

**Mill Creek MetroParks
Deer Management Program
2025-2026 End of Year Summary**

Date of Last Revision 4.23.26

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. This document details the results of the 2025-2026 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 2025-2026 management year, the targeted removal program focused on the southern portion of Mill Creek Park (Boardman Township), with all activity taking place between Midlothian Blvd. and U.S Route 224. In total, the program consisted of four (4) nights of operation on 10/21/2025, 10/28/2025, 11/13/2025, and 11/20/2025.

Results

Number of Deer Damage Permits (DDP's) Issued	50
Program Restrictions	A maximum of 17 (35%) antlered deer may be harvested
Number of Deer Damage Permits Utilized	50
Pounds of Venison Donated	2198.9*

*Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley declined the venison donation that resulted from the 2024-25 management activities. The meat was instead donated to the Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio in Lorain.

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 continued in 2025 as the preferred management technique to manage white-tailed deer populations at various regional facilities throughout the MetroParks system.

Implementation

The 2025-2026 controlled hunting program began in July 2025, when interested licensed hunters entered a lottery drawing conducted by the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW). The lottery entry period was open from July 1st-31st. Successful applicants were selected during the first week of 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, 310 permits were granted (240 archery permits and 70 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 2025-2026 controlled hunting program:

- Collier Preserve
- MetroParks Farm (Archery Only)
- 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:

- 09/28/2025 – 11/22/2025
- 09/28/2025 - 1/31/2026 (Hitchcock and Huntington Woods)

Firearm Hunting Dates (All Properties Excluding Hitchcock, Huntington Woods, and MetroParks Farm)

- 11/29/25 – 11/30/25
- 12/6/25 – 12/7/25
- 12/13/25 – 12/14/25
- 12/20/25 – 12/21/25
- 12/27/25 – 12/28/25

