



Camp Pendleton Deer Report

December 2020

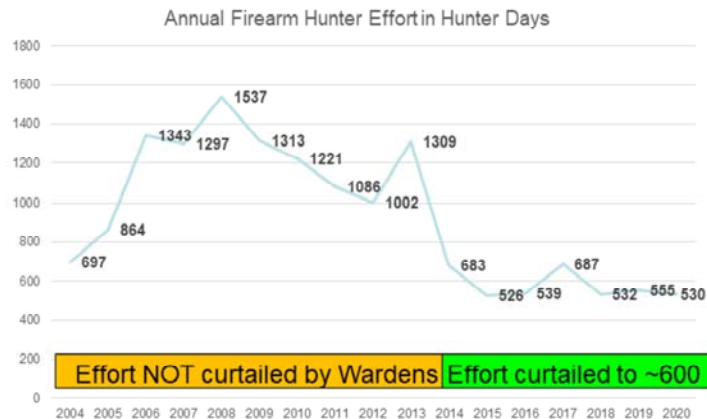
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Deer Hunter Effort



- Effort fluctuated annually
- 2013 and prior hunters limited only by fires and area availability
- Effort intentionally reduced in 2014



Camp Pendleton is special in that we track deer hunting effort by training area. Most public hunt managers do not have that kind of data. Our overall strategy is to limit firearm effort to no more than 600 firearm hunt days and spread the effort out as much as possible. That's why we schedule our firearm season on the holiday weekends to avoid conflicts with military training. Hunter effort is measured in the number of hours hunters spend in the field divided by 8, which gives you a "hunter day". Notice how the base used to have more firearm hunting. It was purposefully curtailed in 2014 as hunters complained that they could not find any deer. Look at the peak effort in 2008, it's about triple the effort we had this year.



Firearm Deer Harvest



- Harvest fluctuates each year
- Deer population fluctuations, hunting effort, and hunting area availability likely contribute to the peaks and valleys of this graph
- **2020 harvest 51 bucks, 37 does**



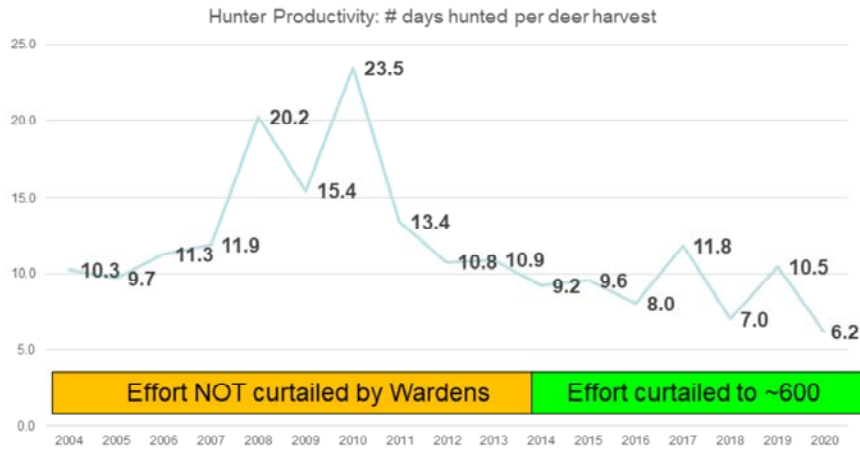
Our base firearm deer harvest goes up and down as well. But, harvest is not tied to effort. Look at 2008. 2008 was a record effort year with more hunters in the field than we ever had. Compare this year's harvest in 2020 to the 2008 harvest. We harvested more deer this year than in 2008, even though we hunted three times as much. In addition to creating a better hunting opportunity, lowering the hunter effort also appears to have reduced the fluctuation in the harvest, which also reduces the fluctuation in the deer herd. Before 2014, we were likely overhunting, which led to the big fluctuations in the harvest.



