

State of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Division of Fish & Wildlife

2023-24 Deer Hunter Survey



Acknowledgements

Prepared by the Rhode Island
Department of Environmental Management

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Introduction

Welcome to our 2023-2024 Deer Hunter Survey report. This document presents the results from the recent survey among deer hunters. The findings provide an understanding of hunting practices, preferences, satisfaction levels and perspectives within the deer hunting community. Deer hunters' participation has been crucial in shaping the Division of Fish and Wildlife's (DFW) understanding of what makes a fulfilling and sustainable hunting experience in Rhode Island. The DFW trusts that this report will serve as a valuable resource for monitoring hunting experiences, preferences, hunter effort and more through time.

Methods

The survey, conducted via Survey Monkey, targeted Rhode Island deer hunters who had been active since 2020. Invitations were sent through Constant Contact to 6,645 individuals aged 12 and above, all of whom had purchased a Rhode Island hunting license and at least one deer permit since 2020, and possessed a valid email address registered in [RIO](#), the RI hunting and fishing licensing system. Hunters without valid email addresses were excluded. Ultimately, 6,355 hunters received the survey, and it was completed by 1,550 respondents.

The survey commenced on February 23, 2024, following the conclusion of the deer season, and concluded on March 18, 2024. It remained open until response rates dwindled to nearly zero following the dispatch of a second reminder email.

If you did not receive an email from the DFW to participate in this survey, please ensure your email is added to your customer account. For assistance with this process, kindly contact the DFW at 401-789-0281 or via email at DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov.

Summary

The 2023-2024 survey will be the initial survey that estimated the preferences, satisfaction levels and perspectives within the deer hunting community and will serve as the baseline. Moving forward, you can expect to be asked to complete annual surveys after each deer season to track and monitor those same metrics. Future surveys may not include the same questions as some metrics aren't expected to change annually. However, if new issues/topics arise, there may be new questions to determine hunters' opinions.

Key findings from the survey include high satisfaction levels among hunters regarding their overall deer hunting experience and experiences at check stations seen in Figures 11 and 12. However, opportunities for improvement were identified, such as increasing reporting rates (Figure 6). Hunter harvest is one of the main ways DFW monitors the deer population. Seeing that 40% of hunters did not report their deer means there is a substantial amount of valuable data that could be reported to DFW to increase understanding of the deer harvest and the deer population. The DFW strongly urges all hunters to report their deer harvest as it is required by regulation, and contributes to the understanding of the deer population and their management.

Another area needing improvement based on survey results is land access (Figure 14). As stated below the graph, the DFW is actively working to expand hunting areas to improve access to land for hunters and to become better able to manage deer in areas that traditionally may have been closed to hunting.

Interestingly, over half of our hunters were successful at harvesting a deer. Conversely, about 50% of hunters were not successful at harvesting a deer. If you find yourself as one of the hunters who was unsuccessful, our Hunter Education Program offers Deer Hunting Workshops annually to improve and hone your deer hunting skills. This class is geared toward the beginner deer hunter or used as a refresher for seasoned ones! The DFW teams up with subject expert volunteers and work together to teach participants basic biology and behavior of white-tailed deer, tips for scouting, where to best set up your hunt spot, tree stand safety, the gear you will need and much more!

Addressing the areas that need improvement can help us work towards ensuring enjoyable, sustainable hunting seasons that benefit both hunters and the deer population.

See the results below. Each figure graphically displays the results from each question asked in the survey. If additional clarification or comment was needed, there may be additional context in the figure descriptions.

Results

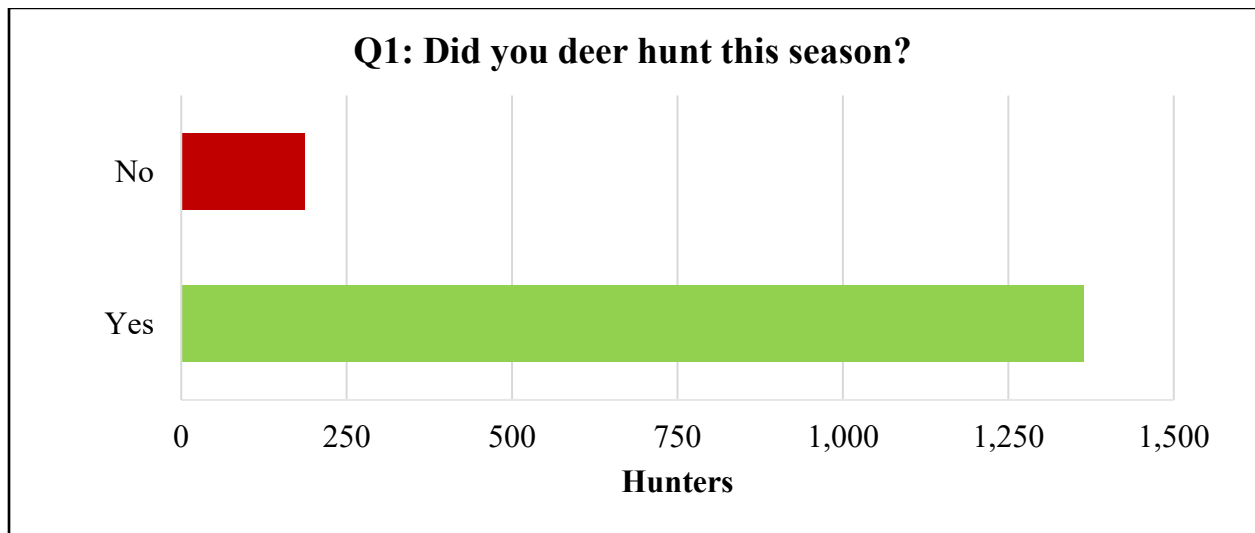


Figure 1. Out of 1,550 responses, 88% of deer hunters hunted this season.

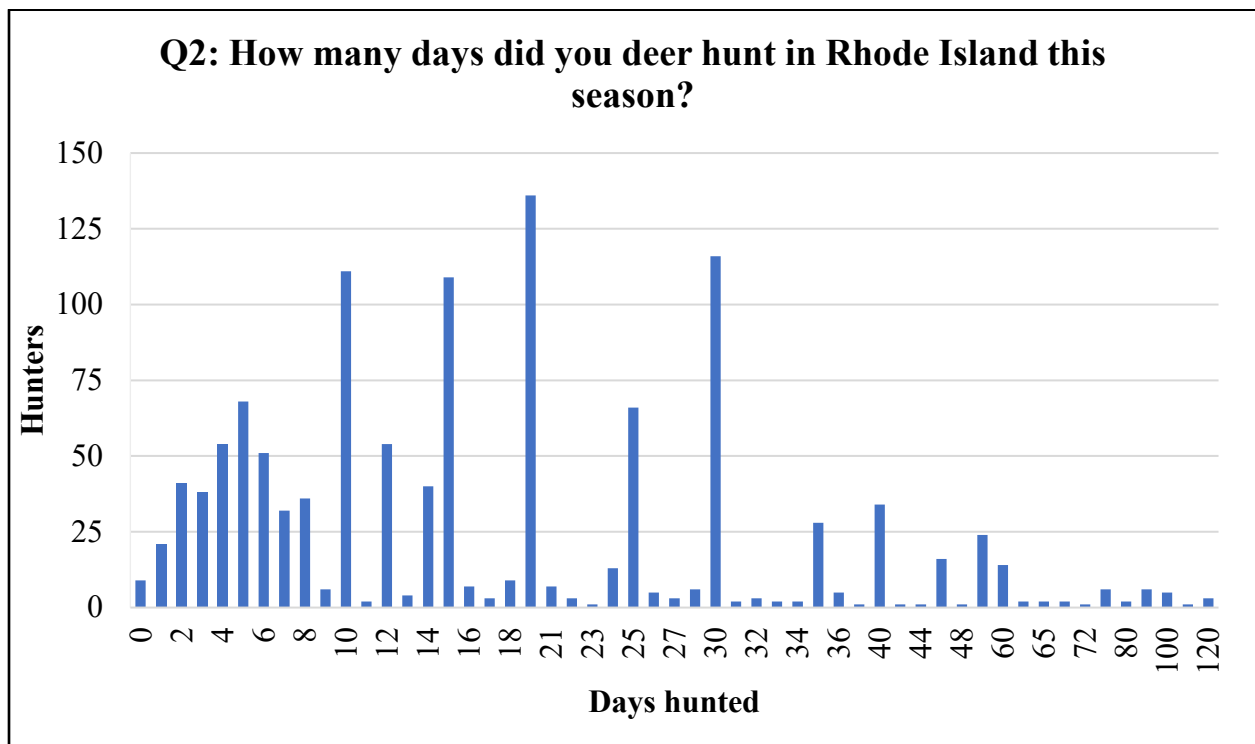


Figure 2. Out of 1,215 responses, just under 40% of hunters spent 10 days or less hunting. Another 30% spent between 11- and 20-days hunting while the remaining 31% spent over 21 days hunting.

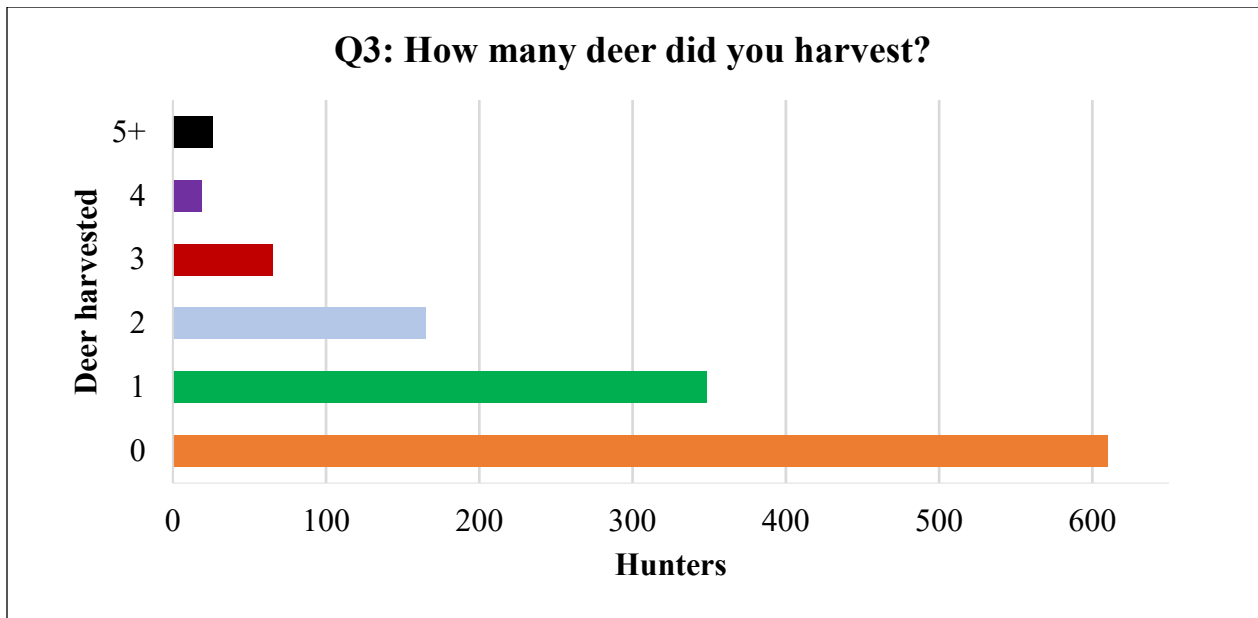


Figure 3. Out of 1,233 responses, the majority (49%) of hunters did not harvest a deer this season.

