

New Hunting Regulations to Increase Harvest of Antlerless Deer

Questions and Answers

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Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Hunters should be aware of new hunting regulations to increase harvest of antlerless deer that will take effect ahead of the 2026 deer hunting seasons.

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, in 2026 DEC finalized new deer hunting regulations to encourage and incentivize hunters to harvest more antlerless deer. Specifically, DEC modified the Deer Management Permit (DMP) issuance process to increase DMP availability, allowed unlimited transfer of DMPs between hunters, included more Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) in the nine-day season for antlerless deer in mid-September, and established an Earn-a-2nd-Buck system. 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 hunter focus groups, a [statewide survey of deer hunters](#), and input from professional deer biologists and managers across the Northeast.



A successful antlerless deer hunt in Tompkins County

- **[Deer Management Permit \(DMP\)](#) application and issuance process modified to increase DMP availability.** Prior to 2026, deer hunters could only receive up to two DMPs through the typical lottery process. Additionally, only WMUs 1C, 3S, 4J, and 8C had unlimited DMPs. The new regulations create a second pathway for DMP issuance that allows hunters to apply for up to four DMPs, two in WMUs with limited DMPs and two in WMUs with unlimited DMPs. DEC has also added 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 WMUs with unlimited DMPs. All hunters who apply for DMPs in WMUs with unlimited DMPs will receive them. Additionally, DMPs that are used to harvest antlerless deer in the WMUs with unlimited DMPs will be replaced with a Bonus DMP upon harvest report, allowing hunters to continue harvesting antlerless deer. Used and reported Bonus DMPs will also be replaced with additional Bonus DMPs. Each year, DEC will adjust which WMUs have unlimited DMPs based on deer population management needs.
- **Unlimited number of DMPs allowed to be transferred between hunters.** Prior to 2026, deer hunters could only have two DMPs transferred to them from other hunters. The new regulations allow hunters to have an unlimited number of DMPs transferred to them from other hunters.
- **Nine-day season for antlerless deer in mid-September expanded.** Prior to 2026, WMUs 1C, 3S, 3M, 3R, 4J, 8A, 8C, 8F, 8G, 8J, 8N, 9A, and 9F had a nine-day season for antlerless deer in mid-September. The new regulations add 10 WMUs (3P, 6P, 7F, 7H, 7J, 7R, 8H, 8R, 8S, and 9G) to the list of WMUs enrolled in this September season.
- **Earn-a-2nd-Buck (EA2B) system established.** Prior to 2026, multi-season deer hunters received two tags that could be used for antlered deer upon purchase of their hunting license – a Bow/Muzzleloader Either-Sex Tag and Regular Season Deer Tag. Under the new EA2B system,

all hunters will receive a first Antlered Deer Tag which can be used during any season (with appropriate privileges), except the September antlerless deer season. Hunters who harvest and report an antlerless deer using a valid tag (DMP, Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag, Deer Management Assistance Program Tag, etc.) will be eligible to receive a second Antlered Deer Tag, which can also be used during any season (with appropriate privileges), except the September antlerless deer season.

To facilitate the new EA2B system, DEC reclassified the former Regular Season Deer Tag as an Antlered Deer Tag and the former Bow/Muzzleloader Either-Sex Deer Tag as a Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag. Hunters who purchase bowhunting and muzzleloading privileges would receive a Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag for each privilege.

Full details of the new regulations, will be available on [DEC's website](#) beginning July 1. DEC compiled answers to commonly asked questions that apply to these changes.

Questions on the Modified DMP Issuance Process

Q. Will hunters be charged an additional fee when they apply for four DMPs instead of two (two in WMUs with unlimited DMPs and two in WMUs with limited DMPs)?

A. No. The [fees to apply for DMPs](#) 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, hunters will have Bonus DMPs automatically added to their [DECALS](#) profile and emailed to them 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 of this during the same hunt. Paper tag users will be able to print the tag(s) from their DECALS profile, from the email, or from a regional DEC office (appointment required). Paper tag users must have the Bonus DMP in their possession before continuing to hunt and harvest additional antlerless deer.

Q. Will applying for DMPs in a WMU with unlimited DMPs affect my preference point status or ability to get DMPs in other WMUs where DMP availability is limited?

A. No. All applicants for DMPs in WMUs with unlimited DMPs will receive them. For WMUs with limited DMP availability, 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 Unlimited Transfer of DMPs Between Hunters

Q. What do hunters need to do to transfer 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 have other types of deer tags transferred to me from 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 harvest 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. Similarly, only the hunter who reports an antlerless deer harvest on a DMP or Bonus DMP, and in a WMU with unlimited DMPs, is eligible to receive a Bonus DMP.