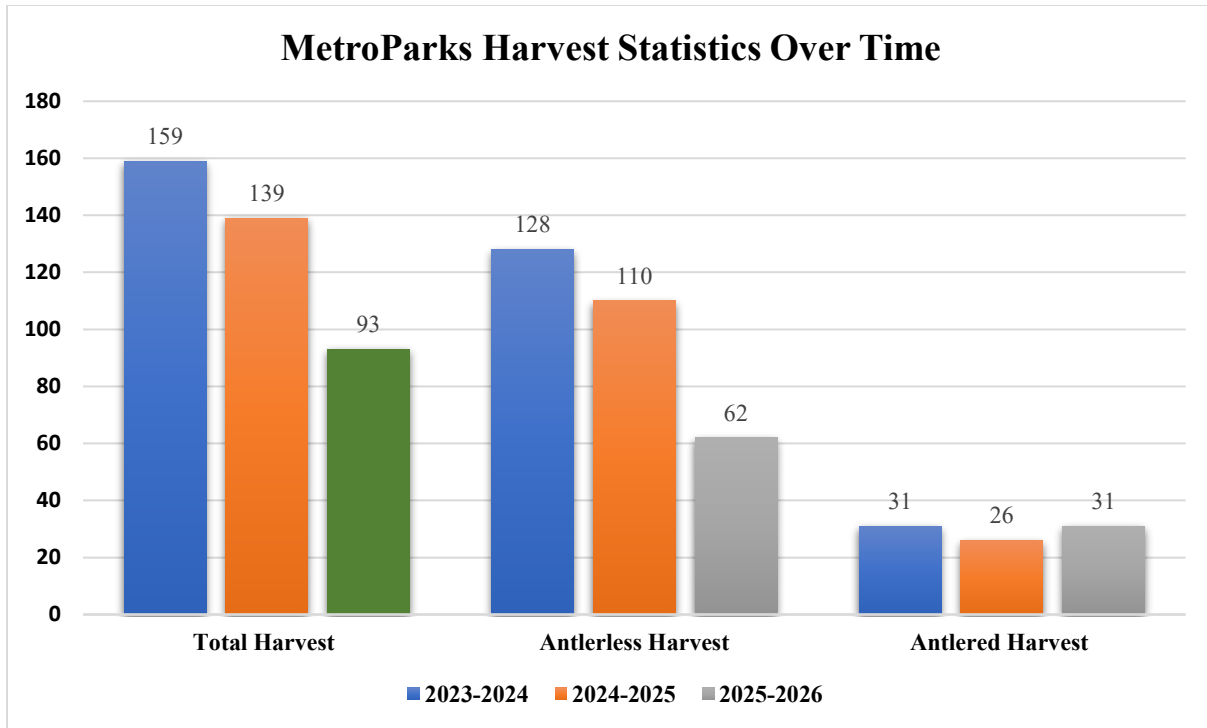
Results

Harvest Statistics*					
Property	Total Acres	Huntable Acres	Total Number of Deer Harvested	Number of Antlerless Deer Harvested	Number of Antlered Deer Harvested
Huntington Woods	383 (0.6 mi ²)	223 (0.35 mi ²)	10 (16.7/mi ²)	6 (10/mi ²)	4 (6.7/mi ²)
Hitchcock Woods	689 (1.08 mi ²)	489 (0.76 mi ²)	15 (13.9/mi ²)	9 (8.3/mi ²)	6 (5.6/mi ²)
MC Wildlife Sanctuary (West)	264 (0.41 mi ²)	220.5 (0.34 mi ²)	9 (22/mi ²)	7 (17.1/mi ²)	2 (4.9/mi ²)
MC Wildlife Sanctuary (East)	218 (0.34 mi ²)	209 (0.32 mi ²)	12 (35.3/mi ²)	7 (20.6/mi ²)	5 (14.7/mi ²)
Collier Preserve	303 (0.47 mi ²)	162 (0.25 mi ²)	12 (25.5/mi ²)	8 (17/mi ²)	4 (8.5/mi ²)
Vickers Nature Preserve	262 (0.41 mi ²)	225 (0.35 mi ²)	16 (39/mi ²)	12 (29.3/mi ²)	4 (9.8/mi ²)
Sawmill Creek Preserve	167 (0.26 mi ²)	128 (0.2 mi ²)	12 (46.2/mi ²)	9 (34.6/mi ²)	3 (11.5/mi ²)
MetroParks Farm	402 (0.62 mi ²)	50 (0.079 mi ²)	0 (0/mi ²)	0 (0/mi ²)	0 (0/mi ²)
Hawkins Marsh	161 (0.25 mi ²)	128 (0.2 mi ²)	5 (20/mi ²)	3 (12/mi ²)	2 (8/mi ²)
Springfield Forest	89 (0.14 mi ²)	82 (0.13 mi ²)	2 (14.3/mi ²)	1 (7.1/mi ²)	1 (7.1/mi ²)
Total	2,977 (4.65 mi²)	1,942 (3.03 mi²)	93 (20/mi²)	62 (13.3/mi²)	31 (6.6/mi²)
# of Unreported Harvests			Percentage of Total Harvest		
4			4.3%		
Deer Harvested Per Permit Issued			0.3		

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 multiple attempts to contact these hunters via email, phone, and physical letter but were unsuccessful – these harvests are included in the total number of deer (93), but they are not assigned to a MCMP property. All unreported harvests were shared with ODOW Wildlife Officers for follow-up.

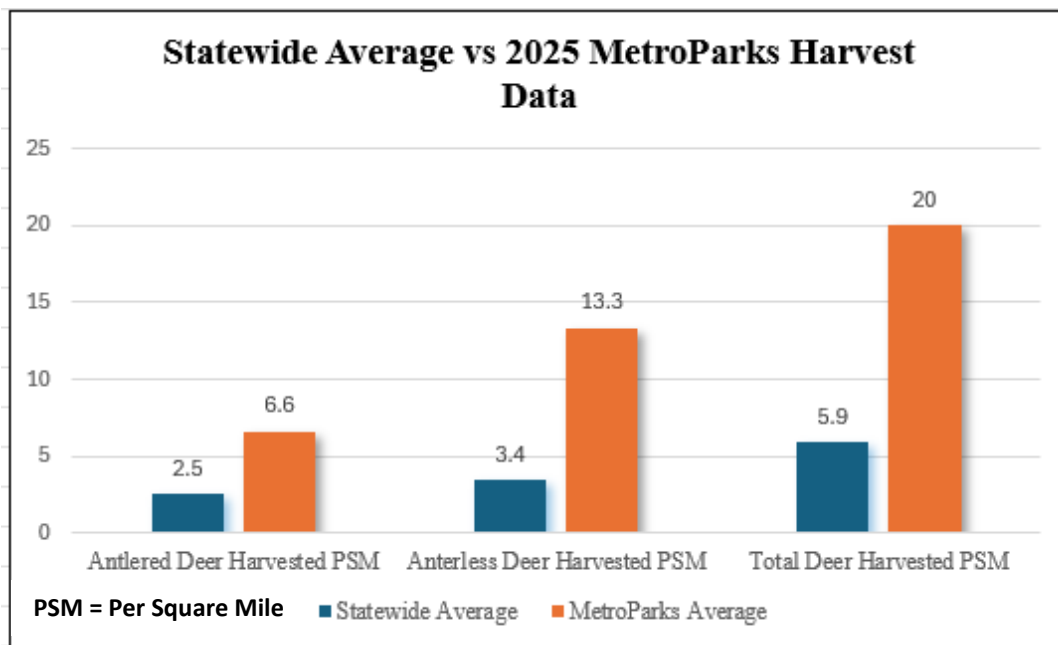
*This data is accurate as of 04.23.26. Any subsequent changes are the result of on-going responses from the unreported harvests referenced above.

