



May 26, 2006

Mr. Frank Wheatlake, Commissioner
Natural Resources Commission

Mr. Rodney Clute, Big Game Specialist
Michigan Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 30028, 530 West Allegan
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Commissioner Wheatlake and Mr. Clute,

On behalf of the Michigan State Chapter of the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) we are writing to provide input on a potential hunting license fee increase, a habitat management plan, and a harvest policy that would reduce the harvest of yearling bucks. The QDMA is a national nonprofit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to ethical hunting, sound deer management and preservation of the deer-hunting heritage. The QDMA has 40,000 members nationwide with Michigan ranking fourth in statewide membership. Our membership includes more than 1,000 of the nation's leading deer biologists, researchers and managers. As such, QDMA is widely regarded as the most respected whitetail organization in the United States.

We recognize the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has suffered significant reductions in the number of wildlife biologists over the past 20 years due to financial constraints. License fees have not kept pace with inflationary increases and the DNR has been forced to reduce staff in areas that directly impact hunters and the quality of hunting experiences in Michigan. To combat this problem we would support an increase in the hunting license fee if it would allow the Department to increase its field staff to levels necessary to adequately manage Michigan's deer herd.

Quality habitat is important to a healthy deer herd and quality winter habitat is especially critical for deer in northern extremes. Thus, we urge the Department to develop a long-range plan for managing winter habitat in northern Michigan to provide adequate thermal protection and natural winter feed. The plan could include the acquisition of "deer yards", providing technical and financial assistance to landowners managing significant deer yards, and possibly including other measures to improve the winter survival of deer in northern Michigan. We also urge the Department to implement a habitat improvement program on public lands across the state. This could be similar to habitat improvement efforts implemented by many private land owners such as forest management practices, food plots, travel corridors, and other improvements that will increase the productivity of public land for Michigan's hunters. The Michigan State Chapter is currently experimenting with food plots on public land and has demonstrated these efforts

significantly improve the productivity of the land and enhance hunting and viewing opportunities.

Lastly, the Natural Resource Commission and DNR have heard from several outdoor groups promoting a one-buck license and prohibiting the sale of a second buck license. We understand you oppose this concept due to the negative impact on revenue and loss of recreational opportunity for hunters. When discussing new license structures we ask you to consider an approach that protects yearling bucks. Protecting yearling bucks provides many biological and ecological benefits to the deer population and can increase the quality of the hunting experience.

Hunter numbers are declining across the U.S. and fewer hunters in Michigan negatively impact our natural resources and our State's economy. Currently in the U.S., we recruit 69 hunters for every 100 we lose. However Michigan only recruits 26 hunters for every 100 we lose. This is 43% below the national average and places Michigan last in the U.S. with respect to our hunter replacement ratio. One factor related to hunter retention and recruitment is the quality of the deer hunting experience. Michigan can likely improve our hunter replacement ratio by increasing the quality of our deer hunting experiences, and improving the age structure of our buck population by protecting yearling bucks would be a great step in that direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on these important issues and we stand ready to work with you to help improve Michigan's deer herd, habitat and hunting experiences.

Respectfully,

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cc: Michigan QDMA State Chapter Directors
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