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Additional Waterfowl Hunting Opportunity for Veterans and Active-Duty Military
In September 2020, DEC adopted new waterfowl hunting regulations that allow veterans and active-duty military service members to hunt migratory game birds for two additional days with a bag limit equal to that of the regular hunting season. For the specific veteran/active-duty waterfowl days in each zone see the Migratory Game Bird Hunting Season information on page 53.

Changes to Trapping Season Dates for Mink, Muskrat, and Beaver
Based on input from trappers and management needs for species like beaver, DEC adopted regulations modifying season dates for mink, muskrat, and beaver. For details see the trapping season maps for these species on page 63.

Pending Revision to Fisher Permit Requirement
At press time, a regulatory proposal was pending that would remove the requirement for a free special permit for fisher trapping. Under the proposal, a trapping license and pelt sealing would still be required for fisher and a free special permit would still be required for marten. For more information and for a summary of what biologists learned from the data collected on fisher, see page 64.

Holiday Deer Hunt
Regulations were adopted to provide an additional late bow and muzzleloading season for deer in the Southern Zone from December 26 through January 1. See page 25 for the deer hunting season map.

New Legislation Lowered the Age for Deer Hunting with a Firearm & Crossbow
Governor Cuomo signed legislation that allows youths aged 12-13 to hunt deer with a firearm or crossbow under the supervision of an experienced adult hunter in upstate counties that choose to participate. Before you head afield, be sure to check the DEC website (www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/46245.html) for an updated list of counties that have “opted in” to this opportunity for junior hunters.

Pending Deer and Bear Hunting Regulations
At press time, regulations were pending to expand deer and bear hunting opportunities including a September antlerless deer season in select WMUs, longer daily hunting hours for deer and bear, allow antlerless deer take again during the early muzzleloader season in some Northern Zone units, and changes to the Adirondack bear season. Be sure to check the DEC website prior to going afield.
Living with the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year plus has been challenging and unprecedented. COVID-19 altered almost every aspect of our daily lives. However, with much of the world on lock-down to flatten the COVID curve, DEC saw record numbers of hunters and outdoor enthusiasts flocking to New York’s natural resources seeking solace and a sense of normalcy.

As another year of hunting and trapping seasons approaches, many of us will once again turn to nature to rejuvenate our spirits and revive cherished annual traditions. DEC is fortunate to have the help of many partners in the conservation community, including hunters and trappers who are among some of the strongest stewards of New York’s natural resources. Throughout this guide, you’ll find essays and quotes submitted by New Yorkers explaining why they hunt or trap. Several key themes emerge in these stories, highlighting the importance of these activities:

• The sense of self-confidence that comes from meeting the physical and intellectual challenge of finding and harvesting game;
• The solace of securing a sustainable, local source of food;
• The satisfaction that comes from being self-sufficient;
• The restorative quality of observing nature;
• The gratification of learning about wildlife and their habitats;
• The value in connecting to and taking care of a special piece of land;
• The joy of creating or reinforcing family traditions and strengthening bonds with family and friends; and
• The pride in helping to manage game species like deer

As a result of the pandemic, more New Yorkers sought out the experience and benefits of venturing afield. DEC adapted quickly and creatively to meet this challenge and provided online hunter safety education courses to nearly 70,000 people. In-person hunter education courses resumed last fall. Additionally, DEC adopted an updated Deer Management Plan that describes strategies for enhancing hunting opportunities for our most popular game species while addressing the challenges caused by overabundant deer.

As New York continues to put the pandemic behind us, I am more grateful than ever to be able to spend time outdoors, hunting with family and friends, and I know many of you feel the same.

Have fun afield this season, and please continue to put safety first.

Basil Seggos
Commissioner
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

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**Message from the Commissioner**

**Game Harvest Reporting**

Hunters are required to report the harvest of deer, bear and turkey within 7 days of take. You may report your harvest using one of these methods:

- Online: [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8316.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8316.html)
- Game Harvest Mobile App (see below for details).

**DID YOU KNOW?**

You may be fined up to $250 for failing to report your deer, bear or turkey take.

**Take it • Tag it • Report it**

Harvest reporting is the LAW and necessary for wildlife management!

**Report your Game Harvests via Mobile App!**

DEC’s mobile app, [HuntFishNY](http://www.dec.ny.gov) provides hunters with an e-license and game harvest reporting tool. Hunters now have a quick, user-friendly way to:

- gain instant, mobile access to an electronic version of sporting licenses and privileges;
- report the harvest of deer, bear and turkey on a smartphone immediately while afield, even when out of cellular range;
- view current and past harvest reports.

The [HuntFishNY App](http://www.dec.ny.gov) can be downloaded from the Apple App store or Google Play store.

**NOTE:** You will need a DEC Automated Licensing System (DECALS) user name and password in order to access your license documents through the app. If you have not yet created an online user name and password, visit the DECALS website today. Questions? – Call our sporting license hotline at 1-866-472-4332.

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**REPORT YOUR HARVEST**

It’s the LAW and necessary for good game management!

