The 2016 hunting season was typified by what most hunters would call normal weather. While hunters were greeted with unusually warm weather on the opener of the Southern Zone deer season, conditions changed dramatically for the second day and in many locations snow remained on the ground for the remainder of the season. Tug Hill and the Adirondacks had snow in November and through the closure in early December. Deer numbers rebounded after the mild winter of 2015 – 16 and hunters commented on seeing more deer than previous seasons. Staff saw more yearling bucks at check stations indicating good survival the previous winter. 2016 was the first fall for the change prohibiting the take of antlerless deer in Adirondack WMUs 6F and 6J during the early muzzleloader season.

Regionally, buck harvest in 2016 increased in most units as anticipated, and antlerless harvest success was higher reflecting a larger population despite the across the board reductions in Deer Management Permit (DMP) allocations.

The 2016-17 winter was relatively mild with frequent thaw periods throughout the season. There were some locations however that had snow from Thanksgiving right on through the spring thaw. Some fawn loss was observed in these snow belts, although not wide spread across the region. Portions of the Region are already rebuilding from reduced deer numbers, DMP allocations have been increased in southern units primarily to reduce or hold steady those populations. If hunting conditions remain favorable, the outlook for 2017 looks very good.

Unit Summaries for the 2016 Season

Included in the discussion of most Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) summaries is a term called the Buck Take Objective (BTO). A BTO for a WMU is the desired number of antlered bucks expected to be harvested per square mile when the WMU’s deer population is at the desired level as determined by the Citizen Task Force. The BTO is not the estimated take for the coming season but rather is the objective of our management efforts. The annual buck harvest is used as a gauge of population size and its relationship to the desired population level.
WMU 6A

Area = 1,472 mile²  
2016 Buck Take = 1.3 bucks harvested per mile²  
BTO = 1.7 bucks harvested per mile²  
2016 Total Deer Take = 1.7 deer harvested per mile²

WMU 6A is situated along the St. Lawrence River in Jefferson, St. Lawrence and Franklin counties. The landscape is primarily agricultural lowlands associated with the St. Lawrence Valley. After record high deer numbers in the mid-1990s through the early 2000s management has been solely directed at increasing the population over the past 8+ years. The harvest increased slightly in 2016 from the harvest in 2015 and continues to remain below objective.

In 2017, DMPs will not be issued for the unit and this will be the third year prohibiting the take of antlerless deer during the October portion of the muzzleloader season. Adult female harvest was cut almost in half through the changes in muzzleloader take and another season is needed to assess whether further management changes will need to be made to stimulate growth. The 2016-17 winter was mild and coupled with a continued reduction in doe harvest should help deer numbers grow.

WMU 6C

Area = 977 mile²  
2016 Buck Take = 1.5 bucks harvested per mile²  
BTO = 1.8 bucks harvested per mile²  
2016 Total Deer Take = 2.5 deer harvested per mile²

WMU 6C is considered a transitional area between the St. Lawrence River plain and the Adirondacks. It is made up of portions of Lewis, St. Lawrence, and Franklin counties. A mix of active agriculture, abandoned cropland, and maturing forest provides good deer habitat. Winter conditions are periodically severe over portions of the unit. After significant increases in deer numbers during the 1990s, this herd declined in the early 2000s. The buck take has been at or slightly above objective the last nine years and remains remarkably stable although the take has dipped slightly the last two hunting seasons. The 2016-17 winter conditions in the unit were mild and deer numbers should continue to increase. The deer population in this unit is slightly below objective and DMPs have been reduced to stimulate herd growth; demand is strong for permits so only landowners and veterans will have access to permits in 2017.
**WMU 6F**

*Area = 1,213 mile²*  
*2016 Buck Take = 0.5 bucks harvested per mile²*  
*BTO = None*  
*2016 Total Deer Take = 0.6 deer harvested per mile²*

WMU 6F is part of the west-central Adirondack region, situated in St. Lawrence and Franklin counties. Although not as high in elevation or as rugged as the High Peaks, it is largely made up of mature forests on hilly to small mountain terrain. This unit has more private lands than State Forest Preserve. Deer populations are at fairly low densities, and winter severity in this unit is the major factor dictating annual deer abundance. The remote nature of this WMU restricts hunter accessibility and therefore can limit overall deer take.

