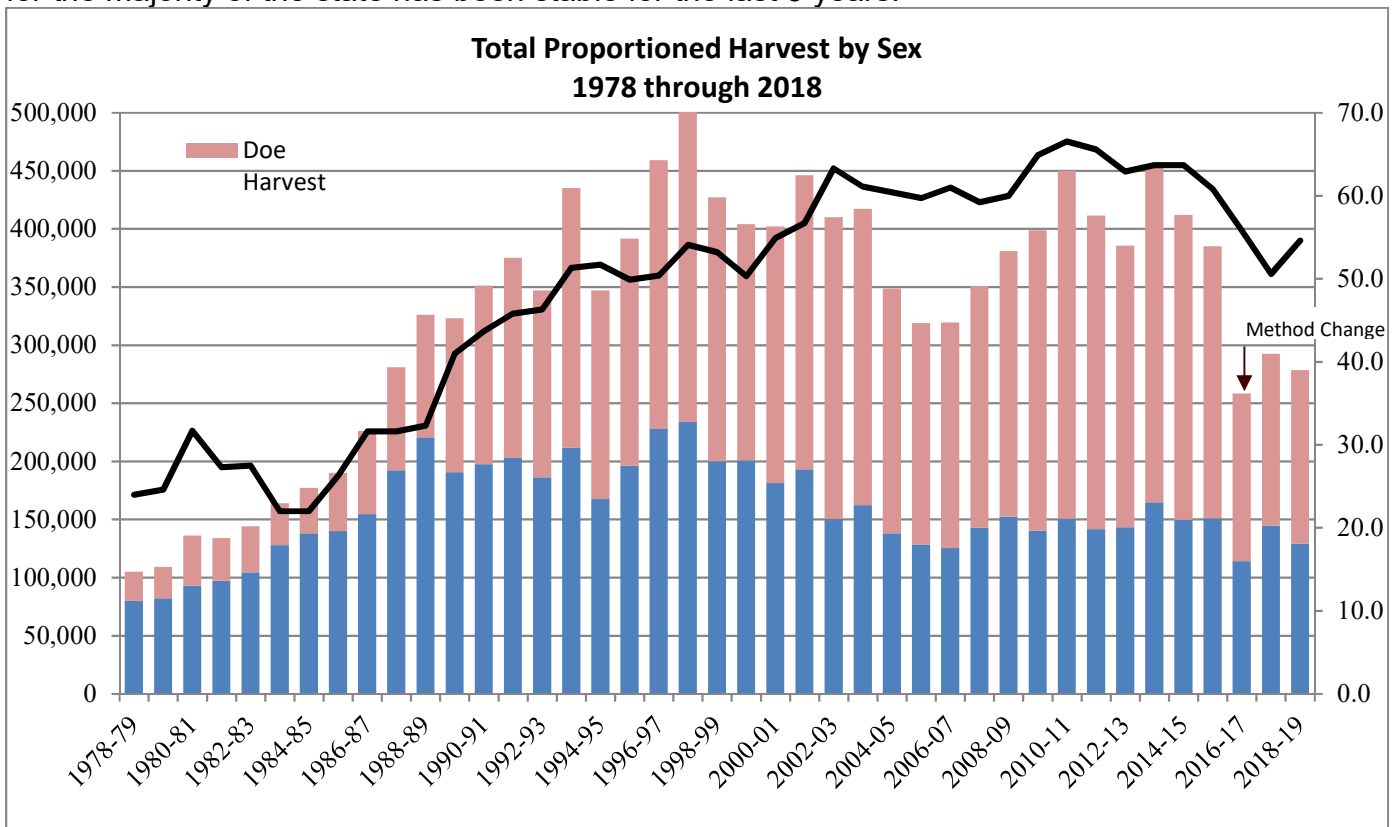


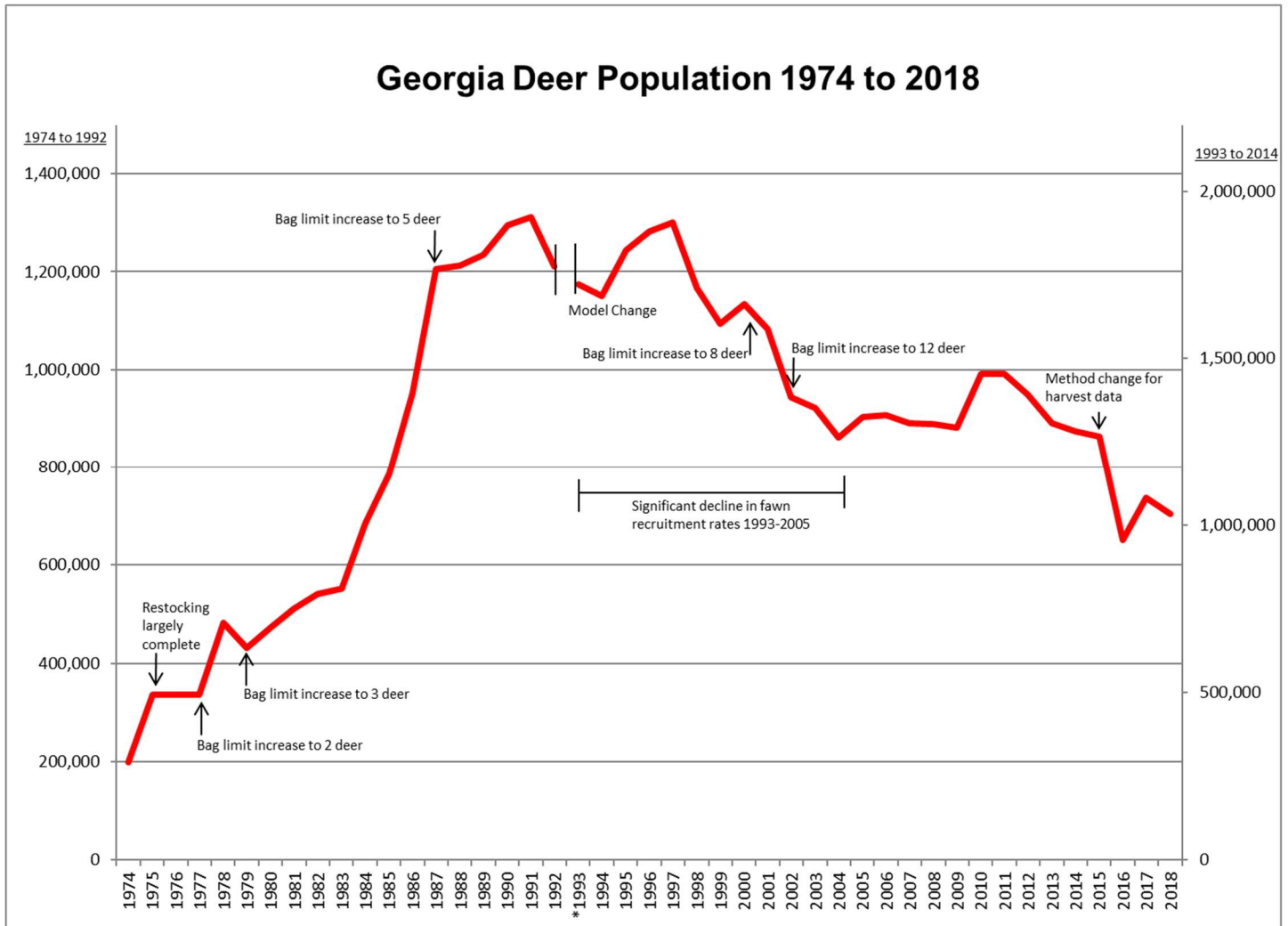
Overview

The 2018-19 deer season was yet another excellent year despite one of the most serious outbreaks of hemorrhagic disease in recent years. Statewide there were 278,403 deer taken by 203,254 Georgia hunters. Regional and statewide deer harvest estimates have historically been determined through telephone surveys which continue today. However, the mandatory harvest reporting system, Georgia Game Check, began collecting harvest data in 2016. Total deer harvest is now estimated from a combination of Game Check minimum harvest reports that are compliance adjusted from reporting rates developed in the telephone survey. As a result, the drop in harvest from 2015 to 2016 is an artifact of the change in methodology rather than a significant drop in harvest.

