



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Deer Hunting by 12- and 13- Year-Old Hunters

A Report to the New York State Senate and Assembly

February 22, 2022



Ava Woolston, age 12, with the deer she took in Orleans County during the 2021 Youth Big Game Hunt, mentored by her father. Ryan Woolston.

www.dec.ny.gov

Deer Hunting by 12- and 13-Year-Old Hunters

- Prepared by -

Jeremy Hurst, NYSDEC Big Game Unit Leader

The 2021 New York State Budget included legislation that adopted a new section of the Environmental Conservation Law (11-0935) authorizing a license holder who is twelve or thirteen years of age to hunt deer with a crossbow, rifle, shotgun, or muzzleloading firearm under the supervision of an experienced adult hunter in eligible areas. The legislation established this new opportunity as a pilot program through 2023 and required counties to adopt a local law authorizing participation and notify the department of such participation.

DEC is pleased to provide the following report to the legislature which highlights the success of the inaugural program and fulfills the requirement of Environmental Conservation Law 11-0935(3) which states, *“The department shall prepare a report by February first of each year including the following information at a minimum: number of violations; hunting related incidents and revocations pursuant to section 11-0719; the number of counties participating; the number of minors participating; and the number of deer taken.”*

Preliminary Results from the 2021-22 Deer Hunting Seasons

Participation of 12- and 13-year-old deer hunters

# Licensed 12- and 13-year-old hunters ¹		9,859
Estimated Participation:	Regular Firearms Deer Season	85%
	Youth Big Game Hunt over Columbus Day Weekend	62%
	General Muzzleloader Deer Season	21%
	Holiday Hunt portion of the Late Muzzleloader Season	26%
	Bowhunting Season	31%
	With a Crossbow During any Season	18%
Deer Harvest Reports submitted by 12- and 13-year-old hunters ²		1,564

¹ License holders who were 12- or 13-years-old at any time during the 2021 hunting seasons when 12- and 13-year-old hunters could use a firearm or crossbow (September 12, 2021 through January 1, 2022).

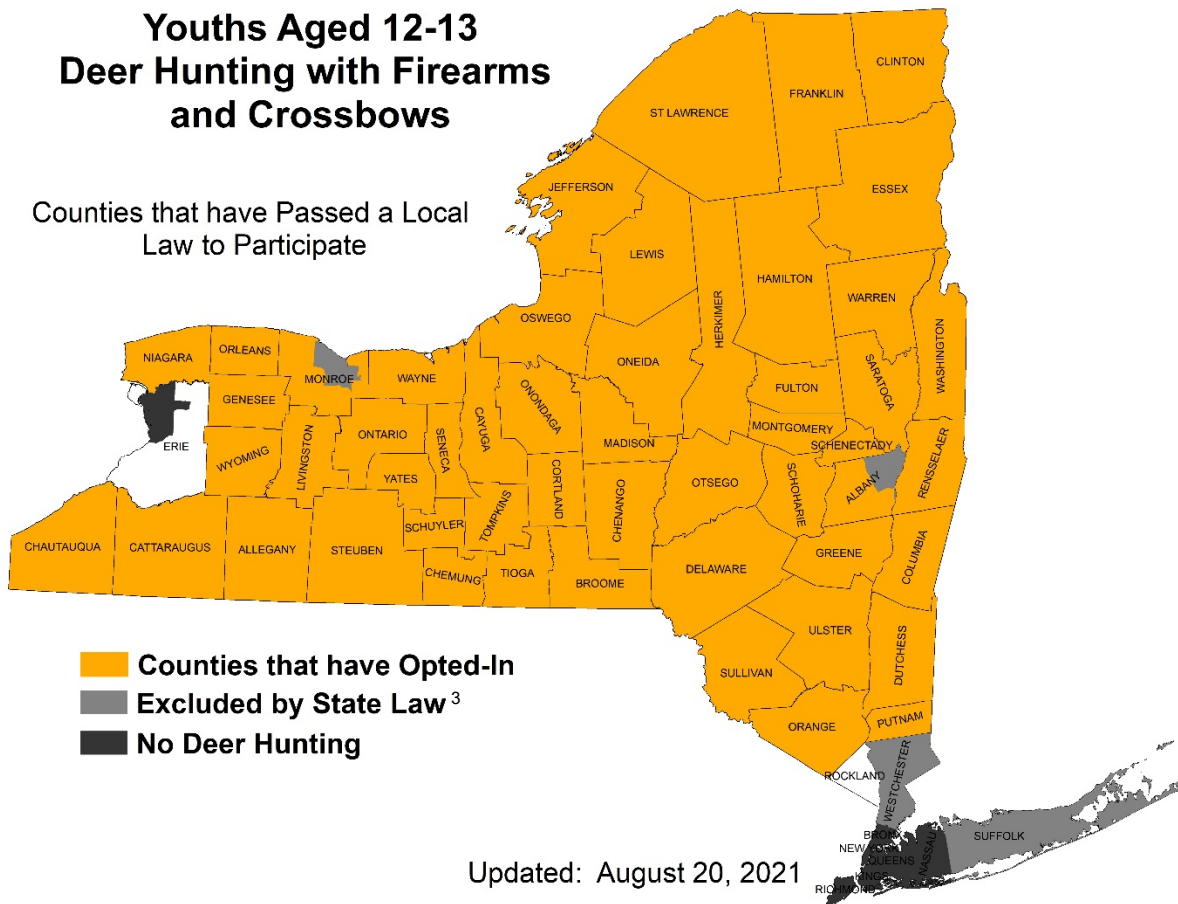
² Reported take value represents raw harvest reports with date of harvest between September 12, 2021 and January 1, 2022. This includes 173 deer reported taken with a bow. Calculated deer harvest was not available at the time of this report, as deer hunting seasons continued in portions of New York until January 31.

