



Overview of the Draft

“SOUTH DAKOTA WHITE-TAILED DEER AND MULE DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2017-2023”

The intent of this overview is to **highlight some of the new management objectives and strategies** that will be implemented and evaluated by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (SDGFP). This overview also details **how all public comment will be presented to SDGFP Commission for consideration of administrative rule change**. The full and abbreviated versions of the draft management plan can be found at <http://gfp.sd.gov/hunting/big-game/deer/deer-management-plan.aspx>.

NEW MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

There are nine over-riding objectives identified in the draft “South Dakota White-tailed Deer and Mule Deer Management Plan, 2017-2023”. For each objective, SDGFP has developed strategies to reach that objective. Below we list each objective and highlight some of the new and more substantial strategies identified in the draft management plan.

Objective 1: Maintain, manage, establish and protect white-tailed deer and mule deer habitat throughout the Black Hills and prairie deer management units of South Dakota.

Without a doubt, habitat management is one of the most important objectives to acknowledge in any wildlife management plan. SDGFP staff and the public have identified habitat loss and conversion as issues that are very important to deer management in South Dakota. The SDGFP will manage white-tailed deer and mule deer populations and habitats by fostering partnerships and stewardship, and applying biological and social sciences. The following bullets summarize a few of the important habitat strategies listed in the plan:

- Identify top 10 habitat management focus areas for each deer species based on habitat needs, public land access, deer population densities, deer harvest densities and biological data (i.e., survival and recruitment).
- Strive to implement at least 16 substantial (> 40 acres of habitat development or > 160 acres of habitat improvement) cooperative habitat improvement projects in focus areas for mule deer and white-tailed deer on federally managed public lands.

- Establish a minimum of 900 acres of woody cover development composed of primarily low-mid growing trees and shrubs specific to each ecoregion on private lands across South Dakota by June 2023 (pending available funds).
- Develop and implement a financial incentives program for deer forb establishment and enhancement practices on private lands.
- Strive for at least 1 million acres of undisturbed Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grassland habitat on private lands in South Dakota by 2020.
- Provide public awareness of mule deer and white-tailed deer habitat Best Management Practices available for use and distribution.

Objective 2: Manage white-tailed deer and mule deer populations by conducting scientifically based biological surveys within South Dakota.

Harvest management strategies for deer populations must be scientifically based. Biological surveys provide substantial information about white-tailed deer and mule deer population demographics and vital rates across the state. The following bullets summarize a few of the important biological survey strategies listed in the plan:

- Assess and monitor white-tailed deer population levels and trends by completing fixed-wing aerial surveys using an established sightability model in applicable units at least once every six years.
- Increase mule deer and white-tailed deer radio-collaring and survival monitoring efforts.
- Complete evaluations of recruitment estimates using herd composition surveys versus reproduction and fawn survival estimates.
- Annually conduct spotlight abundance surveys for white-tailed deer in the Black Hills.

Objective 3: Manage white-tailed deer and mule deer populations for both maximum and quality recreational hunting opportunities, considering all social and biological inputs.

SDGFP manages wildlife and associated habitats for their sustained and equitable use, and the benefit, welfare and enjoyment of the citizens of this state and its visitors. South Dakota’s deer resources demand prudent and increasingly intensive management to accommodate numerous and varied public demands and growing impacts from people. SDGFP must collect and consider all biological and social data available. The following bullets summarize a few of the important hunting opportunity strategies listed in the plan:

- Conduct a scientific-based public opinion survey of landowners and hunters every four years (beginning in 2022) to assess public perceptions regarding mule deer and white-tailed deer management, better define social tolerance levels, and re-evaluate population objectives.
- Within the Black Hills, manage for a preseason abundance of approximately 70,000 (65,000-75,000) white-tailed deer.
- White-tailed deer and mule deer hunting opportunities in Custer State Park (CSP) using “any whitetail” and “any deer” licenses will be allocated approximately 25% to the archery season and 75% to the firearm season.

