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# Deer numbers stay and lots of snow

By Kimberly Davis

*The Oberlin Herald*  
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Deer numbers in Northwest Kansas are pretty much the same as they have been, even with the heavy snowfall and temperatures last winter.

Lloyd Fox, big game program coordinator with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks for northwest Kansas, said hunting Unit 1 has a little bit lower deer density, about four deer per square mile, for both mule and white-tailed deer.

Unit 1 includes Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur and Sheridan counties and half of Norton, Graham, Thomas and Sherman. The farther west toward Colorado you go, he said, the population tends to be more mule deer, with that breed making up more than half the herd.

Farther east in Unit 1, said Mr. Fox, the mix is pretty much 50/50 for both kinds of deer.

Unit 3, which includes Phillips and Rooks Counties and part of Norton, Graham, Trego, Ellis, Russell, Osborne and Smith has some excellent counts for mule deer, he said. The deer density is about 7 1/2 deer per square mile, nearly twice as many deer as in Unit 1.

These numbers, said Mr. Fox, are pretty much the same as last year, adding that he is still analyzing the numbers for the 2007 survey.

The density of deer, he said, doesn't mean that in every square mile in each unit you will find that many deer. People who live in this area, said Mr. Fox, will say that some places have more deer while some nearby areas may have only a few deer or none. This is true, he said.

The deer density numbers, said Mr. Fox, are really an overall average for the units. There could be substantially more in some places, and the country in those units could actually support a higher deer population.

Although the severe winter northwest Kansas had last year could have hurt the deer population, with food hard to find, he said, it doesn't

seem to have affected the numbers. Traditionally with deer, said Mr. Fox, there isn't a lot of winter mortality.

The deer did experience more stress than normal last year, he said, but the department didn't find severe or even significant mortality from the weather.

People could find 50 to 100 deer on any particular hay stack, he said, but the deer held up quite well.

Two major factors that change deer population are hunting pressure and disease, he said.

There is a possible threat from hemorrhagic disease, a virus which is spread by biting flies and kills the deer quickly. The disease is not a threat to humans or domestic animals. Not all of the deer with the disease will die, those who don't will look emaciated or seem to be lame due to hoof damage. Although the area hasn't seen an outbreak for a while, Mr. Fox said he doesn't know if it will show up this year. The disease is common in deer. This disease, he said, could cause significant mortality.

Hemorrhagic disease is not the same as chronic wasting disease, which the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has been testing for the last few years in deer harvested here.

Mr. Fox said they have had one case of chronic wasting disease documented in the state. There has also been some cases in Nebraska, although not close to the Kansas border. There have been more in Colorado.

He said he anticipates that there will be more deer with chronic wasting disease in the future, so he encourages hunters to have the deer they shoot tested for the disease. There is no proof the brain-wasting disease can be transmitted to humans, experts say, but a similar disease in cattle — known commonly as mad cow disease — can be transmitted to people who eat infected meat.

The other factor is how many hunters there are in the units and how many deer they are allowed to harvest, Mr. Fox said.

## Chronic wasting disease

By Patty Decker

*Colby Free Press*  
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Chronic Wasting Disease kills deer, elk and moose, but for hunters in northwest Kansas, the chance of bagging a sick animal or coming down with the illness themselves is minute.

While the disease is similar to "mad cow disease" in cattle and other brain-wasting diseases, only one case has been found in a wild deer in Kansas and there's no proven link to any infection of humans from deer or elk.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has tested about 7,750 deer and elk since 1996 for the disease, said Matt Bain, district wildlife biologist in Colby.

"The disease has been found twice in Kansas," he said, "once when an elk was shipped from a private elk farm in Colorado to a captive elk farm in Kansas."

The second case involved a white-tailed deer killed by a hunter in Cheyenne County in 2005, he said.

"The odds of encountering chronic wasting disease in Kansas are low," he said, "and the risk to humans has not been discovered where the disease occurs."

Bain said the disease causes healthy proteins, called prions, to convert into an abnormal form, which accumulates in lymph tissues and around neurons, especially in the animal's brain.

"The accumulation results in a neurodegenerative disease," he said, "and the infected animal becomes emaciated, displays abnormal behavior and loses control of bodily functions."

The course is slow and irreversible, he said, with symptoms possibly going unnoticed for months or even years after infection.

"The animal may deteriorate for weeks or months before dying," Bain said. "At this point, the long-term effects of the disease on populations remain unknown but are presumed to be highly detrimental to herd quality."

During the late stage of chronic wasting disease, he said, symptoms will include: thin hips