

## **PROPOSAL 39**

### **5 AAC 85.030. Hunting seasons and bag limits for deer.**

**PROPOSED BY:** Craig Fish and Game Advisory Council

#### **WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?**

Shorten the hunting season for deer in Game Management Unit (Unit) 2 as follows:

The deer season will be August 1 to **November 30.**

#### **WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS?**

The deer hunt in Unit 2 is currently 4 bucks, with season dates of Aug. 1 – Dec. 31. The hunt is open to both residents and nonresidents.

The board has made a positive customary and traditional use finding for deer in Unit 2 and an amount reasonably necessary for subsistence finding of 1,500 – 1,600 deer.

#### **WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED?**

There would be a potential reduction in harvest by non-federally qualified users from the shortened season. Harvests for subsistence uses may also decline.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Many factors influence Sitka black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*; deer) populations in Unit 2. These factors include severe winters (high snow accumulation), timber harvests that reduce the amount of critical winter habitat, predation (the two main predators of deer are wolves *Canis lupus ligoni* and black bears *Ursus americanus*), and hunter harvest (figures 39-1 and 39-2).

Recently, the Federal Subsistence Board adopted a reduction for non-federally qualified hunters from a four buck bag limit to a two buck limit in Unit 2. Federal Board members cited public testimony of low deer numbers. Rural residents of Units 1-5 are federally qualified to hunt deer under federal regulations in Unit 2.

Five of six pellet transects in the area show stable or increasing trends in abundance (figures 39-3 through 39-8); VCU 584, Little Ratz declined slightly in 2015. Sampling these plots since 1985 gives us an indicator of trends in abundance over this long time-frame. A second year of aerial alpine surveys show an increase of abundance in central Prince of Wales Island (POW); and the fourth year of surveys in northern POW indicates a slight decrease in deer detected. However, aerial survey data is analyzed cautiously because there the data for both central and northern POW is limited. Also, the Department does not have clear evidence of how aerial surveys relate to overall deer abundance; future research may address this issue.

Deer harvest, the number of hunters, and the number of days hunted have fluctuated over the past 20 years (Figure 39-2). The mean deer harvest by non-federally qualified users in the month of November is 650 deer (1998-2017) (Figure 39-1), and the mean (1998–2017) harvest for non-federally qualified hunters in the month of December was 42 deer

(Figure 39-1). The mean number of hunters, total days hunted, and harvest between 1998 and 2017 were 2,125 hunters (range = 1,510 – 2,812), 11,549 days hunting (range = 7,182 – 14,086), and 3,008 deer harvested (range = 1,885 – 4,249). From 2003 – 2015 the number of hunters, days hunted, and harvest steadily increased. A decrease in all three metrics occurred in 2016 and continued in 2017 (Figure 39-2). The decrease in harvest is likely a function of a decrease in hunters and days spent hunting. Sightability of deer may be decreasing since timber stands cut 20 – 30 years ago are now in stem exclusion phases where visibility is reduced and seeing deer is difficult; this may increase the days hunted before killing a deer, and creates the perception of low deer abundance.

Deer harvest also fluctuates within the season. August is the most popular month to take deer in the alpine and coincides with the opener for non-federally qualified hunters on August 16. The rut occurs in late October through early November. The majority of harvest occurs in November with a mean of 1,338 deer for all user groups (1998 – 2017) (Figure 39-1). The smallest average monthly harvest occurs in December, which is the current end of the season for non-federally qualified hunters (Figure 39-1).

The reduction in season length would likely reduce harvest by non-federally qualified hunters in Unit 2. Mean deer harvested by federally qualified hunters was consistently higher than non-federally qualified hunters from 1998 – 2017 (Figure 39-9).