Hunter Productivity



- The rate of deer harvest varies annually, LOWER IS BETTER
- Average is about 12 hunter days per deer



Instead of focusing on how many deer we harvest, we look at hunter productivity. When it took an average of 23.5 days to harvest a deer in 2010, it was because we did not manage the hunt very well. In the last six years we have higher hunter productivity. In fact, 2020 is the best year yet since we have started to track these numbers. It took an average of 6.2 hunting days to harvest a deer in 2018. Good work hunters! If we focus on controlling the effort, the size of the deer population is not important. If we keep the effort consistent, then hunters will harvest a lot of deer when the herd is big, and less deer when the herd is small. It's a self-regulating system.



Archery Harvest



- Record effort of about 1262 archery hunts, many new archers
- Average harvest about 9 deer, **2020 harvest 17 bucks, 10 does**
- Archery effort not managed due to relatively low harvest numbers
- Inexperienced archers can maim deer, bowhunter courses coming in 2021

Archery Deer Harvested Annually

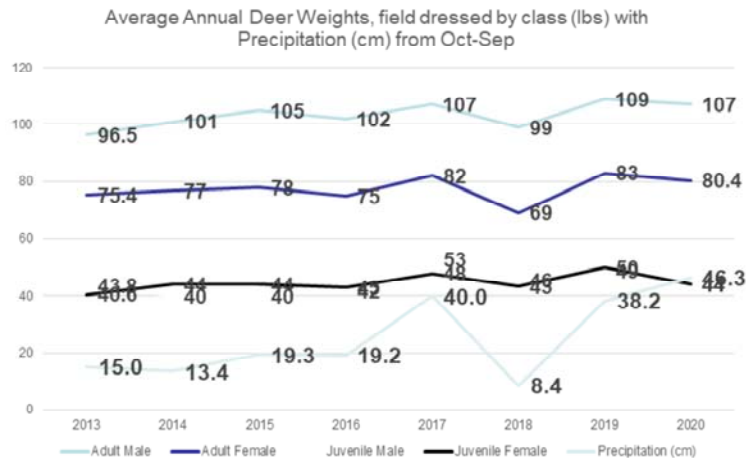


The fire danger rating really limited hunting with firearms this year. But, the archers still got plenty of time in the field. This year archers almost doubled the record. It's not as important to manage the archery harvest as archers take about 50 hunter days to harvest a deer instead of the 6 hunter days (like a firearm hunter). However, an influx of new archers may have led to an increase in non-recovered deer. In order to mitigate that, the Game Wardens will require passing an archery proficiency and ethics class prior to archery hunting next season. Many other states require an archery course (California does not). Many other bases require an archery test. It's one more hurdle to jump through, and we tried to push off implementing this to keep things simple. But, it will reduce competition for hunting areas as many poor archers will not even attend the course. In addition, there will likely be more deer in your favorite archery area.



Dressed Deer Weights

- Precipitation may affect deer weights, more precipitation=more weight
- Doe weight fluctuates more than buck
- Doe fluctuations have reproductive implications (twins, fawn health)



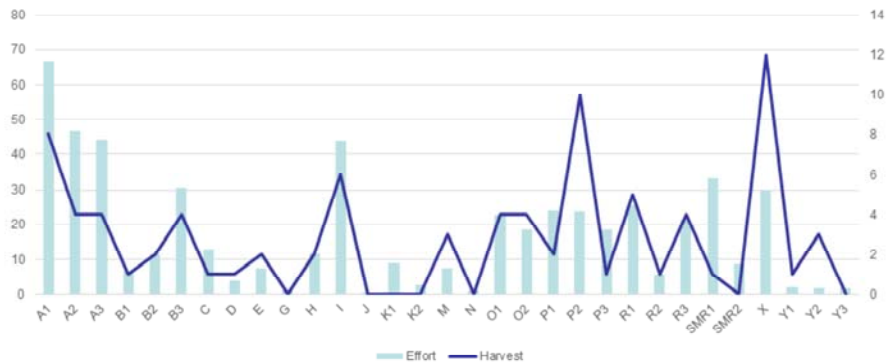
This graph surprised me. The bottom line shows the precipitation from Oct-Sep by year. You can see from 2013-2019 that deer weights go up and down to match precipitation increases and decreases. More rain equals more food, which equals more deer. And, vice versa. BUT, 2020 was different. Even though we had record breaking bucks harvested, the average weight across the deer herd decreased slightly. Just a couple percentage points, not major. But, it happened with the adult bucks, adult does, and male and female fawns. This puzzled me as we actually had MORE rain this year than last year. So, more food was available for the deer. I believe we might be getting close to the base carrying capacity for deer. Food is a limited factor, otherwise the weights wouldn't fluctuate so much with rainfall. I believe this is a good thing as the herd will mature into a population with more diversity in age classes, not just younger deer from an expanding deer herd. This will likely mean more trophy animals on base.



