

# Deer

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## Issue 1: Antler-Point Restrictions for white-tailed deer in Game Management Units 101 (Sherman), 105 (Kellyhill), 108 (Douglas), 111 (Aladdin), 113 (Selkirk), 117 (49 Degrees North), and 121 (Huckleberry)

**Species:** White-tailed deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-020](#), [220-415-030](#)

**Background:** Antler-point restrictions (APRs) have become increasingly popular with some white-tailed deer hunters throughout the U.S. but they are not universally supported. The Department implemented a 4-pt. minimum APR for white-tailed deer in GMUs 117 and 121 during the 2011-2014 hunting seasons but returned to an Any Buck harvest strategy in 2015. Since that time, some hunters have advocated for the Department to reinstate APRs and to possibly expand them to include more GMUs. In association with the Department's commitment to consider APRs during our 2021-2023 rule making process, the Department partnered with Washington State University's Social and Economic Sciences Research Center to conduct a survey of deer hunters in Washington that quantified their opinions regarding the management of white-tailed deer. The survey was distributed via email to more than 44,000 hunters that had reported hunting in GMUs with white-tailed deer, with approximately 13,000 responses.

Although survey results (available using the link below) indicate most respondents were dissatisfied with their opportunity to harvest a mature white-tailed buck, they also indicate a strong lack of support for implementing more restrictive regulations, especially a 4-pt. APR in GMUs 101-121 (District 1). The restrictions that were least opposed included 2 pt. and 3 pt. APRs and if considered, should not apply to youth, senior, and disabled hunters. Survey results also indicated if APRs were implemented, they should be implemented in all District 1 GMUs. However, this would limit the Department's ability to evaluate the effects of this rule change on white-tailed deer populations. As such, it would be our preference to only apply an APR to a subset of GMUs and that subset would be determined prior to the formal rule making process.

Based on survey results, the Department is presenting 4 alternatives for consideration, but with recognition that maintaining the current Any Buck season structure (No change) would be our recommended alternative.

### **Alternatives:**

1. No change.
2. Implement a 2 pt. APR for white-tailed deer in a subset of GMUs in District 1, but provide an exception for youth, senior, and disabled hunters.
3. Implement a 3 pt. APR for white-tailed deer in a subset of GMUs in District 1, but provide an exception for youth, senior, and disabled hunters.
4. Implement a 4 pt. APR for white-tailed deer in a subset of GMUs in District 1, but provide an exception for youth, senior, and disabled hunters.

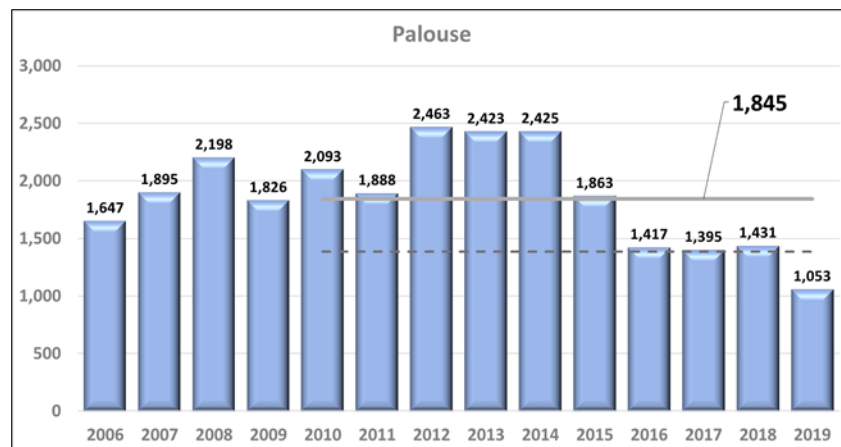
## Issue 2: Reductions in white-tailed deer antlerless harvest in Game Management Units 127-142 are needed to promote population growth.

