

# **Mill Creek MetroParks** **Deer Management Program** **2023-2024 End of Year Summary**

Date of Last Revision 3.11.24

## **Introduction**

As detailed in the White-tailed Deer Management Plan, a two-pronged approach was selected to include targeted removal and controlled hunting based upon scientific research and the options permitted by the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW) to manage white-tailed deer populations on various MetroParks owned and operated facilities in the 2023-2024 management year.

## **Targeted Removal Program**

A targeted removal program is a safe, effective, and ethical method of management primarily utilized in urban/suburban areas. A targeted removal program operates outside of normal hunting regulations as defined by the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW), therefore, requires the issuance of “deer damage permits”. These damage permits are issued on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of ODOW in circumstances where the need for deer management exceeds the ability of typical hunting activities to be effective or are simply not feasible.

## **Implementation**

To facilitate the targeted removal portion of the deer management plan, the MetroParks contracted USDA APHIS Wildlife Services utilizing their team of wildlife biologists and professional marksmen. The program had strict oversight from the Ohio Division of Wildlife, who is responsible for allocating deer damage permits and implementing program restrictions.

In the 2023-2024 management year, the targeted removal program focused on the southern portion of Mill Creek Park (Boardman Township), with all activity taking place between Shields Rd. and U.S Route 224. In total, the program consisted of two (2) nights of operation on 10/11/2023 and 11/30/2023.

## **Results**

Date	10/11/2023
Number of Deer Damage Permits (DDP's) Issued	30
Program Restrictions	A maximum of 6 (20%) antlered deer may be harvested
Number of Deer Damage Permits Utilized	30
Number of Antlerless Deer Harvested	30
Number of Antlered Deer Harvested	0
Pounds of Venison Donated (Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley)	1071.5

Date	11/30/2023
Number of Deer Damage Permits (DDP's) Issued	14
Program Restrictions	A maximum of 7 (50%) antlerless deer may be harvested, 7 (50%) must be antlered
Number of Deer Damage Permits Utilized	8
Number of Antlerless Deer Harvested	7
Number of Antlered Deer Harvested	1
Pounds of Venison Donated (Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio*)	284.3

\*Due to staff limitations surrounding the holiday season, Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley declined the venison donation that resulted from management activities on 11/30/23 and asked that the meat be donated to their counterparts in the Cleveland area. Venison donations to the Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley are anticipated to resume in future program years.

### **Controlled Hunting Program**

The use of regulated hunting has proven to be a safe, effective, and ethical tool to manage wildlife populations for long term-sustainability at the national, state, and local level. Controlled hunting programs have been successfully implemented by other park districts and municipalities across the state to successfully manage white-tailed deer populations in urban, suburban, and rural environments.

A controlled hunting program, in partnership with the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW), was selected as the preferred management technique to manage white-tailed deer populations at various regional facilities throughout the MetroParks system.

### **Implementation**

The controlled hunting program began in July 2023, when interested licensed hunters entered a lottery drawing conducted by the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW). The lottery entry period was open from July 1<sup>st</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>. Successful applicants were selected during the first week in August via the ODOW automated lottery system at which time they were assigned a specific facility and range of dates in which their permit was valid. Selected applicants were also provided with detailed maps and a rules and regulations sheet, specific to Mill Creek MetroParks' controlled hunting program. In total, 331 permits were granted (256 archery permits and 75 firearm permits) with each permit holder reserving the right to bring one (1) partner per day if they so choose.

The following properties were included in the 2023-2024 controlled hunting program:

- Collier Preserve
- MetroParks Farm
- Sawmill Creek Preserve
- Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary
- Springfield Forest
- Hawkins Marsh
- Vickers Nature Preserve
- Huntington Woods (Archery Only)
- Hitchcock Woods (Archery Only)

#### Archery Hunting Dates:

- 10/01/2023 – 11/25/2023
- 10/01/2023-1/25/2024 (Hitchcock and Huntington Woods)

#### Firearm Hunting Dates (All Properties Excluding Hitchcock and Huntington Woods)

- 12/2/2023 - 12/3/2023
- 12/16/2023 - 12/17/2023
- 12/30/2023 - 12/31/2023
- 1/13/2024 - 1/14/2024
- 1/27/2024 - 1/28/2024

