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Title: **Quality Deer Management County Regulations**

Policy Number:

WRD-Q-002

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Division Director

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**Purpose:**

Quality deer management (QDM) is one of many options for managing deer populations on a farm, hunting club, or other unit of land, including a county. A popular component of QDM is instituting antler restrictions on bucks. It is WRD's position that this type of management can be practiced voluntarily by landowners/deer clubs without regulatory statutes mandating this to all hunters.

**Policy:**

WRD's professional wildlife biologists provide technical guidance to support this practice by landowners/deer clubs. However, if a strong majority favors state regulation of antler restrictions within a county, WRD will consider proposing special antler restriction regulations at the county level. This majority must include support from two-thirds of the hunters and two-thirds of the landowners. In the case of a public initiative requesting state regulations mandating antler restrictions for a county, the following procedures will apply until additional data or experience with the program warrant changing them. A list of pros and cons regarding antler restrictions and a timeline of required steps is outlined in Attachment 1 and Attachment 2 respectively.

A. **Project Initiation**

Persons interested in implementing antler restriction regulations in a specific county may request a copy of Procedures for Initiation of Countywide Antler Restrictions by contacting any Game Management Section office. This document will be updated annually and available for public distribution by April 1 of each year. The Game Management Section Chief must receive a formal written request from a group of 10-20 sportsmen, including a complete list of names and telephone numbers of all coordinating volunteers, who agree to work with WRD to facilitate county level evaluations. As part of the written request the sportsman's group agrees to the biological and sociological constraints of countywide antler-restrictions. This group must select a head spokesman who will coordinate with the appropriate Game Management regional supervisor and allow participation as a volunteer by any interested person. This letter, due by July 1, one year before countywide antler restriction regulations would become effective, shall indicate support for the countywide antler restriction regulatory process including, public notification, evaluation of public opinion, the need for a two-thirds majority of both landowners and hunters, the need for a deer herd biologically suitable for countywide antler restrictions, and acceptance of law enforcement necessary to meet countywide antler restriction objectives. A sample letter of request is attached (Attachment 3). Upon initiation of this process, the group's spokesman will be notified of their acceptance into the process and a certified letter will be sent from WRD's Game Management region supervisor to the County Sheriff, State Court Judge, Probate Judge, Chairman of County Commissioners, and County Extension Agent explaining the process for establishing countywide antler restrictions and advising them of its current

application in their respective county. A sample of the letter to county officials is attached (Attachment 4).

**B. Information and Education**

WRD will ensure that a minimum of two articles will be published in a local newspaper at least 2 weeks prior to conducting the required public meeting. At least one public meeting will be advertised and held in the appropriate county. Game Management Section biologists will coordinate, schedule and proctor the meeting and will make a presentation on the procedure for initiation of countywide antler restrictions, the pros and cons of countywide antler restrictions and answer questions. All WRD publicity and speaking opportunities will be balanced giving both positive and negative impacts of countywide antler restrictions. Members of the initiating group and the general public will be provided an opportunity for comments and input at the scheduled meetings. The public meeting and publication requirements will be coordinated and administered by WRD and will be completed by August 15, one year before countywide antler restriction regulations would take effect. Copies of all informational materials distributed to the public and media outlets by the initiating group of sportsman must be forwarded to WRD prior to distribution.

**C. Private Lands Initiative**

Countywide antler restriction regulations are a private lands initiative. Counties with more than 10 percent of timberlands in public ownership including National Forest, Miscellaneous Federal lands (United State Department of Defense, Corps of Engineers, etc.) and State and Local Government lands are not eligible for countywide antler restriction regulations. It would not be fair to restrict public hunting opportunity on these lands. Regulations on public land units within counties pursuing antler restriction regulations may vary depending on individual circumstances and obligations for a particular WMA. Attachment 5 includes a list of ineligible counties based on this criteria obtained from the most current edition of The Georgia County Guide published by The University of Georgia College of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service.