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

Q. Will warm weather and few deer processors being open in September result in meat spoilage?

A. DEC first implemented a September season for antlerless deer in 2021, and for bears in the Catskills in 2014. Successful hunters during these seasons have learned how to appropriately care for their meat. Likewise, hunters in southern states routinely process deer in warm temperatures. A variety of training and educational resources are available online and through DEC's [HuntFishNY events](#) on how to process deer quickly.

Q. Are fawns still dependent on their does in September?

A. Most fawns are weaned and no longer dependent on their does by late August. DEC has not documented impacts to fawn welfare as a result of the current September season.

Q. Will there be impacts to other forms of outdoor recreation that occur in September?

A. DEC has not documented a negative impact on non-hunter safety from the current September season. All deer hunting seasons overlap with other forms of outdoor recreation, and New York hunters have an excellent safety record. In fact, the recent hunting seasons since the September season was established in 2021 have been some of the safest on record.

Q. Aren't New York's deer hunting seasons long enough already?

A. DEC adjusts the length and timing of hunting seasons to achieve deer population management objectives. According to the [National Deer Association's 2026 Deer Report](#), New York's hunting seasons are shorter (on average) when compared to many other states. The September antlerless season also compliments the EA2B system because it affords hunters the opportunity to earn their second Antlered Deer Tag before other deer hunting seasons begin and before antlered deer can be hunted. All WMUs enrolled in the September antlerless season will also have unlimited DMPs to ensure all hunters utilizing the season have access to antlerless deer tags.

Q. Will the September antlerless deer season disturb deer patterns prior to the start of the early bowhunting season?

A. The September antlerless season may increase human activity on hunted lands, but there will be anywhere from 8-14 days without deer hunting prior to the start of early bowhunting season. Research has found that deer no longer avoid hunting sites in as little as 5 days following hunting pressure.

Questions on the Earn-a-2nd-Buck (EA2B) 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 any tag that is valid for an antlerless deer (DMP, DMAP tag, Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag, etc.) 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. Hunters who report an antlerless deer harvest will have the second Antlered Deer Tag automatically added to their [DECALS](#) profile and emailed to them if there is a valid email associated with their profile. 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 (appointment required). Paper tag users must have the second antlered deer tag in their possession before continuing to hunt and harvest a second antlered deer.

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 tags that can be used for antlered deer per license year.

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

A. No. Hunters will not be charged a fee 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 an 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 bowhunting and late muzzleloading seasons.

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

A. The Antlered Deer Tags can be used during any season (with appropriate privileges), except the September antlerless season.

Q. Will the EA2B system be implemented statewide?

A. Yes. The EA2B system will be implemented statewide, including in WMUs where major increases in antlerless deer harvest aren't necessary. DEC will work to prevent overharvest of antlerless deer in these areas by annually adjusting the number of DMPs available to hunters or changing antlerless harvest opportunities during bow and muzzleloader seasons.

Q. How will the EA2B system work for youth hunters during the youth hunting weekend?

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

Q. How will the EA2B system affect lifetime hunting license holders?

A. Lifetime hunting license holders will receive their first Antlered Deer Tag annually. Lifetime bowhunting and muzzleloading privilege holders will also receive a Bow/Muzzleloader Antlerless Deer Tag for each privilege annually, but will no longer receive a Bow/Muzzleloader Either-Sex Deer Tag. DEC modifies the type and number of tags issued under a lifetime license or privilege as management needs change. For example, in 2015 DEC reduced the fall season bag limit from two to one for all turkey permit holders to help address declining turkey populations. Changes will be made to lifetime license holder tags as wildlife populations change, and management needs warrant it.

Q. Will the EA2B system increase buck harvest and reduce the age structure of the buck population?

A. DEC's prior deer hunting tag framework allowed multi-season hunters to harvest two antlered deer per year. However, only about 16% of active hunters took one antlered deer, and 1.5-3% of hunters took two antlered deer per year. Under the EA2B system, the percentage of hunters who harvest two antlered deer could increase, but likely only minimally because so few hunters harvest three deer (one antlerless and two antlered) per year. New York's growing deer population can accommodate a modest increase in antlered deer harvest. The important factor is that all hunters who want the second antlered deer tag would have to first take an antlerless deer, and the incentive is maximized by allowing hunters to take two antlered deer in the same season. DEC also does not anticipate a substantial impact on buck age structure. For decades, hunters have demonstrated increasing selectivity for harvesting older age class bucks. There is no evidence to suggest that hunters would forgo that selectivity if they had access to a second antlered deer tag that can be used in the same season as the first. DEC will continue to monitor the age structure of the buck harvest and hunter satisfaction to determine if additional changes are needed in the future.