#### Results

Harvest Statistics						
Property	Total Acres	Huntible Acres	Total Number of Deer Harvested	Number of Antlerless Deer Harvested	Number of Antlered Deer Harvested	Projected Harvest Goals
Huntington Woods*	383 (0.6 mi <sup>2</sup> )	223 (0.35 mi <sup>2</sup> )	41 (68.3/mi <sup>2</sup> )	36 (60/mi <sup>2</sup> )	5 (8.3/mi <sup>2</sup> )	6-12
Hitchcock Woods	689 (1.08 mi <sup>2</sup> )	489 (0.76 mi <sup>2</sup> )	28 (25/mi <sup>2</sup> )	23 (21.3/mi <sup>2</sup> )	5 (4.6/mi <sup>2</sup> )	16-32
MC Wildlife Sanctuary	482 (0.75 mi <sup>2</sup> )	422 (0.66 mi <sup>2</sup> )	24 (32/mi <sup>2</sup> )	18 (24/mi <sup>2</sup> )	6 (8/mi <sup>2</sup> )	9-18
Collier Preserve	303 (0.47 mi <sup>2</sup> )	162 (0.25 mi <sup>2</sup> )	13 (27.7/mi <sup>2</sup> )	10 (21.3/mi <sup>2</sup> )	3 (6.4/mi <sup>2</sup> )	8-16
Vickers Nature Preserve	262 (0.41 mi <sup>2</sup> )	225 (0.35 mi <sup>2</sup> )	13 (31.7/mi <sup>2</sup> )	8 (19.5/mi <sup>2</sup> )	5 (12.9/mi <sup>2</sup> )	8-16
Sawmill Creek Preserve	167 (0.26 mi <sup>2</sup> )	128 (0.2 mi <sup>2</sup> )	13 (50/mi <sup>2</sup> )	12 (46.2/mi <sup>2</sup> )	1 (3.8/mi <sup>2</sup> )	7-14
MetroParks Farm	402 (0.62 mi <sup>2</sup> )	50 (0.079 mi <sup>2</sup> )	11 (16.1/mi <sup>2</sup> )	9 (14.5/mi <sup>2</sup> )	2 (3.2/mi <sup>2</sup> )	3-6
Hawkins Marsh	161 (0.25 mi <sup>2</sup> )	128 (0.2 mi <sup>2</sup> )	6 (24/mi <sup>2</sup> )	3 (12/mi <sup>2</sup> )	3 (12/mi <sup>2</sup> )	5-11
Springfield Forest	89 (0.14 mi <sup>2</sup> )	82 (0.13 mi <sup>2</sup> )	5 (35.7/mi <sup>2</sup> )	4 (28.6/mi <sup>2</sup> )	1 (7.14/mi <sup>2</sup> )	4-8
Total	2,977 (4.65 mi <sup>2</sup> )	1,942 (3.03 mi <sup>2</sup> )	160 (34.4/mi <sup>2</sup> )	129 (27.74/mi <sup>2</sup> )	31 (6.6/mi <sup>2</sup> )	66-133
# of Unreported Harvests			Percentage of Total Harvest			
6			3.75%			

