

IDNR Deer Season Regulations Changes – Facts and Analysis

The IDNR has adjusted deer hunting regulations for the 2009-2010 deer seasons. The changes reflect input and recommendations from wildlife management professionals, hunters, landowners and other citizens interest in the Illinois deer herd, as well as from the state's Joint Deer Population Task Force.

The task force was created by the Illinois General Assembly to examine and make recommendations on ways to manage the Illinois deer population. Task force members met with IDNR staff and conducted a series of open house public meetings last year to craft recommendations for improving Illinois' deer herd management. A number of the task force's recommendations are included in the regulations changes being implemented beginning in 2009-2010.

Deer Harvest Analysis

Deer seasons and regulations have changed a lot in recent years. How does deer hunting in Illinois stack up when compared with just 10 years ago?

During the 1999 Illinois deer seasons, hunters harvested 136,534 deer. At that time, those results ranked second only to the then-record harvest in the 1995 season. The harvest of does comprised 42 percent of the total harvest with bucks at 58 percent. In 1999, yearling bucks made up about 54 percent of the antlered-buck harvest, with older bucks making up the remaining 46 percent. That was considered good, particularly when compared with other states.

What about today? During the 2008 season, hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 188,425 deer, an increase of more than 51,000 deer and a boost of 38 percent compared with 1999. Buck-to-doe ratios in the harvest last year were very balanced with about 50 percent of each. Although IDNR has not yet completed analysis of the buck age structure for 2008, it has hovered at about 40 percent yearlings/60 percent older bucks during each of the last three years. That is a significant improvement over years past. Perhaps that's why so many hunters from across the country come to Illinois looking for the "good old days."

Deer Hunting Administrative Rule Changes for 2009-2010

Changes to 17 Ill. Adm. Code 650 and 660 – Making unsold firearm and muzzleloader deer permits available over-the-counter (OTC): This was a recommendation of the Joint Deer Task Force (JDTF). It will provide a service that is more convenient and user-friendly to hunters. Since permit numbers will be limited by quota and selling all permits first-come first-served might cause a rush on permit agents, a series of random daily

drawings as are offered currently will be used prior to putting the remaining permits on sale OTC. This will allow for a fair and equitable distribution of permits, but will also allow persons filling their deer tags during the seasons to purchase more permits at license agents, so long as the quota has not been filled, as was the intent of the JDTF recommendation.

Change to 17 Ill. Adm. Code 670 – Changing the ending date of the archery deer season: The JDTF recommended that archery deer hunters be allowed to hunt during the dates of the Late-Winter Deer Season (and that the Late-Winter season be lengthened). Since archers are currently not allowed to hunt during the Late-Winter Season, increasing the number of days in that season would penalize archers and shorten the archery season is not lengthened. The ending date of the archery season will be pushed back by three days to coincide with the end of the Late-Winter and Special CWD Season so that bow hunters may hunt concurrently during those seasons.

Change to 17 Ill. Adm. Code 685 –

- Selling all Youth Deer Permits over the counter (OTC) without a county quota: Youth hunters be allowed to purchase a single, county-specific deer permit for the Youth Deer Season at license agents, as opposed to the current lottery system of permit distribution. Even with the lottery system, IDNR has not limited the number of successful applicants to date. Participation in the youth season has been low, with a record harvest of approximately 1,100 during 2006. In order to encourage youth hunting as much as possible, and to make it as simple as possible to obtain a permit, youth deer season permits will be available OTC for 2009.

Changes to 17 Ill. Adm. Code 680 –

- Designating two categories of counties included in the Late-Winter Season based on deer status: As recommended by the JDTF, the change will allow IDNR to limit permit sales differently, based on the deer management needs of a particular county. For counties needing significant increases in deer harvest (to be known as Zone A), hunters would be able to purchase Late-Winter Season permits without limit. For counties without the need for significant harvest increases (Zone B), hunters would be able to purchase a single permit for each county within the zone. In surveys conducted last year by the IDNR for the JDTF, 62 percent of respondents supported this approach.
- Selling Late-Winter Deer Season permits OTC: As recommended by the JDTF, this change will make it easier for hunters to obtain permits while still allowing IDNR to control permit sales using the zone designation as indicated above. In

extreme cases, IDNR can close a county to Late-Winter deer hunting if herd management warrants it. IDNR has done this before routinely, and only about three-fourths of counties are currently open to this season). In surveys for the JDTF, 76 percent of respondents supported selling Late-Winter season permits OTC.

- Changing the Late-Winter Deer Season from a three-day season in mid-January to a split seven-day season. The season will consist of four days beginning the first Thursday after Christmas and three days beginning the first Friday after January 11. Season dates for the upcoming hunting season would be Dec. 31, 2009 – Jan. 3, 2010, and Jan. 15 - 17, 2010. The second portion of the season coincides with the existing season. The JDTF recommended that the Late-Winter season be lengthened to nine days, so this change addresses the issue of a longer season. Splitting this season and moving the first portion into late December-early January will allow families to hunt together during the Christmas-New Year's holidays when young hunters are typically out of school. In addition, having a split season may avoid some of the adverse weather impacts that have occurred frequently in past years. In surveys for the JDTF, 67 percent of respondents supported lengthening the Late-Winter season.

Changes to 17 Ill. Adm. Code 675 –

- Increasing the length of the Special CWD Deer Season from three days to seven days: The Special CWD season dates will coincide with the expanded Late-Winter season. Checking in deer at check stations will no longer be required during this season, so the automated harvest reporting system will be used.

Comments on the proposed changes in regulations can be submitted in writing through June 22, 2009 to William K. Richardson, General Counsel, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271.