DMPs are not offered in this unit, or in other central Adirondack WMUs because of low deer numbers, sensitivity to antlerless harvest and unpredictable population fluctuations due to winter impacts. The unit experienced a second mild winter in a row in 2016-17 which will foster herd growth. The elimination of antlerless deer take in the early muzzleloader season reduced doe harvest by over half from the previous year. That rule will remain in place in 2017. While there is no BTO for this unit, current management is aimed at increasing the deer population modestly.

**WMU 6G**

*Area = 933 mile²*  
*2016 Buck Take = 2.7 bucks harvested per mile²*  
*BTO = 1.7 bucks harvested per mile²*  
*2016 Total Deer Take = 5.9 deer harvested per mile²*

Unit 6G is located along the eastern Lake Ontario plain in Jefferson and Oswego counties. The dominant land use is agricultural. Deer herds in this unit continue to remain above objective despite tough winters in 2014 and 2015. The deer population in this unit had shown decline after the last several hunting seasons, but bumped up slightly in 2016. WMU 6G has the highest harvest per square mile than any other unit in the Region. The 2015-16 winter was one of the mildest winter experienced in the unit in the last decade and 2016-17 was only slightly less mild. DMP allocations will be increased in 2017 to continue to slow the growth of this deer herd. All applicants will receive a permit.
WMU 6H

Area = 173 mile²

BTO = None

2016 Buck Take = 1.2 bucks harvested per mile²

2016 Total Deer Take = 2.1 deer harvested per mile²

WMU 6H is the Ft. Drum Military Reservation, situated in Jefferson and Lewis counties. Substantial portions are open to deer hunting, although military training and closed hunt areas may affect the amount of available hunting opportunity during any given day and season. A Ft. Drum permit is required to hunt on military property. Deer numbers in this unit are best described as moderate, and annual harvest varies according to available access. The buck take fell to a decade low in 2015 as did the adult female harvest. The total harvest in 2016 jumped up substantially despite widespread military closures on the property. WMU 6H has no BTO established, as DEC works with Ft. Drum managers to allocate tags. As in past years, 700 DMPs will be available in 2017. Resident hunters have a medium chance of receiving a first permit.

WMU 6J

Area = 1,576 mile²

BTO = None

2016 Buck Take = 0.6 bucks harvested per mile²

2016 Total Deer Take = 0.6 deer harvested per mile²

WMU 6J is primarily an Adirondack unit. It includes parts of Lewis, Herkimer, Hamilton, Oneida, and St. Lawrence counties. Deer populations are relatively abundant along the eastern fringe of the Black River Valley but generally low in most of the unit. Winter conditions are the strongest influencing factor on deer numbers in this area. The deer population in this unit had experienced declines in buck take in 2014 and 2015 compared to harvests in the mid-late 2000s. The magnitude of declines have not been great, but concern that the deer herd was not rebounding to mid-2000 levels prompted DEC to eliminate antlerless deer take during the October muzzleloader season in 2016. That change reduced antlerless take by 2/3 of the 2015 harvest. Buck take increased by about 20% also. The conditions during the 2015-16 winter were incredibly mild and 2016-17 was medium severity in portions of the unit. It is anticipated the buck take should continue to increase in 2017 and the prohibition on doe take during the muzzleloader season will remain in effect this fall. No DMPs are available in WMU 6J.
WMU 6K

Area = 1,161 mile²  
2016 Buck Take = 2.0 bucks harvested per mile²  
BTO = 1.8 bucks harvested per mile²  
2016 Total Deer Take = 3.4 deer harvested per mile²

