

WBDMA

Walnut Bayou Deer Management Association



Five Year Report

1996-2000

Need for an Association

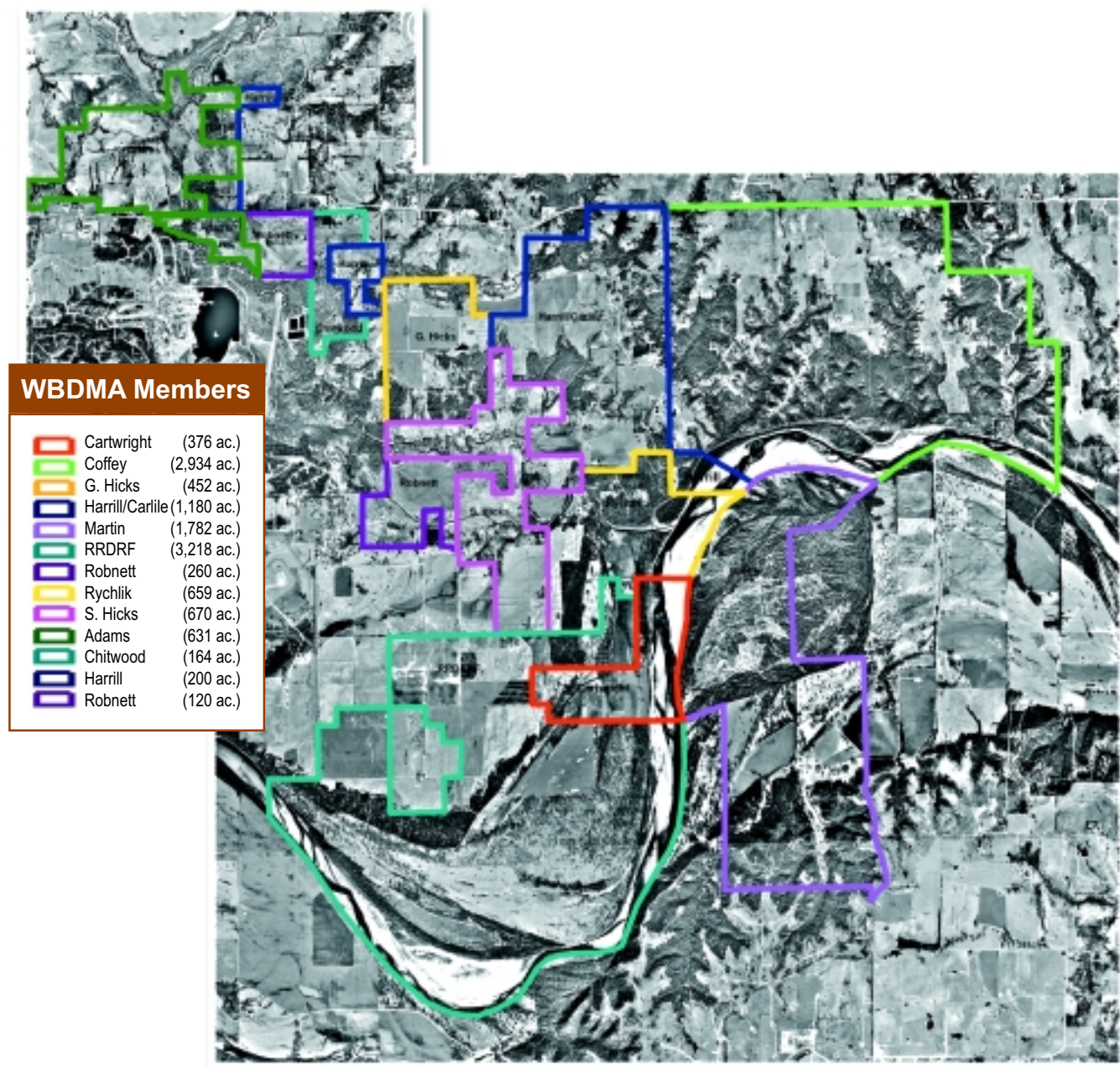
A deer management association is a group of land managers cooperatively managing their shared deer herd to achieve common goals. Most landowners do not own enough property to achieve many deer population goals given the home range requirements of white-tailed deer. Goals such as improving the buck-to-doe ratio, buck age structure, fawn crop, or altering deer density can be more quickly achieved by a group of managers with contiguous land working cooperatively than by landowners with relatively small acreages working alone.

Description of the Area

The Walnut Bayou Deer Management Association (WBDMA) is located along the Red River, predominantly in Love County, Oklahoma, with one tract in Cooke County, Texas (Figure 1). Love County is primarily rural, with a population density of about 18 persons per square mile.

Love and Cooke counties are within the Cross Timbers vegetational area, where the native woody vegetation is comprised of post oak–blackjack oak forest on uplands, and oak-hickory-elm-ash-hackberry forest in the bottoms. In their native condition, open-

Figure 1. Properties of members of the Walnut Bayou Deer Management Association.



ings are dominated by tallgrass prairie species. Many of these openings and some cleared areas have been planted with introduced forages, primarily bermudagrass and cool season forages.

