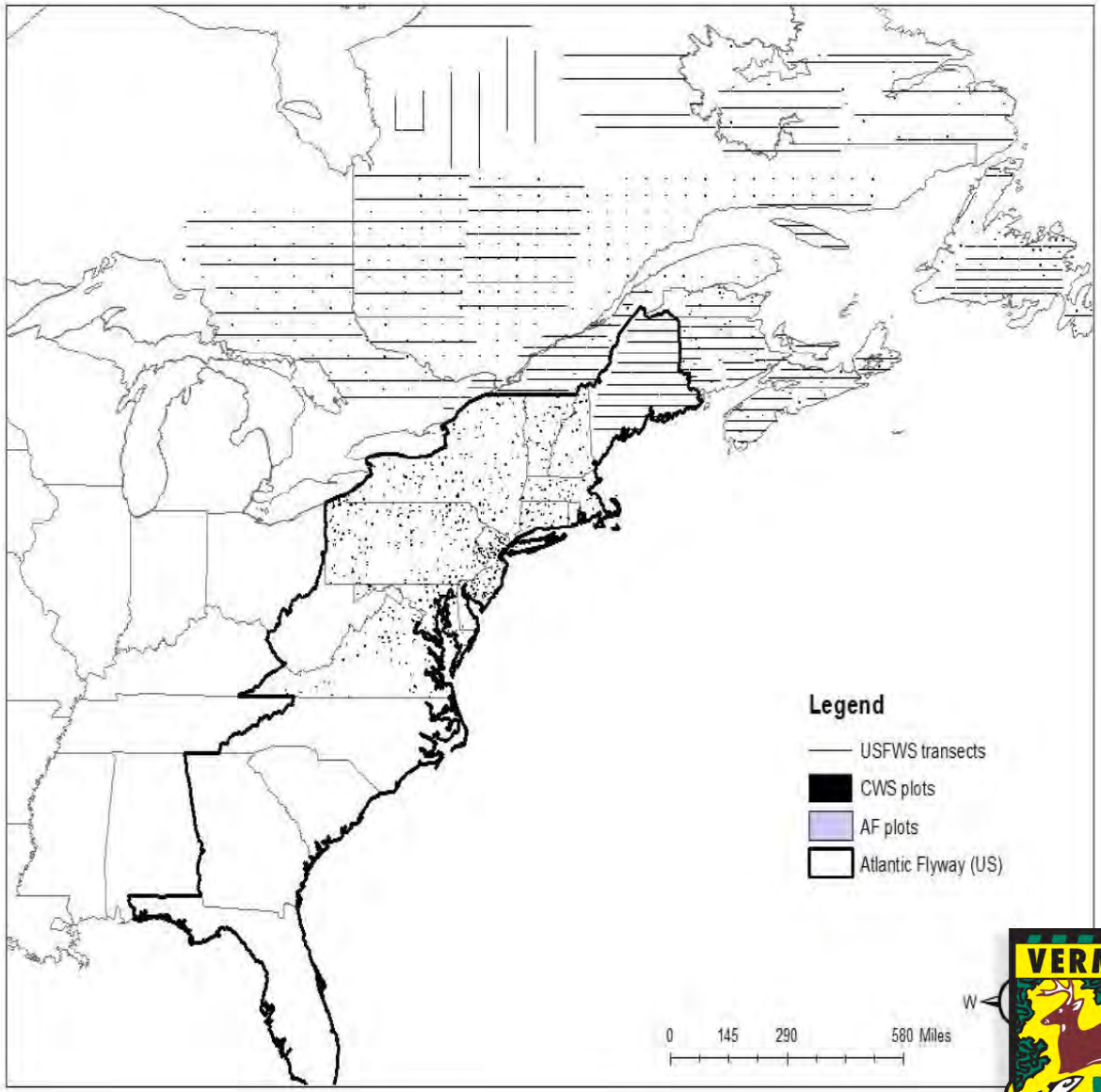
How are Migratory Game Birds Managed?

- Migratory in nature managed by the USFWS with input from states and stakeholders
- Four Flyways in the US
- Atlantic Flyway
    - Eastern States and Provinces including Vermont

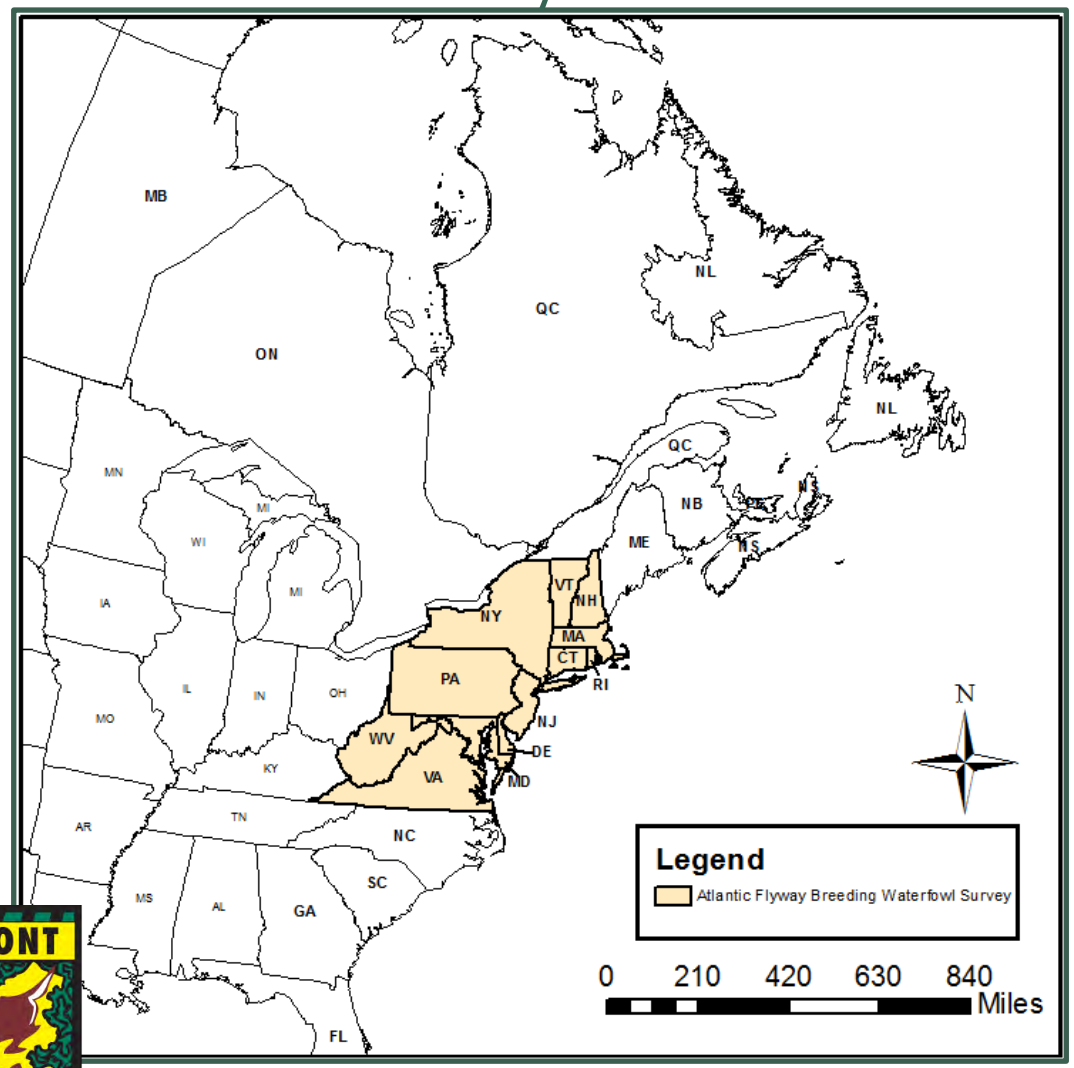


How do we Understand Populations?

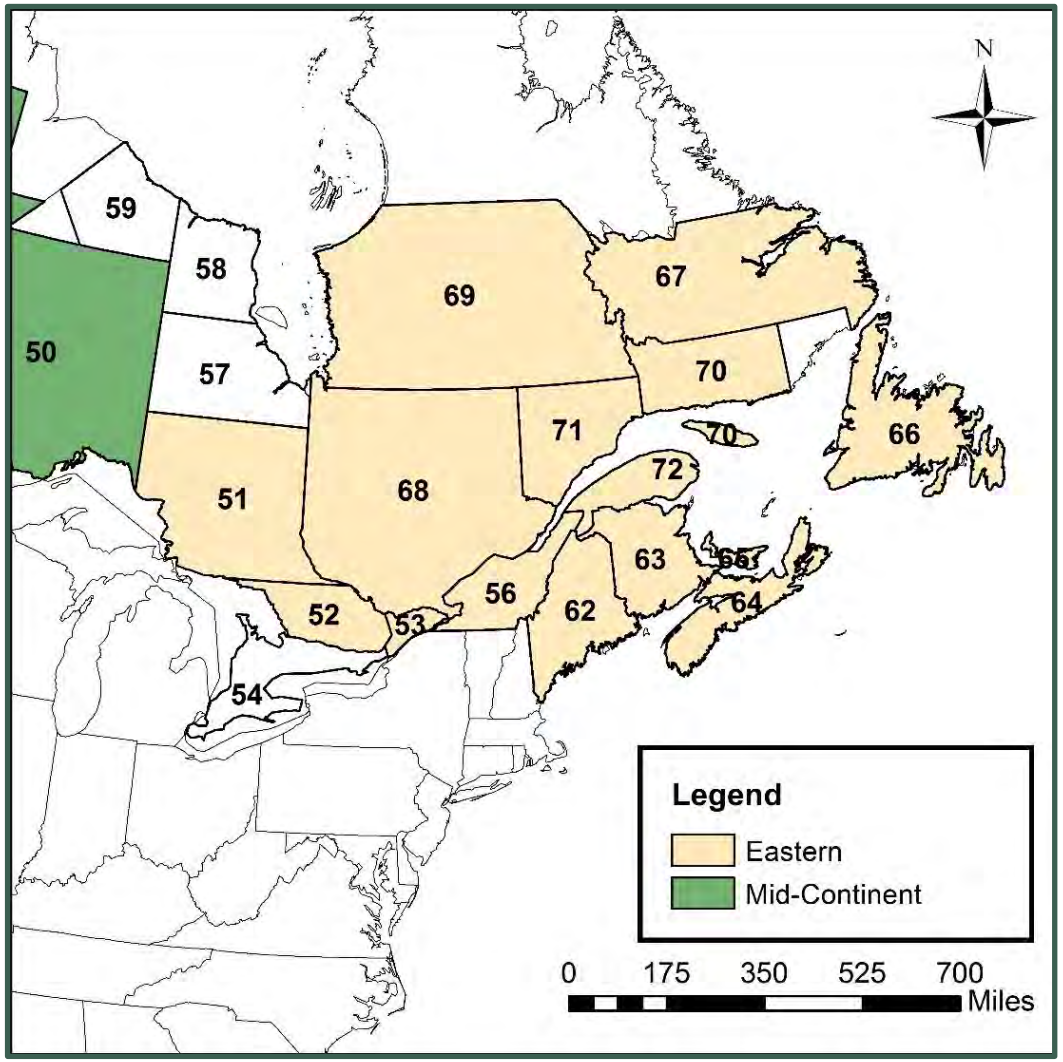
- Breeding surveys provide the best estimate of waterfowl abundance



Atlantic Flyway Breeding Waterfowl Survey Area



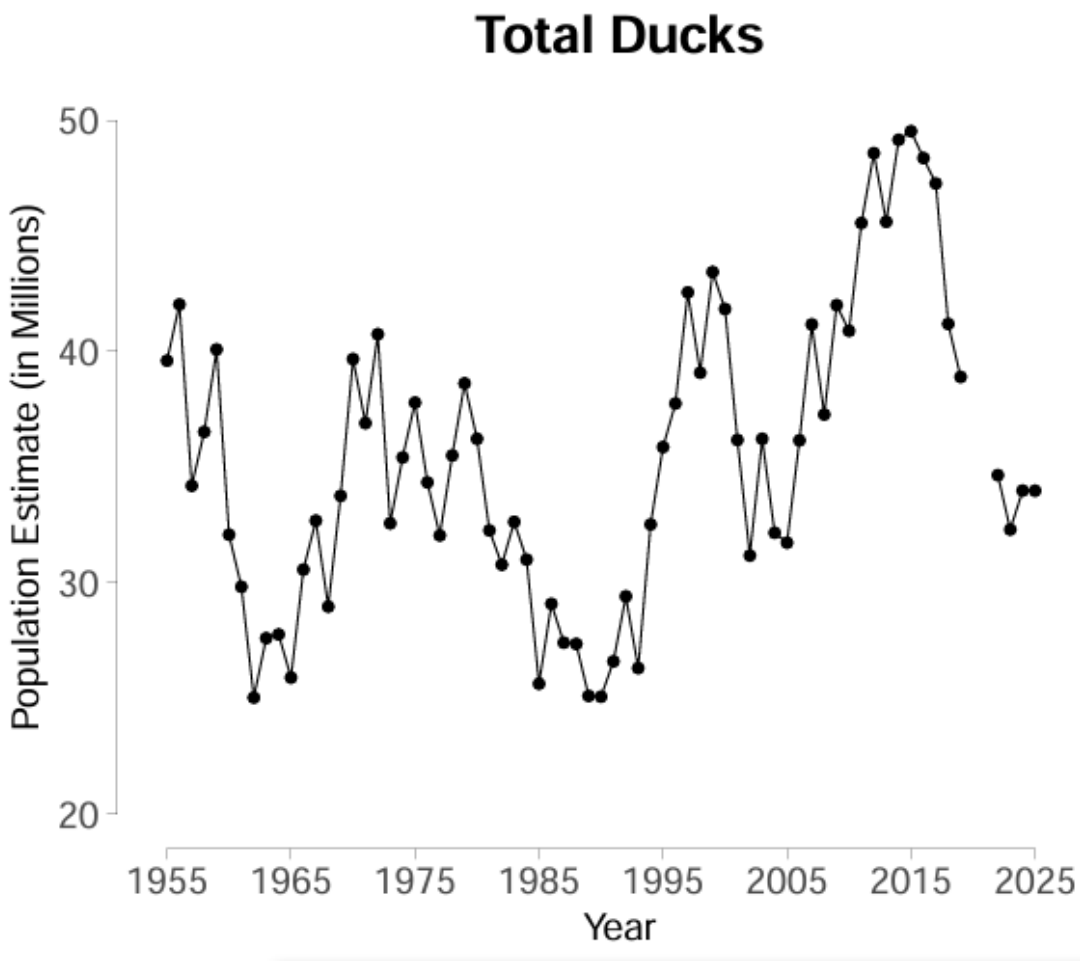
Eastern Survey Area



VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE

Duck Breeding Populations in Eastern Survey Areas

- 2025 breeding habitat conditions ranged from poor to excellent
- Mallard breeding pop. in AF remained about 10% below long-term avg. at 1,137,000
- Total duck breeding pop. est. was similar to 2024 and remains 4% below the long-term avg. in the traditional survey area.



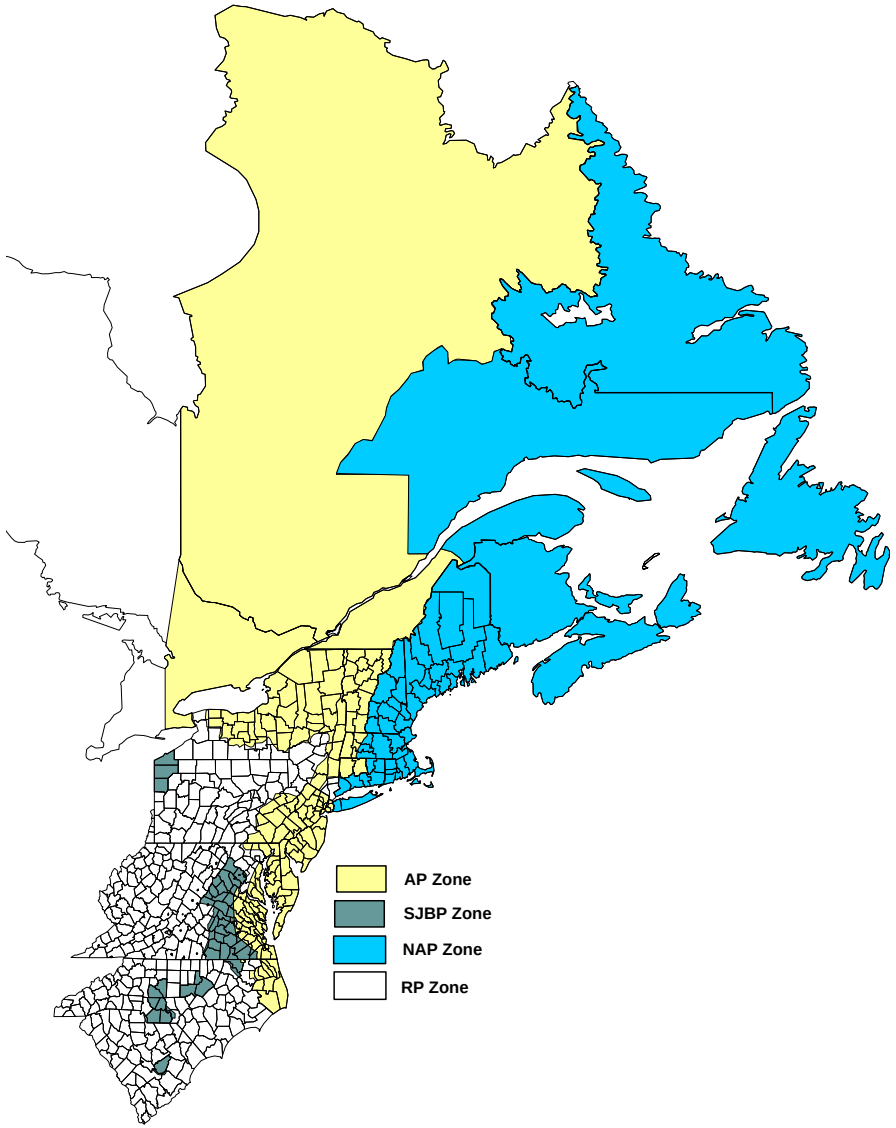
Vermont Waterfowl Production 2025

- Banding efforts and survey results indicated that the resident goose population was stable
- Overall duck production was good with good brood rearing cover in early spring, heavy rains in spring and early summer that turned to drought in late summer and early fall.
- Fall duck banding was successful at 4 banding sites (over 1300 total new bands)

Canada Goose Harvest Zones in the Atlantic Flyway

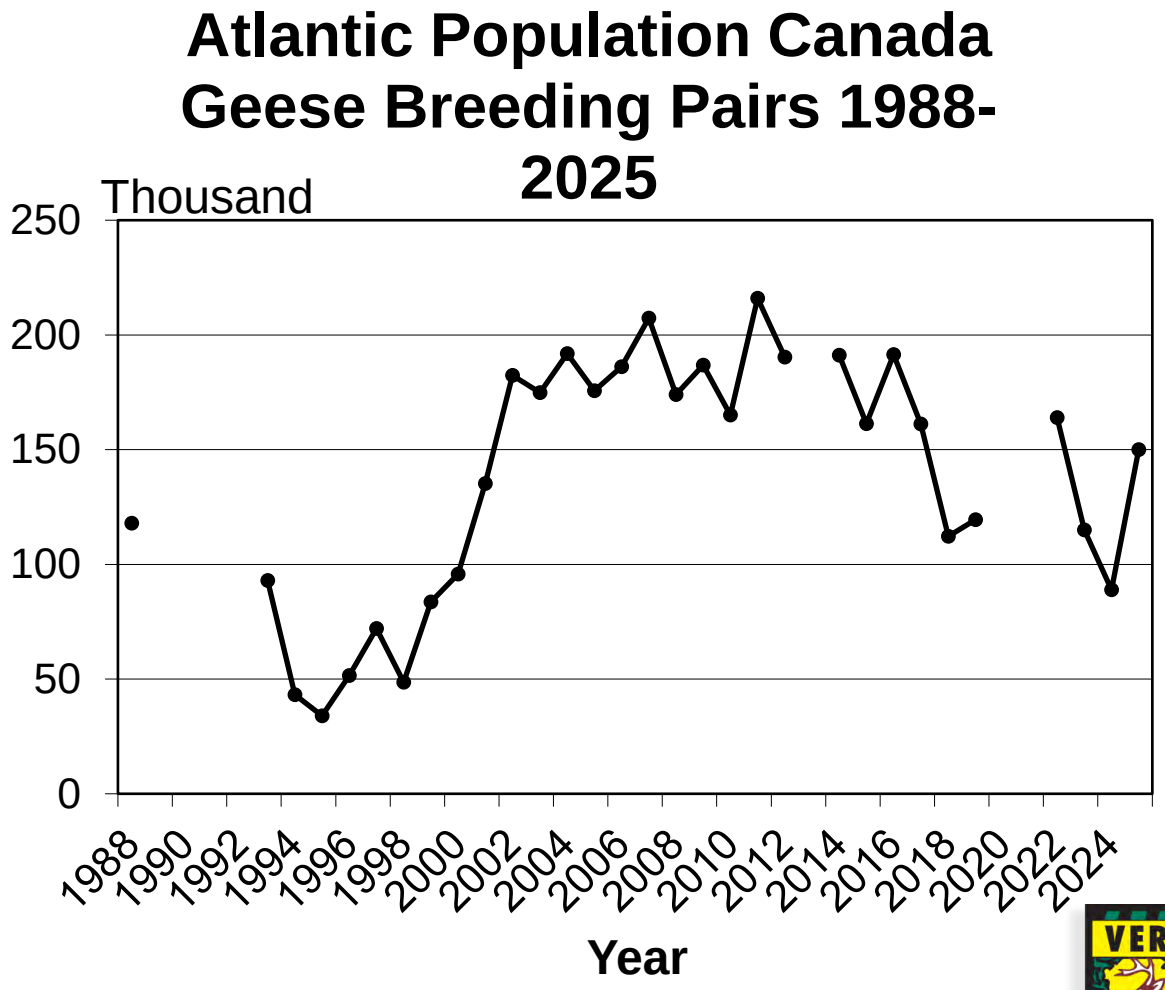
Three Subpopulations in VT

- Atlantic Population
- North Atlantic Population
- Resident



Atlantic Population Canada Geese Breeding pairs 1988-2025

~150,000 Breeding Pairs



Hunter Harvest Estimates

Three main methods of data collection

- Harvest Information Program
- Parts Collection Survey
- Hunter Diaries

Harvest Information Program (HIP)

Hunt

White-tailed Deer
Black Bear
Moose
Wild Turkey
Small Game
Upland Game Birds
Waterfowl
Harvest Information Program (HIP)
Furbearers and Trapping
Seasons
Hunter Education
Hunting Regulations
Youth Hunting
Find A Place To Hunt
Shooting Ranges

Quick Links

Buy a License
Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations

Federal law requires migratory bird hunters to register with the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP). Migratory game birds include: ducks, geese, brant, coots, snipe, and woodcock.

How do I register?



Registering is easy. You will be asked for your name, address, date of birth and a brief summary of last year's hunting activity. There is **no charge** for a HIP registration number.

There are two ways to get a HIP registration number:

1. Get your HIP number by registering online.
2. Call 1-877-306-7091 Monday Friday, 7:45 am to 4:30 pm EST. A live operator will give you a HIP registration number.

You must write the HIP registration number in the Harvest Information Program section of your hunting license.

Permanent or lifetime license holders should print the response form with your HIP registration number and carry it with you while hunting migratory birds.

Please remember Vermont and federal migratory waterfowl stamps are also needed to hunt ducks or geese, if you are 16 years old or older.

Hunters must re-register annually.

Forgot your HIP registration number?

look up your h.i.p. registration number

Vermont Waterfowl Hunting and Harvest Data Comparisons

	No. of Active Adult Duck Hunters	Average Seasonal Duck Bagged Per Hunter	Total Season Estimated Duck Harvest	Total Season Estimated Canada Goose Harvest	Total Season Estimated Snow Goose Harvest	Vermont Duck Stamp Sales
2013	4,000	8.0	31,900	9,600	0	6,436
2014	2,600	6.8	17,800	12,300	46	6,635
2015	2,800	5.8	14,700	6,733	30	6,244
2016	3,400	5.2	17,600	8,800	0	6,016
2017	2,500	7.9	19,900	15,900	0	5,954
2018	2,100	7.8	16.200	7,400	0	5,725
2019	3,000	6.1	18,100	5,600	0	5,620
2020	2,200	9.0	19,900	11,800	116	6,089
2021	2,000	6.4	11,500	5,600	0	6,111
2022	1,900	7.8	14,500	15,683	107	5,956
2023	3,600	7.2	26,100	12,900	119	6,067
2024	3,300	8.4	27,500	11,200	0	5,827

Controlled Hunting Areas 2026

Mud Creek Controlled Hunt Area

- Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday
- First two hunting days by lottery and blinds will be assigned
- Self registration after first two days

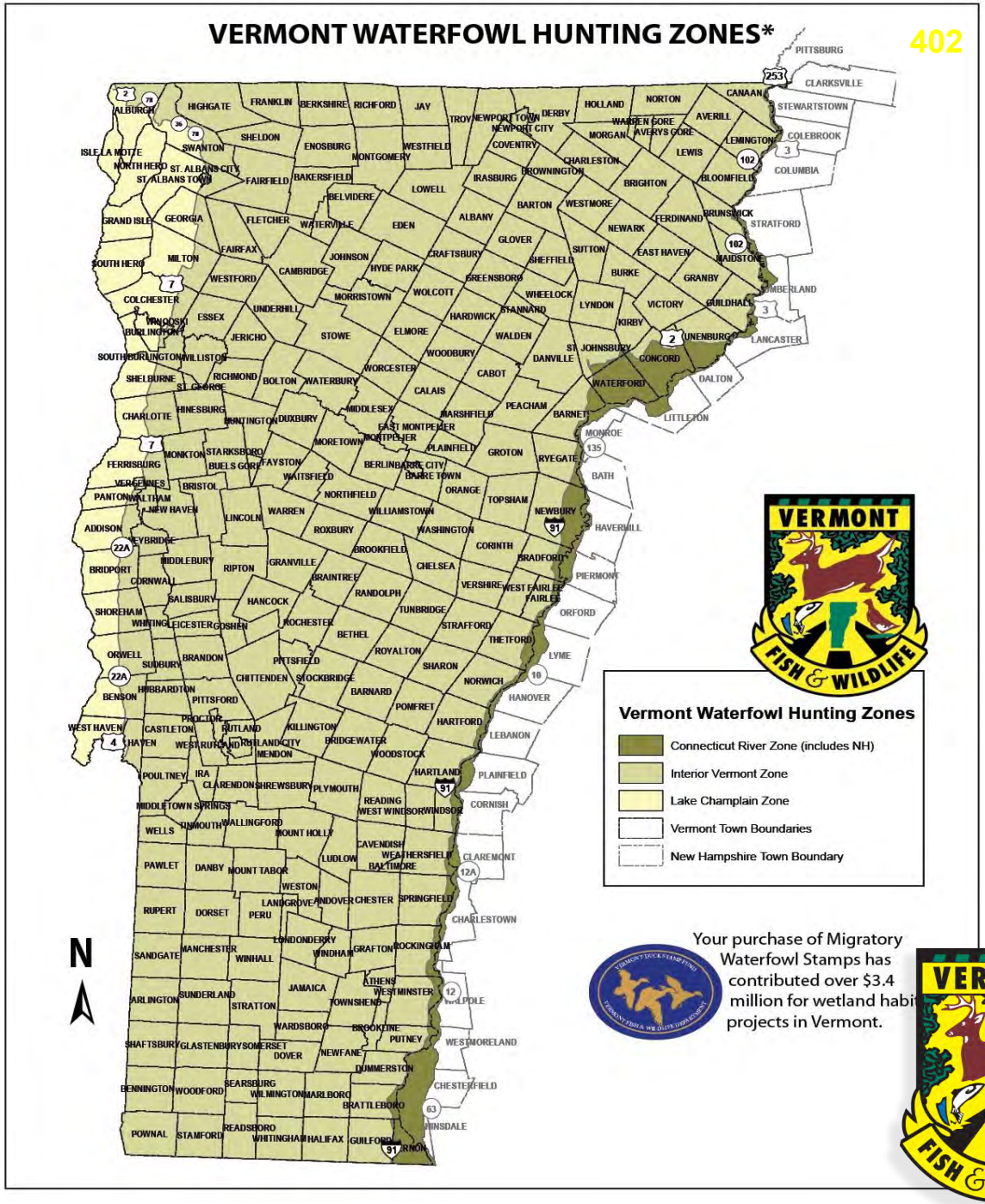
Dead Creek Goose Management Area

- Tuesdays and Thursdays (and One Friday for youth hunters)
- 4/5 Hunting Zones?
- Hunters supply their own blinds
- All sites are by lottery and zones will be assigned
- All hunting is self registration beginning 1.5 hours prior to shooting
- Currently reviewing potential changes



Vermont Waterfowl Hunting Zones

- Lake Champlain Zone (LCZ)
  - Shared with NY set by VT
- Interior Vermont Zone (IVZ)
  - Entirely in VT
- Connecticut River Zone (CRZ)
  - Shared with NH set by NH





2026 Hunting Seasons and Bag Limit Recommendations

Woodcock Season Recommendation

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 45 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 13- Jan. 31
Daily Bag limit: 3/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 45 days
Dates: Sept. 26 – Nov. 9
Daily Bag Limit: 3/day



Snipe Season Recommendation

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 107 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 1- Jan. 31
Daily Bag Limit: 8/day

Recommendation:

Length: 45 days
Dates: Sept. 26 – Nov. 9
Daily Bag Limit: 8/day



Gettyimages: Gerald Corsi

September Early Resident Canada Goose Hunting Season Recommendations

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 25 days

Outside Dates: Sept 1-25

Limit: 15/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 25 days

LCZ, IVZ and CRZ

Dates: Sept. 1 - 25

Daily Bag Limit: 8/day LCZ and IVZ

5/day CRZ



Migratory AP Canada Goose Hunting Season

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 45 days
Outside Dates: Oct. 10 – Feb. 5
Daily Bag Limit: 3/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 45 days
LCZ and IVZ
Dates: Oct. 10 – Nov. 23
Daily Bag Limit: 3/day
Will know more in a week, but may have to revert to last years seasons



Late Resident Canada Goose Hunting Season Recommendations

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 77 days
Outside Dates: Dec. 1 – Feb. 15
Daily Bag Limit: 5/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 35 days
LCZ and IVZ
Dates: Dec. 1 – Jan. 4
Daily Bag Limit: 5/day LCZ and IVZ



Greater Snow Goose Hunting Season

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 107 days
Outside Dates: Oct. 1 – March 10
Daily Bag Limit: 25/day

Recommendation:

Dates: Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2026 (92 days)
Feb. 26 – Mar. 10, 2027 (13 days)
Daily Bag Limit: 25/day Regular
Possession limit: No limit
No CO in 2027 due to population <500,000
Will require Governors signature
Eventually change wording of board rule



Atlantic Brant Hunting Season Recommendation

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 30 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 23 – Jan. 31
Daily Bag Limit: 1/day

Recommendation:

Season Length: 30 days
LCZ and IVZ
Dates: Oct. 10 – Nov. 8
Daily Bag Limit: 1/day



Jim McKnight

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days

Federal Framework:

Season Length: 2 days
Outside Dates: Within 2 weeks of either end of the allowable hunting days

Recommendation:

Season Length: 2 days
LCZ, IVZ, and CRZ
Dates: Sept. 26 & 27
Legal Species: Ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots.

Other Requirements:

Youth hunter must be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old, Adult may assist in calling, setting decoys, retrieving downed birds



Duck Hunting Season Recommendations

Federal Frameworks:

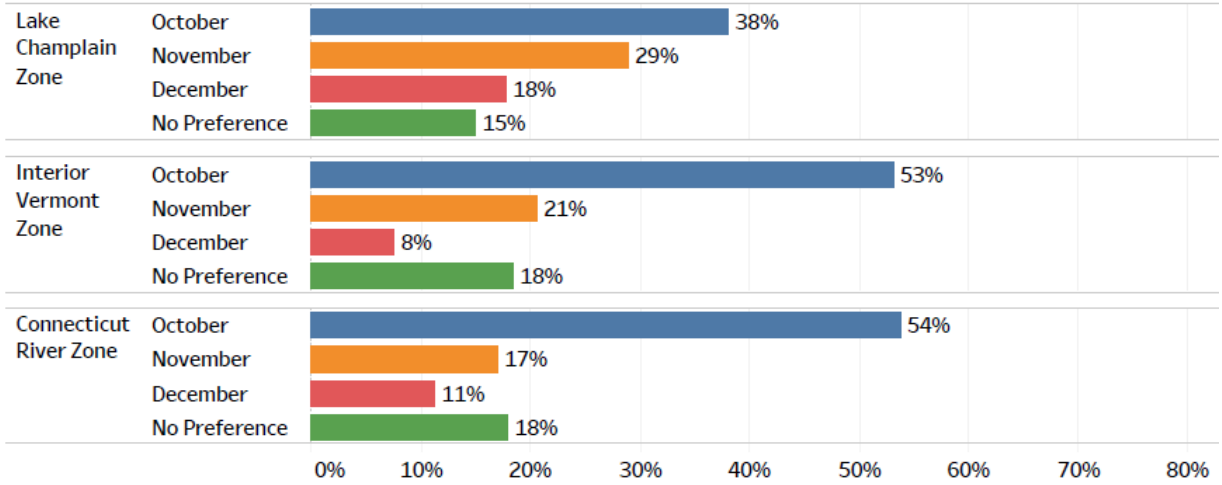
Season length: 60 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 21 – Jan. 31
Daily Bag Limit: 6/day

Recommendation:

Season Dates:
IVZ: Oct. 10 – Dec. 8 (60 days)
LCZ: Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 (23 days)
Nov. 21 – Dec. 27 (37 days)
Daily Bag Limit: 6/day

Daily bag may include no more than, 4 Mallards (2 hens), 3 Wood Ducks, 2 Canvasback, 2 Redheads, 1/40 & 2/20 Scaup, 3 Pintail, 2 Black Duck, 3 Sea Ducks (No more than 3 Scoters, 3 Eiders (1 hen), 3 Long-tailed duck, and no Harlequin).

Figure 15b: Preferred month to have the most duck hunting days open - By Zone Hunted In



Merganser Hunting Season Recommendations

Federal Frameworks:

Season length: 60 days
Outside Dates: Sept. 21 – Jan. 31
Daily Bag Limit: 5/day

Recommendation:

Season Dates:
IVZ: Oct. 10 – Dec. 8 (60 days)
LCZ: Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 (23 days)
Nov. 21 – Dec. 27 (37 days)
Daily Bag Limit: 5/day



Falconry Season

Recommendation:

Season Dates: Coincides with established seasons for each migratory bird species.

Legal Species: All legal migratory game bird species which have a current open season in Vermont (woodcock, snipe, ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots)

Shooting Hours: Same as established open seasons for each migratory game bird species.

Bag Limit: Three (3) migratory game birds; singly or in an aggregate of species, but not to exceed established restrictions which currently exist.



Questions?



2026
Moose Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks. The Department recommends issuing 85 moose hunting permits distributed between WMUs E1 and E2 to stabilize the moose population in that region. No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, because moose densities remain below established objectives. The recommended permit allocation is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

The number of moose in WMU E has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that are negatively affecting moose health and survival. Winter ticks are a host-dependent parasite with moose being the primary host responsible for major fluctuations in winter tick densities. Therefore, reduction in moose population density decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Maintaining a lower-density moose population will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

Reducing winter tick numbers directly, either by treating moose or the landscape with some form of acaricide or fungal pathogen, is not currently a viable option. Research in this area is ongoing, but the realities of treating an entire landscape or a sufficient portion of the moose population make it unlikely that this will be a practical option soon. Importantly, this approach would not address the cause of high winter tick abundance, which is high moose population density.

Maintaining a lower-density moose population should reduce the abundance of winter ticks and improve overall moose health in WMU E, consistent with the Department's established objective of managing for a healthy moose population. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the northeast, they do not significantly impact moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose population densities that limit tick abundance. Instead, moose in these areas are primarily limited by the lack of young forest habitat and internal parasites like brainworm.

Summary of Key Points

- The moose population remains stable or slowly declining in most of Vermont, but may be declining in WMU E (E1 & E2), as intended, due to recent moose harvests.

- Results of moose research and ongoing monitoring in WMU E indicate health of moose is poor in that region.
    - Adult survival remains relatively good, but detrimental health impacts of winter ticks have caused birth rates to be low.
    - Heavy winter tick loads can cause more than half of moose calves to die in late winter.

- Moose density in WMU E remains above the objective of 1 moose per square mile established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.
    - Moose densities greater than 1 moose per square mile are uncommon in North America, occurring in less than 10% of moose range.
    - In Vermont, no WMU outside the Northeast Kingdom ever had a moose density of 1/mi^2.
    - Moose densities greater than 1/mi^2 support high numbers of winter ticks that negatively impact the health of moose.
    - Moose densities below 0.75/mi^2 support relatively few winter ticks that do not impact moose populations. This is the case in most of Vermont – winter ticks are present, but do not cause population level impacts.

- Increased moose harvests in recent years appear to be effectively reducing moose numbers, as intended, in WMU E. The population is approaching the objective of 1 moose per square mile.

- The Department recommends 85 moose hunting permits (65 either sex and 20 antlerless only) be allocated in WMU E to stabilize moose numbers near the objective.
    - This is expected to result in a harvest of approximately 42 moose, or about 6% of the current estimated population in WMU E.

- No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, which cover 93% of Vermont, because moose densities remain below objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Goals

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in WMUs E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks.

Management Objectives

Moose population objectives for each WMU were established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. These objectives aim to maintain healthy regional moose populations at levels that are socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable.

Moose density objectives throughout most of moose range in Vermont have been set at 0.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 1**). This objective is a carryover from earlier moose management plans and reflects peak moose densities in these regions during the early 2000s.

In WMUs D2, E1, and E2, density objectives reflect higher historical densities and the impact of winter ticks on the size and health of the region's moose population. Research has found reduced frequency of winter tick epizootics (where more than 50% of calves die from winter tick infestations) at moose densities near 1/mi^2 and no tick epizootics at densities below 0.75/mi^2 (Samuel 2007, Jones 2016). The Department will initially try to maintain moose densities at or below 1/mi^2 to reduce winter tick abundance and the frequency of epizootics and improve the health of the moose population. However, if tick impacts are not reduced, the moose density may need to be reduced to 0.75/mi^2. Ultimately, the goal is to have healthy moose, with fewer calves dying each year from heavy winter tick loads and healthier cows with higher birth rates.

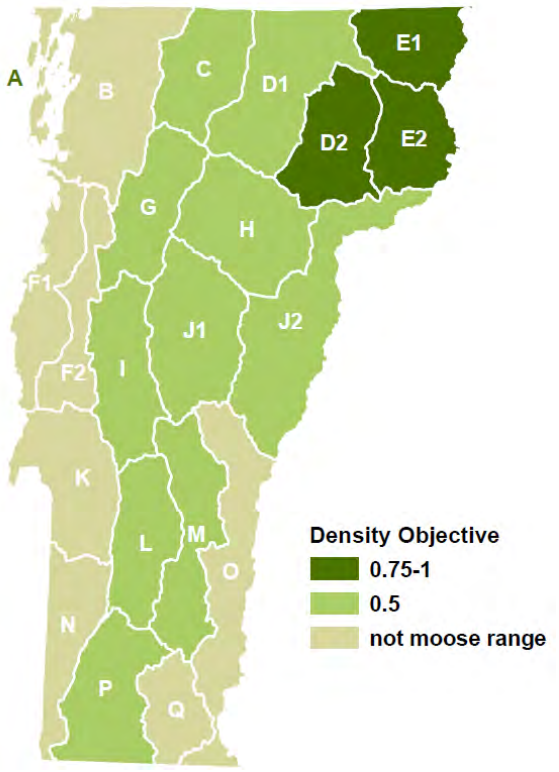


Figure 1. Moose density objectives (moose per square mile of moose habitat) established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Hunting thresholds have also been established for each WMU at 75% of the density objective (**Table 1**). The Department will only consider hunting moose when densities exceed this threshold for two consecutive years. This ensures the other values of moose are maximized at these lower densities.

Moose and Winter Ticks

Studies in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine have concluded that winter ticks are the primary cause of moose mortality across their core range in New England (Musante et al. 2007, 2010, Bergeron et al. 2013, Dunfey-Ball 2017, Jones et al. 2017, Ellingwood et al. 2019, Jones et al. 2019, DeBow et al. 2021), with some moose hosting an astonishingly high number of ticks (>50,000/individual; Jones et al. 2019).

Core moose range in New England extends from northeastern Vermont through northern New Hampshire and western and northern Maine. This part of the region has a colder climate with longer winters, low deer densities, large blocks of forest, and an abundance of young forest created by commercial timber management which allows it to sustain higher densities of moose than more peripheral parts of their range. Population-level effects of winter ticks have only been observed in the region's core moose range, where moose densities have been high enough to support large numbers of winter ticks.

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the region, they have little impact on moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range in the northeast, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose densities which limit tick abundance. Moose numbers outside of the Northeast Kingdom have declined from their peak in the early 2000s, but the main cause of that decline was not winter ticks. It was primarily due to a combination of declining quantity of young forest, increased parasite loads (particularly brainworm linked to increasing deer densities), and fewer moose in core moose range to migrate out to these other regions. These factors continue to limit moose abundance across much of Vermont.

Vermont Research

During 2017–2019, 126 moose (36 adult cows and 90 calves) were fitted with GPS radio collars in WMU E to monitor survival and birth rates. Results of this research clearly showed that chronic, high winter tick loads caused the health of moose in WMU E to be poor. Birth rates were low and overwinter calf survival was poor (49%; DeBow et al. 2021). Although adult female survival remained relatively good, it was lower than expected for a population without major predators. Survival of breeding age females has significant influence on population trends in long-lived species like moose.

Fieldwork associated with the survival study concluded in 2019; however, the Department continued to monitor survival and calf recruitment in the remaining collared cows through 2024. Additionally, the large amounts of data collected during this study allowed University of Vermont researchers to analyze other aspects of moose and winter tick ecology (*see* Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Blouin et al. 2021*b*, Rosenblatt et al. 2021, Rosenblatt et al. 2023). Other related research at UVM assessed the effect of various fungal pathogens on survival of winter tick larvae (*see* Sullivan et al. 2021 and Sullivan et al. 2022).

The Department is currently partnering with multiple northeastern universities and state and federal agencies on regional research efforts focused on non-invasive monitoring of moose and winter ticks. A component of this involves deployment of hundreds of long-term camera monitoring stations that will hopefully allow for better monitoring of moose health and population trends, particularly in parts of the region with little or no moose harvest.

Population Status

Regional Population Estimates

Regional moose densities in Vermont are estimated from moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters during the November rifle season. This approach, originally developed by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, relates sighting rates to moose densities determined by aerial surveys (Bontaites et al. 2000). Aerial surveys conducted in Vermont allowed the Department to modify this model to better fit Vermont sighting data (Millette et al. 2011). Sighting rates often vary from year to year due to factors other than the number of moose (e.g., weather conditions), so a 3-year rolling average is used to smooth out some of this variation.

Using this approach, the 2025 (2023–2025 rolling average) density estimates for WMUs E1 and E2 are 1.32 and 1.09 moose/mi^2, respectively, which remain above the density objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. Moose population densities in all other WMUs except WMU C remain below established hunting thresholds (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Moose density estimates based on sighting rates by deer hunters and density objectives and hunting thresholds established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, by WMU. Density estimates are based on average sighting rates during 2023–2025.

WMU	Habitat (mi^2)	Density (moose/mi^2)			Population Estimate	
		Objective	Hunting Threshold	Current Estimate	N	(80% CI)
A	35	n/a	n/a	0.02	1	(1–1)
B	420	n/a	n/a	0.02	10	(8–11)
C	351	0.5	0.38	0.41	145	(122–168)
D1	449	0.5	0.38	0.09	39	(30–49)
D2	346	0.75-1	0.56	0.24	82	(63–100)
E1	306	0.75-1	0.56	1.32	403	(357–449)
E2	326	0.75-1	0.56	1.09	355	(297–413)
F1	108	n/a	n/a	0.04	5	(3–6)
F2	158	n/a	n/a	0.02	3	(3–3)
G	363	0.5	0.38	0.05	17	(11–23)
H	466	0.5	0.38	0.19	88	(72–104)
I	407	0.5	0.38	0.09	35	(26–44)
J1	464	0.5	0.38	0.04	18	(14–23)
J2	633	0.5	0.38	0.10	65	(54–77)
K	359	n/a	n/a	0.04	14	(8–19)
L	346	0.5	0.38	0.08	27	(17–36)
M	424	0.5	0.38	0.18	77	(55–98)
N	275	n/a	n/a	0.02	6	(6–6)
O	478	n/a	n/a	0.05	25	(13–37)
P	447	0.5	0.38	0.11	49	(34–65)
Q	219	n/a	n/a	0.05	12	(7–16)
STATE	**7380**				**1474**	**(1201–1748)**

Moose density in WMU C exceeded the hunting threshold in 2024 and 2025, meaning permits could now be considered in this WMU according to the guidelines of the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. However, since the current density is only slightly above the hunting threshold, typical year-to-year fluctuations in density estimates make it unlikely that this status will be maintained. Therefore, the Department recommends that no permits be issued in WMU C in 2026.

The Department continues to receive interest in moose hunting in areas outside WMU E, and some local areas could likely sustain a limited moose harvest. However, the uneven distribution of functional moose habitat (and therefore moose) in much of Vermont is a challenge for management. The Department is reevaluating moose habitat mapping and regional population objectives based on recent research efforts in the northeast (e.g., Pearman-Gilman et al. 2020, Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Peterson et al. 2022) This will allow for setting more appropriate population objectives that reflect current habitat limitations, and calculating more meaningful estimates of moose density in WMUs with less homogeneous moose habitat.

Moose Population Trends in WMU E

In WMU E, moose were overabundant in the early 2000s and the Department intentionally worked to reduce moose numbers. Since population reduction efforts ended in 2010, moose density has remained relatively stable in WMU E near 1.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 2**). Importantly, the density of moose over that time has been high enough to support problematic numbers of winter ticks. The population may now be declining, as intended, as a result of higher moose harvests in recent years.

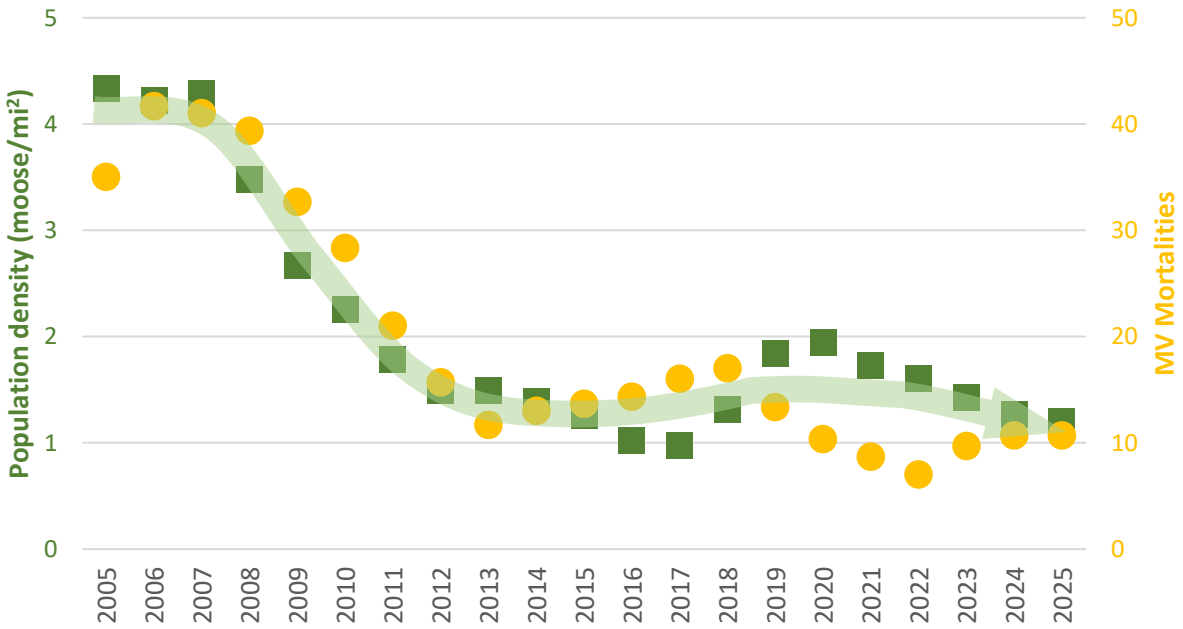


Figure 2. Moose density estimates (green squares) and moose mortalities from motor vehicle collision (yellow circles) in WMU E during 2005–2025. Both metrics are three-year rolling averages. Density estimates are based on moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters. The light green line shows general population trend.

Recent Winter Tick Impacts in WMU E

The severity of annual tick infestations is dependent not only on moose density, but also on climate, including temperature, humidity, wind, and snow. Annual variation in climate conditions results in variation in winter tick loads on moose. Vermont has not collared moose calves to directly monitor overwinter survival since 2019. As a result, the Department relies on other sources of information to estimate winter tick impacts since that time.

One useful measure is counts of winter ticks on bull moose harvested in October (**Figure 6**). This measure provides an indication of tick abundance on the landscape, but final tick loads on moose are largely determined by the length of the questing period. The questing period is typically ended by weather conditions (e.g., persistent snow or freezing conditions) that kill questing winter tick larvae.

Persistent snow arrived in early November in WMU E, resulting in a shorter questing period than in many recent years. However, the higher average winter tick counts in 2025 (**Figure 6**) still suggest a greater likelihood of high calf mortality in the spring of 2026.

Occasional increases in winter tick abundance are expected, even as moose density is reduced. However, these high winter tick years will be less frequent at lower moose density. Winter tick counts were also higher in New Hampshire and Maine in 2025, indicating this increase was driven by annual climate variation, not moose abundance.

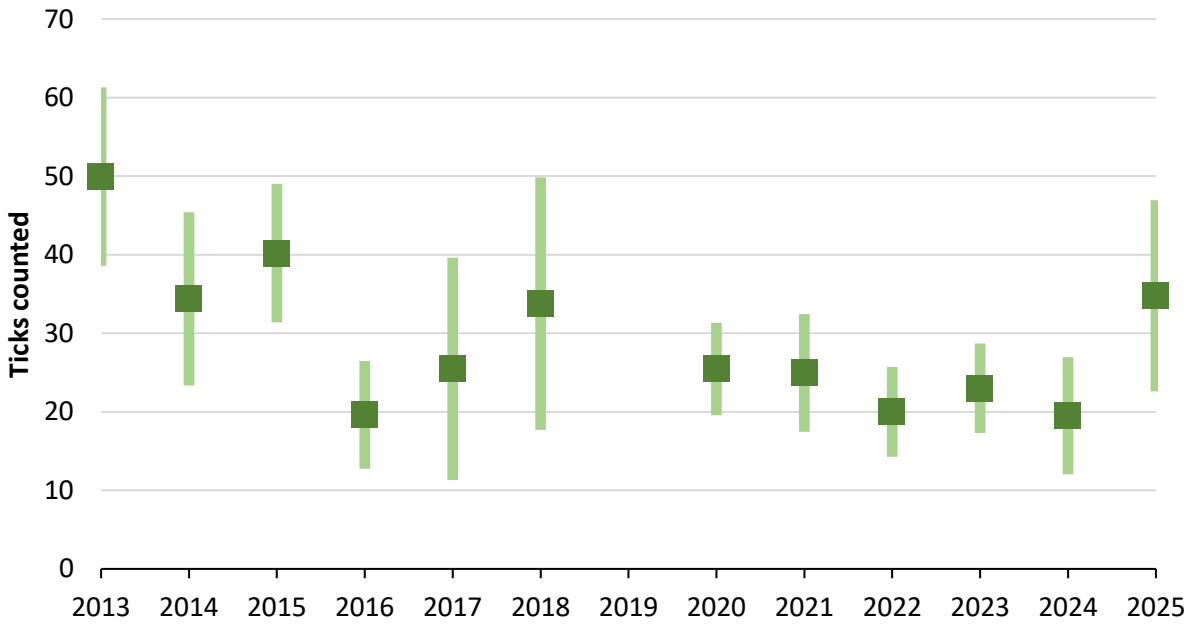


Figure 6. Winter tick counts on bull moose harvested in Wildlife Management Unit E, 2013–2025.

Population Health in WMU E

In the early 2000s, moose were overabundant in WMU E. They were causing significant damage to forest regeneration, and their physical condition was declining as habitat quality declined. The Department actively reduced the moose population in this area to bring it into balance with the habitat and to improve the health of moose. By 2011, the population had been reduced to a level the habitat could support; however, health measures did not improve (**Figures 7** and **8**).

Moose body condition and reproductive rates have remained poor since 2011 due to the impacts of chronic high winter tick loads. Moose are not currently limited by habitat quality in the core part of their range, including WMU E (Dunfey-Ball 2017). However, habitat quality can influence the distribution of moose on the landscape (i.e., higher densities of moose in areas with the highest quality habitat), which can influence local winter tick abundance and impacts on moose health (Healy et al. 2019, Blouin et al. 2021*a* and *b*).

Body condition and reproductive rates have shown signs of improvement in recent years (**Figures 7** and **8**). However, body weights, particularly for yearling moose, declined sharply in 2024 and 2025 (**Figure 7**). The cause of this decline is unknown, but it is likely due to something other than winter ticks. Ultimately, we hope to see sustained improvement in these metrics.

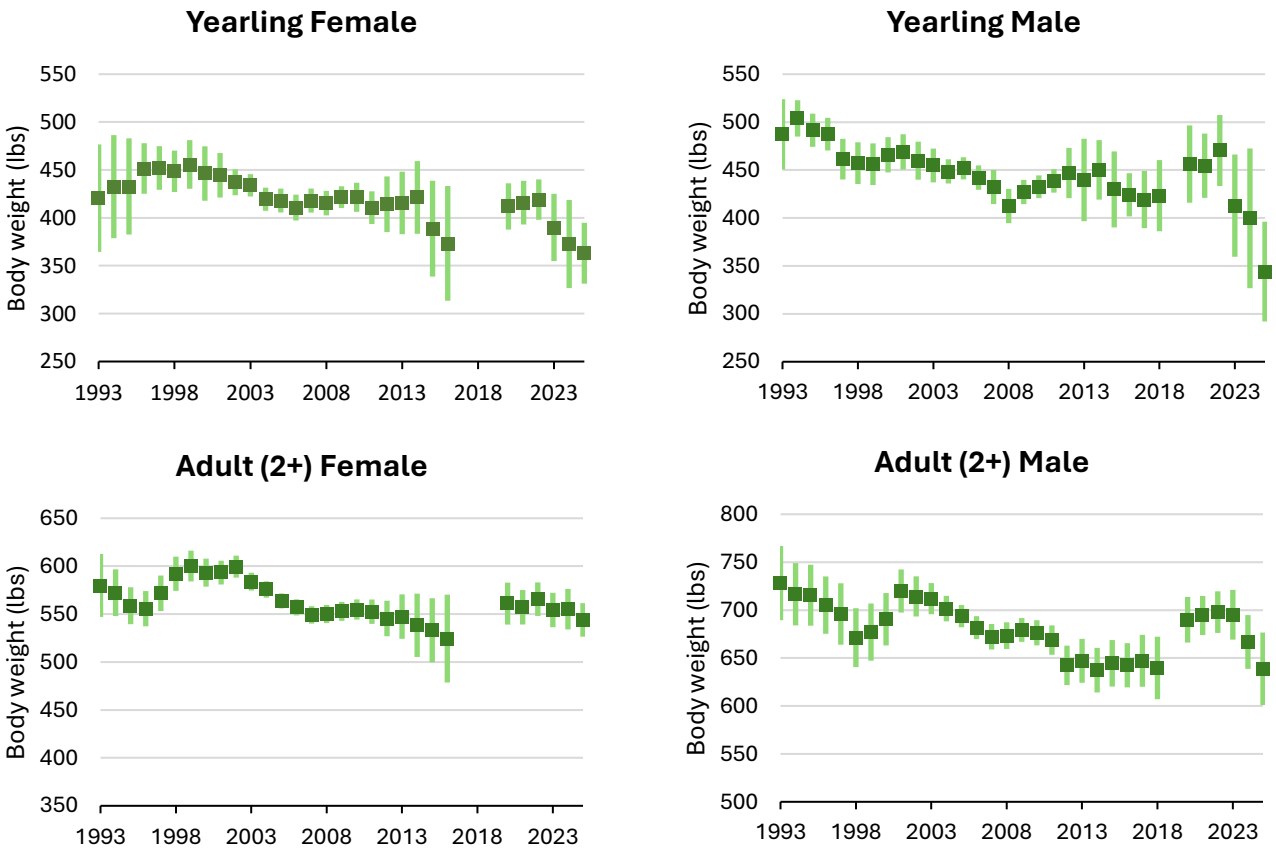


Figure 7. Field-dressed body weights of moose harvested during the regular season in Wildlife Management Unit E, 1993–2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages with 95% confidence intervals.

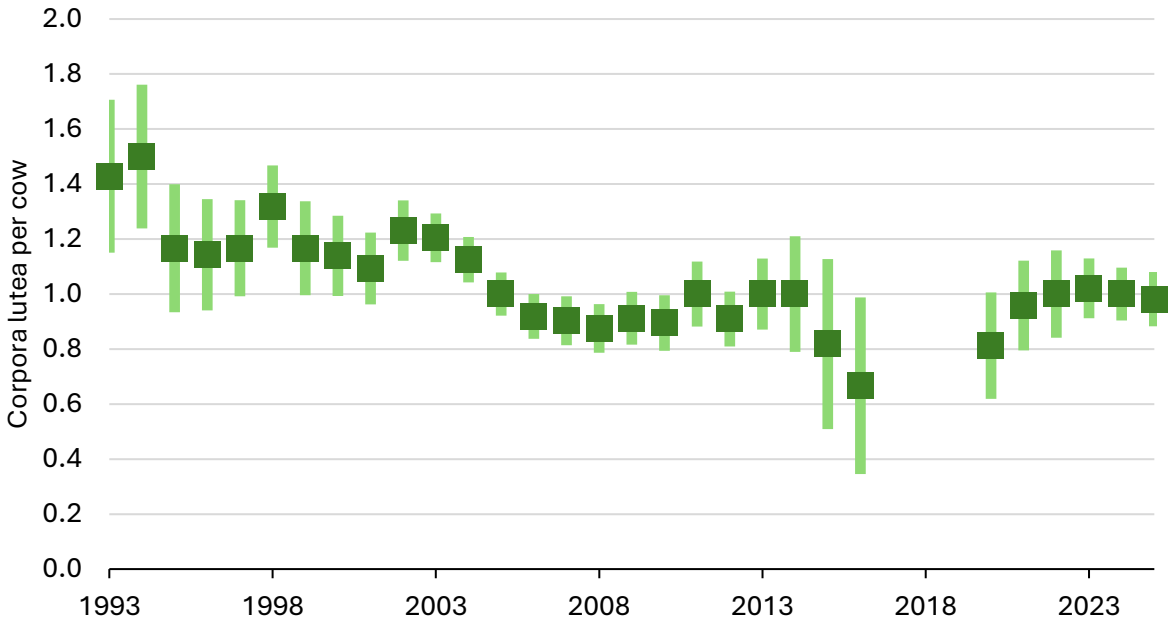


Figure 8. Ovulation rate of prime-aged (≥3 years old) cow moose in WMU E, 1993-2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages from counts of corpora lutea in ovaries collected from hunter-harvested moose.

Harvest Recommendation

The Department recommends harvesting approximately 10-12 adult cow moose (~3% of the cow population) and approximately 30 adult bull moose (~15% of the bull population) in WMU E during the 2026 moose hunting seasons. The Department further recommends that this be accomplished through the issuance of 65 either-sex hunting permits and 20 antlerless-only hunting permits. This is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025. No permits are recommended in the other 19 WMUs.

Permit breakdown by season, type, WMU, and special allocation is provided below in **Table 2**. Given recent success rates and sex-age composition of the harvest for each season and permit type, this allocation is expected to result in the harvest of approximately 42 moose with an expected breakdown of 29 bulls, 11 cows, and 2 calves.

Approximately 55% of permits are recommended to be allocated to WMU E1 due to higher moose density in that WMU. Since most auction and special opportunity permit winners choose to hunt WMU E1, this will result in approximately 65% of permits being assigned to that WMU.

The recommended allocation to the archery season is 25% of either-sex permits, based on the percentage of total applications that were for this season in recent years and the need to obtain sufficient biological data during the regular season. Allocations to the auction, special opportunity, and veterans are the same as prior years and are limited by statute and regulation.

Table 2. Recommended 2026 moose hunting permit allocations and expected harvest by season, permit type, and WMU.

	Permits			Expected Harvest	
	E1	E2	Total		
Archery Season					
Either-sex	7	8	15	8	*(6–10)*
Regular Season[1]					
Either-sex	24	20	44	24	*(20–30)*
Antlerless-only	11	9	20	7	*(6–10)*
Auction[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
Special Opportunity[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
TOTAL			**85**	**42**	*(32–56)*

[1] *Veteran permits are a priority draw for the first 5 regular season permits.*

[2] *Auction and Special Opportunity Permits are either sex and allow choice of season and WMU.*

The results of the moose study and continued monitoring of moose clearly show that the density of moose in WMU E over the past decade has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that negatively affect moose health and survival. Research has shown that winter tick abundance is directly related to moose population density. Reducing the density of moose decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Reducing the moose population and maintaining it at lower density will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

The Department is committed to achieving a healthy moose population in WMU E by meeting the population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. The proposed permit allocation and resulting cow harvest should allow the population to stabilize near the objective of 1 moose/mi^2 (632 moose in WMU E) within the next few years.

In practice, the moose population and winter tick impacts are dynamic, and management must remain adaptive. Actual permit allocations and harvest will be adjusted annually based on new information as it becomes available. Importantly, the Department's primary goal is to improve the health of moose in WMU E. If health does not improve at 1 moose/mi^2, moose density may need to be reduced even further.

Maintaining a healthy, stable, and sustainable moose population requires action to improve moose health. Without management action to reduce the moose population and maintain it at a lower density, high tick loads will continue to impact the health of moose in WMU E. The resulting chronic stress, low birth rates, and high calf mortality will make the population less resilient to diseases, parasites, and environmental variation, which could cause the population to destabilize. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

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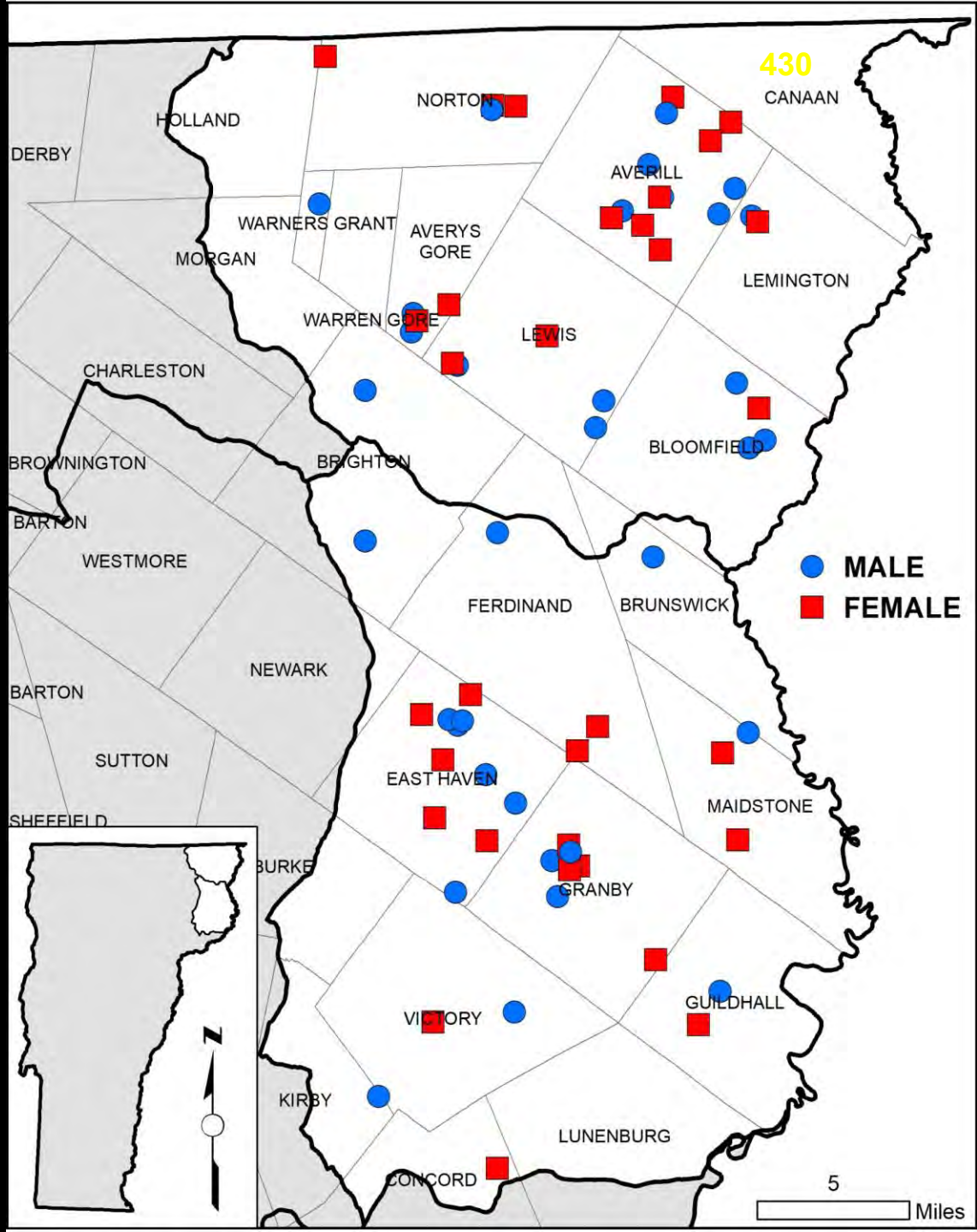
2026 Moose Harvest Recommendation

2025 Moose Harvest

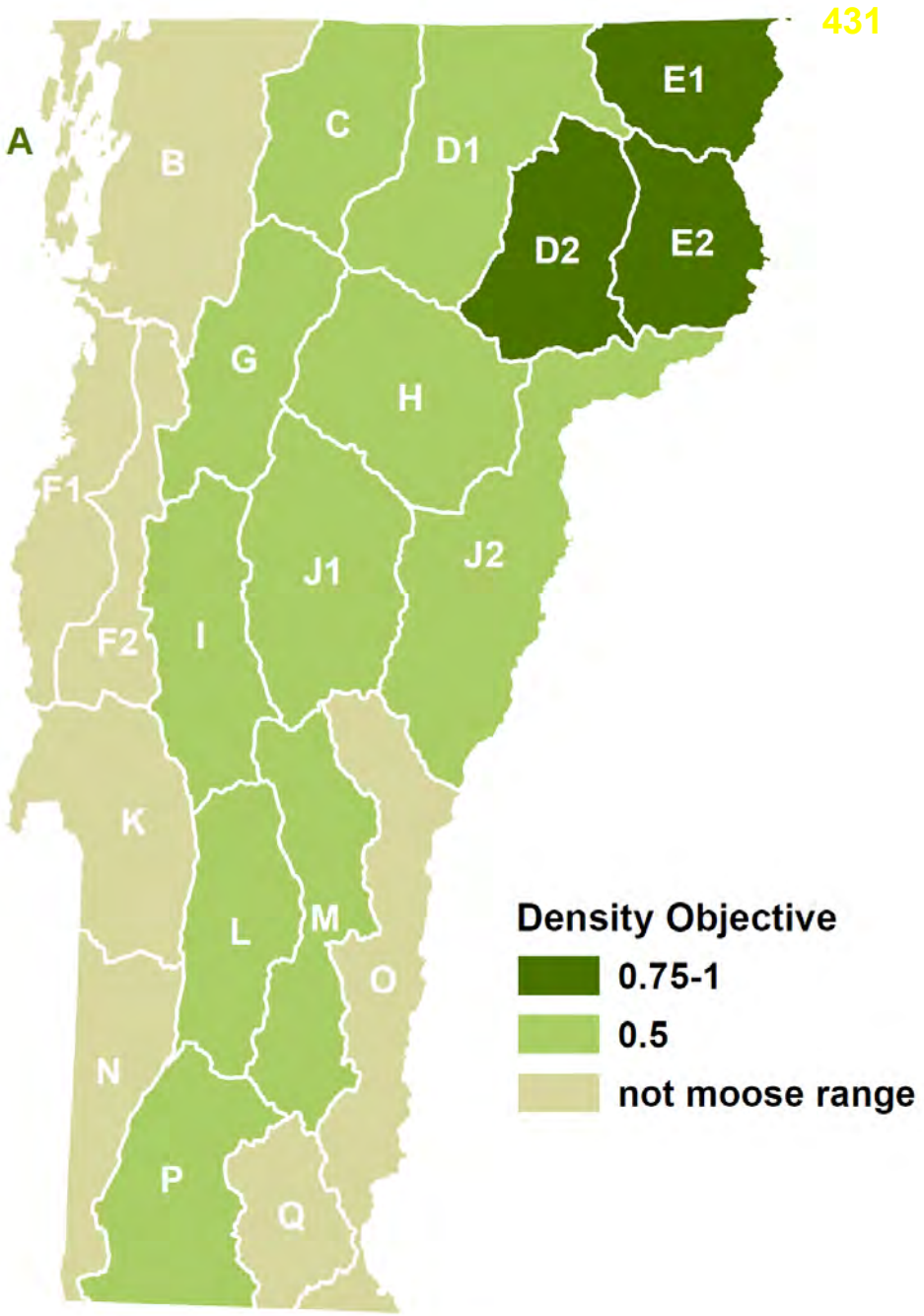
Archery Season:
15 moose
(all bulls)
65% success rate (15/23)

Special Opportunity Season:
1 bull – 33% success rate (1/3)

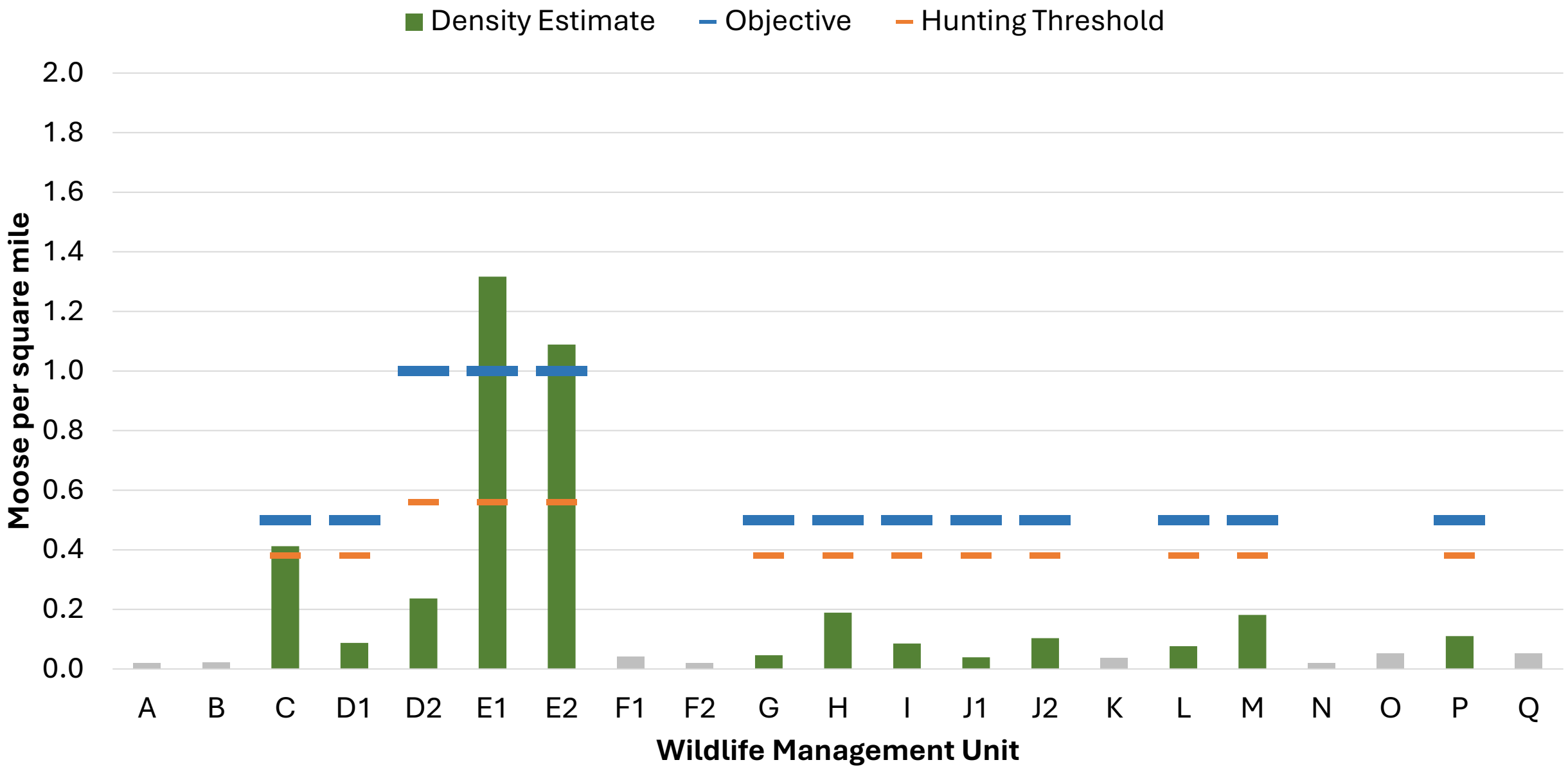
Regular Season:
52 moose
(18 bulls/29 cows/5 calves)
47% ES success rate (25/53)
27% AO success rate (27/99)

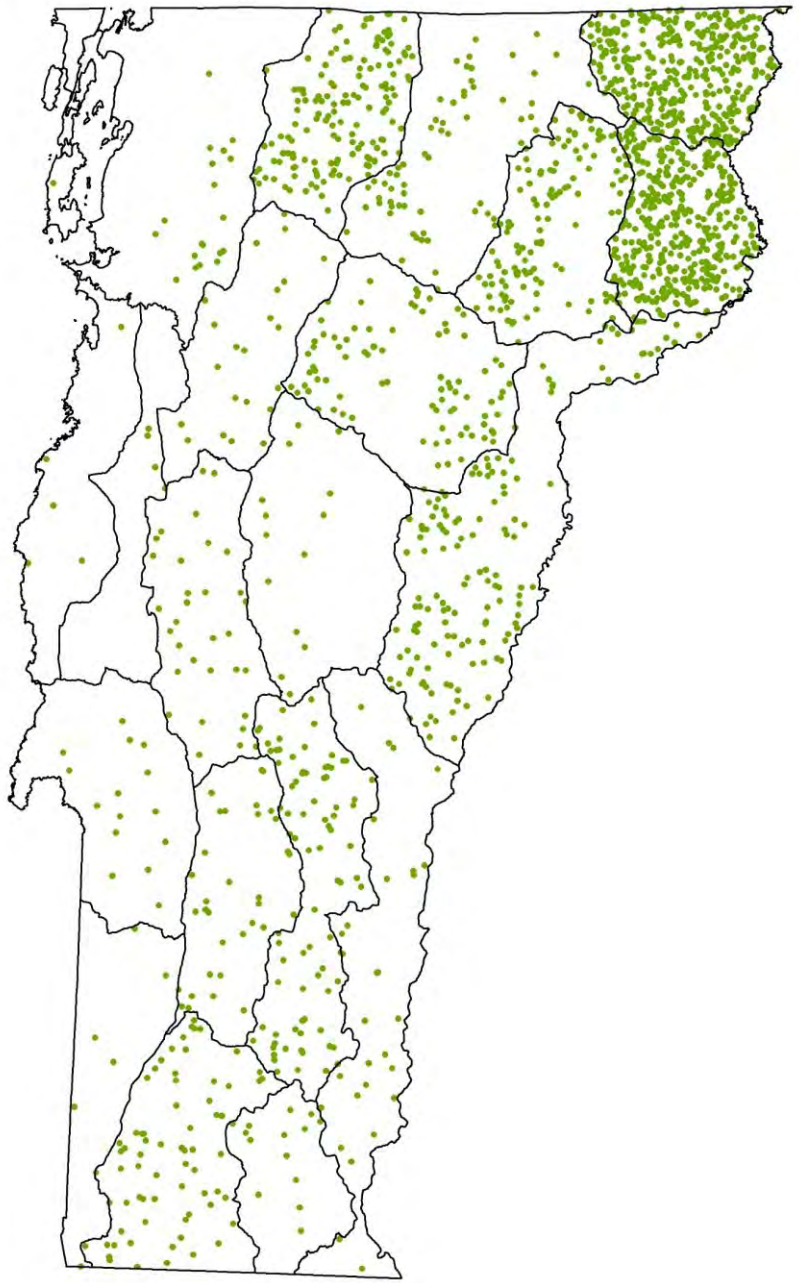


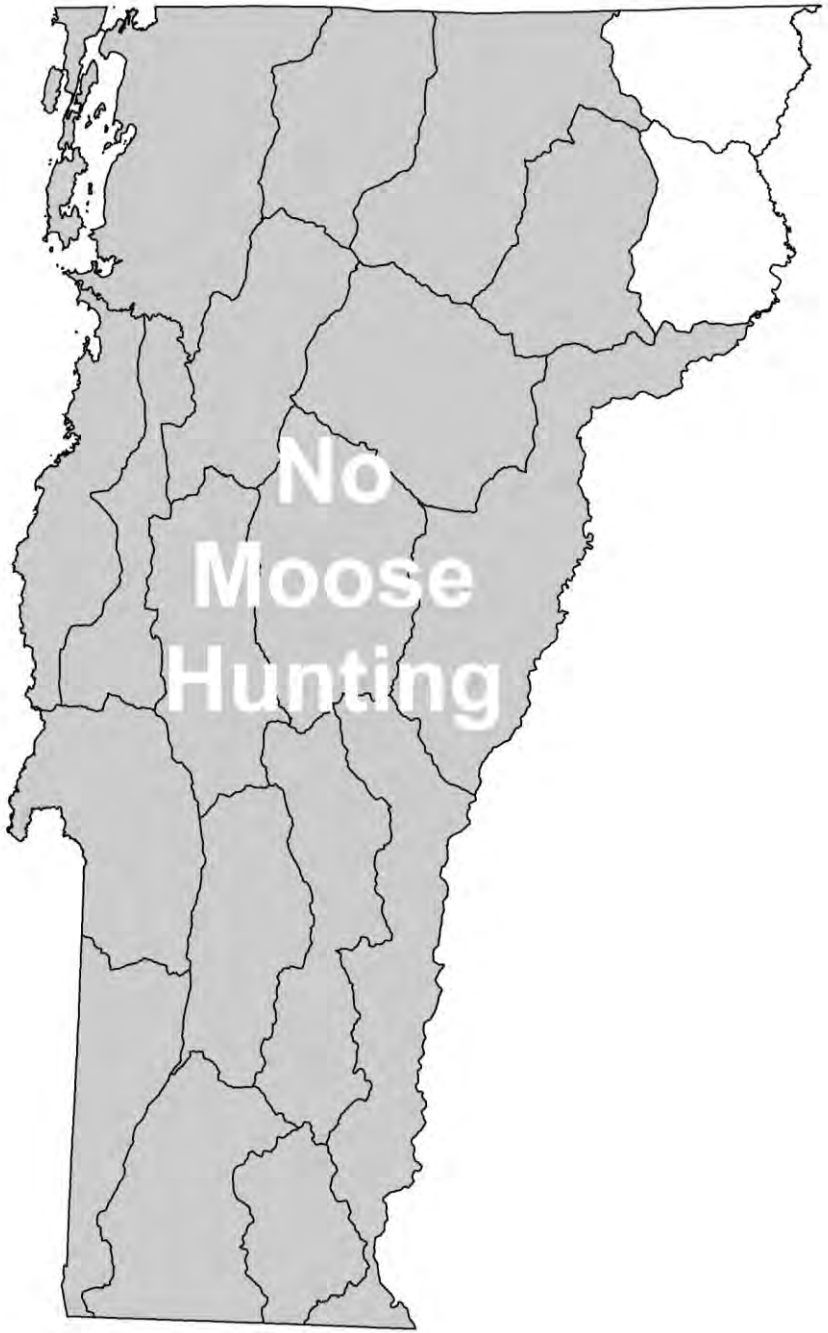
Moose Population Objectives

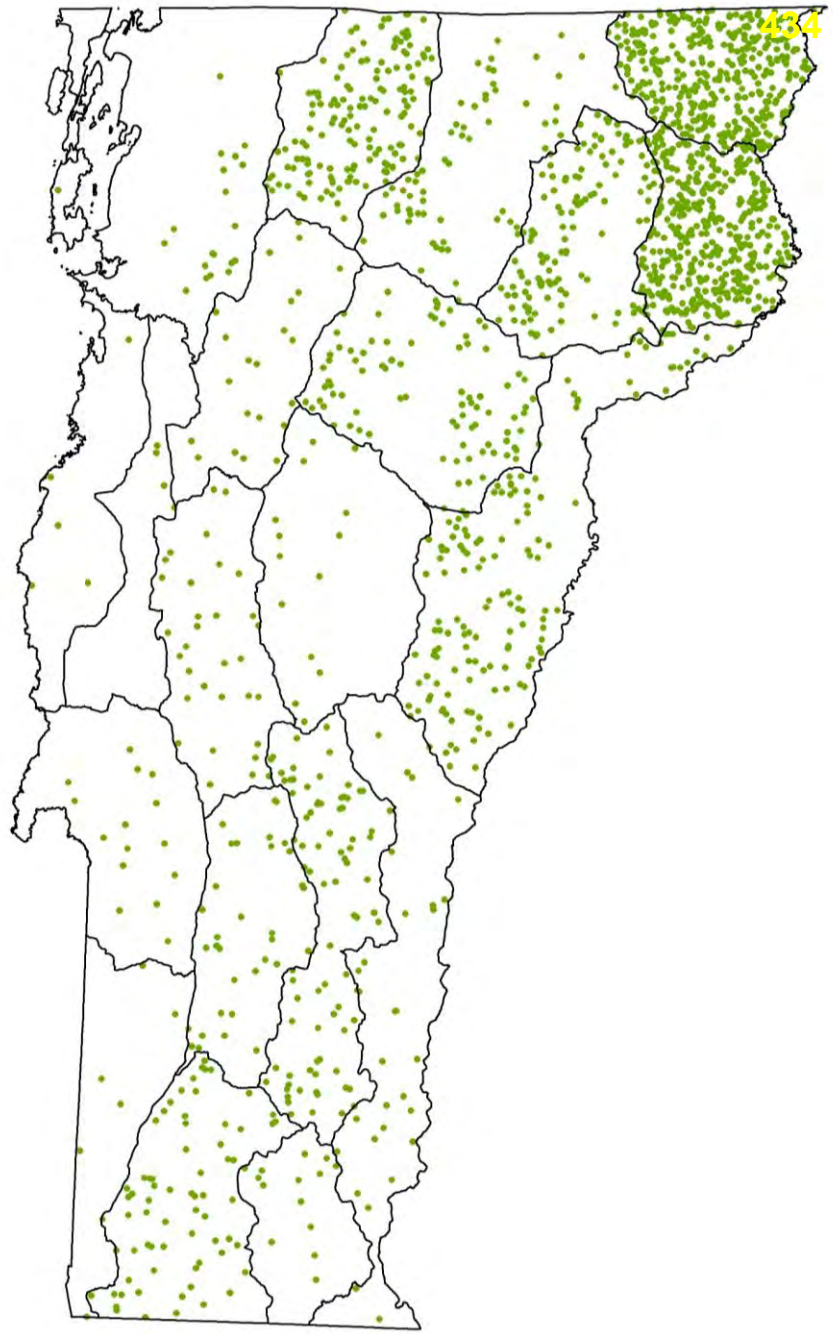


Moose Distribution in Vermont





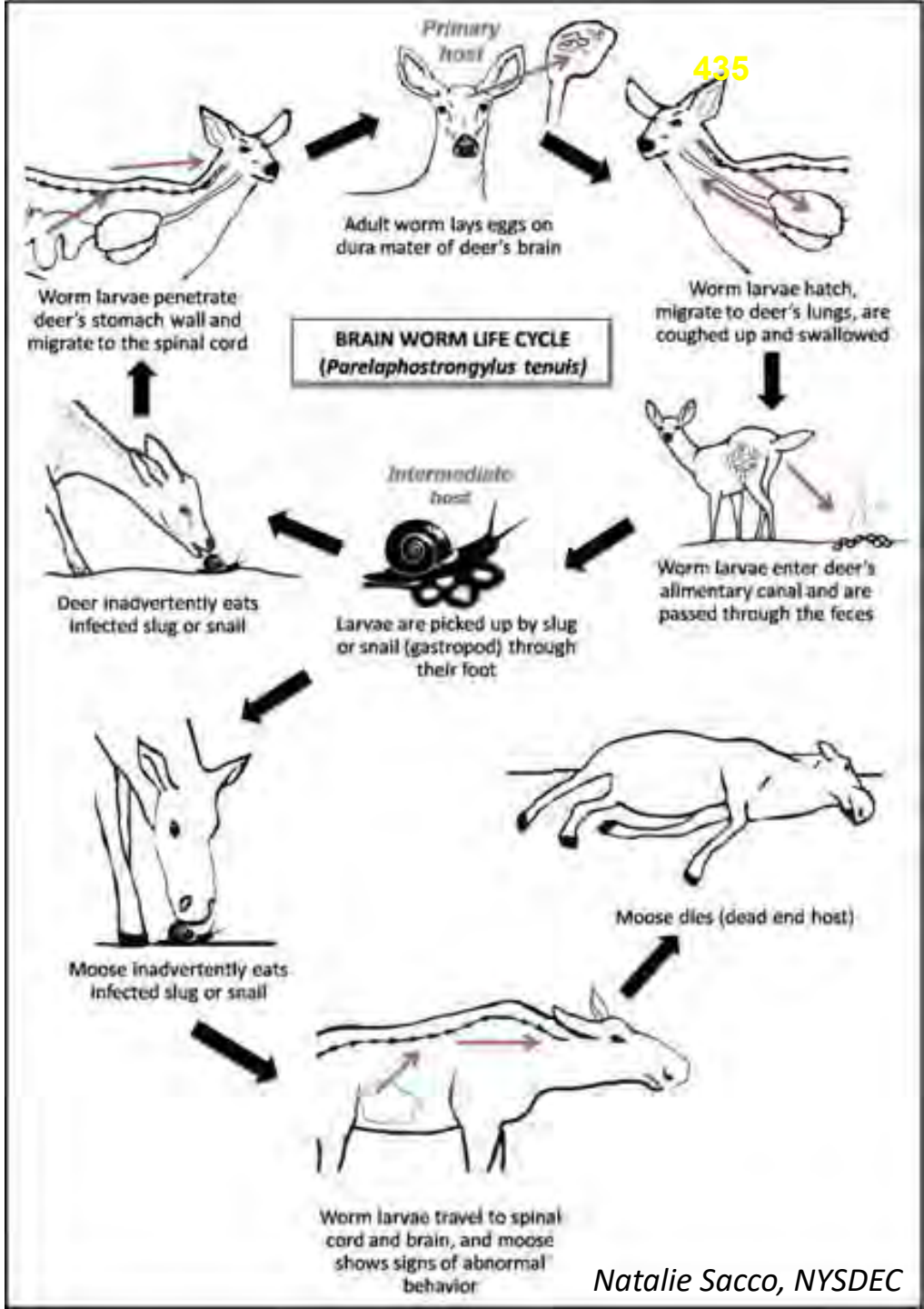

No
Moose
Hunting


434



Brainworm





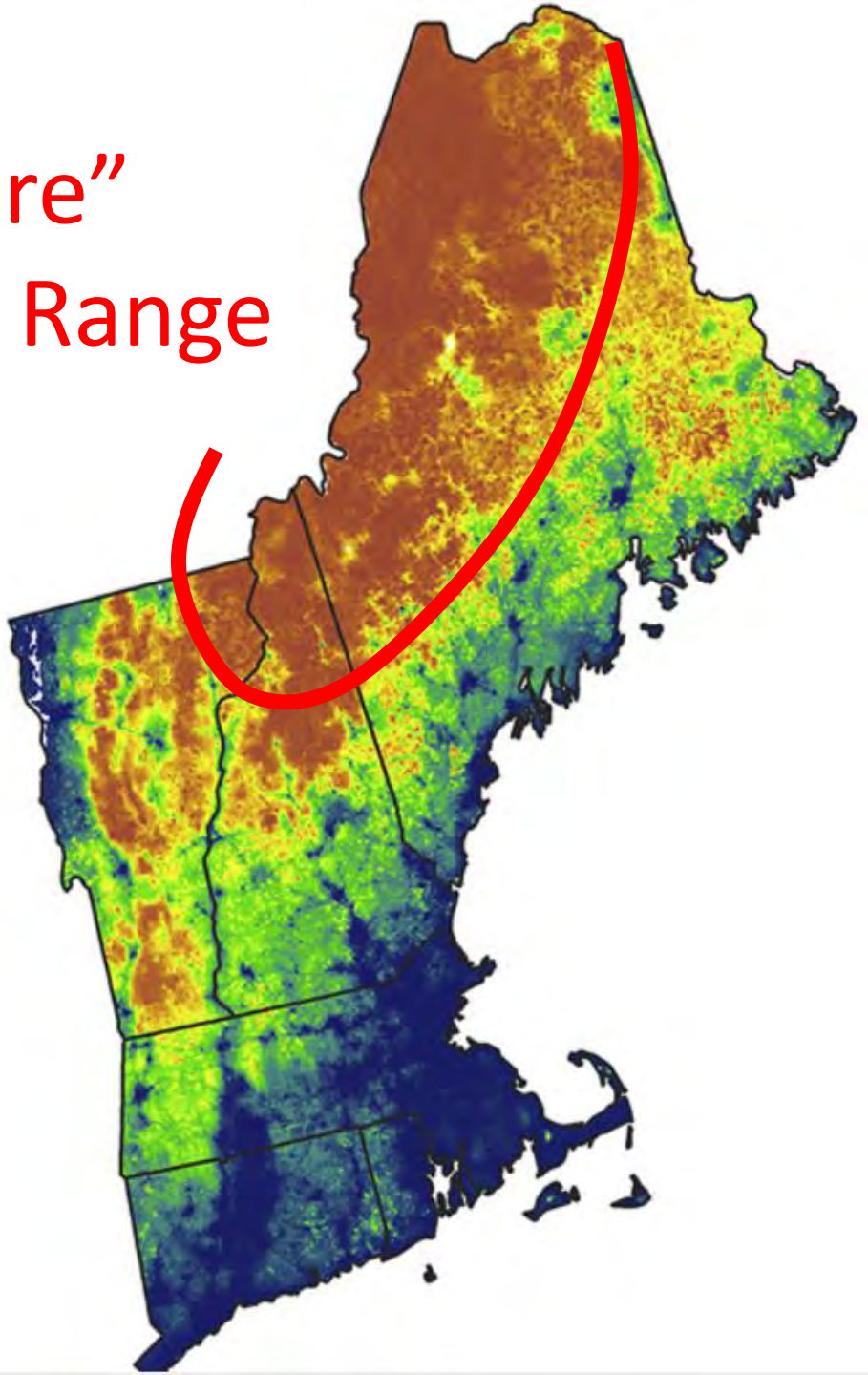
Natalie Sacco, NYSDEC

Loss of Young Forest Habitat

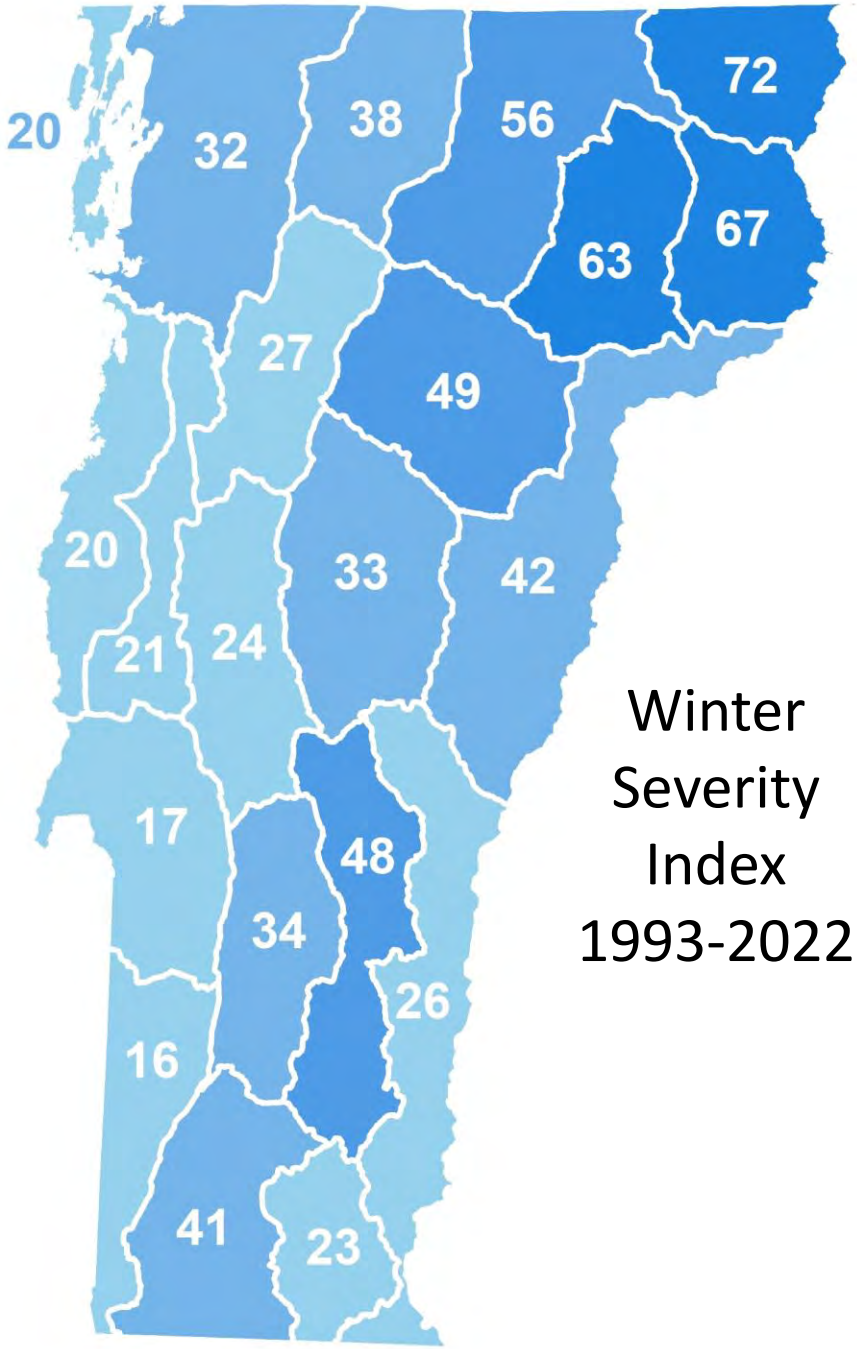




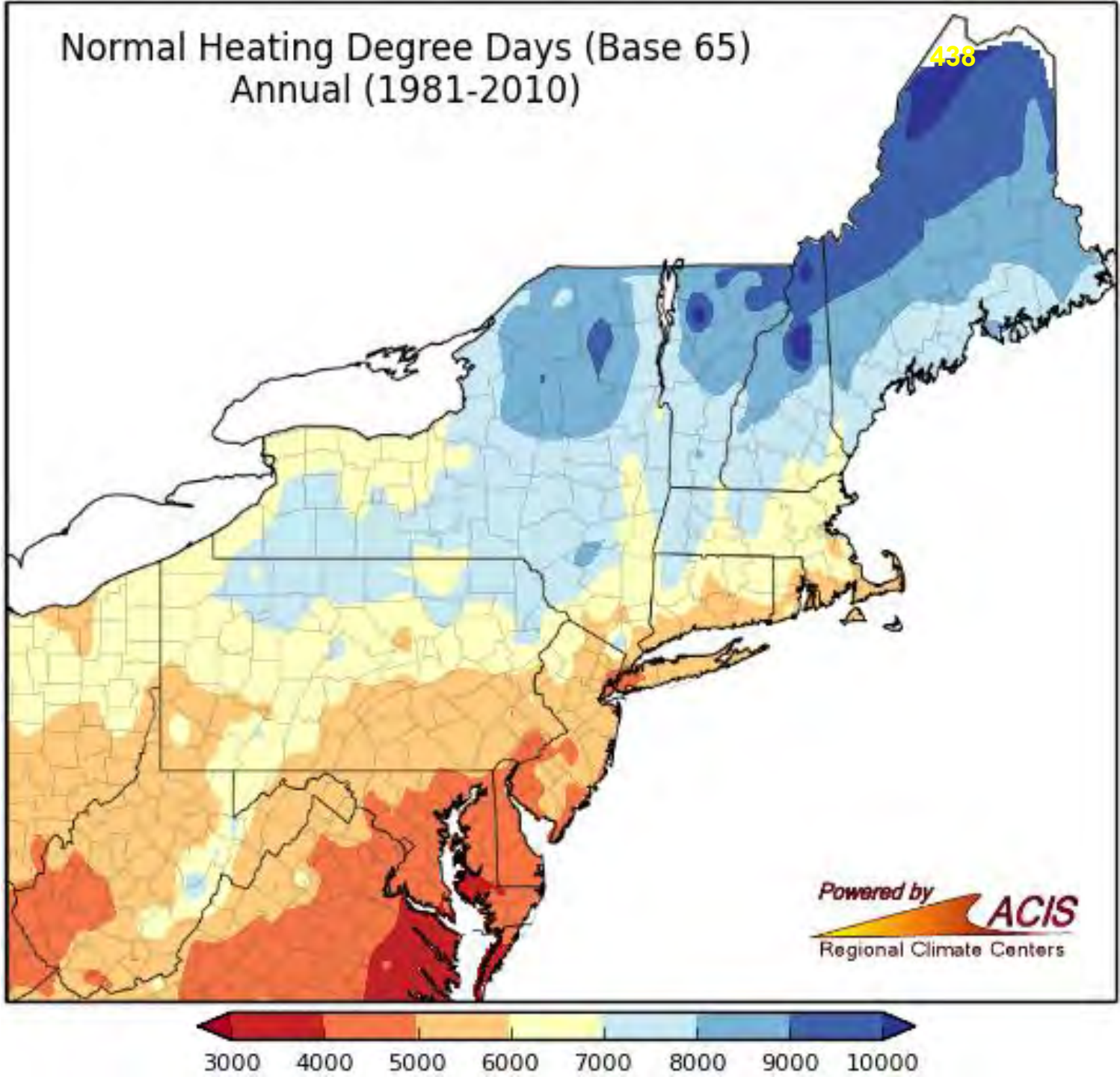
“Core” Moose Range



Probability of moose occurrence
Pearman-Gillman et al. 2020

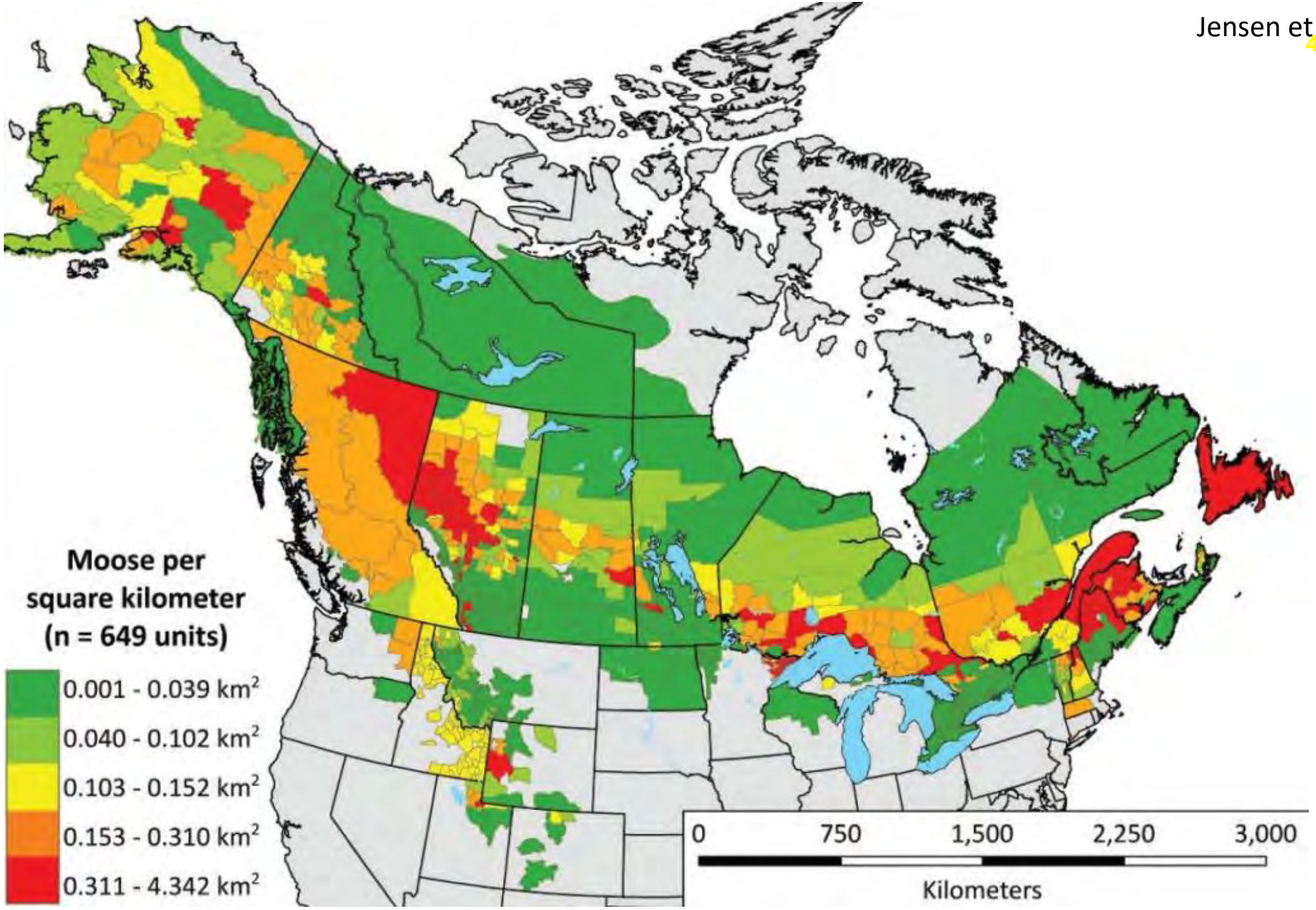


Winter Severity Index 1993-2022

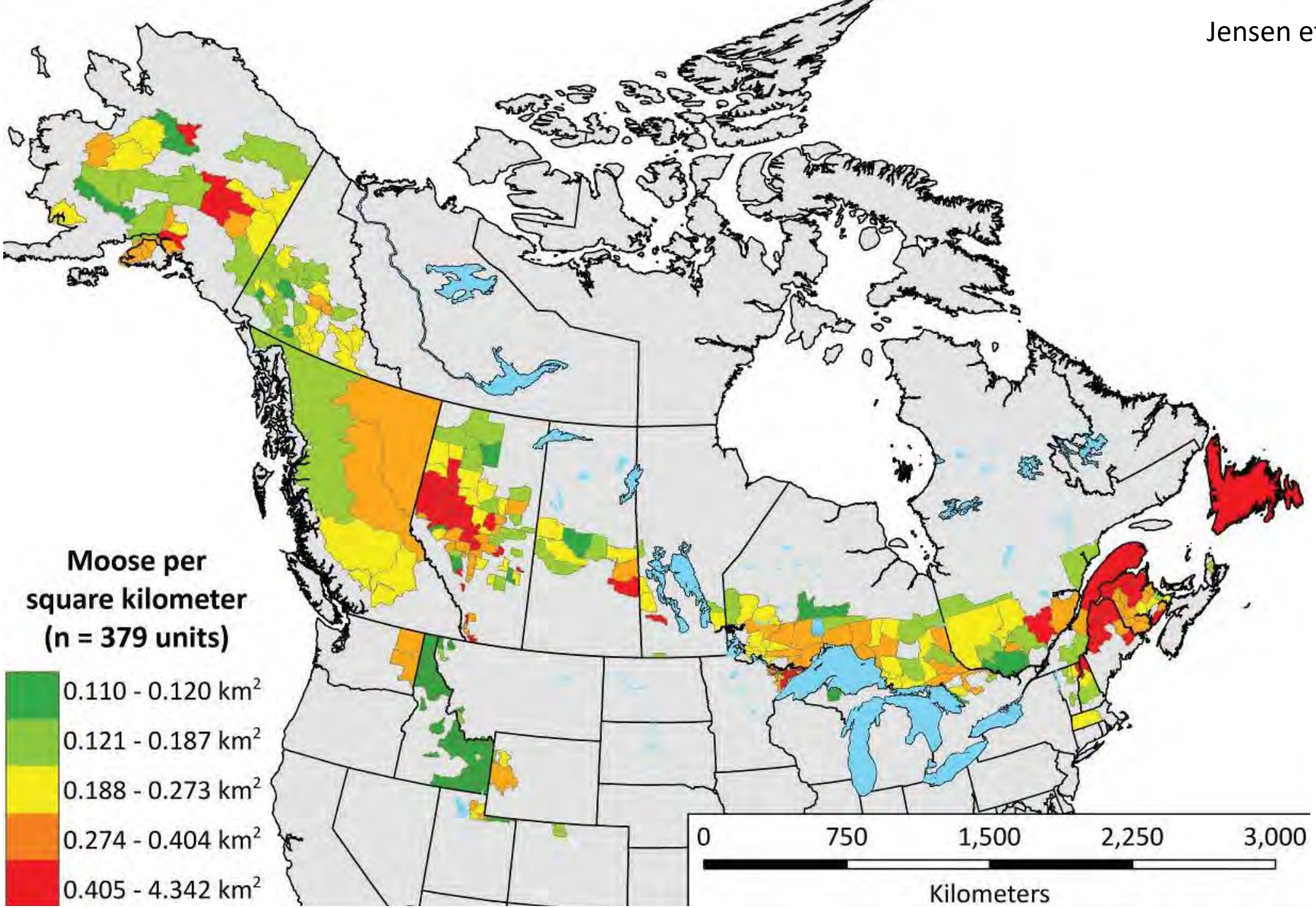




Jensen et al. 2018



Jensen et al. 2018



Winter Tick

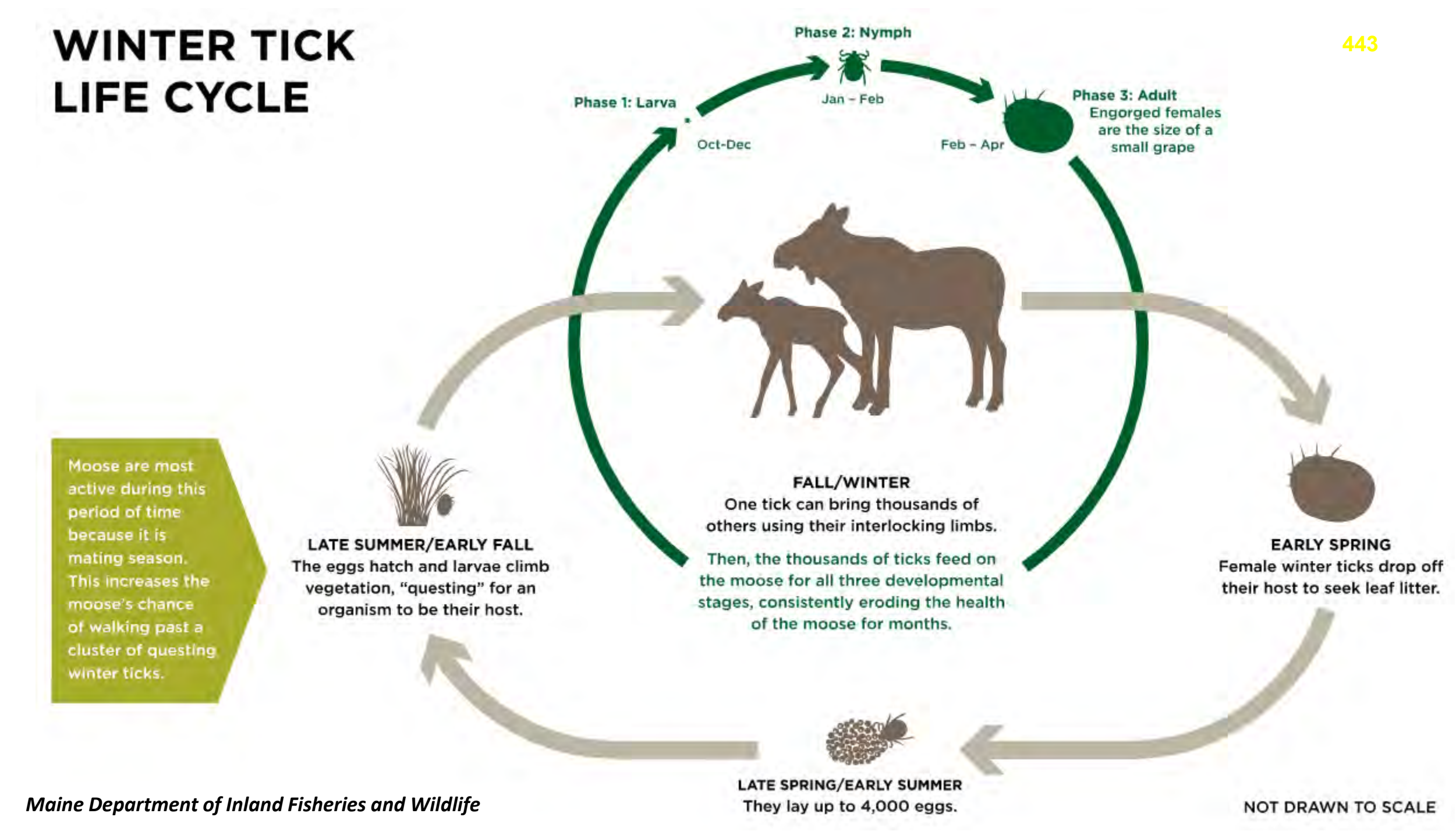








WINTER TICK LIFE CYCLE



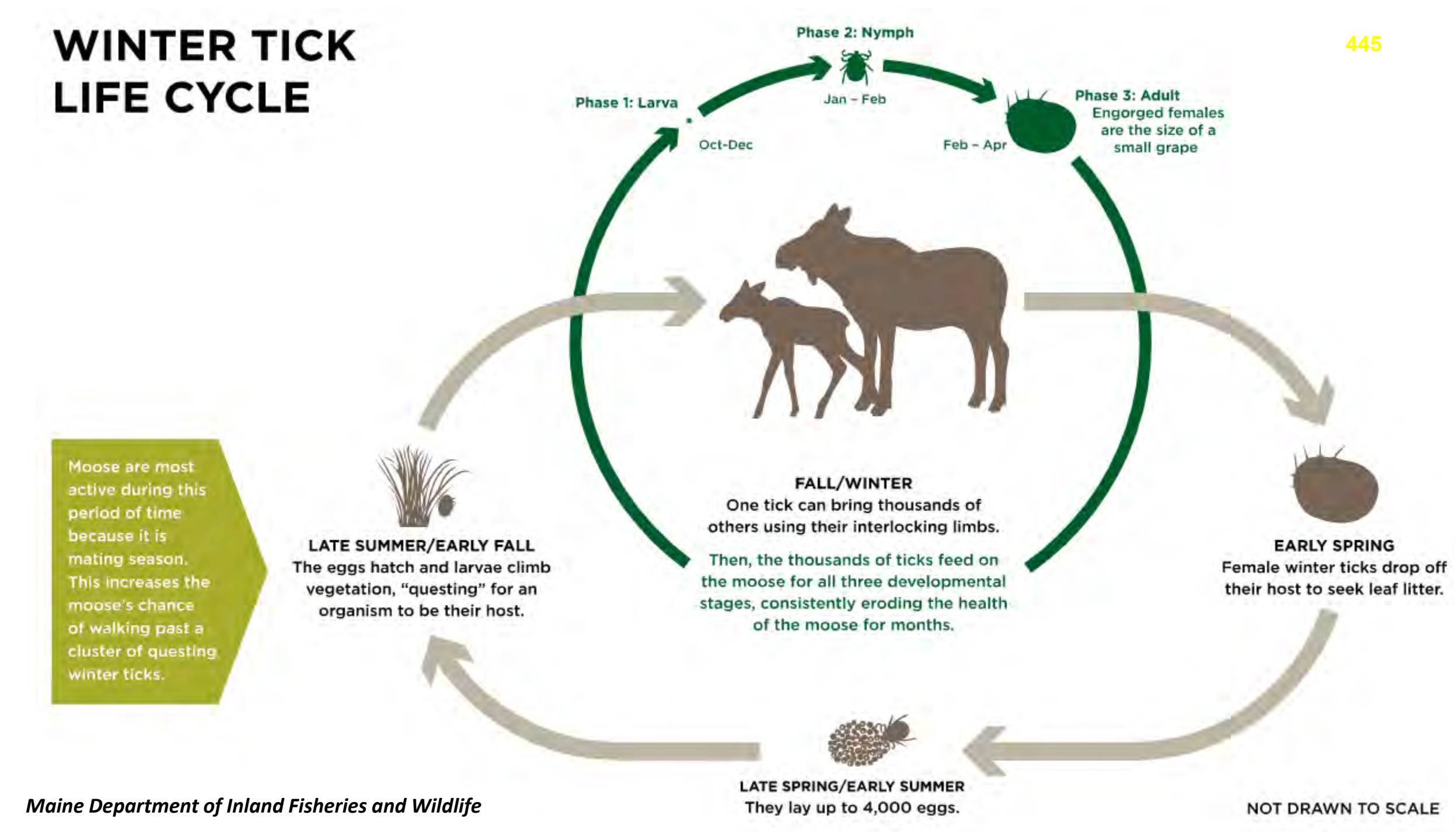
Moose are most active during this period of time because it is mating season. This increases the moose's chance of walking past a cluster of questing winter ticks.

