

State of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Division of Fish & Wildlife

2020-21 Deer, Deer Harvest & Deer Hunter Summary



Acknowledgements

Prepared by the Rhode Island
Department of Environmental Management

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August 2021



THIS PROJECT WAS SUPPORTED by Wildlife Restoration Grants administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program: *Partnering to fund conservation and connect people with nature.*

Federal Aid Project funded by your purchase of hunting equipment.

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Introduction

This summary offers an overview of deer harvest and deer hunters in Rhode Island for the 2020-21 deer season. This information serves as a guide to future management decisions to ensure there is continued hunting opportunity for hunters while maintaining a healthy deer population. In addition, this is aimed to provide a summary of pertinent information related to deer and deer hunting for hunters and the public. Since the first regulated hunting season in Rhode Island in 1954, there have been tremendous changes in deer population, land use, habitat types, hunter effort, and public perception of wildlife and hunters. Deer harvest has also seen significant changes through time. The statewide harvest in 1977 harvest was 157; since then, harvest increased until 2008, peaking at around 3,000 deer. Since 2008, there has been a slight decline to ~2,200 deer harvested annually. Rhode Island offers ample opportunity for hunters to harvest white-tailed deer across the state with lengthy seasons, generous bag limits and ample access to public land. Rhode Island’s extensive deer season begins with archery (including crossbows), which runs from mid-September through the end of January. A month-long muzzleloader season begins the first Saturday of November typically coinciding with the rut, giving hunters a high chance of harvesting a mature buck if they desire. Shotgun season follows the muzzleloader season for 1-2 weeks, depending on the location (zone). A private land, antlerless deer only season is open from the end of December to the beginning of January, which follows the shotgun season and allows for firearms hunters to further reduce deer densities on private properties. Liberal bag limits allow for the take of two* antlered and multiple antlerless deer across the state. In addition, Sunday hunting is permitted in most areas** further increasing hunting opportunity.

The complete set of rules and regulations pertaining to hunting can be found on our website at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/documents/regulations/index.php>.

*Only one may be taken in Zone 3

**Check local ordinances

Regulation Changes

2020-21 Hunting Season

- There were no significant changes for the 2020-21 deer season.

2021-22 Upcoming Hunting Season

- Check stations will be operated during the first weekend of the muzzleloader season (November 6th and 7th) and the first weekend of shotgun season (December 4th and 5th).
- The Tiverton Rod and Gun Club deer check station will be open, located at: 1529 Fish Road, Tiverton.
- Hunting license and deer permit fees have changed. The new fees will generate additional revenue for DEM Fish and Wildlife programs and leverage increased matching funds for federal funding. To minimize the impact on hunters and anglers, fees will increase over an eight-year period in three steps taking place in 2021, 2025, and 2028. For a full list of fees visit www.dem.ri.gov/huntfish or the 2021-22 Hunting and Trapping Regulation Guide (page 4) for current fees.
- Applications for Block Island lottery and required USFWS properties must be post marked by September 15th, 2021.
- Deer may now be quartered in the field outside of check station dates for ease of transportation with new tagging requirements.

2020-21 Deer Harvest

Highlights

The 2020-21 deer season was held from September 12, 2020 to February 28, 2021. Deer hunters reported harvesting 2,348 deer statewide, a 3% increase from the previous season's harvest of 2,285 deer. This is the highest reported harvest since the 2013-14 deer season where 2,502 deer were reported. This is also 589 (20%) less deer reported than the highest ever reported deer harvest in the 2008-09 deer season (2,937 deer reported). For the first time in Rhode Island history, the archery (crossbows and vertical bows combined) harvest (1,033) exceeded the muzzleloader harvest (979). Some possible factors contributing to this could be the ease of obtaining competency with a crossbow, increased accuracy compared to vertical bows, a lengthy archery season (September 15th – January 31st) and increased land development reducing areas where firearms can be used.

For each deer harvested, approximately 30% of its field dressed body weight is available as consumable venison. As a result, the 2020-21 season yielded over 41 tons of consumable venison – equivalent to about 166,000 meals. Recent surveys have shown that most hunters hunt to provide food for their families, while also enjoying time spent with family and friends outdoors. Hunters are continually participating in the conservation of wildlife and their habitats. By purchasing hunting licenses and permits, hunters are helping fund the conservation of habitat and wildlife (including non-game species) in Rhode Island. Wildlife is a renewable resource that when managed properly can provide sustenance in the form of wild, local, sustainable protein year after year to its consumers. In addition, the Wildlife Restoration Act, commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson Act, places an excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment that funds wildlife restoration projects across the United States, including Rhode Island.