- “Any whitetail” licenses in CSP will be set at 1% of the CSP white-tailed deer population estimate, with no more than 50 “any whitetail” licenses issued in any year.
- “Any deer” licenses in CSP will be set at 1% of the CSP mule deer population estimate.
- Manage Limited Access Units (24B, 27L, 35L) and CSP for a quality hunting experience by using the following established thresholds:
 1. Maintain a minimum buck harvest success of 80% (3-year average) for licenses containing “any deer” and “any whitetail” firearm tags; or
 2. Maintain firearm license densities no greater than 1.5 licenses/square mile for “any deer” licenses and no greater than 2.5 licenses/square mile for “any whitetail” licenses.
- Manage for a minimum buck harvest success of 60% (3-year average) for licenses containing “any deer” and “any whitetail” tags in the Black Hills, East River, and West River firearm deer seasons.
- Manage for a minimum buck harvest success of 40% (3-year average) for muzzleloader licenses containing “any deer” and “any whitetail” tags in any USFWS Refuge deer hunting unit.
- By August 2017, present to the SDGFP Commission a summary of public input received from the Deer Stakeholder Group and others regarding deer license allocation concerns.
- Further evaluate Limited Access Units by all user groups by June 2023.

Objective 4: Cooperatively work with private landowners to resolve white-tailed deer and mule deer depredation to growing crops, stored-feed supplies, trees, and private property.

Approximately 80% of South Dakota is comprised of private land and sportsmen and women rely heavily on access to these private lands for hunting opportunities. SDGFP works diligently to maintain a balance between viable deer populations, social tolerances, and the desires of a variety of stakeholders. At times, this balance is difficult to achieve as landowners suffer damage to stored-feeds intended for livestock or damage to growing crops from deer, yet hunters desire higher deer populations for more hunting opportunities. SDGFP understands that cooperative partnerships with private landowners are an essential component of deer management and that private lands serve an important role regarding all wildlife management. It is because of these important considerations that SDGFP operates such an active and comprehensive wildlife damage management program regarding deer depredation abatement. The following bullets summarize a few of the important deer depredation strategies listed in the plan:

- Explore new management techniques that could minimize damage to private property caused by white-tailed deer and mule deer.
- Encourage the enrollment of willing landowners that are experiencing chronic deer depredation issues into Walk-In Area and Controlled Hunting Access Programs to allow public hunting access.
- Expand hunting opportunities where/when possible to address white-tailed deer and mule deer depredation on private lands.
- Develop additional depredation management strategies to increase acceptance of deer population goals.
- Work with agricultural and livestock producers, NRCS, and others to increase awareness of available SDGFP depredation assistance programs.

Objective 5: Monitor and evaluate risk and impact of disease in wild white-tailed deer and mule deer herds in South Dakota.

White-tailed deer and mule deer have the potential to acquire and transmit diseases that may impact other wildlife, domestic animals, or deer population growth. Disease monitoring conducted by SDGFP and other agencies has occurred through research projects, harvest check stations, and opportunistic events. The following bullets summarize a few of the important disease-related strategies listed in the plan:

- Prohibit the unnatural movement of wild white-tailed deer and mule deer within the State of South Dakota.
- Work with the South Dakota Animal Industry Board on chronic wasting disease (CWD), bovine tuberculosis, brucellosis, and other potential disease risks due to potential interaction between wild and captive cervids in South Dakota.
- Establish a SD Animal Industry Board / SDGFP interagency working group to enhance collaborative work on disease management topics.
- Assess rules and procedures to better limit the prevalence and spread of CWD by June 2020.
- Develop guidelines for managing leftover unsold licenses and license refunds in areas with documented deer losses to hemorrhagic disease.

Objective 6: Provide the public with access to private and public land for quality white-tailed deer and mule deer hunting opportunities.

