

Proposed Hunting Regulation Changes to Increase Antlerless Deer Harvest Questions and Answers Fall 2026



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Hunters should be aware of proposed regulation changes to increase harvest of antlerless deer.

Deer populations are growing in many areas of New York State, and increased harvest of antlerless (primarily female) deer is necessary to keep deer populations healthy, in balance with available habitat, and at levels that are acceptable to all members of the public. Therefore, DEC is proposing to modify deer hunting regulations to encourage and incentivize hunters to harvest more antlerless deer.

To get to this point, DEC evaluated a variety of regulatory and non-regulatory options to increase harvest of antlerless deer. The process incorporated results from a series of focus groups, a [statewide survey of deer hunters](#), and input from professional deer biologists and managers across the Northeast. Specifically, DEC is proposing to modify the Deer Management Permit (DMP) issuance process to increase DMP availability, allow unlimited transfer of DMPs between hunters, include more WMUs in the nine-day season for antlerless deer in mid-September, and establish an Earn-a-2nd-Buck system.



A successful antlerless deer hunt in Tompkins County

- **Modify the [Deer Management Permit \(DMP\)](#) issuance process to increase DMP availability.** Currently, Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) 1C, 3S, 4J, and 8C have no DMP quota (i.e., unlimited DMP availability). The proposed regulations would create a second pathway for DMP issuance in units without a quota, allowing hunters to simultaneously apply for two DMPs in WMUs without a quota and two DMPs in WMUs with a quota through the typical lottery process, potentially obtaining up to four DMPs when they buy their license. All hunters who apply for DMPs in units without a quota would receive them. Additionally, hunters who harvest and report antlerless deer using DMPs in any of the WMUs without a quota would automatically receive bonus DMPs, allowing them to continue harvesting antlerless deer. The proposed regulation would enable DEC to add and remove WMUs to the list of units without a DMP quota as population management needs change. For 2026, DEC would add 19 WMUs (3M, 3P, 3R, 6P, 7F, 7H, 7J, 7R, 8A, 8F, 8G, 8H, 8J, 8N, 8R, 8S, 9A, 9F, and 9G) to the list of those with no DMP quota.
- **Allow an unlimited number of DMPs to be transferred between hunters.** Under current regulations, hunters can only have two DMPs transferred to them from other hunters. The proposed regulations would allow hunters to have an unlimited number of DMPs transferred to them from other hunters.
- **Expand the nine-day season for antlerless deer in mid-September.** Currently, WMUs 1C, 3S, 3M, 3R, 4J, 8A, 8C, 8F, 8G, 8J, 8N, 9A, and 9F have a nine-day season for antlerless deer in mid-September. The proposed regulations would add 10 WMUs (3P, 6P, 7F, 7H, 7J, 7R, 8H, 8R, 8S, and 9G) to the list of those enrolled in this September season.

- **Establish an Earn-a-2nd-Buck system.** Currently, deer hunters can harvest two antlered deer per year – one using their Bow/Muzzleloader Either-Sex Tag and a second using their Regular Season Deer Tag. The proposed regulations would require hunters to harvest and report an antlerless deer before receiving a tag to harvest a second antlered deer. To accommodate this, DEC is proposing to reclassify the current Regular Season Deer Tag as an “Antlered Deer Tag” that could be used during all deer seasons with appropriate license privileges. All hunters would receive this first Antlered Deer Tag upon hunting license purchase.

The proposed regulations would also reclassify the Bow/Muzzleloader Either-Sex Deer Tag as a Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag. Hunters who purchase the bowhunting and muzzleloader privileges would receive a Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag for each privilege.

Hunters who harvest and report an antlerless deer on any eligible antlerless deer tag (i.e., Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag, DMP, Deer Management Assistance Program tag, etc.) would receive a second Antlered Deer Tag which could be used during all deer seasons with appropriate license privileges.

Full details of the proposed regulations, are available at [Fish & Wildlife Regulatory Revisions](#). DEC compiled answers to commonly asked questions that apply to these proposed changes.

