



# Common Resource of the Commonwealth

## Managing Deer for Everyone

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) are one of the most important big game species in Pennsylvania. Deer affect people in countless ways, both positive and negative. Balancing white-tailed deer impacts is one of the primary considerations when the agency makes many of Pennsylvania's deer management decisions. The Game Commission's purpose is to do what's best for deer, habitat, and Pennsylvanians who seek them, interact with them, or suffer damage from them.

### REGULATORY AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Pennsylvania Constitution states, "The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people" (Pennsylvania Constitution, Article 1, Section 27). Pennsylvania's Game and Wildlife Code directs the Game Commission to protect, manage, and preserve wildlife and its habitat within the Commonwealth (Title 34, Sections 322 and 2102). The Pennsylvania Game Commission legally is mandated to manage wildlife, including deer, for the benefit of all Pennsylvanians, as well as for wildlife and the habitats that support their existence.

Based on direction from the state Constitution and Game and Wildlife Code, the Game Commission adopted the mission statement "to manage all wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats for current and future generations." Additionally, the Code guides the agency to use hunting and trapping to manage wildlife populations and to preserve and promote our special heritage of hunting and furtaking by providing adequate opportunity to hunt and trap the wildlife resources of this Commonwealth (Title 34, Sections 103 and 322).

### MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

The white-tailed deer is the state animal and a valued part of Pennsylvania's wildlife community. Deer also have the ability to impact other species, their habitat, and people. The Game Commission must manage deer and their impacts for all stakeholders. Management decisions cannot focus solely on building a bigger deer herd, setting a deer harvest record each year, or appeasing a specific interest group.

Implications of any management action must always be considered. Deer management decisions cannot be made simply to satisfy today's desires or to increase deer numbers for the next hunting season without regard to future impacts on wildlife and habitat resources. Managing white-tailed deer is an integral part of the Game Commission's mission of safeguarding wildlife resources and habitats for current and future Pennsylvanians.



The Game Commission follows an adaptive management approach to deer management. Adaptive management starts by establishing clear and measurable objectives, then implementing management actions, monitoring those management actions and whether they achieved the objectives, and adapting policy and management actions as necessary. Adaptive management recognizes deer management decisions must be made without the luxury of perfect information. We cannot accurately predict months or years in advance what the deer population will be, what people will want, or what habitat will look like. Consequently, the focus of adaptive management is on monitoring responses to management actions and learning. By managing white-tailed deer in this way, the Game Commission can effectively adapt its management program as conditions change.

## ORIGIN OF DEER MANAGEMENT GOALS

Deer management goals from 2009 to 2018 are to (1) manage deer for a healthy and sustainable deer herd, (2) manage deer-human conflicts at levels considered safe and acceptable to Pennsylvania citizens, (3) manage deer impacts for healthy and sustainable forest habitat, (4) manage deer to provides recreational opportunities, and (5) improve the public’s knowledge and understanding of deer and the deer management program. Game Commission staff uses these guidelines when making recommendations regarding deer management in Pennsylvania.

These goals are the result of a public involvement process. During development of the Game Commission’s 2003-2007 deer management plan, the agency engaged stakeholders to gather input on management goals. A “stakeholder” is any person who has an interest in or is impacted by an issue. As noted, deer affect everyone in Pennsylvania from hunters to citizens who try to grow crops or gardens to those who drive on Pennsylvania’s highways. Individuals representing the interests of hunters, agriculture, forestry, environmental conservation, urban and suburban municipalities, the legislature, and the Game Commission participated.

This group gathered in July 2002 and was presented with the history of deer management in Pennsylvania and the associated issues and controversies. The group was asked to identify the primary characteristics of an “award-winning” deer management plan. The group *unanimously* agreed to 6 goals, which later were consolidated into the first 3 goals listed above.

Goals (4) and (5) were added to the 2009-2018 deer management plan to recognize the importance of recreation and outreach to a successful deer management program. Each of these goals originally was identified by the stakeholders in 2002 and subsequently was presented at 7 public open houses during the fall of 2007. Results from open houses indicate strong public support for each of the 5 goals.

**Organizations that identified deer management goals**

***Sporting Interest***

- Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs
- Unified Sportsmen of Pennsylvania
- Pennsylvania Deer Association
- United Bowhunters of Pennsylvania
- Quality Deer Management Association
- National Wild Turkey Federation

***Agricultural Interests***

- Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
- Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association

***Commercial Forestry Interests***

- Keith Horn and Associates
- Forest Investment Associates
- Kane Hardwood

***Environmental Conservation Interests***

- Audubon
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy

***Federal and State Agencies***

- United States Forest Service
- Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

***Urban-Suburban Municipalities***

- Montgomery County Parks
- Lorimer Park