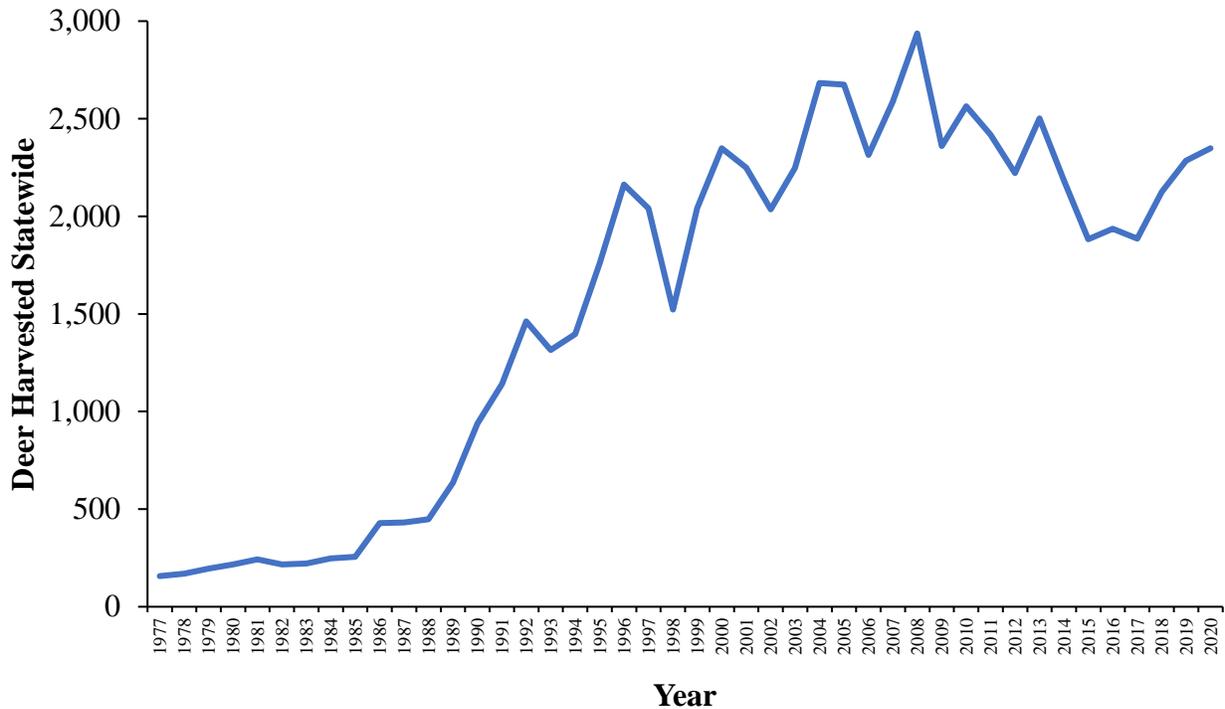


Figure 1. Statewide deer harvest from 1977 to 2020.

Buck to Doe Ratio: Hunters harvested 1,332 (57%) males and 1,016 (43%) females. This results in a 1.31 male to female harvest ratio (for every female harvested, 1.31 males are harvested).

Antlered vs. Antlerless Harvest: A total of 1,148 (49%) were antlered and 1,200 (51%) were antlerless. This is consistent with past harvest results, as antlerless harvest has exceeded antlered harvest since 2011.

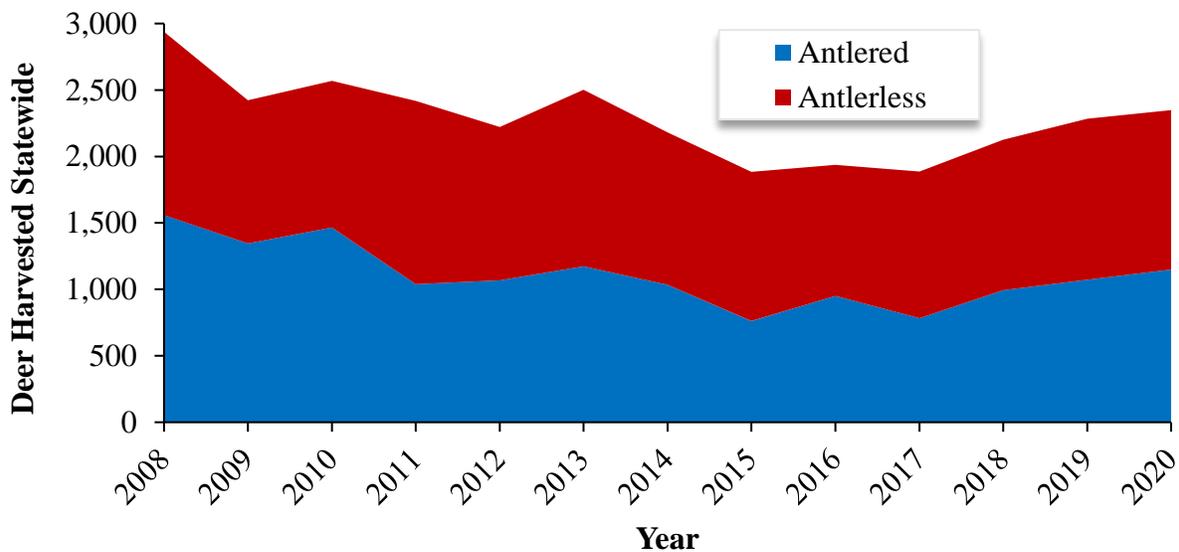


Figure 2. Antlered & Antlerless harvest from 2008 to 2020.

Harvest by Method: Deer were harvested with all four legal method types (archery, crossbow, muzzleloader, and shotgun) throughout the deer season. Compared to last year’s hunting season, the crossbow harvest increased by 5% from 602 to 632 deer. Vertical archery equipment harvest increased 41% from 284 to 401 deer. Muzzleloader harvest decreased 11% from 1,095 to 979 deer. Shotgun harvest increased 11% from 304 to 336 deer. The long season length, ease of use and little amount of practice required to become proficient has made the crossbow a sought-after method of take. For the first time ever, the archery harvest accounted for more deer than the muzzleloader harvest.

Deer Harvest by Method

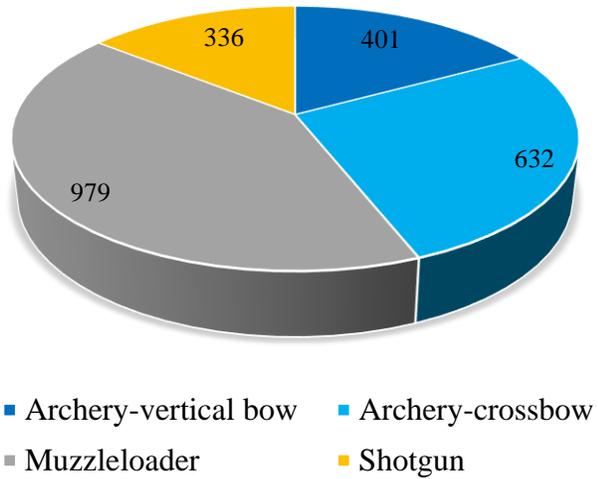


Figure 3. 2020-21 Harvest by method.