**D. Evaluation**

1. WRD will obtain names from county tax records for a landowner survey. Opinion surveys will be mailed to all landowners who own 20 acres or more based on the most recent electronic digest available in the respective county. If a recent (<5years) electronic digest is not available, attempts will be made to identify and screen landowners by hand. Attempts will be made to remove duplicate names when possible. Surveys will be mailed by Sept. 10 with responses due by COB Sept 30. All responses will be held in a dedicated postal box or other suitable facility until the deadline for receipt has past. Surveys not delivered through the United State Postal Service by the appropriate deadline will not be counted.

2. Assuming successful completion of the landowner survey, WRD will distribute and advertise sign-up sheets (Attachment 6) to obtain names and addresses of resident hunters who would like to express their opinion on deer hunting regulations. Only sign-up sheets provided by WRD will be used and they will be delivered to cooperating license dealers and any other sites designated by the Game Management regional supervisor. Sign-up sheets will be available by Oct. 10 and retrieved by WRD by November 30 if applicable. Public opinion surveys of resident hunters (mail survey) and landowners (mail survey) will be completed by WRD prior to regulation formulation in January. Surveys must show at least 66 percent support by landowners and 66 percent support by resident hunters. Respondents expressing “no opinion” will not be included when determining rates of support by landowners or hunters. Only responses received on individually numbered official survey forms provided by WRD will be included in the analysis. Survey responses will be tallied only after the established deadline for submission. Deadlines imply receipt by close of business on the established date or by close of business on the next business day if the deadline falls on a Sat., Sun. or state holiday. The cooperating sportsman’s group shall provide WRD with a certified or cashier’s check for \$3000 by September 1st for survey printing, postage and analysis. The money is non-refundable because funding for intensive county level attitude surveys is not available within WRD. Names and/or addresses of landowners or hunters participating in the survey will not be disclosed.
3. The cooperating sportsmen will be responsible for coordinating deer herd data collection one hunting season in advance of implementation. At least 300 deer (100 antlered bucks and 200 antlerless deer) should be collected for age and condition data. This information must be collected to assess herd conditions across the county. WRD will provide instructions on jawbone collections and antler measurements. Jawbones with identifying information must be returned to WRD by the end of the firearms deer season for the county being surveyed. Counties will not be considered for countywide antler restriction regulations until these data have been collected and delivered to WRD.
4. An assessment of herd condition will be conducted to determine the potential for quality buck production, and to determine antler restrictions that would be required to achieve protection of 1.5 year-old bucks. Two options will be considered; an outside antler spread of 15 inches or a minimum of 4 points on one side. Counties where one of these standards is not appropriate for protecting 1.5 year-old bucks, or where the majority (>50%) of 2.5 year-old bucks are protected, will not receive further consideration for countywide antler restriction regulations.

E. Regulation Phase

1. If public opinion surveys and herd conditions are all favorable; WRD will announce proposed regulations in March, preceding the effective season. Public meetings will be conducted as part of the routine process for changing hunting regulations.

2. Once established, countywide antler restriction regulations may remain in effect until changed through the described public involvement process. A minimum period of five years must elapse before WRD will entertain processes serving to reverse or modify this regulation. Deer herds will be monitored at the regional levels as done currently.
3. Dropping or modifying countywide antler restriction regulations for a county will require letters requesting re-evaluation of public opinion (as done in step 1), collection of hunter and landowner names (step 3) and funding (as outlined in step 4). Public opinion surveys must show two-thirds support for countywide antler restriction regulations to remain in place or countywide antler restriction regulations to be modified if such a challenge is implemented.