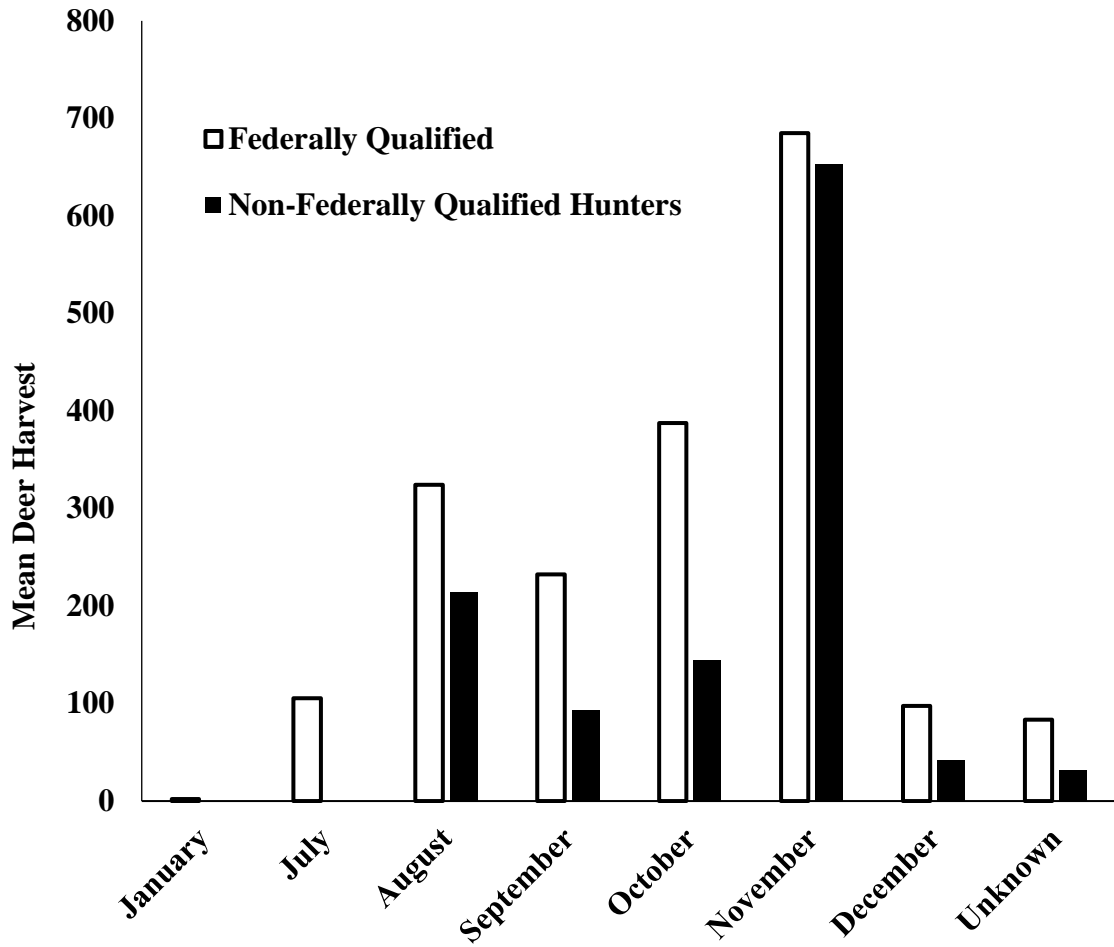


Figure 39-1. Mean Sitka black-tailed (*Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*) harvest in Game Management Unit 2 by month from 1998 – 2017.