Harvest by Zone: Rhode Island is separated into four deer management zones as seen in the Appendix. The total harvest in each zone is partly reflective of the amount of land open to hunting in each zone, which effectively impacts hunter effort. Most harvest occurred in Zone 2 (1,295 deer), mainly because most of the state/cooperative properties are located within its boundaries, and most of this area is comprised of forested habitat and devoid of expansive, densely developed areas that reduce the amount of huntable property. As depicted in Figure 4, a total of 815 deer were harvested in Zone 1, 1,295 in Zone 2, 38 in Zone 3, and 200 in Zone 4. More adult bucks were taken in Zones 1, 2 and 3 whereas most of the harvest in Zone 4 was adult does, where the goal is to reduce deer densities.

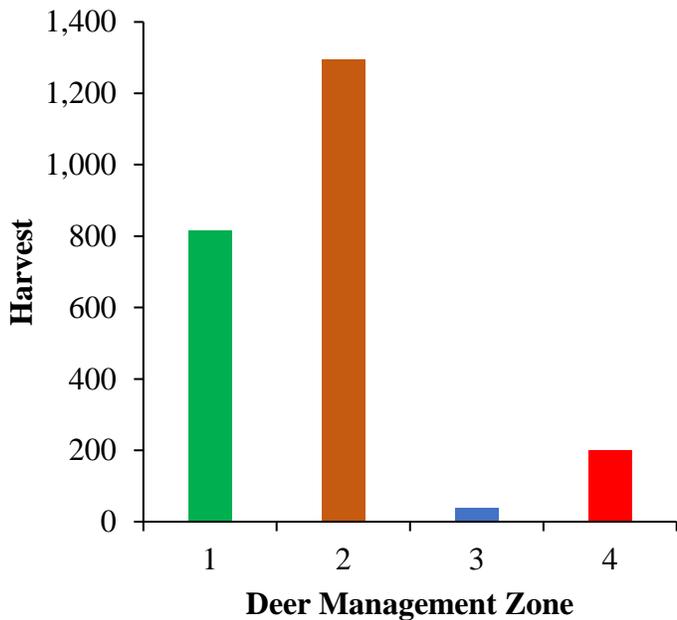


Figure 4. 2020-21 Harvest by Deer Management Zone.

Antler Points: The DFW requires hunters to record the number of antler points for each antlered deer they harvest. Eight-point bucks accounted for the most harvested antlered deer totaling 310 (27%). The second-most harvested antlered buck were 2-point bucks (spikes) at 178 (16%). Both statistics are the same as last year’s harvest.

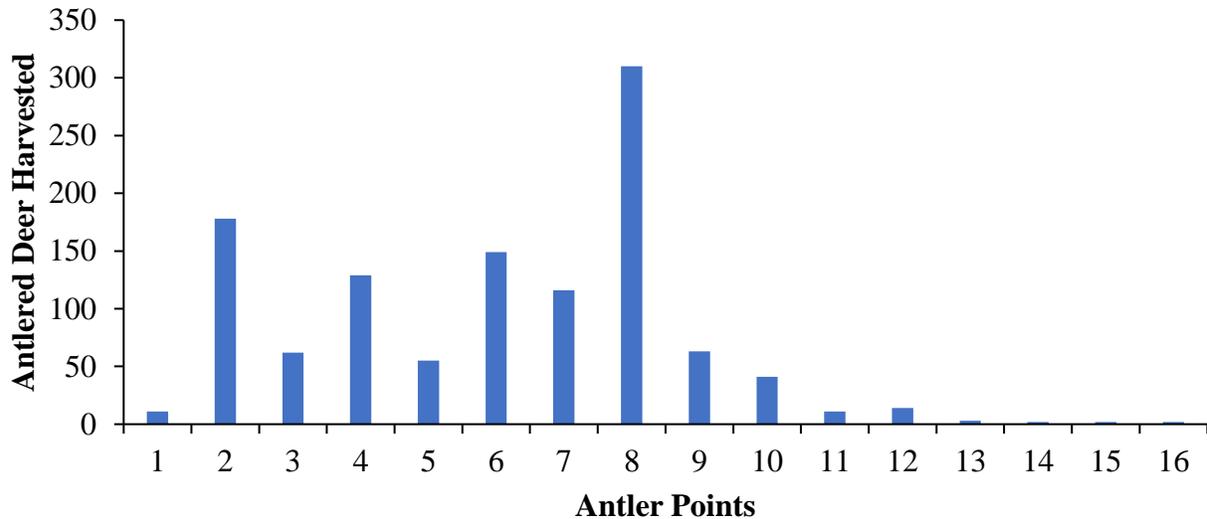


Figure 5. Antler points on antlered deer harvested during 2020-21.

Private and Public Land Harvest: Rhode Island has many Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), Federal properties, Undeveloped State Parks, and Cooperative properties (co-ops) open to hunting. Arcadia Management Area had the most deer harvested (87) of all properties open to hunting. Hunting co-ops enable hunters to access various properties that were not traditionally open to hunting. The DFW has worked closely with private property owners such as land trusts, The Nature Conservancy, and others to open their lands to deer hunting. This is typically allowed to reduce deer densities at the property to mitigate the impacts of high deer densities on habitat. However, 74% (1,731) of all deer harvested in RI, are harvested on private land. The number of deer harvested per each state and co-op property is listed in the appendix.

Check Stations & Herd Health

The DFW operated deer check stations during the first four days of the muzzleloader season (November 7– 10, 2020), during which all deer harvested (except deer in Zones 3 and 4) were required to be brought to a state-operated check station. The four checking locations included: Arcadia Management Area, Carolina Management Area, Durfee Hill Management Area, and Great Swamp Management Area. Biological information was collected at the check stations which included: age, weight, sex, and antler beam measurements. This is also when the majority of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) samples were collected.

REMINDER: Check stations will be operated during the first weekend of the muzzleloader season (November 6th and 7th) and the first weekend of shotgun season (December 4th and 5th). The Tiverton Rod and Gun Club deer check station will be open, located at: 1529 Fish Road, Tiverton.

