



# Wisconsin Buck Fawn Harvest Fact Sheet

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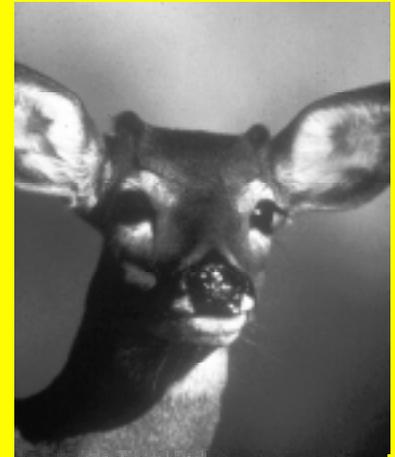
## Why a Fact Sheet on the Buck Fawn Harvest?

*This fact sheet was developed to answer recurring deer hunter questions regarding the harvest of buck fawns during Wisconsin's deer hunting seasons. The questions range from the simple "How many buck fawns do we harvest?" to more complex questions such as "Do high harvest years disproportionately impact buck fawns?". Whether simple or complex, these questions deserve a thorough response. We hope this fact sheet is helpful as you increase your knowledge about Wisconsin's white-tailed deer herd and its management. We welcome your comments on how this publication might better meet your needs.*

*- Your Wisconsin Wildlife Management Staff.*

## What is a Buck Fawn?

A buck fawn (also known as a button buck or nub buck) is a male deer born in the Spring before that year's hunting season. A buck fawn is 4 - 6 months old in the fall.



QDMA Photo

*Buck Fawn: Note the small velvet nubs above the eyes and between the ears.*

Under Wisconsin hunting regulations, buck fawns are classified as antlerless deer. Antlered deer are those deer that have one or more antlers 3-inches or longer.

## What Percentage of the Antlerless Harvest is Comprised of Buck Fawns?

Between 1964 and 2000 the DNR aged 257,920 antlerless deer. On average buck fawns comprised 21.6%, doe fawns 17.4%, adult does 59.4%, and sublegal adult bucks 1.5% of the antlerless deer aged. The percentage of buck fawns in the harvest tends to be slightly lower than the percentage of buck fawns in the fall population due to hunter's desire to harvest

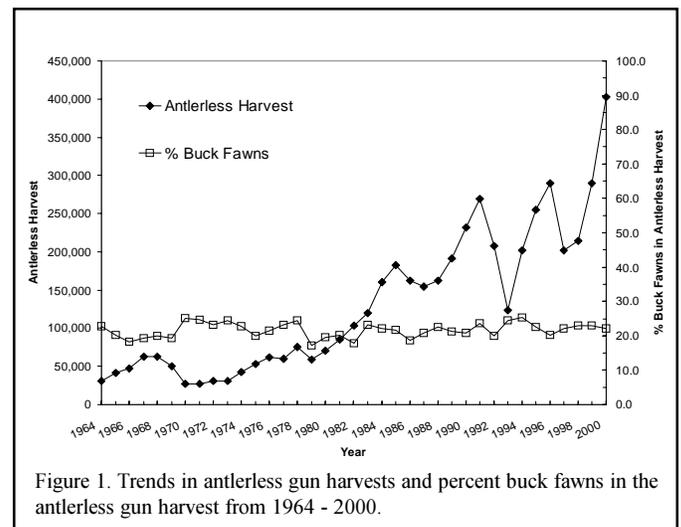


Figure 1. Trends in antlerless gun harvests and percent buck fawns in the antlerless gun harvest from 1964 - 2000.

### Traditional Breakdown of Wisconsin Antlerless Gun Harvest (1964 - 2000)\*



**Adult Does**  
59.4 %



**Doe Fawns**  
17.4 %



**Buck Fawns**  
21.6 %

\*Based on Aging Data

an adult deer. For example, the estimated composition of the 2000 fall population of antlerless deer in the state was about 50% adult does, 26% buck fawns, and 24% doe fawns. During these 37 years the percentage of buck fawns in the gun harvest has remained fairly stable despite substantial variation in the antlerless harvest (Figure 1).



