

POST OAK SAVANNAH WILDLIFER



June 2017

Information for landowners and hunters in and around the Post Oak Savannah

Volume 9, Number 1



Photo by Billy Lambert

A GOOD START

Billy C. Lambert, Jr.

So far, it appears that 2017 is off to a great start, at least in the Brazos Valley area. After a disappointingly warm winter (second in a row), it initially appeared that the area may have been in for a long, hot, and dry year (of which we've had too many in past years). But, after a pretty warm February, the temperatures have been running average to below average with some welcome late cool fronts. Rainfall is always variable throughout the Post Oak, but here in the Brazos Valley, precipitation, for the most part, has been fairly regular without the massive flooding events of the past few years. We'll just have to wait and see what the remainder of the year brings.

As many of you know, long-time biologist Rick Knipe, previously based out of Centerville, recently retired. After a few hiccups in the hiring process, we finally have a new replacement on board. Mason Conley has been hired as the

new regulatory biologist responsible for Leon, Madison, and Grimes counties. Originally from Mississippi, Mason is currently completing his Master's Degree from Texas A&M University and actually was already working as a biologist for TPWD in the Winters area. Mason can be reached at mason.conley@tpwd.texas.gov or at 936-241-2313. Be sure to look over the new personnel map on page 12 to see the changes within the district.

Probably the largest change from the department this year is the unveiling of the new MLDP program. The old MLDP program lasted 20 years and it was time for some new changes in order to streamline the permitting process, better assist cooperators, and meet the demands for an ever-increasing deer population. A slight delay has postponed the start date, but the new program's website should be up and running in the near future.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter. As always, feel free to distribute to any and all that are interested in reading it.

If you would like to unsubscribe to this newsletter or if you received this e-mail from someone other than TPWD and would like to subscribe, please send an e-mail indicating such to billy.lambert@tpwd.texas.gov

WILDLIFE Profile



Photo by Billy Lambert

TEXAS CORAL SNAKE

(*Micrurus tener*)

Billy C. Lambert, Jr.

I don't have many friends. At least according to the book *Billy the Coral Snake* by A. J. Cosmo. Poor Billy thinks his inability to make friends is because of his venom, but apparently it's really due to his overall poor attitude. But, while a fictitious children's book, the actual coral snake isn't really that much different. He doesn't seem to have many friends either.

Coral snakes belong to a group of snakes called elapids (family Elapidae), which also include cobras, mambas, and sea snakes. The coral snake is the only terrestrial elapid found in North America. There are 3 species of coral snake in the United States, but only 1 is found in Texas (the other 2 species occur in Arizona/New Mexico and the eastern US from the Carolinas south to Florida). The Texas coral snake and the eastern variety are very similar in appearance and was once thought to be the same species. The coral snake is the only venomous snake found in the United States that is not a pit viper.

The Texas coral snake is found west of the Mississippi River in Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, and south to central Mexico. In Texas, it is primarily found in the eastern third of the state from the Red River south and west through the Hill Country to the eastern edge of the Trans-Pecos region. Within its range it is a fairly common snake, although they tend to be shy and secretive and are not often seen (I've only seen three live ones).

The coral snake does not appear to require specific habitat conditions, although they do seem to prefer moist, wooded areas and places with higher humidity. Common habitats include areas with sufficient ground concealment such as leaf litter, rocks, and fallen logs. They are primarily nocturnal and crepuscular, moving mostly during nighttime, mornings, and evenings. During the day, coral snakes are content with hiding underneath debris or in shallow burrows. The diet consists mainly of other small snakes, although coral snakes will occasionally eat lizards, skinks, and frogs if available.

A slender snake, the average Texas coral snake measures only 20-30 inches in length, with females typically larger than males. The largest recorded coral measured right at 48

inches. Most coral snakes have a very distinct color pattern, with alternating black, yellow, and red bands running the length of the body. The red bands often contain black specks and are always adjacent to the thin, yellow bands. The head and tail ends of the snake, however, only have alternating black and yellow bands and the head is always black. Of the similarly-colored snakes in Texas, only the coral has red bands touching yellow bands. As with most snakes though, variation in coloration can cause confusion in snake identification. Albinos have been documented in the wild, as well as melanism (all black snakes), and anerythristic snakes lacking the red coloration. While correct the majority of the time, the commonly-heard phrase "red and yellow, kill a fellow," may not always be beneficial in coral snake identification.

Distinctive coloration aside, coral snakes are easily distinguished from other venomous snakes in the state. Coral snakes lack the facial pit characteristic of the pit vipers, such as rattlesnakes, copperheads, and water moccasins, and they also have a rounded head and round pupils as opposed to the triangular head and elliptical pupils found in the other venomous species.

