



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Deer Hunting by 12- and 13- Year-Old Hunters in 2024

A Report to the New York State Senate and Assembly

February 2025



Jordan V., age 12, deer hunting with his mother, Ashley V., in WMU 9M

12- and 13-Year-Old Deer Hunting Pilot Program Summary

Currently, all states allow youth 12 years old or younger to hunt big game with a firearm. In 2021, New York State enacted legislation that created a new section of the Environmental Conservation Law (ECL) 11-0935 authorizing a license holder who is 12 or 13 years of age to hunt deer with a crossbow, rifle, shotgun, or muzzleloading firearm under the supervision of an experienced adult mentor in eligible counties.

The legislation established this opportunity as a pilot program through 2023 and required counties to adopt a local law authorizing participation and to notify the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) of such participation. Legislation enacted in 2023 extended this pilot program through 2025.

Of New York's 54 eligible counties, 52 participated during the first four years of the pilot program. Over this time, DEC documented no hunting-related shooting incidents (HRSIs), violations, or hunting license revocations involving 12- and 13-year-old deer hunters. Further, the pilot program has increased overall Conservation Fund resources through license sales revenue and provided DEC an additional tool to advance deer management objectives. DEC continues to document high levels of participation in and satisfaction with the pilot program through post-season surveys of eligible hunters and their mentors (Table 1, Figure 1). Two hundred-and-eighty-four 12- and 13-year-old hunters and their mentors responded to DEC's post-season survey to evaluate the fourth year of the pilot program.

DEC is pleased to provide the following report to the Legislature highlighting the success of the first four years of the pilot program, as well as recommendations to make the program permanent. This report fulfills the requirement of ECL 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."



Parker L., age 12, deer hunting with his father, Eric L., in WMU 4W

Preliminary Results from 2024-25 Deer Hunting Seasons

Table 1. Pilot program summary statistics. Estimated participation based on a post-season survey of 12- and 13-year-old licensed hunters and their adult mentors.

Big Game Hunting Season		2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
# Licensed 12- and 13-Year-Old Hunters ¹		12,992	12,745	12,717	12,163
Estimated Participation by Season	Regular Firearms Season	85%	85%	79%	76%
	Youth Big Game Hunt	62%	70%	68%	57%
	Muzzleloader Season	21%	16%	18%	12%
	Holiday Hunt	26%	18%	18%	16%
	Bowhunting Season	31%	25%	17%	14%
	Crossbow During any Season	18%	22%	12%	11%
# Deer Harvest Reports ²		1,564	1,824	1,487	2,083
# Hunting-Related Shooting Incidents (HRSIs), violations, & license revocations		0	0	0	0
Hunting License Sales		\$252,915	\$206,095	\$246,880	\$206,415

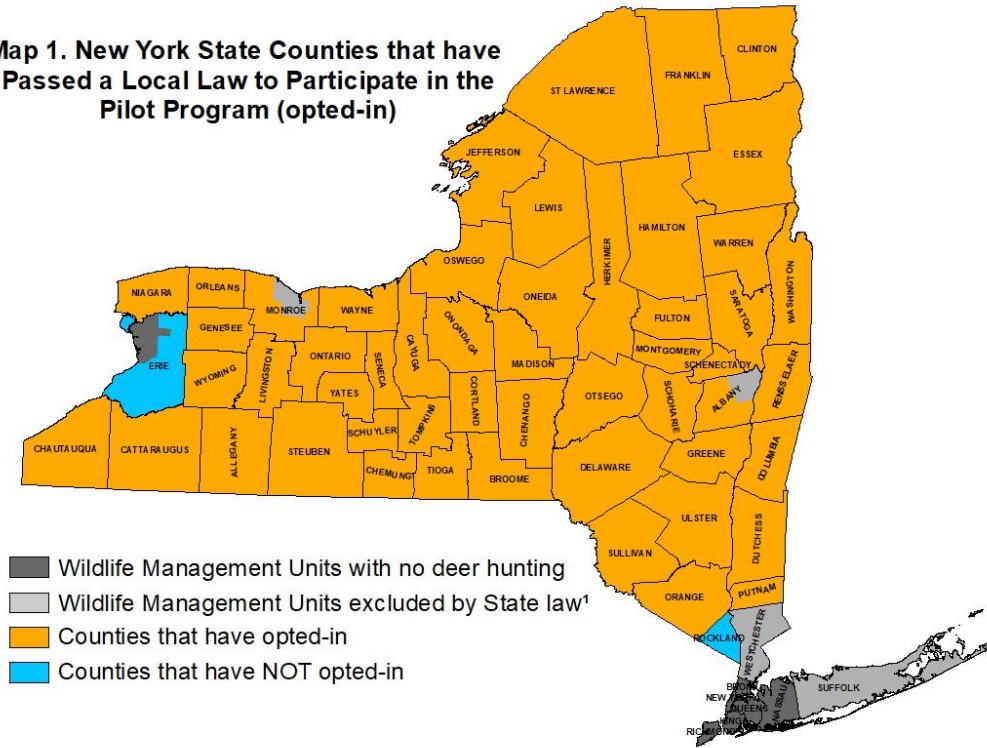
¹ License holders 12 or 13 years old at any time during the hunting season when 12- and 13-year-old hunters could use a firearm or crossbow.

