

**Mill Creek MetroParks
Deer Management Program
2024-2025 End of Year Summary**

Date of Last Revision 3.12.25

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 2024-2025 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 2024-2025 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 three (3) nights of operation on 10/07/2024, 10/09/24, and 10/28/2024.

Results

Number of Deer Damage Permits (DDP's) Issued	75
Program Restrictions	A maximum of 30 (40%) antlered deer may be harvested
Number of Deer Damage Permits Utilized	75
Pounds of Venison Donated	3,292.4

*Due to staff limitations, Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley declined the venison donation that resulted from the 2024-25 management activities and asked that the meat be donated to the Lorain Branch of the Second Harvest Food Bank. 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 continued in 2024 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 2024, 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 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, 318 permits were granted (248 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 2024-2025 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:

- 09/29/2024 – 11/23/2024
- 09/29/2024-1/25/2025 (Hitchcock and Huntington Woods)

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

- 11/30/24 – 12/1/24
- 12/7/24 – 12/8/24
- 12/14/24 – 12/15/24
- 12/21/24 – 12/22/24
- 12/28/24 – 12/29/24

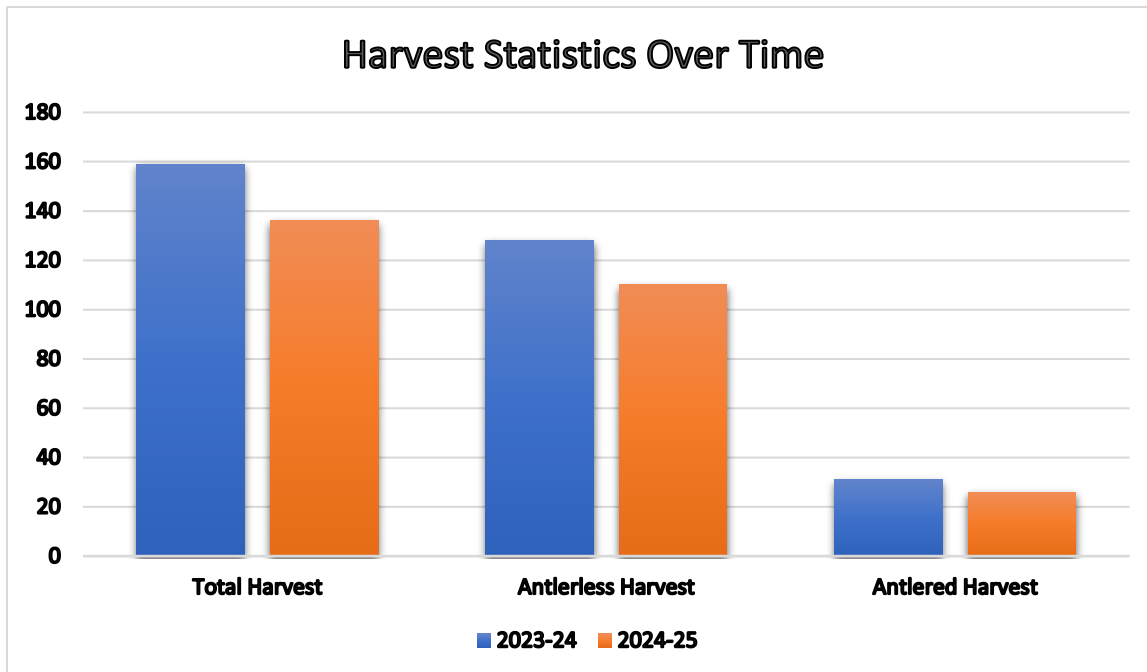
Results

Harvest Statistics						
Property	Total Acres	Huntable 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 ²)	223 (0.35 mi ²)	13 (21.7/mi ²)	10 (28.6/mi ²)	3 (5/mi ²)	6-12
