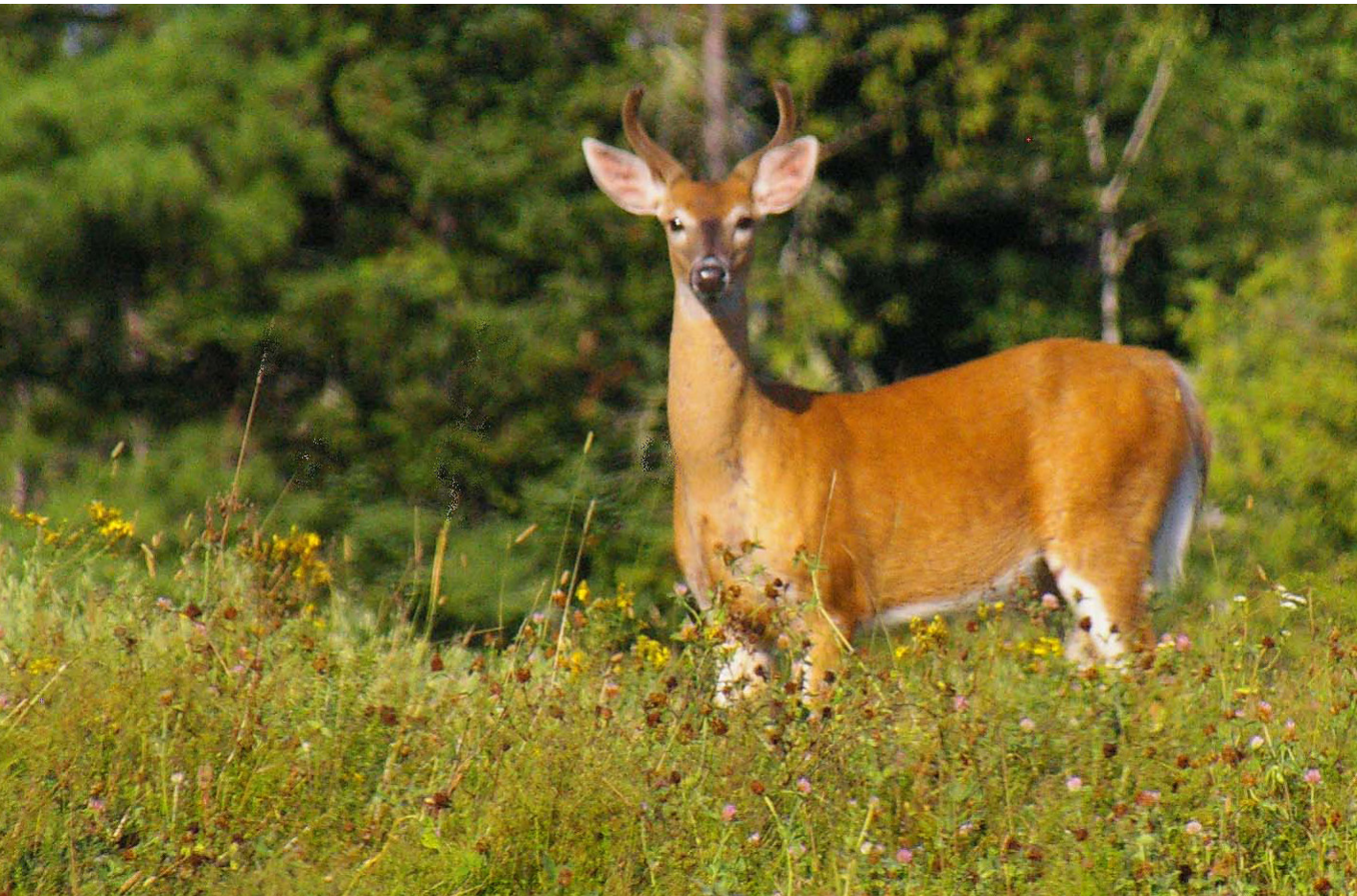


# White-tailed deer

*Odocoileus virginianus*



## Summary of Assessment

**Sustainable:** Based on the knowledge of the biology, status, harvest level and trend of white-tailed deer in Nova Scotia within the context of the existing management and monitoring framework, it is considered that the current use of the species in the province is sustainable.

## Key knowledge, management and/or monitoring strengths

Key knowledge, management and/or monitoring strengths for white-tailed deer have been identified as follows:

▶ **White-tailed deer management** in Nova Scotia aims to maintain a relatively stable population that balances the social and biological carrying capacity, while providing a resource for the hunting



community. Based on the history of the white-tailed deer harvest in Nova Scotia, the restrictions in place have proven effective in preventing overuse of the species as a resource in the province.

