

## **Executive Summary**



### **Idaho Mule Deer Hunter Survey 2017**

### **Summary of Statewide Results**

### **Comparison to 2007 Results**

In 2017, 2,464 hunters responded to our mail survey (49% response rate). An additional 4,405 hunters responded to our email survey (16% response rate). Finally, 378 individuals voluntarily submitted response via the internet. In 2007, 1,462 hunters responded to the mail survey (52% response rate).

### **Experience Level (Q 1, 2 and 3)**

Mule deer hunters who took the survey in 2017 had an average of 34 years of total hunting experience, including 23 years of mule deer hunting experience. On average, the 2017 hunters had 2-3 years more hunting experience compared to hunters in 2007.

### **Weapon Type (Q 4, 5, and 6)**

Similar to the 2007 survey, the **vast majority (72%) of the 2017 hunters used rifles** to hunt mule deer during the previous hunting season; 64% of the hunters had only hunted mule deer with a rifle during the last 5 years. Of those that choose to hunt with archery, short range or muzzleloader, the most important reason was to “hunt when fewer hunters are in the field.”

### **Previous Harvest (Q 7 and 7A)**

Of hunters who took the survey in 2017, **47% were successful** during the previous hunting season (2016), which is significantly higher than those who took the 2007 survey (2006 Hunting Season), **with 33% success**. Significantly fewer antlerless deer were taken by 2016 hunters. In both surveys the majority of hunters reported taking either “Small” or “Medium” bucks.

### **Where Do They Hunt (Q 8 and 9)**

In 2017 the top 5 hunting units mule deer hunters reported hunting in: **39, 43, 32, 76 and 32A**. Similarly, in 2007, the top 5 Units were 39, 32A, 76, 32 and 40. About half the hunters hunt 2-3 different units every year along with a significant number hunting the same unit every year. Results have not changed over time.



### Why Do They Hunt (Q 10)

In 2017, when asked about the **reasons for hunting mule deer** in Idaho the top choices were:

- Being close to nature
- Bringing back pleasant memories
- Viewing the scenery
- Being with friends and family

These are not different from the 2007 survey. Of note, **putting meat on the table was significantly more important in 2017 than in 2007.**

### Desirable Animal (Q 11)

In 2017 when asked about the type of deer most desirable to harvest; “Large Mule Deer Buck” was extremely desirable and “Antlerless Mule Deer” was the least desirable. These results were similar for the 2007 survey. Interesting to note that **the desirability to harvest any deer, antlerless deer and small and medium bucks all increased significantly over the 2007 results.**

### **Antlerless Mule Deer Hunting (Q 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17)**

When asked about conducting antlerless harvest, in 2017, 81% reported they favor the use **“to increase the productivity of the herd,”** 78% of the mule deer hunters reported they favor the use of antlerless deer hunts as a management tool to **“maintain a balance population size for the quality of habitat”**, 78% favored their use **“to provide opportunities for Youth Hunts”**. Due to an error in how this question was analyzed in 2007, we were unable to make comparisons to the 2017 results.

In 2017, 47% of the hunters reported that at some point they had participated in an antlerless mule deer hunt in Idaho. This was significantly lower than those who took the 2007 survey (52%). When asked if they would participate in an antlerless hunt in the future, 50% said “yes”. This number is similar to the 2007 survey.

In 2017, 88% of the hunters reported that they feel hunting antlerless mule deer is appropriate. This number was similar to the 2007 survey.

In 2017, 65% of the hunters reported that they would harvest an antlerless deer in addition to a buck. This number has increased since 2007.

In 2017, hunters reported that, if it is determined that antlerless mule deer harvest is needed, that their preferred method of harvest would be through Youth Hunts. This is similar to what was reported in 2007.

### **Reasons for Not Hunting (Q 18 and 18A)**

The top reasons listed for not being able to hunt included:

- Work schedule
- Family obligations
- Access limitations

When the category “other” was excluded, **work schedule** was the most important reason listed for not hunting. Results are similar to the 2007 survey.