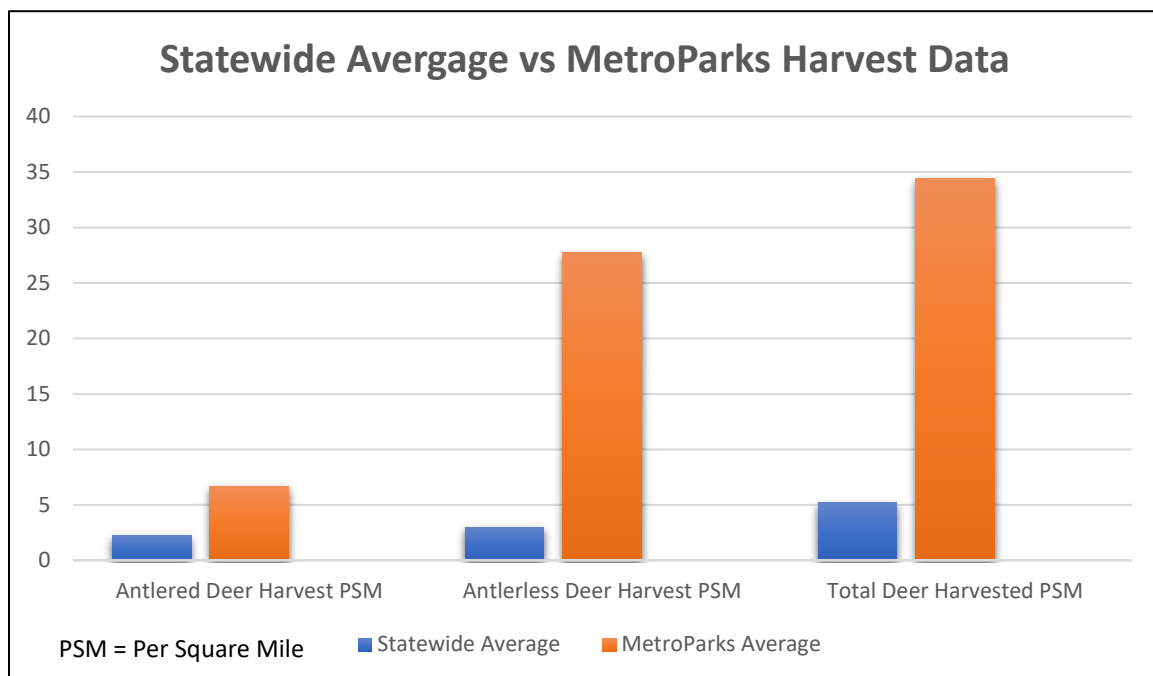
The harvests indicated as unreported are deer that were checked in via the ODOW game check system and the hunter indicated that the deer was harvested as part of the controlled hunt, however, the hunter failed to report which MetroParks property the deer was taken from. Both MetroParks and Division of Wildlife Staff made attempts to contact these hunters via email and phone but were unsuccessful – these harvests are included in the total number of deer (160), but they are not assigned to a MCMP property. All unreported harvests were shared with ODOW Wildlife Officers for follow-up.

\*This data is accurate as of 3.11.24, any changes are the result of on-going responses from the unreported harvests referenced above.

Deer Harvested/Mi<sup>2</sup> is based upon the total number of acres at each facility. In some cases (such as the MetroParks Farm, Collier Preserve, and Huntington Woods) the amount of huntable acreage was significantly less than the total acreage, which skews the harvest data for deer/mi<sup>2</sup> to a lower extent. For example, the total deer harvested/mi<sup>2</sup> based upon the acres hunted (1,942-acres) would be 52.8 deer/mi<sup>2</sup> as compared to 34.4 deer/mi<sup>2</sup> when looking at the total property acreage (2,977-acres).