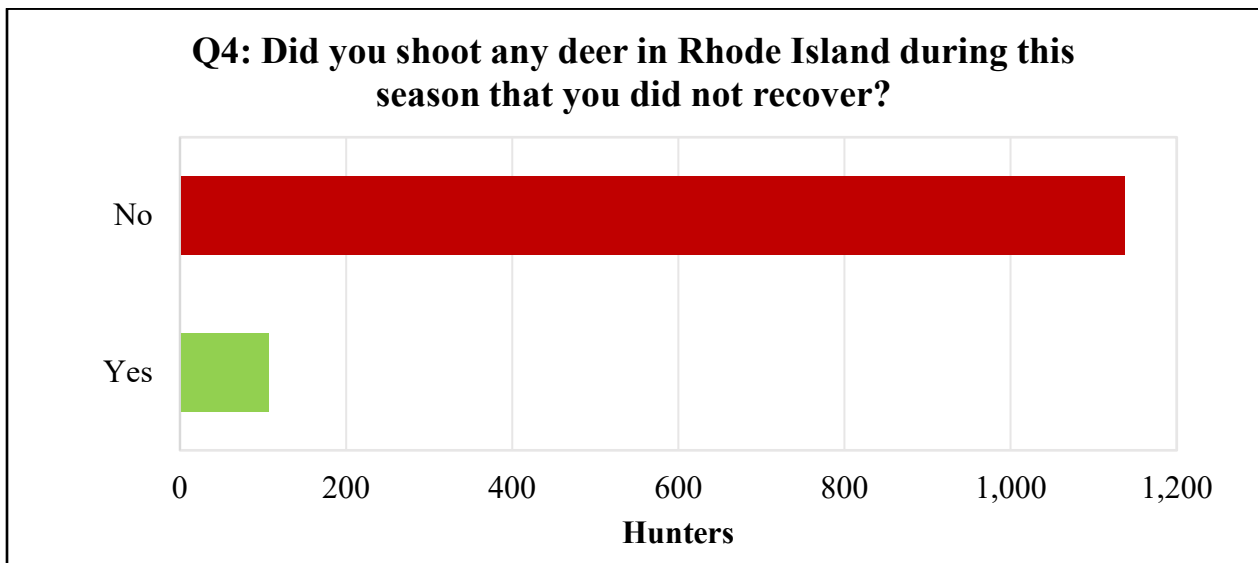


Figure 4. Out of 1,244 responses, 9% of hunters did not recover a deer they attempted to harvest.

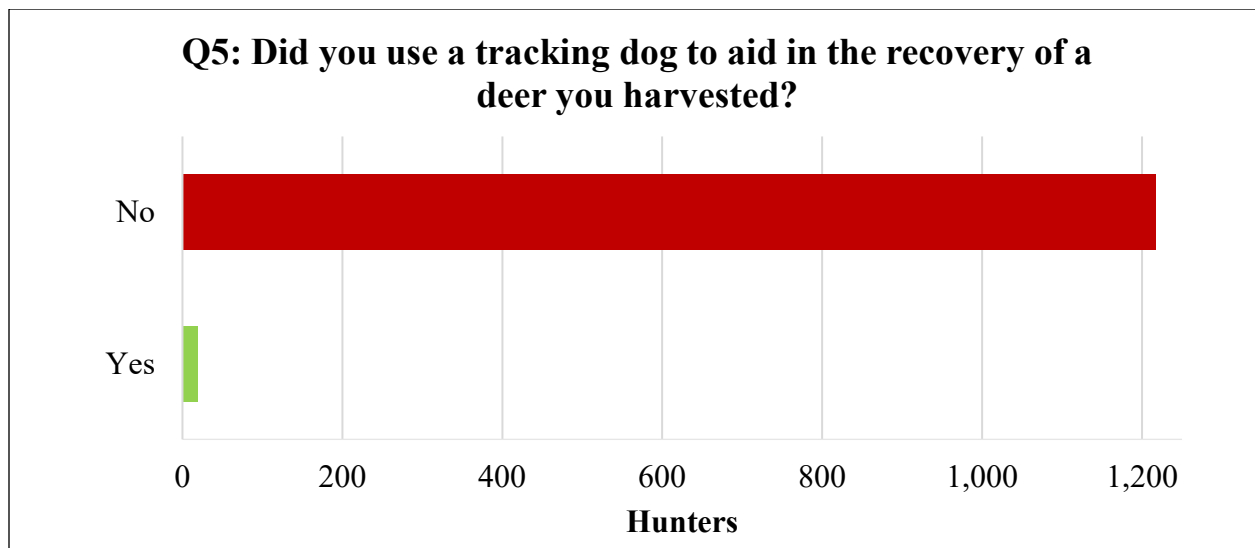


Figure 5. Out of 1,238 responses, only 20 individuals used a dog as a tracking aid to recover a deer. As this was only the first year this was allowed it is expected to increase into the future.

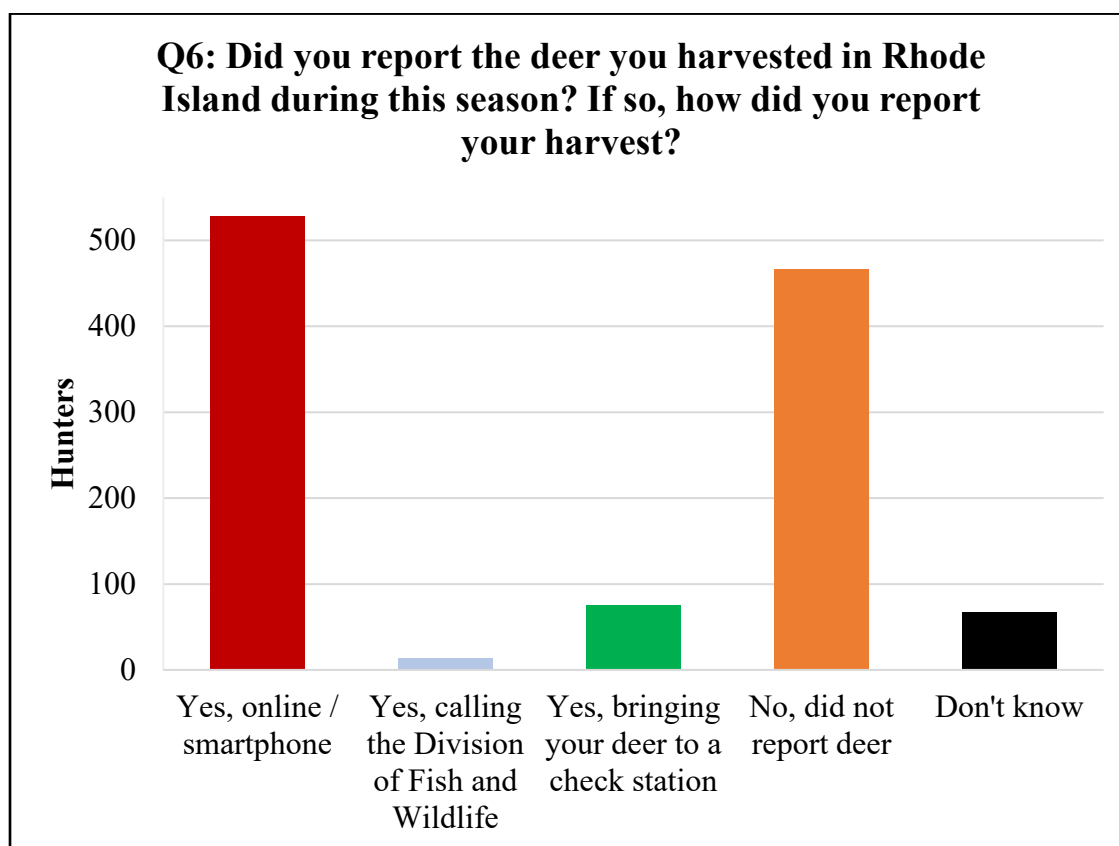


Figure 6. Out of 1,149 responses, nearly half (40%) of did not report their deer harvest. As a reminder, per regulation, **all hunters are required to report their deer harvest to DFW.**

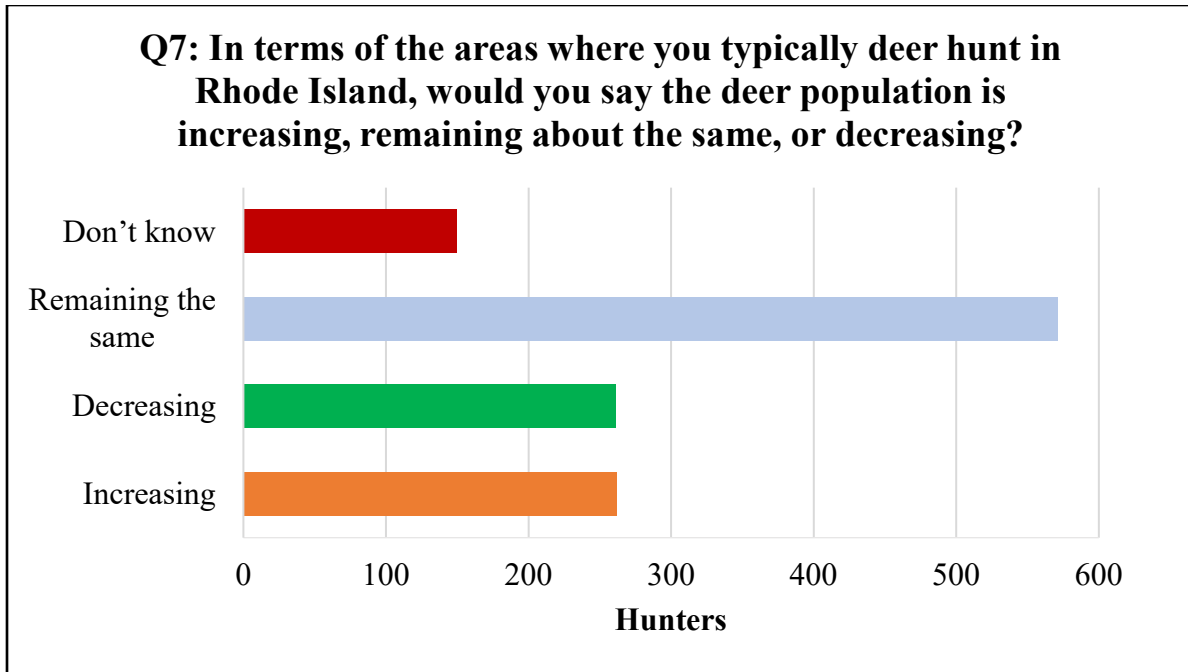


Figure 7. Out of 1,244 responses, 45% of deer hunters believe the deer population remains the same.