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

A. All hunters must harvest and report an antlerless deer on a valid tag to earn the second Antlered Deer Tag. Hunters who live in areas where DMPs are limited or unavailable and who want a second antlered deer tag may travel to WMUs where DMPs are readily available and increased antlerless deer harvest is necessary.

Q. Is DEC concerned about hunters fraudulently reporting antlerless deer that they did not harvest just to receive their second Antlered Deer Tag?

A. Several other Northeastern states have implemented effective Earn-a-Buck systems. DEC reached out to these states to understand how their programs function and how they monitor for and address fraud. Some states do not validate antlerless deer harvests and indicated that if fraud was occurring, it wasn't occurring at a level that affected their deer management. Other states require hunters to retain proof of harvest to accommodate inspections by law enforcement. DEC will implement a variety of mechanisms to minimize fraud, including requiring hunters to provide proof of their antlerless deer harvest within seven days if requested by DEC. Proof may include a photograph, the deer's head or skull, or contact information for where the deer was processed. Additionally, DEC will monitor deer harvest data for evidence of fraud and provide information to its Division of Law Enforcement for investigation. As with any other violation of hunting regulations, hunters who are caught breaking the law would be subject to appropriate action.

General Questions

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

A. Yes. DEC finalized these new regulations for implementation ahead of the 2026 deer hunting seasons. Check [DEC's website](#) and [Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide](#) prior to going afield for more information on the new regulations.

Q. How does DEC prevent overharvest of antlerless deer?

A. DEC has a variety of tools at its disposal to prevent overharvest of antlerless deer as necessary. For example, DEC can adjust which WMUs have a September antlerless season, reduce DMP availability, or change antlerless deer harvest opportunities during bow and muzzleloader seasons. Additionally, September antlerless seasons have been in place and unlimited DMPs available in several WMUs for many years and this has not resulted in overharvest of antlerless deer in these areas. DEC will monitor the impact of these changes and adapt its management based on changing deer management conditions.

Q. These proposals were the outcome of a DEC decision process. What other strategies to increase harvest of antlerless deer were considered?

A. DEC evaluated several other regulatory strategies to increase harvest of antlerless deer, including a 1-buck tag per license year system, an Earn-a-1st-Buck system, limiting the second week of the regular season to antlerless deer only, and creating an antlerless deer-only season in January. Results from DEC's [statewide survey of active deer hunters](#) did not suggest that a 1-buck tag per license year system would result in a substantial increase in antlerless deer harvest. As previously stated, only 1.5-3% of active deer hunters in New York harvest two antlered deer per year. Therefore, removing the opportunity to harvest a second antlered deer would shift harvest effort to antlerless deer for relatively few hunters. Similarly, results suggested that limiting the second week of the regular season to antlerless deer only would have reduced hunter effort, satisfaction, and antlerless deer harvest. Because of the buck tag incentive, an Earn-a-1st-Buck system had the highest potential to increase antlerless deer harvest but was found to be widely unpopular among hunters. Establishing an antlerless deer season in January had high potential to increase antlerless deer harvest and hunter satisfaction but would have not been as complementary to the EA2B system as expanding the September antlerless season, which provides opportunity for hunters to earn their second Antlered Deer Tag early in the season. DEC may reconsider establishing a January season for antlerless deer in the future if additional antlerless harvest is necessary to achieve deer management objectives. DEC is also planning to advance an education and outreach campaign focused on the importance of harvesting antlerless deer and to expand venison donation programming.

Q. Why didn't DEC consider expanding antler point restrictions?

A. DEC did not consider expanding antler point restrictions because prior evaluations found that the existing restrictions did not increase antlerless deer harvest.

Q. Why didn't DEC consider expanding access to private lands for deer hunting?

A. Increasing hunter access to private lands is outside the scope of this rulemaking. DEC is working to increase access to private lands for deer hunting by exploring incentive-based private land access programs.

Questions on the Updated Definition of Archery Equipment

Q. How did DEC update the definition of archery equipment?

A. DEC made a 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.

Q. Will this change prohibit some broadheads from being used by hunters?

A. Yes. While this change will prohibit some broadheads from being used for big game hunting in New York, it adds clarity and will help ensure hunters are using broadheads that are less likely to cause unnecessary harm to animals that may be shot in an otherwise non-lethal location.

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