With no parking access to the eastern portion of Huntington Woods and Mill Creek serving as a formidable natural barrier it is assumed that of the 40 deer harvested at Huntington Woods, the majority were harvested west of Mill Creek in a huntable area consisting of ~73 acres as compared to the total facility acreage which is 383.

Average Statewide Harvest (2022)		
Total Antlered Harvest/Mi <sup>2</sup>	Total Antlerless Harvest/Mi <sup>2</sup>	Total Harvest/Mi <sup>2</sup>
2.2	3.0	5.2



Statewide averages for harvested data acquired from the National Deer Association (NDA) 2024 Deer Report (<https://deerassociation.com/2024-deer-report/>).

Hunter Statistics				
Type of Permit	Number of Hunters	Number of Successful Hunters	Success Rate	Permit Utilization
Archery	449	97	21.6%	96%
Firearm	132	23	17.4%	79%
Total	581	113	19.4%	91%

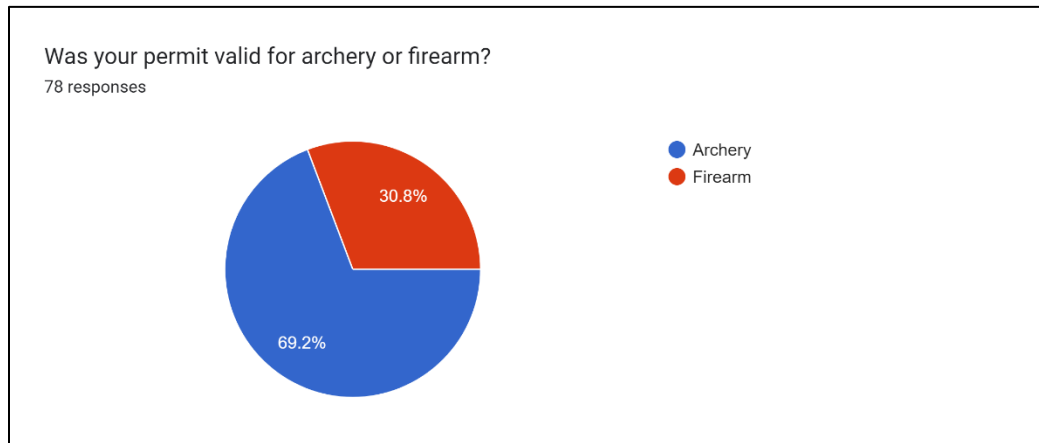
Hunter numbers tallied based on post hunt survey results regarding permit utilization and partner participation.