### **Things Considered When Deciding Where to Go Hunting (Q 19)**

In 2017, the top 5 things listed which were similar to the 2007 survey:

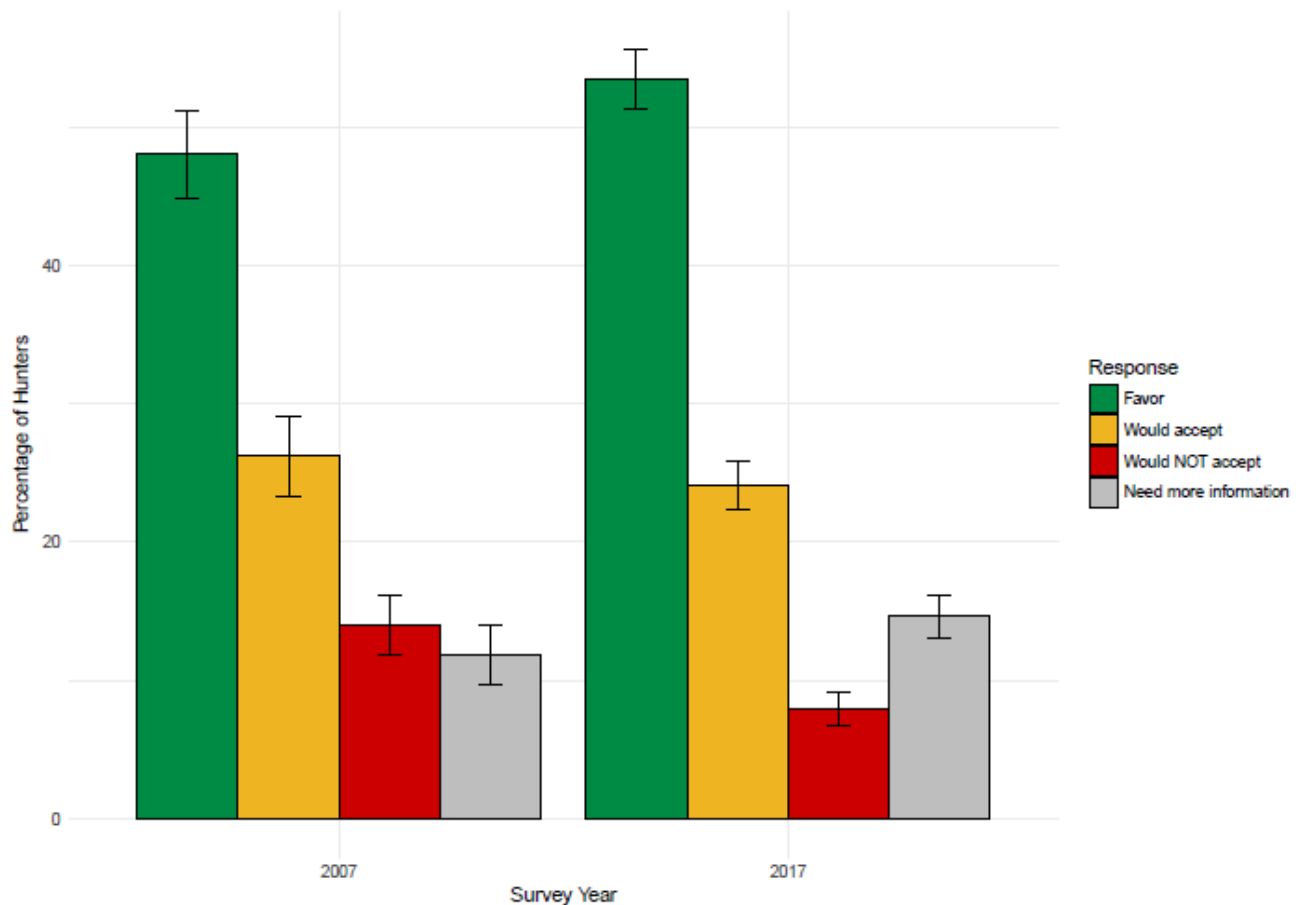
- Access to public lands
- Ability to hunt every year
- Best chance to harvest
- Opportunity to also hunt elk
- Area I am familiar with

