Firearms deer harvest up for Missouri

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Hunters shot 204,668 deer during the November portion of Missouriâ□□s firearms deer season, topping the past four yearsâ□□ harvests and confirming predictions by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC).

This yearâ□□s statewide November deer harvest is 7.7 percent more than last year and only 1.3 percent below the previous 10-year average.

Top harvest counties during the season Nov. 10 through 20 were Howell with 4,037, followed by Texas with 3,916 and Benton with 3,756. MDC recorded five nonfatal and three fatal firearms-related hunting incidents during the 11-day November firearms deer hunt.

County and regional harvest figures confirm the pre-season forecast by MDC Resource Scientist Jason Sumners. He predicted a strong harvest in southern Missouri because of a poor acorn crop. The southern half of the state is dominated by forest, so acorns play a much more important role in deerâ□□s fall and winter diets there. Acorn scarcity forces deer to move more and concentrates them around limited food sources, making them easier for hunters to find.

Eight of the 10 top harvest counties were south of the Missouri River. A ninth county, Callaway, borders the Missouri River and contains a large percentage of forestland. Only Macon County bucked the trend of southern dominance.

Sumners says the Southeast Region reported the largest harvest increase at 30 percent, followed by the Ozark Region, with a 24-percent increase. Other regional increases were St. Louis, 18 percent; Southwest, 17 percent; and Central, 10 percent. MDC recorded harvest decreases of 6 percent in the Kansas City and Northeast regions and a 9-percent decrease in the Northwest Region.

Sumners says the decline in north Missouriâ□□s deer harvest mirrors a decline in deer populations there in the past 10 years. Meanwhile, deer numbers have increased slowly across southern Missouri. He said both trends are the result of MDCâ□□s efforts to maximize hunting opportunity while avoiding unacceptable levels of property damage and deer-vehicle collisions.

Sumners noted that does made up approximately 44 percent of the November deer harvest, a 10 percent increase from last year.

Deer hunting contributes approximately $1.1 billion annually to the state and local economies and supports more than 12,000 jobs in Missouri.