## Post-Hunt Survey

At the conclusion of their permit window, each hunter was provided with a post-hunt survey to gather additional data and feedback from hunters to improve the program over time. The results of that survey effort yielded the following results:

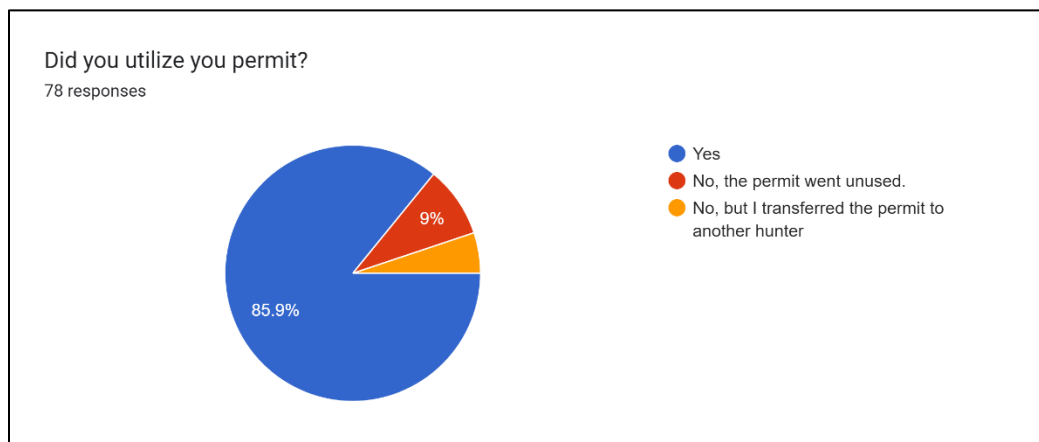
- Number of Survey Responses – 78 (24% Return Rate)

### Respondents



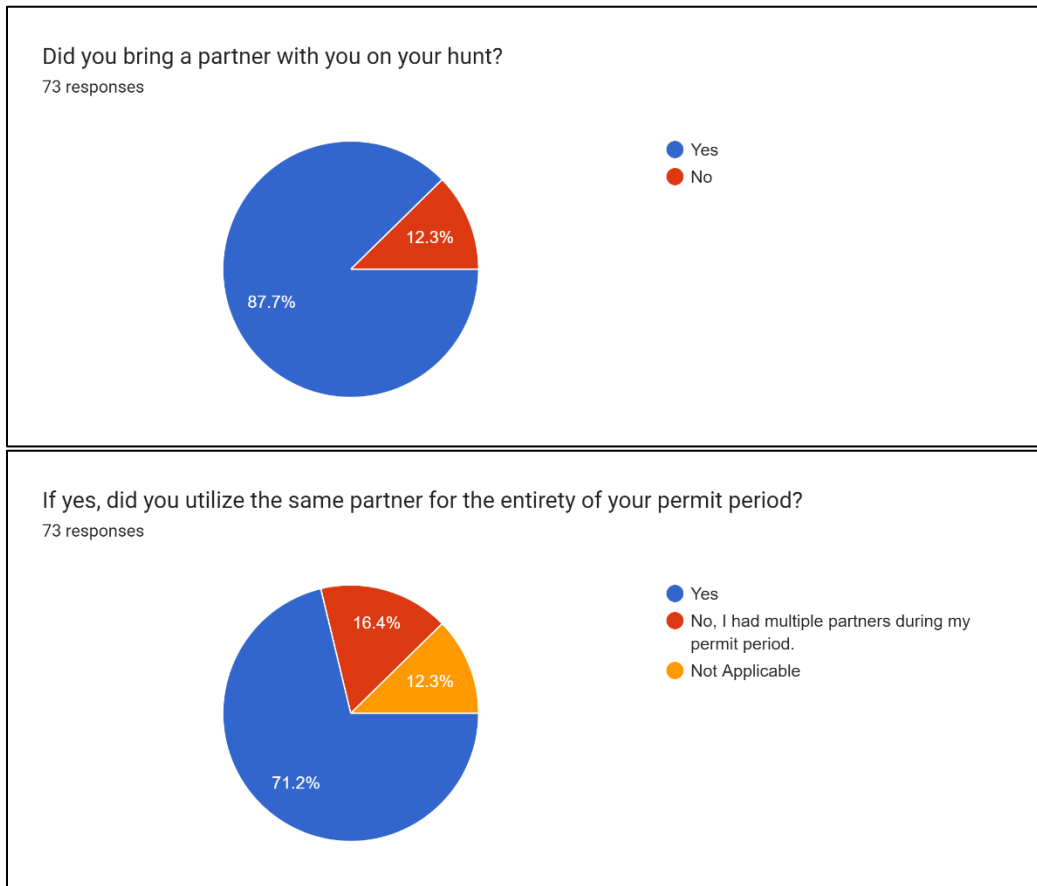
As seen above, the distribution of survey responses between archery and firearm hunters was proportional to the overall permit allocation of 256 archery permits (77.3%) and 75 firearm permits (22.6%).