**TAKE IT • TAG IT • REPORT IT**

1-866-426-3778

[HuntFishNY Mobile App](http://www.dec.ny.gov) [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)

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It’s Your Choice

You can increase the availability of older bucks by choosing to pass up shots at young bucks.

- Older bucks create more rubs and scrapes, vocalize more, and yield more meat – all things that create unforgettable hunting experiences.

You can boost deer condition and body and antler size by balancing the deer population with the habitat:

- Take a doe if permits are available in your area
- Create young forest to enhance natural forage and cover for deer

YOUR CHOICE MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

HUNTERS: Want Older Bucks in New York?

1.5 YEAR OLD

2.5 YEAR OLD

3.5 YEAR OLD

Photo Credit: Charles Alsheimer

2021–2022 New York Hunting & Trapping Guide
Chronic Wasting Disease:  
We Need Your Help to Protect New York’s Deer and Moose

mounts, tanned hides, and cleaned upper canine teeth can be brought into NY. Hunters who improperly import whole carcasses or prohibited parts will be ticketed, and the entire animal (including antlers) will be confiscated and destroyed. If you have CWD-positive deboned meat from another state, DEC will assist with safe disposal of the animal and recommend disinfection methods.

Avoid natural deer urine products — Commercially produced urine products may claim to be CWD-free, but manufacturers cannot guarantee their safety. There is currently no direct regulatory oversight of these products and purported testing has not been validated. Choose synthetic alternatives. You don’t want to contaminate your favorite hunting spot!

Take precautions when handling deer — Wear rubber or latex gloves when field dressing or processing. Remove internal organs with knives or utensils dedicated for hunting. If you use lead ammunition, bury or landfill the organs to ensure scavengers, like bald eagles, do not accidentally ingest lead fragments. Trim generously around the wound channel and bag remaining carcass waste for the landfill.

Do not feed wild deer — Feeding deer is illegal year-round. Concentrating deer around food sources can facilitate the spread of diseases like CWD. Report sick and abnormal deer to DEC. DEC would like to examine any deer that are very thin, drooling, standing with legs splayed and head lowered, listless, circling, or are easily approached. Contact the DEC Regional Wildlife Office near you (see page 6) or visit http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/558.html

What is CWD?
A contagious, fatal disease of cervids (deer, elk, moose, and caribou) that is caused by an abnormal protein called a prion, which causes holes to form in the brain. Animals become diseased from direct contact with live infected animals, animal parts, or contaminated soil and plants. Infected animals shed prions in saliva, feces, and urine before they die. An infected deer can look healthy for months to years before dying.

Why is CWD a Problem?
There is no cure, vaccine, or genetic resistance to CWD. Prions can last in the environment for decades. Once CWD is established in an area, eliminating the disease is virtually impossible. Deer populations and deer hunting will be impacted! Although there are no known human cases, the Centers for Disease Control recommends no one consume a CWD-positive animal. New York randomly tests thousands of deer each year. Hunters can make arrangements to have their deer tested: https://cwhl.vet.cornell.edu/hunter-cwd-testing.

Don’t Be a CWD Risk!
The actions of a few careless hunters can put all deer and moose at risk. The most likely modes of CWD introduction into New York are through: (1) illegal movement of infected carcasses or carcass parts of deer or elk taken by hunters in other states; (2) illegal import of live deer or elk for fee-based shooting of confined animals; or (3) use of infected urine-based lures by hunters.

How Can You Help?
Don’t let CWD into the state again! Know your regulations: http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8325.html.

Here Are Some Things You Can Do:
Debone your harvest if you hunt outside of New York — Meat, hide and cape, antlers, cleaned skull cap with antlers attached, finished taxidermy

Import Restrictions and Allowed Parts:

Deer and other CWD-susceptible cervids that are illegally imported into New York and seized by DEC Environmental Conservation Police Officers are destroyed.

Import Restrictions and Allowed Parts:

Hunters may not bring whole deer, elk, moose, or caribou into New York. You may only import:

- Deboned meat
- Cleaned skull cap
- Antlers with no flesh
- Raw or processed cape or hide
- Cleaned teeth or lower jaw
- Finished taxidermy products

For information on how to bone-out deer meat to remove high-risk tissues, visit the CWD Alliance: cwd-info.org

2021–2022 New York Hunting & Trapping Guide
Crossbow Hunting Qualifications and Safety Information

A crossbow must have compound or recurve limbs with minimum width of 17 inches (outer tip of limbs excluding wheels and cams, uncocked); a minimum overall length from butt of stock to the front of the limbs of 24 inches; and be able to launch a minimum 14 inch arrow/bolt, not including the legal arrowhead. It must have a draw weight of 100 to 200 pounds.

Crossbows may be used by any person age 12 or older to hunt deer and any person age 14 or older to hunt bear, unprotected wildlife and most small game species except waterfowl and other migratory game birds. Crossbows may not be used to take carp or any other fish.

Hunters who plan to hunt with a crossbow must have in their possession while afield either their completed Hunter Education Certificate of Qualification card dated on or after April 1, 2014 OR the completed Crossbow Certificate of Qualification located below.