Hitchcock Woods	689 (1.08 mi ²)	489 (0.76 mi ²)	31 (28.7/mi ²)	26 (24.07/mi ²)	5 (4.6/mi ²)	16-32
MC Wildlife Sanctuary (West)	264 (0.41 mi ²)	220.5 (0.34 mi ²)	13 (31.7/mi ²)	13 (31.7/mi ²)	0 (0/mi ²)	5-13
MC Wildlife Sanctuary (East)	218 (0.34 mi ²)	209 (0.32 mi ²)	9 (26.4/mi ²)	7 (20.6/mi ²)	2 (5.9/mi ²)	5-13
Collier Preserve	303 (0.47 mi ²)	162 (0.25 mi ²)	11 (23.4/mi ²)	10 (21.3/mi ²)	1 (2.1/mi ²)	8-16
Vickers Nature Preserve	262 (0.41 mi ²)	225 (0.35 mi ²)	17 (41.5/mi ²)	10 (24.4/mi ²)	7 (17.1/mi ²)	8-16
Sawmill Creek Preserve	167 (0.26 mi ²)	128 (0.2 mi ²)	14 (53.8/mi ²)	11 (42.3/mi ²)	3 (11.5/mi ²)	7-14
MetroParks Farm	402 (0.62 mi ²)	50 (0.079 mi ²)	6 (9.7/mi ²)	5 (8.1/mi ²)	1 (1.6/mi ²)	3-6
Hawkins Marsh	161 (0.25 mi ²)	128 (0.2 mi ²)	13 (52/mi ²)	12 (44/mi ²)	1 (4/mi ²)	5-11
Springfield Forest	89 (0.14 mi ²)	82 (0.13 mi ²)	4 (28.6/mi ²)	2 (14.3/mi ²)	2 (14.3/mi ²)	4-8
Total	2,977 (4.65 mi ²)	1,942 (3.03 mi ²)	136 (29.2/mi ²)	110 (23.7/mi ²)	26 (5.6/mi ²)	66-133
# of Unreported Harvests			Percentage of Total Harvest			
5			5.84%			
Deer Harvested Per Permit Issued			0.41			

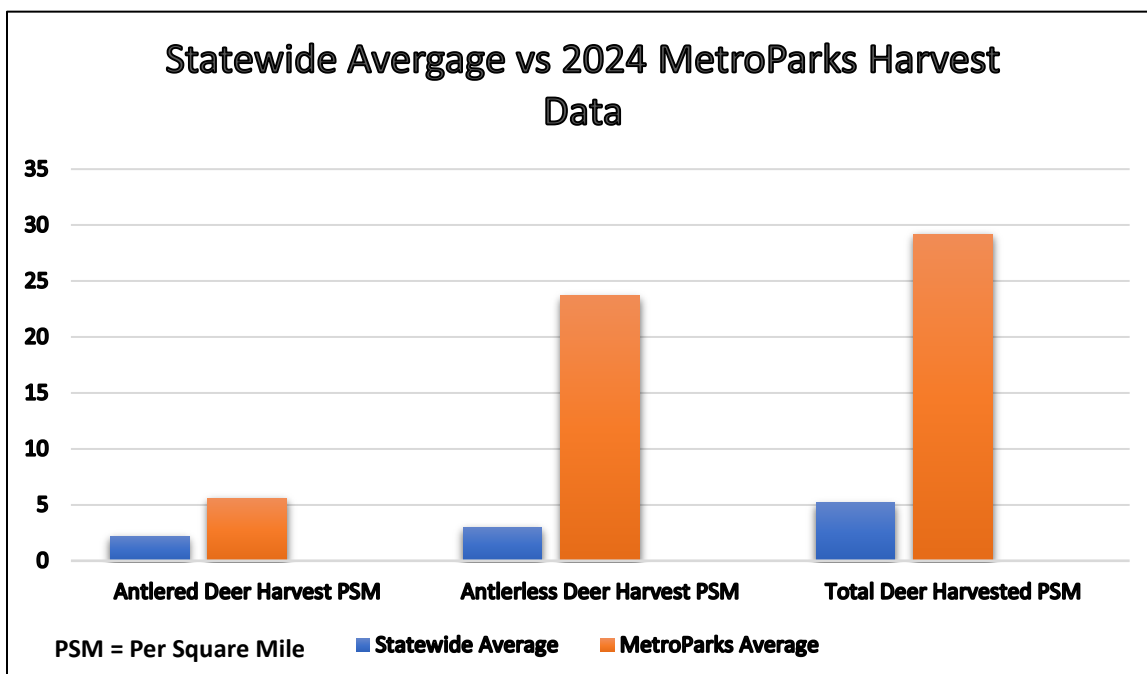
The harvests indicated as unreported are deer that were checked in via the ODOW game check system and the hunter indicated that the deer was harvested as part of the controlled hunt; however, the hunter failed to report which MetroParks property the deer was taken from. Both MetroParks and Division of 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 (139), 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 03.12.25. 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 44.9 deer/mi² as compared to 29.2 deer/mi² when looking at the total property acreage (2,977-acres).