### Permit Utilization



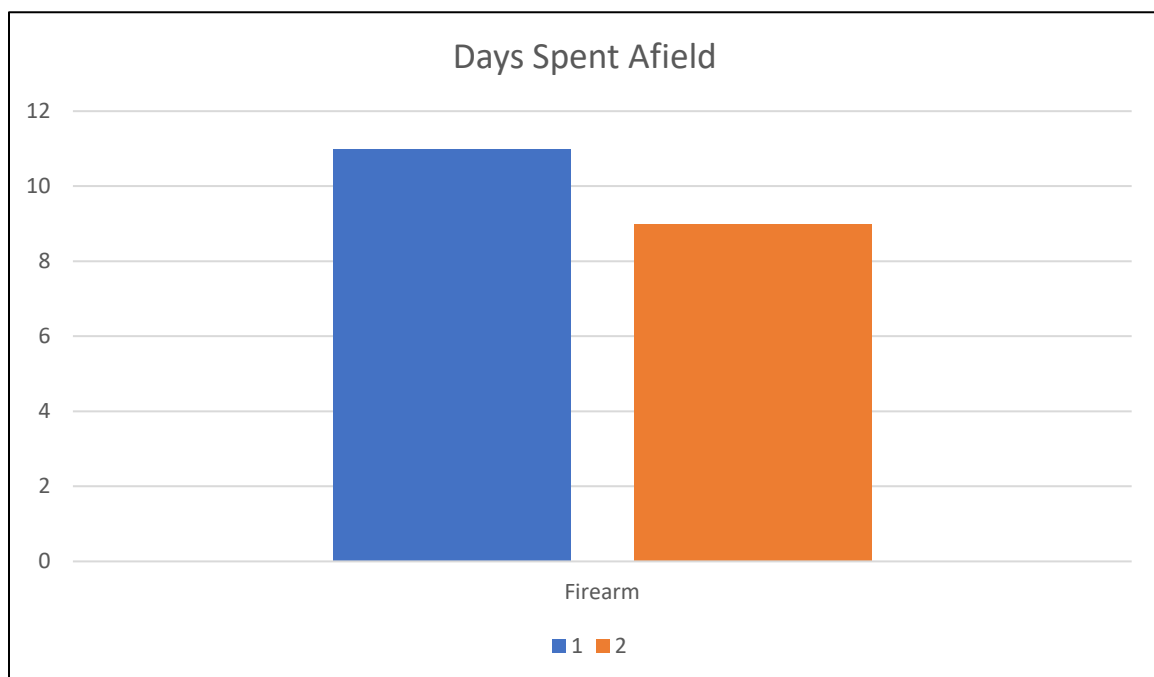
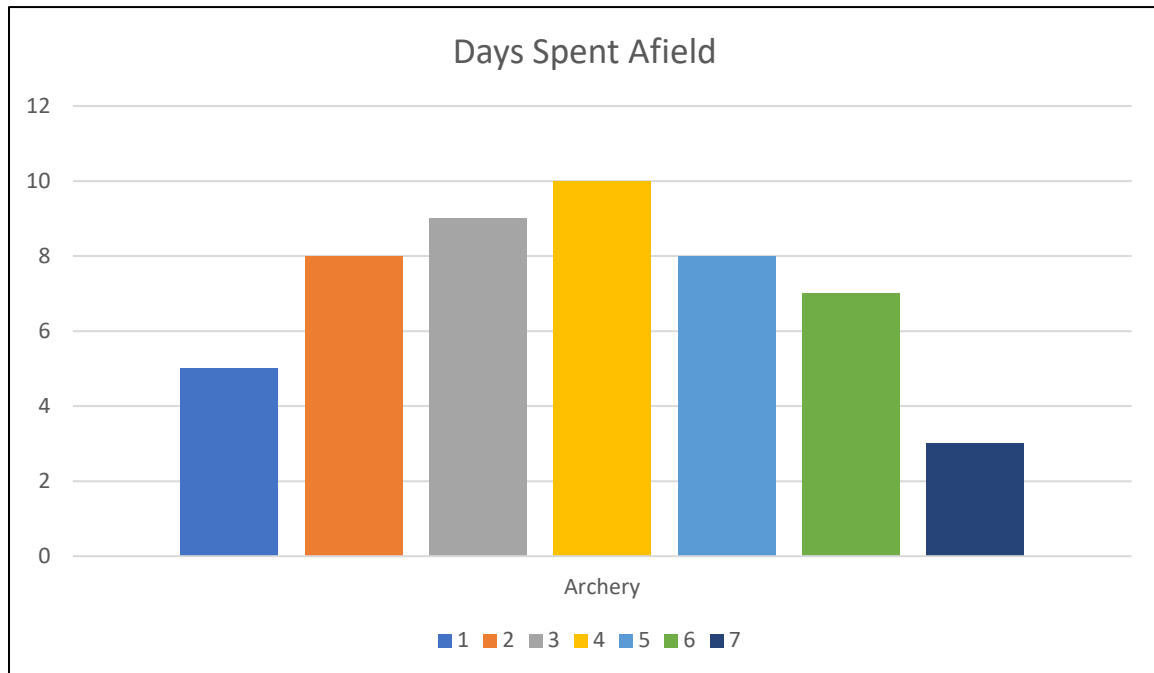
In total, 85.9% of survey respondents utilized their controlled hunt permit. However, according to survey data, 9% of permits went unused and an additional 5.1% of permits were transferred to another hunter. If we apply these metrics to the 331 total permits issued, we can estimate that 301 permits were utilized by the original permit holder or their transferee, and 30 permits went unused. Of the permits that went unused, a higher percentage of those were firearm permits. Based upon survey responses an estimated 21% of firearm permits went unused as compared to only 4% of archery permits – this difference could be attributed to many factors such as a shorter window of opportunity (2 day permits for firearm vs. 7 days for archery), weather, or the fact that the firearm hunts took place later in the season.

