



NNY Outdoors

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Fall 2025

FREE

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inside*

New York food pantries will take it

By JONATHAN WHEELER
jwheeler@wdt.net

WATERTOWN — As uncertainty surrounds the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, New York is reminding residents of a program that allows hunters to donate their meat to food pantries.

As part of the Feeding New York State Venison Donation Program, hunters can drop off their deer at any participating processor, which in Lewis County is at Miller's Meat Market, 6525 Number 4 Road in Lowville. The state does not list any participating processors for Jefferson or St. Lawrence counties.

It is recommended that hunters call a participating processor before dropping the deer off to make sure they can accept the deer.

The program asks that the hunter handles the carcass the same way they would for their own family. Hunters are asked to complete a log

sheet showing their desire to donate the deer and to be mindful when using lead ammunition.

"Lead ammunition can result in small fragments being passed on to humans. Please consider using non-toxic ammunition; even small traces of lead may be toxic to humans, and the effects are irreversible," the program reads.

Those who don't hunt can

donate to the program online or by mailing a check to Feeding New York State, 33 Elk Street, Suite 203, Albany, NY, 12207. Checks should be made payable to "Feeding New York State" with "Venison donation" in the memo so it can be applied to the program.

For a full list of providers, visit wdt.me/FeedingNewYorkState



Russell R. Miller, left, and Willy M. Buehler, Reno, Nevada, while stationed with the 10th Mountain Division in 2008, make a push for whitetail deer in the town of Le Ray near Route 26. Watertown Daily Times



Professional Connection Page 6

HIKE SMART NY

1

NAVIGATION

map, compass,
GPS system

2

INSULATION

waterproof/windproof jacket,
hat, gloves, thermals,
wool socks (pack extra)

3

LIGHT

headlamp, flashlight,
lantern, extra batteries

4

FIRST-AID SUPPLIES

pre-made kit or customized

5

EMERGENCY KIT

whistle, signal mirror, duct tape,
pocket knife/multi-tool

6

FIRE

matches in waterproof
container, lighter, fire starters

10

EMERGENCY SHELTER

tent, space blanket, tarp

9

SUN & INSECT PROTECTION

sunglasses, sunscreen,
hat, bug repellent

8

WATER

plenty of water, water
filtration system

7

FOOD

high-protein and
high-calorie items

10 HIKING ESSENTIALS

Carry these essentials on all hikes for a safe and enjoyable experience.

Birds are feeling the impact of excess deer

HABITAT FOR MANY SPECIES MAY COLLAPSE, AUDUBON WARNS

By **CHRIS BROCK**

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WATERTOWN — A white-tailed deer homing in on your hosta plant or tasting your tulips is frustrating, but there is a largely unseen world where deer browse for chow that has become a problem for the environment, especially for birds.

The first in-depth study showing that deer can drive at-risk bird species out of forests was published in 2001 in the academic journal *Conservation Biology*. “The link is that deer determine which types of plants grow in the understory, which in turn determine the types of birds that live there,” the report said.

Last year, the National Audubon Society called the situation a “crisis.” The summer 2024 issue of *Audubon Magazine* featured the story, “Surging Deer Populations Are a Crisis for Eastern Forests.” One expert warned that important habitat for many bird species is “in imminent danger of collapse.”

Suzanne Treyger is senior manager/forest program, for Audubon’s Connecticut and New York State regional office. She explained to the *Times* that where deer are overabundant, they can greatly impact forest health by selectively browsing native trees, shrubs and herbaceous vegetation and avoiding invasive plants.

“This can mean that forest regeneration, the process of new trees growing in the understory (the lowest level of the forest — the plants that occupy the forest floor up to about 5 feet or so) is unsuccessful with the exception of a few species that deer don’t prefer, especially invasive plants,” Treyger said.

This reduces overall diversity within the forest, negatively influencing forest health and resilience and the availability of quality habitat for forest birds and other wildlife. “And

in many areas, our forests are greatly lacking the understory layer,” Treyger said.

Recent studies have shown that bird populations are declining across all habitat types, and in Eastern forests, bird numbers have dropped by 17% since 1970, Treyger noted.

