



Reference: 254332

March 3, 2020

**VIA EMAIL: [director.gay@rdek.bc.ca](mailto:director.gay@rdek.bc.ca)**

Chair Rob Gay  
Regional District of East Kootenay  
19 - 24th Avenue South  
Cranbrook, British Columbia  
V1C 3H8

Dear Chair Gay:

Thank you for your letter of January 24, 2020, requesting a moratorium on antlerless white-tailed deer hunting seasons in the Kootenay Region (Region 4).

The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development is aware of the concern among some local residents about the population of white-tailed deer within the East and West Kootenays. Provincially-coordinated white-tailed deer seasons were developed to spread antlerless hunting pressure over wide areas and to provide hunting opportunities to substantially more hunters. Creating hunting opportunities must be balanced with conservation measures to ensure that there are healthy and sustainable populations of white-tailed deer within Region 4.

The Kootenay white-tailed deer harvest strategy (Attachment 1), which was developed with input from stakeholders in 2015, recommends managing white-tailed deer for maximum sustainable harvest of bucks and does and recognizes their importance to sustenance hunters. The harvest strategy recommends maintaining a 20 percent or higher success rate for white-tailed deer at the Game Management Zone and maintaining buck harvest trends within 80 percent of the long-term average. We are committed to managing populations to these performance measures and are monitoring hunter success closely. The ministry developed a Frequently Asked Questions document to explain the rationale and supporting information: [http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlife/management-issues/docs/FAQ\\_White-tailed\\_Deer\\_Dec\\_2017\\_Final.pdf](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlife/management-issues/docs/FAQ_White-tailed_Deer_Dec_2017_Final.pdf)

I would like to assure you that the ministry does have reliable trend data on numbers / sex composition of the harvest and hunter effort. This information reflects changes in populations. The Hunter Sample is a long-term dataset that the ministry uses in conjunction with additional local information to inform decisions on hunting seasons.

In the most recent data review with the regional Kootenay Wildlife Harvest Advisory Committee, it was determined that in the West Kootenay, hunter success fell below the recommended 20 percent in the 2018 season (Figure 1, Attachment 2). In response, regional staff recommended closure of the West Kootenay antlerless white-tailed deer season. Hunter success in the East Kootenay is currently 37 percent (Figure 2, Attachment 2), and is likely declining based on feedback from hunters. Staff have recommended shortening the East Kootenay antlerless white-tailed deer season, which is intended to substantially reduce harvest, particularly during the overlap with the Rocky Mountain Elk 6-point bull general open season in October. Both proposals were posted on the ministry's engagement website and will be considered in advance of the 2020 hunting season.

We are committed to continue monitoring white-tailed deer harvest rates closely, and will consider emergency changes should the 2019/20 harvest rates decrease below 20 percent in East Kootenay. We also understand that hunter views towards seasons may change over time, and we are aiming to complete a public survey in conjunction with adjacent regions this year to seek and assess feedback on current objectives for antlerless white-tailed deer seasons.

Again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Wiggill', with a stylized, cursive script.

Garth Wiggill  
Regional Executive Director  
Attachments

pc: Honourable Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource  
Operations and Rural Development

