

Northwest 12 APR update

The recently released 2015 Annual Hunter Survey report from the Michigan DNR, provides us with data from the third season in which 12 counties in the Northwest lower peninsula of Michigan have been under mandatory Antler Point restrictions.

During the campaign that occurred while the sponsoring stakeholder group was promoting the concept of mandatory APR's in the NLP, the suggestion was made that APR's might help to retain hunters and/or increase hunter participation, which in turn could have a positive economic impact on those areas of the NLP which have seen substantial decreases in hunter participation over the last 10 -15 years.

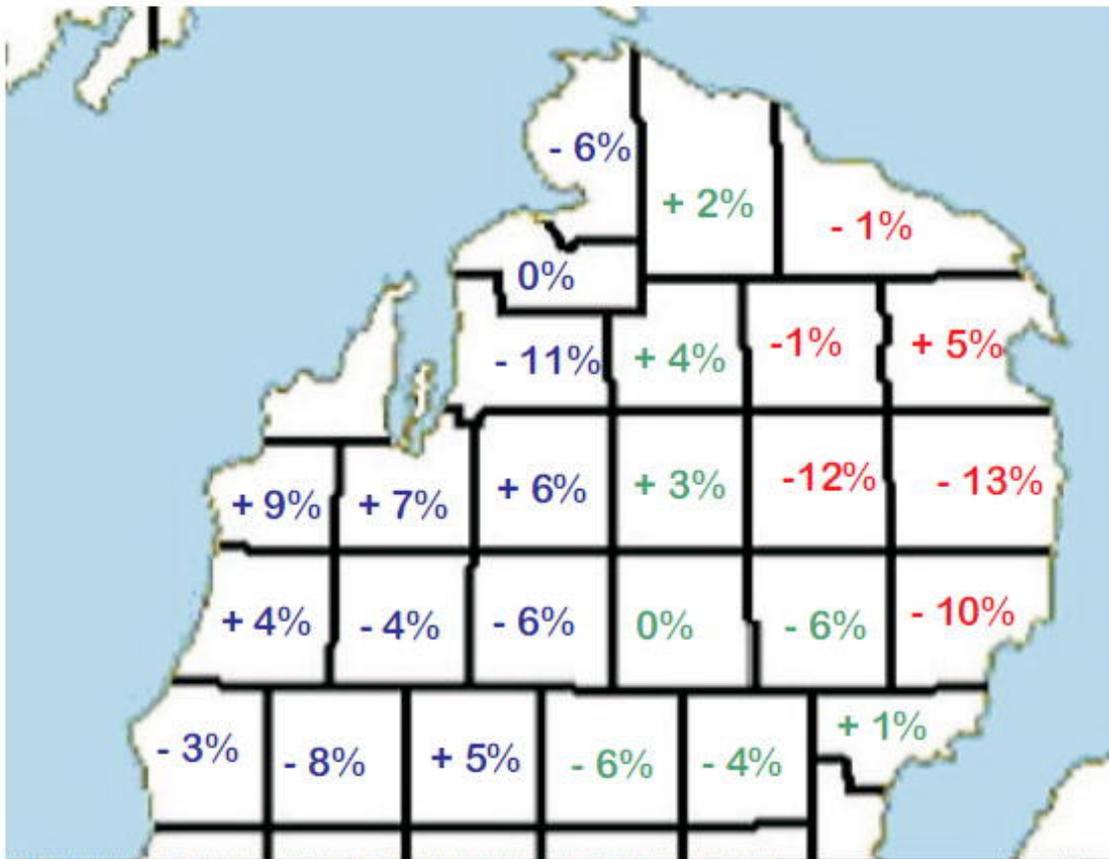
In this update we look at changes and possible trends that have occurred in the NW12 APR counties since those regulations were implemented, focusing on hunter participation and antlered buck harvest.

For control purposes, we compared the NW12 counties to two other groups of counties in the NLP, those counties which do not have mandatory APR's and a third group of counties that have Hunters Choice (HC) APR's. The numbers indicated on the following graphics indicate the percentage of change, either increase or decrease, averaging three years of data which has been compiled since the APR's were enacted in the NW12 counties starting in 2012, compared to a three year pre-APR baseline average.

DMU 045 (Leelanau County) and DMU 115 (Beaver Island) were not included in this analysis, as both of those counties have had mandatory APR's in effect, which pre-date those in the NW12. For comparison purposes, after three years of APR's in DMU 045 (compared to a 2 year baseline), hunter participation was down -4% and antlered buck harvest down -35%. In DMU 115 after 3 years of APR's, hunter participation was down -37% but antlered buck harvest was up +28%, although it should be noted that the relative numbers of hunters and deer harvested in that DMU are very small, so that incremental changes reflect fairly large changes percentage wise.

The first graphic shows the changes that have occurred regarding hunter participation.

NLP Hunter participation trends



Change in hunter numbers since
APR's were enacted in the NW12

Counties in Blue - APRs

Counties in Green - Non -APR

Counties in Red - HC APR's

NW12 Counties - Average loss/gain = -1%

Non-APR Counties Average loss/gain = -1%

HC APR Counties - Average loss/gain = -5%

Comparison of average of NW12 APR period to 3 year pre-APR baseline.

Data compiled from MDNR annual hunter survey reports 2010 - 2015.

The data indicates that of the NW12 APR group, 50% of the counties experienced a decrease in hunter participation, 8% saw no change and 42% saw an increase in hunter participation occur during the time period while mandatory APR's were in effect.

