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1997 MICHIGAN EARLY FIREARM ANTLERLESS DEER SEASON STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

In 1997, an Experimental Early Firearm Antlerless Deer Hunting Season on private land-only was established for Deer Management Unit (DMU) 215. The season, which began September 19 and ended September 28, was open to any hunter who purchased an Early Firearm Deer tag and had landowner permission to hunt on private land within the boundaries of DMU 215. DMU 215 is composed of approximately 471 square miles in southern Menominee County, in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. A large portion of this unit is comprised of privately owned agricultural land. A high density of deer in the area has caused crop damage complaints to rise in recent years. The early hunting season for antlerless deer was established to determine its usefulness as a management tool to help control deer numbers on private lands. This report presents results of a mail survey designed to examine deer harvest, hunter effort, and opinions of those people who purchased an Early Antlerless Deer license.

METHODS

A total of 4,606 Early Antlerless Deer licenses was purchased by 2,422 individuals. A random sample of 374 individuals was sent a questionnaire concerning their effort, harvest, and opinions about the early season. A total of 291 questionnaires was returned for an adjusted response rate of 78 percent.

RESULTS

An estimated 2,072 individuals (86% of licensees) hunted 5,185 days during the 1997 Experimental Early Firearm Antlerless Season in DMU 215. Mean hunter-days was 2.5 days per individual. The total estimated harvest for this season was 2,305 deer for a mean of 1.1 deer tagged per hunter, and approximately one deer tagged per licensee. Estimated license success was 50 percent. Mean number of hunter-days per deer killed was 2.2.

The majority (67%) of the harvest occurred during the first three days of the season (Table 1). Twelve percent were harvested during the weekdays (Monday through Thursday), while the remaining seventeen percent were harvested during the final three days. Although many licensees purchased more than one license (Table 2), only a small percentage of individuals tagged more than two deer (Table 3). Number of days hunted per individual ranged from one to ten, and did not reflect either number of licenses purchased by that individual, or number of deer harvested by that individual.



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Most hunters positively rated their hunting experiences (Table 4). Those who liked the early season (42.4%; 86 of 203 respondents who provided comments) cited reasons such as seeing many deer, warm weather, fewer hunters, and positive experiences with landowners. However, a few hunters who liked the season voiced concern about there being few deer and the season being too short. Those who did not like the early season (40.4%) cited such reasons as seeing few or no deer, seeing only small deer, not wanting to kill fawns so early, being too warm to properly age deer, too many leaves on trees or crops still in fields, and concern about disturbing the coming archery season. Some hunters complained about not being able to gain access to private lands (2.0%), while others (2.5%) felt that the license fee was too high for non residents, or that farmers should not be allowed to charge an access fee.

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Table 1. Results of the 1997 Experimental Early Firearm Antlerless Season.

Day	Date	Number of Deer Harvested
Friday	September 19	674
Saturday	September 20	599
Sunday	September 21	266
Monday	September 22	108
Tuesday	September 23	33
Wednesday	September 24	67
Thursday	September 25	75
Friday	September 26	83
Saturday	September 27	192
Sunday	September 28	108
	Unknown Date*	100
TOTAL		2,305

* Respondent did not enter date of kill on questionnaire.

Table 2. Number of Early Antlerless Deer Licenses purchased per individual in 1997. Licenses were purchased by 2,422 individuals.

Number of Licenses	Number of Individuals
1	1,216
2	791
3	214
4	90
5	43
6	25
7	10
8	8
9	3
10	10
11	1
12	4
14	2
15	1
16	2
20	1
26	1

Table 3. Number of deer tagged per individual in the 1997 Early Firearm Antlerless Season in DMU 215.

Number of deer tagged per individual	Percentage of licensees
1	69%
2	22%
3	4%
4 or more	5%
Total Number of Deer Harvested	2,305

Table 4. Hunter rating of 1997 Early Antlerless Deer hunting experiences in DMU 215 as compared to a regular firearm deer season.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents (n=247)
Excellent	24%
Very Good	22%
Good	21%
Fair	17%
Poor	16%

Table 5. Hunter comments on the 1997 Early Firearm Antlerless Season in DMU 215.

COMMENTS	Hunter Rating					(n=203)
	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	
Liked early season	15.8%	10.8%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	66
Good way to reduce deer	2.5%	1.0%	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%	9
Filled tag	0.5%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5
Liked season, but..	0.5%	0.5%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	6
Didn't like early season	0.0%	3.4%	7.4%	10.3%	13.8%	71
Too much money	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	5
No access	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	1.0%	4
Didn't fill tag	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%	2
Other comments*	5.9%	3.4%	2.5%	2.5%	3.0%	35

* Other comments did not fit any opinion category, i.e. "Too many hunters being careless. Many deer were injured or just left to lay", "I didn't hunt, but..."