## Kootenay Region White-tailed Deer Management Statement: 2016-2020

### Introduction:

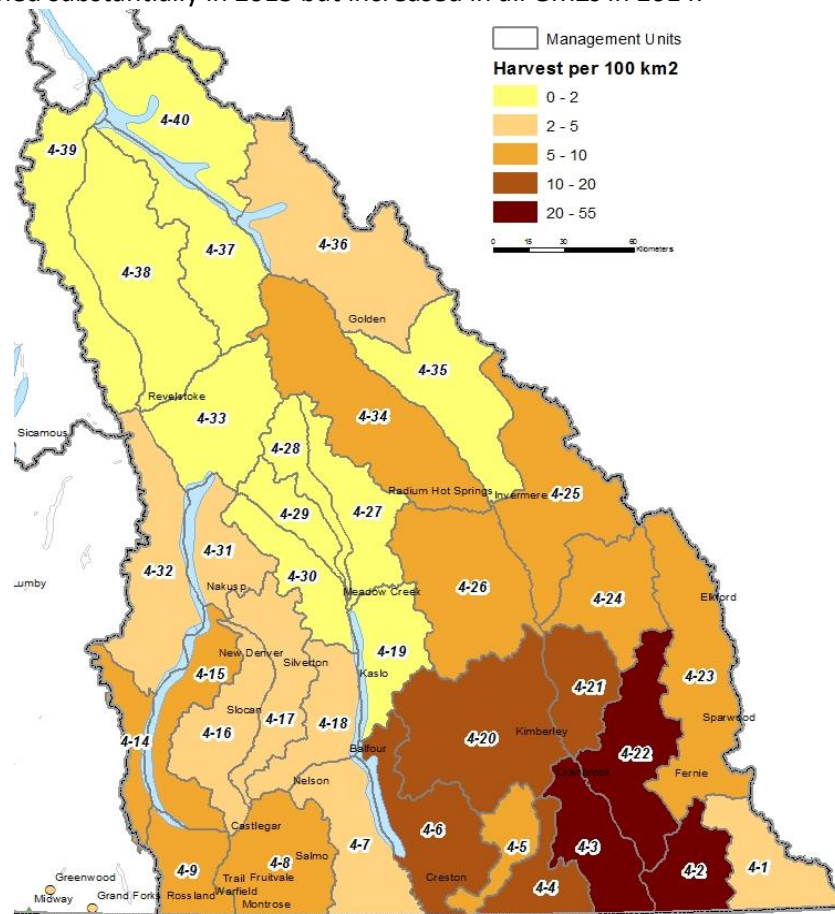
To provide direction in future white-tailed deer management, the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations reviewed recent harvest data and established management objectives that will be discussed with regional wildlife clubs. This management statement will guide harvest management decisions for 2016-2020.

### History of Harvest Management

White-tailed deer in BC were managed using a combination of General Open Season (GOS) and Limited Entry Hunt (LEH) regulations from 1987-2009. In the fall of 2010, provincially-coordinated regulations were introduced to liberalize hunting opportunity for white-tailed deer in response to their increasing abundance and expanding distribution (Aldous 2013, Shackleton 2013). All LEH regulations were eliminated and GOS's were implemented for any buck and antlerless white-tailed deer, where populations were abundant. This included all of the Thompson, Okanagan and Kootenay Regions as well as the southern portions of the Omineca and Peace Regions.

### Review of White-tailed Deer Harvest Data

Highest harvest of white-tailed deer occurs in the south-central and southeast part of the region (Figure 1). Antlerless harvest did not increase in the East Kootenay or West Kootenay the first 2 years of the antlerless GOS (Figures 4 & 5). In 2012 the antlerless bag limit was increased to 2, which caused doe harvest to nearly double in the East Kootenay. Antlerless harvest declined substantially in 2013 but increased in all GMZs in 2014.



**Figure 1: Average kill density of white-tailed deer (kills per 100 km<sup>2</sup>) by Management Unit in the Kootenay Region, 2010-2013. Data originate from voluntary hunter sample reports.**

Harvest data show high and stable hunter success in East Kootenay Game Management Zones (GMZs) post-2010 (Figure 6). Buck harvest has been variable in East Kootenay GMZs since 2010 but within 80-90% of the 27 year peak. Buck harvest and hunter success declined in the West Kootenay from 2005-2013 but increased in 2014 (Figure 7).

Kill density, defined as kills per 100 km<sup>2</sup>, shows a declining trend in the West Kootenay since 2009 but has remained high and stable in the East Kootenay since 2004 (Figure 4).

