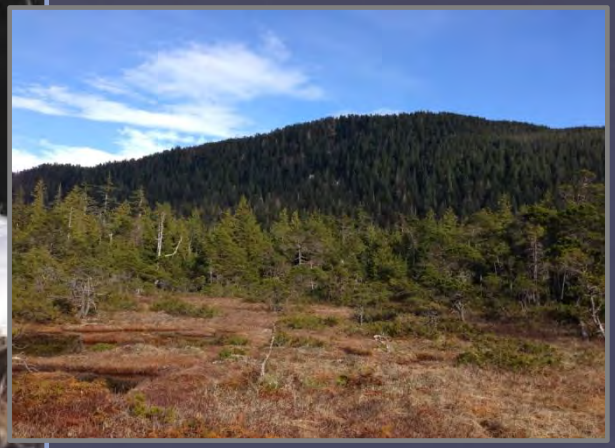
Region I Deer Overwinter Habitat Assessment

Preliminary Methods and Next Steps
Field Season 2014

{ Presentation to Board of Game
Juneau, Alaska, January 2015



Region I Deer Overwinter Habitat Assessment

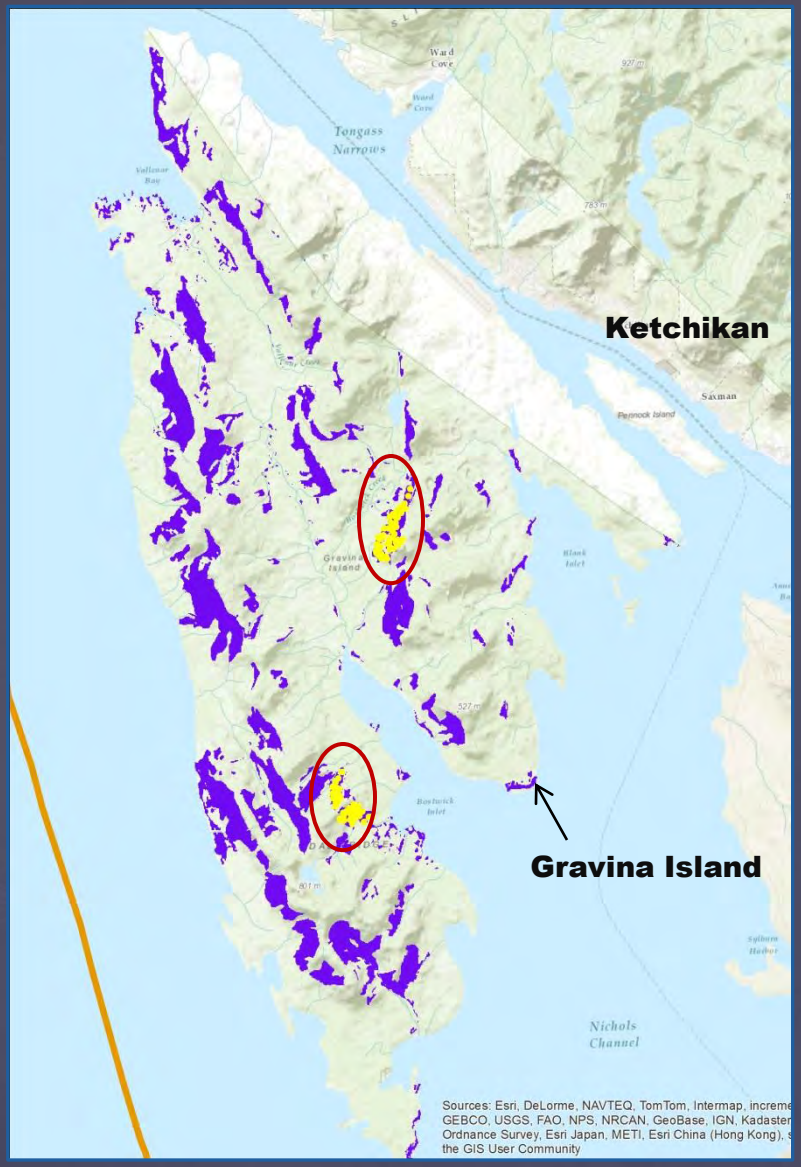
Question:

- Can the deer overwinter range in Units 3 and 1A support more deer?