**Species:** White-tailed deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-020](#), [220-415-030](#)

**Background:** As indicated by trends in general season harvest (figure below), white-tailed deer numbers in the Palouse White-tailed Deer Management Zone have substantially declined in recent years and fell more than 25% below (dashed gray line) the 10-year average harvest (solid gray line) in 2019. This trend is driven predominately by declines in the white-tailed deer population in GMUs 127 – 142. If harvest levels are similar in 2020, harvest will have declined more than 25% below the 10-year average in two consecutive years, which would meet the criteria of an “At-Risk” ungulate population.

The observed decline began with the 2015 Blue Tongue outbreak and has been further exasperated by several smaller hemorrhagic disease events and multiple hard winters. A more rapid recovery can not be accomplished through reduction in antlerless permits alone because over 70% of the antlerless harvest in these GMUs occurs during the general season. Substantial reductions in general season antlerless harvest in GMUs 127-142 are needed for this population to recover more quickly. Muzzleloaders and archers are responsible for ~35% of the general season antlerless harvest, with Youth coming in a close second at ~31%. Senior (≥65yrs old) and Disabled hunters take ~19% and ~16% respectively.



### **Alternatives:**

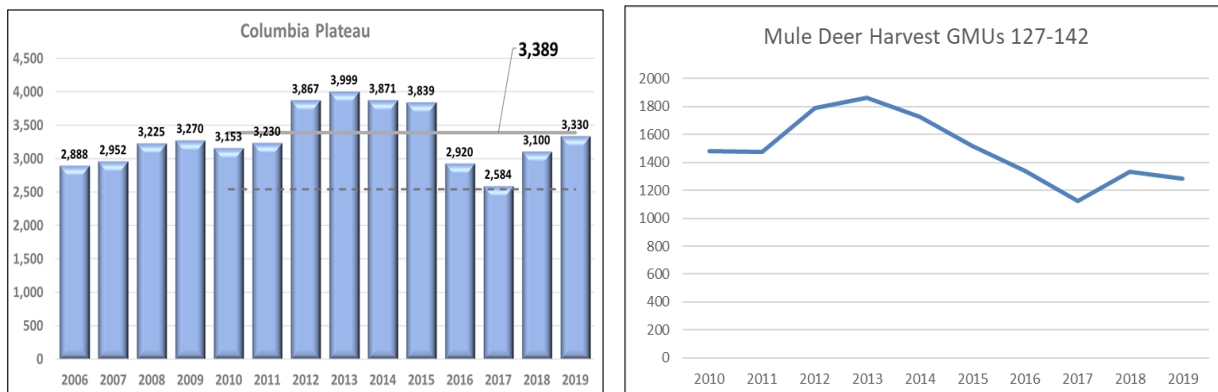
1. No change.
2. Remove all general season opportunities to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer and replace some of the lost opportunity with special permits.
3. Remove archery and muzzleloader general seasons opportunities to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer and replace some of the lost opportunity with special permits. Retain general season antlerless opportunities for Hunters 65 and Over, Disabled hunters, and Youth hunters, but reduce season length substantially.

Issue 3: If general season opportunities to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer are removed in GMUs 127- 142 (see Issue 2), hunter effort is likely to shift to antlerless mule deer, resulting in harvest of antlerless mule deer that is too high.

**Species:** Mule deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-020](#), [220-415-030](#)

**Background:** GMUs 127-142 represent the eastern third of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone where harvest data (left figure) indicates mule deer numbers across the zone have begun to recover following declines that occurred 2015-2017. However, trends in harvest for GMUs 127-142 (right figure) indicate mule deer populations have not fully recovered in the eastern portion of the zone. A substantial reduction in damage complaints associated with mule deer also indicate populations remain below historical levels. A reduction in opportunities to harvest antlerless mule deer is needed to ensure the Department continues to promote the growth of mule deer populations throughout the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone.



**Alternatives:**

1. No change.
2. Remove all general season opportunities for hunters to harvest antlerless mule deer and replace some of the lost opportunity with special permits.

