



NCWRC Public Deer Management Forums Constituent Attitudes and Opinions June 2015

Constituent support and input into the NCWRC's deer management process is paramount to a successful deer management program. In an effort to engage our constituents, specifically deer hunters, Agency staff conducted public deer forums during June, 2015 in each NCWRC Administrative District. Deer hunters were invited to attend these forums to hear results from the statewide biological study and to initiate discussion about future deer management strategies. Attendees were presented with biological information about the deer harvest as well as the results of our efforts to develop Biological Deer Management Units (Appendix 1).

New interactive technology (i-clicker®) was used during the presentations to allow attendees to anonymously comment on questions. This new technology enabled staff biologists to pose specific questions to the audience and also allowed the members of the audience to propose specific questions during the discussion portion of the meetings. The use of this technology was well received by our constituents and provided us the ability to ascertain the audience's understanding of some of the material and data presented. It also allowed us to demonstrate where consensus and disagreement occurs between our constituents by individual district and statewide.

Herein, we provide the results of the audience's participation with answers to specific questions that were asked during the meetings. Because discussion evolved and differing attitudes and concerns were brought up in each meeting, the number of questions evolved as well. Staff asked certain predetermined questions at every forum, however questions were adaptively added as issues arose and the forums progressed. Not all questions were asked at each district, but once a question was added to the presentation every effort was made to continue to ask that question if possible or relevant to the district/attendees. A blank in the results tables indicates that the question was not asked at that particular district forum.

It is important to recognize that the responses to these questions represent the opinions of only those individuals that attended the meeting. They do not and should not be interpreted as statistically valid representations of deer hunters across the state. It may be most appropriate to view these results as a type of focus group evaluation. Many of these questions and answers were influenced by the presentation and the discussion that occurred at each meeting. This

information does provide us the opportunity to ascertain our constituent’s ability to receive and interpret our deer data and some of our analysis and it outlines for us where we can expect to see a level of consensus and potential disagreement on certain questions/issues if asked in a statistically valid survey. Additionally, it provides some direction for further analysis and an increased understanding of our constituents to improve the design of a more comprehensive approach for extending the discussion of deer management to a broader audience.

Presentation Segment of the Forums

Questions were posed at the beginning of each presentation as a way to introduce the attendees to the purpose of the meetings and the new technology. The first question of importance concerned how the attendees first learned of the meeting. This information is useful to the Agency to learn how best to communicate with our constituency. Overwhelmingly across the State the attendees first learned of the meeting through direct email contact, with word of mouth following at a distant second.

Question. What was the first way that you found out about this meeting?					
	Newspaper Article	Email	Facebook/ Twitter (social media)	Word of Mouth	Other
District 1	4.0%	65.0%	0.0%	31.0%	0.0%
District 2	18.0%	46.0%	3.0%	26.0%	8.0%
District 3	1.0%	58.0%	5.0%	28.0%	7.0%
District 4	3.0%	68.0%	0.0%	16.0%	13.0%
District 5	2.0%	81.0%	5.0%	11.0%	2.0%
District 6	2.0%	70.0%	0.0%	24.0%	5.0%
District 7	6.0%	65.0%	10.0%	16.0%	3.0%
District 8	4.0%	56.0%	0.0%	36.0%	4.0%
District 9	3.0%	45.0%	10.0%	28.0%	14.0%
Statewide	4.8%	61.6%	3.7%	24.0%	6.2%

The following question was posed of attendees at the first two forums. As discussions progressed and questions were added it was determined that we should remove this question in the interest of time.

Question	Do you use social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)?			
	Frequently (daily)	Occasionally (weekly)	Rarely (once a month/year)	Never
District 5	45.0%	12.0%	11.0%	32.0%
District 6	31.0%	15.0%	3.0%	52.0%
Average	38.0%	13.5%	7.0%	42.0%

Responses to this question from the first two forums were interesting. If you combine the responses of these two forums it appears that 52% of attendees use social media daily or weekly and 49% of those in attendance rarely or never use it. Unfortunately, the question regarding the age of attendees was not added until the 3rd forum so we unable to determine if there was possibly an age or generational difference in the answers to this question. With 52% of the attendees at these two forums using social media at least weekly, it appears that our Agency’s use of this media will likely continue to be an important way to communicate information to our constituents. However, other more direct lines of communication are still warranted. Responses to the initial question concerning how they found out about the meeting showed that 62% of those in attendance first learned of the meeting through direct contact by email. Even this response highlights the importance of today’s digital communications. Only 5% of those in attendance first learned of the meeting from a newspaper article.