## How Has Buck Fawn Harvest Been Monitored?

Mandatory registration of every deer harvested during the hunting season began in 1953 and is the backbone of the state's deer monitoring system. With the beginning of the party-permit system in 1957 antlerless deer were classified as either an adult doe, a doe fawn, or a buck fawn when they were registered. In addition, wildlife biologists have been aging a sample of harvested deer since the early 1950s. During 1964-83, about 276,000 deer were aged of which 84,000 were antlerless. The percentage of buck fawns in the aging data (21.6%) closely mirrored the percentage in the registration data (20%) during these years (Figure 2). Because both data collection methods were providing similar information we simplified the registration process (in 1984) by no longer requiring hunters to record the type of antlerless deer. The simplification of the registration greatly facilitated sorting and tabulation of the harvest, thereby permitting timely reporting of harvest results.

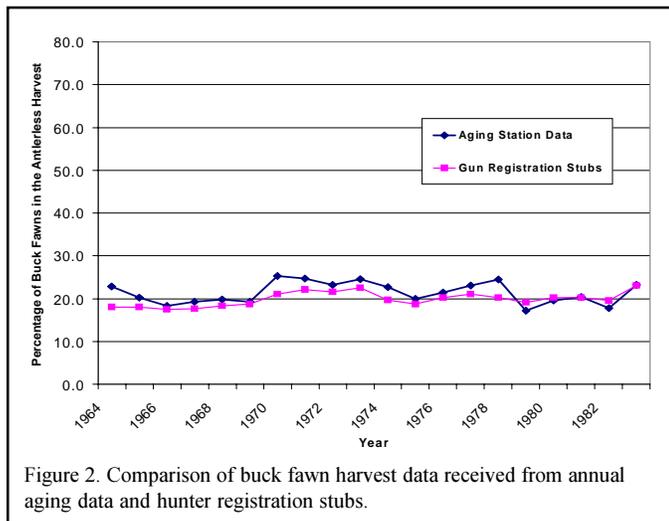
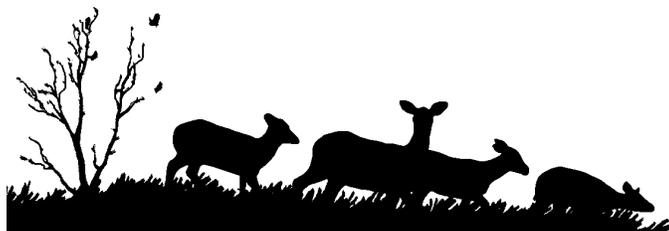


Figure 2. Comparison of buck fawn harvest data received from annual aging data and hunter registration stubs.

Since 1984, we have relied on aging a sample of harvested deer to determine the composition of the antlerless harvest. In recent years an average of 29,000 deer have been aged annually across the state. In 2000, 31,387 deer were aged at 113 locations by 208 deer agers.



## Does the Buck Fawn Harvest Differ Between the Gun and Archery Seasons?

Data from archery and gun registration stubs during 1964-1983 showed that archers harvested a higher proportion of buck fawns than did gun hunters (Figure 3). On average, over a 20 year period, the percentage of buck fawns in the antlerless gun harvest was 19.9% and the percentage of buck fawns in the antlerless archery harvest was 26.8%. During this period the percentage of buck fawns in the antlerless gun and bow harvest remained relatively constant.

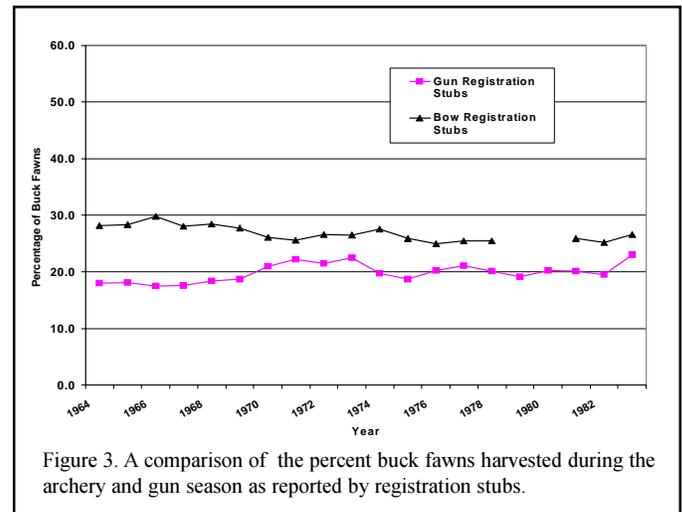


Figure 3. A comparison of the percent buck fawns harvested during the archery and gun season as reported by registration stubs.