### Hunter Crowding (Q 20 and 21)

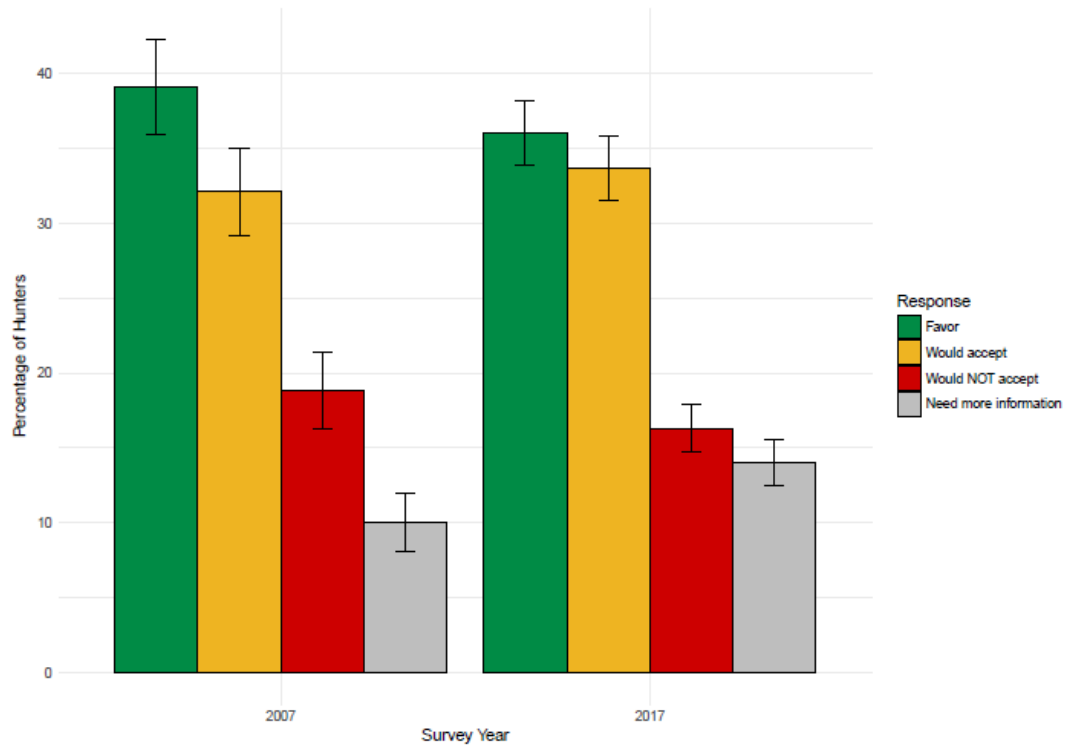
In 2017, 45% of the hunters reported that there were times during the 2016 hunting season when the number of hunters seriously detracted from the quality of their hunting experience. This number is similar to what was reported in the 2007 survey.

For potential ways of managing for lower hunter numbers, the 2017 survey results showed **54% of the hunters favored longer seasons** (significantly more than 2007), **36% favored controlled hunts**, similar to 2007 results. **Stratified Hunts are somewhat acceptable. Choose a Species and Zone Restrictions are not popular choices** similar to the 2007 survey but are significantly more acceptable in 2017 than they were in 2007.

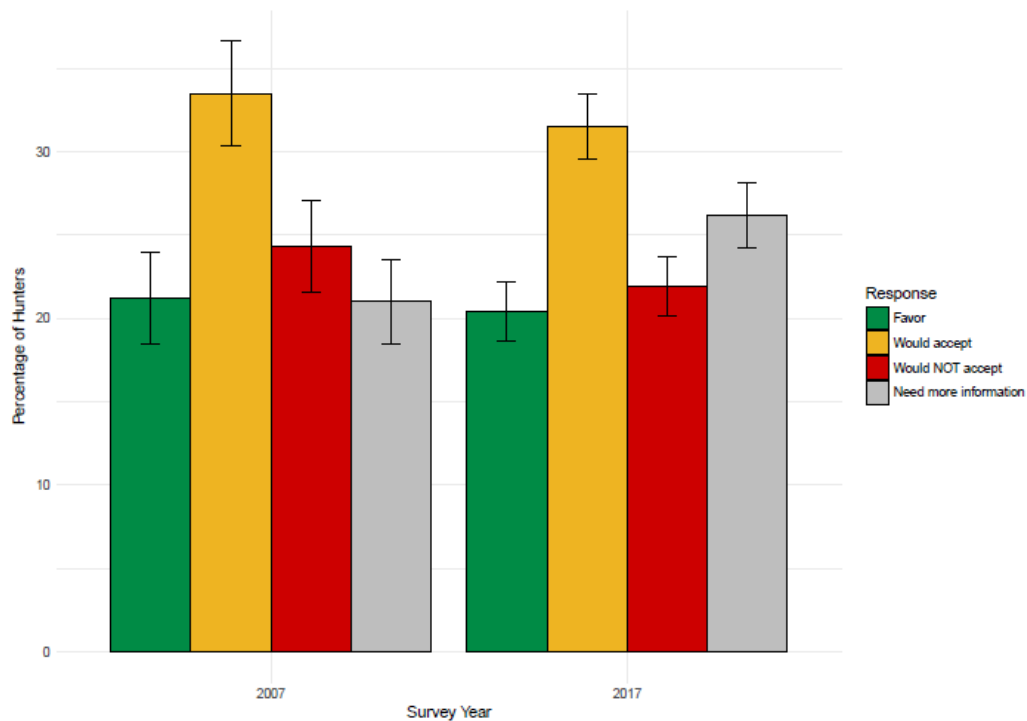
How do you feel about the use of **longer seasons** as a method to manage for lower hunter numbers?