Age Structure: During the mandatory checking period, 255 deer were checked, representing an

increase from 197 deer checked during 2019-20. In 2020-21, a total of 54 females and 201 males (60 antlerless and 195 antlered deer) were checked. There were 55 yearling males checked this season, 27% of the total checked bucks, which is the ideal percentage (less than 30%) of harvest for this age class. Of the total number of bucks checked, 29% were 2.5 years old and 33% were 3.5 years old or older.

Antler Beam Measurement: The DFW measures antler beam diameters and hog weight to assess the overall herd health. The antler beam diameter (mm) is measured one inch above the base of the antlers on yearling males. Large antler beam diameters (>20mm) indicate excellent herd health, while small diameters (<15mm) indicate poor health. Over the past 10 years, yearling male beam measurements have averaged 16.4mm while varying from 15.3mm – 17.6mm. This indicates fair to good health overall. This season produced an average measurement of 15.5mm, which suggests the herd health is poor.

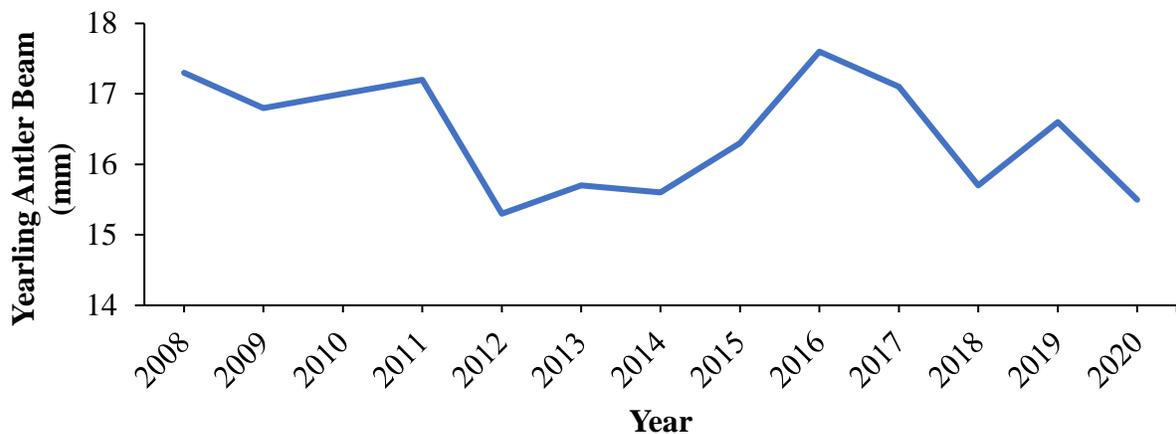


Figure 6. Yearling antler beam measurements (mm) from 2008-2020.

Hog Weight: The DFW also measures the hog weight (completely field dressed with no organs remaining) of all checked deer. Since 2013, there have been no dramatic changes from one year to the next. The DFW will continue to monitor these metrics for significant changes; however, at this point, there is no cause for concern. On average, an adult male’s hog weight is 136lbs and an adult female’s hog weight is 105lbs.

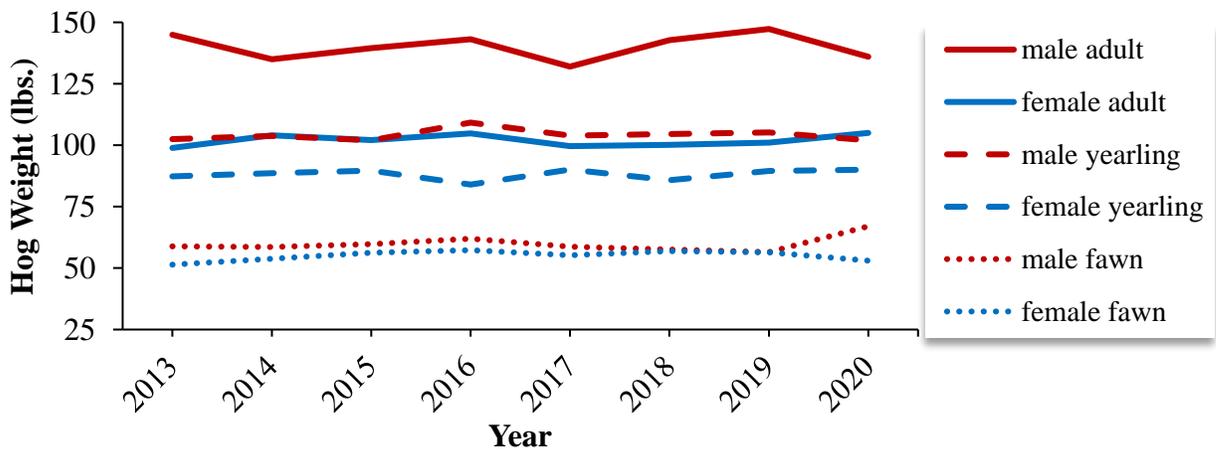


Figure 7. Hog weight of males (red) and females (blue) for adults (solid), yearlings (dashed), and fawns (dotted).

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) & Eastern equine encephalitis

The DFW continued CWD surveillance for the 19th year and implemented a variety of collection methods. In 2020, the DFW sampled 309 deer throughout the state beginning in summer and continuing through winter. Most of the samples originated from hunter harvested deer at check stations (63%), and voluntary deer processors (21%) while the remainder of samples came from taxidermists, road kills, and potentially sick deer. The DFW sampled 75 bucks that were 3.5 years old or older, an increase of 26 deer from the previous year and a 40 deer increase from 2018. This is in large part due to the help of local taxidermists sampling mature males for the DFW that would typically not be sampled.