“One of the main reasons for this decline is the loss of quality habitat — places where birds can safely nest, feed and raise their young,” Treyger said.

To support the many different species of birds that live in eastern forests, Treyger said that forests with a mix of age classes and characteristics are needed. In mature forests, tall trees, layered canopies, and a thick understory (the plants and shrubs growing close to the ground) provide important spaces for birds to nest, find food and seek cover. Young or regenerating forests — especially those surrounded by mature forest — are also essential, offering important nesting and “post-fledging” habitat, Treyger said, explaining the time period when nesting is complete and young birds have left the nest, just prior to migration.

“But in many areas, too many white-tailed deer are damaging forest regeneration. Deer eat young trees and shrubs, which can prevent the growth of the dense vegetation that birds need,” Treyger said.

She added that research has shown that even relatively low deer numbers can reduce bird diversity and abundance, especially for species that rely on the forest floor and understory.

“Some bird species, like the wood thrush, ovenbird, great crested flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, indigo bunting, American robin, and hooded warbler, have been found in smaller numbers, or are even missing, in areas



Two deer munch on the first sign of green grass off Olmsted Drive in Watertown in this spring of 2023 photo. The deer, unaffected by passing traffic, continued to eat. Alec Johnson/Watertown Daily Times

where deer are too abundant,” Treyger said.

How much damage can one deer do? The New Hampshire-based nonprofit Center for Northern Woodlands Education reported in a 2023 article that wildlife managers estimate “the daily consumption of browse by deer at about 7 pounds, with 600 seedling tips per pound or up to 4,200 seedling tips per deer per day. At this consumption rate, even a small herd of deer can have a significant local impact on forest vegetation.”

White-tailed deer, although primarily herbivores, are also known to eat bird eggs and baby birds.

METHODS OF IMPROVEMENT

The 2024 *Audubon Magazine* article explored how Cornell University and National Audubon Society are exploring ways to keep deer out of certain areas by using fencing or barriers made from brush or logs, which are called “slash walls.”

“These methods can help

plants grow back and improve habitat for birds,” Treyger said, and provided an example:

At the Rheinstrom Hill Audubon Sanctuary in eastern New York, two small areas of regenerating forest (6– 6.5 acres each) were fenced to protect new growth from deer browse. “Here, the local deer population was very high, estimated at about 55 deer per square mile,” she said. Over four years of monitoring, breeding bird surveys showed improvements in the fenced areas: a 154% increase in young-forest birds, a 24% increase in birds that use mature forests, and a 209% increase in generalist species that can use both types of habitats.

Plant surveys in these areas also found more native plants inside the fences.

“That’s important because native trees and shrubs support far more insects than non-native plants — many of which deer don’t eat,” Treyger said. “Since most forest bird nestlings require a diet of insects, having a diversity of

native plants, especially trees, can make a big difference for their survival and overall health.”

According to the state Department of Environmental Conservation, 63% of New York is forested, with 75% of that forest — 14 million acres — privately owned.

“Helping increase awareness of private forest owners about the potential impacts deer can have is very important to improve forest health and habitat,” Treyger said.

That awareness includes sharing deer exclusion strategies like forest deer fences, slash walls, or tree tubes, that protect regenerating forests or individual seedlings and saplings.

“In areas with high deer densities, using exclusion methods is crucial for successful forest regeneration, which in turn creates vital breeding habitat for eastern forest birds and supports their population growth,” Treyger said.

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DEC Adopts Electronic Hunting Tags and Other Deer Hunting Enhancements

New York State DEC

NEW REGULATIONS MAKE IT EASIER FOR HUNTERS TO REPORT HARVESTS AND CREATE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH HUNTERS

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Amanda Lefton today announced the adoption of several changes to streamline use and reporting of hunting tags and provide new deer hunting opportunities. Hunters can now use DEC's online app for their licenses and tags as an alternative to paper license and tag options. Youth hunters will also have increased opportunities to earn a new season tag.

"Hunting is an affordable, accessible, and valued tradition for many New Yorkers and a critically important conservation measure," said **Commissioner Lefton**. "DEC is committed to improving user experience for all hunters and these changes will provide new options to improve harvest reporting and success for years to come."