Breeding typically occurs in the summer extending through to the following spring. This lengthy breeding season is thought to be a function of the snake's relatively small home range combined with the male's difficulty in locating



Photo by Billy Lambert



Photo by Billy Lambert

receptive females. The tendency for females to sometimes eat the males also complicates the breeding process. As opposed to many other venomous snakes, female coral snakes lay eggs rather than give birth to live young. The eggs are small, measuring less than 1.5 inches long and 0.5 inches in diameter, and are deposited in summer. There are usually 3-9 eggs per clutch and hatching occurs after 60 days. Newly-emerged snakes are 6-9 inches long and are fully venomous at hatching. Captive snakes have lived up to seven years.

Much confusion and misinformation exists regarding the coral snake's teeth or fangs and its ability to bite. Contrary to popular belief, coral snakes are not rear-fanged, but front-fanged (similar to most other venomous snakes). But, the fangs are not hinged (can't be flattened against the roof of the mouth) as in pit vipers and are permanently erect. The fangs are small, fixed teeth, similar to pegs, located at the front of the upper jaw and are less than 1/8 of an inch long (making it difficult to penetrate most clothing).

Other misconceptions deal with where a coral snake is able to bite and how envenomation occurs. While it is true that they have small mouths and very small fangs, the coral snake can bite any exposed skin, not just between fingers or toes. And, a coral snake does not necessarily need to "chew" in order to release venom; envenomation can occur with a single bite. The misconception likely comes from the fact that coral snakes often bite multiple times when agitated or attacking prey and frequently hold on to prey items for extended periods.

On the positive side, coral snakes are not aggressive towards people and the vast majority will simply crawl away if disturbed (as with most snakes). When provoked though, they will often tuck their head underneath their body and elevate their tail in a threatening posture to mimic a striking pose. Predators of coral snakes would be similar to that of other snake-eaters and, as with most snakes, a significant amount of mortality occurs from people (indiscriminate killing and vehicles).

As mentioned previously, coral snakes are not aggressive, are not often seen, and have difficulty biting through most clothing. As such, there is little chance of being bitten. In fact, there are less than 100 bites to people by coral snakes in the US each year (most cases are in Florida). As with most snakes, bites to people usually only occur if snakes are handled or if trying to kill them. But, even then, deaths from coral snakes are rare. There have only been 2 reported deaths in the US due to coral snake bites in the last 50 years (and one of those was a man that refused any treatment once bitten). Even before antivenin was developed, the mortality rate was listed at less than 10%.

But, while bites and deaths are rare, it is important to note that coral snakes are highly venomous. In fact, their venom is among the most toxic of all North American snakes. But, it is produced at much lower quantities as compared to other venomous snakes. A typical bite from a coral snake may only deliver 1-28 mg of venom as opposed to 300-400 mg of venom from a rattlesnake bite. Larger coral snakes do tend to deliver more venom than smaller snakes, but smaller snakes can also deliver a life-threatening dose (death can occur at 5-10 mg). All bites do not result in envenomation.

Yet another difference between coral snakes and other venomous snakes in the US is that coral snake venom is a neurotoxin, affecting the respiratory and nervous systems. For prey items, this is beneficial in that once bitten, the prey isn't able to put up much of a fight. For people, envenomation can result in paralysis leading to respiratory or cardiovascular failure. Human death has been reported to occur as quickly as 4 hours. But, normally the venom is very slow acting. In fact, initial symptoms may not even be noticeable for up to 12-18 hours or more. Regardless, the best treatment if bitten is always to seek medical attention immediately. While discontinued for many years, coral snake antivenin is currently back in production.

LINKS OF INTEREST

List of Hunting Season by Species:

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/regulations/outdoor-annual/hunting/seasons/statewide/>

Information on TPWD Education Programs:

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/education/>

Volunteer Opportunities with TPWD:

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/volunteer/>

BIOLOGIST Bio

John Silovsky, Wildlife District 5 Leader for the Post Oak Savannah and Blackland Prairie ecoregions, developed an early interest in wildlife while growing up in Kansas. The tallgrass prairies and riparian woodlands held ample numbers of quail, pheasants, rabbit, and squirrels and all were just a short bicycle ride away. Plus, the fascination of catching crawdad in the area creeks and fishing with his mom were icing on the cake. But, it was an archery deer hunting trip with his uncle near the Delaware River that had him hooked for life. To foster his interest in the outdoors, during the summers of his youth John's folks put him on a train bound for his grandparent's ranch in southern Oklahoma to assist with livestock operations and just be a kid outdoors. This early exposure to the outdoors guided John to two objectives in life: become a wildlife biologist and a cowboy.