Starting with the District 3 forum we began asking the audience to identify their age range. The results presented below show that most (76%) attendees were between the ages of 41 and 70 with 56-70 year olds making up the highest percentage of attendees. Is this a reflection of our aging hunter population or merely the fact that hunters in this 56-70 age range perhaps had more flexible time during the month of June and were more apt to attend the forum? We of course do not know this answer, but one might suspect there is a level of both involved. There did appear to be some minor differences between districts with the western districts leaning slightly towards a younger audience than the coastal districts. The reason for that difference is unknown of course and could simply be due to available time and interest in those particular districts.

Question.	Please tell us your age range.				
	24 & Under	25-40	41-55	56-70	71 & Older
District 1	11.0%	26.0%	19.0%	41.0%	4.0%
District 2	5.0%	15.0%	29.0%	41.0%	10.0%
District 3	1.0%	14.0%	37.0%	42.0%	6.0%
District 4	7.0%	20.0%	27.0%	37.0%	10.0%
District 5	-	-	-	-	-
District 6	-	-	-	-	-
District 7	3.0%	19.0%	44.0%	25.0%	9.0%
District 8	7.0%	29.0%	22.0%	31.0%	11.0%
District 9	14.0%	21.0%	31.0%	34.0%	0.0%
Statewide	6.9%	20.6%	29.9%	35.9%	7.1%

We next moved to some specific questions about the attendees' deer hunting habits. These questions were asked and then the audience was presented with the statewide results for the same data obtained from our 2013 Hunter Harvest Survey. The purpose of these questions were twofold, first to provide the presenters some insight into the hunters that were present in terms of their hunting effort and success, and second to allow hunters in attendance to see how their effort and success compared to a random sample of deer hunters across the state. Results suggest that hunters in attendance at these meetings were very avid deer hunters and quite successful when compared to the "average" deer hunter across the state.

Question.	If you deer hunt, on average, how many days do you hunt deer each year?			
	1 to 5	6 to 10	11 to 20	More than 20
District 1	15.0%	12.0%	15.0%	58.0%
District 2	5.0%	5.0%	11.0%	78.0%
District 3	8.0%	6.0%	25.0%	61.0%
District 4	10.0%	3.0%	17.0%	70.0%
District 5	3.0%	3.0%	27.0%	67.0%
District 6	6.0%	7.0%	21.0%	67.0%
District 7	13.0%	9.0%	22.0%	56.0%
District 8	12.0%	19.0%	33.0%	36.0%
District 9	17.0%	17.0%	24.0%	41.0%
Statewide	9.9%	9.0%	21.7%	59.3%

Results from the Statewide Hunter Harvest Survey

Question.	If you deer hunt, on average, how many days do you hunt deer each year?			
	1 to 5	6 to 10	11 to 20	More than 20
Statewide	27.5%	23.2%	24.9%	24.4%

Question.	On average, how many deer do you usually harvest each year?				
	0	1	2	3	4 or more
District 1	16.0%	8.0%	32.0%	28.0%	16.0%
District 2	8.0%	25.0%	25.0%	10.0%	33.0%
District 3	12.0%	23.0%	18.0%	15.0%	32.0%
District 4	19.0%	6.0%	23.0%	26.0%	26.0%
District 5	7.0%	22.0%	25.0%	19.0%	26.0%
District 6	8.0%	24.0%	28.0%	24.0%	17.0%
District 7	9.0%	32.0%	29.0%	9.0%	21.0%
District 8	18.0%	25.0%	23.0%	20.0%	14.0%
District 9	17.0%	17.0%	24.0%	41.0%	0.0%
Statewide	11.4%	28.2%	42.7%	49.2%	20.6%

Results from the Statewide Hunter Harvest Survey

Question.	On average, how many deer do you usually harvest each year?				
	0	1	2	3	4
Statewide	49%	24%	13%	6%	8%

Next we asked the hunters to identify the season in which they hunt most. While results were predictable by district, the table below does allow us to see that hunters in certain districts travel to other “season” areas to deer hunt. Only Districts 6 and 8 actually have two different seasons within the District.