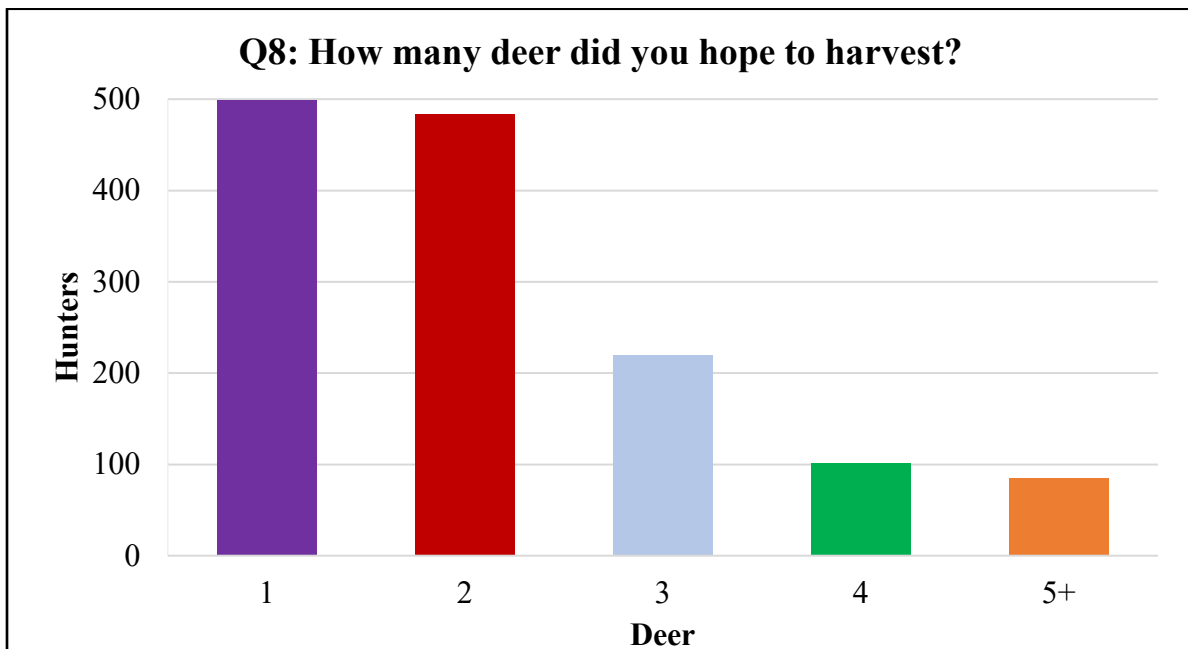


Figure 8. Out of 1,388 responses, 70% of deer hunters hope to harvest 2 deer or less each year.

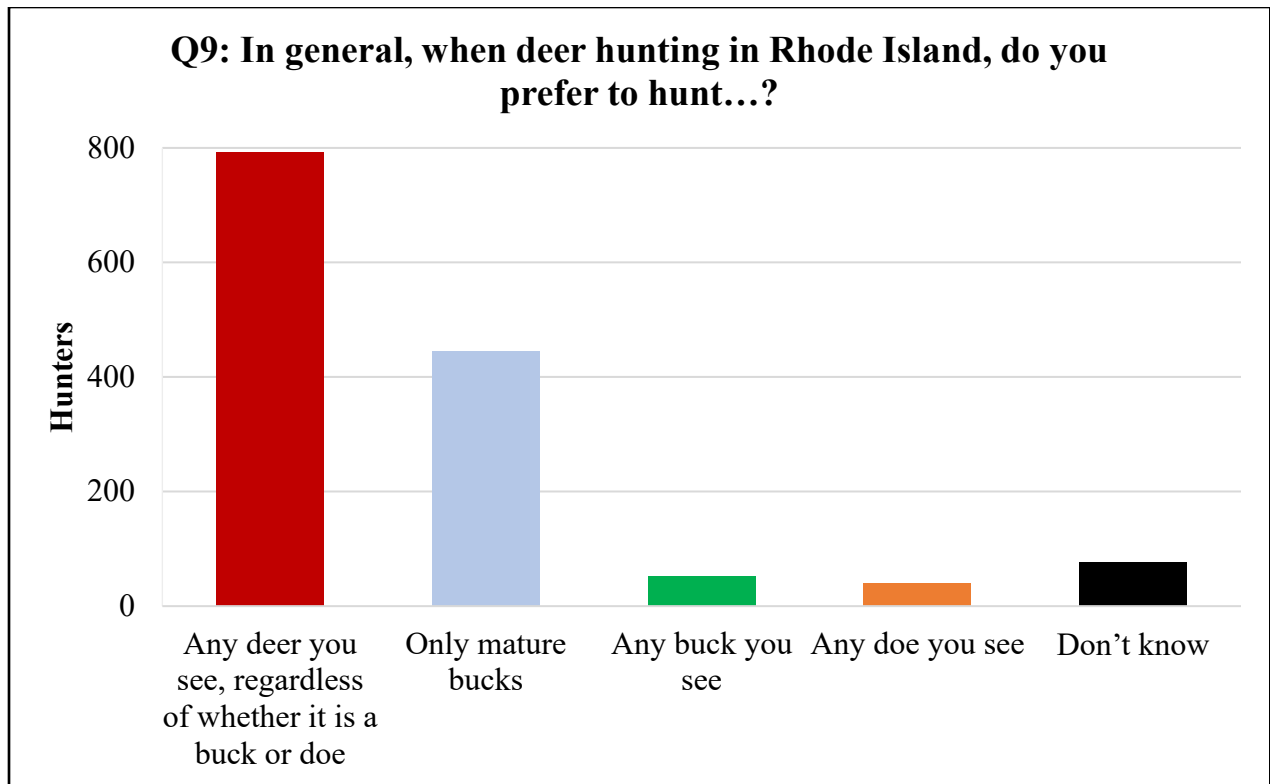


Figure 9. Out of 1,405 responses, the majority of deer hunters (56%) prefer to harvest any deer they see.

Q10: Over the past several years, have you brought any harvested deer to a Division of Fish and Wildlife check station?

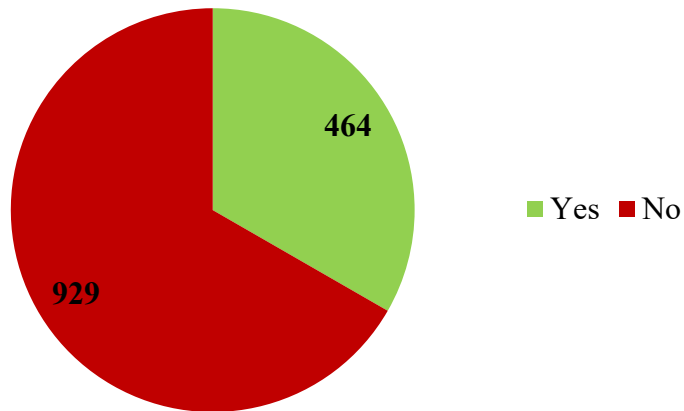


Figure 10. Out of 1,393 responses, 66% of hunters have brought their deer to a check station. All deer taken during the first two days (Saturday & Sunday) of the Muzzleloader Deer Season, and the first two days (Saturday & Sunday) of Shotgun Deer Season, including deer taken with archery equipment, must be physically checked at a state operated biological check station, except those deer taken on Patience, Prudence, and Block Island, which must be reported using the online licensing system. Hunters bringing their deer to a check station DO NOT need to report their harvest online prior to going to the check station.

Deer check stations are the main way the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) monitors the deer herd. The DFW collects biological data such as age, weight, and antler beam measurements and Chronic Wasting Disease tissue samples that cannot be collected from online/phone reports. This collection of information is being used to evaluate overall population health. In order to increase hunter satisfaction by reducing wait time and travel time to and from check stations, there will be a new location open for this year's muzzleloader and shotgun deer check station period. **The new Smithfield Sportsman Club Check Station will be located at 14 Walter Carey Rd, Smithfield, RI 02917 (41.8786, -71.5346).** In addition, Durfee Hill Check Station will be closed for renovations. **George Washington Management Area will be open as a Check Station, 2185 Putnam Pike, Chepachet, (41.919437, -71.759970) in replacement of Durfee Hill Check Station while the renovation is underway.**

Operating hours:

November 2 & 3: 8:00am until **8:00pm**

December 7 & 8: 8:00am until 6:00pm



**Scan to view Deer Check
Station Map**

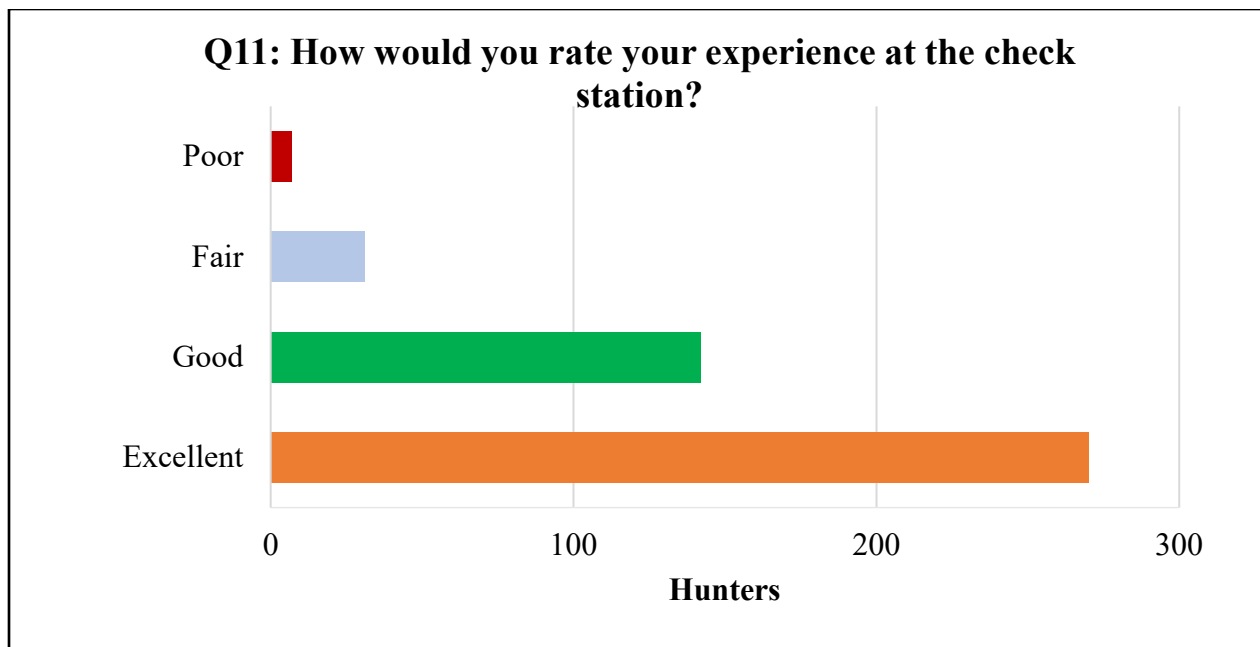


Figure 11. Out of 450 responses, 91% of hunters stated their experience at check station was excellent or good. However, the DFW is still actively working to increase satisfaction by reducing wait times by creating another check station as mentioned above.