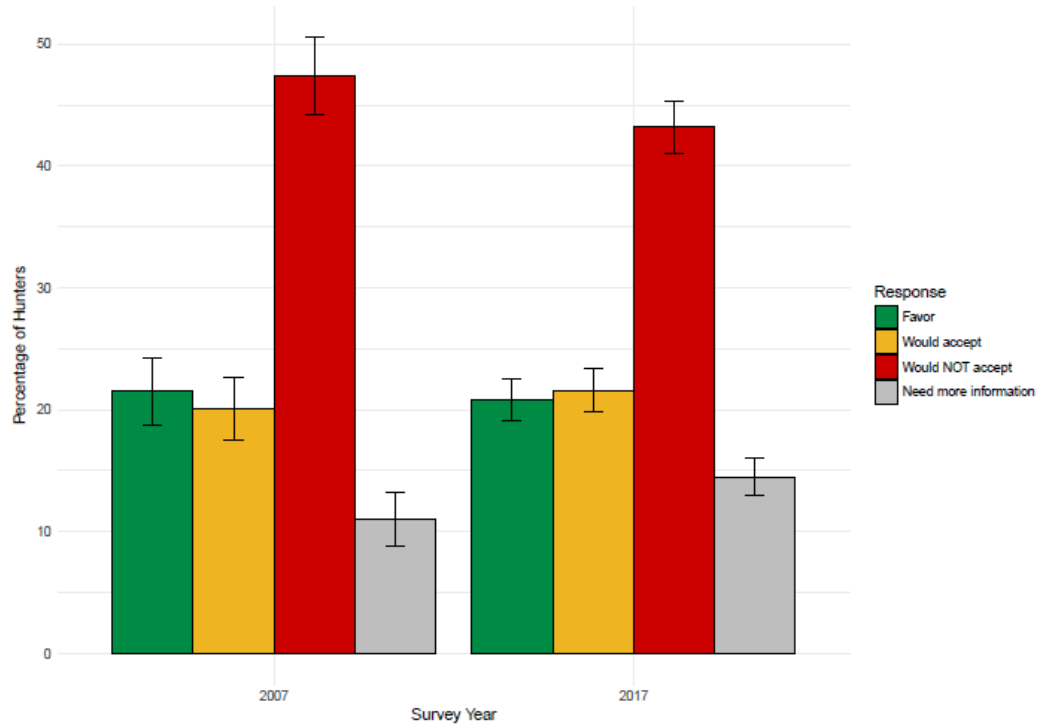
How do you feel about the use of **controlled hunts** as a method to manage for lower hunter numbers?