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

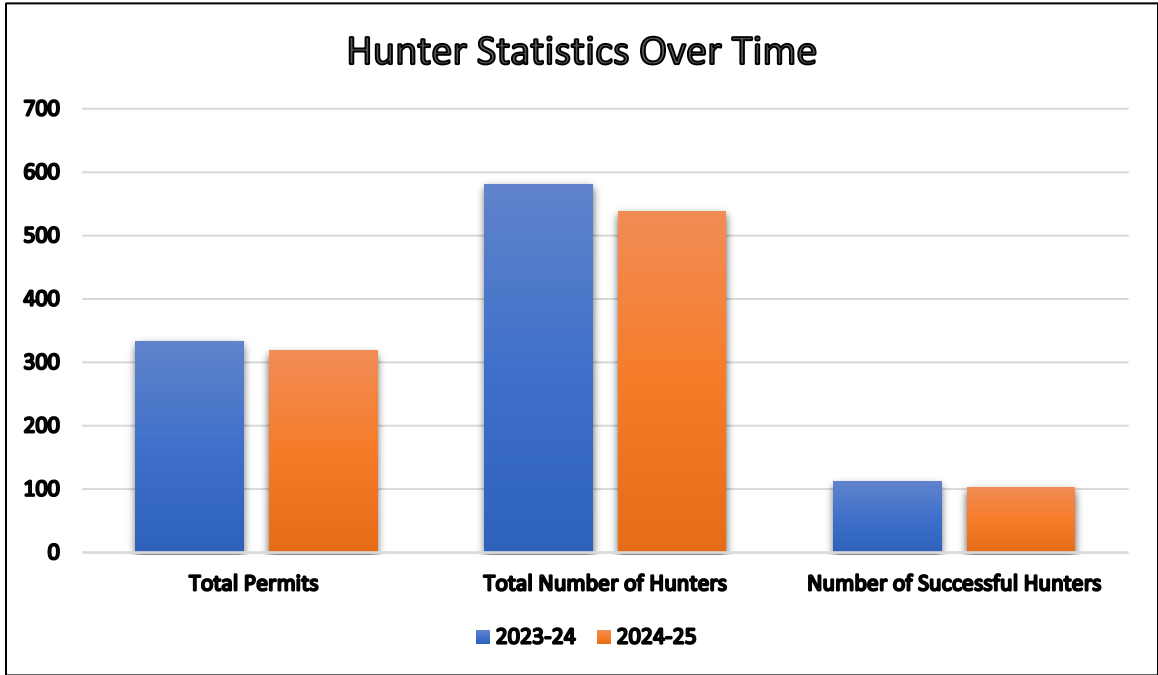


Statewide averages for harvested data acquired from the National Deer Association (NDA) 2024 Deer Report (<https://deerassociation.com/2024-deer-report/>).

Hunter Statistics

Type of Permit	Number of Hunters	Number of Successful Hunters	Success Rate	Permit Utilization
Archery	439	83	18.9%	92.2%
Firearm	99	20	20.2%	94.8%
Total	538	103	19.1%	92.1%