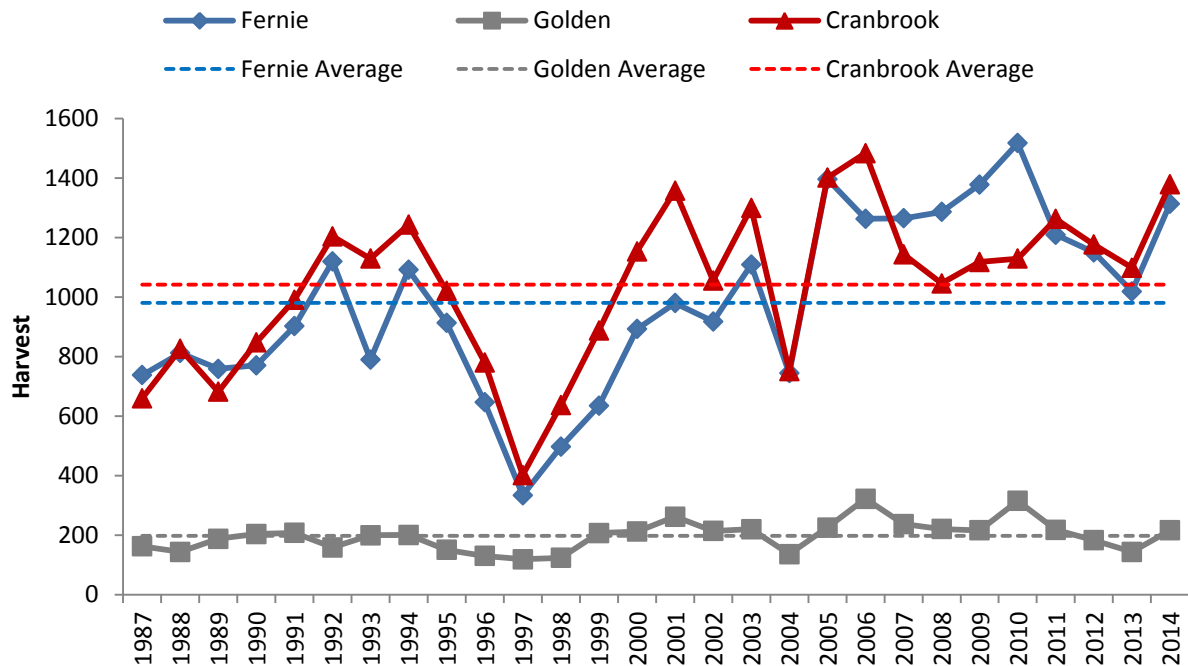


Figure 2: White-tailed deer buck harvest by East Kootenay Game Management Zone, 1987 – 2014. Game Management Zones include Golden (MUs 4-34 to 4-37, 4-40), Cranbrook (MUs 4-03, 4-04, 4-20, 4-26) and Fernie (MUs 4-01, 4-02, 4-21 to 4-25). Data originate from volunteer hunter survey reports.