Updated Reporting Tag Options

Hunters can choose to use a paper license and tags or the HuntFishNY mobile app as electronic proof of licensure and possession of tags for deer, bear, or turkey. Users of electronic tags (e-tags) will be able to immediately report their harvest with the mobile app whether they have cell service or not. Users also won't need to attach a physical tag to their harvested deer, bear, or turkey while they remain in possession of the carcass, including in their vehicle and at their home.

If e-tag users leave the carcass somewhere other than their home or vehicle, such as at a taxidermist or processor, they would need to affix a tag of their making to the carcass that includes the hunter's name, identification number, and reporting confirmation number.

Hunters will still have the option to use paper licenses and tags for deer, bear, and turkey, but to encourage prompt re-

porting and facilitate greater law enforcement oversight, hunters using paper tags are now required to report their harvest within 48 hours rather than seven days.

New Opportunity for Youth Hunters

DEC also created a new opportunity for youth hunters. DEC will issue a bonus regular season tag to youth hunters (ages 12-15) who successfully take and report a deer taken during a Youth Big Game Hunt weekend with their regular season tag and who do not possess a Deer Management Permit (DMP) for the regular firearms season. The bonus regular season tag will be valid for a deer of the sex opposite from what was harvested during the youth hunt (e.g., harvest of an antlered deer during the Youth Deer Hunt would yield an antlerless-only bonus tag for the regular season). DEC will mail this tag to the eligible hunters.

Deer Management Assistance Program Enhancements

DEC also enhanced the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) by extending the permit renewal cycle from three years to five years and rescinding the limit on number of DMAP tags that may be used per hunter. DEC will still determine the number of tags available with each DMAP permit based on property size and management need, but hunters will no longer be limited by the number of DMAP tags they can fill on that property. These changes increase flexibility for landowners, improving their ability to use DMAP to meet land management objectives.

Also new for fall 2025, hunters in New York State may use a crossbow in the same seasons, places, and manner as a vertical bow for hunting deer and bear. More information on expanded use of crossbows for hunting is available on DEC's website.

Visit DEC's website to learn more about hunting licenses, seasons, and regulations and to sign up for DEC's Hunting and Trapping newsletter.

Washington's once-prolific 200-year-old fur trading post you may have never even heard of

By Mathew Callaghan

The Spokesman-Review, Spokane Wash. (TNS)

KETTLE FALLS, Wash. — Beneath the glassy waters of Lake Roosevelt lie the remnants of the second-most important fur trading post in the Pacific Northwest.

About 20 years after the Lewis and Clark Expedition traversed the Columbia River, the Hudson's Bay Company made its way to the Inland Northwest and established Fort Colville, a third of a mile from Kettle Falls. Back then, the falls were a mecca for Indigenous tribes in the area and so full of fish that early written records said one couldn't throw a stick in the water without hitting a salmon.

Built 200 years ago as of this year, Fort Colville was in a lucrative location, where trappers traded thousands of beaver and muskrat pelts each year until the post closed in 1871.

Much of the fort's history was washed away when the Lake Roosevelt reservoir filled up after the completion of the Grand Coulee Dam in 1941. While today Fort Colville is about 80 feet underwater, a smattering of historians, authors and other curious folk gathered at the Mistequa Hotel in Chewelah on Oct. 18 to dredge up bits and pieces of the area's historic heart of fur trapping.

Without writers, researchers and stories passed down generation after generation, the truth about one of Washington's earliest European settlements may very well have completely disappeared beneath the waves of the Columbia River.

The Beaver Bonanza

Mark Weadick, president of the Northwest Fur Trade Historians, said that beaver pelt was far and away "the coin of the realm." One beaver fur cost as much as 10 muskrat pelts. And it took around three beavers to barter for just the blade of an axe, not the handle, in the American West.

Weadick has a log of items traded at Fort Colville and said that in 1833, there were 3,537 beaver furs that went through

the fort. Just six years later, in 1839, that number dropped to 1,943. Muskrats were also another desired kind of fur, as in 1833, Fort Colville saw 13,726 muskrat pelts pass through the fur-trading post.

"You would have been very, very hard-pressed to find a single beaver anywhere in the state of Washington around 1900 (because of the fur trade)," said Ben Goldfarb, an environmental journalist and author of "Eager: The Surprising Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter."