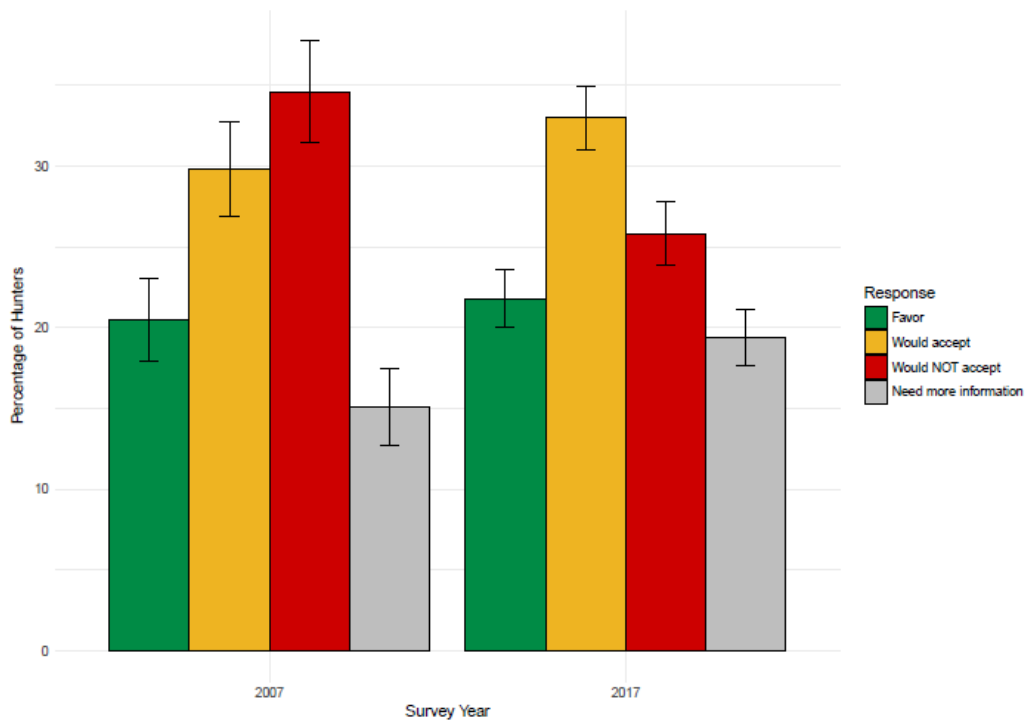
How do you feel about the use of **stratified hunts** as a method to manage for lower hunter numbers?



How do you feel about the use of a **choose a species** method to manage for lower hunter numbers?



How do you feel about the use of **zone restrictions** as a method to manage for lower hunter numbers?