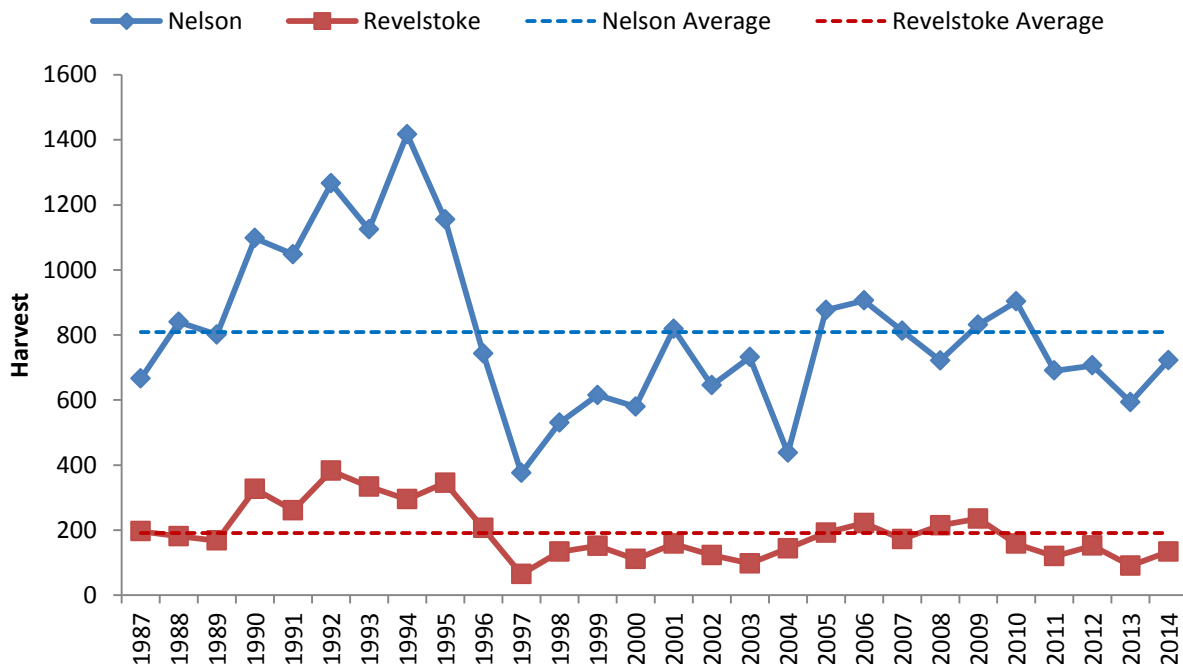


Figure 3: White-tailed deer buck harvest by West Kootenay Game Management Zones, 1987 – 2014. Game Management Zones include Nelson (MUs 4-06 to 4-09, 4-14 to 4-19) and Revelstoke (MUs 4-27 to 4-33, 4-38 and 4-39). Data originate from volunteer hunter survey reports.

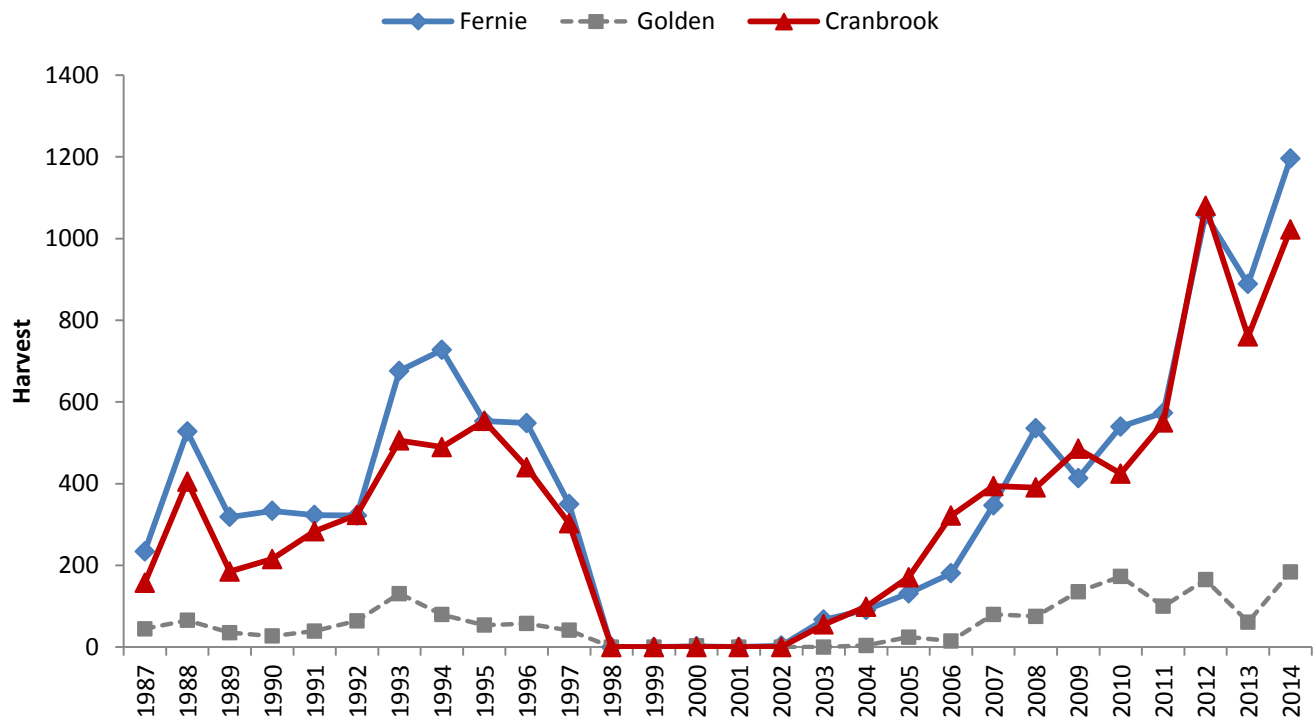


Figure 4: White-tailed deer antlerless harvest by East Kootenay Game Management Zones, 1987 – 2014. Game Management Zones include Golden (MUs 4-34 to 4-37, 4-40), Cranbrook (MUs 4-03, 4-04, 4-20, 4-26) and Fernie (MUs 4-01, 4-02, 4-21 to 4-25). Data originate from volunteer hunter survey reports.