Question.	Which deer season do you hunt the most in?			
	Eastern	Central	Northwestern	Western
District 1	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
District 2	95.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%
District 3	94.0%	5.0%	1.0%	0.0%
District 4	97.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%
District 5	9.0%	87.0%	4.0%	0.0%
District 6	19.0%	75.0%	6.0%	0.0%
District 7	6.0%	9.0%	84.0%	0.0%
District 8	5.0%	2.0%	25.0%	68.0%
District 9	10.0%	10.0%	7.0%	72.0%

The following three questions were asked immediately before and then immediately after each presentation. The purpose of these questions was to determine the perspective of hunters prior to the presentation and then to assess if their opinions changed after seeing certain information that was presented.

Question	Do we shoot too many bucks before the peak of the rut?					
	Yes		No		Not Sure	
	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
District 1	35.0%	67.0%	35.0%	33.0%	31.0%	0.0%
District 2	46.0%	55.0%	39.0%	36.0%	15.0%	9.0%
District 3	38.0%	77.0%	33.0%	19.0%	29.0%	4.0%
District 4	44.0%	68.0%	32.0%	25.0%	24.0%	7.0%
District 5	33.0%	82.0%	30.0%	12.0%	35.0%	6.0%
District 6	31.0%	78.0%	40.0%	14.0%	29.0%	8.0%
District 7	36.0%	82.0%	33.0%	11.0%	30.0%	7.0%
District 8	36.0%	71.0%	40.0%	20.0%	24.0%	9.0%
District 9	21.0%	85.0%	28.0%	4.0%	52.0%	12.0%
Statewide	35.6%	73.9%	34.4%	19.3%	29.9%	6.9%

Attendees’ opinion on this topic appeared to change after seeing the information presented. Approximately thirty six percent (35.6%) of the hunters (statewide) did not feel we shot too many bucks before the peak of the rut before the data/information were presented. While after the presentation, 74% of the hunters (statewide) indicated that their opinion had changed and that in fact we did shoot too many bucks before the peak of the rut. This question did not specifically ask the hunters if they felt a change in season structure/timing was warranted to address this issue.

Our next question addressed the concept of season timing. We wanted to get the perspective/opinion of those in attendance regarding the opening of their deer season. We made clear that we wanted their opinion and there was no right or wrong answer. There were very specific and interesting differences in the before and after responses across the districts. This likely was dependent on which season they most frequently hunted and in what part of the state they were hunting.

Question.	Does your deer season open at the right time?							
	Yes		No, it's too early		No, it's too late		Not Sure	
	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
District 1	62.0%	50.0%	31.0%	46.0%	4.0%	0.0%	4.0%	4.0%
District 2	59.0%	40.0%	31.0%	49.0%	8.0%	6.0%	3.0%	6.0%
District 3	57.0%	40.0%	29.0%	53.0%	9.0%	3.0%	5.0%	5.0%
District 4	66.0%	81.0%	23.0%	15.0%	9.0%	4.0%	3.0%	0.0%
District 5	56.0%	40.0%	15.0%	46.0%	21.0%	7.0%	8.0%	7.0%
District 6	57.0%	44.0%	17.0%	39.0%	19.0%	14.0%	7.0%	3.0%
District 7	56.0%	38.0%	25.0%	48.0%	19.0%	10.0%	0.0%	3.0%
District 8	60.0%	39.0%	21.0%	55.0%	12.0%	7.0%	7.0%	0.0%
District 9	41.0%	12.0%	24.0%	77.0%	21.0%	4.0%	14.0%	8.0%
Statewide	57.1%	42.7%	24.0%	47.6%	13.6%	6.1%	5.7%	4.0%

We next asked the attendees their opinion about the harvest of yearling (1.5 year old) bucks. This issue was not specifically addressed in the presentation beyond presenting the actual harvest percentages, thus the hunter’s opinions before and after were solely dependent on their interpretation of the data presented. It is interesting that both the “Yes” and “No” percentages increased slightly after the presentation while the “Not Sure” category decreased significantly. This suggests that the changes in the yes/no categories are likely linked to participants having a more specific opinion after viewing the data. We cannot verify that this occurred because we

could not determine responses of individual attendees. Regardless, at the statewide level 5% of the not sure responses shifted to the yes and no categories at a ratio of 3% and 2%, respectively.