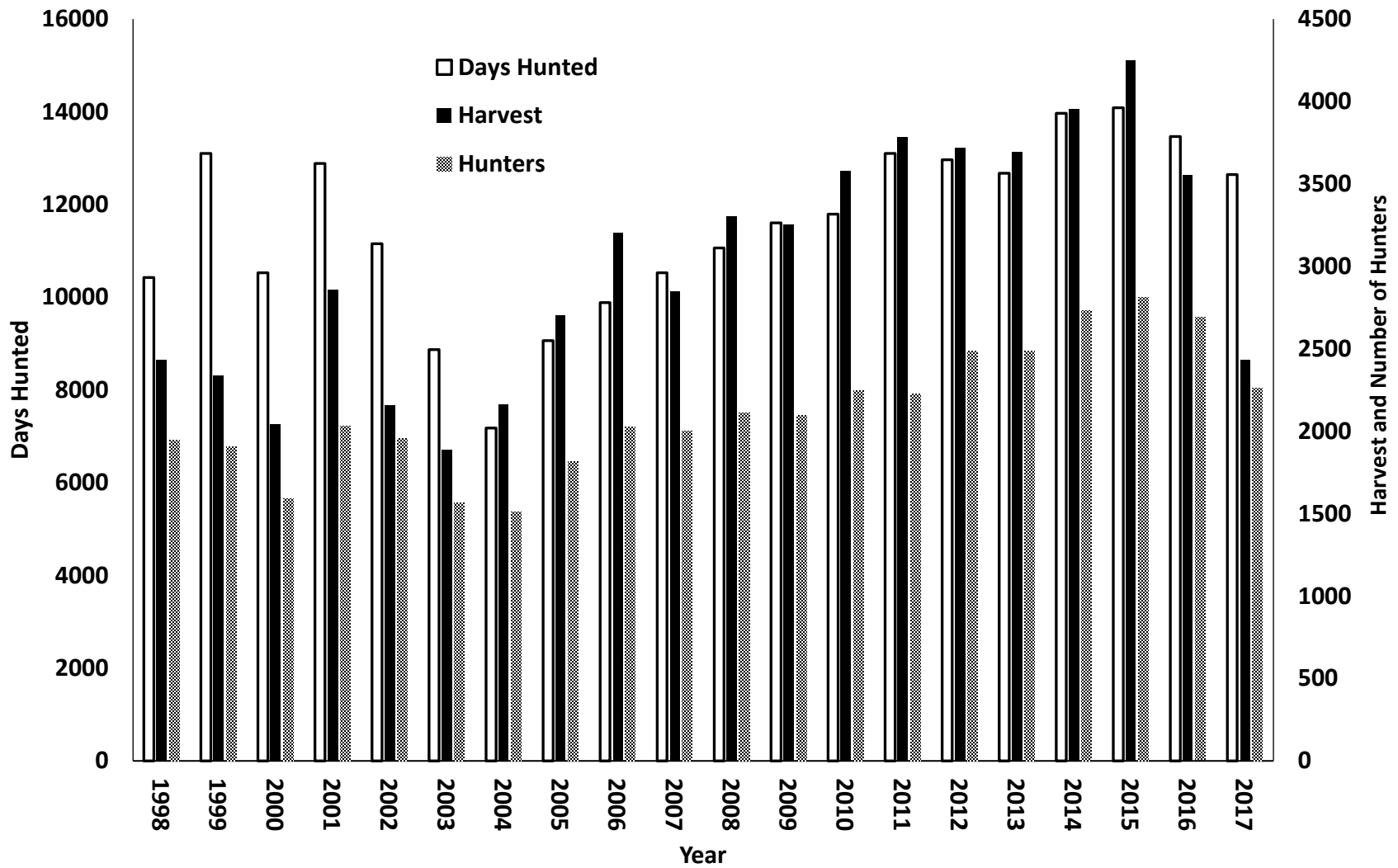


Figure 39-2. Days hunted, number of hunters, and harvest of Sitka black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*) in Game Management Unit 2 from 1998 – 2017.