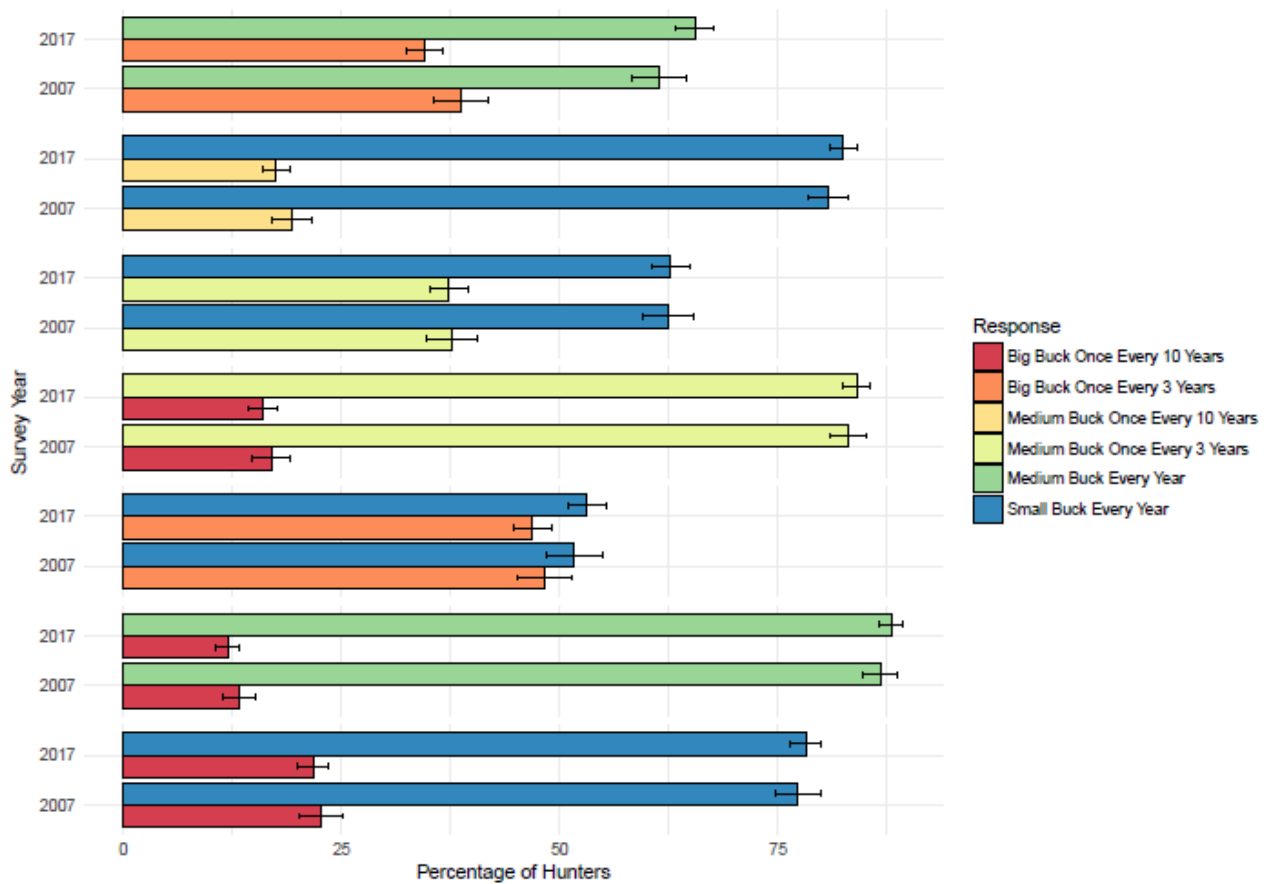


### Opportunity vs. Buck Quality (Q 22)

Hunters were asked to **choose between seven pairs of opposing choices** which allowed us to examine whether they were willing to give up the ability to hunt every year for a better chance at a larger buck.

In 2017, **in all seven choices**, hunters favored **opportunity over the size** of the bucks available. In all 7 choices, the percent of hunters choosing opportunity over buck size increased from the 2007 survey.

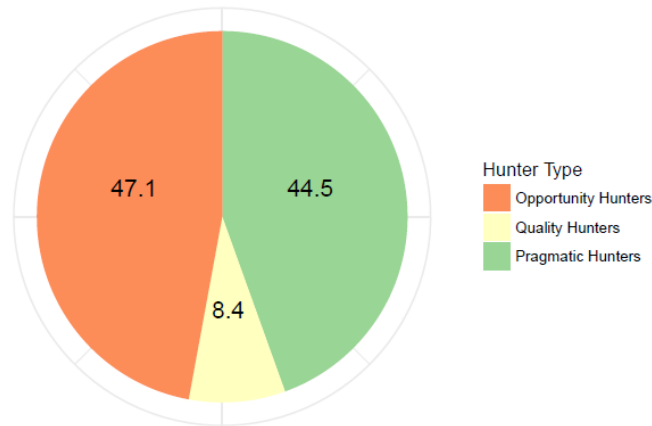
### A Quality Hunt or an Opportunity Hunt?





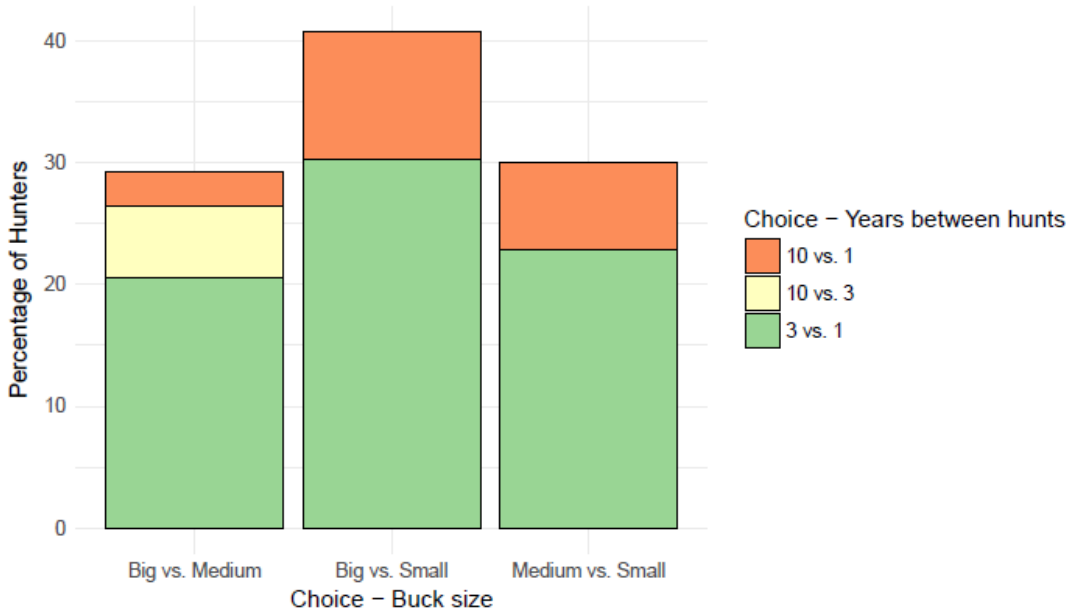


Composition of the 2017 mule deer hunting population.