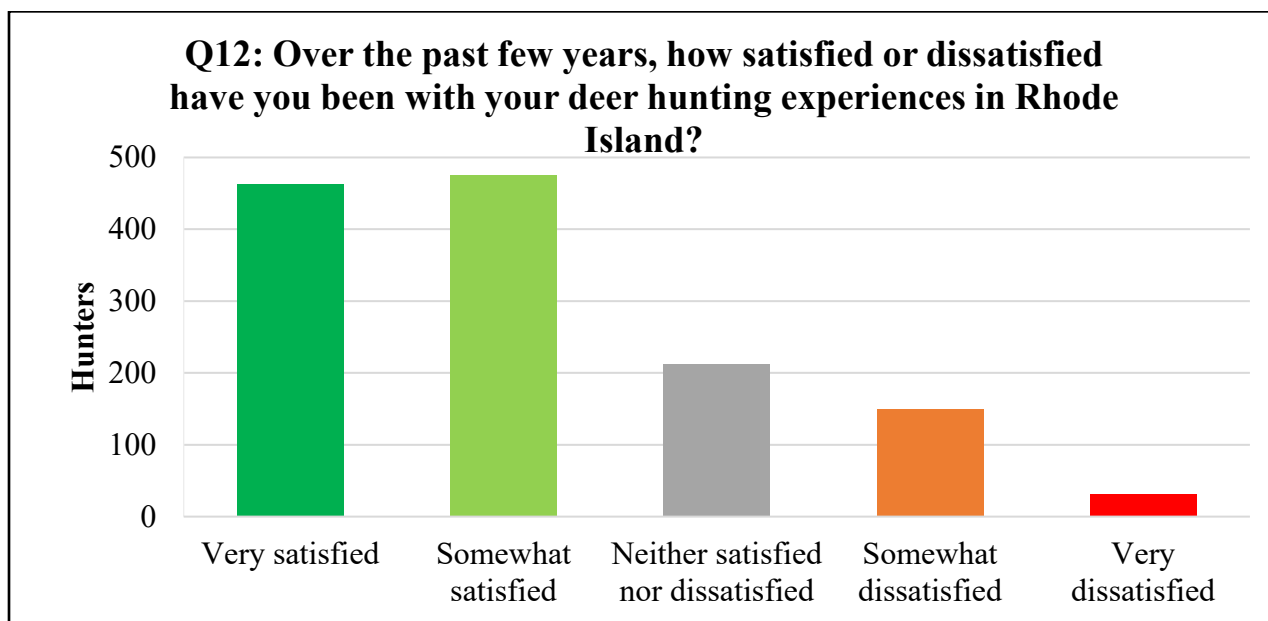


Figure 12. Out of 1,332 responses, only 2% of deer hunters are very dissatisfied and 11% are somewhat dissatisfied with their deer hunting experience in Rhode Island.

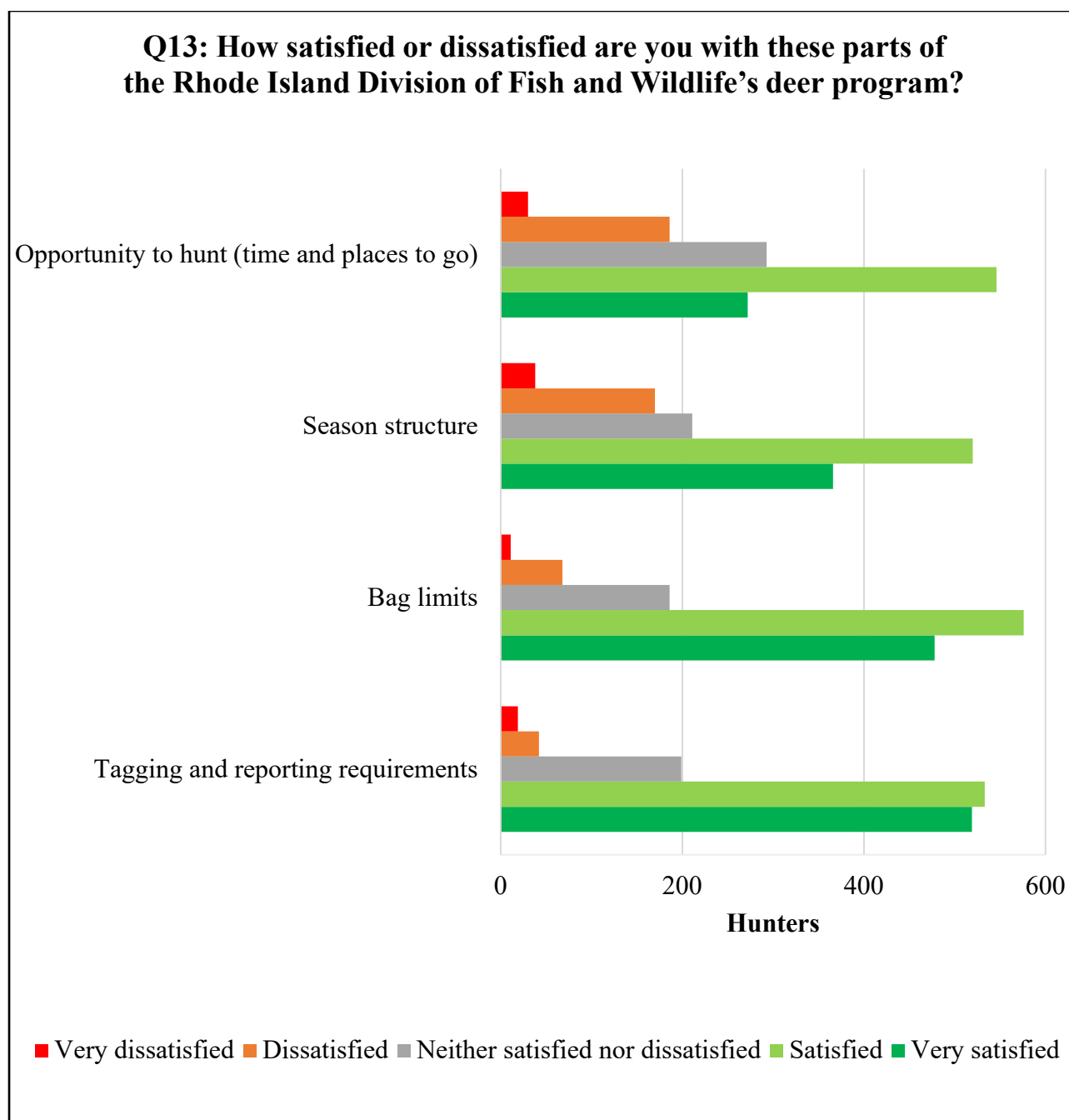


Figure 13. Out of 1,335 responses, both “Tagging and reporting requirements” and “Bag limits” stood out with the highest satisfaction levels, as 80% indicated they were either very satisfied or satisfied. However, “Season structure” and “Opportunity to hunt” had slightly lower satisfaction levels at 67% and 71%, respectively.

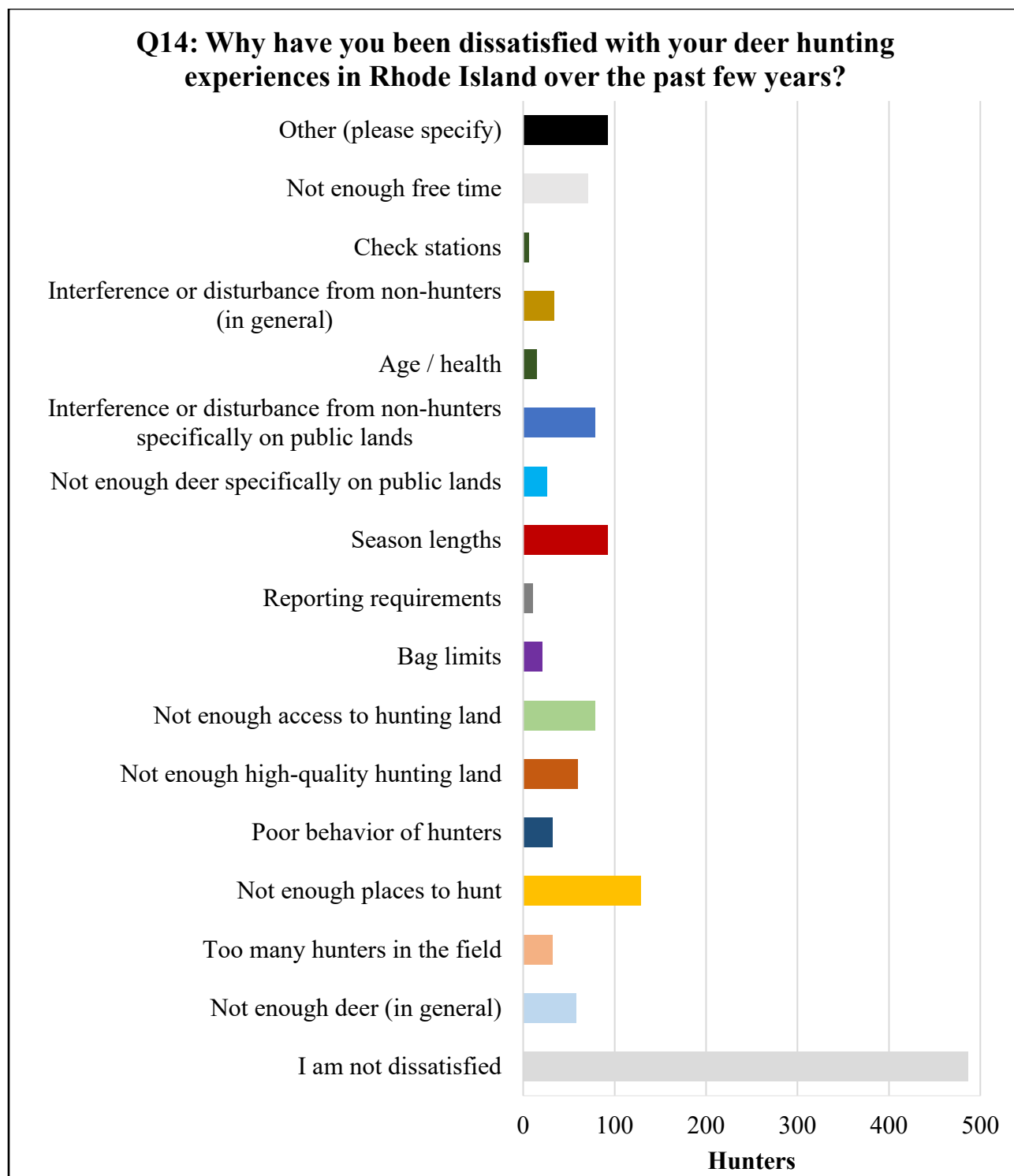


Figure 14. Out of 1,326 responses, the majority (36%) of responses stated they are not dissatisfied with their deer hunting experiences in Rhode Island. The largest dissatisfaction at 9% came from hunting expressing there are not enough places too hunt. The DFW recently opened 5 new cooperative archery deer hunting properties in Bristol and is continually seeking opportunities like this to increase hunting areas.

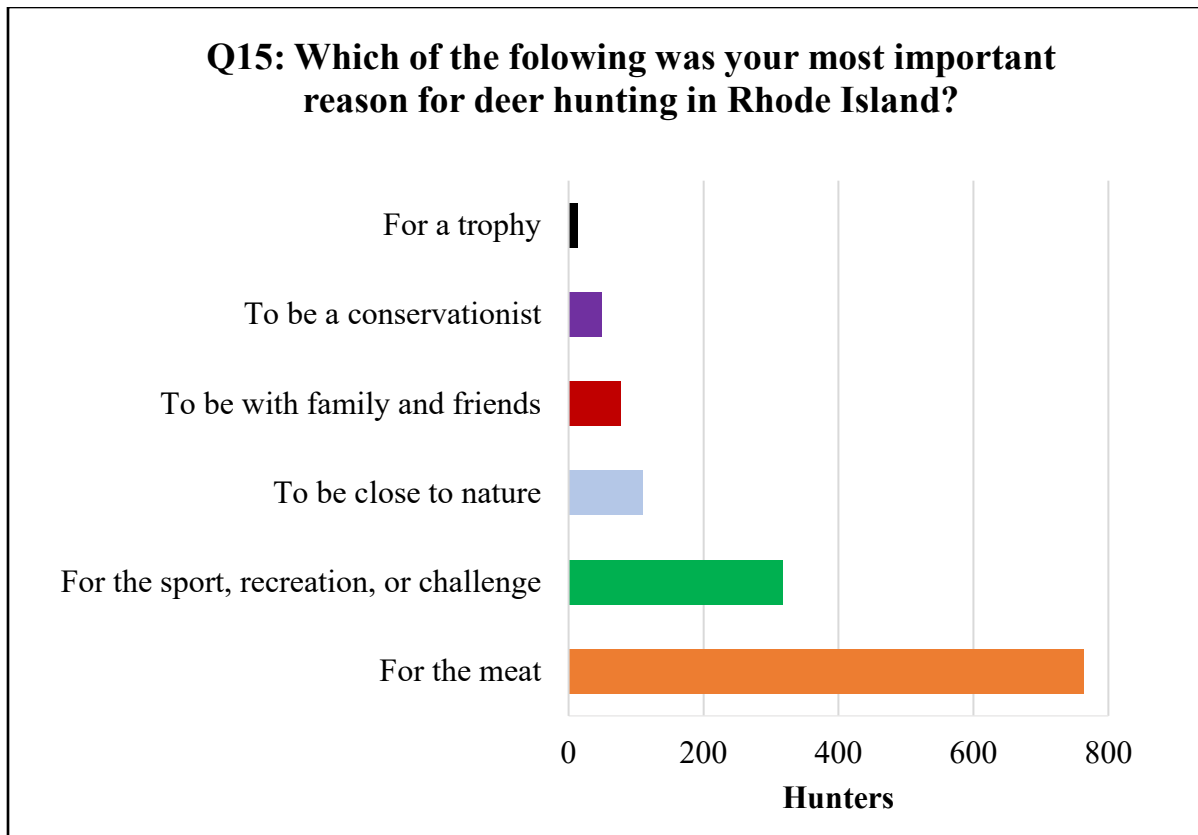


Figure 15. Out of 1,334 responses, over half (57%) stated the most important reason for deer hunting is for the meat. Conversely, only 1% stated they deer hunt for a trophy.