Crossbow safety information
- Before shooting your crossbow, read and thoroughly understand your crossbow owner’s manual.
- Make sure your fingers are well AWAY (below rail) from the path of the bow string and cables.
- Never dry-fire a crossbow (cock and fire without an arrow placed on the rail).
- Make sure the crossbow limbs are free of obstructions before shooting.
- Never carry a cocked crossbow with an arrow in it while walking.
- If hunting from a tree stand, always cock (but do not load) the crossbow on the ground before climbing into the stand.
- Once seated and secured in the tree stand, pull up your unloaded crossbow with a haul line.
- Do not place an arrow on the crossbow until you are safely secured in your stand.
- Never use a cocking device to uncock a crossbow.
- To uncock a crossbow, shoot an arrow tipped with a field point into the soft ground or a target.
- Always identify your target and the area beyond it before shooting.
- To prevent wounding game, practice often and do not take shots at game that are beyond your effective range, generally less than 30–40 yards, similar to a modern compound bow.
- To better understand how an arrow functions and the skill required for hunting with an arrow, DEC recommends all crossbow hunters take a bowhunter education course.

NYSDEC Crossbow Hunting Qualifications:
www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/98061.html

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New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Crossbow Certificate of Qualification

I certify that I have read and understand the safety recommendations, license requirements and legal specifications for crossbow use in New York.

Print Name

Signature

DEC ID# (this is your back-tag number)  Date

Fill in, cut out, and carry afield with your hunting license while hunting with a crossbow.
Deer Management Permits (DMPs)

Hunters possessing a DMP may take one antlerless deer per permit in addition to any deer that may be taken with a regular hunting license or bowhunting and muzzleloading privileges.

- DMPs may not be used for legally antlered deer (at least one antler 3” or longer).
- DMPs may only be used in the WMU for which they are issued.
- Hunters may transfer or receive up to 2 DMPs from other hunters (see page 29).
- Refer to chart on page 26 for information on when DMPs may be used.

Applying for a deer management permit (DMP)

- DMP Application Deadline: Close of business on October 1, 2021
- You may apply for DMPs at all license-issuing outlets, by phone or online beginning on August 2, 2021.
- DMPs are available to all hunters age 14 years or older who purchase or possess a regular hunting license (12 years old for Junior Bowhunting license holders).
- There is a $10 non-refundable application fee for all applicants. The fee is waived for holders of Lifetime Licenses purchased prior to 10/1/2009, and Junior Hunters and Junior Bowhunters.
- Know your Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) before you apply. If you are unsure of your unit, see the WMU maps on pages 70–77 of this guide or visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8302.html for written boundary descriptions. You may also call the DMP Hotline for additional information at 1-866-472-4332.
- You may apply for up to two DMPs. Both must be applied for at the same time. Application can be for DMPs in the same WMU or different WMUs.
- Disabled veterans with a service-connected disability rated at 40% or greater (who are residents of New York) will receive preference on DMPs. Annually, you must bring a letter from the Department of Veterans Affairs, dated in the current year, with your case number and your disability percentage. If you are claiming permanent disabled status, the letter must clearly state that the 40% or more service-related disability is permanent.
- Landowners: It is illegal for more than one person per 50+ acre tax map ID to apply as a landowner. If you own 50 or more contiguous acres of land within the WMU you will be hunting in, you will receive preference on DMP selection. Annually, you must bring your tax map identification number and SWIS code (found on your tax bill) with you when you apply. Be sure to tell the license-issuing agent PRIOR to applying that you are a landowner. Lessees do not qualify as landowners. Corporate ownership: It is illegal for more than one person to apply as a corporate landowner no matter how many 50-acre parcels are owned. The corporation must submit an original letter or certified copy of a resolution, dated in the current year, designating one individual and must include the tax map ID and SWIS code information.
- Group ownership: It is illegal for more than one person per 50+ acre tax map ID to apply as a landowner, regardless of how many co-owners. Additional 50+ acre parcels in the same WMU require separate tax IDs.
- Preference points: Preference points are won and lost on first choice WMU selection only. If you do not receive a DMP in your first choice WMU, you will receive a preference point for the following year. If you were rejected for a first permit in 2020 and have a preference point for the 2021 hunting season, this information is stored in DECALS and will be available to all license-issuing agents. Preference points do not guarantee selection. Any preference points contained in your file are automatically applied to your first-choice WMU selection. If you do NOT receive your first choice, the points are applied to your second choice but will remain in your file for the following year, regardless of your second choice selection results.

2020 Why I Hunt/Trap – Adult, First Hunt Category

My First Harvest

Samantha Hollister
Jefferson County, NY

3:30 a.m.: The alarm goes off on a Sunday morning. My partner all but leaps out of bed as I roll over and groan, sinking deeper into my cocoon of warm blankets. “Are you coming?”

“Five more minutes,” I mumble.

4:30 a.m.: We arrive at the check-in station. I marvel at a patchwork of constellations and moonlight. I take another sip of hot coffee and let the cold, fresh air fill my lungs.

5:00 a.m.: We trudge through cattails by headlamp and moonlight. We pick a spot with the wind at our backs, strategically place our decoys, and wait.