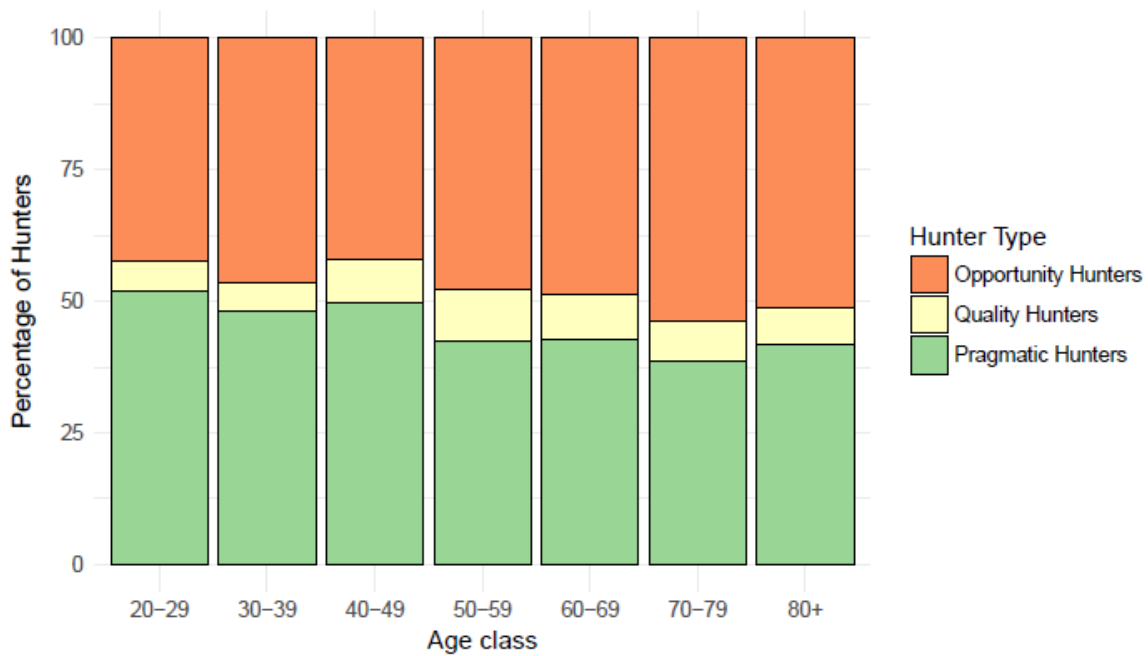
Approximately 55.5 percent of mule deer hunters will choose **Opportunity** (47.1 percent) or **Quality** (8.4 percent) hunts no matter what. But the rest (44.5 percent) may be more **Pragmatic** in their choices.

## When do **Pragmatic Hunters** choose **Quality** hunts?



Pragmatic hunters were most likely to choose a Quality hunt if they only had to wait 3 years for a Big Buck vs. 1 year for a Small Buck.