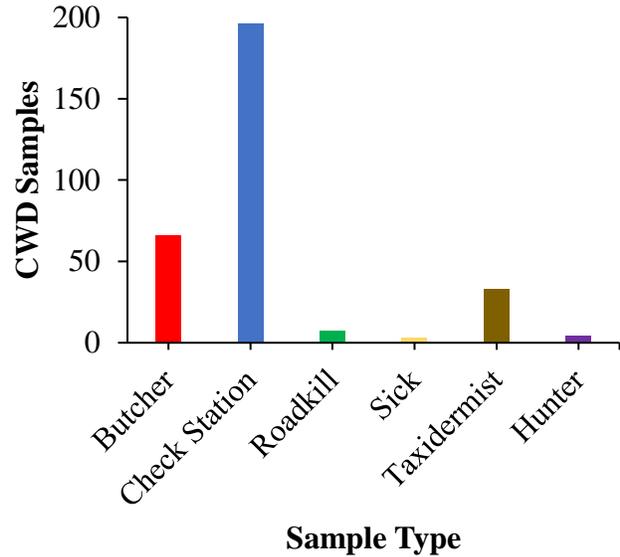


Figure 8 Collection method of CWD samples.

Hunters who successfully harvest a mature buck (3.5 years old or older) often decide not to allow the DFW to take tissue samples from that deer as they would like it to be taxidermied. This is acceptable and common, as the deer’s neck must be cut to remove tissue from the throat, making the deer unsuitable for taxidermy. However, this does not mean the tissues cannot be removed. If the deer is brought to a taxidermist, the sample could be removed after the deer has been caped (hide removed). The DFW will continue to offer training to willing taxidermists and butchers on how to collect tissue for CWD testing to increase our sample size of mature bucks.

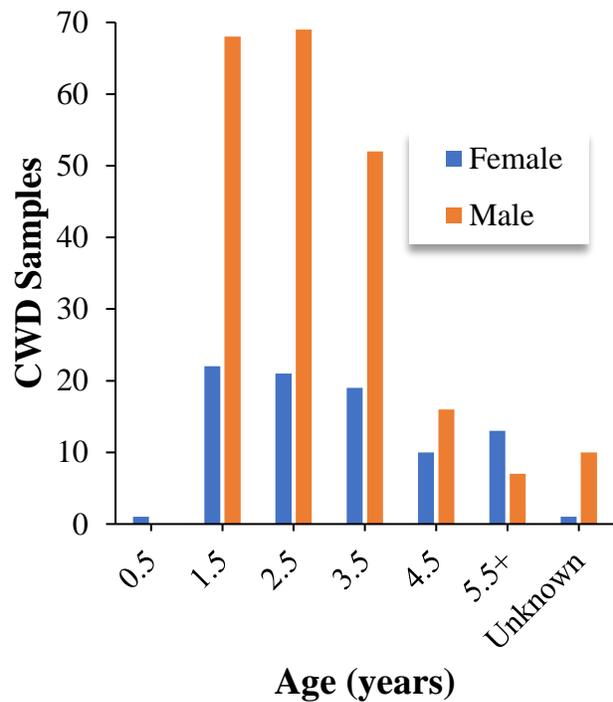


Figure 9. Collection method of CWD samples.

Submit your deer: If you harvest a mature buck (at least 3.5 years old) and would like to have it tested for CWD, please contact the DFW (401-789-0281). We aim to increase mature male samples because they are more likely to contract the disease because of their movement patterns.

CWD has not been detected in any samples submitted for testing during the 19 years of CWD surveillance.

Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE): For the first time, DFW contributed to EEE surveillance in cooperation with the Division of Agriculture and Department of Health by testing hunter harvested deer at state operated check stations. This was conducted to enhance the survey of the landscape for EEE using hunter harvested deer as the test subject, in addition to the annual surveillance of mosquitos. Blood was collected from willing hunters checked deer (n=235), and was tested to determine titer levels of EEE. Titer levels below 20 indicate no exposure to EEE. Titer levels between 20 and 80 indicate a possible recent infection, sample integrity/contamination, or even cross reaction with another alphavirus (Highlands J virus). Titer levels greater than 80 indicate strong evidence for being exposed to EEE. This information from deer is considered valuable for several reasons: it provides an additional surveillance tool that can inform the Mosquito Abatement Coordinator for placement of mosquito traps and unlike mosquito traps, a positive deer is evidence that all the necessary components of EEE transmission to mammals have occurred in a geographic area. EEE is a virus that uses wild birds as a reservoir, that is amplified by transmission of the virus among birds by mosquitos that primarily feed on birds, and then is transmitted to susceptible mammals by species of mosquitos that bite both birds and mammals.

Of the 235 deer sampled, 22 had titers >80. Of the 22 with high titer levels, most were from the western part of the state, from Burrillville, through Westerly. Since the writing of this report (8/11/2021), there have been no reports of mosquitos with EEE in Rhode Island. The DFW will not assist in this surveillance testing next year.

There are no immediate deer herd concerns from deer contracting EEE from mosquitos or humans contracting EEE from consuming venison that has been exposed to EEE.

License Sales

The launch of the new online licensing system has streamlined its hunter harvest data collection process, thereby reducing data entry time and errors. The system has also enhanced the ability of the DFW to analyze license and permit sales, which can be used as a measure of hunter effort. The DFW offers a variety of resident and non-resident hunting licenses to the public. In total, 8,865 (not including previously sold, permanent, over-65 licenses) hunting or hunting and fishing combination licenses were sold in 2020-21. There were a total of 20,108 deer permits sold, with residents accounting for 17,537 permits, and non-residents accounting for the 2,571 remaining permits. Most hunters, both residents and non-residents, purchased two deer permits. There were 1,434 successful deer hunters in Rhode Island, with the majority (88%) of hunters harvesting 2 deer or less. Resident hunters still harvest the most deer in the state, accounting for 2,027 deer, while non-resident hunters harvested 321 deer.

Over the past 20 years, hunting across the country has declined due to a variety of reasons and Rhode Island is no exception. In 2000, there were ~11,528 licensed hunters, purchasing almost 19,000 deer permits. Since then, license sales have decreased 20%. However, there was an increase in this year's hunting license (6%) and deer permit (8%) sales potentially from Covid-19 allowing seasoned and new hunters more time to spend outdoors away from crowds.

