

Concurrent Firearms Season Length

Slides and Notes from Presentation to PA Game Commissioners, April 1, 2013

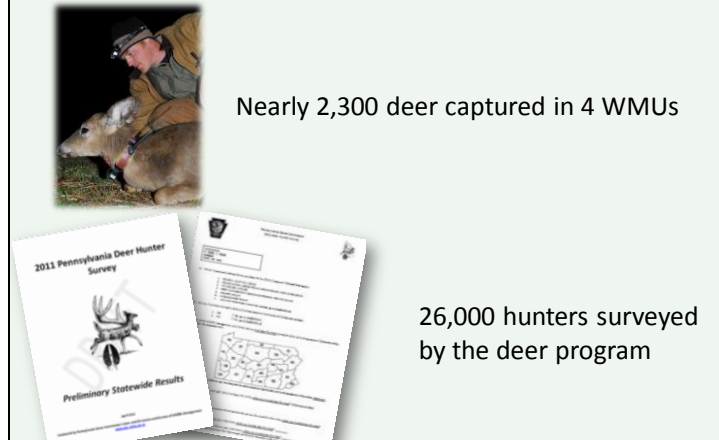
Discussion Topic Concurrent firearms season length

In recent meetings, the length of the concurrent season has been a regular topic of discussion and additional human dimensions data have been requested. In the last year, we completed our final report on the 4 year study of both the biological and social effects of the 7-day concurrent season. This study was conducted in WMUs 2D, 2G, 3C, and 4B. Since this final report was completed following last April's commission meeting, this presentation provides additional results from this 4-year study.

Staff Proposal Statewide 12-day concurrent firearms deer season.

Based on the biological and social science results from the 4-year study, staff is proposing a 12-day concurrent firearms season statewide.

Based on research results, an evaluation of the 7-day concurrent season is possible.



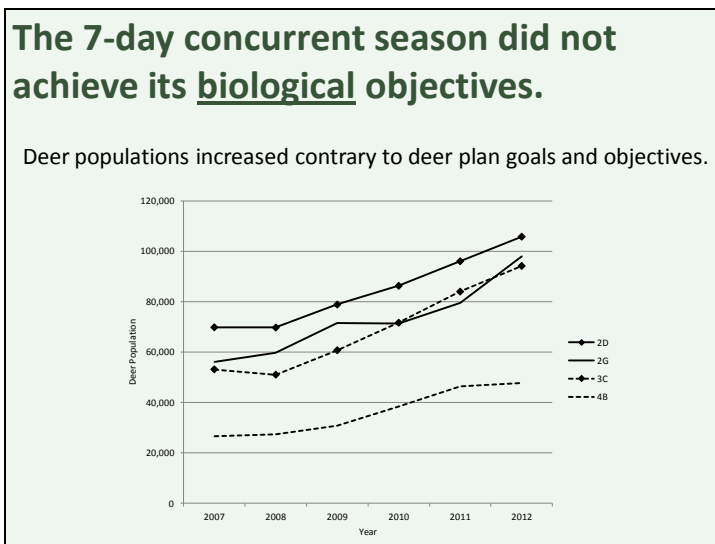
The deer program has completed significant research efforts regarding the biological and social aspects of the 7-day concurrent firearms season.

The primary research questions were, ‘can postponing harvest of antlerless deer improve hunter satisfaction?’ and ‘can we manage deer populations with a 7-day concurrent season?’

Deer and Elk Section personnel captured and monitored nearly 2,300 white-tailed deer in the 4 WMUs. Data from these deer have provided detailed information for population monitoring.

To address the social science questions, the Deer and Elk Section conducted surveys that contacted 26,000 hunters over the last 5 years through various surveys.

With these results from both the field and from hunter surveys, an evaluation of the social and biological aspects of the 7-day season is possible.



The 7-day concurrent season did not achieve its biological objectives. In the 4 study WMUs, the deer population increased substantially; contrary to deer plan goals and objectives. Population objectives – based on deer plan goals and objectives – would have been to stabilize these deer populations.

The 7-day concurrent season did not achieve its social objectives.

WMU	Saw more antlerless deer? ¹	More satisfied with hunting experience?	More satisfied with deer abundance?	More satisfied with firearms season?	More satisfied with deer program?
2D	No	No	No	No	No
2G	Yes (6-9)	Yes (15-25%)	No	No	No
3C	Yes (9-12)	No	No	No	No
4B	No	No	No	No	No

¹ – deer populations increased during this study

The 7-day season did not meet its social objectives.

In 2 WMUs, hunters saw more antlerless deer during the firearms season (i.e., in 2G, average number of antlerless deer seen by hunters increased from 6 to 9 after 4 years), however, this result cannot be attributed solely to the 7-day season because the populations also increased. If we look at the number of antlerless deer seen after 2 years – before deer populations had increased as much as they did after 4 years – we see no change in the number of antlerless deer seen by hunters in WMUs 2G and 3C. As a result, it does not appear postponing the antlerless harvest leads to hunters seeing more antlerless deer.

Hunters were more satisfied with their hunting experience in WMU 2G, but still only a quarter of hunters were satisfied – despite increased deer populations. Satisfaction with deer abundance, the firearms season, and the deer program did not increase.

Other, negative social consequences of the 7-day concurrent season exist.

1. No 2nd opening day effect
2. Fewer hunters travel to hunt opening days
3. The 7-day concurrent season is the least preferred alternative to a 12-day season
4. Limits ‘time to hunt’ – the #1 reason for increased interest in hunting for all age groups.