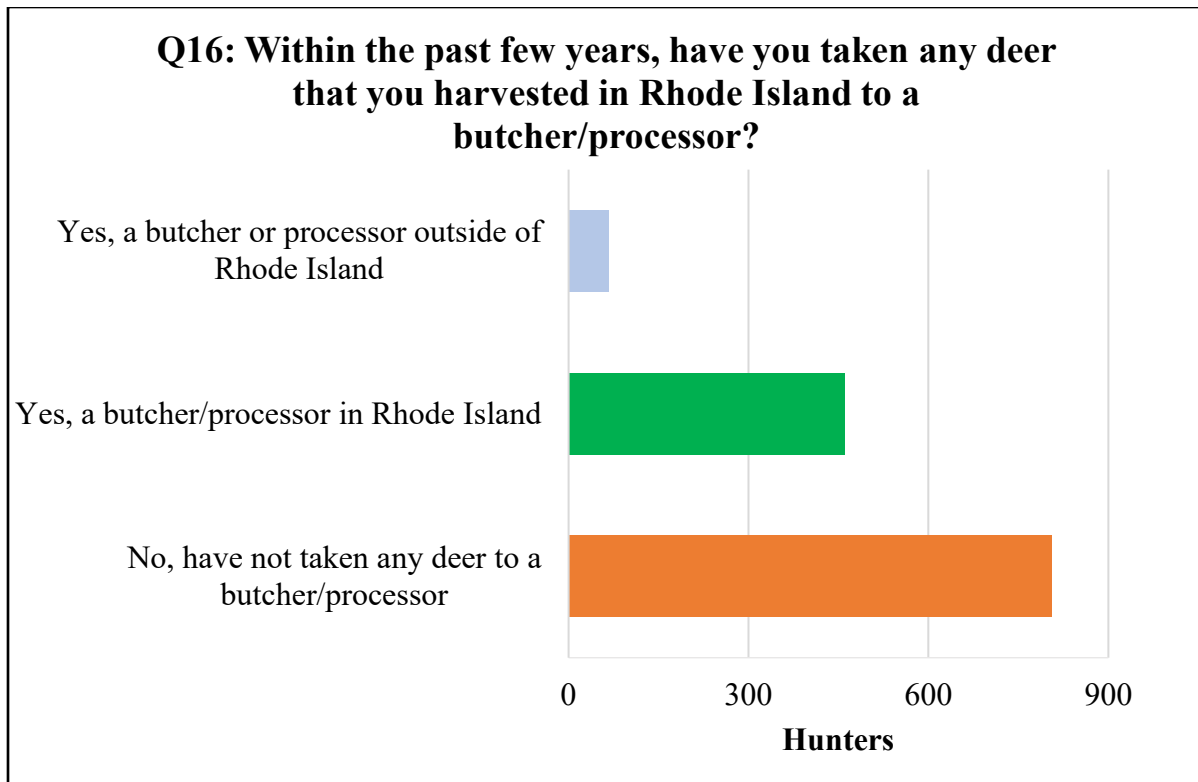


Figure 16. Out of 1,332 responses, 40% of hunters are bringing their deer to a deer processor. The DFW Hunter Education Program offers a Deer Processing Workshop for those who may be interested. If so, please contact our Hunter Education staff at 401-539-0013 for details. Here is a list of known deer processors in Rhode Island.

Deer Processors

Harvest Moon Processing- Don Wiitala: 401-374-3643, Charlestown, RI

Joe Barrette: 401-965-3829, West Greenwich, RI

Quality Cutting: 401-749-6654, Pascoag, RI

Rivers Edge Farm: 401-829-6149 / 401-486-9575, Smithfield, RI

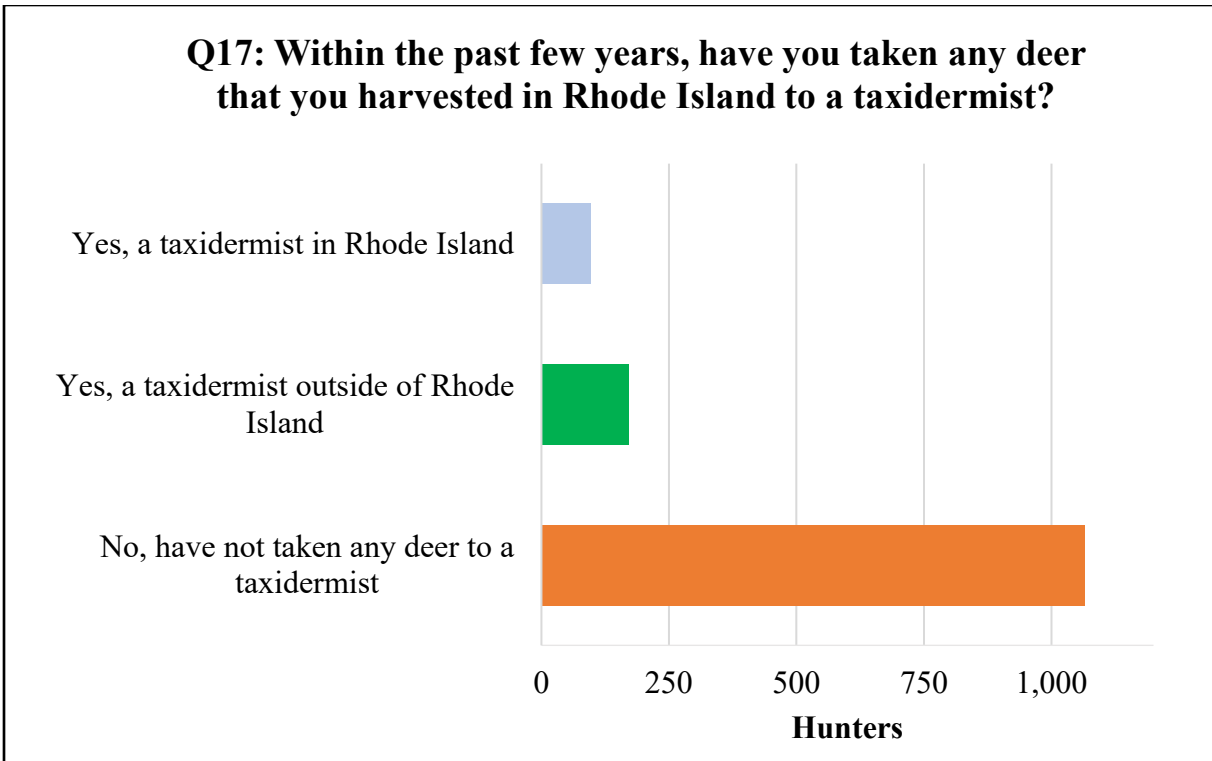


Figure 17. Out of 1,336 responses, 20% of hunters are bringing their deer to a taxidermist. Here is a list of known taxidermists in and close to Rhode Island. Most hunters who bring deer to taxidermists are mature males, the most likely deer to be infected with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and therefore the most valuable for CWD testing. If you would like your deer tested for CWD, feel free to contact DFW at 401-789-0281 or contact dylan.ferreira@dem.ri.gov. Here is a list of known taxidermists in and near Rhode Island.

Taxidermists

After the Shot Taxidermy: 508-947-5455, Middleboro, MA

Headquarters Taxidermy: 508-763-8571, Rochester, MA

It's a Trophy: 860-961-8250, Groton, CT

Joe Pagona: 401-808-0452, North Scituate, RI

North American Game Taxidermy: 508-493-4447, Somerset, MA

Northeast Taxidermy: 860-613-2067, Middletown, CT

Wes Johnson: 401-333-9872 / 401-640-6021 Lincoln, RI

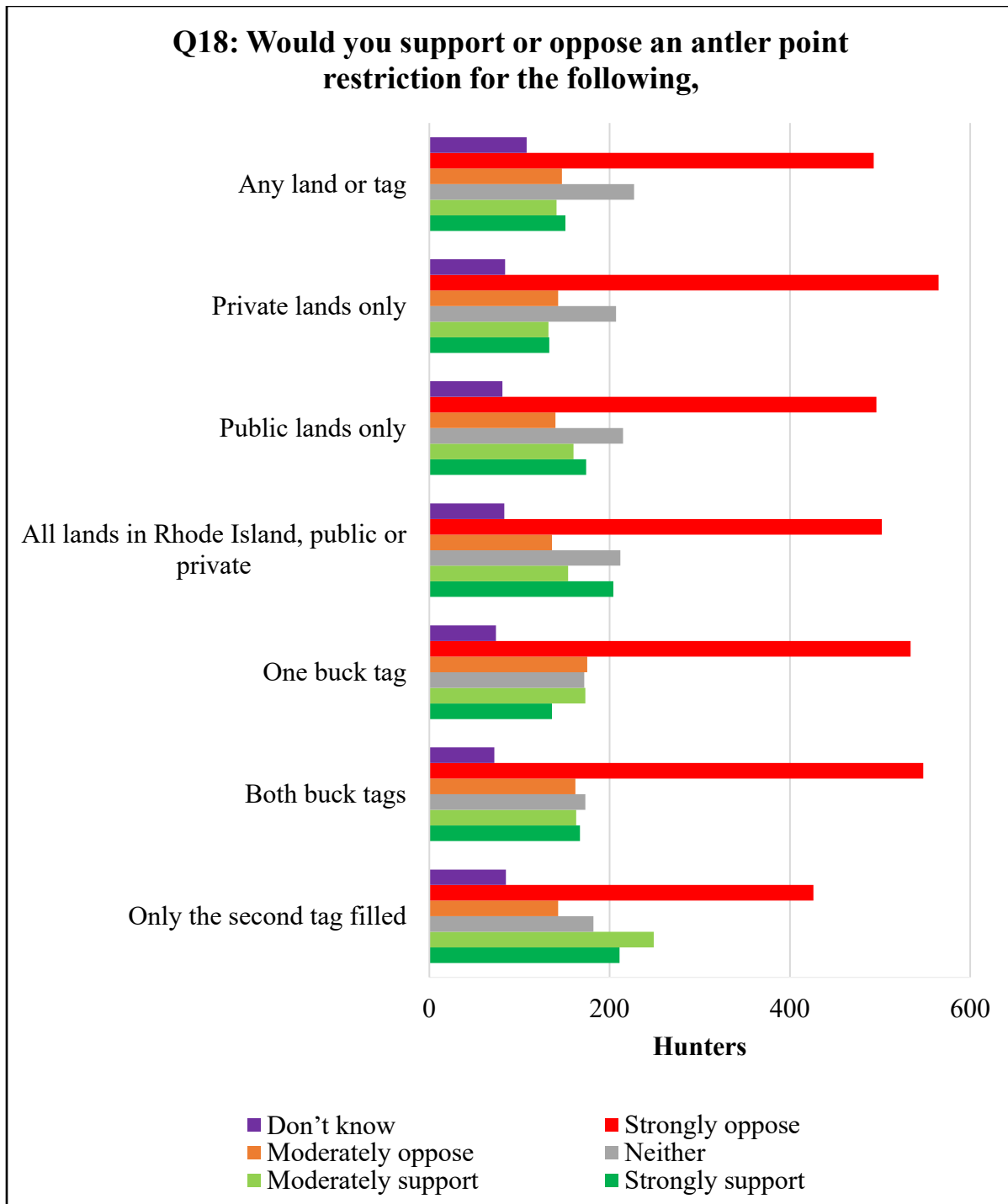


Figure 18. Out of 1,338 responses, all antler point restrictions, except for “Only the second filled tag,” faced strong or moderate opposition from over 50% of deer hunters, while receiving strong or moderate support from 25% of them. The antler point restriction “Only the second tag filled” was opposed by 44% and supported by 35% of respondents.