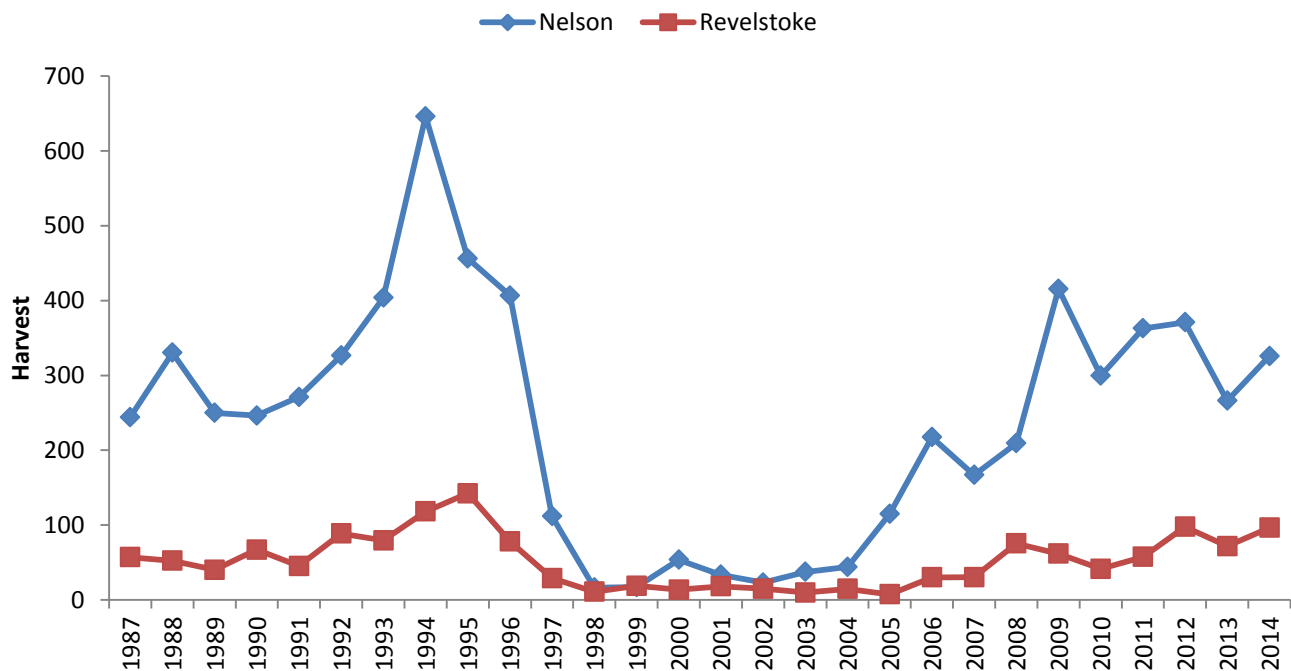


Figure 5: White-tailed deer antlerless harvest by West Kootenay Game Management Zones, 1987 – 2014. Game Management Zones include Nelson (MUs 4-06 to 4-09, 4-14 to 4-19) and Revelstoke (MUs 4-27 to 4-33, 4-38 and 4-39). Data originate from volunteer hunter survey reports.