Question.	Do you think we shoot too many 1.5 year old bucks?					
	Yes		No		Not Sure	
	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
District 1	81.0%	86.0%	8.0%	14.0%	12.0%	0.0%
District 2	79.0%	75.0%	18.0%	23.0%	3.0%	3.0%
District 3	78.0%	82.0%	13.0%	18.0%	9.0%	0.0%
District 4	86.0%	90.0%	9.0%	7.0%	6.0%	3.0%
District 5	83.0%	93.0%	8.0%	7.0%	10.0%	0.0%
District 6	83.0%	86.0%	10.0%	11.0%	7.0%	3.0%
District 7	84.0%	87.0%	6.0%	10.0%	9.0%	3.0%
District 8	89.0%	85.0%	9.0%	13.0%	1.0%	2.0%
District 9	66.0%	77.0%	17.0%	12.0%	17.0%	12.0%
Statewide	81.0%	84.6%	10.9%	12.8%	8.2%	2.9%

Related to the topic of yearling buck harvest we asked participants to tell us their perception of the percentage of 1.5 year old bucks in the reported antlered deer harvest. This question was asked after presenting an age structure from the early 1980s harvest. After answering the question, attendees were then shown the actual buck age structure for the state.

Question.	Across the State, what percentage of the antlered bucks shot by hunters are 1.5 years old?			
	around 20%	around 40%	around 60%	70% or above
District 1	0.0%	32.0%	41.0%	27.0%
District 2	10.0%	26.0%	36.0%	28.0%
District 3	5.0%	47.0%	37.0%	10.0%
District 4	9.0%	36.0%	39.0%	15.0%
District 5	7.0%	31.0%	34.0%	27.0%
District 6	3.0%	41.0%	39.0%	17.0%
District 7	6.0%	41.0%	47.0%	6.0%
District 8	0.0%	37.0%	35.0%	28.0%
District 9	7.0%	59.0%	24.0%	10.0%
Statewide	5.2%	38.9%	36.9%	18.7%
Actual Statewide %	40.8%			

At the end of each presentation and before the floor was opened for discussions, questions, and comments we attempted to glean the opinion of those in attendance about what they felt the future of our deer season structure should be. We were clear that at this time there were no proposals to change anything but we truly wanted their perception/opinion on whether we needed to continue to investigate this subject and if they felt there was some room for improvement.

At the conclusion of the presentation we pointed out that the biological/scientific analysis of our seasons suggested that they are not the best biological fit and that perhaps we could improve our deer management by making some adjustments. However, we stressed that while science and habitat provided us with important information, hunter/constituent desires are very important if our deer management program is to be successful.

Prior to entering the discussion segment of each forum we asked the following question:

Question	At this point in our conversation, do you feel that:			
	We need to make some changes to our deer seasons	Our deer seasons are just fine and we don't need to change	I'm not sure	It doesn't matter to me
District 1	50.0%	35.0%	15.0%	0.0%
District 2	59.0%	26.0%	13.0%	3.0%
District 3	64.0%	29.0%	5.0%	3.0%
District 4	43.0%	43.0%	11.0%	4.0%
District 5	79.0%	10.0%	8.0%	3.0%
District 6	62.0%	24.0%	12.0%	2.0%
District 7	69.0%	22.0%	9.0%	0.0%
District 8	73.0%	14.0%	14.0%	0.0%
District 9	89.0%	7.0%	4.0%	0.0%
Statewide	65.3%	23.3%	10.1%	1.7%

The vast majority of those in attendance felt some level of change to our deer seasons is warranted. At a minimum the answers suggest that the hunters in attendance received and processed the information provided and believed that the Agency should continue efforts to evaluate our deer seasons and deer season structures for potential changes.

Discussion Segment of the Forums

Numerous topics were introduced by both staff and the attendees during the discussion segment of the forums. These topics generated discussion and allowed staff to ask the group many interesting and informative questions about their personal motivations, perceptions and desires related to deer hunting and the deer population in the area they hunt. As previously stated, questions evolved and were added to the forums as we progressed across the state, thus some questions were not asked at every district.

