

ADULT FEMALE WHITE-TAILED DEER IN MONTANE ENVIRONMENTS: WHAT ARE WE MANAGING AND WHAT ARE WE COUNTING? ^{TWS}

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Despite their popularity as a big game animal and prevalence in the hunter bag, comparatively little is known about white-tailed deer response to various hunter harvest strategies in montane environments. Prior to developing an adaptive management protocol for white-tailed deer, it is important to evaluate the regulation packages and validate their anticipated outcomes. In addition, it is important to validate a monitoring protocol. One objective of the Northwest Montana Deer Research Project is to investigate the effects of various regulation types and variable harvest opportunities for antlerless deer. Telemetry was used to determine adult female harvest rates in each of two hunting districts (HD) under various regulation packages and variable antlerless harvest opportunity through time. Whereas the regulations pertaining to the general deer "A" license were consistent for each district, they did change through the 1988-2000 period of study. Antlerless harvest opportunity also changed during the period, though the changes were systematically adopted in only one HD during the hunting seasons 1991-1996, while the other HD served as a control. This permitted comparisons through space and time. Biologists frequently utilize results from the annual telephone harvest survey to monitor trends in total deer harvest for various age and sex categories. Estimates for antlerless harvest (number of deer harvested) were compared to estimated harvest rates of telemetered does. Abiotic factors were also considered. The presentation will summarize preliminary results.