

122

# 1987-88 IDAHO RIFLE DEER HUNTING STUDY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for  
Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Prepared by<sup>1</sup>

Nick Sanyal  
William J. McLaughlin, Ph.D.  
Joanne F. Tynon  
Jim Tangen-Foster  
Stewart Allen, Ph.D.  
Charles C. Harris, Ph.D.

October 1989

---

<sup>1</sup> William J. McLaughlin, Stewart Allen and Charles C. Harris are faculty and Nick Sanyal, Jim Tangen-Foster and Joanne F. Tynon are Ph.D. students in the Department of Wildland Recreation Management, College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences, University of Idaho. This document is published as contribution number 500, Idaho Forest, Wildlife and Range Experiment Station, University of Idaho, Moscow.



## CHAPTER 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### OVERVIEW

The main goal of the Idaho Rifle Deer Hunter Opinion Study is to assist the Idaho Department of Fish and Game in developing information about the views of people who hunt deer with a rifle in Idaho. Descriptions of deer hunters, quality Idaho rifle deer hunting experiences, characteristics of preferred deer hunting settings, and hunters' opinions about various game management issues were explored.

This executive summary focuses on the key findings of a mail questionnaire administered in 1988-89 to resident and nonresident general season license holders who purchased a deer tag<sup>1</sup> in 1987. A total of 1,794 resident and nonresident Idaho rifle deer hunters composed the data set used in the analyses.

These data are representative only of the largest group of deer hunters, those that hunt with a rifle. They do not include archery and muzzle loader hunters. Two other reports from this project describe rifle elk hunters and shotgun hunters.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### *Characteristics of Rifle Deer Hunters*

- A true cross-section of Idahoans, from all age and income groups, hunt deer with a rifle. Most were male (90%) and employed full-time (72%). Nonresident hunters were more affluent than resident hunters.

- Nine distinct types of rifle deer hunters, differing in the relative importance they placed on four reasons for hunting (nature, hunting skills, social factors and harvest factors), were identified.
- Fewer than a third of all hunters were members of hunting, conservation, or sportsmen's organizations. Nonresident rifle deer hunters were more likely to be members of hunting, sportsmen's and/or conservation groups than resident rifle deer hunters.

#### *Desired Kinds of Deer*

- Large mule deer bucks (more than 4 points a side) were the most desired kind of mule deer.
- Resident deer hunters found small mule deer bucks (1 - 3 points a side) as desirable as large bucks (4+ points a side); nonresident hunters had a clear preference for trophy quality animals. Over three-quarters of the nonresident, but only a third of the resident rifle deer hunters found antlerless mule deer not very desirable.
- Large white-tailed bucks (4 or more points a side) were most desired and smaller white-tailed bucks (1-3 points a side) were the second most desired kind of white-tailed deer by both resident and nonresident rifle deer hunters.
- Antlerless white-tailed deer are less desirable than antlerless mule deer, however, resident hunters found antlerless white-tailed deer to be more desirable than did nonresident hunters.

---

<sup>1</sup> Juvenile and senior resident license holders were excluded from the sample.



### *Rifle Deer Hunting in Idaho*

- Not all rifle deer hunters want the same type of hunting experience; different experiences for both mule deer and white-tailed deer are desired and marketable. In most market segments, harvesting, and to even a lesser degree harvesting a trophy, is not the most important aspect of deer hunting.
- Unequal proportions of residents (about 21%) and nonresidents (about 70%) took deer hunting trips lasting seven or more days. A larger proportion of residents than nonresidents took shorter trips, especially one-day and weekend trips.
- Regions 2 (Clearwater) and 6 (Southeast) receive the highest visitation from nonresidents, whereas residents are more equally distributed across all regions with the exception of Region 4 (Southcentral), which received proportionately less use by the resident deer hunters.
- Throughout Idaho, deer hunters primarily hunt in only one region. About 16% of resident hunters and only 8% of the nonresident rifle deer hunters hunt deer in more than one region of the state.
- Access by foot (96.9%) and 4-wheel drive vehicles (84%) were the most common travel modes while hunting deer. Almost half of all hunters used horses or pack animals or 2-wheel drive vehicles at least "sometimes." Dirt bikes and ATV's were used by fewer than one in every five hunters. Snowmobiles, boats, aircraft and mountain bikes were each used by fewer than 7 percent of deer hunters.

### *Quality Rifle Deer Hunting in Idaho*

- The most important reasons for deer hunting in Idaho, selected by rifle deer hunters from a set of 33 possible reasons, were not harvest related, but

rather focused on other aspects of the hunting experience, such as being out in nature, viewing scenery, seeing deer in natural settings, bringing back pleasant memories and getting away from the usual demands of life.