### **Attachments**

- Attachment 1 – Impacts of Antler Restrictions by Regulation
- Attachment 2 – Timeline for Countywide Initiation of Antler Restrictions
- Attachment 3 – Sample Letter of Request for Consideration
- Attachment 4 – Sample Letter to County Officials
- Attachment 5 – List of Ineligible Counties Based on Public Land Ownership
- Attachment 6 – Deer Hunter Opinion Survey

## **IMPACTS OF ANTLER RESTRICTIONS BY REGULATION**

### **PRO**

1. Antler restrictions produce an older buck age structure than produced by traditional management.
2. Antler restrictions increase chances of hunting for and killing a large buck, which is important to many hunters.
3. Aggressive doe harvests, which may be required for QDM, produce deer herds within biological and sociological carrying capacity.
4. QDM encourages hunters to view themselves as resource managers as well as resource users.
5. Hunter-managers are more likely to comply voluntarily with hunting regulations and report observed violations.
6. Improved hunt quality may have positive economic benefits for landowners and communities.
7. Special management may renew interest in deer hunting for some hunters.

### **CON**

1. Antler restrictions will significantly reduce total buck harvest.
2. Reduced populations resulting from aggressive doe harvests lowers hunter satisfaction for some.
3. This technique will not work equally well everywhere, and consistent regulations will not be possible because of differences in habitat quality, genealogy, and herd condition between counties.
4. Protection of 1.5 year-old bucks eliminate many biological tools for monitoring populations including current computer models. QDM requires more intensive, expensive biological data collection.
5. Various antler restrictions decrease the public's ability to understand hunting regulations and increases law enforcement problems.
6. Restrictive regulations reduce resource availability and hunter participation especially by casual and young hunters.
7. Antler restrictions by state regulation eliminates other valid options hunters have for managing deer herds including maximum sustainable yield.
8. The non-hunting public does not support trophy hunting. The distinctions between QDM and trophy hunting may be too fine for the average non-hunter to understand.
9. Antler restriction regulations may result in high lease fees and fewer members per club than otherwise would have been experienced.

**TIMELINE FOR  
COUNTYWIDE INITIATION OF ANTLER RESTRICTIONS**

Accomplished by:

- July 1 Sportsman's group contacts WRD with letter of intent
- Aug. 15 Public meeting and articles describing antler restrictions, quality deer management, and the process at the county level.
- Sept 1. Sportsman's group submits \$3000 for survey expenses or submits notification of intent to terminate the process.
- Sept. 10 Landowner opinion survey mailed.
- Sept. 30 Deadline for receipt of landowner surveys.
- Oct. 10 Sign-up sheets distributed by WRD to cooperating locations.
- Nov. 30 Sign-up sheets collected by WRD.
- Jan. 1 Hunter opinion survey mailed allowing a minimum of 2-weeks for returns from the public; Deer jawbones and associated data provided to DNR
- Jan. 20 Deadline for receipt of hunter surveys.
- Jan. 31 Analysis of survey completed and recommendation formulated
- Mar. 15 Regulations proposed to Board of Natural Resources
- May 30 Regulations formally addressed.
- Aug. 15 Regulations published.



## Sample Letter of Request for Consideration

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief, Game Management  
Wildlife Resources Division  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
2067 U.S. Hwy 278, S.E.  
Social Circle, Georgia 30279

Date

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

This letter is an official request from \_\_\_\_\_ County for implementing a process to evaluate initiation of antler restriction regulations countywide.

We understand and agree that there are two critical elements that must be accomplished before the program will work. The first is that a biological analysis must be done which demonstrates the program would have a reasonable chance of success. A group of 10-20 sportsmen (list and telephone numbers attached) from our county have agreed to work cooperatively with the Game Management Section in support of the established Procedures For Initiation Of Countywide Antler Restrictions. We have read and understand the process fully and completely. Further, we understand that data analysis must show that a 15-inch spread or a four-point minimum on one side would protect 1.5 year-old bucks. If the data shows that neither of these regulations would protect the young bucks, or to the contrary, they protect the majority of 2.5 year-old bucks, the program would not receive further consideration and be stopped at that point.

Number two involves general public support of this program. We understand that a strong majority of people must be in favor of the program for it to work. For that reason, a scientific survey of hunters and landowners, conducted by WRD, must show that at least 66 percent from each group favor the regulation. Any number less would stop the program.