## Partner Participation



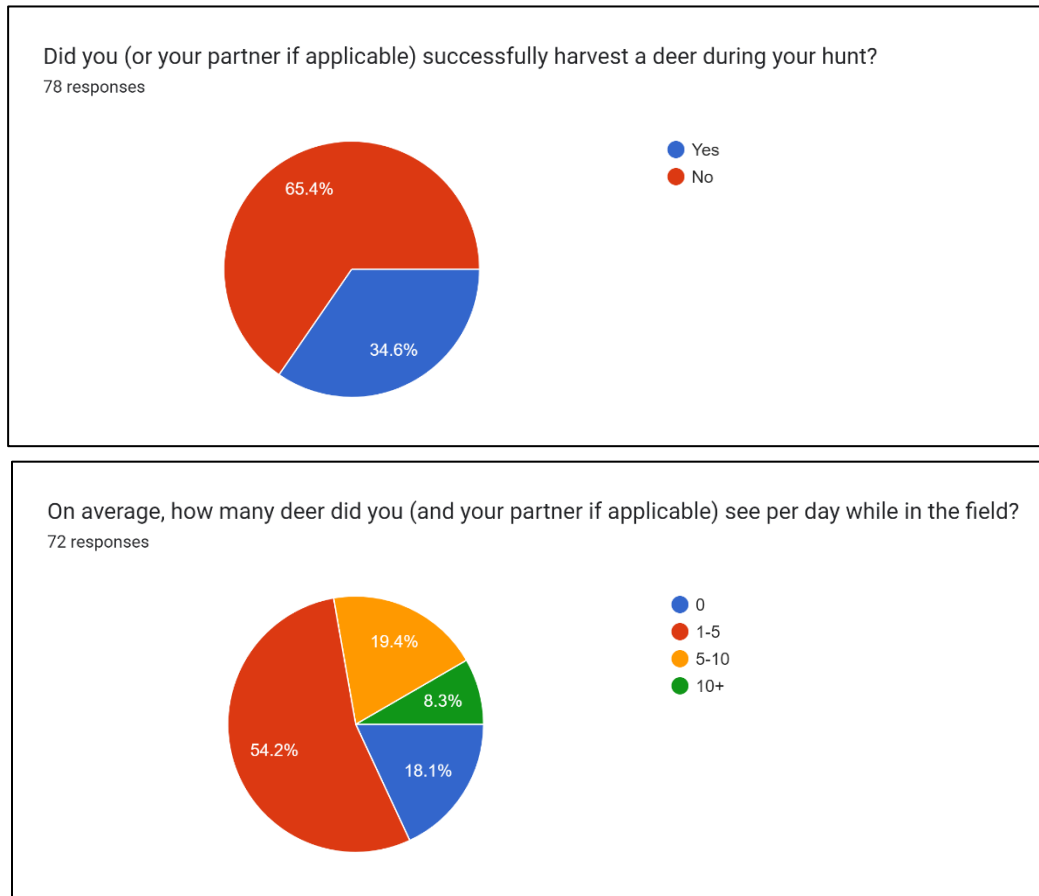
The majority of hunters (87.7%) utilized the option of bringing a partner, with 16.4% indicating that they had multiple partners throughout their permit window (as permitted through the program rules and regulations). Using these metrics and additional data collected by ODNR, an estimated 581 hunters (permit holder + partners) participated in the controlled hunting program in 2023-2024.

# Hunter Effort



Hunter effort measures the number of days each respective hunter spent in the field during their permit window. This is an important metric as it can directly influence overall success rates. In general, hunters who spend more time afield are more successful. Survey data indicates that archery hunters spent an average of 3.82 days afield, utilizing 54% of their allotted permit window (7 days) and firearm hunters spent on average 1.45 days afield, utilizing 72% of their allotted permit window (2 days).

## Hunter Success



Overall, hunter success met expectations and proved to be similar to other controlled hunting opportunities throughout the state. Survey results indicate that 34.6% of survey respondents were successful in harvesting at least one (1) deer. When looking at overall harvest data (see above), the overall hunter success rate is 20.6%, which again is as expected when compared to similar programs.

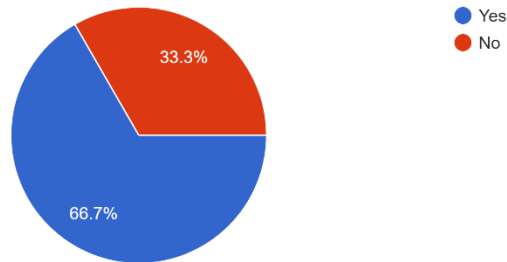
The majority of survey respondents (54.2%) indicated observations of 1-5 deer per day spent afield, with 19.4% observing 5-10 deer per day, and 8.3% observing 10 or more deer per day. 18.1% of survey respondents indicated 0 deer observations during their hunt. Of the survey respondents that indicated no deer observations during their hunt, 14% did not utilize their permit and those that did hunt spent only 2 days afield (on average).



## Hunter Experience

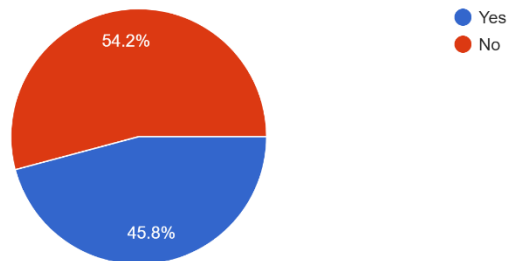
Did you encounter other hunters during your permit window?

72 responses



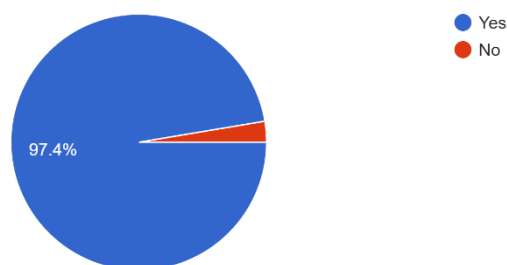
Did you encounter non-hunting park users during your permit window?