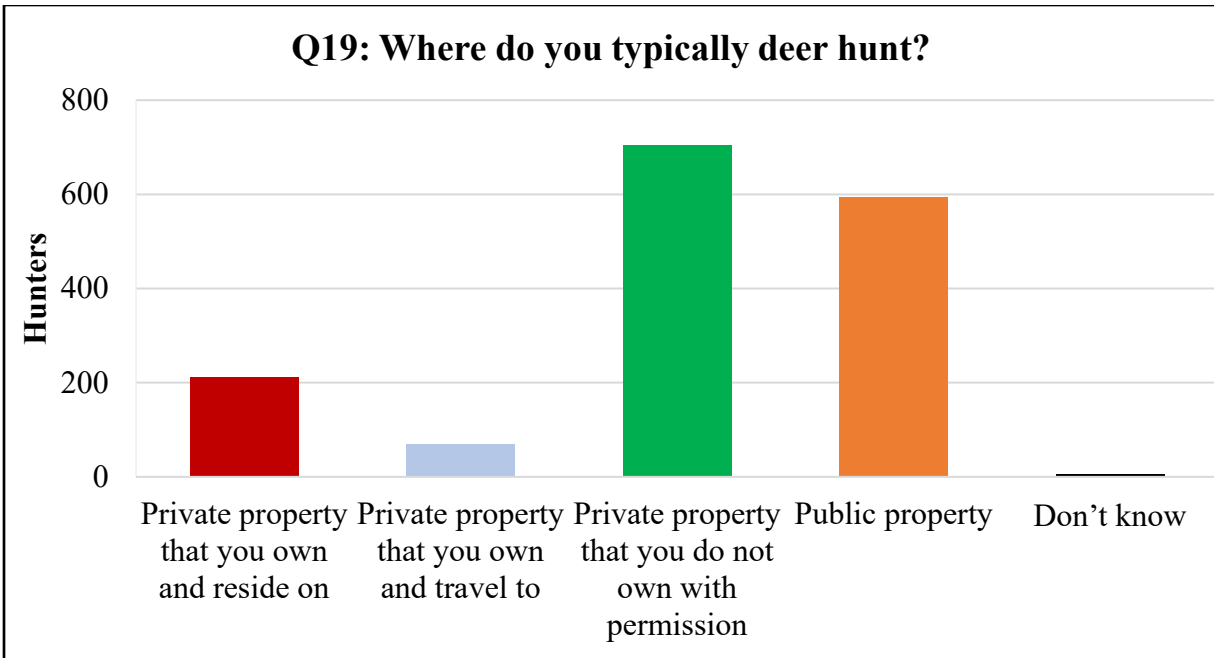


Figure 19. Out of 1,336 responses, the majority of deer hunters hunt on private property. This correlates with data from deer harvest reports in which ~75% deer harvest occurs on private property annually.

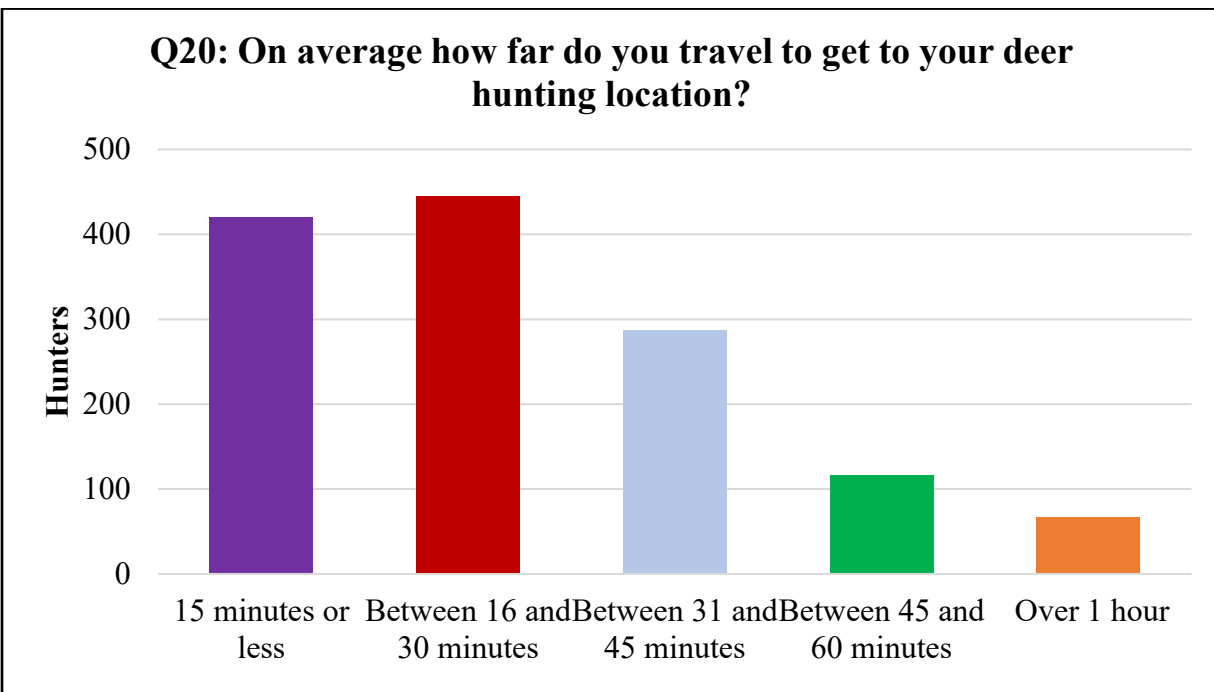


Figure 20. Out of 1,335 responses, over half (64%) of respondents are traveling under 30 minutes to their hunting location.

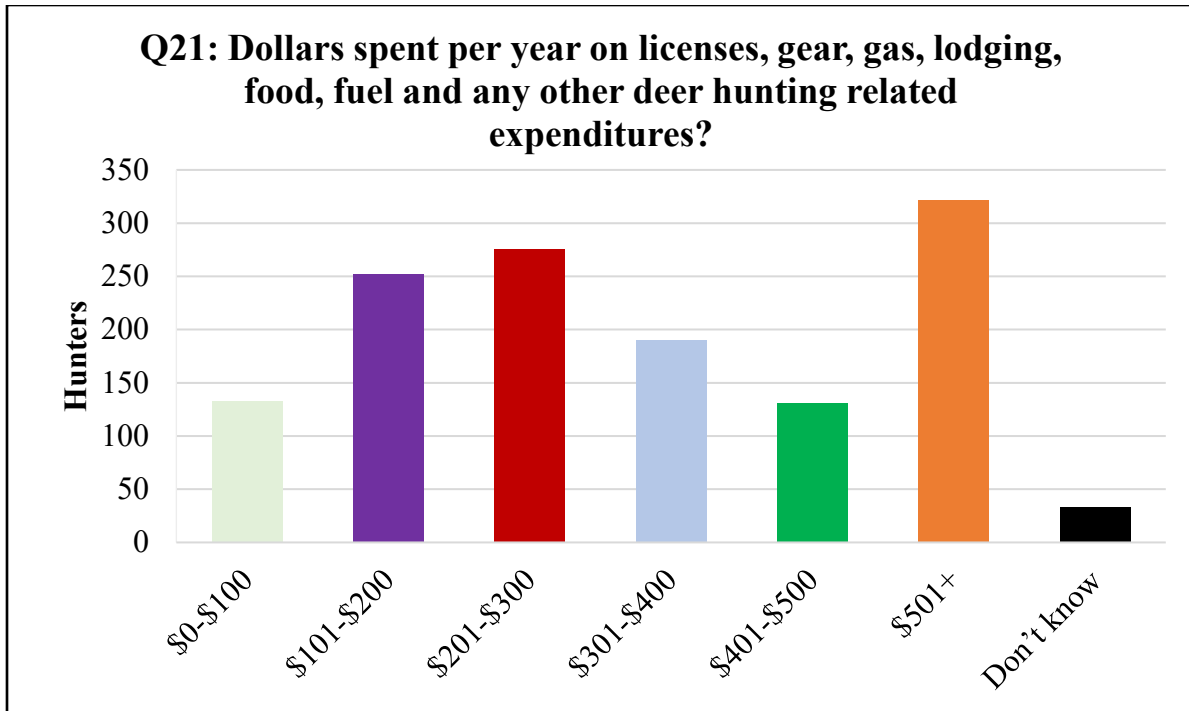


Figure 21. Out of 1,337 responses, there was a wide variety of dollars spent on hunting expenditures. Using the midpoint of each range, (i.e., \$50 for \$0-\$100) multiplied by the number of hunters selecting each category, 1,337 hunters spent \$400,000. As there was no midpoint for the “\$501+” category, \$501 was used.

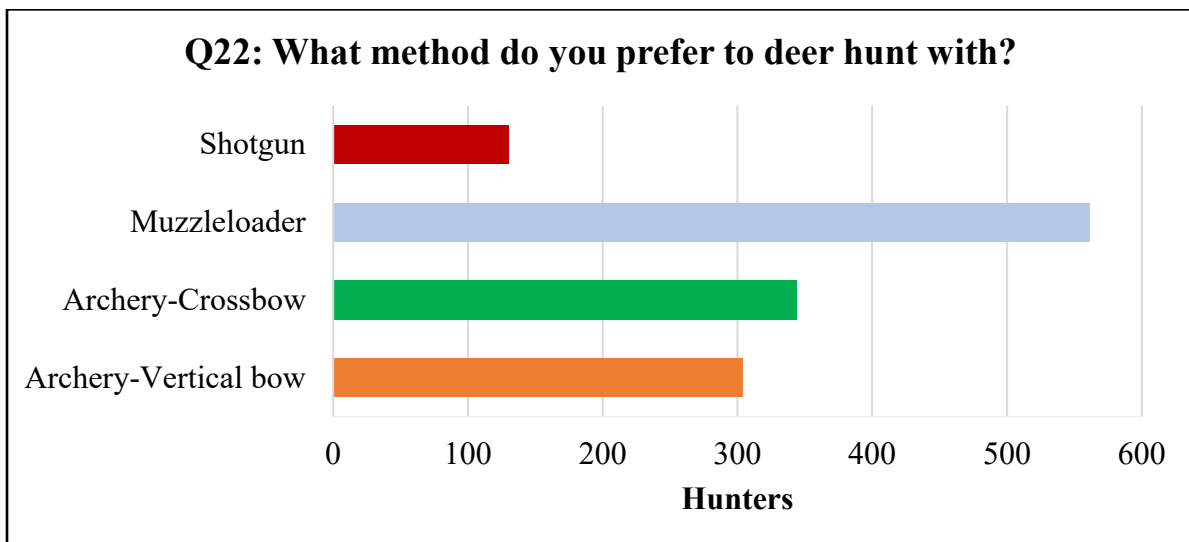


Figure 22. Out of 1,339 responses, the majority of deer hunters prefer to hunt with muzzleloader (41%). However, if vertical bow (22%) and crossbow (25%) are combined (47%), they exceed muzzleloader. As stated with private land harvest, this correlates with our hunter harvest as all archery methods combined and muzzleloader are similar each year.