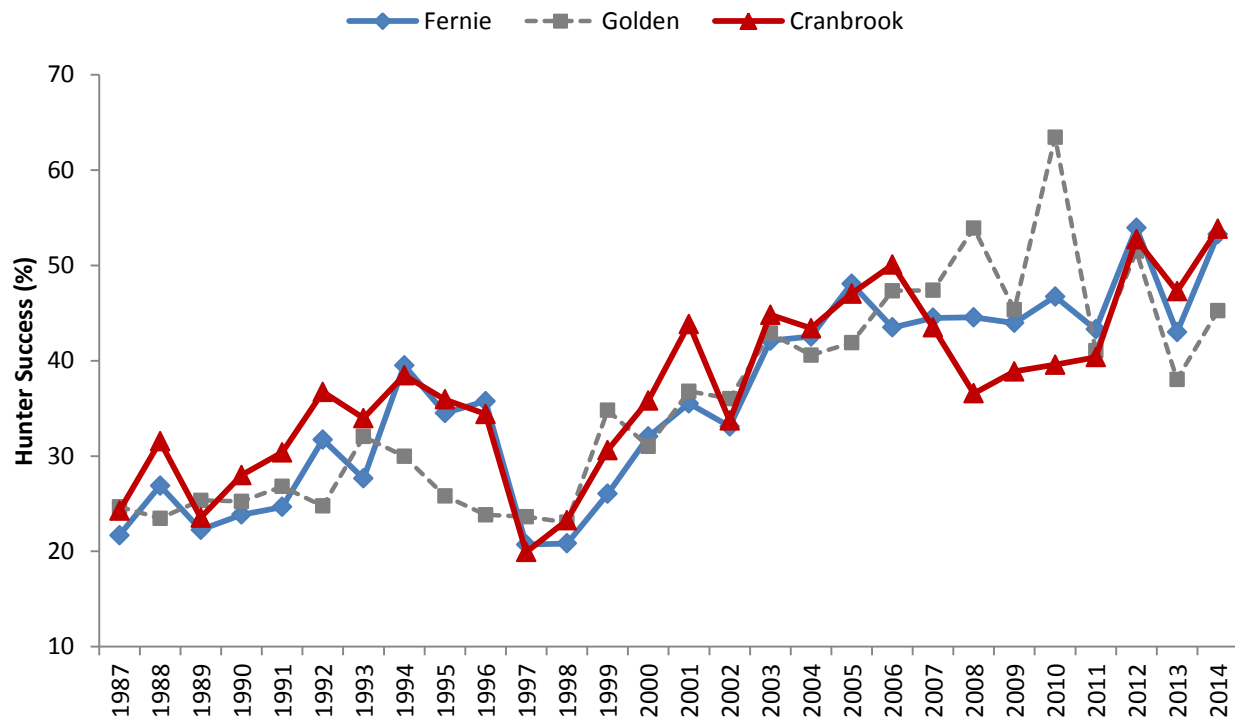


Figure 6: White-tailed deer hunter success (percent of hunters who were successful) by East Kootenay Game Management Zones, 1987 – 2014. Game Management Zones include Golden (MUs 4-34 to 4-37, 4-40), Cranbrook (MUs 4-03, 4-04, 4-20, 4-26) and Fernie (MUs 4-01, 4-02, 4-21 to 4-25). Data originate from volunteer hunter survey reports.