Objective:

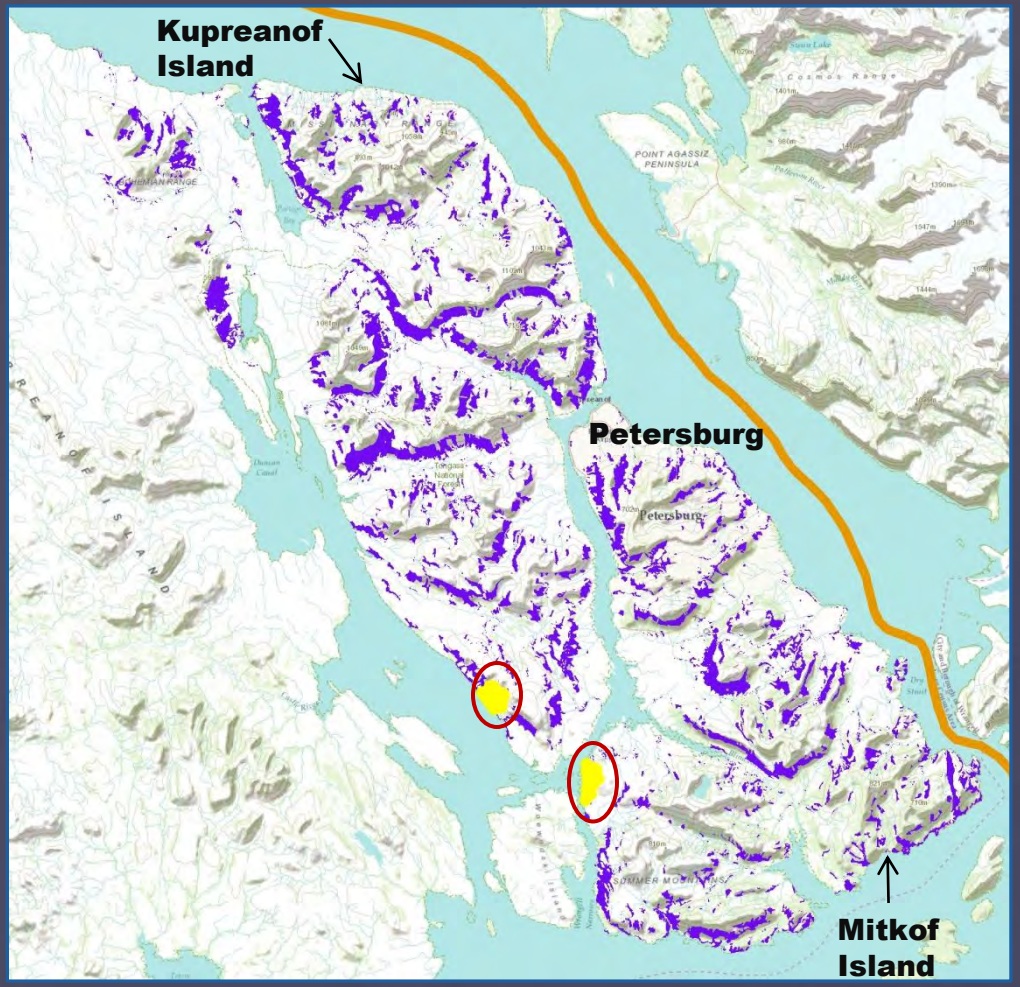
- Conduct a pilot study to assess the abundance, condition, and utilization of key forage plants on important overwinter ranges
  - Browse
  - Forbs