The motivation for deer hunting and how that might influence individual perspectives on certain proposals and concepts related to deer management was often discussed at the meetings. With the use of the i>clicker® technology we were able to show the attendees how difficult it can be to satisfy everyone when it comes to deer management. While many times the room seemed to be in unison on a topic, use of the i>clicker® often demonstrated that there were actually significant differences of opinion.

We knew that individual hunters may hunt for a variety of reasons but we instructed those in attendance that they had to choose the primary reason they hunt deer in the question below. The results are quite interesting. While statewide the largest percentage of hunters identified “hunting for meat” as their primary reason, it is important to note that this was not consistent across all districts. In fact, there are very interesting differences in the reasons for hunting deer reported by these different groups of avid deer hunters.

Question.	Why do you primarily hunt deer?			
	Meat	Recreation	Possibility of killing a trophy	Other
District 1	44.0%	36.0%	16.0%	4.0%
District 2	-	-	-	-
District 3	25.0%	54.0%	13.0%	7.0%
District 4	31.0%	55.0%	14.0%	0.0%
District 5	-	-	-	-
District 6	35.0%	35.0%	29.0%	2.0%
District 7	60.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%
District 8	44.0%	34.0%	22.0%	0.0%
District 9	55.0%	41.0%	0.0%	3.0%
Statewide	42.0%	39.3%	16.3%	2.3%

Attendees were asked at all districts to provide their perspective of the deer population trend in the area they hunt. Responses from most areas of the state suggest that hunters in attendance perceive a decreasing population trend in the areas they hunt. Only in Districts 7 and 9 did hunters perceive the population to be stable and even more interesting is the fact that 21% of those in attendance at the District 9 forum perceived their population to be increasing. That would be consistent with the current harvest trends in many District 9 counties and the information presented.

Question.	The deer population in the area you hunt is:			
	Increasing	Stable	Decreasing	Not Sure
District 1	0.0%	44.0%	48.0%	8.0%
District 2	15.0%	27.0%	56.0%	2.0%
District 3	6.0%	36.0%	55.0%	3.0%
District 4	12.0%	30.0%	45.0%	12.0%
District 5	5.0%	36.0%	49.0%	9.0%
District 6	6.0%	29.0%	61.0%	3.0%
District 7	6.0%	58.0%	26.0%	10.0%
District 8	13.0%	35.0%	48.0%	4.0%
District 9	21.0%	34.0%	31.0%	14.0%
Statewide	9.3%	36.6%	46.6%	7.2%

We asked the attendees to select the statement below that described their desire for deer hunting. Interestingly 61% of attendees indicated they didn't mind seeing fewer deer if those deer were of better quality. We intentionally did not define quality. The discussion about the term quality occurred at several meeting, while many hunters viewed quality in terms of antlers, some in the audience stated that in their minds quality meant healthy animals.

Question.	Which one of these best describes your desires for deer hunting?		
	I like seeing lots of deer and having plenty of deer to shoot	I don't mind seeing fewer deer if it means the deer are better quality	It doesn't really matter to me either way, I just like being in the woods
District 1	41.0%	55.0%	5.0%
District 2	28.0%	62.0%	10.0%
District 3	31.0%	61.0%	8.0%
District 4	10.0%	68.0%	23.0%
District 5	17.0%	78.0%	6.0%
District 6	23.0%	68.0%	9.0%
District 7	37.0%	57.0%	7.0%
District 8	29.0%	67.0%	4.0%
District 9	45.0%	34.0%	21.0%
Statewide	29.0%	61.1%	10.3%

There were some differences in answers by district. Most notable perhaps is the fact that only in District 9, which currently has the most restrictive hunting season and likely the lowest deer densities in the State, did the majority of hunters indicate they like seeing lots of deer and having plenty to shoot. While there are many possible interpretations of that, one might assume that hunting in areas with low deer densities is difficult and seeing deer is a measure of success.

Examining the answers to the previous two questions provides some insight and explanation into the responses to the next question of whether the Agency should reduce doe harvest. It was explained at the meetings that the only way for the Agency (by regulation) to increase the population in a given area is by reducing the either-sex days, thus reducing doe harvest. As a result of those discussions, we feel confident that hunters answered the following question with an informed opinion.