Special Hunt Opportunities

The DFW offers opportunities for youth hunters as well as disabled hunters. Youth hunters have the first opportunity to harvest a deer during archery and muzzleloader seasons. Disabled hunters also have a great opportunity to harvest deer using firearms in Zone 3, which is archery-only for all other hunters. A special hunting permit must be obtained through the RI DEM Office of Boat Registration and Licensing, 235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI 02908 (401-222-3576) by each applicant prior to hunting.

Deer Auto Strikes

There were 1,163 reported deer auto strikes in 2020, an increase of 39% compared to 2019 when 838 deer auto strikes were reported. In 2020, the number of reported deer auto strikes was equivalent to 49% of the total reported hunter harvest. As seen in the map seen in the appendix, towns in Zone 1 have the most deer auto strikes/square mile. This is a reason why our antlerless season bag limit is higher than Zone 2 and 3.

Summer Deer Survey

The DFW created the Summer Deer Survey last year, a community science survey to monitor deer during the summer months. The DFW asked all members of the public to report all live deer sightings to monitor the state's deer herd for the first time last August through September. The information gathered from the public is helpful in determining the number of fawns that survive after common causes of mortality such as predators, weather, and auto strikes. This data will allow the DFW to obtain fawn to doe ratios as an index of reproductive rates through time, assisting in properly managing the state's deer herd.

Last year during the reporting period there were 411 submissions with at least one observation in almost every town (except for Central Falls and Newport)! A total of 539 does, 328 fawns and 99 bucks were observed by the public. This results in a fawn to doe ratio of 0.61.

To participate in this year's survey, the public can submit their reports via Survey123, a new online survey platform which also hosts the Herp Observer and Wild Turkey Brood Survey. This new platform allows the public to download the Survey123 app on their smartphones and record observations on the go, or it can be filled out on a computer. To report observations via Survey 123 please use the following link on your smartphone (you will need to download the Survey123 app prior to opening the link) or computer <https://arcg.is/1SCKWi0>. For detailed instructions on how to download Survey123, and information about all our wildlife observation opportunities, visit <https://dem.ri.gov/reportwildlife>.

Remember

- Report deer sightings in August and September ONLY!
- Record deer observed from dawn to dusk (when headlights are not used for driving).
- Record ALL deer you see but do NOT include multiple observations if you are sure the same deer is being seen repeatedly.
- Do not include trail camera counts in your observations.
- Fawns don't always have spots in September. They have a short snout compared to adults.

Conclusion

The statewide deer harvest has increased annually from 2017, at 1,886 deer harvested, to just above the 10-year average (2,214) this season. Based on biological data (weight, harvest sex ratios, and antler beam measurements), overall, Rhode Island's deer herd is healthy. To ensure sustainability of the deer population, the DFW is currently working to assess and estimate the deer population via tools such as population modeling using existing data sources more accurately. The DFW also intends to survey deer hunters to better understand hunter demographics and behaviors, as well as to gain a better estimate of hunter effort. These surveys will be administered randomly, so if you are selected the DFW highly encourages you to complete the survey. The data from these surveys will be used in conjunction with biological data to develop deer management prescriptions.

In 2018, the average age of hunters in Rhode Island was 47 years old (samples size of 2,855 hunters) and continues to rise annually. In 10-20 years, most of today's hunters will age out, leaving behind a small group of hunters to carry the hunting tradition and financially support wildlife conservation. To keep the hunting tradition alive and to continue funding wildlife conservation, we ask all hunters to **continually** mentor a family member, friend, coworker, or anyone who shows an interest in the outdoors and especially hunting. It is not only difficult to start hunting, but is also difficult to become a successful hunter at an early age especially when an individual is not brought up around hunting.

Please keep in mind when en route to your hunting destination, actively hunting in the field, heading home from your hunt, or stopping at the local coffee shop wearing camouflage, you represent all hunters. A positive public perception of hunters is a key component in keeping the hunting tradition alive. Be respectful when in a public setting to individuals who may not want to see bloody clothing, or the deer you just harvested even though you couldn't be prouder. Do your best to field dress animals in secluded areas, away from hiking trails and parking lots. Dispose of your carcass properly by double bagging it and bringing it to a nearby landfill. Leaving entrails or carcasses in public locations can lead to conflicts between hunters and others while also giving hunters a negative public image.

Whether you are hunting for sustenance, a mature buck, or enjoying time outdoors, Rhode Island offers great hunting opportunities for all hunters. Regardless of your motive, the DFW wishes you a safe and successful upcoming hunting season.

We highly encourage you to provide feedback by emailing it to Dylan.Ferreira@dem.ri.gov.