² Only includes deer harvest reports. Without information on reporting rate these values operate as an index but may not accurately represent harvest trends through time. All deer harvest reports and reporting rate information for the 2024-25 hunting season were not available at the time of this report, as deer hunting seasons continued in portions of New York State until January 31. Final deer harvest estimates from the 2024-25 hunting season will be available in DEC's 2024 white-tailed deer harvest summary report.

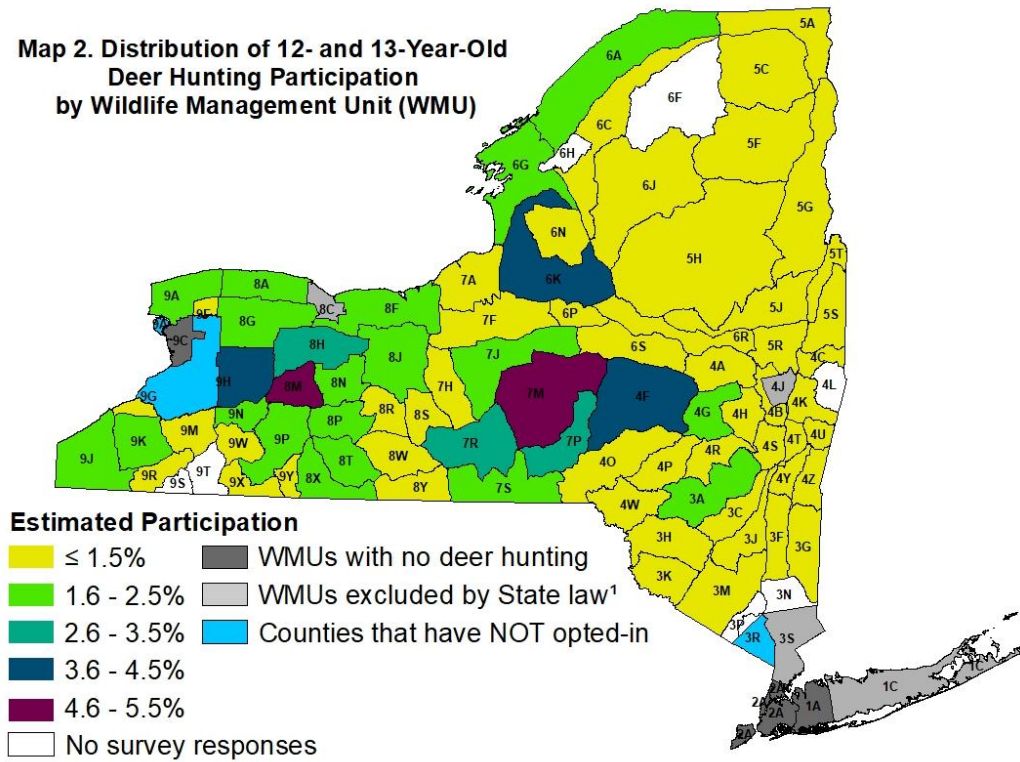
Participation in Eligible Counties and Wildlife Management Units