Question.	Do you believe we should reduce the doe harvest?		
	Yes	No	No Sure
District 1	19.0%	67.0%	15.0%
District 2	37.0%	56.0%	7.0%
District 3	33.0%	66.0%	1.0%
District 4	16.0%	77.0%	6.0%
District 5	-	-	-
District 6	26.0%	70.0%	5.0%
District 7	32.0%	57.0%	11.0%
District 8	29.0%	67.0%	5.0%
District 9	45.0%	45.0%	10.0%
Statewide	29.6%	63.1%	7.5%

The forum attendees across the state did not appear to support a reduction in doe harvest. Was this because they perceive the population to be of acceptable density or is this because while they perceive their population is declining, they are not willing to sacrifice the harvest of does to perhaps reverse that trend? That can't be determined solely by the answers to this question but we propose that this is an important subject and one in which the Agency should continue dialog with our deer hunters.

In many areas the actual population density may be stabilizing at a lower level than what was observed in the 90s and early 2000s and biologically this may actually be a positive trend. In many areas deer densities likely were too high to maximize the potential of the population in terms of weights, productivity and antler characteristics.

Conversely, in some areas added mortality factors such as new predators on the landscape may be contributing to a decline in population density and we suspect this will be an unacceptable trend for deer hunters. The Agency should remain vigilant in monitoring these deer populations, use the best research and scientific principles and methods available to understand the changing ecological influences on the landscape, and be quick to respond when actual biological information is determined to suggest changes in harvest and management strategies are warranted.

While agency biologists and our hunters across the landscape have significant knowledge and understanding with regards to deer management, a full understanding of the potentially new dynamics of our deer populations and factors exerting pressure on those populations is not yet available. Ecologically the deer populations and these new mortality factors will balance themselves overtime, whether that balance is found at a deer population density that hunters find acceptable is the greater question. Ultimately we suggest that the Agency first learn the impacts

and influences these new mortality pressures are having on our populations and then determine the appropriate adjustments to the one mortality factor that can be controlled by regulation, the timing and amount of hunter harvest. Our biologists should also begin discussions with constituents when doing technical guidance visits on other alternatives to address this issue such as habitat modifications.

Consistent with any discussion concerning deer and deer hunting, the conversation turned to buck management. Those in attendance at every district were asked whether they believed the Agency should further restrict buck harvest.

Question	Should the Agency further Restrict Buck Harvest?		
	Yes	No	Not Sure
District 1	48.0%	35.0%	17.0%
District 2	45.0%	53.0%	3.0%
District 3	50.0%	39.0%	11.0%
District 4	56.0%	34.0%	9.0%
District 5	55.0%	27.0%	18.0%
District 6	59.0%	37.0%	4.0%
District 7	53.0%	43.0%	3.0%
District 8	54.0%	39.0%	7.0%
District 9	50.0%	32.0%	18.0%
Statewide	52.2%	37.7%	10.0%

Once again the results provide some level of insight to the difficulties in managing deer for everyone. While most hunters (52%) across the state felt the Agency should further reduce the buck harvest, the strength of that position was not consistent across districts. In some districts a high percentage of hunters were not sure about their response to that question and in one, District 2, the majority response was no.

This question immediately spawned more discussion about buck management and how to effectively regulate the buck harvest. We next asked several follow up questions at most forums concerning specific ways to regulate the buck harvest.

Question	Should the Agency further Restrict Buck Harvest by reducing the buck bag limit?		
	Yes	No	Not Sure
District 1	52.0%	43.0%	4.0%
District 2	33.0%	62.0%	5.0%
District 3	-	-	-
District 4	45.0%	55.0%	0.0%
District 5	-	-	-
District 6	-	-	-
District 7	33.0%	60.0%	7.0%
District 8	58.0%	40.0%	2.0%
District 9	62.0%	31.0%	7.0%
Statewide	47.2%	48.5%	4.3%

Responses to whether the Agency should reduce the buck bag limit were unpredictable with no real pattern across the state. Districts 1, 8 and 9 had the highest percentage of hunters in support of reducing the buck bag limit. These represent one area with the 4-buck bag limit and two areas with the 2-buck bag limit.

The discussion next drifted to trying to increase the quality/age of the bucks by placing some form of antler restriction on the individual bucks that could be harvested. The following question was asked regarding the concept of limiting harvest to a particular “size” of buck using antler point restrictions.