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife



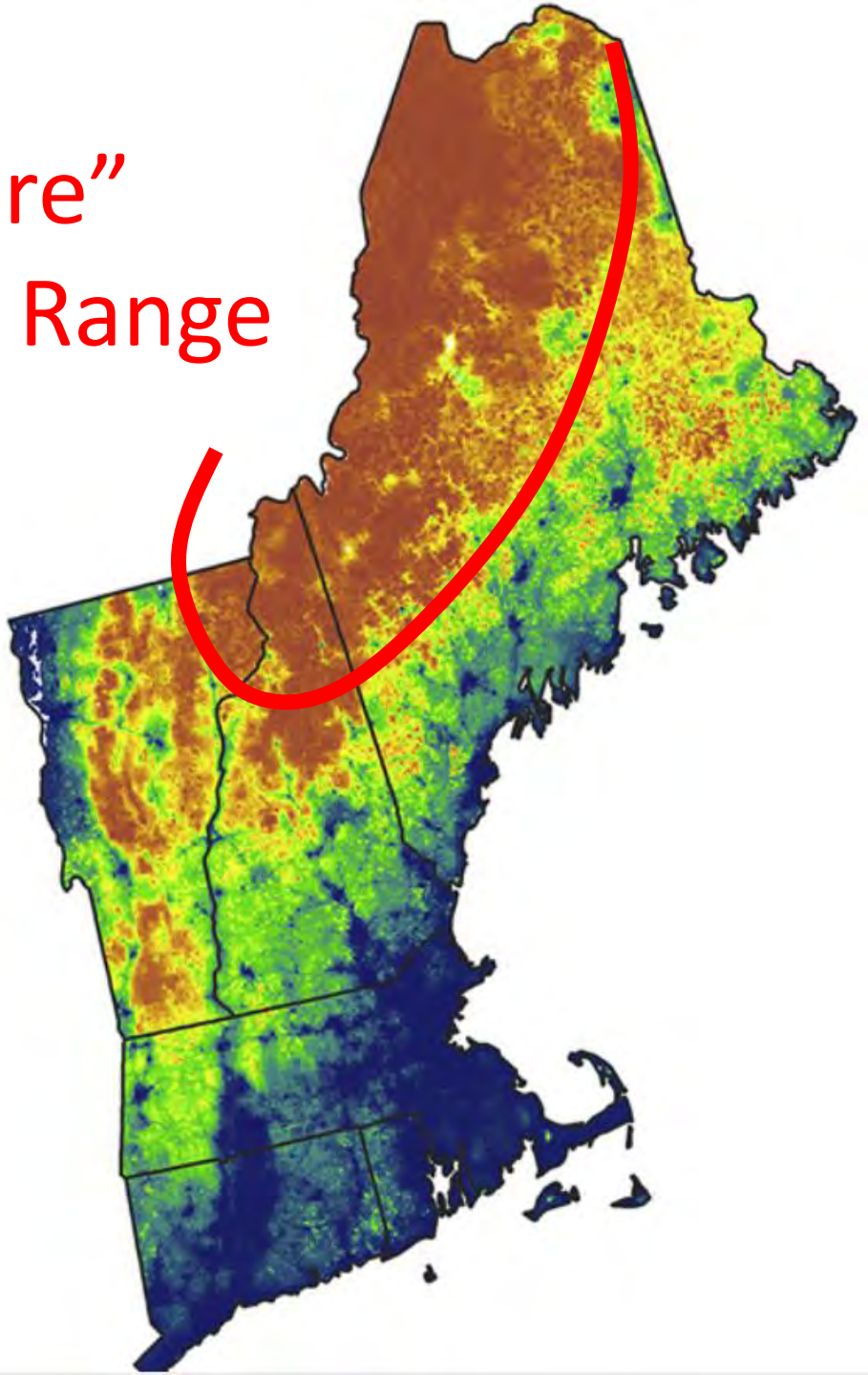
Photo by Cheryl Sullivan

WINTER TICK LIFE CYCLE



Moose are most active during this period of time because it is mating season. This increases the moose's chance of walking past a cluster of questing winter ticks.

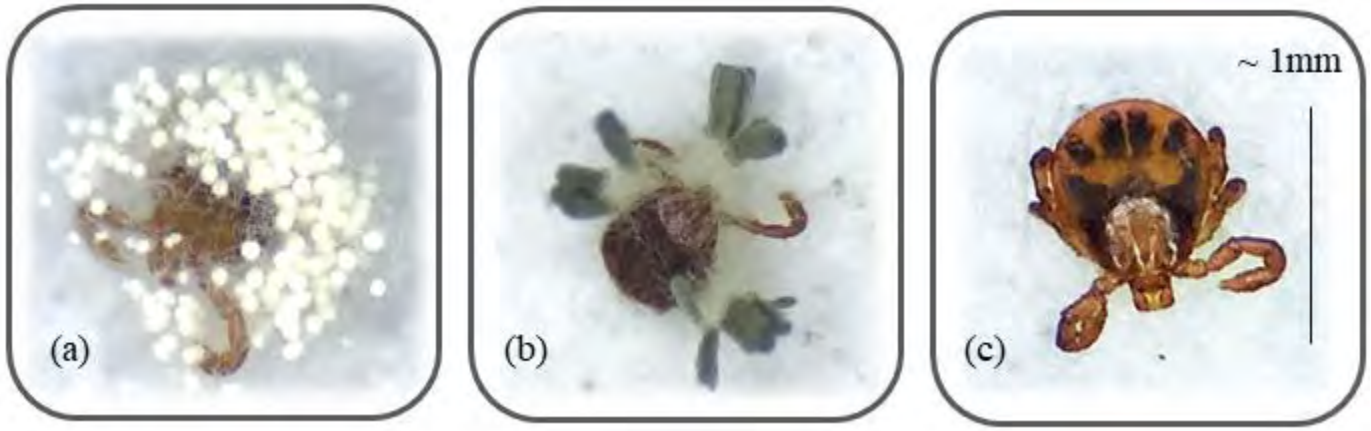
Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife



Probability of moose occurrence
Pearman-Gillman et al. 2020

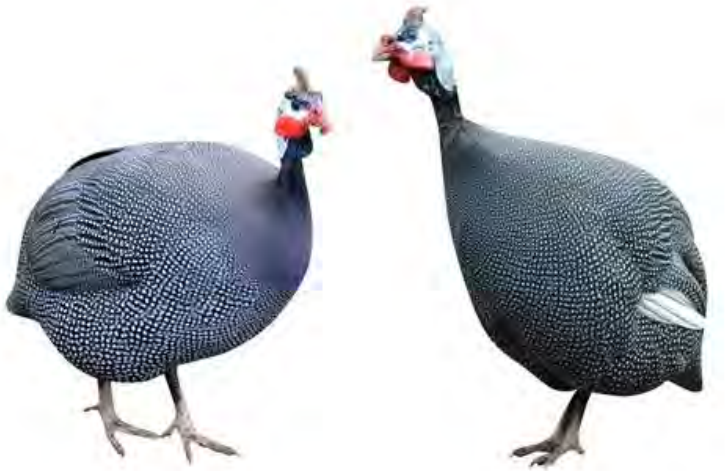
Our Goal: Healthy Moose!







We Can't Manage Winter Ticks Directly

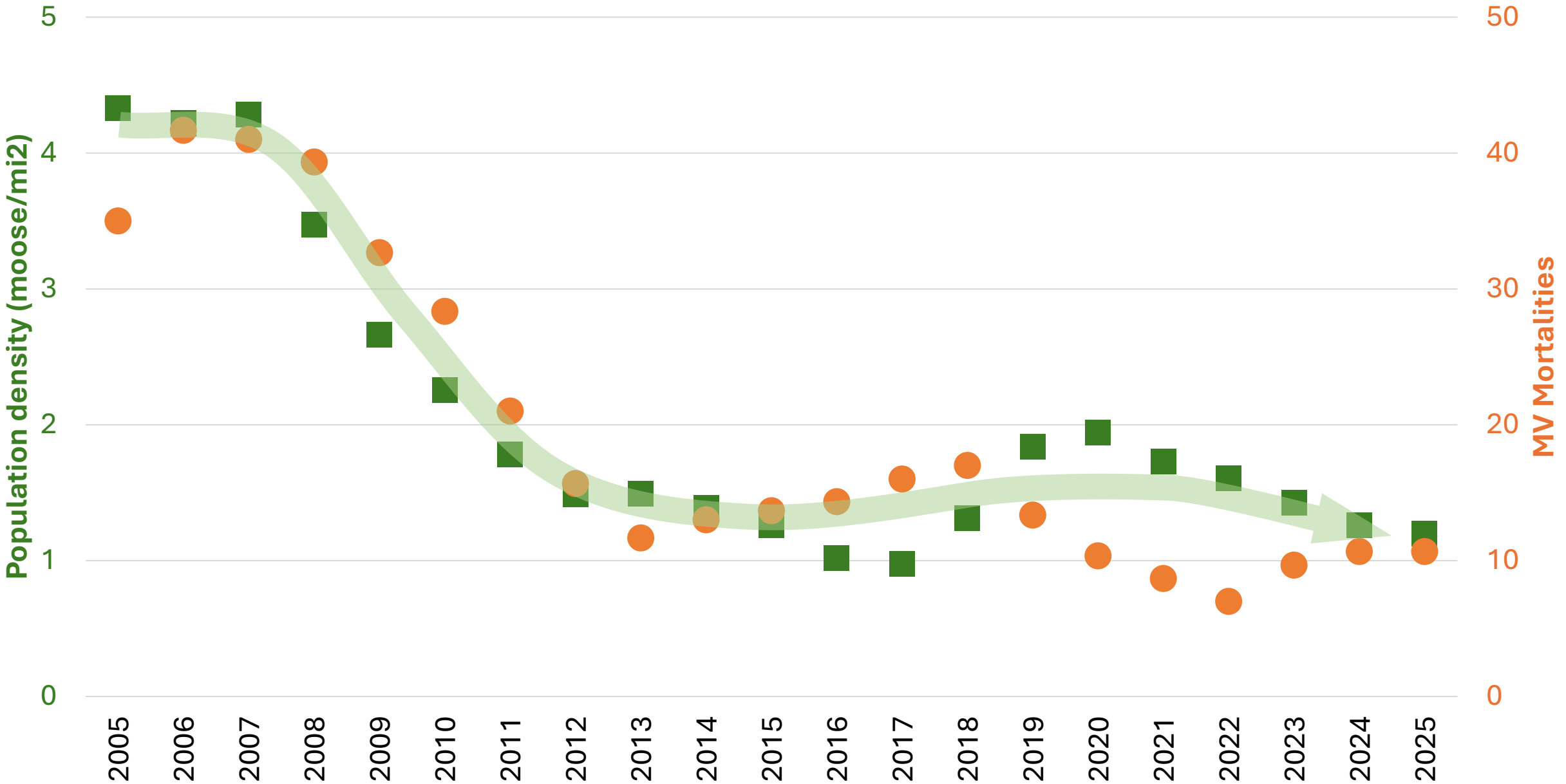




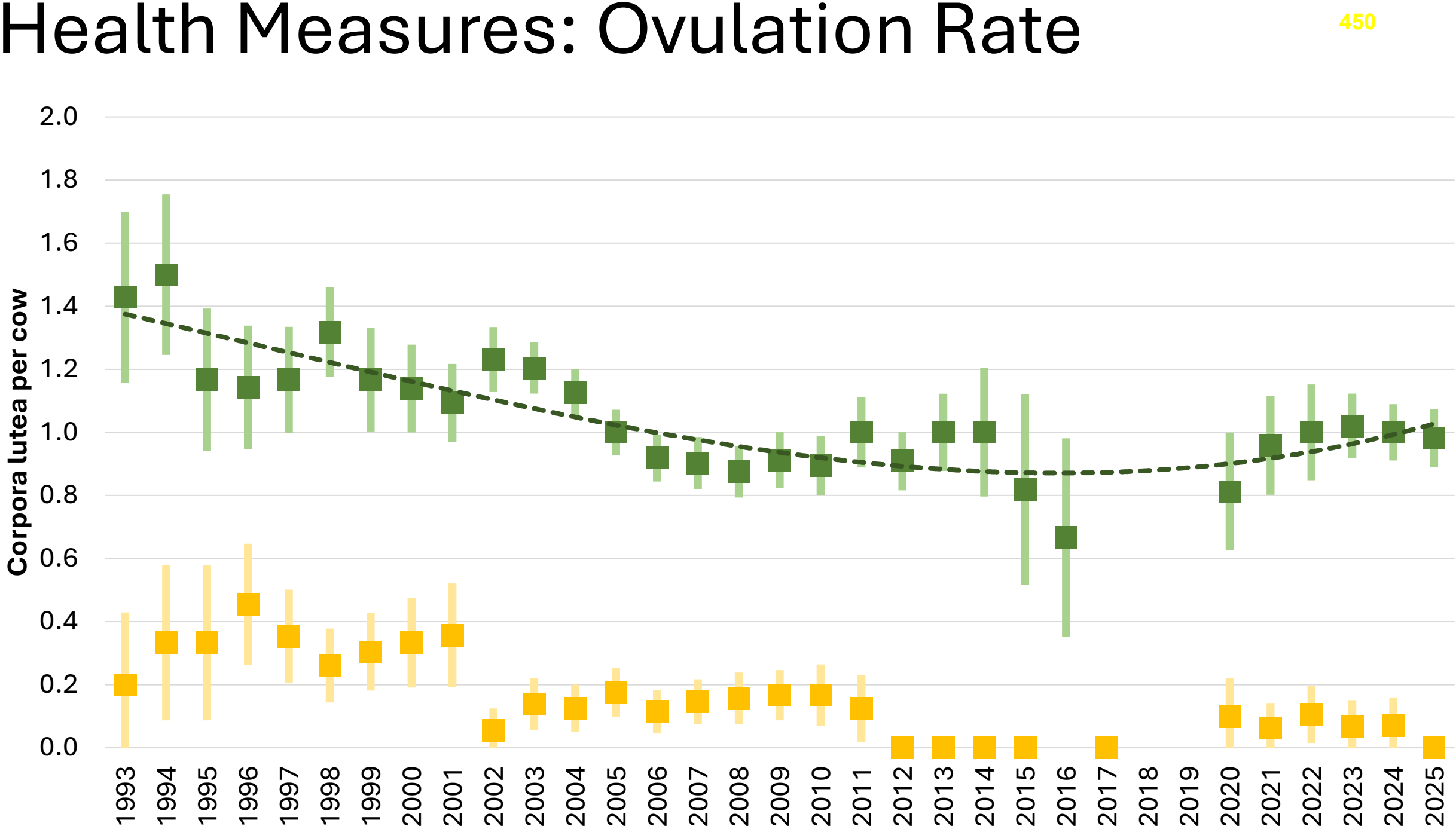


Population Trend in WMU E

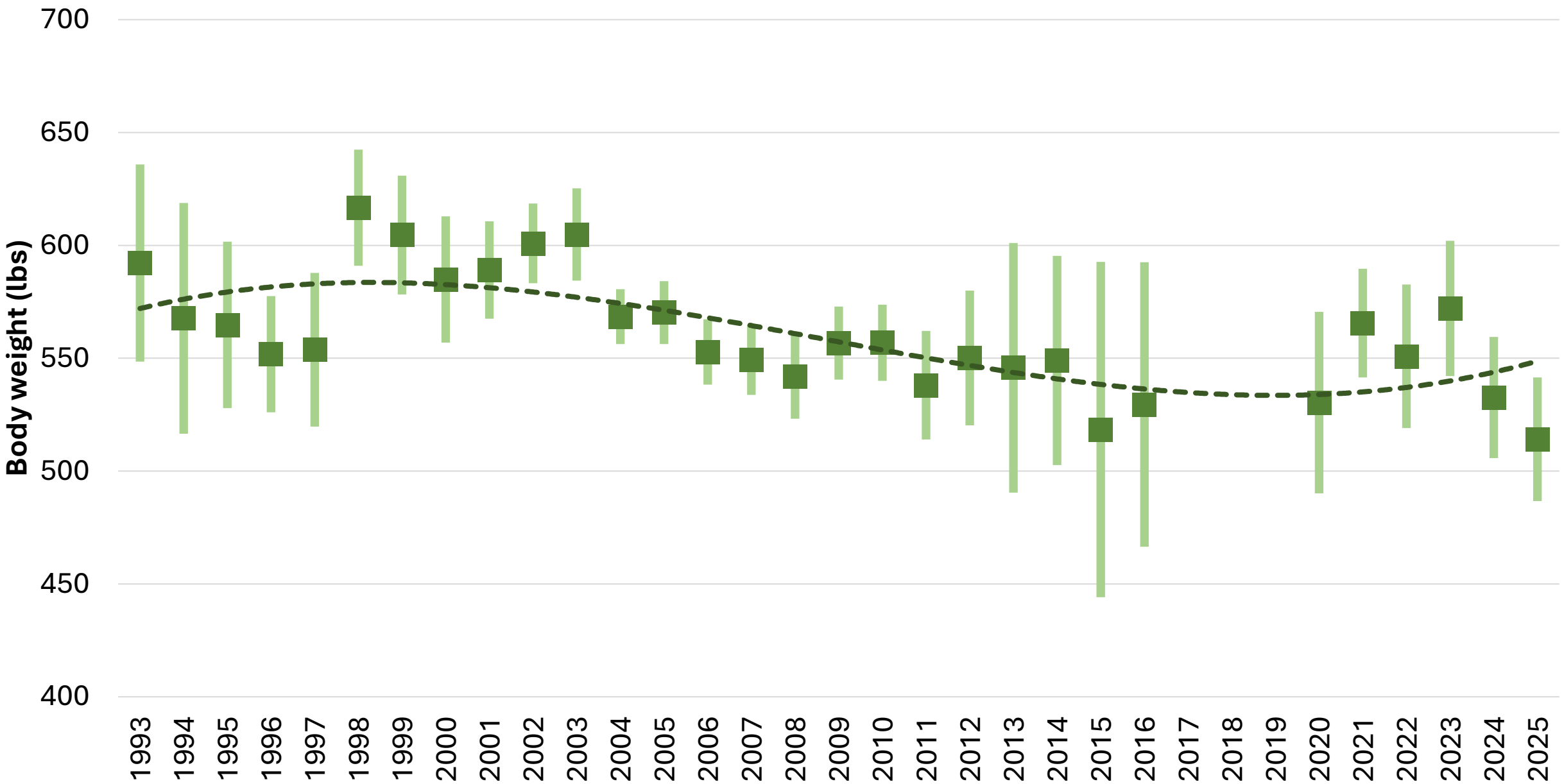
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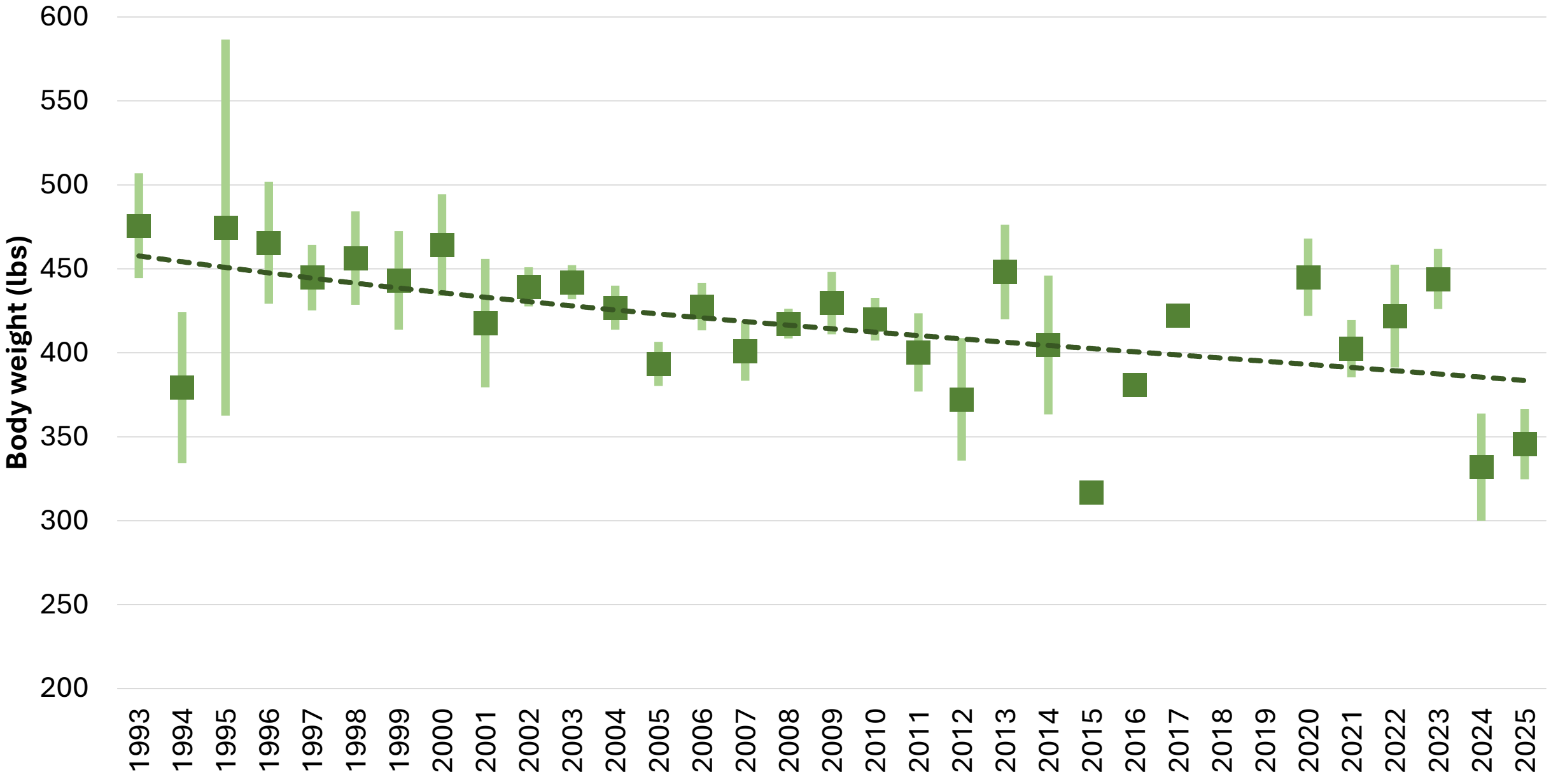
Health Measures: Ovulation Rate



Health Measures: Adult Female Weight

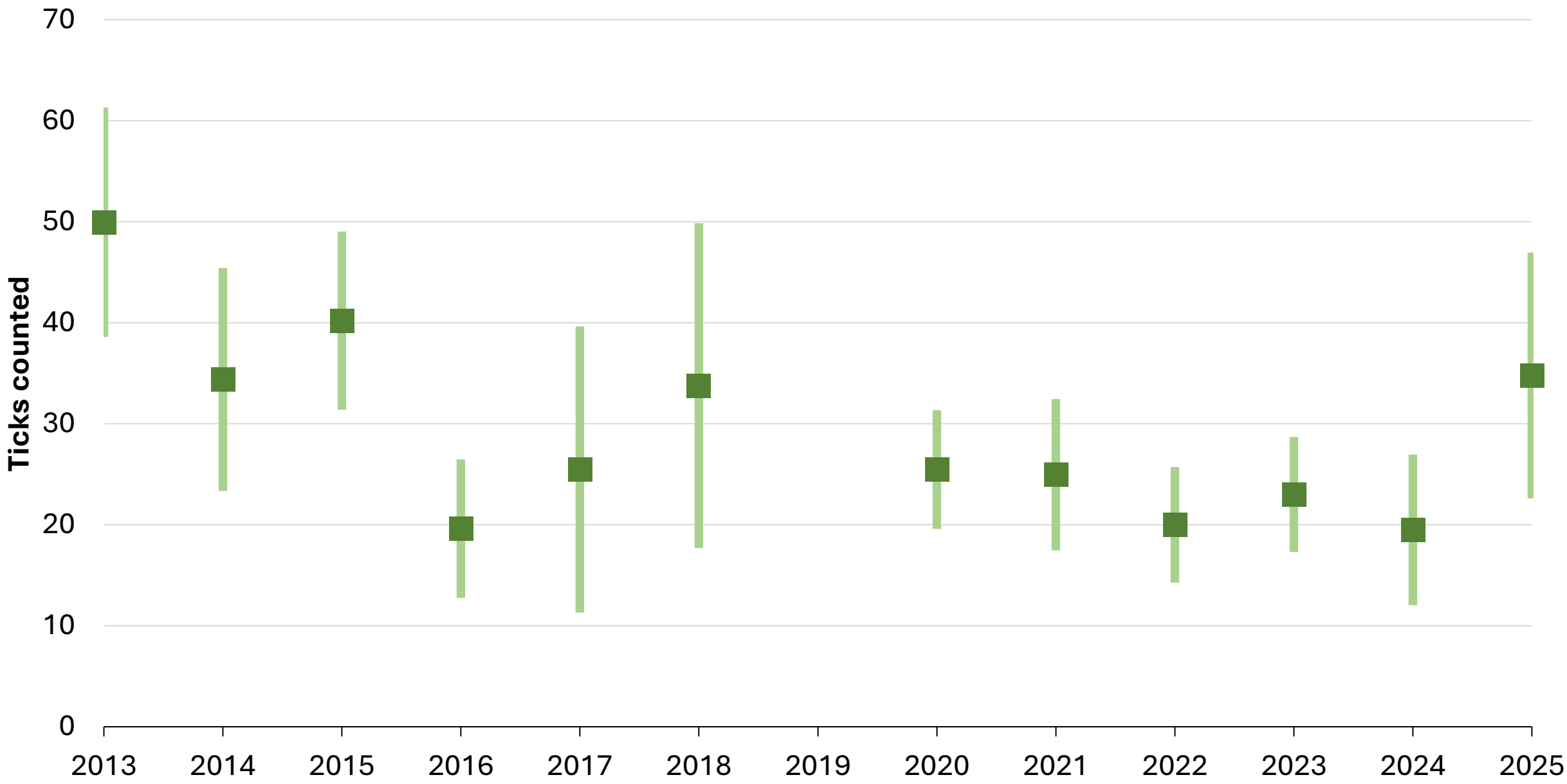


Health Measures: Yearling Female Weight



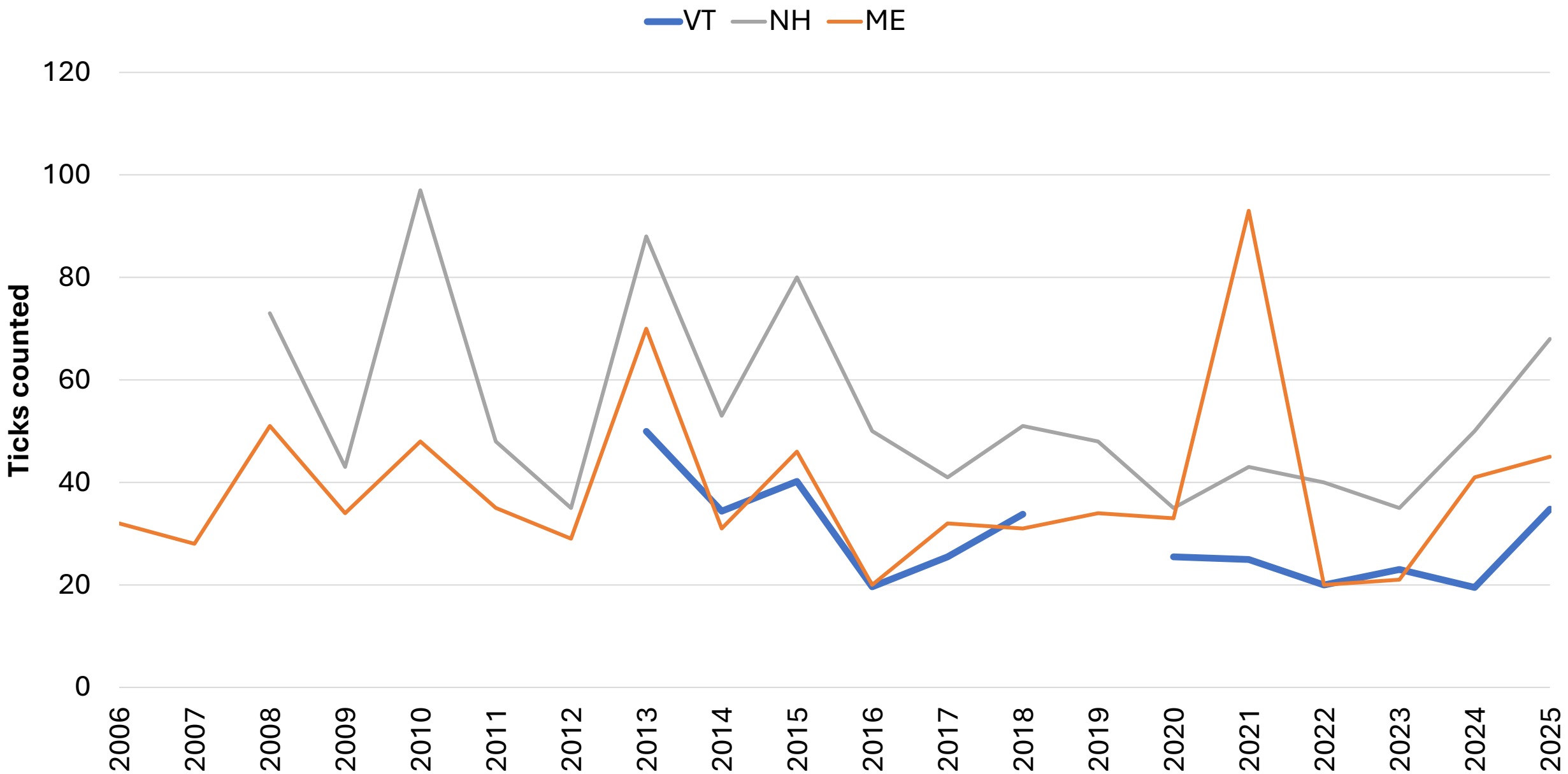
Tick Counts on Harvested Bull Moose

453

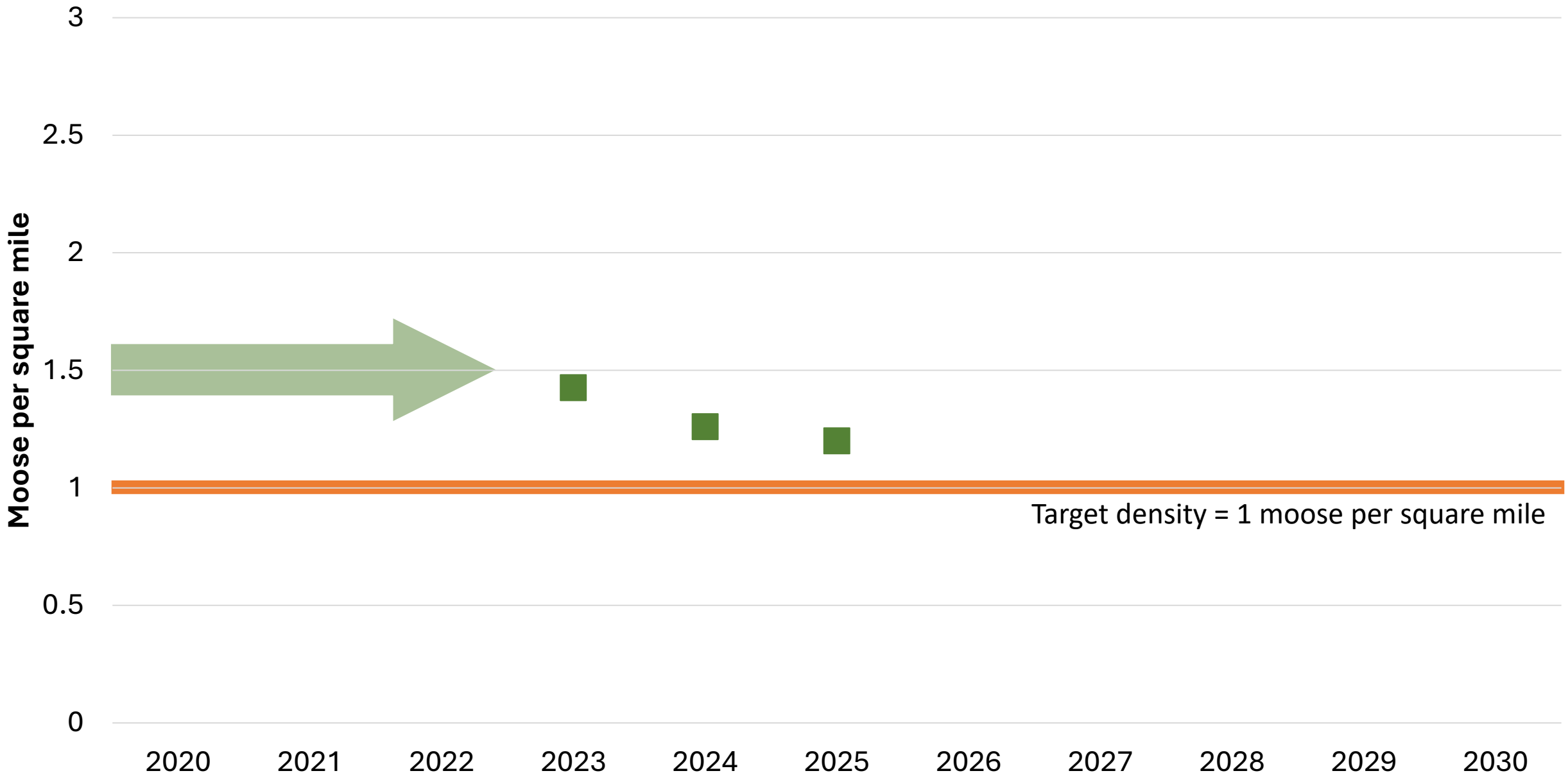


Tick Counts on Harvested Bull Moose

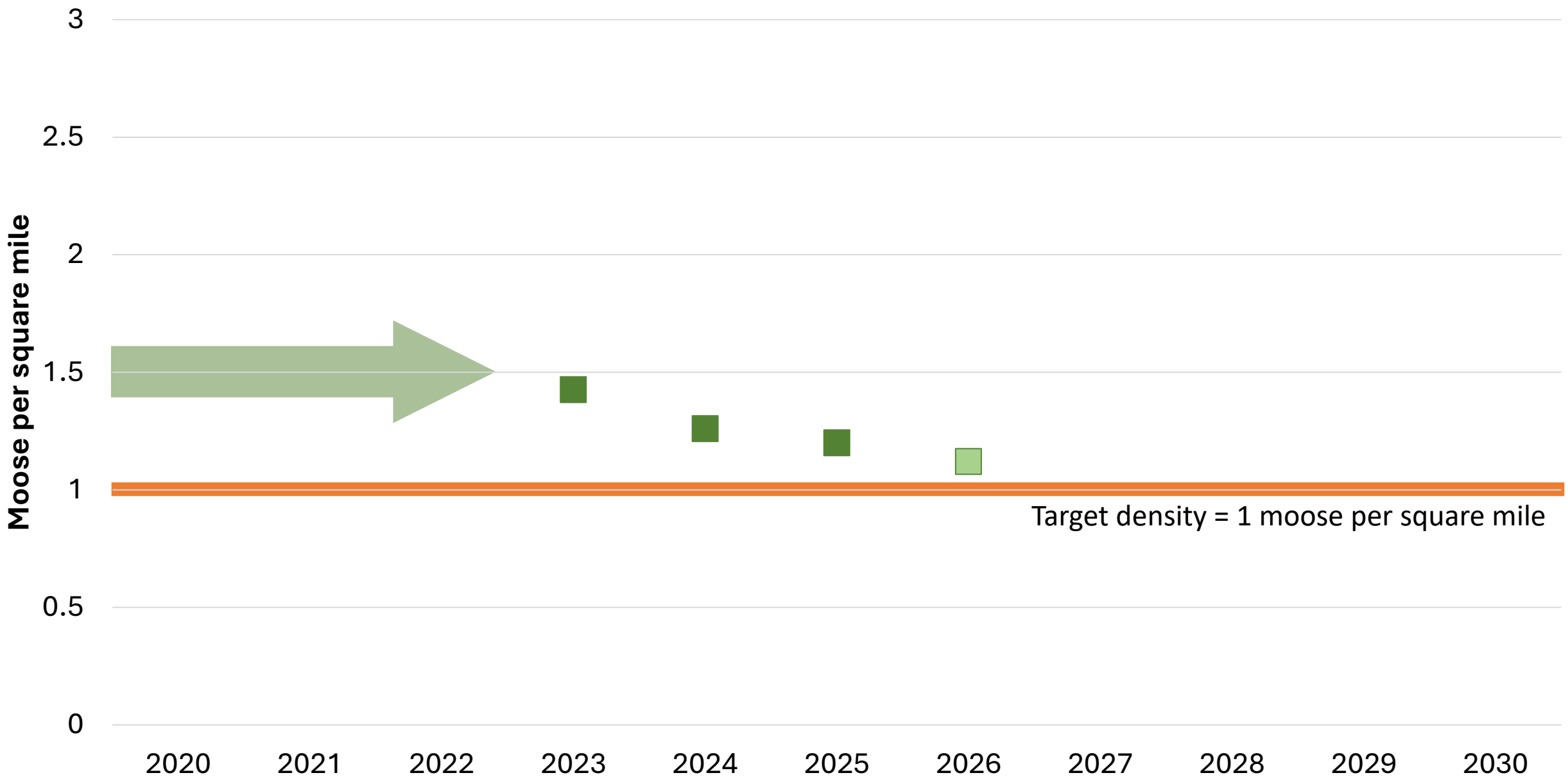
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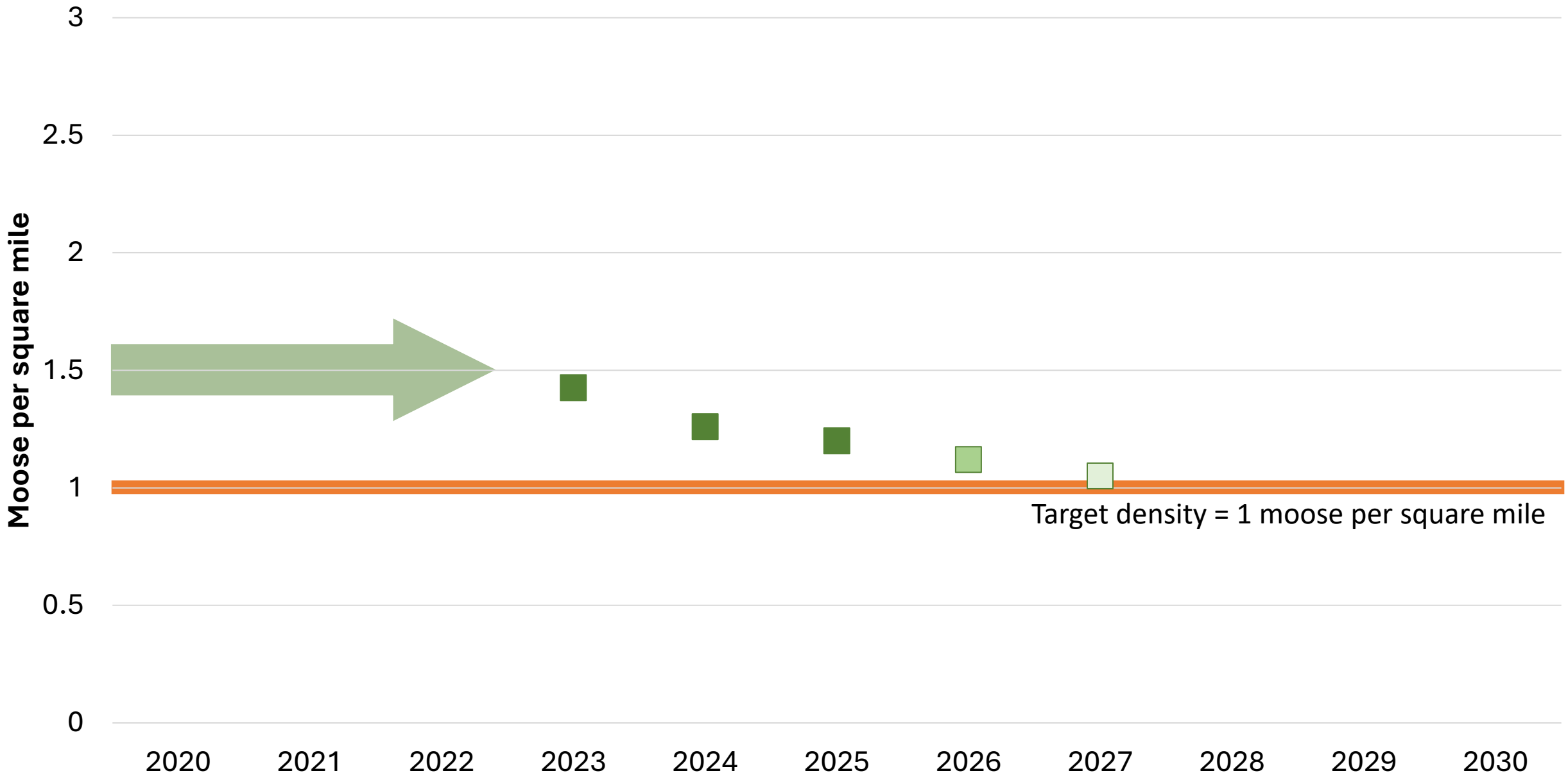
Population Projection in WMU E



Population Projection in WMU E



Population Projection in WMU E



Permit Recommendation

458

	Permits			Expected Harvest
	E1	**E2**	**Total**	
Archery Season				
Either-sex	7	8	15	8 *(6-10)*
Regular Season				
Either-sex	24	20	44	24 *(20-30)*
Antlerless-only	11	9	20	7 *(6-10)*
Auction		*choice*	3	2 *(0-3)*
Special Opportunity		*choice*	3	2 *(0-3)*
TOTAL			**85**	42 *(32-56)*

Next Steps

Tonight

- Presentation to Board
- Preliminary Approval
  (vote on what is presented to public for comment)

Public Comment

- Public Hearings
  - 3/16 – Brattleboro
  - 3/18 – St. Johnsbury
  - 3/19 – St. Albans
  - Presentation & recommendation available online
- Public comments by email

April 1st

- F&W Board Final Vote

Questions?

Big Game
Black Bear
Proposed Rule Change Recommendations

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

February 18, 2026

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

Summary of Recommended Changes

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (4.1) (b) – Bear Seasons

- Adjust the late bear season to run until the end of regular deer season, resulting in a seven-day extension.

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (5.3) – Yearly Bag Limit

- Allow for a second bear to be harvested in select wildlife management units, when deemed necessary by the board with recommendations from the department, approved on an annual basis as needed.

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (7.6) – Prohibit Intentional Harvest of Female Black Bear with Cubs

- Prohibit the intentional taking of a female black bear that is accompanied by one or more cubs.

3 V.S.A. § 814 – Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit

- Clarify authority to revoke a bear dog permit.

Potential Reciprocity Requirement on Out of State Residents to Obtain a Permit to Hunt Bear with Dogs or Restrict use of out-of-state dogs for hunting bear with dogs

- Explore the Commissioner's authority to establish a reciprocity requirement for out of state bear hound hunting whereby if the state of residence doesn't allow Vermont hunters to use dogs, then they can't get a permit to use hounds in Vermont.

- Discuss the possibility of limiting Department Registered Dogs to dogs that are kept in Vermont and owned by Vermont residents, unless the jurisdiction of residence also allows hunting bear with dogs.

Background

Fifty years ago, Vermont's bear population was estimated to be less than 1,500. Over the past thirty years the population has fluctuated from approximately 4,000-6,500 bears. Population estimates for recent years indicate the population may have increased beyond this range. The robust bear population is the result of habitat conservation and hunting regulations designed for a sustainable harvest of black bears. The *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* established a population objective of 3,500-5,500 bears. The mean estimated population has been above objective since 2021 and has ranged from a mean estimate of 6,500 (2021) to 7,600 (2022). The most recent mean estimate for 2024 was 7,400 bears (Figure 1). During this time Vermont's annual black bear harvests have exceeded 800 bears including harvests in 2024 and 2025 that exceeded 1,000 bears (Figure 2). These harvests have removed an average range of 11 – 14% of the population annually (2021-2024). Incidents of human-bear interactions, bear-vehicle collisions, and bear-caused property damage have increased, including in areas where few bears existed twenty years ago. Despite the sustained increases in annual black bear harvest and vehicle collision mortalities, Vermont has not attained a decrease in the bear population required to meet current population objectives.

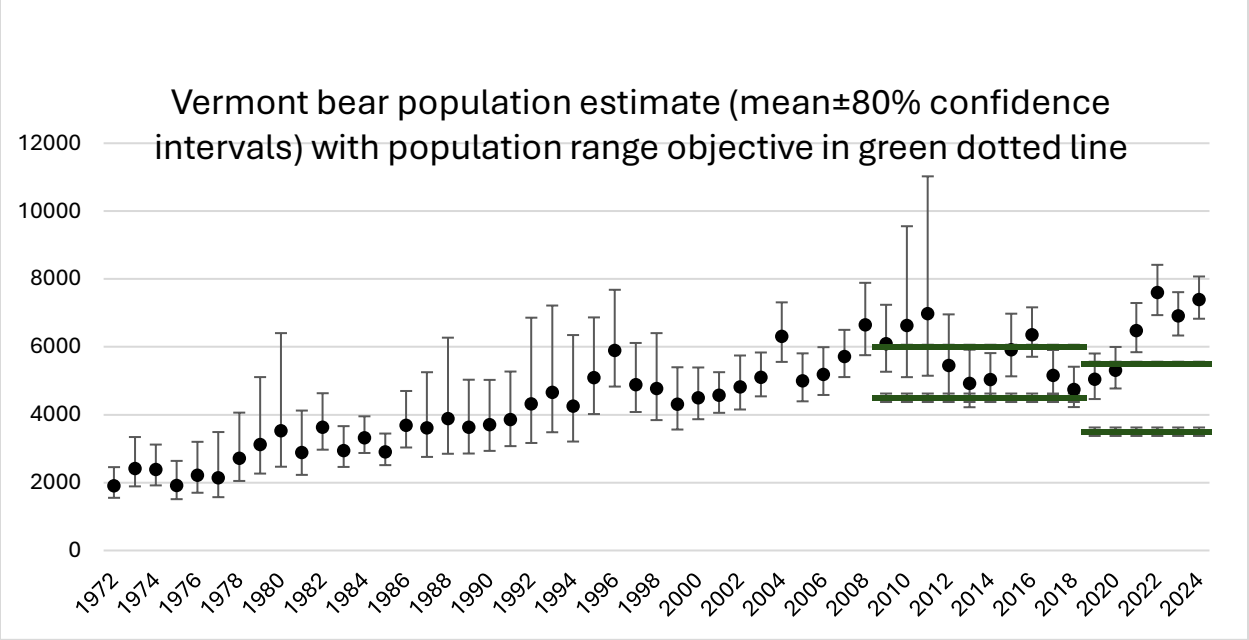


Figure 1. Vermont black bear population estimates (80% C.I.), 2000-2024. The green horizontal lines identify the population objective.

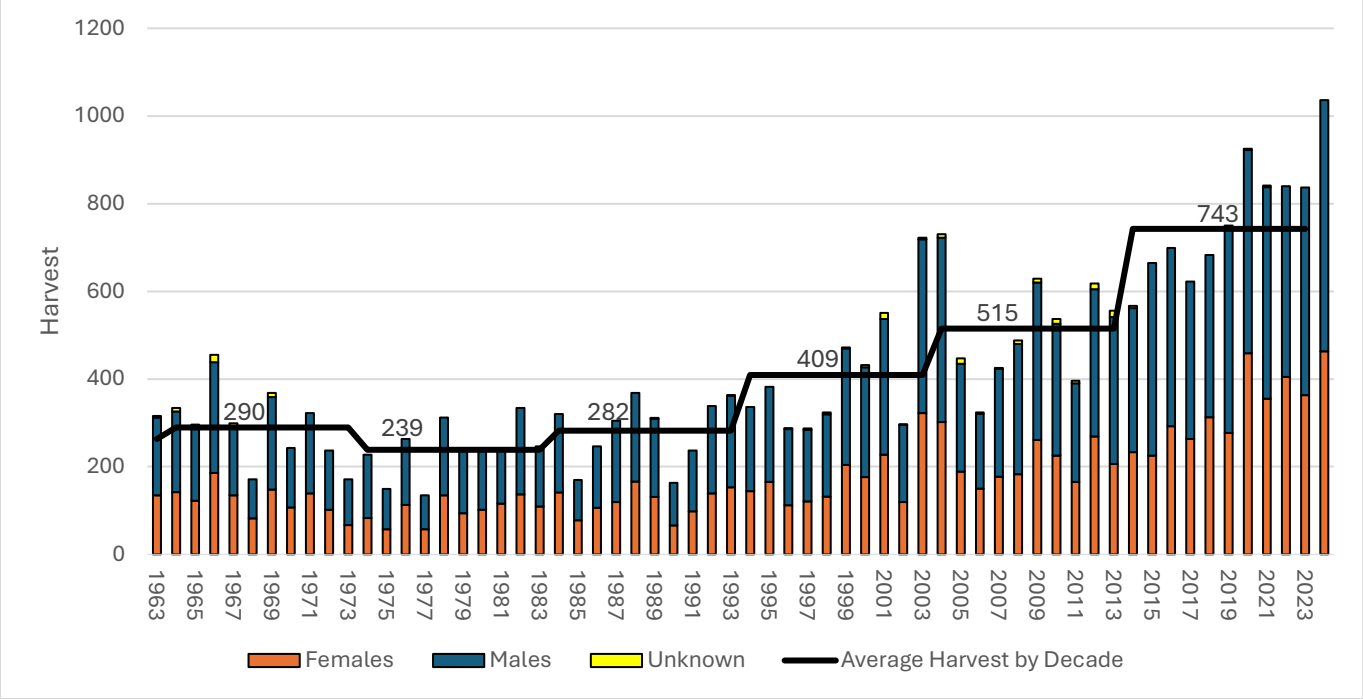


Figure 2. Vermont annual black bear harvest with rolling ten year average, 1963-2024.

App. V.S.A. § 7 – Bear Management Rule

Extend the Late Bear Season
The Department recommends extending the late bear season until the final day of the regular deer season.

Currently hunters may harvest bear during the late season from the first Saturday of the regular deer season until the Sunday of the second weekend, providing a nine-day season. The extension to the end of the regular deer season would provide seven additional days, making a 16-day late bear season. This recommendation would provide additional hunting opportunities.

An average of 184 bears are harvested during the current late season, which makes up on average 26% of the overall harvest. However, natural food availability and the onset of winter conditions cause this number to vary greatly from year to year, and this harvest has ranged from a low of 57 bears (2022) to a high of 319 bears (2015). The last full week of the bear late season has averaged just over 100 bears harvested annually over the past six years.

A recent survey of bear hunters in Vermont revealed that slightly more than half (54%) primarily incidentally hunt bear while hunting for other species and 79% of bear hunters hunted during the late bear season in 2023. A 2018 survey of Vermont hunters revealed high support (85%) for extending the length of the bear season. These results indicate that a significant number of hunters would likely participate in this proposed season expansion. However, by late November many bears have entered winter dens, limiting the availability of bears for harvest. The Department anticipates this expansion will likely result in a conservative increase in harvest.

Allow Hunters to Take a Second Bear
The Department recommends allowing hunters to take one additional bear, with the purchase of a second tag. The second bear may only be taken in WMUs annually designated by the board. The availability of the second bear tag would also be approved annually by the board.

Currently, hunters may only harvest one bear annually either in the early or late season. Hunters must purchase the privilege of hunting during the early season. All hunters receive a late season bear tag when they purchase a hunting or combination hunting and fishing license. This recommended change allowing hunters to take a second bear would provide additional bear harvest opportunities for hunters and allow the direction of hunting pressure into WMUs with elevated bear-vehicle collisions, incidents of human-bear conflicts, and strong bear hunting participation.

A 2018 survey of Vermont hunters revealed that 38% of hunters would support increasing the annual bag limit on black bears from one bear a year to two bears a year. However, the mean bear population estimate in 2018 was approximately 4,700 bears – the lowest it has been since the early 2000s. A 2024 survey of Vermont's bear hunters found that meat was by far the dominant reason why they hunt bear (58%); however, population control was the top motivation for hunters who have recently increased their targeted bear hunting (55%). Although Vermont's bear hunters have not been directly asked if they would try to harvest two bears in a year, these survey results indicate participation would be limited and therefore would result in a conservative increase in the overall harvest.

New Hampshire's experience introducing a two-bear bag limit in four of their WMU's supports the Department's expectation that this proposed expansion will result in a modest increase to Vermont's bear harvest. Despite approximately 1,200 hunters purchasing a second bear tag in 2024 only 46 hunters harvested a second bear. Preliminary results from NH's 2025 bear season indicate that less than 50 hunters harvested two bears. The contribution from a second bear in jurisdictions that have a two-bear bag limit is typically 4-5% of the overall harvest.

Not Allow Hunters to Intentionally Take a Female Bear with Cubs

The Department recommends not allowing hunters to intentionally take a female bear with visible cubs. Black bear cubs are dependent on sows through their first fall and don't typically become independent until their second spring when they are approximately 16-18 months old. When conditions are favorable, it is possible for cubs to survive when they are separated or orphaned prematurely; however, the Department receives reports every year of starving orphaned cubs and yearlings who would not survive without intervention. These starving bears are typically found near homes attempting to access human-created foods. Conflicts with people, vehicle collisions, and hunting are all potential causes for these orphaning events. It is important that hunters take precautions to avoid harvesting sows accompanied by cubs.

Vermont's bear hunters generally do not intentionally harvest female bears accompanied by dependent cubs. In a recent survey of Vermont's bear hunters, 97% reported that they would not harvest a bear with cubs while 1% said that they would and another 2% reported that they were unsure. However, when asked if they assess whether a bear is in a group or with cubs before shooting, 88% reported that they regularly take this precaution while the remaining 12% reported either never or only occasionally taking this step. Further, 13% of hunters reported that they were not aware of the Department's recommendation that hunters avoid harvesting females accompanied by cubs.

Of the 44 jurisdictions in North America with black bear hunting seasons, 37 (84%) have regulations prohibiting the harvest of female bears accompanied by cubs. This includes three states that have initiated new black bear hunting seasons in the past five years. As part of a previous Department assessment of a petition related to this subject, we reached out to some of the jurisdictions with this type of regulation to better understand the specific language they use and how it is enforced. Jurisdictions reported that this regulation is widely supported by both hunters and the non-hunting public. Some regulations are written with specific size parameters defining cubs that hunters must follow while others are written so that it is only a violation if a

hunter knowingly harvests a female bear with cubs present. In both cases, jurisdictions reported that citations are rarely issued as it can be difficult to prove. In fact, one jurisdiction reported written violations related to this regulation were often from self-reporting by hunters who didn't see cubs until after the bear was harvested. The Department's intention is not to punish hunters who mistakenly harvest sows when cubs are not immediately present. Instead, our intention is to create a regulation that only applies to situations where a hunter knowingly harvests a sow with cubs present. Since a similar petition related to this subject was proposed, there have been a couple situations where this regulation could have potentially been applied.

Currently, the Department is recommending regulation changes to increase bear hunting opportunities. Anticipating that these changes will increase the number of bears harvested each year in Vermont, now is an appropriate time to take precautionary steps and increase protection for female bears with dependent young and encourage additional awareness among hunters.

Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit
The Department recommends clarifying authority for the Commissioner to revoke bear dog permits. The Commissioner has broad authority to revocation permits pursuant to 3 V.S.A. 814, which establishes an administrative process for revocation of permits and licenses. The Commissioner currently can choose not to issue a new hound permit. The Department will need to establish criteria that must be met before the Commissioner signs a permit.

Revocation is more complicated since the statute does not clearly establish the Commissioner's ability to revoke permits, and statute requires certain due process before a permit can be revoked (a contested-case hearing before a hearing officer). Currently, permits can be revoked based on violations resulting in the accumulation of points.

Reciprocity Requirement on Out of State Residents to Obtain a Permit to Hunt Bear with Dogs
The Department would like to discuss establishing a reciprocity requirement for non-resident bear hound hunting whereby if the jurisdiction of residence doesn't allow Vermont hunters to use dogs, then they can't receive a bear dog permit to hunt bears in Vermont.

Current examples of situations Vermont hunters encounter include the inability to use their hounds in New York that has a hound training season but no hunting season where hounds are allowed. New York hunters may hunt in Vermont with their dogs if they obtain a bear dog permit. Out-of-state hound permits are limited to no more than 10% of the previous year's resident permit numbers. New Hampshire does not allow out of state hunters to use their dogs during their bear hound season, but New Hampshire hunters commonly obtain non-resident bear dog permits to hunt during Vermont's bear hound season.

Other Topics Vetted by the Big Game Management Team Included:

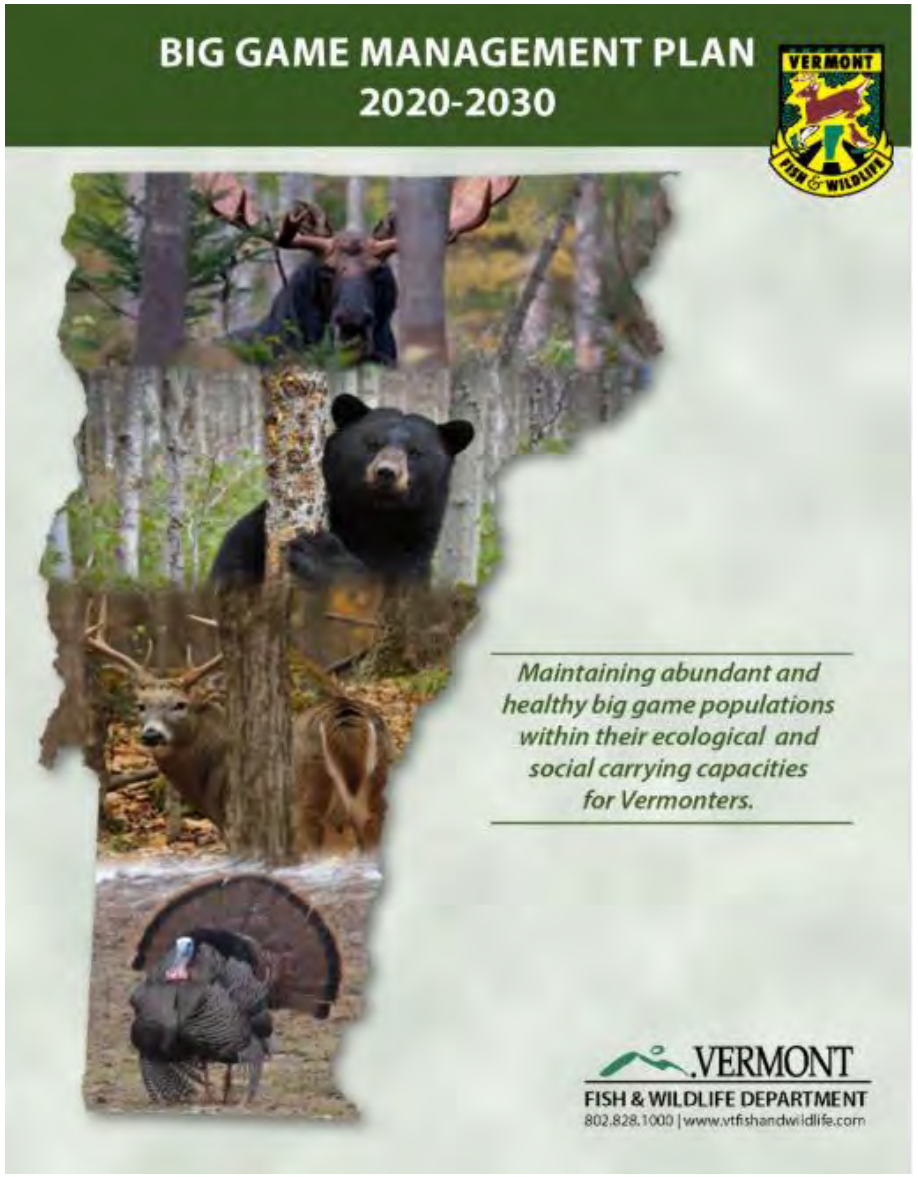
- Baiting season
- Spring season
- Registering all dogs in ownership on a bear dog permit application
- Extending the season into August
- Establishing bag limits for bear dog permits
- Allow online reporting of harvested bears



Black Bear Proposed Rule Change Recommendations

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
Jaclyn Comeau

02/18/26

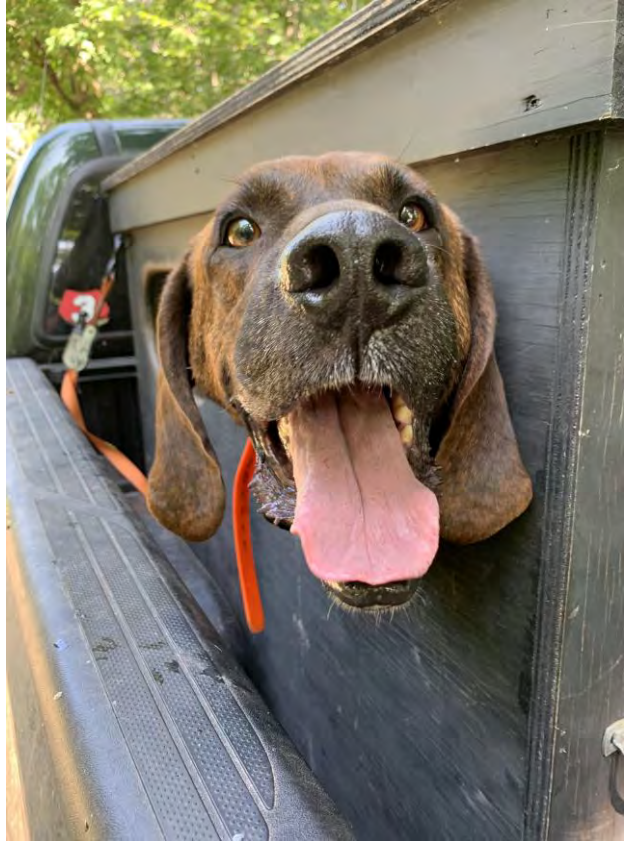


- GOAL: Maintain bear population at ecologically sustainable levels, while minimizing human conflicts.
  - Population objective: 3,500 – 5,500.
  - Use hunting length as primary method.
  - Consider regional management.

- GOAL: Optimize hunting opportunity for the utilization of bears for food and other uses, ensure hunter satisfaction within biologically sustainable regulations, and continue to use hunting to meet black bear population objectives.

- GOAL: Minimize negative interactions occurring between bears and humans to achieve acceptable levels of human safety.









Living With Bears

- Protect/manage bear habitat
- Sustainably manage the number of bears
- Change people behavior
- Try to manage bear behavior



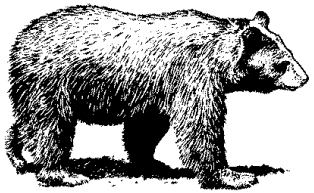


Vermont's Bear Population Model:

Population Reconstruction Model

Dead bears are used as a representative sample to estimate Vermont's bear population

1. Hunting Mortality Data
   - Count and age of females
   - Count and age of males
   - Total count
2. Non-Hunting Mortality Data
   - Total count



Vermont's Black Bear Population Estimate, 1972-2024

mean ±80% confidence intervals

Objective (green line): 3,500 to 5,500 bears

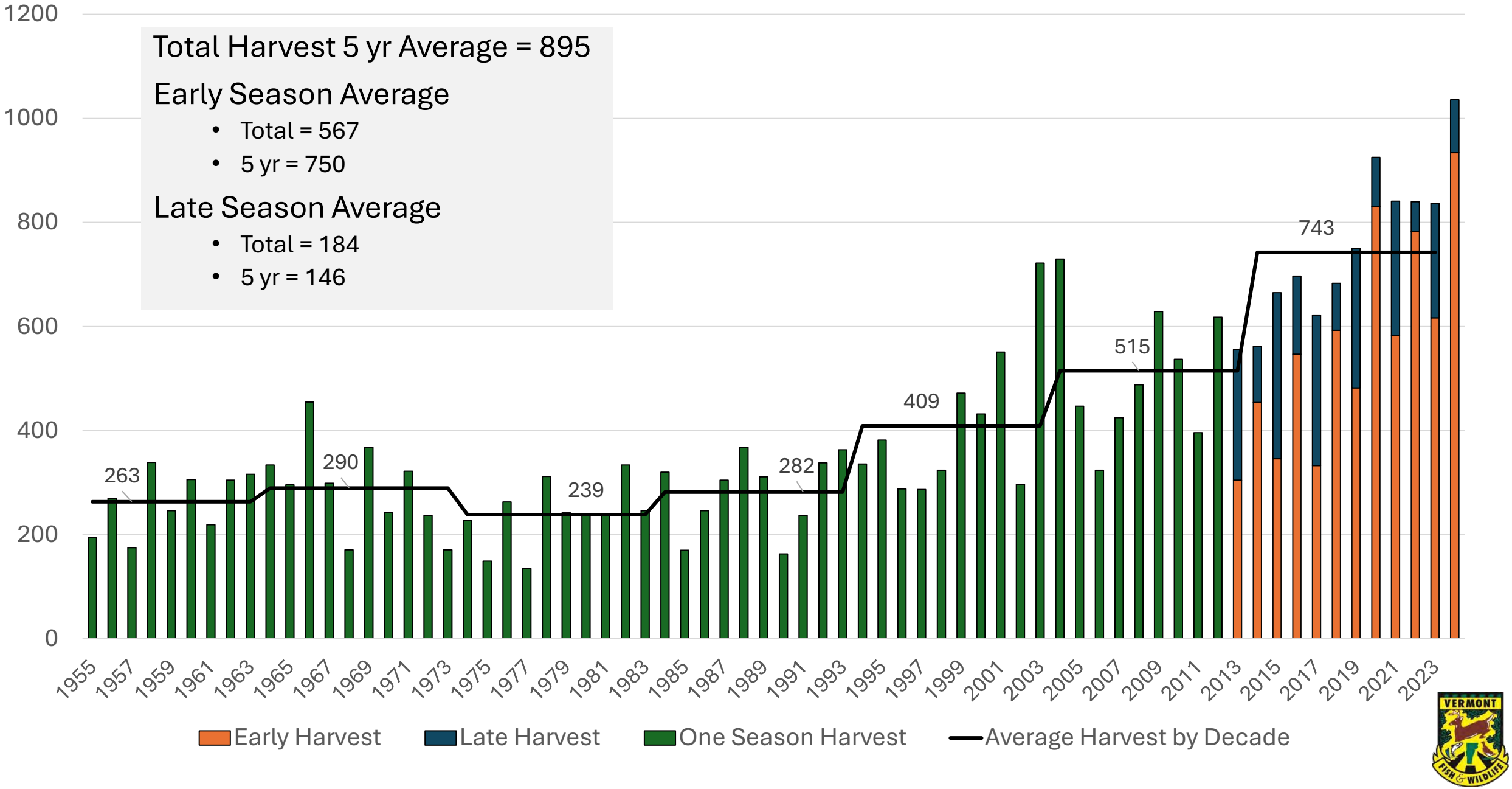
Current Estimate: 6,800 to 8,000 bears

12000
10000
8000
6000
4000
2000
0

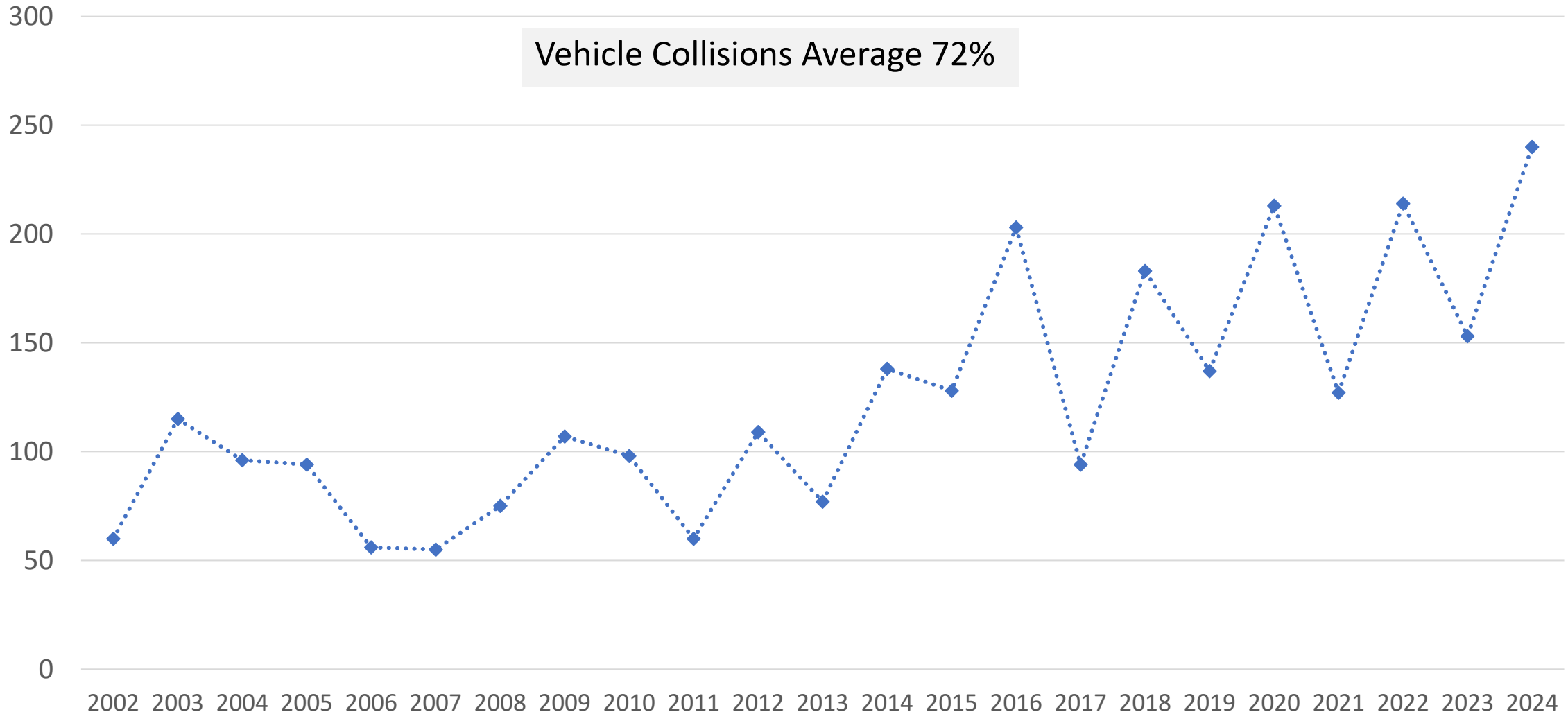
1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024

Vermont Bear Harvest by Season, 1955 - 2024

472



Reported Non-Hunting Mortalities, 2002 – 2024



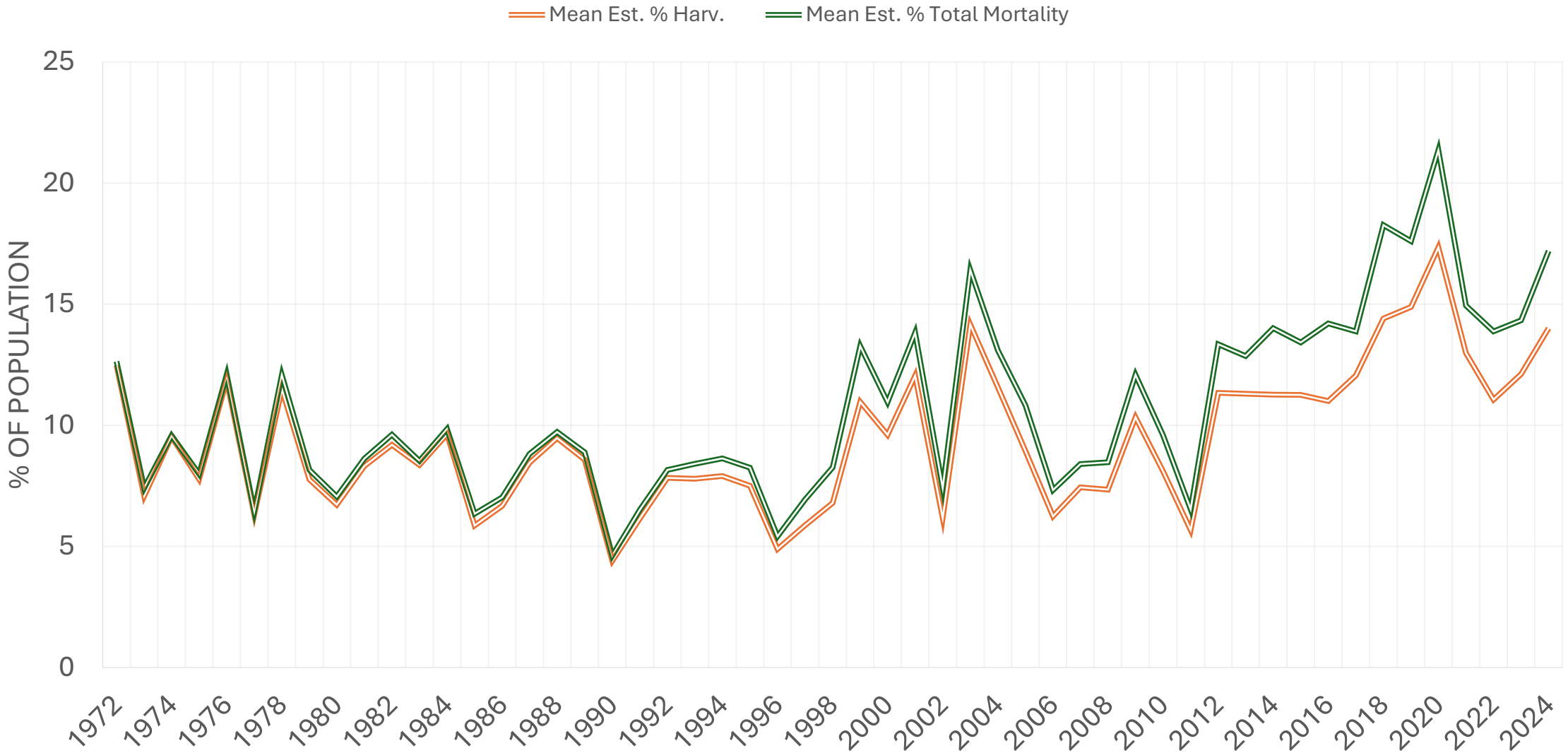
10-yr Average:

474

Harvest = 12 – 15% of population

All Mortality = 14 – 18% of population

PERCENT OF POPULATION SUBJECT TO MORTALITY



Current Black Bear Hunting Seasons

Early Bear Season	75 days, Sept. 1 – Day Before Regular Deer
Late Bear Season	9 days, First 9 days of Regular Deer Season
Bear Hound Hunting	Resident = 75 days, Early Bear Season Non-Resident = 60 days, Sept. 15 – End of Early Bear

Recommendation #1: Extend the Late Bear Season Through Regular Deer Season

— Goal: Increase Opportunity to Address Population Trend

Increase the season by 7 days: add 1 weekend and Thanksgiving

- 2024 hunter survey: 54% of successful bear hunters reported they primarily incidentally hunt bear and 79% hunted during the late bear season.
- 2018 hunter survey: 85% strong support for extending the length of the bear season.

Recommendation #2: Allow a Two Bear Bag Limit in Designated WMUs

Goal: Increase Opportunity to Address Population Trend and Create Ability for Regional Management

Increase the number of bears that a successful hunter can harvest

- 2024 survey found that meat is the dominant reason hunters hunt bear.
- 2018 survey found 38% of hunters supported a second bear tag.
- Other jurisdictions report limited number of hunters take 2 bears.
  - NH has seen less than 50 additional bears harvested across 4 WMUs.

Recommendation #3: Prohibit the Intentional Harvest of Female Bears with Cubs

— **Goal: Improve Awareness**

- Cubs are dependent until their second spring – premature orphaning can have cascading effects.
- 84% of black bear hunting jurisdictions prohibit the harvest of females accompanied by cubs.

Why Now?

- 2024 survey found 12% not taking necessary precautions and 13% reported not being aware of the Department's recommendation.
- Increasing harvest opportunity.
- Broad public support in jurisdictions that recently added this regulation.

Recommendation #4: Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit

Goal: Clarify Commissioner authority to revoke a bear dog permit

Potential Reciprocity Requirement or Restrict Use Of[480] Out-Of-State Dogs For Hunting Bears.

Goal: Explore Commissioner's authority to establish a reciprocity requirement for non-resident bear hound hunting.

Discuss limiting Department Registered Dogs to those kept in Vermont and owned by residents, unless non-resident's jurisdiction allows Vermonters to hunt bear with dogs.

Summary of Recommended Changes

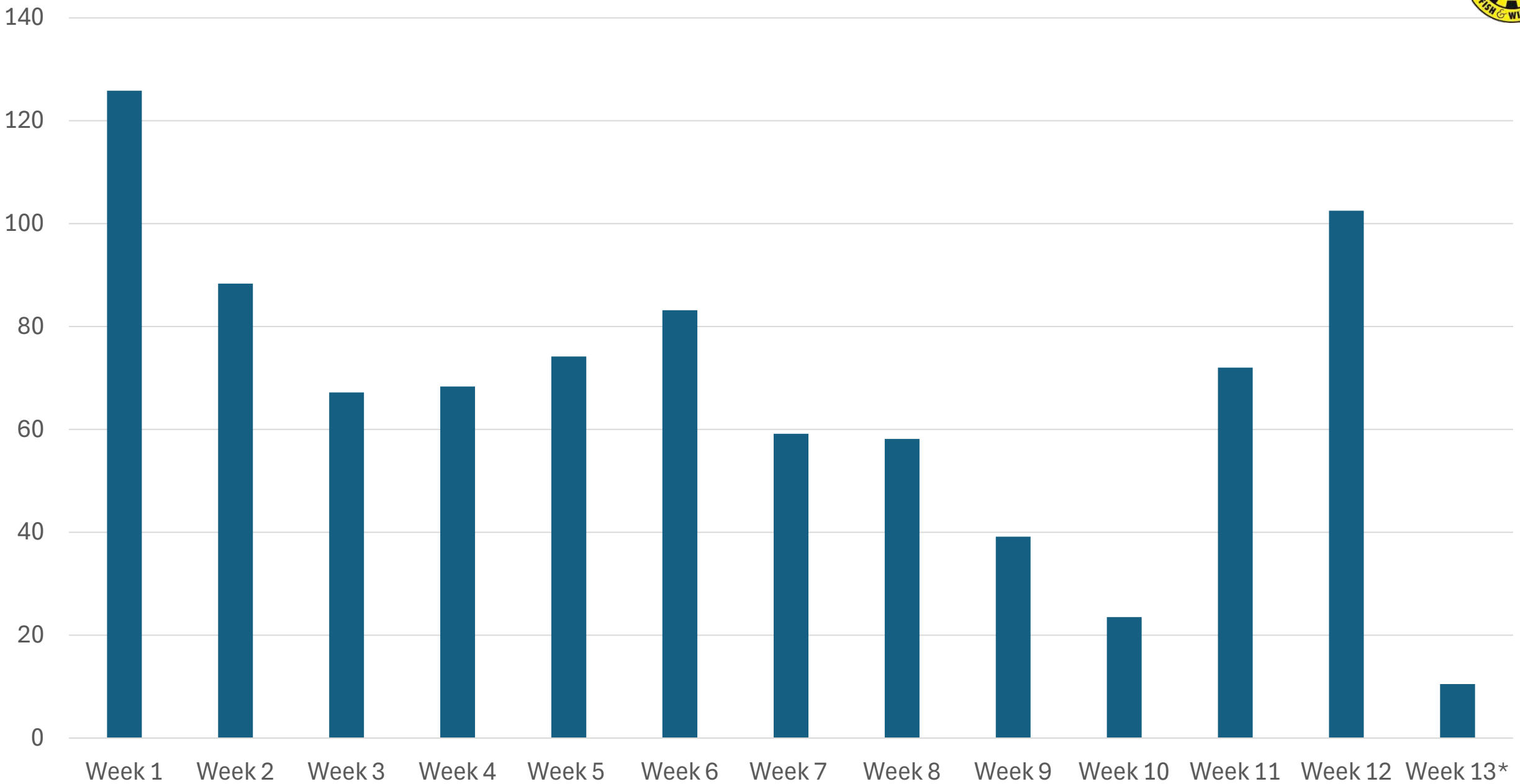
1. Extend the late bear season through the regular deer season.
2. Allow for a second bear to be harvested in select WMUs.
3. Prohibit the intentional harvest of females accompanied by cubs.
4. Clarify Commissioner's authority to revoke bear dog permit.
5. Discuss restricting use of out-of-state dogs for bear hunting from jurisdictions where Vermonters can't hunt bear with dogs.

Additional Approaches Considered

- ❑ Establish a spring bear hunting season
- ❑ Establish a bear baiting season
- ❑ Extending the early bear season into August
- ❑ Registration of individual dogs on a bear dog permit
- ❑ Establish bag limits for bear dog permits
- ❑ Allow online reporting of harvested bears

Average Bear Harvest by Week, 2019-2024

483



2026
Moose Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

The Fish & Wildlife Department recommends the same moose hunting permit allocation adopted by the Board by straw vote on February 18, 2026. During the public comment period, which started immediately after the Board meeting on February 18, the Department did not receive any new or additional information to justify changes to the initial recommendation.

The following is the same text the Department submitted to the Board for its February meeting.

All public comments received are provided in the appendices.

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks. The Department recommends issuing 85 moose hunting permits distributed between WMUs E1 and E2 to stabilize the moose population in that region. No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, because moose densities remain below established objectives. The recommended permit allocation is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

The number of moose in WMU E has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that are negatively affecting moose health and survival. Winter ticks are a host-dependent parasite with moose being the primary host responsible for major fluctuations in winter tick densities. Therefore, reduction in moose population density decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Maintaining a lower-density moose population will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

Reducing winter tick numbers directly, either by treating moose or the landscape with some form of acaricide or fungal pathogen, is not currently a viable option. Research in this area is ongoing, but the realities of treating an entire landscape or a sufficient portion of the moose population make it unlikely that this will be a practical option soon. Importantly, this approach would not address the cause of high winter tick abundance, which is high moose population density.

Maintaining a lower-density moose population should reduce the abundance of winter ticks and improve overall moose health in WMU E, consistent with the Department's established objective of managing for a healthy moose population. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the northeast, they do not significantly impact moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose population densities that limit tick abundance. Instead, moose in these areas are primarily limited by the lack of young forest habitat and internal parasites like brainworm.

Summary of Key Points

- The moose population remains stable or slowly declining in most of Vermont, but may be declining in WMU E (E1 & E2), as intended, due to recent moose harvests.

- Results of moose research and ongoing monitoring in WMU E indicate health of moose is poor in that region.
    - Adult survival remains relatively good, but detrimental health impacts of winter ticks have caused birth rates to be low.
    - Heavy winter tick loads can cause more than half of moose calves to die in late winter.

- Moose density in WMU E remains above the objective of 1 moose per square mile established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.
    - Moose densities greater than 1 moose per square mile are uncommon in North America, occurring in less than 10% of moose range.
    - In Vermont, no WMU outside the Northeast Kingdom ever had a moose density of 1/mi^2.
    - Moose densities greater than 1/mi^2 support high numbers of winter ticks that negatively impact the health of moose.
    - Moose densities below 0.75/mi^2 support relatively few winter ticks that do not impact moose populations. This is the case in most of Vermont – winter ticks are present, but do not cause population level impacts.

- Increased moose harvests in recent years appear to be effectively reducing moose numbers, as intended, in WMU E. The population is approaching the objective of 1 moose per square mile.

- The Department recommends 85 moose hunting permits (65 either sex and 20 antlerless only) be allocated in WMU E to stabilize moose numbers near the objective.
    - This is expected to result in a harvest of approximately 42 moose, or about 6% of the current estimated population in WMU E.

- No permits are recommended for the other 19 WMUs, which cover 93% of Vermont, because moose densities remain below objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Goals

This recommendation aims to achieve moose population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* and to improve the health of moose in WMUs E1 and E2 by reducing the impact of winter ticks.

Management Objectives

Moose population objectives for each WMU were established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. These objectives aim to maintain healthy regional moose populations at levels that are socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable.

Moose density objectives throughout most of moose range in Vermont have been set at 0.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 1**). This objective is a carryover from earlier moose management plans and reflects peak moose densities in these regions during the early 2000s.

In WMUs D2, E1, and E2, density objectives reflect higher historical densities and the impact of winter ticks on the size and health of the region's moose population. Research has found reduced frequency of winter tick epizootics (where more than 50% of calves die from winter tick infestations) at moose densities near 1/mi^2 and no tick epizootics at densities below 0.75/mi^2 (Samuel 2007, Jones 2016). The Department will initially try to maintain moose densities at or below 1/mi^2 to reduce winter tick abundance and the frequency of epizootics and improve the health of the moose population. However, if tick impacts are not reduced, the moose density may need to be reduced to 0.75/mi^2. Ultimately, the goal is to have healthy moose, with fewer calves dying each year from heavy winter tick loads and healthier cows with higher birth rates.

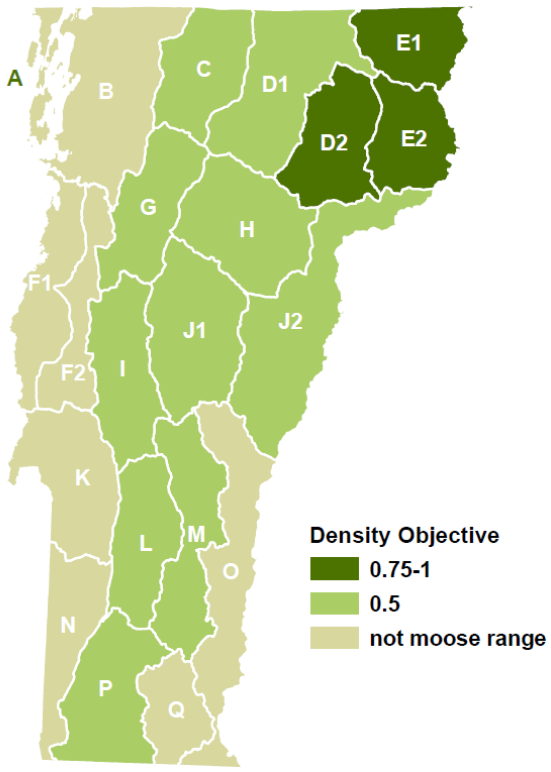


Figure 1. Moose density objectives (moose per square mile of moose habitat) established in Vermont's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Hunting thresholds have also been established for each WMU at 75% of the density objective (**Table 1**). The Department will only consider hunting moose when densities exceed this threshold for two consecutive years. This ensures the other values of moose are maximized at these lower densities.

Moose and Winter Ticks

Studies in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine have concluded that winter ticks are the primary cause of moose mortality across their core range in New England (Musante et al. 2007, 2010, Bergeron et al. 2013, Dunfey-Ball 2017, Jones et al. 2017, Ellingwood et al. 2019, Jones et al. 2019, DeBow et al. 2021), with some moose hosting an astonishingly high number of ticks (>50,000/individual; Jones et al. 2019).

Core moose range in New England extends from northeastern Vermont through northern New Hampshire and western and northern Maine. This part of the region has a colder climate with longer winters, low deer densities, large blocks of forest, and an abundance of young forest created by commercial timber management which allows it to sustain higher densities of moose than more peripheral parts of their range. Population-level effects of winter ticks have only been observed in the region's core moose range, where moose densities have been high enough to support large numbers of winter ticks.

Although winter ticks can be found on moose throughout the region, they have little impact on moose populations across the more-peripheral parts of their range in the northeast, including the rest of Vermont, due to lower moose densities which limit tick abundance. Moose numbers outside of the Northeast Kingdom have declined from their peak in the early 2000s, but the main cause of that decline was not winter ticks. It was primarily due to a combination of declining quantity of young forest, increased parasite loads (particularly brainworm linked to increasing deer densities), and fewer moose in core moose range to migrate out to these other regions. These factors continue to limit moose abundance across much of Vermont.

Vermont Research

During 2017–2019, 126 moose (36 adult cows and 90 calves) were fitted with GPS radio collars in WMU E to monitor survival and birth rates. Results of this research clearly showed that chronic, high winter tick loads caused the health of moose in WMU E to be poor. Birth rates were low and overwinter calf survival was poor (49%; DeBow et al. 2021). Although adult female survival remained relatively good, it was lower than expected for a population without major predators. Survival of breeding age females has significant influence on population trends in long-lived species like moose.

Fieldwork associated with the survival study concluded in 2019; however, the Department continued to monitor survival and calf recruitment in the remaining collared cows through 2024. Additionally, the large amounts of data collected during this study allowed University of Vermont researchers to analyze other aspects of moose and winter tick ecology (*see* Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Blouin et al. 2021*b*, Rosenblatt et al. 2021, Rosenblatt et al. 2023). Other related research at UVM assessed the effect of various fungal pathogens on survival of winter tick larvae (*see* Sullivan et al. 2021 and Sullivan et al. 2022).

The Department is currently partnering with multiple northeastern universities and state and federal agencies on regional research efforts focused on non-invasive monitoring of moose and winter ticks. A component of this involves deployment of hundreds of long-term camera monitoring stations that will hopefully allow for better monitoring of moose health and population trends, particularly in parts of the region with little or no moose harvest.

Population Status

Regional Population Estimates

Regional moose densities in Vermont are estimated from moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters during the November rifle season. This approach, originally developed by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, relates sighting rates to moose densities determined by aerial surveys (Bontaites et al. 2000). Aerial surveys conducted in Vermont allowed the Department to modify this model to better fit Vermont sighting data (Millette et al. 2011). Sighting rates often vary from year to year due to factors other than the number of moose (e.g., weather conditions), so a 3-year rolling average is used to smooth out some of this variation.

Using this approach, the 2025 (2023–2025 rolling average) density estimates for WMUs E1 and E2 are 1.32 and 1.09 moose/mi^2, respectively, which remain above the density objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. Moose population densities in all other WMUs except WMU C remain below established hunting thresholds (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Moose density estimates based on sighting rates by deer hunters and density objectives and hunting thresholds established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, by WMU. Density estimates are based on average sighting rates during 2023–2025.

WMU	Habitat (mi^2)	Density (moose/mi^2)			Population Estimate	
		Objective	Hunting Threshold	Current Estimate	N	(80% CI)
A	35	n/a	n/a	0.02	1	(1–1)
B	420	n/a	n/a	0.02	10	(8–11)
C	351	0.5	0.38	0.41	145	(122–168)
D1	449	0.5	0.38	0.09	39	(30–49)
D2	346	0.75-1	0.56	0.24	82	(63–100)
E1	306	0.75-1	0.56	1.32	403	(357–449)
E2	326	0.75-1	0.56	1.09	355	(297–413)
F1	108	n/a	n/a	0.04	5	(3–6)
F2	158	n/a	n/a	0.02	3	(3–3)
G	363	0.5	0.38	0.05	17	(11–23)
H	466	0.5	0.38	0.19	88	(72–104)
I	407	0.5	0.38	0.09	35	(26–44)
J1	464	0.5	0.38	0.04	18	(14–23)
J2	633	0.5	0.38	0.10	65	(54–77)
K	359	n/a	n/a	0.04	14	(8–19)
L	346	0.5	0.38	0.08	27	(17–36)
M	424	0.5	0.38	0.18	77	(55–98)
N	275	n/a	n/a	0.02	6	(6–6)
O	478	n/a	n/a	0.05	25	(13–37)
P	447	0.5	0.38	0.11	49	(34–65)
Q	219	n/a	n/a	0.05	12	(7–16)
STATE	**7380**				**1474**	**(1201–1748)**

Moose density in WMU C exceeded the hunting threshold in 2024 and 2025, meaning permits could now be considered in this WMU according to the guidelines of the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. However, since the current density is only slightly above the hunting threshold, typical year-to-year fluctuations in density estimates make it unlikely that this status will be maintained. Therefore, the Department recommends that no permits be issued in WMU C in 2026.

The Department continues to receive interest in moose hunting in areas outside WMU E, and some local areas could likely sustain a limited moose harvest. However, the uneven distribution of functional moose habitat (and therefore moose) in much of Vermont is a challenge for management. The Department is reevaluating moose habitat mapping and regional population objectives based on recent research efforts in the northeast (e.g., Pearman-Gilman et al. 2020, Blouin et al. 2021*a*, Peterson et al. 2022) This will allow for setting more appropriate population objectives that reflect current habitat limitations, and calculating more meaningful estimates of moose density in WMUs with less homogeneous moose habitat.

Moose Population Trends in WMU E

In WMU E, moose were overabundant in the early 2000s and the Department intentionally worked to reduce moose numbers. Since population reduction efforts ended in 2010, moose density has remained relatively stable in WMU E near 1.5 moose/mi^2 (**Figure 2**). Importantly, the density of moose over that time has been high enough to support problematic numbers of winter ticks. The population may now be declining, as intended, as a result of higher moose harvests in recent years.

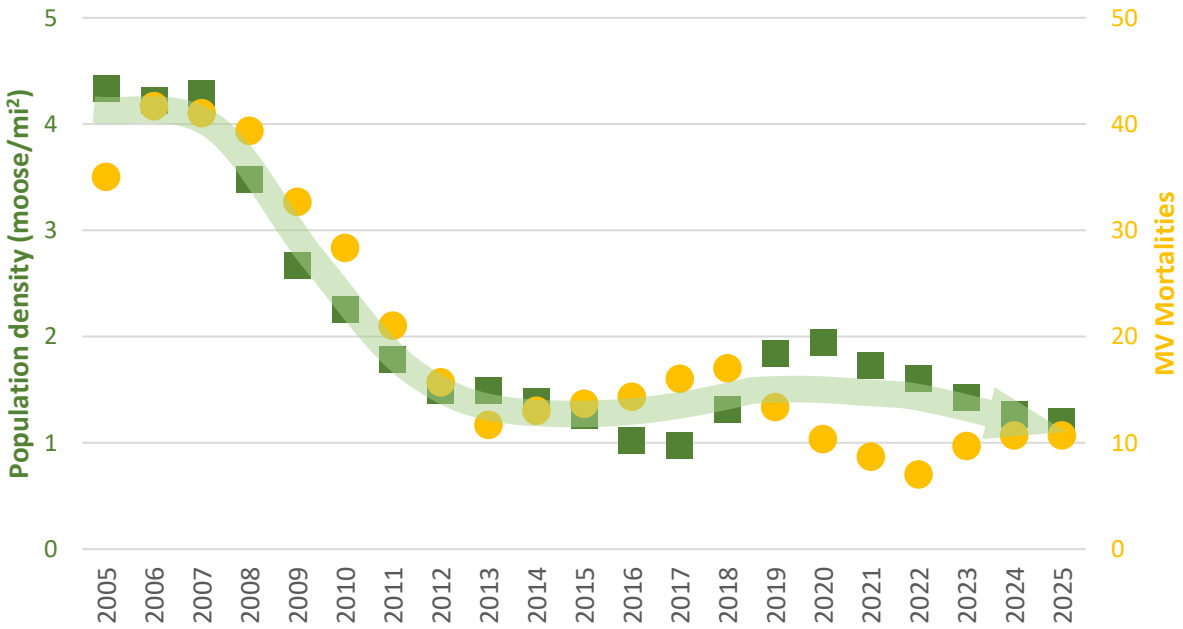


Figure 2. Moose density estimates (green squares) and moose mortalities from motor vehicle collision (yellow circles) in WMU E during 2005–2025. Both metrics are three-year rolling averages. Density estimates are based on moose sighting rates reported by deer hunters. The light green line shows general population trend.

Recent Winter Tick Impacts in WMU E

The severity of annual tick infestations is dependent not only on moose density, but also on climate, including temperature, humidity, wind, and snow. Annual variation in climate conditions results in variation in winter tick loads on moose. Vermont has not collared moose calves to directly monitor overwinter survival since 2019. As a result, the Department relies on other sources of information to estimate winter tick impacts since that time.

One useful measure is counts of winter ticks on bull moose harvested in October (**Figure 6**). This measure provides an indication of tick abundance on the landscape, but final tick loads on moose are largely determined by the length of the questing period. The questing period is typically ended by weather conditions (e.g., persistent snow or freezing conditions) that kill questing winter tick larvae.