Safety and Compliance of 12- and 13-year-old deer hunters

Hunting related shooting incidents	0
Hunting violations	0
Hunting license revocations	0

County Participation

ECL 11-0935(2) defines eligible areas as: “a county that has passed a local law authorizing participation in the pilot program and has notified the department of such participation, however, that the following counties: Westchester; Richmond; Bronx; New York; Kings; Queens; Nassau; and Suffolk shall not be deemed to be eligible.” Thus, 54 of the 62 New York State counties were eligible to participate in the pilot program. Of the 54 eligible counties, only Erie and Rockland county did not pass a local law to allow 12- and 13-year-olds to hunt deer with a firearm or crossbow.



³ Portions of Albany and Monroe counties were excluded by state laws (ECL 11-0907(5)(a) and 11-0907(7)(b)) that restrict deer hunting in those areas to use of longbows only.

Testimonials from Junior Hunters and their Mentors on the 2021 Big Game Seasons

"Best thing NYS has done for youths in NYS. Great to have the kids enjoying the outdoors."

"Had a great time teaching and enjoying the extra time with son. Thanks again."

"I got to spend time with my grandfather and although we did not score a deer just being in our woods was fun."

"It's a great way to get the young generation to hunt."

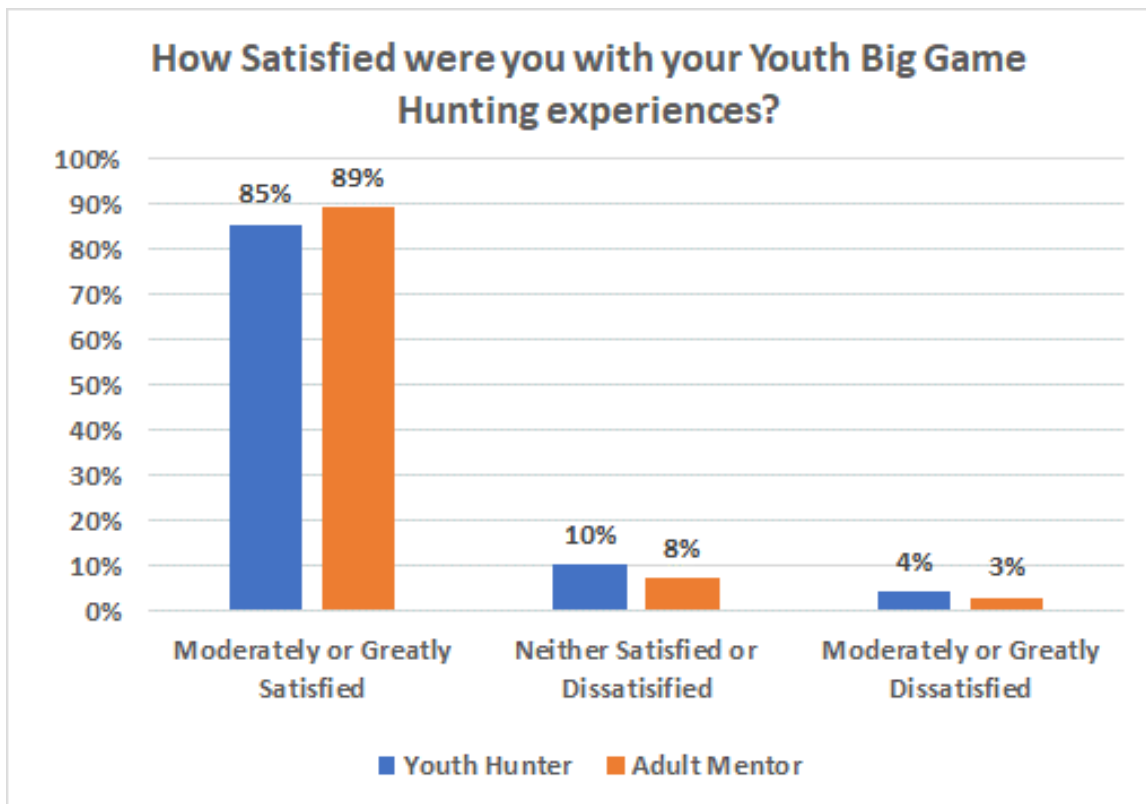
"Love the early opportunity with my father. Great bonding experience."