John attended Pittsburg State University in Kansas and received his Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife Biology in 1981. Immediately upon graduation, he began his career with Kansas Wildlife and Parks and after acquiring a few seasonal positions, John successfully landed an assistant manager position on a wildlife management area.

From there he was promoted to the lead biologist of one of the state's premier waterfowl management areas, which led to a twenty-year immersion in habitat manipulations for a variety of wetland-associated wildlife species. In his spare time, he ran and operated a 300-head stocker cattle operation utilizing management intensive grazing techniques on

a variety of forage types. A move to northeast Kansas as the Regional Public Lands Supervisor completed the last eight years of a thirty-two year adventure in Kansas.

John relocated to Texas three years ago and joined TPWD to serve as District 5 Leader where he supervises nine biologists within the district and also routinely works with area landowners and cooperators.

The move to Texas was precipitated by a strong desire to continue to utilize his professional experience in natural resource management to promote and implement resource programs that are sustainable and that also meet the needs of a broad constituent base. According to John, "getting inside a ranch gate, developing an understanding of the landowners' objectives, and then assisting them in meeting those objectives is very rewarding. Balancing the economics of all aspects of ranch management with the direct and indirect costs of habitat enhancement is one of the greatest challenges for the biologist

and the landowner. Working with departmental staff and landowners in the Post Oak Savannah, as well as the many partner organizations, makes it easy to go to work every day. Sometimes I can't believe that I really get paid to do this kind of work."

Outside work, John enjoys pursuing crappie and hybrids on Lake Palestine, hunting, and bird watching. He has been married to his girlfriend for 35 years and has a daughter, son-in-law, and grandson in Alabama. Feel free to contact John at 903-566-1626 or at john.silovsky@tpwd.texas.gov.



Photo by Billy Lambert



TEXAS BIG GAME AWARDS

2017



BANQUETS

May 20 ABILENE Abilene Civic Center
 June 10 UVALDE Willie DeLeon Civic Center
 June 24 LUFKIN Pitsier Garrison Convention Center



TICKETS

Awardee is FREE | \$20 for adults | \$15 for kids under 12
 Reserved Table for \$300 (10 tickets)

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Doors Open @ 2 pm

Seminars & Activities @ 3 pm

Dinner @ 5:30 pm

Awards Ceremony @ 6:30 pm

Raffle drawing following the awards

Must Register to Attend.

Tickets will not be available at the door.

Deadline to purchase tickets is two weeks prior to banquet.

Dress is banquet casual.

PLANT Profile



Photo by Billy Lambert

Southern Dewberry

(Rubus trivialis)

Billy C. Lambert, Jr.

After several suspect years, I have finally come to the conclusion that my wife is goofy. I was somewhat undecided in that regard until a recent conversation finally provided the evidence that I needed. We were picking dewberries along the back fenceline and I encouraged her to sample a few as there were more than enough to collect for future pies and cobblers. After selecting a nice plump berry and popping it in her mouth, she declared “that’s nasty” with a grimace reminiscent of me staring at a bowl of spinach with a side of greens. “You must have got a bad one,” I replied, “try this one.” Same response, “gross.” After sampling several, I couldn’t even get her to try any more. Now I’m going to have to go back and review our wedding vows to see if there is a hidden dewberry clause, otherwise I just might have to let her go.

Southern dewberry is a perennial, low-growing, evergreen shrub from the rose family. It is found throughout the southeastern and central United States with a range extending from Texas north to Kansas and over to Maryland south to Florida. Although truly a woody shrub, dewberry often resembles a vine, with several long and tangled stems that can become dense. This, along with the many thorns, can make dewberry patches difficult to navigate through. Dewberry does not grow very tall, however, usually less than 3 feet in height.

Dewberry is highly adaptable and occurs in a variety of areas, ranging from upland fields and savannahs to floodplains and bottomlands. They will grow in any soil type with the exception of the heaviest clay soils that excessively hold water and can thrive in both alkaline and acidic soils. Dewberry seems to perform best in full sunlight, but also can be found in partially-shaded areas and moderate woodlands. Dewberry is most commonly seen in disturbed areas such as waste areas, fallow fields, fencelines, and clearings.

Leaves are palmately compound and located alternately along the stem. Each leaf consists of 3-5 dark green leaflets arranged in pentagon fashion. Leaflets are typically 1-3 inches in length by 0.75-1.5 inches wide and are serrated, or toothed. No significant color change occurs prior to leaf drop and leaves emerge in late winter extending though fall into early winter. Stems are red or

green in color and are unbranched during their first year. Multiple branches sprout during the second year and can form roots when tips touch the ground.