Deer Harvested/Mi² 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/mi² to a lower extent. For example, the total deer harvested/mi² based upon the acres hunted (1,942-acres) would be 30.7 deer/mi² as compared to 20 deer/mi² when looking at the total property acreage (2,977-acres).



Average Statewide Harvest (2024-2025)

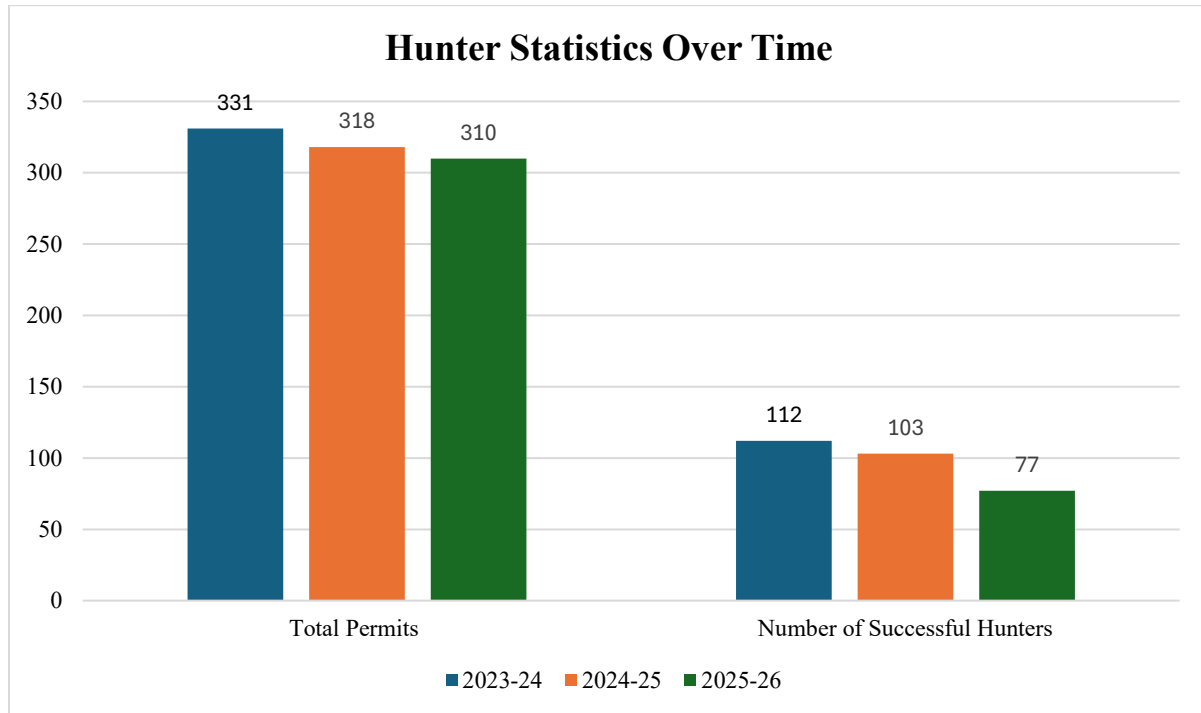
Total Antlered Harvest/Mi ²	Total Antlerless Harvest/Mi ²	Total Harvest/Mi ²
2.5	3.4	5.9



Statewide averages for harvested data acquired from the National Deer Association (NDA) 2026 Deer Report (<https://deerassociation.com/2026-deer-report/>). Statewide harvest data lags by approximately one year; comparisons are made using the most recent available dataset, which is the 2024-2025 season.