Overwinter Habitat and Selection of Stands for Pilot Work



Unit 1A

Unit 3



Selection of Stands to Conduct Pilot Work

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Methods

Browse data collected in late April/early May 2014 before spring leaf out

Focused on *Vaccinium* (blueberry) species

- Density
- Height
- Overwinter utilization
- Architecture of plant

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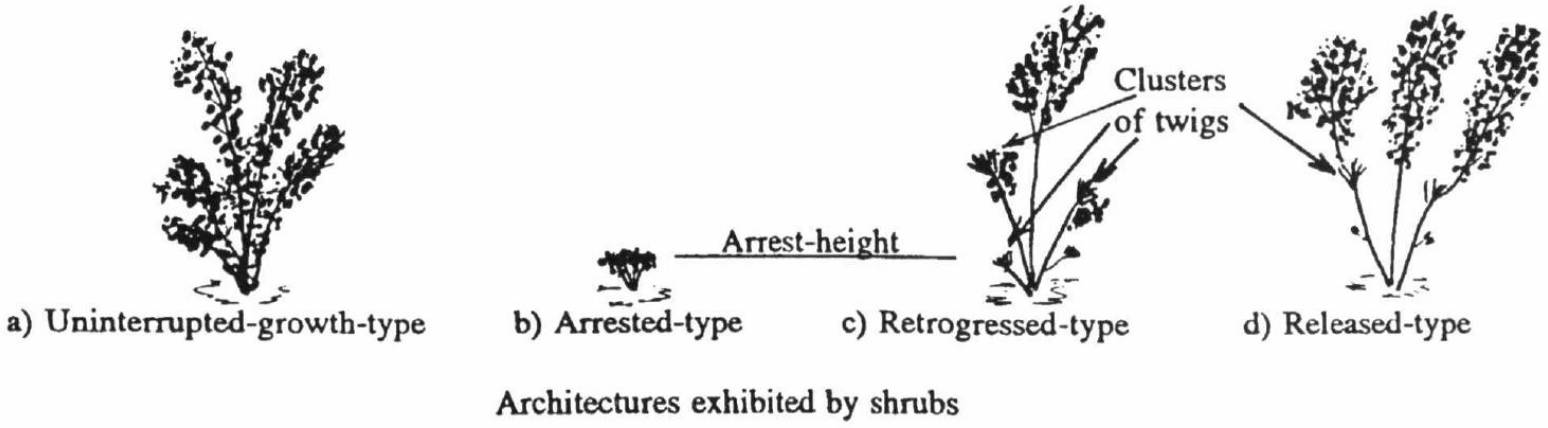
Architecture Index
Keigley et al. (2002)



Architectures exhibited by shrubs

Reflects condition of plant as it relates to the plant's browse history

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Methods

Forb data collected in late August/early September 2014 at end of growing season

Collected percent cover of all forb species at same points browse data were collected in spring

- Grouped into functional class for analysis -- evergreen and deciduous forbs

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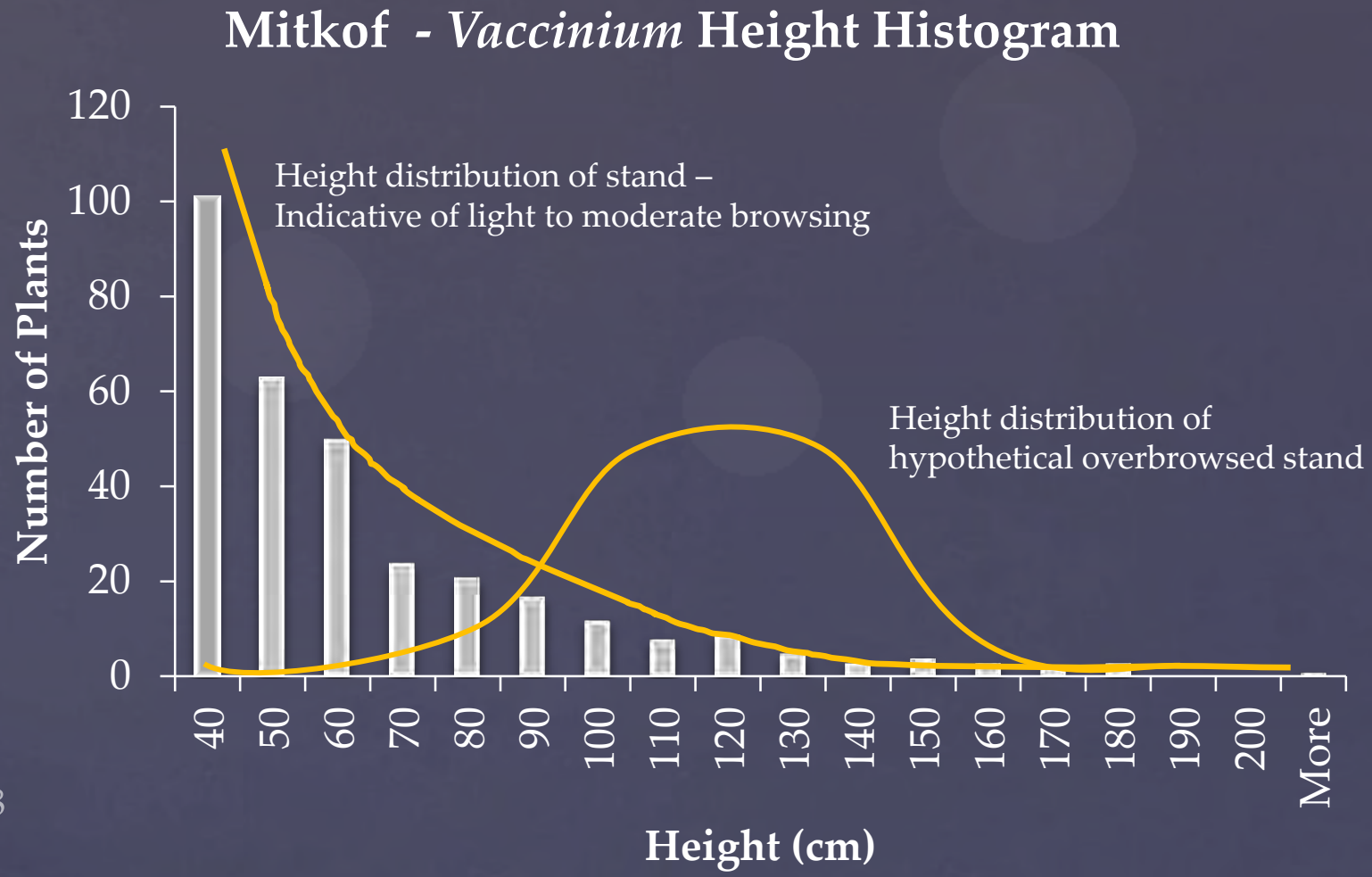
Preliminary Results