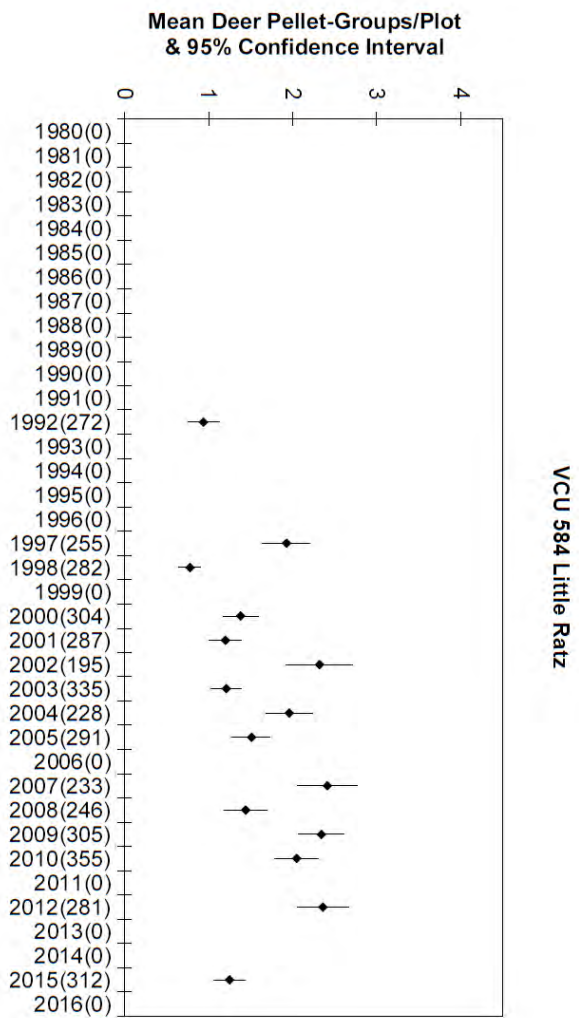


Figure 39-3. Little Ratz pellet count data from 1980 to 2016 showing mean pellet groups per plot and 95% confidence intervals. The number of pellet plots surveyed for each year is included in parenthesis after each year on the x-axis.

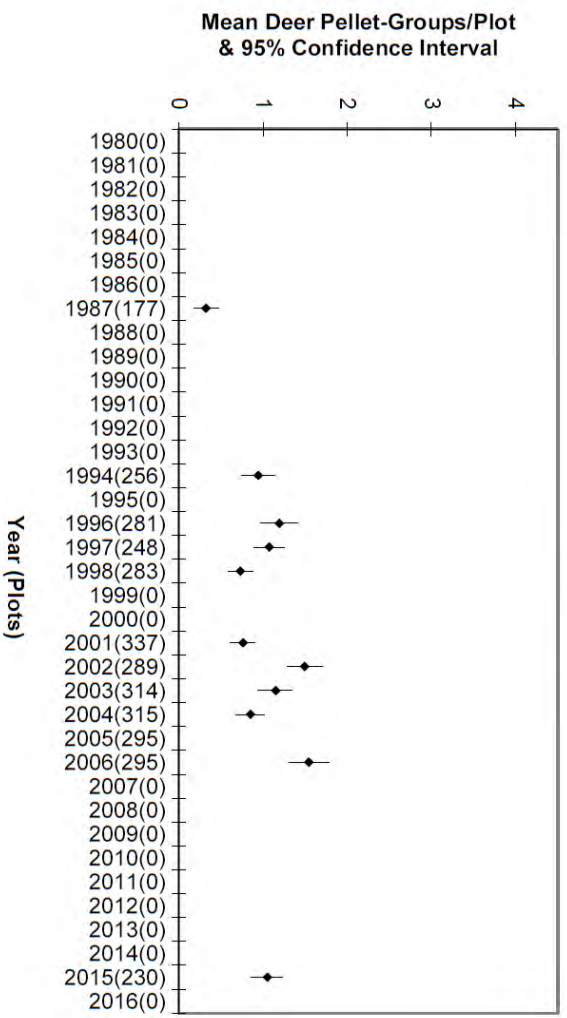


Figure 39-4. Red Bay pellet count data from 1980 to 2016 showing mean pellet groups per plot and 95% confidence intervals. The number of pellet plots surveyed for each year is included in parenthesis after each year on the x-axis.