Question	Should the Agency further Restrict Buck Harvest by implementing antler point restrictions?		
	Yes	No	Not Sure
District 1	46.0%	54.0%	0.0%
District 2	58.0%	39.0%	3.0%
District 3	-	-	-
District 4	63.0%	34.0%	3.0%
District 5	-	-	-
District 6	-	-	-
District 7	43.0%	54.0%	4.0%
District 8	76.0%	20.0%	4.0%
District 9	72.0%	21.0%	7.0%
Statewide	59.7%	37%	3.5%

As expected most of those in attendance were supportive of that concept, however this was not the case in Districts 1 and 7 where the majority of hunters did not support the concept of antler point restrictions. After asking this question in most districts a discussion followed about the effectiveness of antler restrictions specifically at large scales. We talked about making sure that antler restrictions actually produce the desired results and do not inadvertently protect bucks that should not be protected or, perhaps just as troubling, allow for the harvest of your highest quality bucks as yearlings.

We discussed that while we encourage selective harvest criteria for bucks (including antler restrictions) at the smaller scale (hunt club, etc.) we had concerns about potential frustrating and even detrimental effects they might have at larger scales. Inadvertently, in District 7 this discussion occurred prior to asking the question and may have influenced the opinions of those in attendance relative to Agency mandated antler point restrictions. In District 1 the question was asked prior to the discussion and it would appear from the responses that attendees there slightly favored a bag limit restriction over antler point restrictions if further buck restrictions were put into place.

Obviously the avid group of deer hunters that attended these meetings are concerned about buck harvest and significant discussion relative to buck management should continue across the landscape. They are somewhat conflicted as to what might be the best way to manage bucks through regulations. Agency staff developed a report on the concept of buck harvest regulations, *An Evaluation of Selective Harvest Criteria and Considerations for Implementation in North Carolina*, July 2009. This report (Appendix 2.) provides detailed discussion and examination of the different benefits and challenges of regulatory Selective Harvest Criteria (point restrictions, etc.).

Because NCWRC game lands, specifically national forest lands, are a significant portion of the landscape in the western region, we asked hunters in Districts 7, 8, and 9 to identify the lands on which they primarily hunt. District 9 had the largest percentage of hunters that hunt primarily on game lands and/or hunted equally on both game lands and private lands.

Question.	I primarily hunt deer on:		
	Game Lands (State, National Forest, etc.)	Private Lands	Both almost equally
District 7	3.0%	94.0%	3.0%
District 8	11.0%	76.0%	13.0%
District 9	38.0%	45.0%	17.0%
Average	17.3%	71.7%	11.0%

The next two questions actually came from the audience during two of the meetings. The first, asking whether the Agency should establish a trophy management game land, was proposed by an audience member in District 6.

Question	Would you like to see a trophy management game land?		
	Yes	No	Unsure
District 1	60.0%	32.0%	8.0%
District 2	-	-	-
District 3	60.0%	34.0%	6.0%
District 4	66.0%	22.0%	13.0%
District 5	-	-	-
District 6	65.0%	15.0%	20.0%
District 7	73.0%	17.0%	10.0%
District 8	78.0%	11.0%	11.0%
District 9	72.0%	24.0%	3.0%
Statewide	67.7%	22.1%	10.1%

While we can't determine what percent of the attendees hunted on game lands except in the western districts, it is interesting to note that the majority of hunters in every district that this question was asked responded favorably to the idea of a trophy management game land.

The question of establishing additional archery only game lands was asked at the request of an audience member in District 9. Because the discussion was primarily focused on establishing archery only areas on national forest game lands we asked the question again in District 8 where significant amounts of those lands also occur. Opinions seemed to differ slightly between these two districts but the majority of those in attendance did appear to support the concept of archery only areas on some of these lands.

Question	Should the agency establish additional archery only game lands?		
	Yes	No	Unsure
District 8	59.0%	34.0%	7.0%
District 9	79.0%	11.0%	11.0%
Average	46.0%	15.0%	6.0%

Hunting methods might impact a hunter’s opinion on certain topics or issues, so we asked those attending meetings in the eastern deer season area where dog hunting is legal how they “hunt deer”. Approximately two-thirds responded that they hunt by still hunting, approximately one third responded that they hunt using both methods, and only 4% responded that they hunt exclusively with dogs. Once again this represents only a sample of hunters who actually attended the forums. These responses are interesting but prior to any significant changes or alterations in seasons or regulations the Agency should certainly attempt to engage hunters at a more equitable or representative proportion of the hunting methods in the eastern season.