Hunter Statistics

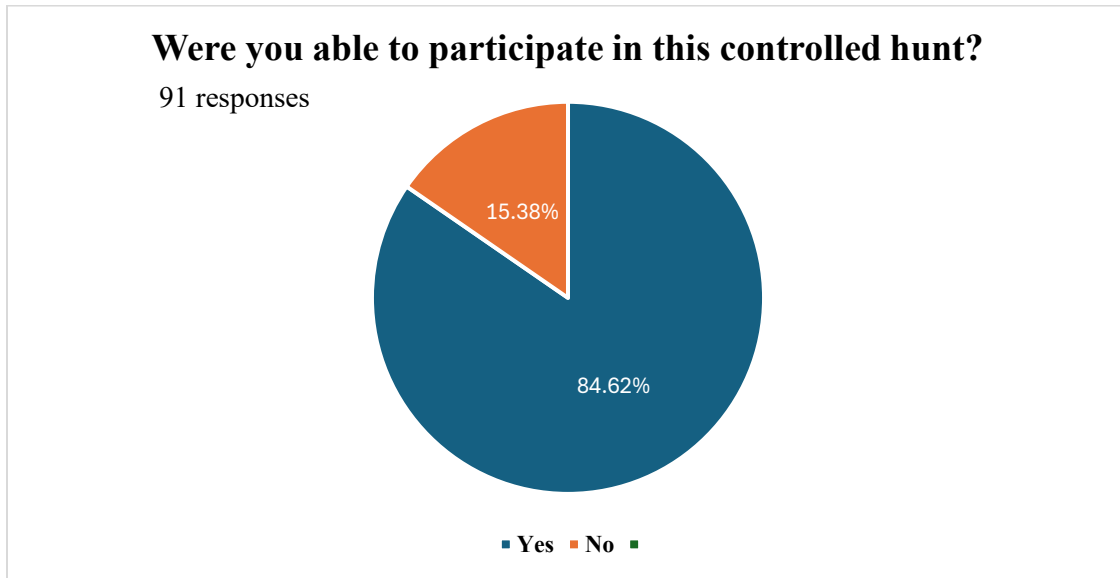
Type of Permit	Number of Successful Hunters
Archery	51
Firearm	26
Total	77



Post-Hunt Survey

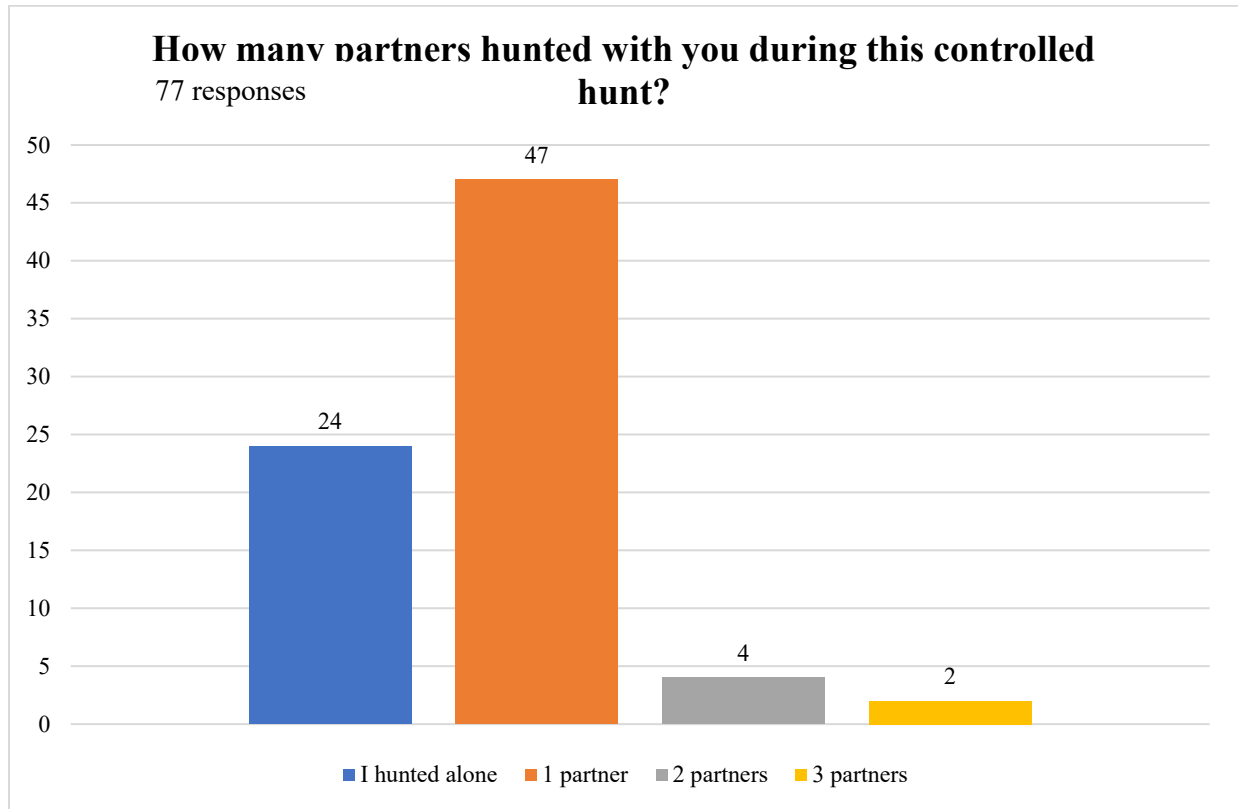
At the conclusion of each permit period, hunters were historically provided with a post-hunt survey administered by the MetroParks to collect feedback and inform program improvements. Due to a transition in program management, this survey was not administered during the 2025–2026 season. However, a similar survey conducted by the Division of Wildlife provided supplemental data. Surveys are sent via email to each controlled hunt permittee the day after their hunt. Responses to individual survey questions were optional; therefore, not all respondents answered every question. Results from that survey effort are summarized below:

Permittee Participation



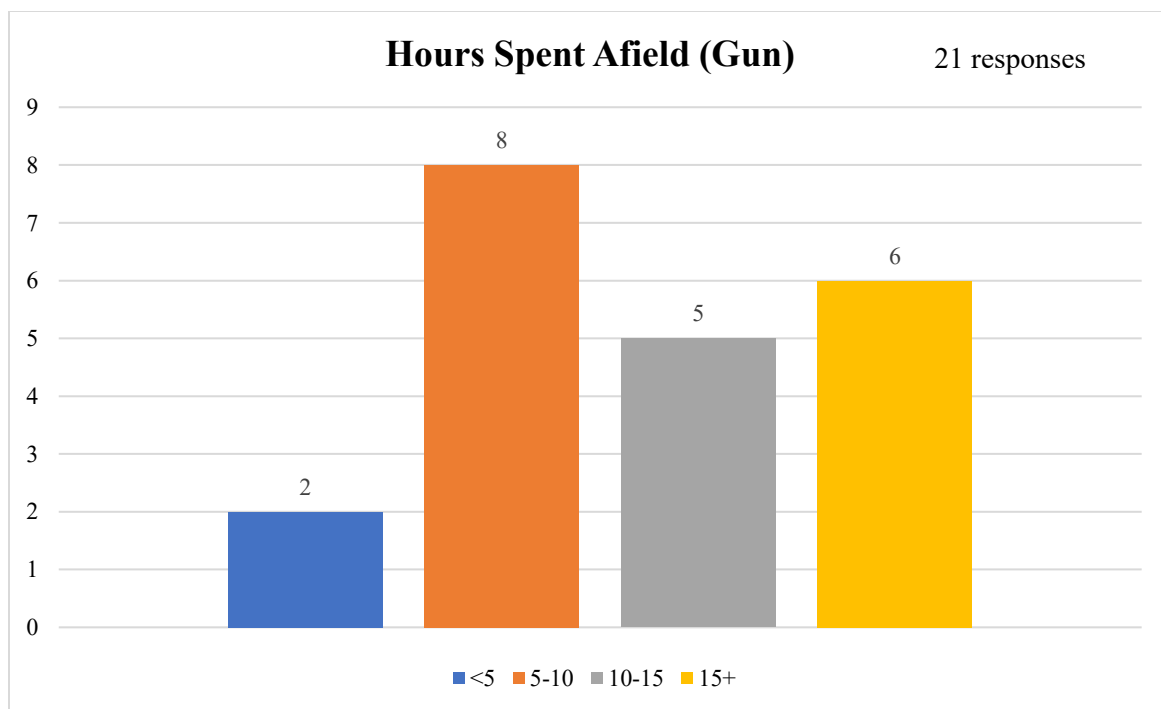
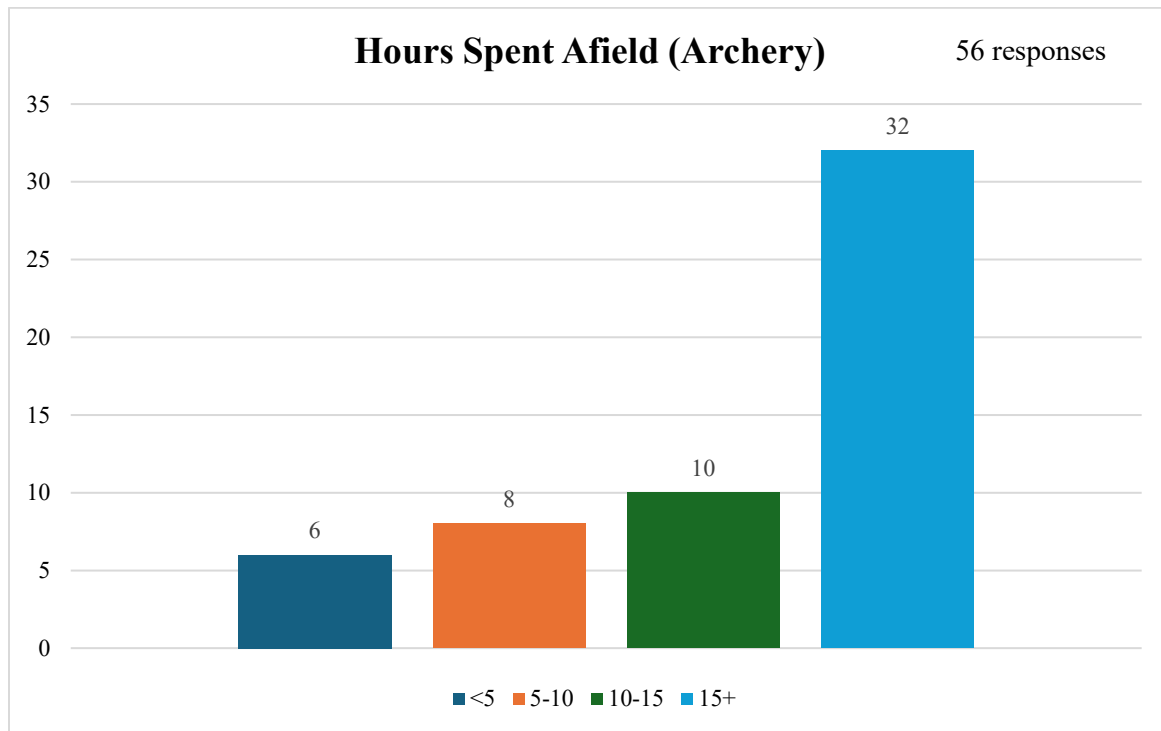
In total, ~85% of survey respondents utilized their controlled hunt permit; however, according to survey data, about 15% of permits either went unused or were transferred to another hunter. If we apply these metrics to the 310 total permits issued, we can estimate that 262 permits were utilized by the original permit holder, and 48 permits either went unused or were transferred to another hunter.