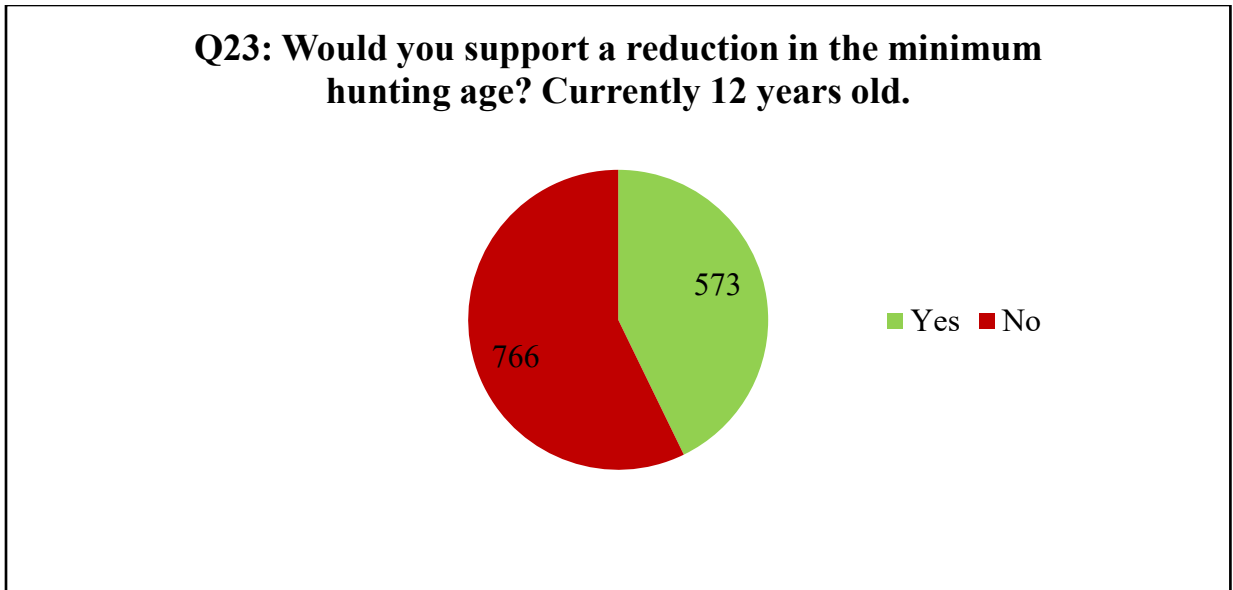


Figure 23. Out of 1,339 responses, 57% of hunters would not support a reduction in the current minimum hunting age of 12 years old.

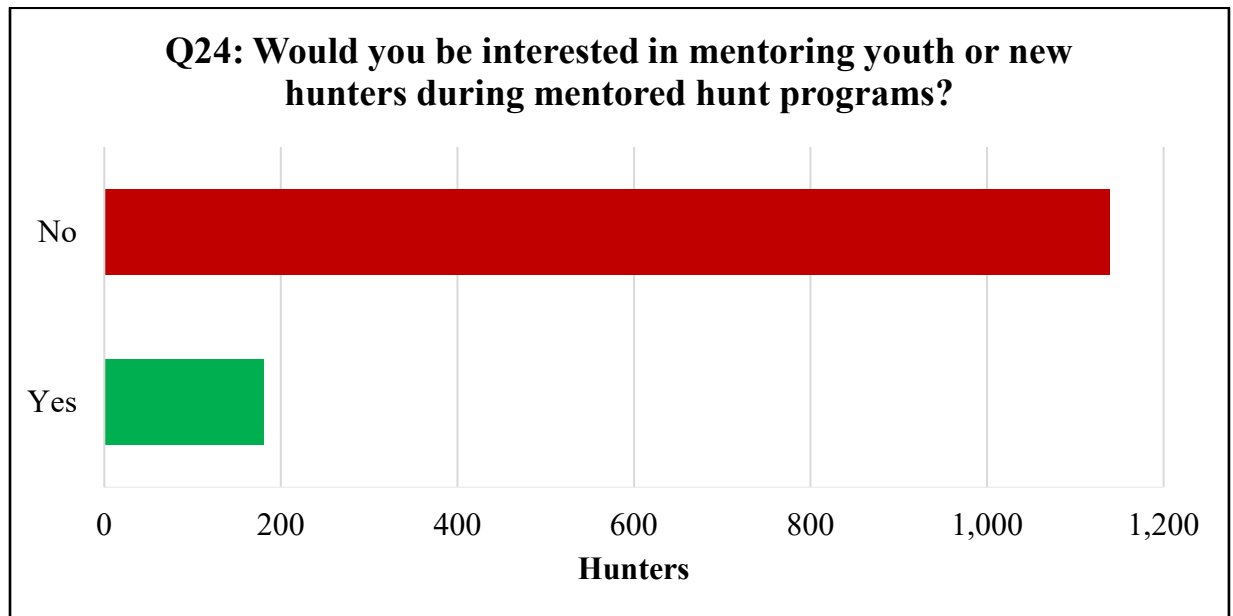


Figure 24. Out of 1,320 responses, 13% of hunters would be interested in mentoring new hunters during mentored hunting programs. If you are interested, please contact the Hunter Education staff at 401-539-0013.

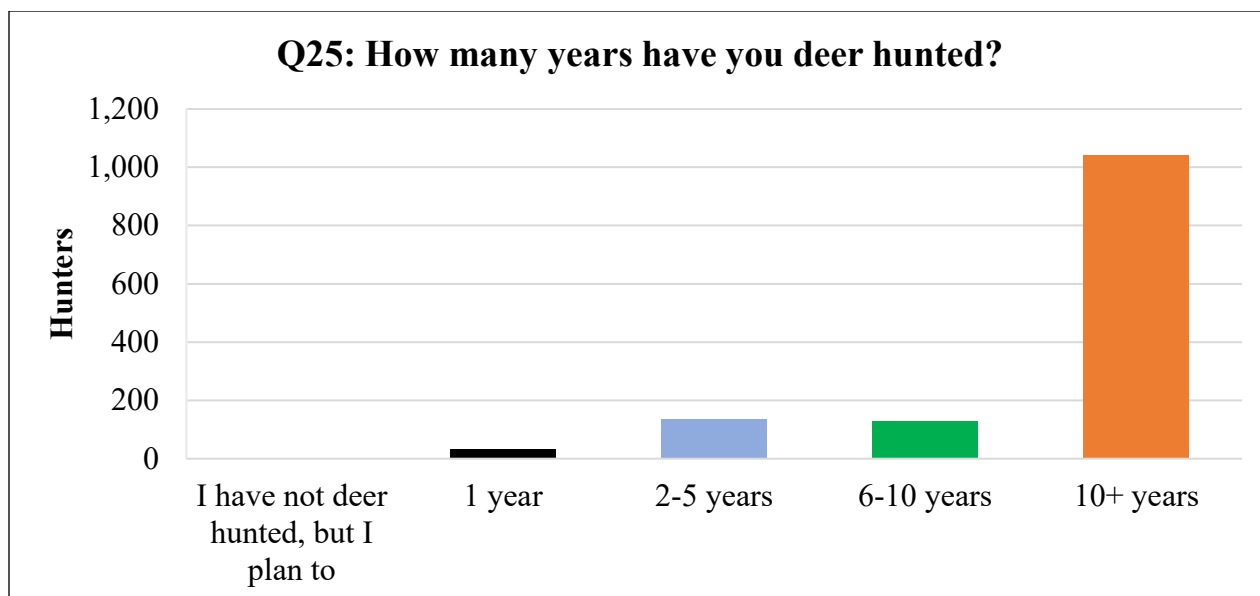


Figure 25. Out of 1,339 responses, the majority (77%) of respondents stated they have been hunting for over 10 years.

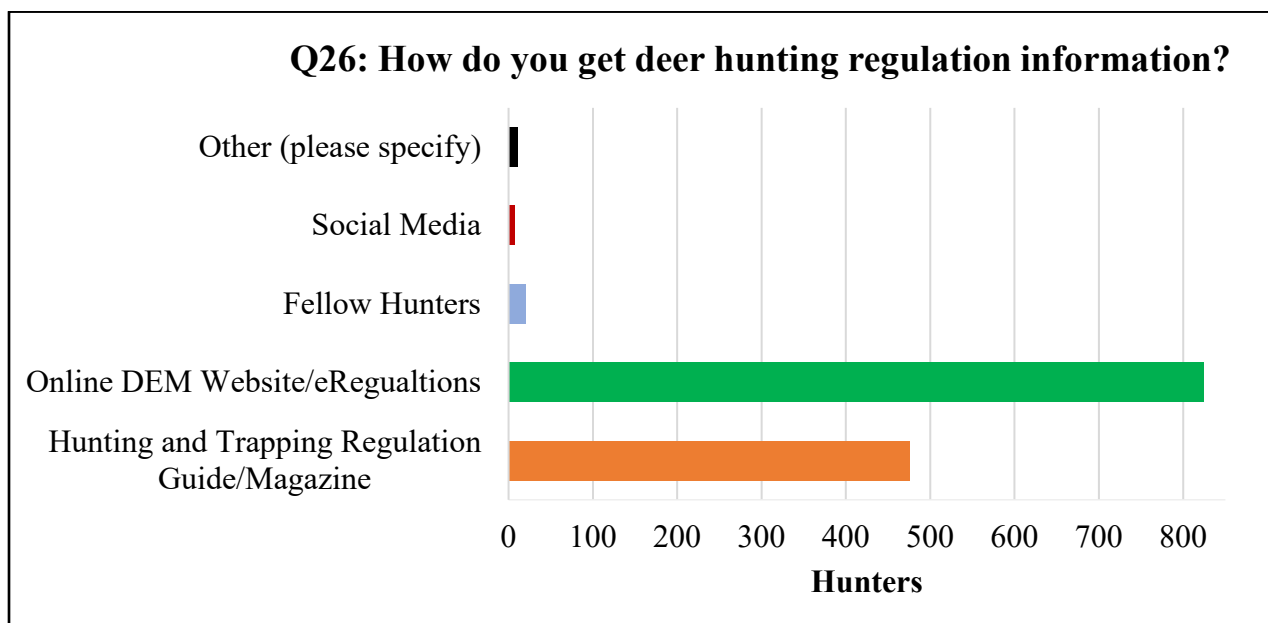


Figure 26. Out of 1,340 responses, the majority of respondents are accessing hunting regulations online from DEM's website/eRegualtions. The Hunting and Trapping Regulation Guide/Magazine was used by 35% of hunters. This offers all season dates, bag limits, outreach information and other critical news relating to hunting and trapping. Arguably most importantly, it outlines the latest significant changes for the upcoming hunting and trapping season. Copies are available at the Office of Boat Registration & Licensing, 235 Promenade St, Room 360, Providence, RI, and at the Division of Fish and Wildlife Field Headquarters, 277 Great Neck Road, West Kingston, RI 02892, as well as at all locations where hunting licenses are sold and online.