Historic Perspective

Georgia's deer population reached an all time high in 1997, then declined steeply until the mid-2000's. Throughout the 1990's, most of Georgia's deer population was in a state of overabundance and a reduction was necessary to balance the population with the available habitat. The primary causes for the decline were an increase in hunter harvest as bag limit and season length increased and a sharp decline in fawn recruitment. While a reduction in the population was welcomed, deer density had fallen below acceptable levels. As a result, either-sex days were manipulated to reduce female deer harvest in 2013. By 2015, female harvest was reduced significantly enough to slightly increase and stabilize the population. Because the population model is driven by deer harvest data, it was sensitive to the change in method for harvest estimation in 2016. However, the deer population for the majority of the state has been stable for the last 5 years.

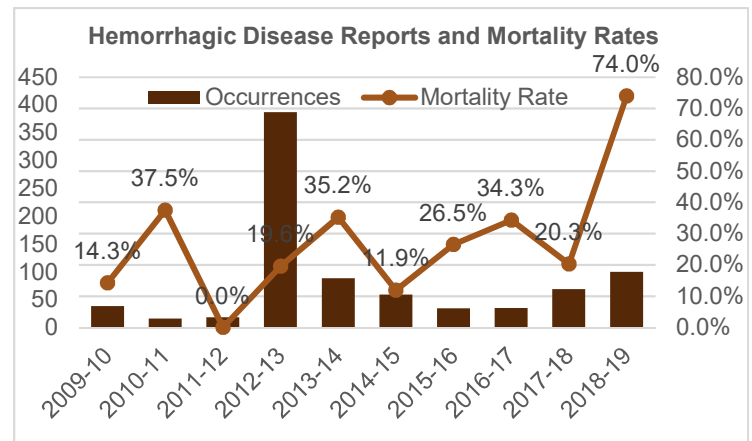




Disease

Georgia is fortunate to have a strong herd immunity to hemorrhagic disease, so outbreaks capable of causing regional population declines are rare. 2018 didn't have an exceptional number of reports of the disease, however the mortality rate was significant at 74% where it did occur.

Chronic Wasting Disease has not been found in Georgia to date, however recent discoveries in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee have increased our level of concern. We are continually monitoring the population and adapt our disease surveillance strategy whenever new scientific information becomes available.



Fawn Recruitment

Fawn recruitment is the ratio of fawns per adult doe that survive to deer season, which is one of the most important measures of productivity of the deer population. The best available science suggests that the proliferation of coyotes in Georgia likely played a significant role in the decline in fawn recruitment from the 1990's until the mid-2000's. However, fawn recruitment has been stable for the last 10 years at what is likely the new normal.

Research

As a result of significant declines in the deer population on the Chattahoochee National Forest and associated WMAs, a fawn mortality study was launched in 2017. During the 2018 capture season, only 23% of radio-collared fawns survived and 80% of the mortalities were attributed to predation. Using mortality investigation and DNA testing, most mortalities were attributed to coyotes followed by black bears and a single mortality to a bobcat.

Baited trail camera surveys have been used to estimate local deer population abundance and population demographics for the last couple of decades. However, the methods lacked rigorous testing for much of that time and new literature has shown biases associated with baited surveys. To improve survey accuracy and eliminate complications with bait on WMAs, a new passive survey was developed. The new method will be tested on WMAs across the state in 2019 for final adjustment and will likely be available to the public for use in Fall 2020.

Both projects are a collaborative effort between the Wildlife Resources Division and the University of Georgia.