In the non-APR group of counties during the same time period, 38% of counties saw a decrease in hunter participation, 13% remained unchanged and 50% of counties saw an increase in hunter participation.

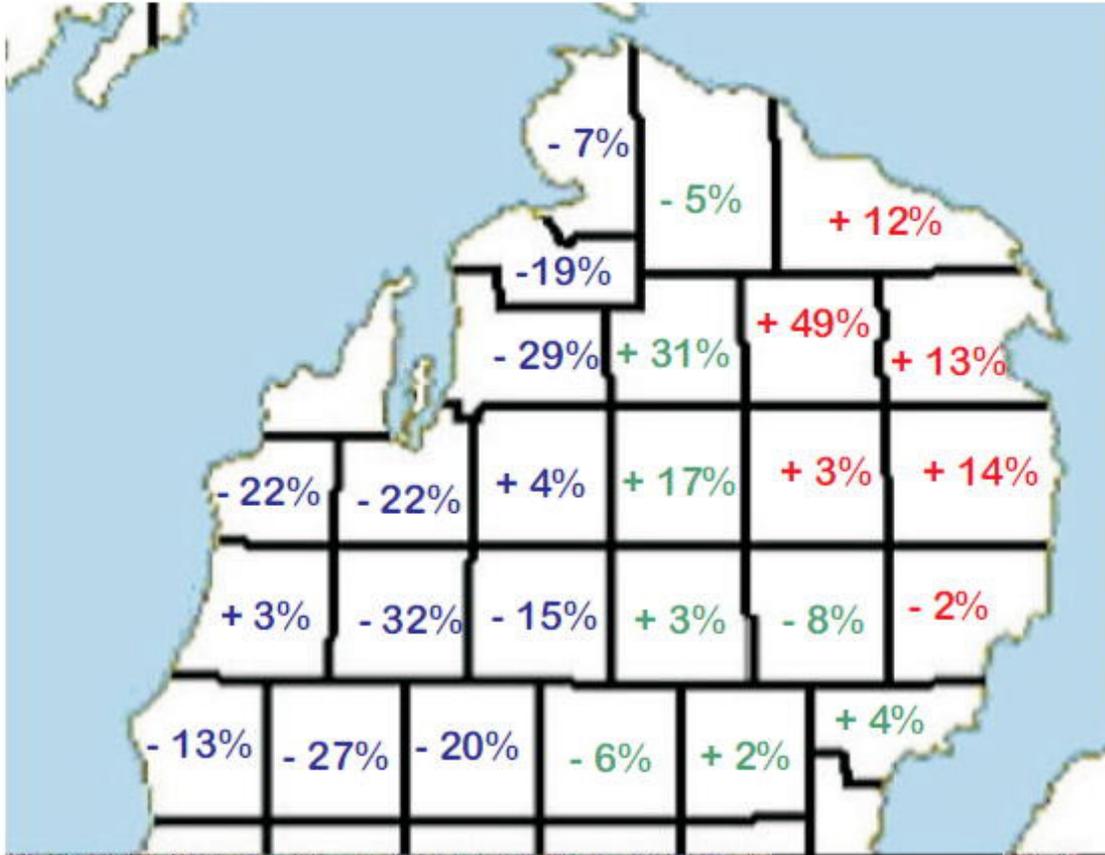
In the group of counties which had HC APR's in place, 83% of counties saw a decrease in hunter participation and 17% saw an increase.

Based on this data, there does not appear to be any clear correlation between mandatory APR's and hunter retention and/or recruitment in the NW12, to this point in time. That of course may change in future years as additional data is gathered but for now the suggestion that mandatory APR's could be a solution to the problem of hunter loss in the NLP remains unsupported.

Given the data that is currently available, the regulatory structure in place in the area which showed the greatest level of increase in hunter participation would be the non-APR counties.

The second graphic shows changes in antlered buck harvest.

NLP Antlered Harvest trends



Change in Antlered Buck harvest since APR's were enacted in the NW12

Counties in Blue - APRs	NW12 Counties - Average loss/gain = -17%
Counties in Green - Non -APR	Non-APR Counties - Average loss/gain = + 5%
Counties in Red - HC APR's	HC APR Counties - Average loss/gain = + 15%

Comparison of average of NW12 APR period to 3 year pre-APR baseline.
 Data compiled from MDNR annual hunter survey reports 2010 - 2015.

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It was anticipated that antlered buck harvest would drop during the first year of mandatory APR's in the NW12 counties but it has been suggested by some that

antlered harvest would rapidly rebound and that within several years it would be back to pre-APR levels.

That prediction has not come to pass in most of the NW12 counties, however. The 2015 antlered buck harvest in 10 of the 12 NW12 counties was lower than the 3 year pre-APR baseline average. The 3 year APR average antlered buck harvest is lower in 10 of 12 NW12 APR counties, as well.

In the non-APR control counties, antlered buck harvest increased in 5 of the 8 counties during the same time period and in the HC regulation counties, antlered buck harvest increased in 5 out of the 6 counties.

SUMMARY

Comparisons based on 3 years of data compared to three years of baseline data indicates that there is no clear correlation between mandatory APR's and hunter retention/recruitment and that antlered buck harvest levels remain substantially lower when compared to pre-APR baseline levels, in 10 out of the 12 NW12 APR counties. In comparison, non-APR counties experienced a higher rate of hunter recruitment/retention and a majority of non-APR counties experienced increases in antlered buck harvests during the same time period. We will continue to monitor these trends during the 4th and 5th years of the NW12 experiment.