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

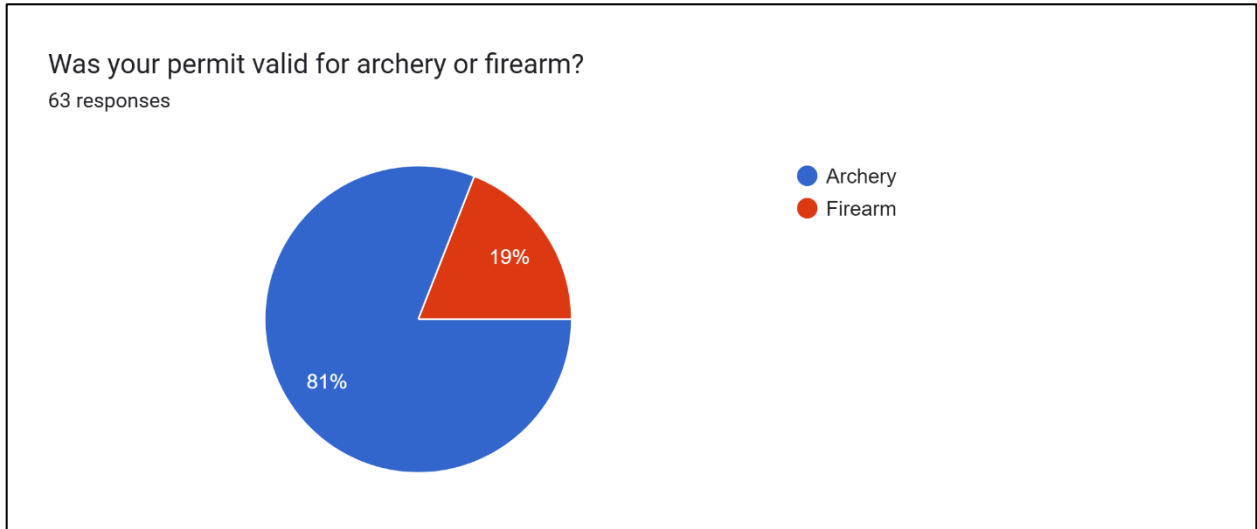


Post-Hunt Survey

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:

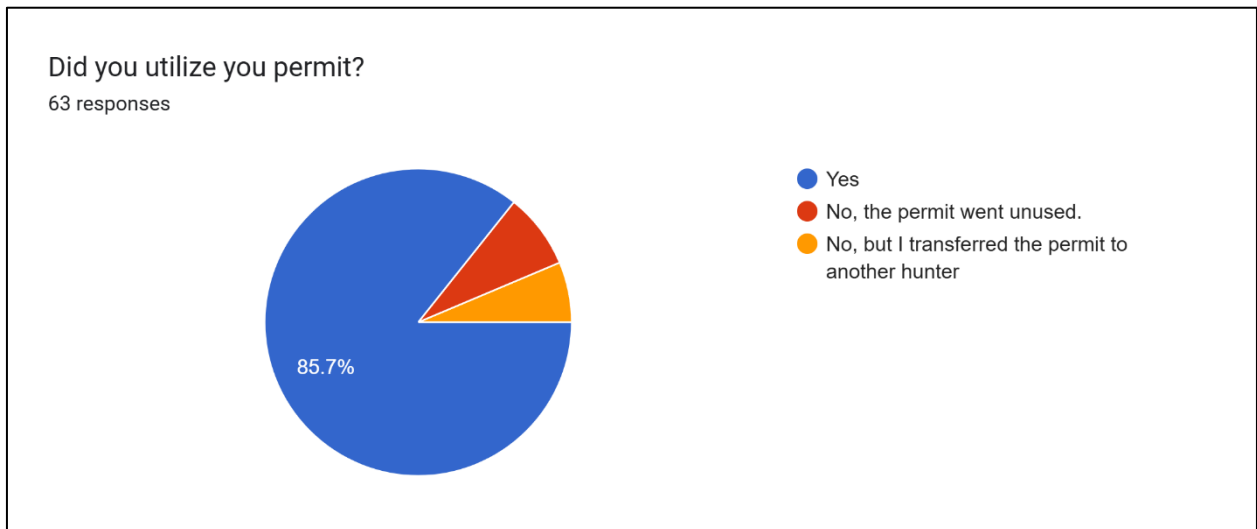
- Number of Survey Responses – 63 (19.8% Return Rate)

Respondents



As seen above, the distribution of survey responses between archery and firearm hunters was proportional to the overall permit allocation of 248 archery permits (78.0%) and 70 firearm permits (22.0%).