Persistent snow arrived in early November in WMU E, resulting in a shorter questing period than in many recent years. However, the higher average winter tick counts in 2025 (**Figure 6**) still suggest a greater likelihood of high calf mortality in the spring of 2026.

Occasional increases in winter tick abundance are expected, even as moose density is reduced. However, these high winter tick years will be less frequent at lower moose density. Winter tick counts were also higher in New Hampshire and Maine in 2025, indicating this increase was driven by annual climate variation, not moose abundance.

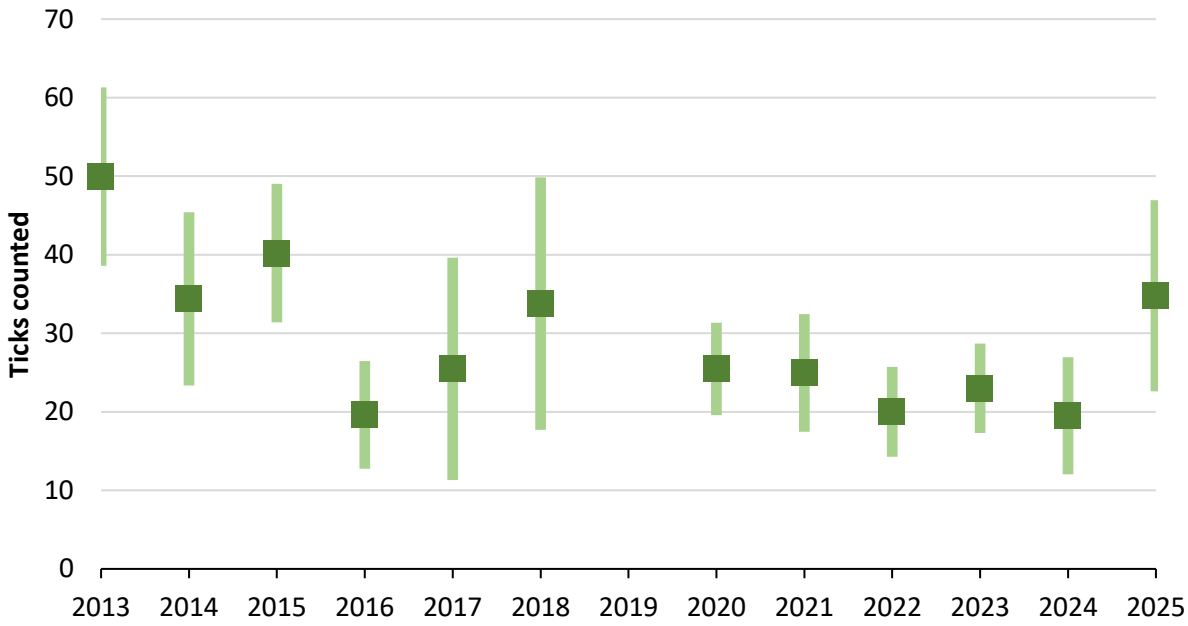


Figure 6. Winter tick counts on bull moose harvested in Wildlife Management Unit E, 2013–2025.

Population Health in WMU E

In the early 2000s, moose were overabundant in WMU E. They were causing significant damage to forest regeneration, and their physical condition was declining as habitat quality declined. The Department actively reduced the moose population in this area to bring it into balance with the habitat and to improve the health of moose. By 2011, the population had been reduced to a level the habitat could support; however, health measures did not improve (**Figures 7** and **8**).

Moose body condition and reproductive rates have remained poor since 2011 due to the impacts of chronic high winter tick loads. Moose are not currently limited by habitat quality in the core part of their range, including WMU E (Dunfey-Ball 2017). However, habitat quality can influence the distribution of moose on the landscape (i.e., higher densities of moose in areas with the highest quality habitat), which can influence local winter tick abundance and impacts on moose health (Healy et al. 2019, Blouin et al. 2021*a* and *b*).

Body condition and reproductive rates have shown signs of improvement in recent years (**Figures 7** and **8**). However, body weights, particularly for yearling moose, declined sharply in 2024 and 2025 (**Figure 7**). The cause of this decline is unknown, but it is likely due to something other than winter ticks. Ultimately, we hope to see sustained improvement in these metrics.

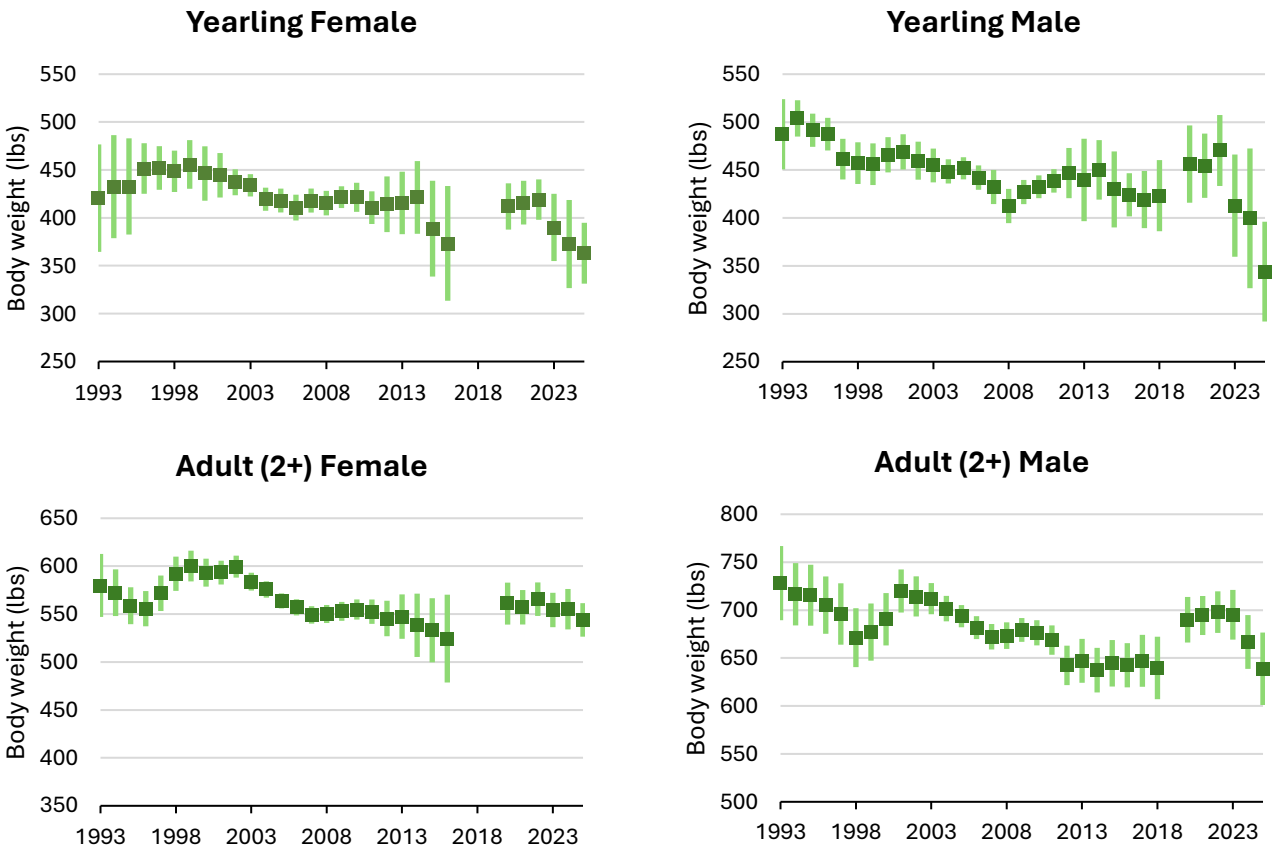


Figure 7. Field-dressed body weights of moose harvested during the regular season in Wildlife Management Unit E, 1993–2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages with 95% confidence intervals.

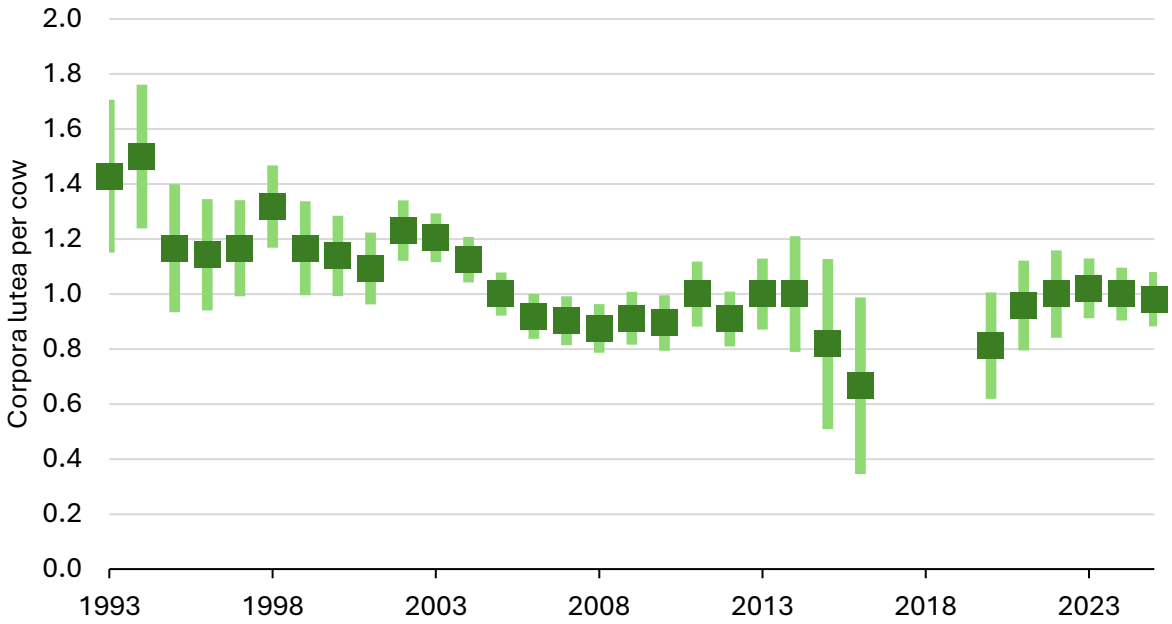


Figure 8. Ovulation rate of prime-aged (≥3 years old) cow moose in WMU E, 1993-2025. Data are 3-year rolling averages from counts of corpora lutea in ovaries collected from hunter-harvested moose.

Harvest Recommendation

The Department recommends harvesting approximately 10-12 adult cow moose (~3% of the cow population) and approximately 30 adult bull moose (~15% of the bull population) in WMU E during the 2026 moose hunting seasons. The Department further recommends that this be accomplished through the issuance of 65 either-sex hunting permits and 20 antlerless-only hunting permits. This is a 53% reduction from the 180 permits approved by the Board in 2023, 2024, and 2025. No permits are recommended in the other 19 WMUs.

Permit breakdown by season, type, WMU, and special allocation is provided below in **Table 2**. Given recent success rates and sex-age composition of the harvest for each season and permit type, this allocation is expected to result in the harvest of approximately 42 moose with an expected breakdown of 29 bulls, 11 cows, and 2 calves.

Approximately 55% of permits are recommended to be allocated to WMU E1 due to higher moose density in that WMU. Since most auction and special opportunity permit winners choose to hunt WMU E1, this will result in approximately 65% of permits being assigned to that WMU.

The recommended allocation to the archery season is 25% of either-sex permits, based on the percentage of total applications that were for this season in recent years and the need to obtain sufficient biological data during the regular season. Allocations to the auction, special opportunity, and veterans are the same as prior years and are limited by statute and regulation.

Table 2. Recommended 2026 moose hunting permit allocations and expected harvest by season, permit type, and WMU.

	Permits			Expected Harvest	
	E1	E2	Total		
Archery Season					
Either-sex	7	8	15	8	*(6–10)*
Regular Season[1]					
Either-sex	24	20	44	24	*(20–30)*
Antlerless-only	11	9	20	7	*(6–10)*
Auction[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
Special Opportunity[2]	choice		3	2	*(0–3)*
TOTAL			**85**	**42**	*(32–56)*

[1] *Veteran permits are a priority draw for the first 5 regular season permits.*

[2] *Auction and Special Opportunity Permits are either sex and allow choice of season and WMU.*

The results of the moose study and continued monitoring of moose clearly show that the density of moose in WMU E over the past decade has been sufficient to sustain winter ticks at high levels that negatively affect moose health and survival. Research has shown that winter tick abundance is directly related to moose population density. Reducing the density of moose decreases the number of available hosts which in turn decreases the number of winter ticks on the landscape. Reducing the moose population and maintaining it at lower density will be necessary to break the winter tick cycle and improve the health of moose in this region.

The Department is committed to achieving a healthy moose population in WMU E by meeting the population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*. The proposed permit allocation and resulting cow harvest should allow the population to stabilize near the objective of 1 moose/mi^2 (632 moose in WMU E) within the next few years.

In practice, the moose population and winter tick impacts are dynamic, and management must remain adaptive. Actual permit allocations and harvest will be adjusted annually based on new information as it becomes available. Importantly, the Department's primary goal is to improve the health of moose in WMU E. If health does not improve at 1 moose/mi^2, moose density may need to be reduced even further.

Maintaining a healthy, stable, and sustainable moose population requires action to improve moose health. Without management action to reduce the moose population and maintain it at a lower density, high tick loads will continue to impact the health of moose in WMU E. The resulting chronic stress, low birth rates, and high calf mortality will make the population less resilient to diseases, parasites, and environmental variation, which could cause the population to destabilize. Importantly, 65% of Vermont residents support maintaining a smaller moose population through hunting if it reduces the number of moose that die each year from winter ticks. Only 15% oppose this approach (Responsive Management 2019).

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Appendix A. Summary of comments from 2026 moose hearings

Note: comments are arranged from most common to least common. Approximately 52 members of the public attended these three hearings.

30 individuals left this question blank or indicated "no comment."

Agree/Looks Good/Support
Similar comments were received from 8 individuals.

When scouting last year I saw plenty of sign but saw few moose. My overall opinion is that the moose are healthy and have a decent age structure. The proposal numbers seem appropriate.

I believe we achieved the density already that we are looking for.
The moose we are seeing seem very healthy / some of the bulls are Maine/Alaska quality.
I would like to see no more than 40 permits issued.

The population of the moose herd I believe are a [sustainable?] rate, however 2%-5% increase in permits would keep the harvest at a manageable herd size.

I think there should be some selective moose hunting in other populated areas. Steam Mill Brook in D2 has a growing population that could use some limited harvesting.

I think the moose have been studied adequately so I think the moose proposal is spot on.

It seems you have a good plan in place, hopefully the tick are down.

Would it be feasible to tranquilize and treat moose to reduce tick infestation in the NEK?

I would agree with the decision to drop the number of antlerless permits.
Would it be beneficial to have a separate cow only season?

I would love to see a push to expand moose habitat so we can see more than 85 tags available.

Support continued efforts to reduce density in E1/E2. Don't particularly like that 3 permits are auctioned to highest bidder. Don't like that those non-residents who participate bypass lottery system residents have to apply for. Also think funds from auction should be used for moose research.

Hopefully this plan works and the health of the moose improves.

Moose management is on point, but there should be a few statewide permits (Gov. tag) with a 60 day season.

Don't even put in for a permit – never got one so I stopped.

Shut down the season for one year.

Appendix B. Moose public comment emails

Sent: Thursday, February 19, 2026 7:59 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Moose Hunting

Moose hunting should stop completely. Instead of hunting, the F&G should spend energy on controlling ticks by spraying areas were moose frequent. This is a little more common sense. If you're going to issue moose hunting permits, they should be $1000.00 each.

Sent: Saturday, February 21, 2026 2:57 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 moose proposal

I'm writing to the board in favor of the proposed moose permit number. If there's been a reduction then there must be a reason why Nick has made that decision and the number of permits. I hope that this proposal will go forward and those number of permits will be issued if the information that is being used is stable throughout this year. Thank you for your time, Jeremy Ayotte

---

Sent: Saturday, March 7, 2026 8:34 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: No Moose permits for 2026

The Vermont Moose population is dramatically down. I support no moose hunting season in 2026. Thank you, Ginny Callan

---

Sent: Friday, March 13, 2026 6:40 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: moose hearings

i am surprised you aren’t having a hearing in island pond since that is where moose are hunted.

2026-2027 WATERFOWL SEASONS RECOMMENDATIONS

APRIL 1, 2026

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3905

Executive Summary

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department proposes the same recommendations the Board approved by straw vote on February 18, 2026. The Department makes these recommendations based on the following:

The majority of public comments from both public meetings (NY- 1 citizen and VT- 18 citizens) were happy with the recommendations and there was no consensus for change. The majority of the comments from people attending the public meetings and emails were that the proposed season dates were good and no changes needed to be made. We also received a few comments about different zone configurations in the future.

Justifications for Recommendations Discussed through Public Input Sources

The Department does not recommend making any changes to the recommendations presented in February.

In review, these are the actions the Department requests that the Board takes tonight for the 2026-2027 migratory game bird seasons: Setting the 2026 duck, goose, merganser, coot, brant, woodcock and snipe season dates and daily bag limits, setting the 2026 youth waterfowl hunting weekend dates, and setting the 2026-27 falconry regulations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 - 2026 Lake Champlain Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons: That the 2026-2027 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Lake Champlain zone run from October 10 to November 1 and November 21 to December 27, 2026. Within the chosen dates, we recommend the 60-day season with a daily bag limit of no more than 6 ducks (with species restrictions) and 15 coots.

Recommendation 2 – 2026 Interior Vermont Zone Duck, Merganser and Coot Seasons: That the 2026-2027 duck, mergansers, and coot seasons of the Interior Vermont zone run from October 10 to December 8, 2026. Within the chosen dates, we recommend the 60-day season with a daily bag limit of no more than 6 -ducks (with species restrictions) and 15 coots.

Recommendation 3 – 2026 September Resident Canada Goose Season: That the September resident Canada goose season run from September 1-25, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 8 birds per day and a possession limit of 24 birds within the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones. New Hampshire plans to offer the same dates within the Connecticut River zone, but with a daily bag limit of 5 birds per day and a possession limit of 15 birds.

Recommendation 4 – 2026 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Migrant Canada Goose Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the migrant Canada goose season to run from October 10 to November 23, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 3 birds per day and a possession limit of 9 birds

- If the federal season promulgation process does not go through we seek conditional approval to submit the following dates: October 10 to November 8, 2026 with a daily bag limit of 1 bird per day and a possession limit of 3 birds.

Recommendation 5 – 2026 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Snow Goose Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the snow goose season to run from October 1st to December 31, 2026 and February 26 to March 10, 2027, with a daily bag limit of 25 birds per day and no possession limit.

Recommendation 6 – 2026 Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont Zones Brant Season: That the Lake Champlain and Interior Vermont zones be set for the brant season to run from October 10 to November 8, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 1 bird per day and a possession limit of 3 birds.

Recommendation 7 - 2025 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: That the youth waterfowl hunting weekend occur on Saturday and Sunday, September 26 & 27, 2026, within all Vermont zones.

Recommendation 8- 2026 Falconry Season: A person possessing a valid falconry permit may take migratory game birds only during open seasons and within designated shooting times. The daily bag limit shall be a maximum of three legal migratory game birds, singly or in the aggregate, not to exceed restrictive daily bag limits for certain species as listed herein. Possession limit shall be equal to three times the daily limit.

Recommendation 9 – 2026 Woodcock Season: That the woodcock season run from September 26 to November 9, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 3 birds per day and a possession limit of 9 birds, statewide.

Recommendation 10 – 2026 Snipe Season: That the snipe season run from September 26 to November 9, 2026, with a daily bag limit of 8 birds per day and a possession limit of 24 birds, statewide.

Recommendation 11 – Hybrid Scaup Season: Provide a hybrid season on scaup that allows for a 20-day segment with a two-bird daily bag limit and a 40-day segment that allows for a one bird daily bag limit. The 20-day and two bird daily limit should be placed on the last twenty days within the Lake Champlain and Interior Zone seasons of Vermont. All remaining days of the seasons will be a one bird daily limit.

Recommendation 12 – December Resident Canada Goose Season: That the December resident Canada goose season run from December 1, 2026 to January 4, 2027

- If the federal season promulgation process does not go through we seek conditional approval to submit the following dates: December 1, 2026 to January 19, 2027, with a daily bag limit of 5 birds per day and a possession limit of 15 birds, statewide.

Background

Vermont currently has three waterfowl hunting zones (Figure 1):

- Lake Champlain Zone that we share with New York. Vermont sets the dates for this zone.
- Interior Zone that is entirely within Vermont.
- Connecticut River Zone that we share with New Hampshire. New Hampshire sets the dates for this zone as an extension of their Inland Zone.

Under Vermont's three zones, Vermont can split any zone once to create two hunting segments. Vermont currently has sixty days to divide between the two duck hunting segments to accommodate the diverse desires of the variety of Vermont waterfowl hunters. Migrant Canada goose season currently has 45-days to utilize but may have to revert to 30 days depending on the federal government. The zones were also set up to take into consideration the differences in the physiographic regions of the state and the climatic differences each has.

2026 Duck Season: The Board has traditionally held the youth waterfowl weekend the last weekend in September. The Department has withheld any fishing tournament permits for that weekend to reduce conflicts between anglers and youth waterfowlers.

2026 Goose, Brant, Mergansers, and Coots Seasons: Resident Canada geese have a 25-day season option and may run from September 1st to the 25th. The migrant Canada goose season may not open prior to October 10th. Migrant Canada geese have a 45-day season option with a three-bird daily bag limit. Atlantic brant have a 30-day season option with a one-bird daily bag limit. The Board traditionally has run the merganser and coot seasons concurrently with the duck season. December resident Canada geese have 35 days allowed for the 2026-2027 season to use between December 1st and February 15th.

2026 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: The Department may select two days per duck-hunting zone, designated as ''Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days," in addition to the regular duck seasons. The days must be held outside any regular duck season on a weekend, holiday, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The days may be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck-season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season, or within any other open season on migratory birds. The daily bag limits may include ducks, geese, mergansers, and coots, and would be the same as those allowed in the regular season.

The age of youth hunter eligibility was changed in 2016 at the federal level. That same year the Board changed the youth waterfowl hunter age to 17 years of age or younger. In addition, an adult at least 18 years of age must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt but may participate in other seasons that are open on the special youth day. Youth hunters 16 years of age and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as Federal Duck Stamp). Vermont also requires all hunters 16 years of age and older to have a state duck stamp. All hunters regardless of age are required to have a HIP number. Within the Connecticut River Zone, youth must be 15 years of age or younger to participate during the youth weekend.

Special Falconry Regulations: Falconry is a permitted means of taking migratory game birds in any State meeting Federal falconry standards in 50 CFR 21.29. These States may select an extended season for taking migratory game birds in accordance with the following:

Extended Seasons: For all hunting methods combined, the combined length of the extended season, regular season, and any special or experimental seasons must not exceed 107 days for any species or group of species in a geographical area. Each extended season may be divided into a maximum of 3 segments.

Daily Bag Limits: Falconry daily bag limits for all permitted migratory game birds must not exceed 3 birds, singly or in the aggregate, during extended falconry seasons, any special or experimental seasons, and regular hunting seasons in all States, including those that do not select an extended falconry season.

Regular Seasons: General hunting regulations, including seasons and hunting hours, apply to falconry in each State listed in 50 CFR 21.29. Regular season bag limits do not apply to falconry. The falconry bag limit is not in addition to gun limits.

Vermont has traditionally run the falconry season during any open migratory game bird season. Last year falconers had the opportunity to begin on September 1st with the resident Canada goose season and ended their season on January 19th when the late resident Canada goose season closed. The falconry season reopened on February 26, 2026. A three-bird daily bag limit was in effect.

Public Input and Outreach: The Department, in conjunction with the Board, held two public meetings in 2026. Meetings occurred on the evenings of March 10 and 12 and began at 6:30 pm. Comments received at the public meetings and the number of attendees is provided within the accompanying document.

After the Board approves final season dates and bag limits, the Department will submit season selections to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by April 30th and the information will be sent to a printer for production of the 2026 syllabus of state and federal hunting regulations. The early decision deadlines will allow the Department to have the syllabus available to the public in print version by August a full month prior to any migratory bird hunting season. The seasons will be placed on the Department's website within days of approval. This year the printed syllabus will not contain dates for the migratory October/November Canada goose season or the late resident December/January Canada goose season. Instead, it will point hunters to the department website. This will allow us to revert to a more restrictive season package if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not able to complete the new season promulgation process in time.

Tally of Public Comments

The Department received a total of 5 emails containing comments on the proposed migratory game bird seasons. Nineteen citizens attended the two public meetings hosted by the Board and Department. Comments made during the meetings are captured on the attached documents.

Below are the main comments received from all sources with the number of individuals that commented.

1. Happy with seasons as proposed (17)
2. Bring back Wednesday openers (3)
3. South of the Champlain Bridge in Addison/Crown Point should be moved to the interior zone (2)
4. Late Resident Canada Goose season is too late (1)
5. Start duck season on a fixed date annually (1)
6. Lake Champlain Zone is closed too long in November (1)
7. Woodcock season opens too early (1)
8. Lake Champlain Zone should close October 25, and reopen November 14 (1)
9. Split Interior Zone into North and South Zones (1)
10. Interior split into 2 segments (1)
11. Lake Champlain Zone and Northeast NY zone should not open on the same day (1)
12. Should allow hunting at Mud Creek on the first Sunday (1)

Figure 1.

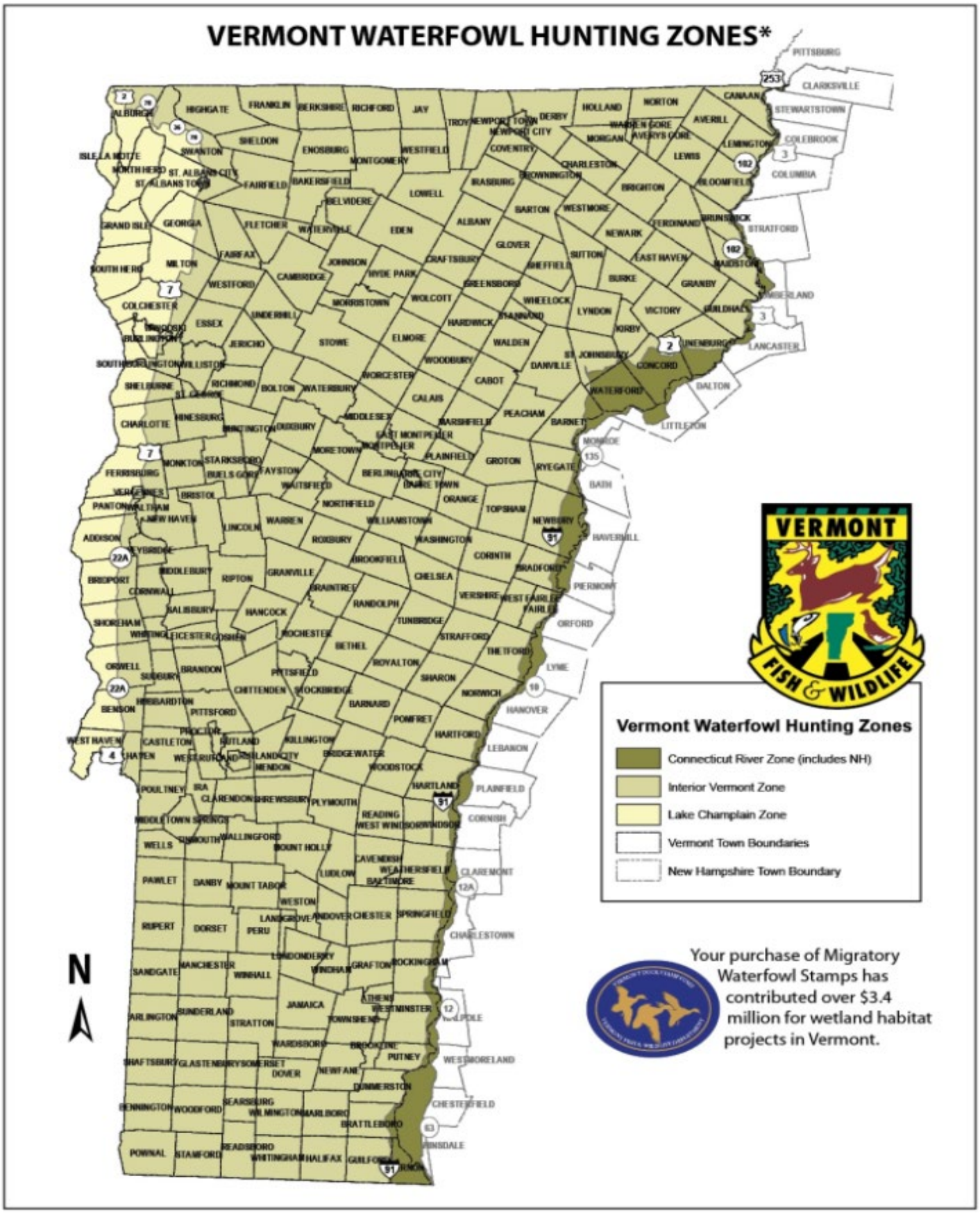

VERMONT WATERFOWL HUNTING ZONES*
VERMONT
FISH & WILDLIFE
Vermont Waterfowl Hunting Zones
Connecticut River Zone (includes NH)
Interior Vermont Zone
Lake Champlain Zone
Vermont Town Boundaries
New Hampshire Town Boundary
N
Your purchase of Migratory Waterfowl Stamps has contributed over $3.4 million for wetland habitat projects in Vermont.

Table 1. 507

2026 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

LAKE CHAMPLAIN ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 27	6	18
MERGANSERS *	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 27	5	15
Scaup*	Split	40 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 7	1	3
	Hybrid	20 Days	Dec. 8 – Dec. 27	2	6
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 1 & Nov. 21 – Dec. 27	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 – Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1, 2026 – Jan. 4, 2027	5	15
Snow Geese **	Straight	107 Days	Oct. 1 – Dec. 31, 2026	25	NONE
	Split		Feb. 26 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Federal species restrictions apply.
** Includes blue geese also.

Table 2.

2026 WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATION

VERMONT INTERIOR ZONE

	SEASON TYPE	SEASON LENGTH	INCLUSIVE DATES	DAILY LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
DUCKS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	6	18
MERGANSERS *	Straight	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	5	15
SCAUP*	Split	40 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 18	1	3
	Hybrid	20 Days	Nov. 19 – Dec. 8	2	6
COOTS	Split	60 Days	Oct. 10 – Dec. 8	15	45
GEESE					
Canada Geese	Straight	25 Days	Sept. 1 – Sept. 25	8	24
	Straight	45 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 23	3	9
	Straight	35 Days	Dec. 1, 2026 – Jan. 4, 2025	5	15
Snow Geese **					
	Straight	107 Days	Oct. 1 – Dec.31, 2026	25	NONE
			Feb. 26 – Mar. 10, 2027	25	NONE
Brant	Straight	30 Days	Oct. 10 – Nov. 8	1	3

SHOOTING HOURS - All Waterfowl - All Days - ½ hour before sunrise to sunset

* Federal species restrictions apply.
** Includes blue geese also.

Appendix A
2026 FALL CALENDAR
Lake Champlain Zone

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
SEPTEMBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30			
OCTOBER					1	2	3
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
NOVEMBER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30					
DECEMBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30	31		

Proposed Lake Champlain Zone season

2026 FALL CALENDAR
Interior Vermont Zone

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
SEPTEMBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30			
OCTOBER					1	2	3
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
NOVEMBER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30					
DECEMBER			1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30	31		

Proposed Interior Vermont Zone season

18 pub
511
3 board

ATTENDANCE ROSTER

PUBLIC WATERFOWL MEETING – ESSEX JUNCTION, VT – MARCH 12, 2026

PLEASE PRINT

NAME	ADDRESS	EMAIL
Doug Dezotell	[redacted]	[redacted]
Bill Sladgett		
Shane Libby		
COLIN KEENAN		
Eric Greenwood		
Jordan Markarian		
MATTHEW MAYO		

@ 3 VT Staff
1 NY staff
3 board members

ATTENDANCE ROSTER

PUBLIC WATERFOWL MEETING – ESSEX JUNCTION, VT – MARCH 12, 2026

PLEASE PRINT

NAME	ADDRESS	EMAIL
ANDY DEZOTELLE	[redacted]	[redacted]
Addison Dezotelle		
Colton Desrochers		
JASON MCHAYA		
Robert Frohock		
Ron DeVincenzi		
GREG OLES		
Drew Desrochers		

2 Board members
3 NY staff
2 VT staff

ATTENDANCE ROSTER

PUBLIC WATERFOWL MEETING – Whitehall, NY – MARCH 10, 2026

PLEASE PRINT

NAME	ADDRESS	EMAIL
C. J FRANKIEWICZ	[redacted]	[redacted]
M. Bargiboj		
L. Brogan		

Don Rivers:

Move split earlier: Close October 25 reopen November 14. Reduce COGO bag limits. Wednesday opener at a minimum every 3rd year.

Michael Gardner:

Andrew,

I thought I would follow-up from my previous email and share some data with you. We conducted a survey on the VT Waterfowlers FB page last year. Some answers had clear winners, others, not so much.

1. Do you support moving the Lake Champlain Zone Boundary to encompass the entire lake? 51.35% in favor, 48.65% against
2. Do you support an Interior Zone Split? (North/South) 70% in favor, 30% against
3. Do you support a 60 day consecutive season for the proposed Northern Interior Zone? 84% in favor, 16% against
4. Do you support a split season for the proposed Southern Interior Zone? 76% in favor, 24% against
5. Do you support a hunter survey as part of the HIP program? 89% in favor, 11% against.

I'm happy to connect when it is convenient for you

Thanks

Mike Gardner

Andrew and David,

My name is Michael Gardner, I'm the current state chairman for Ducks Unlimited and an avid waterfowl hunter. It was my intent to reach out a few weeks ago after chatting with Commissioner Batchelder, but I wanted to get some additional feedback from a large fundraiser that happened last Saturday night.

I hope you're both doing well. I'm not sure I've had the pleasure of meeting you both in person, but I was fortunate to meet Andrew at our DU event in Barre, and David, I thank you for your leadership on waterfowl before Andrew stepped in. I wasn't sure who best to reach out to regarding the proposed interior season dates, but having come from a fundraiser Saturday night on Lake Bomoseen with 100+ duck hunters in the room, in the heart of Vermont's interior zone I knew I had to reach out. The general consensus in the room was that the surveys don't seem to be reaching actual migratory bird hunters, and that F+W might not be getting the feedback from the survey program in helping to make the very tough decision on season dates. There was even consensus that trying to please everyone in a long skinny state poses some challenges.

The #1 proposal from hunters both North and South is that the survey should be required to be completed to get your HIP number. Simple, easy, and you are targeting the people being impacted. It should be clear that the results impact the decision making on season dates.

Conversations beyond the HIP idea ranged in perspective. In a perfect world, we would have 2 interior zones, and it's my understanding that we can't make more zones without Federal approval. In the past we were required, apparently, to maintain 60 consecutive days but in the 2024 season we had a split, so it seems that might have changed. While the folks way up North seem to like a 60 day consecutive season, anyone mid state down, or anyone who enjoys hunting migrators on the rivers and larger lakes really gets left out with a 60 day consecutive season. Having traveled the state to attend every DU banquet and nearly every conservation project I hear it from both sides, including the guys that hunt Missisquoi bay and worry about getting frozen out. All of that said I think it might be a good idea, assuming we can't split the state, to propose some sort of alternating framework, where we have an interior split one year, and then 60 days consecutive the next, and articulate that since we can't please all of the people, all of the time, we are at listening intently.

While we only did it once, we held a waterfowl meeting in Bennington, at the firehouse 10+ years ago and it was VERY well attended. Whether I'm in the northern part of the state or the southern, people aren't going to meetings like they once did because they feel like they aren't being heard. We all know the incredible irony in that assumption, because if you don't show up you definitely aren't going to be heard, but it's the most frequent feedback I get.

If it helps you at all I'd be happy to host a listening meeting, or 2 meetings (one north, one mid state), email blast all the Vermont DU members, and advertise on social media to put it together. Alternatively I'd be thrilled to hop on a call with either of you, or both at almost any time.

Lastly, I think there is a tremendous banding opportunity at the Vermont Veterans home in Bennington VT. If that is something of interest I can wrangle some volunteers.

On a personal note, I strongly favor the split, it's really tough to hunt divers on Lake Bomosseen when the season is closed, and my favorite birds are those late season black ducks and mallards, but those birds arrived on the Battenkill and Walloomsac on December 5th this year....

Respectfully,

Michael Gardner
Vermont State Chairman Ducks Unlimited.

C. J. Frankiewicz:
March 17, 2026

Andrew:

Here's my Migratory Game Bird Questions and Comments from the Waterfowl Meeting in Whitehall, NY on March 10.

First 4. No questions.

5. I think the VF&W Board should consider reclassifying some portion of the Lake Champlain Zone south of the Champlain Bridge to the Interior Zone. This southern portion of LC is substantially shallower than the portion of LC north of the bridge and therefore freezes much faster than the deeper north portion.

With the LCZ season closure at December 27, many hunting days are lost due freeze-up (which certainly varies each year) of the southern portion of LC. And, there is already a loss of 19 hunting days due to the split season in the LCZ.

Thus, this southern portion of LC experiences very much less hunting pressure due to both the interim closure and freeze-up. Give us more hunting days by reclassifying some portion of the LCZ south of the Champlain Bridge to the Interior Zone. This would enable this southern portion of LC to have close to the same number of real hunting days as everywhere else in the State of Vermont.

I understand that it will be some years before this could take effect, and further understand that it must be considered with New York DEC.

Please ask the VF&W Board to consider this proposal.

Sincerely,

C. J. Frankiewicz

Jake Kehaya:

Andrew, last night was the most civil meeting I've ever attended for duck regs. You should be commended for that.
I still believe an October 10 opener every year (like Turkey opening on May 1) would be a good compromise. A 5 year trial would be in order of course but by then how many of us rabid duck hunters will still be slogging through the marsh.
Thanks, Jake

Michael Pond:

Gentleman,

How many people participated in the obtained feedback ?

I've been hunting duck since I was 14.... now 68. I can tell you that in NY to have both Champlain and Northeast open at the same time really limits opportunity. I hunted approximately 10 days in both zones this year.. Never killed more than one duck or even saw more than 20 out of range. Clearly it wasn't even worth getting up to go out.

The first season opening in Lake Champlain... I did not have a single duck within range and shot one snipe at Ausable point. This year, for the second season opener, I'll bet if you combined everybody who hunted's bag ..the total bag limit would not even have been six ducks. The first shot was fired 45 minutes after legal shooting time! Never have seen that in my life. We used to limit out within the first half hour.

I am a NY Hunter Safety Instructor and Waterfowl Identification Course Instructor. So I've been very active and follow waterfowl closely. And I can tell you that since youth and Veterans Day started we have not had an opening day in either zone that was actually worth hunting. The Ducks are completely blown out by the regular opening. Actually , it used to be the only good days were the opening days. Those opening days would have been the only possible days to limiting out. That is not the case anymore. I've been hunting in the same places since 1986... The first 20-25 years were great... Now it's hardly worth going even for opening day . In the northeast zone I have hunted the same place in the Adirondacks since 1974.... Used to be great now if you shoot one duck it's amazing. Something's wrong.

I understand you may not want to "put pressure on the waterfowl" but it would be nice to actually have some shooting. And another possible problem is that I guarantee our brethren across the border do a lot of shooting.. I have hunted in Canada... They put a lot of pressure on. They shoot earlier and more... By the time the birds cross the St Lawrence and get to the United States they are totally skittish.

Oh and by the way... the drivers just showed up... Starting December 28th and now at Ausable Point they are there by the thousands.. a day or two after the season closed. This is happening year after year now. You can add these comments to your public comments and I realize I'm only a voice of one but something's clearly wrong.

Respectfully,
Michael

Hi Michael,

Based on surveys of waterfowl hunters from New York and Vermont and public comments from the public hearings that we conduct annually in both New York and Vermont the overall preference was for the duck season to open the second weekend of October in the Lake Champlain zone. If you have any other questions regarding the Lake Champlain zone feel free to reach out.

Thanks,
Andrew

Good morning Michael,

Sorry for the delayed response. This inbox isn't monitored much during the season.

Opening dates for the Lake Champlain Zone are actually set by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board. Federal regulations require our seasons on Lake Champlain to be the same.

While I understand your desire to have multiple opening days, the intent of zoning is to capture the varied migration of waterfowl within each zone. The purpose is not to expose ducks to additional opening days and additional pressure. I've looped in the Vermont waterfowl biologist who may be able to shed more light on how/why the Vermont board set the dates they did for this duck season.

Josh

To whom it may concern,
I know there's a committee that decides opening dates in New York... does this comment get sent there and who makes up that committee?
I would just like to point out that I live in the Adirondacks and duck coming is really limited to opening days... So I really disagree with opening Champlain and the Northeastern Zone at the same time. This really cuts down on the ability to enjoy two opening days. Now that there's a youth day in a Veteran's Day the regular season open day is essentially blown out and ruined. I really can't imagine why this was done(other than for preventing people to hunt or limiting the shooting) ? Can you explain it?

Thank you,
Michael Pond

Sid Harmon:

My name is Sid Harmon of Essex Vt - I have hunted the Missisquoi and Mud Creek area for years. Historically the waterfowl season opens on a Wednesday or a Saturday. Mud creek allows hunting on Tuesday , Thursday , and Saturday with the exception of no hunting allowed on opening day. If it lands on a Saturday - parties have to wait until Tuesday. If it starts on a Wednesday, parties can hunt on Thursday. I propose that hunting be allowed on Sunday if the season opens on a Saturday. This exception would apply to just that one Sunday . By waiting until Tuesday most prime hunting has occurred and many parties have left town because they have returned to work after opening weekend. This change would still allow rest periods between hunting days.
Thanks for your consideration ---
Sid Harmon -

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  TO LATE

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  OK

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  KEEP SAME

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Jason Kulseya

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  FINE

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone? NONE AS LONG AS ITS A STRAIGHT 60 DAYS

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  FINE

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season? N/A

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

START DUCK SEASON OCT 10 OR REGARDLESS OF DAY OF WEEK 15

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  dont hunt

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

Dont hunt

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

GOOD

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

GOOD

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

GOOD

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

DON'T HUNT

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone? OK
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone? OK
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  OK
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season? none
- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  no

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  OK / Baiting

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  OK

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  Think they are good

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  Good

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  Good

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  do not change

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?*** ____

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone? closed to long in November
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone? very good
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?
- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?
- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  Fine

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  also fine

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  opener seems early. Full vegetation still

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  South of Champlain bridge to whitehall often marshes are froze out by dec 1.. can opportunity be addressed?

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  OKAY

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  OKAY

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  OKAY

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  OKAY

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  NO CHANGE

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

Migratory Game Bird Hearing Questions

Questions

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Lake Champlain Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the Interior Vermont Zone?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the late resident Canada goose season in December 2026 and January 2027?

  OK

- What are your comments on the proposed hunting season dates for the woodcock season?

  N/A

- Do you have any comments/thoughts on future Waterfowl Hunting zone boundary changes?

  No

➢ ***More public comment/ testimony?***

- Email ANR.FWPublicComment@vermont.gov

From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2026 11:34 AM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov'
Subject: FW: May 20 Board Meeting
Attachments: Board Meeting Agenda 5.20.26.pdf; Unapproved_Board Meeting Minute_4.22.2026.pdf; VFWD_Recommendation_Bear_Hunt_Petition_VBA_Lawrence_Saldi.pdf; VDFW_Recommendation_YouthNovice_Archery_VBA.pdf; 2026 Antlerless Rec with Public Comments.pdf; Bear Management Rule_Draft 2026.docx; Sec. 2a Big Game Tagging_draft_4.22.26.docx; Sec. 2a Big Game Tagging_draft_10.13.25.docx

Good morning, Board Members,

Please note that we are having the Board meeting in the large NL building (Davis) and not the Dewey building in the back of the parking lot. Security will have your name tags ready and we will direct you where the room is. Please feel free to call or text me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Department of Fish & Wildlife
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

Support Vermont's wildlife with a Habitat Stamp!

Written communications to and from state employees regarding state business are considered public records and may be subject to public scrutiny.

From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Friday, May 15, 2026 11:31 AM
To: anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov
Subject: FW: May 20 Board Meeting

Good morning, Board Members,

Please the 2026 antlerless deer permits and youth season recommendation attached. Included are the public comments received.

Sincerely,

Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Department of Fish & Wildlife
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

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From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2026 4:57 PM
To: anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov
Subject: FW: May 20 Board Meeting

Good afternoon, Board Members,

Please see the attached recommendations from the department regarding the petitions.

Sincerely,

Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Department of Fish & Wildlife
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

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From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2026 11:23 AM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov' <anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov>
Subject: May 20 Board Meeting

Good morning, Board Members,

Please see the attached agenda for the May 20, 2026 Board Meeting. Please note that we will be meeting in the main National Life building (Davis), not the Dewey building in the back of the parking lot.

Also attached are the unapproved minutes from April 22, 2026 for your review.

We will send you the department recommendations as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Department of Fish & Wildlife
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

Support Vermont's wildlife with a Habitat Stamp!

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Fish and Wildlife Board
Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, May 20, 2026
5:00 pm

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board will hold an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, May 20, 2026, at the National Life Davis Building, Floor 2, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620.

To attend the meeting virtually, please use the following link: Join the meeting now
Meeting ID: 281 154 970 305 03 Passcode:9JK69oj6
Or call in (audio only): +1 802-828-7667,,620384934#
Phone Conference ID: 620 384 934#

Agenda:

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (April 22, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. 2026 Antlerless Deer Permits and Youth Season – Final Vote
4. Tagging Rule – Potential Vote
5. Department Recommendation: Youth and Novice Archery Season Petition – Potential Vote
6. Department Recommendations: Black Bear Regulations Petitions – Potential Vote
7. Black Bear Rule – Department Presentation, Board Discussion, Potential Vote
8. Commissioner's Update

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Fish and Wildlife Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 22, 2026

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, April 22, in the National Life Dewey Conference Room, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620. A recording of the meeting is available on the department's YouTube channel.

Agenda

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (April 1, 2026)

2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)

3. 2026 Antlerless Deer Permits and Youth Season – Preliminary Approval

Board Members Present: Jeffrey Corey, Beth Deimling, Neal Hogan, Ryan Kilborn, Paul Noel (Acting Chair), Robert Patterson, Jon Valsangiacomo, Martin Van Buren
Virtual: David Deen, Nick Burnham
Absent: Richard Craig

Department Staff Present: Wildlife Division Director John Austin, General Counsel Hannah Smith, Director of Outreach Alison Thomas, Wildlife Program Manager David Sausville, Deer and Moose Project Leader Nick Fortin, Game Warden Colonel Justin Stedman, Game Warden Major Jenna Reed,
Virtual: Information Specialist John Hall

Members of the Public Present: Justin Lindholm, Kevin Lawrence, Butch Spear, Benjamin Ilsley, Rod Coronado, Bert Saldi, Rocky Bunnell, Brent Gadapee, Mike Stoddard, Chris Bradley, Bob Galvin, Maureen Dwyer

Virtual: Sarah Gorsline, Jeremiah Gracie, Bill Hickock,

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Board Member Bob Patterson moved to approve the April 1st meeting minutes. Board Member Martin Van Buren seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes (10-0).

Public Comment Period

Justin Lindholm, Rutland, VT, spoke about how hunter education has begun doing an in-depth focus on how to hunt deer. This mentorship style hunting is something he wants to be continued

Unapproved

Kevin Lawrence, Newbury, VT, Spoke about teaching hunter education this weekend and how he shared social media comments with his students, which ranged from positive to negative toward hunting.

Butch Spear, Newbury, VT, Spoke in regard to next month's meeting topic on bear baiting, and proposed rule changes. He expressed opposition to allowing bear to be shot over bait.

Rod Coronado, Orange, VT, Commented on the bear baiting petitions. Not opposed to bear hunting, but he is against bear baiting. He referred to the VTFW website's webpage on coexistence with black bears. He highlighted how bears are at increased risks if they get habituated to being fed.

Rocky Bunell, Baiting and feeding bears are not the same thing and he supports bear baiting for hunting. He highlighted that baiting is in a controlled environment. He argued that if the regulations allow for bear baiting, VTFW can have greater control of the population.

Bob Galvin, Bolton, VT, Baiting bears is inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. He wants more science grounding some of the discussions about baiting.

Maureen Dwyer, Barre Town, VT, Against bear baiting, highlighted guidance provided by the Department, i.e. a fed bear is a dead bear, pull in bird feeders, etc. She questions if bear baiting is fair chase and ethical. Argued that baiting seems like a terrible idea, and habituating bears to human food is a bad idea.

Sarah Gorsline (virtual), Grand Isle, indicated that she had comment, but was unable to unmute through the Teams call. Volume appeared to be working for all other virtual participants.

The recording of the public comments and the meeting can be viewed here.

Paul Noel began the meeting by reminding all participants to maintain respectful decorum when participating in Board meetings.

John Austin addressed questions about the petitions that will be discussed and voted on during the May meeting. Specifically, he acknowledged concerns that voting on the petitions had been delayed to allow the Board time to consider all the petition language, and to allow further discussion to occur when both the Commissioner and Bear Project leader are present. John explained that the department is deliberately moving changes to the Bear rules forward at a measured pace to allow time to digest all proposed changes. The Bear Management Rules have not been amended in a long time and will generate a lot of public interest. The board can choose to accelerate the rulemaking process, and the department will accommodate that pace.

Martin Van Buren asked if the bear regulation changes will be lumped together like the deer regulations were in one package in 2026. Hannah Smith said that the rule will be advanced as a single document, but the board will decide which changes to the rule move forward.

Unapproved

Jon Valsangiacomo expressed concern about how the process for deciding how to deal with the petitions is being framed. He reminded everyone that the board can deny petitions, ask the department for more information, or change other aspects of the process. He reminded the board that they can take their time and determine the process.

Paul Noel reminded the Board that they can advance rule changes even if the changes will not be adopted in time for inclusion in this year's hunting digest.

2026 Antlerless Deer Permits and Youth Season – Preliminary Approval

Nick Fortin presented on the 2026 antlerless deer harvest recommendations. Nick focused on the status of the deer population and on the harvest recommendations. He explained that the severity of the previous winter likely did not significantly impact the deer population. For most of the state, we're stable or above our deer population density objective. Deer density objectives in wildlife management units are determined based on biological staff's assessment of habitat and deer health within the unit. WMUs are a broad, yet necessary, way to manage populations. Anything smaller is ineffective. Data collected at deer check-stations indicates long-term decline in deer health (past 20 years). This is about declining habitat, not decreasing deer numbers. The quality of the habitat is unable to support the number of deer in the state. This is an issue that will need to be addressed through permit issuance, but not this year since we need to gauge the impact of last year's deer rule changes first.

Antlerless permits are recommended for 19 of the state's 21 WMUs in 2026. These permits may be filled during the antlerless-only October muzzleloader season, during the regular season, or during the December muzzleloader season. The Department recommends that a total of 12,050 antlerless permits be issued (49 percent fewer than the 23,400 approved for distribution in 2025). A decrease in antlerless permits is recommended in all WMUs due to the expected increase in fill rates resulting from new hunting regulations

Nick reminded the Board members of the public meetings scheduled for May 5th and 7th. He will present the final recommendation at the May 20th meeting.

Board members asked questions about deer density and population status, and antlerless permit issuance, in various WMUs.

Board Member Martin Van Buren moved to accept the Department's preliminary antlerless deer harvest recommendations. Board Member Bob Patterson seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the motion (10-0).

Other business:

Unapproved

Ryan Kilborn asked about vacant Board seats and John Austin reported that the Department has not heard updates on filling those vacancies.

John Austin reported on the successful turkey reintroduction event that took place on April 18th in Pawlet.

Commissioner's Update

N/A

Motion To Adjourn:

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 6:07 pm.

Unapproved

2026
Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

Summary of Key Points

- The effects of new hunting regulations on antlerless harvests is a key component of this recommendation. It aims to demonstrate our continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest by maintaining antlerless harvests at or below levels achieved in recent years.

- Due to uncertainty around the level of impact these changes will have, relatively substantial increases in archery and youth/novice antlerless harvests and antlerless permit success rates have been incorporated in this recommendation. As a result, antlerless harvest targets may not be achieved in many areas.

- Antlerless harvests can be adjusted as needed in future years once the impact of the new regulations is understood and harvests are more predictable.

- The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2026 was near or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, only minor changes in deer numbers are expected.

- Yearling antler beam diameters, fawn weights, and other physical condition metrics continue to be below optimal levels in many areas, indicating that deer numbers have exceeded the level their habitat can support long-term.

- The recommended permit allocations are expected to result in the harvest of 3,041 antlerless deer during the October muzzleloader season, regular season, and December muzzleloader season. This would result in an estimated total antlerless harvest from all seasons of approximately 7,598 antlerless deer.

Executive Summary

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department estimates there will be approximately 138,000 white-tailed deer on the Vermont landscape prior to the start of the 2026 deer hunting seasons. This represents a decrease of five percent from the retrospective 2025 pre-hunt estimate. The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2026 was near or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, only minor changes in deer numbers are expected.

For deer to be healthy and productive, deer populations must be kept below the carrying capacity of the habitat through the regulated harvest of antlerless deer. Biological information collected annually by the Department, including reproductive data, fawn and yearling body weights, and yearling antler size, indicate that deer populations have exceeded the level the habitat can support long-term in some parts of Vermont. Deer populations must be reduced or maintained below the limits of their habitat or physical condition will continue to decline, habitat damage will increase, and populations will become unstable and susceptible to substantial winter mortality.

Deer densities, habitat conditions, and winter severity can vary substantially from one part of Vermont to another. Additionally, these factors and the effects of historical deer densities have resulted in deer in some regions being in better physical condition than others. This results in variable deer population dynamics across the state; therefore, deer management prescriptions are made at the WMU level rather than statewide. Harvest management strategies that account for regional differences in deer density are essential to the health and proper management of Vermont's deer herd.

This recommendation aims to maintain antlerless harvests at previous levels while incorporating the uncertain effects of new deer hunting regulations. To account for this uncertainty and demonstrate a continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest, the Department has assumed relatively substantial impacts which may not be achieved. Antlerless harvests can be adjusted as needed in future years once the impact of the new regulations is understood and harvests are more predictable.

The Department recommends the harvest of 7,598 antlerless deer during the 2026 hunting seasons. The Department recommends that antlerless harvest be authorized during the archery and youth/novice seasons in all WMUs. After accounting for expected archery and youth/novice season harvests, the Department recommends that 3,041 antlerless deer be harvested, by permit, during the regular and muzzleloader seasons. Achieving this harvest, given expected increases in permit fill rates, requires the issuance of 12,050 WMU-specific antlerless permits distributed among 19 of Vermont's 21 WMUs. This is 49 percent fewer permits than the 23,400 allotted in 2025.

Three public hearings were held on March 16, 18, and 19, 2026 to gather comments on the deer herd. Approximately 52 members of the public participated in these hearings. Two additional public hearings will be held May 5 and 7, 2026.

2026 Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Pursuant to 10 V.S.A. §§4081, 4082, 4084 and 4742a, and 10 V.S.A. Appendix §37, hereafter is the Department's 2026 antlerless deer harvest recommendation. Based on population estimates, a harvest of 7,598 antlerless deer is recommended during the 2026 hunting seasons. This includes 4,557 antlerless deer harvested during the archery, youth, and novice seasons, and 3,041 antlerless deer harvested, by permit, during the regular season and the October and December muzzleloader seasons. Adult females are typically 84 percent of the total antlerless deer harvest, so harvesting this number of antlerless deer would yield approximately 6,346 adult does.

Population Status

The buck harvest during the 2025 deer hunting seasons was one percent more than the previous 3-year average (see *2025 Vermont White-tailed Deer Harvest Report* for more information). Nine WMUs had retrospective population estimates in 2025 that exceeded their respective population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* by more than two deer per square mile. The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2025 was close to or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, small declines in deer numbers are expected in some northern and central WMUs, with little change expected in most other areas.

Winter Severity 2026

The Department has long recognized the influence that winter weather can have on Vermont's deer herd and has been collecting winter severity data since 1970. Between December 1 and April 15, one winter severity index (WSI) point is tallied for each day with at least 18 inches of snow on the ground, and one point for each day the temperature reaches 0°F or below. These data have proven useful to describe deer population dynamics; however, how well deer survive winter depends largely on three factors: 1) body condition of deer as winter begins, 2) availability of quality deer wintering habitats, and 3) the timing of snow in the fall and snowmelt in spring. Snow cover that remains late into spring can cause significant negative impacts by delaying spring green up and, consequently, reducing fawn survival.

The winter of 2025 was near, or slightly above, normal in most areas, with a state-wide average WSI of 46 points (**Figure 1**). This was slightly above the 30-year median of 36 and above the 10-year median of 30. As is typically the case, winter severity varied considerably among WMUs, ranging from 21 in WMU K to 73 in WMU P (**Figure 2**). The pattern of variation in WSI was consistent with long term averages. Importantly, snow depths were minimal across most of the state until mid-January. Conditions were relatively severe from late January to early March, with deep snow confining deer to areas of quality winter cover. However, the snow melted quickly, and snow-free conditions arrived earlier than normal in most areas. The length of time deer are confined to wintering areas is perhaps the most important factor affecting survival rates. Since severe conditions only lasted for about 6 weeks, overwinter survival is expected to be relatively good.

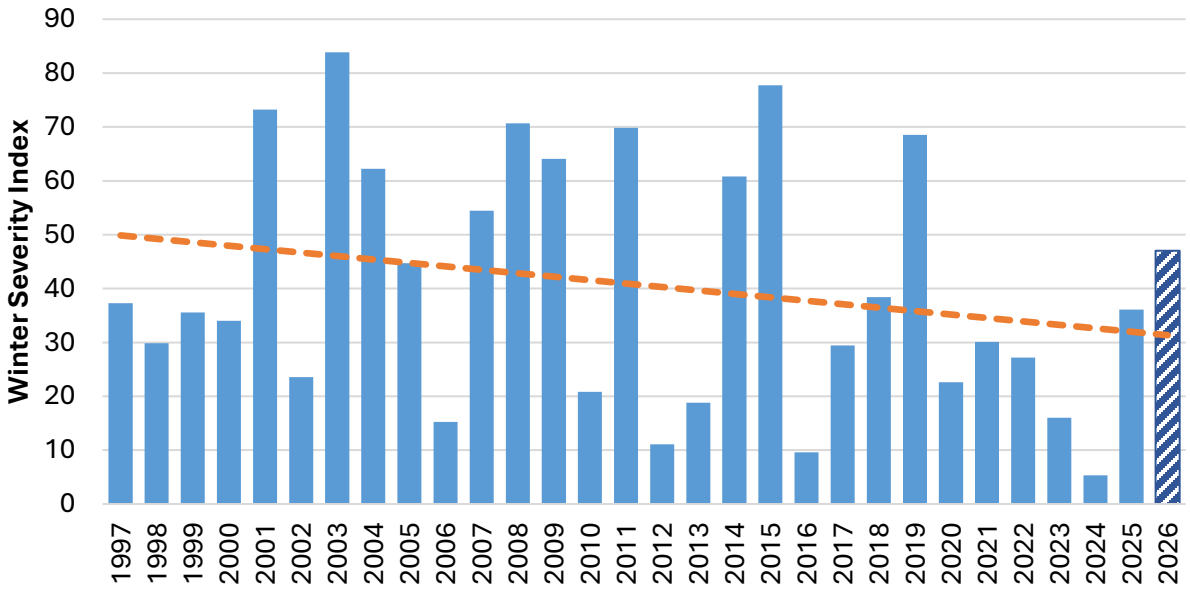


Figure 1. Statewide winter severity index (WSI), 1997–2026. The dashed line shows the 30-year trend.

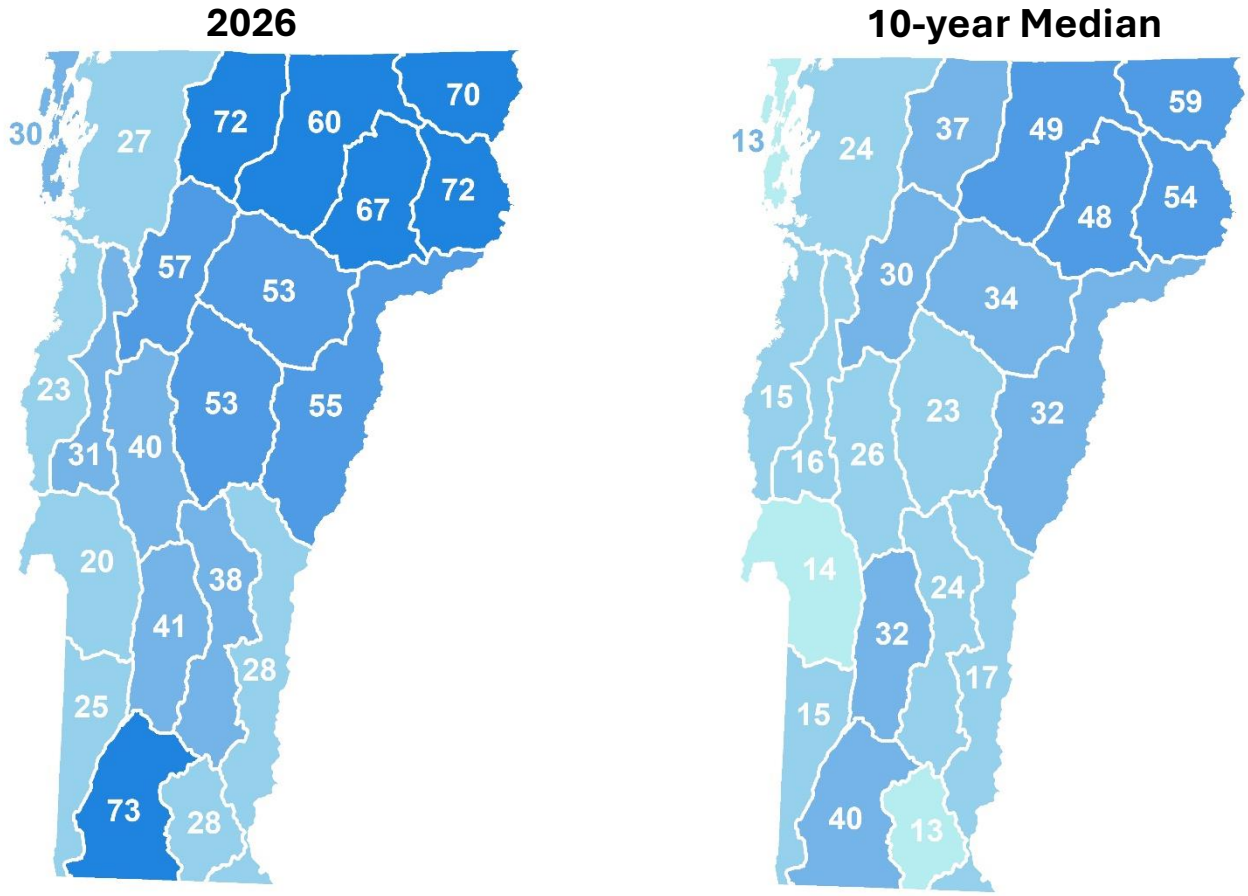


Figure 2. Winter severity index by Wildlife Management Unit in 2026 and the 10-year median.

Population Health

Biological information collected annually by the Department, including reproductive data, fawn and yearling body weights, and yearling antler size, indicate that deer populations have exceeded the level the habitat can support long-term in some parts of Vermont (**Figure 3**, see **Appendix A** for individual WMU information). In many cases, this does not appear to be a new problem. Instead, this appears to be a subtle but chronic problem that may have occurred for decades in some areas. Declines in measures like yearling antler beam diameter have been slow (**Figure 3**); therefore, it takes many years of data to separate the trend from normal annual variation.

Health concerns are evident in many parts of Vermont (see **Appendix A** for more detail). In most cases, the Department believes the primary driver of declines in physical condition was not a recent increase in deer abundance, but rather a slow, steady decline in the quality of deer habitat. Deer abundance has been relatively stable during the past 30 years. However, Vermont's forests are aging and the amount of young forest (less than 20 years old), which provides critical forage for deer, is declining. Other factors, including hunter access to private land, proliferation of invasive plants, and climate change are also important, and make the problem and any solutions more complex. The simple result, however, is that the habitat cannot support the number of deer it used to, and carrying capacity may continue to decline in some areas as forests get older. Deer populations must be reduced below the limits of their habitat or physical condition will continue to decline, habitat damage will increase, and populations will become unstable and more susceptible to disease and substantial winter mortality.

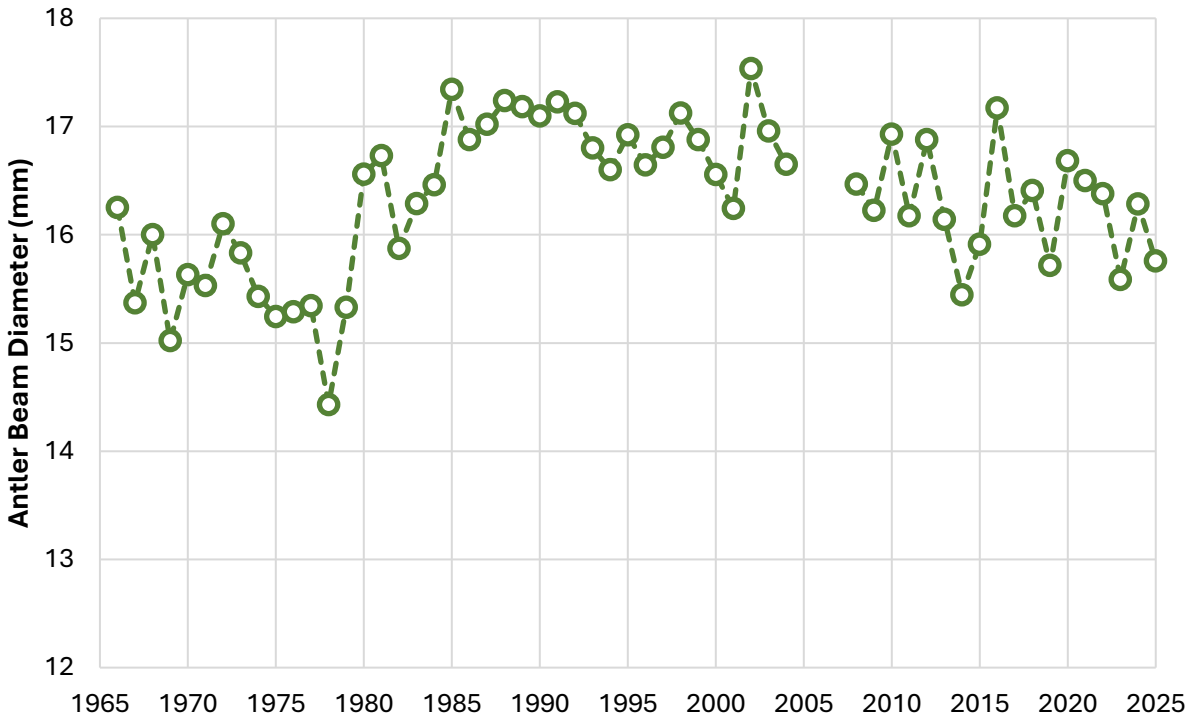


Figure 3. Antler beam diameter of yearling bucks in Vermont, 1965–2025. Data are from deer examined at biological check stations.

Population Projections and Management Objectives

Antlerless deer harvests in 2025 were close to objectives in most WMUs. Considering 2025 retrospective population estimates, 2025 antlerless harvests, and 2026 winter severity, little change in deer numbers is expected in most areas, with small declines possible in northern and east-central WMUs. Importantly, deer densities remain above population objectives in several WMUs, and recent management efforts have not been sufficient to reduce deer numbers. To provide healthy habitats and thereby keep deer healthy and productive, deer densities must be kept at established objectives (**Figure 8**). Maintaining a healthy deer herd is the best way to mitigate the potential effects of winter weather and provide a stable population over the long term.

Based on analysis of herd demographic data, hunter effort, deer sighting rates (**Figure 4**), buck harvests (**Figure 5**), antlerless deer harvests, and winter severity data (**Figure 2**), the Department expects deer numbers to decline slightly in northern and east-central WMUs and remain relatively stable in most other WMUs (**Figures 6 and 7**). Seven WMUs will have deer densities that exceed their respective population objectives by more than 2 deer per square mile (**Figures 8 and 9**), and the Department's intent is to reduce deer densities in those areas. Other WMUs will have deer densities that are within two deer per square mile of their population objective, and the intent is to stabilize those populations at or near their current level.

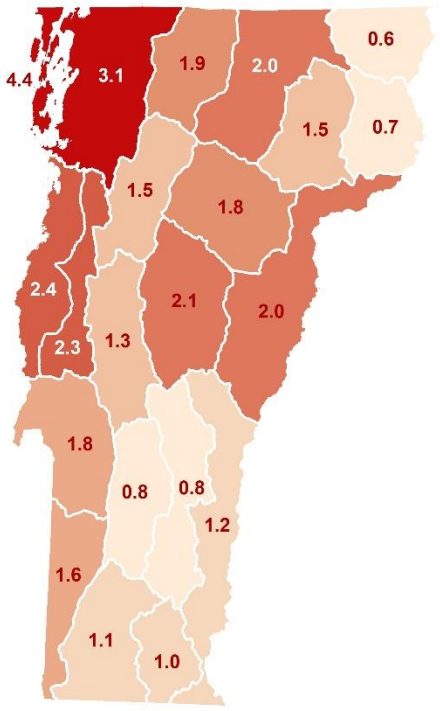


Figure 4. Deer seen per 10 hours of hunting by regular season deer hunters, 2023–2025.

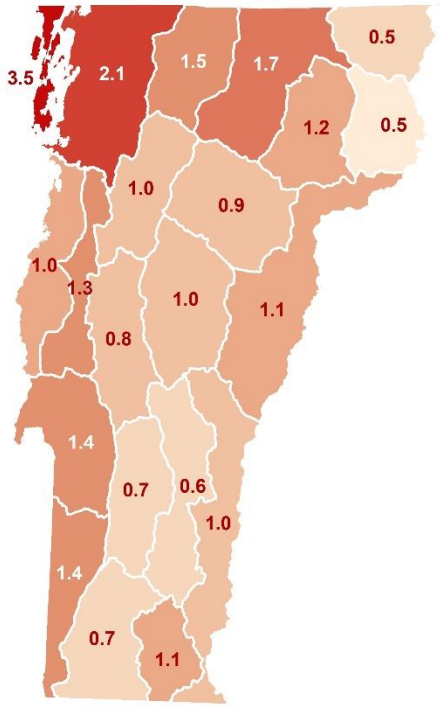


Figure 5. Adult buck harvest per square mile during the 2025 deer seasons. Buck harvest rate is affected by antler restrictions in some WMUs.

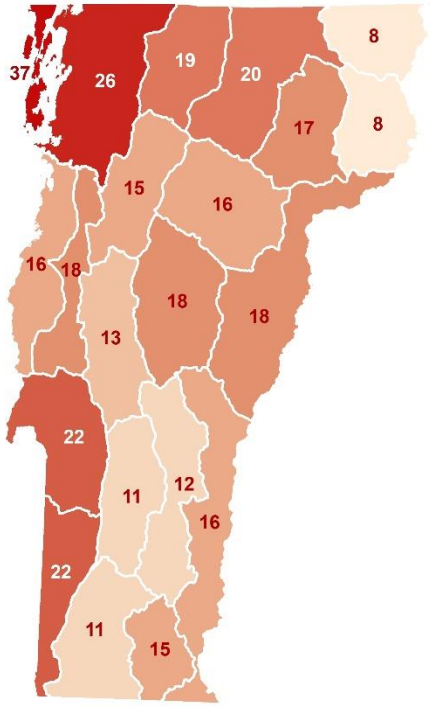


Figure 6. 2025 estimated deer density (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

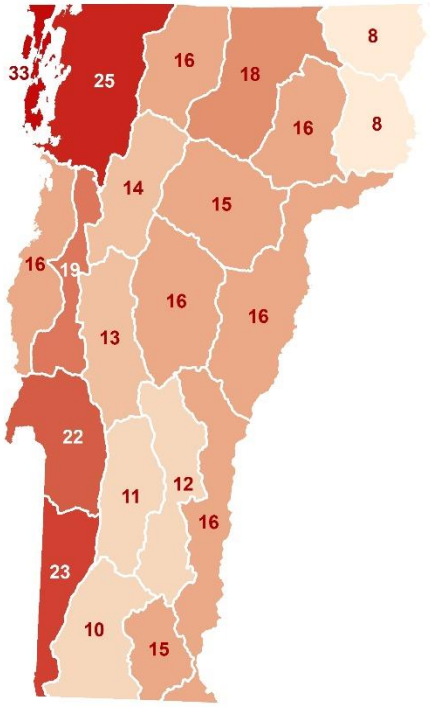


Figure 7. 2026 predicted deer density (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

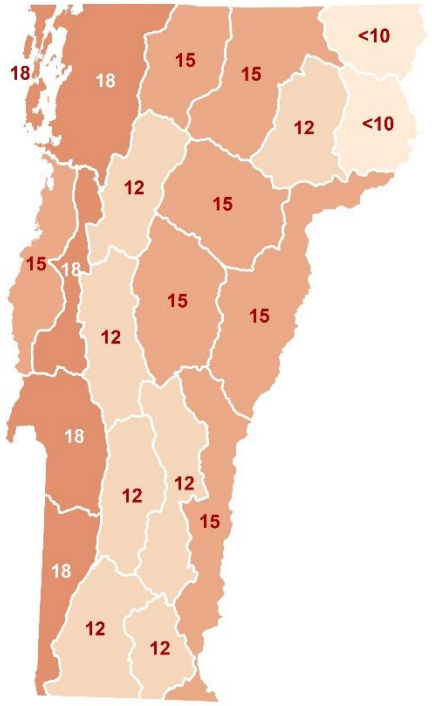


Figure 8. Deer density objectives (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

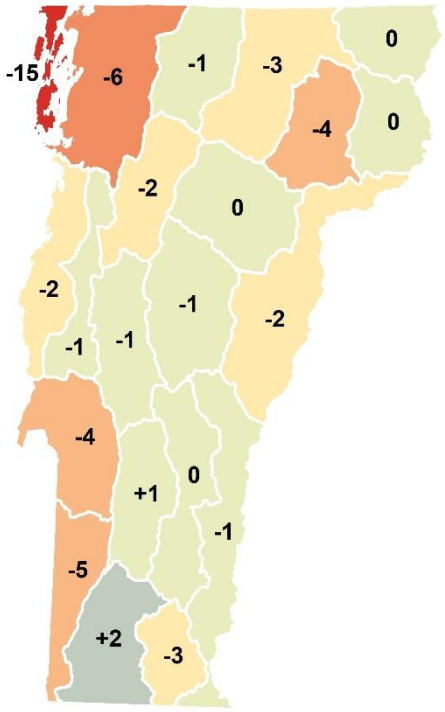


Figure 9. Desired change in deer density, by WMU, to reach density objectives.

Effects of New Hunting Regulations

Several new or updated deer hunting regulations will take effect in 2026 and are expected to impact antlerless deer harvests. To account for these changes and their uncertain impact on antlerless harvests, the following adjustments have been made to this recommendation. These changes in antlerless harvest are plausible, but it is more likely that antlerless harvests will be lower than what is recommended. The Department is intentionally taking a conservative approach to demonstrate our continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest under these new regulations. If antlerless harvests need to be increased in the future, these regulations allow for that.

To account for the addition of Expanded Archery Zones and the extension of archery season through the regular season, the expected archery antlerless harvest has been increased by 10 percent. That much increase is unlikely, but this also creates a buffer in the overall antlerless harvest to allow for typical annual variation and/or higher harvest related to the novelty of the new regulations.

To account for changing the timing of the youth/novice weekend, the expected youth/novice antlerless harvest has been increased by 20 percent. This is equivalent to the observed decline in the youth weekend harvest after the season was moved two weeks earlier in 2020.

Lastly, to account for antlerless permits being used during the regular season and 5 days being added to the December muzzleloader season, the expected fill rate on antlerless permits has been increased by 10 percent in each WMU. This results in a statewide average fill rate of 25%, which is higher than antlerless permit fill rates observed in most other northeastern states. Expected WMU-specific fill rates range from 22% to 30% (**Table 3**).

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

Archery Season

The Department recommends that all WMUs be open to the taking of antlerless deer during the 2026 archery season. Antlerless harvest in archery season is a key component in deer population management in Vermont. Archery hunters tend to focus their hunting effort and harvest in areas with higher deer numbers. As a result, archery antlerless harvest has little or no impact in areas with fewer deer. Importantly, archery harvest allows hunters to better regulate local deer herds in areas with high deer densities, particularly areas where firearm hunting is limited.

Youth and Novice Season

The Department is strongly committed to recruiting new hunters into Vermont's deer hunting heritage. Based on this commitment and the importance of harvesting an adequate number of female deer each year, the Department recommends that youth and novice season hunters be allowed to take any deer in all WMUs. This would include antlerless deer or any buck, regardless of antler characteristics. This will provide these hunters with additional opportunity to harvest a deer and the opportunity to help properly manage Vermont's deer herd. It is critical that spike-antlered bucks be taken during this season so the Department can obtain important biological information (e.g., weight, antler measurements) from this portion of the yearling buck population. This is the primary reason Department biologists examine deer during this season each year. This will have no impact on buck age structure management, as the buck harvest during this season is typically about four percent of the overall buck harvest.

Antlerless Permits

Antlerless permits are recommended for 19 of the state's 21 WMUs in 2026. These permits may be filled during the antlerless-only October muzzleloader season, during the regular season, or during the December muzzleloader season. The Department recommends that a total of 12,050 antlerless permits be issued (49 percent fewer than the 23,400 approved for distribution in 2025). A decrease in antlerless permits is recommended in all WMUs due to the expected increase in fill rates resulting from new hunting regulations (**Figure 10**).

These recommendations are intended to move populations toward WMU-specific deer density and physical condition objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* (see **Appendix A** for additional detail). This permit allocation is expected to result in the harvest of an additional 3,041 antlerless deer above those harvested during the archery and youth/novice seasons.

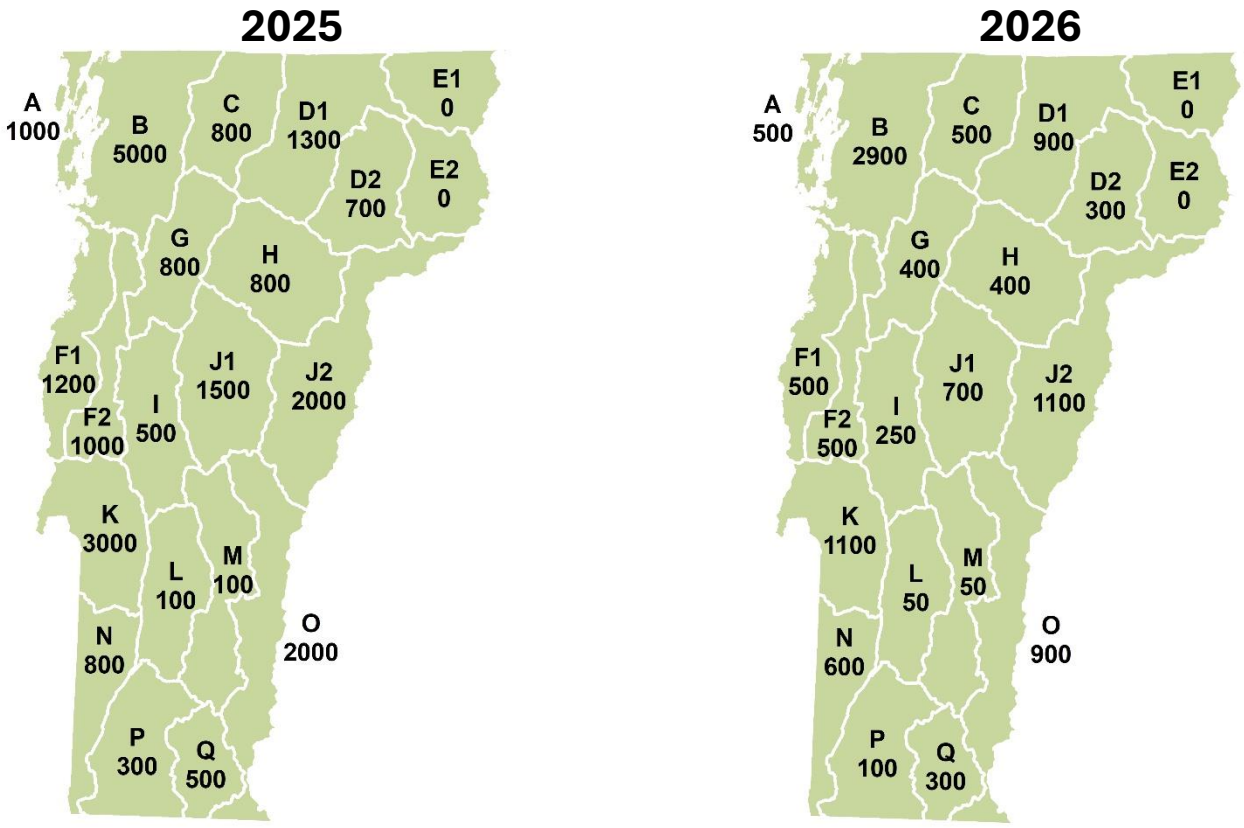


Figure 10. Antlerless permit allocations by wildlife management unit for 2025 and 2026 (proposed).

Public Comments

Three public hearings were held on March 16, 18, and 19, 2026 to gather comments on the deer herd. Approximately 52 members of the public participated in these hearings. Two additional public hearings will be held on May 5 and 7, 2026.

Table 1. Estimated deer densities and predicted antlerless deer harvests during the 2026 deer hunting seasons, by wildlife management unit.

	Deer per mi²			Antlerless Permits			Other Antlerless					
WMU	Objective	2025	2026	Permits	Fill Rate	Harvest	Archery	Youth/ Novice	2026 Total Antlerless	% of Doe Population Harvested	Doe Harvest per Mi²	Doe Harvest per 100 Bucks[a]
A	18	37	33	500	25%	125	154	19	297	22%	3.54	117
B	18	26	24	2,900	26%	763	728	146	1638	19%	2.22	116
C	15	19	16	500	30%	152	251	41	444	12%	0.96	73
D1	15	20	18	900	29%	258	345	109	711	12%	1.03	72
D2	12	17	16	300	30%	89	155	38	281	8%	0.60	57
E1	<10	8	8	0	-	0	27	7	34	2%	0.09	19
E2	<10	8	8	0	-	0	28	7	36	2%	0.09	22
F1	15	16	16	500	24%	121	136	27	284	9%	0.75	73
F2	18	18	19	500	24%	120	111	27	257	9%	0.80	69
G	12	15	14	400	23%	192	140	13	246	7%	0.53	56
H	15	16	15	400	25%	101	294	42	438	9%	0.71	76
I	12	13	13	250	25%	62	110	8	181	5%	0.36	49
J1	15	18	16	700	25%	173	239	43	455	9%	0.72	75
J2	15	18	16	1,100	26%	290	369	75	734	10%	0.87	88
K	18	22	22	1,100	23%	249	185	49	482	8%	0.92	64
L	12	11	11	50	26%	13	58	14	85	3%	0.19	28
M	12	12	12	50	22%	11	40	8	59	2%	0.11	18
N	18	22	23	600	23%	136	97	34	266	6%	0.68	52
O	15	16	16	900	22%	197	183	21	401	8%	0.62	65
P	12	11	10	100	24%	24	87	10	120	4%	0.22	37
Q	12	15	15	300	22%	65	77	6	148	7%	0.54	52
STATE				**12,050**	**25%**	**3,041**	**3,813**	**743**	**7,598**			

[a] *In WMUs with an antler restriction, which reduces buck harvest, this number will be higher than a comparable area with no antler restriction.*

Table 2. Muzzleloader antlerless permit history by WMU, 2018–2025, and recommended permit allocation for 2026. Numbers in parentheses are the number of permits actually distributed.

WMU	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	1100 (720)	1100 (939)	1000	500	800	1000 (855)	1000 (650)	1000 (647)	**500**
B	5500	5500	4500	3500	4000	5000	6000 (4651)	5000 (4707)	**2900**
C	800	300	500	500	500	500	1000	800	**500**
D1	1200	500	1000	800	800	1000	1800	1300	**900**
D2	800	300	500	300	200	200	800	700	**300**
E1	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	**0**
E2	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	**0**
F1	1000 (900)	1000	1000	1300	1500 (1453)	1800 (1145)	1800 (864)	1200 (837)	**500**
F2	1300	1300	1300	1000	1000	1000	1300 (994)	1000	**500**
G	300	300	700	700	700	700	1000	800	**400**
H	1100	400	300	300	300	500	1000	800	**400**
I	300	300	500	500	500	500	500	500	**250**
J1	1200	800	1500	1200	800	1000	1500	1500	**700**
J2	2500	2000	2000	1800	1500	1500	2000	2000	**1100**
K	4000 (2446)	4000 (2440)	3000	3000 (2795)	2500	3000 (2222)	3000 (2007)	3000 (2064)	**1100**
L	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	100	**50**
M	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	100	**50**
N	2000 (1487)	2000 (1462)	2000	1800 (1642)	1500	1500 (1378)	1500 (1163)	800	**600**
O	2600 (2300)	2000	2000	1500	1500	1500	2300 (2128)	2000	**900**
P	0	0	100	100	100	100	300	300	**100**
Q	700 (604)	600	500	600	600	600	700 (642)	500	**300**
STATE	**27000** (24057)	**23000** (20741)	**23000**	**20000** (19637)	**19400** (19353)	**22000** (20300)	**28300** (23799)	**23400** (21455)	**12050**

Table 3. Antlerless permit fill rate by WMU, 2018–2025, and expected fill rate for 2026.

WMU	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	19%	13%	17%	14%	11%	13%	13%	18%	**25%**
B	19%	14%	18%	15%	14%	14%	15%	19%	**26%**
C	33%	24%	23%	20%	20%	21%	18%	20%	**30%**
D1	29%	24%	23%	19%	18%	22%	19%	18%	**29%**
D2	21%	21%	20%	17%	18%	22%	18%	21%	**30%**
E1							9%		
E2							16%		
F1	16%	13%	17%	13%	12%	12%	12%	18%	**24%**
F2	19%	12%	17%	11%	10%	11%	12%	18%	**24%**
G	28%	14%	17%	12%	12%	13%	12%	14%	**23%**
H	20%	18%	21%	18%	16%	18%	16%	14%	**25%**
I	24%	15%	19%	14%	10%	13%	13%	15%	**25%**
J1	26%	19%	18%	14%	17%	14%	16%	14%	**25%**
J2	23%	17%	21%	16%	18%	17%	17%	16%	**26%**
K	18%	14%	16%	11%	12%	10%	12%	15%	**23%**
L	31%	15%	17%	13%	9%	15%	13%	16%	**26%**
M	24%	13%	17%	13%	17%	12%	14%	12%	**22%**
N	18%	11%	13%	11%	11%	9%	12%	13%	**23%**
O	20%	11%	13%	13%	16%	12%	13%	12%	**22%**
P			17%	13%	14%	14%	14%	15%	**24%**
Q	18%	10%	13%	9%	11%	8%	11%	13%	**22%**
STATE	**21%**	**14%**	**17%**	**14%**	**14%**	**13%**	**15%**	**16%**	**25%**

Appendix A: Population Status by WMU

Deer densities, habitat conditions, and winter severity can vary substantially from one part of Vermont to another. Additionally, these factors and the effects of historical deer densities have resulted in deer in some regions being in better physical condition than others. This results in variable deer population dynamics across the state; therefore, deer management prescriptions are made at the WMU level rather than statewide.

The Department is aware that deer densities (and other factors) vary within each WMU, sometimes substantially. Unfortunately, managing deer at a smaller scale than a WMU is not currently feasible given the structure of hunting regulations and the Department's ability to collect enough data. However, hunters generally do a good job of targeting areas of higher deer density within a WMU if they have sufficient access.

Description of data provided for each WMU

Area of deer habitat: Deer habitat is all land that is not developed.

Physical Condition of Deer: Antler beam diameter and body weights are from deer examined by biologists at youth/novice weekend check stations. Adult birth rate (fetuses per doe) is from examinations of incidentally killed deer during February-May. All metrics show the average for the most recent five years of data. Sample size is shown in parentheses. Minimum acceptable levels for each metric, established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, are also shown.

Deer Density: Estimated pre-hunt deer density over the past 10 years based on retrospective population modelling and the projected density in fall 2026. The density objective established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* is represented by a dashed green line in the figure. The shaded green area shows ±2 deer per square mile – a range that accounts for typical year-to-year variation in deer abundance and uncertainty around density estimates.

Red Numbers: Numbers are red when a metric does not meet the objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Harvest: The total buck and antlerless deer harvests during all seasons during the past 10 years. The proposed antlerless harvest for 2026 is shown by the dotted red line.

Harvest per 100 Adult Bucks: The number of antlerless deer and adult does harvested for every 100 adult bucks harvested over the previous 3 years. This provides a useful indicator of antlerless harvest rate.

Harvest Age Composition: The age composition of the adult buck and doe harvests over the previous 3 years. Ages are from cementum annuli analysis. Sample size is shown at the bottom, in parentheses. The proportion of harvested deer in older age classes is a useful indicator of harvest rate. Generally, when more than 40% of does are 4 ½-plus years old, it suggests the population may be under-harvested.

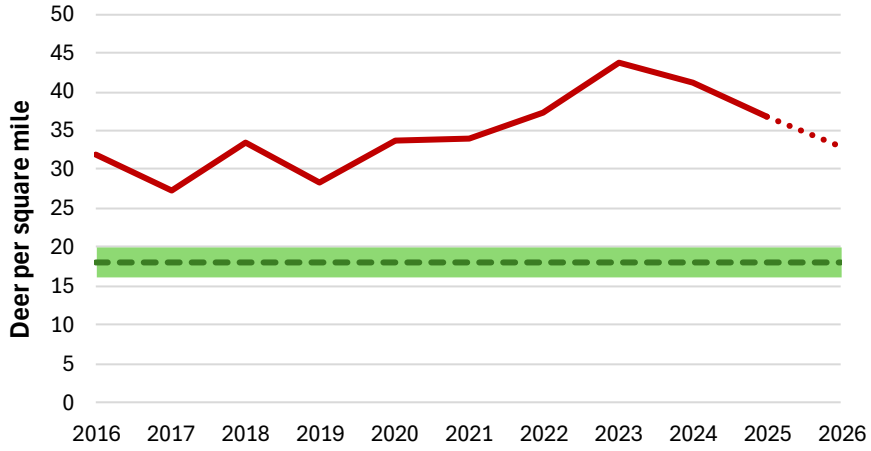


Wildlife Management Unit A

71 *mi² of deer habitat – 46% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(13)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**121.5** *(21)*	118
Fawn Weight	**57.9** *(10)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.25** *(4)*	1.60

Deer Density



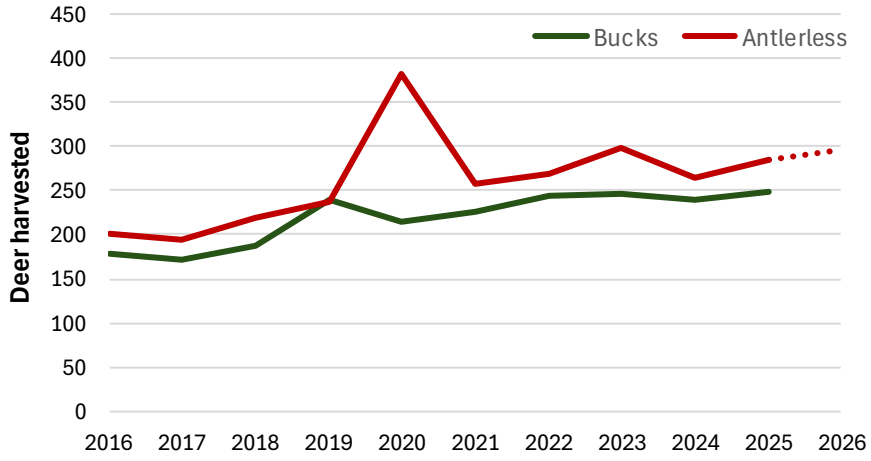
2026 Estimate

33 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
116	94

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	26%	40%
2.5	55%	13%
3.5	16%	27%
4.5+	3%	20%
no. deer aged	*(143)*	*(15)*

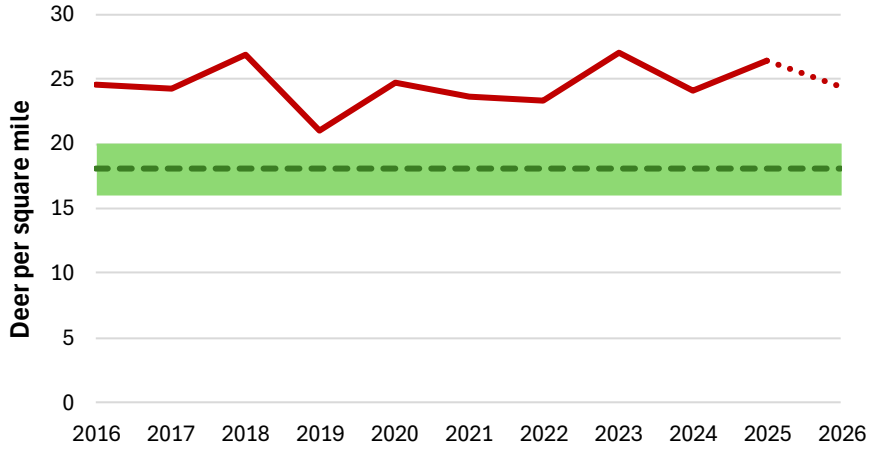


Wildlife Management Unit B

616 *mi² of deer habitat – 66% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.8** *(154)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**116.3** *(165)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.1** *(126)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.93** *(15)*	1.60

Deer Density



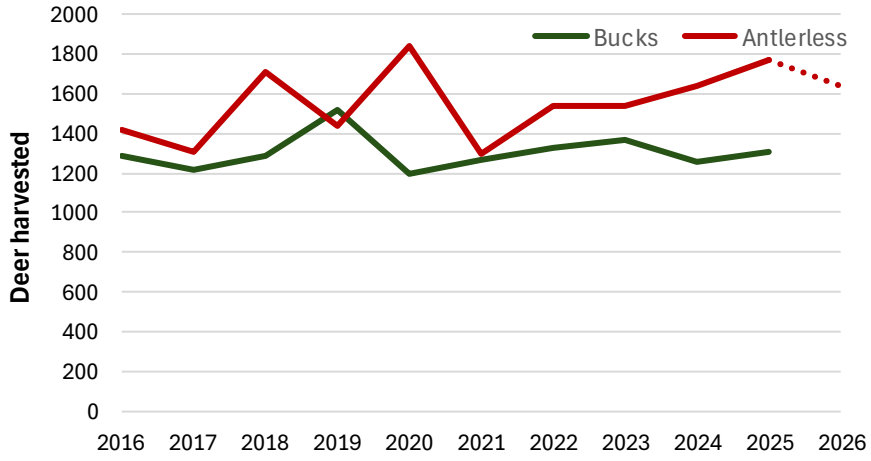
2026 Estimate

24 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
126	102

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	17%	22%
2.5	61%	17%
3.5	16%	19%
4.5+	6%	41%
no. deer aged	*(781)*	*(138)*

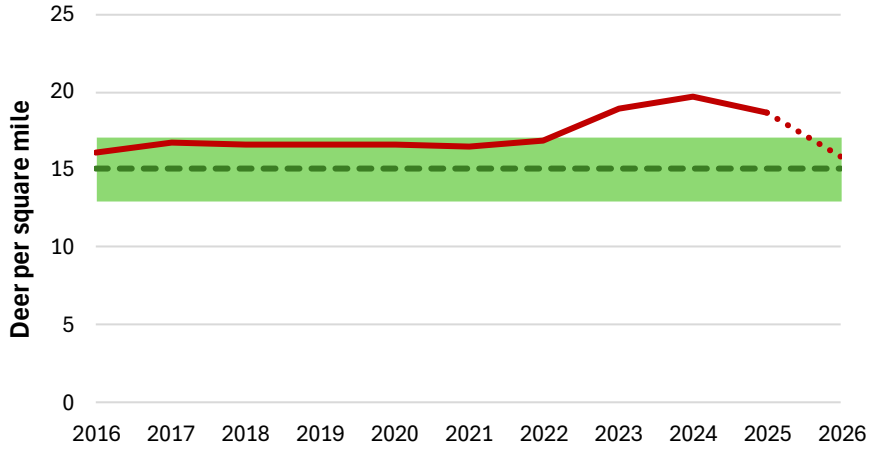


Wildlife Management Unit C

386 *mi² of deer habitat – 90% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.6** *(42)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**113.0** *(45)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.2** *(32)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.29** *(7)*	1.60

Deer Density



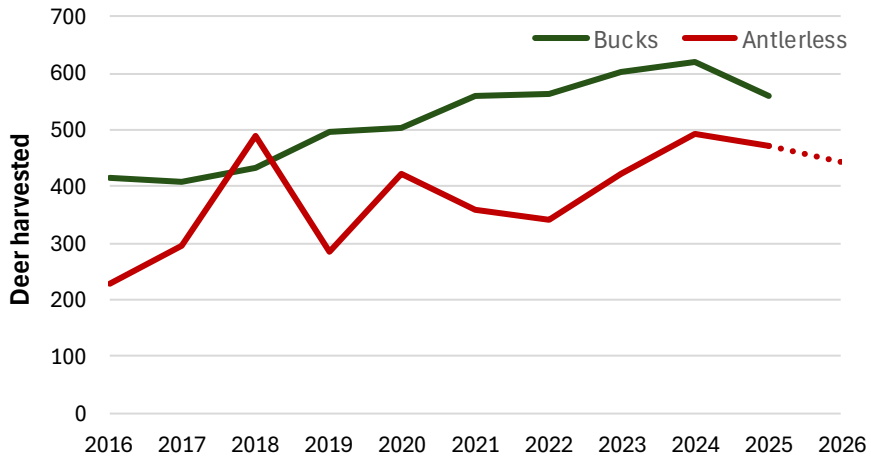
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
78	63

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	39%	22%
2.5	40%	27%
3.5	14%	9%
4.5+	8%	42%
no. deer aged	*(511)*	*(45)*

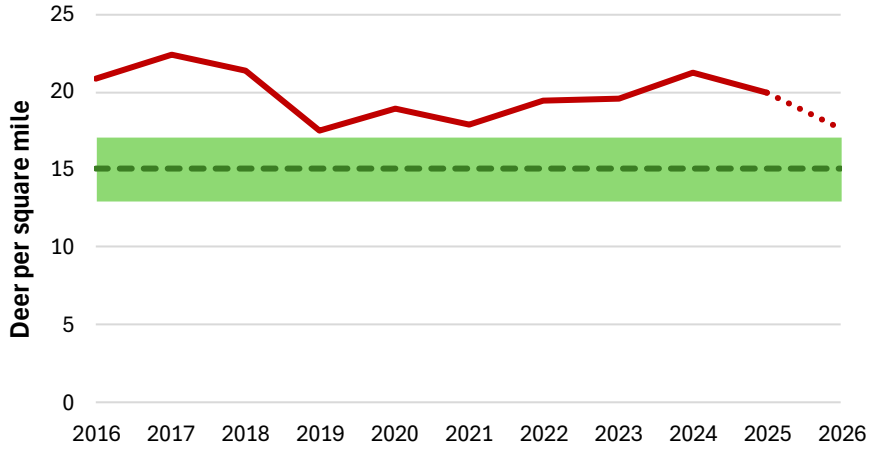


Wildlife Management Unit D1

570 *mi² of deer habitat – 78% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(80)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**117.2** *(82)*	118
Fawn Weight	**60.2** *(49)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.68** *(19)*	1.60

Deer Density



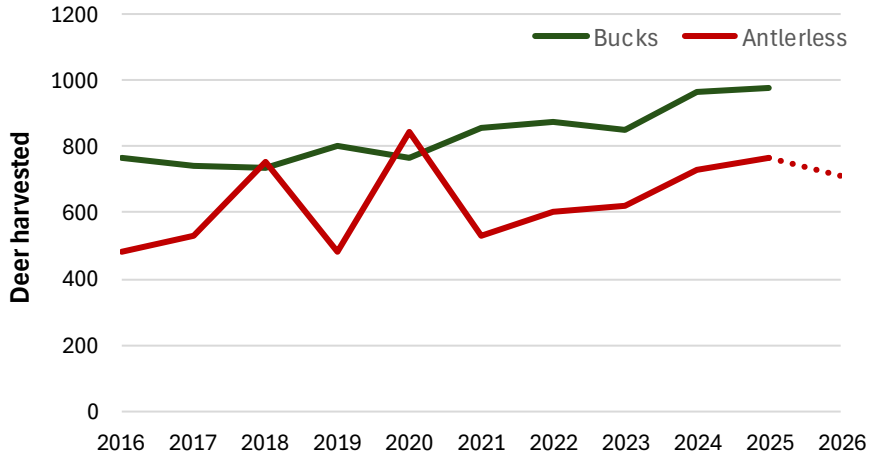
2026 Estimate

18 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
76	64

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	47%	24%
2.5	38%	21%
3.5	9%	10%
4.5+	6%	45%
no. deer aged	*(695)*	*(87)*

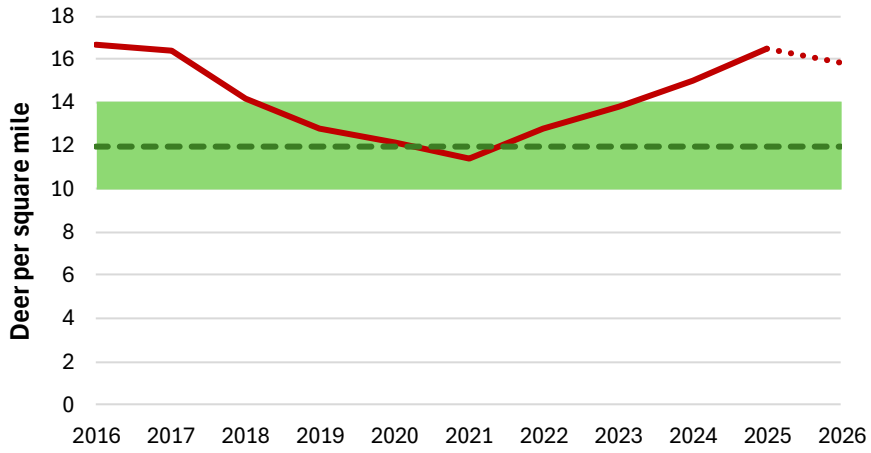


Wildlife Management Unit D2

387 *mi² of deer habitat – 89% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.3** *(23)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**116.0** *(24)*	118
Fawn Weight	**59.4** *(13)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.83** *(12)*	1.60

Deer Density



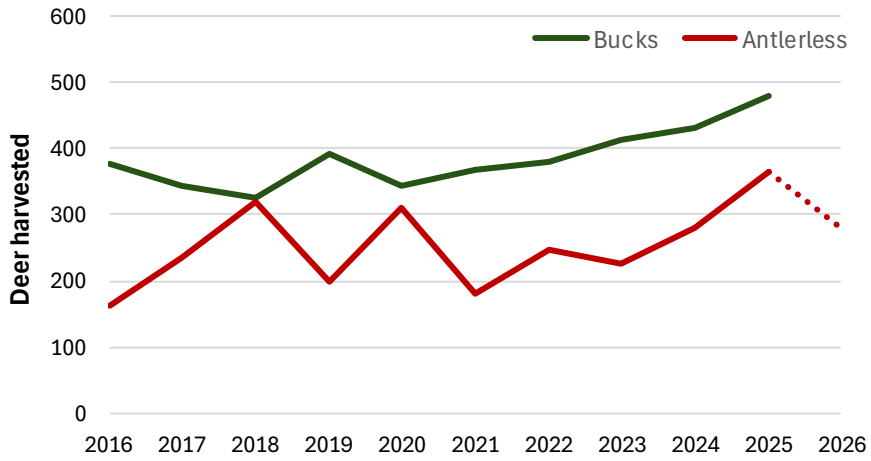
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
66	54

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	44%	24%
2.5	32%	16%
3.5	15%	14%
4.5+	8%	46%
no. deer aged	*(385)*	*(37)*

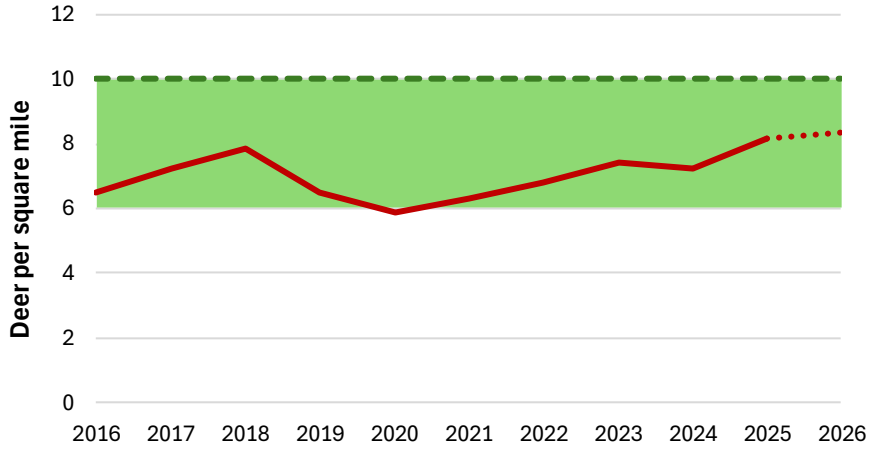


Wildlife Management Unit E1

***648** mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**20.3** *(5)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**120.8** *(6)*	118
Fawn Weight	**57.0** *(2)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.00** *(2)*	1.60