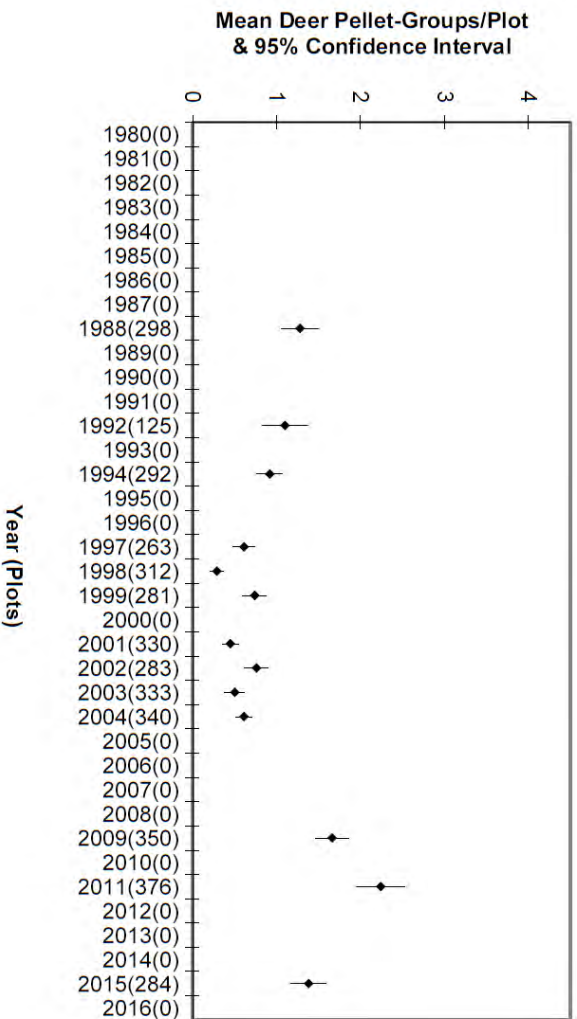


Figure 39-5. Sarkar pellet count data from 1980 to 2016 showing mean pellet groups per plot and 95% confidence intervals. The number of pellet plots surveyed for each year is included in parenthesis after each year on the x-axis.

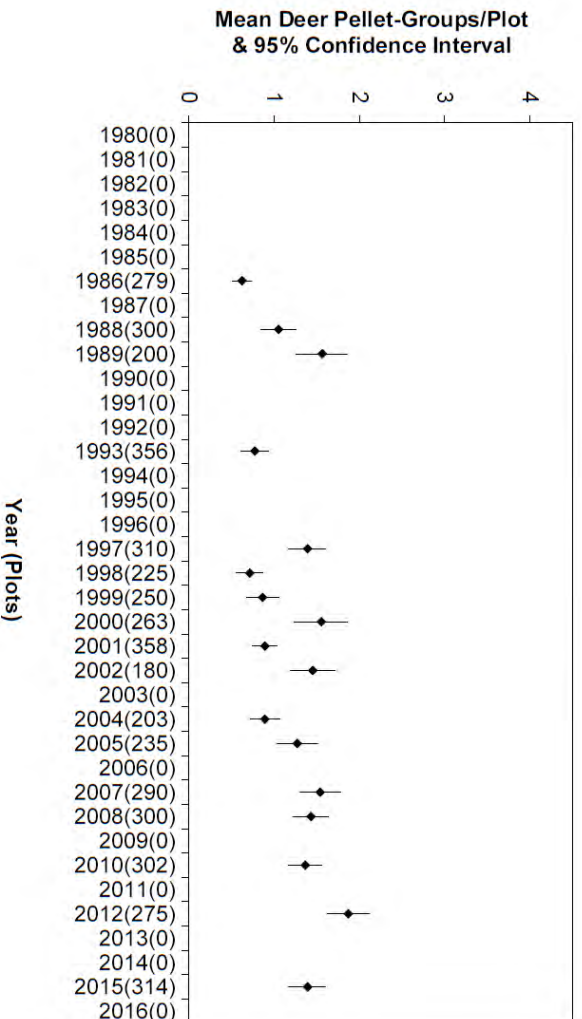


Figure 39-6. Snakey Lakes pellet count data from 1980 to 2016 showing mean pellet groups per plot and 95% confidence intervals. The number of pellet plots surveyed for each year is included in parenthesis after each year on the x-axis.