- Descriptions of quality rifle deer hunting in Idaho, in response to an open-ended question, revealed that hunters feel knowing deer are abundant, the naturalness of the setting, being around few other hunters, seeing deer, and harvesting a trophy are key attributes of quality. Other lesser important attributes of quality include killing a deer, getting away, and being with family and friends.
- Almost three-quarters of all rifle deer hunters feel they experienced a quality hunt more than half the time when hunting in Idaho. Residents are slightly more likely than nonresidents to feel they obtained a quality hunt more than half the time.
- Over 90 percent of all deer hunters are positively affected by seeing unique species or hunting in an area they are attached to. Seeing non-game, the opportunity to hunt more than one species, encountering few other hunters, hunting an area that is close to the hunter's home or that has no roads are setting characteristics that add to the quality of the hunting experience of at least two-thirds of all rifle deer hunters.
- Things that detract from the hunting quality of at least two-thirds of the hunters include encountering other hunting groups, motorized vehicles being used off of roads, areas with many open roads, current logging, or areas recently burned by forest fires.

### *How Rifle Deer Hunters Feel About Selected Issues*

- The majority of resident (71.2%) and nonresident (68%) rifle deer hunters



support fee increases to offset the increasing costs of game management.

- Hunting in an area with no roads strongly added to the deer hunting experiences of 42% of all hunters. This attitude was further supported because almost three quarters said hunting in an area having many open roads detracted somewhat or a lot from their rifle deer hunting experience in Idaho.
- For the most part, hunters said they accepted encountering closed roads while hunting deer in Idaho. Only 10% said closed roads were never acceptable. Nonresidents were more accepting of road closures than residents.
- In general, respondents were clearly not willing to trade elk security for increased motorized access to hunting areas. And there is a strong belief that every type of vehicle (truck, trailbike, snowmobile, etc.) should be treated the same under a road closure policy.
- Hunters are cognizant of and sympathetic about the problem of crop depredation. When presented with alternative actions that could be taken to address big game depredation, rifle deer hunters tended to favor options that required both the landowner and the Department to contribute. The most favored options were to provide materials that the landowner would have to install to keep wildlife away or have the Department chase the animals away from the fields. The least acceptable options specified either direct payment to landowners or providing materials at no cost.
- The majority of hunters found the idea of managing for large mule deer bucks acceptable, and most would accept the use of controlled hunts to increase deer survival and prohibiting the harvest of bucks during rut.
- Deer hunters do not support over harvesting. Allowing hunters to harvest two deer is acceptable only if it is for

depredation control, particularly to hunters who hunt deer in Regions 5 and 6. It would also be acceptable to have separate tags for white-tailed and mule deer (idea is most acceptable to Region 5 and 6 deer hunters), to be able to purchase two tags for deer of either species (idea most acceptable to Region 1 deer hunters and least acceptable to Region 4 deer hunters), and to have a statewide tag for either species and a zone tag for a specific area.

- Rifle deer hunters favored the alternatives that limited the way that people can hunt black bear (using bait and hounds), rather than limiting the basic opportunities for bear hunting.
- More than half of all rifle deer hunters feel that the Department of Fish and Game is doing an excellent or good job of deer management and general fish and wildlife management. About one of every ten hunters feels the Department is doing a poor or very poor job of management.

## MAJOR POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results of the 1987-88 Idaho Rifle Deer Hunting Study lead to many conclusions. What these findings mean for the future management of Idaho's wildlife resources can only be assessed by examining them in the context of wildlife management policy. Seven key policy implications that address deer management from the perspective of sport hunting are presented below.

- Managers formulating policy need to explicitly recognize that the Department presently manages a diversity of hunting opportunities or products. Also, the potential exists to market these to definable hunter market segments. Presently, Idaho's highest quality hunting product as defined by the hunter is an unroaded natural setting (particularly those designated as Wilderness) with an abundance of wildlife species (particularly unique



- ones), few other hunters, the opportunity to pursue animals in all age classes, and a chance to use and practice hunting skills with companions.
- Managers formulating policy need to describe non-hunting opportunities or products to be developed based upon the findings of this study and the national trends that suggest increasing numbers of people are interested in wildlife for non-harvest reasons. If trend measurements prove to be accurate, the development of new wildlife products (wildlife viewing, photography contests, etc.) will play a critical role in the future of the Department and its programs.
  - Quality rifle deer hunting in Idaho is the result of packages of attributes that include natural setting characteristics, an uncrowded feeling, a healthy deer population with a diverse age structure, regulations that recognize that people hunt in groups, perceived game abundance, the chance for trophy hunting, and harvesting an animal. Therefore, the department's effort, energy and money need to be balanced among these to ensure that multiple attributes are considered in the management and species planning process -- rather than just the number of animals available for harvest or how many licenses can be sold.
  - Rifle hunters have little interest in limiting their hunting opportunities, but are willing to trade off things like road access and increased fees to ensure that a quality game population is maintained. This provides managers an opportunity to manage from both a biological and sociological perspective.
  - Management issues are often perceived differently by diverse groups such as residents and nonresidents, Idahoans from different regions of the state, and hunters who seek distinct hunting products. Therefore, it is important to monitor these opinion trends and consider them when analyzing impacts and making decisions.
  - Channels for communicating with the hunting public must be expanded to ensure that the opinions of formal, organized groups are not over-represented in the Department's policy, planning and management processes. Many of the hunters surveyed expressed the need for additional information to more effectively evaluate wildlife management alternatives -- and they are eager to learn more about wildlife management.
  - This study points out the need to integrate social science expertise into the day-to-day management operations and research and planning programs of the Idaho Department of Fish & Game.