## Is the Aging Data from the November Gun Season Representative of the October T Zone Harvest?

Some hunters have expressed concern that the aging data collected during the November gun season may not be representative of the antlerless harvest during October T Zone special hunts. They have suggested that buck fawns may be especially vulnerable to harvest during late October when the rut is beginning.

While the vast majority of deer aging has been conducted during the opening weekend of the gun season, the Department has aged a limited number of deer during the October T Zone hunts. In Northern Wisconsin during the 2000 October T Zone special hunt, harvested antlerless deer were classified as adult doe, buck fawn, and doe fawn when registered. These data indicate that the percentage of buck fawns in the October T Zone harvests are similar to their percentage

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in the fall population. Recall that the fall 2000 antlerless population was 50% adult does, 26% buck fawns, and 24% doe fawns. Based upon sampling conducted during the October T Zone hunts the harvest was 53% adult does, 23% buck fawns, and 24% doe fawns (Table 1). There seems to be no indication that the October T Zone hunts are resulting in a disproportionate harvest of buck fawns.

Another line of evidence that suggests that October T Zone hunts do not result in a disproportionate harvest of buck fawns is the aging data from the November gun season in the units that were in Zone T. If buck fawns were suffering a disproportionate harvest in the October antlerless gun hunt, we would expect they would comprise a smaller percentage of the November antlerless kill than we see normally. Since 1996 we have aged 18,545 antlerless deer in Zone T units during November following an October special hunt. The antlerless harvest composition of the aged sample from these units was 57% adult does, 22% buck fawns, and 20% doe fawns, and 1% sublegal bucks. This is remarkably similar to the overall antlerless harvest composition during the last 37 years, where 21.6% of the antlerless harvest has been buck fawns, 17.4% doe fawns and 59.4% adult does.

Based on the Departments aging and registration data from the October Zone T hunts and the substantial aging data from the November gun season there seems to be no evidence that buck fawns are especially vulnerable during the October Zone T hunts. However, the Department will continue to monitor the October antlerless harvest in Zone T units.

### How do High Antlerless Harvests Affect Buck Fawns?

Although the percentage of buck fawns in the antlerless harvest has been fairly stable, the number of buck fawns harvested does vary with the size of the antlerless harvest. A large antlerless harvest means more buck fawns will be taken. A large antlerless harvest is prescribed to reduce the deer population. **The reality of herd reduction is that fewer bucks and does will be available in the future when the herd is brought closer to goal.**

Location	Antlerless Total	Buck Fawn Total	%
<b>1999</b>			
North East WI	294	73	24.8%
East Central WI	579	193	33.3%
<b>2000</b>			
Bayfield	975	168	17.2%
Barron	674	188	27.9%
Burnett	570	137	24.0%
Douglas	786	165	21.0%
Forest	154	33	21.4%
Iron	703	156	22.2%
Langlade	579	140	24.2%
Lincoln	122	38	31.1%
Oneida	1,605	386	24.0%
Price	1,622	368	22.7%
Polk	772	211	27.3%
Rusk	820	188	22.9%
Sawyer	980	200	20.4%
Vilas	272	55	20.2%
Washburn	641	142	22.2%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12,148</b>	<b>2,841</b>	<b>23.1%</b>

Table 1. 1999-2000 October Zone T aging and registration data.

### How Does Wisconsin Compare to Other Midwest States ?

According to data received from other Mid-western states, Wisconsin's buck fawn harvest is similar to what is found in other states (Figure 4). During the 90's Wisconsin's buck fawn harvest averaged 22.5% of the antlerless harvest, whereas Illinois, Minnesota and Indiana had average percentages of 26.7%, 19.7% and 24.8% respectively.