Before Europeans came to the United States, the National Park Service estimates that up to 200 million beavers roamed freshwater habitats across the country. By 1900, the number dropped to as few as 100,000.

Beavers, the largest rodents in North America, were hunted nearly to extinction because their underhairs have microscopic hooks that latch to one another like Velcro. This underhair was used to create gentlemen's top hats sold across several major cities in Europe and on the East Coast.

Goldfarb said beavers have about as many individual hairs on a postage stamp size patch of skin as people have on our heads.

He continued, "So just remarkably dense fur. And they also have two layers of hair. They've got these longer outer guard hairs, and they've got this secondary layer of under fur, which trappers called beaver wool."

"It was the most desirable pelt, besides sea otters, which have the thickest fur of any mammal."

The HBC implemented the "fur desert policy," which decimated beaver populations. The company believed that if they effectively wiped out the beaver populations, Americans would view the Northwest as unappealing, and the region known as the "Oregon Territory" could remain under the crown's control. The Oregon Territory stretched from the Pacific Coast to the Rocky Mountains and re-

mained an item of contention between a burgeoning United

States and Britain until a treaty in 1846.

See FUR T7

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From T5

Old names with modern ties

Weadick said he tracked 15 surnames belonging to modern families in the region and, using historic records, traced them back to workers at Fort Colville or people with Indigenous roots

"We come from such a polygon bunch of people that it gets hard to trace your lineage," said Joe Barreca, president of the Heritage Network and lead organizer of the summit. "And certainly you're not going to find it in a public school. But I think that's the way we should be doing history altogether. We should be starting with our own history and then understanding what our ancestors went through to be here and to become us. It makes it so much more interesting."

He saw last Saturday's summit as a way to take a close look at local history, without forgetting all the ugliness, beauty and intricacies that came with the intersection of the fur trade and Indigenous communities. In total, he got around a dozen speakers together to talk about their own families, challenges of the fur trade, Indigenous culture in the area and the kind of boats used on the Columbia.

Fort Colville, not to be confused with the army base Fort Colville, was named for the London-based governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Andrew Colville. Even though two forts, a group of confederated tribes comprised of 12 total bands and a city of about 5,000 people are all named after this 18th-century English lord, he never visited the Pacific Northwest.

While there are several families with ties to historical figures who lived in and around Fort Colville, Weadick mentioned two mostly forgotten men as still having living relatives: Angus McDonald and Jacques "Jaco" Finlay.

McDonald, a Scotsman, was the last and longest-serving chief trader at Fort Colville, serving from 1858 until the trading hub closed in 1871. His great-great-niece teleconferenced in for the summit from Germany to talk about his life,

his love for poetry and devotion to his Nez Perce wife and their 12 children.

Matty Ross is the great-great-great-great-great grandson of Finlay, the Canadian fur trader who constructed the Spokane House. From 1810 until 1826, the Spokane House was the first fur-trading post to grace what would one day become Washington state. The idea of a trading hub existing in the Inland Northwest first blossomed with fur trader and explorer David Thompson in 1811. He was the first Euro-American to journey through the Upper Columbia River. While Thompson had the dream, Finlay was the one to bring the vision of a fur-trading post to fruition.

Changing mindsets for a different time

Warren Seyler, a historian with the Spokane Tribe of Indians, gave the closing remarks before lunchtime at the summit. Next to him was Ross, wearing a bright red newsboy cap and sporting a long white beard.

Seyler told a story about two Indigenous girls walking in the woods long ago when they heard a rustling in the bushes. The girls assumed it was a wild animal, Seyler said, because Native Americans didn't usually romp around the woods that loudly. But when a white man emerged from the bushes, the girls screamed, "Suyape!" which is Salish for "people with an upside-down face."

At the pinnacle of the story, Seyler gestured with his palm out toward Ross. With one swift movement, Ross took his red newsboy cap off to reveal a shiny, bald head, further emphasizing his Santa Claus-like beard. Seyler then explained (although the joke mostly wrote itself) that many Europeans, who often had long beards and bald heads, looked quite opposite from their Indigenous counterparts, hence why they were referred to as "upside-down faces."