Flowers emerge in the spring, usually March or April. They occur in small clusters of 1-3 individuals from the lateral branches. Commonly white, but sometimes slightly pink, the flowers are up to 1.5 inches and have 5 petals that are widely spaced and rounded. Both male and female organs exist, with numerous stamens and pistils residing in the cup-shaped flower.

The fruit is produced in spring to early summer and each berry is actually an aggregate cluster of individual



Photo by Billy Lambert

drupelets that collectively measure 0.25-0.75 inches in length. Initially, dewberries start out green in color, but quickly switch to red, and finally to purplish-black as the fruit matures. The fruit is thought to be sweeter than the closely-related blackberry, and is enjoyed by a variety of wildlife species (other than my wife).

While oftentimes considered a desirable plant simply because of the berries they produce, many people overlook just how beneficial dewberry is to many different wildlife species. As the shrub usually grows in dense clusters, dewberry can provide excellent thermal, hiding, and nesting cover for many small mammal and reptile species. Plus, the leaves and stems can be consumed by a variety of animals up to and including deer. The flowers are an important source of nectar early in the year for a variety of insects, especially bees and bumble bees. And, the berries are consumed by a multitude of small mammal and bird species.



Photo by Billy Lambert

Dewberry can be used as a barrier plant and may also be a good choice to prevent erosion, especially in areas where it is desirable to attract wildlife. While beauty is in the eye of the beholder, dewberry may not be a great choice as an ornamental since it has thorns, does not produce showy flowers, and tends to be invasive. But, in general, the benefits far outweigh the negatives.

Aside from just tasting good, dewberries are high in vitamin C and also provide other important dietary components such as vitamins A and B, copper, manganese, potassium, and magnesium. And, dewberry may also provide some medicinal value. Native Americans made a tea with the leaves and roots to treat sore throat, diarrhea, urinary problems, and rheumatism and also used the plant topically to treat hemorrhoids. The roots, leaves, and berries are astringent, meaning that it helps tissues retain water, and also contain antioxidants to prevent cell damage.

Now for the best part. Dewberries are good to eat. The fruit can be eaten straight from the plant or cooked and is often used in jellies, jams, preserves, pies, cobblers, ice cream, juices, and even wine. Because dewberries do not keep well unless frozen, they are seldom seen commercially. Therefore, dewberry delicacies are usually 'self-serve,' meaning you need to pick them yourself. Fortunately, they are not usually hard to find

(this year's crop was the heaviest area-wide that I've seen in the past 17 years). On the downside, dewberry often resides right alongside snakes, chiggers, and poison ivy, all of which are active during the typical dewberry-pickin' timeframe. Plus, you have the thorns to contend with. But, a scoop of ice cream alongside a dewberry cobbler tends to make it all worthwhile.

TROPHY Corner



Photo by Jeremy O'Guin

Jeremy O'Guin collected this amazing partially-melanistic bobcat last November in Grimes county. This particular coloration had not previously been documented in bobcats anywhere in the US.



Photo by Luke Catching

Chad Catching shot his first deer last year from Grayson County. This exceptional deer has 14 points, gross scored 175 3/8, and easily makes Texas Big Game Awards and the Pope and Young Club record book.



Photo by Brian Stallones

Chris Miguez shot this great non-typical from Robertson County last season with a bow. The deer has 13 total points, gross-scored 147 0/8 and makes the Pope and Young Club record book.

RESEARCH Summary

Potential Impacts of CWD on White-tailed Deer in Texas

Billy C. Lambert, Jr.

Foley, A. M., Hewitt, D. G., DeYoung, C. A., DeYoung, R. W., and Schnupp, M. J. 2016. "Modeled Impacts of Chronic Wasting Disease on White-tailed Deer in a Semi-Arid Environment." PLoS ONE 11(10): e0163592.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an always-fatal neurological disease found in white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose and other members of the deer family. The disease was first recognized in 1967 in Colorado, and has subsequently been documented in captive and free-ranging deer in 24 states and two Canadian Provinces. The infectious agent is a prion with no preventative measures or treatments for the disease.

This disease presents numerous challenges for state wildlife agencies across North America. A primary consideration is the potential for decline within deer, elk, or other susceptible cervid populations. In addition, CWD could have indirect impacts on hunting, hunter participation, and economic benefits derived from big game hunting. In Texas, hunting is a \$2.2 billion economic engine, supporting many rural towns across the state.

Because eradication is thought to be impossible once CWD becomes established in a population, the best defense strategy is simply to try and prevent the disease from entering the population from outside sources. But, unfortunately, CWD was detected in Texas in a captive white-tailed deer breeding facility in 2015. Subsequent testing also revealed the disease in 3 additional captive facilities and a high-fenced property where deer from the breeder facilities were released.