Love County rainfall and temperature data are summarized in Figures 2 and 3, respectively. Data collected between April through October, the time period important for doe lactation and buck antler growth, were summarized to reflect growing season conditions. The WBDMA lands suffered an extended drought of above average temperature and below average rainfall between 1996-2000.

Reported harvest of white-tailed deer in Love County increased rapidly throughout the 1990s (Table 1). Buck harvest regulations were essentially unchanged in the decade, and since there were probably no dramatic changes in hunter effort, it is reasonable to assume the overall county deer population grew steadily. There was a slight increase in the percentage of does taken in the total harvest, from an average of 22 percent between 1990 and 1994 to an average of 33 percent between 1995 and 1999. This may be due to a shift in hunter attitudes favoring doe harvest, and/or a function of more liberalized doe harvest opportunity through regulation changes.

Figure 2. Growing season (April–October) rainfall variation from the 60-year average, Love County, Oklahoma.

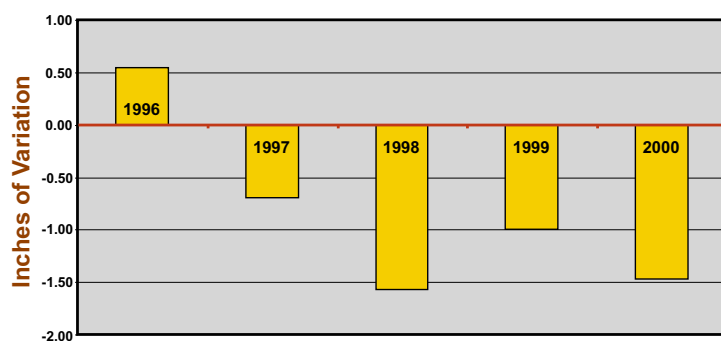
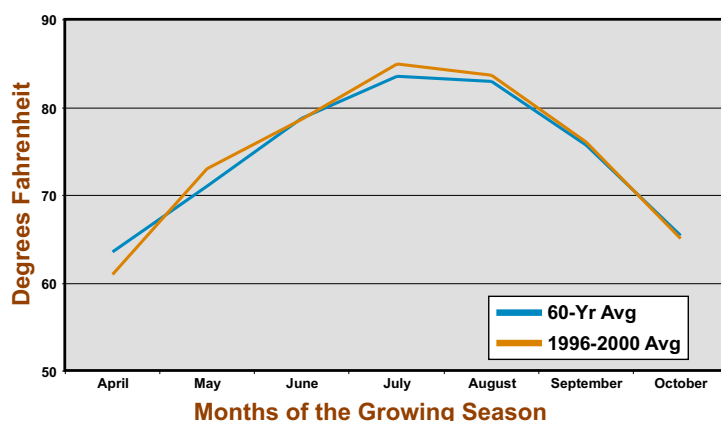


Figure 3. Temperature variation from the 60-year average, Love County, Oklahoma.



Member Profile

Curtis Carlile

Curtis Carlile is a property owner and association member who rates the WBDMA highly. The WBDMA has offered a wealth of information about deer herd behavior and property/habitat management, he said.

"We've been in it, what? Five years? And every year it just gets better and better," he said.



During the management association's first three drought-marred years, he saw few bucks, and, so, refocused the spotlight onto doe harvest. In spite of a decades-long belief that hunters shouldn't kill does, "we knew by watching everything around us that we needed to take (harvest) more does."

Now, he estimates the buck-to-doe ratio is closer to fifty-fifty, "and that's what we want."

The importance of doe harvesting was just one of the many things learned through his association with the WBDMA, though, Carlile said.

"There are so many things (learned), I can't even remember them all," he said. "It's been a godsend. Several of us had talked about joining DMAP (the Deer Management Assistance Program implemented through the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation). Kent (Shankles, with the Noble Foundation) helped get it going." Carlile added that members now have help to make better management decisions.

The success of the Southern Oklahoma-North Texas association has grown. Coworkers constantly seek him out to learn more about the WBDMA or to ask questions about deer management or hunting.

"They'd come and look me up to ask me who to talk to," he said. "Even now, they call me up at home to ask me things."

About the only change he might like to see in the program is that it change from strictly being a *deer* management program.

"I want it to be wildlife," covering all types of game wildlife, Carlile said. "I'm sure there are other things I might like to change, but I can't think of any. If it's not broke, don't fix it. We have all of the resources we could need."

What he likes best about the program is the camaraderie among association participants.

"Every year we add some more," Carlile said. "When you get something like this, where everyone gets along so well ... usually with this many people, there might be problems."

He said joining the association allows him to better know his neighbors, as well as meet other like-minded property owners in the area.

"It's a pretty good feeling, and it's something everybody needs," Carlile said.

Carlile is especially proud of the youth program. He took two young people hunting with him during the last deer season. Like other people in the organization, he feels focusing on the youth today will ensure a future for the sport of hunting.

"It (interest in the program) is growing like wildfire," Carlile said. "That's good, that's what we need. It's a good program and it really works."

Member Profile

John Cartwright

John Cartwright has hunted his entire life and used to travel to the south-eastern part of the state to do so, back when there weren't many deer here.