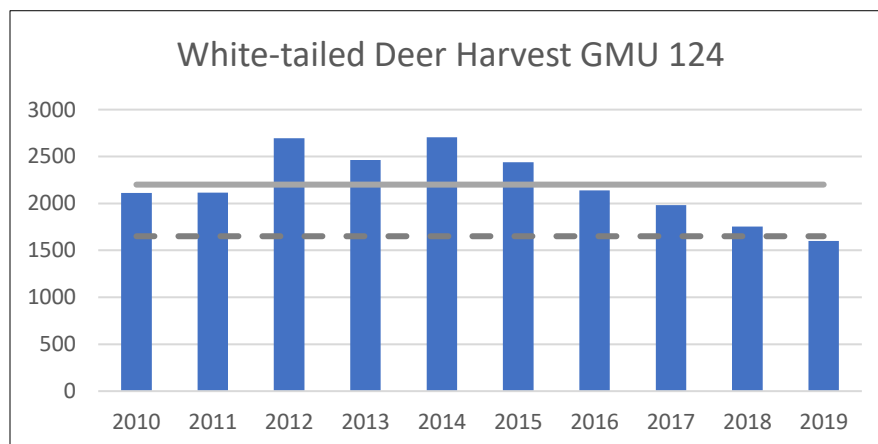
## Issue 4: Reduce opportunities to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer in Game Management Unit 124 (Mount Spokane)

**Species:** White-tailed deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-020](#), [220-415-030](#)

**Background:** As indicated by trends in general season harvest (figure below), white-tailed deer numbers in GMU 124 have substantially declined in recent years and fell more than 25% below (dashed gray line) the 10-year average harvest (solid gray line) in 2019. If harvest levels are similar in 2020, harvest will have declined more than 25% below the 10-year average in two consecutive years, which would meet the criteria of an “At-Risk” ungulate population.

The observed decline began with the 2015 Blue Tongue outbreak and has been further exasperated by several smaller hemorrhagic disease events and multiple hard winters. A more rapid recovery cannot be accomplished through reduction in antlerless permits alone because ~75% of the antlerless harvest in GMU 124 occurs during the general season. Substantial reductions in general season antlerless harvest opportunities are needed for this population to recover more quickly. Archers and Muzzleloaders are responsible for ~34% of the general season antlerless harvest, with Youth coming in a close second at ~30%. Senior (≥65yrs old) and Disabled hunters take ~18% and ~17% respectively.