Unit 6K is situated in portions of Lewis, Oswego, Oneida, and Jefferson counties and makes up the southern, northern, and western fringe of the Tug Hill Plateau. Habitat varies from agriculture in the west and south to mature forest along the boundary with Tug Hill. The unit receives abundant snowfall, and deer populations fluctuate in response to winter conditions. Snow conditions varied widely during the 2016-17 winter, with portions surrounding Tug Hill having moderately severe snow conditions while areas near the Mohawk Valley had more mild conditions with frequent thaw periods which dropped snow depths. The harvest in 2016 was up slightly from the previous year reflecting a strong yearling component in the deer herd. This unit remains slightly above BTO and harvest objectives for 2017 will be to reduce the herd with a slight increase in DMPs. Hunter interest in DMPs in this unit is high with success rates amongst the highest in the Northern Zone (>20%).

WMU 6N

Area = 491 mile²  
2016 Buck Take = 2.0 bucks harvested per mile²  
BTO = None  
2016 Total Deer Take = 2.5 deer harvested per mile²

WMU 6N is the core of the Tug Hill Plateau in Lewis, Oswego, and Jefferson counties. Due to its location downwind of Lake Ontario, this region experiences the highest annual snowfall in the eastern United States, and deer populations are heavily influenced by frequent severe winters. Hunter success is also heavily dependent on fall conditions and how early winter snows arrive. Buck take dropped in 2015 to 1.0 bucks per square mile which was half the buck harvest in 2012 and 13, but rebounded to 1.6 in 2016 reflecting the impact of variations in winter severity within the unit. WMU 6N remains a “buck only” unit during the muzzleloader season and no DMPs are issued for the unit. The winter conditions in 2016-17 were average with snow pack holding until early April. Hunting should be good in 2017 if weather conditions remain favorable throughout the season.
WMU 6P

Area = 203 mile²
2016 Buck Take = 2.3 bucks harvested per mile²
BTO = 1.3 bucks harvested per mile²
2016 Total Deer Take = 4.7 deer harvested per mile²

WMU 6P makes up the eastern Oneida Lake plain in Oneida County. Both buck and antlerless take have remained surprisingly constant although increasing over the last decade plus. Lack of significant public lands and private land use patterns may have a greater role in determining deer harvest than the number of deer available. Both buck and doe take increased significantly in 2016 no doubt reflecting the strong fawn survival the previous winter. The winter of 2016-17 was also mild for deer with frequent thaw periods. The unit has now experienced two mild winters with data suggesting an increasing deer herd. DMP allocations for 2017 will be high.

WMU 6R

Area = 542 mile²
2016 Buck Take = 2.1 bucks harvested per mile²
BTO = 0.7 bucks harvested per mile²
2016 Total Deer Take = 4.3 deer harvested per mile²

WMU 6R makes up the northern Mohawk Valley in portions of Oneida, Herkimer, Fulton, Montgomery, Saratoga, and Schenectady counties. Largely rolling hills and agricultural in nature, the unit typically experiences relatively mild winters. Winter conditions in 2016-17 were relatively mild with only a few storms hitting the unit. Harvest was up in 2016 after an extremely mild winter. Fawn survival was good and more DMPs were issued in anticipation of a larger deer herd. Both buck and doe take increased last fall. The availability of DMPs will increase in 2017 to maintain pressure on a herd that remains above objective.
WMU 6S

Area = 589 mile$^2$  
BTO = 2.5 bucks harvested per mile$^2$  
2016 Buck Take = 3.0 bucks harvested per mile$^2$  
2016 Total Deer Take = 5.3 deer harvested per mile$^2$

WMU 6S is located in the southern Mohawk Valley in Oneida, Herkimer, Otsego, Montgomery, and Madison counties. The landscape includes forested hills with significant agriculture along the Mohawk River and Route 20 corridor. The harvest continues to remain strong, and WMU 6S has the second highest deer harvest density in Region 6. Buck take increased last fall and all indices suggest a growing deer herd. Management and DMP issuance remains directed toward reducing the population. Resident applicants will have high odds of getting their first permit.

Steven R. Heerkens
Region 6 Big Game Biologist