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 62 New York counties were eligible to participate in the pilot program. Of the 54 eligible counties, only Erie and Rockland counties did not pass a local law allowing 12- and 13-year-old hunters to participate in the pilot program (Map 1). Surveyed 12- and 13-year-old hunters went deer hunting with a firearm or crossbow in 77 Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) across the state with the highest estimated participation in WMUs 7M and 8M (Map 2).

Map 1. New York State Counties that have Passed a Local Law to Participate in the Pilot Program (opted-in)



Map 2. Distribution of 12- and 13-Year-Old Deer Hunting Participation by Wildlife Management Unit (WMU)



¹ WMUs 1C, 3S, 4J, and 8C were excluded from the pilot program by state laws (ECL 11-0907(5)(a) and 11-0907(7)(b)) that restrict deer hunting in those areas to use of bows only.

12- and 13-Year-Old Hunter/Mentor Testimonials and Satisfaction

Similar to previous years, 89 percent of 12- and 13-year-old hunters and 92 percent of their adult mentors were moderately or greatly satisfied with their youth deer hunting experience (Figure 1). Testimonials provided by participating 12- and 13-year-old hunters and their mentors demonstrate the great value they see in the pilot program and desire for it to continue permanently.

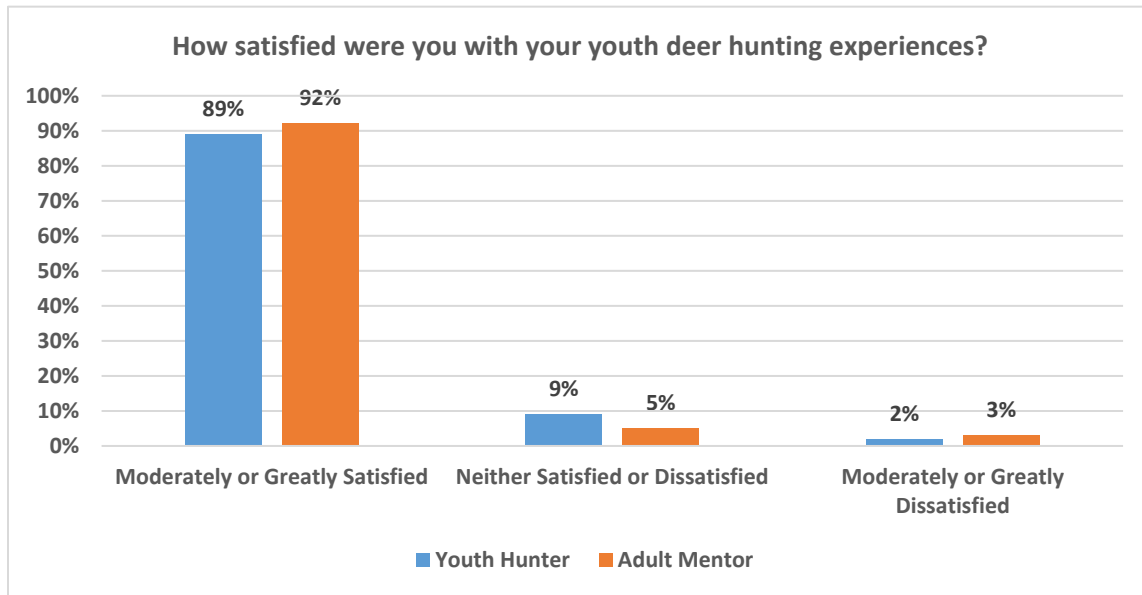


Figure 1. Results from DEC's post-season survey of 12- and 13-year-old deer hunters and their adult mentors about their satisfaction with the 2024-25 pilot program.