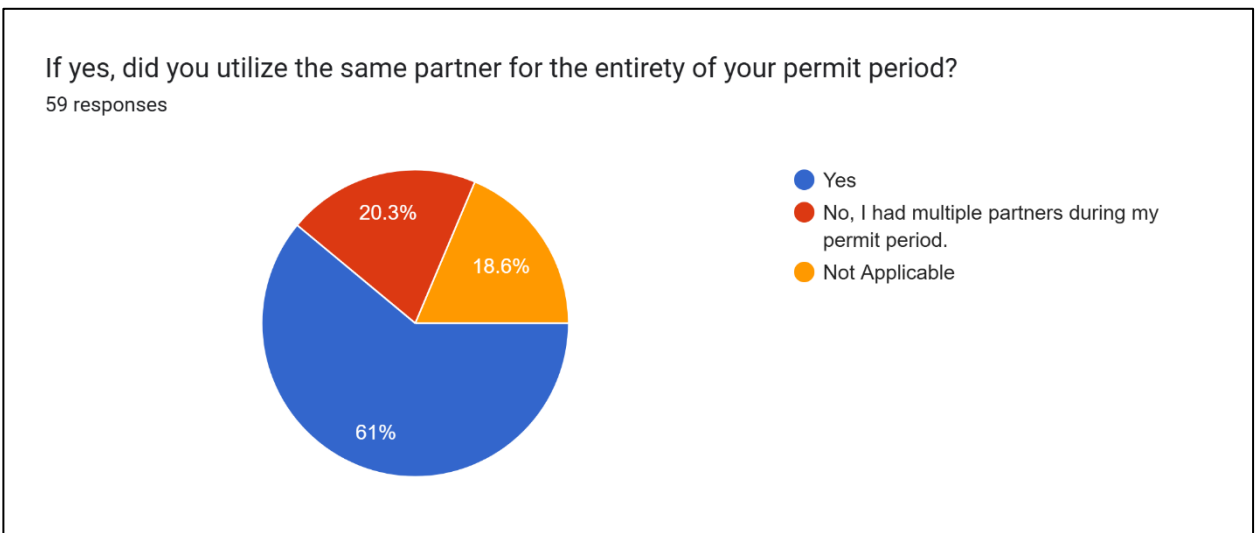
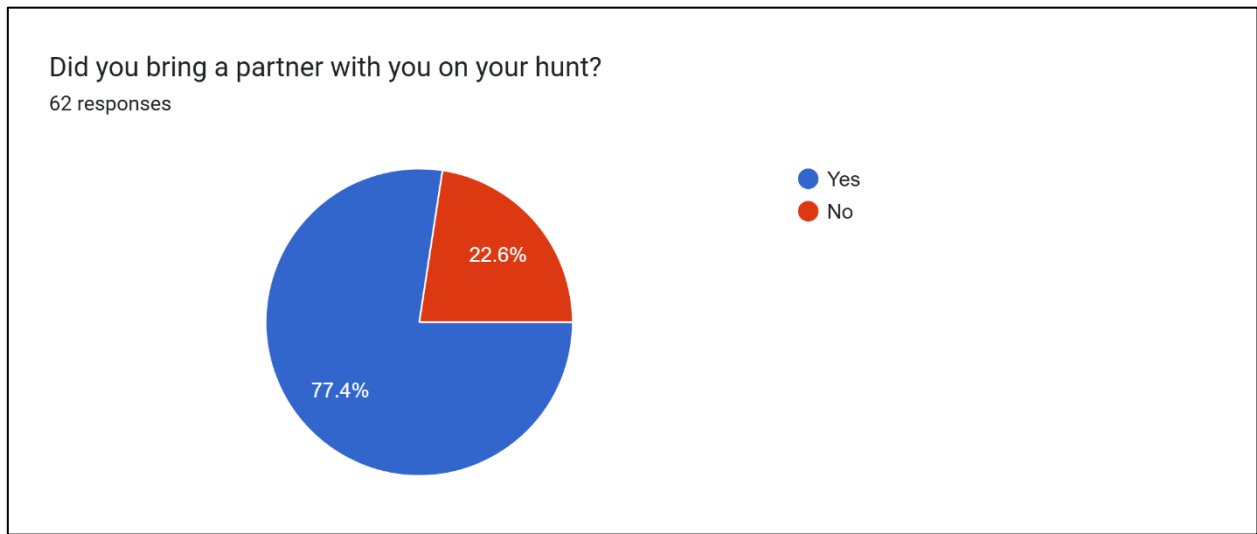
Permit Utilization