Deer Density



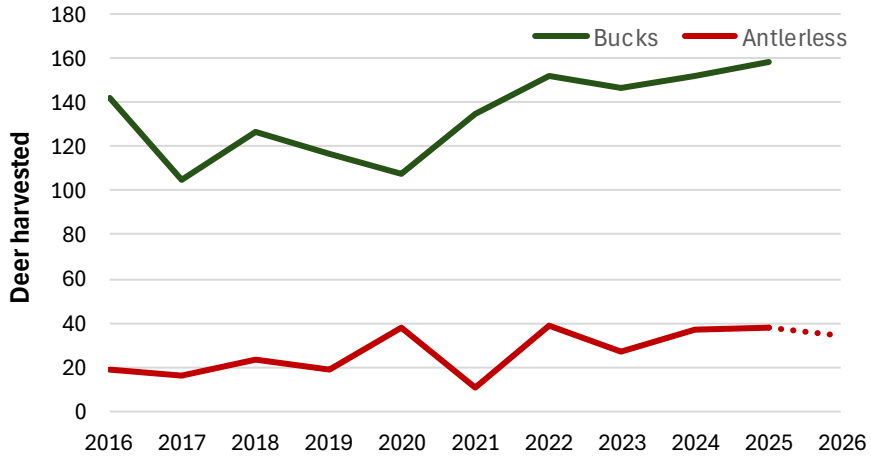
2026 Estimate

8 deer/mi2

Objective

<10

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
22	19

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	28%	10%
2.5	39%	20%
3.5	19%	0%
4.5+	13%	70%
no. deer aged	*(109)*	*(10)*

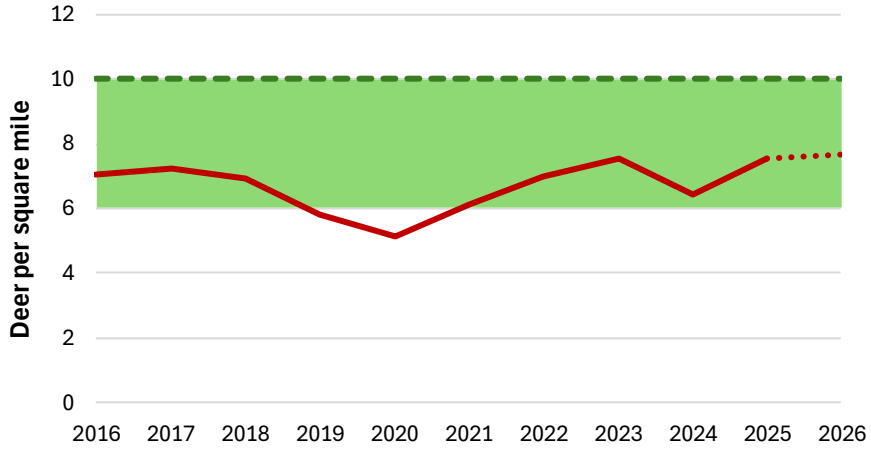


Wildlife Management Unit E2

***648** mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**19.2** *(6)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**119.6** *(8)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.8** *(3)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.00** *(2)*	1.60

Deer Density



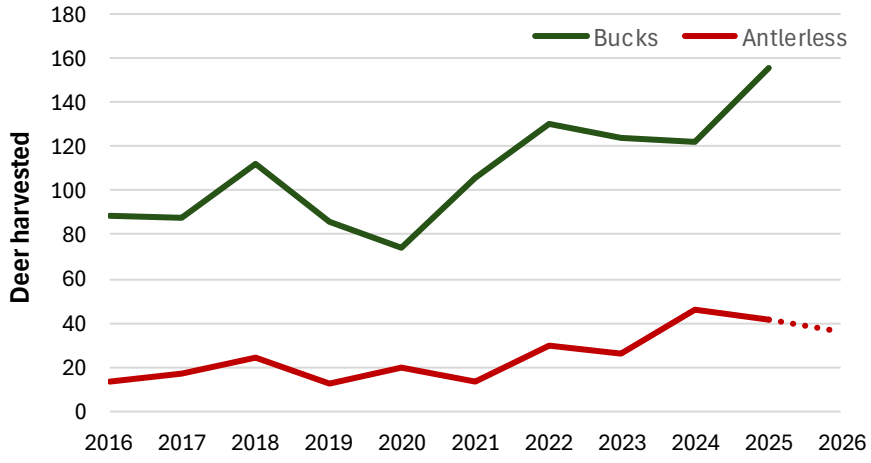
2026 Estimate

8 deer/mi2

Objective

<10

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
28	20

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	34%	67%
2.5	28%	0%
3.5	19%	0%
4.5+	20%	33%
no. deer aged	*(80)*	*(3)*

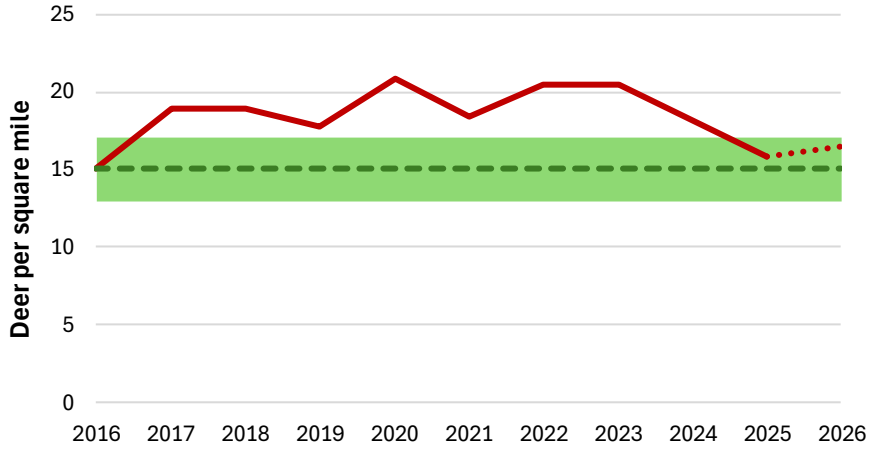


Wildlife Management Unit F1

***316** mi² of deer habitat – 33% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.1** *(29)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**119.7** *(31)*	118
Fawn Weight	**59.0** *(13)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.33** *(6)*	1.60

Deer Density



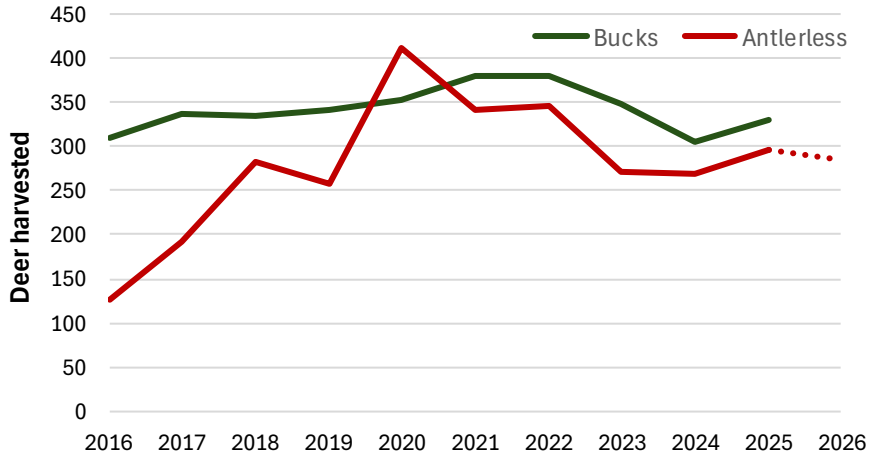
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
85	75

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	18%	24%
2.5	49%	10%
3.5	24%	41%
4.5+	8%	24%
no. deer aged	*(233)*	*(29)*

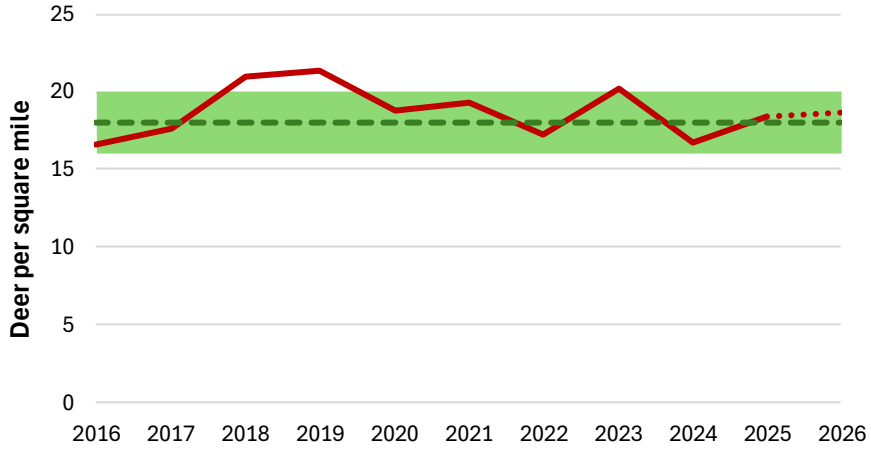


Wildlife Management Unit F2

286 *mi² of deer habitat – 57% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.6** *(22)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**117.1** *(24)*	118
Fawn Weight	**60.0** *(21)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.71** *(8)*	1.60

Deer Density



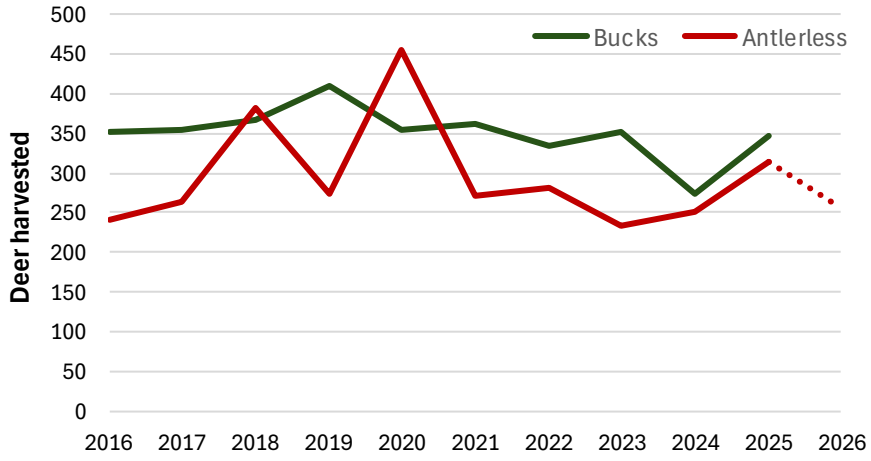
2026 Estimate

19 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
82	70

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	19%	10%
2.5	50%	7%
3.5	20%	23%
4.5+	11%	60%
no. deer aged	*(234)*	*(30)*

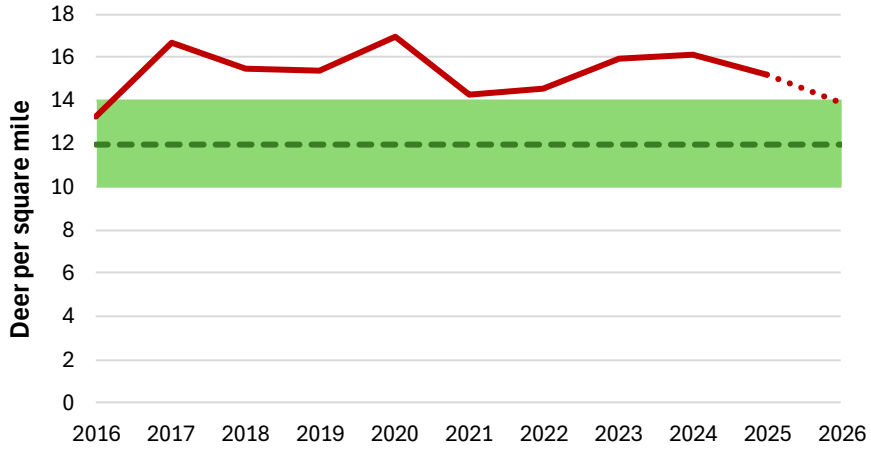


Wildlife Management Unit G

388 *mi² of deer habitat – 93% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.9** *(14)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**115.8** *(14)*	115
Fawn Weight	**60.5** *(2)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.20** *(5)*	1.60

Deer Density



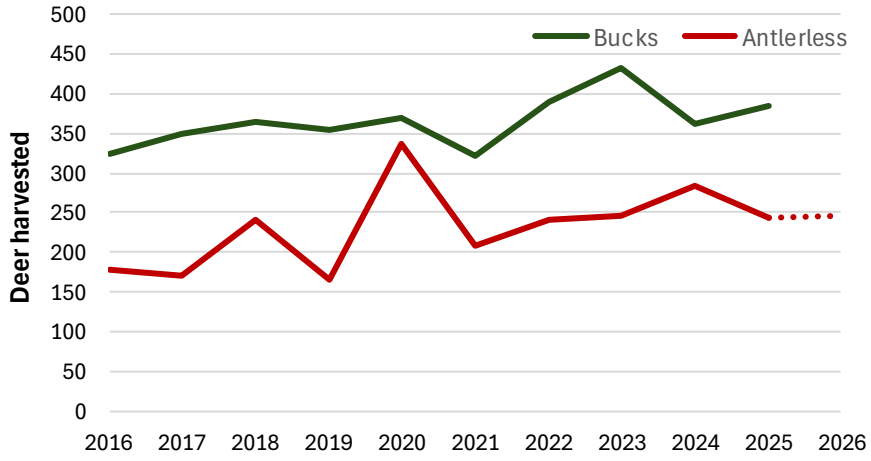
2026 Estimate

14 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
65	53

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	27%	42%
2.5	42%	8%
3.5	17%	8%
4.5+	14%	42%
no. deer aged	*(406)*	*(12)*

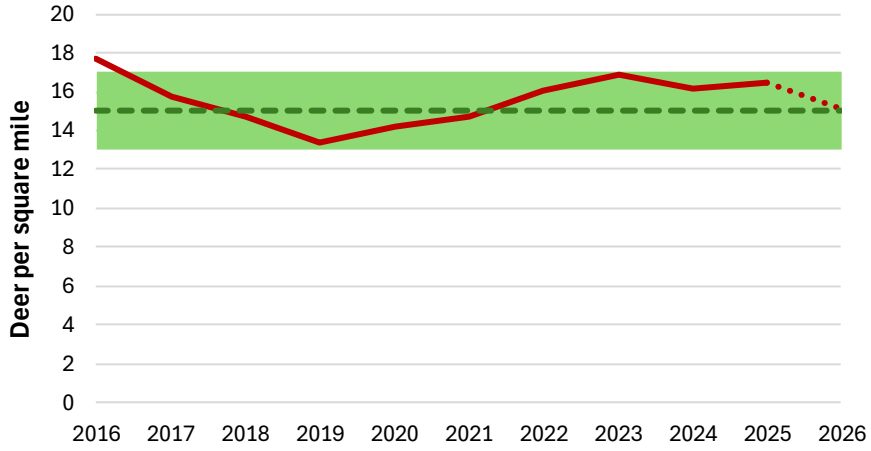


Wildlife Management Unit H

518 *mi² of deer habitat – 90% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**14.9** *(30)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**109.1** *(32)*	115
Fawn Weight	**58.8** *(23)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.21** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



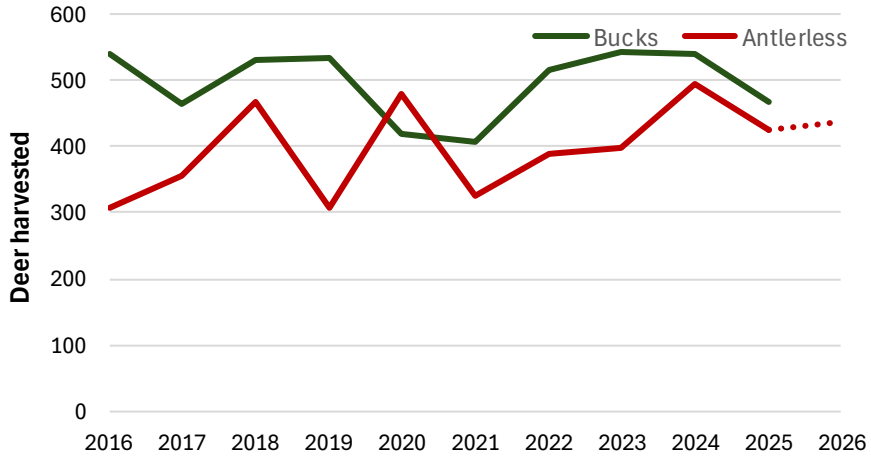
2026 Estimate

15 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
85	73

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	11%	18%
2.5	51%	23%
3.5	25%	9%
4.5+	13%	50%
no. deer aged	*(522)*	*(56)*

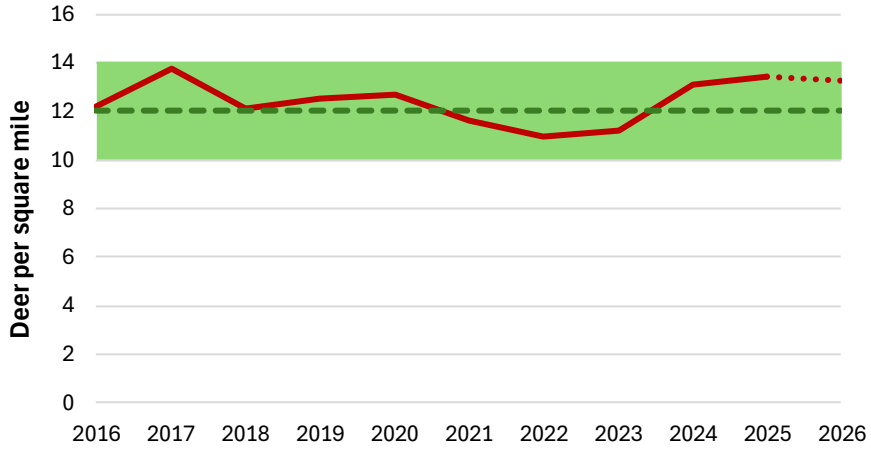


Wildlife Management Unit [redacted]

424 *mi² of deer habitat – 96% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.0** *(10)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**117.7** *(11)*	115
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(8)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.80** *(5)*	1.60

Deer Density



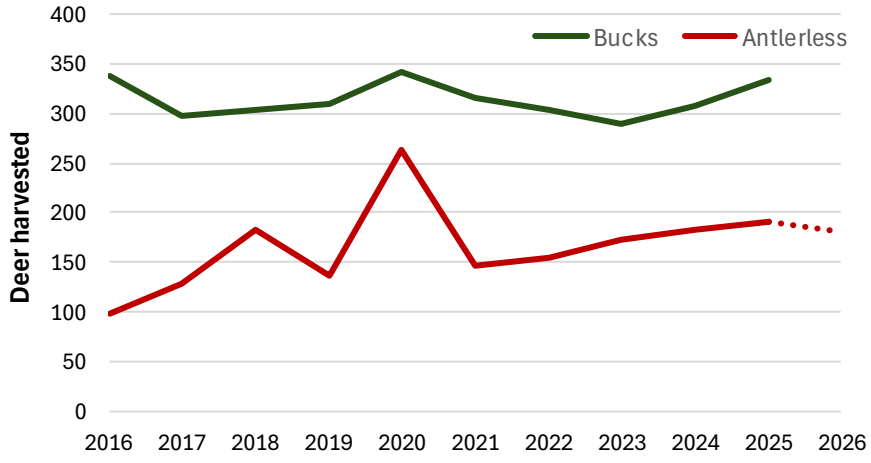
2026 Estimate

13 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
59	49

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	24%	0%
2.5	41%	0%
3.5	18%	0%
4.5+	18%	100%
no. deer aged	*(335)*	*(4)*

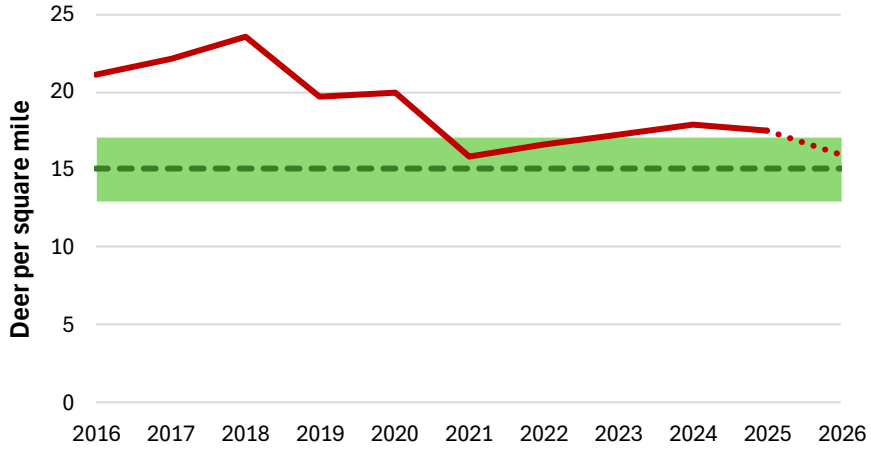


Wildlife Management Unit J1

***528** mi² of deer habitat – 87% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.1** *(18)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**116.5** *(20)*	115
Fawn Weight	**62.3** *(16)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.78** *(23)*	1.60

Deer Density



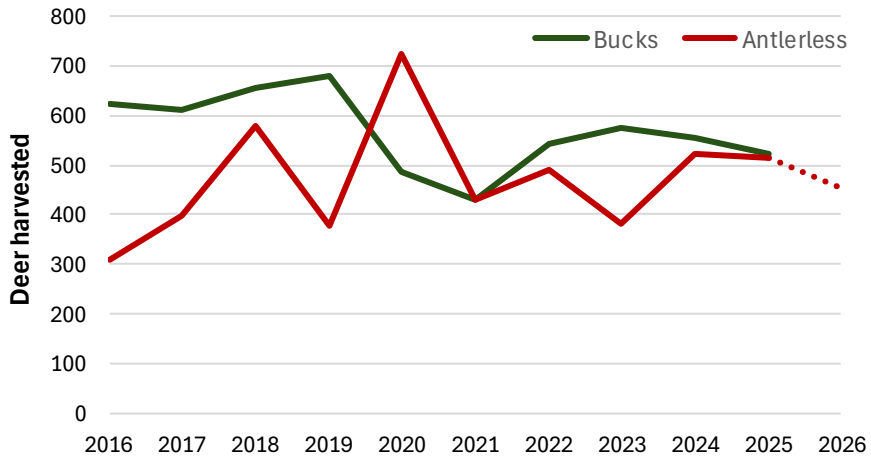
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
86	74

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	13%	18%
2.5	51%	21%
3.5	22%	11%
4.5+	13%	50%
no. deer aged	*(741)*	*(28)*

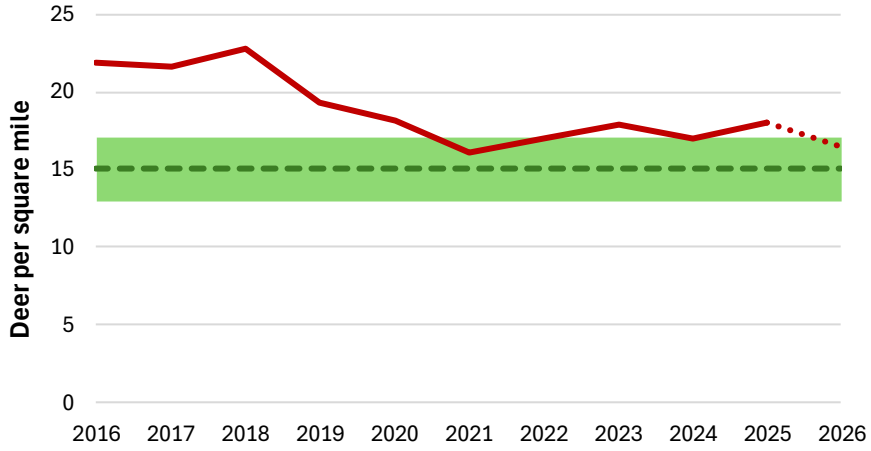


Wildlife Management Unit J2

705 *mi² of deer habitat – 89% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.5** *(41)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**109.5** *(42)*	115
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(55)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.67** *(24)*	1.60

Deer Density



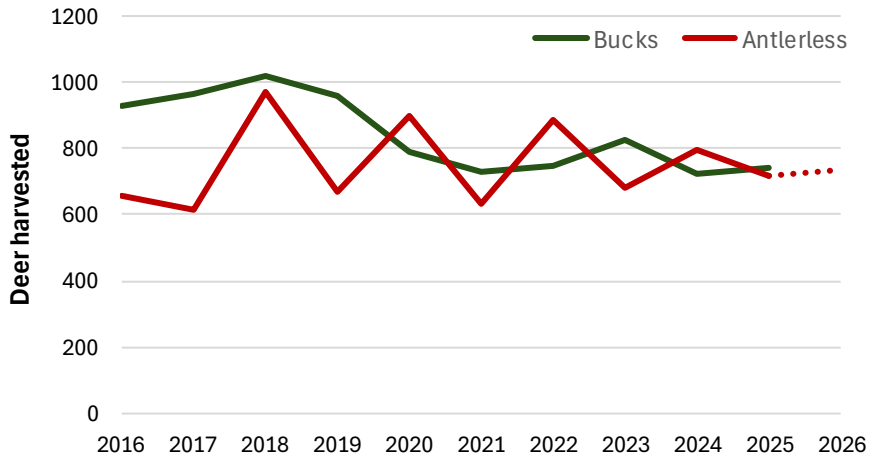
2026 Estimate

17 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
96	80

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	11%	20%
2.5	51%	16%
3.5	24%	14%
4.5+	14%	49%
no. deer aged	*(732)*	*(85)*

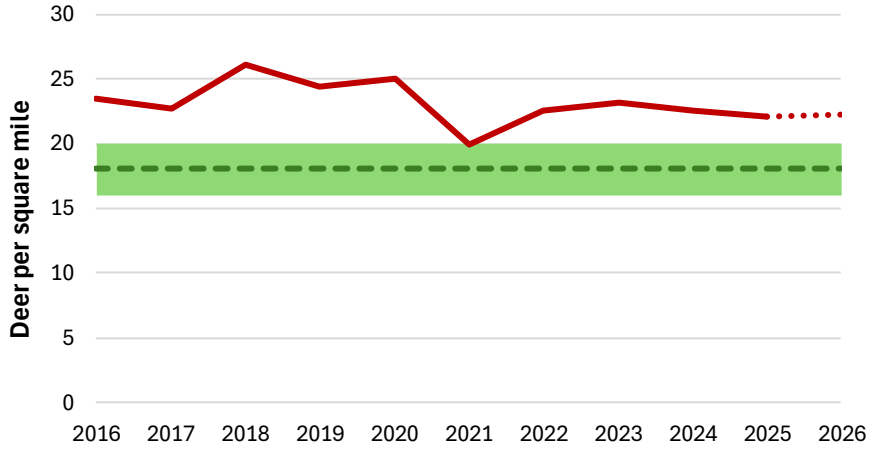


Wildlife Management Unit K

438 *mi² of deer habitat – 81% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(34)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**110.8** *(39)*	115
Fawn Weight	**59.1** *(38)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.65** *(17)*	1.60

Deer Density



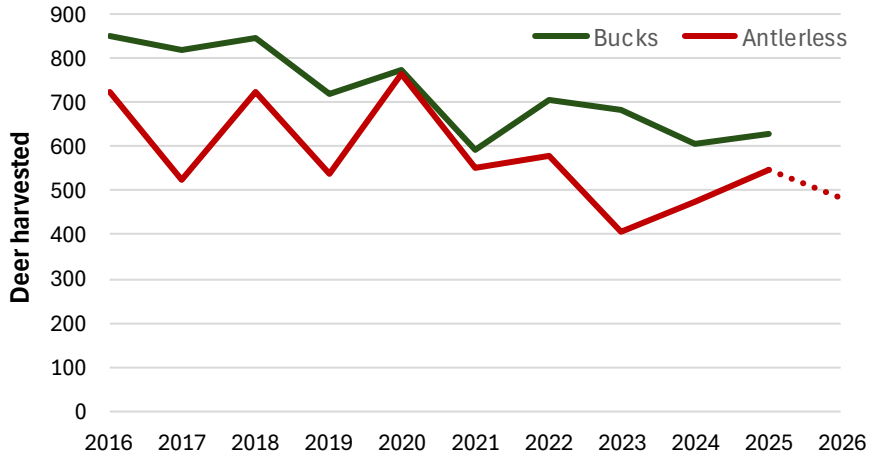
2026 Estimate

22 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
75	62

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	12%	16%
2.5	56%	10%
3.5	24%	10%
4.5+	8%	63%
no. deer aged	*(470)*	*(68)*

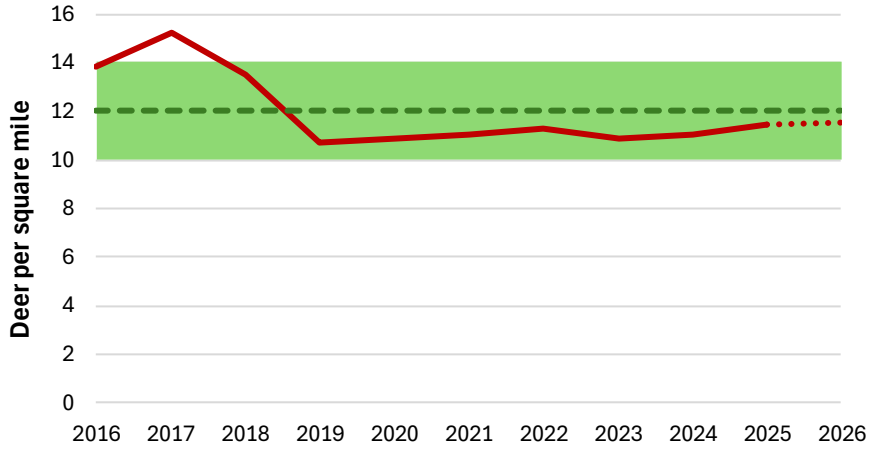


Wildlife Management Unit L

***365** mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.6** *(4)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**108.5** *(4)*	110
Fawn Weight	**49.6** *(7)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.63** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



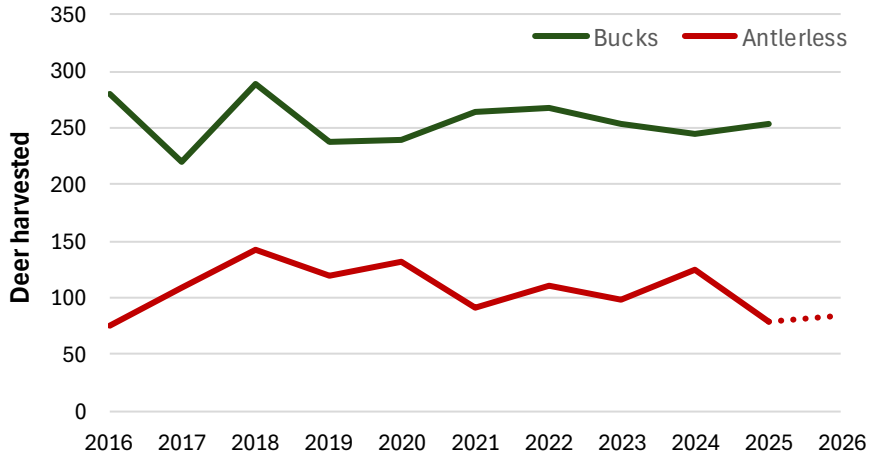
2026 Estimate

12 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
40	33

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	21%	21%
2.5	35%	0%
3.5	27%	21%
4.5+	17%	57%
no. deer aged	*(126)*	*(14)*

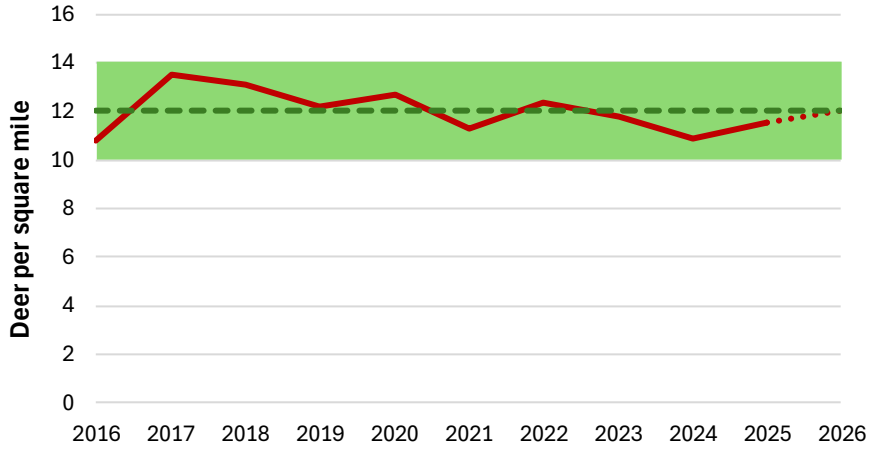


Wildlife Management Unit M

451 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.8** *(3)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**109.7** *(3)*	110
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(3)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.73** *(12)*	1.60

Deer Density



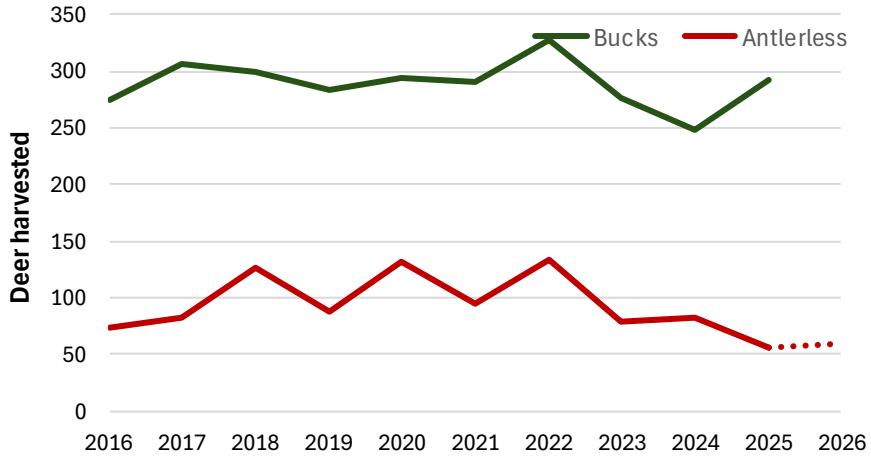
2026 Estimate

12 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
26	23

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	21%	0%
2.5	36%	0%
3.5	20%	25%
4.5+	23%	75%
no. deer aged	*(185)*	*(4)*

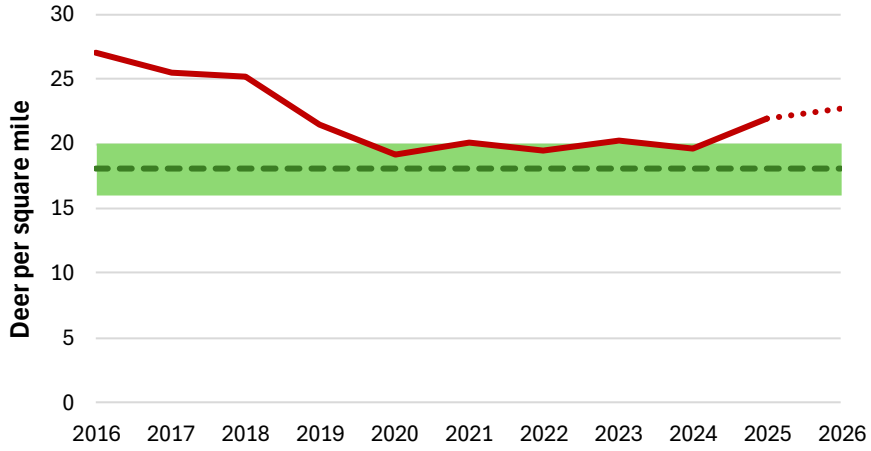


Wildlife Management Unit N

323 *mi² of deer habitat – 85% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**17.1** *(18)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**111.6** *(20)*	110
Fawn Weight	**57.5** *(28)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.56** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



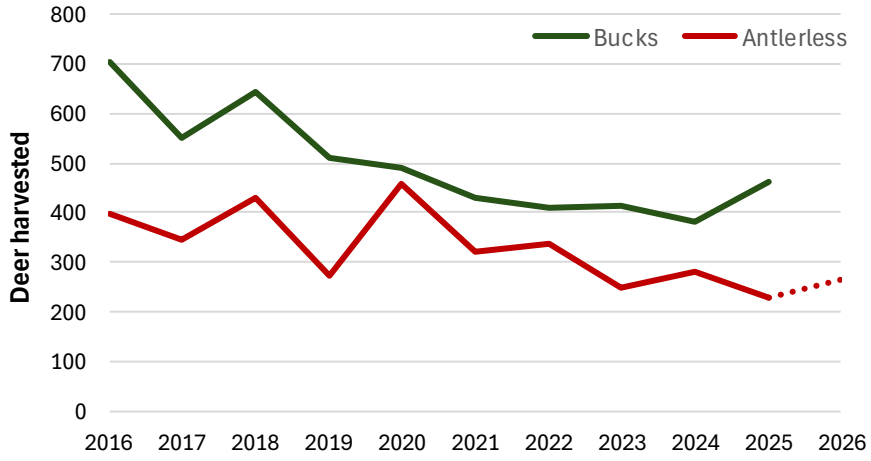
2026 Estimate

23 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
60	49

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	20%	22%
2.5	47%	17%
3.5	21%	11%
4.5+	12%	50%
no. deer aged	*(378)*	*(36)*

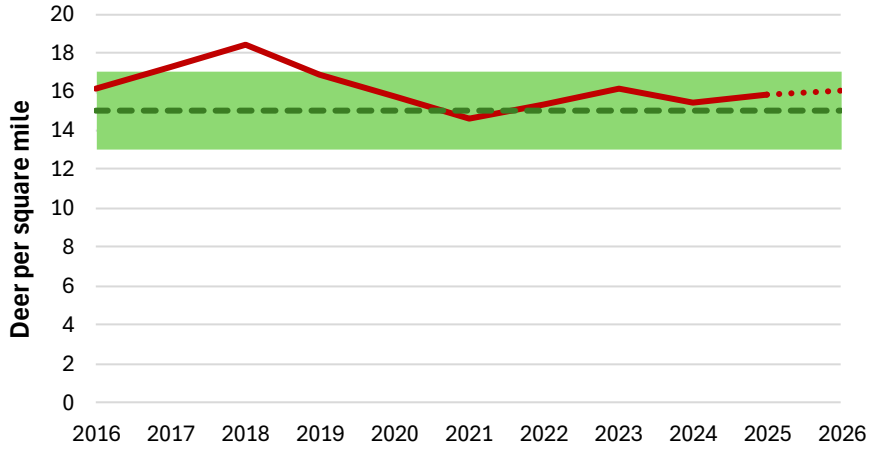


Wildlife Management Unit O

548 *mi² of deer habitat – 87% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.9** *(15)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**115.5** *(15)*	110
Fawn Weight	**56.0** *(12)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.78** *(18)*	1.60

Deer Density



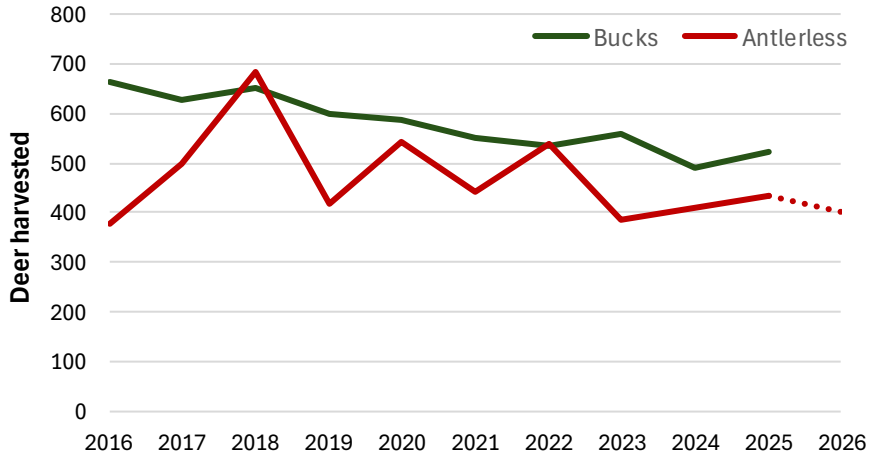
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
78	65

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	19%	19%
2.5	45%	6%
3.5	21%	13%
4.5+	15%	63%
no. deer aged	*(476)*	*(16)*

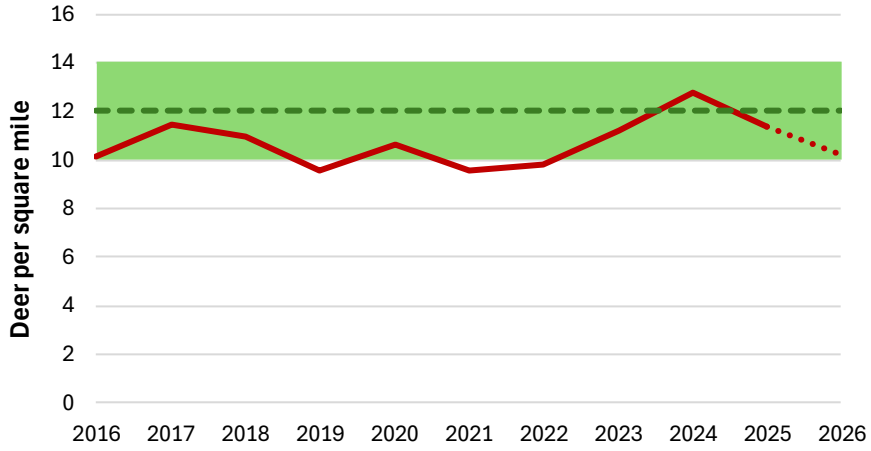


Wildlife Management Unit P

455 *mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**14.6** *(8)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**104.1** *(10)*	110
Fawn Weight	**59.8** *(6)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.46** *(13)*	1.60

Deer Density



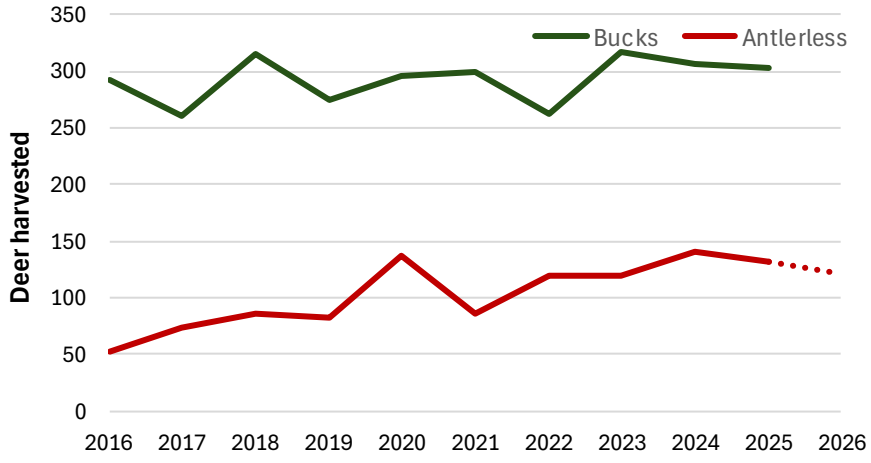
2026 Estimate

10 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
42	34

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	26%	40%
2.5	37%	0%
3.5	20%	20%
4.5+	17%	40%
no. deer aged	*(286)*	*(5)*

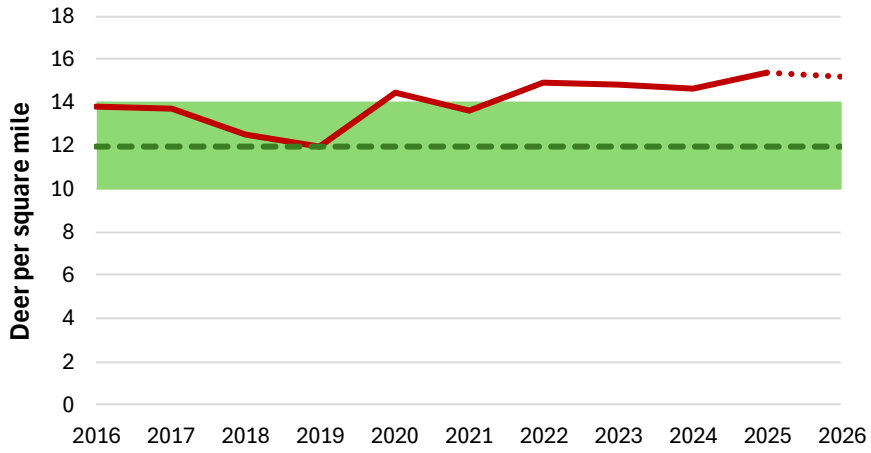


Wildlife Management Unit Q

233 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	*no data* *(0)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	*no data* *(0)*	110
Fawn Weight	*no data* *(0)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.11** *(10)*	1.60

Deer Density



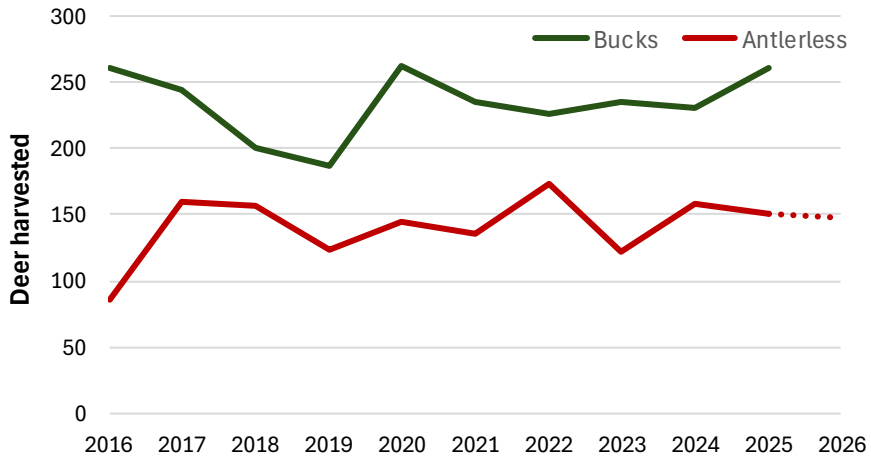
2026 Estimate

15 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
59	48

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	29%	0%
2.5	33%	0%
3.5	24%	0%
4.5+	14%	0%
no. deer aged	*(182)*	*(0)*

Recommendations Related to Requests for a Regulated Black Bear Baiting Season, Season Extension and Increase of Annual Bag Limit

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

May 20, 2026

Public requests to develop a regulated black bear baiting season, extend hunting season, and increase annual bag limit in Vermont.

Recommendation

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

On February 18, 2026, the Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) submitted a petition requesting that the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board (Board) create a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont that would occur during the early black bear hunting season in September. The petition is summarized as follows:

1) VBA requests the development of a black bear baiting season in Vermont, similar to what is currently allowed by regulation in New Hampshire.

2) The framework for the season would include a permitting system that outlines conditions by which a hunter would be allowed to use bait to attract black bears for hunting purposes.

3) The suggested season would run from September 1st -30th.

On April 1, 2026, Bert Saldi and Kevin Lawrence submitted a similar request to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board to create a black bear baiting season, extend bear hunting until the second Sunday in December, and to allow for a second bear to be harvested by any hunter statewide. The second petition is summarized as follows.

1) Extend the current bear hunting season from September 1st to the second Sunday in December.

2) Allow hunters to purchase a second bear tag with an annual limit of two bears per hunter.

3) Incorporate a bear baiting season similar to current bear baiting season in Maine and New Hampshire.

4) All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board, go into effect the 2027 Season.

Department Recommendation:

The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) recommends that the Board,

1. Not develop a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont.
2. Extend the late season black bear hunting season until the end of the December muzzleloader deer season.

3. Allow for a second bear tag within annually approved wildlife management units, not to exceed two bears annually per hunter.

These recommendations are supported by the information presented below.

Comment/Question**:** Petition received on February 18, 2026

"The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting the creation of a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont. Our intent is to support the Department's long-term bear management objectives, improve harvest selectivity, and reduce human–bear conflicts while upholding the high standards of ethical and science-based wildlife management.

Vermont's black bear population continues to expand in both numbers and distribution throughout the state, creating challenges for landowners, farmers, and communities. Traditional hunting methods remain important but often fall short of harvest objectives, especially in years of abundant natural foods. The proposed season would provide Vermont's bear management team with a precise and predictable tool to manage goals while ensuring sustainability and accountability. New Hampshire has a carefully structured baiting season in place that has been very successful in meeting their management goals.

It should be noted that while the VBA is submitting this petition, it is not asking that this be considered as an archery-only season but rather be open to all legal bear hunting implements.

Benefits of a Regulated Bear Baiting Season

1. A baiting season allows hunters to be in **close proximity** so they can more readily identify bears before harvest. This would reduce the likelihood of taking sows with cubs and provide a better opportunity for the best shot placement to provide a swift harvest. This supports Vermont's commitment to ethical, selective, and responsible wildlife management.
2. It is an effective tool for **population management**. In heavy mast years, traditional hunting methods often struggle to meet harvest objectives. Baiting provides a consistent, reliable method for achieving management goals across wildlife management units.
3. It can help reduce **human–bear conflicts** by targeting harvest in areas with recurring property damage, agricultural damage, and other nuisance bear activities, supporting the Department's conflict mitigation strategies.

Framework to Be Considered

Everyone participating in the baiting season must obtain a mandatory Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Permit. Permit numbers can be limited by Wildlife Management Units to ensure population sustainability, prevent overcrowding and overharvesting, and help the Department meet management objectives. The applications for the Permit should include:

1. Written landowner permission.
2. Map(s) showing the exact location of bait sites.
3. Names and contact information for each hunter that will be allowed to hunt the sites.
4. Fee for the Permit, to be determined by the Department.

5. Types of bait that may be used or not used (e.g., any form of cocoa or chocolate because of its toxicity to bears and other wildlife). Other restrictions may be added to prevent attraction of non-target species.
6. The season dates as set by the Department. The VBA suggests that a short pre-baiting period be added before the start of the hunting season. The actual season could be September 1–30, with all bait removed from the site at the end of the season.
7. If an application is accepted, copies of the Permit shall be given to the landowner and the Department, and a copy carried by each hunter.
8. Successful hunters will report the bears in the manner dictated by the Department regulations.

The Vermont Bowhunters Association believes a well-regulated fall bear baiting season built on proven regional models and guided by Vermont's strong conservation ethic would provide the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department with an effective and responsible tool for managing our growing bear population. We respectfully request that the Board consider initiating rulemaking to establish such a season."

Comment/Question**:** Petition received on April 1, 2026

"Please accept the petition to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board.
Regarding bear hunting season:
1) Extend the current bear hunting season from September 1st to the second Sunday in December.
2) Allow hunters to purchase a second bear tag with an annual limit of two bears per hunter.
3) Incorporate a bear Baiting Season similar to current Bear Baiting season in Maine and New Hampshire.

All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board, go into Effect the 2027 Season.
I believe there's no reason this can't happen.....
Please Reach out to confirm receipt.
To: Kevin Lawrence, Former Board Chair.

Thank you...
The Vermonter
Bert Saldi"

Department Response to Proposal:

1) The Department does not recommend that the Board establish a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont for the month of September for the following reasons:
    a. It is uncertain that a bear baiting season will significantly increase harvest to a level that will improve Vermont's ability to manage the bear population. For reference, New Hampshire does not harvest a larger portion of their bear

population in comparison to Vermont despite over 60% of their harvest occurring with bait. Over the past decade, Vermont's bear hunting seasons take on average 12-15% of Vermont's bear population. In comparison, New Hampshire's bear hunting seasons also take on average 12-15% of that state's population (https://www.wildlife.nh.gov/hunting-nh/hunting-reports-harvest-summaries). Even with bear baiting, New Hampshire, struggles to meet their population objectives in most bear management zones (https://www.wildlife.nh.gov/hunting-nh/bear-hunting-new-hampshire) and therefore liberalized hunting regulations in 2024 by extending still hunting season dates (WMUs L and M) and adding a second bear tag (WMUs C1, D2, E, F).

b. It is unlikely that a bear baiting season will allow consistent harvests across years of varying natural food availability. Many states with bear baiting seasons report smaller harvests over bait during times of abundant natural foods. Many factors influence bear harvest susceptibility and hunter effort, for example very cold weather may cause bears to den earlier if food supplies are low, while also causing hunters to be in the field less.
c. It is unlikely that a bear baiting season will allow hunters to target food conditioned bears to help mitigate human-bear conflicts. Food conditioned and non-food conditioned bears will be mixed at bait sites, making it difficult to target one over the other. By September, the Department sees a dramatic reduction in human-bear conflict reports. This is likely due, in large part, to increased natural food availability across the landscape during this period. By September most food conditioned bears have shifted their foraging to the same food sources non-food conditioned bears are targeting. States that have bear baiting seasons do not experience proportionally less human-bear conflicts than states without bear baiting seasons.
d. The addition of another permitting system will be burdensome on the bear project, permit administrative personnel, and licensing staff.

2) The Department recommends that the Board consider allowing a second bear harvest tag for hunters and extending the bear hunting season, consistent with proposed rule changes that will be presented following deliberation of these petitions based on the following considerations:
    a. The Department is currently in the process of developing extensive proposed bear season regulation revisions, which align with the petitioner's requests related to season length (including extending the bear season until the end of the December deer muzzleloader season) and increasing the annual harvest limit to two bears annually within approved wildlife management units.
    b. Season extension may provide additional hunter opportunity.

c. A second tag may provide additional harvest pressure in areas with higher bear occurrence, incompatible land use pressure such as development or agriculture, higher reports of crop damage, and hunter participation.
d. Improve ability for hunters to target bears depredating on corn.
e. Based on past experience, the department expects these changes will result in a modest increase in black bear harvest, while still maintaining a healthy bear population across the Vermont landscape.

3) Public input will occur over calendar year 2026, in which at least two public meetings will be held and a minimum of 30-days of comment period will be open.

Other Information to Consider:

Concerns include:

- Establishment of hunter ownership of a baited parcel of land, limiting hunter access, which may create additional posted lands and/or conflicts between hunters.
- Conflict between bait and non-bait hunters.
- Placing additional human-based foods on the landscape would artificially increase food availability for bears and potentially increase opportunity to condition bears to human food sources. This is also in direct conflict with Department recommendations regarding not placing food and attractants out near an individual's property. (Appendix A)
- Placing concentrations of human-based foods will attract species other than bears including deer, turkeys, coyotes, rodents, and corvids. This could create an opportunity for illegal harvest of non-target species.
- Transmission of disease between bears and non-target species. Specific diseases and parasites of concern include chronic wasting disease, rabies, sarcoptic mange, and distemper.
- Baiting will not necessarily target bears in conflict areas.
- Increased enforcement issues with bait sites on the landscape.

Potential benefits include:

- Potentially increasing bear hunting opportunity.
- Potential future regional targeting of populations where additional hunting pressure is needed to reduce populations. Currently, the Department does not have regional population management goals for black bears but rather manages the population at the statewide scale.
- Potential recruitment and retention of bear hunters.
- Potentially increasing opportunity for selectivity and shot placement by hunters when bear hunting.

Appendix A.

Title 10 : Conservation and Development

Chapter 113 : Game

Subchapter 004 : WILD ANIMALS DOING DAMAGE

(Cite as: 10 V.S.A. § 4827a)

- **§ 4827a. Feeding bear; prohibition**

(a) A person shall not knowingly feed a bear and shall not knowingly give, place, expose, deposit, distribute, or scatter any bait, food, or other edible material in a manner intended to lure a bear to feed except:

(1) under a license or permit issued under section 4152 of this title by the Commissioner for bona fide scientific research, mitigation of wildlife damage, nuisance problems, or wildlife population reduction program;

(2) by planting, cultivating, or harvesting of crops directly associated with bona fide agricultural practices, including planted wildlife food plots; or

(3) by distribution of feed material for livestock directly associated with bona fide agricultural practices.

(b) A person who has intentionally placed bait, food, or other edible material, including placing food within a bird feeder, to lure wildlife, as that term is defined to include birds and other animals under subdivision 4001(15) of this title, onto the property within the past 30 days shall be prohibited from taking a bear doing damage under the authority set forth in section 4827 of this title. The Commissioner or his or her designee may issue an order requiring a person to remove or contain the bait, food, or edible material if the placing of bait or food results in the feeding of a bear.

(c) As used in this section, “bait, food, or other edible material” means fruit, grain, salt, grease, garbage, or other materials intended to feed or lure wildlife. (Added 2013, No. 78, § 17.)

(https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/10/113/04827a)

Recommendation Related to a Request for a Youth and Novice Archery Season

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

April 1, 2026

Public request to develop a youth and novice archery season on the last weekend of September.

Recommendation

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

February 18, 2026, the Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) requested that the Board create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

(1) VBA suggests a two-day season, on the last full weekend in September to allow for hunting beyond the September expanded archery zones, prior to the regular archery season

(2) The overall rules for this special season could be adapted from the current youth/novice firearm season model

Department Recommendation:

The Department recommends not establishing a youth/novice archery hunting weekend at this time.

Department Response to Proposal:

Comment/Question**:** **"**The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting consideration by the Fish and Wildlife Board to create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

We know that the current Youth and Novice Gun Seasons for deer, turkey, and waterfowl are great opportunities to bring in young and new hunters to the outdoors sports. Creating a Youth and Novice Archery Season will not only encourage youngsters and new hunters to learn archery but enable them to hunt in a less pressurized environment.

The VBA suggests a two-day season, being the last full weekend in September. While this is after the start of the Expanded Archery Deer Season, we feel that the zones included in that season are relatively small and many archers either live too far from one or might not have access to those private lands outlined in the zones. Also, the weather is usually warm and conducive to longer stays on the stand. The end of September is the end of the summer feeding season for deer, but before the cooler weather sets in and the onset of the beginning of the breeding time. This timing helps make deer a bit more predictable, so new archers can more readily pattern the deer and get in close.

The overall rules for this special season could be adapted by the current gun season models. We feel that a Youth and Novice Archery Season will offer a welcoming atmosphere to new archers as they learn from their mentors and open the door for them to a lifetime of enjoying Vermont's natural beauty and resources. We hope you will see the benefits of this special season."

Response:

1) The Department implemented extensive changes to deer hunting regulations in 2026 and will need to evaluate the effects of these changes over the next several years.
2) The Department would prefer to review and update deer hunting regulations on a five-year cycle to allow for several years of data to be collected after changes are made. The Department and Board could consider this proposal during the next review period around 2030.
3) The current archery season is 76 days long (October 1 through December 15), or 92 days if you include the new expanded archery zones/season. Late sunsets during the early part of the season also allow time for hunting after school or work. This provides substantial opportunity for mentoring new hunters.
4) Youth participation in archery season appears to be relatively high, so it seems unlikely that this change would result in a substantial increase in participation. The percentage of archery deer taken by youth age 15 and under (3.9%) is almost the same as the percentage of regular season deer taken by youth (4.5%).

5) The only other state the Department is aware of with a youth archery season is New Jersey, where firearm discharge is restricted in much of the state and most of their deer harvest occurs by archery.

Other Information to Consider:

Concerns include:

- Increased regulatory complexity and administrative burden with minimal potential increase in participation.
- Competition with the current youth waterfowl season which occurs the same weekend.
- Competition with the recently created expanded archery zones, potentially reducing their effectiveness. Also, potential enforcement issues since expanded archery zones/season only allow the harvest of antlerless deer.

Potential benefits include:

- Potentially increasing youth participation in archery hunting.

2026
Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

The Fish & Wildlife Department recommends the same antlerless harvest regulations accepted by the Board by straw vote on April 22, 2026. During the public comment period, which started immediately after the Board meeting on February 18, the Department did not receive any new or additional information to justify changes to the initial recommendation.

The following is the same text the Department submitted to the Board for its April 22nd meeting.

All public comments received are provided in appendices at the end of this document.

Summary of Key Points

- The effects of new hunting regulations on antlerless harvests is a key component of this recommendation. It aims to demonstrate our continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest by maintaining antlerless harvests at or below levels achieved in recent years.

- Due to uncertainty around the level of impact these changes will have, relatively substantial increases in archery and youth/novice antlerless harvests and antlerless permit success rates have been incorporated in this recommendation. As a result, antlerless harvest targets may not be achieved in many areas.

- Antlerless harvests can be adjusted as needed in future years once the impact of the new regulations is understood and harvests are more predictable.

- The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2026 was near or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, only minor changes in deer numbers are expected.

- Yearling antler beam diameters, fawn weights, and other physical condition metrics continue to be below optimal levels in many areas, indicating that deer numbers have exceeded the level their habitat can support long-term.

- The recommended permit allocations are expected to result in the harvest of 3,041 antlerless deer during the October muzzleloader season, regular season, and December muzzleloader season. This would result in an estimated total antlerless harvest from all seasons of approximately 7,598 antlerless deer.

Executive Summary

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department estimates there will be approximately 138,000 white-tailed deer on the Vermont landscape prior to the start of the 2026 deer hunting seasons. This represents a decrease of five percent from the retrospective 2025 pre-hunt estimate. The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2026 was near or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, only minor changes in deer numbers are expected.

For deer to be healthy and productive, deer populations must be kept below the carrying capacity of the habitat through the regulated harvest of antlerless deer. Biological information collected annually by the Department, including reproductive data, fawn and yearling body weights, and yearling antler size, indicate that deer populations have exceeded the level the habitat can support long-term in some parts of Vermont. Deer populations must be reduced or maintained below the limits of their habitat or physical condition will continue to decline, habitat damage will increase, and populations will become unstable and susceptible to substantial winter mortality.

Deer densities, habitat conditions, and winter severity can vary substantially from one part of Vermont to another. Additionally, these factors and the effects of historical deer densities have resulted in deer in some regions being in better physical condition than others. This results in variable deer population dynamics across the state; therefore, deer management prescriptions are made at the WMU level rather than statewide. Harvest management strategies that account for regional differences in deer density are essential to the health and proper management of Vermont's deer herd.

This recommendation aims to maintain antlerless harvests at previous levels while incorporating the uncertain effects of new deer hunting regulations. To account for this uncertainty and demonstrate a continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest, the Department has assumed relatively substantial impacts which may not be achieved. Antlerless harvests can be adjusted as needed in future years once the impact of the new regulations is understood and harvests are more predictable.

The Department recommends the harvest of 7,598 antlerless deer during the 2026 hunting seasons. The Department recommends that antlerless harvest be authorized during the archery and youth/novice seasons in all WMUs. After accounting for expected archery and youth/novice season harvests, the Department recommends that 3,041 antlerless deer be harvested, by permit, during the regular and muzzleloader seasons. Achieving this harvest, given expected increases in permit fill rates, requires the issuance of 12,050 WMU-specific antlerless permits distributed among 19 of Vermont's 21 WMUs. This is 49 percent fewer permits than the 23,400 allotted in 2025.

Three public hearings were held on March 16, 18, and 19, 2026 to gather comments on the deer herd. Approximately 52 members of the public participated in these hearings. Two additional public hearings will be held May 5 and 7, 2026.

2026 Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Pursuant to 10 V.S.A. §§4081, 4082, 4084 and 4742a, and 10 V.S.A. Appendix §37, hereafter is the Department's 2026 antlerless deer harvest recommendation. Based on population estimates, a harvest of 7,598 antlerless deer is recommended during the 2026 hunting seasons. This includes 4,557 antlerless deer harvested during the archery, youth, and novice seasons, and 3,041 antlerless deer harvested, by permit, during the regular season and the October and December muzzleloader seasons. Adult females are typically 84 percent of the total antlerless deer harvest, so harvesting this number of antlerless deer would yield approximately 6,346 adult does.

Population Status

The buck harvest during the 2025 deer hunting seasons was one percent more than the previous 3-year average (see *2025 Vermont White-tailed Deer Harvest Report* for more information). Nine WMUs had retrospective population estimates in 2025 that exceeded their respective population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* by more than two deer per square mile. The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2025 was close to or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, small declines in deer numbers are expected in some northern and central WMUs, with little change expected in most other areas.

Winter Severity 2026

The Department has long recognized the influence that winter weather can have on Vermont's deer herd and has been collecting winter severity data since 1970. Between December 1 and April 15, one winter severity index (WSI) point is tallied for each day with at least 18 inches of snow on the ground, and one point for each day the temperature reaches 0°F or below. These data have proven useful to describe deer population dynamics; however, how well deer survive winter depends largely on three factors: 1) body condition of deer as winter begins, 2) availability of quality deer wintering habitats, and 3) the timing of snow in the fall and snowmelt in spring. Snow cover that remains late into spring can cause significant negative impacts by delaying spring green up and, consequently, reducing fawn survival.

The winter of 2025 was near, or slightly above, normal in most areas, with a state-wide average WSI of 46 points (**Figure 1**). This was slightly above the 30-year median of 36 and above the 10-year median of 30. As is typically the case, winter severity varied considerably among WMUs, ranging from 21 in WMU K to 73 in WMU P (**Figure 2**). The pattern of variation in WSI was consistent with long term averages. Importantly, snow depths were minimal across most of the state until mid-January. Conditions were relatively severe from late January to early March, with deep snow confining deer to areas of quality winter cover. However, the snow melted quickly, and snow-free conditions arrived earlier than normal in most areas. The length of time deer are confined to wintering areas is perhaps the most important factor affecting survival rates. Since severe conditions only lasted for about 6 weeks, overwinter survival is expected to be relatively good.

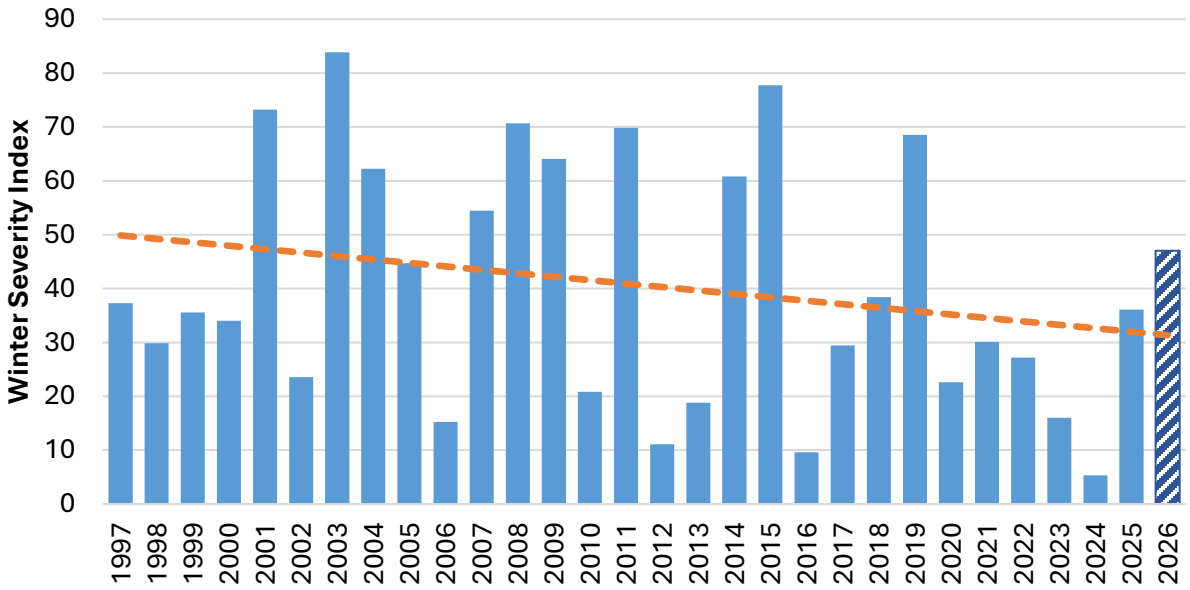


Figure 1. Statewide winter severity index (WSI), 1997–2026. The dashed line shows the 30-year trend.

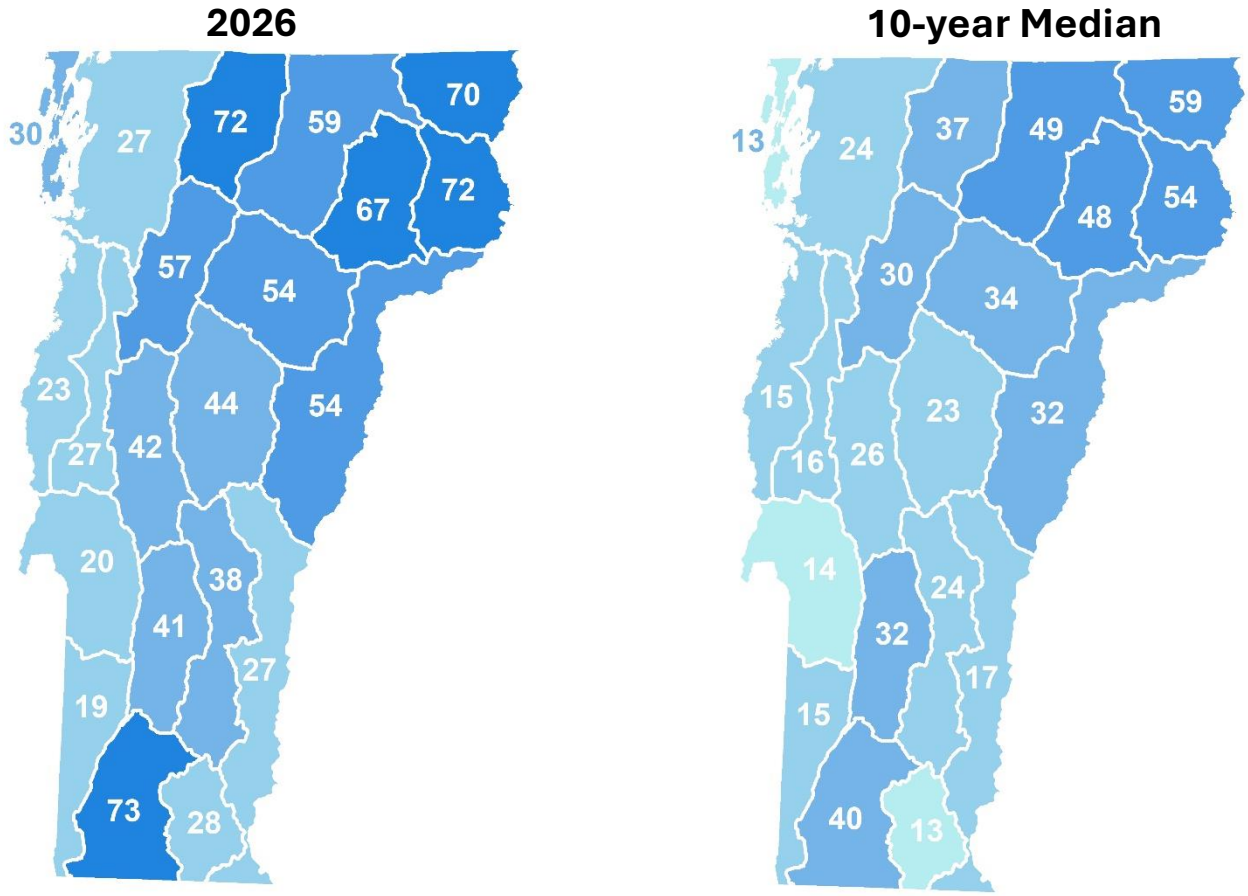


Figure 2. Winter severity index by Wildlife Management Unit in 2026 and the 10-year median.

Population Health

Biological information collected annually by the Department, including reproductive data, fawn and yearling body weights, and yearling antler size, indicate that deer populations have exceeded the level the habitat can support long-term in some parts of Vermont (**Figure 3**, see **Appendix A** for individual WMU information). In many cases, this does not appear to be a new problem. Instead, this appears to be a subtle but chronic problem that may have occurred for decades in some areas. Declines in measures like yearling antler beam diameter have been slow (**Figure 3**); therefore, it takes many years of data to separate the trend from normal annual variation.

Health concerns are evident in many parts of Vermont (see **Appendix A** for more detail). In most cases, the Department believes the primary driver of declines in physical condition was not a recent increase in deer abundance, but rather a slow, steady decline in the quality of deer habitat. Deer abundance has been relatively stable during the past 30 years. However, Vermont's forests are aging and the amount of young forest (less than 20 years old), which provides critical forage for deer, is declining. Other factors, including hunter access to private land, proliferation of invasive plants, and climate change are also important, and make the problem and any solutions more complex. The simple result, however, is that the habitat cannot support the number of deer it used to, and carrying capacity may continue to decline in some areas as forests get older. Deer populations must be reduced below the limits of their habitat or physical condition will continue to decline, habitat damage will increase, and populations will become unstable and more susceptible to disease and substantial winter mortality.

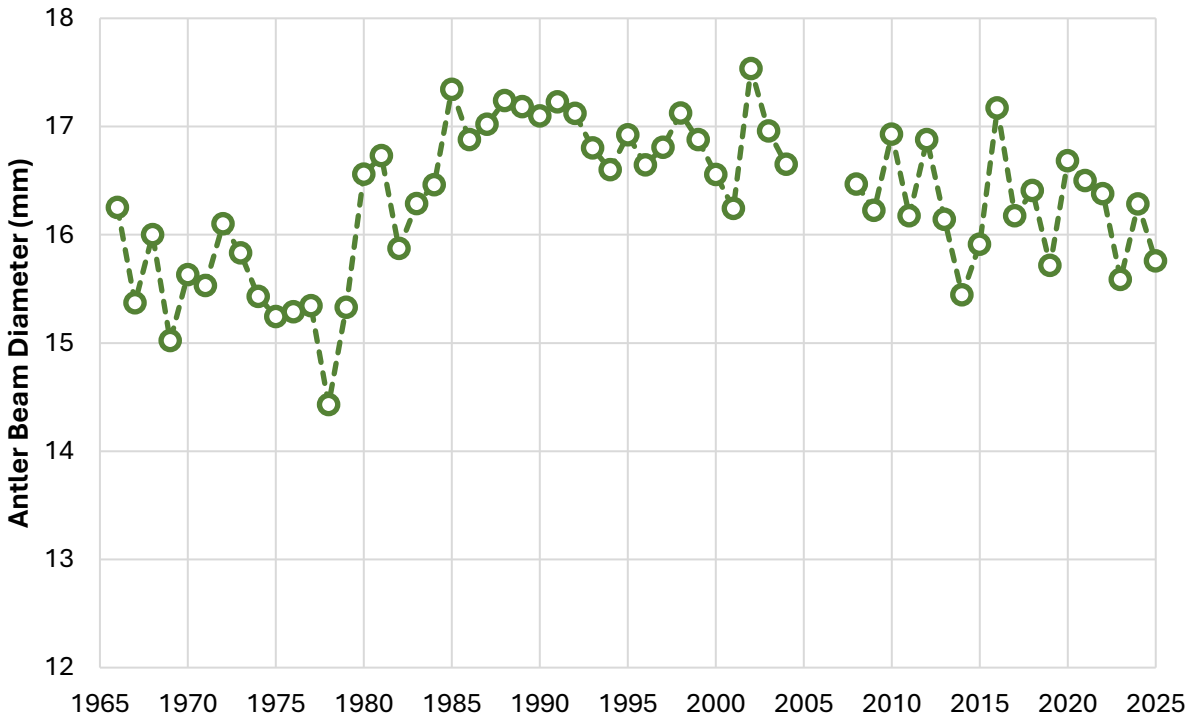


Figure 3. Antler beam diameter of yearling bucks in Vermont, 1965–2025. Data are from deer examined at biological check stations.

Population Projections and Management Objectives

Antlerless deer harvests in 2025 were close to objectives in most WMUs. Considering 2025 retrospective population estimates, 2025 antlerless harvests, and 2026 winter severity, little change in deer numbers is expected in most areas, with small declines possible in northern and east-central WMUs. Importantly, deer densities remain above population objectives in several WMUs, and recent management efforts have not been sufficient to reduce deer numbers. To provide healthy habitats and thereby keep deer healthy and productive, deer densities must be kept at established objectives (**Figure 8**). Maintaining a healthy deer herd is the best way to mitigate the potential effects of winter weather and provide a stable population over the long term.

Based on analysis of herd demographic data, hunter effort, deer sighting rates (**Figure 4**), buck harvests (**Figure 5**), antlerless deer harvests, and winter severity data (**Figure 2**), the Department expects deer numbers to decline slightly in northern and east-central WMUs and remain relatively stable in most other WMUs (**Figures 6 and 7**). Seven WMUs will have deer densities that exceed their respective population objectives by more than 2 deer per square mile (**Figures 8 and 9**), and the Department's intent is to reduce deer densities in those areas. Other WMUs will have deer densities that are within two deer per square mile of their population objective, and the intent is to stabilize those populations at or near their current level.

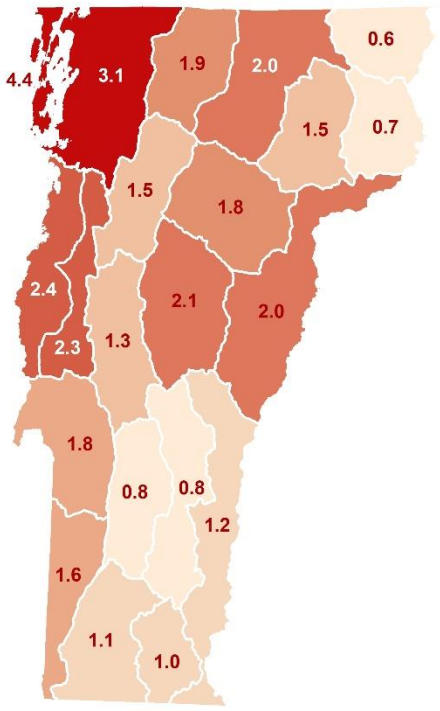


Figure 4. Deer seen per 10 hours of hunting by regular season deer hunters, 2023–2025.

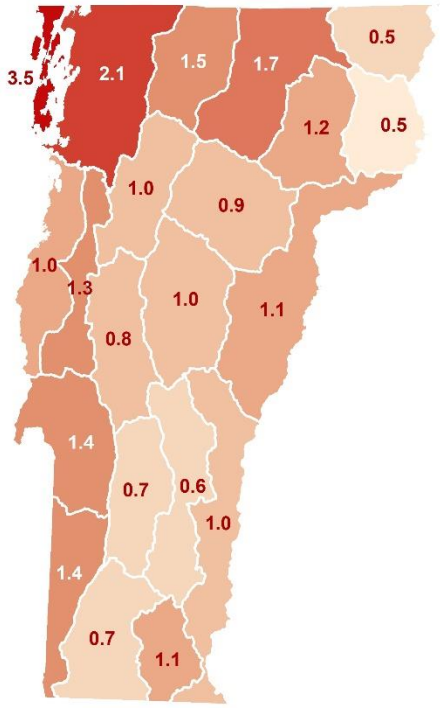


Figure 5. Adult buck harvest per square mile during the 2025 deer seasons. Buck harvest rate is affected by antler restrictions in some WMUs.

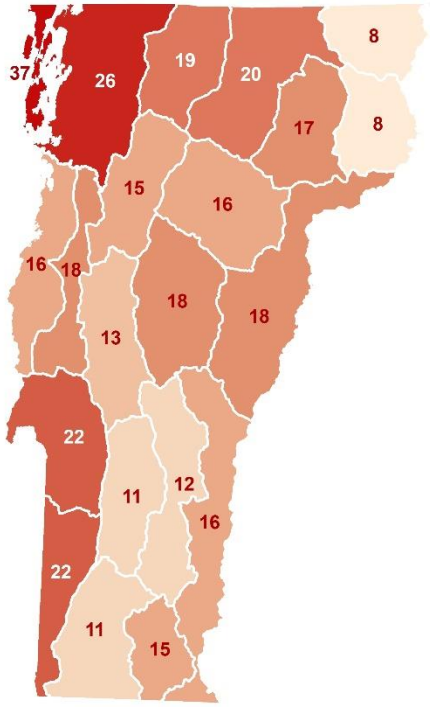


Figure 6. 2025 estimated deer density (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

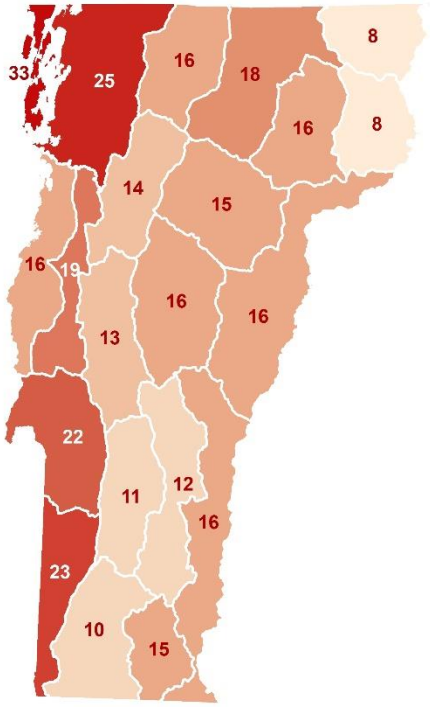


Figure 7. 2026 predicted deer density (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

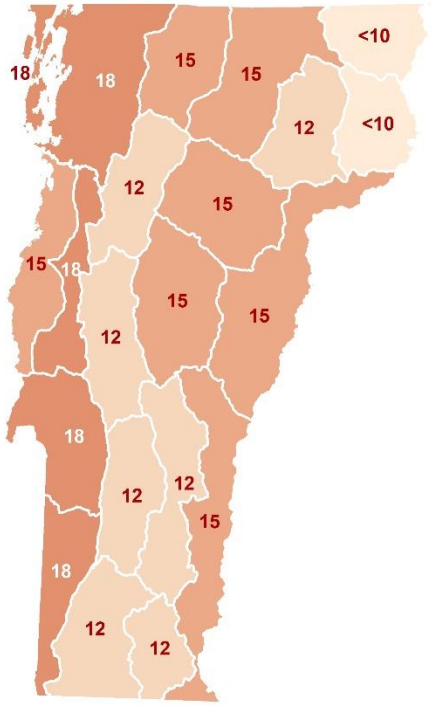


Figure 8. Deer density objectives (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

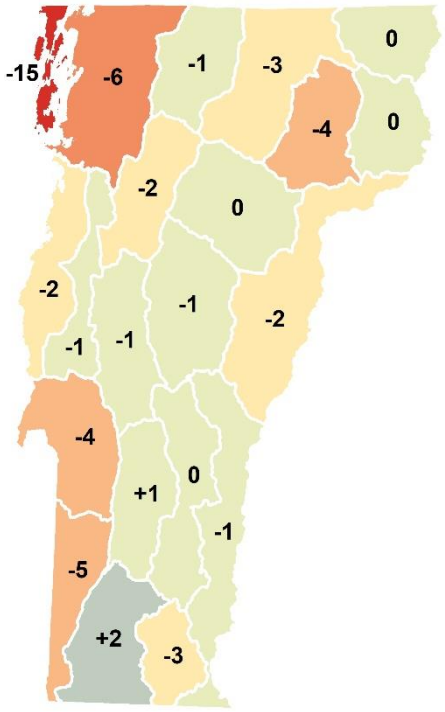


Figure 9. Desired change in deer density, by WMU, to reach density objectives.

Effects of New Hunting Regulations

Several new or updated deer hunting regulations will take effect in 2026 and are expected to impact antlerless deer harvests. To account for these changes and their uncertain impact on antlerless harvests, the following adjustments have been made to this recommendation. These changes in antlerless harvest are plausible, but it is more likely that antlerless harvests will be lower than what is recommended. The Department is intentionally taking a conservative approach to demonstrate our continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest under these new regulations. If antlerless harvests need to be increased in the future, these regulations allow for that.

To account for the addition of Expanded Archery Zones and the extension of archery season through the regular season, the expected archery antlerless harvest has been increased by 10 percent. That much increase is unlikely, but this also creates a buffer in the overall antlerless harvest to allow for typical annual variation and/or higher harvest related to the novelty of the new regulations.

To account for changing the timing of the youth/novice weekend, the expected youth/novice antlerless harvest has been increased by 20 percent. This is equivalent to the observed decline in the youth weekend harvest after the season was moved two weeks earlier in 2020.

Lastly, to account for antlerless permits being used during the regular season and 5 days being added to the December muzzleloader season, the expected fill rate on antlerless permits has been increased by 10 percent in each WMU. This results in a statewide average fill rate of 25%, which is higher than antlerless permit fill rates observed in most other northeastern states. Expected WMU-specific fill rates range from 22% to 30% (**Table 3**).

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

Archery Season

The Department recommends that all WMUs be open to the taking of antlerless deer during the 2026 archery season. Antlerless harvest in archery season is a key component in deer population management in Vermont. Archery hunters tend to focus their hunting effort and harvest in areas with higher deer numbers. As a result, archery antlerless harvest has little or no impact in areas with fewer deer. Importantly, archery harvest allows hunters to better regulate local deer herds in areas with high deer densities, particularly areas where firearm hunting is limited.

Youth and Novice Season

The Department is strongly committed to recruiting new hunters into Vermont's deer hunting heritage. Based on this commitment and the importance of harvesting an adequate number of female deer each year, the Department recommends that youth and novice season hunters be allowed to take any deer in all WMUs. This would include antlerless deer or any buck, regardless of antler characteristics. This will provide these hunters with additional opportunity to harvest a deer and the opportunity to help properly manage Vermont's deer herd. It is critical that spike-antlered bucks be taken during this season so the Department can obtain important biological information (e.g., weight, antler measurements) from this portion of the yearling buck population. This is the primary reason Department biologists examine deer during this season each year. This will have no impact on buck age structure management, as the buck harvest during this season is typically about four percent of the overall buck harvest.

Antlerless Permits

Antlerless permits are recommended for 19 of the state's 21 WMUs in 2026. These permits may be filled during the antlerless-only October muzzleloader season, during the regular season, or during the December muzzleloader season. The Department recommends that a total of 12,050 antlerless permits be issued (49 percent fewer than the 23,400 approved for distribution in 2025). A decrease in antlerless permits is recommended in all WMUs due to the expected increase in fill rates resulting from new hunting regulations (**Figure 10**).

These recommendations are intended to move populations toward WMU-specific deer density and physical condition objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* (see **Appendix A** for additional detail). This permit allocation is expected to result in the harvest of an additional 3,041 antlerless deer above those harvested during the archery and youth/novice seasons.

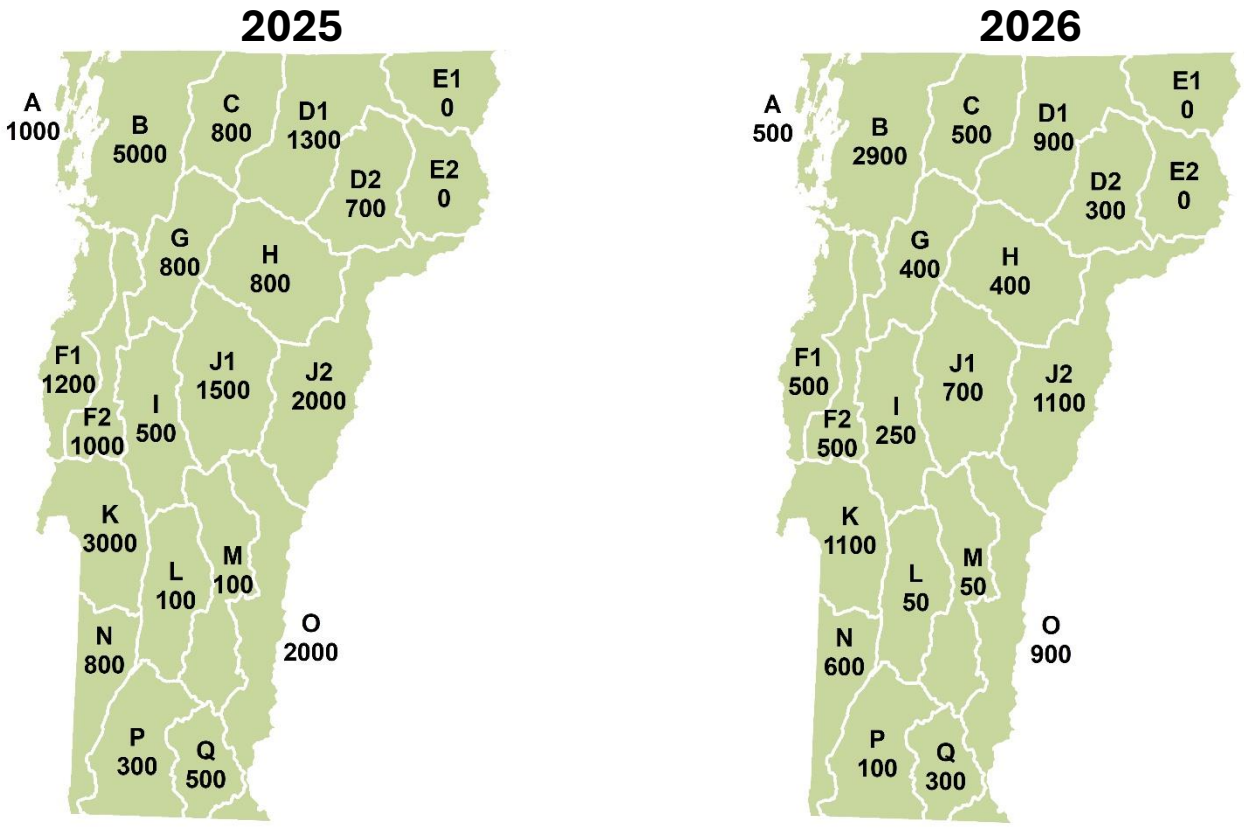


Figure 10. Antlerless permit allocations by wildlife management unit for 2025 and 2026 (proposed).

Public Comments

Three public hearings were held on March 16, 18, and 19, 2026 to gather comments on the deer herd. Approximately 52 members of the public participated in these hearings. Two additional public hearings will be held on May 5 and 7, 2026.

Table 1. Estimated deer densities and predicted antlerless deer harvests during the 2026 deer hunting seasons, by wildlife management unit.

	Deer per mi²			Antlerless Permits			Other Antlerless					
WMU	Objective	2025	2026	Permits	Fill Rate	Harvest	Archery	Youth/ Novice	2026 Total Antlerless	% of Doe Population Harvested	Doe Harvest per Mi²	Doe Harvest per 100 Bucks[a]
A	18	37	33	500	25%	125	154	19	297	22%	3.54	117
B	18	26	24	2,900	26%	763	728	146	1638	19%	2.22	116
C	15	19	16	500	30%	152	251	41	444	12%	0.96	73
D1	15	20	18	900	29%	258	345	109	711	12%	1.03	72
D2	12	17	16	300	30%	89	155	38	281	8%	0.60	57
E1	<10	8	8	0	-	0	27	7	34	2%	0.09	19
E2	<10	8	8	0	-	0	28	7	36	2%	0.09	22
F1	15	16	16	500	24%	121	136	27	284	9%	0.75	73
F2	18	18	19	500	24%	120	111	27	257	9%	0.80	69
G	12	15	14	400	23%	192	140	13	246	7%	0.53	56
H	15	16	15	400	25%	101	294	42	438	9%	0.71	76
I	12	13	13	250	25%	62	110	8	181	5%	0.36	49
J1	15	18	16	700	25%	173	239	43	455	9%	0.72	75
J2	15	18	16	1,100	26%	290	369	75	734	10%	0.87	88
K	18	22	22	1,100	23%	249	185	49	482	8%	0.92	64
L	12	11	11	50	26%	13	58	14	85	3%	0.19	28
M	12	12	12	50	22%	11	40	8	59	2%	0.11	18
N	18	22	23	600	23%	136	97	34	266	6%	0.68	52
O	15	16	16	900	22%	197	183	21	401	8%	0.62	65
P	12	11	10	100	24%	24	87	10	120	4%	0.22	37
Q	12	15	15	300	22%	65	77	6	148	7%	0.54	52
STATE				**12,050**	**25%**	**3,041**	**3,813**	**743**	**7,598**			

[a] *In WMUs with an antler restriction, which reduces buck harvest, this number will be higher than a comparable area with no antler restriction.*

Table 2. Muzzleloader antlerless permit history by WMU, 2018–2025, and recommended permit allocation for 2026. Numbers in parentheses are the number of permits actually distributed.

WMU	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	1100 (720)	1100 (939)	1000	500	800	1000 (855)	1000 (650)	1000 (647)	**500**
B	5500	5500	4500	3500	4000	5000	6000 (4651)	5000 (4707)	**2900**
C	800	300	500	500	500	500	1000	800	**500**
D1	1200	500	1000	800	800	1000	1800	1300	**900**
D2	800	300	500	300	200	200	800	700	**300**
E1	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	**0**
E2	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	**0**
F1	1000 (900)	1000	1000	1300	1500 (1453)	1800 (1145)	1800 (864)	1200 (837)	**500**
F2	1300	1300	1300	1000	1000	1000	1300 (994)	1000	**500**
G	300	300	700	700	700	700	1000	800	**400**
H	1100	400	300	300	300	500	1000	800	**400**
I	300	300	500	500	500	500	500	500	**250**
J1	1200	800	1500	1200	800	1000	1500	1500	**700**
J2	2500	2000	2000	1800	1500	1500	2000	2000	**1100**
K	4000 (2446)	4000 (2440)	3000	3000 (2795)	2500	3000 (2222)	3000 (2007)	3000 (2064)	**1100**
L	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	100	**50**
M	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	100	**50**
N	2000 (1487)	2000 (1462)	2000	1800 (1642)	1500	1500 (1378)	1500 (1163)	800	**600**
O	2600 (2300)	2000	2000	1500	1500	1500	2300 (2128)	2000	**900**
P	0	0	100	100	100	100	300	300	**100**
Q	700 (604)	600	500	600	600	600	700 (642)	500	**300**
STATE	**27000** (24057)	**23000** (20741)	**23000**	**20000** (19637)	**19400** (19353)	**22000** (20300)	**28300** (23799)	**23400** (21455)	**12050**

Table 3. Antlerless permit fill rate by WMU, 2018–2025, and expected fill rate for 2026.

WMU	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	19%	13%	17%	14%	11%	13%	13%	18%	**25%**
B	19%	14%	18%	15%	14%	14%	15%	19%	**26%**
C	33%	24%	23%	20%	20%	21%	18%	20%	**30%**
D1	29%	24%	23%	19%	18%	22%	19%	18%	**29%**
D2	21%	21%	20%	17%	18%	22%	18%	21%	**30%**
E1							9%		
E2							16%		
F1	16%	13%	17%	13%	12%	12%	12%	18%	**24%**
F2	19%	12%	17%	11%	10%	11%	12%	18%	**24%**
G	28%	14%	17%	12%	12%	13%	12%	14%	**23%**
H	20%	18%	21%	18%	16%	18%	16%	14%	**25%**
I	24%	15%	19%	14%	10%	13%	13%	15%	**25%**
J1	26%	19%	18%	14%	17%	14%	16%	14%	**25%**
J2	23%	17%	21%	16%	18%	17%	17%	16%	**26%**
K	18%	14%	16%	11%	12%	10%	12%	15%	**23%**
L	31%	15%	17%	13%	9%	15%	13%	16%	**26%**
M	24%	13%	17%	13%	17%	12%	14%	12%	**22%**
N	18%	11%	13%	11%	11%	9%	12%	13%	**23%**
O	20%	11%	13%	13%	16%	12%	13%	12%	**22%**
P			17%	13%	14%	14%	14%	15%	**24%**
Q	18%	10%	13%	9%	11%	8%	11%	13%	**22%**
STATE	**21%**	**14%**	**17%**	**14%**	**14%**	**13%**	**15%**	**16%**	**25%**

Appendix A: Population Status by WMU

Deer densities, habitat conditions, and winter severity can vary substantially from one part of Vermont to another. Additionally, these factors and the effects of historical deer densities have resulted in deer in some regions being in better physical condition than others. This results in variable deer population dynamics across the state; therefore, deer management prescriptions are made at the WMU level rather than statewide.

The Department is aware that deer densities (and other factors) vary within each WMU, sometimes substantially. Unfortunately, managing deer at a smaller scale than a WMU is not currently feasible given the structure of hunting regulations and the Department's ability to collect enough data. However, hunters generally do a good job of targeting areas of higher deer density within a WMU if they have sufficient access.

Description of data provided for each WMU

Area of deer habitat: Deer habitat is all land that is not developed.

Physical Condition of Deer: Antler beam diameter and body weights are from deer examined by biologists at youth/novice weekend check stations. Adult birth rate (fetuses per doe) is from examinations of incidentally killed deer during February-May. All metrics show the average for the most recent five years of data. Sample size is shown in parentheses. Minimum acceptable levels for each metric, established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, are also shown.

Deer Density: Estimated pre-hunt deer density over the past 10 years based on retrospective population modelling and the projected density in fall 2026. The density objective established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* is represented by a dashed green line in the figure. The shaded green area shows ±2 deer per square mile – a range that accounts for typical year-to-year variation in deer abundance and uncertainty around density estimates.

Red Numbers: Numbers are red when a metric does not meet the objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Harvest: The total buck and antlerless deer harvests during all seasons during the past 10 years. The proposed antlerless harvest for 2026 is shown by the dotted red line.

Harvest per 100 Adult Bucks: The number of antlerless deer and adult does harvested for every 100 adult bucks harvested over the previous 3 years. This provides a useful indicator of antlerless harvest rate.

Harvest Age Composition: The age composition of the adult buck and doe harvests over the previous 3 years. Ages are from cementum annuli analysis. Sample size is shown at the bottom, in parentheses. The proportion of harvested deer in older age classes is a useful indicator of harvest rate. Generally, when more than 40% of does are 4 ½-plus years old, it suggests the population may be under-harvested.