### **Alternatives:**

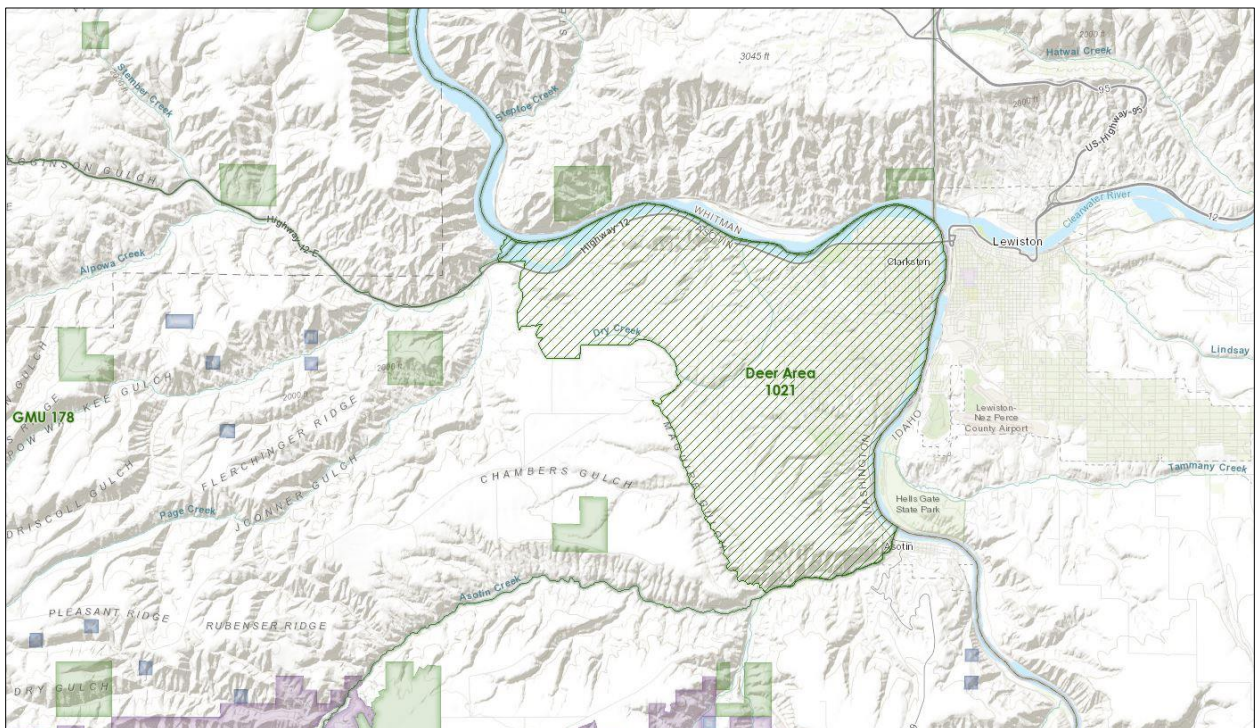
1. No change.
1. Remove all general season opportunities to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer and replace some of the lost opportunity with special permits.
2. Remove archery and muzzleloader general seasons opportunities to harvest antlerless white-tailed deer and replace some of the lost opportunity with special permits. Retain general season antlerless opportunities for Hunters 65 and Over, Disabled hunters, and Youth hunters, but reduce season length substantially.

## Issue 5: Deer complaints near the city of Clarkston have declined to levels that no longer require a need for Deer Area 1021-Clarkston (Asotin Co.)

**Species:** Mule deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-010](#)

**Background:** Deer Area 1021 (hashed area in image above) was created to assist with mitigating damage complaints caused by resident mule deer near the city of Clarkston. Hunting seasons included a late archery general deer season that occurred Dec. 9-31 for antlerless deer only and special archery second deer permits for antlerless deer in November and December. The number of complaints related to damage caused by mule deer has declined to levels that no longer require a need for this Deer Area. Moreover, preliminary findings from the Department's efforts to radio-collar mule deer in the foothills of the Blue Mountains indicate some of the mule deer within Deer Area 1021 move into this area during winter but migrate back to summer range. As such, the late antlerless opportunities associated with Deer Area 1021 were likely targeting migratory mule deer more so than residents, which was not the intent.



### **Alternatives:**

1. No change.
2. Eliminate Deer Area 1021 as proposed.

Issue 6: Game Management Units 247 (Entiat), 254 (Saint Andrews), 262 (Withrow), 266 (Badger), and 269 (Moses Coulee) are not open during early general muzzleloader seasons for white-tailed deer.

**Species:** White-tailed deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-020](#)

**Background:** Currently, GMUs 247, 254, 262, 266, and 269 are not open during early general muzzleloader seasons for any buck white-tailed deer, but there is no biological justification for them not being open. Opening these GMUs would increase opportunity and make opportunity among weapon types more consistent in GMUs with similar white-tailed deer populations.

**Alternatives:**

1. No change
2. Open some of the GMUs during early general muzzleloader seasons for Any Buck white-tailed deer (Indicate which GMUs should be open in the comments section).
3. Open all 5 GMUs during early general muzzleloader seasons for Any Buck white-tailed deer.