Appendix

Figure 10. Rhode Island State Map

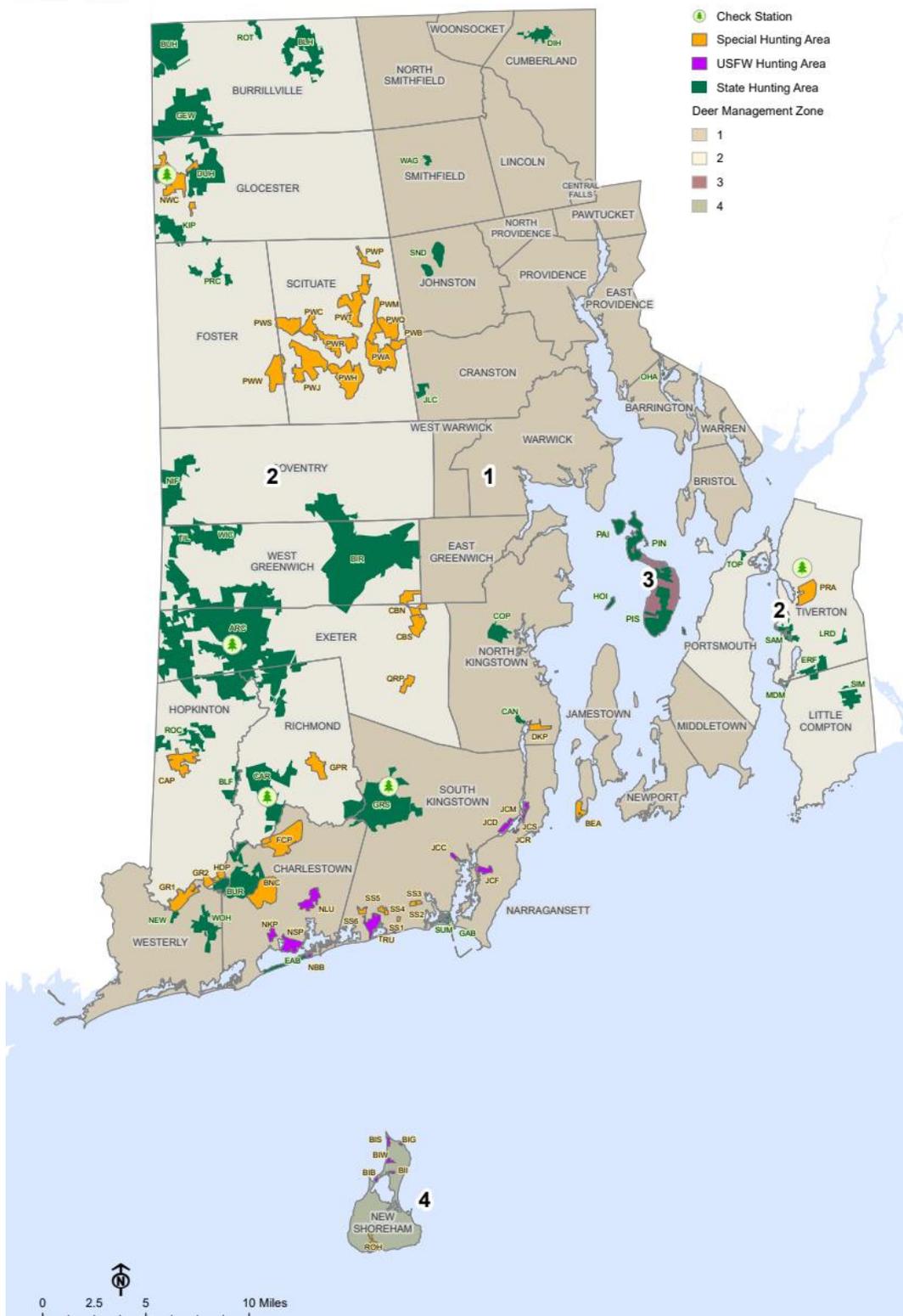


Table 1. Rhode Island Deer Harvest Annual Change

	2020-21	2019-20	1 Year Change
Statewide Harvest	2,348	2,285	3%
Resident Harvest	2,027	1,977	3%
Non-Resident Harvest	321	308	4%
Zone 1	815	736	11%
Zone 2	1,295	1,389	-7%
Zone 3	38	19	100%
Zone 4	200	141	42%
Shotgun	336	304	11%
Muzzleloader	979	1,095	-11%
Archery (combined)	1,033	886	17%
Archery-Crossbow	632	602	5%
Archery-Vertical Bow	401	284	41%
Antlerless	1,200	1,213	-1%
Antlered	1,148	1,072	7%
Female	1,016	1,002	1%
Male	1,032	1,283	-20%
Private Land	1,731	1,708	1%
Public Land	617	577	7%
Buck Kill/Sq. Mile	1.32	1.24	7%
% Yearling Buck Harvest	27%	26%	4%
Yearling Antler Beam (mm)	15.5	16.6	-7%
Male Fawn Weight (lbs.)	67	57	18%
Male Yearling Weight (lbs.)	102	105	-3%
Male Adult Weight (lbs.)	136	147	-7%
Female Fawn Weight (lbs.)	53	56	-5%
Female Yearling Weight (lbs.)	90	90	0%
Female Adult Weight (lbs.)	105	101	4%
Checked Deer	255	197	29%
CWD samples	309	328	-6%
Non-Seasonal Take	6	41	-85%
Auto strikes	1,163	838	39%
Hunting Licenses	8,865	8,326	6%
Deer Hunters	4,992	4,834	3%
Deer Permits	20,108	18,535	8%
Average Weight (lbs.)	118	115	3%
Consumable Venison (lbs.)	83,119	78,833	5%
Meals	166,238	157,665	5%

Table 2. Rhode Island Deer Harvest by Town via Method

Town	Archery	Crossbow	Muzzleloader	Shotgun	Total
Barrington	0	0	0	0	0
Bristol	8	6	0	0	14
Burrillville	12	26	107	13	158
Charlestown	24	33	42	15	114
Coventry	9	23	50	10	92
Cranston	4	10	4	7	25
Cumberland	4	13	6	2	25
East Greenwich	6	11	14	3	34
East Providence	0	2	0	0	2
Exeter	16	28	98	15	157
Foster	8	27	83	6	124
Glocester	26	15	62	16	119
Hopkinton	12	21	66	13	112
Jamestown	23	24	3	4	54
Johnston	2	10	12	1	25
Lincoln	3	14	0	0	17
Little Compton	21	14	38	3	76
Middletown	6	6	1	0	13
Narragansett	28	21	0	0	49
New Shoreham	17	38	12	133	200
North Kingstown	29	44	28	6	107
North Smithfield	10	16	27	10	63
Portsmouth	16	35	0	1	52
Richmond	17	12	43	10	82
Scituate	13	43	104	22	182
Smithfield	3	10	17	3	33
South Kingstown	36	62	55	21	174
Tiverton	30	29	22	4	85
Warren	1	4	0	0	5
West Greenwich	10	17	56	11	94
Westerly	8	16	28	7	59
Woonsocket	0	2	0	0	2
Total	402	632	978	336	2,348