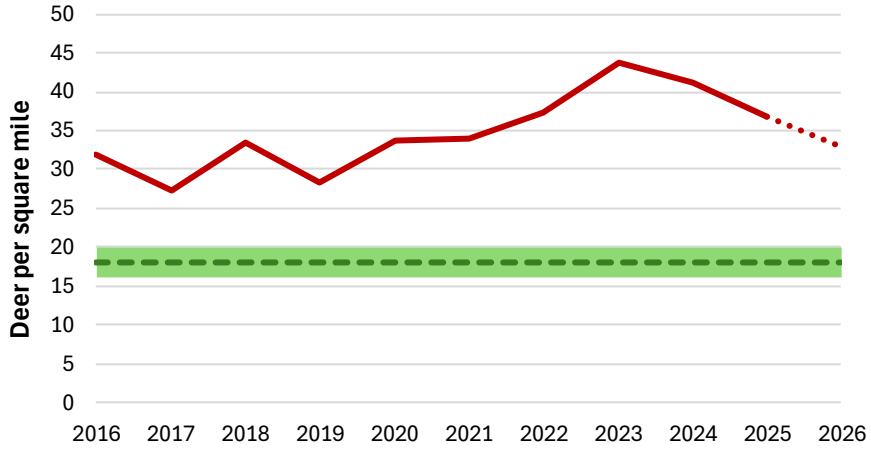


Wildlife Management Unit A

71 *mi² of deer habitat – 46% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(13)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**121.5** *(21)*	118
Fawn Weight	**57.9** *(10)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.25** *(4)*	1.60

Deer Density



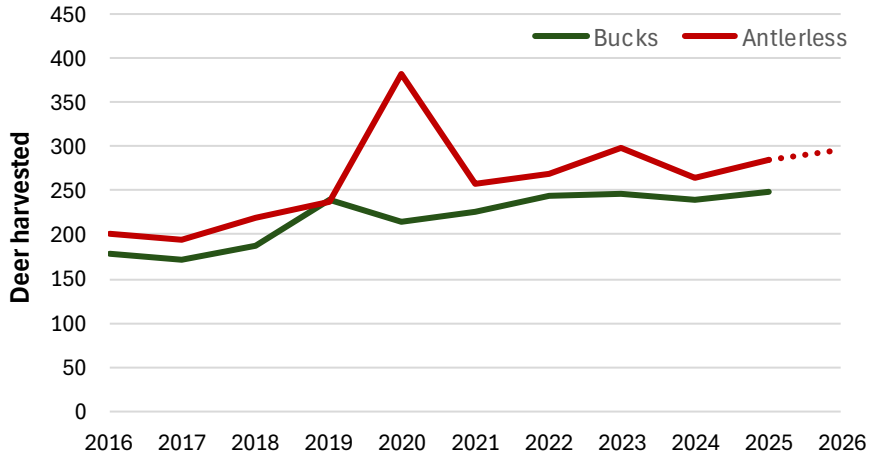
2026 Estimate

33 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
116	94

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	26%	40%
2.5	55%	13%
3.5	16%	27%
4.5+	3%	20%
no. deer aged	*(143)*	*(15)*

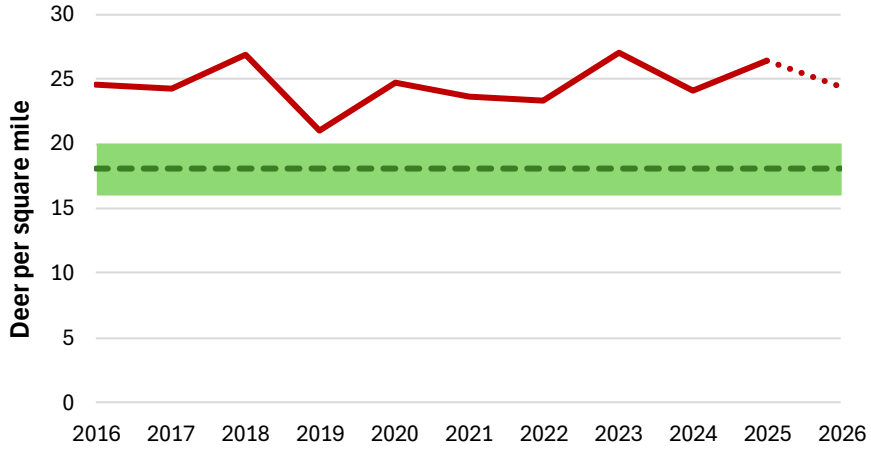


Wildlife Management Unit B

616 *mi² of deer habitat – 66% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.8** *(154)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**116.3** *(165)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.1** *(126)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.93** *(15)*	1.60

Deer Density



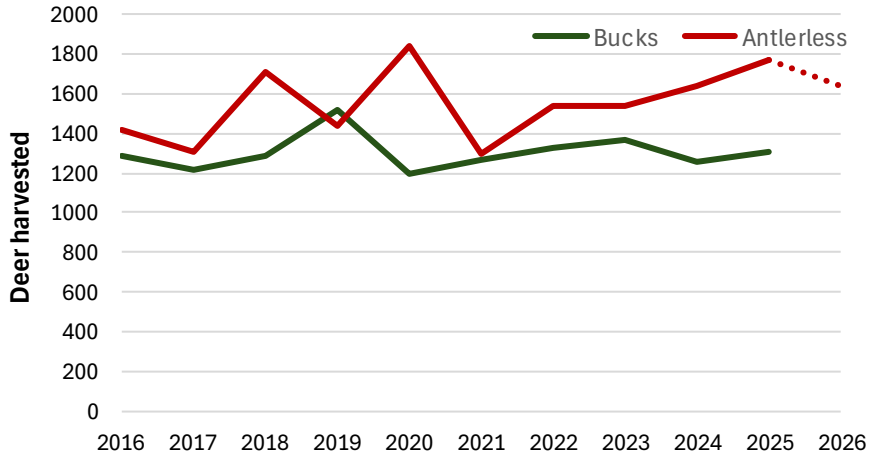
2026 Estimate

24 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
126	102

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	17%	22%
2.5	61%	17%
3.5	16%	19%
4.5+	6%	41%
no. deer aged	*(781)*	*(138)*

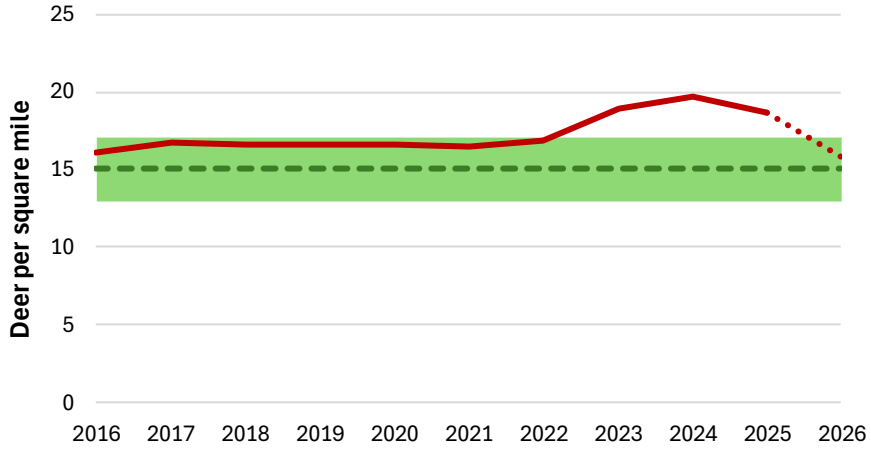


Wildlife Management Unit C

386 *mi² of deer habitat – 90% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.6** *(42)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**113.0** *(45)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.2** *(32)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.29** *(7)*	1.60

Deer Density



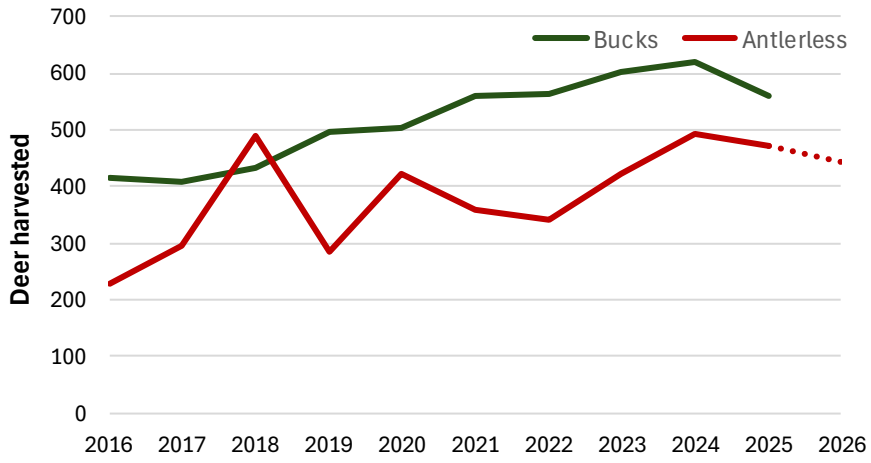
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
78	63

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	39%	22%
2.5	40%	27%
3.5	14%	9%
4.5+	8%	42%
no. deer aged	*(511)*	*(45)*

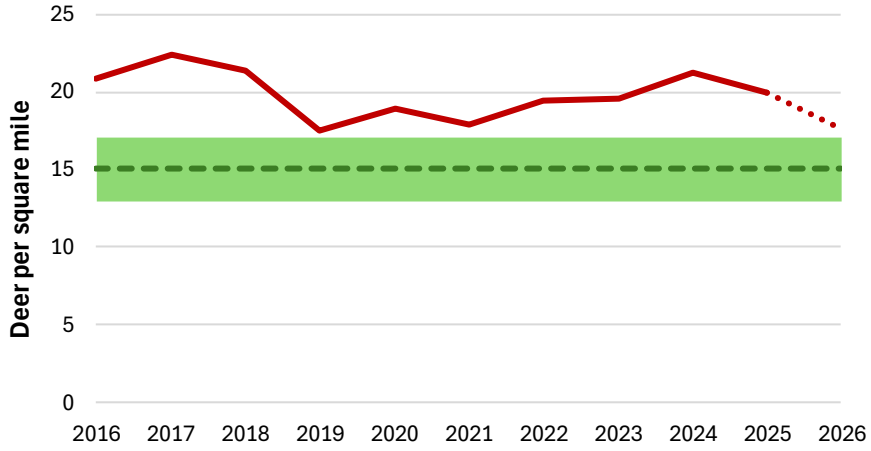


Wildlife Management Unit D1

570 *mi² of deer habitat – 78% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(80)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**117.2** *(82)*	118
Fawn Weight	**60.2** *(49)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.68** *(19)*	1.60

Deer Density



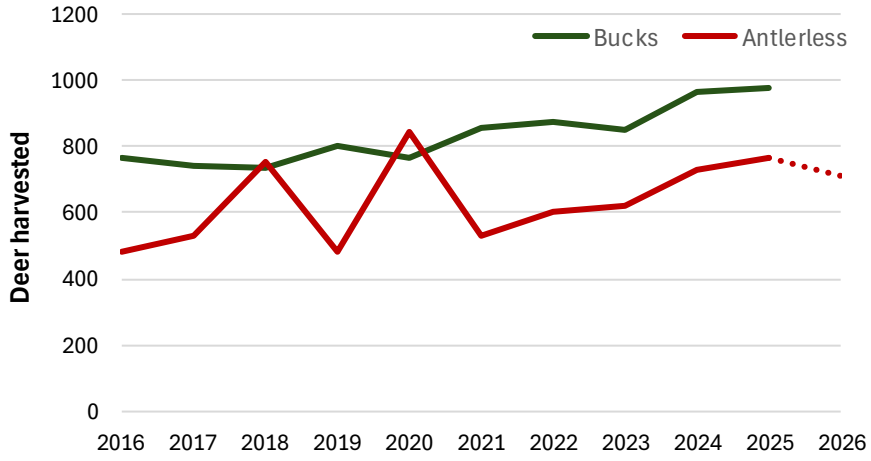
2026 Estimate

18 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
76	64

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	47%	24%
2.5	38%	21%
3.5	9%	10%
4.5+	6%	45%
no. deer aged	*(695)*	*(87)*

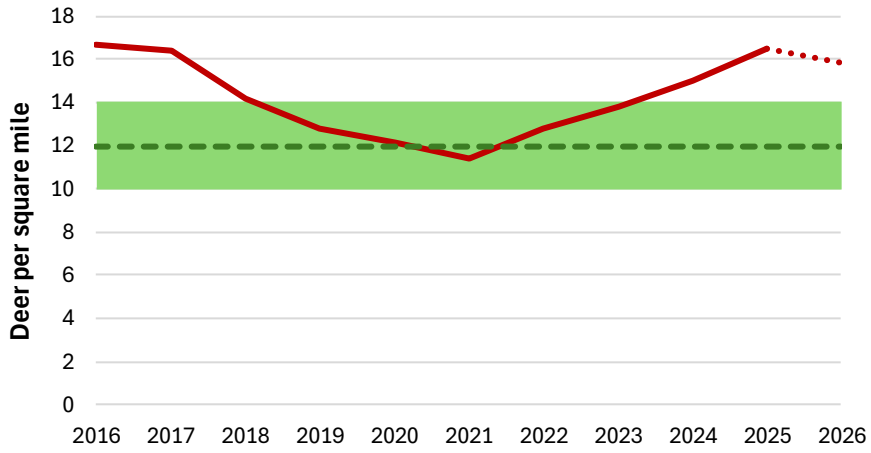


Wildlife Management Unit D2

387 *mi² of deer habitat – 89% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.3** *(23)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**116.0** *(24)*	118
Fawn Weight	**59.4** *(13)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.83** *(12)*	1.60

Deer Density



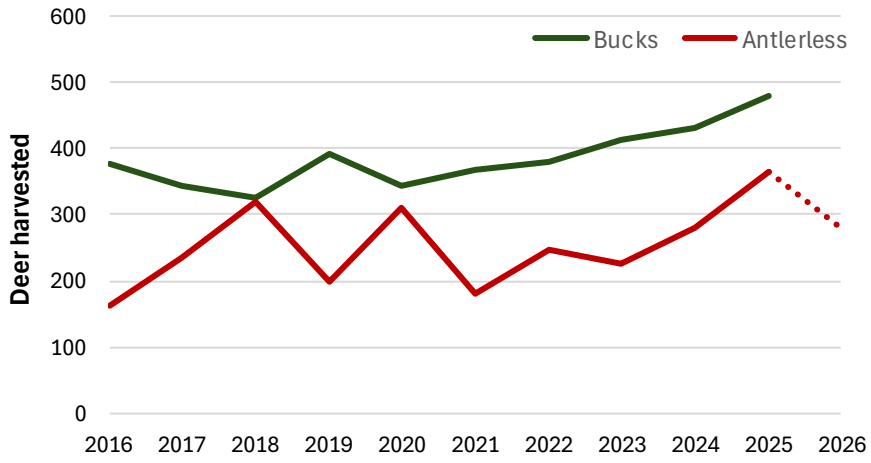
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
66	54

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	44%	24%
2.5	32%	16%
3.5	15%	14%
4.5+	8%	46%
no. deer aged	*(385)*	*(37)*

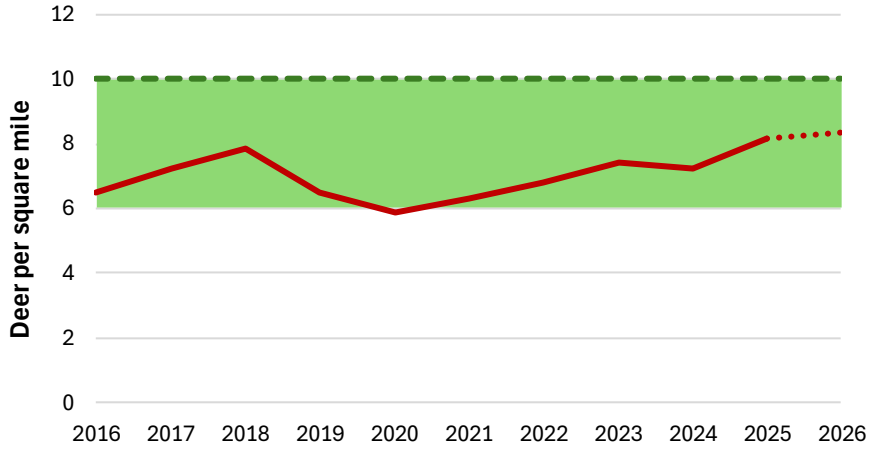


Wildlife Management Unit E1

***648** mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**20.3** *(5)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**120.8** *(6)*	118
Fawn Weight	**57.0** *(2)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.00** *(2)*	1.60

Deer Density



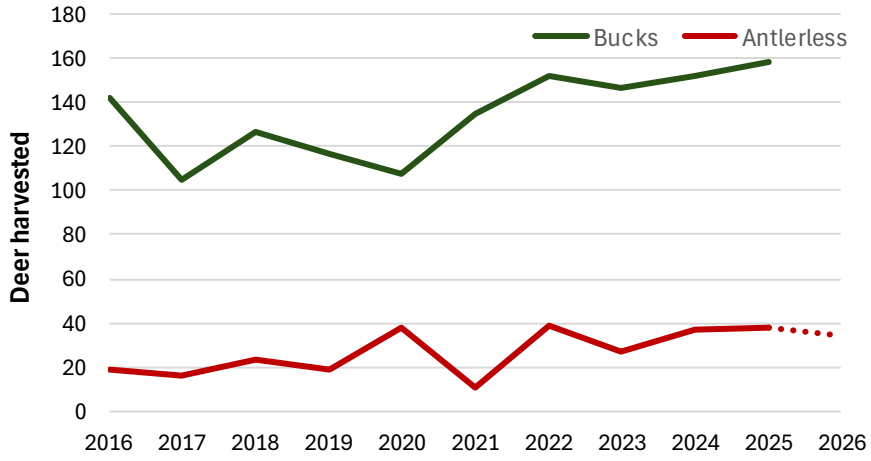
2026 Estimate

8 deer/mi2

Objective

<10

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
22	19

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	28%	10%
2.5	39%	20%
3.5	19%	0%
4.5+	13%	70%
no. deer aged	*(109)*	*(10)*

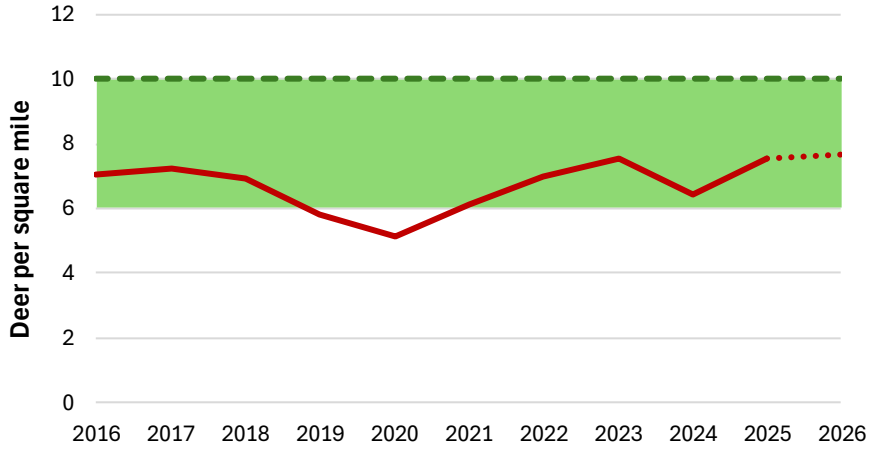


Wildlife Management Unit E2

***648** mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**19.2** *(6)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**119.6** *(8)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.8** *(3)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.00** *(2)*	1.60

Deer Density



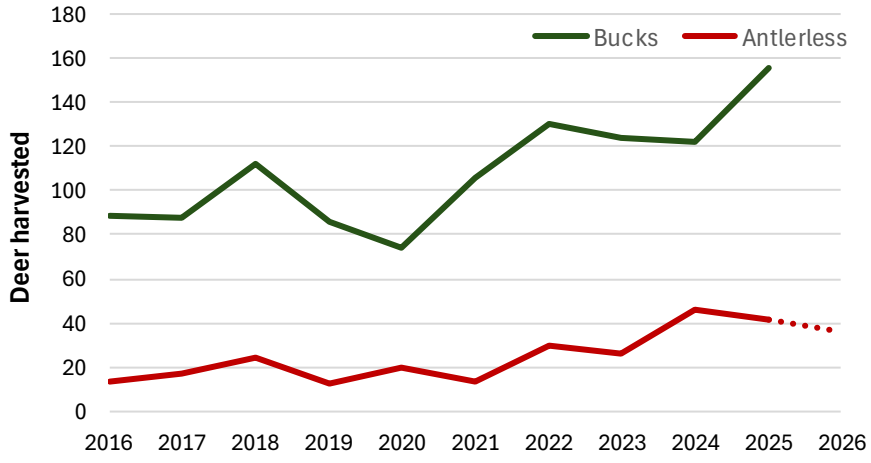
2026 Estimate

8 deer/mi2

Objective

<10

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
28	20

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	34%	67%
2.5	28%	0%
3.5	19%	0%
4.5+	20%	33%
no. deer aged	*(80)*	*(3)*

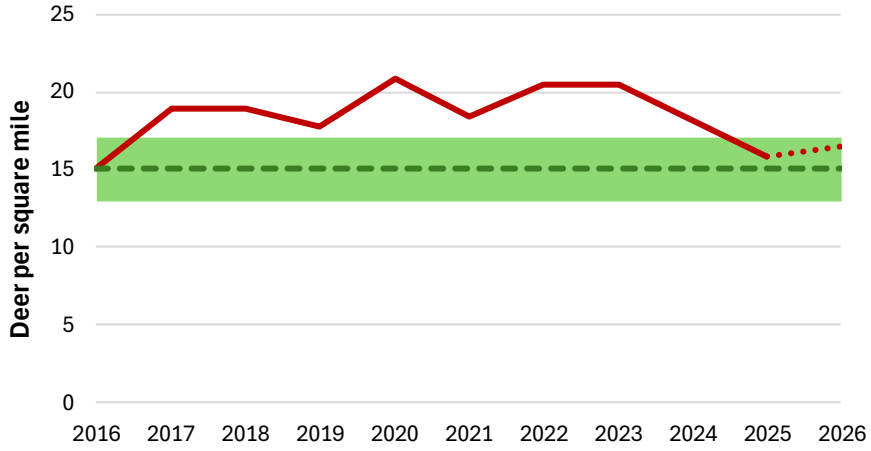


Wildlife Management Unit F1

***316** mi² of deer habitat – 33% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.1** *(29)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**119.7** *(31)*	118
Fawn Weight	**59.0** *(13)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.33** *(6)*	1.60

Deer Density



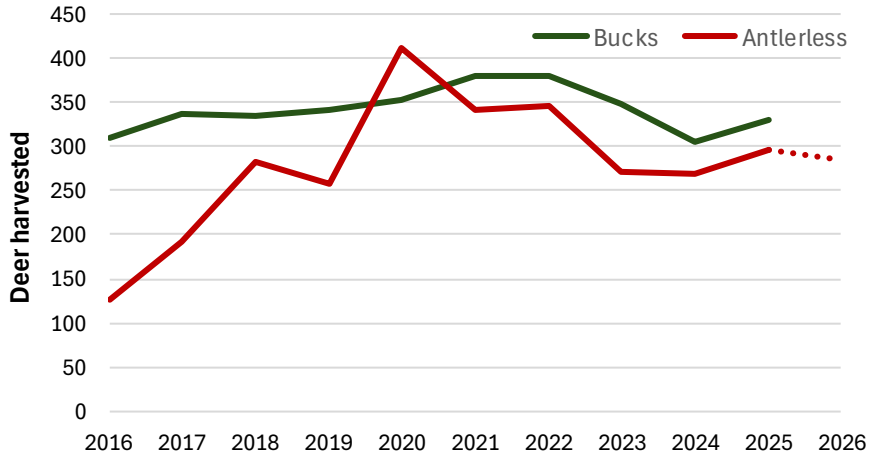
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
85	75

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	18%	24%
2.5	49%	10%
3.5	24%	41%
4.5+	8%	24%
no. deer aged	*(233)*	*(29)*

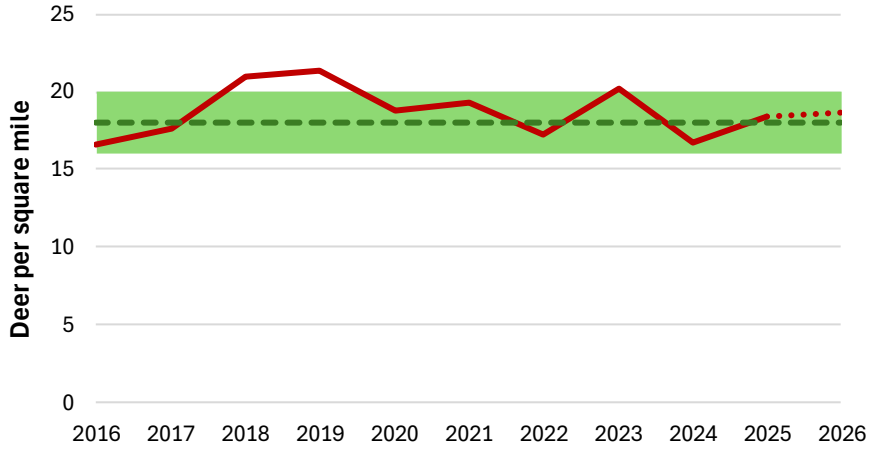


Wildlife Management Unit F2

***286** mi² of deer habitat – 57% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.6** *(22)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**117.1** *(24)*	118
Fawn Weight	**60.0** *(21)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.71** *(8)*	1.60

Deer Density



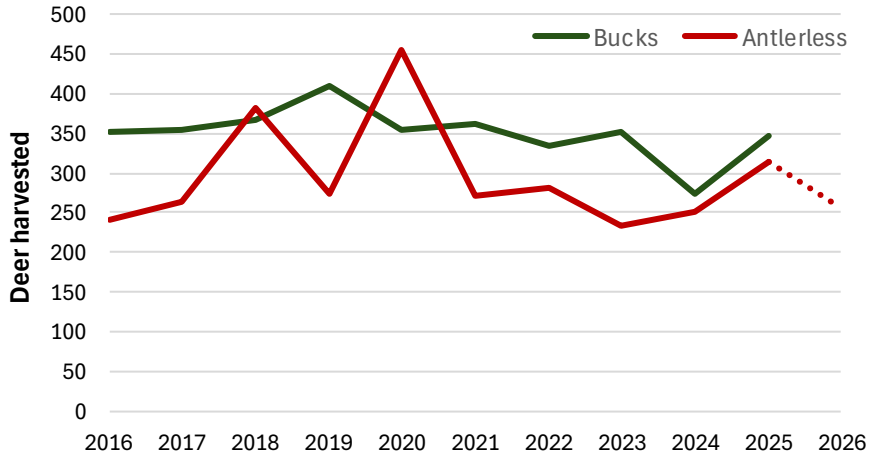
2026 Estimate

19 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
82	70

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	19%	10%
2.5	50%	7%
3.5	20%	23%
4.5+	11%	60%
no. deer aged	*(234)*	*(30)*

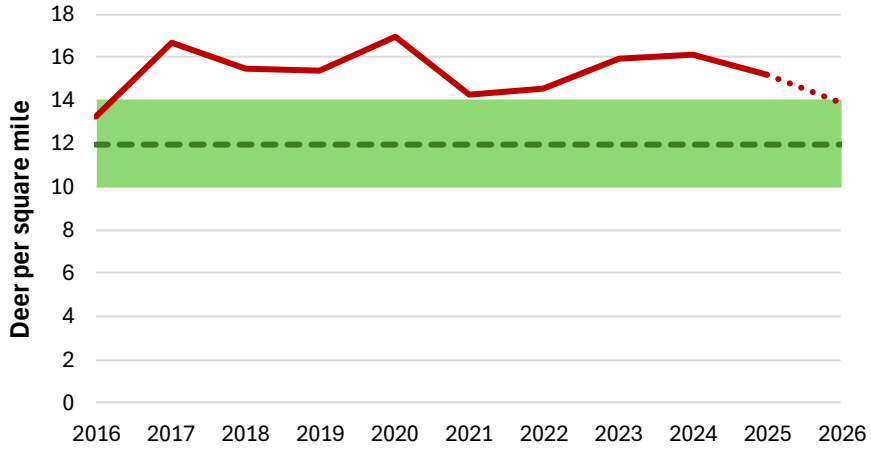


Wildlife Management Unit G

388 *mi² of deer habitat – 93% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.9** *(14)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**115.8** *(14)*	115
Fawn Weight	**60.5** *(2)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.20** *(5)*	1.60

Deer Density



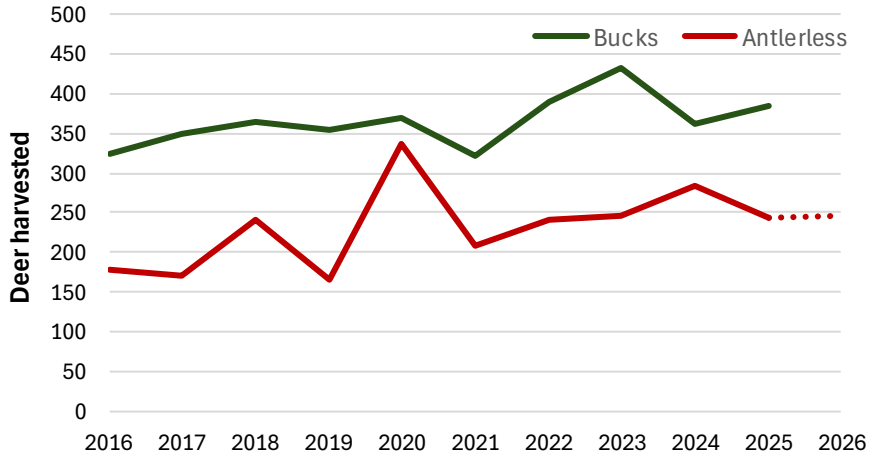
2026 Estimate

14 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
65	53

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	27%	42%
2.5	42%	8%
3.5	17%	8%
4.5+	14%	42%
no. deer aged	*(406)*	*(12)*

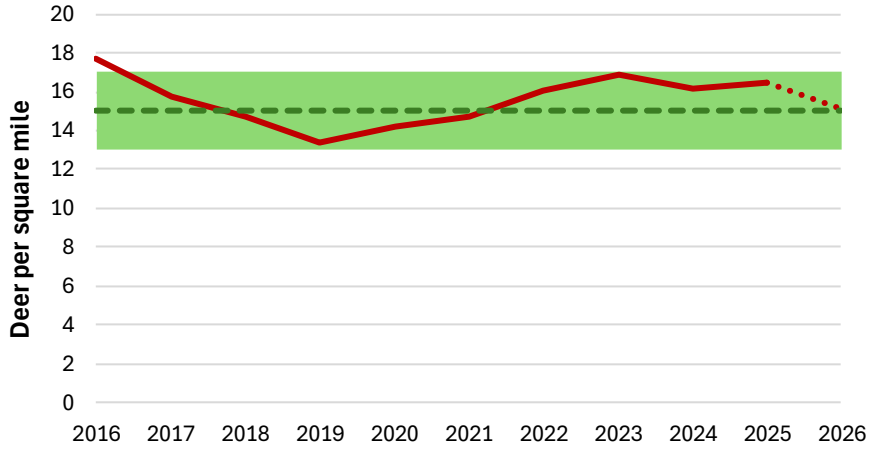


Wildlife Management Unit H

518 *mi² of deer habitat – 90% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**14.9** *(30)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**109.1** *(32)*	115
Fawn Weight	**58.8** *(23)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.21** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



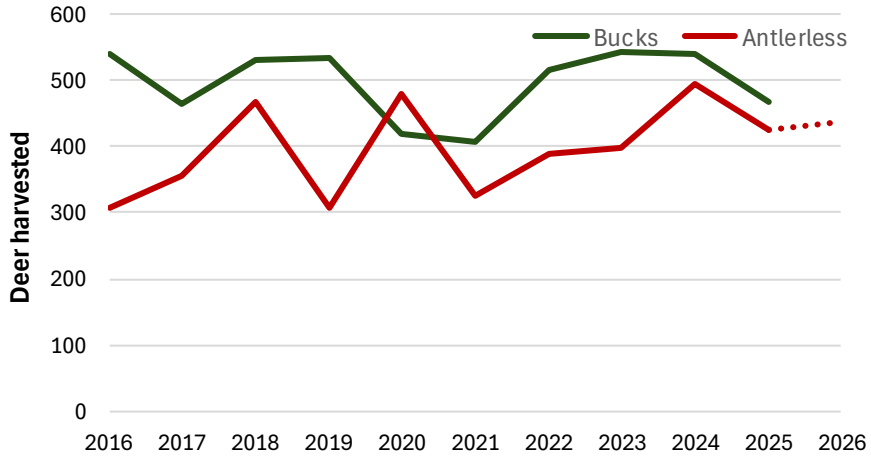
2026 Estimate

15 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
85	73

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	11%	18%
2.5	51%	23%
3.5	25%	9%
4.5+	13%	50%
no. deer aged	*(522)*	*(56)*

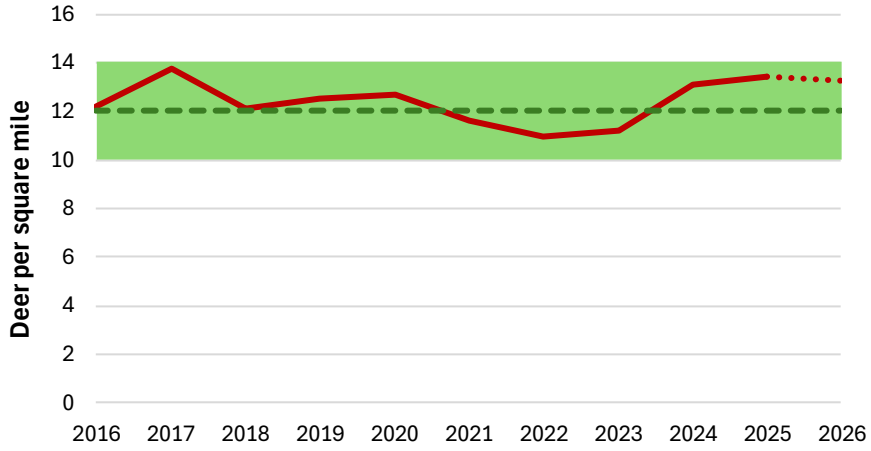


Wildlife Management Unit [redacted]

424 *mi² of deer habitat – 96% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.0** *(10)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**117.7** *(11)*	115
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(8)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.80** *(5)*	1.60

Deer Density



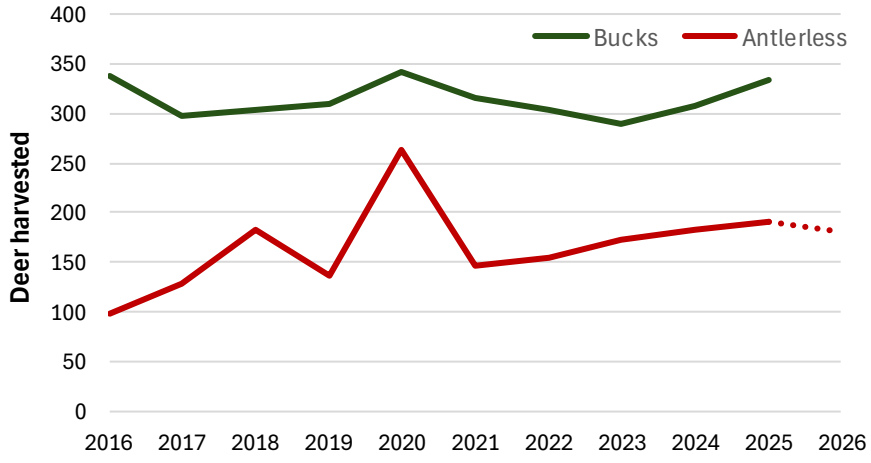
2026 Estimate

13 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
59	49

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	24%	0%
2.5	41%	0%
3.5	18%	0%
4.5+	18%	100%
no. deer aged	*(335)*	*(4)*

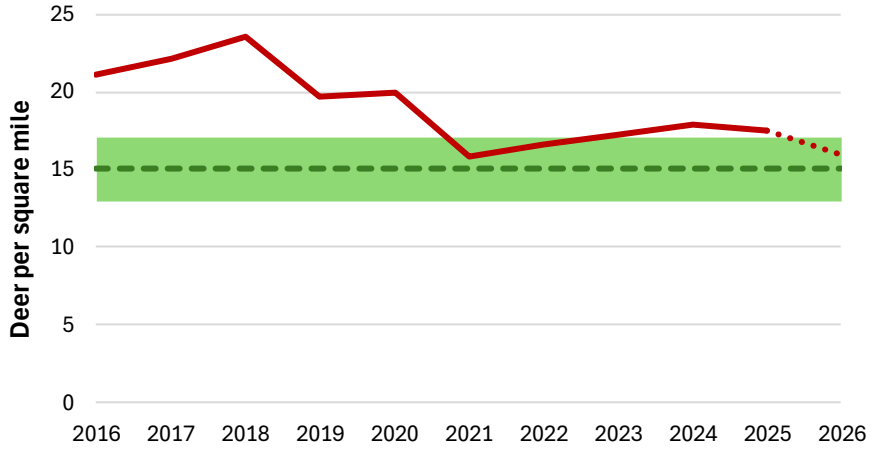


Wildlife Management Unit J1

528 *mi² of deer habitat – 87% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.1** *(18)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**116.5** *(20)*	115
Fawn Weight	**62.3** *(16)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.78** *(23)*	1.60

Deer Density



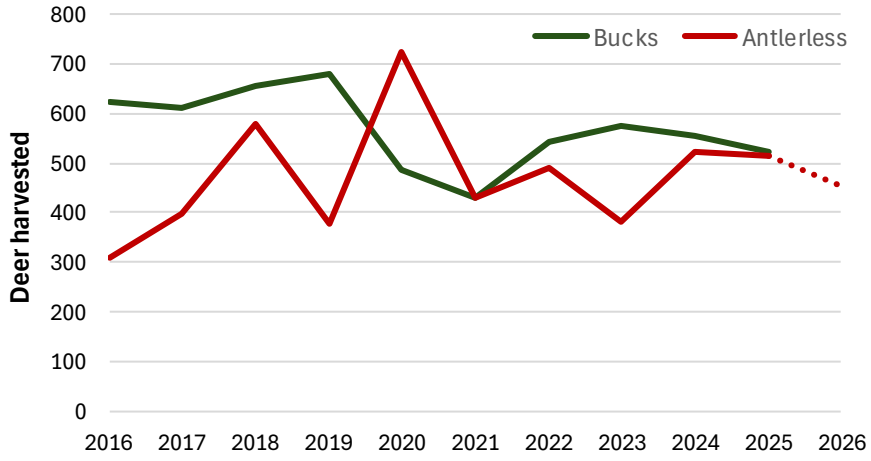
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
86	74

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	13%	18%
2.5	51%	21%
3.5	22%	11%
4.5+	13%	50%
no. deer aged	*(741)*	*(28)*

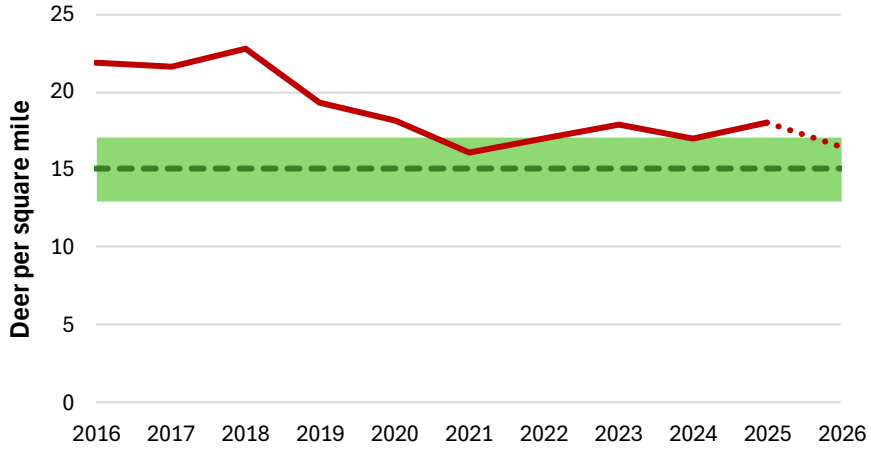


Wildlife Management Unit J2

705 *mi² of deer habitat – 89% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.5** *(41)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**109.5** *(42)*	115
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(55)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.67** *(24)*	1.60

Deer Density



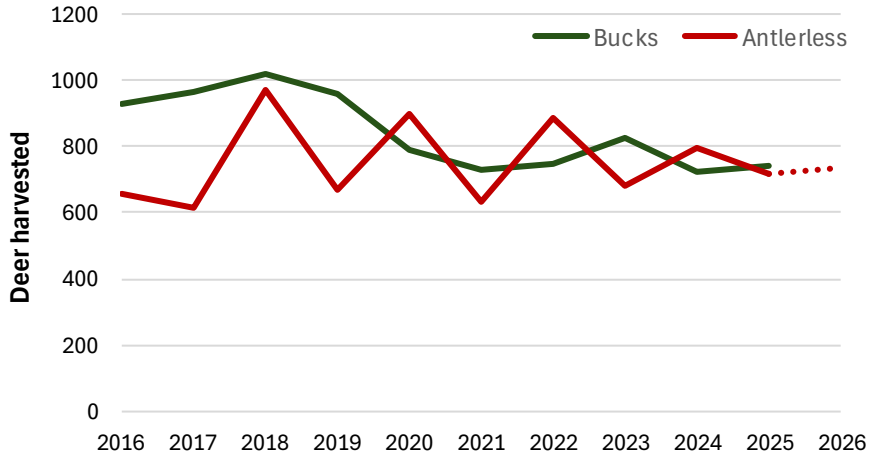
2026 Estimate

17 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
96	80

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	11%	20%
2.5	51%	16%
3.5	24%	14%
4.5+	14%	49%
no. deer aged	*(732)*	*(85)*

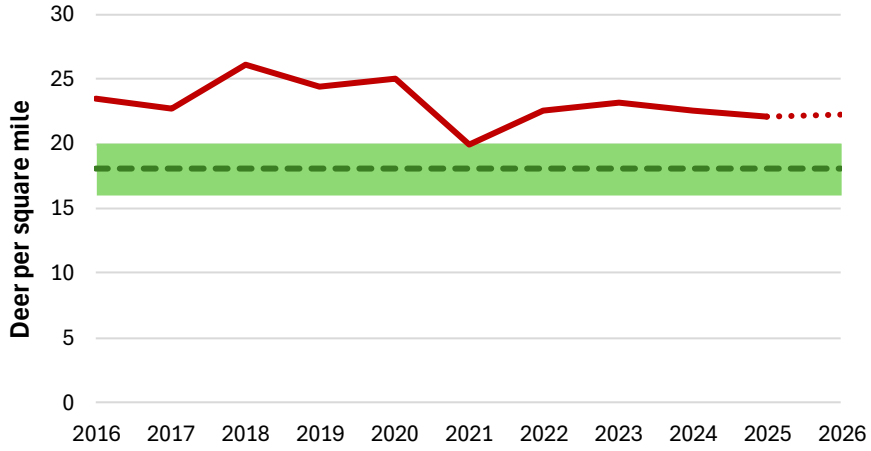


Wildlife Management Unit K

438 *mi² of deer habitat – 81% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(34)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**110.8** *(39)*	115
Fawn Weight	**59.1** *(38)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.65** *(17)*	1.60

Deer Density



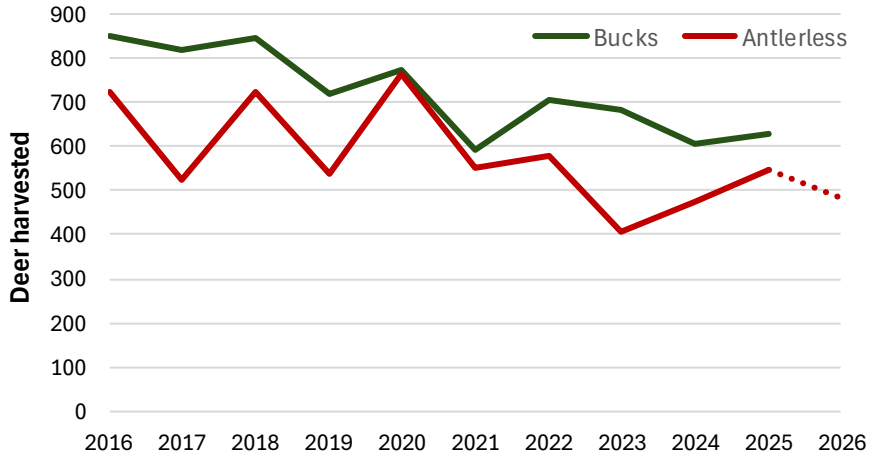
2026 Estimate

22 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
75	62

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	12%	16%
2.5	56%	10%
3.5	24%	10%
4.5+	8%	63%
no. deer aged	*(470)*	*(68)*

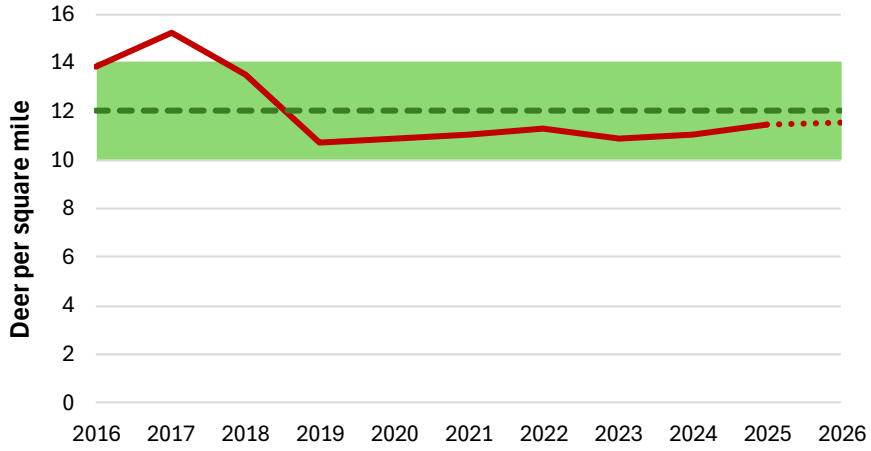


Wildlife Management Unit L

365 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.6** *(4)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**108.5** *(4)*	110
Fawn Weight	**49.6** *(7)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.63** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



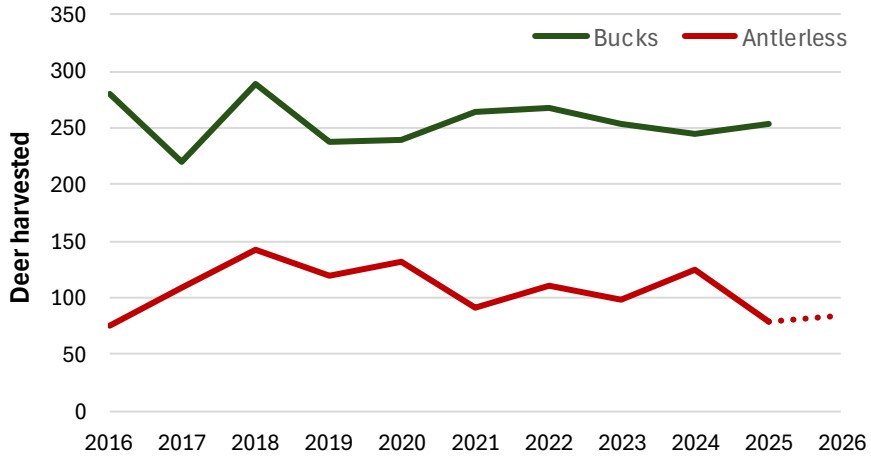
2026 Estimate

12 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
40	33

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	21%	21%
2.5	35%	0%
3.5	27%	21%
4.5+	17%	57%
no. deer aged	*(126)*	*(14)*

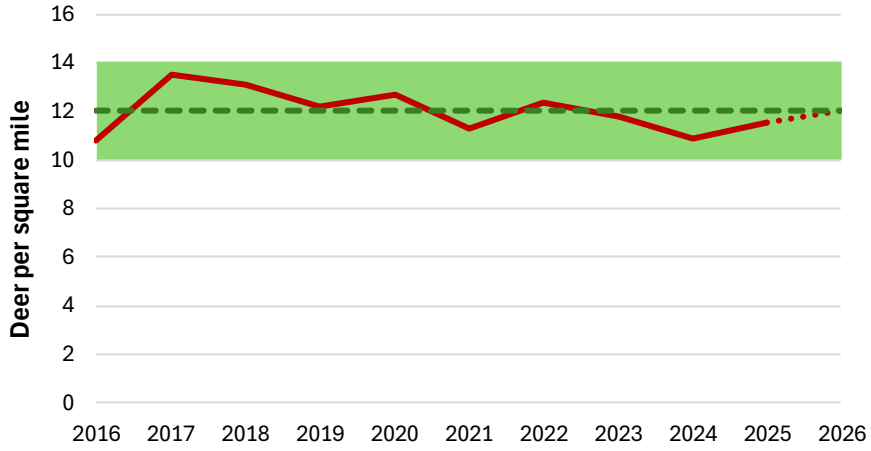


Wildlife Management Unit M

451 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.8** *(3)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**109.7** *(3)*	110
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(3)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.73** *(12)*	1.60

Deer Density



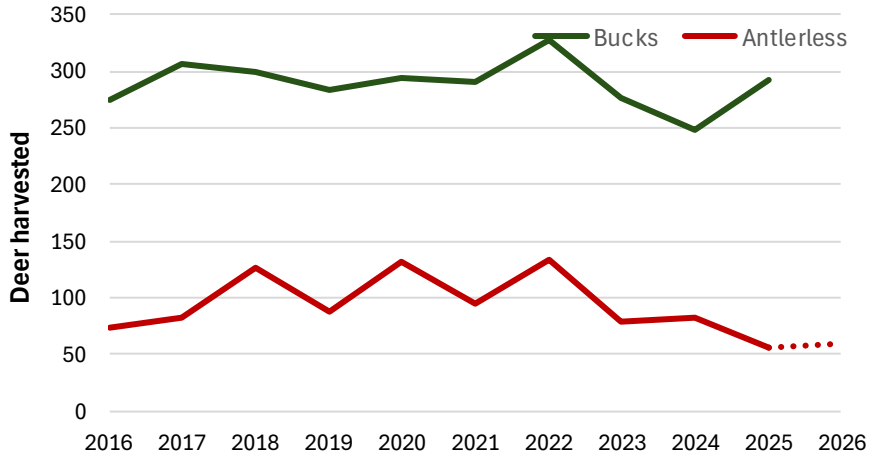
2026 Estimate

12 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
26	23

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	21%	0%
2.5	36%	0%
3.5	20%	25%
4.5+	23%	75%
no. deer aged	*(185)*	*(4)*

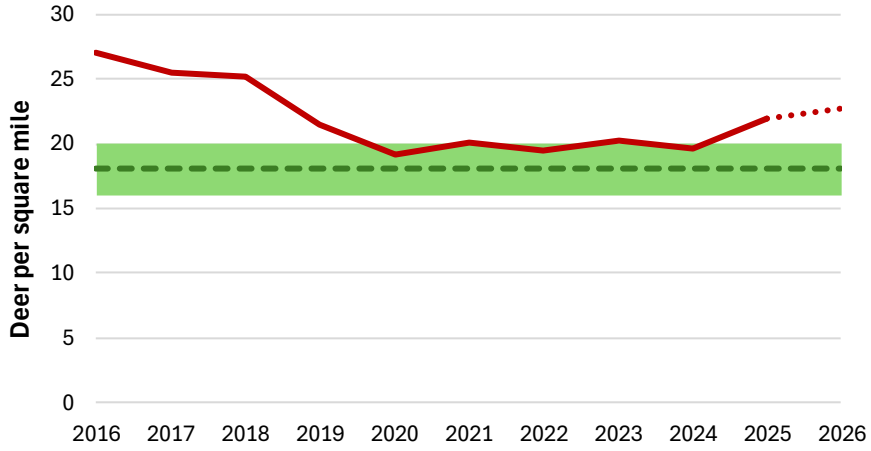


Wildlife Management Unit N

323 *mi² of deer habitat – 85% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**17.1** *(18)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**111.6** *(20)*	110
Fawn Weight	**57.5** *(28)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.56** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



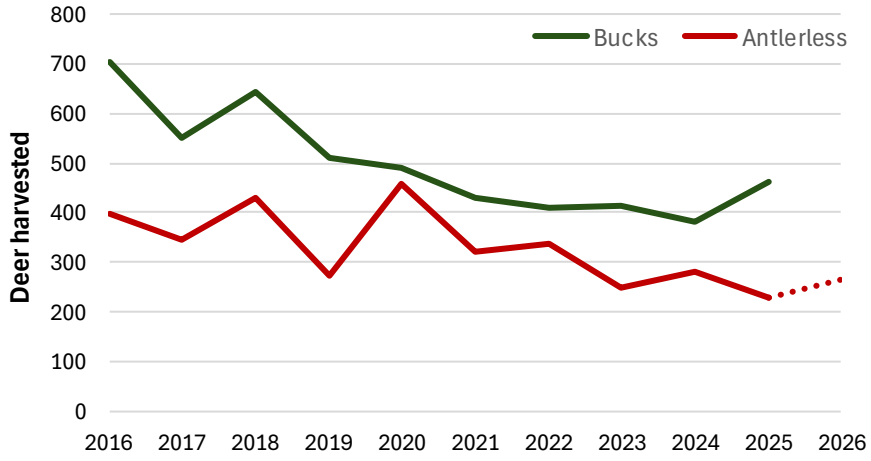
2026 Estimate

23 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
60	49

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	20%	22%
2.5	47%	17%
3.5	21%	11%
4.5+	12%	50%
no. deer aged	*(378)*	*(36)*

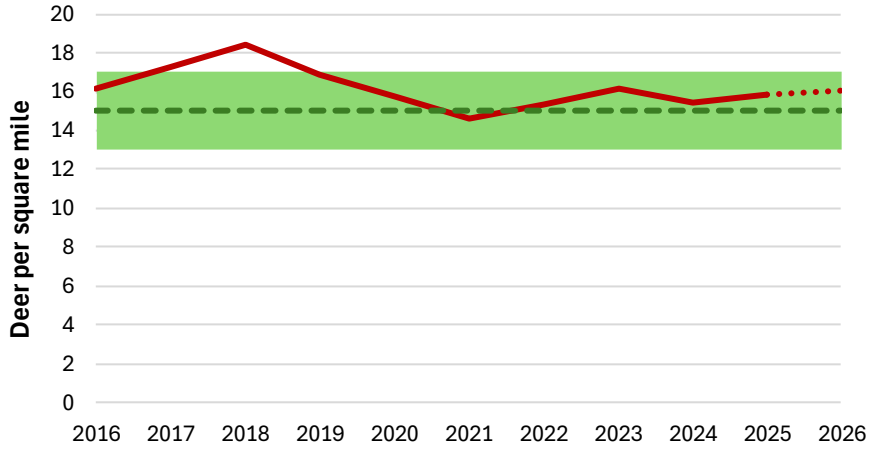


Wildlife Management Unit O

548 *mi² of deer habitat – 87% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.9** *(15)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**115.5** *(15)*	110
Fawn Weight	**56.0** *(12)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.78** *(18)*	1.60

Deer Density



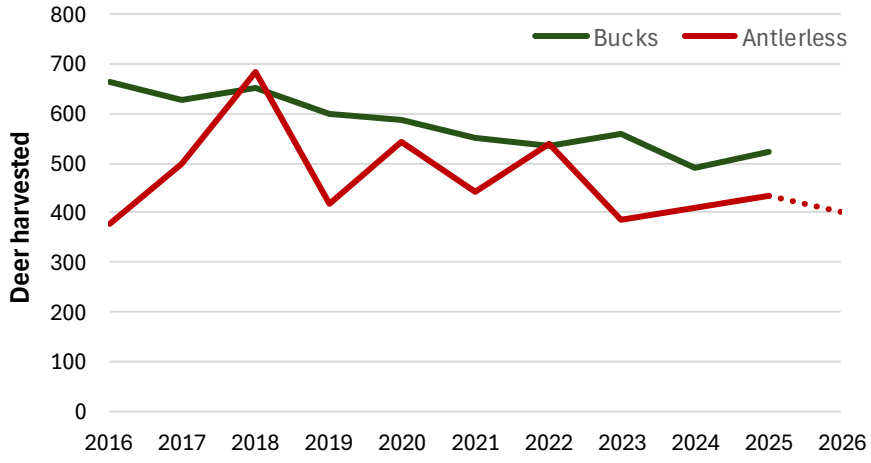
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
78	65

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	19%	19%
2.5	45%	6%
3.5	21%	13%
4.5+	15%	63%
no. deer aged	*(476)*	*(16)*

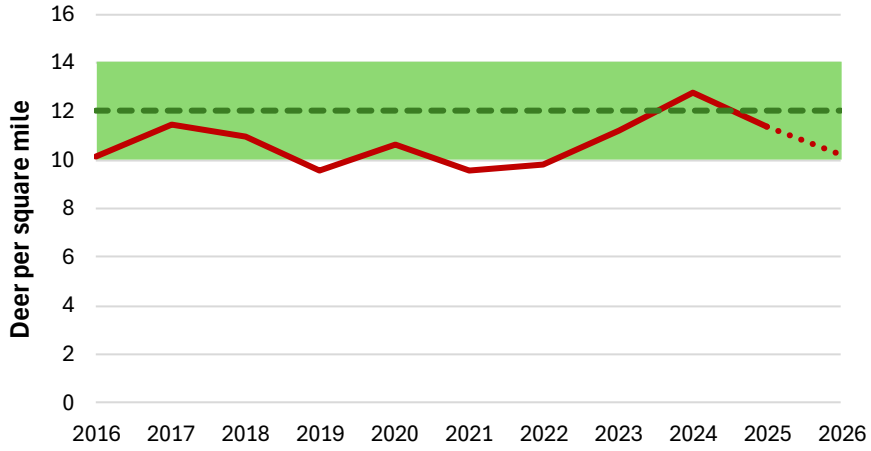


Wildlife Management Unit P

455 *mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**14.6** *(8)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**104.1** *(10)*	110
Fawn Weight	**59.8** *(6)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.46** *(13)*	1.60

Deer Density



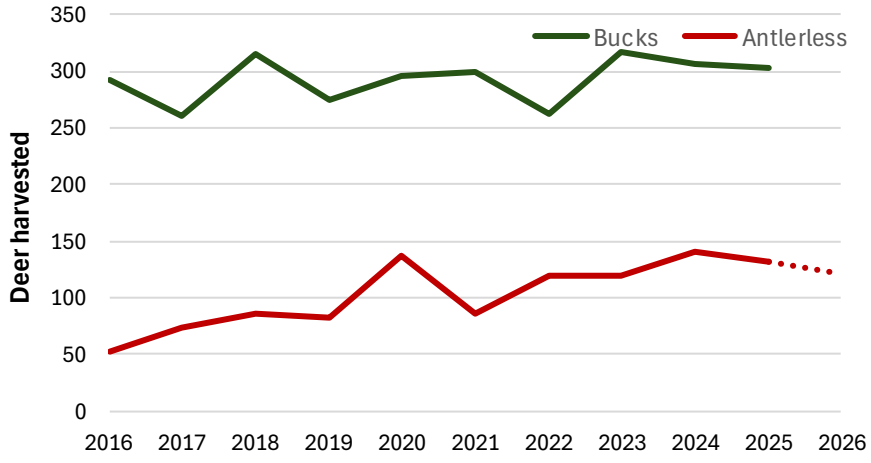
2026 Estimate

10 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
42	34

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	26%	40%
2.5	37%	0%
3.5	20%	20%
4.5+	17%	40%
no. deer aged	*(286)*	*(5)*

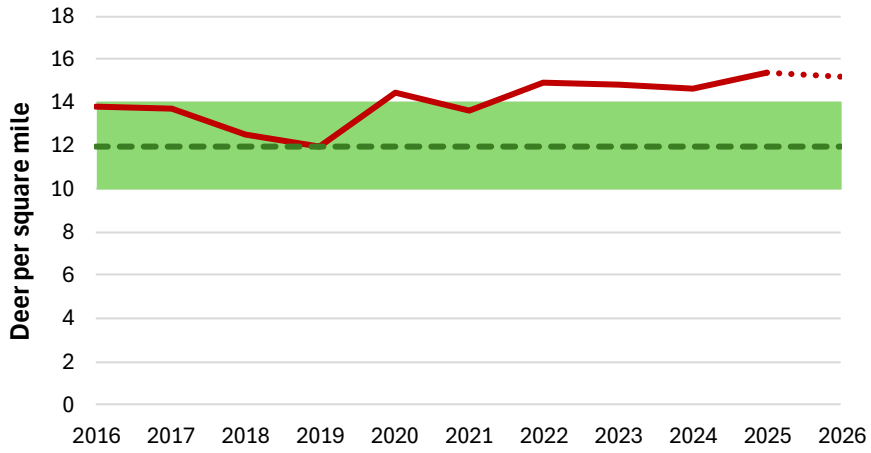


Wildlife Management Unit Q

233 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	*no data* *(0)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	*no data* *(0)*	110
Fawn Weight	*no data* *(0)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.11** *(10)*	1.60

Deer Density



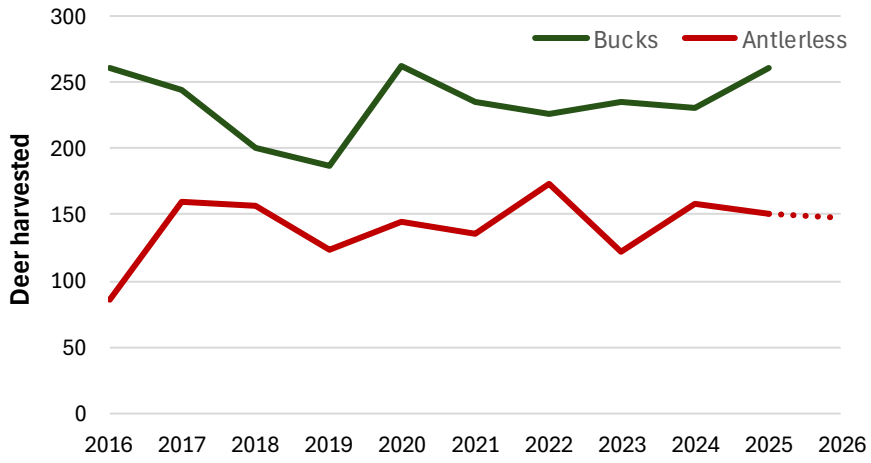
2026 Estimate

15 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
59	48

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	29%	0%
2.5	33%	0%
3.5	24%	0%
4.5+	14%	0%
no. deer aged	*(182)*	*(0)*

Appendix B: Comments from 2026 deer public hearings.

Brattleboro – March 16, 2026 (public attendance: 9)

Status of deer population

- I feel the deer herd is doing well and can stand a bit more in the way of harvest.
- I think the deer we have are healthy. I certainly don't see the numbers I used to, but that seems to be the objective. Looking forward to the expanded opportunities.
- Logging needs to be increased on private land. Changes to the UVA program.
- Winter seemed a little worse than average, but the snow had no crust, which kept coyotes from moving around and the powder snow insulated the bodies of deer laying down.
- I feel the deer pop is good. I feel land access is a big issue in achieving the correct deer numbers.
- I feel like we really need these changes for the improvement of the deer herd.
- Good. (x2)
- Our winter was very cold, but lack of crust in Windham County was big plus for deer herd. I see no need for 2 buck tags. Where are all the young hunters? We need to have access to more land in Halifax, Guilford area, there are tons of posted land in areas we hunt.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Maybe the number of nonresident hunters coming into our area needs to be considered in all this. We see a fair number of NH hunters in our woods and on our roads from mid Oct-mid Dec, Brattleboro/Dummerston area.
- I see no reason to restrict the antlerless opportunities during archery or youth/novice season. I sounds like the Department is being conservative with the permits, which I agree with.
- Cut antlerless lottery permits at least in half overall but don't cut back at all during youth/novice seasons because we need to encourage new hunters.
- Antlerless should def. be harvested during archery/novice especially novice/youth. Once again, land access should be considered. A lot of the higher density areas have too much restricted/posted land.
- That people will most likely with new changes be more gung-ho for at least the first year and will most likely have a higher success rate.
- Over 70 years of age gets doe permit.
- Give more doe permits.
- Be cautious with this. I saw what happened in the '80's. I do think you are the right track with this action you are taking.

St. Johnsbury – March 18, 2026 (public attendance: 25)

Status of deer population

- Support increasing archery opportunities w/ zones in pop. areas.
- So far the deer we have been seeing have been in good shape barring any bad storms late in the season. We just need more work reducing the predator populations.
- I'm interested to see what the success rates look like with rifle hunting does. I do not think it will increase the amount of deer killed in Chittenden County. We need to encourage sustainable logging and expanding habitat.
- Population is at a good number but agree that to increase the herd a lot of habitat work needs to be done.
- I've definitely noticed a drop in the body weight of rifle season bucks in my area, but does not so much.
- Population is good. 2 buck is false will not happen. Permits for this will not be going to general hunter all permits will go to landowner only.
- The status of our deer population seems good now, but always take into account how different we are in the Kingdom (snowfall/cold) and winter kill.
- This past winter we had more below zero days than the past 10 years combined. If this contributed to higher deer kills, do you have a way to reduce permits?
- Reinstate clearcutting first and foremost, especially in D1 and D2, it's a sterile wasteland.
- I am still gravely concerned that we may be falling into the same trap as in the '80's, which were my early years of Vermont deer hunting. I hope you are right, but I'm afraid you are not.
- All good.
- Antlerless increase this year was long overdue. (thank you).

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Support conditional take of antlerless before a second buck can be taken.
- Our group does not harvest antlerless deer anyway so any permits we get is to save a doe's life. We also do not harvest spikes. Save them for the grandkids.
- Antlerless should be harvested in archery and youth season.
- Plan for high success rate. Keep working to expand habitat and hunting areas.
- Definitely assume high harvest rate so good idea to limit permits to see how things shake out this 2026 season.
- I would take into account the older people that will buy a permit to "save a doe."
- Archery will take does as in past. When cutting permits will go to landowner only because not enough of them.
- I agree with all of the proposals and you folks are on point w/ managing the herd for herd health and being conservative.
- Winter deer kill.
- The number of illegally killed deer will go way up. I would like to know how this is being addressed by F&W.
- It will be interesting how it turns out. It may change where people normally hunt, and increase pressure in certain areas.
- Keep antlerless in archery and youth – plan for a 30% fill rate.
- J2 is too big – not in area but length and diversity. Working in Tunbridge and driving to St. J daily, I can see the night and day population difference. I own 150 acres in Waterford (prime habitat) and I don't

hunt it due to population. I drive south or just go to NH. The orientation of the unit should be considered.
- Only 2 per year and no more.

St. Albans – March 19, 2026 (public attendance: 18)

Status of deer population

- We don't have the amount of deer you think we do. Farmers nowadays are much bigger and they now use liquid shit and spread on grassland every 30 days and that alone turns a deer nose off and they don't deed in hay fields like they used to.
- Fair but some areas need more deer. Some need less.
- It seems we are seeing bigger bucks and healthier deer harvested in recent years.
- I believe we have a healthy herd! But don't agree with the extended muzzleloader season. The does are already bred at that point! So you are killing 3 deer instead of 1!
- I think we don't have the deer population we used to.
- Our population on our properties = B+C are very healthy and plentiful. Friends and family took 7 deer between the 2 properties, 3 buck/4 doe.
- The deer health in my area seem to be good!

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Again here at least in Franklin County we don't have the doe we use to have.
- Some units can't afford antlerless hunting. WMU C is one.
- PA permits are different than VT. Doe can only be shot if you get a permit… VT is open doe harvest all bow season.
- Winter severity impacts. Need to drastically reduce # of permits if allowing rifles.
- My belief is we need to equal our the buck to doe ration and I believe the new changes will help except the 2 buck rule!
- Yes – I feel archery should include antlerless also.
- Not to overdo it like in the early '80s.

Montpelier – May 5, 2026 (public attendance: 14)

Status of deer population

- Buck to doe ratio needs to improve.
- Seem to be seeing less and less deer in our area – J1. Despite managing many food plots etc…, however, the mature forest probably plays a big role. The fawn kill is much more than in years past due to increase in black bear. I think there should be more incentive to kill more bear. Have a drop center for people who don't want the meat? Same with coyotes.
- It is much lower than the 1990-2000.
- The state has pockets of deer. Landowners need to do a better job of selective harvests of the wildlife. It's the hunters choice to harvest or not to harvest.
- Legislature needs to pass laws to open up more cutting to allow public land hunters a higher success. Our woods are awful compared to other states.
- How could we shape the population to be stronger and healthier? Is it about how we maintain our ecosystems and woods or having less of them?
- Needs to be more focus on improving habitat perhaps more encouragement of policy to do through UVA enrolled land and WMUs to increase regenerative forestry practices.
- Too many deer in areas that are posted. The deer in Northfield seemed to have had a good winter, but not a lot of deer.
- High elevation in zone H, Cabot, very few doe. Ratio 4-1, 4 bucks to 1 doe. Yes, but don't tell anyone. Do see only 1 fawn to adult doe. Hard to fill an antlerless tag.
- They seem healthy in J2 area. There are plenty around where I hunt.
- Sounds like we also need to work on habitat.
- I am optimistic it will be good.
- Deer populations in some areas need reducing, not in all units.
- In our area of J1, the northwest corner of Williamstown, the deer are healthy enough but there has been a steady decline in the population. That concerns me a lot.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Way too many changes all at once even though I see the intended goal.
- I'm not sure that will help our situation at this time. We need to start seeing more doe than we do now. Some of these areas might need to be micromanaged if possible.
- Taking doe if needed in a specific unit it should be targeted to a smaller specific area not always the entire zone.
- It comes down to choice. Hunters know the deer population for where they are hunting. Yes, some areas need to be thinned while others don't.
- Open up suburban hunting early but allow buck to be shot.
- I believe it's a very good idea and way to take more advantage of more traditional hunting.
- Sounds reasonable. I would expect the percentage of successful harvests to increase with centerfire rifles.
- Glad to see the reduction in permits to be better balanced with mostly likely a higher success rate.
- Less if you can shoot them during rifle season. The last time they shot doe during rifle season there were lots of small deer left dead in the woods.
- 2nd buck is a good idea. Will still be difficult to find antlerless deer. I have hunted Montpelier, more deer, but also more interference from non-hunters, such a hiking trails in large tracts of woods.
- More rules and regs but I don't dislike them and will stay legal and follow the rules.
- Look forward to seeing how they work out.

- I am OK with what I heard tonight.
- It sounds like too many antlerless deer will be taken.
- Cut the permits in half for a couple of years to see if we can bring the herd back to what it should be.

Castleton – May 7, 2026 (public attendance: 8)

Status of deer population

- I feel the current trend with a 1 buck rule has started to produce decent deer in my area. I agree we need a better buck/doe ratio and an increase in urban antlerless kill would be ideal. I live in Rutland area and know the urban hunting situation well – everything is inaccessible unless you're walking in from Rte 3. Most of surrounding Rutland Town is posted. I think you will have no problem achieving your antlerless kill with permits being filled with rifle. It's just not going to always target the deer you want. Just outside of town there is much lower deer density, those permits will significantly effect those small herds.
- After the easy winter, prospects are good.
- The powdery snow without a thick crust was tougher on coyote and domestic dogs who chase deer and that powdery snow helped insulate deer when bedded down.
- All deer I saw over the winter and spring looked to be in great condition. I think 2026 season will be a good one.
- Seems to be about the same as it has been. Some unknowns with the changes.
- I do think the winter was easy and fast green up in the spring will make good antler growth this year.
- Good health. Prospects for 2026 season low.
- I would like to see the population in my area grow some (K – Wells). Our winters have been very mild and predation has increased with the coyotes and bear numbers increasing. I question your fawn recruitment numbers and how we count our population of deer.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- One antlerless permit per hunter.
- Well thought out by WMU
- Adding 7 different ways to take deer will help give more of a chance to those hunters who don't have as much time to hunt because of their busier schedules in life.
- It is good that we are being conservative with the doe permits this first year of all these extra chances of harvesting deer.
- I would like to see more permits but I am happy with just one.
- Not sure if reducing the permits that much is going to give you a bigger harvest.
- I think more people will harvest a doe to be able to shoot a second buck. Archery thru rifle I don't believe will make a difference, but harvesting a doe with a rifle will. May reduce buck kill due to many bucks go nocturnal from more shooting.
- Could the doe be pregnant?
- I will never agree to shooting does with a rifle, but I glad to see you cut the permit numbers and are being careful moving forward.

Appendix C: Written public comments.

Sent: Monday, April 20, 2026 8:56 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearings

For what it's worth: How do you propose to "Manage" Vermont,'s deer herd especially in Orange county or other counties that have much posted land. The owners of the land don't care what the department of fish and game wants, they only care about saving deer from hunters! Plus, they are not going to spend their money on improving the habitat on THEIR land so hunters can shoot THEIR deer. So much land is posted that it concentrates hunters on unposted land and makes hunting much more difficult.

Capt. Tom Malanchuk
(16 year Veteran hunter safety instructor both bow and rifle).

Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2026 4:25 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Allocation

The state of Vermont needs to lower the deer limit to 2 deer. One buck and then one doe across all means of harvest. 4 deer a year is ridiculous. Most land owners are posting their private property because of deer mismanagement. All bucks harvested should be required to have at least 3 pts on one side, except for junior hunters.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:45 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Anterless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Good afternoon,

There are 3 of us that currently hunt private property in zone Q. (roughly 375 acre) We have many cameras out and yearly we generally see 3 to 4 different Does.

If we harvest the Does that we are allowed to we would be eliminating the heard in our area. So I believe that the proposed changes would not be a good idea.

Thanks for your time,
Matt Horton

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:07 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Management

Dear Wildlife Board,

I won't be able to attend either meeting.

I wanted to express satisfaction with the VT Fish and Wildlife's management of the deer herd with the emphasis of harvesting more anterless deer. As a forester and after reading Quality Whitetails, it is clear to me that it is best for the landscape to keep the numbers well below the carrying capacity. The quality of the habitat, the amount of posted land, and simple differences in geography and its inherent differences in winter severity are out of everyone's control. As a hunter, I am more than satisfied with the number of animals I see and the health of the animals I am able to harvest. I have no issues with changes coming. Nick Fortin and his team have my trust.

Thank you,
Markus Bradley

PS - I do think the State of Vermont needs to consider taking more bear. My historic average is 1 sighting per year. In 2024 I saw 17, 8 in 2025, and already 2 this year.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:09 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Deer Harvest Recommendations

The biggest obstacle VT is facing is the rising amount of posted property. I would say in the past 10 – 15 years, 70% of the land I hunted for over 30 years has now been posted and doesn't allow hunting. I'm talking thousands of acers. Talking to land owners this year, a lot more land is going to be posted because they are opposed to hunters being able to take does with a rifle.

I wonder if VT Fish and Wildlife went back to the 70s when you could take does with a rifle with a permit. I suspect the success rate was pretty high. As a person who hunted back then I found it very unsettling and dangerous especially the opening weekend. Hunters were shooting at anything that moved. What did I see out of all those doe rifle seasons was the deer population was obliverated. I remember going onto large plots of land with snow on the ground and finding no deer tracks. It became very hard to see any deer. People who hunted back in that time period are very concerned about VT the same thing again and wiping out the deer herd.

Why not start out a bit conservative. I think with permits you are suggesting its really going to impact the deer herd. I think more land is going to be posted. I think we will hear of shooting incidents. Overall, VTs biggest problem is all the posted land. We all know that deer go to where they can escape pressure. Posted land is a great place to hide and they know it. Also, around houses is another great place. You want to see some deer head to a couple of those locations.

Thanks,

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:10 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: What deer

Can't believe you want to kill off more does. When you only see ONE deer in the entire season. When you only see ONE deer all summer, when there are NO tracks in the usual deer yards all winter it's time to stop

killing doe's. I know the Dumbercrats in VT want to ban all guns and if you keep killing off all the does no one will be hunting any longer because there won't be anything to hunt. Your not going to make much money on just fishing, especially since you don't stock much of anything except ponds anymore.
G Despart

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:22 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe seasons

Good afternoon,
I believe that smaller management zones would allow for more precise control over doe permit allocation. I reside in Wildlife Management Unit J2, and in my experience, the doe population is not consistent across the entire unit. For example, conditions in Norwich differ significantly from other areas within J2.
One of the primary challenges in Norwich, as well as throughout much of the state, is the prevalence of posted land, which limits access for hunters and complicates population management efforts. I understand the importance of managing the doe population and actively contribute to that effort; however, I am selective about where within J2 I choose to do so, based on local conditions.
I recognize that the board faces a difficult task and that it is not possible to satisfy all perspectives. I simply wanted to share my observations and viewpoint for consideration.
Thank you for your time.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:29 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer plan comment

I think we should be trying to maximize permit numbers even if that means shorter seasons.

It would be a shame to shrink the hunting community because some people can’t get a tag.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:51 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Anterless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Good day,

I have never been part of a board or complained about rules and regulations. That said, my hunting property is in Montgomery and during rifle season over the past 2 years; I have seen a total 2 deer while in the woods. I hunt about an average of 70 hours during the 2-week period. PLEASE put anterless hunting within certain wildlife areas, not across the whole state. You can't compare Franklin county to Chittenden, Rutland or Winsor as there is no comparison.

Sincerely,
Randy Cutter

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 8:23 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer management rule change

I live 2 hours away from the closest public hearing site. I would like to participate. Since there is no convient way for me to be able to attend I am unable.

I am against the rule change. There is no way to manage posted property in this state and this rule is moot. Causing more costs to an already over expensed state. There is no way that is will work.

Causing extreme fluctuation in the deer population making it harder to manage the deer poulation. Causing more stress on an already stressed wildlife department.

At the same time causing dissatisfied hunters where there is non posted land because there will be even less deer in those areas since those are the areas which will be over hunted and over harvested with the new rule.

However the posted property will have the opposite effect. Under hunted and over populated since deer will be housed on these properties.

This will have a chain effect causing more hunters to violate laws and trespass onto posted property. Causing upset hunters and land owners of posted property. Wardens will be overwhelmed. Causing chaos and more harm then good for the public.

Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 8:04 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearing Opinion

Hi,

I can't attend the hearing and wanted to voice my opinion. I am a 70 year old lifelong Vermont deer hunter with an M.S. in Biology. I have been retired for almost 10 years and hunt at least 45 days in state every season. I can't remember the last time I didn't get a buck with my bow and continue to hunt every day after my tag is filled because I love to.
My biggest concern is that I see declining deer populations every season and yet the state continues to relax bag limits. I recognize that there are large populations of deer in urban areas and probably other parts of the state. In the areas that I hunt, zone B and the foothills of the mountains, the population of accessible deer is quite low. Land access is extremely limited and so the density of Hunters is high compared to game. The antler restriction has helped a lot combined with the 1 buck limit.

Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 8:18 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearing, continued

I just sent an opinion before completing so here's a follow-up.
I am strongly opposed to increasing the bag limits and adding a second buck tag generally across the state. Perhaps in selected areas with high population density AND adequate land access, this is necessary but generally I see it depleting an already limited resource. Many people are giving up hunting VT for nearby out

of state opportunities because the experience is so much better. Not because there are more animals, but because access to hunting and hunter density is lower. I am expecting our state to get better as people give up hunting here when the population is even more depleted. We hunters see the deer hunting as more revenue oriented than resource oriented. Thanks,
Stephen Mongeon

Sent: Saturday, April 25, 2026 9:13 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Antlerless Deer Season Changes

I fully support the 2026 updated deer season regulations related to antlerless deer. As a consulting forester I see first hand the impacts on the health of our forests from an increasing deer population. The impacts to tree regeneration quality and quantity caused by elevated deer numbers represent a long-term threat to forest health and productivity.

As a hunter I am excited at additional opportunities to harvest wild game.

Thanks to V F&W for using science to inform policy updates and public communications.

-R

Rick Morrill

Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2026 9:30 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment

I'm writing to inform the fishing game board that I am concerned with the number of permits that are being issued this year for "doe permits". While I definitely was pushing for doe permits to be used in November; I was and still are concerned about the number of does that may be taken during the bow season since you're allowed to use bows for doe also during the rifle season. There's so many different variables that are going to go into this season and the unknowns. How many people will refuse ; how many people will buy them and not use them ; how many people etc etc etc. I think decreasing to half was a great idea but would it really hurt to decrease it another 10 to 15 percent or the board should consider having a provision that if numbers are getting out of control with the number harvest that the fishing game board can halt seasons objectives regarding doe. I appreciate all the hard work the biologists at the fishing game department. Nick for his dedication. Thank you for your time Sincerely Jeremy Ayotte

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Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2026 3:52 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendations

To Whom It May Concern,

I am 63 years old and have been hunting in Vermont since I was 13. I am deeply concerned about and strongly against regulation changes aimed at harvesting more antlerless deer in 2026.

I was told by a F&W Program Manager at the Yankee Sportsman's Classic that a survey was sent to solicit feedback on antlerless permits during rifle season. We have 9 people at our deer camp and 5 other camps around us with up to 5 people each and none of us (a) received a survey or (b) knows of anyone who received one.

The last time that F&W issued antlerless permits in Vermont the herd suffered severely; especially along the spine of the Green Mountains. As a young hunter it would be nothing to see up to 10 deer a day and where I hunt in WMU G it would take 5 years to see 10 deer...if you're lucky.

I've been hearing that our forests are old and the deer habitat has been declining since John Buck was the State deer biologist. What is being done to support habitat and improve it so that more deer can be sustained, hunting success rates can be increased and hunting revenue could possibly increase as well. There was a time when I hunted in Pittsfield, VT where people came from all over New England to hunt whitetail deer. Those days are long gone since the last antlerless harvest during rifle season. I fear that history is going to repeat itself and if so even fewer people will hunt the state further impacting F&W's declining revenue stream. I already know alot of Vermonters who travel out of state for their deer hunting because the success rate here is in the tank.

I do believe there are areas like the Champlain Valley and the Lake Champlain Islands where deer are abundant and a doe harvest is needed. Crop damage, deer/car incidents and bad genes are prominent. I've seen several buck shot in the island with under developed antlers and lower body weight.

It's time that hunters and F&W band together to work on deer habitat to preserve a long and history-filled tradition of deer hunting in Vermont.

Mark Manley

Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2026 4:27 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe permits

I do not agree with giving these permits. I also believe we should go back to the 3 points on 1 side rule. The population is not great as I did not see as many deer as I have within past 5 years. They are not getting enough time to be bucks in the area.

Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2026 8:11 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Comment on antlerless harvest recommendations

I am a landowner in the Town of Calais (Wildlife Mgt Unit H) and my property is not posted. Most adjoining acreage is hunted. I have almost no advanced tree regeneration in the understory except for red spruce (a species not preferred by deer). More than half of my property is softwoods (cedar, spruce, pine) or mixed forest and about 30% is northern hardwoods. I have only found 1 seedling of cedar that is under 6' tall and there is no cedar foliage under 6'. Sugar maple are not regenerating on my property.

I understand that you have to make management decision based upon the mgt unit (518 sq miles) and that my local conditions may not be representative of the WMU. However, I would note that every single metric you are using to make management decisions is below goal:
yearling male antler beam diameter - 14.9 with a minimum goal of 16
yearling male weight - 109.1 with a minimum goal of 115
fawn weight - 58.8 with a minimum goal of 60
adult birth rate 1.21 with a minimum goal of 1.60

Yet despite the fact that you are not meeting your deer mgt goals, your proposed mgt decision is to keep deer density stable. If this will be your decision then I suggest you need to provide landowners with tools to harvest additional antlerless deer on their property.

Your deer mgt plan recognizes that the amount of early successional forest is declining in Vermont. As a landowner with substantial acreage of forestland, I can assure you that if you maintain deer densities in WMU H at your stated 15 deer/sq mile I will not be cutting any timber as I will not be able to regenerate my forest stands.

I am writing to request that you increase antlerless permits available in WMU H. If not, then I strongly suggest you implement a program to allow landowners to harvest additional antlerless deer to meet their forest management objectives. Otherwise, you will not be able to meet your stated deer management objectives for WMU H.

Sincerely,

Duane R. Diefenbach

Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2026 8:52 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Antlerless deer harvest recommendatino

To whom it may concern,

I am a landowner in Randolph Center, Vermont and also a State of Vermont County Forester. My farm and forest in Randolph Center is suffering significantly from excessive deer browse pressure which is limiting regeneration success in recent timber harvest areas (approximately 22 acres of overstory removal conducted in historic softwood plantations in the fall of 2022). Deer browse pressure has forced me to spend thousands of dollars to supplement insufficient natural regeneration through tree planting. In addition to planting oaks (protected by tree shelters), I have planted hybrid larch throughout. Although hybrid larch is usually a less desirable browse species to deer, they are even browsing that species. I have had to replant areas two years in a row.

The way that the antlerless harvest regulations and tag availability are structured, I have found it impossible to harvest enough antlerless deer to make any discernible difference. Continued browse damage and expense has been the result.

Please consider increasing the allocation of antlerless deer tags for wildlife management zone J1 to give landowners the tools to preserve the ecological health and productivity of their forests.

I would be happy to host Fish and Wildlife representatives for a site visit to discuss this problem further.

Thank you!

Robert Nelson

Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2026 10:05 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe season

Hi my name is Scott Smith and i would like to give you my opinion on the new regs on doe season in rifle. I deer hunt in the spine of the Green Mountains in area G. I'm against having doe season with rifles. I was hunting when the last time we had doe season during rifle and thought the impact in our area was drastic! I do realize that there are areas in Vermont that are over populated with deer like area A and B. The area we hunt is mostly state forest where we don't have many deer plus anyone has access to hunt there. The areas that are over populated usually are the areas where most people can't get on to hunt. That being said people will go to state land where we are and shoot anything that is Brown! I'm not against taking does but not with rifles. I'm concerned if they take to many does in our area it will really affect us. I believe last time they did it they said they wouldn't have a doe season with rifles again. Please re consider your decision about does with rifles! Thanks for your time! Best! Scott

---

Sent: Tuesday, May 12, 2026 9:25 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Comments to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department - Proposed Changes to the 2026 Deer Hunting Regulations

To whom it may concern –

Provided at the attachment are my thoughts and questions to be entered into the Public Comment regarding the changes proposed by the VT Fish and Wildlife Department 2026 Deer Hunting Rules and Regulations.

I disagree with the changes as proposed. As a fourth generation Vermont deer hunter I consider the proposed take limits excessive and do not reflect an overpopulation alleged by the VFWD in my area and SMU.

Due to family commitments, I was unable to attend the public hearing at the Kehoe Conservation Camp on 7 May 2026 but instead am sending written comments prior to the 15 May 2026 deadline.

I look forward to your comments and feedback regarding your concerns.

Sincerely,

Lindsey C. Waterhouse

Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 2026 2:43 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: anterless deer harvest Bethel

We have had this 100 acre parcel in Bethel 40 years
and are avid deer hunters. Our presence on the property in all 4 seasons of the year allows a carefull look at deer population here. Covering alot of ground and Tracks in the snow reveal very few deer here. We are very aware of the larger than usual coyote and bear populations and the impact that has on the deer herd. As an avid bow hunter in Bethel, I will not take a Doe in this area. Every Doe harvested worsens the outlook for seeing any deer at all. I hope the doe hunting and permit allocation is reduced or eliminated until the population show significant changes.

Tom, Concerned land owner.

Annotated

10 V.S.A. App. § 7. Bear Management Rule

1.0 Authority

1.1 This rule is adopted pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4081(a). In adopting this rule, the Fish and Wildlife Board is following the policy established by the General Assembly that the protection, propagation, control, management, and conservation of fish, wildlife and fur-bearing animals in this state is in the interest of the public welfare and that the safeguarding of this valuable resource for the people of the state requires a constant and continual vigilance.

1.2 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4082, this rule is designed to maintain the best health, population and utilization levels of the black bear population.

1.3 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4084, this rule establishes season and possession limits for black bear and prescribes the manner and means of taking black bears.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this regulation is to establish seasons for the taking of black bear, to establish legal means or methods of taking black bears, and to establish limits on the number of black bears to be taken annually.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 "Accompany" for the purposes of hunting bear with dogs means that:

a) A Sub-permittee engaged in the control, handling, transporting or intercepting of Department registered dogs while hunting with dogs, shall be under the under the express direction of the permit holder, and

b) A Sub-permittee who harvests a black bear shall be under the direct control and supervision of the bear dog permit holder, including the ability to see and communicate with each other without the aid of artificial devices such as radios or binoculars, except for medically necessary devices such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.

3.2 “Bait” means ~~as~~ any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any other wildlife.

Annotated

3.3 “Baited area" means an area where any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any wildlife, has been placed or deposited including, but not limited to, bird feeders.

3.4 “Bear Dog Permit” or “Permit” means a permit issued by the Commissioner to a person who wishes to hunt, pursue or take black bear with the aid of dogs.

3.5 “Commissioner” means the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.6 “Control of Dog/Dogs” means the transportation, loading or unloading of dogs from vehicle(s); the handling, catching, restraining or releasing dogs; and the use of telemetry/GPS to locate or track dogs.

3.7 “Department” means the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.8 "Department Registered Dog" means a dog bearing a numbered identification dog-tag (Department Registration Dog-Tag) approved or issued by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~, with the permit holder’s bear dog permit number and a number one through six.

3.9 “Hunting with Dogs” for the purposes of this rule means that one or more dog(s) with Department ~~Registered~~ Registration Dog-Tags are on the ground whether in pursuit of a black bear or not.

3.10 “Legal means” or “Legal method” means the taking of a black bear by muzzleloader, rifle, handgun, archery equipment, or crossbow when authorized.

3.11 “Pack of Dogs” means one to six dogs, acting as a unit during the pursuit of black bear.

3.12 “Sub-Permittee” means any person with a valid Vermont hunting license designated by the bear dog permit holder to assist or take a bear with the aid of dogs, in accordance with written authorization issued by the Department.

3.13 “Relaying Dogs/Packs” means the removal and replacement of one or more ~~dog or~~ dogs to the trail of a bear to the original pack of dogs once the pursuit has begun. If the hunting or pursuit of a black bear commences with fewer than six dogs in the original Pack of Dogs, the addition of a dog or dogs shall not be considered relaying, provided that no more than the same six dogs are

part of a single Pack of Dogs during the hunting, pursuing or taking of a black bear.

3.14 "Bear Tag" means a document issued by the Department authorizing the taking of a black bear in the current season.

3.15 "Unregistered Dog" means a dog that does not have a valid Department Registration Dog-Tag as described in 3.8.

4.0 Seasons and Shooting Hours

4.1 Early and Late Season

a) **Early Season:** For Vermont Residents: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.
For Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.
For Non-resident Bear Dog Permit Holders: The early black bear season shall be open to Non-Resident bear dog permit holders on September 15 and not before.

b) **Late Season**: For Vermont Residents and Nonresidents: The first day of the Regular Deer season through the ~~second Sunday of the Regular Deer Season~~last day of the December muzzleloader season, as defined in 10 App. V.S.A. § 37.

4.2 Shooting hours: One half hour before sunrise until one half hour after sunset.

5.0 Tags and Bag Limit

5.1 To take a black bear during the Early Season, a person must, in addition to having a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license, possess an Early Season Bear Tag issued separately by the Department.

5.2 To take a black bear during the Late Season, a person must have a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license.

5.3 A person shall not harvest more than one black bear per calendar year, not to include animals taken pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4827, unless the Board determines a second bear may be taken during the calendar year within specified WMUs, based on the recommendations of the Department. To take a second bear, a person must purchase a Second Bear Tag issued by the

Annotated

Department. A second bear may be taken during either the early or late season, and only within the WMUs specified by the Board.

6.0 **The taking of bear with the aid of dogs**

6.1 Licenses and Permits

Any person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting License, use only Department Registered Dogs and possess ~~a~~ valid Department-issued bear tags. In addition, the person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid bear dog permit or accompany a bear dog permit holder. The permit shall be carried at all times by the permittee while hunting with dogs or taking black bear and exhibited to a game warden, landowner, or law enforcement officer upon demand.

6.2 A person shall not take a black bear into his/her actual possession except by killing the bear by legal means or methods.

a) A person taking black bear with the use of a bow and arrow or crossbow shall, upon demand of a game warden or other law enforcement personnel, show proof of having a prior archery license, or of having passed a bow hunter education course in Vermont, another state or a province of Canada approved by the Commissioner.

6.3 Dogs and Packs

a) A person shall not take black bear with the aid of dogs unless the person is in control of the dog or dogs.

b) No person shall take a black bear with the aid of any Unregistered Dog. No person shall have an Unregistered Dog in his or her possession while hunting, pursuing or taking a black bear.

c) A person hunting ~~with dogs~~, pursuing, and taking black bear with the aid of dogs shall attach a Department Registration Dog-Tag and a metal identification name plate with the person's name, address and telephone number to the dog's collar.

d) A person taking a black bear with the aid of dogs shall only take a black bear with a Pack of Dogs as defined in this rule. No person shall pursue, hunt, or take black bear by Relaying Dogs/Packs.

Annotated

e) Two or more permit holders may hunt together and combine Department Registered dog(s) to form a Pack of Dogs. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not take black bear with the aid of more than six dogs combined forming a single Pack of Dogs. Once hunting with dogs commences, dogs not on the hunt shall be restrained in the dog box or inside the vehicle. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not possess any Unregistered Dogs while hunting, pursuing or taking black bear.

7.0 Prohibitions

7.1 No person shall knowingly place bait to attract black bear for the purposes of allowing a bear dog to catch/strike the scent of a black bear. No person shall take bear by knowingly using bait or a baited area.

7.2 A person shall not advertise, barter, exchange goods or services, or otherwise sell the use of a dog or dogs for the purpose of taking any black bear.

7.3 While hunting with dogs, no person shall have in their possession an Unregistered Dog while possessing Department Registered dogs.

7.4 It shall be a violation for a Vermont resident to apply for a bear dog permit for the purpose of allowing a nonresident bear dog owner to take bear in Vermont with the aid of dogs.

7.5 No person shall hunt black bear with a bow and arrow or crossbow if the arrow or bolt has an arrowhead that measures less than seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point or that has less than two sharp cutting edges.

8.0 Reporting

8.1 The black bear carcass shall be field dressed prior to reporting.

8.2 Upon request of a Game Warden, the person harvesting the bear and the permit holder shall show and return to the kill site with a Game Warden.

8.3 All bear harvests shall be reported to a game warden, official Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~ Reporting Station, or a person designated by the Commissioner within 48 hours. If a bear is taken with the aid of dogs, ~~T~~the person who harvested the bear and the bear dog permit holder must both be present to legally report the harvest. ~~If the bear dog permit holder harvested the bear, only he or she must be present when reporting the harvest.~~

Annotated

8.4 It shall be unlawful to provide false information when reporting a black bear taken with the aid of dogs.

8.5 The fine, points and any other penalty for any violation of this subsection 8 shall be assessed to the violator and in addition, to the permit holder if the violator is not the permit holder.

9.0 Biological Collection

9.1 Any person who harvests a black bear shall collect a premolar tooth and submit the tooth to a game warden, official Fish and Wildlife Department Reporting Station, or to a person designated by the Commissioner to receive the biological collection, within 48 hours of taking the bear.

9.2 Unless otherwise specified by statute, the failure to collect and submit a black bear tooth shall not result in license suspension points and shall be considered a minor violation subject to a civil fine.

10 App. V.S.A. § 2a. Big game; tagging

(a) A person taking big game, as defined by 10 V.S.A. § 4001, pursuant to the seasons provided by law or regulation of the Fish and Wildlife Board, shall immediately tag the big game carcass upon taking with the applicable tag or permit information for that animal, which shall include the person's name and tag or permit number. The tag shall be placed on the big game carcass in a location that is open to view. Such tag shall remain on the big game carcass during possession and transportation and until such time that the animal is processed for consumption.

(b) Landowners taking big game on their property pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4253 shall affix a tag to the big game animal taken on their property with their name and the address where the animal was taken, and the applicable permit number if a permit is required for the taking of that animal.

(c) A person shall not transport parts of a big game animal prior to being processed for consumption ~~that has been processed for consumption~~ unless the parts or ~~package~~ container containing them are marked with the name of the person who harvested the big game.

(d) A person may transport into and possess in this state big game legally taken in another state or country provided such person shall retain the tag required to be attached to the carcass by the state or country where taken.

10 App. V.S.A. § 2a. Big game; tagging

(a) A person taking big game, as defined by 10 V.S.A. § 4001, pursuant to the seasons provided by law or regulation of the Fish and Wildlife Board, shall immediately tag the big game carcass upon taking with the applicable tag or permit information for that animal, which shall include the person's name and tag or permit number. The tag shall be placed on the big game carcass in a location that is open to view. Such tag shall remain on the big game carcass during possession and transportation and until such time that the animal is processed for consumption.

(b) Landowners taking big game on their property pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4253 shall affix a tag to the big game animal taken on their property with their name and the address where the animal was taken, and the applicable permit number if a permit is required for the taking of that animal.

(c) A person shall not transport parts of a big game animal that has been processed for consumption unless the parts or package containing them are marked with the name of the person who killed the big game.

(d) A person may transport into and possess in this state big game legally taken in another state or country provided such person shall retain the tag required to be attached to the carcass by the state or country where taken and mark each package of meat with the name of the person who took the animal, tag number, date, and state or country of origin.

From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Thursday, June 11, 2026 9:32 AM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov'
Subject: June 17 Board Meeting
Attachments: Board Meeting Agenda 6.17.26.pdf; Board_Meeting_Minutes_5.20.26.pdf; 6.2.26 Andy Phelan Petition.pdf

Good morning, Board Members,

Please see the attached agenda for the June 17, 2026 Board Meeting. The meeting will be held at the VTrans Dill Building, 2178 Airport Rd, Barre, VT.

Also attached are the unapproved minutes from May 20 and the petition from Andy Phelan.

Sincerely,

Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Department of Fish & Wildlife
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-1454 office | 802-636-7414 cell
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

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Fish and Wildlife Board
Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, June 17, 2026
5:00 pm

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board will hold an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, June 17, 2026, at the VTrans Dill Building, 2178 Airport Rd, Barre, VT 05641.

To attend the meeting virtually, please use this link.
Meeting ID: 231 722 966 665 101 Passcode: 52x6tb6w
Or call in (audio only): +1 802-828-7667,,55970124#
Phone Conference ID: 559 701 24#

Agenda:

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (May 20, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. Petition from Andrew Phelan Re Prohibiting Taking of Sow with Cubs
4. Black Bear Rule – Department Comments, Board Discussion, Potential First Vote
5. Commissioner's Update

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Fish and Wildlife Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 20, 2026

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board held an in-person meeting at 5:00 pm on Wednesday, May 20, 2026, in the National Life Davis Building, Floor 2, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05620. A recording of the meeting is available on the department's YouTube channel.

Agenda

1. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (April 22, 2026)
2. Public Comments (Limited to 2-minutes per speaker)
3. 2026 Antlerless Deer Permits and Youth Season – Final Vote
4. Tagging Rule – Potential Vote
5. Department Recommendation: Youth and Novice Archery Season Petition – Potential Vote
6. Department Recommendations: Black Bear Regulations Petitions – Potential Vote
7. Black Bear Rule – Department Presentation, Board Discussion, Potential Vote
8. Commissioner's Update

Board Members Present: Nicholas Burnham, Jeffrey Corey, Richard Craig, Beth Deimling, Heather Furman, Neal Hogan, Ryan Kilborn, Paul Noel (Acting Chair), Robert Patterson, Jon Valsangiacomo, Martin Van Buren

Virtual: David Deen

Department Staff Present: Commissioner Jason Batchelder, Chief Operating Officer Andrea Shortsleeve, General Counsel Hannah Smith, Wildlife Division Director John Austin, Black Bear Project Leader Jaclyn Comeau, Wildlife Specialist Nicole Dickan, Game Warden Colonel Justin Stedman, Wildlife Management Program Manager David Sausville, Planner & Analyst Christopher Saunders, Public Information Officer Joshua Morse, Game Warden Lieutenant Mike Scott, Game Warden Sergeant Jeffrey Whipple, Game Warden Trainee Ryan O'Neill, Principal Assistant Abigail Connolly

Virtual: Deer and Moose Project Leader Nick Fortin, Director of Outreach Alison Thomas, Information Program Manager Megan Duni, Information Specialist John Hall

Members of the Public Present: Pam Perry, Nipa Wheatly, Alexia Voitle, Robin Voitle, Fern Lickfield, Sophie Bowater, Sarah Gorsline, Kevin Carney, Linda Cacupardo, Bill Hickok, Mark Green, Vanessa Kranz, Brent Gadapee, Charles Palmer, Rocky Burnell, Fred Schroeder, Anne Jameson, Sarah Moos, Jacob Moorby, Rod Coronado, Steve Niederhauser, Dennis Fournier, Shelah Vogel, Kevin Lawrence, Bert Saldi, Davis McCarthy, Ben Isley, Butch Spear, Jamie Shaw, Brian Fitzgerald, Dylan Machitchie, Aidan Fletcher, Justin Beaudet, Mark Moran, Maureen Dwyer, Nancy Fitzpatrick, Chris Pritchard, William Fitzpatrick, Diane Reynolds, Eric Messier, Paul Campbell, Andy Phelan, Dan Carr

Virtual: Jane Fitzwilliam, Catherine, Barbara Felitti, Alisa Bernat, Linda Andrews, Brad Herring, Chris Bradley, Bruce, Jennifer Lovett, Linda Huebner, Devin Brennan, Gabriella Miller, Bob Galvin, Master of Coin, Laura Ireland, Tara Miller, John Aberth, Tyler, Marilyn Ganahl, Patricia Hunt, Jean, Vanessa Kranz, Benjamin Breen

Unapproved

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 pm

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Board Member Patterson moved to approve the April 22, 2026 meeting minutes. Board Member Van Buren seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes (11-0).

Public Comment Period

Pam Perry, Plainfield, regarding black bear baiting
Alexia Voitle, Orange, regarding black bear baiting
Fern Lickfield, Worchester, regarding black bear baiting and the extension of the black bear hunting season
Sophie Bowater, Middlesex, regarding black bear baiting, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and a second bear tag
Sarah Gorsline, Grand Isle, regarding Project Coyote's petition to adjust the bear hound training season which would require legislative action, black bear baiting, bear proof dumpsters, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Kevin Carney, Lyndon, regarding the extension of the black bear hunting season
Linda Cacupardo, Sheffield, regarding black bear baiting
Bill Hickok, West Minster, regarding the Vermont Bowhunter's Association petition to create a regulated black bear baiting season
Vanessa Kranz, Bethel, regarding black bear baiting, the extension of the black bear hunting season, a second bear tag, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Charles Palmer, Danville, regarding black bear baiting
Rocky Burnell, regarding black bear baiting
Fred Schroeder, Bristol, regarding the panfish regulations
Anne Jameson, Marshfield, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Sarah Moos, Randolph, regarding black bear baiting and the bear hound training season
Rod Coronado, Orange, regarding black bear baiting, prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs, and the extension of the black bear hunting season
Shelah Vogel, East Charleston, regarding black bear baiting
Kevin Lawrence, Newbury, regarding the timing of the Board's vote and rules of decorum that the Board could adopt
Davis McCarthy, Orange, regarding black bear baiting and the black bear population estimates
Butch Spear, Newbury, regarding black bear baiting
Jamie Shaw, Worcester, regarding black bear baiting
Brian Fitzgerald, South Duxbury, regarding black bear baiting
Aidan Fletcher, regarding black bear baiting
Justin Beaudet, regarding black bear baiting

Unapproved

Maureen Dwyer, Barre Town, regarding black bear baiting
Nancy Fitzpatrick, Barre Town, regarding black bear baiting
Chris Pritchard, Pawlet, regarding black bear baiting and support for the Department
Diane Reynolds, Huntington, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Eric Messier, Randolph, regarding black bear baiting and the bear hound training season
Andy Phelan, Fayston, regarding his petition from 2023 to prohibit the intentional harvest of sows with cubs and black bear baiting
Linda Huebner, Halifax, regarding black bear baiting, a second bear tag, the extension of the black bear hunting season, shortening the bear hound training season, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs
Bob Galvin, Bolton, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Barbara Felitti, Huntington, regarding the black bear petition, black bear baiting, a second bear tag, and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Alisa Bernat, regarding prohibiting the intentional hunting of sows with cubs
Jennifer Lovett, Starksboro, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Devin Brennan, South Royalton, regarding black bear baiting
Gabriella Miller, White River Junction regarding black bear baiting
Mike Savillas, Bethel, regarding black bear baiting, prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs, and a second bear tag
Marilyn Ganahl, regarding black bear baiting and prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs
Jane Fitzwilliam, Putney, regarding black bear baiting, the extension of the black bear hunting season, and a second bear tag
Catherine, Lamoille County, regarding black bear baiting

The recording of the public comments and the meeting can be viewed here.

2026 Antlerless Deer Permits and Youth Season – Final Vote

John Austin spoke about the cautious approach the department recommends taking with the antlerless deer permits due to the recent changes to the deer rule and allowing the harvest of antlerless deer during rifle season. Nick Fortin explained that there was light attendance at the public hearings and there are no changes to the original recommendation presented to the Board on April 1, 2026. The department recommendation and the summary of public comments are included below.

Board Member Van Buren moved to approve the 2026 antlerless deer permits and youth season as recommended by the department. Board Member Corey seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

Unapproved

Tagging Rule – Potential Vote

Hannah Smith explained that the Board voted on the tagging rule earlier in the year but there were suggested changes from Board Member Patterson that were substantial enough to require another first vote by the Board. The Board Members asked Hannah Smith and Justin Stedman questions about the Importation Rule and its requirements. The proposed Tagging Rule language is included below.

Board Member Patterson moved to accept the revised Tagging Rule language. Board Member Corey seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

The Board recessed at 6:49 pm and returned at 7:22 pm.

Department Recommendation: Youth and Novice Archery Season Petition – Potential Vote

John Austin explained that the intent of the petition is appreciated by the department, but that the timing of the petition is not ideal because the Board just revised the deer rule last year. The deer rule is usually revised every four to five years, and at least three years of data is helpful before opening the deer rule again. The department recommendation is included below. The Board Members discussed early season archery zones, youth shooting compound bows versus crossbows, the timing of the current youth season, and youth participation numbers.

Board Chair Noel moved to reject the petition to a later date. Board Member Deimling seconded the motion. Board Member Craig suggested putting the motion in the affirmative. Board Chair Noel moved to accept the petition and move into rulemaking. Board Member Craig seconded the motion. Board Member Hogan expressed that it would be acceptable if the season was statewide except for the early season archery zones, otherwise he would reject the petition as written. The Board voted to deny the motion (12-0). Board Chair Noel expressed that the Board is not against the petition, just does not want to move forward with it at this time.

Department Recommendations: Black Bear Regulations Petitions – Potential Vote

John Austin reviewed the content of the two black bear regulations petitions received and the historical context. John Austin reviewed the department recommendations to establish a second

Unapproved

bear tag and extend the bear season into December and the department's concerns about establishing a bear baiting season. The department's recommendations are included below.

The Board Members discussed the second bear tag being for the whole state or by WMU. The Board Members discussed the process for accepting or denying the petitions/the concepts in the petitions and advancing into rulemaking. Board Member Deen emphasized that the statutory obligation on the Board is to initiate rulemaking, amend an existing rule, or deny the petition, the primary obligation being that the Board consider and respond to the petition.

Board Member Van Buren moved to advance the second bear tag proposal to the rulemaking process. Board Member Hogan seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

Board Member Furman moved to advance the extension of the black bear hunting season proposal to the rulemaking process. Board Member Burnham seconded the motion. The Board voted (12-0) to approve the motion.

The Board discussed black bear baiting. Board Member Patterson indicated he would like to hear more about the nuisance bear issues the game wardens are dealing with, what diseases New Hampshire and Maine might be dealing with due to bear baiting, and whether allowing bear baiting would result in a significant decrease in the bear population. Board Member Deimling asked Jackie Comeau about black bear ranges and spoke about using electric fences to deter bears, whether baiting could increase the bear population, humans creating issues with compost and garbage, and the public comment received. Board Member Hogan expressed that he would like to move forward with extending the bear hunting season and a second bear tag before allowing bear baiting.

Board Member Hogan moved to not develop a black bear baiting season. Board Member Van Buren seconded the motion. Board Member Furman expressed the desire to explore tools to manage the black bear population that does not put extra burden on the department. The Board voted to approve the motion (11-1), with Board Member Patterson voting no.

Hannah Smith reminded the Board that the petition from Bert Saldi and Kevin Lawrence requested that the changes be made for the 2027 black bear hunting season and that there is a deadline for any changes made to the black bear regulations to go into the hunting digest.

Black Bear Rule – Department Presentation, Board Discussion, Potential Vote

Jaclyn Comeau gave a presentation on the big game management population objectives for black bear, the black bear population estimate over time, what is driving human bear conflicts over time, strategies for reducing human bear conflicts, the current black bear hunting season, the department recommendations to extend the bear hunting season to the end of deer muzzleloader

Unapproved

season and to allow a second bear to be harvested by Wildlife Management Unit (WMU), and the additional approaches that were considered by the department.

Board Chair Noel asked about the approach to allow a second bear tag by WMU instead of statewide and Jaclyn Comeau responded.

Board Member Valsangiacomo asked why the department wasn't moving forward with recommending prohibiting the intentional harvest of a sow with cubs. Commissioner Batchelder responded and asked the Board to have a larger discussion about it. Board Member Hogan spoke about enforceability, wanting protocols when it is not intentional, and education. Board Member Burnham asked about the frequency of it occurring.

Board Member Corey asked about the number of bears taken by hounders and the possible impact of allowing a second bear tag. Board Member Patterson spoke about the small impact the second bear tag had in New Hampshire. Board Member Kilborn asked about the process for farmers to get a depredation permit for nuisance bears. Jaclyn Comeau and Lieutenant Scott responded.

Board Chair Noel asked about the determining of WMUs for the second bear tag and David Sausville explained that the intent was to come to the Board annually to propose WMUs and numbers of tags similar to what the department already does for antlerless deer permits.

The Board Members discussed the implications of prohibiting the harvest of sows with cubs.

Board Member Hogan asked about the additional stressors on black bears and why they aren't impacting the black bear population numbers. Jaclyn Comeau discussed how beech leaf disease is spreading but hasn't had a significant impact on the black bear food sources yet.

The Board Members asked about permanent and lifetime licenses and the early bear season with the second bear tag change.

Hannah Smith walked through the department's recommended changes to the black bear rule. The language is included below.

The Board Members discussed extending the bear hunting season to the end of muzzleloader season versus to the end of archery season. Board Member Valsangiacomo moved to amend the language to have the black bear hunting season end on the last day of archery deer season. Board Member Craig seconded the motion. The Board discussed the timing of the seasons. Board Member Valsangiacomo withdrew his motion. Board Member Burham moved to extend the bear hunting season to December 15. Board Member Corey seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the motion (12-0).

The Board Members discussed continuing the conversation about prohibiting the intentional harvest of sows with cubs and whether to have the first vote on the black bear rule. Board Member Craig moved to table the conversation and first vote until the next meeting. Board Member Valsangiacomo seconded the motion. Board Member Patterson asked about whether the

Unapproved

black bear rule changes could be included in the 2027 hunting guides and John Austin and Joshua Morse responded. The Board voted to approve the motion (12-0).

Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Batchelder provided a legislative update, including H.723 (an act relating to posting of land) which was signed by the Governor, H.928 (an act relating to technical corrections to fish and wildlife statutes), and a bill to remove the department's ability to create an area license.

Board Member Corey asked about the cost of a second buck tag and Hannah Smith responded.

Board Member Van Buren asked about when the antlerless deer lottery will be available and the department answered it would be Thursday, May 21, 2026.

Motion To Adjourn:

The Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:46 pm.

Unapproved

2026
Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendation

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

The Fish & Wildlife Department recommends the same antlerless harvest regulations accepted by the Board by straw vote on April 22, 2026. During the public comment period, which started immediately after the Board meeting on February 18, the Department did not receive any new or additional information to justify changes to the initial recommendation.

The following is the same text the Department submitted to the Board for its April 22nd meeting.

All public comments received are provided in appendices at the end of this document.

Summary of Key Points

- The effects of new hunting regulations on antlerless harvests is a key component of this recommendation. It aims to demonstrate our continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest by maintaining antlerless harvests at or below levels achieved in recent years.