At that time, there was still hope for containment as all of the known positive white-tailed deer in the state were located in pens or high-fenced areas. But, during the 2016-2017 hunting season, and for the first time, CWD was detected in a hunter-harvested, free-ranging white-tailed deer close to the captive facilities. A fifth breeder facility was found to have a positive case as well. Much concern exists about long-term impacts that the disease may have on wild white-tailed deer populations in Texas.

Researchers at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute (CKWRI) at Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK) used data collected from 4 areas within the King Ranch (Brooks, Kenedy, and Kleberg Counties) to model potential impacts of CWD on white-tailed deer. Survey and harvest data from the ranch were used to determine fawn recruitment rates, population size, and harvest rates for each year from 1996-2015.

Four different scenarios were analyzed: no recreational deer harvest and no CWD present, no recreational deer harvest with CWD present at varying levels, harvest of bucks only with CWD present, and harvest of both sexes with CWD present. CWD prevalence rates used in the analysis were actual estimates obtained from 3 areas where CWD already exists in wild populations. The low (0.26%), Medium (0.83%), and High (2.3%) prevalence rates were obtained from West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, respectively. Based on prior research, mortality of CWD-affected deer within the model was 100% within a 1-3 year period. The researchers ran 1,000 model simulations for a 25-year period for each of the CWD/Harvest scenarios. A much more thorough and detailed explanation of the model can be found in the original publication.

As expected, results indicated that with no CWD present in the deer herd and no hunting, the population increased an average of 1.43% per year for 25 years. By adding the lowest incidence of CWD (0.26%), the population again showed an average annual increase, although it was reduced to 0.41% per year. Once CWD prevalence rates increased to the medium (0.83%) and high (2.3%) levels found in other states, however, the populations declined an average of 1.72% and 10.33% per year, respectively.

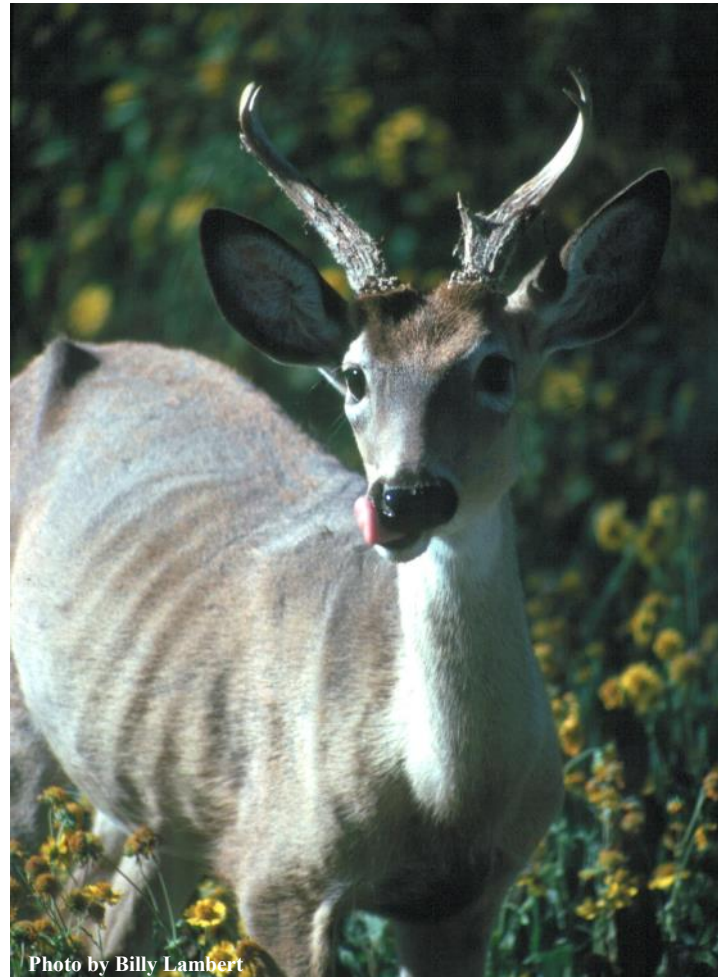


Photo by Billy Lambert

All of the above analysis was calculated assuming no recreational hunting pressure. But, the additional mortality associated with just a 1.0% harvest rate of females caused the population to decline, even at the lowest level of CWD prevalence. The harvest of males only, however, did not result in a population decline.

Looking at it another way (Figure 1), at the relatively conservative recreational harvest rate of 2% of the population (males and females) with no CWD present, the population remained stable for the 25-year period. However, with the introduction of even a low CWD infection rate, the population declined over the same timeframe.