"The youth hunt is great...I think it builds a great trust and cooperation between DEC officers, young hunters and their parents, that extends well beyond the weekend. Great experience."

"This was a great opportunity. Thank you for allowing this and promoting younger hunters."



Holland B. from Ontario County got her first doe and buck in 2021. "What an amazing year!"



Recommendations

As evidenced in this report, it is clear that 12- and 13-year-old hunters can safely and successfully hunt deer with a firearm or crossbow and should be authorized to retain this important opportunity. In order to continue to cultivate the next generation of safe and responsible hunters and capitalize on the success of this program, DEC provides the following recommendations to expand youth hunting opportunities in New York:

- 1- Make permanent the authorization for 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt deer with a firearm and crossbow.** We assessed participation and harvest by junior big game hunters through a post-season survey and asked about their level of satisfaction with their big game hunting opportunities in 2021. More than 9,800 young hunters (aged 12 and 13), representing approximately 9,500 families were eligible to hunt deer with a firearm or crossbow in 2021. These hunters were safe and successful, and satisfaction levels were extremely high. 85% of these young hunters and 89% of their adult mentors reported being moderately or greatly satisfied with their youth big game hunting experience this past year. Existing state law permanently allows hunters aged 12 and 13 to hunt small game with a firearm or long bow and big game with a long bow, when properly supervised. Establishing the same permanent provisions for 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt big game with a firearm will ensure that 12-year-olds can continue to hunt big game when they are 13 and that younger siblings have the same opportunity when they turn 12.
- 2- Allow 12- and 13-year-old hunters to also hunt black bear with a firearm and crossbow.** Youths aged 12 and 13 have been legally able to hunt black bears with a longbow in New York since 2011 and have done so without incident. Hunting black bear with a longbow is unquestionably more challenging than hunting black bear with a firearm. Nonetheless, 12- and 13-year-old hunters have routinely demonstrated that they can safely and successfully harvest a black bear with a longbow. These same hunters, and all 12- and 13-year-old hunters, should be given the opportunity to also hunt black bear with firearms and crossbows.
- 3- Extend the authorization for 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt deer with a firearm or crossbow to all of New York State (subject to other provisions of ECL) and remove the requirement for counties to pass a local law opting-in.** Of all the eligible counties in New York, only Erie and Rockland Counties did not pass a local law authorizing participation in the pilot program as required by 11-0935. However, in both of these counties, hunters aged 14-years or older can hunt deer and bear with firearms and crossbows. Similarly, Westchester and Suffolk Counties were specifically excluded from the provisions of 11-0935 despite an existing firearms season for deer in January in Suffolk County and provisions in 11-0903(7) authorizing the same potential opportunity in Westchester County. Young hunters in Erie, Rockland, Suffolk, and Westchester counties should not be forced to hunt elsewhere and should be given opportunity to hunt in the same locations and in the same manner as their peers, older siblings, and other family members.