- Due to uncertainty around the level of impact these changes will have, relatively substantial increases in archery and youth/novice antlerless harvests and antlerless permit success rates have been incorporated in this recommendation. As a result, antlerless harvest targets may not be achieved in many areas.

- Antlerless harvests can be adjusted as needed in future years once the impact of the new regulations is understood and harvests are more predictable.

- The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2026 was near or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, only minor changes in deer numbers are expected.

- Yearling antler beam diameters, fawn weights, and other physical condition metrics continue to be below optimal levels in many areas, indicating that deer numbers have exceeded the level their habitat can support long-term.

- The recommended permit allocations are expected to result in the harvest of 3,041 antlerless deer during the October muzzleloader season, regular season, and December muzzleloader season. This would result in an estimated total antlerless harvest from all seasons of approximately 7,598 antlerless deer.

Executive Summary

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department estimates there will be approximately 138,000 white-tailed deer on the Vermont landscape prior to the start of the 2026 deer hunting seasons. This represents a decrease of five percent from the retrospective 2025 pre-hunt estimate. The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2026 was near or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, only minor changes in deer numbers are expected.

For deer to be healthy and productive, deer populations must be kept below the carrying capacity of the habitat through the regulated harvest of antlerless deer. Biological information collected annually by the Department, including reproductive data, fawn and yearling body weights, and yearling antler size, indicate that deer populations have exceeded the level the habitat can support long-term in some parts of Vermont. Deer populations must be reduced or maintained below the limits of their habitat or physical condition will continue to decline, habitat damage will increase, and populations will become unstable and susceptible to substantial winter mortality.

Deer densities, habitat conditions, and winter severity can vary substantially from one part of Vermont to another. Additionally, these factors and the effects of historical deer densities have resulted in deer in some regions being in better physical condition than others. This results in variable deer population dynamics across the state; therefore, deer management prescriptions are made at the WMU level rather than statewide. Harvest management strategies that account for regional differences in deer density are essential to the health and proper management of Vermont's deer herd.

This recommendation aims to maintain antlerless harvests at previous levels while incorporating the uncertain effects of new deer hunting regulations. To account for this uncertainty and demonstrate a continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest, the Department has assumed relatively substantial impacts which may not be achieved. Antlerless harvests can be adjusted as needed in future years once the impact of the new regulations is understood and harvests are more predictable.

The Department recommends the harvest of 7,598 antlerless deer during the 2026 hunting seasons. The Department recommends that antlerless harvest be authorized during the archery and youth/novice seasons in all WMUs. After accounting for expected archery and youth/novice season harvests, the Department recommends that 3,041 antlerless deer be harvested, by permit, during the regular and muzzleloader seasons. Achieving this harvest, given expected increases in permit fill rates, requires the issuance of 12,050 WMU-specific antlerless permits distributed among 19 of Vermont's 21 WMUs. This is 49 percent fewer permits than the 23,400 allotted in 2025.

Three public hearings were held on March 16, 18, and 19, 2026 to gather comments on the deer herd. Approximately 52 members of the public participated in these hearings. Two additional public hearings will be held May 5 and 7, 2026.

2026 Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Pursuant to 10 V.S.A. §§4081, 4082, 4084 and 4742a, and 10 V.S.A. Appendix §37, hereafter is the Department's 2026 antlerless deer harvest recommendation. Based on population estimates, a harvest of 7,598 antlerless deer is recommended during the 2026 hunting seasons. This includes 4,557 antlerless deer harvested during the archery, youth, and novice seasons, and 3,041 antlerless deer harvested, by permit, during the regular season and the October and December muzzleloader seasons. Adult females are typically 84 percent of the total antlerless deer harvest, so harvesting this number of antlerless deer would yield approximately 6,346 adult does.

Population Status

The buck harvest during the 2025 deer hunting seasons was one percent more than the previous 3-year average (see *2025 Vermont White-tailed Deer Harvest Report* for more information). Nine WMUs had retrospective population estimates in 2025 that exceeded their respective population objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* by more than two deer per square mile. The 2025 antlerless deer harvest was close to the recommended antlerless harvest in most WMUs, and the winter of 2025 was close to or slightly above average severity in most areas. As a result, small declines in deer numbers are expected in some northern and central WMUs, with little change expected in most other areas.

Winter Severity 2026

The Department has long recognized the influence that winter weather can have on Vermont's deer herd and has been collecting winter severity data since 1970. Between December 1 and April 15, one winter severity index (WSI) point is tallied for each day with at least 18 inches of snow on the ground, and one point for each day the temperature reaches 0°F or below. These data have proven useful to describe deer population dynamics; however, how well deer survive winter depends largely on three factors: 1) body condition of deer as winter begins, 2) availability of quality deer wintering habitats, and 3) the timing of snow in the fall and snowmelt in spring. Snow cover that remains late into spring can cause significant negative impacts by delaying spring green up and, consequently, reducing fawn survival.

The winter of 2025 was near, or slightly above, normal in most areas, with a state-wide average WSI of 46 points (**Figure 1**). This was slightly above the 30-year median of 36 and above the 10-year median of 30. As is typically the case, winter severity varied considerably among WMUs, ranging from 21 in WMU K to 73 in WMU P (**Figure 2**). The pattern of variation in WSI was consistent with long term averages. Importantly, snow depths were minimal across most of the state until mid-January. Conditions were relatively severe from late January to early March, with deep snow confining deer to areas of quality winter cover. However, the snow melted quickly, and snow-free conditions arrived earlier than normal in most areas. The length of time deer are confined to wintering areas is perhaps the most important factor affecting survival rates. Since severe conditions only lasted for about 6 weeks, overwinter survival is expected to be relatively good.

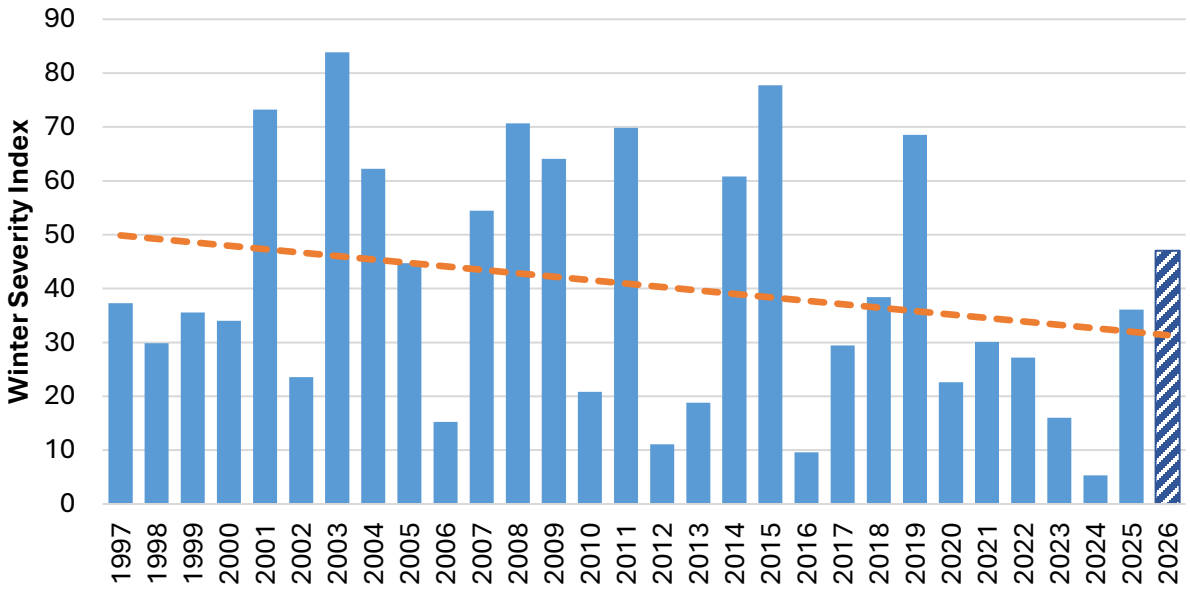


Figure 1. Statewide winter severity index (WSI), 1997–2026. The dashed line shows the 30-year trend.

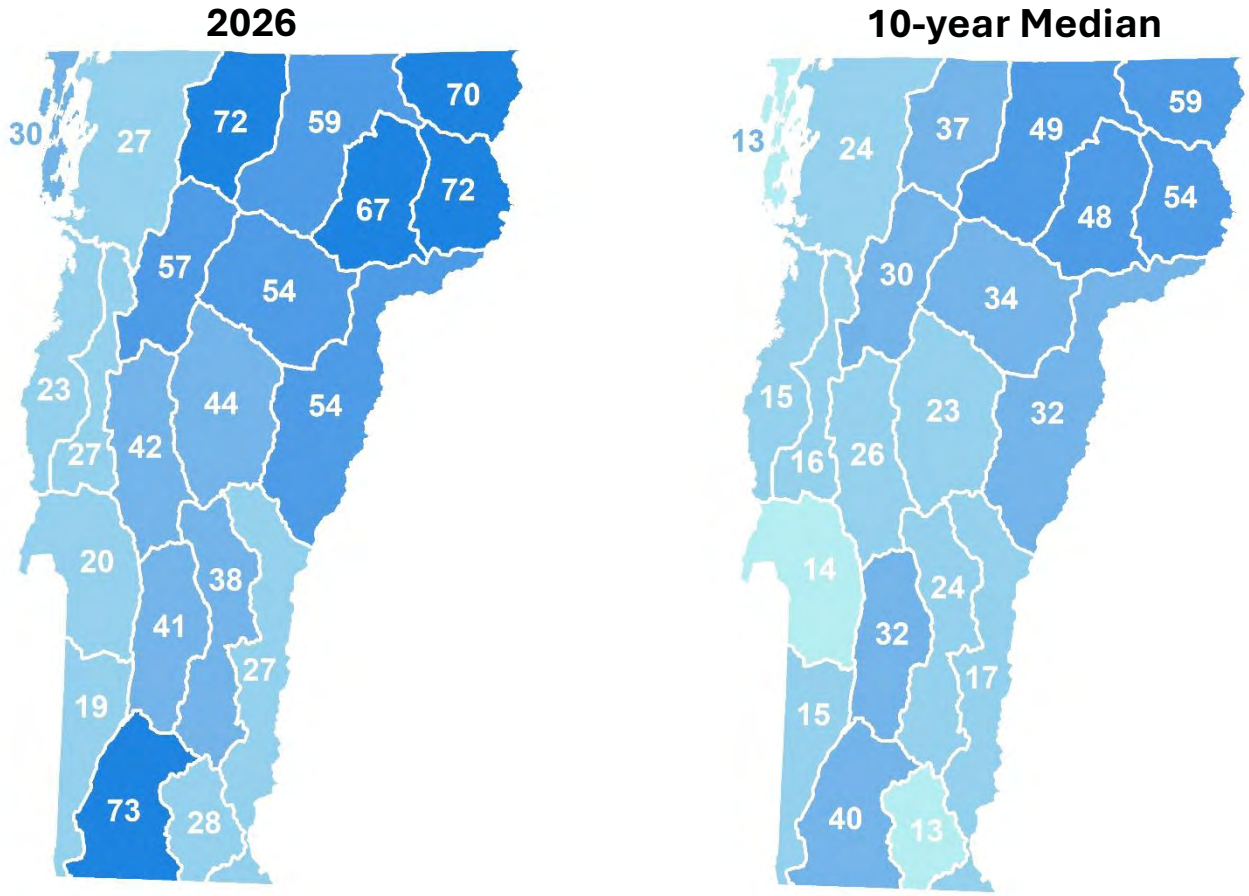


Figure 2. Winter severity index by Wildlife Management Unit in 2026 and the 10-year median.

Population Health

Biological information collected annually by the Department, including reproductive data, fawn and yearling body weights, and yearling antler size, indicate that deer populations have exceeded the level the habitat can support long-term in some parts of Vermont (**Figure 3**, see **Appendix A** for individual WMU information). In many cases, this does not appear to be a new problem. Instead, this appears to be a subtle but chronic problem that may have occurred for decades in some areas. Declines in measures like yearling antler beam diameter have been slow (**Figure 3**); therefore, it takes many years of data to separate the trend from normal annual variation.

Health concerns are evident in many parts of Vermont (see **Appendix A** for more detail). In most cases, the Department believes the primary driver of declines in physical condition was not a recent increase in deer abundance, but rather a slow, steady decline in the quality of deer habitat. Deer abundance has been relatively stable during the past 30 years. However, Vermont's forests are aging and the amount of young forest (less than 20 years old), which provides critical forage for deer, is declining. Other factors, including hunter access to private land, proliferation of invasive plants, and climate change are also important, and make the problem and any solutions more complex. The simple result, however, is that the habitat cannot support the number of deer it used to, and carrying capacity may continue to decline in some areas as forests get older. Deer populations must be reduced below the limits of their habitat or physical condition will continue to decline, habitat damage will increase, and populations will become unstable and more susceptible to disease and substantial winter mortality.

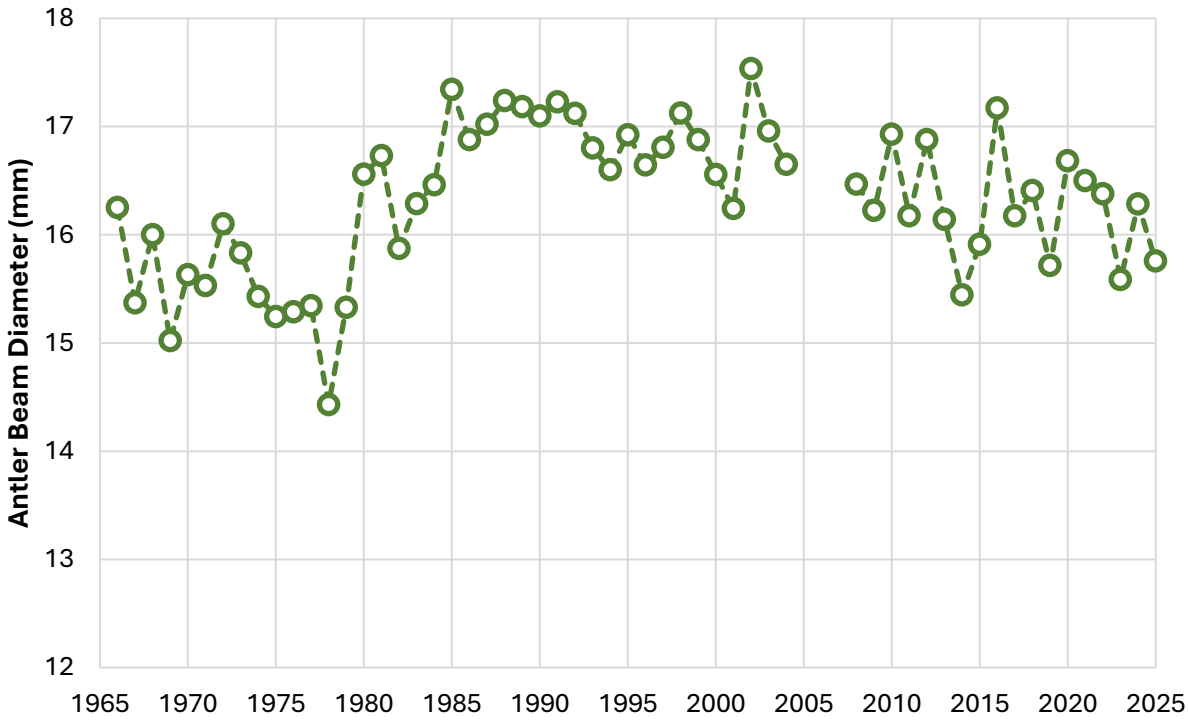


Figure 3. Antler beam diameter of yearling bucks in Vermont, 1965–2025. Data are from deer examined at biological check stations.

Population Projections and Management Objectives

Antlerless deer harvests in 2025 were close to objectives in most WMUs. Considering 2025 retrospective population estimates, 2025 antlerless harvests, and 2026 winter severity, little change in deer numbers is expected in most areas, with small declines possible in northern and east-central WMUs. Importantly, deer densities remain above population objectives in several WMUs, and recent management efforts have not been sufficient to reduce deer numbers. To provide healthy habitats and thereby keep deer healthy and productive, deer densities must be kept at established objectives (**Figure 8**). Maintaining a healthy deer herd is the best way to mitigate the potential effects of winter weather and provide a stable population over the long term.

Based on analysis of herd demographic data, hunter effort, deer sighting rates (**Figure 4**), buck harvests (**Figure 5**), antlerless deer harvests, and winter severity data (**Figure 2**), the Department expects deer numbers to decline slightly in northern and east-central WMUs and remain relatively stable in most other WMUs (**Figures 6 and 7**). Seven WMUs will have deer densities that exceed their respective population objectives by more than 2 deer per square mile (**Figures 8 and 9**), and the Department's intent is to reduce deer densities in those areas. Other WMUs will have deer densities that are within two deer per square mile of their population objective, and the intent is to stabilize those populations at or near their current level.

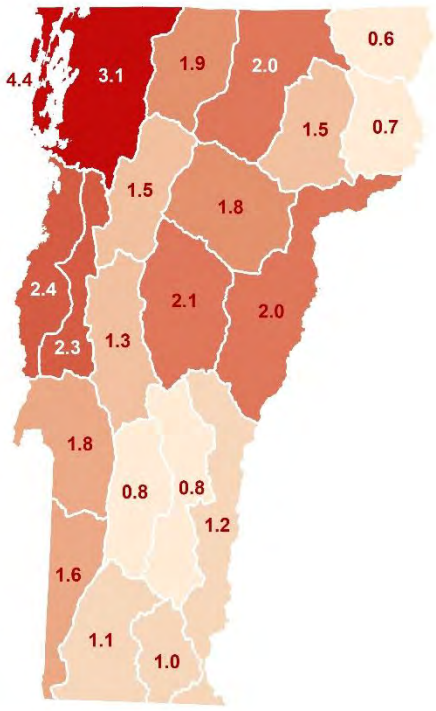


Figure 4. Deer seen per 10 hours of hunting by regular season deer hunters, 2023–2025.

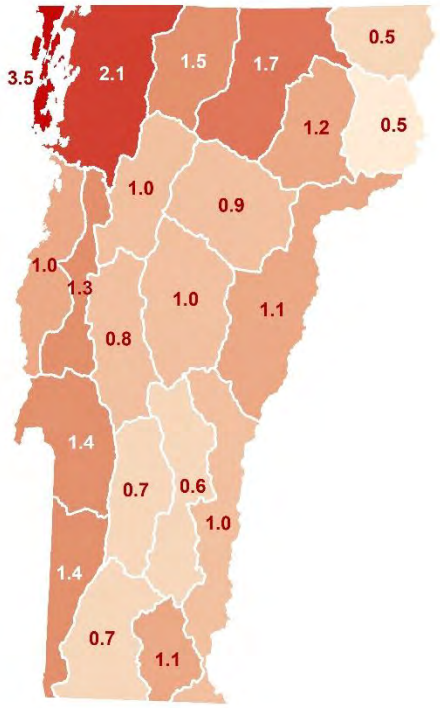


Figure 5. Adult buck harvest per square mile during the 2025 deer seasons. Buck harvest rate is affected by antler restrictions in some WMUs.

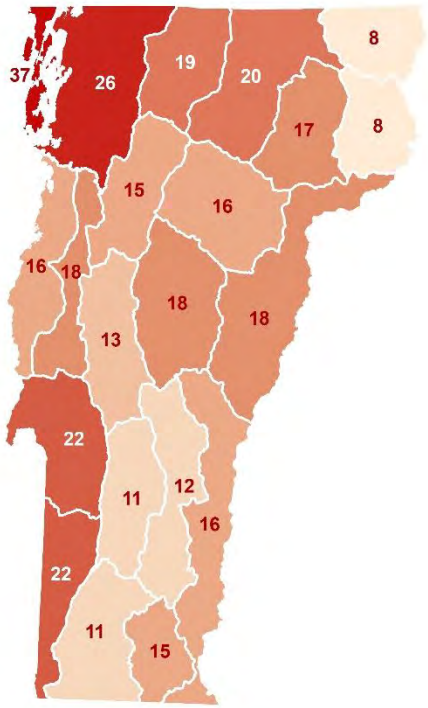


Figure 6. 2025 estimated deer density (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

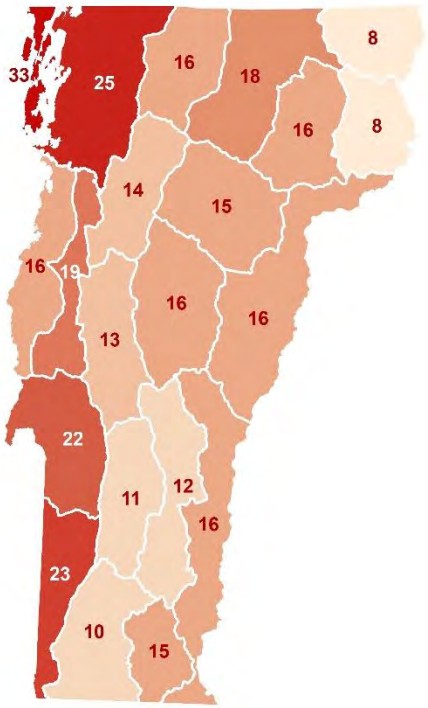


Figure 7. 2026 predicted deer density (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

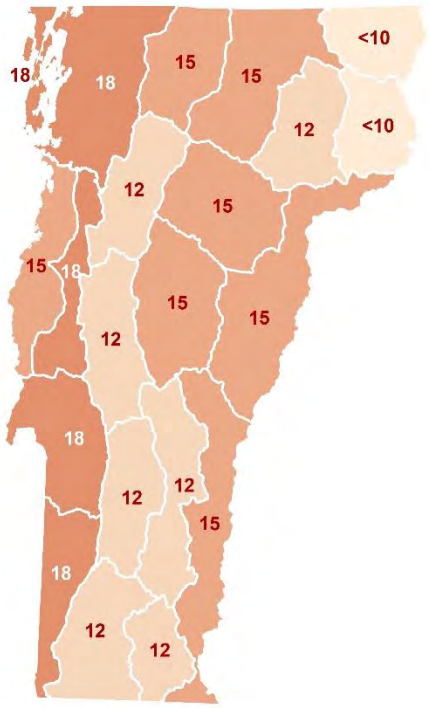


Figure 8. Deer density objectives (deer per square mile of habitat), by WMU.

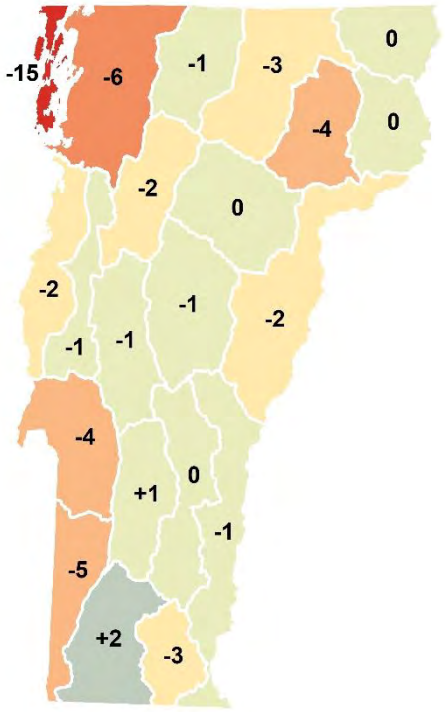


Figure 9. Desired change in deer density, by WMU, to reach density objectives.

Effects of New Hunting Regulations

Several new or updated deer hunting regulations will take effect in 2026 and are expected to impact antlerless deer harvests. To account for these changes and their uncertain impact on antlerless harvests, the following adjustments have been made to this recommendation. These changes in antlerless harvest are plausible, but it is more likely that antlerless harvests will be lower than what is recommended. The Department is intentionally taking a conservative approach to demonstrate our continued ability to regulate antlerless harvest under these new regulations. If antlerless harvests need to be increased in the future, these regulations allow for that.

To account for the addition of Expanded Archery Zones and the extension of archery season through the regular season, the expected archery antlerless harvest has been increased by 10 percent. That much increase is unlikely, but this also creates a buffer in the overall antlerless harvest to allow for typical annual variation and/or higher harvest related to the novelty of the new regulations.

To account for changing the timing of the youth/novice weekend, the expected youth/novice antlerless harvest has been increased by 20 percent. This is equivalent to the observed decline in the youth weekend harvest after the season was moved two weeks earlier in 2020.

Lastly, to account for antlerless permits being used during the regular season and 5 days being added to the December muzzleloader season, the expected fill rate on antlerless permits has been increased by 10 percent in each WMU. This results in a statewide average fill rate of 25%, which is higher than antlerless permit fill rates observed in most other northeastern states. Expected WMU-specific fill rates range from 22% to 30% (**Table 3**).

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

Archery Season

The Department recommends that all WMUs be open to the taking of antlerless deer during the 2026 archery season. Antlerless harvest in archery season is a key component in deer population management in Vermont. Archery hunters tend to focus their hunting effort and harvest in areas with higher deer numbers. As a result, archery antlerless harvest has little or no impact in areas with fewer deer. Importantly, archery harvest allows hunters to better regulate local deer herds in areas with high deer densities, particularly areas where firearm hunting is limited.

Youth and Novice Season

The Department is strongly committed to recruiting new hunters into Vermont's deer hunting heritage. Based on this commitment and the importance of harvesting an adequate number of female deer each year, the Department recommends that youth and novice season hunters be allowed to take any deer in all WMUs. This would include antlerless deer or any buck, regardless of antler characteristics. This will provide these hunters with additional opportunity to harvest a deer and the opportunity to help properly manage Vermont's deer herd. It is critical that spike-antlered bucks be taken during this season so the Department can obtain important biological information (e.g., weight, antler measurements) from this portion of the yearling buck population. This is the primary reason Department biologists examine deer during this season each year. This will have no impact on buck age structure management, as the buck harvest during this season is typically about four percent of the overall buck harvest.

Antlerless Permits

Antlerless permits are recommended for 19 of the state's 21 WMUs in 2026. These permits may be filled during the antlerless-only October muzzleloader season, during the regular season, or during the December muzzleloader season. The Department recommends that a total of 12,050 antlerless permits be issued (49 percent fewer than the 23,400 approved for distribution in 2025). A decrease in antlerless permits is recommended in all WMUs due to the expected increase in fill rates resulting from new hunting regulations (**Figure 10**).

These recommendations are intended to move populations toward WMU-specific deer density and physical condition objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* (see **Appendix A** for additional detail). This permit allocation is expected to result in the harvest of an additional 3,041 antlerless deer above those harvested during the archery and youth/novice seasons.

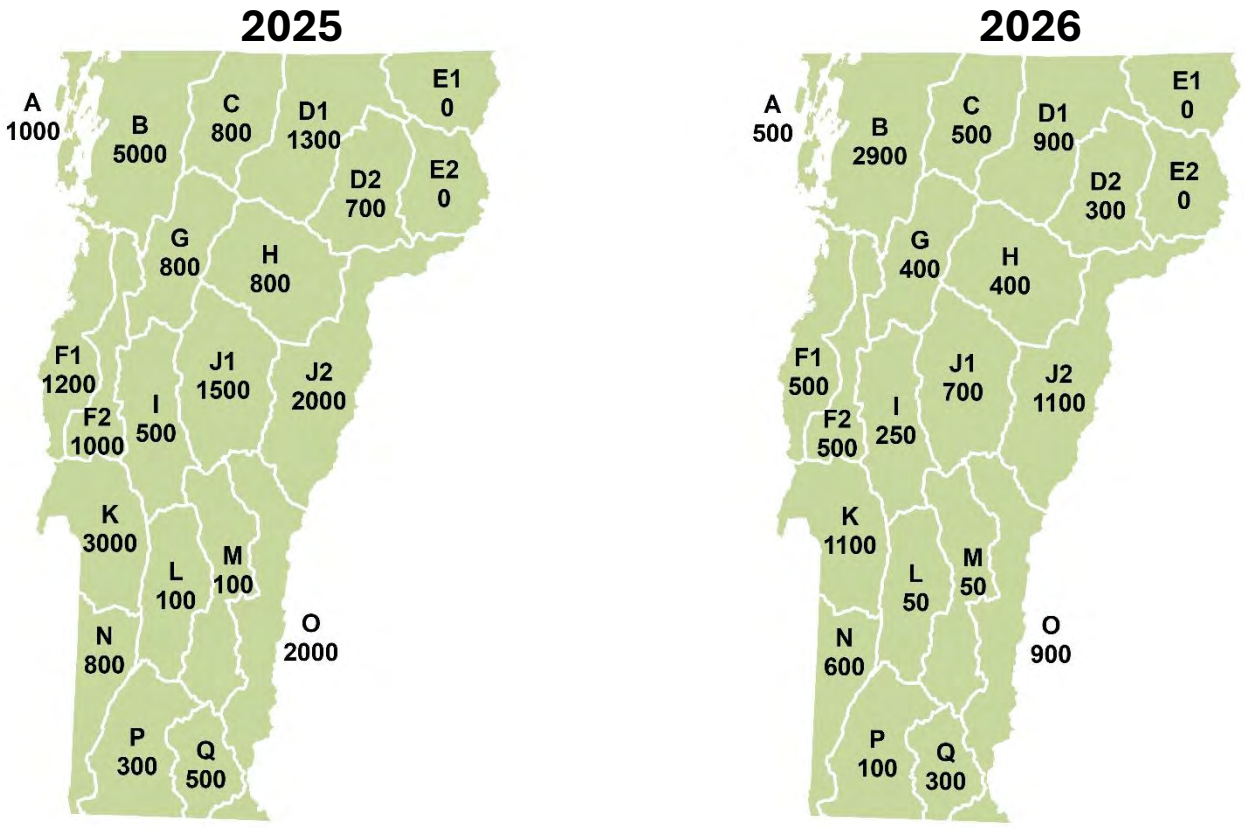


Figure 10. Antlerless permit allocations by wildlife management unit for 2025 and 2026 (proposed).

Public Comments

Three public hearings were held on March 16, 18, and 19, 2026 to gather comments on the deer herd. Approximately 52 members of the public participated in these hearings. Two additional public hearings will be held on May 5 and 7, 2026.

Table 1. Estimated deer densities and predicted antlerless deer harvests during the 2026 deer hunting seasons, by wildlife management unit.

	Deer per mi²			Antlerless Permits			Other Antlerless					
WMU	Objective	2025	2026	Permits	Fill Rate	Harvest	Archery	Youth/ Novice	2026 Total Antlerless	% of Doe Population Harvested	Doe Harvest per Mi²	Doe Harvest per 100 Bucks[a]
A	18	37	33	500	25%	125	154	19	297	22%	3.54	117
B	18	26	24	2,900	26%	763	728	146	1638	19%	2.22	116
C	15	19	16	500	30%	152	251	41	444	12%	0.96	73
D1	15	20	18	900	29%	258	345	109	711	12%	1.03	72
D2	12	17	16	300	30%	89	155	38	281	8%	0.60	57
E1	<10	8	8	0	-	0	27	7	34	2%	0.09	19
E2	<10	8	8	0	-	0	28	7	36	2%	0.09	22
F1	15	16	16	500	24%	121	136	27	284	9%	0.75	73
F2	18	18	19	500	24%	120	111	27	257	9%	0.80	69
G	12	15	14	400	23%	192	140	13	246	7%	0.53	56
H	15	16	15	400	25%	101	294	42	438	9%	0.71	76
I	12	13	13	250	25%	62	110	8	181	5%	0.36	49
J1	15	18	16	700	25%	173	239	43	455	9%	0.72	75
J2	15	18	16	1,100	26%	290	369	75	734	10%	0.87	88
K	18	22	22	1,100	23%	249	185	49	482	8%	0.92	64
L	12	11	11	50	26%	13	58	14	85	3%	0.19	28
M	12	12	12	50	22%	11	40	8	59	2%	0.11	18
N	18	22	23	600	23%	136	97	34	266	6%	0.68	52
O	15	16	16	900	22%	197	183	21	401	8%	0.62	65
P	12	11	10	100	24%	24	87	10	120	4%	0.22	37
Q	12	15	15	300	22%	65	77	6	148	7%	0.54	52
STATE				**12,050**	**25%**	**3,041**	**3,813**	**743**	**7,598**			

[a] *In WMUs with an antler restriction, which reduces buck harvest, this number will be higher than a comparable area with no antler restriction.*

Table 2. Muzzleloader antlerless permit history by WMU, 2018–2025, and recommended permit allocation for 2026. Numbers in parentheses are the number of permits actually distributed.

WMU	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	1100 (720)	1100 (939)	1000	500	800	1000 (855)	1000 (650)	1000 (647)	**500**
B	5500	5500	4500	3500	4000	5000	6000 (4651)	5000 (4707)	**2900**
C	800	300	500	500	500	500	1000	800	**500**
D1	1200	500	1000	800	800	1000	1800	1300	**900**
D2	800	300	500	300	200	200	800	700	**300**
E1	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	**0**
E2	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	**0**
F1	1000 (900)	1000	1000	1300	1500 (1453)	1800 (1145)	1800 (864)	1200 (837)	**500**
F2	1300	1300	1300	1000	1000	1000	1300 (994)	1000	**500**
G	300	300	700	700	700	700	1000	800	**400**
H	1100	400	300	300	300	500	1000	800	**400**
I	300	300	500	500	500	500	500	500	**250**
J1	1200	800	1500	1200	800	1000	1500	1500	**700**
J2	2500	2000	2000	1800	1500	1500	2000	2000	**1100**
K	4000 (2446)	4000 (2440)	3000	3000 (2795)	2500	3000 (2222)	3000 (2007)	3000 (2064)	**1100**
L	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	100	**50**
M	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	100	**50**
N	2000 (1487)	2000 (1462)	2000	1800 (1642)	1500	1500 (1378)	1500 (1163)	800	**600**
O	2600 (2300)	2000	2000	1500	1500	1500	2300 (2128)	2000	**900**
P	0	0	100	100	100	100	300	300	**100**
Q	700 (604)	600	500	600	600	600	700 (642)	500	**300**
STATE	**27000** (24057)	**23000** (20741)	**23000**	**20000** (19637)	**19400** (19353)	**22000** (20300)	**28300** (23799)	**23400** (21455)	**12050**

Table 3. Antlerless permit fill rate by WMU, 2018–2025, and expected fill rate for 2026.

WMU	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A	19%	13%	17%	14%	11%	13%	13%	18%	**25%**
B	19%	14%	18%	15%	14%	14%	15%	19%	**26%**
C	33%	24%	23%	20%	20%	21%	18%	20%	**30%**
D1	29%	24%	23%	19%	18%	22%	19%	18%	**29%**
D2	21%	21%	20%	17%	18%	22%	18%	21%	**30%**
E1							9%		
E2							16%		
F1	16%	13%	17%	13%	12%	12%	12%	18%	**24%**
F2	19%	12%	17%	11%	10%	11%	12%	18%	**24%**
G	28%	14%	17%	12%	12%	13%	12%	14%	**23%**
H	20%	18%	21%	18%	16%	18%	16%	14%	**25%**
I	24%	15%	19%	14%	10%	13%	13%	15%	**25%**
J1	26%	19%	18%	14%	17%	14%	16%	14%	**25%**
J2	23%	17%	21%	16%	18%	17%	17%	16%	**26%**
K	18%	14%	16%	11%	12%	10%	12%	15%	**23%**
L	31%	15%	17%	13%	9%	15%	13%	16%	**26%**
M	24%	13%	17%	13%	17%	12%	14%	12%	**22%**
N	18%	11%	13%	11%	11%	9%	12%	13%	**23%**
O	20%	11%	13%	13%	16%	12%	13%	12%	**22%**
P			17%	13%	14%	14%	14%	15%	**24%**
Q	18%	10%	13%	9%	11%	8%	11%	13%	**22%**
STATE	**21%**	**14%**	**17%**	**14%**	**14%**	**13%**	**15%**	**16%**	**25%**

Appendix A: Population Status by WMU

Deer densities, habitat conditions, and winter severity can vary substantially from one part of Vermont to another. Additionally, these factors and the effects of historical deer densities have resulted in deer in some regions being in better physical condition than others. This results in variable deer population dynamics across the state; therefore, deer management prescriptions are made at the WMU level rather than statewide.

The Department is aware that deer densities (and other factors) vary within each WMU, sometimes substantially. Unfortunately, managing deer at a smaller scale than a WMU is not currently feasible given the structure of hunting regulations and the Department's ability to collect enough data. However, hunters generally do a good job of targeting areas of higher deer density within a WMU if they have sufficient access.

Description of data provided for each WMU

Area of deer habitat: Deer habitat is all land that is not developed.

Physical Condition of Deer: Antler beam diameter and body weights are from deer examined by biologists at youth/novice weekend check stations. Adult birth rate (fetuses per doe) is from examinations of incidentally killed deer during February-May. All metrics show the average for the most recent five years of data. Sample size is shown in parentheses. Minimum acceptable levels for each metric, established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*, are also shown.

Deer Density: Estimated pre-hunt deer density over the past 10 years based on retrospective population modelling and the projected density in fall 2026. The density objective established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* is represented by a dashed green line in the figure. The shaded green area shows ±2 deer per square mile – a range that accounts for typical year-to-year variation in deer abundance and uncertainty around density estimates.

Red Numbers: Numbers are red when a metric does not meet the objectives established in the *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

Harvest: The total buck and antlerless deer harvests during all seasons during the past 10 years. The proposed antlerless harvest for 2026 is shown by the dotted red line.

Harvest per 100 Adult Bucks: The number of antlerless deer and adult does harvested for every 100 adult bucks harvested over the previous 3 years. This provides a useful indicator of antlerless harvest rate.

Harvest Age Composition: The age composition of the adult buck and doe harvests over the previous 3 years. Ages are from cementum annuli analysis. Sample size is shown at the bottom, in parentheses. The proportion of harvested deer in older age classes is a useful indicator of harvest rate. Generally, when more than 40% of does are 4 ½-plus years old, it suggests the population may be under-harvested.

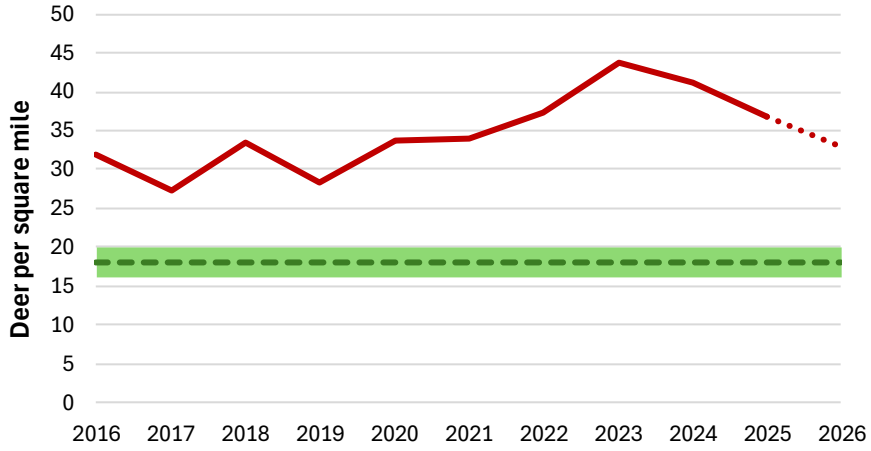


Wildlife Management Unit A

71 *mi² of deer habitat – 46% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(13)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**121.5** *(21)*	118
Fawn Weight	**57.9** *(10)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.25** *(4)*	1.60

Deer Density



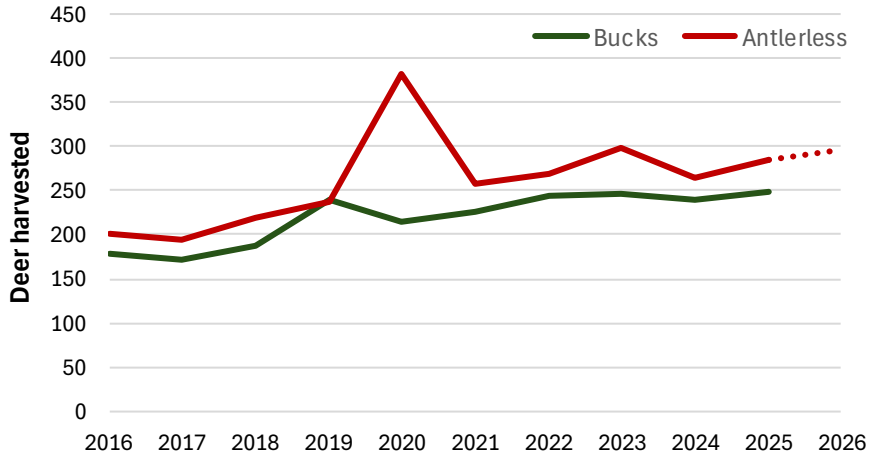
2026 Estimate

33 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
116	94

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	26%	40%
2.5	55%	13%
3.5	16%	27%
4.5+	3%	20%
no. deer aged	*(143)*	*(15)*

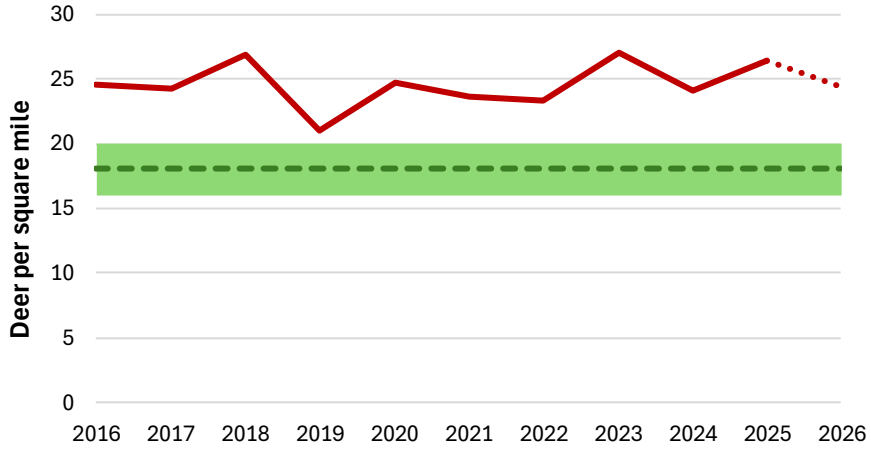


Wildlife Management Unit B

616 *mi² of deer habitat – 66% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.8** *(154)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**116.3** *(165)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.1** *(126)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.93** *(15)*	1.60

Deer Density



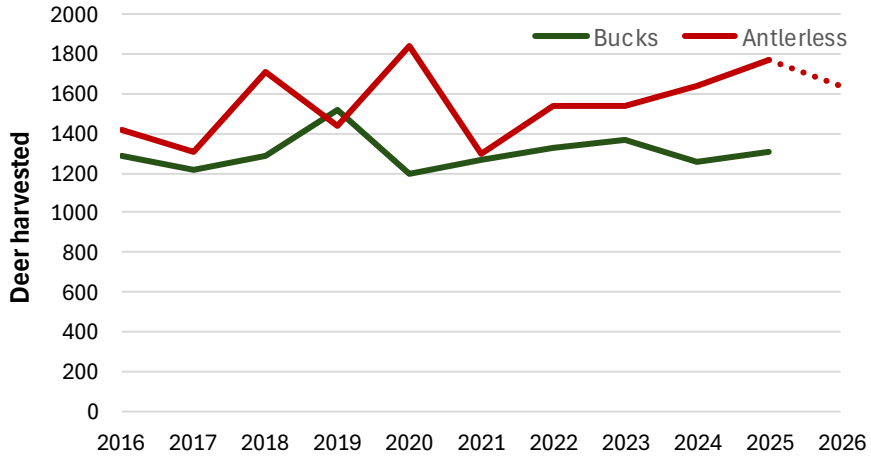
2026 Estimate

24 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
126	102

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	17%	22%
2.5	61%	17%
3.5	16%	19%
4.5+	6%	41%
no. deer aged	*(781)*	*(138)*

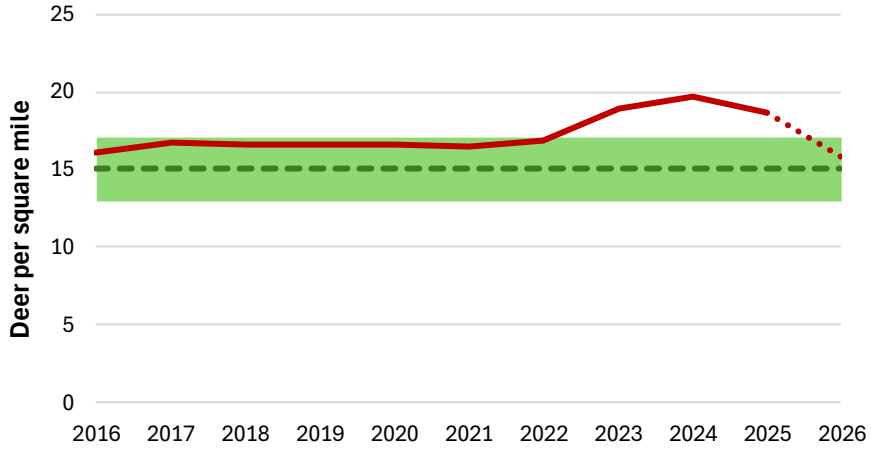


Wildlife Management Unit C

386 *mi² of deer habitat – 90% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.6** *(42)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**113.0** *(45)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.2** *(32)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.29** *(7)*	1.60

Deer Density



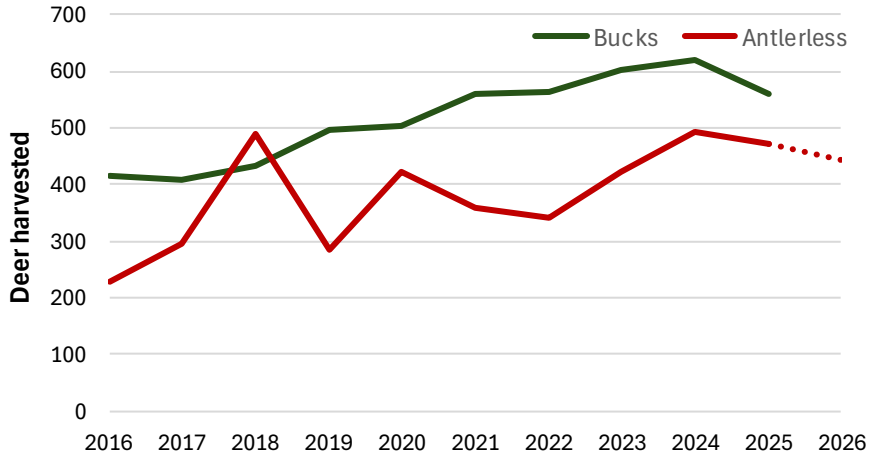
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
78	63

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	39%	22%
2.5	40%	27%
3.5	14%	9%
4.5+	8%	42%
no. deer aged	*(511)*	*(45)*

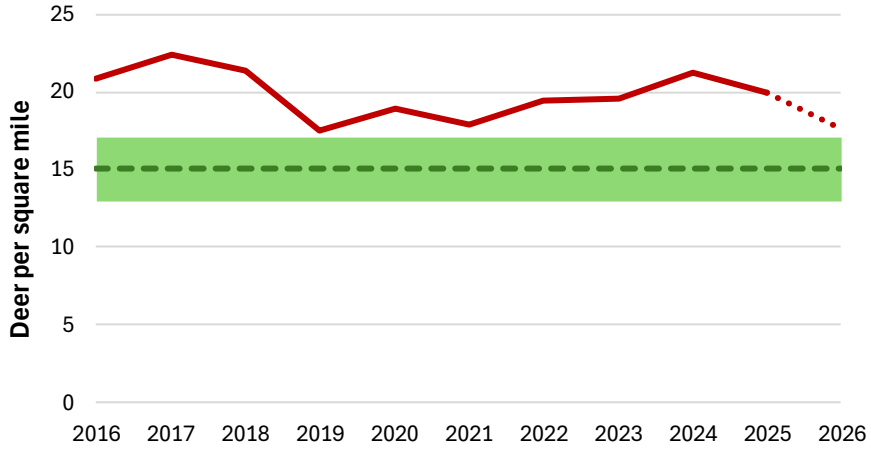


Wildlife Management Unit D1

570 *mi² of deer habitat – 78% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(80)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**117.2** *(82)*	118
Fawn Weight	**60.2** *(49)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.68** *(19)*	1.60

Deer Density



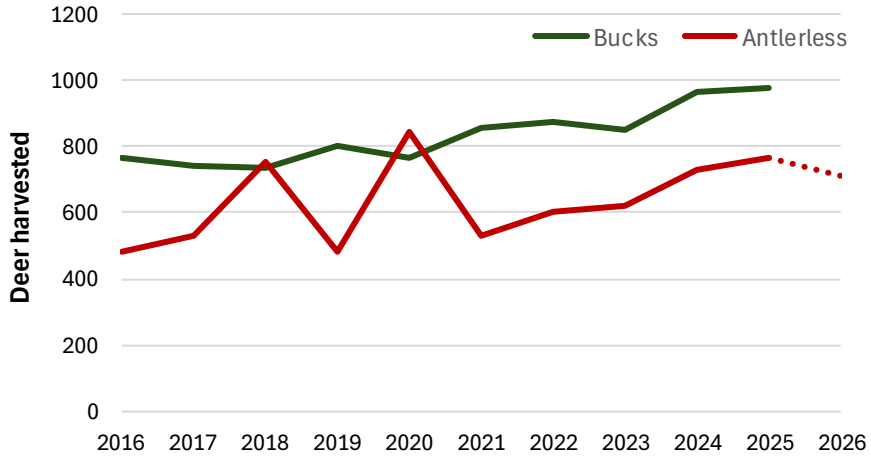
2026 Estimate

18 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
76	64

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	47%	24%
2.5	38%	21%
3.5	9%	10%
4.5+	6%	45%
no. deer aged	*(695)*	*(87)*

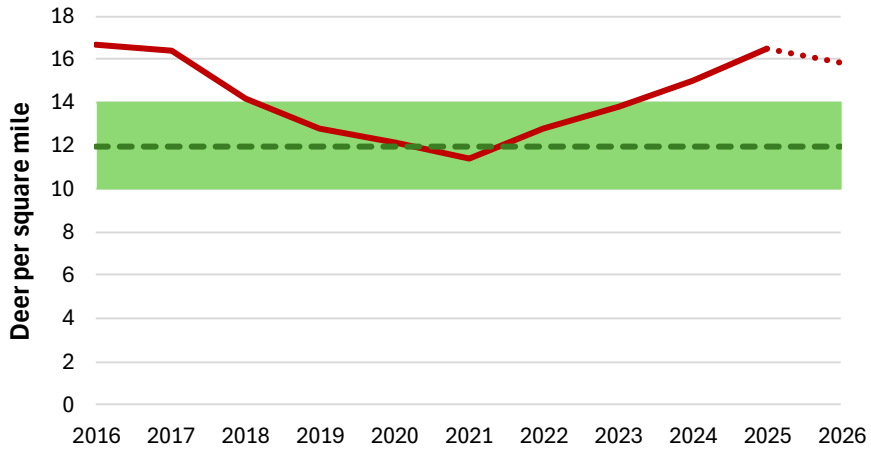


Wildlife Management Unit D2

387 *mi² of deer habitat – 89% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.3** *(23)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**116.0** *(24)*	118
Fawn Weight	**59.4** *(13)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.83** *(12)*	1.60

Deer Density



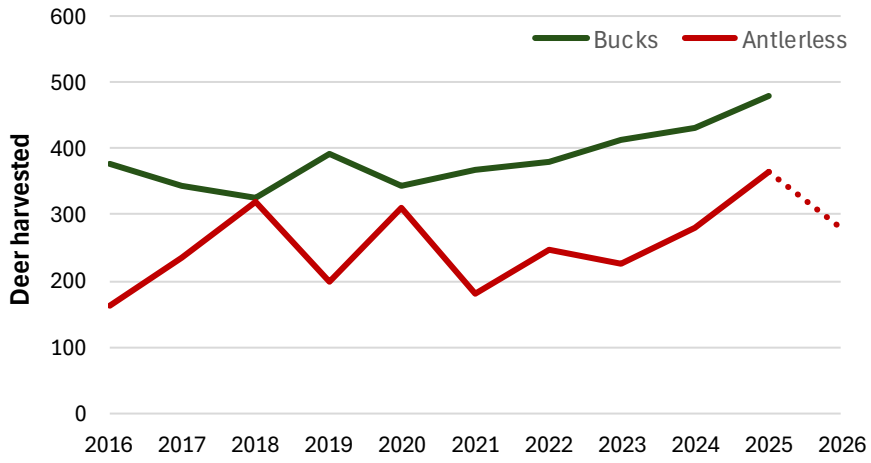
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
66	54

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	44%	24%
2.5	32%	16%
3.5	15%	14%
4.5+	8%	46%
no. deer aged	*(385)*	*(37)*

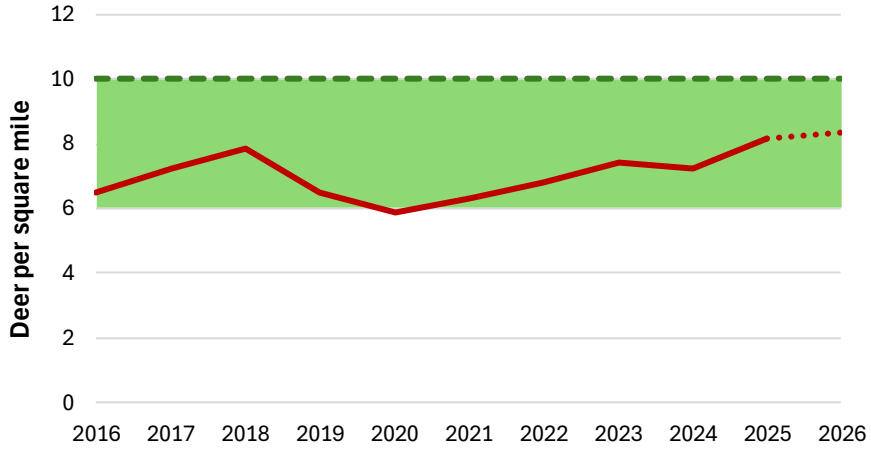


Wildlife Management Unit E1

***648** mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**20.3** *(5)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**120.8** *(6)*	118
Fawn Weight	**57.0** *(2)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.00** *(2)*	1.60

Deer Density



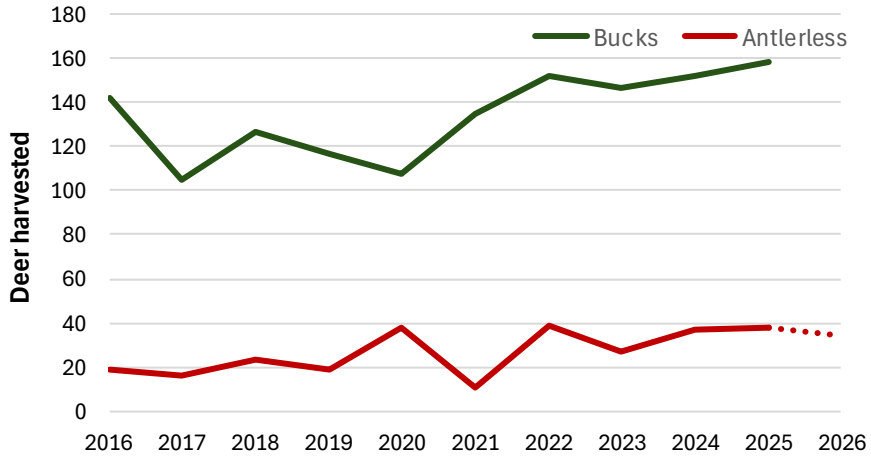
2026 Estimate

8 deer/mi2

Objective

<10

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
22	19

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	28%	10%
2.5	39%	20%
3.5	19%	0%
4.5+	13%	70%
no. deer aged	*(109)*	*(10)*

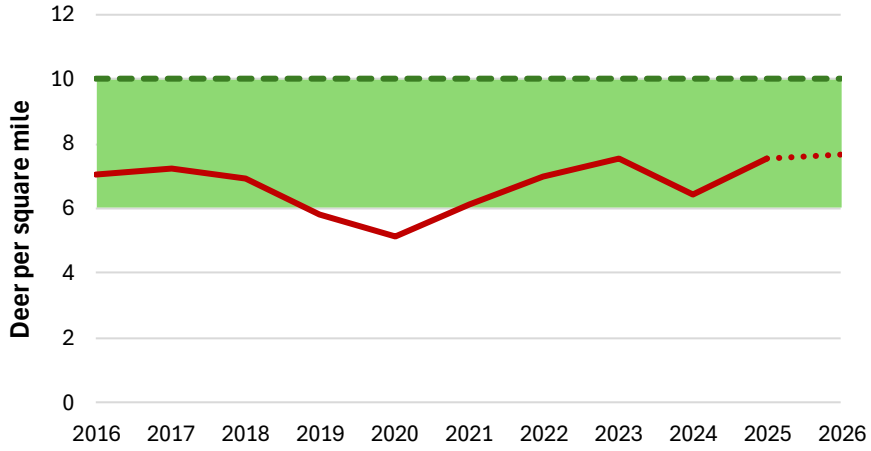


Wildlife Management Unit E2

***648** mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**19.2** *(6)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**119.6** *(8)*	118
Fawn Weight	**58.8** *(3)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.00** *(2)*	1.60

Deer Density



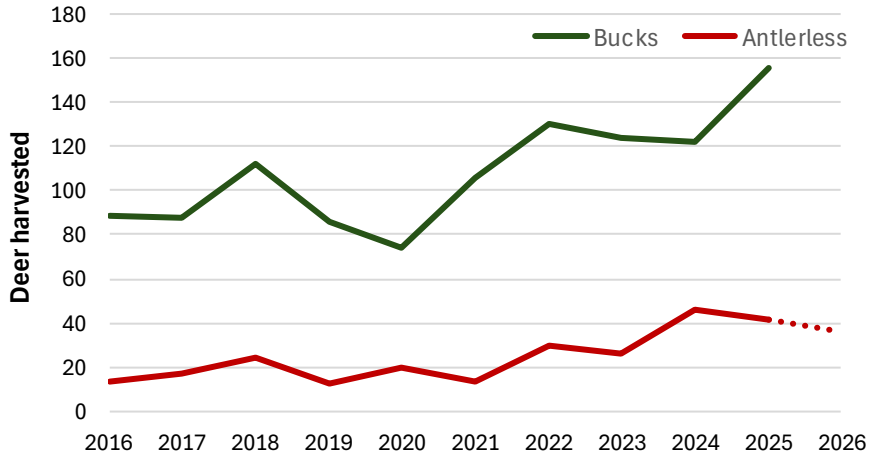
2026 Estimate

8 deer/mi2

Objective

<10

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
28	20

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	34%	67%
2.5	28%	0%
3.5	19%	0%
4.5+	20%	33%
no. deer aged	*(80)*	*(3)*

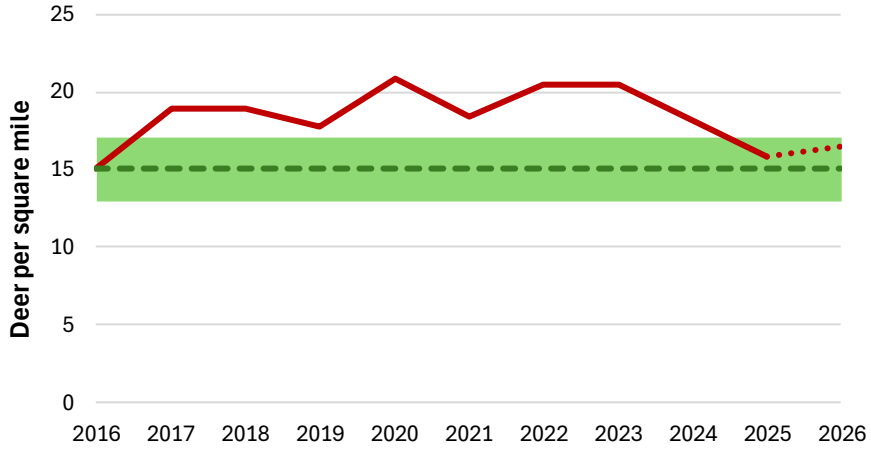


Wildlife Management Unit F1

316 *mi² of deer habitat – 33% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.1** *(29)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**119.7** *(31)*	118
Fawn Weight	**59.0** *(13)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**2.33** *(6)*	1.60

Deer Density



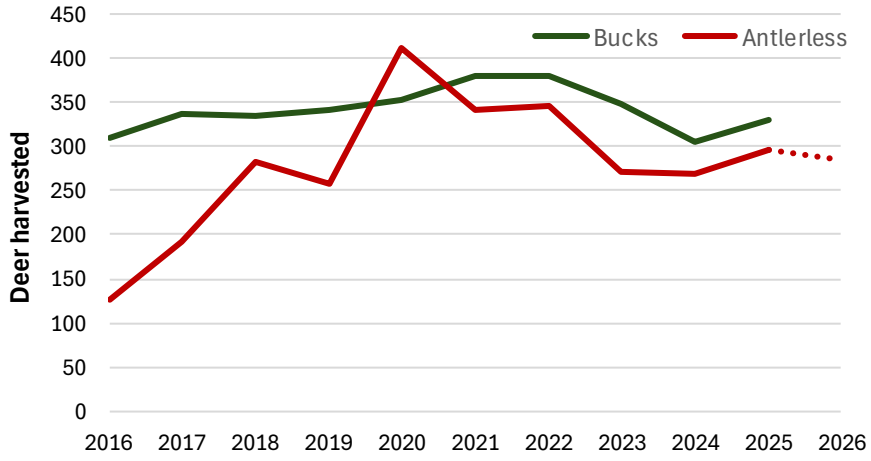
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
85	75

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	18%	24%
2.5	49%	10%
3.5	24%	41%
4.5+	8%	24%
no. deer aged	*(233)*	*(29)*

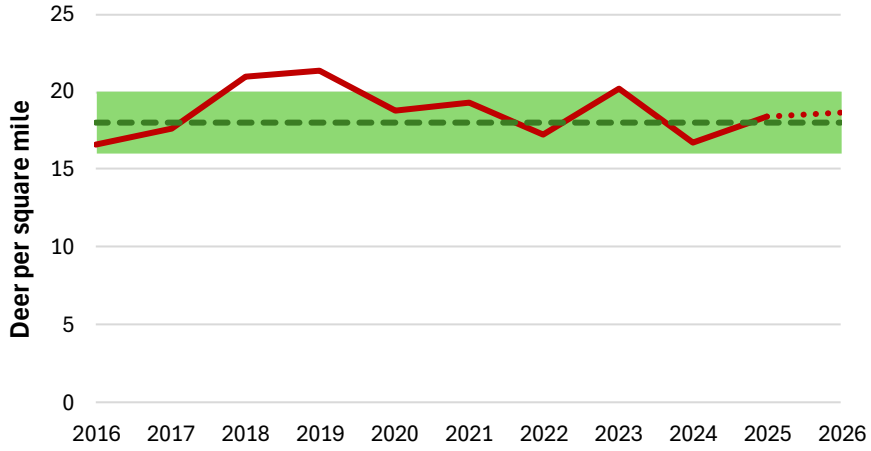


Wildlife Management Unit F2

286 *mi² of deer habitat – 57% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.6** *(22)*	17
Yearling Male Weight	**117.1** *(24)*	118
Fawn Weight	**60.0** *(21)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.71** *(8)*	1.60

Deer Density



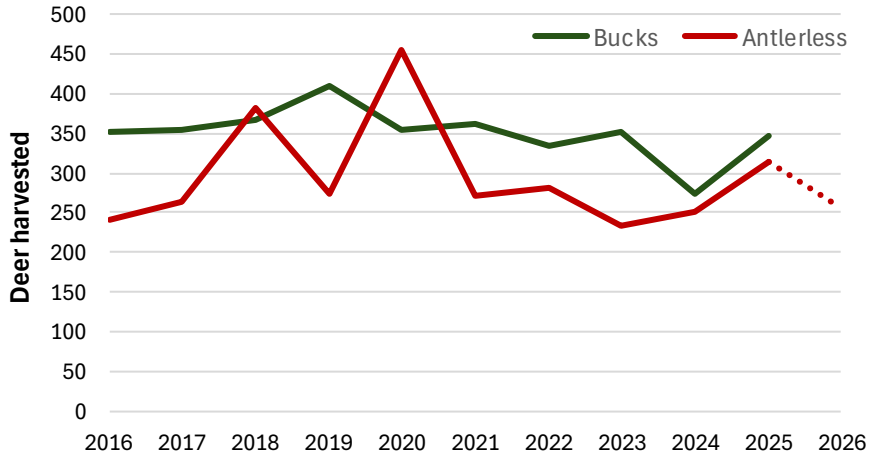
2026 Estimate

19 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
82	70

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	19%	10%
2.5	50%	7%
3.5	20%	23%
4.5+	11%	60%
no. deer aged	*(234)*	*(30)*

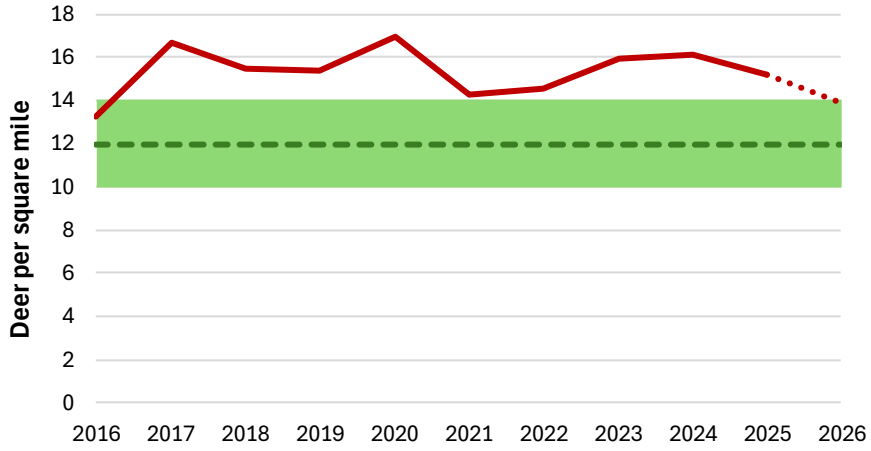


Wildlife Management Unit G

388 *mi² of deer habitat – 93% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.9** *(14)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**115.8** *(14)*	115
Fawn Weight	**60.5** *(2)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.20** *(5)*	1.60

Deer Density



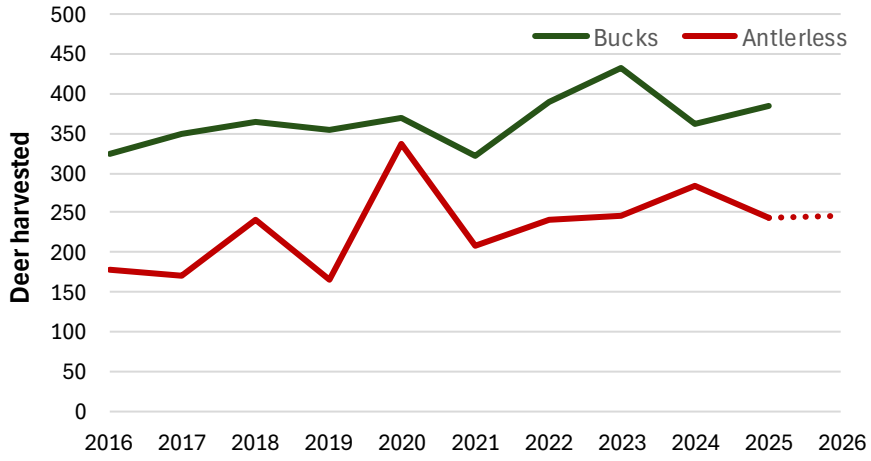
2026 Estimate

14 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
65	53

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	27%	42%
2.5	42%	8%
3.5	17%	8%
4.5+	14%	42%
no. deer aged	*(406)*	*(12)*

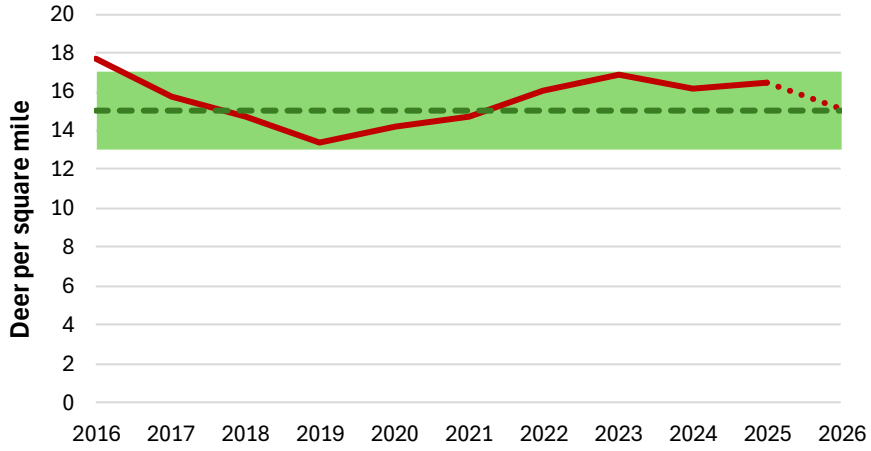


Wildlife Management Unit H

518 *mi² of deer habitat – 90% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**14.9** *(30)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**109.1** *(32)*	115
Fawn Weight	**58.8** *(23)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.21** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



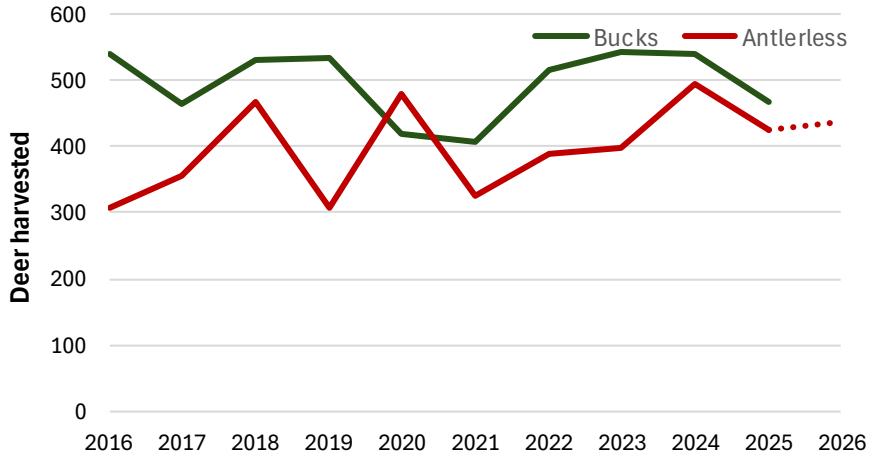
2026 Estimate

15 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
85	73

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	11%	18%
2.5	51%	23%
3.5	25%	9%
4.5+	13%	50%
no. deer aged	*(522)*	*(56)*

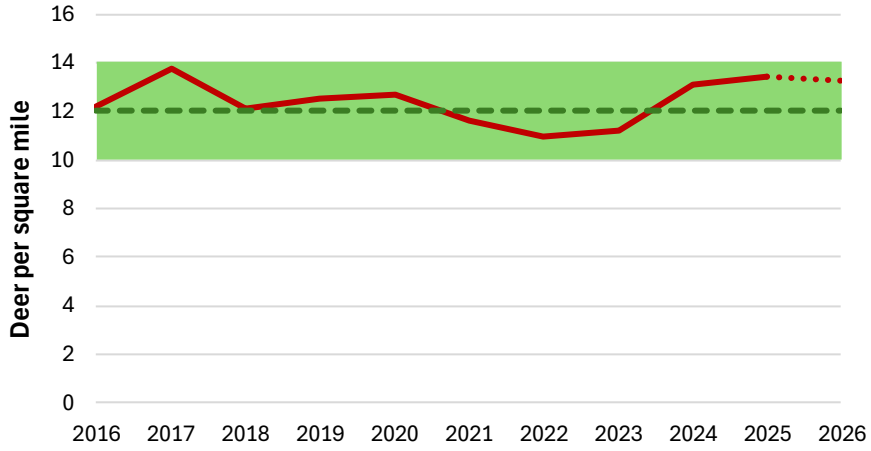


Wildlife Management Unit [redacted]

424 *mi² of deer habitat – 96% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.0** *(10)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**117.7** *(11)*	115
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(8)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.80** *(5)*	1.60

Deer Density



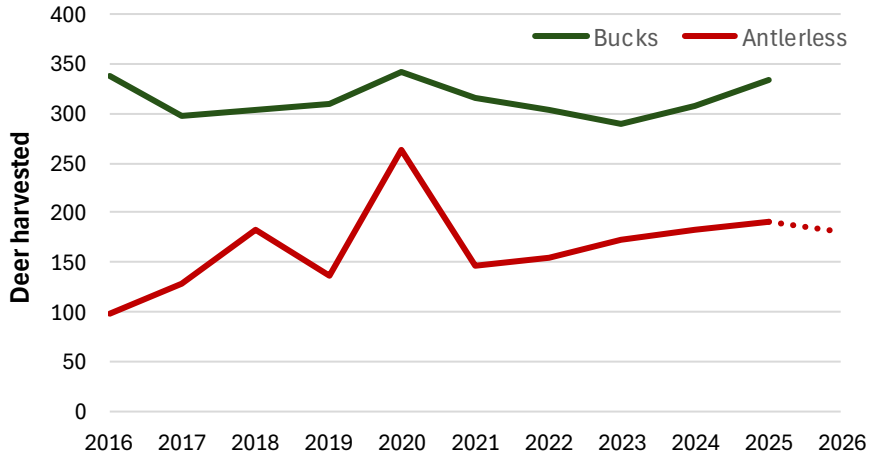
2026 Estimate

13 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
59	49

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	24%	0%
2.5	41%	0%
3.5	18%	0%
4.5+	18%	100%
no. deer aged	*(335)*	*(4)*

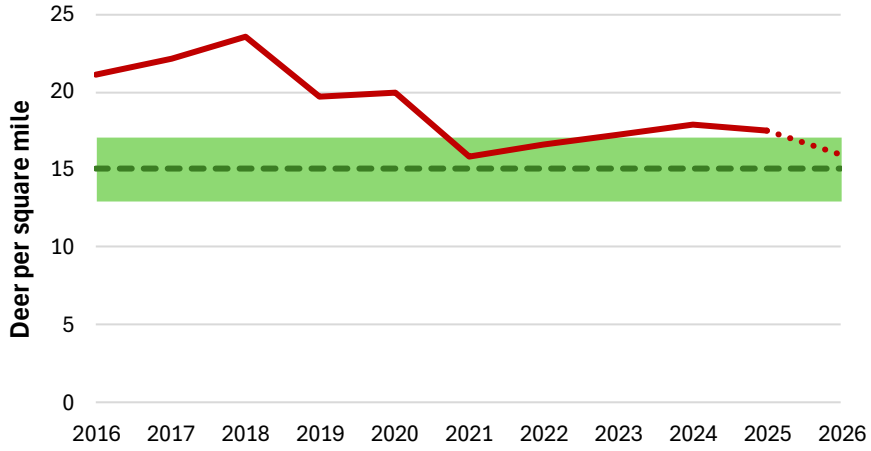


Wildlife Management Unit J1

528 *mi² of deer habitat – 87% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.1** *(18)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**116.5** *(20)*	115
Fawn Weight	**62.3** *(16)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.78** *(23)*	1.60

Deer Density



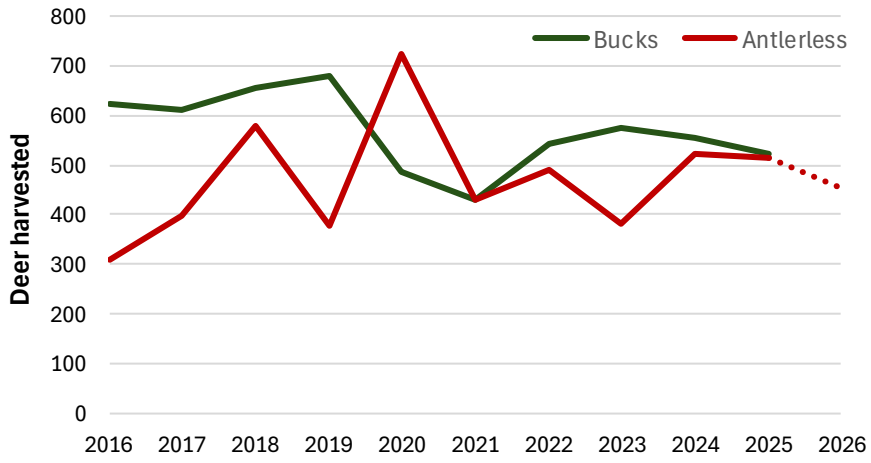
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
86	74

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	13%	18%
2.5	51%	21%
3.5	22%	11%
4.5+	13%	50%
no. deer aged	*(741)*	*(28)*

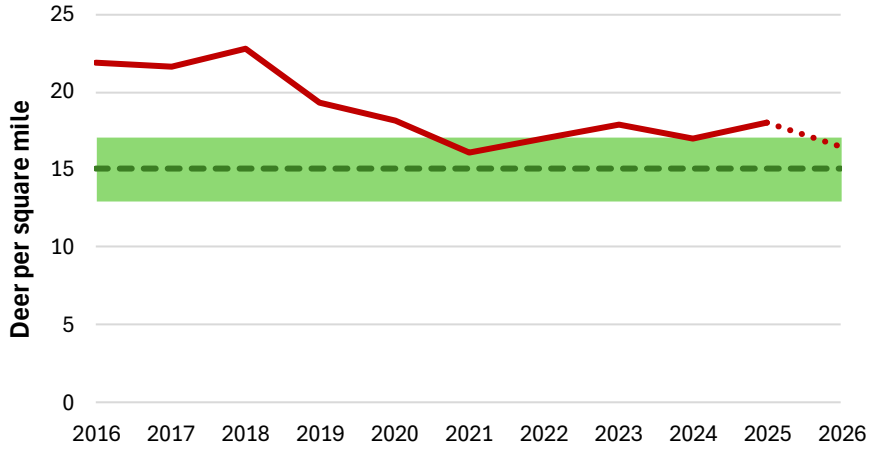


Wildlife Management Unit J2

705 *mi² of deer habitat – 89% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.5** *(41)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**109.5** *(42)*	115
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(55)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.67** *(24)*	1.60

Deer Density



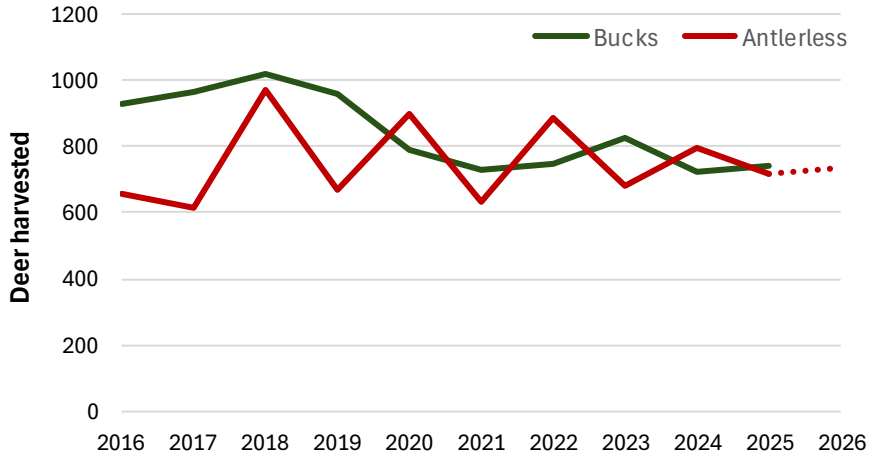
2026 Estimate

17 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
96	80

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	11%	20%
2.5	51%	16%
3.5	24%	14%
4.5+	14%	49%
no. deer aged	*(732)*	*(85)*

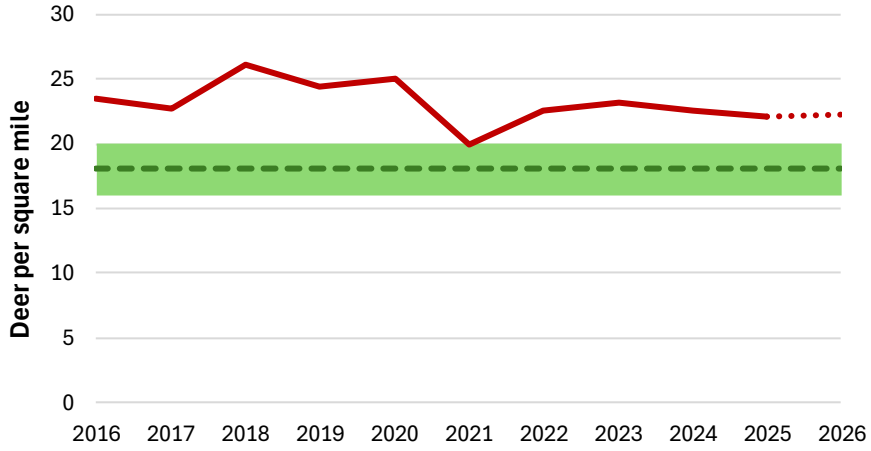


Wildlife Management Unit K

438 *mi² of deer habitat – 81% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.4** *(34)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**110.8** *(39)*	115
Fawn Weight	**59.1** *(38)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.65** *(17)*	1.60

Deer Density



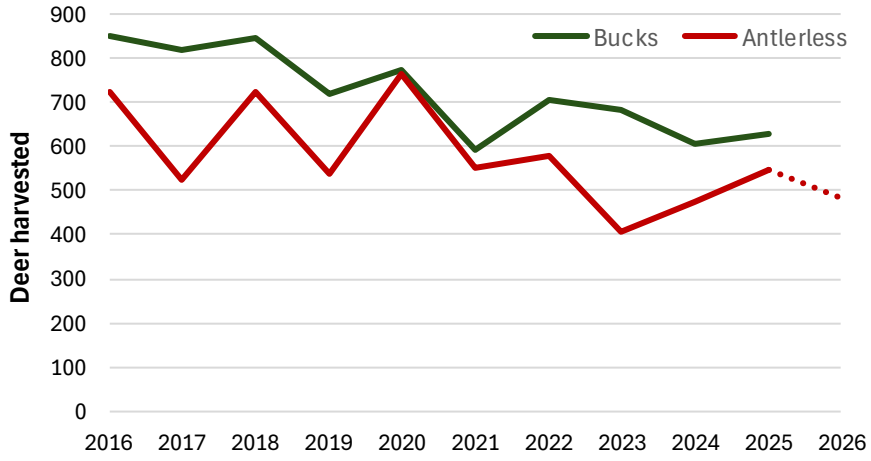
2026 Estimate

22 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
75	62

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	12%	16%
2.5	56%	10%
3.5	24%	10%
4.5+	8%	63%
no. deer aged	*(470)*	*(68)*

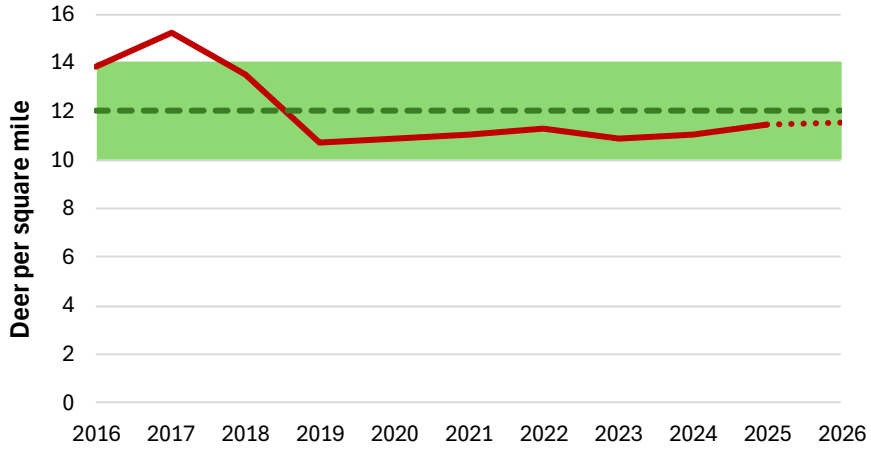


Wildlife Management Unit L

***365** mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**15.6** *(4)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**108.5** *(4)*	110
Fawn Weight	**49.6** *(7)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.63** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



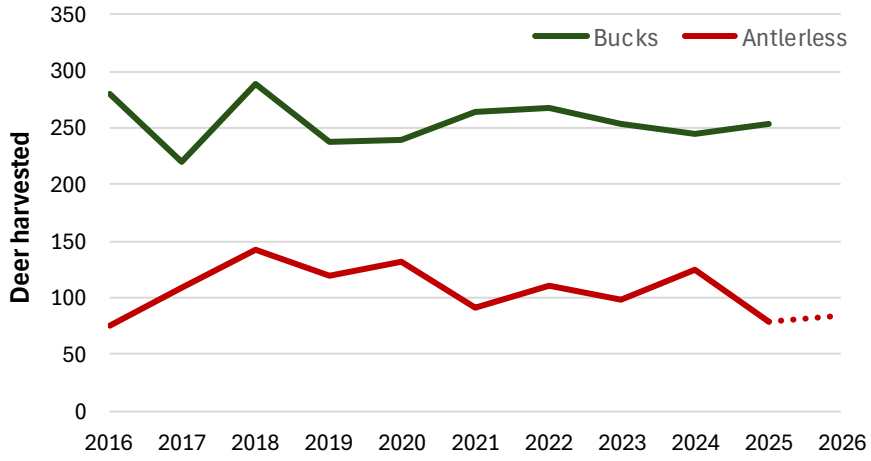
2026 Estimate

12 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
40	33

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	21%	21%
2.5	35%	0%
3.5	27%	21%
4.5+	17%	57%
no. deer aged	*(126)*	*(14)*

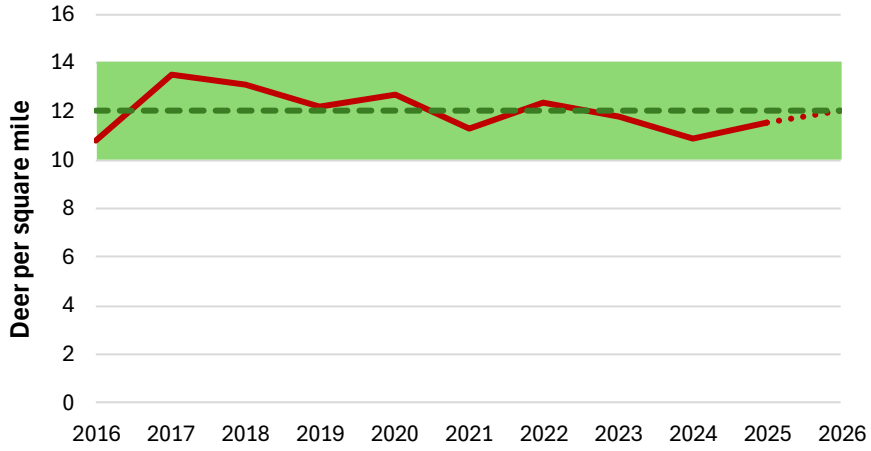


Wildlife Management Unit M

451 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.8** *(3)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**109.7** *(3)*	110
Fawn Weight	**55.3** *(3)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.73** *(12)*	1.60

Deer Density



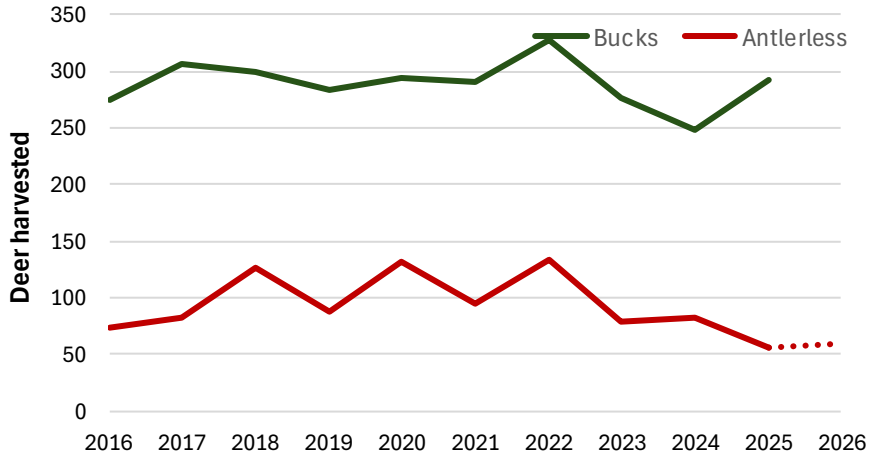
2026 Estimate

12 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
26	23

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	21%	0%
2.5	36%	0%
3.5	20%	25%
4.5+	23%	75%
no. deer aged	*(185)*	*(4)*

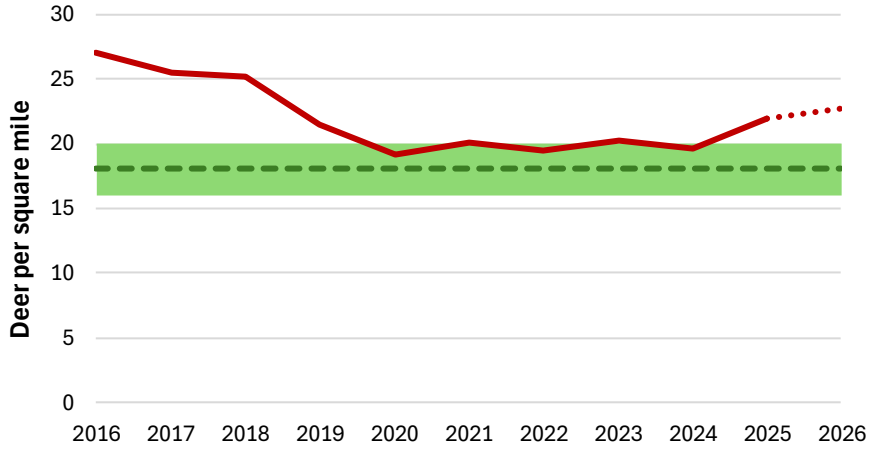


Wildlife Management Unit N

323 *mi² of deer habitat – 85% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**17.1** *(18)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**111.6** *(20)*	110
Fawn Weight	**57.5** *(28)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.56** *(16)*	1.60

Deer Density



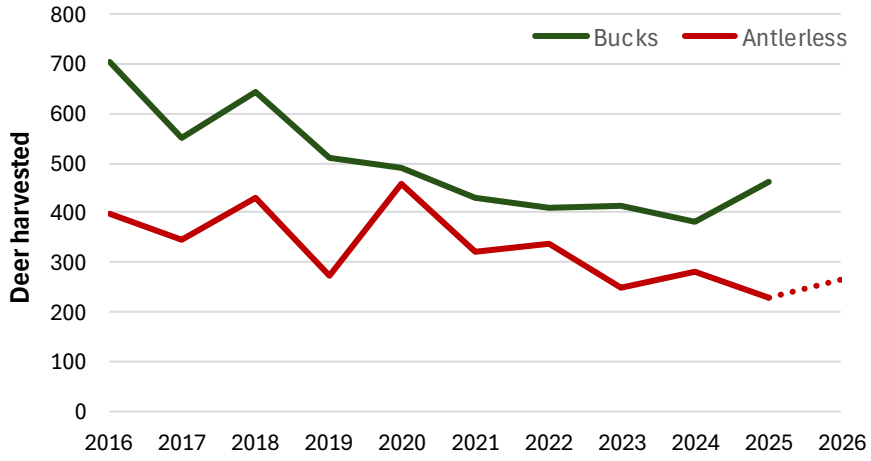
2026 Estimate

23 deer/mi2

Objective

18

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
60	49

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	20%	22%
2.5	47%	17%
3.5	21%	11%
4.5+	12%	50%
no. deer aged	*(378)*	*(36)*

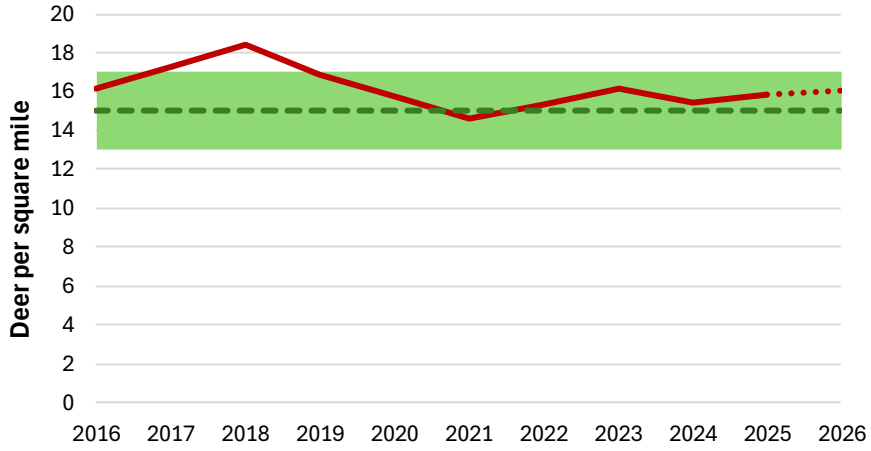


Wildlife Management Unit O

548 *mi² of deer habitat – 87% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**16.9** *(15)*	16
Yearling Male Weight	**115.5** *(15)*	110
Fawn Weight	**56.0** *(12)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.78** *(18)*	1.60

Deer Density



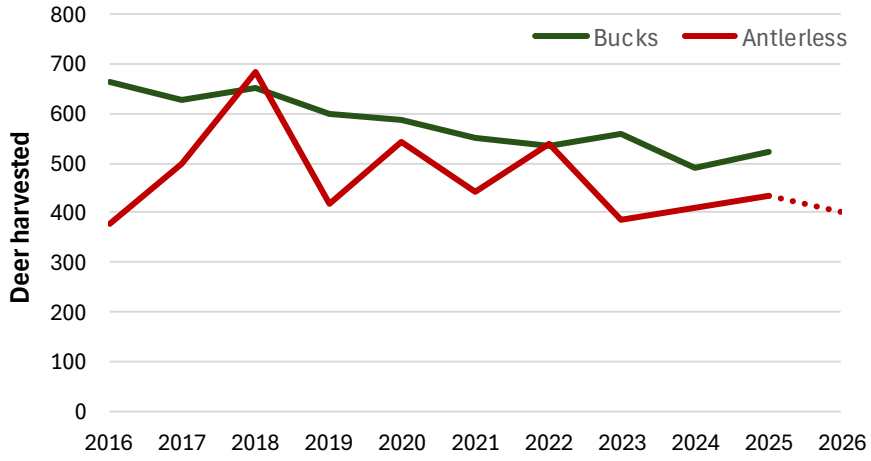
2026 Estimate

16 deer/mi2

Objective

15

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
78	65

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	19%	19%
2.5	45%	6%
3.5	21%	13%
4.5+	15%	63%
no. deer aged	*(476)*	*(16)*

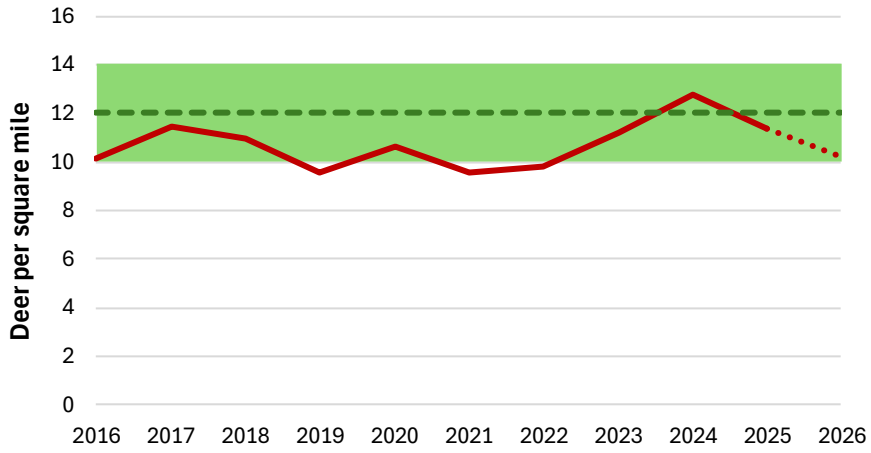


Wildlife Management Unit P

455 *mi² of deer habitat – 97% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	**14.6** *(8)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	**104.1** *(10)*	110
Fawn Weight	**59.8** *(6)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.46** *(13)*	1.60

Deer Density



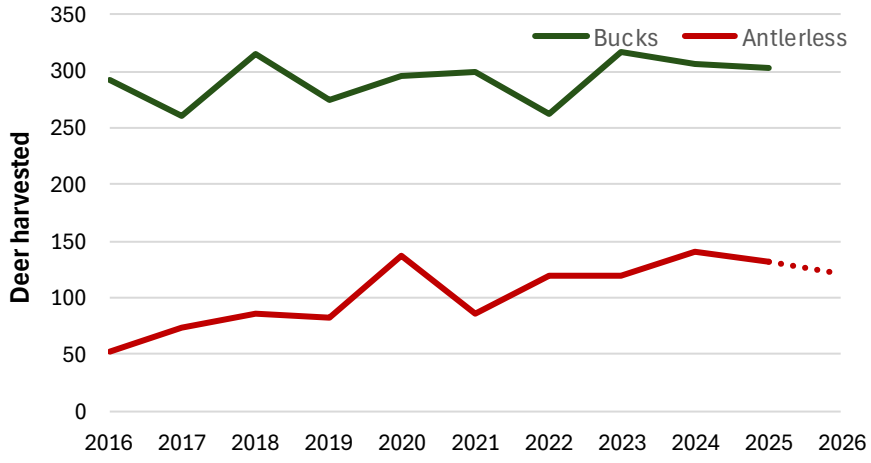
2026 Estimate

10 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
42	34

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	26%	40%
2.5	37%	0%
3.5	20%	20%
4.5+	17%	40%
no. deer aged	*(286)*	*(5)*

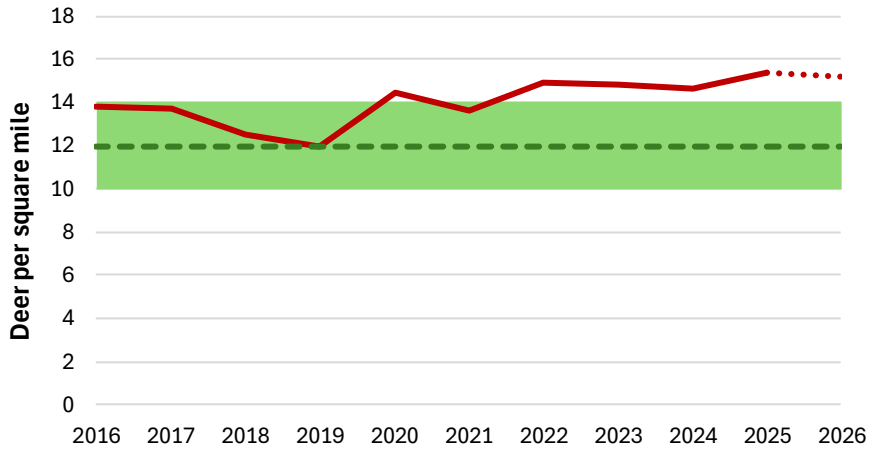


Wildlife Management Unit Q

233 *mi² of deer habitat – 94% forested*

Physical Condition of Deer	5-Year Avg. *(n)*	Minimum
Yearling Male Antler Beam Diameter	*no data* *(0)*	16.5
Yearling Male Weight	*no data* *(0)*	110
Fawn Weight	*no data* *(0)*	60
Adult Birth Rate	**1.11** *(10)*	1.60

Deer Density



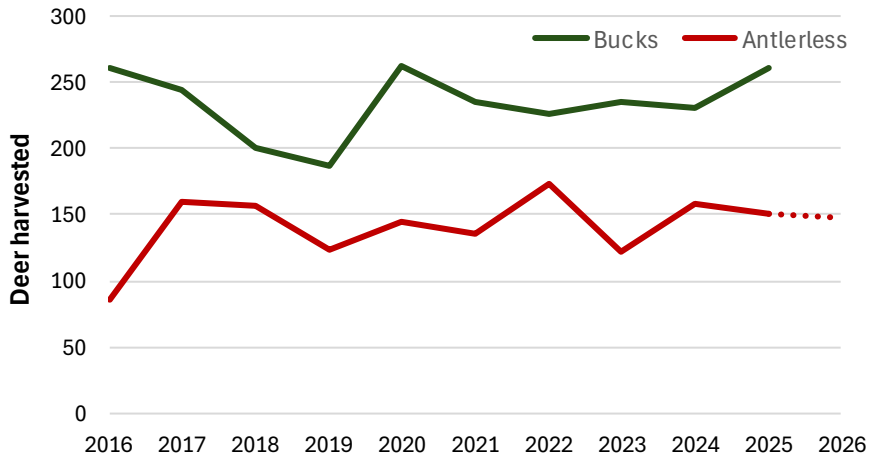
2026 Estimate

15 deer/mi2

Objective

12

Deer Harvest



2023-2025 Harvest per 100 adult bucks

All Antlerless	Adult Does
59	48

2023-2025 Harvest Age Composition

Age	Bucks	Does
1.5	29%	0%
2.5	33%	0%
3.5	24%	0%
4.5+	14%	0%
no. deer aged	*(182)*	*(0)*

Appendix B: Comments from 2026 deer public hearings.

Brattleboro – March 16, 2026 (public attendance: 9)

Status of deer population

- I feel the deer herd is doing well and can stand a bit more in the way of harvest.
- I think the deer we have are healthy. I certainly don't see the numbers I used to, but that seems to be the objective. Looking forward to the expanded opportunities.
- Logging needs to be increased on private land. Changes to the UVA program.
- Winter seemed a little worse than average, but the snow had no crust, which kept coyotes from moving around and the powder snow insulated the bodies of deer laying down.
- I feel the deer pop is good. I feel land access is a big issue in achieving the correct deer numbers.
- I feel like we really need these changes for the improvement of the deer herd.
- Good. (x2)
- Our winter was very cold, but lack of crust in Windham County was big plus for deer herd. I see no need for 2 buck tags. Where are all the young hunters? We need to have access to more land in Halifax, Guilford area, there are tons of posted land in areas we hunt.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Maybe the number of nonresident hunters coming into our area needs to be considered in all this. We see a fair number of NH hunters in our woods and on our roads from mid Oct-mid Dec, Brattleboro/Dummerston area.
- I see no reason to restrict the antlerless opportunities during archery or youth/novice season. I sounds like the Department is being conservative with the permits, which I agree with.
- Cut antlerless lottery permits at least in half overall but don't cut back at all during youth/novice seasons because we need to encourage new hunters.
- Antlerless should def. be harvested during archery/novice especially novice/youth. Once again, land access should be considered. A lot of the higher density areas have too much restricted/posted land.
- That people will most likely with new changes be more gung-ho for at least the first year and will most likely have a higher success rate.
- Over 70 years of age gets doe permit.
- Give more doe permits.
- Be cautious with this. I saw what happened in the '80's. I do think you are the right track with this action you are taking.

St. Johnsbury – March 18, 2026 (public attendance: 25)

Status of deer population

- Support increasing archery opportunities w/ zones in pop. areas.
- So far the deer we have been seeing have been in good shape barring any bad storms late in the season. We just need more work reducing the predator populations.
- I'm interested to see what the success rates look like with rifle hunting does. I do not think it will increase the amount of deer killed in Chittenden County. We need to encourage sustainable logging and expanding habitat.
- Population is at a good number but agree that to increase the herd a lot of habitat work needs to be done.
- I've definitely noticed a drop in the body weight of rifle season bucks in my area, but does not so much.
- Population is good. 2 buck is false will not happen. Permits for this will not be going to general hunter all permits will go to landowner only.
- The status of our deer population seems good now, but always take into account how different we are in the Kingdom (snowfall/cold) and winter kill.
- This past winter we had more below zero days than the past 10 years combined. If this contributed to higher deer kills, do you have a way to reduce permits?
- Reinstate clearcutting first and foremost, especially in D1 and D2, it's a sterile wasteland.
- I am still gravely concerned that we may be falling into the same trap as in the '80's, which were my early years of Vermont deer hunting. I hope you are right, but I'm afraid you are not.
- All good.
- Antlerless increase this year was long overdue. (thank you).

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Support conditional take of antlerless before a second buck can be taken.
- Our group does not harvest antlerless deer anyway so any permits we get is to save a doe's life. We also do not harvest spikes. Save them for the grandkids.
- Antlerless should be harvested in archery and youth season.
- Plan for high success rate. Keep working to expand habitat and hunting areas.
- Definitely assume high harvest rate so good idea to limit permits to see how things shake out this 2026 season.
- I would take into account the older people that will buy a permit to "save a doe."
- Archery will take does as in past. When cutting permits will go to landowner only because not enough of them.
- I agree with all of the proposals and you folks are on point w/ managing the herd for herd health and being conservative.
- Winter deer kill.
- The number of illegally killed deer will go way up. I would like to know how this is being addressed by F&W.
- It will be interesting how it turns out. It may change where people normally hunt, and increase pressure in certain areas.
- Keep antlerless in archery and youth – plan for a 30% fill rate.
- J2 is too big – not in area but length and diversity. Working in Tunbridge and driving to St. J daily, I can see the night and day population difference. I own 150 acres in Waterford (prime habitat) and I don't

hunt it due to population. I drive south or just go to NH. The orientation of the unit should be considered.
- Only 2 per year and no more.