In total, 85.7% of survey respondents utilized their controlled hunt permit; however, according to survey data, 7.9% of permits went unused and an additional 6.3% of permits were transferred to another hunter. If we apply these metrics to the 318 total permits issued, we can estimate that 293 permits were utilized by the original permit holder or their transferee, and 25 permits went unused. This season saw very similar permit utilization rates when comparing archery vs. firearm permits, which was a stark difference from 2023 which saw much

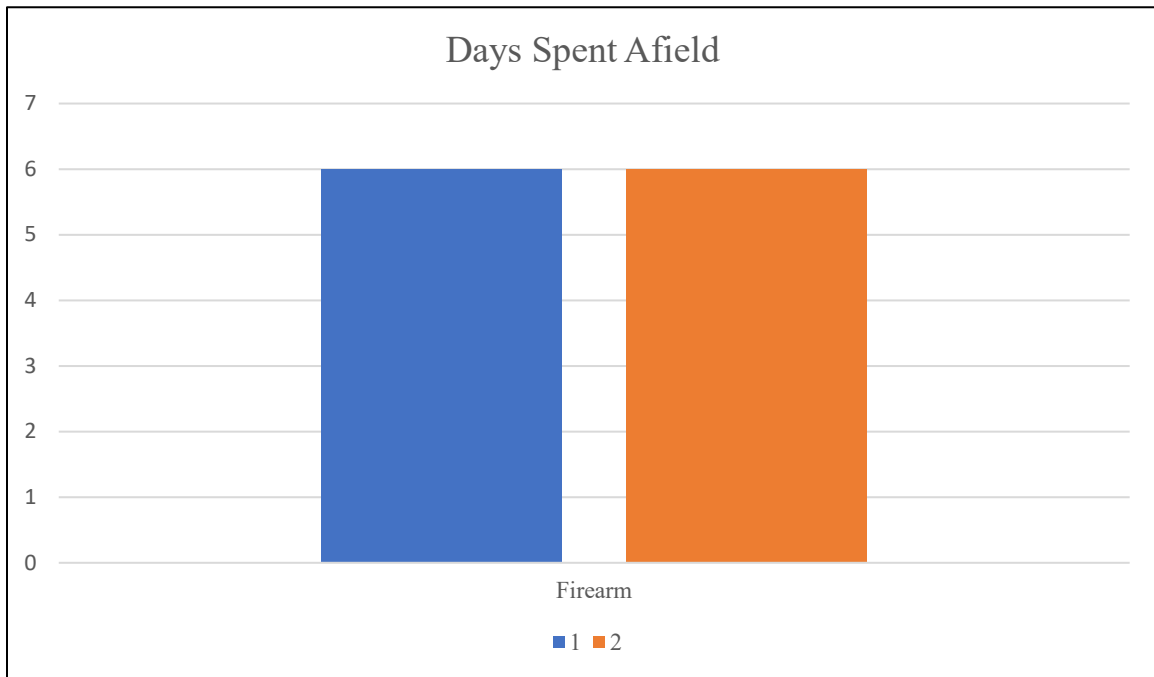
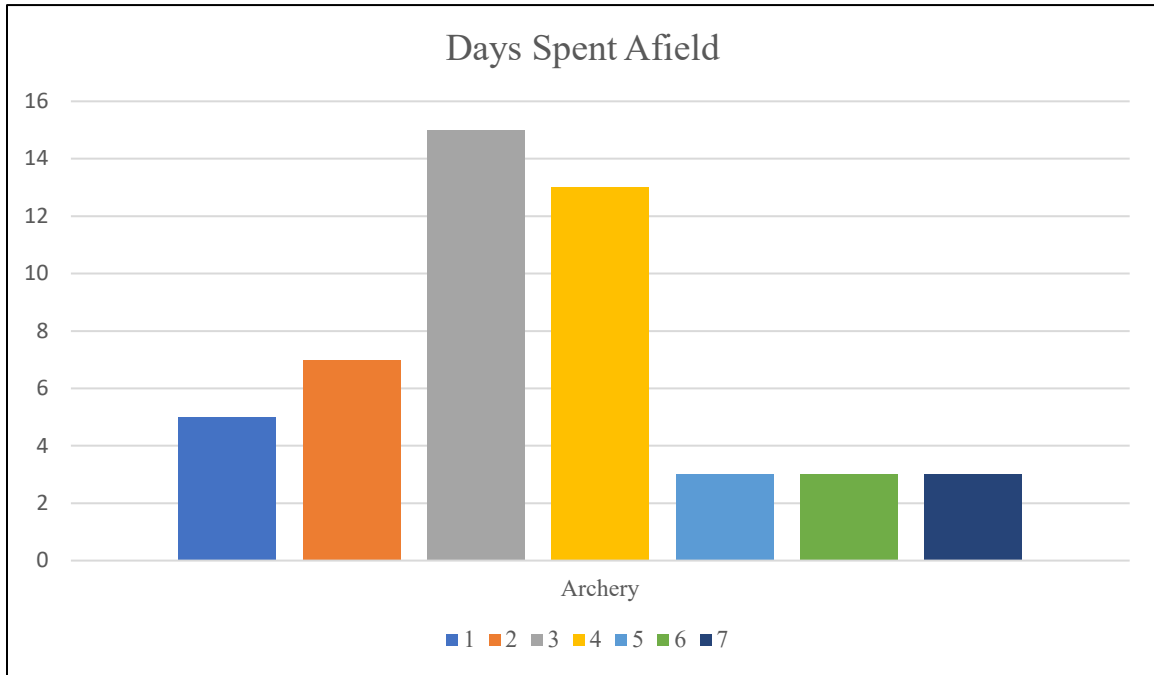
higher rates for unused firearm permits. The decision to move the firearm hunts to earlier in the year seemingly had a positive effect on participation.