Question.	I hunt deer by:			
	Using dogs	Still Hunting	Both	Other
District 1	8.0%	56.0%	36.0%	0.0%
District 2	3.0%	77.0%	20.0%	0.0%
District 3	4.0%	57.0%	38.0%	0.0%
District 4	0.0%	79.0%	18.0%	4.0%
Statewide	3.8%	67.3%	28.0%	1.0%

An interesting question was asked by an audience member in District 7. Because a discussion was taking place regarding baiting of deer the audience was asked how many used bait to hunt deer. Not surprisingly, the majority of deer hunters did use bait. However, it is interesting that 31% of the hunters responded that they did not use bait to hunt deer. Because only 6% of the hunters responded that they hunt exclusively or equally on game lands (where baiting is prohibited) there was a rather larger portion of hunters present at the District 7 forum that did not use bait.

Question	Do you use bait to hunt deer?	
	Yes	No
District 7	69.0%	31.0%

Starting with the fourth forum we began asking attendees several questions related to the use of trail cameras and their willingness to work with our Agency and the Museum of Science on possible “citizen science” projects.

Question	Do you use trail cameras to monitor deer or other wildlife on the property you own or hunt?		Would you be willing to participate in a study by the WRC & Museum of Science where you would use your trail cameras outside of the deer hunting season?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
District 1	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%	0.0%
District 2	78.0%	22.0%	92.0%	8.0%
District 3	-	-	-	-
District 4	79.0%	21.0%	87.0%	13.0%
District 5	-	-	-	-
District 6	-	-	-	-
District 7	73.0%	27.0%	92.0%	8.0%
District 8	80.0%	20.0%	90.0%	10.0%
District 9	72.0%	28.0%	89.0%	11.0%
Statewide	74%	26%	92%	8%

Finally, we asked attendees their opinion about the forums and whether they would like to see more or similar forums in the future. The forums appeared to be well received.

Question	Is this type of forum helpful?			Would you like to see more forums or something similar?		
	Yes	No	Not Sure	Yes	No	Not Sure
District 1	96.0%	0.0%	4.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
District 2	90.0%	8.0%	3.0%	92.0%	0.0%	8.0%
District 3	99.0%	0.0%	1.0%	96.0%	3.0%	1.0%
District 4	94.0%	3.0%	3.0%	92.0%	4.0%	4.0%
District 5	88.0%	4.0%	8.0%	98.0%	0.0%	1.0%
District 6	94.0%	2.0%	5.0%	99.0%	1.0%	0.0%
District 7	96.0%	0.0%	4.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
District 8	95.0%	2.0%	2.0%	95.0%	5.0%	0.0%
District 9	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Statewide	94.7%	2.1%	3.3%	96.9%	1.4%	1.6%

Constituent Attendance/Participation at Forums	
District	# of Attendees
1	27
2	41
3	83
4	35
5	67
6	74
7	34
8	45
9	29
Statewide Total	435
Statewide Average	48

Conclusions:

Feedback we received from these nine forums, in essence nine focus groups, indicates a number of very important considerations for continuing discussions about deer management in our State:

- 1) A large percentage of the attendees at these forums believe that some changes are needed in our current deer hunting seasons (statewide average = 65.3%). While this percentage will likely differ for the deer hunter population at large, this result strongly suggests that we should “continue the conversation” and further investigate social desires for deer management into the future.
- 2) Opinions about what constitutes quality deer hunting and how deer management should be changed are many and vary considerably across the State.
- 3) If we customize our approach, our deer hunter constituency is very willing to engage in helping our agency define the future of deer management in our State.
- 4) To optimize solutions for moving forward we must meld biological data with the attitudes and opinions of our citizens interested in managing our deer resource.

- 5) Recommended next steps include broadly disseminating all information gathered thus far (including this report) and initiating a statewide, science-based survey of our deer hunters. While these forums and the results therefrom are vital to determining the future of deer management, they do not reflect a representative sample of the subcultures in the deer hunting community. Therefore, we should use the results from these forums as the springboard to more complete understanding gained through comprehensive sampling of our deer hunters.