

# Joint Task Force on Deer Population Control frequently asked questions

## *Answers from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources*

### ***What role did IDNR have in the creation of the Joint Task Force?***

The Joint Task Force (JTF) on Deer Population Control was created by House Joint Resolution 65 of the 95<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, with the mission “to examine and make recommendations on ways to manage the Illinois deer population”. The resolution specified that the JTF was to consist of 15 members, of which 8 were members of the General Assembly (or their appointee). The remaining seven members were also described by the resolution: “the Director of Natural Resources or his or her designee; one member representing conservation police officers appointed by the Director of Natural Resources; the Director of State Police or his or her designee; one member appointed by an association representing firearm deer hunters; one member appointed by an association representing Illinois archery deer hunters; one member appointed by an association representing the insurance industry; and one member appointed by an association representing farmers”. IDNR was not consulted prior to passage of the resolution, but did make recommendations as to which associations might be contacted to appoint their respective member for the JTF. In addition, IDNR named professional staff to serve on a Joint Task Force Technical Support Group, whose purpose was to provide pertinent information, data, and advice to the JTF members.

### ***Why use deer/vehicle collision data to assess Illinois’ deer herd?***

The JTF recommended using the rate of deer/vehicle accidents for a number of reasons. Biologists throughout the Midwest have routinely utilized accident rate information as an index to deer, and other wildlife populations, for many years. Note that this is the RATE of accidents, not the raw number of accidents, so it takes into account that counties with a lot of traffic can have a lot of accidents without having a significant number of deer. It also accounts for changes in the amount of traffic over time (from year to year). As a result, this accident rate serves as an index to deer population size, functioning in a manner similar to spotlight counts and many other commonly used population indices. That is why there is such a difference between the top 10 counties on a list of the total number of annual deer/vehicle accidents versus a list of the *rate* of accidents – many Illinois counties that have a high *number* of accidents simply have a tremendous amount of vehicular traffic. Since deer/vehicle accidents and the amount of traffic are tracked every year by the Illinois Department of Transportation, this was an index that was already available statewide at no additional cost; it is straightforward and easy to understand; and it is data that is collected by a neutral party with no stake in deer management. Most people have difficulty visualizing what 20 or 40 deer/mi<sup>2</sup> (or 10,000 deer in a county) is like, or whether those numbers would be problematic for farmers or motorists, so the JTF recommended using the risk of deer collisions as a more meaningful objective.

***Why are you listening to special interest groups? Special interests should be the last voices heard on this subject.***

The number of deer that the Illinois landscape can support (the ‘biological carrying capacity’) is huge, far higher than reasonable Illinoisans can accept because of the problems and damage that they would cause. As a result, acceptable levels for the deer herd must be based on how many deer our society is willing to allow. By definition, anyone that has some interest in Illinois deer belongs to one or more “special interest groups”, whether they are hunters, wildlife watchers, conservationists, farmers, nursery owners, motorists, businessmen, or others. Each of these “special interest groups” has a very different perspective on the size and condition of the deer population. Since acceptable deer population levels are primarily a societal question, the most sensible approach is to involve in the process those segments of our society who have an interest in deer. The challenge is to take all this diverse and sometimes opposing public input, and develop a deer population level that is acceptable to people in a given area.

***How would you respond to members of the public or hunters who feel their voices have not been heard?***

We have and will continue to take input from the public including hunters. Prior to the JTF making their final recommendations, IDNR provided news releases and held a series of public meetings around the State for the purpose of gathering public input. At those meetings, our staff answered questions and solicited comments from attendees. Attendees were also encouraged to fill out survey forms to provide their opinions about the various options that were being discussed by the JTF. In addition, an online survey was made available on the internet so that interested persons who could not attend a meeting could also provide input. About 1,300 surveys were completed, analyzed, and considered in the decision-making process. Most notably, this input was a major factor in discarding consideration of an October antlerless-only season (significant opposition) and recommendation of a longer January antlerless-only season (significant support by all major interest groups). Results of the public’s input is available in the final report on the DNR website at [www.dnr.state.il.us](http://www.dnr.state.il.us).

***Extending the length of the Late Winter Deer Season from 3 to 9 days risks over-harvest and driving down the deer herd. How can you guard against that?***

Each county is unique in regard to its deer population and the status of that population compared to the Task Force’s recommended objective. In counties that are significantly above target levels, the goal will be to reduce herds until the goal is reached. In other counties, maintaining the current deer population size is desired. Regulations for the Late Winter Season allow for different permit sales restrictions depending on the status of the deer herd in open counties. There are also counties which will not be open for this season. As a result, a county’s regulations can be changed to address its specific needs.

***Why offer an antlerless-only season that runs until about mid-January and risk harvesting all those adult bucks that have already shed their antlers?***

A small proportion of bucks have shed their antlers by mid-January. Experience throughout the Midwest, not just Illinois, has shown that regardless of the scheduling of antlerless-only seasons

within the framework of a normal hunting season, you can expect that about 20% to 25% of the antlerless harvest will be males. For instance, during the last three Late-Winter Seasons (January) from 2006 thru 2008, males comprised from 20.6% to 23.6% of the harvest. During the last three Youth Seasons (October) in which harvest was restricted to antlerless deer (2004-2006), males comprised from 20.8% to 25.8% of the harvest.

***Why is DNR allowing the insurance industry and other interests to destroy Illinois' deer herd?***

We're not. We are not aware of any organized lobby by the insurance industry to make modifications to our deer management program. Insurance companies have actuaries that assess risk so that insurance rates allow for profit margins, so the costs of deer/vehicle accidents are simply passed on to the consumer. IDNR suggests that all individuals concerned about the Task Force's proposed objectives take the time to review those specific recommendations – they are all based on a deer population level that has occurred in each of the counties during the period 1994-2007. Some counties are already at or below their goal levels, while other counties will require moderate to significant herd reduction to reach their objective. In either case, we think it's safe to say that all Illinois counties enjoyed quality deer herds during that several-year period.

***Why did the JTF not address the quality of Illinois' deer herd?***

The quality of the Illinois' deer herd was not a significant topic of discussion, as that was not one of the specific charges of the resolution that created the Task Force. In addition, Illinois is renowned for the quality of deer produced here. The focus of the IDNR deer program is not only to achieve county population goals, but also to provide deer hunters and landowners/controllers of property the framework within which they can meet their own special needs. Our approach to population management, which provides hunters with opportunities for either-sex harvest while encouraging increased antlerless harvest where needed, has resulted in balanced harvest sex ratios and excellent age structure in bucks. This approach has resulted in Illinois being a national leader in trophy production while providing a quality source of meat and recreation for our hunters.

***Why did the Joint Task Force not consider the "decimation" of the deer herd by the 2007 EHD outbreak?***

The impact of EHD, a viral disease spread by biting insects, tends to be localized and patchy over a large area. As a result, declines in deer numbers throughout an entire county are often far less severe than public perception. IDNR sought input from the public during the significant disease outbreak of 2007, and received 458 reports of 1,987 dead deer in 57 counties (average = 34.8 deer/reporting county), most notably in the southern part of the state. We do not anticipate noticeable changes in deer numbers as a result of this, although small areas such as individual farms, etc. may have short-term declines. During 2008, there were 12 separate reports from nine counties, totaling 22 deer.