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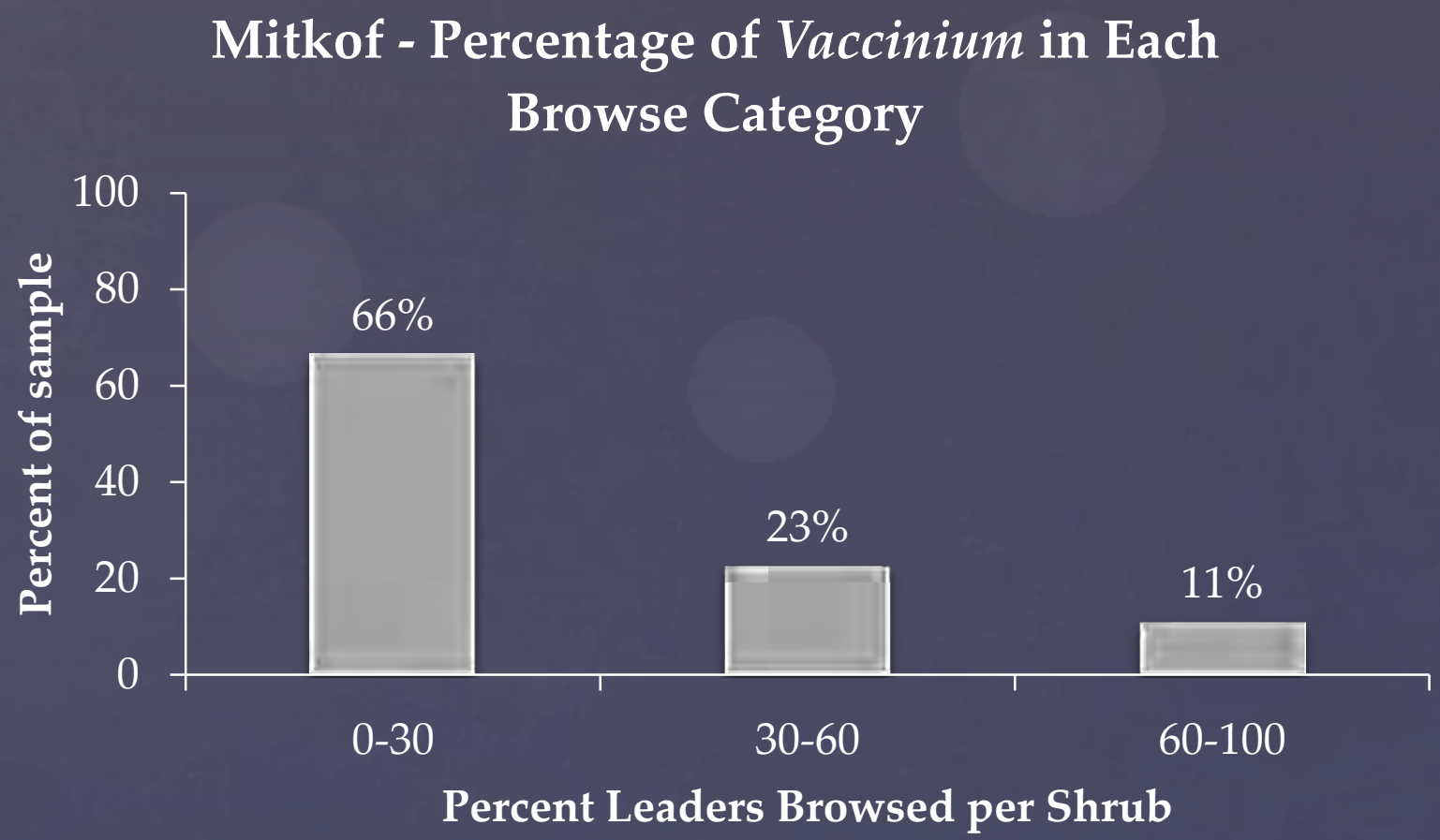
Preliminary Results