## Hunter types by **Age**



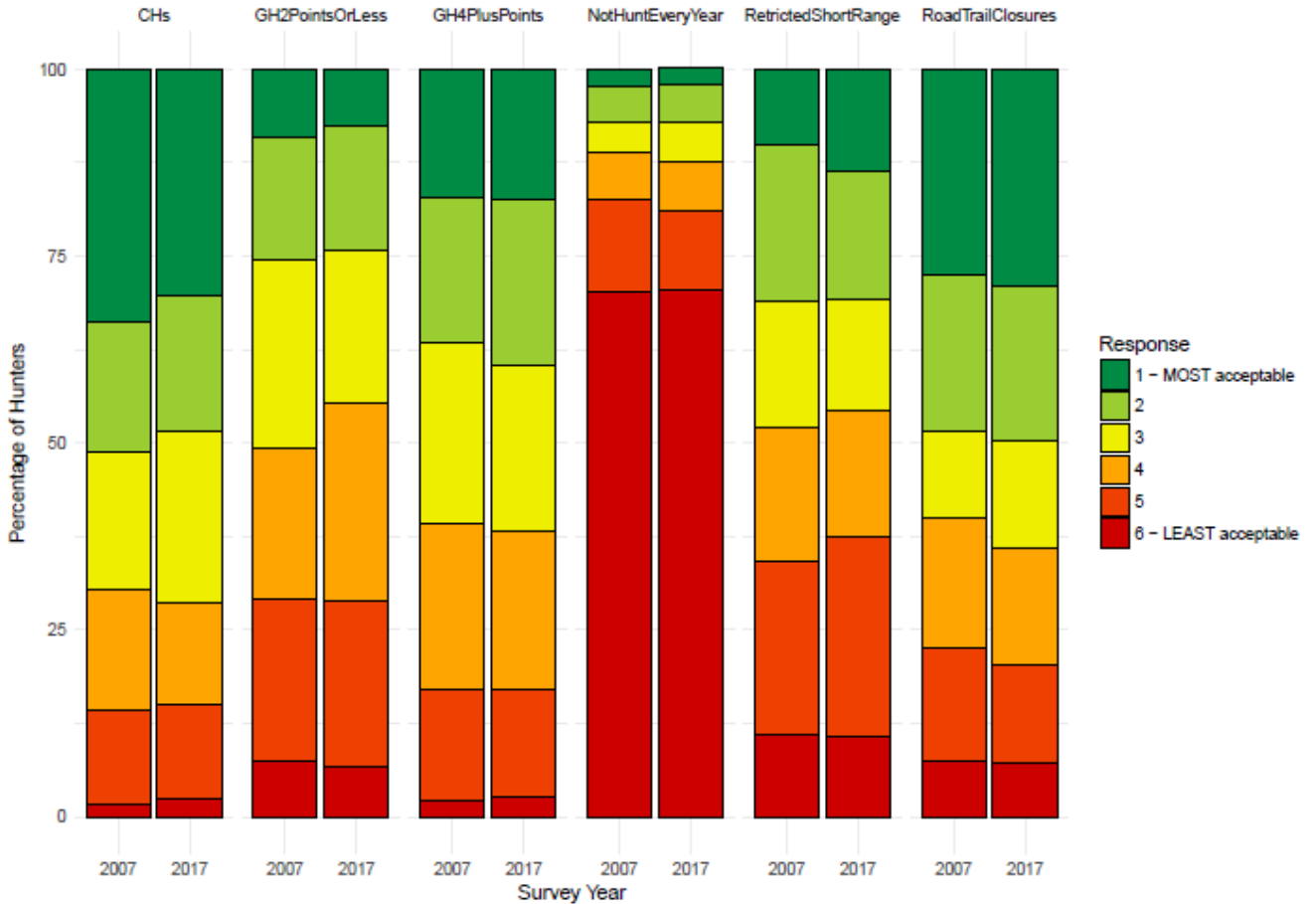
Younger individuals tend to be Pragmatic Hunters

### Willing to Accept Additional Restrictions (Q 23 and 23A)

In 2017, **62% of the hunters reported that they are willing to accept additional restrictions** in order to manage for larger and/or more mule deer bucks. This number is similar to the 2007 survey, 65%.

In general, hunters prefer restrictions that preserve (maximizes) hunting opportunity and harvest. The 2017 results indicate little change from the 2007 results. “Controlled Hunts” were found to be the most acceptable while “Giving Up the Ability to Hunt Every Year” was least acceptable. **It appears that hunters like controlled hunts as long as there are still adequate opportunities to general hunt if they don’t draw a controlled tag.**

### Acceptability of Mule Deer management restrictions to hunters.



### **Mule Deer vs. Elk (Q 24)**

Hunters were asked their thoughts about **reducing elk populations** on a **large scale** to potentially increase mule deer, or in some **select units'** mule deer will be given management priority over elk or reduce elk populations in the **units they hunted in** to potentially increase mule deer. In all cases, **hunters rejected these concepts** and would not accept these as management options. Similar results were found in 2007.

### **Hunter Satisfaction (Q 25)**

In the 2017 survey, hunters were asked about several aspects of their 2016 hunt:

- Number of deer they saw
- Number of bucks they saw
- Size of bucks they saw
- Length of the season
- Timing of the season
- Overall quality of their hunt

When it came to hunter satisfaction, **all of the above significantly increased** over the 2007 hunter survey results. Hunter satisfaction declined statistically from the 2007 survey with respect to number of other hunters encountered.