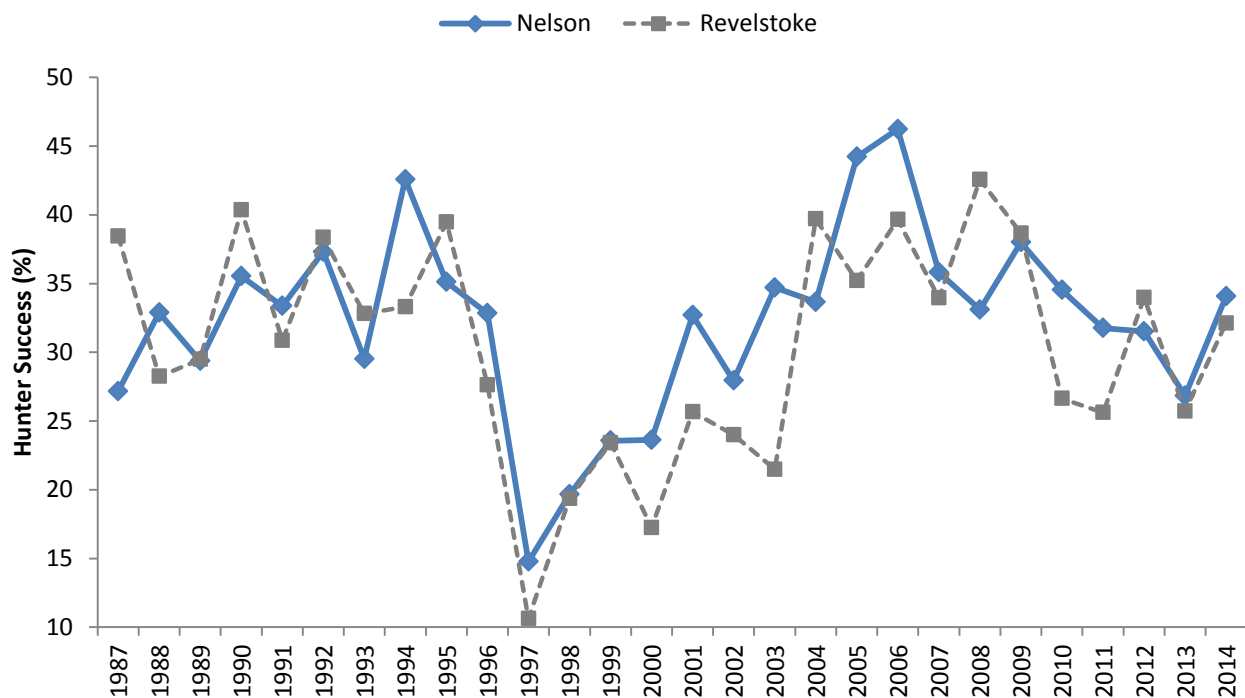


Figure 7: White-tailed deer hunter success (percent of hunters who were successful) by West Kootenay Game Management Zones, 1987 – 2014. Game Management Zones include Nelson (MUs 4-06 to 4-09, 4-14 to 4-19) and Revelstoke (MUs 4-27 to 4-33, 4-38 and 4-39). Data originate from volunteer hunter survey reports.

Overall, harvest data suggest white-tailed deer populations have declined in the West Kootenay since 2005. This change is likely unrelated to antlerless harvest, considering harvest and success were declining pre-GOS and antlerless harvest has changed very little post-2010 (Figures 3 & 7). Anecdotal reports suggest fewer white-tailed deer in the East Kootenay; however population reductions are not yet apparent in harvest data as both buck harvest and hunter success are relatively high in East Kootenay GMZs (Figures 2 & 6).

## Recommended Management Direction

For 2016-20, wildlife staff recommend managing white-tailed deer for maximum sustainable harvest. To maintain antlerless hunting opportunities, it is recommended that the antlerless season remain in place with a reduction in the antlerless bag limit to one. If there is evidence that certain MUs could sustain additional antlerless harvest, adoption of LEH seasons will be considered for the 2018-20 regulation cycle.

Buck seasons will remain consistent so buck harvest can be used as an index of population trend. Changes to antlerless seasons will be considered if hunter success in the Game Management Zone (GMZ) drops below 20% for 3 consecutive years (Table 1). Harvest management will be the primary tool to increase populations if objectives are not being met, while other management tools to increase white-tailed deer populations (i.e., habitat restoration) will not be considered.

**Table 1: Draft population objectives, management strategies and performance measures for white-tailed deer in the Kootenay Region.**

Objective	Strategy	Performance Measures
Manage for highest sustainable harvest of bucks and does.	<p>Maintain current buck seasons so buck harvest can be used as index of population trend</p> <p>Maintain current antlerless GOS unless GMZ success drops below 20% for 3 consecutive years</p> <p>Use LEH to increase antlerless harvest when populations are increasing</p> <p>Bag limit of 1 antlerless and 1 buck</p>	<p>Maintain <math>\geq 20\%</math> hunter success at GMZ level</p> <p>Buck harvest trend within 20% of long term (1987-2014) average</p>

## Mule Deer and Caribou Recovery Objectives

Past research has shown increasing white-tailed deer populations can lead to high predation rates on mule deer and limit population growth (i.e., apparent competition; Robinson et al. 2002). The Kootenay Mule Deer Management Plan (FLNR 2014) recommends identifying priority areas for future white-tailed deer reductions to benefit mule deer (e.g., where mule deer are declining, predation is high and alternate prey are thought to be supporting high predator populations). Wildlife staff will use mule deer survival rates from monitored populations to determine if predation rates are higher in populations with high white-tailed deer densities and whether additional antlerless harvest is needed.

Increasing and expanding white-tailed deer populations may lead to higher cougar populations and increased predation risk to endangered mountain caribou. Wildlife staff will consider liberal white-tailed deer seasons in caribou recovery areas to limit growth of white-tailed deer and cougar populations.