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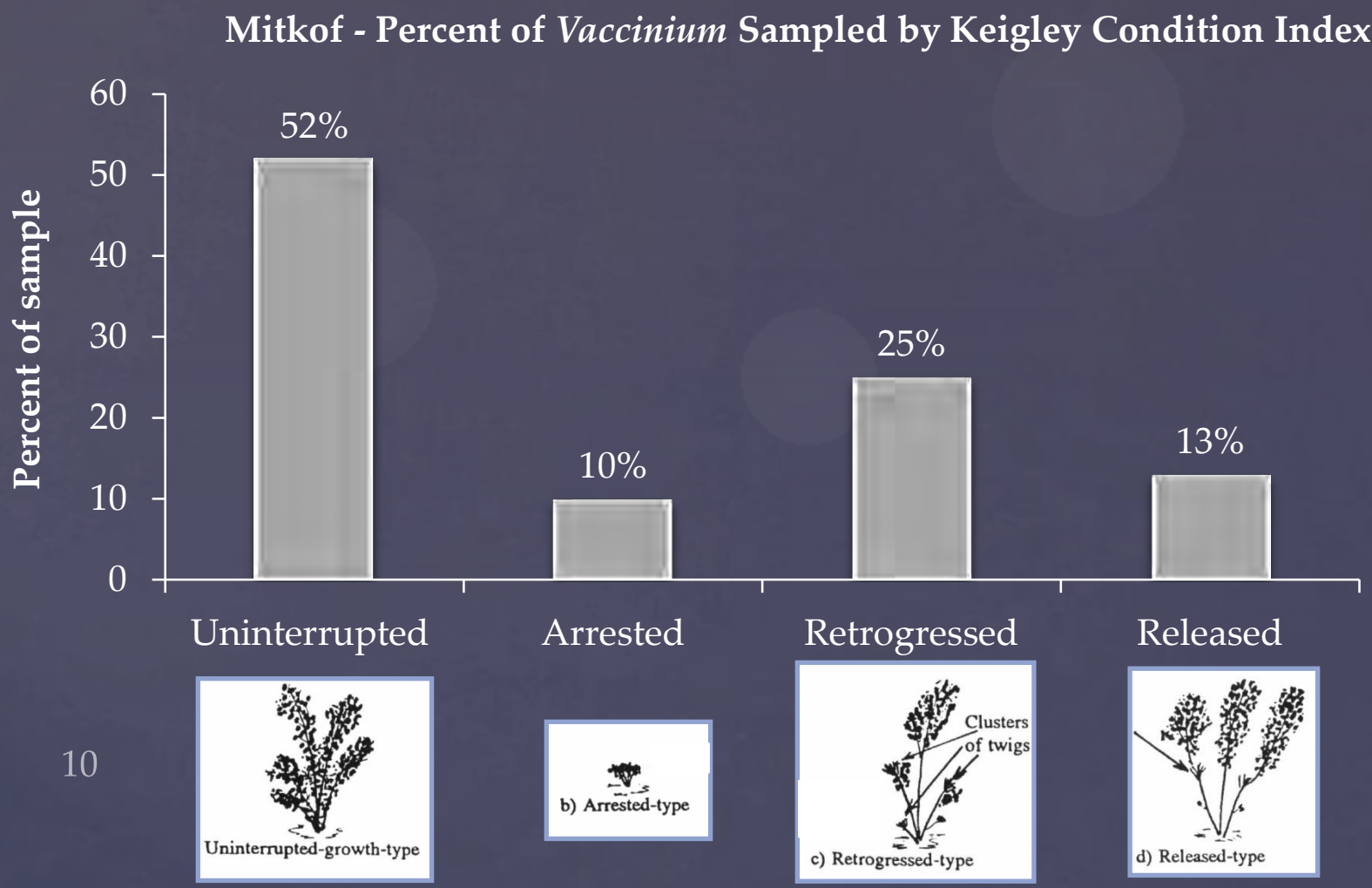

