

ACTIVITIES OF THE FORT DRUM FISH & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM: DEER MANAGEMENT IN THE TRAINING AREA

Fort Drum's Fish & Wildlife Management Program is responsible for all fish and wildlife resources on the installation. The primary focus is to support and sustain the military mission, but supporting the mission takes many forms. We ensure compliance with state and federal regulations; review proposed actions for potential impacts to fish, wildlife and their habitats; monitor various environmental parameters to maintain healthy ecosystems; promote and manage outdoor recreation; and ensure good stewardship of lands for military training and the public in perpetuity. Deer management is just one activity of the Fish & Wildlife Management Program.

The white-tailed deer is a highly visible and valued big game species throughout New York State. Like most of NYS, the deer population on Fort Drum is controlled by regulated recreational hunting. The installation has been open to the public for deer hunting since 1959; first as a part of NYSDEC Deer Management Unit 19, and in 1998 Fort Drum became its own Wildlife Management Unit 6H.

The overall goal of deer population management on Fort Drum is to reduce conflicts with the desired training landscape and forest management in the Training Area, and forest and human activities in the Cantonment Area, yet provide quality recreational opportunities for the greatest number of hunters.



A key component to achieving a healthy population—including an integral part of Healthy Deer Management—is ensuring a liberal harvest of antlerless deer (with a focus on females). Each adult female normally has two fawns each year. Female deer can begin reproducing when they are only one year old. If only male deer are killed, deer numbers will continue to grow. Thus, female as well as male deer must be removed to control deer numbers. In general, about 40% of adult female deer must be killed each year to keep deer numbers stable. More must be taken to reduce a deer population.

A specific harvest goal in the Training Area is to achieve a harvest ratio of approximately 1 female:1 male through the use of Deer Management Permits (DMPs) which allow the harvest of antlerless deer. Beginning in 2002, DMPs were issued for Fort Drum for the first time. See Page 6 for a brief explanation of DMPs.

The antlerless harvest is analyzed each year, which is the reason it is important for hunters to report their harvested deer to the NYSDEC hotline as required by state hunting regulations. Harvest information and the probability of a hunter receiving a DMP to harvest antlerless deer is calculated by NYSDEC based on historical and predicted information, the number of DMPs and probability of receiving a permit are determined cooperatively between the NYSDEC and Fort Drum's Fish & Wildlife Management Program each year.

In recent years, only about one-third of DMPS were filled by hunters. Hunters fill about half of those permits with adult does. Therefore, it is necessary to issue about six permits for each adult doe to be killed. NYSDEC adjusts the number of Deer Management Permits (DMPs) to be issued to achieve the desired effect on a deer population. In general, we have targeted the issuance of 700 permits annually.

Deer populations have remained fairly stable annually and harvest numbers have remained relatively consistent and actually increased since DMPs were first issued (see Deer Harvest table on Page 6).

Although there have been inquiries about the development of food plots, and there are anecdotal accounts of food plots established to enhance the deer population historically, Fort Drum has no plans for any food plot program. Instead, Fort Drum's Fish & Wildlife Management Program works closely with land management actions on the installation to provide maximum benefit to many species including deer. Performing silvicultural actions, such as harvesting to promote early successional forest habitat, provide more and longer term benefits than food plots would. Additionally, there is the added benefit that these forest management actions require no annual maintenance like food plots may.



Stay tuned for the next installment about Fort Drum's Fish & Wildlife Management Program!