Partner Participation



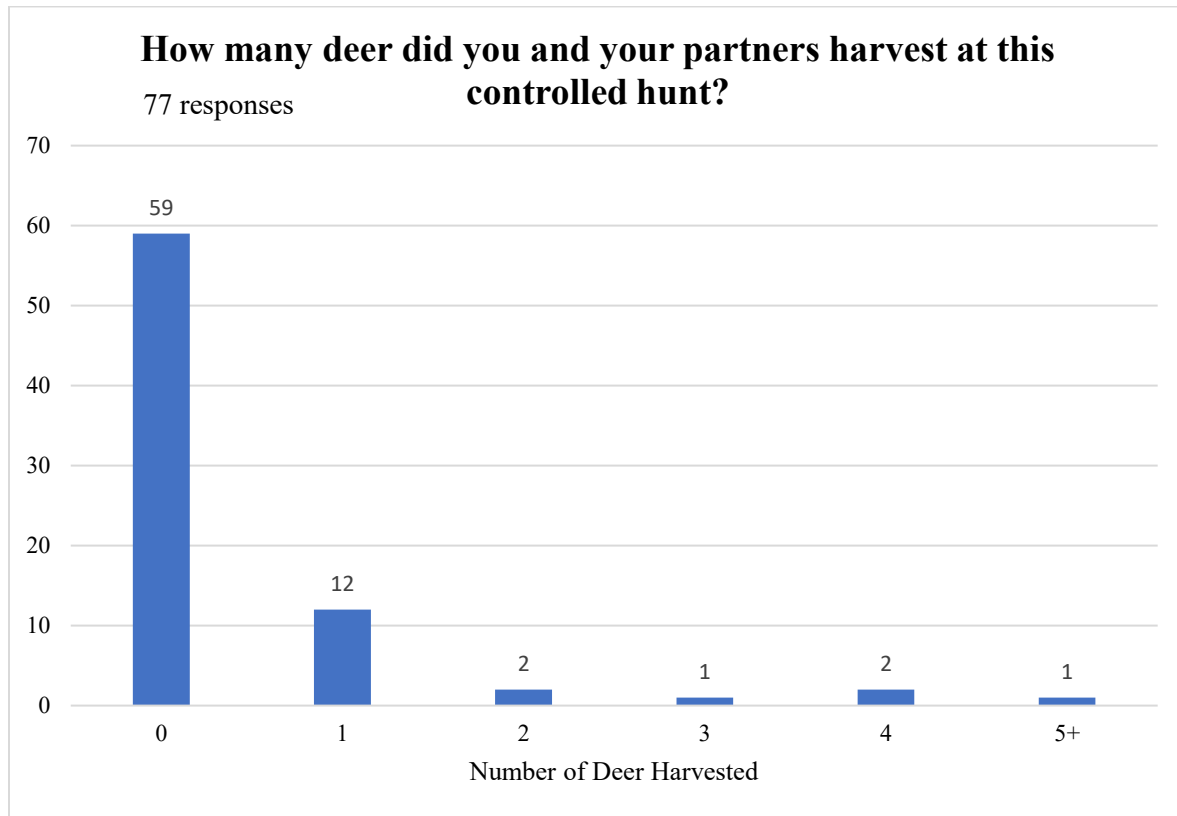
The majority of hunters (68.9%) utilized the option of bringing a partner. Of those, 11.3% indicated that they had multiple partners throughout their permit window (as permitted through the program rules and regulations).

