

# Report to Survey Participants 2002 West River Resident Deer Hunter Survey

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Dear West River Deer Hunter,

This is a summary report of the 2002 West River Deer Hunter Survey. We sincerely thank all of you who participated by completing and returning your booklet questionnaire. We had 1,595 hunters return their questionnaire for a response rate of 85.3%. The general purpose of this survey was to learn more about resident West River rifle deer hunters. A major focus of this study was on antlerless deer hunting.

The issue facing wildlife managers is how to get the yearly harvest of antlerless deer needed to keep the deer population under control and also provide “quality” hunting opportunities for South Dakota hunters?

# 2002 West River Resident Deer Hunter Survey

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## Selected Results from the Survey:

- Many 2002 West River deer hunters (36.1%) had more than one West River deer license (1.42 average West River deer licenses). And, most 2002 West River deer hunters (67.1%) had more than one tag (1.88 average West River deer tags).
- Most (93.2%) of the 2002 West River deer hunters had one or more tags that permitted taking a buck. Also, 63.3% of the 2002 West River deer hunters had one or more tags for antlerless deer.
- The 2002 West River deer hunters averaged 3.61 days of hunting in the 2002 West River deer season, harvesting an average of 1.00 deer per hunter. Antlered harvest consisted of 56.2% of the total 2002 West River deer harvest (34.5% antlered whitetails and 21.7% antlered mule deer).
- The 2002 West River deer hunters reported seeing an average of 58 deer and 10.6 bucks. Most 2002 West River deer hunters (61.5%) were satisfied and 23.6% were dissatisfied.
- Many 2002 West River deer hunters (28.8%) also had an East River deer license, and 10% had a Black Hills deer license. About 50% of the 2002 West River deer hunters had one or more deer license types for a season other than the West River deer season. And, the 2002 West River deer hunters had an average total of 2.68 tags per hunter.
- The 2002 West River deer hunters had an average of 7.94 total days of deer hunting in 2002, and averaged about 1.38 deer harvested per hunter (0.80 antlered deer and 0.59 antlerless deer).
- About 37% of the 2002 West River deer hunters would have liked to have harvested more antlerless deer than they did in 2002. The main reason that hunters did not want to harvest more antlerless deer were, *I already had all the deer meat that I wanted*, with about 65% of the hunters attributing some level of importance to this reason.
- The two top reasons for why hunters did not harvest as many antlerless deer as they wanted were, not having enough time and not being lucky (57.8% and 49.1%, respectively of the hunters attributing some level of importance to these reasons).
- West River deer hunters listed an average of 2.57 deer as an optimal number of deer that they would like to harvest. Note that this is about 1.19 deer per hunter higher than the 2002 West River deer hunters actually achieved.

- Hunters were asked to pick their top reason for why they like West River deer hunting. Most hunters picked social reasons (26.9%) followed by 22.2% picking nature and 18.4% picking excitement.

<b>TOP REASON</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Enjoying the time spent with friends/family. <b>(Social)</b>	405	26.9%
To enjoy nature, the outdoors and the beauty of the area. <b>(Nature)</b>	333	22.2%
For the excitement that hunting provides, e.g., the feeling one gets when you see deer, etc. <b>(Excitement)</b>	277	18.4%
To bring home a nice buck to hang on the wall or otherwise to demonstrate hunting skills and accomplishment. <b>(Trophy)</b>	178	11.8%
To bring meat home for food. <b>(Meat)</b>	135	9.0%
For the challenges associated with “out smarting” a deer & dealing with the elements <b>(Challenge)</b>	97	6.5%
To have <u>additional</u> deer hunting opportunities <b>(Hunting Opportunity)</b>	40	2.7%
To spend time alone in the woods. <b>(Solitude)</b>	38	2.5%
<b>Total</b>	1,503	100%

- Filling their tag (harvesting a deer) had some level of importance for most West River deer hunters, only 8.2% reported that “filling their tag” was not important. Most (41.6%) rated “filling their tag” as “moderately” important and 24.1% rated “filling their tag” as “very” important.
- Having an “un-crowded, undisturbed” hunting trip was more important than “filling their tag.” Most West River deer hunters (58.5%) reported that having an “un-crowded, undisturbed” hunting trip was “very” important, with only 1.6% reporting that it was “not” important. Overall, West River deer hunters rated having an “un-crowded, undisturbed” hunting trip as 22% more important than “filling their tag.”
- About 21% of the resident West River (rifle) deer hunters were only interested in hunting for a buck (reporting that they would not shoot a doe even if they had an any-deer license). A higher percent of hunters (44.7%) were only interested in hunting for a “large” buck (reporting that they would pass up legal bucks that do not measure up to their standards). This means that some “large” buck hunters would shoot antlerless deer, but not small bucks. Most West River deer hunters (67.5%) would shoot an antlerless on their “any-deer” tag near the end of the season, but about 20% would not.
- Very few West River deer hunters (14.4%) felt that the antlerless deer harvest was too high for the areas where they deer hunt. Also, many West River deer hunters (47.4%) trust that GFP’s deer management strategies are biologically sound, only 21.7% disagreed.

- Most West River deer hunters (64.6%) would make an effort to harvest more antlerless deer if “GFP made a case that it was best for the deer herd.” A slightly higher percent (68.8%) would make an effort to harvest more antlerless deer if “it would reduce the likelihood that some deer would have to be killed after the season because of crop damage.” And, a significantly higher percent (82.5%) would make an effort to harvest more antlerless deer if “it was needed to help control wildlife disease.”

**Increasing Antlerless Deer Harvest.** There are two general types of strategies to increase antlerless deer harvest. One type would be strategies designed to increase the effectiveness of current deer hunters to kill as many deer as they desire. The other type of strategies would be designed to increase hunters’ desire or willingness to harvest more antlerless deer (includes strategies to attract new deer hunters).

For West River deer hunters there seems to be a large potential to increase antlerless deer harvest by working to increase the effectiveness of hunters that already have a desire to harvest more deer. In general, it will be easier to increase the antlerless deer harvest by working with deer hunters that already have a desire to harvest more deer than it would be to increase hunter’s desires to harvest more deer. However, there does seem to be potential to increase hunters’ desire to harvest more deer. For example, many hunters indicated a willingness to harvest more antlerless deer if a case could be made that it was in the best interest of the deer herd. Willingness to harvest additional antlerless deer was especially high if a case could be made that it was needed to control wildlife disease(s).

**Some New Changes for the 2003 West River Deer Season:**

- 1) reduced fees for antlerless deer licenses
- 2) an extended week of hunting for antlerless deer (unsold and unfilled “any deer”, “any whitetail” and “any mule deer” will be changed to their respective antlerless tags)
- 3) an additional antlerless season from January 1-11 on private land only for any unsold or un-filled tags (unsold and unfilled “any deer”, “any whitetail” and “any mule deer” will be changed to their respective antlerless tags)
- 4) increase in the maximum number of licenses one may purchase from 3 to 5

For a complete copy of these survey results, please send your name and address to:

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and ask for the **2002 West River Resident Deer Hunter Survey** report.