I reflect on the challenges of the last few months: a back injury, a career change, the stress of an international pandemic… and then, something changes. In the stillness of the swamp I sit with my partner, hidden from the world, completely alone but never more connected. I notice the sparrows rustling behind me, innately aware that dawn is about to break. They take no note of me, and I realize I bear witness to what many never see: nature as if I am not even there.

The sun peaks over the horizon, illuminating the water and sky while the rest remains shrouded in darkness. A swamp sparrow lands close enough that I see in detail his rusty crest and black eye stripes. Six or seven snow geese fly no more than twenty yards above my head. I remind myself to breathe. My heart is about to leap out of my chest at the thrill of it all, and I am overcome with gratitude. The swamp is awake, alive, thriving, and I am part of it as it is part of me.

6:45 a.m.: The swamp is thundering like fireworks on the Fourth of July. Ducks take flight, and everything comes together. The years of studying waterfowl identification, the summer I spent getting my hunter safety certification, the Sunday mornings spent at the shooting range…

I watch as she falls from the sky. I shake with adrenaline and pride, but also sadness over intentionally ending the life of a being I so respect and admire. I reach her and silently express my gratitude: for the meal her body will provide, and for the wisdom the swamp has gifted me.
I come to hunting as a cook. I realized it fully one Sunday, sitting around the table eating a long-braised shoulder roast of venison with my family. I was amazed that I had provided the meal and knew which shoulder specifically we were eating. My choice to take up hunting came initially from a personal desire to minimize my carbon footprint and truly eat local. I shop at farmers’ markets and try to only buy meat from small farms. But even the most sustainably raised animals have an environmental cost, and hunting was the next logical step.

Deciding to take up hunting as an adult is a challenging endeavor. Growing up, my grandfather didn’t hunt, so my father didn’t hunt, and thus I didn’t hunt. I decided I wanted to learn when I was 26 years old. I’m 30 now. Felling a doe this year with my bow represents the culmination of four years of hard work. Between living in New York City and local regulations for firearm ownership, bow hunting is the best option for me. It took a year before I was comfortable heading into the woods.

My first two seasons were filled with excitement and frustration, but no deer. This has been one of the most rewarding challenges of my life. It’s hard to put into words what successfully harvesting a deer feels like, but it is definitely the start of something, not the end.

From the beginning I wanted to carry out the butchering process myself. Breaking down a whole animal was an intimidating prospect, but the satisfaction provided at the end of the process was immense. I have intimate knowledge of what is on my plate. I’m the only person who has laid a hand on it from the moment it was killed until all the cuts were wrapped up in the freezer.

Hunting has completely changed how I view the meat I eat, for the better. There are a lot of reasons to pick up hunting, but for me the satisfaction lies in those moments, sitting around a table with those closest to you, sharing a meal. It makes you consider how much work goes into putting that cut on your plate. You realize that what you’re doing is sacred. As the world grows increasingly digital and fast paced, hunting provides a profound connection to nature. I am looking forward to deepening it for many more seasons to come.
DEC Adopts New Deer Management Plan

Some highlights include:

- Establish desired deer population trajectories (more deer, fewer deer, stay the same) for 23 regions of the state by including data on deer impacts on forest regeneration and public preferences for deer population change.

- Monitor deer populations for diseases such as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and take steps to reduce disease risk.

- Recommend a number of hunting-related changes to provide additional hunter opportunity or strategically increase antlerless harvest where needed including: a September season for antlerless deer in select areas, a late bow and muzzleloader season in the Southern Zone between Christmas and New Year’s Day, restoring either-sex harvest to the early muzzleloader season in several Northern Zone WMUs, extending the daily hunting hours to 30 minutes before sunrise and 30 minutes after sunset, establishing a January season in Westchester County and a youth deer hunt with firearms in Suffolk County, creating an urban hunt program, and modifying the way that DMPs are issued.

- Continue DEC’s successful effort to encourage hunters to voluntarily Let Young Bucks Go and Watch Them Grow (www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27663.html) which balances hunters’ desire to see and take older bucks with their strong desire to maintain the freedom to choose what type of buck to harvest.

- Encourage the use of non-lead ammunition (such as copper) by deer hunters to reduce human and wildlife exposure to lead by ingestion.

- Provide technical assistance for community-based deer management including local hunting programs, suburban/urban hunter-training workshops, and explore the potential for a small grants program to assist communities in developing and implementing local deer management plans.

DEC recently adopted a second-edition Management Plan for White-tailed Deer in New York State, 2021-2030 (www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7211.html), building off progress made during the first plan and considerable research and input from the public, including hunters.

Deer management, deer hunting, and deer-related impacts to agriculture, forests, and communities across the state are important concerns for many New Yorkers. With this updated management plan, DEC is taking innovative steps to address overabundant deer in urban and suburban areas, provide relief to farmers and forest owners experiencing deer damage, protect New York’s deer from the potential devastation of Chronic Wasting Disease, and enhance our great deer hunting traditions.