Over the years, that has been changing, deer populations are increasing in Southern Oklahoma-North Texas. He is also seeing the buck-to-doe ratio change. And that, he said, is a direct result of the work of members of the Walnut Bayou Deer Management Association.

Cartwright said he was a little skeptical at first about the possibility of bettering the area deer herd.

"I didn't really understand it, but I know we have bigger deer now, larger bucks," he said. "We've had some large deer killed through the years, but now they're heavier. I believe it really works."

He said he was especially keen about joining the association when they started encouraging the harvesting of does, something frowned upon by hunters in the past.

"I never could understand why we couldn't take a doe," Cartwright said, especially considering that hunting does and skipping bucks gives male deer more time to mature. Long before the Noble Foundation took over management of the Coffey Ranch, Cartwright had been seeing a proliferation of does.

These days, Cartwright said he enjoys watching deer as much as hunting them. He has learned about deer habitat requirements and nutritional needs through the association. For example, he's learned what herbicides not to spray, that greenbriers are a delicacy for deer, and that burned briers come back with added protein. He has planted stands of clover, oats, ryegrass, winter peas, and vetch for deer to graze, and is considering planting alfalfa. He also is encouraging the growth of native sunflowers, plants he had never paid much attention to in the past, and is always on the lookout for other beneficial forages.

He would like to see more encouragement by the association for planting legumes such as red clover and wild peas as an additional supplement for deer.

Cartwright thinks the association works well, adding that, to him, the biggest benefit of all is getting to hunt doe throughout rifle season, instead of just four days.



John Cartwright's grandson with his first deer.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) maintains a record book (Cy Curtis Awards Program) listing by county of all bucks submitted with a minimum Boone and Crockett score of 135 for typical and 150 for non-typical racks. Analysis of these records through the 10-year period ending June 15, 2001, shows that Love County ranked seventh among Oklahoma's 77 counties with 16 square miles per listed whitetail. The state average was 36 square miles per listed whitetail.

Table 1. Love County reported white-tailed deer harvest, 1990-1999.

Year	Bucks	Does	Total
1990	129	25	154
1991	113	23	136
1992	176	43	219
1993	228	69	297
1994	289	105	394
1995	300	78	378
1996	274	150	424
1997	285	139	424
1998	310	170	480
1999	337	206	543

Description of the WBDMA

One of the participating WBDMA properties, the Noble Foundation's D. Joyce Coffey Ranch, has been under a deer management plan and leasing hunting rights since 1987. Because of efforts to increase the age structure of bucks, the lessees are not allowed to harvest yearling bucks. In time, the lessees began to express concerns about gunshots they were hearing on neighboring properties, thinking that the yearling bucks they were not allowed to harvest were being shot by neighboring hunters.

Kent Shankles, Coffey Ranch farm manager, knew all of the neighbors. He visited with each one of them about the concerns expressed by the Coffey Ranch lessees. The neighbors shared the same concerns, only they thought yearling bucks were being harvested on the Coffey Ranch and other adjoining properties.

With this information, Shankles organized a spring 1996 meeting between all neighbors with properties between the Coffey Ranch and the Noble Foundation Red River Demonstration and Research Farm (RRDRF). The result was the formation of the WBDMA. Charter members included Coffey Ranch, RRDRF, Carlile/Harrill Ranch, Rychlik Ranch, Cartwright Ranch, and Thompson Ranch. Since that initial meeting, the Thompson Ranch has dropped out and the Robnett Ranch, Steve Hicks Ranch, George Hicks Ranch, Adams Ranch, and the Martin Ranch have been added for a current total of 12,608 acres under association management (Figure 1).

The WBDMA is enrolled in the ODWC's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). DMAP applies to Okla-

homa properties only. This is a benefit to several WBDMA members because DMAP participants must have a minimum of 1,000 acres to enroll. DMAP allows additional days of doe harvest opportunity to help landowners meet their population management goals. Limits are removed on the number of does an individual hunter can harvest as long as the total doe harvest limit is not exceeded. The Martin Ranch is enrolled in a similar program in Texas called the Managed Lands Deer Permit Program (MLDP). DMAP and MLDP require landowners to collect spotlight survey data annually to help determine population management strategies. The WBDMA also collects harvest data in order to gain a better understanding of herd population parameters.

The WBDMA meets twice annually and has hosted a biologist and a law enforcement officer from ODWC, Oklahoma State University Extension range and wildlife biologists, and the executive director of the Quality Deer Management Association from Watkinsville, Georgia. Other activities have included attendance at a White-tailed Deer Genetics meeting in College Station, Texas, and a trip to the Hunters Extravaganza in Fort Worth, Texas.

Goals and Objectives adopted by the WBDMA

1. WBDMA members agree to obey all hunting regulations and rules as defined by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Willful disregard of state game laws will result in expulsion from the WBDMA.
2. Demonstrate an atmosphere of camaraderie, sportsmanship and cooperative effort in deer management with neighbors, the community and the general public.
3. Demonstrate the value of deer management on a large land holding with diverse ownership to the local community and to the general public.
 - A) Strive to increase the age structure within the buck segment of the deer herd by strongly encouraging the protection of yearling bucks.
 - B) Strive to increase buck:doe ratios through increased doe harvest and decreased buck harvest.
 - C) Strive to balance deer numbers with habitat conditions.
 - D) Strive to educate members, both young and old, about deer population and habitat management.
 - E) Assist in the development and education of young hunters and increase youth exposure to deer management practices.