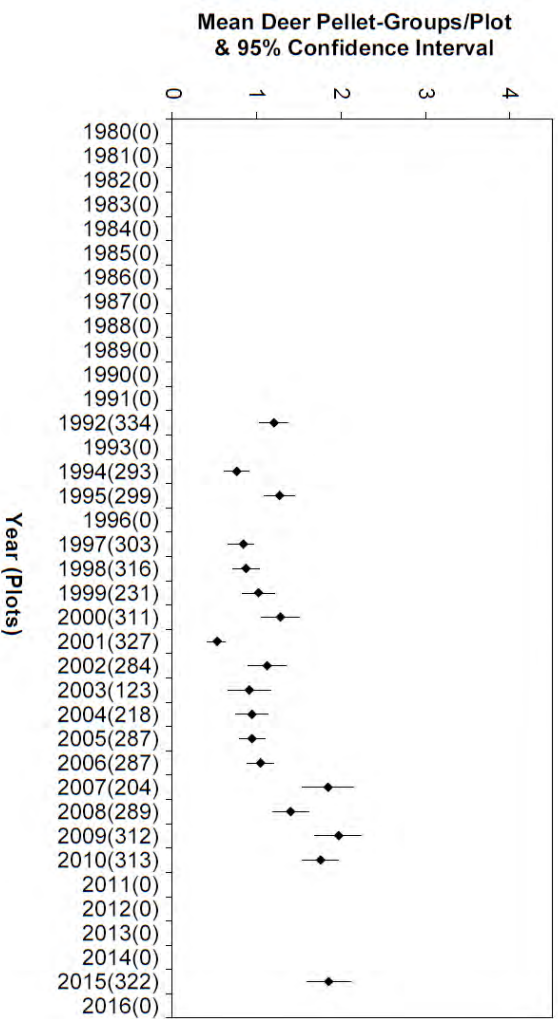


Figure 39-7. Thorne Lake pellet count data from 1980 to 2016 showing mean pellet groups per plot and 95% confidence intervals. The number of pellet plots surveyed for each year is included in parenthesis after each year on the x-axis.

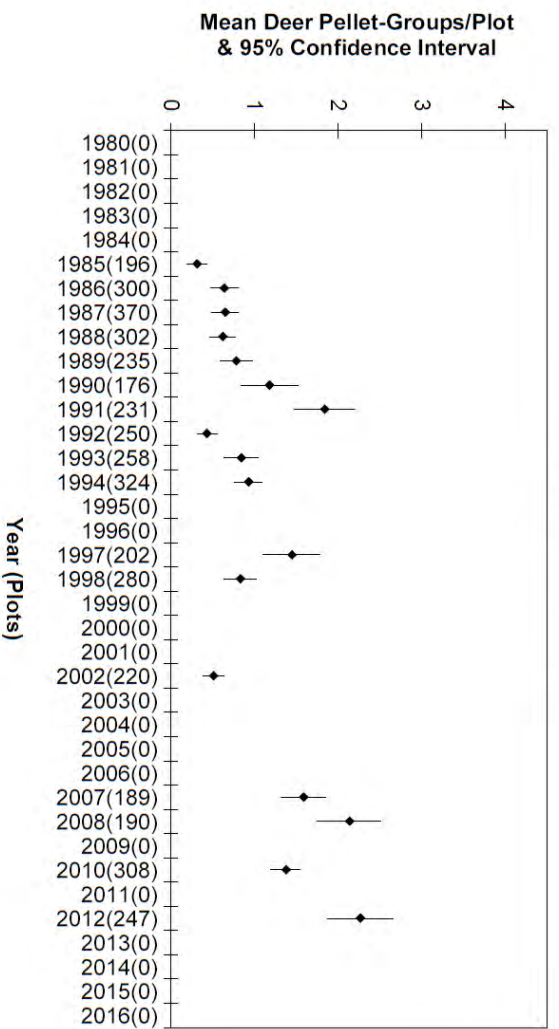


Figure 39-8. Twelve Mile Arm pellet count data from 1980 to 2016 showing mean pellet groups per plot and 95% confidence intervals. The number of pellet plots surveyed for each year is included in parenthesis after each year on the x-axis.