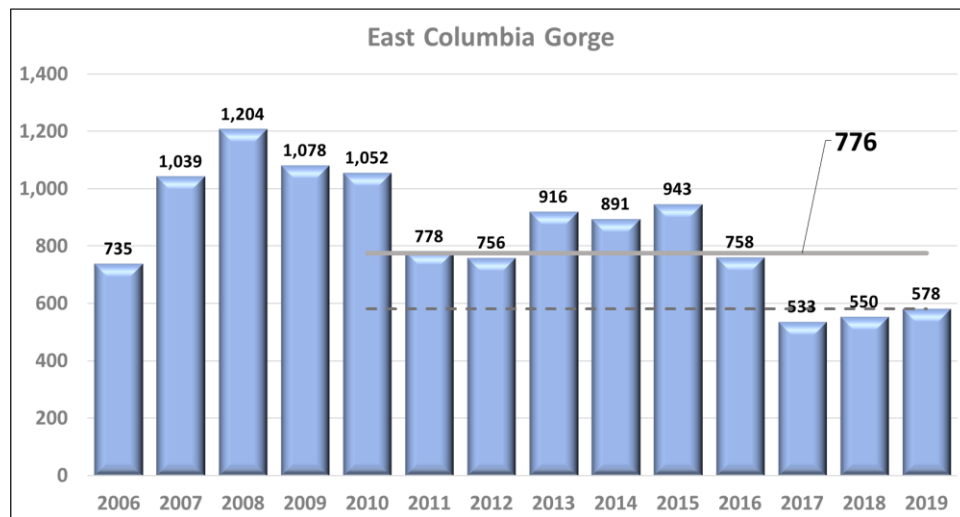


Issue 7: Continue promoting recovery of mule deer populations in the East Columbia Gorge Mule Deer Management Zone by eliminating opportunities to harvest antlerless mule deer.

**Species:** Mule deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-020](#)

**Background:** As indicated by trends in harvest (image below), mule deer numbers in the East Columbia Gorge Mule Deer Management Zone (Game Management Units 382 and 388) have substantially declined over the past decade and currently meet the criteria of an “At-Risk” ungulate population because harvest has dropped more than 25% below (gray dashed line) the 10-year average (solid gray line) for at least two consecutive years. The Department has removed all other opportunities to harvest antlerless mule deer in GMUs Units 382 (East Klickitat) and 388 (Grayback) and is proposing to also remove opportunities during the early archery general season.



**Alternatives:**

1. No change.
2. Remove opportunities to harvest antlerless mule deer in GMUs 382 and 388 during the early general archery season.



## Issue 8: Black-tailed deer populations on Puget Sound islands are very high and need to be reduced.

**Species:** Black-tailed deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-030](#)

**Background:** Black-tailed deer populations in GMUs 411 (Orcas Island), 412 (Shaw Island), 413 (San Juan Island), 414 (Lopez Island), 415 (Blakely Island), and 420 (Whidbey Island) are at levels that warrant a reduction. Controlling deer numbers on Puget Sound islands has been a long-standing management challenge for the Department because they are dominated by privately owned lands, which makes facilitating hunter access extremely difficult. To limit population growth, the Department currently offers general season opportunities for any deer during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The Department also offers special second deer antlerless permits for modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader tag holders with season dates varying by weapon type. This proposal seeks to make all second deer special permits any weapon and establish a single permit season that would occur Aug. 1-Dec. 31. This change is modeled after the approach the Department has implemented in GMU 422 (Vashon Island), which increases opportunity through a longer season and allows more flexibility to hunters relative to the weapon type they can use.

### **Alternatives:**

1. No change.
2. Change the conditions of 2<sup>nd</sup> deer permits in some GMUs (indicate which GMUs in the comments section).
3. Change the conditions of 2<sup>nd</sup> deer permits in all 6 GMUs.