Another factor revealed in the analysis was the age structure of the male segment of the deer herd, an important consideration for both hunters and landowners alike. Buck age structure declined with the presence of CWD, meaning that the proportion of older age class males 5.5 years old or older declined, while the proportion of younger-aged males increased. This seems especially important given that antler development is closely tied to age and that large-antlered bucks are the most sought-after segment of the deer herd by hunters. The female age structure, however, was unaffected by the presence of CWD.

This research very well illustrates that the presence of CWD is not desirable for the long-term health and sustainability of deer populations in Texas from biological, recreational, and economic standpoints. As the authors point out, this appears to especially be true in areas where adult survival may be more important in maintaining population size as opposed to strict dependence on high fawn recruitment. Fawn production is frequently correlated with annual

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precipitation, which can be highly variable in Texas, and therefore cannot be a dependable source of population stability. Years of low fawn recruitment combined with additive adult mortality from CWD likely will have negative consequences. And, that populations may continued to decline even in the absence of hunting (which is bad enough) is particularly disturbing. The only model with CWD that indicated something other than a population decline was at a relatively low CWD prevalence rate.

As hunting is extremely important to both the heritage and economy of Texas, efforts should continue to limit the potentially negative consequences of the disease. This would be primarily accomplished through attempts to prevent its introduction into new areas and to limit the spread of the disease where it currently exists.

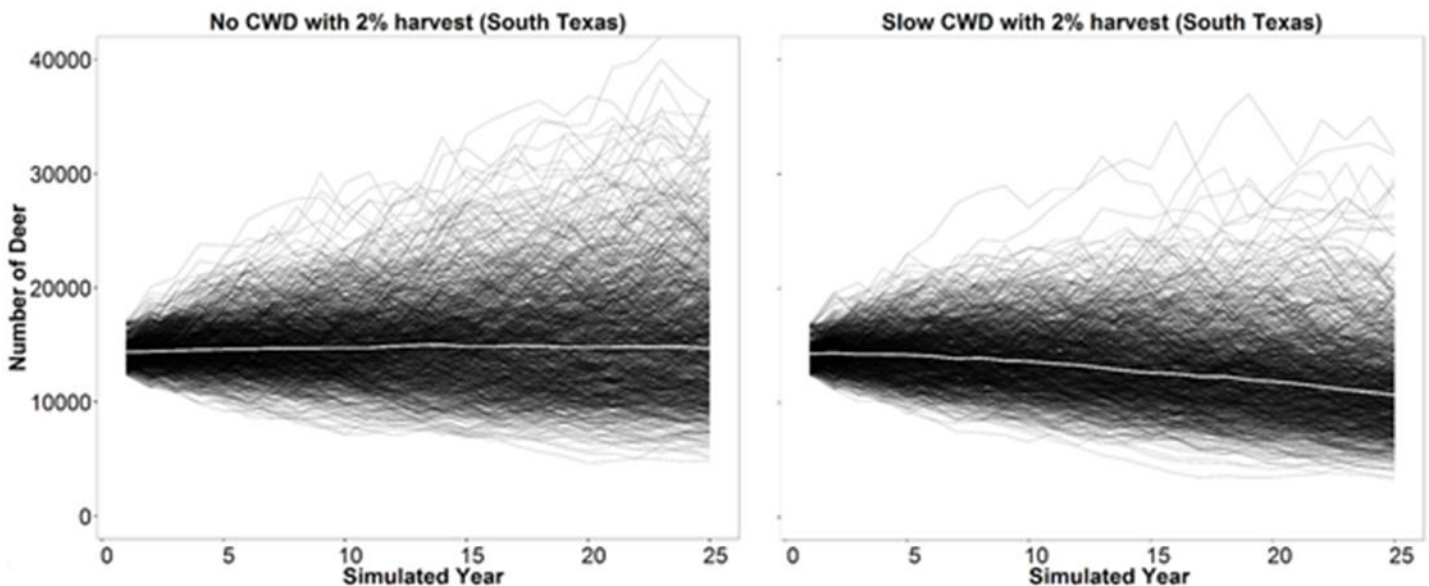


Figure 1. The authors ran 1,000 25-year simulations for each model. The left graphic, with no CWD present in the population and a conservative 2% recreational hunting harvest rate, shows relatively stable population growth over time with no decrease in animal numbers. The right graphic, however, indicates an average population decline over time when the presence of CWD mortality is added to the 2% recreational hunting harvest rate.

MANAGED LANDS DEER PROGRAM - Billy C. Lambert, Jr.

In 1996, a new deer management program was initiated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. MLDP, as it would come to be known, was originally a deer permit and assistance program designed to allow landowners more flexibility in their deer management efforts while encouraging sound habitat management principles and reducing deer populations to more healthy levels that the habitat could support naturally. Significant changes were made periodically through 2005, but the program remained essentially unchanged for the next 12 years.