## References:

- Aldous, K. 2013. Spatial analysis of white-tailed deer, mule deer and cougar harvest trends in British Columbia: BCIT Project Methodology and Results. Unpublished student project.
- Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO). 2014. Kootenay-Boundary mule deer management plan. BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Cranbrook, BC.
- Mowat, G. and G. Kuzyk. Mule deer and white-tailed deer population review for the Kootenay Region. BC Ministry of Environment, Nelson BC.
- Robinson, H. S., R. B. Wielgus and J. C. Gwilliam. 2002. Cougar predation and population growth of sympatric mule deer and white-tailed deer. Canadian Journal of Zoology 50: 556-568.
- Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. 2013. Kootenay-Boundary mule deer management plan. URL: [http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlife/management-issues/docs/kb\\_mule\\_deer\\_managementplan.pdf](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlife/management-issues/docs/kb_mule_deer_managementplan.pdf)



Figure 1: West Kootenay male and female harvest rates and hunter success rates 1987 – 2018.

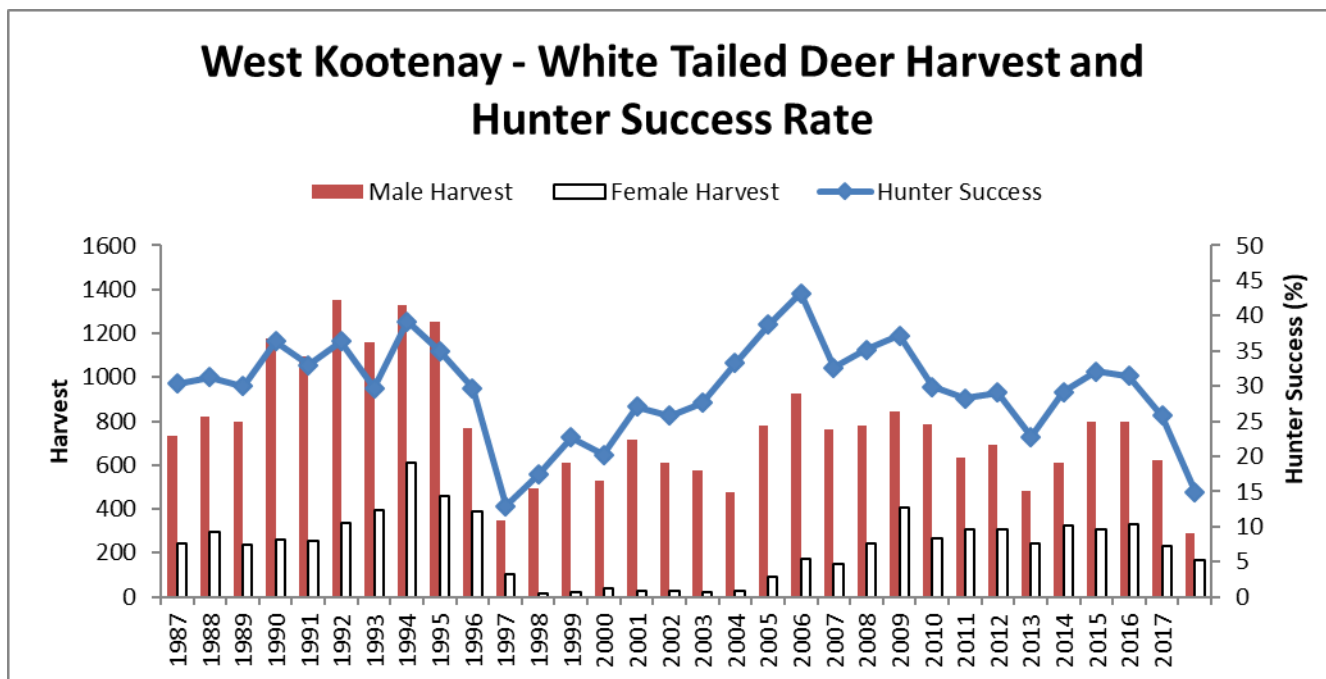


Figure 2: East Kootenay male and female harvest rates and hunter success rates 1987 – 2018.

