



How many pronghorn bucks should we harvest?

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Landowners in the Panhandle have wide-ranging opinions regarding pronghorns, which are often associated with land use (ranching vs. farming). Some landowners are not interested in supporting any pronghorn on their land while others would like to see more on their property. Beginning this hunting season, landowners in Herd Units 8, 17, and 25 will have greater freedom and responsibility than ever before in managing pronghorn in those units. For the first time ever, landowners in the Experimental Units will not be limited in their pronghorn buck harvest through TPWD-issued permits. The outcome of this Experimental Season will rest entirely upon the attitudes and decisions of private landowners in those units. Hopefully, the Experimental Season will be successful over a 3-4 year period, and we can expand this type of season for bucks to the other pronghorn herd units. How do we define success? --landowners having greater control over their big game harvest while doing so in a sustainable manner. However, we realize that some landowners and hunters would like some assistance in determining an appropriate buck harvest rate for their land. For those interested in a harvest rate that is sustainable over time, we have provided some harvest guidelines below. Any of the methods below can be used to calculate a sustainable harvest rate, but using a combination of these estimators is even more effective in determining an appropriate harvest rate. If the harvest intensity exceeds these recommended levels substantially, it is likely that the Experimental Season will not be acceptable biologically and will be suspended.

Sex Ratio

Sex ratios in pronghorn herds fluctuate slightly over time, depending on hunting pressure and other types of mortality occurring for both bucks and does. Prior to the hunting season, it is common to observe sex ratios of approximately 2-3 does per buck. Large ranches interested in producing trophy bucks will generally ensure that post-season ratios do not exceed 3 does per buck. A post-season ratio of 4-5 does per buck will result in a slightly younger age structure among bucks but is sustainable and will continue to provide adequate buck numbers for breeding success and harvest. **Example:** A ranch with 20 bucks and 60 does would normally be able to harvest about 5 bucks during the season, resulting in a post-season sex ratio of 1 buck to 4 does.

Percent of Buck Segment of the Herd

Another method that is just as effective in achieving a buck harvest that is sustainable over time for trophy quality is determining the average number of bucks on the property (not the maximum number) and harvesting 20-25% of the bucks. This harvest rate will allow many of the bucks to reach 3-5 years of age and often results in a post-season sex ratio of approximately 1 buck to 4 does. **Example:** A ranch with 8-12 bucks using the property (an average of 10) could expect a sustainable harvest by taking 2-3 bucks.

Acres per Surplus Buck

Pronghorn tend to occur in herds and can move considerable distances in a short period of time. These behaviors may produce the perception that there are more pronghorn in an area than actually occur. The following information may provide landowners and hunters some idea about the relationship between Herd Unit acres and the average number of pronghorn within those units. In Herd Unit 8, TPWD's herd evaluations in 2012 indicated that an issuance rate of 1 buck permit for every 2,300 acres was appropriate. In Herd Unit 17, where pronghorn numbers are lower, 1 buck permit was issued for every 4,500 acres based upon TPWD's survey data. This is another example of the approximate harvest intensity that could be anticipated on an annual basis.

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