

**VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE  
DEPARTMENT**

**Annual Report on the Management of the Vermont Moose and  
Deer Populations**

Submitted to:  
Vermont Legislature  
House Committee on Environment  
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

Submitted by:  
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# **Annual Report to the Vermont Legislature on Management of Moose and the Deer Herd**

## Introduction

This report fulfills the requirements of 10 V.S.A. § 4082 and 4084.

§ 4082 states:

*The final annual antlerless deer and moose harvest permit numbers shall be reported to the House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy as part of the annual deer report required under section 4084 of this title.*

§ 4084 states:

*Each January, the Commissioner shall publish an annual deer report.*

Management of white-tailed deer in Vermont is a high priority and important responsibility of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (Department). Most Vermonters have some level of contact with deer, are affected by management of the deer herd, and have opinions about how to manage them. The Department's current 10-year management plan for white-tailed deer and other big game species covers 2020-2030 and reflects the myriad public opinions and interests associated with deer management.

Deer management goals are:

- 1) To maintain an abundant and healthy deer population,
- 2) To maintain adequate quantity and quality of deer wintering areas to sustain populations at regionally established target levels,
- 3) To maintain deer populations at levels that are socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable,
- 4) To minimize the number of deer-human conflicts, and
- 5) To provide a quality deer hunting experience for as many hunters as possible.

## Antlerless Deer Permitting and Youth Season Process

Department staff conducted five (5) public deer meetings in spring 2024, which satisfied Vermont Statute and Fish and Wildlife Board (Board) regulations. Meetings were held in the towns of Hardwick, Brattleboro, and Enosburg during March 18-21, 2024, and in Rutland and Thetford May 6 and 8, 2024. Approximately 94 members of the public participated in these meetings. The meetings were designed to receive public comment on numerous issues, including the status of the deer and moose herds, youth deer hunting season, and moose and antlerless deer harvest recommendations. Questions and comments focused mostly on the health of the deer herd, hunting regulations, hunting access on private land, and concerns about the lack of high-quality deer habitat. Attendees were grateful for the opportunity to interact with Department staff and Board members. Public comments and questions and Department responses from these meetings can be found in Appendix A at the end of this document.

On April 24, 2024, the Department proposed allocating 28,300 antlerless permits to be applied in Vermont’s 21 Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) during the 2024 muzzleloader seasons. This was 31 percent more permits than the Board allocated in 2023 (22,000), and distribution among WMUs was slightly different. In addition, the Department recommended that all WMUs be open to antlerless hunting during the 2024 archery season, the youth season bag limit be one deer of either sex in all WMUs, and that hunters during youth season be able to take any buck, regardless of antler characteristics. The Fish and Wildlife Board approved the recommendations as proposed for consideration during the public input process.

On May 15, 2024, the Fish and Wildlife Board approved the distribution of 28,300 antlerless deer muzzleloader season permits, antlerless hunting during archery season in all WMUs, and allowing youth season and novice hunters to harvest any deer regardless of sex or antler characteristics.

### 2024 Deer Harvest Summary

Hunters harvested a total of 17,316 deer during Vermont’s five (5) deer hunting seasons in 2024. This represents a 3% increase from 16,845 deer harvested in 2023. The total buck harvest, 9,350, was 5% less than the 2023 buck harvest of 9,848 and 2% less than the previous three-year average of 9,533.

Table 1. Vermont deer harvest by age-sex class and season, 2024.

<b>Season</b>	<b>Adult Bucks</b>	<b>Adult Does</b>	<b>Male Fawns</b>	<b>Female Fawns</b>	<b>Total</b>
Archery	1,478	3,235	277	223	5,213
Youth	384	468	104	94	1,050
Novice	19	23	4	3	49
October Muzzleloader	5 <sup>1</sup>	910	90	99	1,104
Regular	6,847				6,847
December Muzzleloader	617	2,039	238	159	3,053
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,350</b>	<b>6,675</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>17,316</b>

<sup>1</sup> *Adult bucks harvested during the October Muzzleloader season were legally “antlerless” deer, with both antlers less than three inches long.*

## Moose Permitting Process

At the February 21, 2024 Fish and Wildlife Board meeting, the Department proposed to issue 180 moose hunting permits in 2024. All permits were allocated to WMUs E1 and E2 (Essex County) where a greater moose abundance has contributed to greater abundance of winter ticks, which are having substantial detrimental impacts on moose health and survival. No moose hunting permits were recommended for the remainder of Vermont, as populations in those areas were below minimum hunting thresholds established in the Department's *2020-2030 Big Game Management Plan*.

The Department solicited public input on the proposed moose permit procedure at three (3) public meetings March 18, 20, and 21, 2024. Individual comments and questions on the status of the moose population can be found in Appendix B at the end of this document.

On April 10, 2024, the Fish and Wildlife Board approved the Department's moose permit recommendation. A total of 62 moose were harvested during the 2024 fall hunting seasons.

## Appendix A: Summary of deer comments from 2024 public hearings

**Hardwick – March 18, 2024** (public attendance: 23)

Assuming very healthy with the mild winters past few years.

Keep up the good work.

Keep antlerless harvest at least at what it is currently.

Winters more severe than recorded.

Can't find a doe – only 1 fawn

Low-no increase in numbers – camera.

I like the health of deer in our D1 area.