No matter how you measure it, the program was a success. The number of cooperators, number of enrolled acres, and the number of enrolled properties continued to climb as word spread and more landowners and hunters saw the benefits of the program. In fact, the number of properties receiving assistance increased from 813 early on to over 10,000 in 2014 and there was no sign of it slowing down.

It seems the program had become a victim of its own success. With the increase in technical guidance to cooperators, biologist were facing the increasingly difficult task of providing assistance to everybody requesting it, as well as still being able to perform the many other duties and requirements of the job. It was time for a change.

After much discussion and input from the public, stakeholder groups, committees, advisory boards, executive staff, and field staff, the TPWD Commission adopted changes to the MLD Program in August 2015 that would essentially allow for the same objectives as the original program, but streamline the process for more effective partnerships with cooperators. Once adopted by the TPWD Commission, work began to create the web-based system that would accommodate the new program. And that pretty much brings us up to date. Currently, the new program is scheduled to launch on 1 July 2017.

The new MLDP program consists of 2 options, the Harvest Option and the Conservation Option, and both are available statewide. Requirements differ depending on the option desired, but all cooperators can choose the option that best fits their particular needs (assuming they successfully meet the requirements of the program). Both options allow for extended hunting seasons and enhanced bag limits. Application and enrollment in the new program is almost entirely web-based, which requires participants in the program to have access to a computer and have a valid e-mail address.

Online applications can be made through the Land Management Assistance online system accessed from TPWD's website once the program begins July 1.

One significant change that will occur as part of the new system is that MLDP tags will no longer be mailed from either the local biologist or TPWD headquarters. For the first time, TPWD will institute a "print your own tag" system for tag issuance. Once the appropriate number of tags have been determined, a PDF document will be generated whereby cooperators can print the tags whenever they desire. Any type of printer paper will suffice, but remember, the tag must be maintained in legible condition until tagging requirements cease. Also, once MLDP tags have been issued, it is a violation for a hunter to use tags from their regular hunting license on the enrolled property (total harvest for the property is limited to the number of tags issued).

Hunters should be aware that a MLDP tag may not be used more than once on a harvested deer. As with the previous program, a properly executed tag will serve as proof of sex. Participants in both MLDP options will also now be required to maintain a daily harvest log on any property enrolled in the MLDP program. Once a deer requiring an MLDP tag is harvested, the information must be entered in the harvest log the same day the deer is killed. This log must be made available to TPWD employees upon request.



Photo by Billy Lambert

With the upcoming deer season fast approaching, many hunters are anxiously awaiting the roll-out of the new deer management assistance program provided through TPWD.

The following is a brief description of the two MLDP options. Contact your local biologist for a more-detailed explanation or for more information. To find your local biologist, you can go to http://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists/.

HARVEST OPTION

The Harvest Option is a completely automated tag issuance program that essentially combines the old LAMPS and MLDP systems. It does not require a management plan or any involvement from a TPWD biologist (unless requested). As opposed to the old MLDP program, this option does not require the cooperators to collect deer survey information or require habitat management practices. The deadline to enter the Harvest Option is September 1 each year.

There is no minimum acreage requirement as long as there is enough acreage to qualify for a tag. The number of tags issued is based on a formula that incorporates property information (Deer Management Unit in which the property exists, number of acres, and habitat types) and deer herd information (sex ratio, deer density, and fawn crop) obtained through surveys that departmental employees collect throughout the state. In the event that an individual property does not have enough acreage to qualify for a tag(s), two or more low-fenced contiguous properties may combine acreage to obtain tags which can then be used on any property located within the combined (aggregate) acreage.

A Harvest Option tag estimator tool will be available to allow a cooperator to see how many tags they may be receive under the Harvest Option without having to create and account and enroll in MLDP. To obtain an MLDP tag estimate, a cooperator will simply go to tag estimator tool on the TPWD website and outline their property boundary on a base map. Once completed, the system will generate a harvest recommendation that can be viewed immediately.

The cooperator will then decide if they want to receive the recommended number of tags for bucks, does, or both (or none) and proceed with an account creation and enrollment process. But remember, if tags are issued, the number of deer harvested cannot exceed the number of tags issued. If tags are declined for a particular sex of deer, the regular county season and bag limits will apply for that sex during the season, including buck antler restrictions.

If a cooperator accepts doe tags, the season for this year would be 30 September 2017 through 28 February 2018 by any legal means (including rifle). Likewise, if buck tags are accepted, the season for bucks with at least one unbranched antler would be the same as that listed above for does. For branch-antlered bucks, archery season would remain the same as in the past (30 September 2017 through 3 November 2018, legal archery equipment only) and then bucks could be taken by any legal means during the period of 4 November 2017 through 28 February 2018. If MLDP tags are issued for bucks, antler restrictions are not enforced.