In 2016, over 4.75 million acres or 10% of South Dakota were open to public deer hunting access. A majority of this public land (over 2 million acres) is owned and managed by the US Forest Service (USFS), with smaller portions owned by the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM; 274,00 acres), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS; 150,000 acres), SD Office of School & Public Lands (SDSPL; 750,000 acres), and SDGFP (281,000 acres). A large portion (over 1.2 million acres) of the land made publicly accessible is leased by SDGFP from private landowners through the Walk-In Area (WIA) program. Enhancing both the quality and quantity of hunting opportunities has been identified as a SDGFP Strategic Plan goal (<http://gfp.sd.gov/agency/information/default.aspx>). The following bullets summarize a few of the important public access strategies listed in the plan:

- Annually promote and encourage hunters through social media platforms and news releases to respect private property boundaries and seek hunting permission well in advance of the season opening dates.
- Work cooperatively with USFS, BLM, and other land management agencies to address road closure and recreational access issues during hunting seasons and critical wintering months.
- Identify public land areas that would benefit from signing or additional signing.
 1. Continue to work on signing Missouri River Game Production Areas.
 2. Coordinate with other public land management agencies to identify boundary signing needs and potential funding/assistance.
 3. Invite non-governmental organizations to assist in volunteer signage of public lands.

- Form an interagency working group between USFWS and SDGFP to develop ways to enhance deer hunting opportunities on USFWS Refuges and other properties.

Objective 7: Engage the public on and evaluate white-tailed deer and mule deer research and management needs.

Effective decision-making by wildlife agencies necessitates the need to consider public perceptions and opinions, in addition to potential responses to management policies. Along with hunter harvest and biological data collected, public involvement is an important component in developing and implementing a deer management plan in South Dakota. Public participation helps ensure decisions are made in consideration of public needs and preferences. Successful public participation is a continuous process, consisting of a series of activities and actions to inform the public and stakeholders, as well as obtain input regarding decisions which affect them. Multiple avenues for public involvement and outreach, therefore, are used in the development of the Deer Management Plan. These approaches are designed to involve the public at various stages of plan development and to ensure opportunities for participation are accessible to all citizens. The following bullets summarize a few of the important public outreach and input strategies listed in the plan:

- Meet with concerned and interested individuals, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, surrounding state wildlife agencies, Tribal agencies, local sportsman's groups, USFS, BLM, USFWS, livestock and agriculture organizations, and private landowners to facilitate discussions about white-tailed deer and mule deer populations and management.
- When appropriate, involve SDGFP Regional Advisory Panels and the Deer Stakeholder Group with further development of this plan and with future issues related to white-tailed deer and mule deer management.
- Periodically review white-tailed deer and mule deer survey protocols and discuss changes that could improve data collection efficiency and accuracy.
- Formally evaluate the white-tailed deer and mule deer Management Plan at least every six years. Plan updates and changes, however, may occur more frequently as needed.

Objective 8: Promote public, landowner, and conservation agency awareness of white-tailed deer and mule deer management needs and challenges.

South Dakota's deer resources demand careful and increasingly intensive management to accommodate varied public demands and growing impacts from people. Promoting awareness and providing information about deer management needs and challenges is important to managing this public resource. The following bullets summarize a few of the important public awareness strategies listed in the plan:

- Periodically include articles about white-tailed deer and mule deer and associated habitats in the South Dakota Conservation Digest and other popular magazines, journals, and media outlets.

- Work with local South Dakota retail companies in order to better inform customers of the laws and regulations pertaining to deer hunting in South Dakota and the associated permitted use of certain items sold in retail stores.
- Make available paper and electronic copies of “White-tailed Deer and Mule Deer Management Plan for South Dakota, 2017-2023” to all interested conservation partners, the public, and private landowners.

Objective 9: Cooperatively work with municipalities and other agencies in South Dakota to manage urban deer and deer vehicle collisions.