Hunter Effort



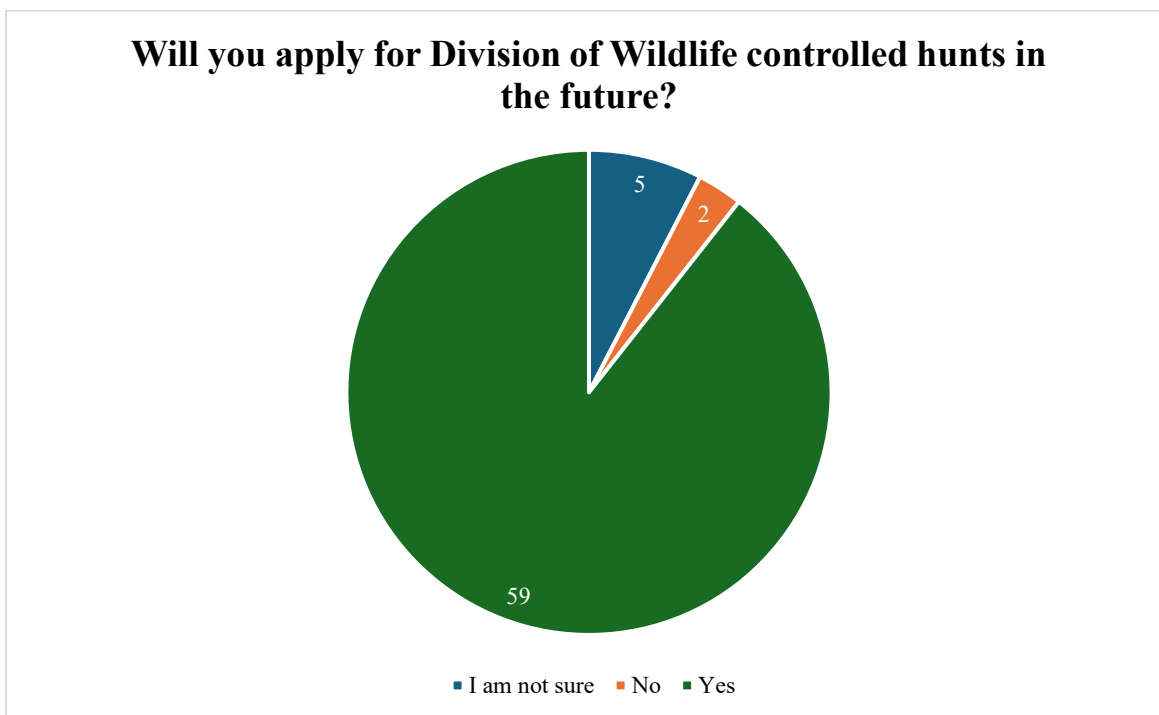
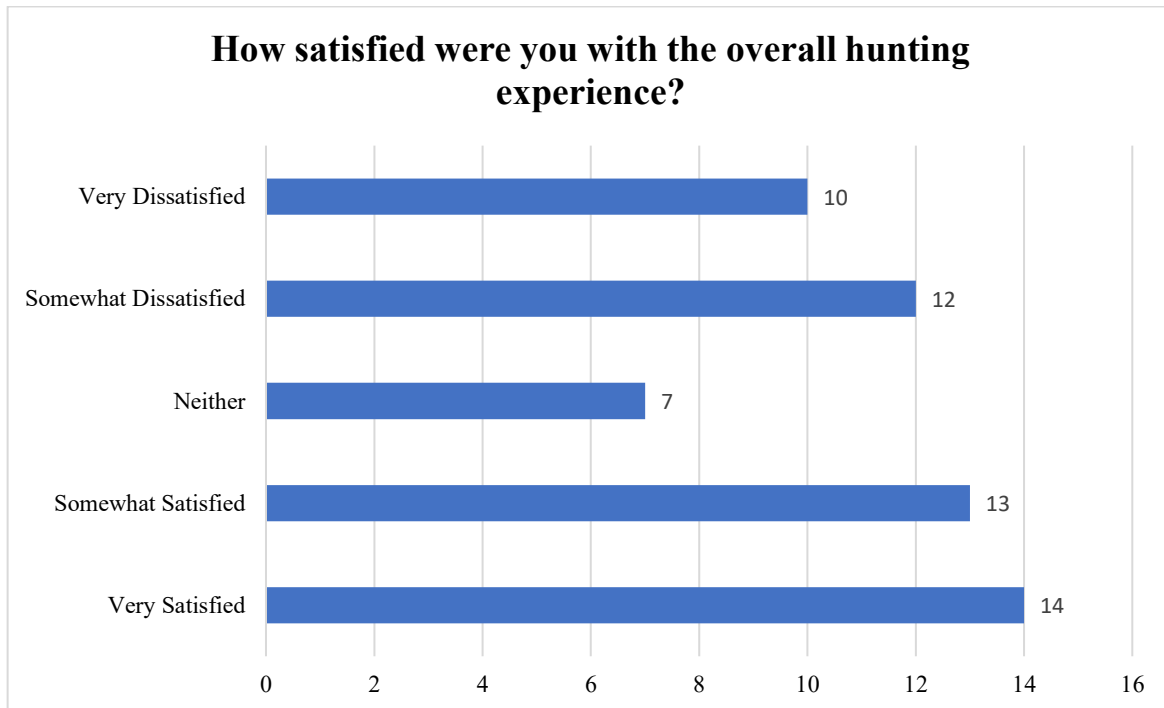
Hunter effort measures the number of hours each respective hunting group (permittee and partner) spent in the field during their permit window. This is an important metric as it can directly influence overall success rates. In general, hunters who spend more time afield are more successful. Survey data indicates that archery hunters spent an average of 14 hours afield, utilizing ~12% of their allotted permit window (5 AM to 10 PM = 17 hours x 7 days) and firearm hunters spent on average 5.25 hours afield, utilizing ~15% of their allotted permit window (5AM to 10PM = 17 hours x 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 23.4% of survey respondents were successful in harvesting at least one (1) deer. Overall harvest outcomes were consistent with expectations and comparable to recent program performance. Due to the absence of comprehensive participation data, an overall hunter success rate could not be calculated for the 2025–2026 season. However, available survey responses provide limited insight into hunter experiences, though results are not directly comparable to prior years due to differences in survey administration and response rates.

