Drought and an outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) in 2012 caused significant reductions in whitetail deer populations, permit sales and harvest.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission responded to the outbreak in October by reducing antlerless permit quotas and hunters responded by purchasing fewer permits and harvesting fewer deer.

Deer permit sales in 2012 declined 13 percent to 122,214. Total deer harvest fell 30 percent to 60,548.

The whitetail buck harvest fell 29 percent to 26,309; whitetail antlerless harvest dropped 36 percent to 24,974; mule deer buck harvest declined three percent to 7,325; and the mule deer antlerless harvest fell eight percent to 1,940.

“Mule deer were less affected by EHD, but there has been significant mortality due to meningeal worms over the past five years,” said Kit Hams, Game and Parks’ big game program manager.

Whitetail buck harvest declined 50 percent in the Calamus West and Loup West units in 2012, 35 percent in Calamus East, Elkhorn, Keya Paha, Loup East, Missouri and Wahoo units, and 25 percent in all other units, except the Frenchman, which was down eight percent.

Whitetail buck harvest also decreased on the following permits: landowner (41 percent), youth (37 percent), archery (36 percent) and muzzleloader (32 percent).

“Statewide mule deer and whitetail populations are similar to population numbers of 10 years ago,” Hams said.

“Most herds will recover over the next four or five years. Loss of habitat due to drought, increased corn and bean production, and a goal to keep deer populations at a level acceptable to most landowners will likely keep deer numbers well below those seen the past few years,” he said.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners will consider deer and other big game recommendations for 2013 at a meeting March 8 in Kearney.

The deer season recommendations are designed to allow for controlled herd growth in most areas of the state. Staff recommends a reduction of approximately 4,000 deer permits and 86,000 bonus antlerless deer tags.

To view the recommendations, visit: http://www.sos.ne.gov/dyindex.html.