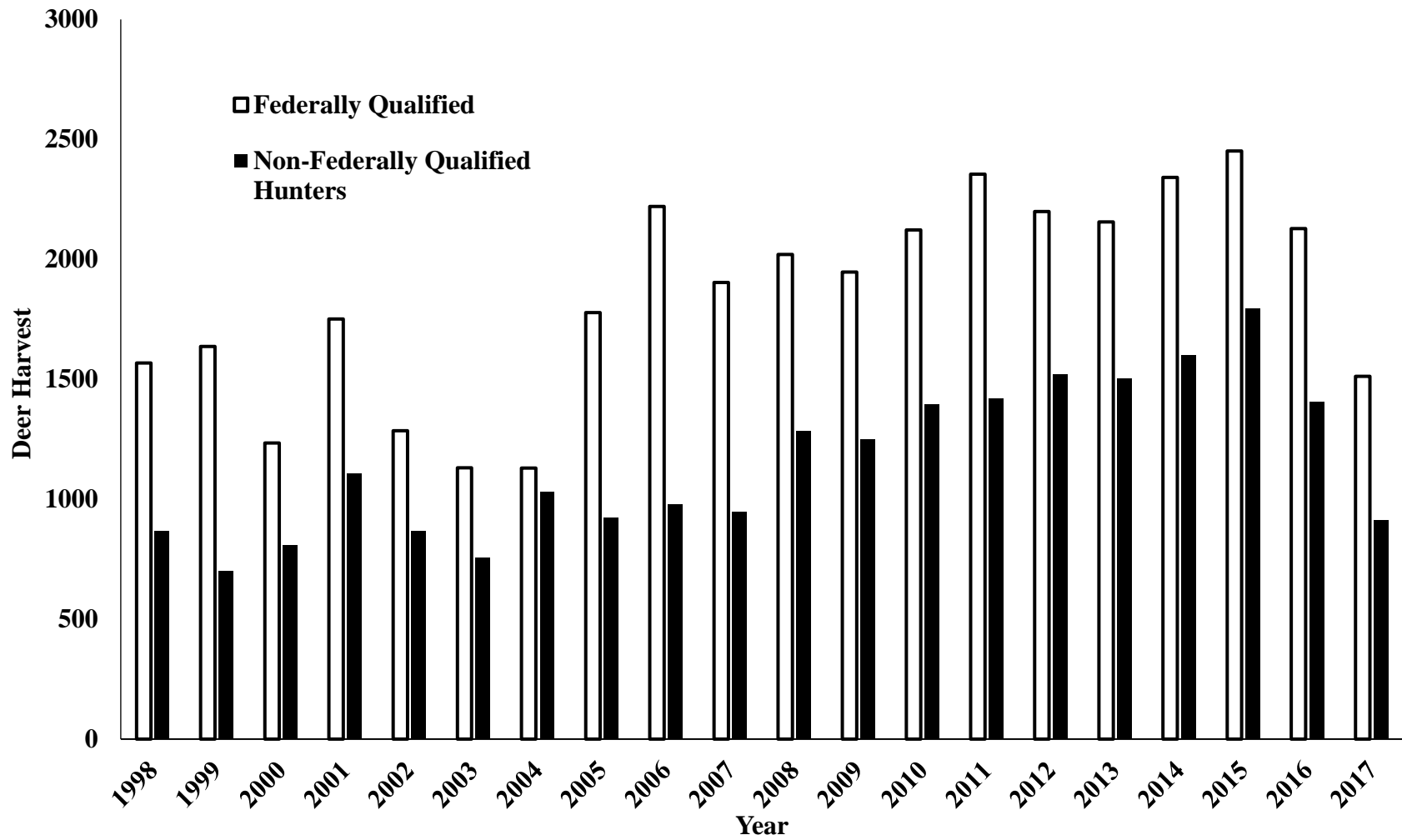


Figure 39-9. Sitka black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*) harvest in Game Management Unit 2 from 1998 – 2017. Comparison of harvest between federally qualified and non-federally qualified hunters.



**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:**

The Department is **NEUTRAL** on this proposal since this is an allocation issue. Based on pellet count data showing stable trends in abundance and a drop in hunters and days spent hunting, the recent decrease in harvest does not elicit an immediate biological concern. A reduction in season length is not needed at this time. The Federal Subsistence Board recently reduced the non-federally qualified bag limit from four bucks to two bucks. This will reduce harvest directly through non-federally qualified hunters only being allowed to take two deer. Non-federally qualified hunters are limited to bucks and the December hunt is primarily for increased opportunity, since there is little harvest. The board should consider if adoption of the proposal affects reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses of deer in Unit 2.

**COST ANALYSIS:**

Adoption of this proposal is not expected to result in additional costs to the department.