Hunting Rule Changes

Questions and Answers
Fall 2025

NEW YORK STATE | Department of Environmental Conservation

Hunters should be aware of changes to carcass tagging, harvest reporting, and crossbow hunting opportunities for the 2025-26 hunting seasons. Check DEC's website prior to going afield for more information.

Electronic Tagging and Harvest Reporting

TAGGING PROCESS

E-Tag:
Take it → Report it → Tag It If You Leave It

Paper Tag:
Take it → Tag it → Report it

Q. What is an e-license and an e-tag?
A. An e-license is the electronic record of your hunting, fishing, and trapping license privileges in DEC's HuntFishNY mobile app. E-tags are electronic records of your unreported and reported carcass tags for deer, bear, and turkey in the HuntFishNY mobile app. The app can be downloaded through DEC's website. Once you are signed into the app, tap on My Licenses & Tags/Report Harvests to view your licenses and tags and report your harvests.

Q. Will I still have the option to use paper tags?
A. Yes. Plain paper licenses and tags will still be available and a valid option while hunting. Paper tags still need to be attached to the carcass, so the tag is intact, legible, and visible. Refer to DEC's website for instructions on how to print and use paper licenses and tags.

Q. How do I purchase my license(s) and tags?
A. Licenses and tags can be purchased online, at a License Issuing Agent (LIA), or over the phone. You'll now have the option to receive an e-license and e-tags or a paper license and paper tags.

Q. Is harvest reporting changing?
A. Yes. E-tag users must report immediately after harvesting a deer, bear, or turkey through the HuntFishNY mobile app. Paper tag users must report their harvest within 48 hours (no longer 7 days) through DEC's website, the HuntFishNY mobile app, or calling 1-866-426-3778.

Q: Do I need internet service to view my e-licenses or report my e-tags?
A. No. As long as you sign into your HuntFishNY mobile app account while online before going afield, licenses and tags will continue to show in the app even while offline. You can submit a harvest report for an e-tag without internet service. The report will be uploaded when service resumes.

Q: If I use an e-tag, do I have to attach anything to the animal?
A. Hunters using e-tags who harvest a deer, bear, or turkey must immediately electronically "tag" the animal by reporting the harvest via the HuntFishNY mobile app. You do not need to attach anything to the carcass while in possession of it, including in your vehicle and at home. If the carcass is not in your possession (e.g., brought to a meat processor or taxidermist), the hunter must attach to the carcass a tag of your making that includes your name, hunter ID number, and reporting confirmation number (available in the mobile app). You can also print, fill-out (including reporting confirmation number), and attach the paper carcass tag from your DECALS account.

Successful deer hunt in Delaware County

Changes to Expand Access to and Use of Crossbows

Q. What license and privilege do I need to hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the bowhunting seasons and what tag do I use when I harvest a deer during these seasons?
A. To hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the bowhunting

seasons, a hunter must have a hunting license and bowhunting privilege. To be eligible to purchase a bowhunting privilege, a hunter must have bowhunter education certification. Obtain bowhunter education certification through the online or in-person course.

Deer harvested with a crossbow during a bowhunting season may be tagged with a bow/muzzleloader either-sex tag, bow/muzzleloader antlerless tag, Deer Management Assistance Program tag (antlerless deer only), or a Deer Management Permit (antlerless deer only) for the WMU where the deer was harvested. A regular season deer tag may be used during the late bowhunting season for a deer of either sex.

Q. In prior years, big game hunters were required to carry their hunter education certificate dated on or after April 1, 2014, or carry the completed Crossbow Certificate of Qualification to hunt with a crossbow. Does that process or a previously completed certification still allow use of crossbows for deer or bear hunting?
A. No. Big game hunters are required to take the NYS Bowhunter Education course to hunt deer or bear with a crossbow, regardless of past crossbow certification of qualification.

Q. What license and privilege do I need to hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the regular (firearm) season and what tag do I use when I harvest a deer during this season?
A. To hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the regular (firearm) season you need a hunting license and bowhunter education certification; you do not need a bowhunting privilege. Deer harvested with a crossbow during the regular (firearm) season should be tagged with your regular season tag (antlered deer only), Deer Management Assistance Program tag (antlerless deer only), or with Deer Management Permit (antlerless deer only) for the WMU where the deer was harvested.

Q. What license and privilege do I need to hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the muzzleloader seasons and what tag do I use when I harvest a deer during these seasons?
A. Crossbows are no longer associated with muzzleloading privileges. To hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during the bowhunting seasons that overlap muzzleloader seasons, a hunting license and bowhunting privilege are required. See information above about hunting with a crossbow during the bowhunting season.

Q. What are the age requirements for hunting deer and bear with a crossbow?
A. Hunters ages 14 and up with a valid hunting license and bowhunting privilege may hunt deer and bear with a crossbow during any season and in any location where a longbow is permitted. Hunters ages 12 and 13 that have a valid hunting license and bowhunting privilege may hunt deer with a crossbow only in those counties that have passed a local law allowing such hunters to do so. Check DEC's website for details.

Q. Can I use a crossbow to hunt deer in "archery only" areas like portions of Albany and Monroe counties and in Westchester and Suffolk counties?
A. Yes. Hunters may use a crossbow in archery only areas; however, the minimum setback distance from homes and other structures (i.e., dwelling, farm building, school, playground, occupied factory, or church) for discharge of a crossbow in Westchester and Suffolk counties is 500 feet. In all other counties where deer and bear hunting are permitted, the minimum setback distance is 250 feet. Hunters may discharge a crossbow at shorter setback distances with permission from landowners that have homes or other structures within these setback distances.

Q. Have the physical specifications for a legal crossbow changed?
A. Yes. Crossbows must have a working trigger safety and a minimum peak draw weight of 100 pounds. There is no minimum limb width, no minimum length, and no maximum draw weight.

CONTACT:

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Fish and Wildlife
Bureau of Wildlife
(518) 402-8883
wildlife@dec.ny.gov