Questions about the Regulation Timeline

Q. Will these changes be in place for the 2026 hunting seasons?

A. Possibly. The public has 60 days to review and submit comments on the proposals. After reviewing those comments, DEC will then decide whether to withdraw, modify, or adopt the changes as proposed. Additionally, the proposed changes require modification of DEC’s licensing system. If DEC decides to adopt the proposals, the changes could potentially be implemented in 2026. Or, if the timeline is too tight to adequately inform hunters or make the necessary updates to the licensing system, DEC could decide to hold implementation till 2027.

Check [DEC’s website](#) and [Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide](#) prior to going afield for more information on the proposed changes.

Questions on Modifying the DMP Issuance Process to Increase DMP Availability

Q. Will there be an increased fee for DMPs if hunters can apply for four DMPs instead of two upon purchase (two DMPs in WMUs with no quota and two DMPs in WMUs with a quota)?

A. No. The [fees to apply for DMPs](#) will remain unchanged.

Q. In WMUs with unlimited DMPs, will hunters be able to harvest multiple antlerless deer in one hunt and then tag them all at the end of the hunt?

A. Hunters may only harvest the number and type of deer for which they possess tags (paper or electronic). If a hunter possesses two DMPs for the WMU they are hunting in, they may fill both of those tags during the same hunt. If they are hunting in a WMU with unlimited DMPs and e-tag their harvest, Bonus DMPs will be automatically added to their [DECALS](#) profile and emailed if there is a valid email associated with their profile. E-tag users will automatically see these Bonus DMPs in the [HuntFishNY mobile app](#) under “Licenses & Tags/Report Harvest.” E-tag users could do all this while hunting. Paper tag users will be able to print the tag(s) from their DECALS profile, from the email, or from a regional DEC office. Paper tag users must have the Bonus DMP in their possession before continuing to hunt and harvest additional antlerless deer.

Q. Won’t unlimited DMPs create the potential for substantial overharvest of deer populations?

A. WMUs 1C, 3S, 4J, and 8C already have no DMP quota and Bonus DMPs. This has not resulted in an overharvest of deer populations in those areas. DEC is only proposing unlimited DMPs in WMUs where deer populations need to be reduced and will monitor whether the proposed changes have helped achieve deer population objectives. If so, the proposed WMUs with unlimited DMPs would eventually transition back to having DMP quotas.

Q. Will applying for DMPs in a No-Quota WMU affect my preference point status or ability to get DMPs in WMUs with a quota?

A. No. All applicants in WMUs without quotas will receive DMPs. For WMUs with DMP quotas, the issuance will proceed as it has in the past with landowners of >50 acres and veterans with disabilities having highest priority for issuance, followed by residents with preference points, then residents without preference points, then non-residents.

Questions on Allowing an Unlimited Number of DMPs to be Transferred Between Hunters

Q. How will the DMP transfer process work if hunters can transfer an unlimited number of DMPs?

A. Hunters looking to transfer DMPs must use paper tags and follow the process described on DEC's [Antlerless Deer Hunting webpage](#) and page 31 of DEC's annual [hunting and trapping regulations guide](#). DMPs cannot be transferred electronically at this time.

Q. Can I transfer my other deer tags to other hunters?

A. No. Only DMPs and Bonus DMPs can be transferred to other hunters.

Q. If I transfer a DMP to another hunter and they report an antlerless deer with it, do I get the second Antlered Deer Tag and/or a Bonus DMP?

A. No. Only the hunter who reports an antlerless deer harvest is eligible to receive the second Antlered Deer Tag if that is the first antlerless deer they report. Similarly, only the hunter who reports an antlerless deer harvest on a DMP, and in a WMU with unlimited DMPs, is eligible to receive a Bonus DMP.

Questions on Expanding the Nine-Day Season for Antlerless Deer in Mid-September

Q. Why is DEC proposing to add WMUs to the antlerless deer season in mid-September?

A. The nine-day season for antlerless deer in mid-September has been in place in 13 WMUs since 2021 and provides opportunity for hunters to take adult female deer at a time when they may be more readily distinguished from fawns and without the distraction of hunting for antlered deer. In the additional 10 WMUs proposed for inclusion in the September antlerless season, deer populations are greater than desired and simply issuing more DMPs is not an adequate solution. The September antlerless season also compliments and will work together with the other elements of the proposed regulations (i.e., unlimited DMP availability and Earn-a-2nd-Buck). For example, the September season affords hunters the opportunity to earn their second Antlered Deer Tag by taking an antlerless deer before other deer hunting seasons begin and before antlered deer can be hunted. Additionally, all WMUs proposed to be enrolled in the September season are also proposed to have unlimited DMPs.