Partner Participation



The majority of hunters (77.4%) utilized the option of bringing a partner. Of those, 20.3% indicated 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 538 hunters (permit holder + partners) participated in the controlled hunting program in 2024-2025, a slight decrease (7.5%) from last season.

Hunter Effort

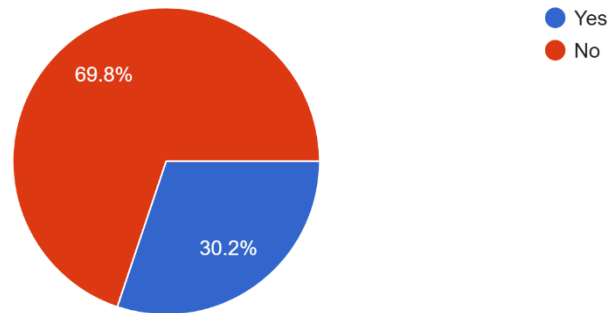


Hunter effort measures the number of days each respective hunter spent in the field during their permit window. This is an important metric as it can directly influence overall success rates. In general, hunters who spend more time afield are more successful. Survey data indicates that archery hunters spent an average of 3.06 days afield, utilizing 44% of their allotted permit window (7 days) and firearm hunters spent on average 1.5 days afield, utilizing 75% of their allotted permit window (2 days).

Hunter Success

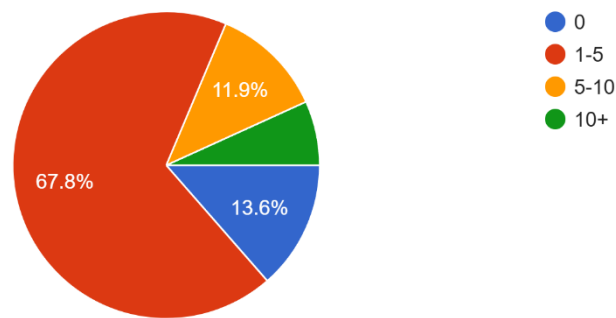
Did you (or your partner if applicable) successfully harvest a deer during your hunt?