Hunter Experience



Based upon survey responses, the overall experience for hunters was positive with 89.4% of hunters indicating that they plan to apply for future controlled hunting opportunities. One of the more common complaints from hunters was the desire to have fewer permits issued during each permit window. The number of permits issued per permit window at each property is reassessed after each hunting season based on harvest numbers, hunter feedback, and a variety of other factors.

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 2025-2026 deer management program:

Ohio Division of Wildlife: Law Enforcement

- Zero (0) safety related incidents reported
- Zero (0) incidents of hunters trespassing onto neighboring properties
- Zero (0) reports of hunter harassment
- Zero (0) instances of illegal baiting
- Zero (0) reports of injured deer

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.

Hunter Reported Incidents

- Zero (0) reports of deliberate hunter harassment
- One (1) report of non-hunting park users being off-trail at Hitchcock Woods. The incident was reported to MetroParks staff after the hunter's permit window ended, resulting in no action being taken.

Program Summary

Both the targeted removal and controlled hunting portions of the deer management program were a success for the 2025-2026 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. A majority of the properties enrolled in the 2025-2026 controlled hunting program met or exceeded their projected harvest goals for the year (see above), with the exceptions of MetroParks Farm and Springfield Forest. As mentioned previously, the number of permits issued at these properties may be reassessed before next season. 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 within the projected budget for the program.

Additional population monitoring and habitat assessments will take place in preparation for the 2026-2027 management season to evaluate harvest goals moving forward.