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## **Results from White-tailed Deer Check Station for Lake Shelbyville Project Lands**

**Lake Shelbyville, January 22, 2008** – The US Army Corps of Engineers in conjunction with Illinois Department of Natural Resources conducted a white-tailed deer check station for deer harvested on Lake Shelbyville project lands during the 1<sup>st</sup> shotgun season. A 40% random sample of successful Lake Shelbyville shotgun applicants in both Moultrie and Shelby counties were required to bring any deer they harvested during the 1<sup>st</sup> shotgun season to the check station located in Wolf Creek State Park. Data collected included antler measurements, dressed weights, approximate age class, lactation rates for does, and tissue samples to test for chronic wasting disease. “Last year was the first year we collected detailed harvest data on the lake. The 2006 data was used to establish a baseline. This second year of data, and subsequent years, will be compared to the 2006 data and herd health monitored. Additionally, we assisted the Illinois Department of Natural Resources in collecting chronic wasting disease samples” said Natural Resource Specialist Lee Mitchell. A total of 54 deer were checked through the station over the 2 day check station period. “This year we upped the percentage of hunters surveyed by 10% and excluded Sunday. We checked so few deer on Sunday last year it wasn’t worth running it the 3<sup>rd</sup> day” stated Mitchell.

“I was very pleased with the response from all the hunters that were surveyed. I also appreciated the efforts of the staff at Wolf Creek State Park for generously allowing me to use their facilities for the check station and for assisting me with the data collection” stated Mitchell. “We feel it is important to monitor the overall herd health around the lake to ensure that habitat quality stays high. Too many deer in an area can quickly degrade the habitat. By monitoring the herd, we should be able to make sound management decisions that will prevent this from happening”, said Mitchell.

In 2006 none of the deer tested positive for chronic wasting disease and the 2007 results have not been received to date. Overall weights were down in all age classes of bucks by approximately 10 lbs. but antler measurements were up slightly. Lactation (in milk) rates taken from does 2.5 years and older (when a doe is considered mature) tell us that a doe raised at least 1 fawn during the year. This rate was also down this year. However, with only 2 years of data it can be dangerous to read too much into the data", stated Mitchell. There are so many variables involved, such as weather parameters, poor mast crop, a decrease in soybeans due to corn prices, etc. that I won't even speculate on what caused the decrease in weights and lactation rates. Obviously the more data we have the better informed we are. We will reevaluate after the 2008 season", said Mitchell.

"A summary of the data did show a few things that I still feel need to change", stated Mitchell. "Again, I was disappointed to see does representing only 31% of the harvest. I would like to see does making up at least 50% of the harvest. Not only would harvesting more does aid in keeping the population in check which would in turn reduce the number of deer vehicle collisions, habitat damage, and incidence of disease, but hunters would begin to see an increase in the intensity of the rut due to increased competition for does." Another disappointing finding was that immature bucks (buck fawns, 1.5, and 2.5 year old bucks) made up 79% of the buck harvest. Bucks 3.5 years old and older represented only 21% of the buck harvest. "What this tells me is that very few bucks are living past their 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday. I receive calls each year from hunters expressing an interest in taking a large buck. While there are some great bucks roaming the land around Lake Shelbyville, I tell them their odds of taking one are pretty slim due to the skewed age structure" said Mitchell. We certainly have quality food and good genetics in the region; but our limiting factor is age. My advice to hunters lucky enough to draw a shotgun tag (and bow hunter's) would be to pass on the younger bucks and if the opportunity arises, harvest a doe," stated Mitchell.

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