The plan details a new method for setting deer population objectives that integrates an assessment of deer impacts on forests with public preferences for deer population changes. It emphasizes new and adaptive approaches for harvesting antlerless deer by recommending strategic hunting season and tag changes in rural landscapes where additional harvest is needed and developing new opportunities for community-based deer management in suburban and urban areas. The plan provides greater transparency into the processes behind deer management including the methodology for setting harvest quotas for antlerless deer and estimating annual deer harvest totals. In addition, the plan identifies a series of statutory recommendations that would improve deer management capacity throughout New York.

To read the plan, go to www.dec.ny.gov and search “Deer Management Plan.”
The 10 Commandments of Firearm Safety

1. Watch that muzzle! Keep it pointed in a safe direction at all times.
2. Treat every firearm with the respect due a loaded gun. It might be loaded, even if you think it isn’t.
3. Be sure of your target and what is in front of it and beyond it. Know the identifying features of the game you hunt. Make sure you have an adequate backstop—don’t shoot at a flat, hard surface or water.
4. Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot. This is the best way to prevent an accidental discharge.
5. Check your barrel and ammunition. Make sure the barrel and action are clear of obstructions, and carry only the proper ammunition for your firearm.
6. Unload firearms when not in use. Leave actions open, and carry firearms in cases and unloaded to and from the shooting area.
7. Point a firearm only at something you intend to shoot. Avoid all horseplay with a gun.
8. Don’t run, jump, or climb with a loaded firearm.Unload a firearm before you climb a fence or tree, or jump a ditch. Pull a firearm toward you by the butt, not the muzzle.
9. Store firearms and ammunition separately and safely. Store each in a secured location beyond the reach of children and careless adults.
10. Do not consume alcoholic beverages before or during shooting. Also avoid mind- or behavior-altering medicines or drugs.

It’s About Learning

Preston Bilotta
Cuba, NY

There’s nothing like waking up at 4 a.m. on a cool, crisp spring morning, and just listening to a tom hammer off. There’s nothing like the crunching of the leaves of that buck that’s closing the distance. There’s nothing like that rabbit that takes off out of the bush you step on. Sitting around the fire telling old hunting stories, that’s what it’s all about. And until you experience it, you’ll never know the integrity of it.

I am 15 years old and I have been hunting for about four years now. I absolutely love it. I’ve been accompanying other hunters for about as long as I can remember. My dad first took me out when I was 5 years old. If I knew my dad was going hunting, and he didn’t wake me up the next morning to tag along, I would give him an earful! I thought I was the coolest person ever, walking around the woods with my dad. Rarely did we see anything, but I still had fun.

Ever since I was little, I enjoyed going out no matter the circumstance. I would walk all over the place for miles, to see no squirrels with my uncle. I would sit, not still, with my dad and see no deer; however, I enjoyed it every single time, and I still do. It doesn’t matter to me if I’m going out in the middle of the rut, on the edge of a hot bedding area, or if I’m running through the weeds chasing rabbits and squirrels. It’s all a learning thing for me, and I love it all. I have been fortunate enough to meet a lot of cool people who have helped me with hunting’s learning curve. Meeting people like the late Dave Streb, who worked for Quaker Boy turkey calls, has helped me learn a lot.

The best part of hunting is the adrenaline rush after harvesting an animal. There’s just nothing like it. This past year I broke my ankle, which held me back from being as mobile as I wanted to, but it did not slow me down from getting out there. I’ve been fortunate enough to have some pretty good luck. While doing what I absolutely love to do, I’ve been lucky enough to kill 4 deer, 3 turkeys, a coyote, and a bear.

But, there’s more to hunting than just killing “the big one.” Hunting is about learning, telling stories, making friends, and having fun! At the end of the day, it’s a reward if you harvest an animal. As my grandfather once told me, that’s why they call it hunting, not killing. Hunting and being in the woods is my happy place.
The use of lead ammunition for hunting is a complex issue. We know that lead bullet fragments in hunter-killed game can harm wildlife that feed on carcasses and gut piles and may be present in processed game meat consumed by people. We also know that hunters have questions and concerns about non-lead alternatives. While many express interest in learning more about the issue and may be willing to try non-lead options, concerns about ballistic performance, cost, and availability of non-lead ammunition are often expressed. Many hunters also worry about the potential for restrictions on how they hunt and their ability to make informed choices about what ammunition to use.

There is no “quick fix” to complex issues like this. Lead based ammunition has been used in hunting for generations, but more recently, reducing the risks lead bullet fragments can have on wildlife and people has gained attention. Coming up with effective solutions to reduce exposure to lead requires a deep understanding of the needs, interests, and concerns of all involved – hunters, conservationists, ammunition manufacturers and retailers, and wildlife managers, to name just a few.

To address this challenge, DEC convened a working group that includes representatives from DEC, the New York State Department of Health, Cornell University’s Wildlife Health Program, and organized hunting and conservation groups. Their goal is to understand all the facets of this issue including potential impacts to wildlife and human health, the economics of ammunition supply and demand, the pros and cons of existing programs, and the attitudes and values of hunters and other constituencies. This “fact finding” aspect is a critically important step that is necessary before effective solutions can be identified. Ultimately, the working group will make recommendations on ways to minimize the risks associated with lead hunting ammunition and increase acceptance and use of non-lead alternatives. Having a diverse group of partners working together on this issue will lead to actions that benefit the greatest number of people, our wildlife, and the environment for the long-term. For more information: https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/48420.html

Attention Rabbit Hunters: Protect New York’s Rabbits and Hares

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease is a fatal virus that affects rabbits and hares. In 2010, a new strain, RHDV2 was identified. RHDV2 was first documented in pet rabbits in the U.S. in 2018. In 2020, RHDV2 jumped to wild rabbits and hares in the southwestern U.S., where it spread to six states within 4 months.