63 responses



On average, how many deer did you (and your partner if applicable) see per day while in the field?

59 responses



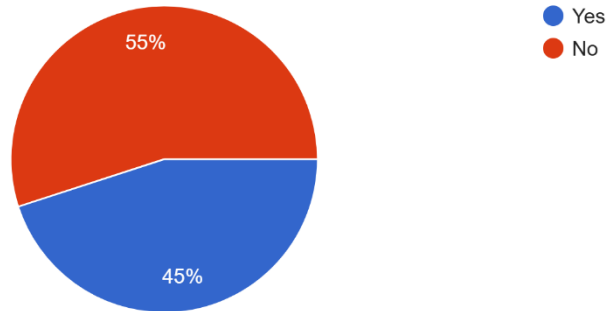
Overall, hunter success met expectations and proved to be similar to other controlled hunting opportunities throughout the state. Survey results indicate that 30.2% of survey respondents were successful in harvesting at least one (1) deer. When looking at overall harvest data (see above), the overall hunter success rate is 19.3%, which again is as expected when compared to similar programs.

The majority of survey respondents (67.8%) indicated observations of 1-5 deer per day spent afield, with 11.9% observing 5-10 deer per day, and 6.8% observing 10 or more deer per day. 13.6% of survey respondents indicated 0 deer observations during their hunt.

Hunter Experience

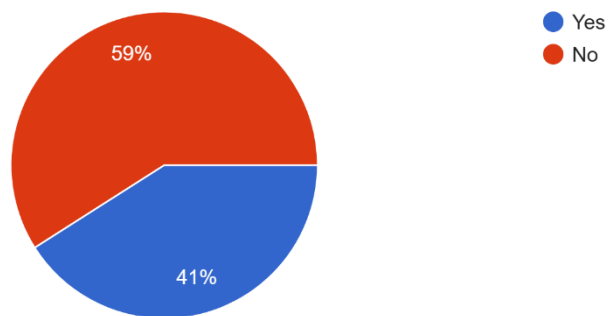
Did you encounter other hunters during your permit window?

60 responses



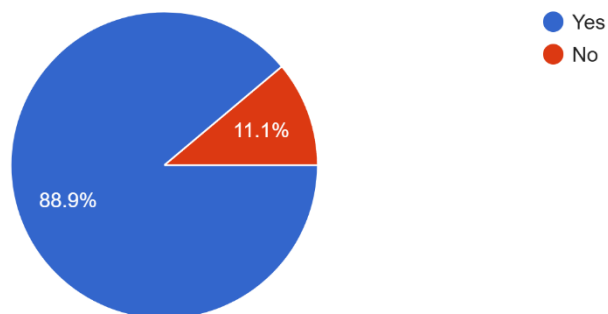
Did you encounter non-hunting park users during your permit window?

61 responses



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

63 responses



Based upon survey responses, the overall experience for hunters was positive with 88.9% 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 55% of hunters indicating that they encountered other hunters during their visit. Interactions between hunters and non-hunting park users were also positive, 59% of hunters indicated that they encountered other park users during their visit without conflict.

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 2024-2025 deer management program:

Ohio Division of Wildlife: Law Enforcement

- Zero (0) safety related incidents reported.
- One (1) incident of a hunter trespassing from Hawkins Marsh onto a neighboring property, no citation was issued.
- Zero (0) reports of hunter harassment
- One (1) instance of illegal baiting, which resulted in the issuance of two (2) citations.
- 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
- Zero (0) reports of non-hunting park users either being off-trail or entering a closed property which resulted in a negative hunter interaction.

Program Summary

Both the targeted removal and controlled hunting portions of the deer management program were a success for the 2024-2025 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 the properties enrolled in the 2024-2025 controlled hunting program met or exceeded their projected harvest goals for the year (see above). 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 2025-2026 management season to evaluate harvest goals moving forward.