St. Albans – March 19, 2026 (public attendance: 18)

Status of deer population

- We don't have the amount of deer you think we do. Farmers nowadays are much bigger and they now use liquid shit and spread on grassland every 30 days and that alone turns a deer nose off and they don't deed in hay fields like they used to.
- Fair but some areas need more deer. Some need less.
- It seems we are seeing bigger bucks and healthier deer harvested in recent years.
- I believe we have a healthy herd! But don't agree with the extended muzzleloader season. The does are already bred at that point! So you are killing 3 deer instead of 1!
- I think we don't have the deer population we used to.
- Our population on our properties = B+C are very healthy and plentiful. Friends and family took 7 deer between the 2 properties, 3 buck/4 doe.
- The deer health in my area seem to be good!

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Again here at least in Franklin County we don't have the doe we use to have.
- Some units can't afford antlerless hunting. WMU C is one.
- PA permits are different than VT. Doe can only be shot if you get a permit… VT is open doe harvest all bow season.
- Winter severity impacts. Need to drastically reduce # of permits if allowing rifles.
- My belief is we need to equal our the buck to doe ration and I believe the new changes will help except the 2 buck rule!
- Yes – I feel archery should include antlerless also.
- Not to overdo it like in the early '80s.

Montpelier – May 5, 2026 (public attendance: 14)

Status of deer population

- Buck to doe ratio needs to improve.
- Seem to be seeing less and less deer in our area – J1. Despite managing many food plots etc…, however, the mature forest probably plays a big role. The fawn kill is much more than in years past due to increase in black bear. I think there should be more incentive to kill more bear. Have a drop center for people who don't want the meat? Same with coyotes.
- It is much lower than the 1990-2000.
- The state has pockets of deer. Landowners need to do a better job of selective harvests of the wildlife. It's the hunters choice to harvest or not to harvest.
- Legislature needs to pass laws to open up more cutting to allow public land hunters a higher success. Our woods are awful compared to other states.
- How could we shape the population to be stronger and healthier? Is it about how we maintain our ecosystems and woods or having less of them?
- Needs to be more focus on improving habitat perhaps more encouragement of policy to do through UVA enrolled land and WMUs to increase regenerative forestry practices.
- Too many deer in areas that are posted. The deer in Northfield seemed to have had a good winter, but not a lot of deer.
- High elevation in zone H, Cabot, very few doe. Ratio 4-1, 4 bucks to 1 doe. Yes, but don't tell anyone. Do see only 1 fawn to adult doe. Hard to fill an antlerless tag.
- They seem healthy in J2 area. There are plenty around where I hunt.
- Sounds like we also need to work on habitat.
- I am optimistic it will be good.
- Deer populations in some areas need reducing, not in all units.
- In our area of J1, the northwest corner of Williamstown, the deer are healthy enough but there has been a steady decline in the population. That concerns me a lot.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- Way too many changes all at once even though I see the intended goal.
- I'm not sure that will help our situation at this time. We need to start seeing more doe than we do now. Some of these areas might need to be micromanaged if possible.
- Taking doe if needed in a specific unit it should be targeted to a smaller specific area not always the entire zone.
- It comes down to choice. Hunters know the deer population for where they are hunting. Yes, some areas need to be thinned while others don't.
- Open up suburban hunting early but allow buck to be shot.
- I believe it's a very good idea and way to take more advantage of more traditional hunting.
- Sounds reasonable. I would expect the percentage of successful harvests to increase with centerfire rifles.
- Glad to see the reduction in permits to be better balanced with mostly likely a higher success rate.
- Less if you can shoot them during rifle season. The last time they shot doe during rifle season there were lots of small deer left dead in the woods.
- 2nd buck is a good idea. Will still be difficult to find antlerless deer. I have hunted Montpelier, more deer, but also more interference from non-hunters, such a hiking trails in large tracts of woods.
- More rules and regs but I don't dislike them and will stay legal and follow the rules.
- Look forward to seeing how they work out.

- I am OK with what I heard tonight.
- It sounds like too many antlerless deer will be taken.
- Cut the permits in half for a couple of years to see if we can bring the herd back to what it should be.

Castleton – May 7, 2026 (public attendance: 8)

Status of deer population

- I feel the current trend with a 1 buck rule has started to produce decent deer in my area. I agree we need a better buck/doe ratio and an increase in urban antlerless kill would be ideal. I live in Rutland area and know the urban hunting situation well – everything is inaccessible unless you're walking in from Rte 3. Most of surrounding Rutland Town is posted. I think you will have no problem achieving your antlerless kill with permits being filled with rifle. It's just not going to always target the deer you want. Just outside of town there is much lower deer density, those permits will significantly effect those small herds.
- After the easy winter, prospects are good.
- The powdery snow without a thick crust was tougher on coyote and domestic dogs who chase deer and that powdery snow helped insulate deer when bedded down.
- All deer I saw over the winter and spring looked to be in great condition. I think 2026 season will be a good one.
- Seems to be about the same as it has been. Some unknowns with the changes.
- I do think the winter was easy and fast green up in the spring will make good antler growth this year.
- Good health. Prospects for 2026 season low.
- I would like to see the population in my area grow some (K – Wells). Our winters have been very mild and predation has increased with the coyotes and bear numbers increasing. I question your fawn recruitment numbers and how we count our population of deer.

Antlerless Harvest Recommendation

- One antlerless permit per hunter.
- Well thought out by WMU
- Adding 7 different ways to take deer will help give more of a chance to those hunters who don't have as much time to hunt because of their busier schedules in life.
- It is good that we are being conservative with the doe permits this first year of all these extra chances of harvesting deer.
- I would like to see more permits but I am happy with just one.
- Not sure if reducing the permits that much is going to give you a bigger harvest.
- I think more people will harvest a doe to be able to shoot a second buck. Archery thru rifle I don't believe will make a difference, but harvesting a doe with a rifle will. May reduce buck kill due to many bucks go nocturnal from more shooting.
- Could the doe be pregnant?
- I will never agree to shooting does with a rifle, but I glad to see you cut the permit numbers and are being careful moving forward.

Appendix C: Written public comments.

Sent: Monday, April 20, 2026 8:56 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearings

For what it's worth: How do you propose to "Manage" Vermont,'s deer herd especially in Orange county or other counties that have much posted land. The owners of the land don't care what the department of fish and game wants, they only care about saving deer from hunters! Plus, they are not going to spend their money on improving the habitat on THEIR land so hunters can shoot THEIR deer. So much land is posted that it concentrates hunters on unposted land and makes hunting much more difficult.

Capt. Tom Malanchuk
(16 year Veteran hunter safety instructor both bow and rifle).

Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2026 4:25 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Allocation

The state of Vermont needs to lower the deer limit to 2 deer. One buck and then one doe across all means of harvest. 4 deer a year is ridiculous. Most land owners are posting their private property because of deer mismanagement. All bucks harvested should be required to have at least 3 pts on one side, except for junior hunters.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:45 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Anterless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Good afternoon,

There are 3 of us that currently hunt private property in zone Q. (roughly 375 acre) We have many cameras out and yearly we generally see 3 to 4 different Does.

If we harvest the Does that we are allowed to we would be eliminating the heard in our area. So I believe that the proposed changes would not be a good idea.

Thanks for your time,
Matt Horton

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:07 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Management

Dear Wildlife Board,

I won't be able to attend either meeting.

I wanted to express satisfaction with the VT Fish and Wildlife's management of the deer herd with the emphasis of harvesting more anterless deer. As a forester and after reading Quality Whitetails, it is clear to me that it is best for the landscape to keep the numbers well below the carrying capacity. The quality of the habitat, the amount of posted land, and simple differences in geography and its inherent differences in winter severity are out of everyone's control. As a hunter, I am more than satisfied with the number of animals I see and the health of the animals I am able to harvest. I have no issues with changes coming. Nick Fortin and his team have my trust.

Thank you,
Markus Bradley

PS - I do think the State of Vermont needs to consider taking more bear. My historic average is 1 sighting per year. In 2024 I saw 17, 8 in 2025, and already 2 this year.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:09 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Deer Harvest Recommendations

The biggest obstacle VT is facing is the rising amount of posted property. I would say in the past 10 – 15 years, 70% of the land I hunted for over 30 years has now been posted and doesn't allow hunting. I'm talking thousands of acers. Talking to land owners this year, a lot more land is going to be posted because they are opposed to hunters being able to take does with a rifle.

I wonder if VT Fish and Wildlife went back to the 70s when you could take does with a rifle with a permit. I suspect the success rate was pretty high. As a person who hunted back then I found it very unsettling and dangerous especially the opening weekend. Hunters were shooting at anything that moved. What did I see out of all those doe rifle seasons was the deer population was obliverated. I remember going onto large plots of land with snow on the ground and finding no deer tracks. It became very hard to see any deer. People who hunted back in that time period are very concerned about VT the same thing again and wiping out the deer herd.

Why not start out a bit conservative. I think with permits you are suggesting its really going to impact the deer herd. I think more land is going to be posted. I think we will hear of shooting incidents. Overall, VTs biggest problem is all the posted land. We all know that deer go to where they can escape pressure. Posted land is a great place to hide and they know it. Also, around houses is another great place. You want to see some deer head to a couple of those locations.

Thanks,

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:10 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: What deer

Can't believe you want to kill off more does. When you only see ONE deer in the entire season. When you only see ONE deer all summer, when there are NO tracks in the usual deer yards all winter it's time to stop

killing doe's. I know the Dumbercrats in VT want to ban all guns and if you keep killing off all the does no one will be hunting any longer because there won't be anything to hunt. Your not going to make much money on just fishing, especially since you don't stock much of anything except ponds anymore.
G Despart

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:22 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe seasons

Good afternoon,
I believe that smaller management zones would allow for more precise control over doe permit allocation. I reside in Wildlife Management Unit J2, and in my experience, the doe population is not consistent across the entire unit. For example, conditions in Norwich differ significantly from other areas within J2.
One of the primary challenges in Norwich, as well as throughout much of the state, is the prevalence of posted land, which limits access for hunters and complicates population management efforts. I understand the importance of managing the doe population and actively contribute to that effort; however, I am selective about where within J2 I choose to do so, based on local conditions.
I recognize that the board faces a difficult task and that it is not possible to satisfy all perspectives. I simply wanted to share my observations and viewpoint for consideration.
Thank you for your time.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:29 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer plan comment

I think we should be trying to maximize permit numbers even if that means shorter seasons.

It would be a shame to shrink the hunting community because some people can’t get a tag.

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:51 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Anterless Deer Harvest Recommendation

Good day,

I have never been part of a board or complained about rules and regulations. That said, my hunting property is in Montgomery and during rifle season over the past 2 years; I have seen a total 2 deer while in the woods. I hunt about an average of 70 hours during the 2-week period. PLEASE put anterless hunting within certain wildlife areas, not across the whole state. You can't compare Franklin county to Chittenden, Rutland or Winsor as there is no comparison.

Sincerely,
Randy Cutter

Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2026 8:23 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer management rule change

I live 2 hours away from the closest public hearing site. I would like to participate. Since there is no convient way for me to be able to attend I am unable.

I am against the rule change. There is no way to manage posted property in this state and this rule is moot. Causing more costs to an already over expensed state. There is no way that is will work.

Causing extreme fluctuation in the deer population making it harder to manage the deer poulation. Causing more stress on an already stressed wildlife department.

At the same time causing dissatisfied hunters where there is non posted land because there will be even less deer in those areas since those are the areas which will be over hunted and over harvested with the new rule.

However the posted property will have the opposite effect. Under hunted and over populated since deer will be housed on these properties.

This will have a chain effect causing more hunters to violate laws and trespass onto posted property. Causing upset hunters and land owners of posted property. Wardens will be overwhelmed. Causing chaos and more harm then good for the public.

Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 8:04 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearing Opinion

Hi,

I can't attend the hearing and wanted to voice my opinion. I am a 70 year old lifelong Vermont deer hunter with an M.S. in Biology. I have been retired for almost 10 years and hunt at least 45 days in state every season. I can't remember the last time I didn't get a buck with my bow and continue to hunt every day after my tag is filled because I love to.
My biggest concern is that I see declining deer populations every season and yet the state continues to relax bag limits. I recognize that there are large populations of deer in urban areas and probably other parts of the state. In the areas that I hunt, zone B and the foothills of the mountains, the population of accessible deer is quite low. Land access is extremely limited and so the density of Hunters is high compared to game. The antler restriction has helped a lot combined with the 1 buck limit.

Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 8:18 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Deer Hearing, continued

I just sent an opinion before completing so here's a follow-up.
I am strongly opposed to increasing the bag limits and adding a second buck tag generally across the state. Perhaps in selected areas with high population density AND adequate land access, this is necessary but generally I see it depleting an already limited resource. Many people are giving up hunting VT for nearby out

of state opportunities because the experience is so much better. Not because there are more animals, but because access to hunting and hunter density is lower. I am expecting our state to get better as people give up hunting here when the population is even more depleted. We hunters see the deer hunting as more revenue oriented than resource oriented. Thanks,
Stephen Mongeon

Sent: Saturday, April 25, 2026 9:13 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Antlerless Deer Season Changes

I fully support the 2026 updated deer season regulations related to antlerless deer. As a consulting forester I see first hand the impacts on the health of our forests from an increasing deer population. The impacts to tree regeneration quality and quantity caused by elevated deer numbers represent a long-term threat to forest health and productivity.

As a hunter I am excited at additional opportunities to harvest wild game.

Thanks to V F&W for using science to inform policy updates and public communications.

-R

Rick Morrill

Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2026 9:30 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment

I'm writing to inform the fishing game board that I am concerned with the number of permits that are being issued this year for "doe permits". While I definitely was pushing for doe permits to be used in November; I was and still are concerned about the number of does that may be taken during the bow season since you're allowed to use bows for doe also during the rifle season. There's so many different variables that are going to go into this season and the unknowns. How many people will refuse ; how many people will buy them and not use them ; how many people etc etc etc. I think decreasing to half was a great idea but would it really hurt to decrease it another 10 to 15 percent or the board should consider having a provision that if numbers are getting out of control with the number harvest that the fishing game board can halt seasons objectives regarding doe. I appreciate all the hard work the biologists at the fishing game department. Nick for his dedication. Thank you for your time Sincerely Jeremy Ayotte

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Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2026 3:52 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: 2026 Antlerless Deer Harvest Recommendations

To Whom It May Concern,

I am 63 years old and have been hunting in Vermont since I was 13. I am deeply concerned about and strongly against regulation changes aimed at harvesting more antlerless deer in 2026.

I was told by a F&W Program Manager at the Yankee Sportsman's Classic that a survey was sent to solicit feedback on antlerless permits during rifle season. We have 9 people at our deer camp and 5 other camps around us with up to 5 people each and none of us (a) received a survey or (b) knows of anyone who received one.

The last time that F&W issued antlerless permits in Vermont the herd suffered severely; especially along the spine of the Green Mountains. As a young hunter it would be nothing to see up to 10 deer a day and where I hunt in WMU G it would take 5 years to see 10 deer...if you're lucky.

I've been hearing that our forests are old and the deer habitat has been declining since John Buck was the State deer biologist. What is being done to support habitat and improve it so that more deer can be sustained, hunting success rates can be increased and hunting revenue could possibly increase as well. There was a time when I hunted in Pittsfield, VT where people came from all over New England to hunt whitetail deer. Those days are long gone since the last antlerless harvest during rifle season. I fear that history is going to repeat itself and if so even fewer people will hunt the state further impacting F&W's declining revenue stream. I already know alot of Vermonters who travel out of state for their deer hunting because the success rate here is in the tank.

I do believe there are areas like the Champlain Valley and the Lake Champlain Islands where deer are abundant and a doe harvest is needed. Crop damage, deer/car incidents and bad genes are prominent. I've seen several buck shot in the island with under developed antlers and lower body weight.

It's time that hunters and F&W band together to work on deer habitat to preserve a long and history-filled tradition of deer hunting in Vermont.

Mark Manley

Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2026 4:27 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe permits

I do not agree with giving these permits. I also believe we should go back to the 3 points on 1 side rule. The population is not great as I did not see as many deer as I have within past 5 years. They are not getting enough time to be bucks in the area.

Sent: Sunday, May 3, 2026 8:11 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Comment on antlerless harvest recommendations

I am a landowner in the Town of Calais (Wildlife Mgt Unit H) and my property is not posted. Most adjoining acreage is hunted. I have almost no advanced tree regeneration in the understory except for red spruce (a species not preferred by deer). More than half of my property is softwoods (cedar, spruce, pine) or mixed forest and about 30% is northern hardwoods. I have only found 1 seedling of cedar that is under 6' tall and there is no cedar foliage under 6'. Sugar maple are not regenerating on my property.

I understand that you have to make management decision based upon the mgt unit (518 sq miles) and that my local conditions may not be representative of the WMU. However, I would note that every single metric you are using to make management decisions is below goal:
yearling male antler beam diameter - 14.9 with a minimum goal of 16
yearling male weight - 109.1 with a minimum goal of 115
fawn weight - 58.8 with a minimum goal of 60
adult birth rate 1.21 with a minimum goal of 1.60

Yet despite the fact that you are not meeting your deer mgt goals, your proposed mgt decision is to keep deer density stable. If this will be your decision then I suggest you need to provide landowners with tools to harvest additional antlerless deer on their property.

Your deer mgt plan recognizes that the amount of early successional forest is declining in Vermont. As a landowner with substantial acreage of forestland, I can assure you that if you maintain deer densities in WMU H at your stated 15 deer/sq mile I will not be cutting any timber as I will not be able to regenerate my forest stands.

I am writing to request that you increase antlerless permits available in WMU H. If not, then I strongly suggest you implement a program to allow landowners to harvest additional antlerless deer to meet their forest management objectives. Otherwise, you will not be able to meet your stated deer management objectives for WMU H.

Sincerely,

Duane R. Diefenbach

Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2026 8:52 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Antlerless deer harvest recommendatino

To whom it may concern,

I am a landowner in Randolph Center, Vermont and also a State of Vermont County Forester. My farm and forest in Randolph Center is suffering significantly from excessive deer browse pressure which is limiting regeneration success in recent timber harvest areas (approximately 22 acres of overstory removal conducted in historic softwood plantations in the fall of 2022). Deer browse pressure has forced me to spend thousands of dollars to supplement insufficient natural regeneration through tree planting. In addition to planting oaks (protected by tree shelters), I have planted hybrid larch throughout. Although hybrid larch is usually a less desirable browse species to deer, they are even browsing that species. I have had to replant areas two years in a row.

The way that the antlerless harvest regulations and tag availability are structured, I have found it impossible to harvest enough antlerless deer to make any discernible difference. Continued browse damage and expense has been the result.

Please consider increasing the allocation of antlerless deer tags for wildlife management zone J1 to give landowners the tools to preserve the ecological health and productivity of their forests.

I would be happy to host Fish and Wildlife representatives for a site visit to discuss this problem further.

Thank you!

Robert Nelson

Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2026 10:05 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Doe season

Hi my name is Scott Smith and i would like to give you my opinion on the new regs on doe season in rifle. I deer hunt in the spine of the Green Mountains in area G. I'm against having doe season with rifles. I was hunting when the last time we had doe season during rifle and thought the impact in our area was drastic! I do realize that there are areas in Vermont that are over populated with deer like area A and B. The area we hunt is mostly state forest where we don't have many deer plus anyone has access to hunt there. The areas that are over populated usually are the areas where most people can't get on to hunt. That being said people will go to state land where we are and shoot anything that is Brown! I'm not against taking does but not with rifles. I'm concerned if they take to many does in our area it will really affect us. I believe last time they did it they said they wouldn't have a doe season with rifles again. Please re consider your decision about does with rifles! Thanks for your time! Best! Scott

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Sent: Tuesday, May 12, 2026 9:25 AM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: Comments to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department - Proposed Changes to the 2026 Deer Hunting Regulations

To whom it may concern –

Provided at the attachment are my thoughts and questions to be entered into the Public Comment regarding the changes proposed by the VT Fish and Wildlife Department 2026 Deer Hunting Rules and Regulations.

I disagree with the changes as proposed. As a fourth generation Vermont deer hunter I consider the proposed take limits excessive and do not reflect an overpopulation alleged by the VFWD in my area and SMU.

Due to family commitments, I was unable to attend the public hearing at the Kehoe Conservation Camp on 7 May 2026 but instead am sending written comments prior to the 15 May 2026 deadline.

I look forward to your comments and feedback regarding your concerns.

Sincerely,

Lindsey C. Waterhouse

Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 2026 2:43 PM
To: ANR - FW Public Comment
Subject: anterless deer harvest Bethel

We have had this 100 acre parcel in Bethel 40 years
and are avid deer hunters. Our presence on the property in all 4 seasons of the year allows a carefull look at deer population here. Covering alot of ground and Tracks in the snow reveal very few deer here. We are very aware of the larger than usual coyote and bear populations and the impact that has on the deer herd. As an avid bow hunter in Bethel, I will not take a Doe in this area. Every Doe harvested worsens the outlook for seeing any deer at all. I hope the doe hunting and permit allocation is reduced or eliminated until the population show significant changes.

Tom, Concerned land owner.

10 App. V.S.A. § 2a. Big game; tagging

(a) A person taking big game, as defined by 10 V.S.A. § 4001~~(31)~~, pursuant to the seasons provided by law or regulation of the Fish and Wildlife Board, shall immediately tag the big game carcass upon taking with the applicable tag or permit information for that animal, which shall include the person's name and tag or permit number. The tag shall be placed on the big game carcass in a location that is open to view. Such tag shall remain on the big game carcass during possession and transportation and until such time that the animal is ~~cut up~~processed for consumption.

(b) Landowners taking big game on their property pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4253 shall affix a tag to the big game animal taken on their property with their name and the address where the animal was taken, and the applicable permit number if a permit is required for the taking of that animal.

(c~~b~~) A person shall not transport parts of a big game animal prior to being processed for consumption ~~that has been processed for consumption~~ unless the parts or ~~package~~ container containing them are marked with the name ~~and address~~ of the person who ~~killed~~ harvested the big game.

(d~~c~~) A person may transport into and possess in this state big game legally taken in another state or country provided such person shall retain the tag required to be attached to the carcass by the state or country where taken. ~~and mark each package of meat with the name of the person who took the animal, tag number, date, and state or country of origin.~~

Recommendation Related to a Request for a Youth and Novice Archery Season

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

April 1, 2026

Public request to develop a youth and novice archery season on the last weekend of September.

Recommendation

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

February 18, 2026, the Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) requested that the Board create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

(1) VBA suggests a two-day season, on the last full weekend in September to allow for hunting beyond the September expanded archery zones, prior to the regular archery season

(2) The overall rules for this special season could be adapted from the current youth/novice firearm season model

Department Recommendation:

The Department recommends not establishing a youth/novice archery hunting weekend at this time.

Department Response to Proposal:

Comment/Question**:** **"**The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting consideration by the Fish and Wildlife Board to create a Youth and Novice Archery Season.

We know that the current Youth and Novice Gun Seasons for deer, turkey, and waterfowl are great opportunities to bring in young and new hunters to the outdoors sports. Creating a Youth and Novice Archery Season will not only encourage youngsters and new hunters to learn archery but enable them to hunt in a less pressurized environment.

The VBA suggests a two-day season, being the last full weekend in September. While this is after the start of the Expanded Archery Deer Season, we feel that the zones included in that season are relatively small and many archers either live too far from one or might not have access to those private lands outlined in the zones. Also, the weather is usually warm and conducive to longer stays on the stand. The end of September is the end of the summer feeding season for deer, but before the cooler weather sets in and the onset of the beginning of the breeding time. This timing helps make deer a bit more predictable, so new archers can more readily pattern the deer and get in close.

The overall rules for this special season could be adapted by the current gun season models. We feel that a Youth and Novice Archery Season will offer a welcoming atmosphere to new archers as they learn from their mentors and open the door for them to a lifetime of enjoying Vermont's natural beauty and resources. We hope you will see the benefits of this special season."

Response:

1) The Department implemented extensive changes to deer hunting regulations in 2026 and will need to evaluate the effects of these changes over the next several years.
2) The Department would prefer to review and update deer hunting regulations on a five-year cycle to allow for several years of data to be collected after changes are made. The Department and Board could consider this proposal during the next review period around 2030.
3) The current archery season is 76 days long (October 1 through December 15), or 92 days if you include the new expanded archery zones/season. Late sunsets during the early part of the season also allow time for hunting after school or work. This provides substantial opportunity for mentoring new hunters.
4) Youth participation in archery season appears to be relatively high, so it seems unlikely that this change would result in a substantial increase in participation. The percentage of archery deer taken by youth age 15 and under (3.9%) is almost the same as the percentage of regular season deer taken by youth (4.5%).

5) The only other state the Department is aware of with a youth archery season is New Jersey, where firearm discharge is restricted in much of the state and most of their deer harvest occurs by archery.

Other Information to Consider:

Concerns include:

- Increased regulatory complexity and administrative burden with minimal potential increase in participation.
- Competition with the current youth waterfowl season which occurs the same weekend.
- Competition with the recently created expanded archery zones, potentially reducing their effectiveness. Also, potential enforcement issues since expanded archery zones/season only allow the harvest of antlerless deer.

Potential benefits include:

- Potentially increasing youth participation in archery hunting.

Recommendations Related to Requests for a Regulated Black Bear Baiting Season, Season Extension and Increase of Annual Bag Limit

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

May 20, 2026

Public requests to develop a regulated black bear baiting season, extend hunting season, and increase annual bag limit in Vermont.

Recommendation

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

On February 18, 2026, the Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) submitted a petition requesting that the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board (Board) create a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont that would occur during the early black bear hunting season in September. The petition is summarized as follows:

1) VBA requests the development of a black bear baiting season in Vermont, similar to what is currently allowed by regulation in New Hampshire.

2) The framework for the season would include a permitting system that outlines conditions by which a hunter would be allowed to use bait to attract black bears for hunting purposes.

3) The suggested season would run from September 1st -30th.

On April 1, 2026, Bert Saldi and Kevin Lawrence submitted a similar request to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board to create a black bear baiting season, extend bear hunting until the second Sunday in December, and to allow for a second bear to be harvested by any hunter statewide. The second petition is summarized as follows.

1) Extend the current bear hunting season from September 1st to the second Sunday in December.

2) Allow hunters to purchase a second bear tag with an annual limit of two bears per hunter.

3) Incorporate a bear baiting season similar to current bear baiting season in Maine and New Hampshire.

4) All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board, go into effect the 2027 Season.

Department Recommendation:

The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) recommends that the Board,

1. Not develop a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont.
2. Extend the late season black bear hunting season until the end of the December muzzleloader deer season.

3. Allow for a second bear tag within annually approved wildlife management units, not to exceed two bears annually per hunter.

These recommendations are supported by the information presented below.

Comment/Question**:** Petition received on February 18, 2026

"The Vermont Bowhunters Association (VBA) respectfully submits this petition requesting the creation of a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont. Our intent is to support the Department's long-term bear management objectives, improve harvest selectivity, and reduce human–bear conflicts while upholding the high standards of ethical and science-based wildlife management.

Vermont's black bear population continues to expand in both numbers and distribution throughout the state, creating challenges for landowners, farmers, and communities. Traditional hunting methods remain important but often fall short of harvest objectives, especially in years of abundant natural foods. The proposed season would provide Vermont's bear management team with a precise and predictable tool to manage goals while ensuring sustainability and accountability. New Hampshire has a carefully structured baiting season in place that has been very successful in meeting their management goals.

It should be noted that while the VBA is submitting this petition, it is not asking that this be considered as an archery-only season but rather be open to all legal bear hunting implements.

Benefits of a Regulated Bear Baiting Season

1. A baiting season allows hunters to be in **close proximity** so they can more readily identify bears before harvest. This would reduce the likelihood of taking sows with cubs and provide a better opportunity for the best shot placement to provide a swift harvest. This supports Vermont's commitment to ethical, selective, and responsible wildlife management.
2. It is an effective tool for **population management**. In heavy mast years, traditional hunting methods often struggle to meet harvest objectives. Baiting provides a consistent, reliable method for achieving management goals across wildlife management units.
3. It can help reduce **human–bear conflicts** by targeting harvest in areas with recurring property damage, agricultural damage, and other nuisance bear activities, supporting the Department's conflict mitigation strategies.

Framework to Be Considered

Everyone participating in the baiting season must obtain a mandatory Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Permit. Permit numbers can be limited by Wildlife Management Units to ensure population sustainability, prevent overcrowding and overharvesting, and help the Department meet management objectives. The applications for the Permit should include:

1. Written landowner permission.
2. Map(s) showing the exact location of bait sites.
3. Names and contact information for each hunter that will be allowed to hunt the sites.
4. Fee for the Permit, to be determined by the Department.

5. Types of bait that may be used or not used (e.g., any form of cocoa or chocolate because of its toxicity to bears and other wildlife). Other restrictions may be added to prevent attraction of non-target species.
6. The season dates as set by the Department. The VBA suggests that a short pre-baiting period be added before the start of the hunting season. The actual season could be September 1–30, with all bait removed from the site at the end of the season.
7. If an application is accepted, copies of the Permit shall be given to the landowner and the Department, and a copy carried by each hunter.
8. Successful hunters will report the bears in the manner dictated by the Department regulations.

The Vermont Bowhunters Association believes a well-regulated fall bear baiting season built on proven regional models and guided by Vermont's strong conservation ethic would provide the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department with an effective and responsible tool for managing our growing bear population. We respectfully request that the Board consider initiating rulemaking to establish such a season."

Comment/Question**:** Petition received on April 1, 2026

"Please accept the petition to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board.
Regarding bear hunting season:
1) Extend the current bear hunting season from September 1st to the second Sunday in December.
2) Allow hunters to purchase a second bear tag with an annual limit of two bears per hunter.
3) Incorporate a bear Baiting Season similar to current Bear Baiting season in Maine and New Hampshire.

All bear proposals or petitions approved by Fish and Wildlife Board, go into Effect the 2027 Season.
I believe there's no reason this can't happen.....
Please Reach out to confirm receipt.
To: Kevin Lawrence, Former Board Chair.

Thank you...
The Vermonter
Bert Saldi"

Department Response to Proposal:

1) The Department does not recommend that the Board establish a regulated black bear baiting season in Vermont for the month of September for the following reasons:
    a. It is uncertain that a bear baiting season will significantly increase harvest to a level that will improve Vermont's ability to manage the bear population. For reference, New Hampshire does not harvest a larger portion of their bear

population in comparison to Vermont despite over 60% of their harvest occurring with bait. Over the past decade, Vermont's bear hunting seasons take on average 12-15% of Vermont's bear population. In comparison, New Hampshire's bear hunting seasons also take on average 12-15% of that state's population (https://www.wildlife.nh.gov/hunting-nh/hunting-reports-harvest-summaries). Even with bear baiting, New Hampshire, struggles to meet their population objectives in most bear management zones (https://www.wildlife.nh.gov/hunting-nh/bear-hunting-new-hampshire) and therefore liberalized hunting regulations in 2024 by extending still hunting season dates (WMUs L and M) and adding a second bear tag (WMUs C1, D2, E, F).

b. It is unlikely that a bear baiting season will allow consistent harvests across years of varying natural food availability. Many states with bear baiting seasons report smaller harvests over bait during times of abundant natural foods. Many factors influence bear harvest susceptibility and hunter effort, for example very cold weather may cause bears to den earlier if food supplies are low, while also causing hunters to be in the field less.
c. It is unlikely that a bear baiting season will allow hunters to target food conditioned bears to help mitigate human-bear conflicts. Food conditioned and non-food conditioned bears will be mixed at bait sites, making it difficult to target one over the other. By September, the Department sees a dramatic reduction in human-bear conflict reports. This is likely due, in large part, to increased natural food availability across the landscape during this period. By September most food conditioned bears have shifted their foraging to the same food sources non-food conditioned bears are targeting. States that have bear baiting seasons do not experience proportionally less human-bear conflicts than states without bear baiting seasons.
d. The addition of another permitting system will be burdensome on the bear project, permit administrative personnel, and licensing staff.

2) The Department recommends that the Board consider allowing a second bear harvest tag for hunters and extending the bear hunting season, consistent with proposed rule changes that will be presented following deliberation of these petitions based on the following considerations:
    a. The Department is currently in the process of developing extensive proposed bear season regulation revisions, which align with the petitioner's requests related to season length (including extending the bear season until the end of the December deer muzzleloader season) and increasing the annual harvest limit to two bears annually within approved wildlife management units.
    b. Season extension may provide additional hunter opportunity.

c. A second tag may provide additional harvest pressure in areas with higher bear occurrence, incompatible land use pressure such as development or agriculture, higher reports of crop damage, and hunter participation.
d. Improve ability for hunters to target bears depredating on corn.
e. Based on past experience, the department expects these changes will result in a modest increase in black bear harvest, while still maintaining a healthy bear population across the Vermont landscape.

3) Public input will occur over calendar year 2026, in which at least two public meetings will be held and a minimum of 30-days of comment period will be open.

Other Information to Consider:

Concerns include:

- Establishment of hunter ownership of a baited parcel of land, limiting hunter access, which may create additional posted lands and/or conflicts between hunters.
- Conflict between bait and non-bait hunters.
- Placing additional human-based foods on the landscape would artificially increase food availability for bears and potentially increase opportunity to condition bears to human food sources. This is also in direct conflict with Department recommendations regarding not placing food and attractants out near an individual's property. (Appendix A)
- Placing concentrations of human-based foods will attract species other than bears including deer, turkeys, coyotes, rodents, and corvids. This could create an opportunity for illegal harvest of non-target species.
- Transmission of disease between bears and non-target species. Specific diseases and parasites of concern include chronic wasting disease, rabies, sarcoptic mange, and distemper.
- Baiting will not necessarily target bears in conflict areas.
- Increased enforcement issues with bait sites on the landscape.

Potential benefits include:

- Potentially increasing bear hunting opportunity.
- Potential future regional targeting of populations where additional hunting pressure is needed to reduce populations. Currently, the Department does not have regional population management goals for black bears but rather manages the population at the statewide scale.
- Potential recruitment and retention of bear hunters.
- Potentially increasing opportunity for selectivity and shot placement by hunters when bear hunting.

Appendix A.

Title 10 : Conservation and Development

Chapter 113 : Game

Subchapter 004 : WILD ANIMALS DOING DAMAGE

(Cite as: 10 V.S.A. § 4827a)

- **§ 4827a. Feeding bear; prohibition**

(a) A person shall not knowingly feed a bear and shall not knowingly give, place, expose, deposit, distribute, or scatter any bait, food, or other edible material in a manner intended to lure a bear to feed except:

(1) under a license or permit issued under section 4152 of this title by the Commissioner for bona fide scientific research, mitigation of wildlife damage, nuisance problems, or wildlife population reduction program;

(2) by planting, cultivating, or harvesting of crops directly associated with bona fide agricultural practices, including planted wildlife food plots; or

(3) by distribution of feed material for livestock directly associated with bona fide agricultural practices.

(b) A person who has intentionally placed bait, food, or other edible material, including placing food within a bird feeder, to lure wildlife, as that term is defined to include birds and other animals under subdivision 4001(15) of this title, onto the property within the past 30 days shall be prohibited from taking a bear doing damage under the authority set forth in section 4827 of this title. The Commissioner or his or her designee may issue an order requiring a person to remove or contain the bait, food, or edible material if the placing of bait or food results in the feeding of a bear.

(c) As used in this section, “bait, food, or other edible material” means fruit, grain, salt, grease, garbage, or other materials intended to feed or lure wildlife. (Added 2013, No. 78, § 17.)

(https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/10/113/04827a)

Annotated

10 V.S.A. App. § 7. Bear Management Rule

1.0 Authority

1.1 This rule is adopted pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4081(a). In adopting this rule, the Fish and Wildlife Board is following the policy established by the General Assembly that the protection, propagation, control, management, and conservation of fish, wildlife and fur-bearing animals in this state is in the interest of the public welfare and that the safeguarding of this valuable resource for the people of the state requires a constant and continual vigilance.

1.2 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4082, this rule is designed to maintain the best health, population and utilization levels of the black bear population.

1.3 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4084, this rule establishes season and possession limits for black bear and prescribes the manner and means of taking black bears.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this regulation is to establish seasons for the taking of black bear, to establish legal means or methods of taking black bears, and to establish limits on the number of black bears to be taken annually.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 "Accompany" for the purposes of hunting bear with dogs means that:

a) A Sub-permittee engaged in the control, handling, transporting or intercepting of Department registered dogs while hunting with dogs, shall be under the under the express direction of the permit holder, and

b) A Sub-permittee who harvests a black bear shall be under the direct control and supervision of the bear dog permit holder, including the ability to see and communicate with each other without the aid of artificial devices such as radios or binoculars, except for medically necessary devices such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.

3.2 “Bait” means ~~as~~ any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any other wildlife.

Annotated

3.3 “Baited area" means an area where any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any wildlife, has been placed or deposited including, but not limited to, bird feeders.

3.4 “Bear Dog Permit” or “Permit” means a permit issued by the Commissioner to a person who wishes to hunt, pursue or take black bear with the aid of dogs.

3.5 “Commissioner” means the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.6 “Control of Dog/Dogs” means the transportation, loading or unloading of dogs from vehicle(s); the handling, catching, restraining or releasing dogs; and the use of telemetry/GPS to locate or track dogs.

3.7 “Department” means the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.8 "Department Registered Dog" means a dog bearing a numbered identification dog-tag (Department Registration Dog-Tag) approved or issued by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~, with the permit holder’s bear dog permit number and a number one through six.

3.9 “Hunting with Dogs” for the purposes of this rule means that one or more dog(s) with Department ~~Registered~~ Registration Dog-Tags are on the ground whether in pursuit of a black bear or not.

3.10 “Legal means” or “Legal method” means the taking of a black bear by muzzleloader, rifle, handgun, archery equipment, or crossbow when authorized.

3.11 “Pack of Dogs” means one to six dogs, acting as a unit during the pursuit of black bear.

3.12 “Sub-Permittee” means any person with a valid Vermont hunting license designated by the bear dog permit holder to assist or take a bear with the aid of dogs, in accordance with written authorization issued by the Department.

3.13 “Relaying Dogs/Packs” means the removal and replacement of one or more ~~dog or~~ dogs to the trail of a bear to the original pack of dogs once the pursuit has begun. If the hunting or pursuit of a black bear commences with fewer than six dogs in the original Pack of Dogs, the addition of a dog or dogs shall not be considered relaying, provided that no more than the same six dogs are

Annotated

part of a single Pack of Dogs during the hunting, pursuing or taking of a black bear.

3.14 "Bear Tag" means a document issued by the Department authorizing the taking of a black bear in the current season.

3.15 "Unregistered Dog" means a dog that does not have a valid Department Registration Dog-Tag as described in 3.8.

4.0 Seasons and Shooting Hours

4.1 Early and Late Season

a) **Early Season:** For Vermont Residents: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.
For Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.
For Non-resident Bear Dog Permit Holders: The early black bear season shall be open to Non-Resident bear dog permit holders on September 15 and not before.

b) **Late Season**: For Vermont Residents and Nonresidents: The first day of the Regular Deer season through the ~~second Sunday of the Regular Deer Season~~last day of the December muzzleloader season, as defined in 10 App. V.S.A. § 37.

4.2 Shooting hours: One half hour before sunrise until one half hour after sunset.

5.0 Tags and Bag Limit

5.1 To take a black bear during the Early Season, a person must, in addition to having a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license, possess an Early Season Bear Tag issued separately by the Department.

5.2 To take a black bear during the Late Season, a person must have a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license.

5.3 A person shall not harvest more than one black bear per calendar year, not to include animals taken pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4827, unless the Board determines a second bear may be taken during the calendar year within specified WMUs, based on the recommendations of the Department. To take a second bear, a person must purchase a Second Bear Tag issued by the

Annotated

Department. A second bear may be taken during either the early or late season, and only within the WMUs specified by the Board.

6.0 **The taking of bear with the aid of dogs**

6.1 Licenses and Permits

Any person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting License, use only Department Registered Dogs and possess ~~a~~ valid Department-issued bear tags. In addition, the person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid bear dog permit or accompany a bear dog permit holder. The permit shall be carried at all times by the permittee while hunting with dogs or taking black bear and exhibited to a game warden, landowner, or law enforcement officer upon demand.

6.2 A person shall not take a black bear into his/her actual possession except by killing the bear by legal means or methods.

a) A person taking black bear with the use of a bow and arrow or crossbow shall, upon demand of a game warden or other law enforcement personnel, show proof of having a prior archery license, or of having passed a bow hunter education course in Vermont, another state or a province of Canada approved by the Commissioner.

6.3 Dogs and Packs

a) A person shall not take black bear with the aid of dogs unless the person is in control of the dog or dogs.

b) No person shall take a black bear with the aid of any Unregistered Dog. No person shall have an Unregistered Dog in his or her possession while hunting, pursuing or taking a black bear.

c) A person hunting ~~with dogs~~, pursuing, and taking black bear with the aid of dogs shall attach a Department Registration Dog-Tag and a metal identification name plate with the person's name, address and telephone number to the dog's collar.

d) A person taking a black bear with the aid of dogs shall only take a black bear with a Pack of Dogs as defined in this rule. No person shall pursue, hunt, or take black bear by Relaying Dogs/Packs.

Annotated

e) Two or more permit holders may hunt together and combine Department Registered dog(s) to form a Pack of Dogs. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not take black bear with the aid of more than six dogs combined forming a single Pack of Dogs. Once hunting with dogs commences, dogs not on the hunt shall be restrained in the dog box or inside the vehicle. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not possess any Unregistered Dogs while hunting, pursuing or taking black bear.

7.0 Prohibitions

7.1 No person shall knowingly place bait to attract black bear for the purposes of allowing a bear dog to catch/strike the scent of a black bear. No person shall take bear by knowingly using bait or a baited area.

7.2 A person shall not advertise, barter, exchange goods or services, or otherwise sell the use of a dog or dogs for the purpose of taking any black bear.

7.3 While hunting with dogs, no person shall have in their possession an Unregistered Dog while possessing Department Registered dogs.

7.4 It shall be a violation for a Vermont resident to apply for a bear dog permit for the purpose of allowing a nonresident bear dog owner to take bear in Vermont with the aid of dogs.

7.5 No person shall hunt black bear with a bow and arrow or crossbow if the arrow or bolt has an arrowhead that measures less than seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point or that has less than two sharp cutting edges.

8.0 Reporting

8.1 The black bear carcass shall be field dressed prior to reporting.

8.2 Upon request of a Game Warden, the person harvesting the bear and the permit holder shall show and return to the kill site with a Game Warden.

8.3 All bear harvests shall be reported to a game warden, official Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~ Reporting Station, or a person designated by the Commissioner within 48 hours. If a bear is taken with the aid of dogs, ~~T~~the person who harvested the bear and the bear dog permit holder must both be present to legally report the harvest. ~~If the bear dog permit holder harvested the bear, only he or she must be present when reporting the harvest.~~

Annotated

8.4 It shall be unlawful to provide false information when reporting a black bear taken with the aid of dogs.

8.5 The fine, points and any other penalty for any violation of this subsection 8 shall be assessed to the violator and in addition, to the permit holder if the violator is not the permit holder.

9.0 Biological Collection

9.1 Any person who harvests a black bear shall collect a premolar tooth and submit the tooth to a game warden, official Fish and Wildlife Department Reporting Station, or to a person designated by the Commissioner to receive the biological collection, within 48 hours of taking the bear.

9.2 Unless otherwise specified by statute, the failure to collect and submit a black bear tooth shall not result in license suspension points and shall be considered a minor violation subject to a civil fine.

Date: June 2, 2026
From: Andy Phelan, Fayston, VT
To: Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board ("Board") - sent to each Member's ANR email address
Cc: Vermont Dept. of Fish & Wildlife ("DFW"): J. Batchelder, *Comm.*, J. Comeau, *Black Bear Proj. Leader*, J. Austin, *Wildlife Div. Dir.*, D. Sausville, *Wildlife Mgmt. Program Mngr*
Subject: **Petition to be Heard by the Board on Pending Proposed Change to the Bear Regulations to Prohibit the Deliberate Harvest of Female Black Bears With Cub(s)**

This Petition requests a brief period – just 15 minutes – to present to the Board at its June 17 meeting (and at the Board's discretion, any additional time to answer Board member questions before a vote on the issue), the main points of my 2023 Petition, DFW's response, and responses to the several concerns that DFW and some Board members have raised – or that the Board may want to raise going forward – concerning adoption of a regulation that prohibits the intentional harvest of female black bears with cubs.

The basis for this request is simple. It can help the Board thoroughly and thoughtfully address this issue, which is of significant public and wildlife management importance to the DFW, the Board, and the people of Vermont (hunters and non-hunters). The significance and importance of this issue was made very clear at the May 20 Board meeting, and came in the form of numerous comments from the public (in writing and submitted electronically), from the in-person and online attendance at that meeting of an extremely and unusually large number of constituents, and from comments made by Board members and DFW officials.

I started this discussion in 2023, became well-informed about it through extensive research and thought, and submitted detailed information about it, and remain informed on the issue. My 2023 and 2026 submittals identify the principle issues and anticipate and answer the few reservations usually raised about such a rule change. I invite questions so the issues can be thoroughly examined.[1]

The two-minute public comment period provided for general comments in ordinary circumstances is simply not enough to address this issue adequately and fairly, as shown by the detail in my submissions. Nor does it allow for the Board members to pose questions to me about that detail. Indeed, at the May 20 Board meeting, two directors mentioned my petition directly – and me by name. But I had no opportunity to correct or explain points that I believe would resolve concerns I heard, including answers in the submissions themselves. I have no problem with such questions or even warranted criticism, but it is only fair to allow the petitioner to respond, whether to clarify, correct, or even acknowledge a point.

The issue right now before the Board in 2026 is the same as raised and thoroughly addressed in my 2023 Petition and in DFW's October 2023 and 2026 submissions to the Board. DFW has been given more than ample time to address it, and kicking it down the road for later assessment is unwarranted. There is no reason for delay or putting this issue off again – perhaps for years, as almost happened late in the 4-hour May 20 meeting. The only difference this time is that it was DFW in February 2026 that essentially raised my the

[1]The Commissioner's Office wrote on May 19 that it had distributed to each Board member my May 18, 2026 distillation memo along with (1) my 3/3/2023 Petition; (2) DFW's 10/18/2023 Recommendation/Response to that Petition; and (3) my 10/18/2023Response to the DFW's Recommendation.

exact same substance as my petition before DFW inexplicably (to many, including the public) attempting to abandon it. But several Board members moved and voted to keep alive and discuss the sow/cubs rule change.

Nothing material about the issue has changed since I submitted it in 2023 and the DFW responded to it, except that in 2026 DFW acknowledged that the education efforts adopted instead of the rule change failed in the three hunting seasons since the Board denied my petition.

One thing that has changed, and materially, is the constitution of the Board. Only six (6) of the fourteen (14) Board members who heard and voted for education instead of for my Petition remain on the Board. More than a 50% turnover. Six new members and two vacant seats provide an additional and significant reason to grant this petition for me to be heard. It is only fair to all Vermonters – hunters and non-hunters alike, all of whom are the Board's constituents – that the Board members who joined after October 2023 have the opportunity to fully and fairly determine this important issue DFW raised in 2026 that is virtually identical to what was raised in 2023.

Of the hundred or more public comments sent to DFW and Board members, and of the 2-minute comments made by in-person and virtual attendees during the May 20 Board meeting, every single one that addressed DFW's recommendation to prohibit the intentional harvest of female black bears with cub(s) supported it. Yet DFW tried to drop that recommendation.

When a Board member asked DFW to explain whether and why it was dropping the recommendation, the Commissioner's answers only underscore the need for the Board to address it, now. (His comments appear on the video at hour/tape-counter 03:10 to 03:19.) Among the Commissioner's words were the following, with which I fully agree:

- The intentional harvest of sows with cubs is "unconscionable."
- "A lot of people are looking for leadership around this issue."
- "There is a significant portion of our credibility as a Department and the Board that relies on how people perceive our ability to manage something that might not be a biological need" that we do for "social reasons" such as we do socially for spike horns.
- The Department feels pressures "from the legislature … the hunters, the non-hunters, the advocates, the wildlife lovers, that is Vermonters in general. That is probably most important."
- "I know that the Department could likely manage it."
- "I know that there is a significant portion of society that would love to see this. I feel like we could manage it"

In his statements, the Commissioner raised, but did not address, issues that I have addressed in my petition submittals and am fully prepared to respond to the Board about. These include:

- The erroneous notion that a well-intended hunter who mistakenly shoots a sow bear with cubs is a "terrible person" or even a target of the rule change.

- That deliberately killing sow bears with cubs so that the cubs will die is not a desired or acceptable form of responsible population management.

- That hunters feed families with bear meat; true and fine, but it should not deliberately include the meat of sows with cubs any more than a deer hunter would harvest a doe with a speckled fawn.

I am also prepared to address and respond to concerns raised by Board members at the May 20 Board meeting. These include the following, and anything else Board members might ask:

- That wardens and Vermont should be able to prosecute hunters like the one in Stowe last October who worked in a condo development where everyone saw a mother with multiple cubs (as many as 5) all summer, then about the first week of hunting season, he brought his rifle to work and shot her, posting the kill a short time later on social media.

- Wardens should have the tools – a law prohibiting killing female bears with cubs – to prosecute hunters like the one in the Mad River Valley unwittingly captured on a security camera shooting a mother bear near a house in the presence of her cubs, one of which was found dead from exposure and starvation just weeks later.

- Honest mistakes are not the target and will not be prosecuted. The rule would not be "feel good" – it would be enforced through the discretion of trained law enforcement (wardens) exercising their discretion on such "intent" determinations virtually every day on the job. The fact that 37+ states and 9 Canadian provinces have such rules against killing mother bears with cubs and have enforced them for many decades demonstrates that there is no enforcement problem.

- That there is a problem that needs to be addressed, that it has near-universal support, and that the mere passage of the rule change will have the salutary effect of preventing ethical and law-abiding hunters from deliberately shooting female bears with cubs – all consistent with DFW's existing educational efforts that recommend that female bears with cubs not be harvested – in direct conflict with the existing Vermont law that makes such killings legal.

[End – June 2026 Phelan Petition to be Heard/Bear Reg/IntHarvFemCub]

Date: March 8, 2023

To: Board of Directors, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

From: Andrew C. Phelan

Cc: Catherine Gjessing, General Counsel, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept.
Christopher Herrick, Commissioner, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept.
Jaclyn Comeau, Black Bear Project Leader, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept.
Andrew Timmins, Game Programs Supervisor, Bear Project Leader, NH Fish & Game
Ben Kilham, Kilham Bear Center, Lyme, New Hampshire

Subject: **Petition For the Department to: (1) Pass a Regulation that Prohibits the Deliberate Killing of black bear Sows with Cubs; and (2) Require Bear Education for Hunters As a Condition to Obtain a Bear Hunting License**

Introduction

On an October evening in 2022, a video camera on a front porch in the Mad River Valley captured a black bear mother with two cubs, about 8 months old, as they crossed a field to feed under an apple tree. They fed for a while, the cubs played. Close together, they were clearly a family group. Something caused the sow to try to take her cubs to safety. Together, they moved off-screen to the left. A hunter entered from the right, crouching and stalking them. On video, he shot the mother bear and dragged her body away behind his truck. Three weeks later, a neighbor walking in nearby woods found one of her cubs starved to death near a stream, with no signs of dismemberment or injury. When she returned several days later, its body had been moved and scavenged. By the time I was shown the site a month later, all that remained were tufts of fur and black hair. The other cub was never seen again and likely suffered the same fate.

I do not oppose ethical and humane hunting. What happened here was neither. Deliberately killing a mother with cubs is cruel. In most cases, and as clearly demonstrated here, it leaves the orphaned cubs extremely vulnerable to suffering a prolonged and painful death from exposure, starvation, or predators. A regulation that bars deliberately killing mother bears with cubs, together with mandatory bear education that includes cub dependence and other salient bear/cub information would, every year: (1) spare dozens of helpless cubs the cruelty and pain the cub here suffered; (2) require no substantial expenditure of money or time; and (3) likely have broad support across Vermont, from both hunters and non-hunters alike.

Discussion

A. The Department's "recommendation" against killing mothers with cubs does not protect vulnerable cubs.

Assuming this killing was unlawful, I researched the topic. Although numerous states prohibit the deliberate killing of mothers with cubs, Vermont is not one of them. The Department's statements and literature, however, already seem to support a prohibition against killing sows with cubs. A heading in Vermont's 2022 bear hunting pamphlet said, "Don't Shoot Sows With Cubs," followed by text that the Department

> "recommends not shooting sows accompanied by cubs or a bear that is part of a group of bears as bears seen together in the fall are most likely a female accompanied by her cubs."

Other text urges hunters to be ethical and humane, including to spare sows because the "cubs are still dependent on their mothers this time of year and will stay with her until the following spring." These recommendations, however, are readily disregarded by hunters. The Mad River Valley hunter showed nothing but contempt for the Department's recommendations and appeal to humane hunting. As long as it remains legal, such hunters will continue these killings.

The Department has no idea how many other hunters deliberately kill mothers with cubs each year or how many cubs suffer the same fate as the Mad River Valley cub. The Department does not track that information and likely has no reliable way to do so. It happens far more frequently that any of us would like to admit. Numerous publications across the country, year after year, identify hunter killings as either the top or a top cause of orphaned cubs, often followed by vehicle strikes, dispatch of nuisance bears, and den disruption.

The Board can and should pass a hunting regulation to prohibit these killings. The Department is responsible for humanely managing Vermont's wildlife for all Vermonters. It should not cede this key responsibility by leaving the killing of mother bears to the discretion of hunters. Passing this regulation would also correct an omission necessary to ensure compliance with Vermont's bear quota. Vermont law allows hunters to kill only one bear per year. Allowing hunters to deliberately kill mothers with cubs sanctions violations of this limit. A cub is a bear. Killing the mother makes it very likely that her cubs will also die. Killing the mother causes not just her death, but the death of two or more bears, depending on the size of her litter. That the hunter did not also shoot the cubs does not render them any less dead. Killing the mother directly caused each additional cub's death.

B. The proposed regulation would have immediate effect and require no significant resources or time.

The Department's black bear hunting reports note that, in 2020 and 2021, Vermont hunters killed 459 and 355 sow bears, respectively, for an average of 407 per year. Even conservatively assuming that just 15% of the sows had first-year litters of only 2 cubs each, means more than 120 cubs every year (on average) are exposed to suffering the same fate as the Mad River Valley cub. Sparing these cubs that cruelty would require no new, expensive, or time-consuming initiative. It may even save resources spent rescuing even the few cubs that Vermonters find orphaned after their mothers were shot. Most of those orphans will die alone and unnoticed off in the woods. The regulation would also save resources of rehabilitators like the Kilham Bear Center, which are already swamped by too many orphaned cubs.

Saving so many cubs annually would be achieved simply by passing the regulation. This is because the vast majority of law-abiding hunters will comply. In recent years, the Department has issued more than 12,000 bear-specific hunting permits and 80,000 general hunting permits that allow "opportunistic" bear hunting while targeting other species. Spread out across Vermont, it is inevitable that these many thousands of hunters will find many mother bears with cubs. With the regulation in place, the vast majority of these hunters, knowing it is illegal, will not kill those mother bears and will take more care to look for cubs nearby. All those cubs, left to be raised by their mothers, will enhance the diversity and health of the Vermont bear population by learning how to survive in the wild from their wild mothers and be less likely to become nuisance bears.

C. By passing the regulation, Vermont will join numerous other states, likely even a majority, that ban this practice.

The requested regulation is far from extreme. Indeed, it seems that Vermont is one of the few states that allows killing mother bears. Even in the limited time I had to survey other states, I found ten with long hunting traditions that explicitly prohibit killing mother bears with cubs: Montana, Idaho, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, West Virginia, California, Wisconsin, and Oregon. Alaska also prohibits these killings in most parts of the state. From this research, it appears that a majority of states, perhaps even most states that allow black bear hunting, prohibit the cruel practice of killing mothers with cubs. Vermont should join them.

D. Most Vermonters, hunters and non-hunters, likely would support this regulation.

I spoke with dozens of people from many walks of Vermont life while researching this petition and after publishing commentaries on the Mad River Valley killing in VTDigger, Front

Porch Forum, and the Valley Reporter. Without exception, every person with whom I spoke or who responded expressed disgust at the cruelty and lack of ethics this killing demonstrated. Significantly, many were hunters, including a member of this Department's Board. Without exception, every hunter told me that neither he nor any hunter he knew would have killed the sow. Even the owner of the business that hosts the game reporting station where this killing was reported told me he would support a regulation that bars deliberately killing mother bears with cubs. Sightings of mother bears with cubs are favored wildlife sightings for many Vermonters. They create lasting memories. Hunters are not immune from that reaction either. In researching this petition, I came across numerous blogs across the country where hunters wrote that, when they spotted a sow with cubs, they did not pull the trigger and, instead, took some time to enjoy watching the bear family, relieved that they had not fired. The only people who might oppose the regulation are the unethical hunters, whose input I trust the Department would not credit.

E. In tandem with the regulation, the Department should require bear-specific education in order to obtain any license that would allow targeted or opportunistic hunting of bears.

Hunters who are informed of the important reasons behind a regulation are more likely to comply with it and, importantly, will then be equipped to share that information and persuade other hunters to comply as well. This education will be useful in many ways, including to correct erroneous notions that most first-year orphaned cubs can survive without their mothers. It would help hunters avoid adverse bear interactions, by, for example, providing tips for safe interactions when hunters come across a sow with cubs (e.g., not getting between them; leaving the bears an escape route, etc.). It would provide training on specific things a prudent hunter does to check for cubs before shooting. It could include what Andrew Timmins, New Hampshire's Game Programs Supervisor and Bear Project Leader, recently told me: hunters spotting cubs should not be a significant problem, as some people may claim. By the time fall hunting season begins, the cubs are weaned and eat on their own, rather than suckling. So they are no longer stashed in trees while the sow goes off to feed. Rather, the family groups typically stay close together and feed together. This proximity was clearly displayed with the Mad River Valley bear and cubs on video. The hunter shot the sow with her cubs by her side.

F. Available facts, studies, expertise, and common sense indicate that most orphaned first-year cubs will die without their mothers.

As a matter of black bear biology and evolutionary development, cubs stay with their mothers for 18 months before separating. There is a natural reason that bears have evolved this

way: this period is needed for the cubs to grow and learn to survive while being protected from predators. Born in February at less than a pound, cubs need extended guidance and protection. They need time to learn to forage for food in different seasons, including when soft- or hard-mast is scarce. They need to learn how to avoid human food sources and traffic, how to build up fat reserves needed to survive hibernation, how to den, how to hibernate, and, critically, they need protection and help in their depleted condition when they emerge from their first hibernation and must find scarce early-spring food to survive.

As noted earlier, the Department's hunting pamphlet and website recognize first-year bear cubs' reliance on their mothers until their second spring. A Department bear biologist, Forrest Hammond, also recognized in a published study that black bear cubs need their mothers to survive through their first hibernation. Having tracked 17 mother/cub litters in this study over an extended period, Hammond noted that any black bear cubs that were "not present in the den with their mothers as yearlings were assumed to have died."[1]

Significant current knowledge about orphaned black bears and their survival capabilities comes from extensive hands-on work with orphaned bear cubs at the Kilham Bear Center ("**Kilham**") in New Hampshire.[2] For the past 30 years, Kilham has rehabilitated, and released orphaned black bear cubs from Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Kilham has released over 500 orphaned cubs back to the wild. Kilham does not return first-year cubs to the wild for the simple reason that they are not ready and would be unlikely to survive. Kilham releases them at about 18 months, in the spring after their first successful hibernation and after they have bulked up from hibernation depletion. This release age is no coincidence: it is the same age at which, in the wild, they are ready to live independently and separate from their mothers.[3]

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[1]Hammond, Forrest M., *Stratton Mountain black bear Study, The Effects of Resort and Residential Development on black bears in Vermont,* Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife Final Report (November 2002) at 11.

[2]Link: kilhambearcenter.org. Of particular interest is a recent (October 2022) New Hampshire Union Leader article on Kilham, which details the work of that Center and current orphan cub statistics, and identifies coordination efforts with the Department's bear and other wildlife staff.

[3]Bear cub rehabilitators are scarce. New England is fortunate to have Kilham, which grew out of Ben Kilham's concern for orphaned cubs. His Center survives on private donations. Food alone for each cub costs up to about $2,500. This figure does not include the substantial labor performed by the Kilham family. https://forestsociety.org/forest-journal-column/orphan-bear-cubs. Kilham can take in only a fraction of cubs orphaned each year. It already has too much work and too few resources to handle the volume of orphaned cubs in need, which in 2022 was projected to be over 100 orphaned cubs.

G. The notion that most orphaned first-year black bear cubs can survive without their mothers is based on flawed articles from decades ago that continue to be cited today, often inaccurately.

A common rationalization for the failure to prohibit killing mother bears with cubs is the flawed notion that most orphaned first-year black bear cubs 5 to 8 months of age readily survive on their own in the wild after they lose their mothers. For ease of reference, I will refer to this as the "**Broad Survival Notion.**" Although I looked for them, I found no recent or modern studies that support this Notion, apparently because such survival is very hard to study.

Recent orphaned black bear survival studies do exist, but they focus not on any release of first-year cubs, but, rather, on release of yearlings. Yearlings are cubs in their second year: they have come through their first full winter hibernation and are released at about 18 months. This appears to be the modern view and focus: that survival is far more likely for orphans released as yearlings and not in their first-year. *See* J. Clark, M. Pelton, B. Wear, D. Ratajczak, *Survival of Orphaned Black Bears Released in the Smoky Mountains* (2002); W. Smith, P. Pekins, A. Timmins, B. Kilham, *Short-term fate of rehabilitated orphan black bears released in New Hampshire* (2016).

With no recent study on the survivability of first-year cubs to fill the void, many people, including some wildlife authors, continue to rely on the same very old authorities as supposedly supporting the Broad Survival Notion. Two principal articles are cited time and again: A. Erickson, *The Age of Self-Sufficiency in the Black Bear* (1959) ("**1959 Erickson**"); and G. Alt & J. Beecham, *Reintroduction of Orphaned Black Bear Cubs in the Wild* (1984) ("**1984 Alt & Beecham**"). A third article is also often cited: N. Payne, *Unusual Movements of Newfoundland Black Bears* (1975) ("**1975 Payne**"). None of these articles, however, says that most orphaned black bear cubs will survive, nor do I think that their authors expected them to be so interpreted. But that seems to be what has happened. This has probably resulted from the fact that these articles, in the absence of anything more recent, have been cited time and time again without the people who cite them going back to carefully read these original works. As a result, they cite them, often innocently but nevertheless carelessly, as supposed proof for the Broad Survival Notion that most if not all 5 to 8 month first-year orphaned cubs can survive in the wild without their mothers.[4] The more these articles have been cited, the more widespread the Broad Survival

[4]An oft-cited publication by a Vermont bear biologist also repeats the Broad Survival Notion. C. Willey, *The Vermont Black Bear* (1976). Of course, he cites the 1959 Erickson article. *Id*. at 7 & 63. His recitation of this Notion is by rote, like so many other authors. Willey asserted the Notion of first-year orphan survivability from a mere 5 months of age as purported fact because he relied, innocently but erroneously, on the Erickson article. Willey is also incorrect in asserting that cubs as small as 18 pounds readily survive. He also bases this entirely on Erickson's article. Perhaps it can survive for 14 days

Notion has become despite its inaccuracy. But repeating a faulty Notion, no matter how many times, does not make it true.[5]

I do not claim to know more about bears than biologists or experienced wildlife professionals. But, as a lawyer who, for decades, handled litigation matters for the Justice Department and in private practice, a significant part of my work has involved assessing numerous expert reports prepared by professionals in various fields in order to determine whether what they did supported the opinions they asserted. I applied the same approach to a careful review of the three articles and found it clear that, in them, their own authors did not assert the Broad Survival Notion and the data they compiled also does not support that Notion. In Appendix A to this petition, I explain in detail my analysis of these articles. I summarize the salient parts of each and then explain how they do not support the Broad Survival Notion.

It is not disputed that some remarkable orphaned first-year cubs can survive on their own. For this to happen, however, requires the rare confluence of numerous favorable events, including: (1) a remarkable cub, the older and larger at the time it is orphaned the better; (2) readily available natural food, preferably with bumper crops of soft- and hard-mast; (3) unusual luck in avoiding or escaping predators, vehicles, and humans (including their trash); (4) the instinct to divine how and where to safely den to survive their first winter in hibernation; and (5) skills and luck to avoid predators and find scarce early-spring food when the cub emerges from hibernation in depleted physical condition. Because the confluence of all of these is so rare, the vast majority of orphaned first-year cubs die the same kind of death suffered by the Mad River Valley by a stream last October, mere weeks after the hunter killed its mother.

Conclusion

In only one sense can something positive come from the Mad River Valley hunter's killing the mother bear and dooming her cubs to suffer and die. He was unwittingly captured on video clearly and deliberately killing the mother bear in the immediate presence of her cubs and a Vermonter walking in nearby woods just a short time later happened across the dead, starved cub. Most hunting kills take place out in the woods where nobody sees them and only the hunter

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(Erickson's standard) or even somewhat longer, but modern bear experts can confirm that survival of such a small cub is extremely unlikely. Such small cubs are easy prey for Vermont carnivores like adult bears, coyotes, fisher cats, dogs, and even bobcats or large raptors, to say nothing of their greater likelihood to succumb to starvation or failed hibernation. Willey's publication contains a wealth of detailed, useful, and accurate black bear information, but his assertions about the likely survivability of most orphaned 5-7 month black bear cubs are incorrect.

[5]Some, such as unethical hunters or those who favor completely unrestricted hunting, have no interest in accuracy and will continue claiming, falsely, that these articles support the Broad Survival Notion.

knows what actually happened. And when hunters kill mothers with cubs, the fate of those cubs remains unknown but shrouded behind the Notion that first-year cubs readily survive on their own. The stark facts here contradict both aspects and identify a blind spot in our law that we should and must clear. Hunters do deliberately kill mothers with cubs. That is a fact. And most of their orphaned first-year cubs will die as a direct result. That also is a fact.

We now have the opportunity – really, the obligation – to re-examine both the failure to prohibit killing mothers with cubs and the validity of the flawed articles that have been used for decades to justify or rationalize that failure. Rote reliance on, or even exaggerated expansions of, these decades-old articles should end. Modern knowledge of black bear cub development among wildlife biologists and extensive and direct experience among cub rehabilitators contradicts the Broad Survival Notion and demonstrates that most first-year cubs need 18 months to grow and learn to survive independently.

The only rationale I can think of that would prompt the Board to not pass the requested regulation here is that the it does not consider cruel deaths each year of dozens of orphaned first-year cubs by predators, exposure, and prolonged starvation to be a sufficiently important public interest to address as part of its obligation to humanely manage wildlife for all Vermonters. If that is the case, it is very troubling and disappointing where the suffering and deaths of orphaned cubs is so easily preventable and results directly from activity that the Department currently endorses by allowing hunters to kill sows with cubs.

I hope that the Department considers this issue an important one. The 18 months that cubs need is unfortunate (for the cubs) and inconvenient (for the hunters inclined to deliberately kill their mothers) because this period will always span one bear-hunting season. But it is a minor inconvenience. The cubs really are helpless. They cannot fend for themselves and need protection. The least we should do as regulators charged with humanely managing vulnerable wildlife, is to prohibit these deliberate killings. This regulation can protect countless helpless and vulnerable cubs from the senseless suffering that we know the Mad River Valley cubs here experienced, and that uncounted others will experience as well.[6]

A.C.P.

[6] In Appendix B below, I respond to several potential other objections that some might raise to the proposed regulation. If those or any others appear to the Board to have significant merit that I have not addressed, please let me know. I am available to discuss this issue further.

APPENDIX A

Analysis of 1959 Erickson, 1985 Alt & Beecham, and 1975 Payne Articles

1. Summary of the Three Articles.

The 1959 Erickson Study. Erickson stated that the purpose of his study was to "report[] experiments to determine whether black bear cubs 5 to 8 months old can survive by themselves in Michigan's Upper Peninsula when released from steel traps … or when orphaned by hunters." He noted that, a "hunting season which permits killing the mother before the young become self-reliant necessarily results in the loss of her young as well." The standard for his opinion on survivability (he called it "self-reliance"), was whether the cubs survived for at least 14 days after release. He said, "Recoveries [i.e., killings or re-trappings] 2 weeks or longer after release were considered adequate evidence of self-sufficiency." The data upon which he based his opinion was as follows: he released 20 orphaned cubs and compared their "survival" against a control group of 12 cubs released with their mothers. Of the 20 orphaned cubs, 13 were never seen again, only 1 overwintered (shot at 391 days), 1 was re-trapped after 17 days and 5 were shot within 47, 54, 88, 102, and 117 days. Of the 12 control group cubs, 8 were never seen again, 3 were shot within 95 days and one was retrapped 348 days later.[7]

In addition, Erickson released one 5.25 month cub and one 6.5 month cub, each on a small uninhabited island (one had a Coast Guard station). A third cub released on one of the islands was shortly thereafter killed by a trapper. Erickson described the islands as having relatively poor natural food sources for bears and no other bears. When he returned to the islands the next July, he found recent evidence of the bear cubs on both islands, indicating that they had overwintered but one was shot that month as a nuisance to the Coast Guard station.

The 1984 Alt & Beecham Study. Alt and Beecham studied various ways to save orphaned cubs. These included, for example, rehabilitating cubs until they were 15-18 months before release and efforts to get other sows to foster orphans (such as by tossing them near or into natal dens, treeing natural cubs and adding the orphan to the tree before the mother returned). Relevant here, they also tried releasing first-year orphaned black bear cubs into the wild. Specifically, 23 cubs were held in captivity for 2-3 months before being released at "≥ 5 months of age." Given the stated release dates of June 17 and August 22, and using February 1

[7]Looking at these figures with so many orphaned first-year cubs being shot makes it clear that another significant danger orphaned cubs face is being mistaken for adult bears because, as orphans, they will move not as a family group and be recognizable as such and not shot – at least by ethical hunters, but as single bears more prone to be shot.

as the approximate birth date, the cubs must have ranged between 5.5 and 7 months at release. The authors defined success/survivability as follows:

> "Reintroductions of pen-reared orphans were classified as failures if cubs were found dead or if they became a chronic nuisance. They were classified as successful if the orphans were recaptured in non-nuisance situations after 30 days."

Of the 23 cubs: 14 were never seen again; 5 were deemed "successful" and 4 were deemed "failures." The "4 failures included 3 recoveries in nuisance situations soon after release and one that died of unknown causes within a week after release." The authors do not explain anything about the 5 they deemed "successful," such as the number of days before recapture, so we assume that, per the definition, that they were recaptured in non-nuisance situations after 30 days. They did not identify any that survived for any extended length of time, let alone any that survived overwintering to become yearlings.

The 1975 Payne Article. Payne did not conduct a study. Rather, he wrote a brief article on "unusual" travel by several black bears in Newfoundland. Two were caught and shipped to an island a considerable distance away but returned to the capture site. A third bear, with three cubs, also traveled a very long distance to return to her capture site, but returned with only two of her cubs. She was killed, presumably as a nuisance. Payne wrote that this sow's two cubs were recaptured a year later after again traveling great distances and observed that, as first-year orphans, they had successfully evaded predators, denned, and overwintered.

2. Observations about the Erickson, Alt & Beecham, and Payne Articles.

a. Defining "survival" or "self-sufficiency" as staying alive for merely 14 or 30 days is meaningless because it fails to account for the actual survival gauntlet that orphaned black bear cubs face from the time they are orphaned through their emergence from overwintering.

Successful "survival" is not reasonably or reliably projected by the fortuity that, for periods as short as 14 or 30 days, a few cubs can manage to find some food and avoid predators. Survivability must be examined for a much longer period because orphaned cubs must overcome many challenging obstacles to survival over the course of the many months into the spring after their first overwintering. These diverse and challenging obstacles do not last a mere 14-30 days. They last until an orphaned cubs would normally leave its mother naturally at 15-18 months. Alone with no guidance or protection, orphaned cubs must survive the starvation-exposure-carnivore gauntlet. For this entire time – not just 14-30 days, or even for a couple of months – orphans must forage for sufficient food to gain weight. They must do so across

increasingly difficult seasons: summer, fall, early winter (before hibernation) and early spring. They must do so in both high and low-mast years, and switch between foods in times of scarcity. For all those months while they search for food, they must also avoid carnivores (e.g., bears, coyotes, fisher cats, even unleashed dogs), vehicles, and human foods. Critically, they must gain sufficient mass and fat to hibernate successfully, so their food requirements are high. They must build functional dens that avoid collapse, flooding, etc., and stay warm through hibernation and avoid rapid energy depletion without the obvious benefit of their bulky mother's shared body heat. Then, upon emerging from hibernation in depleted physical condition, they must find scarce early spring food while again avoiding or fighting off hungry predators. Bear biologists recognize the early spring as "undoubtedly the most difficult time of year" for the cubs. C. Willey, *The Vermont black bear* (1976) at 9. None of this is captured by the almost nonsensical notion that survivability can be judged by survival for a mere 14 or 30 days. The role of the mother is to help her cubs through this lengthy survival gauntlet. An orphaned cub must survive that entire period alone.

Significantly, the Alt & Beecham article admits the critical need to survive overwintering. People who cite them for the Broad Survival Notion that cubs survive from a mere 5 months overlook that the authors explicitly recommended that orphaned cubs <u>not</u> be released before 15-18 months due to concern that, without their mothers, they would not be able effectively to forage for sufficient food. They made the following specific recommendation:

> "If releases are to be in remote areas, we recommend holding pen-reared bears until they are 15-18 months old, especially if there is a poor supply of natural foods during the summer and fall that they are cubs."

They do not define "remote" or say how it differs from other release sites. The only explanation I can think of for this is that they could mean that, in remote locations, human food sources will not be available to supplement natural forage. Well, all cub releases should be in "remote" locations because the last thing anyone wants is for them to (artificially) survive on human food, which will likely cause them to later require destruction as "nuisance" bears. In all events, it is very significant that, despite asserting that they would deem releases of bears at 5 months to be "successful" if those cubs were survived for a mere 30 or more days in non-nuisance situations, the authors explicitly recommend holding pen-reared cubs until they are 15-18 months old. Well, this recommendation trumps their "success" assertions at younger ages. After all, pen reared cubs at least have humans to help care for them. Orphaned cubs in the wild have nothing but themselves: no mothers and no humans.

Alt and Beecham's 15-18 month pre-release recommendation also not only identifies the extreme importance of good natural food supplies for survival, it also spans the overwintering period (usually month 12 to month 15 or 16), and the early-spring bulk up period, ending only at the 18th month at which non-orphaned black bears normally separate from their mothers. All of this further negates the Broad Survival Notion of cubs as young as 5-7 months and highlights the need to measure survivability through the age when cubs would normally leave their mothers at 18 months.[8]

b. If the correct survivability measuring period runs from each orphan's loss of its mother through overwintering, then both studies utterly fail to provide any basis for the Broad Survival Notion: across those two studies only a single cub survived that long.

In Erickson's mainland orphan cub study, there was only evidence that 1 of the 20 cubs overwintered. This yields a proven survival rate of just 5%. Even if we disregard the unknown fates of the 13 cubs, only 1 cub overwintered and the remaining 6 were shot or captured before winter, for a survival rate of a mere 14%. In their study, Alt & Beecham reported no evidence that any of the original 23 cubs, or even any of the 9 cubs that they deemed to be "successful" or "failures" ever overwintered. Whether we assess all 23 or just the 9, Alt & Beecham demonstrated an overwinter survival rate of 0%.

c. The unknown fates of numerous orphaned cubs in both the Erickson and Alt & Beecham studies undermine the assertion that those studies support the Broad Survival Notion.

Erickson did not know the fates of 65% (13 of 20) of the mainland orphaned cubs. Alt & Beecham did not know the fates of 60% (14 of 23) of the orphaned cubs. This may be because digital tracking was not available or not economical. Whatever the reason, it substantially undermines those studies. The unknown fates of so many missing cubs in studies where their

[8]This need to measure survivability through the overwintering months was also noted by a more recent first-year orphan black bear study. *See* L. Rogers, *Aiding the Wild Survival of Orphaned Bear Cubs,* USDA Forest Service (1992). In this study, Rogers claimed "successful overwinter survival" where 9 of 14 orphaned cubs older than 7-months survived their first full winter. The author readily admitted, however, that a "confounding factor in the high survival" rate in his study was the fact that all the cubs, even after being orphaned, "had access to supplemental food." In fact, they accessed the same human food sources that prompted the destruction of their mothers as nuisance bears. This negated his "survival" rate because, as he admitted, the cubs were far better able to survive because, due to the human food, they "grew more rapidly than cubs with mothers" and were not "wild" because they were essentially human-fed and not self-sufficient. They also were likely doomed as nuisance bears by their habituation to people and trash. Rogers' work did confirm a very important point: to accurately assess first-year survivability requires us to account for the period through overwintering.

fates were so critically important for the study itself, shows the methodologies wanting. After all, the only purpose of the studies was to see if the orphans could survive death from starvation, exposure, and predation without their mothers. But 27 cubs across the two studies simply disappeared. Common sense and the laws of probability given the myriad risks that faced these orphans would indicate that the most likely reason they went missing is because they died from the gauntlet of risks they faced all alone – risks that the control group cubs with their mothers did not face. In all events, that an equal percentage of cubs went missing from the control group is meaningless for proving any aspect of survivability.

d. Evidence that some first-year orphans overwintered shows that some can survive without their mothers, but does not even remotely support the Notion that most could survive

In his article, Payne identified two Newfoundland first-year orphaned cubs that overwintered and survived. This demonstrates that some first-year cubs can survive. Payne did not, however, extrapolate from this that such survivability is or could even be expected to be widespread. Further, combining Payne's 2 observed cubs with the ones shown to have overwintered in Erickson (3 of 22, including the two island cubs) and Alt & Beecham (0 of 23), yields a total of 5 cubs for which there is proof of overwintering from a combined group of 47, for an extremely low successful overwintering rate of just 10%, which does not support at all the Broad Survival Notion.

Payne's article is also useful in underscoring key capacities that must be learned or demonstrated in order to survive. He observed that the two cubs were able to build suitable dens, overwinter, and avoid mortality from encounters with grown bears and other predators. Two of those occur during the 12-15th month of a cub's life (denning and overwintering) the third occurs throughout all 18 months until the orphan would normally have left its mother. These observations from a wildlife biologist further support the notion that survivability assessments must measure survival capacity through overwintering into early spring.

Regarding Ericksons' two surviving overwintering cubs on the two islands, several survivability points are worth mentioning that weaken even that "proof" of survivability. The environments into which he placed them were artificial and lacked significant risks orphans face in the wild. First, both islands had no bears and, further, Erickson made no mention of any other potential predators. Adult bears are the prime predation danger to unrelated cubs. Second, the absence of other bears also meant that these cubs, each on a separate island, had no competition for any bear forage. Third, Erickson admitted that one of the cubs had to be killed as a yearling in early summer (July) as a nuisance to the Coast Guard station. This raises significant concern

that human food artificially contributed to the cub's survival through early spring. Erickson said that the Coast Guardsmen may have fed the bear, but he did not think so. Attraction to human food, however, is the principal reason bears become nuisances and need to be destroyed. Erickson did not disclose what made this bear a nuisance, but it likely was the most common reason: acclimation to human food sources.

A.C.P.

APPENDIX B

Responses to Other Potential Objections

Objection 1: We need to control the number of bears, there are too many.

Response: If the bear population is a problem, the solution is to adjust some other aspect of adult bear hunting, not to visit on helpless cubs prolonged and inhumane suffering and death from starvation, the elements, or predation.

Objecton 2: Hunter education is enough, there is no need to prohibit killing mothers with cubs.

Response: Education alone is not enough. The current law makes it legal to kill a mother with cubs. No amount of education will prevent unethical hunters from deliberately killing sows with cubs where that killing is legal and therefore permitted by the Department. The education is important as a supplement to the prohibition because it explains the rationale for the prohibition, which encourages compliance, and will teach ethical hunting, including the responsibility to check for cubs. It will also likely persuade previously uninformed hunters of the valid reasons for sparing the mothers and those hunters will spread that information to other hunters.

Objection 3: Most hunters would not kill a mother with cubs, so this is not needed.

Response: There are several responses to this. First, there is no data to support this assertion. The Department does not know, and cannot know, the number of mothers who are killed or the number of their cubs that starve or die from starvation, exposure, or predators.

Second, if killing a mother with cubs is wrong for all the reasons stated in the body of the petition, then there is no legitimate reason why such killings should not be illegal. If the Department continues to permit the deliberate killing of mothers, hunters will kill them.

Objection 4: The Department does not get reports of such killings so it is not a problem.

Response: First, all such killings – even if it were just a few each year – should be prohibited because they are cruel and unethical and cause the cubs painful suffering and death.

Second, the Department does not know how often this happens. Of the 814 sows taken by hunters in 2020 and 2021 combined, the Department has no idea how many were mothers or how many cubs were orphaned and died as a result. By the same token I have no data to prove exactly how often it happens or how many cubs suffered and died. We delude ourselves, however, if we say it is not a problem. With hundreds of sows harvested every year in Vermont coupled with the fact that hunters through the present know it is perfectly legal to kill mother bears, it is baseless, even reckless, to turn a blind eye and deny that it

happens far more frequently than we all would like. The killings are most often hidden from view off in the woods with no witnesses. The chance of again capturing such a killing on video, as we did here, and followed quickly by the discovery of the dead, starved cub is remote at best. But we have it now and that video, hopefully, has highlighted for all of us a blind spot in our hunting laws and management that we should now correct.

Objection 5: The cubs were big enough to survive, they were yearlings, they were all adults even though they were together.

Response: As explained in detail above, black bear cubs need to stay with their mothers for about 18 months for the protection and learning needed to survive. The no-kill prohibition needs to be black and white. It cannot leave gray areas for some hunters, who are about to take the shot, to rationalize the killing and kill the sow based on their own actual or feigned conception of cub survivability. A blurry and weak prohibition that leaves open the decision to shoot the sow based on one or another "exception" would substantially reduce the effectiveness of the regulation in protecting vulnerable cubs.

Objection 6: It could be too hard to enforce in individual cases, so it is not worth it.

Response: As explained at the start of the petition, the focus of the requested regulation is not enforcement in individual cases. It is much more far-reaching and important than the much narrower enforcement focus. The principal focus is to save cubs by the immediate impact the regulation will have on the thousands of Vermont hunters who come across mother bears with cubs. They will not take that shot because they are law-abiding and know that such killing is unlawful.

Even as to enforcement in individual cases, this objection fails. First, in some cases it would be very easy to enforce – the Mad River Valley hunter's killing of the mother clearly with her cubs was captured on videotape, for example. An illegal and gruesome killing of a mother bear and her cubs in their den was captured on wildlife video in Alaska recently, leading to convictions of both hunters. Second, the enforcement of that regulation will be no more difficult or different than the situation presented to game wardens and law enforcement every day as they enforce countless other laws. Exercising their discretion based on their investigation and the facts presented is what they are trained to do. Allowing such a cruel, unethical, and painful practice to continue against vulnerable cubs just because enforcing it might at times be inconvenient or difficult fails to pursue ethical and humane wildlife management.

A.C.P.

From: Smith, Hannah
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2026 4:21 PM
To: anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov
Cc: Connolly, Abigail; Comeau, Jaclyn
Subject: RE: February 18 Board Meeting Agenda
Attachments: Big Game Black Bear Rule Change Recommendations_2.18 Board Meeting.pdf

Good Afternoon, Board Members,
Please see the attached black bear rule change recommendations. Bear Project Leader Jaclyn Comeau will present the recommendations, teeing up a preliminary discussion of the proposals at tomorrow's meeting.

Thanks,
Hannah

VERMONT
Hannah Smith, Esq., General Counsel
Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife
One National Life Drive – Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3802
802.461.8187 | hannah.smith@vermont.gov

From: Connolly, Abigail <Abigail.Connolly@vermont.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2026 4:02 PM
To: anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov
Subject: [ANR.FWBoard] FW: February 18 Board Meeting Agenda

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.
Please see the 2026 moose harvest recommendation attached.

VERMONT
Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources | Fish & Wildlife Department
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
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From: Connolly, Abigail
Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2026 12:33 PM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov' <anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov>
Subject: February 18 Board Meeting Agenda

Good afternoon, Board Members,

Please see the agenda attached for the Board Meeting on Wednesday, February 18, 2026. Also attached are the unapproved minutes from January, the two petitions that will be presented by the Vermont Bowhunters Association, and the 2026 migratory game bird season recommendation.

We will send out additional materials this week.

Sincerely,

VERMONT

Abigail Connolly (she/her) | Principal Assistant to the Commissioner
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources | Fish & Wildlife Department
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2 | Montpelier, VT 05620
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Big Game
Black Bear
Proposed Rule Change Recommendations

to the
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board

February 18, 2026

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3208
802-828-1000

Summary of Recommended Changes

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (4.1) (b) – Bear Seasons

- Adjust the late bear season to run until the end of regular deer season, resulting in a seven-day extension.

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (5.3) – Yearly Bag Limit

- Allow for a second bear to be harvested in select wildlife management units, when deemed necessary by the board with recommendations from the department, approved on an annual basis as needed.

10 App. V.S.A. § 7 (7.6) – Prohibit Intentional Harvest of Female Black Bear with Cubs

- Prohibit the intentional taking of a female black bear that is accompanied by one or more cubs.

3 V.S.A. § 814 – Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit

- Clarify authority to revoke a bear dog permit.

Potential Reciprocity Requirement on Out of State Residents to Obtain a Permit to Hunt Bear with Dogs or Restrict use of out-of-state dogs for hunting bear with dogs

- Explore the Commissioner's authority to establish a reciprocity requirement for out of state bear hound hunting whereby if the state of residence doesn't allow Vermont hunters to use dogs, then they can't get a permit to use hounds in Vermont.

- Discuss the possibility of limiting Department Registered Dogs to dogs that are kept in Vermont and owned by Vermont residents, unless the jurisdiction of residence also allows hunting bear with dogs.

Background

Fifty years ago, Vermont's bear population was estimated to be less than 1,500. Over the past thirty years the population has fluctuated from approximately 4,000-6,500 bears. Population estimates for recent years indicate the population may have increased beyond this range. The robust bear population is the result of habitat conservation and hunting regulations designed for a sustainable harvest of black bears. The *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan* established a population objective of 3,500-5,500 bears. The mean estimated population has been above objective since 2021 and has ranged from a mean estimate of 6,500 (2021) to 7,600 (2022). The most recent mean estimate for 2024 was 7,400 bears (Figure 1). During this time Vermont's annual black bear harvests have exceeded 800 bears including harvests in 2024 and 2025 that exceeded 1,000 bears (Figure 2). These harvests have removed an average range of 11 – 14% of the population annually (2021-2024). Incidents of human-bear interactions, bear-vehicle collisions, and bear-caused property damage have increased, including in areas where few bears existed twenty years ago. Despite the sustained increases in annual black bear harvest and vehicle collision mortalities, Vermont has not attained a decrease in the bear population required to meet current population objectives.

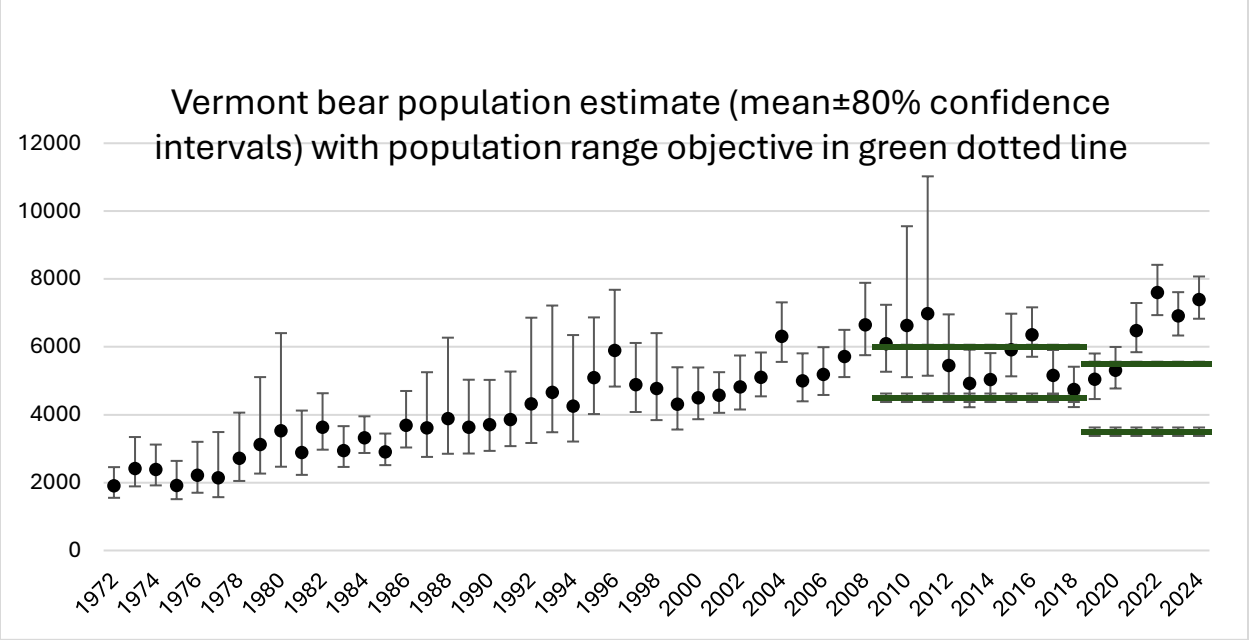


Figure 1. Vermont black bear population estimates (80% C.I.), 2000-2024. The green horizontal lines identify the population objective.

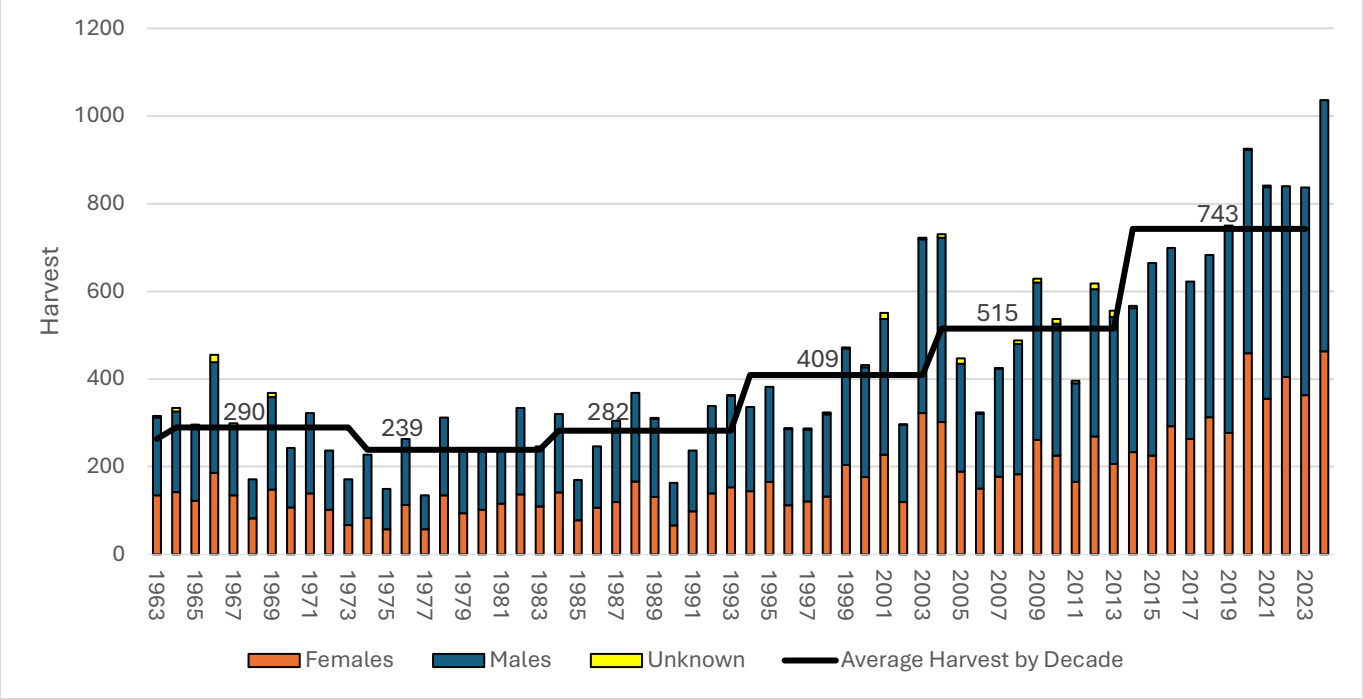


Figure 2. Vermont annual black bear harvest with rolling ten year average, 1963-2024.

App. V.S.A. § 7 – Bear Management Rule

Extend the Late Bear Season
The Department recommends extending the late bear season until the final day of the regular deer season.

Currently hunters may harvest bear during the late season from the first Saturday of the regular deer season until the Sunday of the second weekend, providing a nine-day season. The extension to the end of the regular deer season would provide seven additional days, making a 16-day late bear season. This recommendation would provide additional hunting opportunities.

An average of 184 bears are harvested during the current late season, which makes up on average 26% of the overall harvest. However, natural food availability and the onset of winter conditions cause this number to vary greatly from year to year, and this harvest has ranged from a low of 57 bears (2022) to a high of 319 bears (2015). The last full week of the bear late season has averaged just over 100 bears harvested annually over the past six years.

A recent survey of bear hunters in Vermont revealed that slightly more than half (54%) primarily incidentally hunt bear while hunting for other species and 79% of bear hunters hunted during the late bear season in 2023. A 2018 survey of Vermont hunters revealed high support (85%) for extending the length of the bear season. These results indicate that a significant number of hunters would likely participate in this proposed season expansion. However, by late November many bears have entered winter dens, limiting the availability of bears for harvest. The Department anticipates this expansion will likely result in a conservative increase in harvest.

Allow Hunters to Take a Second Bear
The Department recommends allowing hunters to take one additional bear, with the purchase of a second tag. The second bear may only be taken in WMUs annually designated by the board. The availability of the second bear tag would also be approved annually by the board.

Currently, hunters may only harvest one bear annually either in the early or late season. Hunters must purchase the privilege of hunting during the early season. All hunters receive a late season bear tag when they purchase a hunting or combination hunting and fishing license. This recommended change allowing hunters to take a second bear would provide additional bear harvest opportunities for hunters and allow the direction of hunting pressure into WMUs with elevated bear-vehicle collisions, incidents of human-bear conflicts, and strong bear hunting participation.

A 2018 survey of Vermont hunters revealed that 38% of hunters would support increasing the annual bag limit on black bears from one bear a year to two bears a year. However, the mean bear population estimate in 2018 was approximately 4,700 bears – the lowest it has been since the early 2000s. A 2024 survey of Vermont's bear hunters found that meat was by far the dominant reason why they hunt bear (58%); however, population control was the top motivation for hunters who have recently increased their targeted bear hunting (55%). Although Vermont's bear hunters have not been directly asked if they would try to harvest two bears in a year, these survey results indicate participation would be limited and therefore would result in a conservative increase in the overall harvest.

New Hampshire's experience introducing a two-bear bag limit in four of their WMU's supports the Department's expectation that this proposed expansion will result in a modest increase to Vermont's bear harvest. Despite approximately 1,200 hunters purchasing a second bear tag in 2024 only 46 hunters harvested a second bear. Preliminary results from NH's 2025 bear season indicate that less than 50 hunters harvested two bears. The contribution from a second bear in jurisdictions that have a two-bear bag limit is typically 4-5% of the overall harvest.

Not Allow Hunters to Intentionally Take a Female Bear with Cubs

The Department recommends not allowing hunters to intentionally take a female bear with visible cubs. Black bear cubs are dependent on sows through their first fall and don't typically become independent until their second spring when they are approximately 16-18 months old. When conditions are favorable, it is possible for cubs to survive when they are separated or orphaned prematurely; however, the Department receives reports every year of starving orphaned cubs and yearlings who would not survive without intervention. These starving bears are typically found near homes attempting to access human-created foods. Conflicts with people, vehicle collisions, and hunting are all potential causes for these orphaning events. It is important that hunters take precautions to avoid harvesting sows accompanied by cubs.

Vermont's bear hunters generally do not intentionally harvest female bears accompanied by dependent cubs. In a recent survey of Vermont's bear hunters, 97% reported that they would not harvest a bear with cubs while 1% said that they would and another 2% reported that they were unsure. However, when asked if they assess whether a bear is in a group or with cubs before shooting, 88% reported that they regularly take this precaution while the remaining 12% reported either never or only occasionally taking this step. Further, 13% of hunters reported that they were not aware of the Department's recommendation that hunters avoid harvesting females accompanied by cubs.

Of the 44 jurisdictions in North America with black bear hunting seasons, 37 (84%) have regulations prohibiting the harvest of female bears accompanied by cubs. This includes three states that have initiated new black bear hunting seasons in the past five years. As part of a previous Department assessment of a petition related to this subject, we reached out to some of the jurisdictions with this type of regulation to better understand the specific language they use and how it is enforced. Jurisdictions reported that this regulation is widely supported by both hunters and the non-hunting public. Some regulations are written with specific size parameters defining cubs that hunters must follow while others are written so that it is only a violation if a

hunter knowingly harvests a female bear with cubs present. In both cases, jurisdictions reported that citations are rarely issued as it can be difficult to prove. In fact, one jurisdiction reported written violations related to this regulation were often from self-reporting by hunters who didn't see cubs until after the bear was harvested. The Department's intention is not to punish hunters who mistakenly harvest sows when cubs are not immediately present. Instead, our intention is to create a regulation that only applies to situations where a hunter knowingly harvests a sow with cubs present. Since a similar petition related to this subject was proposed, there have been a couple situations where this regulation could have potentially been applied.

Currently, the Department is recommending regulation changes to increase bear hunting opportunities. Anticipating that these changes will increase the number of bears harvested each year in Vermont, now is an appropriate time to take precautionary steps and increase protection for female bears with dependent young and encourage additional awareness among hunters.

Authority to Revoke Bear Dog Permit
The Department recommends clarifying authority for the Commissioner to revoke bear dog permits. The Commissioner has broad authority to revocation permits pursuant to 3 V.S.A. 814, which establishes an administrative process for revocation of permits and licenses. The Commissioner currently can choose not to issue a new hound permit. The Department will need to establish criteria that must be met before the Commissioner signs a permit.

Revocation is more complicated since the statute does not clearly establish the Commissioner's ability to revoke permits, and statute requires certain due process before a permit can be revoked (a contested-case hearing before a hearing officer). Currently, permits can be revoked based on violations resulting in the accumulation of points.

Reciprocity Requirement on Out of State Residents to Obtain a Permit to Hunt Bear with Dogs
The Department would like to discuss establishing a reciprocity requirement for non-resident bear hound hunting whereby if the jurisdiction of residence doesn't allow Vermont hunters to use dogs, then they can't receive a bear dog permit to hunt bears in Vermont.

Current examples of situations Vermont hunters encounter include the inability to use their hounds in New York that has a hound training season but no hunting season where hounds are allowed. New York hunters may hunt in Vermont with their dogs if they obtain a bear dog permit. Out-of-state hound permits are limited to no more than 10% of the previous year's resident permit numbers. New Hampshire does not allow out of state hunters to use their dogs during their bear hound season, but New Hampshire hunters commonly obtain non-resident bear dog permits to hunt during Vermont's bear hound season.

Other Topics Vetted by the Big Game Management Team Included:

- Baiting season
- Spring season
- Registering all dogs in ownership on a bear dog permit application
- Extending the season into August
- Establishing bag limits for bear dog permits
- Allow online reporting of harvested bears

From: Smith, Hannah <Hannah.Smith@vermont.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, May 19, 2026 3:37 PM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov'
Subject: [ANR.FWBoard] Draft Bear Management Rule & Big Game Tagging Rule
Attachments: Bear Management Rule_Draft 2026.docx; Sec. 2a Big Game Tagging_draft_4.22.26.docx; Sec. 2a Big Game Tagging_draft_10.13.25.docx; ATT00001.txt

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Good afternoon, Board Members,
I've attached two draft rule documents for review at tomorrow's meeting. The first is a draft of the Bear Management Rule, with annotated revisions proposed by the Department. We will be walking through this rule in detail tomorrow to review the Department's proposed changes, as well as discuss any additional changes proposed by the Board.

I have also attached a draft of the Big Game Tagging Rule (10 App. V.S.A. 2a), dated 4.22.26. The Board voted on proposed revisions to this rule back in October, but since then an issue with the draft language was flagged by a Board member, and further revisions were made. The changes from the last version are primarily in subparagraph (c) and are highlighted for reference. I have also attached the draft the Board reviewed in October (dated 10.13.25), for comparison. I will walk through these relatively simple changes (in detail) tomorrow.

Thanks,
Hannah

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Annotated

10 V.S.A. App. § 7. Bear Management Rule

1.0 Authority

1.1 This rule is adopted pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4081(a). In adopting this rule, the Fish and Wildlife Board is following the policy established by the General Assembly that the protection, propagation, control, management, and conservation of fish, wildlife and fur-bearing animals in this state is in the interest of the public welfare and that the safeguarding of this valuable resource for the people of the state requires a constant and continual vigilance.

1.2 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4082, this rule is designed to maintain the best health, population and utilization levels of the black bear population.

1.3 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4084, this rule establishes season and possession limits for black bear and prescribes the manner and means of taking black bears.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this regulation is to establish seasons for the taking of black bear, to establish legal means or methods of taking black bears, and to establish limits on the number of black bears to be taken annually.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 "Accompany" for the purposes of hunting bear with dogs means that:

a) A Sub-permittee engaged in the control, handling, transporting or intercepting of Department registered dogs while hunting with dogs, shall be under the under the express direction of the permit holder, and

b) A Sub-permittee who harvests a black bear shall be under the direct control and supervision of the bear dog permit holder, including the ability to see and communicate with each other without the aid of artificial devices such as radios or binoculars, except for medically necessary devices such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.

3.2 “Bait” means ~~as~~ any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any other wildlife.

Annotated

3.3 “Baited area" means an area where any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any wildlife, has been placed or deposited including, but not limited to, bird feeders.

3.4 “Bear Dog Permit” or “Permit” means a permit issued by the Commissioner to a person who wishes to hunt, pursue or take black bear with the aid of dogs.

3.5 “Commissioner” means the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.6 “Control of Dog/Dogs” means the transportation, loading or unloading of dogs from vehicle(s); the handling, catching, restraining or releasing dogs; and the use of telemetry/GPS to locate or track dogs.

3.7 “Department” means the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.8 "Department Registered Dog" means a dog bearing a numbered identification dog-tag (Department Registration Dog-Tag) approved or issued by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~, with the permit holder’s bear dog permit number and a number one through six.

3.9 “Hunting with Dogs” for the purposes of this rule means that one or more dog(s) with Department ~~Registered~~ Registration Dog-Tags are on the ground whether in pursuit of a black bear or not.

3.10 “Legal means” or “Legal method” means the taking of a black bear by muzzleloader, rifle, handgun, archery equipment, or crossbow when authorized.

3.11 “Pack of Dogs” means one to six dogs, acting as a unit during the pursuit of black bear.

3.12 “Sub-Permittee” means any person with a valid Vermont hunting license designated by the bear dog permit holder to assist or take a bear with the aid of dogs, in accordance with written authorization issued by the Department.

3.13 “Relaying Dogs/Packs” means the removal and replacement of one or more ~~dog or~~ dogs to the trail of a bear to the original pack of dogs once the pursuit has begun. If the hunting or pursuit of a black bear commences with fewer than six dogs in the original Pack of Dogs, the addition of a dog or dogs shall not be considered relaying, provided that no more than the same six dogs are

part of a single Pack of Dogs during the hunting, pursuing or taking of a black bear.

3.14 "Bear Tag" means a document issued by the Department authorizing the taking of a black bear in the current season.

3.15 "Unregistered Dog" means a dog that does not have a valid Department Registration Dog-Tag as described in 3.8.

4.0 Seasons and Shooting Hours

4.1 Early and Late Season

a) **Early Season:** For Vermont Residents: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.
For Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.
For Non-resident Bear Dog Permit Holders: The early black bear season shall be open to Non-Resident bear dog permit holders on September 15 and not before.

b) **Late Season**: For Vermont Residents and Nonresidents: The first day of the Regular Deer season through the ~~second Sunday of the Regular Deer Season~~last day of the December muzzleloader season, as defined in 10 App. V.S.A. § 37.

4.2 Shooting hours: One half hour before sunrise until one half hour after sunset.

5.0 Tags and Bag Limit

5.1 To take a black bear during the Early Season, a person must, in addition to having a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license, possess an Early Season Bear Tag issued separately by the Department.

5.2 To take a black bear during the Late Season, a person must have a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license.

5.3 A person shall not harvest more than one black bear per calendar year, not to include animals taken pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4827, unless the Board determines a second bear may be taken during the calendar year within specified WMUs, based on the recommendations of the Department. To take a second bear, a person must purchase a Second Bear Tag issued by the

Annotated

Department. A second bear may be taken during either the early or late season, and only within the WMUs specified by the Board.

6.0 **The taking of bear with the aid of dogs**

6.1 Licenses and Permits

Any person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting License, use only Department Registered Dogs and possess ~~a~~ valid Department-issued bear tags. In addition, the person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid bear dog permit or accompany a bear dog permit holder. The permit shall be carried at all times by the permittee while hunting with dogs or taking black bear and exhibited to a game warden, landowner, or law enforcement officer upon demand.