With this letter, we request the process to continue as described in Wildlife Resources Division's written procedures. Again, our citizen group is ready and willing to work collecting data and coordinating any public information-gathering program.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Spokesperson for citizens group



## Sample Letter to County Officials

Date

Name  
Title  
Agency/Institution/Affiliate  
Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Sir or Madam (County Sheriff, State Court Judge, Probate Judge, County Commission Chairman and County Extension Agent):

This letter is to inform you of the fact that the Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division (DNR/WRD) has received from a citizens group a request to implement the Procedures For Initiation Of Countywide Antler Restrictions for \_\_\_\_\_ county. This is a private lands initiative that places a restriction on the antler requirements for a harvestable buck. Attached for your review, is a copy of the process used by DNR/WRD to determine if the landowners and hunters desire this style of management. It is the position of DNR/WRD that this style of management is best achieved by clubs/landowners and 66% of the hunters desire this mandated management, regulations will be recommended to the Board of Natural Resources for adoption serving then as a mandate to every hunter.

There are two critical elements that must be accomplished before countywide antler restriction regulations can be adopted. The first is that a biological analysis must be done which demonstrates the program will have a reasonable chance of success. A group of sportsman from \_\_\_\_\_ county have agreed to work cooperatively with the Game Management Section to collect harvest data from deer. Data analysis must show that a 15-inch spread or a four-point minimum on one side would protect 1.5 year-old bucks. If the data shows that neither of these regulations would protect the young bucks, or to the contrary, they protect the majority of 2.5 year-old bucks, the program would be considered infeasible and stopped at that point.

Number two involved general public support of this program. An overwhelming majority of hunters and landowners must favor this program to result in success. For that reason, separate scientific surveys of landowners (owning 20 acres or more) and hunters will be conducted. At least 66% of each group must be in favor of such regulation. Any number less would stop the program.

Again, this letter serves as notification that this process has begun in \_\_\_\_\_ county. There will be newspaper articles explaining antler restrictions, quality deer management and the process published in the local newspaper. In addition, there will be a public meeting held on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ PM at \_\_\_\_\_. This meeting will be designed to discuss the pros and cons of antler restrictions and the process for implementation. The main goal of this meeting is to educate and inform the public of the process and style of management. At that time, input from the public will be received relative to this process and style of management.

I welcome any questions or comments you might have. You may contact me at any time at the above numbers.

Sincerely,

Regional Supervisor, Game Management Section



**LIST OF INELIGIBLE COUNTIES BASED ON PUBLIC LAND OWNERSHIP\***

Bryan	Long
Catoosa	Lumpkin
Chatham	McDuffie
Chattahoochee	McIntosh
Chattooga	Morgan
Clayton	Murray
Cobb	Muscogee
Dawson	Paulding
Elbert	Peach
Evans	Putnam
Fannin	Rabun
Forsyth	Richmond
Gilmer	Stephens
Greene	Towns
Habersham	Union
Jasper	Walker
Jones	Ware
Liberty	White
Lincoln	Whitfield

\*Counties with more than 10 percent of timberlands in public ownership including National Forest, Miscellaneous Federal lands (United States Department of Defense, Corps of Engineers, etc.) and State and Local Government lands will not be considered for countywide antler restriction regulations. This list was developed using information obtained from the 2005 edition of *The Georgia County Guide* published by The University of Georgia College of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service.



**DEER HUNTER OPINION SURVEY (Georgia Residents Only)**

The undersigned hunt in \_\_\_\_\_ County and wish to be surveyed regarding antler restriction regulations for \_\_\_\_\_ County.

NAME	STREET ADDRESS	CITY, STATE	ZIP CODE	LAST 7 DIGITS OF 21-DIGIT LICENSE NUMBER
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
15.				

Vendor's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Vendor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Auth. WRD Signature \_\_\_\_\_ WRD Point of Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_

Sheet # \_\_\_\_\_