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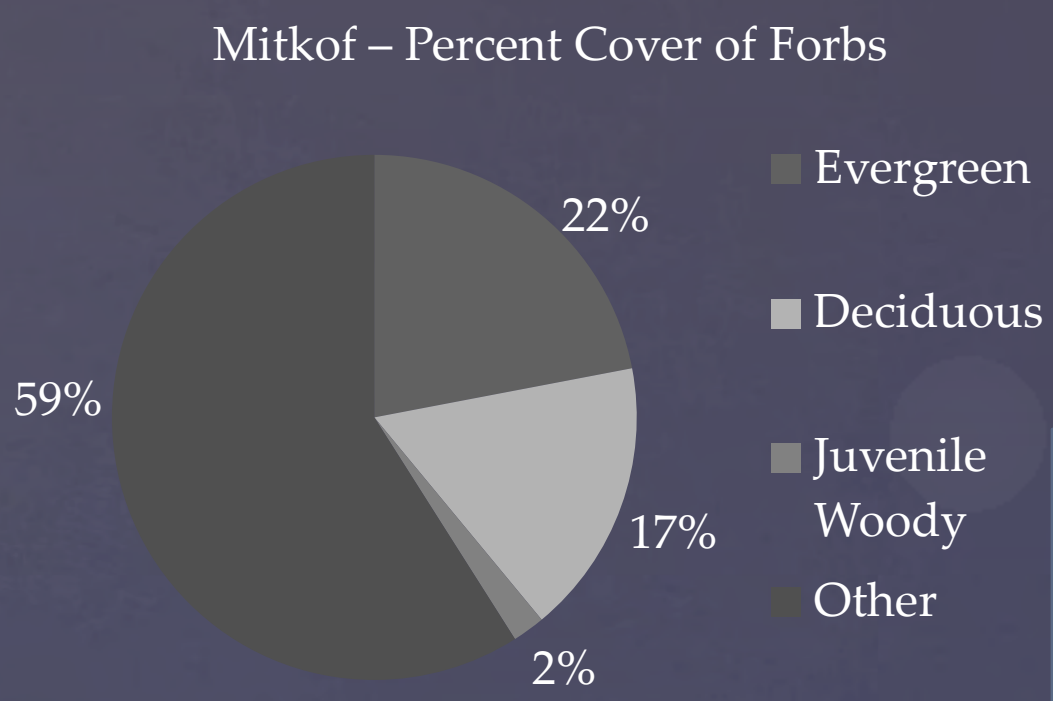
Preliminary Results



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Next Steps

Methods are objective, repeatable, easy to complete in field, and require only small crews and limited supplies.

Complete analysis of the data and link to deer density estimates, as well as winter severity data from last year

Assess feasibility and logistics for scaling up to a level appropriate for management decisions

See if we can compare vegetation data to previous work (e.g., H. Merriam and D. Person)

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Summary

Methodology tested in this pilot study can provide relevant overwinter habitat data to help inform management decisions.

Implemented at a larger scale these habitat data can provide an efficient index of the status of key forage that can be compared over time. When combined with deer density estimates and winter severity data, we will be able to better discern deer carrying capacity on the landscape.