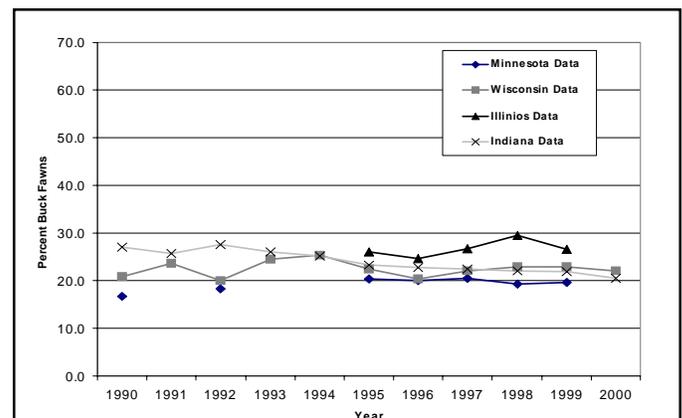


Figure 4. Percentage of buck fawns in the antlerless harvests of Midwestern states.

## Why Have Antlerless Harvests Changed Over Time?

In addition to discussing the specifics of buck fawn harvest it is important to understand how and why antlerless harvests change from year to year.

The DNR's deer harvest strategies are dictated by Natural Resources Board Policy. Administrative Code NR 1.15(2)(a) states:

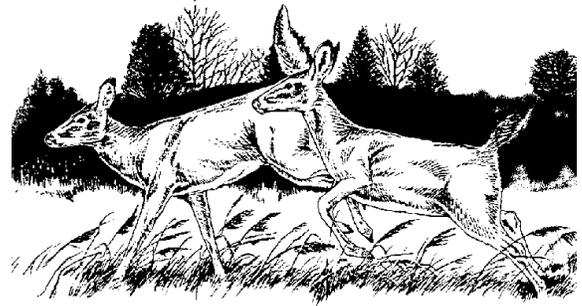
The department will seek to maintain a deer herd in balance with its range and at deer population goals reasonably compatible with social, economic and eco-system management objectives for each deer management unit. Deer population goals are to be based on: (1) carrying capacity as determined by unit population response to habitat quality and historical records of winter severity, (2) the demand for deer hunting and viewing opportunities, (3) ecological and economic impacts of deer browsing, (4) disease transmission, (5) concern for deer-vehicle collisions, and (6) Chippewa treaty harvest.

To accomplish these objectives the DNR varies the harvest of antlerless deer during the gun season to increase or decrease the population depending on the size of the herd relative to population goals. Between 1964 and 2000 antlerless deer harvests have ranged from approximately 26,000 to 402,000 (Figure 1).

Because of the polygamous mating behavior of deer (a buck will mate with more than one doe), harvest of antlered bucks has little effect on future herd growth. Therefore, the DNR has not limited the number of hunters that are allowed to harvest bucks. In contrast, harvest of does can substantially affect herd growth; so the harvest rate of does must be carefully controlled. Because it is often difficult to differentiate buck fawns from doe fawns and in some cases adult does, harvest regulations include buck fawns in the category of "antlerless" deer.

The statewide overwinter population goal, for all deer management units, is over 700,000 deer. With normal reproduction we would expect a fall population near 1,100,000 when at goal and a total buck harvest by gun and bow of about 130,000. By comparison, the statewide deer population has exceeded the goal level by 30% or more in 5 of the past 7 years and combined buck harvests have exceeded 190,000 in 4 of the past 6 years. Sizable antlerless harvest quotas

have been prescribed in recent years in an effort to restore deer populations to goal levels. If the statewide deer population was at goal the antlerless harvest would average about 200,000 deer, 40,000 - 45,000 of which would be buck fawns.



## Conclusions:

- 1. Buck fawns comprised 21.6% of the antlerless harvest during 1964-2000 gun seasons with little annual variation. The percent of buck fawns in the harvest is similar to that of the fall population.**
- 2. As the antlerless deer harvest increases, the number of buck fawns taken also increases. However, on a percentage basis, buck fawns still comprise between 20-25% of the harvest.**
- 3. Aging data provides an excellent estimate of buck fawn harvest.**
- 4. Wisconsin's buck fawn harvest is very similar to that of other midwestern states.**
- 5. Buck fawn harvests in special deer seasons are very similar to regular deer seasons.**

## Further Reading:

*Wisconsin's Deer Management Program: The Issues Involved in Decision-Making. Second Edition. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. 1998. PUBL-SS-931-98*



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