Member Profile

Claude Crossland



Claude Crossland has worked on the Noble Foundation's Red River Demonstration and Research Farm for 24 years. During that time, he's seen major changes in the deer population in the area, going from practically none to a preponderance of does, to a more even buck-to-doe ratio in recent years.

Deer used to be so sparse, he didn't kill one locally until 1986, although he'd hunted since he was a kid.

Just as the deer population has changed, so have Crossland's hunting techniques.

"I've been (re)educated it's all right to kill a doe," he said. "Before, I'd been told you were killing the nursery when you killed a doe."

"I don't think we've seen the full benefits of the deer association yet," Crossland said. Those benefits include ongoing educational programs.

"I'm seeing, through speakers and our specialists, more knowledge for the members," he said. And he's also seeing that knowledge in action. "They (association members) are looking for more habitat now, putting more deer habitat in. They're not planting all the way to their fence rows any more."

That increased knowledge is being used to better handle an increase in the deer population, which in turn provides more opportunity for hunters and wildlife watchers. He also notes an important part of the association includes seeing goals met.

Crossland recommends any interested property owner join a deer management association.

"It results in better control of deer herds on their farms, better herd size, increased buck maturity, even lease hunting through the association," he said. Crossland also is pleased by the increased interaction among association members.

Member Profile

Rex Harrill

Rex Harrill recognizes the difference the WBDMA has made — “We’ve got plenty of deer now, and there’s always a big one or two in the bunch.”

That certainly wasn’t always the case. For years, he said, deer were a scarce commodity.

Harrill doesn’t consider himself much of a hunter, but friends and family hunt frequently on his property. He and his wife enjoy watching deer, though, and he’s learned about the deer population that wanders through his property.

“They eat a lot of different things, more so than I thought,” he said. “I didn’t know they eat everything like they do,” and not just “green stuff (winter pasture),” either.

There are a number of advantages to joining the association besides the better deer herd, Harrill asserts.

“We don’t have as much unwanted traffic (trespassing poachers) as we used to have,” he said. He has a lot of past unpleasant experience to draw on including calves being shot and fences cut. At one time, he recalls, there were so many poachers, his dad said it sounded like a battlefield.

“We don’t see much of that now. I think it’s working better,” he said, citing the WBDMA signs wired to landowners’ fences and the “community watch” attitude of the area members as reasons.

Harrill grew up in Love County “on the Bayou and around the river,” and he’s noticed the positive changes taking place since the WBDMA was organized six years ago.

The other advantage: “We have some big suppers,” he grins, and lists the fellowship with fellow property owners and managers as another benefit to association membership.

“It seems like everybody kind of looks out for everybody else more,” he said. “I think there’s a pretty good bunch of people in it.”

Although he couldn’t think of any changes he’d like the association to make, he said he’s pleased with some that are already coming about, like the inclusion of young hunters.

“I like the idea of those seeds” growing into mature, responsible hunters, he said.



- F) Members should: 1) be a credit to deer hunting, 2) respect the beliefs of other hunters, landowners and the public, and 3) support the goals and objectives of the WBDMA.

Table 2. WBDMA deer herd characteristics.

Year	Deer/Square Mile				Does/ Buck	Fawns/ Doe
	Bucks	Does	Fawns	Total		
1996	5.7	15.6	7.1	28.4	2.7	0.5
1997	5.3	17.0	13.5	35.8	3.2	0.8
1998	10.8	23.4	16.0	50.2	2.2	0.7
1999	10.0	21.8	15.5	47.3	2.2	0.7
2000	8.6	17.5	10.6	36.7	2.0	0.6

WBDMA Deer Population Trends

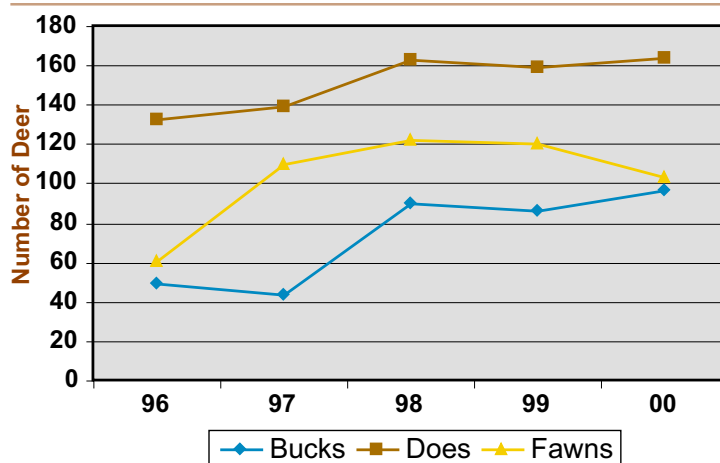
Deer herd parameters on the WBDMA were estimated through the use of spotlight surveys. Each spotlight route was surveyed five times between August 15 and September 30 annually.

The total length and sampled area of all routes varied each year, and totaled 33.1 miles and 2,215 acres in 2000. Estimates from this sampled acreage were extrapolated to the entire WBDMA acreage to produce the data in Table 2.