Urban communities continue to expand and deer populations often adapt to these landscape changes. These new environments challenge wildlife managers to develop effective deer management strategies because traditional management techniques such as hunting are typically not acceptable or practical in these areas. In addition, deer-vehicle collisions are a serious safety concern for motorists and can also be a substantial source of mortality for deer populations in some areas. As road densities and the number of people that travel these roadways increases in South Dakota, deer-vehicle collisions continue to be a complex issue for wildlife managers as well as transportation agencies. The following bullets summarize a few of the important urban deer and other human conflict strategies listed in the plan:

- Provide technical advice regarding deer-human conflicts and cooperatively work with municipalities to develop/review urban deer management plans.
- Promote hunting around and within city limits to manage urban deer populations when possible.
- Work with the SD Department of Transportation (SDDOT) and SD Department of Public Safety to identify and mark critical areas where high numbers of deer-vehicle collisions occur.
- Consider cooperative and new management techniques and strategies that can minimize deer-vehicle collisions at appropriate locations.
- Periodically meet with SDDOT to discuss upcoming road projects, deer-vehicle collisions, and potential mitigation strategies.

SUMMARIZATION OF PUBLIC COMMENT FOR SDGFP COMMISSION

Involving the public in the development of the South Dakota White-tailed Deer and Mule Deer Management Plan has been a high priority of SDGFP from the beginning. When it comes to public involvement, one-size does not fit all. Every situation is different and each approach to a specific situation will be unique. No single citizen or group of citizens is able to represent the views of all citizens. Multiple avenues for public involvement and outreach, therefore, were used in the development of the Deer Management Plan. These approaches were designed to involve the public at various stages of plan development and to ensure opportunities for participation are accessible to all citizens.

In 2016, SDGFP conducted a public opinion survey of landowners and hunters to collect and evaluation opinions from these publics on numerous topics related to deer management. Another important technique used by SDGFP to formally gather public opinion on deer management was

to develop a South Dakota Deer Stakeholder Group, which included representation from the following: general public, deer hunters, private landowners, agricultural interests, commercial hunting interests, and conservation organizations. The South Dakota Deer Stakeholder Group held four meetings in 2016 and one meeting in 2017. Individual views and opinions varied amongst the broad representation of this stakeholder group. The general public was also invited to review stakeholder meeting notes and topics, and share ideas during this process via the SDGFP Deer Management Plan webpage (<http://gfp.sd.gov/hunting/big-game/deer/deer-management-plan.aspx>). Careful consideration of these opinions was included in identifying the management objectives and strategies necessary to manage deer within the varying social carrying capacities.

In March of 2017, SDGFP made the first draft plan available to the public. The public interest and response to the draft plan has been great, and to-date approximately 130 comments have been formally received via email, letter, or public testimony. In fact, due to the overwhelming response, the SDGFP Commission has extended the public comment period to May 5, 2017.

Numerous opinions and suggestions have been received related to the following topics (listed in no particular order): license allocation; lottery draw process; late season antlerless deer hunts; nonresident archery licenses; nonresident license fees; season structures; landowner preference; landowner-own-land licenses; mandatory harvest survey; and several others. As with many topics pertaining to deer management, opinions vary greatly on each issue identified, and potential solutions needed, if any. Many of the public suggestions would involve changes to South Dakota Administrative Rules, which is under the authority of the SDGFP Commission. Implementing suggested changes would therefore require following the rule promulgation process outlined in state statute. SDGFP is mandated to follow this process, and it's an important process because it ensures the public has sufficient opportunity for input. Making rule changes in the deer plan would not only be a violation of this statute-mandated process, but it would limit the ability of the SDGFP Commission and the public to implement changes.

A summary of all public comments and recommended changes offered by the public will be presented to the SDGFP Commission for consideration. Since many of these suggestions require changes to administrative rule, the SDGFP Commission will consider all public comments and incorporate such changes through the mandated rule making process found at <http://gfp.sd.gov/agency/commission/default.aspx>.