▶ **Data collected** through Pellet Group Inventories, hunter reports, the spring roadkill carcass collection, the Deer Management Contributor program, and recently implemented trail camera surveys provide information on white-tailed deer in Nova Scotia. Overall, the species is abundant in the province, though density varies widely. Recently, the population has remained relatively stable.

▶ Management of white-tailed deer harvest in Nova Scotia is carried out under a set of **legislated regulations**. Compliance with strict protection measures is believed to be high among Nova Scotia deer hunters.

▶ **The adaptive harvest management regime** currently used in the province relies on information from population monitoring tools to determine the number of antlerless deer licenses to issue within the 12 Deer Management Zones.

▶ **Harvest is limited** to a set time in the fall and is subject to additional regulations regarding sex and age. Harvest is used to respond to changes in deer populations and strives to maintain populations below winter carrying capacity.

▶ The harvest of white-tailed deer in Nova Scotia will likely **remain relatively stable** in the near-future.

▶ Some white-tailed deer are **illegally harvested without a licence**, but this number is believed to be small relative to the overall deer harvest and likely remains relatively constant between years.

▶ **Budgetary and human resources** are sufficient to allow on-going annual collection of quantitative population indices.



## Gaps identified

The following gaps in available information, and current management and/or monitoring regimes have been identified:

- ▶ **No formal management plan** is in place for white-tailed deer in the province.
- ▶ **Quantitative information** on the proportion of harvest in protected areas and/or areas with open access is not currently available for white-tailed deer in Nova Scotia.
- ▶ **The availability of food and shelter during the winter** months is likely the primary threat facing white-tailed deer in Nova Scotia, yet there is currently no formal plan in place for monitoring the quality and quantity of available wintering habitat.
- ▶ **Wintering habitat is monitored** where forestry managers must adhere to guidelines, but traditional wintering areas may become less suitable with time and a changing climate.
- ▶ **Controlling white-tailed deer populations** in some areas of Nova Scotia may result in a more biodiverse habitat structure, but the extent of this is unknown.

## Summary of supporting information

### Biological characteristics

The white-tailed deer is a long-lived species with a low reproductive rate. The species can make use of a wide variety of habitats and has a diverse diet, although it does not often disperse very far. The white-tailed deer has a relatively symbiotic relationship with humans.

### Status

White-tailed deer are common in almost all parts of Nova Scotia. Quantitative data collected annually indicates that the species declined from an abundance exceeding range capacity in the mid-1980s, but has been comparatively stable in recent years. The availability of wintering habitat is likely the primary threat facing the species in Nova Scotia.

### Management

In Nova Scotia, most deer are taken for their meat during the regular fall hunting season using rifles. Although there is no management plan in place for the species, an adaptive harvest management regime is currently being used in the province based on 90+ years

of harvest information. Details of harvest management vary between management zones in response to local deer densities and citizen concerns; however, in all areas the goal is to maintain relatively stable populations of white-tailed deer that can sustain a substantial harvest. This is accomplished largely by adjusting the number of antlerless deer licences issued within each management zone, thereby controlling the number of females and yearlings taken. Management of habitat for white-tailed deer is limited to maintaining specific forest characteristics in traditional wintering areas.

### Control of harvest

Quantitative information on the proportion of harvest in protected areas and/or areas with open access is not currently available for the white-tailed deer in Nova Scotia. Harvest management of the species in Nova Scotia is controlled by regulations that apply equally on all lands regardless of ownership.

### Harvest trend

Harvest data has been collected annually from white-tailed deer hunters in Nova Scotia for close to 100 years. Based on an



assessment of these data and the status of the deer population in the province at present, there is no reason to believe that harvest will not remain relatively stable in the near future.

### **Monitoring**

The white-tailed deer population in Nova Scotia is formally monitored using a variety of quantitative indicators on an on-going basis. There is currently no formal plan in place for monitoring the quality and quantity of wintering habitat available for the species.

### **Incentives and benefits from harvesting**

Data collected and submitted by deer hunters in Nova Scotia make a valuable contribution to the information available to decision makers with respect to management and conservation of the species. The management regime uses harvest as a tool to help achieve its goal of maintaining a relatively stable population.

### **Protection from harvest**

Harvest of white-tailed deer in Nova Scotia is limited to a set season in the fall and is subject to additional regulations regarding sex and age. Harvest is prohibited in provincial and federal parks, nature reserves, urban areas, and some game sanctuaries and wildlife management areas (as per regulations) across the provincial range of the species. High compliance and historic records on the management of the species suggests that the species is not at risk of overuse in Nova Scotia.