Two points should be made before interpreting this data. At best, spotlight surveys only provide an index of the actual deer population; they are not a census of the deer herd. Second, additional survey lines and acreage were added every year as the WBDMA grew. Thus, the sampled area is not constant when comparing annual data. Over the 1996-2000 period, estimated deer numbers peaked in 1998 for the WBDMA as a whole, and declined slightly thereafter. The buck-to-doe ratio improved from near 1:3 to 1:2, but the fawn crop declined after 1997.

Perhaps the best comparison of the WBDMA deer herd over time can be drawn from the raw data of the 24.1 miles of

Figure 4. Total deer observed on original WBDMA deer spotlight survey lines.



spotlight survey lines established in 1996 which have been surveyed each year (Figure 4). Total deer observed on these lines increased dramatically from 1996 to 1998, and then remained relatively constant through 2000. Sightings of each age/sex class increased over the period, but the number of bucks doubled from 1996 to 2000.

WBDMA Deer Harvest Trends

Deer numbers on the WBDMA are above desirable levels to optimize habitat quality. Doe harvest information is kept to monitor success in achieving the goal of balancing deer numbers with habitat quality. Doe harvest increased as estimated doe numbers increased over the five-year period (Figure 5).

Figure 5. WBDMA doe population and harvest.

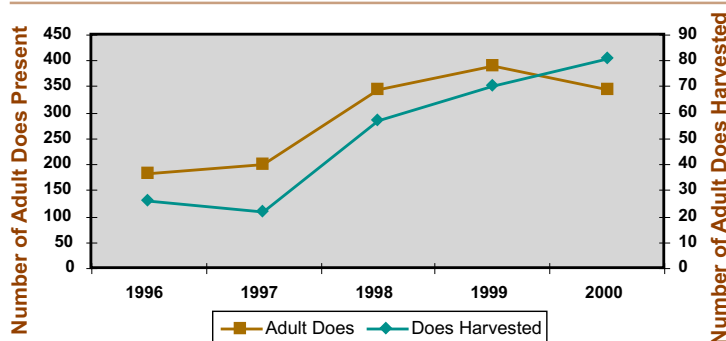
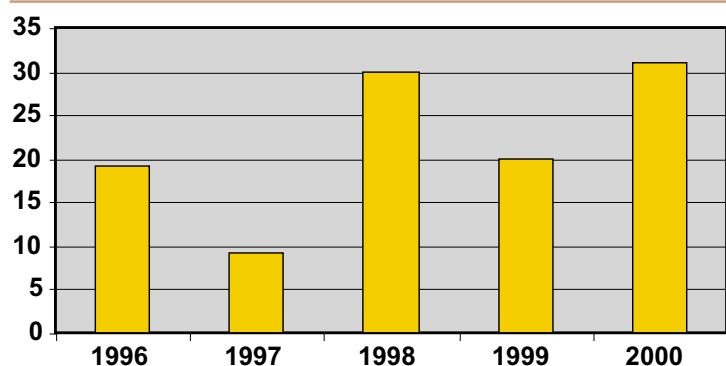


Figure 6. Yearling percentage in WBDMA doe harvest.



Currently, it is not clear whether the decline in doe numbers is due to harvest pressure or other variables such as weather or habitat conditions. The current annual doe harvest goal for the WBDMA is one per 100 acres, or 125 does.

Age and body weight information is recorded for each doe harvested. Theoretically, as doe harvest pressure increases, the number of yearling-aged does harvested should increase. Figure 6 shows an increasing trend in the percentage of yearling does in the doe harvest since 1996. There has been no change in doe body weights for adult, yearling or fawn age classes (Table 3).

Information collected from hunters willing to shoot a doe at every legal opportunity on the Coffey Ranch was analyzed

Member Profile

George Hicks



George Hicks considers himself one of the "old-timers" of the WBDMA, along with fellow member Rex Harrill, but admits he came to hunting later than most. He had never hunted until he was 50, and then only on the urging of a son-in-law. Since then, he's even gone out-of-state to hunt, including to Colorado and New Mexico.

He especially wants to preserve the joy of hunting for his interested grandchildren, having witnessed firsthand the excitement of a grandson killing his first deer.

"When you see something they've done that you didn't get to do when you were young, it makes you feel good inside," Hicks said.

He also enjoys seeing more quality deer in the area, due to the better management of the local herd. "We didn't have too many deer around when I was younger," he said.

By joining WBDMA, Hicks feels he is helping preserve the deer population not only for the enjoyment of himself and his own family, but for all the association members and their children and grandchildren.

"I'm just a little rancher and I do it (work with the WBDMA) as a novelty on the side," Hicks said. "I do it primarily for my grandsons and my sons-in-law."

He also believes that as a result of training provided the association members, there have been fewer hunting accidents.

"It's a good, clean sport and everyone looks out for everyone else," he said. "It makes you feel like a family."

Member Profile

Steve Hicks

Steve Hicks is a new-comer to the Walnut Bayou Deer Management Association; he joined three years ago. Although he hasn't been a member as long as most, he's seen definite changes.

"We're seeing bigger bucks with more mature racks," he said. "There's been a couple of nice bucks taken on my place, and they (hunters) have seen a couple of bigger ones."