RHDV2 is extremely hardy, easily transmitted, and highly lethal to rabbits and hares. It does not infect humans or other animals. RHDV2 spreads easily through direct contact between rabbits or contact with contaminated environments or objects. The virus can remain contagious for 3 or more months in a carcass or on inanimate objects.

If RHDV2 enters New York’s wild rabbit and hare populations, it could be impossible to control and could result in significant population declines throughout the State. To help protect these species:

- Avoid contact with domestic rabbits.
- If you are a member of a beagle club, avoid using domestic rabbits or transplanted wild rabbits for training.
- Avoid travel to states that have confirmed RHDV2 outbreaks; disinfect all gear after out-of-state travel with a 10% bleach solution (1-part household bleach, 9 parts water).
- Properly dispose of rabbit carcasses and bury carcasses deep enough to prevent scavenging.
- Do not bring rabbit carcasses killed in other states to New York.
- Report unusual rabbit mortalities to the DEC Wildlife Health Program (518-478-2203; wildlife@dec.ny.gov).

2020 Why I Hunt/Trap – Junior, First Hunt Category

Hunting – Expect the Unexpected

Mike Lomascolo
Auburn, NY

I’m a first-year youth outdoorsman. I was certified last year with an online hunter safety course. Since my other sports were cancelled because of COVID-19, I took the opportunity to hunt with my family and friends and learned a lot of things. Before COVID-19, I did not enjoy hunting as much as I do now because I had never had the chance to participate in the hunt. Now it was my turn and I was excited to go on my very first youth turkey hunt. In my turkey hunt, the turkey had gobbled, strutted, spit and drummed 10 yards away from me. It looked and sounded so cool to me because I had never seen that before in my life. I’m sure not too many people have seen that before! After getting my first turkey ever, I wanted to go more and more often. It felt so good to accomplish something I had never done or even thought I could do.

I enjoy hunting because you never know what’s going to happen. It’s always a surprise. Things don’t always go how you would expect, and I learned that the hard way. But that’s the thing about hunting, you can’t give up because then you won’t get to experience the feeling of long-awaited success. It taught me to be patient and to persevere. I hope I will hunt for the rest of my life and get to put a lot more animals on my trophy wall. I will always enjoy the pursuit of any animal I am hunting. Thanks to my family and friends that are hunters, I now have the desire to hunt for the rest of my life. I hope my experience will help other youths enjoy hunting.
Small Game includes upland and migratory game birds, small game mammals, certain fur-bearers, and reptiles and amphibians.

Please read general hunting regulations first on page 14.

General Regulations

• You may not use a rifle or handgun to hunt pheasant or migratory game birds. See page 48 for more information on turkeys.
• See pages 51–52 for additional information on migratory game birds.
• Air guns (see page 14) may be used to hunt squirrels, rabbits, hares, ruffed grouse, fur-bearers that may be hunted (e.g., raccoons and coyotes) and unprotected species (see page 15). Air guns may not be used to hunt waterfowl, pheasant, wild turkey, or big game.
• Crossbows may not be possessed afield in the Northern Zone when hunting small game (except coyotes) with the aid of a dog or when accompanied by a dog. Crossbows may be used to take any other small game or game birds during their respective open seasons except in Westchester and Suffolk counties.
• In Wildlife Management Unit 2A, hunting is permitted by falconry only.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Frogs—“Frogs” are defined as eastern spadefoot toad, eastern American toad, Fowler’s toad, northern cricket frog, northern gray treefrog, northern spring peeper, western chorus frog, bullfrog, green frog, mink frog, wood frog, northern leopard frog, southern leopard frog, and pickerel frog.

A fishing or hunting license is required to take frogs with a spear, club, hook, or by hand.

Snapping turtles—A hunting license is required to take snapping turtles. The only legal implement for taking snapping turtles is a gun, bow or crossbow.

Falconry Seasons

To hunt small game species with trained raptors, you must possess a Falconry License and a hunting license. Licensed falconers may take small game from October 1 through March 31 in any area of the state open to hunting these species EXCEPT:

Spruce Grouse vs. Ruffed Grouse

Male spruce grouse are very distinctive (mostly black with white markings and a red comb over each eye), but female spruce grouse are similar in color to ruffed grouse. By knowing the differences, hunters can avoid accidentally shooting spruce grouse. Loss of a female spruce grouse could be a significant setback for a small local population.