Testimonials from 12 and 13 Year Old Hunters and Mentors on the 2024 25 Deer Seasons

"I hope the State Senate and Assembly follow the lead of neighboring states and reduce the legal barriers to passing on our outdoor heritage and traditions to the next generation." - **Mentor of Chase A., Age 12**

"Extending the youth hunt to 12- and 13-year-olds really opens the opportunity up for the children of NYS to get outdoors and enjoy this beautiful state." - **Mentor of Logan K., Age 12, Ontario County**

"We spent the whole summer getting her comfortable and accurate with a firearm. I have been anticipating her first season as much as she has and watching her take her first deer was thrilling and rewarding." - **Mentor of Adeline B., Age 12, Cayuga County**

"It was a great experience for my grandson. He was so excited to take a buck. Sitting next to him, it was an even greater thrill for me." - **Mentor of Austin S., Age 12, Allegheny County**

"It's so important to take your kids hunting. It gets them in nature and is a life sport that gets generations of families together." - **Mentor of Michael P., Age 13**

"The Youth Hunt Weekend and Holiday Hunt are great! The Youth hunt allows my youngest son and I to spend a great weekend in the woods. The Holiday Hunt is a great time to get the entire family out when everyone is off from school and work!" - **Mentor of Hayes F., Age 12, Ulster County**

12- and 13-year-old Deer Hunter Photo Submissions



Charlie C., 13, deer hunting with his brother and father, Rob C., in WMU 5A



Adam M., 12, deer hunting with his father, Matt M., in WMU 7M



Annette S., 12, and Michael S., 13, deer hunting with their parents, Jim and Mary Beth S., in WMU 4F



Jillian H., 13, filling out the tag for the buck she harvested during the Youth Hunt in WMU 4F



Kayden R., 12, with the buck she harvested during the Youth Hunt in WMU 6K



Elise M., 12, with the buck she harvested during the Youth Hunt in WMU 8P

Recommendations

Over the first four years of the pilot program, 12- and 13-year-old hunters and their mentors have proven they can safely and successfully hunt deer with a firearm or crossbow. To cultivate the next generation of safe and responsible hunters and capitalize on this program's success, DEC provides the following recommendations:

1. **Make permanent the authorization for 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt deer with a firearm and crossbow.** Existing state law allows 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt small game with a firearm or longbow and big game with a longbow when properly supervised. Establishing the same permanent provisions for 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt big game with a firearm would make New York State consistent with other states that currently allow youth 12 years old or younger to hunt big game with a firearm. Further, many 12- and 13-year-old hunters lack the physical strength to pull back a longbow. Allowing 12- and 13-year-old hunters to use a crossbow would help ensure they are able to participate during New York's bowhunting seasons.
2. **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 into the program.** Throughout New York State, hunters aged 14 years or older can hunt deer and bear with firearms and crossbows. An annual county opt-in program for 12- and 13-year-old hunters creates a potential patchwork of regulations and hunting opportunities and additional work for county legislatures, increases the likelihood for confusion among participating hunters and mentors, and cedes DEC's regulatory authority to manage hunting seasons.
3. **Allow 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt black bear with a firearm and crossbow.** Twelve- and 13-year-old hunters have been legally able to hunt black bears with a longbow in New York since 2011 and have done so successfully and without safety incidents. Hunting black bear with a longbow is unquestionably more challenging than hunting black bear with a firearm. Therefore, 12- and 13-year-old hunters should be given the opportunity to hunt black bear with firearms and crossbows.
4. **Allow 12- and 13-year-old hunters to hunt big game with a firearm from an elevated position.** Twelve- and 13-year-old big game hunters are currently able to hunt with longbows from elevated positions but are prohibited from using an elevated tree stand or elevated blind when hunting with a firearm. This reduces sight distances, which limits opportunities to see and harvest animals and restricts shot opportunities that might otherwise be safely taken using the ground as a backstop. Hunting from an elevated position is safe when hunters follow appropriate [safety precautions](#). Two-person ladder stands and elevated blinds provide easily accessible, safe shooting platforms for 12- and 13-year-old hunters and their mentors.