6.2 A person shall not take a black bear into his/her actual possession except by killing the bear by legal means or methods.

a) A person taking black bear with the use of a bow and arrow or crossbow shall, upon demand of a game warden or other law enforcement personnel, show proof of having a prior archery license, or of having passed a bow hunter education course in Vermont, another state or a province of Canada approved by the Commissioner.

6.3 Dogs and Packs

a) A person shall not take black bear with the aid of dogs unless the person is in control of the dog or dogs.

b) No person shall take a black bear with the aid of any Unregistered Dog. No person shall have an Unregistered Dog in his or her possession while hunting, pursuing or taking a black bear.

c) A person hunting ~~with dogs~~, pursuing, and taking black bear with the aid of dogs shall attach a Department Registration Dog-Tag and a metal identification name plate with the person's name, address and telephone number to the dog's collar.

d) A person taking a black bear with the aid of dogs shall only take a black bear with a Pack of Dogs as defined in this rule. No person shall pursue, hunt, or take black bear by Relaying Dogs/Packs.

Annotated

e) Two or more permit holders may hunt together and combine Department Registered dog(s) to form a Pack of Dogs. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not take black bear with the aid of more than six dogs combined forming a single Pack of Dogs. Once hunting with dogs commences, dogs not on the hunt shall be restrained in the dog box or inside the vehicle. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not possess any Unregistered Dogs while hunting, pursuing or taking black bear.

7.0 Prohibitions

7.1 No person shall knowingly place bait to attract black bear for the purposes of allowing a bear dog to catch/strike the scent of a black bear. No person shall take bear by knowingly using bait or a baited area.

7.2 A person shall not advertise, barter, exchange goods or services, or otherwise sell the use of a dog or dogs for the purpose of taking any black bear.

7.3 While hunting with dogs, no person shall have in their possession an Unregistered Dog while possessing Department Registered dogs.

7.4 It shall be a violation for a Vermont resident to apply for a bear dog permit for the purpose of allowing a nonresident bear dog owner to take bear in Vermont with the aid of dogs.

7.5 No person shall hunt black bear with a bow and arrow or crossbow if the arrow or bolt has an arrowhead that measures less than seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point or that has less than two sharp cutting edges.

8.0 Reporting

8.1 The black bear carcass shall be field dressed prior to reporting.

8.2 Upon request of a Game Warden, the person harvesting the bear and the permit holder shall show and return to the kill site with a Game Warden.

8.3 All bear harvests shall be reported to a game warden, official Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~ Reporting Station, or a person designated by the Commissioner within 48 hours. If a bear is taken with the aid of dogs, ~~T~~the person who harvested the bear and the bear dog permit holder must both be present to legally report the harvest. ~~If the bear dog permit holder harvested the bear, only he or she must be present when reporting the harvest.~~

Annotated

8.4 It shall be unlawful to provide false information when reporting a black bear taken with the aid of dogs.

8.5 The fine, points and any other penalty for any violation of this subsection 8 shall be assessed to the violator and in addition, to the permit holder if the violator is not the permit holder.

9.0 Biological Collection

9.1 Any person who harvests a black bear shall collect a premolar tooth and submit the tooth to a game warden, official Fish and Wildlife Department Reporting Station, or to a person designated by the Commissioner to receive the biological collection, within 48 hours of taking the bear.

9.2 Unless otherwise specified by statute, the failure to collect and submit a black bear tooth shall not result in license suspension points and shall be considered a minor violation subject to a civil fine.

10 App. V.S.A. § 2a. Big game; tagging

(a) A person taking big game, as defined by 10 V.S.A. § 4001, pursuant to the seasons provided by law or regulation of the Fish and Wildlife Board, shall immediately tag the big game carcass upon taking with the applicable tag or permit information for that animal, which shall include the person's name and tag or permit number. The tag shall be placed on the big game carcass in a location that is open to view. Such tag shall remain on the big game carcass during possession and transportation and until such time that the animal is processed for consumption.

(b) Landowners taking big game on their property pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4253 shall affix a tag to the big game animal taken on their property with their name and the address where the animal was taken, and the applicable permit number if a permit is required for the taking of that animal.

(c) A person shall not transport parts of a big game animal prior to being processed for consumption ~~that has been processed for consumption~~ unless the parts or ~~package~~ container containing them are marked with the name of the person who harvested the big game.

(d) A person may transport into and possess in this state big game legally taken in another state or country provided such person shall retain the tag required to be attached to the carcass by the state or country where taken.

10 App. V.S.A. § 2a. Big game; tagging

(a) A person taking big game, as defined by 10 V.S.A. § 4001, pursuant to the seasons provided by law or regulation of the Fish and Wildlife Board, shall immediately tag the big game carcass upon taking with the applicable tag or permit information for that animal, which shall include the person's name and tag or permit number. The tag shall be placed on the big game carcass in a location that is open to view. Such tag shall remain on the big game carcass during possession and transportation and until such time that the animal is processed for consumption.

(b) Landowners taking big game on their property pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4253 shall affix a tag to the big game animal taken on their property with their name and the address where the animal was taken, and the applicable permit number if a permit is required for the taking of that animal.

(c) A person shall not transport parts of a big game animal that has been processed for consumption unless the parts or package containing them are marked with the name of the person who killed the big game.

(d) A person may transport into and possess in this state big game legally taken in another state or country provided such person shall retain the tag required to be attached to the carcass by the state or country where taken and mark each package of meat with the name of the person who took the animal, tag number, date, and state or country of origin.

_____
ANR.FWBoard mailing list
ANR.FWBoard@list.vermont.gov
https://list.vermont.gov/mailman/listinfo/anr.fwboard

From: Smith, Hannah <Hannah.Smith@vermont.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, June 17, 2026 3:08 PM
To: 'anr.fwboard@list.vermont.gov'
Subject: [ANR.FWBoard] Board materials 6.17.26
Attachments: SowCubRegulations.US.Canada.CDS.6.16.26.xlsx; BoardPPT.CDS.6.17.26.pptx; Bear Management Rule_Draft 6.17.2026.docx; ATT00001.txt

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Good afternoon,
Attached please find materials related to the regulation of taking sows with cubs, for discussion at tonight's meeting. I have also attached the annotated rule language, for continued discussion. Please note that I have highlighted some new proposed language on pages 3 and 4, specifically addressing the early season tag requirement. We will discuss this language in detail tonight.

Thanks,
Hannah

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Jurisdiction	Entity
Alabama	State
Alaska	State
Arizona	State
Arkansas	State
California	State
Colorado	State
Connecticut	State
Delaware	State
Florida	State
Georgia	State
Hawaii	State
Idaho	State
Illinois	State
Indiana	State
Iowa	State
Kansas	State
Kentucky	State
Louisiana	State
Maine	State
Maryland	State
Massachusetts	State

Michigan	State
Minnesota	State
Mississippi	State
Missouri	State
Montana	State
Nebraska	State
Nevada	State
New Hampshire	State
New Jersey	State
New Mexico	State
New York	State
North Carolina	State
North Dakota	State
Ohio	State

Oklahoma	State
Oregon	State
Pennsylvania	State
Rhode Island	State
South Carolina	State
South Dakota	State
Tennessee	State
Texas	State
Utah	State
Vermont	State
Virginia	State
Washington	State
West Virgina	State
Wisconsin	State
Wyoming	State
Alberta	Province - Territory
British Columbia	Province - Territory

Manitoba	Province - Territory
New Brunswick	Province - Territory
Newfoundland and Labrodor	Province - Territory
Northwest Territories	Province - Territory
Nova Scotia	Province - Territory
Nunavut	Province - Territory
Ontario	Province - Territory
Prince Edward Island	Province - Territory
Quebec	Province - Territory
Saskatchewan	Province - Territory

Regulation Summary	Regulation
No regulated bear season	
Both sows with cubs and cubs, with exceptions	5 AAC 92.260
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Hunt Guidelines for the 2023-2024 through 2027-2028 Hunting Seasons Bear: Commission Order 9
No restrictions	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	14 CA ADC § 365
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Code of Colorado Regulations Title 22 - Chapter W-02
No regulated bear season	
No regulated bear season	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Fla. Admin. Code Ann. R. 68A-12.002
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r. 391-4-2-.22 Bear
N/A	
Sows with cubs only	IDAPA 13.01.08
No regulated bear season	
No regulated bear season	
No regulated bear season	
No regulated bear season	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	301 KAR 2:300
Both sows with cubs and cubs	La. Admin. Code tit. 76, § XIX-109
No restrictions	
No restrictions	
No restrictions	

Both sows with cubs and cubs	The Wildlife Conservation Order: 3.205
Cubs only	Minnesota Administrative Rules: 6232.2800
No regulated bear season	
In the presence of one or more bears	Rules of Department of Conservation Division 10—Conservation Commission Chapter 7—Wildlife Code: Hunting: Seasons, Methods, Limits: 3 CSR 10-7.900
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Fish & Wildlife Commission Rule
No regulated bear season	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	NAC 502.373
No restrictions	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	New Jersey Administrative Code Title 7, Chapter 25:SUBCHAPTER 5. 2023-2024 GAME CODE
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Title 19 Natural Resources and Wildlife: 19.031.0011
Cubs and bears in a group, with exceptions	N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. Tit. 6 § 1.31
Both sows with cubs and cubs	15A NCAC 10B .0107
No regulated bear season	
No regulated bear season	

Both sows with cubs and cubs	Okla. Admin. Code § 800:25-7-66
Both sows with cubs and cubs	2026 Oregon Big Game Hunting Regulations
No restrictions	
No regulated bear season	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Title 50 - FISH, GAME AND WATERCRAFT CHAPTER 11: Protection of Game ARTICLE 1 General Provisions
No regulated bear season	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	TENNESSEE FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION PROCLAMATION 26-11
No regulated bear season	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Utah Admin. Code R657-33
No restrictions	
Both sows with cubs and cubs	4VAC15-50
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Wash. Admin. Code § 220-415-090
Both sows with cubs and cubs	West Virginia Code §20-2-22a.
Sows with cubs only	Wis. Admin. Code Department of Natural Resources NR 10.101
Both sows with cubs and cubs	040-3 Wyo. Code R. §§ 3-7
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Alta Reg 143/1997
Yearlings and cubs only	B.C. Reg. 190/84

Sow with cubs only	M.R. 165/91
Sow with cubs only; spring season only	Fish and Wildlife Act .2004-85
Both sows with cubs and cubs	Subsection 5(2) of the Black Bear Hunting and Trapping Order, Newfoundland and Labrador
Both sows with cubs and cubs	BIG GAME HUNTING REGULATIONS R-019-92
Sow with cubs only	Bear Harvesting Regulations
No restrictions	
Both sows with cubs and cubs; springs season only	Ontario Regulation 665/98
N/A	N/A
No restrictions	
Sow with cubs only	The Wildlife Regulations, 1981

Regualtion Language
A person may not take a cub bear or a female bear accompanied by a cub bear, except that a black bear cub or a female black bear accompanied by a cub bear may be taken by a resident hunter (1) under customary and traditional use activities at a den site (A) from October 15 through April 30 in (i) Unit 19(A); (ii) Unit 19(D), that portion of the Kuskokwim River drainage upstream from the Selatna and Black river drainages; (iii) Units 21(B), 21(C), and 21(D); and (iv) Unit 24; and (B) from December 1 through the last day of February in Unit 25(D); and (2) from July 1 through November 30 and March 1 through June 30 in Unit 25(D).
4. The legal bear will be any bear except cubs and sows with cubs.
(c) Bag and Possession Limit: One adult bear per hunting license year. Cubs and females accompanied by cubs may not be taken. (Cubs are defined as bears less than one year of age or bears weighing less than 50 pounds.)
#241 – Special Restrictions B. No cubs shall be killed nor shall any black bear accompanied by one (1) or more cubs be killed. As used herein a "cub" shall mean any black bear less than one (1) year of age.
(7) The taking of fawn deer, cub bear, bear with at least one cub bear, panther or swimming deer is prohibited.
(6) It is unlawful to kill a female with cubs or kill a cub having a live weight of less than 75 pounds.
300. (RESERVED) IDENTIFICATION OF ANIMALS THAT LEGALLY MAY BE TAKEN. 01. (3-31-22) Big Game Animals of Either Sex. Big game animals of either sex may be taken, except the following may not be taken: b.Black Bear. Females accompanied by young.
Section 6. Hunter Restrictions. (1) A person shall not: (d) Harvest: 1. A female bear that has a cub; or a bear weighing less than seventy-five (75) pounds;
4. Harvest of cubs and females with cubs is prohibited. A cub is defined as any bear 75 pounds or less.

3.205 Bear; unlawful acts. (5) It shall be unlawful to take a cub bear. “Cub bear” means a bear less than 42 inches in length from the tip of nose to the base of tail. It shall be unlawful to divide any bear in a manner that does not keep one part of the bear intact to allow it to be measured in a straight line from the tip of the nose to the base of the tail. It shall be unlawful to take a female bear accompanied by a cub bear.
GENERAL REGULATIONS FOR TAKING BEARS. Subpart 1. Bag Limit: a person may not take more than one bear in quota areas and two bears in no-quota areas during any calendar year whether by firearm or archery. Bears taken may be of either sex or any age except that bear cubs may not be taken.
(10) Only lone black bears may be taken. No person shall take a black bear they know or reasonably should have known is in the presence of one (1) or more other bears, including female black bears with cubs.
Black Bear Specific Regulations (CR) • It is unlawful to harvest/take black bear cubs. Cubs are defined as bears less than one year old. • It is unlawful to harvest/take a female black bear with cubs.
5. It is unlawful for any person to: (a) Kill a female black bear that is accompanied by a black bear cub; or (b) Kill or posses a black bear cub. As used in this subsection "black bear cub" means any black bear which is less than 1 year of age or less than 50 pounds.
Bag limit: One bear of either sex and any age with a live weight greater than 75 pounds or a dressed weight greater than 50 pounds may be harvested per permit. No adults accompanying cubs under 75 pounds may be taken.
19.31.11.10 BEAR AND COUGAR ZONE CLOSURES, BAG LIMITS AND RESTRICTIONS: B.Bag limit: The bag limit for bear is one; the bag limit for cougar is two. It is unlawful to kill a bear sow with cub(s) or any bear cub less than one year old, or to kill a spotted cougar kitten or any female cougar accompanied by spotted kitten(s)
(7) Except in the Northern Zone, it is unlawful for any person to knowingly shoot a cub or shoot a bear that such person knows or should have known to be a cub.(8) In the Southern bear range, it is unlawful for any person to shoot or take a bear from any group of bears.
It is unlawful to take or possess a female bear with a cub or cubs at its side, or to take or possess a cub bear, unless authorized by a valid captivity license, depredation permit, or scientific collection license issued by the Commission. For the purpose of this Rule, cub bear is defined as specified in G.S. 113-291.7(b).

(7) Prohibited activities. (B) Shooting females with cubs is prohibited. (D) Shooting cubs is prohibited.
Bag Limit: One bear per tag, except it is unlawful to take cubs less than one year old or sows with cubs less than one year old.
(E) It is unlawful to: (4) take or attempt to take a sow bear with cubs SECTION 50-11-435. Weight restriction on bear taken; penalties.It is unlawful to take or attempt to take a bear of less than one hundred pounds. A person violating this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined not more than five hundred dollars or imprisoned not more than thirty days, or both. In addition, each person convicted of a violation of this section may be required to pay restitution to the department of not more than one thousand five hundred dollars for each bear that is taken in violation of this section.
B. Bear Bag Limits and Season Dates 1. Bag Limits Unless special hunt regulations apply, the bag limit for any person participating in the statewide hunt, or Bear Party-Dog Hunts or both shall not exceed one (1) bear per license year. Cubs or female bears with cub(s) at side may not be taken at any time. A cub is defined as any bear weighing less than seventy-five (75) pounds.
(a) A person may not take or pursue a cub, or a sow accompanied by cubs.(b) Any bear, except a cub or a sow accompanied by cubs, may be taken during the prescribed seasons.
It shall be unlawful to kill a bear of less than 100 pounds live weight or less than 75 pounds dressed weight (entrails and internal organs removed). It shall be unlawful to take or kill a female bear accompanied by a cub.
It is unlawful to kill or possess a cub (less than one year old) or a female bear accompanied by cub(s).
(d) It is unlawful: (4) To shoot at or kill:(A) A bear weighing less than seventy-five pounds live weight or fifty pounds field dressed weight, after removal of all internal organs; (B) Any bear accompanied by a cub; or (C) Any bear cub so accompanied, regardless of its weight;
(1) Prohibited methods. No person may: Non-adult bears. Shoot, shoot at or kill a bear that is accompanied by a bear that is not an adult bear.
(a) Hunting Regulations. Hunters may take any black bear except dependent young and female black bears with dependent young at side.
5. The open seasons for the hunting of big game do not apply: (c) to the hunting of a black bear under the age of 1 year,(e) to the hunting of a female black bear accompanied by a black bear under the age of 1 year,
(1) A person commits an offence where the person takes or kills any of the following: (b) a black bear less than 2 years old or a black bear in the company of it;

Hunting of female bear with a cub prohibited. 26(1) No person shall kill or attempt to kill a female bear while she is accompanied by a cub.
6(3)No person shall shoot or kill a female bear from the third Monday in April until the last day in June, inclusive, in any year, if she is accompanied by a cub or cubs.
(2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the following shall not be taken by shooting: (a) a female black bear accompanied by cubs under one year of age; and (b) a black bear cub under one year of age.
9. No person shall hunt a black bear cub or a black bear that is accompanied by a cub. Aboriginal harvester in harvester's traditional areas are excluded.
[Prohibition—female bear with cubs] 7A Despite Section 5 and subsection 7(1), no person who holds a Bear Hunting License shall take, hunt or kill or attempt to take, hunt or kill a female bear that is accompanied by one or more cubs
55. (1) A person who holds a license to hunt bear or a trapping license shall not shoot or attempt to shoot a cub or a female bear that is accompanied by a cub during any part of an open season for bear specified in Table 2 of Ontario Regulation 670/98 (Open Seasons — Wildlife) made under the Act that falls within May or June in any year. O. Reg. 544/17, s. 6 (1).
Prohibitions: (2) No person shall, while hunting pursuant to the authority of a license, kill female black bears with young of the year cubs at heel.

Additional Definitions	Definition
5 AAC 92.990. Definitions	(20) "cub bear" means a brown/grizzly bear in its first or second year of life, or a black bear (including the cinnamon and blue phases) in its first year of life;
Fla. Admin. Code Ann. R. 68A-1.004	(25) Cub bear – A bear that is less than 100 pounds whole (ungutted) or less than 75 pounds eviscerated (gutted) weight.

6232.2600 DEFINITIONS	"Bear cub" means a bear less than one year of age.
G.S. 113-291.7(b)	§ 113-291.7. Regulation of bears; limited retention of local acts closing bear seasons. (b) Any rule adopted by the Wildlife Resources Commission that regulates the taking of female bears with cubs or that regulates the taking or possession of cub bears shall define cub bears as bears weighing less than 75 pounds.

Utah Admin. Code R657-33-2 - Definitions	(h) "Cub" means a bear less than one year of age.
NR 10.001 Definitions.	(1h) “Adult bear” means a bear measuring 42 inches or greater measured in a straight line from the tip of the nose to the base of the tail.
	(e) “Dependent young” means any black bear cub of the year or yearling black bear traveling with an adult female black bear.

	26(2) In this section, "cub" means a black bear weighing 20.5 kg or less.
	(a) A black bear cub has a hide measuring less than 1.2 m from tip of the nose to the end of the tail when fresh, and less than 1.6 m when stretched and dried.

Regulations Related to the Taking of Sows with Cubs

US & Canada

6/17/26

Regulated Black Bear Hunting

US

- 35 states
- Newest: FL, LA, MO
- 28 (80%) restrict sows with cubs and/or cubs
- Most protect both
- 7 have no restrictions, including MA, ME, NH

Canada

- 11 provinces & territories
- PEI… no bears
- 9 (82%) restrict sows with cubs and/or cubs
- 2 are limited to spring season only
- 2 have no restrictions, including QC

Regulations Sows with Cubs and/or Cubs

Both sows with cubs and cubs are protected	26
Both sows with cubs and cubs; spring season only	1
Only sows in the presence of cubs protected	5
Only sows in the presence cubs; spring season only	1
Young bears protected only	2
Bears in a group	2

Regulations What is a “cub”?

No definition	8

One year or less	11
"Know or should have known to be a cub"	2
Two years or less	1
Dependent young traveling with sow	1
"At Heels" of sow	1

<100lbs (live weight; 75lbs gutted)	3
<50 lbs (live weight)	2

<42" (tip of nose to base of tail)	2
<1.2 meters (47 inches)	1
<20.5 kg (46lbs)	1

Regulations Exemptions & Exceptions

Most sow with cubs and/or cub protections are state/province-wide

- By zones (NY)
- “Customary and traditional” hunts
- First Nations/aboriginal
- Protections in spring season only

Questions?



Annotated

10 V.S.A. App. § 7. Bear Management Rule

1.0 Authority

1.1 This rule is adopted pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4081(a). In adopting this rule, the Fish and Wildlife Board is following the policy established by the General Assembly that the protection, propagation, control, management, and conservation of fish, wildlife and fur-bearing animals in this state is in the interest of the public welfare and that the safeguarding of this valuable resource for the people of the state requires a constant and continual vigilance.

1.2 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4082, this rule is designed to maintain the best health, population and utilization levels of the black bear population.

1.3 In accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 4084, this rule establishes season and possession limits for black bear and prescribes the manner and means of taking black bears.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this regulation is to establish seasons for the taking of black bear, to establish legal means or methods of taking black bears, and to establish limits on the number of black bears to be taken annually.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 "Accompany" for the purposes of hunting bear with dogs means that:

a) A Sub-permittee engaged in the control, handling, transporting or intercepting of Department registered dogs while hunting with dogs, shall be under the under the express direction of the permit holder, and

b) A Sub-permittee who harvests a black bear shall be under the direct control and supervision of the bear dog permit holder, including the ability to see and communicate with each other without the aid of artificial devices such as radios or binoculars, except for medically necessary devices such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.

3.2 “Bait” means ~~as~~ any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any other wildlife.

Annotated

3.3 “Baited area" means an area where any animal, vegetable, fruit, mineral matter, honey, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting black bear or any wildlife, has been placed or deposited including, but not limited to, bird feeders.

3.4 “Bear Dog Permit” or “Permit” means a permit issued by the Commissioner to a person who wishes to hunt, pursue or take black bear with the aid of dogs.

3.5 “Commissioner” means the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.6 “Control of Dog/Dogs” means the transportation, loading or unloading of dogs from vehicle(s); the handling, catching, restraining or releasing dogs; and the use of telemetry/GPS to locate or track dogs.

3.7 “Department” means the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~.

3.8 "Department Registered Dog" means a dog bearing a numbered identification dog-tag (Department Registration Dog-Tag) approved or issued by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~, with the permit holder’s bear dog permit number and a number one through six.

3.9 “Hunting with Dogs” for the purposes of this rule means that one or more dog(s) with Department ~~Registered~~ Registration Dog-Tags are on the ground whether in pursuit of a black bear or not.

3.10 “Legal means” or “Legal method” means the taking of a black bear by muzzleloader, rifle, handgun, archery equipment, or crossbow when authorized.

3.11 “Pack of Dogs” means one to six dogs, acting as a unit during the pursuit of black bear.

3.12 “Sub-Permittee” means any person with a valid Vermont hunting license designated by the bear dog permit holder to assist or take a bear with the aid of dogs, in accordance with written authorization issued by the Department.

3.13 “Relaying Dogs/Packs” means the removal and replacement of one or more ~~dog or~~ dogs to the trail of a bear to the original pack of dogs once the pursuit has begun. If the hunting or pursuit of a black bear commences with fewer than six dogs in the original Pack of Dogs, the addition of a dog or dogs shall not be considered relaying, provided that no more than the same six dogs are

Annotated

part of a single Pack of Dogs during the hunting, pursuing or taking of a black bear.

3.14 "Bear Tag" means a document issued by the Department authorizing the taking of a black bear in the current season.

3.15 "Unregistered Dog" means a dog that does not have a valid Department Registration Dog-Tag as described in 3.8.

4.0 Seasons and Shooting Hours

4.1 For Vermont Residents and Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1st through the last day of the regulated deer hunting season. For Non-Resident bear dog permit holders, the season shall begin no earlier than September 15th. ~~Early and Late Season~~

~~a) **Early Season:** For Vermont Residents: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.~~

~~For Non-Vermont Residents without the use of dogs: September 1 through the day before the first day of the Regular Deer Season.~~

~~For Non-resident Bear Dog Permit Holders: The early black bear season shall be open to Non-Resident bear dog permit holders on September 15 and not before.~~

~~b) **Late Season**: For Vermont Residents and Nonresidents: The first day of the Regular Deer season through the second Sunday of the Regular Deer Season.~~

4.2 Shooting hours: One half hour before sunrise until one half hour after sunset.

5.0 Tags and Bag Limit

5.1 To take a black bear during the ~~Early~~ Bear Season, a person must, in addition to having a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license, possess a ~~an Early Season~~ Bear Tag issued separately by the Department.

~~5.2 To take a black bear during the Late Season, a person must have a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting license.~~

5.3 A person shall not harvest more than one black bear per calendar year, not to include animals taken pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 4827, unless the Board

Commented [HS1]: This language is intended to ensure the season aligns with the deer seasons.

Annotated

determines a second bear may be taken during the calendar year within specified WMUs, based on the recommendations of the Department. To take a second bear, a person must purchase a Second Bear Tag issued by the Department. A second bear may be taken during either the bear season, and only within the WMUs specified by the Board.

6.0 **The taking of bear with the aid of dogs**

6.1 Licenses and Permits

Any person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid Vermont Big Game Hunting License, use only Department Registered Dogs and possess ~~a~~ valid Department-issued bear tags. In addition, the person hunting, pursuing, harvesting, or in any manner involved in the taking of a black bear with the use of dogs must hold a valid bear dog permit or accompany a bear dog permit holder. The permit shall be carried at all times by the permittee while hunting with dogs or taking black bear and exhibited to a game warden, landowner, or law enforcement officer upon demand. The permittee shall comply with all bear dog permit conditions, including the effective dates of the permit.

6.2 A person shall not take a black bear into his/her actual possession except by killing the bear by legal means or methods.

a) A person taking black bear with the use of a bow and arrow or crossbow shall, upon demand of a game warden or other law enforcement personnel, show proof of having a prior archery license, or of having passed a bow hunter education course in Vermont, another state or a province of Canada approved by the Commissioner.

6.3 Dogs and Packs

a) A person shall not take black bear with the aid of dogs unless the person is in control of the dog or dogs.

b) No person shall take a black bear with the aid of any Unregistered Dog. No person shall have an Unregistered Dog in his or her possession while hunting, pursuing or taking a black bear.

c) A person hunting ~~with dogs~~, pursuing, and taking black bear with the aid of dogs shall attach a Department Registration Dog-Tag and a metal identification name plate with the person's name, address and telephone number to the dog's collar.

Annotated

d) A person taking a black bear with the aid of dogs shall only take a black bear with a Pack of Dogs as defined in this rule. No person shall pursue, hunt, or take black bear by Relaying Dogs/Packs.

e) Two or more permit holders may hunt together and combine Department Registered dog(s) to form a Pack of Dogs. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not take black bear with the aid of more than six dogs combined forming a single Pack of Dogs. Once hunting with dogs commences, dogs not on the hunt shall be restrained in the dog box or inside the vehicle. The combined bear dog permit holders shall not possess any Unregistered Dogs while hunting, pursuing or taking black bear.

7.0 Prohibitions

7.1 No person shall knowingly place bait to attract black bear for the purposes of allowing a bear dog to catch/strike the scent of a black bear. No person shall take bear by knowingly using bait or a baited area.

7.2 A person shall not advertise, barter, exchange goods or services, or otherwise sell the use of a dog or dogs for the purpose of taking any black bear.

7.3 While hunting with dogs, no person shall have in their possession an Unregistered Dog while possessing Department Registered dogs.

7.4 It shall be a violation for a Vermont resident to apply for a bear dog permit for the purpose of allowing a nonresident bear dog owner to take bear in Vermont with the aid of dogs.

7.5 No person shall hunt black bear with a bow and arrow or crossbow if the arrow or bolt has an arrowhead that measures less than seven-eighths of an inch at its widest point or that has less than two sharp cutting edges.

8.0 Reporting

8.1 The black bear carcass shall be field dressed prior to reporting.

8.2 Upon request of a Game Warden, the person harvesting the bear and the permit holder shall show and return to the kill site with a Game Warden.

8.3 All bear harvests shall be reported to a game warden, official Department of Fish and Wildlife ~~Department~~ Reporting Station, or a person designated by the Commissioner within 48 hours. If a bear is taken with the aid of dogs, ~~T~~the person who harvested the bear and the bear dog permit holder must both be

Annotated

present to legally report the harvest. ~~If the bear dog permit holder harvested the bear, only he or she must be present when reporting the harvest.~~

8.4 It shall be unlawful to provide false information when reporting a black bear taken with the aid of dogs.

8.5 The fine, points and any other penalty for any violation of this subsection 8 shall be assessed to the violator and in addition, to the permit holder if the violator is not the permit holder.

9.0 Biological Collection

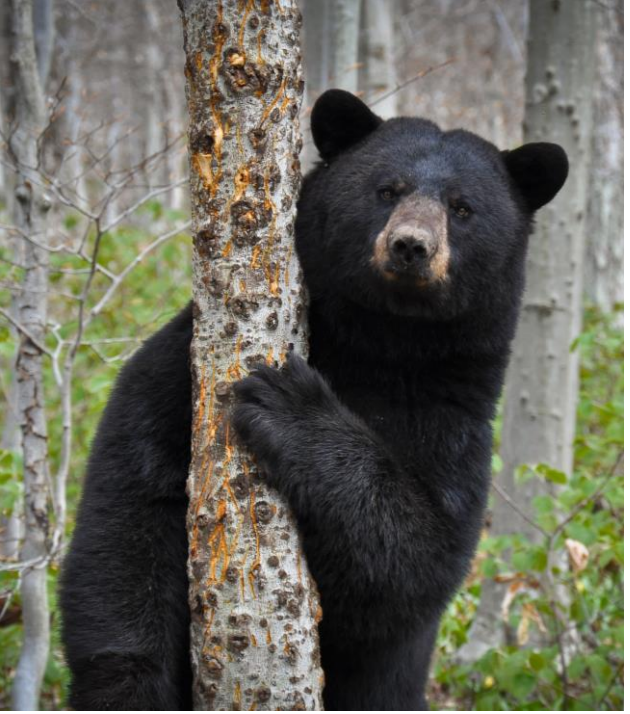
9.1 Any person who harvests a black bear shall collect a premolar tooth and submit the tooth to a game warden, official Fish and Wildlife Department Reporting Station, or to a person designated by the Commissioner to receive the biological collection, within 48 hours of taking the bear.

9.2 Unless otherwise specified by statute, the failure to collect and submit a black bear tooth shall not result in license suspension points and shall be considered a minor violation subject to a civil fine.



Vermont Fish & Wildlife's Black Bear Program

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
Jaclyn Comeau
10/15/25



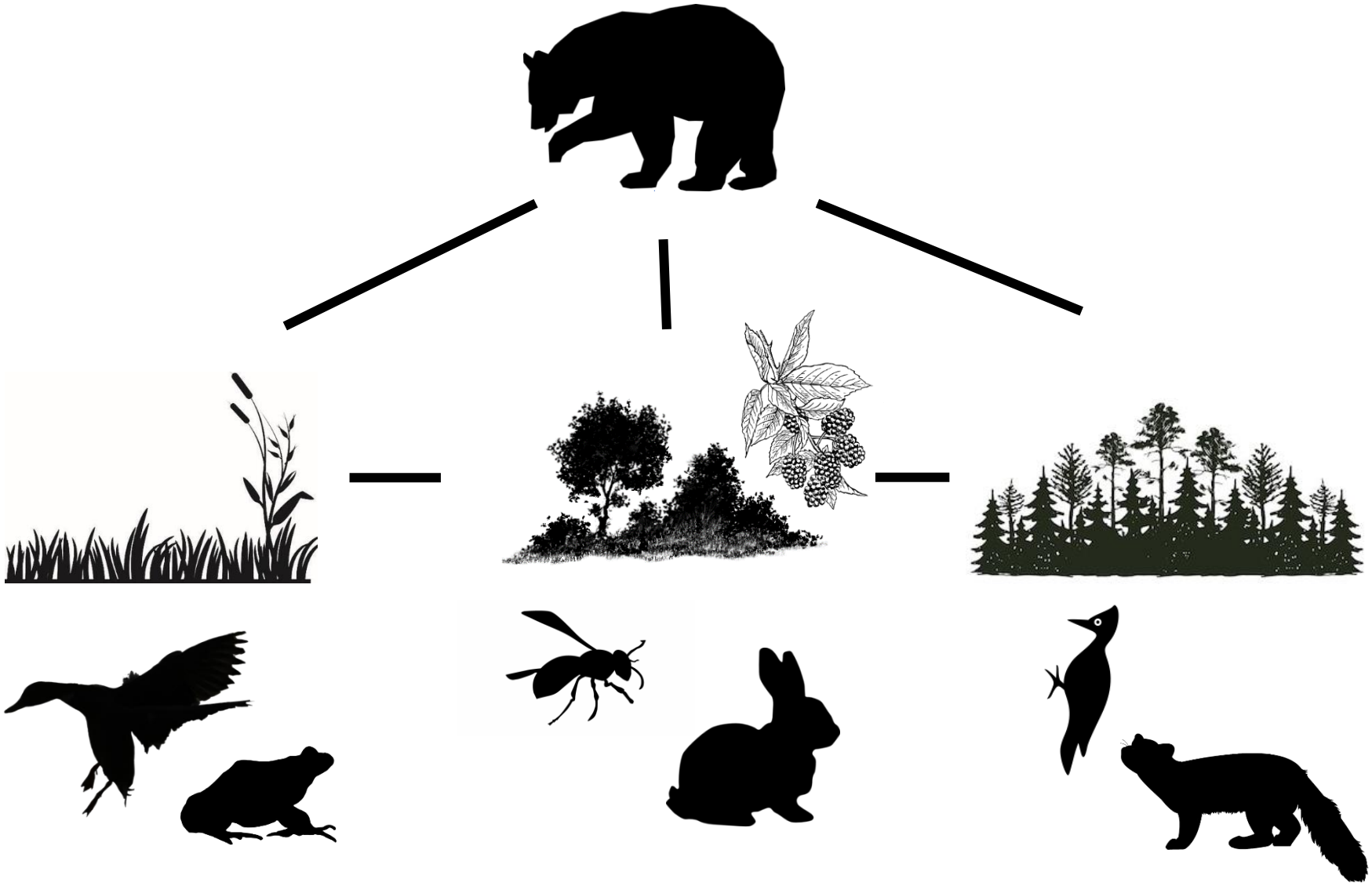




VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE

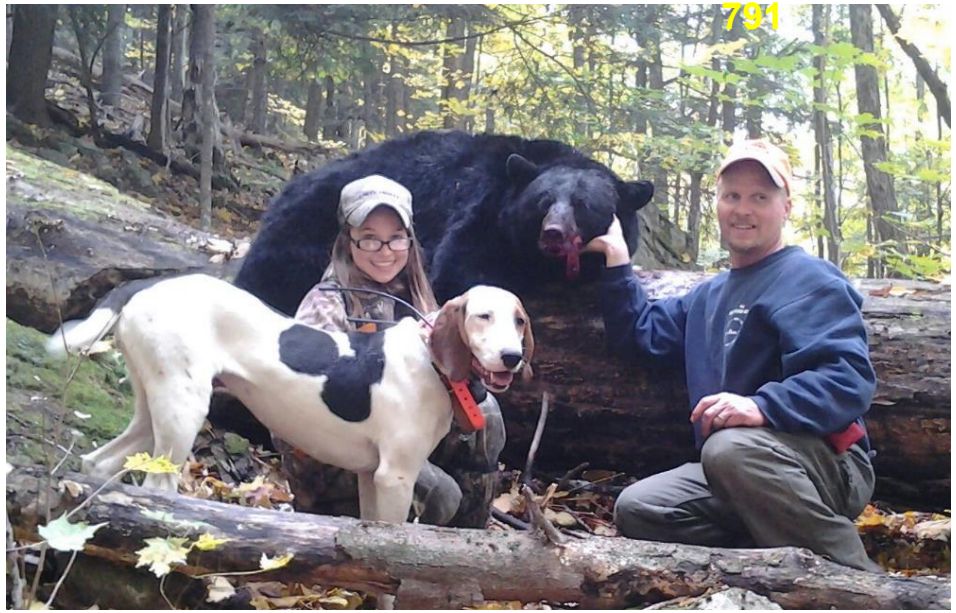


The mission of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is the conservation of our fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the people of Vermont



Black Bears are an Umbrella Species




791







VFWD's Black Bear Project: Habitat Conservation & Management



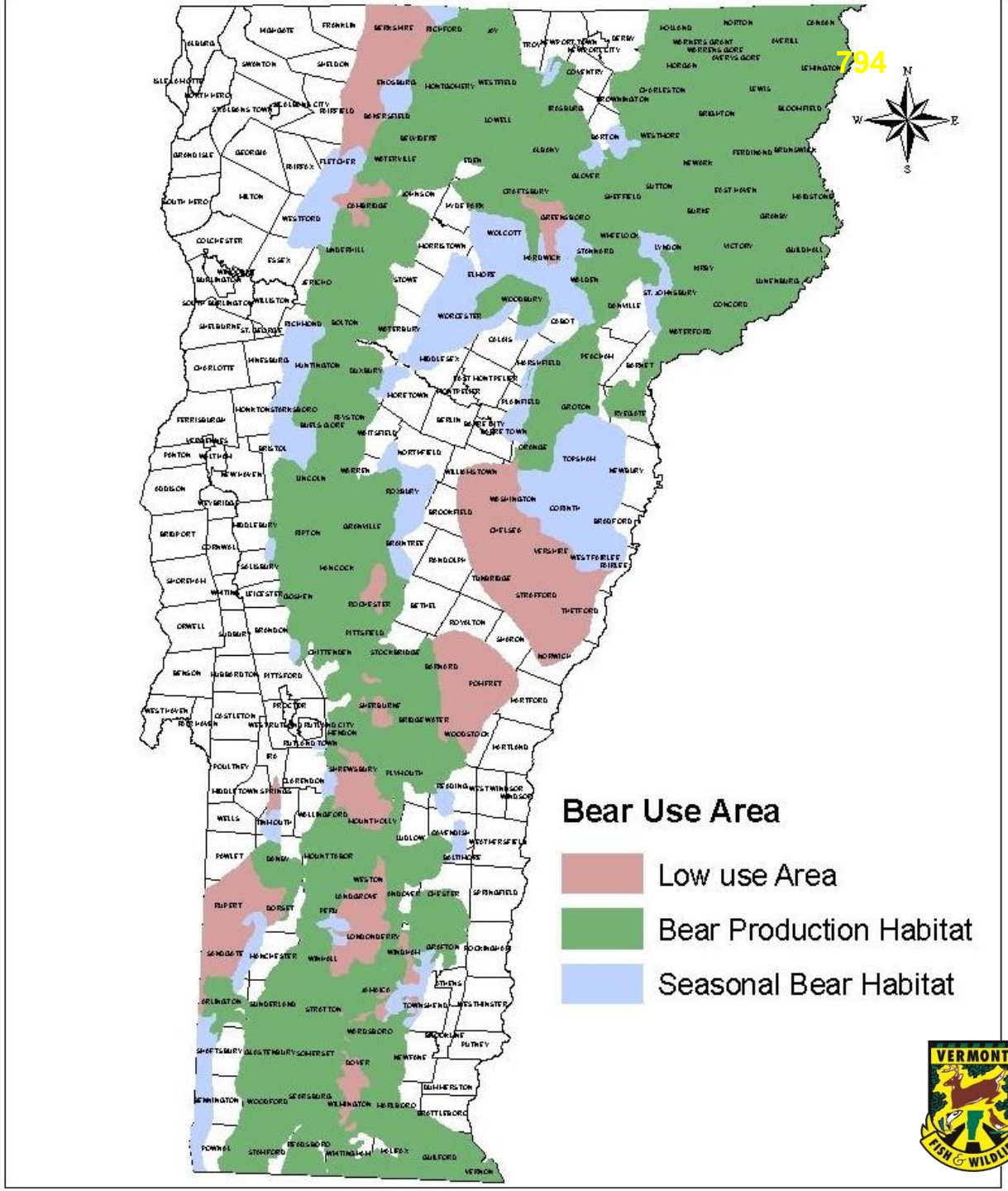

793





Black Bear Habitat in Vermont as of 1989












VERMONT
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Black Bear Habitat Goal: Maintain large concentrations of important foods and landscape connectivity

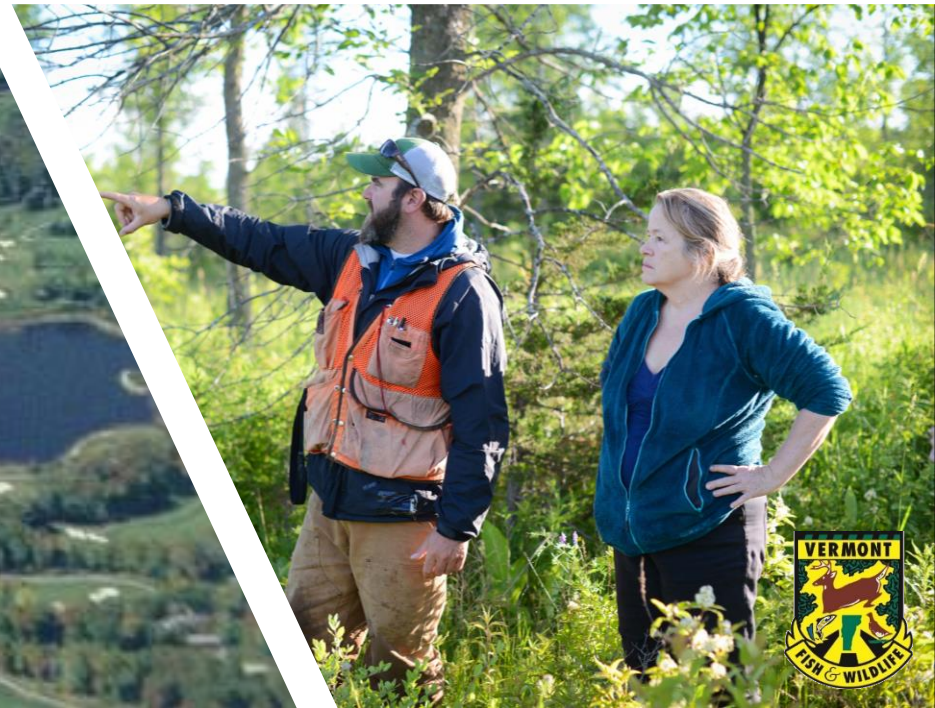


VFW Habitat Program

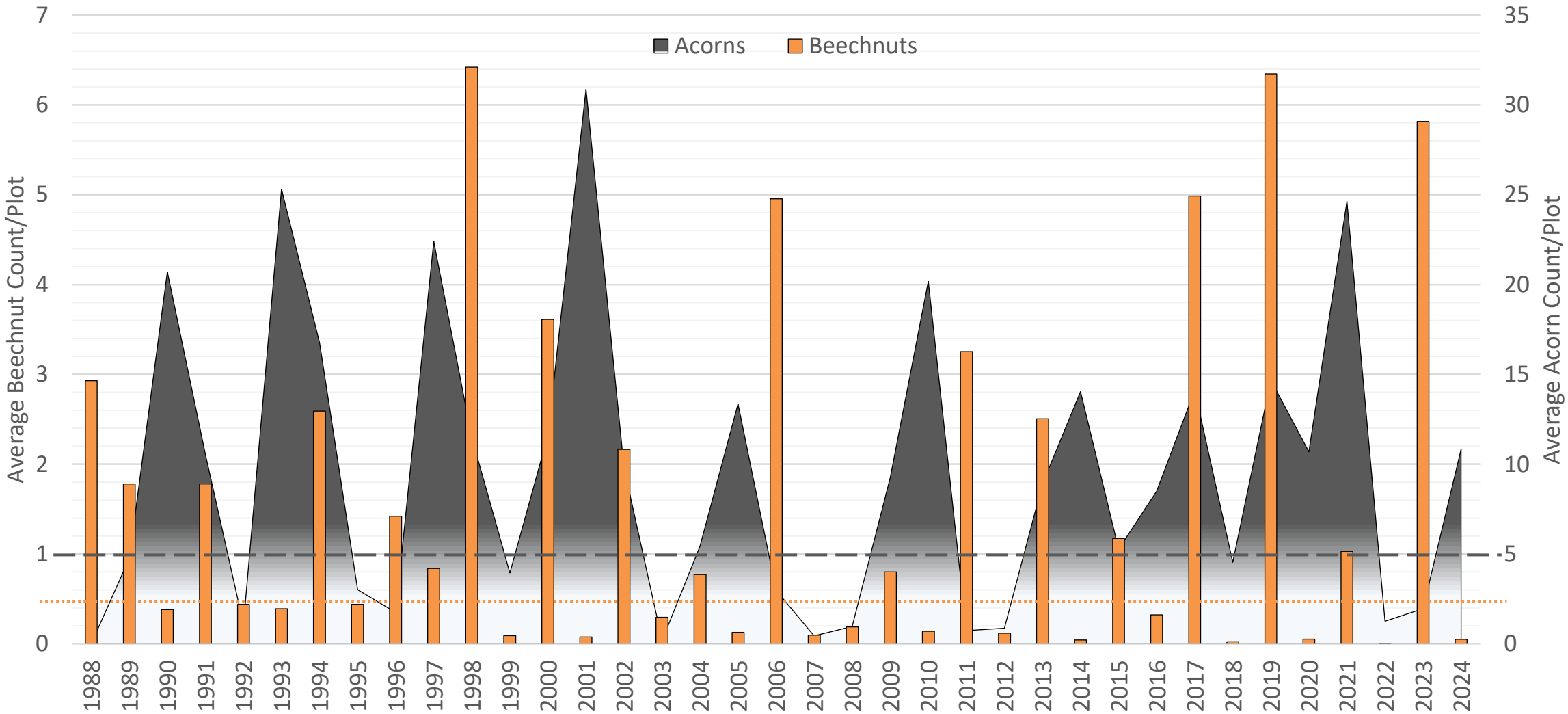
- Land conservation
- Habitat management on state lands
- Assistance for private landowners
- Review of development projects (ACT 250)

Legal Precedent: Necessary Black Bear Habitat

- Concentrations of hard mast
- Spring bear wetlands



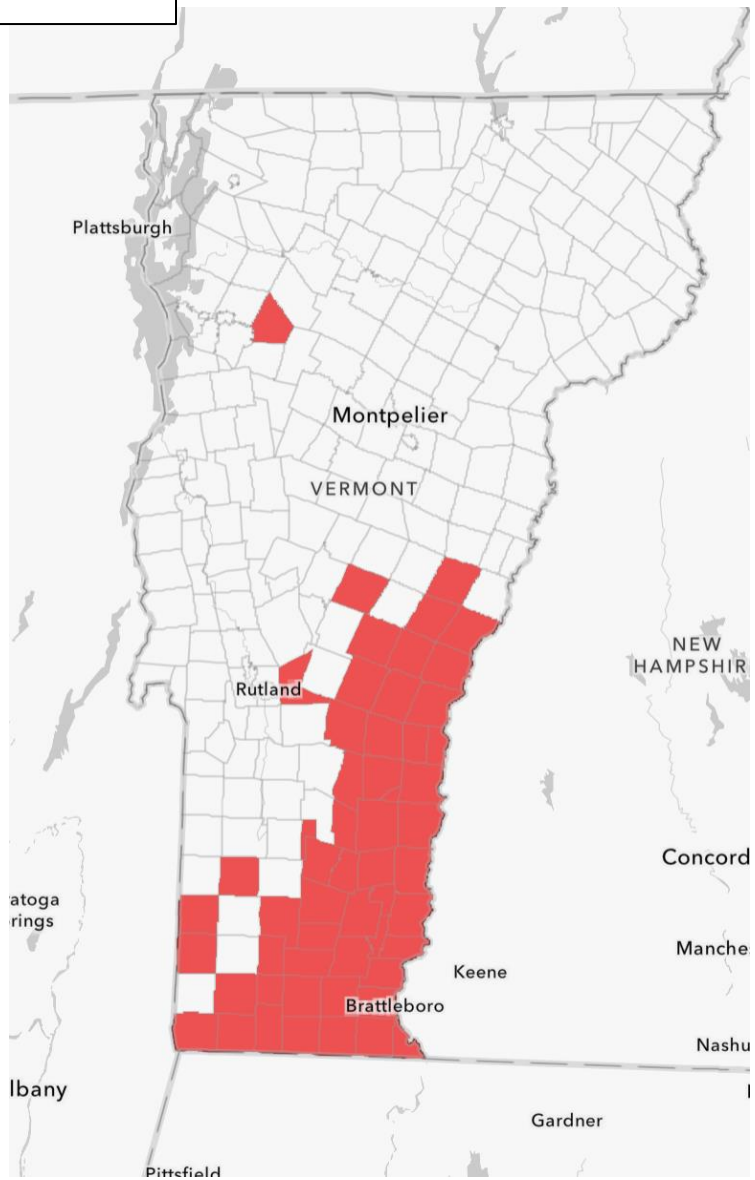
Hard Mast Availability in Vermont, 1988 - 2024



Beech Leaf Disease



Beech Leaf Disease: shrivelling of leaves associated with Beech Leaf Disease.





VFWD's Black Bear Project: Population Monitoring & Management





Vermont's Bear Population Model:

Population Reconstruction Model

800

Dead bears are used as a representative sample to estimate Vermont's bear population

1. Hunting Mortality Data
   - Count and age of females
   - Count and age of males
   - Total count
2. Incidental Mortality Data – more recent
   - Total count

Vermont's Black Bear Population Estimate, 1972-2024

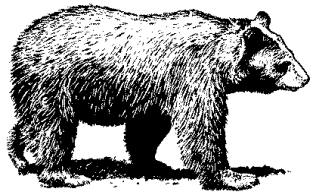
VT bear population estimate (mean±80% confidence intervals)
with population range objective in green dotted line

Focus is the Population Trend

Objective Range: 3,500 to 5,500 bears

2024 Estimate: 6,800 to 8,000 bears

801



Vermont Bear Hunting Regulations

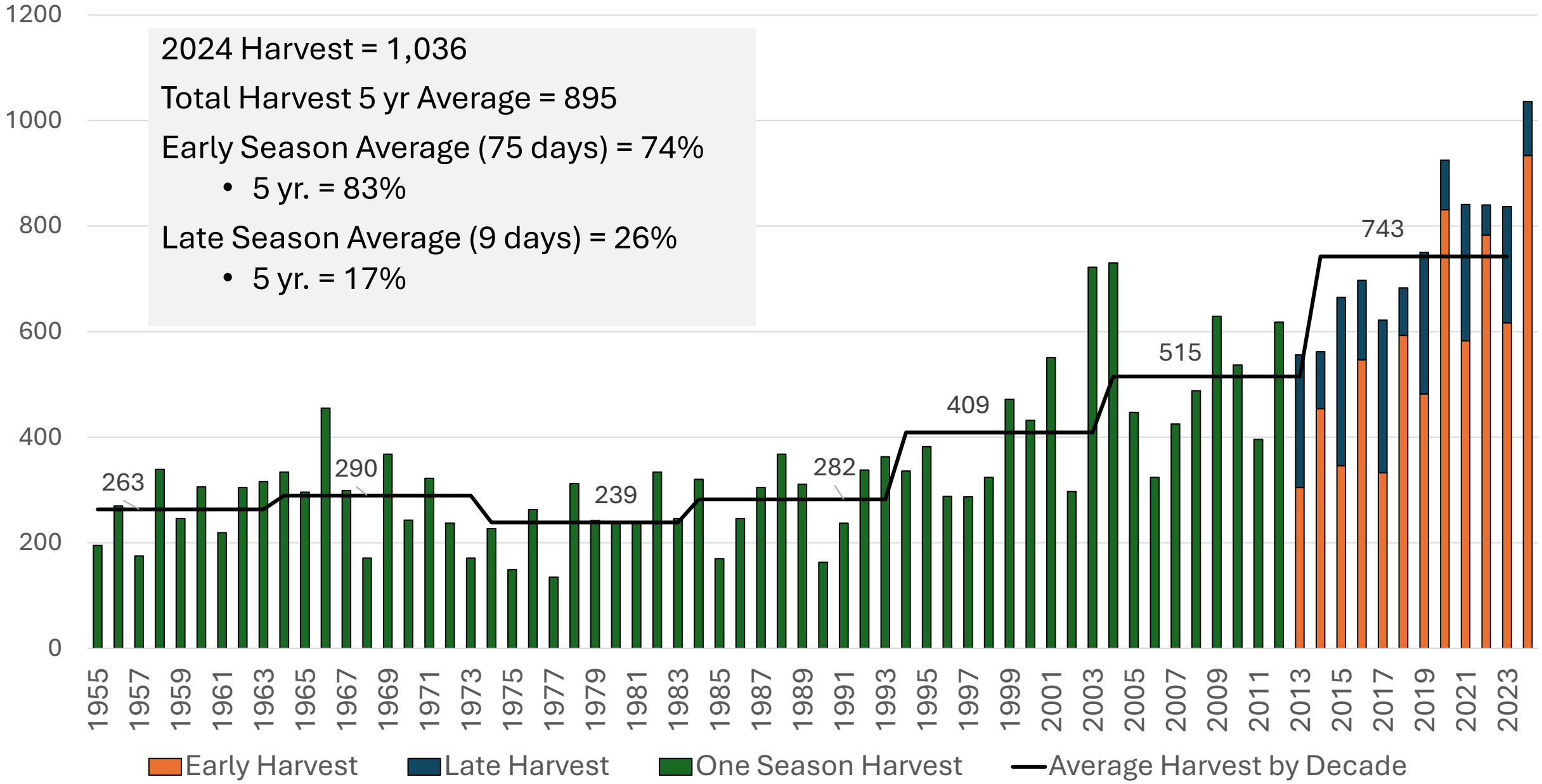
802

- **1831 to 1941** – Vermont legislature imposed a bounty on bears
  - 1,295 bounty claims were paid (Willey 1978)
- **1941** – First bear season established, June 1 to Dec. 31
- **1955** – Report harvested bears required
- **1961** – Season reduced to Sept. 1 – Nov. 30
- **1967** – Trapping bears prohibited
- **1968** – Limit of 1 bear per year
- **1972** – Bear dog permit required, and baiting prohibited
- **1974** – Season reduced, Sept. 15 – 9th day of deer season
- **1980** – Season extended, Sept. 1 – 9th day of deer season
- **1982** – Formalized process for setting population goals
- **1990** – Season reduced, Sept. 1 – 5th day of deer season
- **2013** – Early season tag required, & season extended, Sept. 1 – 9th day of deer season
- **2017** – Tooth submission mandatory
- **2018** – Field dressed before reporting required and refined bear dog requirements
- ?



Vermont Bear Harvest by Season, 1955 - 2024

803



2024 VERMONT BLACK BEAR HARVEST REPORT

Bear Harvest	2024	Average	Range
% of Population Estimate	14%	9%	4% to 17%
% Early Season	90%	72%	52% to 93%
% Males in Harvest	55%	58%	50% to 66%
% with Hounds	13%	15%	6% to 26%

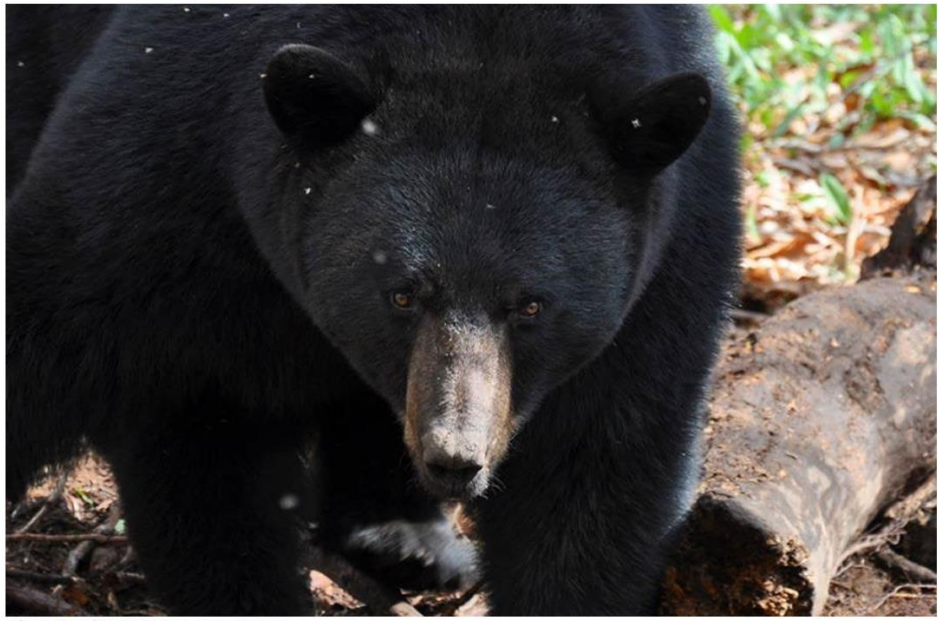
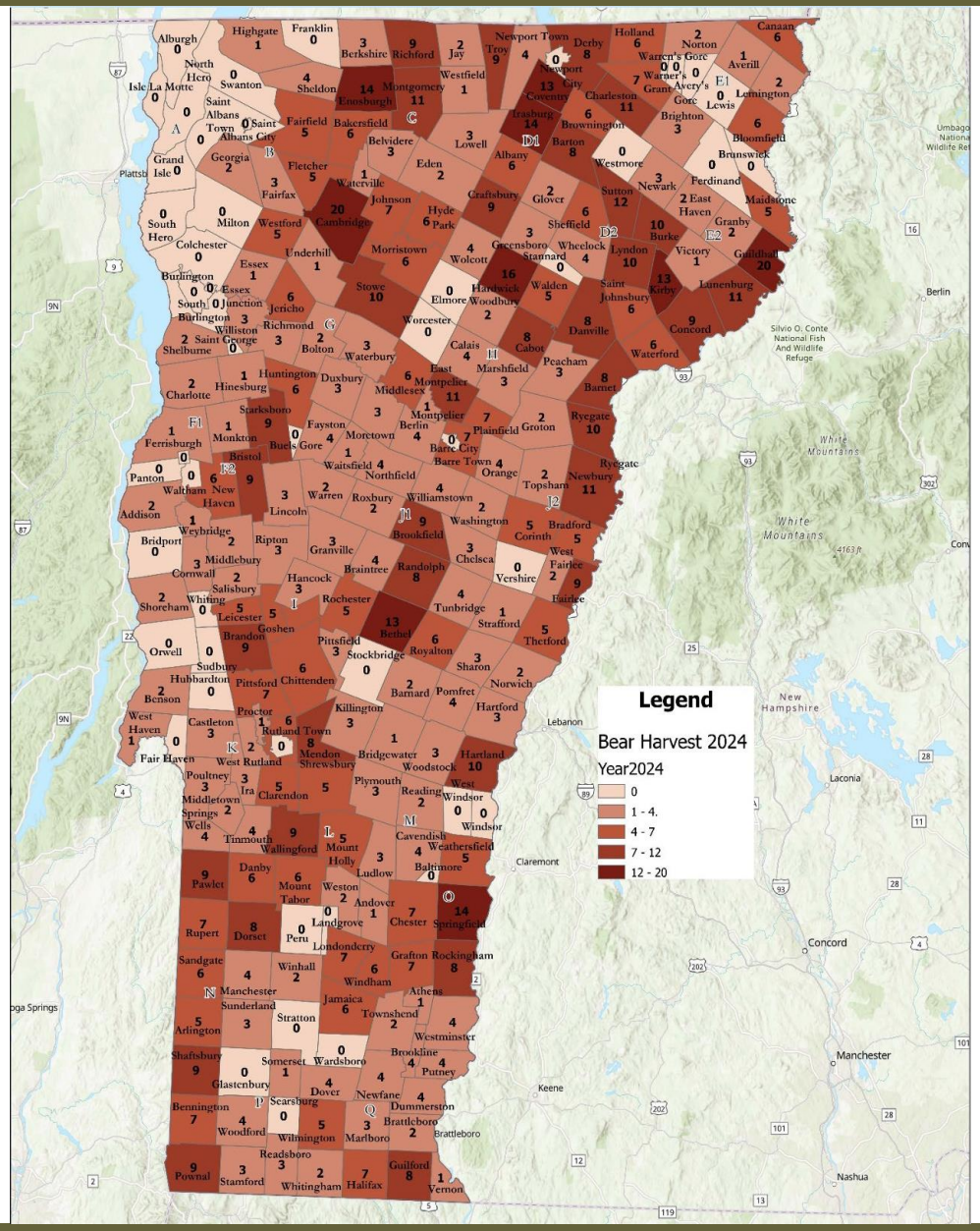
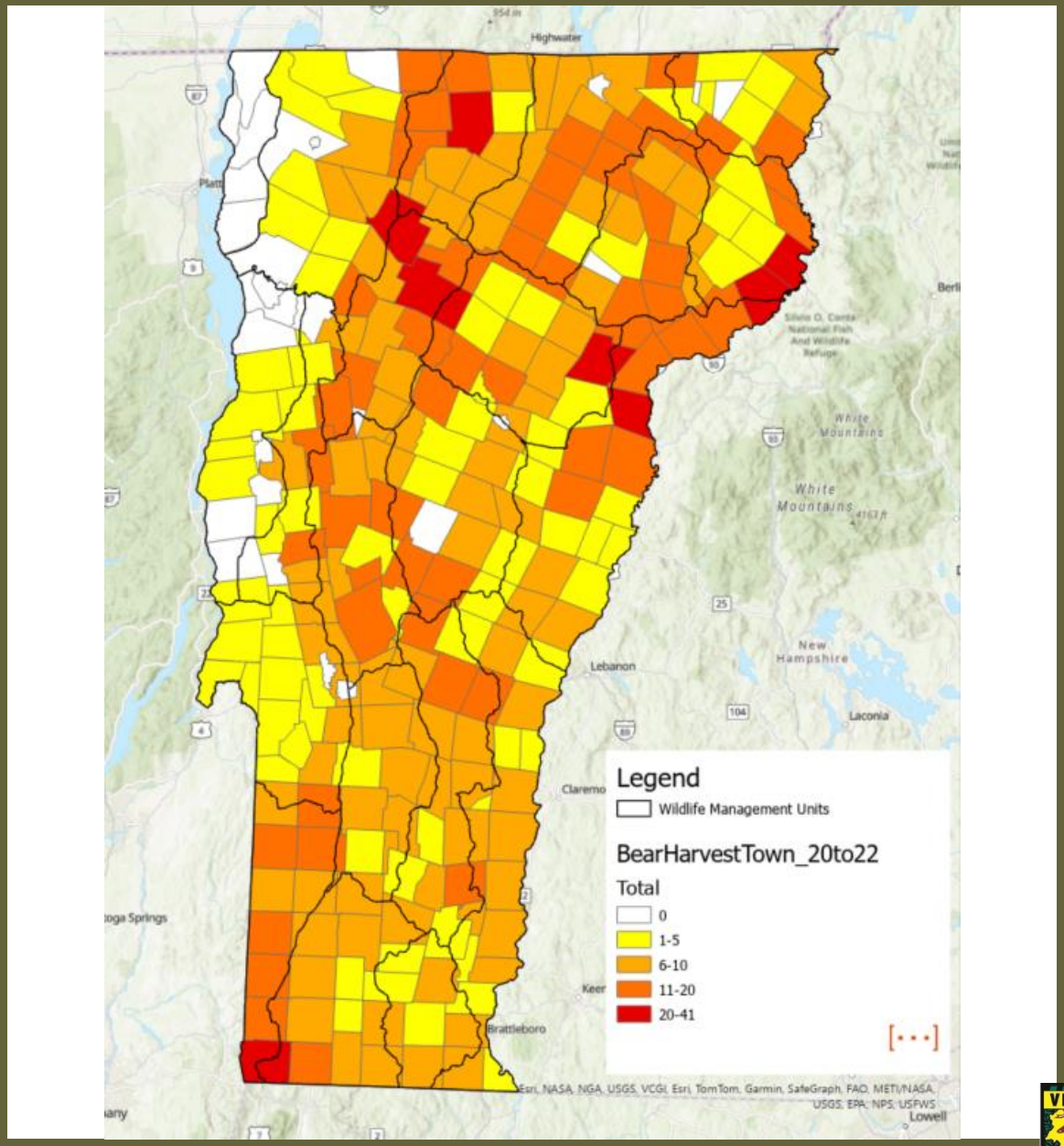


Photo Credit: VTFWD, Tom Rogers

VERMONT
FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
(802) 828-1000 / www.vtfishandwildlife.com


Legend
Bear Harvest 2024
Year2024
0
1 - 4.
4 - 7
7 - 12
12 - 20

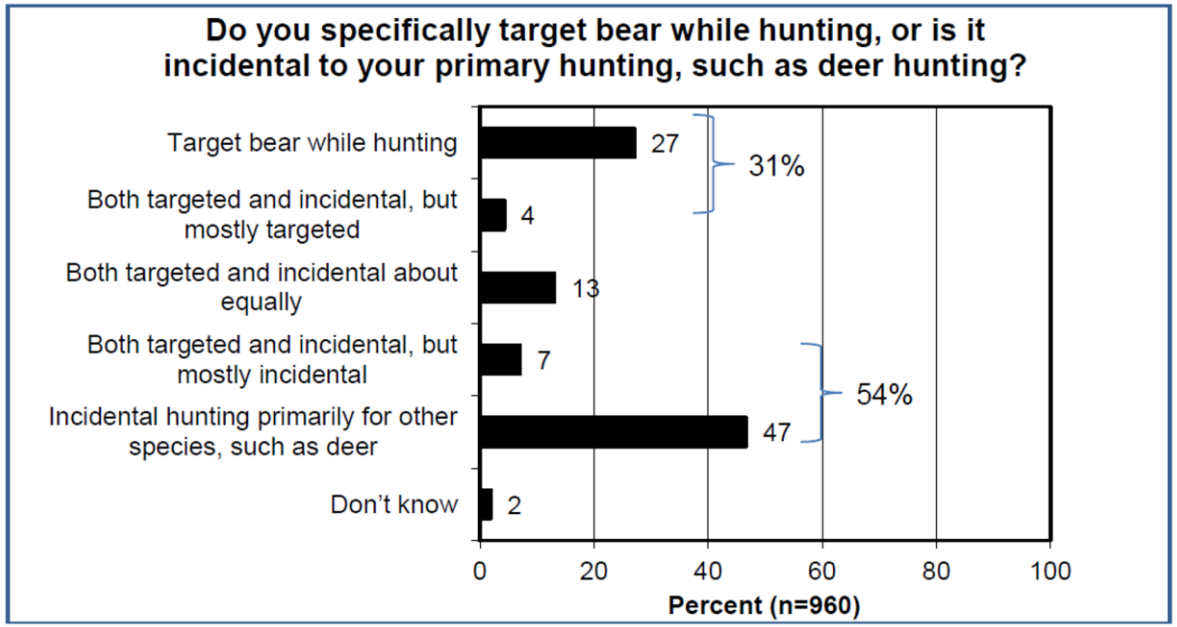

Legend
Wildlife Management Units
BearHarvestTown_20to22
Total
0
1-5
6-10
11-20
20-41
Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, VCGI, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USFWS

2024 Bear Hunter Survey

960 bear hunter respondents

- 75% had hunted bear in 2023
- 62% had hunted bear in all 5 of past 5 years

- Incidental bear hunting (54%) is more popular than targeted bear hunting (31%)
- Targeted early season bear hunters reported hunting a mean of 9.3 days
- Targeted late season bear hunters reported hunting a mean of 4.4 days
- Meat/Utilization was the primary motivation for why people bear hunt (67%)
- Equal preference for early vs. late seasons
- Of all hunters surveyed 13% hunted bear in 2023 and 18% had hunted bear in the past 5 years

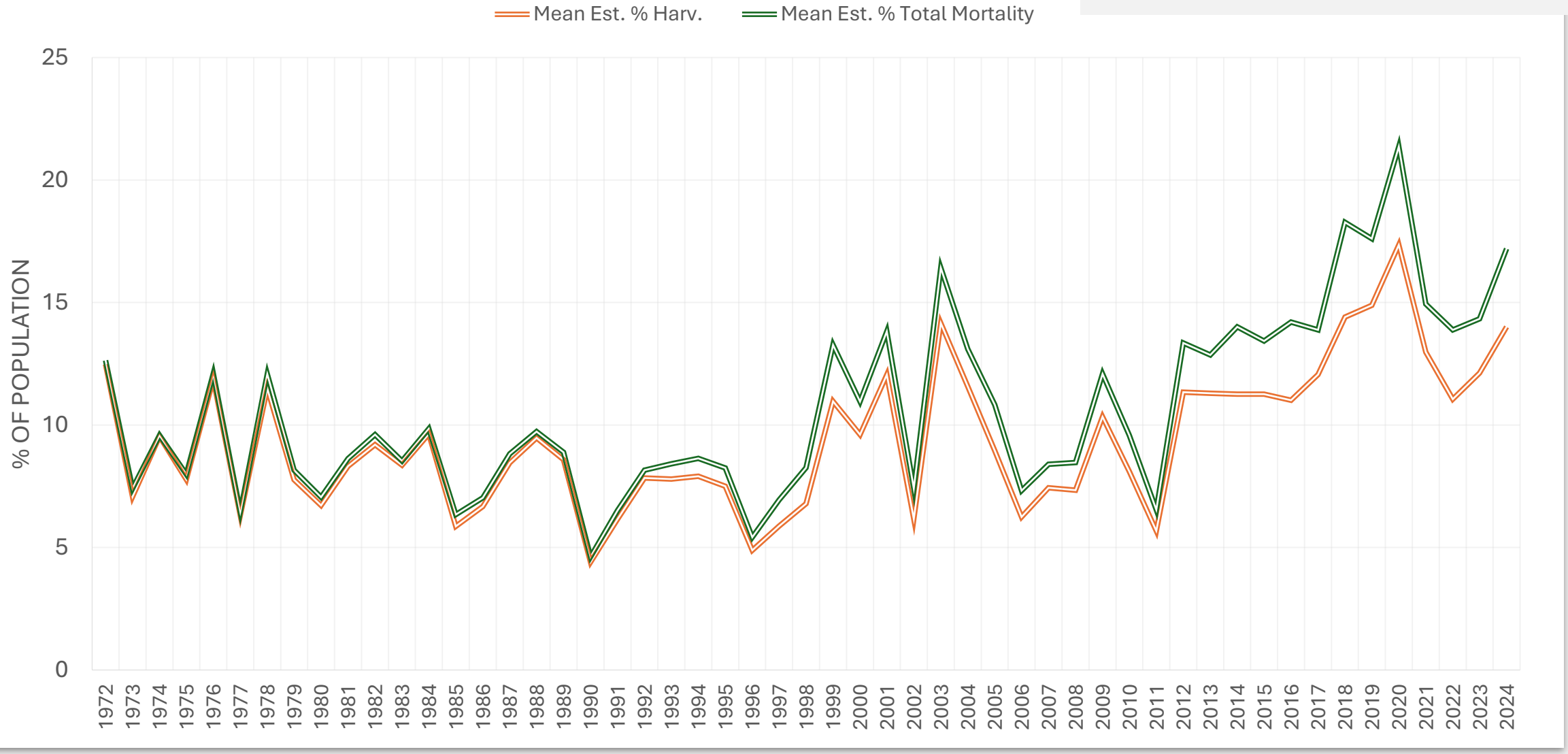


807

10-yr Average:

- Harvest = 13% of population
- All Mortality = 16% of population

PERCENT OF POPULATION SUBJECT TO MORTALITY



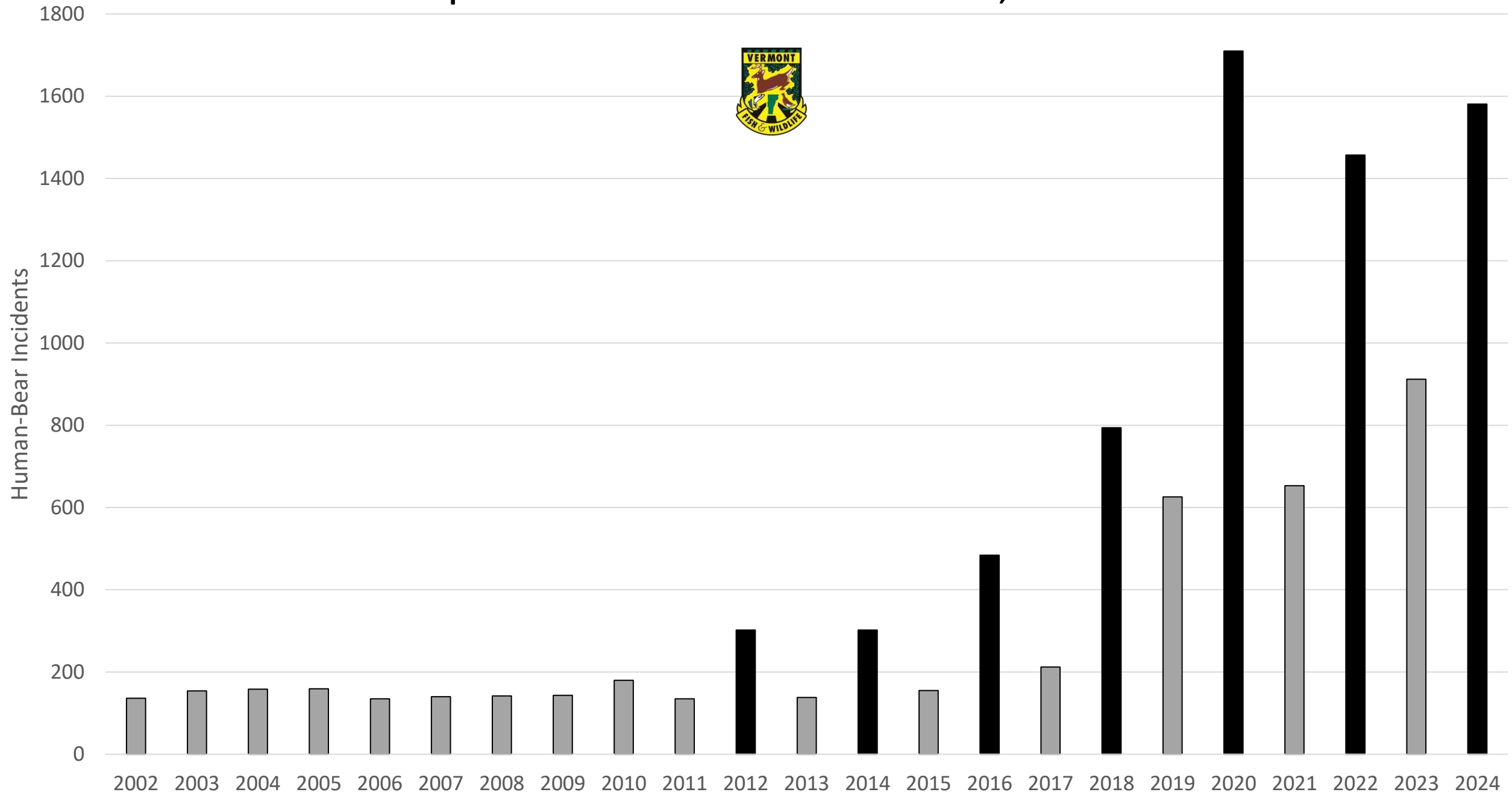
“I shouldn’t, but I’m going to have the garbage.”



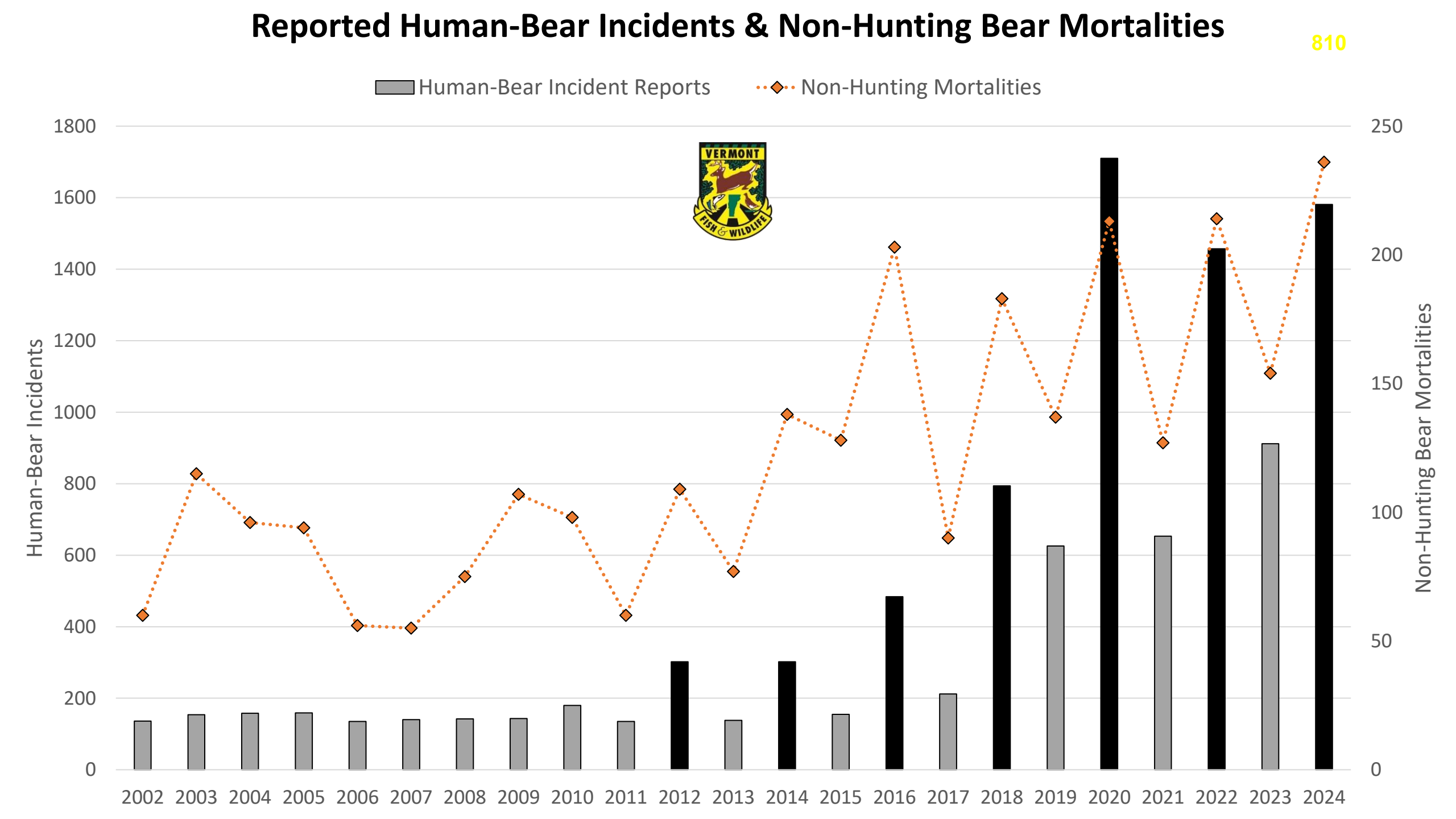
VFWD’s Black Bear Project: Human-Bear Interactions

Reported Human-Bear Incidents in Vermont, 2002-2024

809



Reported Human-Bear Incidents & Non-Hunting Bear Mortalities



What is driving human-bear conflicts?

- Bear Population: size & distribution
- Human Population: size & distribution
- Wild Food Availability
- Human Food Availability
- Bear & Human Behavior

Every Meal Is A Learning Experience!

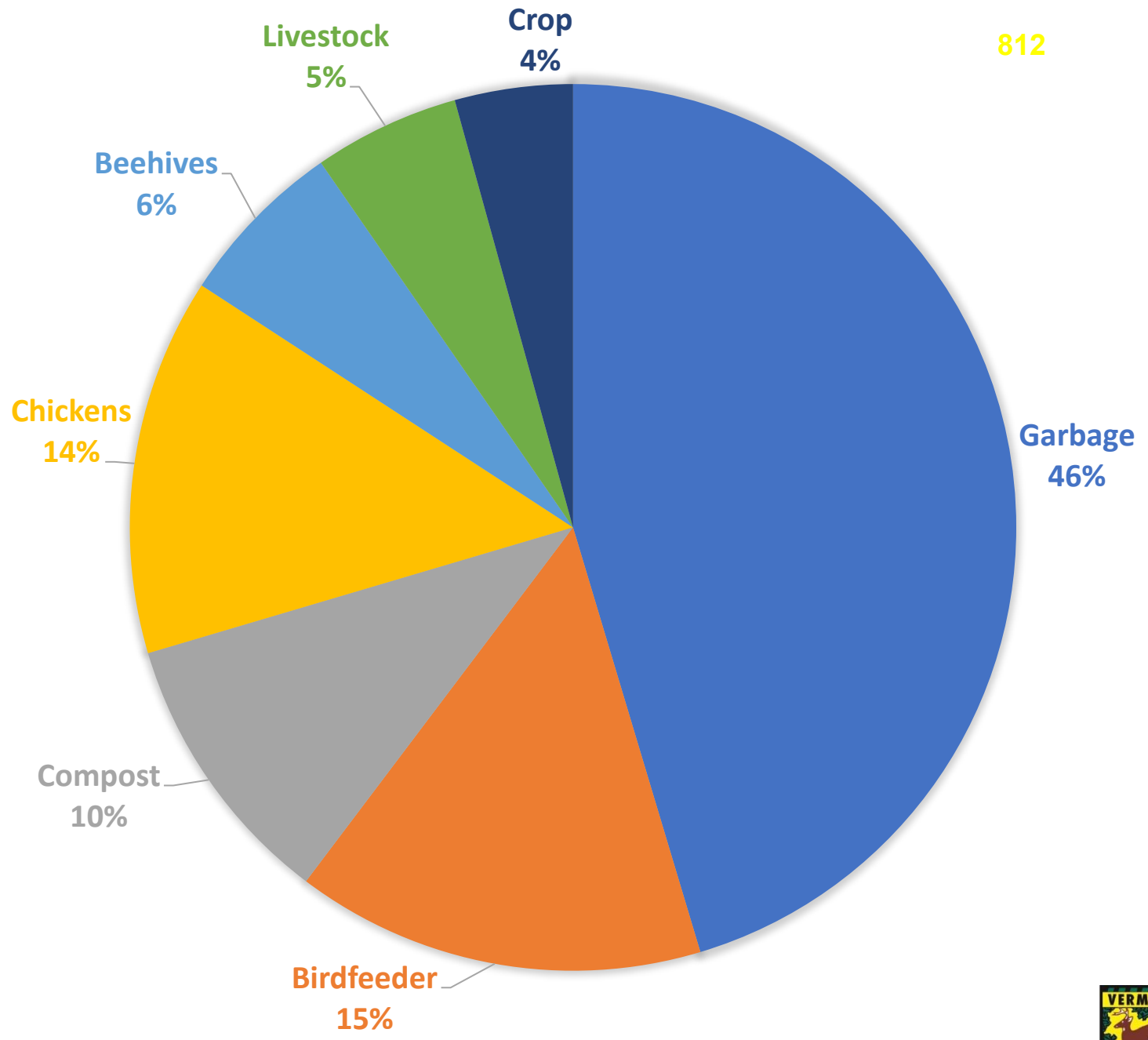




Bears Have Easy Access to Human Foods in Vermont!

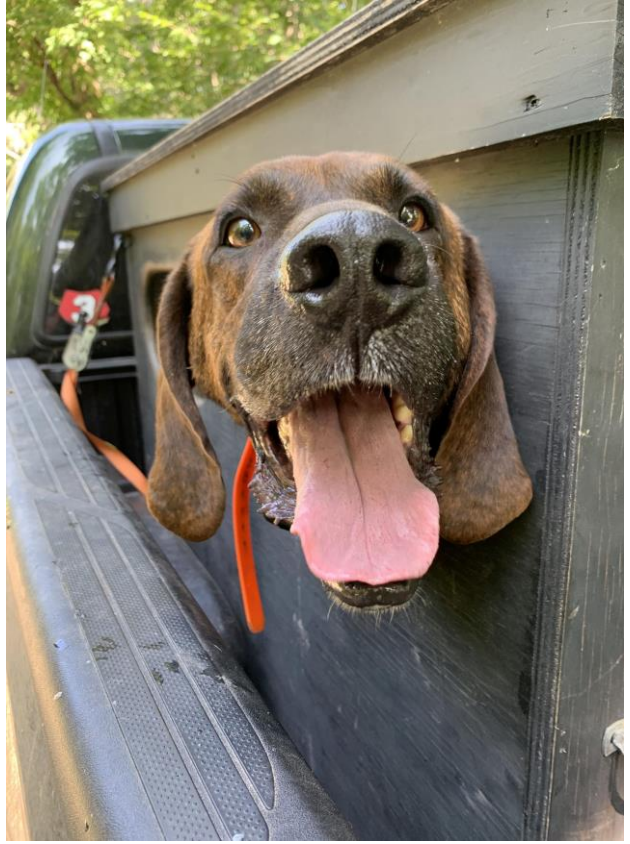






Human Foods Involved in Human-Bear Conflicts, 2011-2023









What Can We Do?

- Protect bear habitat
- Manage the number of bears
- Try to manage bear behavior
- Change people behavior

Bears are active in your community. Take action:

HELP KEEP BEARS WILD

NEVER FEED BEARS
it's illegal!

SECURE GARBAGE, COMPOST, & FOODS
behind closed doors or in bear-proof bins

BE LOUD
make bears feel uncomfortable

USE ELECTRIC FENCES
for chickens and other farm animals

TAKE DOWN ALL BIRDFEEDERS

Learn more and report bear encounters:

vtfishandwildlife.com







Composting in Bear Country

Composting well protects animals and people because it reduces the chance that you will accidentally feed an animal.

Take down birdfeeders, except when bears are hibernating. Bird seed draws bears into yards. Plant native flowers and shrubs that attract birds instead.

Compost in a hard, durable bin, ideally with a lid that would be challenging for a bear to open. Cover all food scraps with "browns" (dried yard debris, wood chips, sawdust, or shredded paper); they help contain odor. Frequently mix the pile.

Don't compost meat and bones at home. Bring them to a compost drop-off or put them in the trash.

You have options! You can bring food scraps to transfer stations and other local drop-offs. Consider drop offs in the spring when bears are most active.

Curious Bear? Don't Feed It.

1. **Contact Vermont Fish & Wildlife** for more advice on deterring a bear in your yard **before it becomes a problem.** Fill out this form to get in touch: Anrweb.vt.gov/FWD/FW/WildlifeBearReport.aspx

2. Bring food scraps to a drop-off for a while. **OR** Surround your bin with an electric fence (smear peanut butter on the fence so the bear gets a little zap to the face).

USDA Wildlife Services

Agency of Natural Resources
Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

Hunt | Fish | Lands & Habitat | Wildlife | I want to

- Home
- Hunt
- Fish
- Conserve
- Licenses and Lotteries
- Watch Wildlife
- Get Involved
- **Learn More**
  - Conservation Education
  - **Living with Wildlife**
    - **Living with Black Bears**
      - Bear-Resistant Trash Containers
      - Composting in Bear Country
      - If You Encounter A Bear
      - Living with Black Bears FAQs
      - Bear Necessities: Living With Black Bears

Living with Black Bears



Seeing black bears in their natural surroundings is exciting. But when bears venture into human territory, problems can occur and bears

Click Here to Report a Bear Incident

Human-Bear Conflicts: A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear

People often encourage bears to come out of the forest by providing food without realizing it. When bears become used to these food so with humans they become more dependent on human foods and less wary. This is bad news for the bears. This puts bears at increased r killed in defense of property.

The most common sources of food that attract bears are: **pet food, bird feeders, barbecue grills, garbage, household trash containe with accessible food and food wastes.**

Purposely feeding a bear is not just bad for the bear, **it's also illegal**.

ediate assistance dealing with an unsafe bear situation, please contact your local game

Have any questions? Please visit our website for more information at VT Fish&Wildlife's Citizen Reporting information page or feel free to contact VFWD Wildlife at jaclyn.comeau@vermont.gov or (802) 461-5620.

Required fields are marked with *

RESET

ENCOUNTER CONTEXT

In which type of setting did your bear incident occur? *

- Yard / Neighborhood / In Town
- Camping / Campground / Picnic Area
- Recreation Trails

www.bearwise.org

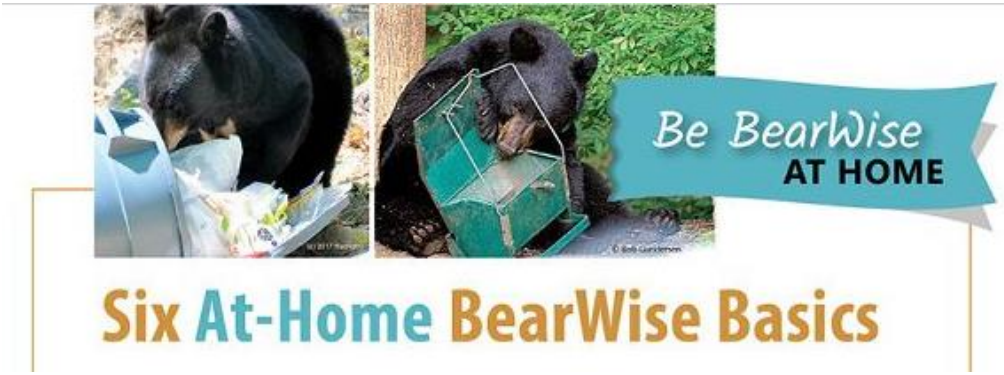
Be Bear Wise!

Helping people live responsibly with bears

BearWise VERMONT

VERMONT
AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Keep Vermont's Bears Wild



Six At-Home BearWise Basics

Be BearWise AT HOME CHECKLIST



How BearWise Are You?

Be BearWise GUEST CHECKLIST

How to Be a BearWise Guest



BearWise® BULLETIN #4

Action Plan for Communities in Bear Country



VFWD's Black Bear Project: Research

Deerfield Wind Black Bear Study:

Black Bear Habitat Selection in Response to Wind Energy



Tawnee Dupuis, M.S. UA

Dr. Mark S. Boyce, UA

Deerfield Wind Energy Project

818

Wind Project Infrastructure

- 15 wind turbines, 2.0 mw
- 7 km road
- Substation

Green Mountain National Forest

- Bear Scarred Beech: 3,000+ acres

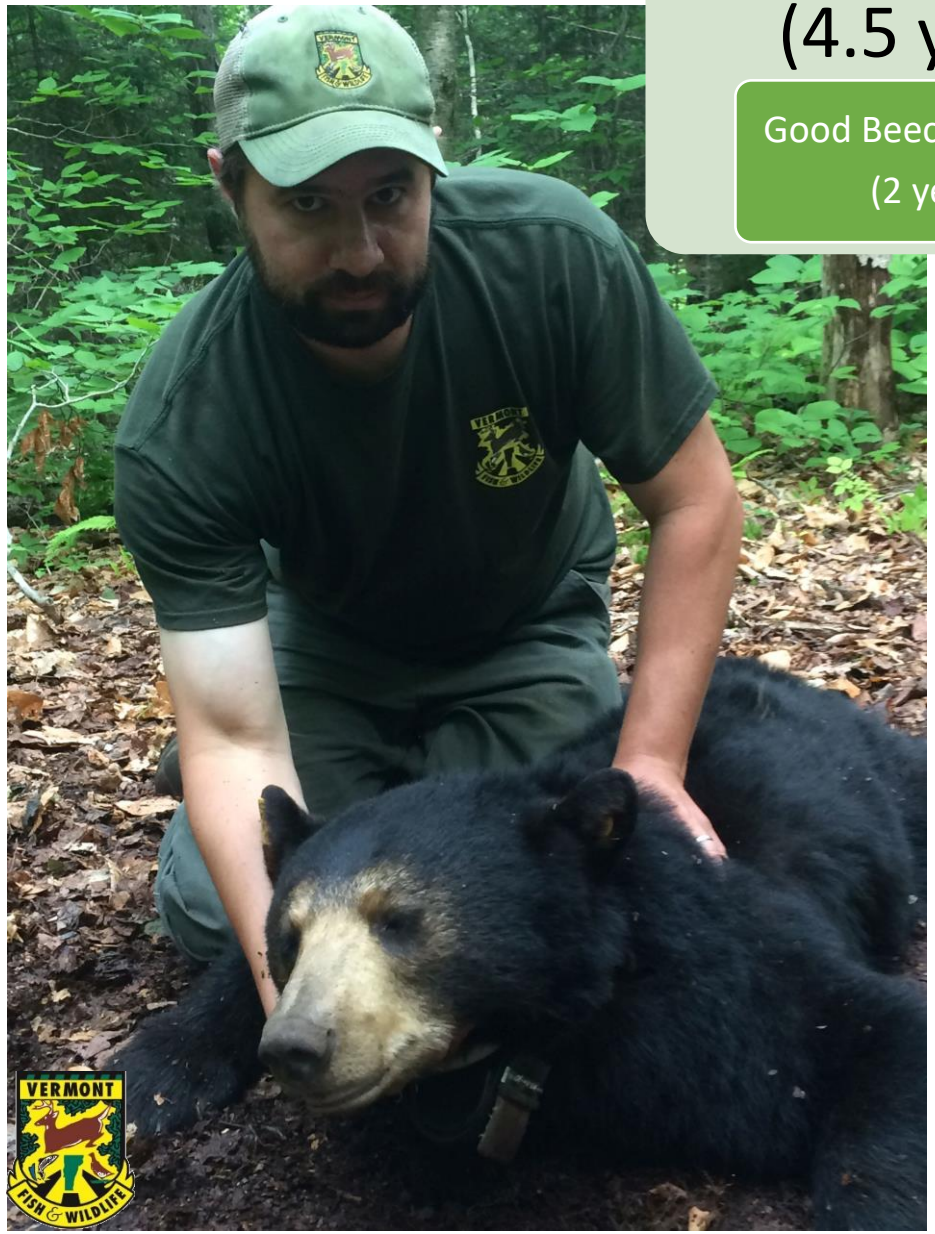


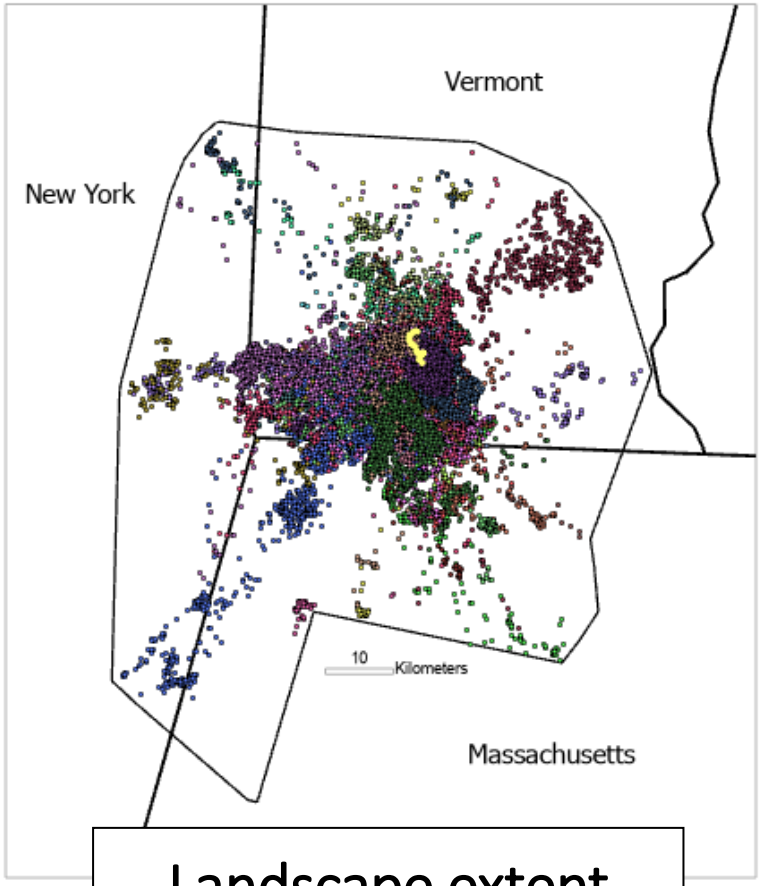
Objectives:

- How important is beech habitat for bears?
- Does wind energy development change use of habitat?
- If so, what are the consequences?

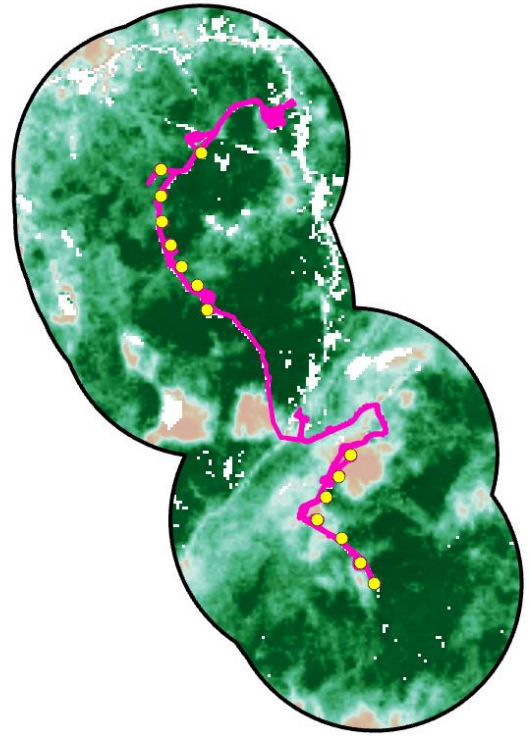
Study Design:

Pre-Construction (4.5 years)	Construction (1.5 years)	Operation (2 years)
Good Beech Nut Crop (2 years)	Good Beech Nut Crop (1 year)	Good Beech Nut Crop (1 year)





Landscape extent



Local extent

Bear F30
Pre-Construction
Good Beechnut Fall

Bear F30820
Construction
Good Beechnut Fall



1
Kilometers

1
Kilometers

Bear F30
Construction
Good Beechnut Fall

Bear F30 821
All Locations – 4 years



0 3 6 Kilometers



Major Findings

822

Before Wind Development

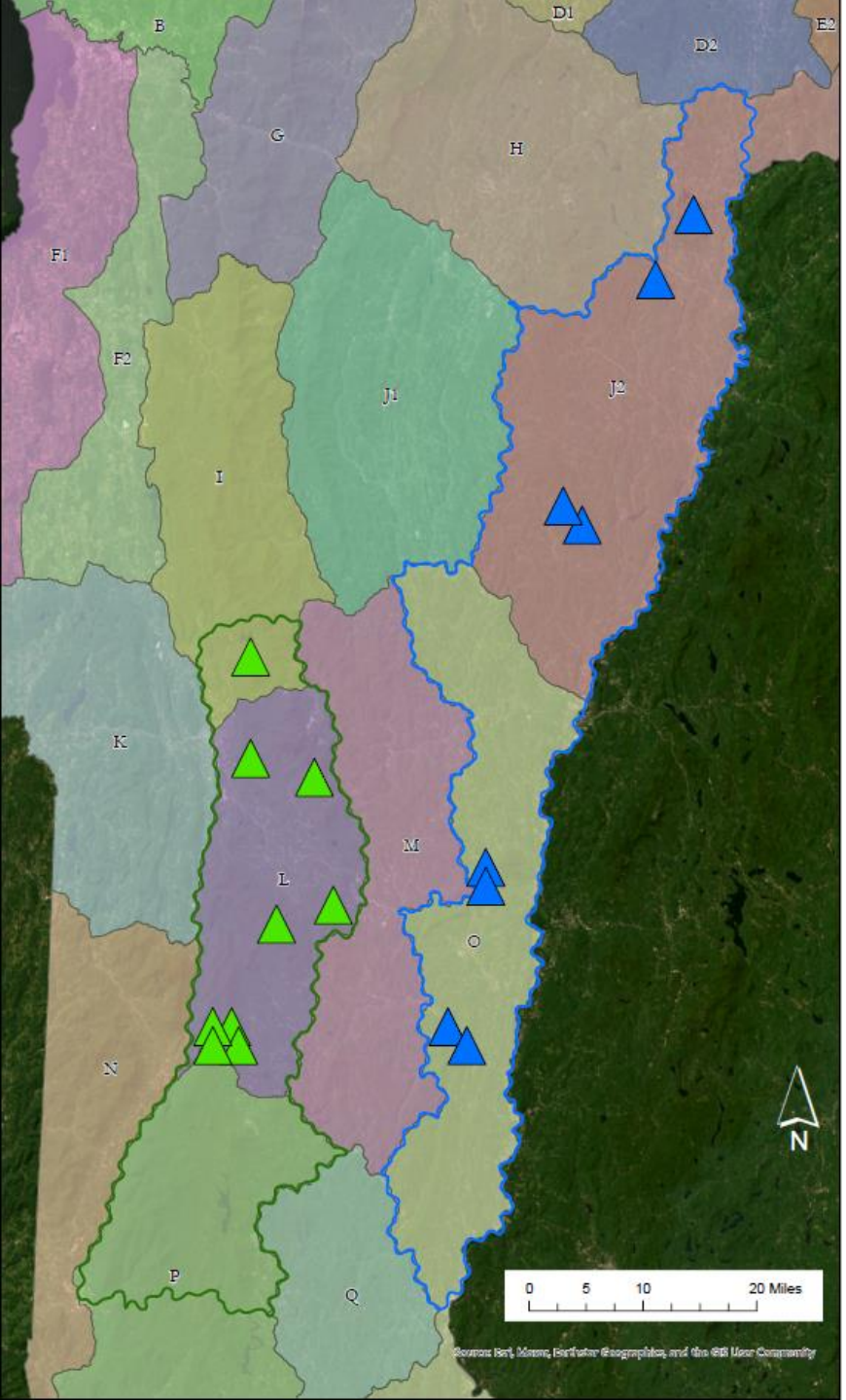
- Selected for beech habitat across most seasons
- Selected for oak habitat when beech crop poor and acorns abundant
- Generally avoided highly developed areas

During Construction & Wind Operation

- Reduced selection for beech near wind (up to1.5 km)
- Increased selection for beech stands further away
- Increased likelihood of selection for developed areas
  - Creating opportunities for learned anthropogenic foraging?

Protecting intact high-quality habitat is important

Black Bear Reproduction Study 823



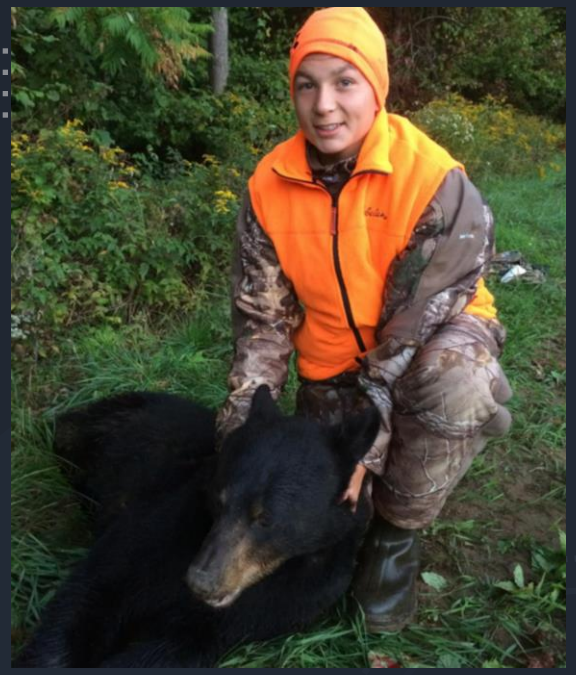
Assess productivity and relationships between major foods

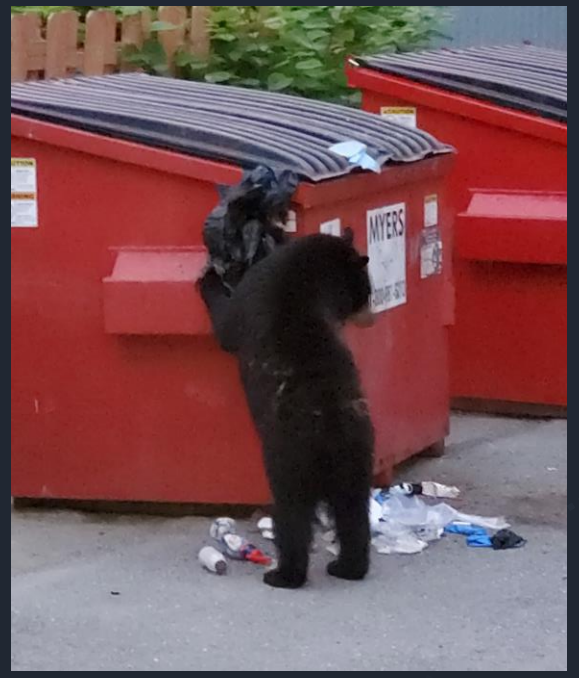
Study Area 1: Southern Green Mountains

- Goal: 9 adult female bears
- Dominant fall food: beechnuts

Study Area 2: Southern Vermont Piedmont/Connecticut River Valley

- Goal: 9 adult female bears
- Dominant fall food: acorns







"People … must accept that they are participants in the natural world, not mere observers."

-David Baron, The Beast In The Garden