72 responses



Do you plan to apply for future hunting opportunities at the MetroParks?

76 responses



Based upon survey responses, the overall experience for hunters was positive with 97.4% of hunters indicating that they plan to apply for future controlled hunting opportunities at the MetroParks. One of the more common complaints from hunters was the desire to have fewer permits issued during each permit window, with 66.7% of hunters indicating that they encountered other hunters during their visit. Interactions between hunters and non-hunting park users were also positive, 45.8% of hunters indicated that they encountered other park users during their visit with little to no conflict. Over the course of the program, the MetroParks was made aware of five (5) of instances via survey responses or phone conversations where a negative interaction

with the public took place, but overall, these appeared to be mostly chance encounters where hikers found themselves too far off the designated trails or non-hunting park users entered properties while they were closed.

### **Incident Reports**

Over the course of the deer management program there was extensive law enforcement oversight including multiple Wildlife Officers from the Ohio Division of Wildlife and Mill Creek MetroParks' Police Department. The following list summarizes incidents that required a law enforcement response in relation to the 2023-2024 deer management program:

#### **Ohio Division of Wildlife: Law Enforcement**

- Zero (0) safety related incidents reported.
- One (1) incident of a hunter trespassing from the Mill Creek Wildlife Sanctuary onto a neighboring property, a citation was issued.
- One (1) incident of hunter harassment at Sawmill Creek Preserve, no citations issued.
- Two (2) instances where hunters were cited for harvesting more deer than they had tags for.
- Two (2) reports of injured deer. One instance was a buck with an arrow lodged in its shoulder off of Augusta Dr. in Boardman Twp. (near Shields Road North of the Golf Course) – the deer later died and was recovered by ODNR further to the north near Anderson Dr. (Boardman Twp.). Located ~1.5 miles from the nearest hunting unit (Huntington Woods), it is unclear if the injury was a result of the controlled hunting program. All hunters who had controlled hunt permits for Huntington and Hitchcock Woods in the two (2) weeks prior to the deer being seen were contacted and none indicated that they had wounded and not recovered the deer. It is important to note that hunting elsewhere within the Township on private property is permitted.

#### **Mill Creek MetroParks Police Department**

Mill Creek Officers routinely monitored hunting areas and oversaw the facility closure/traffic control for the targeted removal program.

- Zero (0) safety related incidents reported.
- Zero (0) incidents reported requiring the issuance of a citation.

#### **Neighboring Departments**

- Zero (0) safety related incidents reported.
- One (1) report of an injured deer. Boardman Township Police Department responded to the report of an injured buck with an arrow lodged in its shoulder off Augusta Drive (discussed above).

#### **Hunter Reported Incidents**

- Two (2) reports of deliberate hunter harassment, one at Sawmill Creek Preserve and one at the MetroParks Farm.
- Three (3) reports of non-hunting park users either being off-trail or entering a closed property which resulted in a negative hunter interaction – these interactions were reported at Hitchcock Woods, Vickers Nature Preserve, and Sawmill Creek Preserve.

### **Program Summary**

Both the targeted removal and controlled hunting portions of the deer management program were a success for the 2023-2024 management season. Each portion effectively reduced deer populations within the targeted areas, while also demonstrating that the programs were conducted safely.

The controlled hunting program operated seamlessly and resulted in zero (0) safety related issues being reported to ODNR or the MetroParks. All of the properties enrolled in the 2023-2034 controlled hunting program met or exceeded their projected harvest goals for the year (see above), with some greatly exceeding expectations such as Huntington Woods. The overall success of the controlled hunting program in terms of the number of deer harvested (primarily with archery equipment) is a testament to the deer densities found on MetroParks properties, reinforcing the need for such a program to take place.

The targeted removal program was conducted successfully, safely, and efficiently thanks to the expertise of USDA APHIS Wildlife Services and the Mill Creek MetroParks Police Department. The high density of deer found between Shields Rd. and U.S. 224 allowed USDA teams to work quickly and efficiently to meet harvest goals while also staying well below the projected budget for the program.

Additional population monitoring and habitat assessments will take place in preparation for the 2024-2025 management season to evaluate harvest goals moving forward.