"When (fur traders) came here for the beaver, our mindset was, if we wanted gloves for a child or for ourselves, we might go kill one or two beavers," Seyler said. "But what we were taught was exploitation. Don't just kill for your immediate needs. Go kill everything you can find. Don't kill one or two.

NNY Outdoors

Go kill 100 or 200. So that was a change in a mindset that I don't think people ever think about."

Prior to the influx of white settlers and a slew of smallpox that ravaged Indigenous communities, Kettle Falls was a place to exchange goods, ideas and news for several tribes in the area. Thousands of salmon, some weighing as much as 100 pounds, dried on quartzite slabs along the Kettle Falls every single day.

The sound of rushing water cascaded down nearly 50 feet and resounded for miles. Salish speakers referred to Kettle Falls as Shonitkwu, which meant "roaring or noisy waters."

Seyler stressed it's important to acknowledge there are always two sides to the same story. So while Fort Colville prompted economic growth in the area, Seyler said it was the beginning of change for Indigenous tribes, as they transferred from having everything they could ever need to having very little or nothing at all.

Standing next to his mother, Ryan Booth pondered how remarkable it was to discuss and learn with others, many of whom look completely different from himself, their shared history. Booth, a professor of history at Washington State University and member of the Upper Skagit Tribe, said moments like what happened at Misteqwa are few and far between. The beauty is in finding what's similar among us, not what divides us.

"In an era where we're sort of atomized and living in our little silos, this is a moment of everyone coming together and sharing this common history," Booth said. "This is the human experience. We really do crave being with other human beings and learning from each other, and this seems to be a really good example of that. Despite our differences, despite things that could divide us, and I'm sure if we really wanted to, we could jam some wedges in here. But that's not what this is about."

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New York loosens crossbow hunting laws

BILL WIDENS LEGAL DESIGNS, ALLOWING USE DURING ALL OF BOWHUNTING SEASON



New York now allows hunting all bow season with crossbows.
Steve Featherstone/syracuse.com/TNS

By Alex Gault

agault@wdt.net

ALBANY — New York's crossbow hunting laws have been loosened.

In August, before the start of this hunting season, Gov. Kathleen C. Hochul signed a bill into law that clarifies and updates New York's crossbow laws, giving hunters and enthusiasts access to a wider variety of crossbows to buy. The law also changes the terms under which crossbows can be used for hunting, expanding the legal hunting season in which they can be used for large and small game to the entire bowhunting season.

Under the old state law, crossbows were heavily restricted for use in hunting or recreation. They were restricted to a 200-pound peak draw weight, and could not be shorter than 24 inches from buttstock to front. They couldn't be used for most of the bowhunting season either.

Now, length and bolt-size restrictions have been struck, keeping only the requirement that the crossbow have at least a 100-pound minimum peak draw weight. They also must have a working trigger safety mechanism.

Under the new law, regional restrictions on crossbow use have also been lifted; they can now be used wherever bowhunting is legal, including the archery-only areas of Albany and Monroe counties, and in the previously restricted Westchester and Suffolk counties. In Westchester and

Suffolk, a crossbow can't be used within 500 feet of a building, and in the rest of the state the limit is 250 feet.

Age and license requirements remain the same. Crossbows may be used to hunt by people ages 14 and older, with a valid hunting license and bowhunting privilege for deer and bear, anywhere bowhunting is allowed. These hunters can take bear, unprotected species and most small game.

12- and 13-year-olds with a valid license and bowhunting privilege may only hunt deer, and only in counties that have passed the local laws to allow youth hunting.

State laws explicitly bar the possession of a cocked crossbow in a vehicle, and in areas with deer or bear, hunters are not permitted to carry the weapon unless it is secured in a case, locked in the trunk or unstrung. Crossbows cannot be used to take fish, or while doghunting for small game.

Recent regulatory changes have also invalidated the former "Crossbow Certificate of Qualification," a document crossbow hunters were permitted to carry as evidence they were aware of the law and compliant with it. Now, hunters have to show a bowhunting education certificate, or prove they've held a bowhunting license or stamp issued since 1980.

The new rules were lauded by the state Conservation Council, which advocates for hunter-friendly laws in Albany.

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