In New York State, the spruce grouse is an endangered species and not legal to hunt. Spruce grouse exist in lowland conifer forests in the Adirondacks. Although ruffed grouse occur in upland hardwoods statewide, during the fall and winter ruffed grouse may be found in spruce grouse habitat. Small game hunters in the Adirondack region must learn to distinguish between these species so that spruce grouse are not shot by mistake.
Waterfowl Hunting Zone Descriptions

Western Zone – That area west of a continuous line extending from Lake Ontario east along the north shore of the Salmon River to Interstate Route 81 and then south along Interstate Route 81 to the New York-Pennsylvania boundary.

Northeastern Zone – That area north of a continuous line extending from Lake Ontario east along the north shore of the Salmon River to Interstate Route 81, south along Interstate Route 81 to Route 31, east along Route 31 to Route 13, north along Route 13 to Route 49, east along Route 49 to Route 365, east along Route 365 to Route 28, east along Route 28 to Route 29, east along Route 29 to Route 22, north along Route 22 to Route 153, east along Route 153 to the New York-Vermont boundary, exclusive of the Lake Champlain Zone.

Lake Champlain Zone – That area east and north of a continuous line extending along Route 11 from the New York-Canada boundary south to Route 9B, south along Route 9B to Route 9, south along Route 9 to Route 22 south of Kees- eville, south along Route 22 to the west shore of South Bay along and around the shoreline of South Bay to Route 22 on the east shore of South Bay, southeast along Route 22 to Route 4, northeast along Route 4 to the New York- Vermont boundary.

Southeastern Zone – That area east of Interstate Route 81 that is south of a continuous line extending from Interstate Route 81 east along Route 31 to Route 13, north along Route 13 to Route 49, east along Route 49 to Route 365, east along Route 365 to Route 28, east along Route 28 to Route 29, east along Route 29 to Route 22, north along Route 22 to Route 153, east along Route 153 to the New York-Vermont boundary, and northwest of Interstate Route 95 in Westchester County.

Long Island Zone – That area consisting of Nassau and Suffolk counties and their tidal waters, and that area of Westchester County and its tidal waters southeast of Interstate Route 95. (See map page 53).

Special Sea Duck Area – All coastal waters and all waters of rivers and streams in New York State seaward from the first upstream bridge.

Changes in Atlantic Population Canada Goose Seasons

Atlantic Population (AP) Canada geese nest throughout northern Quebec and winter from New England to South Carolina. The largest concentrations of AP geese occur on the Del marva Peninsula (Delaware and the eastern shores of Maryland & Virginia) during the winter. Biologists in the Atlantic Flyway divide season zones based on the population that is most frequently harvested in an area. Although the zone boundaries may appear to be arbitrary, they were carefully developed using information from hunter band recoveries, neck collar studies, and satellite telemetry. The goal of zoning is to provide maximum opportunity in areas that mostly harvest “resident population” Canada geese (i.e., the birds that nest in southern Canada and Northeast U.S. states) while protecting the more vulnerable populations of migratory AP geese.

New York is in the heart of the Atlantic Flyway and serves as a major migration corridor for AP geese. These geese are a significant proportion of the harvest throughout upstate New York, especially in the Finger Lakes, Lake Ontario, St. Lawrence River, Lake Champlain, and Hudson River Valley regions. Season length and daily bag limits are more restrictive in these areas to protect migrating birds. While our local Canada geese are incredibly productive and have extremely high survival, the migratory Canada geese (that look nearly identical) are not so lucky. They take longer to sexually mature, have smaller clutch sizes, and lower survival. In some years, their breeding habitat isn’t thawed until late June. In those years, productivity can be very low to near zero, as occurred in 2018 and 2020.

The population of AP geese has fluctuated from as few as 35,000 pairs in the early to mid-1990s to over 200,000 during the 2000s. As a result of the low population in the 1990s, the hunting season was closed for a few years while the population recovered. By 2002, the population had rebounded to 180,000 breeding pairs and remained near that level until 2016. From 2010-2019 we have experienced several below-average productivity years compounded by increased harvest. The combination of poor productivity and increasing harvest caused a precipitous decline in the population from 2016 (192,000 pairs) to 2018 (112,000 pairs).

To avoid closed seasons, the Atlantic Flyway Council recommended that when seasons are restrictive, all states should have the same regulations to allow populations to rebound as quickly as possible. Therefore, the regular Canada goose season will be reduced to a 30-day season with a daily bag limit of one in the West Central, East Central, Northeast, Lake Champlain, and Hudson Valley zones. Harvest restrictions have also been made in Quebec and Ontario. The reduction in harvest will hopefully shorten the amount of time we are in a restrictive package. When the population rebounds, we anticipate season lengths and bag limits will be liberalized.
Q: Can I use a carcass tag from a friend or family to put on a deer, bear or turkey that I shot?  
A: No - it is unlawful to possess or use tags of another person, except properly consigned Deer Management Permits (DMPs) or landowner DMPs. DMP instructions can be found in this guide.

Q: I'm using an “app” that shows land owned by NY State – can I hunt on that land?  
A: State lands are owned by DEC, DOT, SUNY, NYS Parks, Thruway, and others. It's your responsibility to check the rules for each property, as even some DEC lands are off-limits to hunting.