I see the greatest threats to deer hunting are the limits to where we can hunt and changes to habitat/ Conservation Range Program?/ Hunters registering w/ land owners to find places to hunt.

I would say that the deer hunting in Vermont is improving.

Review current use – your land should not be posted.

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**Brattleboro – March 20, 2024** (public attendance: 36)

I believe that deer in my area are at a healthy level.

Good info. Harvest goals seem prudent.

We live in section Q and your graph says we are overpopulated which is wrong. In the last 15 years living in the same place we started out seeing tons each night to now maybe seeing 2. Its definitely dropped by numbers.

Keep hearing overpopulated in Q. I hunted every season last year I saw 1 deer. I would like to know where the information is gathered.

Deer populations are good in my opinion.

Based on presentation it sounds like State is on track.

Kill rates being down also are a result of lazy hunters?

Excellent job – increase the no. of deer a hunter can harvest – does.

The deer population where I hunt seems healthy.

Personally I have seen a consistent decline in deer seen over the last 30ish years. IMO the single biggest issue is coyote predation. I spend an enormous amount of time in the woods and I consistently cut more coyote tracks than deer tracks. \*Way too many coyotes\*

Clearly there are too many deer in most areas of VT if more people have their land in land use.

I think it's bad in my area. Think maybe taking a few antlerless deer during rifle season would help.

I live in W Brattleboro most land is posted & fewer hunters but a healthy population – hunters have created bad feelings – somehow we need to educate both landowners & hunters to get along.

My observations parallel dept's own. Population numbers exceed habitat and consumption of seedlings and browns on saplings is often severe and is diminishing forest diversity. I would support any mechanism that allowed greater success rates in doe harvest.

As described we have too many deer for our forest health. We should issue enough permits to increase antlerless & youth season harvests. We should also encourage specified methods of hunting especially rifles on landowners properties i.e., no trapping, no baiting, only shooting.

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**Enosburg – March 21, 2024** (public attendance: 14)

Stop shooting so many doe and go back to two bucks.

Provide more incentives and programs (not just NRCS) for habitat management on private lands. Maybe a tiered system for open/posted land.

Deer are in great shape.

Deer populations in most of Vermont too dense.  
Noted (via certified forester) no new generational growth due to deer overbrowse (I am in WMU B).  
Must find a way to recruit/retain/reactivate more hunters.

Plenty of deer but access is still an issue. WMU B.

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**Rutland – May 6, 2024** (public attendance: 7)

Deer seem healthy in most areas.  
Population seems very out of whack. Areas have low deer densities and some are high. High seem to be areas with lots of posted land and liberal demographic.  
It (antlerless harvest) will come in under objectives.

Too many deer.

A lot of places had no apples or acorns last year due to late frost. Wouldn't that have affected winter kill?

The deer population appears to be dwindling, even in areas where there is habitat to support them.

I believe that there should be much less antlerless deer harvested in VT.

From what I've seen the deer themselves seem to be very healthy, but the population is extremely poor. I hunt units M & L, and I think this season will be as slow as the ones prior. Why hunt these units when NH is a half hour away? Hunters are losing interest because of the lack of deer.

Health seems fine.

Prospects depend on weather (no control) and other activities!

They (the recommendations) are fine.

I think the health is good due to the mild winter this year.

WMU have too many does to support the population, increase doe harvest.

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**Thetford – May 8, 2024** (public attendance: 14)

We need more access it seems to hunt WMUs where we need to kill more deer (Chittenden county, western edge of the state.

Recommendations seem good.

Is there room in the budget to advertise youth weekend more?

Healthy today, worried that if we've surpassed the carrying capacity of the land then we'll definitely be seeing a decrease in deer health over the next couple of years.

I wonder if the deer/sq mi. is low enough to permit habitat to improve.

I hunt J2. Decline in deer size has been noticeable. Deer numbers appear to be good.

I'm not sure how effective an increase in antlerless permits will be if previous year's goal were not met.

I'm concerned that we are going to see numbers skyrocket, and our available habitat is hopelessly inadequate.

We need to increase antlerless harvests far more than is recommended.

The status seems okay, more bigger bucks, personally pass on smaller bucks for youth.

Too many deer with increased housing more pressure on landscape plantings, native plants and forestry regeneration.

Antlerless harvest should be for all seasons.

It (deer population status and health) different from town to town with the limited acres to access to hunt.

It's (deer population status and health) getting better.

There are a lot of healthy deer out there.

I feel there are enough but not too many deer. I – J2.

Okay with it (the 2024 antlerless recommendation).

Habitat and vegetation cannot support the current deer densities.

Expand all efforts to increase the antlerless deer harvests.

## **Appendix B: Summary of moose comments from 2023 public hearings**

*Note: comments are arranged from most common to least common. A total of 73 members of the public attended these three hearings.*

**Agree with the recommendation/Seems reasonable/Makes sense/Trust the science.**

*Similar comments were received from 22 individuals.*

**Increase the number of permits/reduce moose numbers quicker to reduce winter ticks.**

*Similar comments were received from 4 individuals.*

**How do we increase logging (to improve habitat)/Concerned about lack of quality habitat.**

*Similar comments were received from 2 individuals.*

**Would like more archery permits.**

**Extend the season.**

**Too many permits.**

**Split season again to reduce crowding.**

**Population seems healthy in D2.**

**Fewer moose than 10/20/30 years ago.**

**Like the density map.**

**Must balance moose density with habitat.**