

Deer Population Management

Update to 2016 Evaluation Report

February 2018

Problems Identified

- **Lack of Formal Deer Management Plan.** Several Department of Natural Resources (DNR) divisions are either directly or indirectly engaged in deer management, but DNR did not have a formal deer management plan that defined DNR's responsibilities and prioritized resources, goals, and objectives for managing deer statewide and over time. Also, DNR's management of deer has not supported adequate deer hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities in some parts of the state.
- **Weaknesses in Deer Estimates.** DNR's approach to estimate deer populations generally aligned with best deer management practices, but included some weaknesses in statistical methods, data resources, records management, and validation of deer estimates. DNR collected limited information about deer presence and their impact on local environments.
- **Insufficient Goal-Setting Processes.** When setting deer population goals, DNR deer advisory teams did not receive adequate information about the availability of deer habitat; characteristics of local environments; or management of deer in some smaller areas, such as state parks, game refuges, private land, and local governments. Also, DNR's surveys of hunters and landowners may not capture the broad range of public opinions about deer.

Changes Implemented

- **Initiated Deer Management Plan.** DNR is in the process of developing a ten-year deer management plan with input from the public and a technical advisory committee that represents a range of stakeholder interests. DNR anticipates releasing a draft plan for public comment in Spring 2018.
- **Data Collection and Statistical Methods Improved.** DNR initiated research into various aspects of deer populations around the state. Also, DNR staff refined its deer population modeling methods and recordkeeping practices to mitigate potential error.
- **Enhanced Information About Deer Permit Areas.** DNR created an interactive map on its website with links to additional information about deer permit areas, hunting, disease management, and public opinion surveys. Also, DNR implemented a bowhunter survey to record deer observations and other data.

Action Needed

- **Finalize Deer Management Plan and Update Deer Population Goals.** DNR should finalize and adopt a deer management plan and continue updating deer population goals around the state, including deer permit area goals set during 2012.
- **Compile and Utilize More Deer Data.** DNR should conduct more field research and collect more data on the overabundance of deer and their impact within local environments.