## Issue 9: Allow hunters to use dogs to assist with tracking wounded big game.

**Species:** Elk, Deer, Moose, Bighorn, Mt. Goat

**RCW(s):** [77.15.240](#), [77.15.245](#)

**WAC(s):** [220-413-060](#)

**Background:** The Department frequently receives requests from hunters to allow the use of dogs for tracking wounded big game, as is allowed in many other states. Those requests are usually associated with deer and elk hunting, but it is likely to be beneficial for recovering other big game species as well. However, the Department would not allow the use of dogs to track wounded black bears or cougars to ensure compliance with RCWs 77.15.245 and 77.15.240 and WAC 220-413-060. Specific rule language allowing the use of dogs to track wounded big game will be developed prior to the formal rule making process but restrictions are likely to include:

1. Only allowed for deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat.
2. Only allowed during legal hunting hours.
3. Can only use 1 dog at a time.
4. Dog must always be on-leash.
5. Must occur within 72 hours of the animal being wounded

### **Alternatives:**

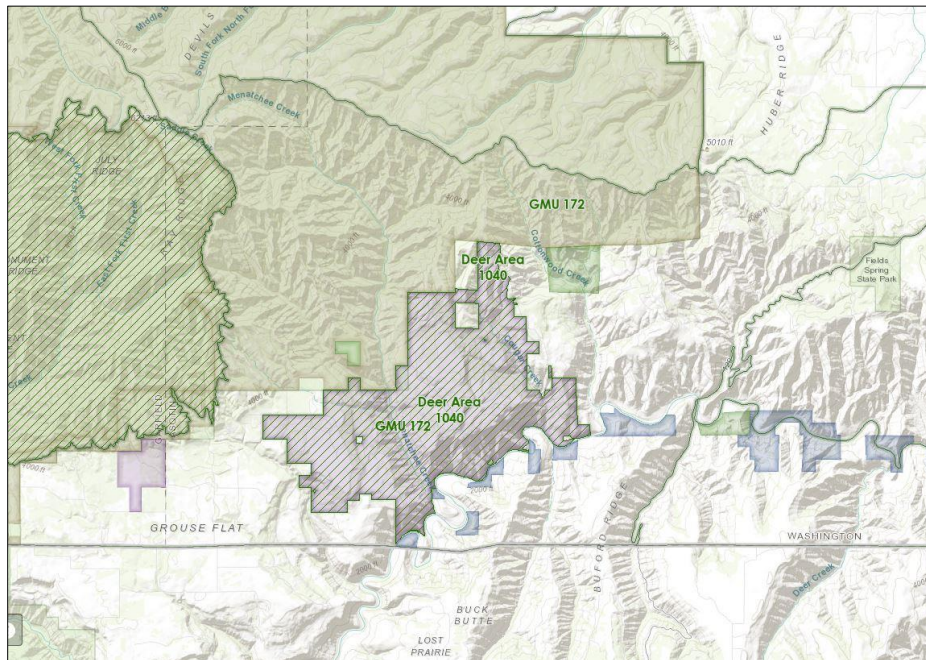
1. No change.
2. Allow the use of dogs to track wounded game as proposed.

## Issue 10: Eliminate Deer Area 1040 and open the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area Unit during general deer seasons

**Species:** Deer

**WAC(s):** [220-415-020](#), [220-415-030](#)

**Background:** Deer Area 1040 (area shaded purple in the above image), is the area in Game Management Unit 172 (Mountain View) that is associated with lands managed by the Department as the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area Unit. Since 2014, the Department has provided limited special permit opportunities within the Deer Area and excluded general season opportunities with the intent of providing a quality hunting experience. However, because Deer Area 1040 is within the ceded area of the Nez Perce Tribe, tribal hunters also pursue deer in this area. To ensure opportunities to access this area and hunt deer are similar for state and tribal elk hunters, the Department is proposing to eliminate Deer Area 1040, expand the hunt area for the special permits to GMU 172, and open the area during general deer seasons.



### **Alternatives:**

1. No change.
2. Eliminate Deer Area 1040 and open the area during general deer seasons as proposed.