Q. Is DEC concerned that the antlerless deer season in mid-September could increase harvest of buck fawns or adult does with fawns?

A. Hunters have continued to demonstrate their ability to differentiate adult female deer from fawns based on DEC's tracking of the age structure of the antlerless deer harvest. Fawns are even easier to distinguish from adult does in September because of their much smaller size. Some fawns will also still have spots at that time of year. Most fawns are fully weened by mid to late August and can survive on their own even if their doe is harvested.

Questions on Establishing an Earn-A-2nd-Buck System

Q. What do I have to do to get the second Antlered Deer Tag?

A. You must harvest an antlerless deer using a valid tag and report it. You can report [online](#), via the [HuntFishNY Mobile App](#), or using the toll-free automated reporting system at 1-866-GAME-RPT (1-866-426-3778).

Q. Does it matter what tag I use to harvest an antlerless deer?

A. Hunters who report an antlerless deer harvest on a DMP, DMAP tag, Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag, Bonus Youth Antlerless Deer Tag, or Antlered Deer Tag during a late Bow/Muzzleloader season (valid for a deer of either-sex during the late bow/muzzleloader seasons) will be eligible to receive the second Antlered Deer Tag.

Q. Once I report an antlerless deer harvest, how will I receive my second Antlered Deer Tag?

A. When hunters report their first antlerless deer harvest, the second Antlered Deer Tag will automatically be added to their [DECALS](#) profile and will be sent as a PDF via email to hunters with a valid email address. E-tag users will automatically see the second Antlered Deer Tag in the [HuntFishNY mobile app](#) under "Licenses &

Tags/Report Harvest". Paper tag users will be able to print the tag from their DECALS profile, from the email, or from a regional DEC office.

Q. Will I receive more Antlered Deer Tags if I harvest more than one antlerless deer?

A. No. As in the past, hunters will be limited to two Antlered Deer Tags per license year.

Q. Will hunters be charged a fee for the second Antlered Deer Tag?

A. No. Hunters who report an antlerless deer harvest will not be charged a fee in order to receive the second Antlered Deer Tag.

Q. Are the Antlered Deer Tags going to be for antlered deer only, regardless of season or WMU?

A. For most hunters, Antlered Deer Tags will be for antlered deer only. However, during the youth hunting weekend, youth hunters will be allowed to harvest a deer of either-sex with their Antlered Deer Tag. Additionally, all hunters in Suffolk (WMU 1C) and Westchester (WMU 3S) counties and in bowhunting only WMUs 4J and 8C may use Antlered Deer Tags for deer of either-sex. Likewise, Antlered Deer Tags may be used for deer of either-sex during all late bow and late muzzleloading seasons.

Q. What hunting seasons can the Antlered Deer Tags be used in?

A. Antlered Deer Tags can be used in any season for which the hunter has a license or bow/muzzleloader privilege.

Q. How will the Earn-a-2nd-Buck system work for youth hunters during the youth hunting weekend?

A. During the youth hunting weekend, Antlered Deer Tags will be able to be used by youth hunters for a deer of either-sex. If a youth hunter uses the Antlered Deer Tag on an antlerless deer, the youth hunter would receive a second Antlered Deer Tag and a Bonus Youth Antlered Deer Tag. If the youth hunter uses the Antlered Deer Tag on an antlered deer, they would receive a Bonus Youth Antlerless Deer Tag, but they would not be eligible to receive a second Antlered Deer Tag until they also harvested and reported an antlerless deer.

Q. Why is DEC getting rid of the Bow/Muzzleloader Either-Sex tag?

A. To create the Earn-a-2nd-Buck system, DEC needed to simplify the current tag structure by removing the Bow/Muzzleloader Either-Sex Tag. With this change, DEC can issue one Antlered Deer Tag when a hunter buys their license and a second Antlered Deer Tag after they harvest and report an antlerless deer. This approach also provides more flexibility for hunters, as the first and second Antlered Deer Tags can be used during all seasons with appropriate license privileges.