Table 3. Rhode Island Deer Harvest by Property

Property	Deer Harvested
Private	1,736
Arcadia Management Area	87
Big River Management Area	45
Black Farm Management Area	1
Black Hut Management Area	20
Black Rock/Rodman Hollow Co-Op	10
Block Island NWR Co-Op	5
Buck Hill Management Area	14
Burlingame Management Area	41
Burlingame North Camp Co-Op	3
Camp Nokewa	8
Carolina Management Area	17
Chafee NWR Co-op Area	34
Cocumcussoc	17
Cuttyhunk Brook North TNC Co-Op	5
Cuttyhunk Brook South TNC Co-Op	2
Diamond Hill	15
Durfee Hill Management Area	12
Eight Rod Farm Management Area	12
Francis Carter TNC Co-Op	9
Galilee Bird Sanctuary	1
George Washington Management Area	17
Grass Pond Preserve	2
Grass Pond TNC Co-Op	4
Great Swamp Management Area	18
Grills Preserve 1 Westerly Land Trust Co-Op	6
Grills Preserve 2 Hopkinton Land Trust Co-Op	2
JL Curran	4
Killingly Pond Management Area	14
King Preserve TNC Co-Op	6
Lake Road Tiverton	1
Mary Donovan Marsh	1
Nicholas Farm Management Area	6
Ninigret NWR Co-Op	11
North Prudence Island Management Area	9
Northwest Co-Op	4
Patience Island	1
Pocasset Ridge TNC Co-Op	7
Ponagansett Management Area	5
Providence Water Supply Co-Op	32
Queens River TNC Co-Op	2
Rockville Management Area	3
Round Top Management Area	1
Simmons Mill Management Area	18
Snake Den	4
South Prudence Island Management Area	23
South Shore Management Area	14
Tillinghast Pond Management Area	7
Town Pond	1
Wickaboxet Management Area	6
Woody Hill Management Area	20
Unknown	5
Total	2,348

Figure 11. Rhode Island Deer Auto Strikes/Square Mile

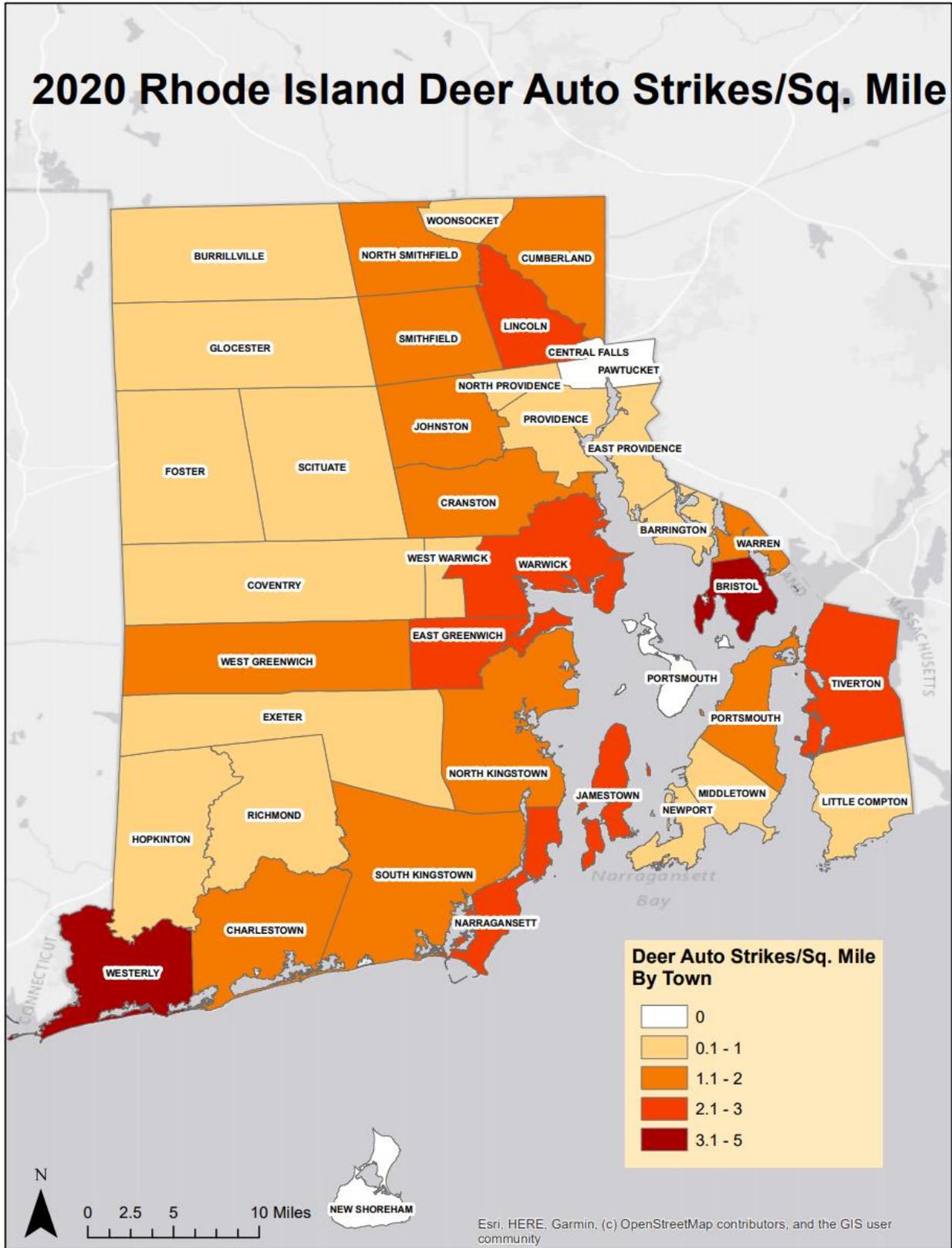


Figure 12. Rhode Island Daily Deer Harvest