And, like others, he's been re-educated about deer hunting.

Now, he's willing to let a young buck pass without taking a shot, knowing there's a chance he'll see the same animal with more weight and a larger rack down the road. Waiting for the bucks to mature isn't bothering him, though.

"I've enjoyed sitting and watching them go by," he said.

Hicks also has enjoyed the fellowship that belonging to WBDMA affords, especially the twice-a-year pot-luck get-togethers.

Education is an important part of the association. Hicks said he's learned a great deal from guest speakers, including what plants provide nutrition for deer, habitat management, how to identify deer forage and other plants, and how to tell a buck's maturity.

"And I've learned I don't need to clean up my place (spraying, dozing, etc.) as much as I thought I did," he added, grinning.

Although he feels the association is working well, he said he'd like to see more information on food plots, and figures a few more meetings among association members would be good as well, in part to reinforce what has already been taught.

"They (association members) have done a real good job," Hicks said. "The information is probably all already there if we'd just look at it."

Hicks said he plans to provide more fenced areas to provide deer additional bedding and food. Like many other association members, he said he's been hunting "all my life."

He'd definitely recommend other property owners to join existing deer management groups, or create their own.

"It helps them to manage their deer herds better and get a better buck-doe ratio," he said. "You also get better trophy deer."

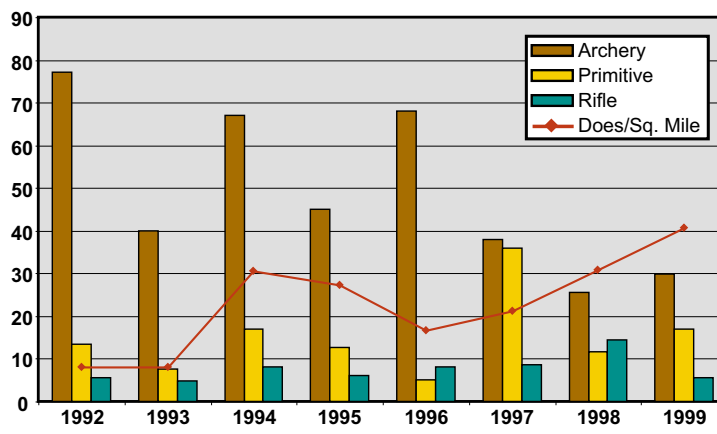


Table 3. Average dressed body weights of WBDMA deer.

Year	Bucks			Does		
	Adult	Yearling	Fawn	Adult	Yearling	Fawn
1996	116 (8) ¹	86 (2)	55 (2)	85 (20)	75 (6)	47 (2)
1997	125 (7)	87 (3)	49 (4)	84 (20)	76 (2)	47 (5)
1998	127 (9)	87 (3)	52 (8)	86 (40)	75 (17)	52 (11)
1999	130 (14)	71 (2)	45 (7)	84 (56)	76 (14)	42 (8)
2000	128 (21)	110 (2)	50 (5)	84 (54)	72 (25)	42 (4)

¹number of deer in sample

Figure 7. Relationship of doe density and number of hunts per harvested doe by hunting season at the Noble Foundation Coffey Ranch.

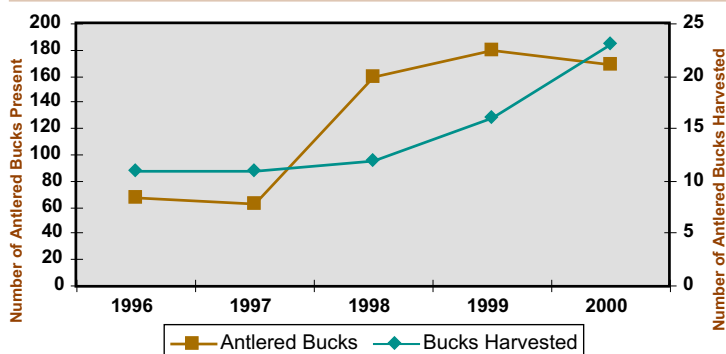


to assess the effort involved in harvesting does. On average it took more hunts to harvest a doe with a bow, followed by blackpowder and rifle, respectively (Figure 7).

Adult buck harvest increased from 1996 to 2000 (Figure 8). However, these numbers represent less than 20 percent of the estimated total number of bucks on the WBDMA each year. Yearlings and buck fawns were occasionally misidentified and mistakenly shot for does. Adult buck body weights have increased slightly since 1996. This may be due to increased selectivity among hunters, increased average age of bucks, or both.

Buck harvest information has been collected on the Coffey Ranch since 1987. Age and antler characteristics were com-

Figure 8. WBDMA buck population and harvest.



