

# **Participation in and the Effectiveness of the Venison Donation Program**

**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
May 28, 2010**

## **Cost**

Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Section 3.197, we estimate it cost approximately \$600.00 to produce this report. This includes staff time for drafting and reviewing this report. These costs do not include preceding research, planning, and public participation efforts by the Department of Natural Resources prior to the requirement of this report being prepared.

## **Introduction**

This report fulfills the requirements of Laws 2007, Chapter 57, Article 1, Section 81, which requires: “*By February 10, 2010, the commissioner shall report to the legislature on the participation in and the effectiveness of the venison donation program.*”

## **Overview and Funding**

The venison donation program was established by the legislature in 2007. At the time, three sources of funding were created to establish the program:

1. \$160,000 one-year general fund appropriation,
2. \$5 increase in the price of all non-resident hunting licenses, and
3. Voluntary donation of \$1, \$3, or \$5.

For 2008, there was no general fund appropriation; rather, the cost of antlerless deer permits increased by \$1. From 2007 through 2009, the program has generated a total of \$968,203 in revenue. The legislation allows for deer to be processed for donation to charitable organizations. Certified processors are compensated at a rate of \$70 per deer. The venison is then distributed through local food shelves/food banks throughout Minnesota.

## **Participation and Effectiveness**

In order to participate in the program, venison processors must be registered with the Department of Agriculture (MDA). In 2007, no additional training was required (other than standard MDA inspections), and 70 processors participated. With the discovery of lead in venison during 2008 more stringent requirements were placed on processors, including a mandatory training session that included a component on reducing lead in venison—see Appendix A. In 2008 and 2009, processor numbers were 30 each year.

With respect to effectiveness (as measured by donations), 90 percent of donated deer come from deer permit areas that have bag limits greater than one. Therefore, it can be presumed that deer donated to the program were at some level additive in regard to overall deer harvest. However, the contribution these deer may have made to population management cannot be empirically measured. Donations peaked in 2007 (1,996) and declined in both 2008 (650) and 2009 (450). The decline in the number of donations were principally related to two factors: 1) 50 percent reduction in the number of participating processors, and 2) change in management designation where fewer deer permit areas allowed for multiple deer harvest.

Table 1. Summary of revenue generated and the number of deer donated 2007-2009.

Year	General Fund	Antlerless Permits (\$1)	Donation (\$1, \$3, \$5)	Non-Resident Licenses (\$5)	Total	Deer Donated
2007	\$160,000	\$0	\$50,248	\$116,386	\$326,634	1,996
2008	\$0	\$190,063	\$51,361	\$114,285	\$355,709	650
2009	\$0	\$141,093	\$35,107	\$109,660	\$285,860	450
Total	\$160,000	\$331,156	\$136,716	\$340,331	\$968,203	3,096

### Program Expenditures

Of the \$968,000 brought into the program, \$397,165 has been spent. As of this report, approximately \$571,000 remains in the venison donation account.

Table 2. Annual breakdown of programmatic expenditures and per pound costs.

	2007	2008	2009
Processor reimbursements only	\$139,720	\$45,500	\$31,500
Administrative	\$15,867	\$8,423	\$7,400
X-ray testing	\$1,750	\$6,481	\$6,400
Product pick-up and delivery	N/A	\$7,590	\$7,335
Lab testing	\$22,200	\$9,000	\$0
DNR program expenditures <sup>1</sup>	\$10,500	\$2,000	\$1,872
Program Subtotal	\$190,037	\$78,994	\$56,379
Cost/lb; reimbursement only	\$1.78	\$2.41	\$1.78
Cost/lb including administrative, X-ray, pickup and delivery	\$2.00	\$3.60	\$2.98
Cost per pound for all expenses (includes lab testing, DNR program expenses)	\$2.43	\$4.18	\$2.98
2008 DNR bullet fragmentation study <sup>2</sup>		\$45,000	
GRAND TOTAL	\$190,037	\$123,994	\$56,379

<sup>1</sup> DNR program expenditures were as follows:

- 2007
  - Re-programming of ELS terminals to accommodate voluntary donations.
- 2008
  - Costs associated with training processors
- 2009
  - Costs associated with training processors

<sup>2</sup> DNR conducted a controlled experiment in 2008 to estimate the amount of bullet fragmentation and extent of fragment distribution in carcasses for commonly used bullets

## **Appendix A.**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, December 3, 2008**

**CONTACT:** Michael Schommer, MDA Communications, 651-201-6629

### **Additional state tests show lead fragments in venison intended for food shelves**

ST. PAUL, Minn. – The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) today announced that random X-ray testing shows lead fragments in venison samples collected from Minnesota meat processors and intended for donation to area food shelves under the Minnesota Hunter Harvested Venison Donation Program.

In response to this finding, MDA will expand the X-ray testing to screen all venison donated to food shelves. Only product that clears the X-ray tests will be distributed to food shelves around the state. Processors who registered with the venison donation program will be allowed to accept product, but will be asked to store the donated venison until it has been tested and cleared for shipment to food shelves.

MDA conducted the X-ray tests to verify the effectiveness of changes made to the donation program after laboratory tests conducted earlier this year found varying amounts of lead fragments in venison collected from Minnesota food shelves. The random testing included samples from processors around the state who signed up for the venison donation program. The testing showed 5.3 percent of whole-cut venison processed for the donation program contained lead fragments. In comparison, roughly 2 percent of the whole-cut venison tested last winter contained lead fragments. None of the firearms-harvested venison donated this autumn had been delivered to food shelves while the state X-ray testing was being conducted, and only product that was not found to contain lead will be cleared for shipment to food shelves.

While in most cases the amount of lead was very small, the contamination raises questions about the effectiveness of the program changes. These changes included mandatory training sessions for processors, and prohibitions against ground venison and venison from animals with extensive damage from ammunition.

"Minnesota sets the bar high when it comes to food safety," MDA Assistant Commissioner Joe Martin said. "The donated venison program must meet the same standards we set for regulated food businesses."

According to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), elevated levels of lead in the bloodstream can harm children and adults but the exact level at which health impacts occur can depend on a variety of factors. The most at-risk groups are children under the age of 6 and pregnant women. Pregnant women and younger children are especially sensitive because they absorb most of the lead they take in, and the brains of infants and young children are still developing. Lead is also toxic for adults, but they are less sensitive to its effects.

Operated by MDA in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and state food shelves, the Minnesota Hunter Harvested Venison Donation Program gives hunters the opportunity to donate venison to food shelves. State officials have made no decisions about the program for 2009, but they plan to confer with legislators, hunters, processors, food shelves and other stakeholders in the coming months.