Q. With the Earn-a-2nd-Buck system, hunters will be able to harvest two antlered deer in the same season? Isn't DEC concerned that this will increase buck harvest?

A. Currently, only a small fraction of hunters successfully harvest two bucks in a season. Under the proposed Earn-a-2nd-Buck system, hunters would need to harvest three deer (1 antlerless and 2 antlered) to utilize their second antlered deer tag, which would exceed the desired and realized deer harvest of most hunters. However, because the new system will allow both Antlered Deer Tags to be used in the same season, the buck harvest could go up slightly. This incentive is important to increase harvest of antlerless deer.

Q. If I hunt in an area with few or no DMPs and use my Antlered Deer Tag on a buck during an early bow or muzzleloader season, how will I be able to earn my second Antlered Deer Tag to hunt during the regular season?

A. All hunters must harvest and report an antlerless deer to earn the second Antlered Deer Tag. Hunters who hunt in an area with few or no DMPs and choose to use their Antlered Deer Tag on a buck during an early bow or muzzleloader season, would need to also take an antlerless deer during the early bow or muzzleloader season or obtain a DMP and harvest an antlerless deer in a WMU where DMPs are more readily available to receive a second Antlered Deer Tag.

Q. What will DEC do about hunters who illegitimately report an antlerless deer that they did not harvest just to receive the second Antlered Deer Tag?

A. As with any other violation of hunting regulations, hunters who are caught breaking the law would be subject to an enforcement action. Other states that have implemented earn-a-buck approaches indicate that if fraud is occurring, it is at a low level and not impacting their deer management. Still, DEC would assess compliance with the proposed Earn-a-2nd-Buck system using harvest data and information received from DEC's Division of Law Enforcement.

General Questions About These Proposals

Q. These proposals were the outcome of a DEC decision process. What other changes were considered and not recommended?

A. DEC explored the likely outcomes and impacts of a variety of potential regulatory changes, using information from hunter focus groups and surveys to assess how each alternative would influence hunter effort, willingness to harvest antlerless deer, and satisfaction. DEC also incorporated input from deer biologists in New York and other northeastern states to understand likely outcomes. In addition to the changes included in the proposed regulations, DEC also considered limiting hunters to one antlered buck per license year, establishing an earn-a-1st-buck system, limiting hunters to antlerless deer only during part of the regular firearms season, and creating an antlerless-only season in January.

Of these other possibilities, establishing an antlerless deer season in January was also identified as an alternative that would have increased hunter satisfaction and effort to harvest antlerless deer. However, several nonhunting groups have expressed concern over potential impacts to their activities if deer hunting were to occur in January. For example, snowmobilers are concerned that landowners may keep snowmobile trails closed until after deer season, thus limiting snowmobiling opportunity. As a practical compromise, the proposed regulations would expand the existing season for antlerless deer in mid-September as previously described. Should the proposed regulations be insufficient to achieve deer management objectives, DEC may reconsider establishing a season for antlerless deer in January.

Q. Why didn't DEC consider a 1-buck per hunter rule or antler point restrictions as regulations to focus hunter effort on antlerless harvest?

A. DEC did evaluate the potential impacts of a 1-buck per hunter regulation. While that regulation would be simple to implement and enforce, DEC's survey of hunters' attitudes and behaviors suggested a net reduction of antlerless harvest with a 1-buck per hunter rule. DEC did not consider additional antler point restrictions in this process, because prior evaluations of New York's existing antler point restrictions found that they did not increase hunter successful use of DMPs or the overall harvest of antlerless deer.

Questions on Updating the Definition of Archery Equipment

Q. How is DEC updating the definition of archery equipment?

A. DEC proposes a minor change to clarify how mechanical broadheads with moving blades may be deemed non-barbed to comply with the statutory prohibition on use of barbed broadheads for big game hunting. Broadheads with blades that appear barbed but which freely swing forward to a non-barbed position upon withdrawal of the arrow are not considered barbed. This proposal clarifies that "freely swing" infers no external force beyond gravity.

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