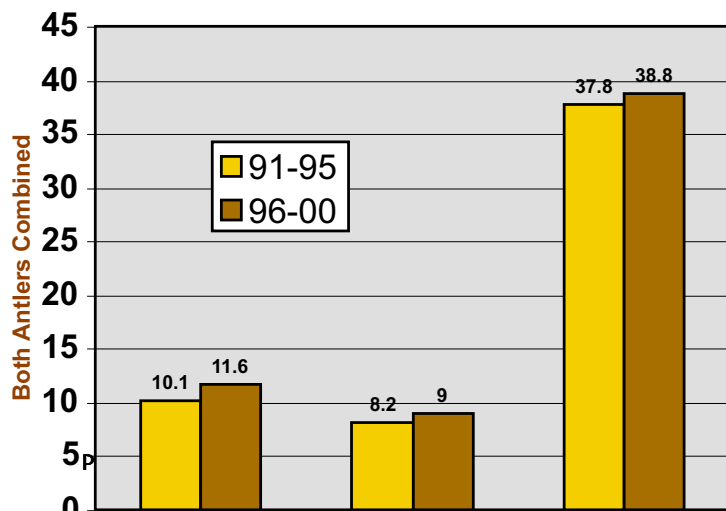
pared between bucks harvested five years preceding the formation of the WBDMA and after. Although the Coffey Ranch had similar harvest management before WBDMA formation, there were increases in main beam length, basal circumference and antler points in harvested adult bucks (Figure 9).

Photographs accompanying this article on pages 11 and 12 depict some of the 22 bucks harvested on the WBDMA lands since 1996 that had gross Boone and Crockett scores of 135 or more.

Summary

- Size of harvested bucks increased.
- Estimated WBDMA deer numbers increased significantly from 1996-1998, but then leveled off. The greatest increase was in buck numbers.
- Deer body weights and antler growth were not negatively impacted by the increased deer density or growing season drought conditions. Estimated fawn production remained below optimum levels throughout the period, however.
- Harvest of 11 to 18 percent of the estimated fall doe population was not sufficient to reduce doe numbers.
- WBDMA members have individually sponsored several youth deer hunts. The WBDMA will sponsor an organized youth hunt in 2001. This is a win-win situation. The youth have the opportunity to participate in an outdoor activity and the WBDMA gets to educate youth and supplement the doe harvest.

Figure 9. Average antler measurements of bucks harvested on the NF Coffey Ranch before and after formation of WBDMA.



Member Profile

Chad Martin



Chad Martin had just returned to run his parents' ranch when he found himself needing some agricultural advice. He found that information at the Noble Foundation, where he also learned about the WBDMA.

"I was just getting started on my own in farming and ranching and I knew I wanted to do something with the deer population," he recalls. "Without the (Walnut Bayou) association, I would probably still be floundering."

Martin is teased about being the "token Texan" in the association, but since his property boasts the largest deer herd of the group, he takes the teasing pretty easily. He also participates in the Texas deer management program, LAMPS.

"Russell (Stevens, NF wildlife specialist) led me through the paperwork," Martin said, but he especially enjoys the WBDMA. "Being hooked in with the association, you have the tracking and other resources available. You know what your neighbors are doing" to improve the deer population, so there's no need for other association members to worry about someone not following the rules.

Martin especially likes being a part of a larger community of landowners, although he predicts "the 'neighbor' aspect will go away and we'll have to pay more attention to the guidelines" in the future as the group continues to grow.

"It seems to work so well now," Martin said.

"There may not be a need for it now, but in the future, we may have to have official rules and guidelines to follow."

He has seen a number of positive changes on his property since joining the WBDMA.

"When we first got involved, the doe harvest was so low, you could say we didn't have one," Martin said. "There have always been deer on the place, but when I was a kid, they were few enough that it was a neat deal to see one."

Recently, the deer population on his property was on the verge of overcrowding. Where an average of 8.5 to 12 acres per deer is recommended, the population on his property came in at about one deer for every 6.5 acres. Careful management has improved those numbers, though, and now his property averages about 8.5 acres per deer.

"The number of bucks has increased and the age structure has changed drastically," he said. There is now an older buck population. After conducting "browse" surveys of deer feeding sites, he has noticed an increase in available deer forage as well.

The concept of having the support of an association is an important part of the WBDMA, Martin said.

"You know you're not the only landowner-hunter out there, the only person trying to improve the quality of the deer herd," he said. "You know you have neighbors trying to do the same things you are."

Although he knew the basics about deer populations and hunting from taking college wildlife classes and hunting "all my life," he said his association with the WBDMA has taught him a great deal — how to tell how old a deer is, and how to measure and score antler racks, among other things.

He'd certainly encourage others to take advantage of deer management associations.

"I think anyone involved in hunting should be involved in a quality management effort," he said, which, unless they own a large amount of land, is practically impossible to do on their own.

Member Profile

Adolfo Ramon and Monte Dinwiddie

Adolfo Ramon and Monte Dinwiddie are also avid supporters of the WBDMA and the opportunities the association provides.

Ramon has seen a marked increase in the buck population that traverses his property since the deer management association was formed. He said one lessee on his place has reported seeing from 14 to 16 bucks. He still wouldn't mind seeing the deer herd grow even larger, though, and has started putting up signs prohibiting hunting. There is still a problem with people shooting deer from the road, he said.

Dinwiddie suggests posting signs not only at entry gates, but also along main roads.

Ramon said he has been hunting in the area with fellow WBDMA member Curtis Carlile for about 15 years, and in the past two to three years, has seen an increase of "big," mature bucks, thanks to the management plan.

