



QUALITY DEER MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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Date: 30 January 2011
To: Pennsylvania Game Commission
From: Rick Watts, Pennsylvania State Chapter President
Kip Adams, Northern Director of Education and Outreach
Re: Deer Management

On behalf of the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) and the Pennsylvania State Chapter we appreciate the opportunity to provide input on Pennsylvania's 2011-12 deer season. The QDMA is an international nonprofit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to ensuring the future of white-tailed deer, wildlife habitat, and our hunting heritage. The QDMA has over 50,000 members nationwide including over 3,000 in Pennsylvania. Notably, Pennsylvania's membership includes numerous wildlife and forestry professionals.

Pennsylvania's deer management program has been nationally recognized for many years, both favorably and unfavorably. Historically it was recognized as one of the poorest in the country. More recently it has been recognized as a national leader – deer herds in balance with what the habitat could support, balanced adult sex ratios, complete age structures, healthy deer, improved habitat health, and increased recreational opportunity. These were the results of a science-based deer management program supported by the majority of Pennsylvania sportsmen and women.

Unfortunately, unscientific management is becoming the norm today. This is irresponsible on the Agency's part, unfair to Pennsylvania citizens, and unfortunate for Pennsylvania sportsmen and women. We recognize there is a vocal minority unhappy with current conditions in the Commonwealth. However, a quick comparison to other states clearly shows how successful Pennsylvania's deer management program is, and how fortunate our hunters are. For example:

- PA is one of only six states in the U.S. to harvest more than 300,000 whitetails annually;
- In 2009 PA harvested 2.4 antlered bucks per square mile (PSM)– this is higher than the averages for the Northeastern (2.0) and Midwestern (1.5 bucks PSM) states;
- In 2009 for the first time in several decades (or maybe ever) over half of PA's antlered buck harvest was 2.5 years or older;
- In 2009 PA harvested 4.4 antlerless deer PSM – this is higher than the averages for the Northeastern (3.2), Midwestern (2.1) and Southeastern (3.6 antlerless deer PSM) states. If PA has no deer how can our hunters continue to annually harvest more on a PSM basis than most other states in the U.S.?
- In 2009 PA harvested 1.9 antlerless deer per antlered buck – this is higher than the averages for the Northeastern (1.4), Midwestern (1.4) and Southeastern (1.1 antlerless deer per antlered buck) states.

The above data are included on pages 5, 7, 9 and 27 of QDMA's 2011 Whitetail Report available at www.QDMA.com, and they clearly show how well Pennsylvania compares to

other states. These are reasons to celebrate our deer management program, not change it or replace its managers. They also highlight the successes of our program; successes that clearly would not be attainable if the herd was mismanaged as some contend.

One final measure is according to Pope and Young record book data from 1999 to 2009, only eight states harvested and recorded more record-book bucks on a PSM basis than Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania finished above popular trophy destinations like Kansas and Kentucky! Not that record-book entries are a goal of Pennsylvania's program, but they clearly show the success of our program and the opportunities available for our sportsmen and women.

Regarding the proposal to amend the antler point requirement in WMUs 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B and 2D, we support this change as long as the new requirement still protects the majority of yearling bucks, Game Commission staff evaluate the impacts of the amendment, and the majority of hunters and landowners in the affected WMUs support it.

We acknowledge there are some areas in the Commonwealth with very low deer densities, and we sympathize with hunters in these areas. However, we contend the reason for these densities is habitat related in most instances. The proper way to address these situations is through improved habitat management, not reorganization of the deer management program.

Our final comments relate to DMAP and youth hunter recruitment and retention. We support all public and private landowners having the opportunity to take full advantage of the DMAP program, and keeping DMAP coupons separate from the general antlerless license allocation. This is one of the most useful programs ever afforded to landowners. Thank you for writing a resolution in support of the transfer tag legislation for mentored hunters. Our mentored youth hunting program is an overwhelming success, and the opportunity to harvest antlerless deer in this program will further increase its value. Alternatively, the quickest way to extinguish excitement for young hunters is to restrict their hunting and harvest opportunities. Given the absence of Sunday hunting and the demands of school and extracurricular activities, many youth are only able to hunt the opening day of firearms season. What a shame that youth in 8 of our 22 WMUs (over a third of our state) are not allowed to shoot an antlerless deer. Non-concurrent seasons are extremely counterproductive to youth recruitment and retention.

We strongly urge you to return to managing our wildlife resources with science-based programs. The majority of Pennsylvania hunters are currently reaping the benefits of a highly successful deer management program. However, non-concurrent seasons, unscientific antlerless allocations, and reduced opportunity all threaten these successes. Major changes to this program will negatively impact Pennsylvania's whitetail herds, other wildlife species, habitat, and current and future hunters. Thank you for your time, and we'll close by offering our assistance in any way that we can help the Board or Agency regarding deer management.

Respectfully,

Rick Watts

Rick Watts
Pennsylvania State Chapter President

Kip Adams

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Director of Education & Outreach