- No increase in hunter participation was observed on the 1st Saturday – which was the opening day of the antlerless season.
- In a WMU such as 2G, where a large percentage of the hunters travel to hunt, fewer hunters travelled to WMU 2G to hunt the first 2 days.
- When presented with other alternatives – such as a 6-day or a 3-day antlerless season – hunters chose these alternatives over the 7-day concurrent season.
- Finally, a 7-day concurrent season limits time to hunt. More time to hunt is the number one reason for an increased interest in hunting for every age group.

Time to hunt, not antlerless deer seen, increases hunter interest for all ages.

Rankings of 8 reasons for more interest than 5 years ago				
Rank	Juniors	18-39 years	40-59 years	60 years +
1	Time to hunt	Time to hunt	Time to hunt	Time to hunt
2	Place to hunt	Place to hunt	Place to hunt	Bucks seen
3	Bucks seen	Bucks seen	Bucks seen	Place to hunt
4	Expenses	Partners	Partners	Health
5	Partners	Crossbows	Crossbows	Crossbows
6	Antlerless deer	Expenses	Health	Antlerless deer
7	Crossbows	Antlerless deer	Expenses	Expenses
8	Health	Health	Antlerless deer	Partners

When asked, what was the most important reason affecting change in your interest in deer hunting?, time to hunt, not antlerless deer seen, was most important for those whose interest increased.

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Time to hunt was consistently the top reason for increased hunter interest for all age groups.

The number of antlerless deer hunters saw was a key reason for the original switch to the 7 day antlerless firearms season; in other words, by postponing the harvest of antlerless deer, hunters were to see more antlerless deer and be more satisfied.

However, the number of antlerless deer seen has little effect on increasing interest for all hunters.

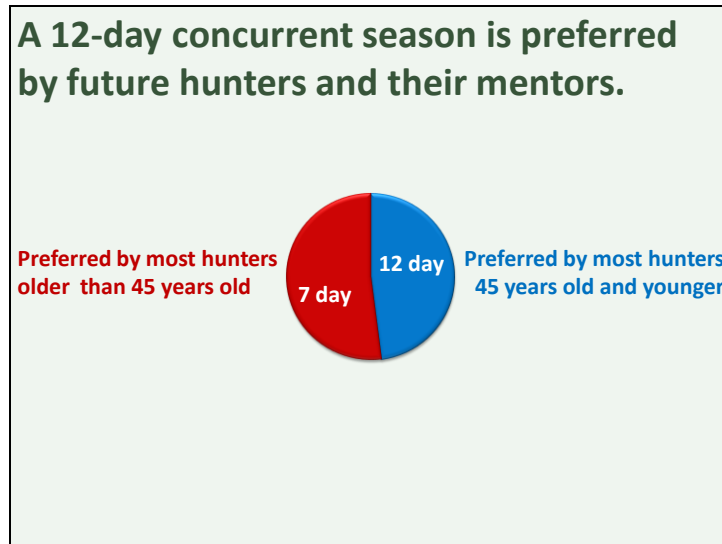
A 12-day concurrent season increases hunting days for those who use them.



When the deer program conducted the 2011 deer hunter survey, the Deer and Elk Section randomly surveyed 6,000 hunters. Their preference for concurrent season length was split.

Further investigation of this result uncovered distinct differences between these groups. For those who prefer the 7-day concurrent season, most hunt to harvest a buck only. In other words, these hunters already have 12-days to harvest their preferred animal.

For those who prefer the 12-day season, most of them hunt to harvest any deer. With a 7-day season, they are losing 5 days of hunting.



Age differences are evident between those who prefer a 7-day vs. a 12-day concurrent season.

Older hunters prefer the 7-day season. However, young hunters and those most likely to be their mentors – i.e., their fathers – prefer the 12-day season.

The 12-day concurrent season is preferred by Pennsylvania’s future hunters and their mentors.



A 12-day concurrent season will simplify regulations.

With a 7-day concurrent season, there are 4 different versions of a firearms season that varies by WMU and by properties within a WMU. A single firearms season is certainly simpler.

A 12-day concurrent season will not reduce deer populations.

Smaller allocations with a 12-day season

- 7-day allocation: 417,000
- 12-day allocation: 369,000

All WMUs with 12-day season have stable (or increasing) deer populations

The differences between hunters who prefer the 7-day season and those who prefer the 12-day season is most evident in their belief of what a 12-day season means to the deer population.

83% of hunters who prefer a 7-day season believe that too many antlerless deer are killed during a 12-day season. However, a 12-day season alone will not reduce deer populations.

The recommended harvest of antlerless deer does not change with length of season. The only thing that changes is the number of antlerless licenses that it takes to harvest those deer. This is why we recommend smaller allocations with the 12-day season. In 2012, the allocation in the 11 WMUs with a 7-day season was 417,000. If the season length in these 11 WMUs had been 12-days, the recommended allocation would have been 369,000.

Finally, we have experience with a 12-day concurrent season in half of our WMUs. All of those deer populations are stable or increasing.

Based on social and biological data, staff recommends a 12-day concurrent season.

- The 12-day concurrent firearms season is recommended because it:
 - Increases time to hunt any deer
 - Is preferred by hunters of the future and their mentors
 - Simplifies regulations
- The 12-day concurrent firearms season is not recommended to:
 - Increase antlerless harvests
 - Increase hunter satisfaction

Based on social and biological data, staff recommends a 12-day concurrent season.

Based on our results from the last 5 years, no evidence suggests that we can increase hunter satisfaction via manipulation of firearms season length.

12-day concurrent season

A simple and effective solution for future hunters
and their mentors who want more time to hunt.