Q: What documentation must I carry when hunting?  
A: You must carry your hunting license, plus carcass tags (deer, bear, turkey), any special permits (e.g., turkey permit), and a “duck” stamp with HIP# (if hunting migratory game birds), plus a back tag (where required). “Hunting license” means the printed license listing privileges or a lifetime license card or NY driver’s license with an “Adventurer” hunting icon. You may also use your HuntFishNY app for proof of a hunting license, provided you still have your back tag (where required) and carcass tag(s), or the quarry you’re hunting doesn’t require a carcass tag. Special hunts or hunt areas may require additional paperwork.

Q: Why can NY stores sell deer bait and salt blocks when it is illegal to use them for hunting?  
A: The law and regulation do not prohibit sale, but they prohibit the use of bait to aid in hunting and feeding deer (and bear) at all times. If the material is placed where the animal may ingest it, it is likely to be considered baiting or feeding.

Q: Are deer urine scents legal in NY?  
A: Yes, but DEC strongly urges hunters not to use natural deer urine products to protect NY deer from Chronic Wasting Disease. Hunters who want to use deer attractant scents should only use synthetic products.

Q: Why aren't food plots considered feeding or baiting?  
A: DEC regulations exempt wildlife food plots from feeding and baiting prohibitions as "areas established by standard agricultural production practices." Wildlife food plots do not concentrate deer in the same way as supplemental feed sites and do not entail the same risk of disease spread, behavioral changes, or localized ecological damage.

Q: Can I hunt small game with a rifle in counties where deer hunting with a rifle is prohibited?  
A: Yes, but if any deer season is open, you cannot use a rifle larger than .22 caliber. You may not possess rifles afield on Long Island or in Westchester Co.

Q: If the trapping season is open, can I hunt for that species?  
A: It depends on the season and species. Some furbearers may only be trapped, while some can also be hunted, but with different seasons. Coyote is a good example of a species that can be hunted and trapped, but season dates for hunting and trapping this species are different, so be sure to check the guide before going afield.

Q: I found a live wild animal in a trap. What can I do?  
A: Unless you own the trap or have permission (and are licensed to trap), it is illegal to release, dispatch or steal a trapped furbearer or tamper with legally set traps.

Q: After reporting my deer, transporting and cutting it up, what do I do with the carcass tag?  
A: The tag stays with the carcass and is not needed after the deer is prepared for consumption. DEC strongly encourages all hunters to dispose of your carcass waste in a landfill as a “best practice” for minimizing disease risks.

Q: How can I transport a crossbow in a vehicle?  
A: A crossbow must be decoccked to be legally possessed in or on a motor vehicle. Simply removing the bolt does not meet the requirement. When spotlighting deer, a crossbow must be taken down, securely fastened in a case, or locked in the trunk.

Q: What basic steps should I follow when an ECO approaches me while I am afield hunting?  
A: Most importantly, keep firearms pointed in a safe direction with the safety “ON.” Do not try to unload them, which can lead to accidents.

Q: Without permission, how far must I be from a house to discharge an implement?  
A: You must be a minimum of 150 feet to discharge a bow, 250 feet for crossbow and 500 feet for firearms including muzzleloaders. Local laws or ordinances on firearm discharges may also apply.

Q: May I hunt small game with an air gun?  
A: You may use an air gun to hunt any species that may legally be taken with a .22 caliber rim fire rifle, provided the air gun is no smaller than .17 caliber and has a muzzle velocity of at least 600 f.p.s.

Q: May I take a child younger than 12 with me while hunting? What about a spouse?  
A: Yes, a person of any age may accompany a hunter afield to observe as long as they do not assist in the taking of wildlife, such as calling animals or actively participating in a deer drive. If unsure, consult an ECO.

Q: I own a camp and property in New York. Can I purchase a resident hunting license?  
A: Residency is a fixed, permanent and principal home to which a person always intends to return. Simply owning land or paying taxes does not make one eligible for resident license fees. More information on residency is found in the front of this guide.

Q: Can our hunting party “share” Deer Management Permits (DMPs) on a deer drive?  
A: Only the person possessing the DMP may take an antlerless deer. DMPs may be consigned from one hunter to another, but this needs to happen before the deer is harvested. See the DMP consignment rules for more info.

Q: Can I target shoot on DEC lands?  
A: Yes, on some DEC lands. Many DEC state lands, including State Forests and Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) have specific rules prohibiting target shooting in some or all areas – call ahead. Where target shooting is allowed, you may not damage live trees and must remove all litter.

Q: Can I carry a handgun while bowhunting deer/bear during the special bowhunting seasons?  
A: No, you may not possess a firearm of any type while bowhunting during those seasons. Possession of a handgun in NY requires a NY Pistol Permit. NY does not recognize any permits from other states.

Q: Can 12 and 13-year-olds hunt deer with a firearm or crossbow in my county?  
A: Recently passed legislation allows supervised 12- and 13-year-olds to hunt deer with a firearm or crossbow only in upstate counties that opt into this provision. For more details and a list of counties that have opted in, go to https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/46245.html.

Q: May I transport an entire deer carcass into NY from another state?  
A: No. Chronic Wasting Disease regulations ban importation of whole carcasses from anywhere outside of New York State. See the CWD pages of this guidebook.