"What I've seen has always been the man going out to kill the bucks. It wasn't deer hunting, it was buck hunting," Dinwiddie said. "We're seeing the impact of the deer management (program) they started years ago. We're really optimistic at seeing what will be done on down the road."

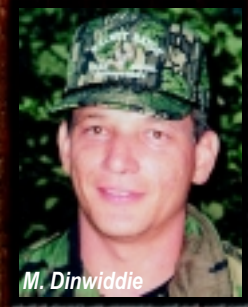
Ramon, like most other association members, advocates protection of young bucks, and Dinwiddie adds that education provided through the association now means "we're not under that 'we're going buck hunting' stigmatism" that prevents harvesting does.

Both agree they also enjoy the fellowship among the WBDMA members.

"Some of the best people in the world are right here," Dinwiddie said. "I know. I've been around the world three times in the military."



A. Ramon



M. Dinwiddie

Member Profile

Raymond Rychlik

Raymond Rychlik has seen noticeable changes in deer populations on his property since the WBDMA was formed five years ago, and it's all been for the good.

When he and his wife took over his father-in-law's ranch, Rychlik said he seldom saw deer around, and he gradually quit hunting. That isn't the story now, although it took a while for the change to take place.

"From the first year to the third year, you couldn't see much of a difference in the size of the bucks," he recalls. "Since then, just in these last two years, we've been seeing more mature bucks than we did during all of the previous three years."

Although he's been impressed with the improvement in the deer population, it's the camaraderie he feels among the other members of the WBDMA that he cites as the biggest reason for joining the organization.

"We (WBDMA members) have more of a level plane of talking because we're all after the same goal," he said —to manage the deer herds on the joint properties to ensure hunting opportunities for the association members and their children and grandchildren.

"They'll have a place to hunt and there will be some nice deer" due to the work being undertaken by the WBDMA now, he said. Rychlik said he would like to see more classes offered to WBDMA members over topics such as deer herd management and management of pastureland.

"You're never too old to learn how to improve things," he said.

Rychlik learned a great deal about deer by attending one of the Noble Foundation's deer seminars. There, he learned he was making major mistakes for someone who wanted to increase the deer population on his land.

"When I would spray for weeds, I would spray right next to the fence and even over the fence line. Then I found that what I was killing was what the deer like." He now not only leaves an unsprayed buffer area along fence rows, he leaves entire pastures untreated with herbicides as well.

His overall rating of the WBDMA is high.

"It has really improved my (knowledge) and (that of) the people who hunt here, their respect for the land and respect for the animals. It's not just get out and kill deer anymore."



Member Profile

Kent Shankles

It wasn't necessarily an increased and improved deer herd that caused Kent Shankles to first start thinking about creating the Walnut Bayou Deer Management Association, although it became a great side benefit.

It was the concept of organizing area ranchers into a familiar, friendly unit working toward a common goal that whetted Shankles' appetite for organizing the property owners. And it's worked.

"(Before the WBDMA was formed,) you didn't know the owners around you enough to help them if they needed help, and they might not have felt comfortable enough to ask for it," Shankles said. "I wanted that kind of relationship with the other property owners. The benefit I have gained in having that now is even more beneficial than having the deer herd!"

An example, he said, is that now he warns area property owners when he's going to be conducting prescribed burns so that they don't sound the alarm when they see smoke coming from the Noble Foundation's Coffey Ranch. Also, the members help each other by watching for spotlighting poachers.

But the better deer herd, and thus better hunting opportunities, aren't being sneezed at, he adds.

Shankles didn't hunt when he first took the job on the NF ranch in 1987, but started in 1990. "When you're around people who hunt, they rub off on you," he laughs. In the late '90s, he recalls that does were "easy to come by, but bucks weren't."

He considers himself a doe hunter, only occasionally harvesting a buck. In the early days of the WBDMA, that was a big plus — there were many more does than bucks.

Association members are beginning to see more bucks now, and the does are getting more wary, Shankles said.

He added that the more desirable one-to-two buck-to-doe ratio being attained is only happening because of the joint property owners' agreement.

"It could have been done only by expanding the acreage and increasing the education of hunters so that they could harvest the does."

Now the deer herd is managed over 12,608 acres, instead of the approximately 2,500 of the Coffey Ranch alone. Still, it's been a five-year process, and there's a long way to go.

"We're all still in the learning part of this," Shankles points out. "Friendship-wise and with camaraderie, it's good. I've learned that if you have something you want out there, you can achieve it if everyone works together."

Everyone in the association looks forward to August and September now, when the group conducts its annual spotlight survey, Shankles said.

"We all want to know how we're doing," he said.

He adds that the biggest benefits he sees in belonging to the deer management association don't all have to do with deer.

"First and foremost, it improves the communication between boundary fences," he said. "Sure, there are going to be differences, but they don't get so big because we're getting together and talking things out."

He said for smaller property owners, the benefits of forming an association such as WBDMA are immeasurable. Even if the individual members' goals are different — wildlife watching, habitat management, lease hunting, etc. — everyone can benefit by forming such an organization.

"If everyone tries to be on the same page, they can all benefit," Shankles said.





The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 2180, Ardmore, OK 73401
2510 Sam Noble Parkway, Ardmore, OK 73401
(580) 223-5810 www.noble.org