CONSERVATION OPTION

The Conservation Option is very similar to the Level 3 MLDP program from previous years. An approved wildlife management plan is required and enrollment in the Conservation Option requires deer survey and harvest data and at least 2 habitat management practices each year for the immediate two years preceding the time of application. Once accepted in the Conservation Option, cooperators are required to submit the survey and harvest data annually as well as to conduct 3 habitat management practices each year (supplemental feeding does not count as a habitat management practice). The normal deadline to enter the Conservation Option is 15 June of each year. However, during this initial transition year to the new LMA system the deadline has been extended to 1 August. If a cooperator misses the deadline or otherwise does not qualify for the Conservation Option, they may still enroll in the Harvest Option for that year by the September 1 deadline.

For the Conservation Option, site-specific harvest recommendations are determined based on survey data that the cooperator collects each fall. Both buck and doe tags must be accepted, and harvest may not exceed the number of tags issued. As with the Harvest Option, multiple properties may combine acreage for tag issuance. Once tags are issued, the hunting season will be 30 September 2017 through 28 February 2018 by any legal means for both sexes. For both options, harvest data must be submitted by 1 April to be eligible to continue enrollment in MLDP for the following year. Conservation Option participants must also report their habitat management practices by 1 April for continued eligibility in MLDP.



**WHITE-TAILED DEER AND
FERAL HOG WORKSHOP**
29 July 2017, Canton

**Contact the Van Zandt County AgriLife
Extension office at 903-567-4149
for more information**

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GUS ENGELING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

1st Friday Wildlife Habitat Management Workshop

The Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area will host habitat workshops monthly from May thru August on the first Friday of each month. The workshops will begin at 1:00 p.m. at the Gus Engeling Wildlife Conservation Center. Attendees will receive a brief overview and history of the property and then will be taken on a guided tour of the WMA with a wildlife biologist. The tour will show attendees proper habitat management practices for the Post Oak Savannah Ecoregion. Attendees will see areas that show the progression of prescribed fire in various habitat types ranging from historically burned to entry level burns. Hardwood timber management techniques, strip disking and other mechanical treatments, harvest management, grazing management, and herbicide application will also be discussed. The workshops will be informal and open to discuss any further topics of interest by attendees. For more information, contact the Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area at 903-928-2251.



Wildlife Habitat Management Calendar

January

Prescribed Fire (Cool)
Native Grass Planting
Hardwood Tree Planting
Light Disking and High Mowing
Feral Hog Removal
Brush Control (Grazing)

February

Prescribed Fire (Cool)
Native Grass Planting
Hardwood Tree Planting
Light Disking and High Mowing
Feral Hog Removal
Brush Control (Grazing)

March

Prescribed Fire (Cool)
Native Grass Planting
Hardwood Tree Planting
Overseed Legumes (Warm)
Feral Hog Removal
Brush Control (Grazing)

April

Native Grass Planting
Overseed Legumes (Warm)
Avoid Grass Cutting (Fawns, Turkeys)
Feral Hog Removal
Remove Livestock from Wildlife Area

May

Avoid Grass Cutting (Fawns, Turkeys)
Feral Hog Removal
Remove Livestock from Wildlife Area

June

Prescribed Fire (Warm)
Tame Grass Herbicide Work (Warm)
Avoid Grass Cutting (Fawns, Turkeys)
Feral Hog Removal
Waterfowl Planting
Remove Livestock

July

Prescribed Fire (Warm)
Tame Grass Herbicide Work (Warm)
Brush Control
Feral Hog Removal
Waterfowl Planting
Deer Surveys

August

Prescribed Fire (Warm)
Tame Grass Herbicide Work (Warm)
Feral Hog Removal
Waterfowl Planting
Deer Surveys

September

Reserve Hardwood Trees
Overseed Legumes (Cool)
Feral Hog Removal
Deer Surveys & Stand Maintenance
Mow around Ponds (Dove)

October

Reserve Hardwood Trees
Overseed Legumes (Cool)
Feral Hog Removal
Tame Grass Herbicide Work (Cool)
Harvest Management Deer
Plant Wildflowers

November

Prescribed Fire
Prepare Fire Guards
Feral Hog Removal
Deer Harvest

December

Prescribed Fire
Prepare Fire Guards
Feral Hog Removal
Deer Harvest

Resource Links:

Texas Parks and Wildlife:
www.tpwd.texas.gov

Texas A&M Forest Service:
www.texasforestservice.tamu.edu/main/default.aspx

NRCS Texas:
www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension:
www.agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service:
www.fws.gov

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