



Delbert Scott
28th Senate District

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 416
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Weekly Column for the
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**Contact: Debbie Poire
(573) 751-8793**

Missouri's Deer Population

It's hard to believe that at one time, our state almost had a nonexistent deer population. According to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), whitetail deer were abundant in our state during presettlement times. However, the increase in the amount of settlers to Missouri, along with the unrestricted market hunting and habitat destruction, resulted in a large decline in the species. In 1925, our state's deer population was estimated to be about 400. Thanks to the efforts of the first Conservation Commission (formed in 1937), restoration of the whitetail deer began to succeed, and by 1944, the statewide deer population increased to 15,000.

Most Missourians have a love-hate relationship with these four-legged, white-tailed creatures. Deer hunting season provides outdoorsmen and women with a sport that can result in nourishing meat for family and friends. This time of year also means crop damage and vehicle accidents caused by these creatures. The Missouri State Highway Patrol Statistical Analysis Center reported that Missouri had 3,419 traffic crashes involving deer in 2007. That equals one deer strike every 2.6 hours. Sadly, five people lost their life and 351 injuries resulted from these types of accidents last year. With the 28th Senate district located in a wide rural area, citizens need to be careful and alert when on our state's roadways.

Deer hunting season is composed of different portions that provide Missourians a variety of hunting opportunities. Our state has two deer hunting seasons: firearms (urban, youth only, November, muzzleloader, and antlerless only) and archery. For new hunters, the MDC's website (www.mdc.mo.gov) can provide you with helpful tips that will improve your chances of getting a deer.

Hunters took more than 260,000 deer during the 2007 firearms season. Deer regulations are set the summer before the hunting season begins. There are several new changes for the 2008 season, and you can read about them in the "Fall Deer and Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information" booklet. You can obtain this booklet from permit vendors, MDC offices, or by going online to MDC's website.

For those hunters who would like to donate their deer to those who are less fortunate, there is a program called [Share the Harvest](#). This program, run by the MDC and the Conservation Federation of Missouri, provides an easy way for hunters to donate venison to Missourians in need of a dependable source of protein. The program makes it extremely easy for hunters to donate their harvest. Hunters take their deer to an approved processing plant (found in the “Fall Deer and Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information” booklet), and tell the processor how much venison the hunter wishes to donate. The processor packages and stores the meat until it is distributed to a particular agency. Agencies receiving venison ensure that the distribution of the donated meat is used and goes to where it serves the greatest need.

For more information about this year’s hunting season, visit MDC’s website at www.mdc.mo.gov. And if you have questions or comments about any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.mo.gov.

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.

