

Life & Times of the whitetail **Biologist**



Harvest Hype & Allocation Anticipation

IT SEEMS LIKE economic meltdowns, foreign wars, pandemic viruses and the like all take a back seat in Pennsylvania when the deer harvest figures are released.

It's like the plot of a great movie: It was the first day of deer season last fall. Throngs of eager hunters descended upon the woods; and by the time the sun set on the last day of deer season, hunters had started to figure out what this year's harvest might be.

But this is a suspense thriller. The last day of hunting season isn't until the end of January. And more than a hundred thousand report cards must be entered into the database. As biologists, we are the detectives in this show, gathering data, examining evidence, and formulating answers. With age, sex and kill data in hand and the harvest report card database, we can crack the case. But, analyzing and verifying these data take time and it isn't until

March, when the much-awaited annual deer harvest is finally released, that the mystery concludes.

Though the release of harvest figures is climactic, it actually sets the stage for the next act. A year of data must be analyzed and integrated to paint a picture of the deer population in each wildlife management unit (WMU). From these data, we will recommend the antlerless allocation for each WMU. Harvest, age and sex composition, reproductive data, forest data, population trends, and citizen input are all considered individually and jointly. But, the clock is ticking. Our recommendations must be presented to the executive director before the season-setting April Commission meeting.

Maybe it's not a fantastic flick, but, it is the most nail-biting, edge-of-your-seat-sitting part of being a deer biologist. It's much easier to watch the movie than to be part of the real-life drama. **!**



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