Effort and Harvest by Area



2020 Firearm Deer Effort (in 8 hours days), Deer Harvest by Hunting Areas



The training areas are listed across the bottom. The number of hunter days is depicted with the bar graph, the units are on the left. The harvest is depicted with the line, the units are listed on the right. Look at "X", we had about 30 hunter days of effort and 12 deer harvested. This graph makes it easy to see the most productive places, where the line is above the bar. So, M, P2, X, Y1, and Y2 stand out as productive areas. While some areas, like A1, A2, A3, B3, I, P1, SMR1 all had lower amounts of harvest compared to effort.. Don't overthink this graph, too much. Some areas were always available, like A1, so we racked up a lot of effort. A1 had a harvest of 9 deer, which is the third highest. That doesn't make it a bad place at all. Also, hardly anyone went to the Yankees, so it's hard to say how many deer would have come out of there if more hunters had gone there.



2018 Deer Hunting Lowlights



- Very High Fire Danger Rating restricted firearm hunting. Also, training delayed due to COVID took place during the hunting season, further restricting areas.
- Four hunters received indefinite hunting bans due to violations such as: leaving the deer head in the field, hunting out of area, harvesting a deer without checking out to hunt. Eight hunters received suspensions for entering a hunting area before 0500 or not checking out of their area using iSportsman. A few citations were written for illegal spikes and unauthorized firearm. All of these actions threaten the safety and sustainability of our program.
- Multiple complaints came in regarding a few hunters would disrupt other people's hunts.

As a Game Wardens office, we work to ensure that our hunt is safe, sustainable, and enjoyable. With iSportsman, wardens are spending more time in the field to ensure this happens. Please help the Game Wardens office by reporting illegal, unsafe, or unethical behavior. We'll incorporate some etiquette pointers into next year's safety brief. Some people come from places where it is normal to be within 100 yards of another hunter, for example. They aren't doing anything disrespectful when they park next to your vehicle and hunt next to you, it's just how they were raised.



2019 Deer Hunting Highlights



- Archery effort highest on record (1262 archery days), also record harvest, 27 deer
- Record bucks, 3 over 160 lbs field dressed
- Over 2600 trips to the field for archery and firearm deer hunters without injury or training interference
- iSportsmans increased hunter time in the field while decreasing hunter administrative burdens
- Hunters harvested more bucks than does, about a 60:40 split indicating they are able to be selective

I'll always remember 2020 as an excellent hunting year. Great harvest, some record animals, and a safe/sustainable hunt. iSportsman helped the hunters and wardens stay in the field more.



2021 Deer Hunting



- Archery course introduced as archery requirement
- G10 tags issued through online lottery
- Tweaking rules based on Sportsman's Club input to best leverage iSportsman
- Dry year will likely mean smaller deer, less twins

If you have ideas on how to improve the rules, work through the Sportsmans Club. The Sportsmans Club discusses the proposed changes and sends up a short list that everyone agrees with. I don't think we'll have record weights next year due to a lack of rainfall. I'm looking forward to ABSOLUTELY NO LINE STANDING for 2021 hunters with the G10 lottery going on line. Go to the free archery ranges and take your archery class before the season.



Summary



- Camp Pendleton Deer Hunting appears
 - 🌐 SUSTAINABLE
 - 🌐 HIGH QUALITY
- The 2021 Hunt Will:
 - 🌐 Hunt 600 hunter days for firearm season
 - 🌐 Improved competency of archers
- Monitor herd size to determine carrying capacity of base

I appreciate the deer and the hunters creating a memorable season. It would be truly remarkable if we have a deer herd approaching carrying capacity. It's been six years in the works!