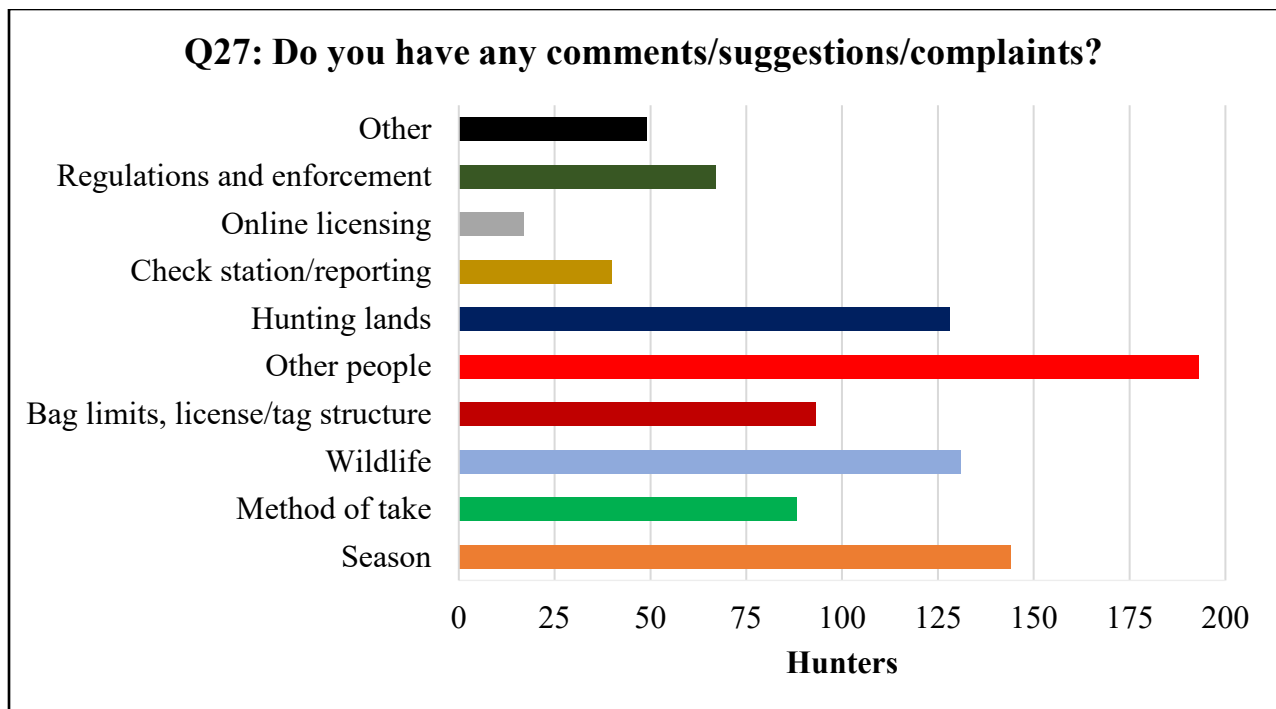


Figure 27. Out of 943 responses, there was a wide variety of comments submitted. The top commented on subject was other people and how they use Wildlife Management Areas. In the order from highest to lowest in that category comments included preventing non hunters from using the lands during hunting season (20), seeing too many mountain bikers (20), and people not wearing orange (18). The most common suggestion was to have antler point restrictions (29) followed by having a longer shotgun season (27). Some other common comments were expressing their satisfaction (16), increase hunting lands (15), stop the use of crossbows during archery season (14), open Zone 2 archery on September 15th (14), there are too many deer (14), need more deer (13), and don't allow antler point restrictions (12). As you can tell from the mention of antler point restrictions, number of deer, and crossbows, there are many conflicting opinions across the state for varying topics.

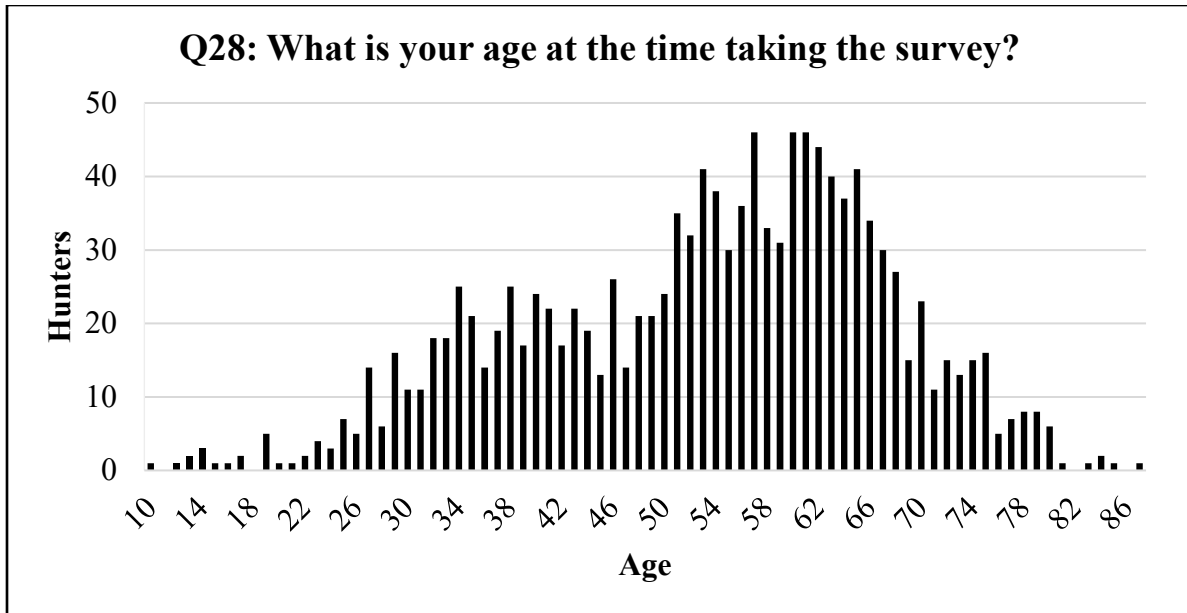


Figure 28. Out of 1,293 responses, the majority of hunters range from the age of 51 to 70 years old, containing 55% of respondents.

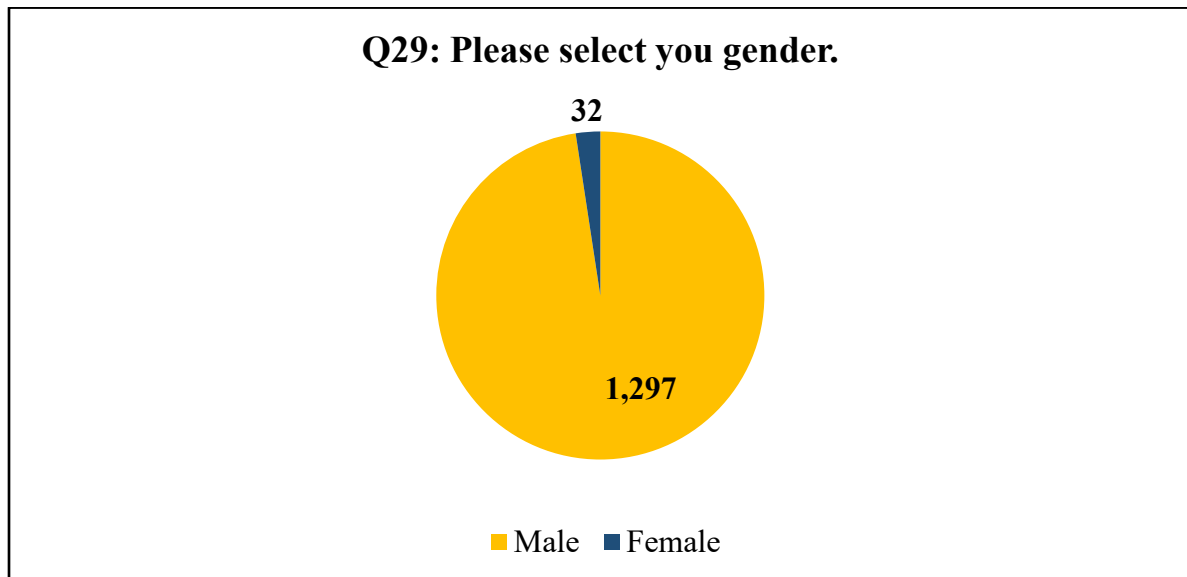


Figure 29. Out of 1,329 responses, the vast majority (97%) of hunters were male.

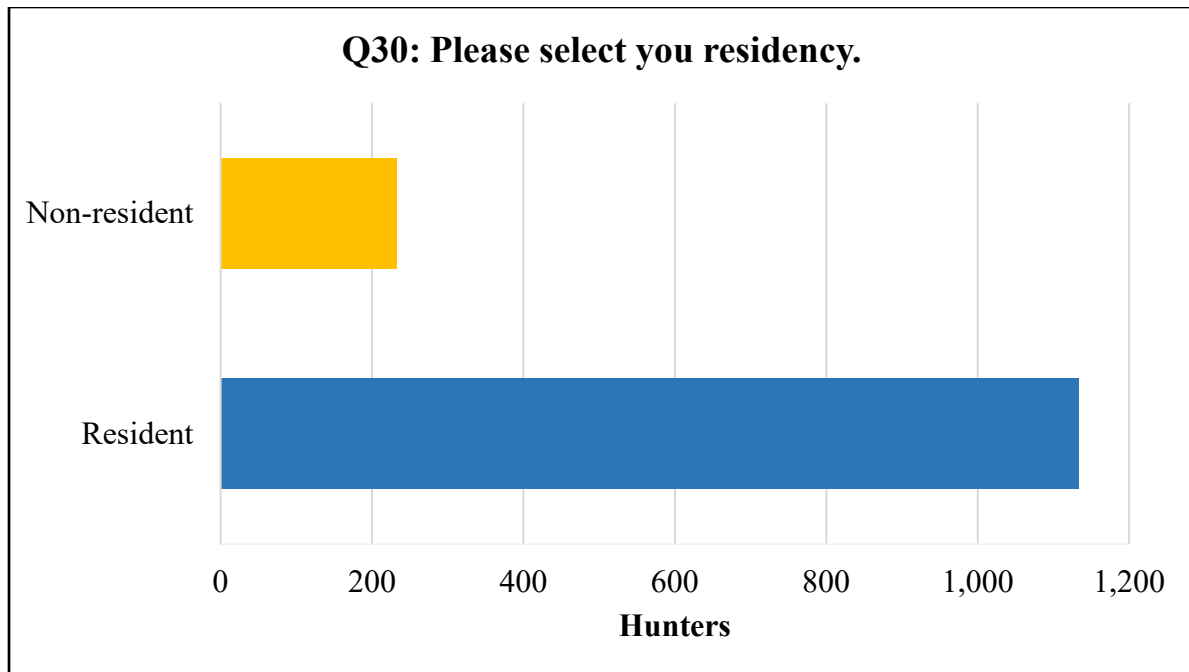


Figure 30. Out of 1,336 responses, 84% of the hunters were residents of Rhode Island.