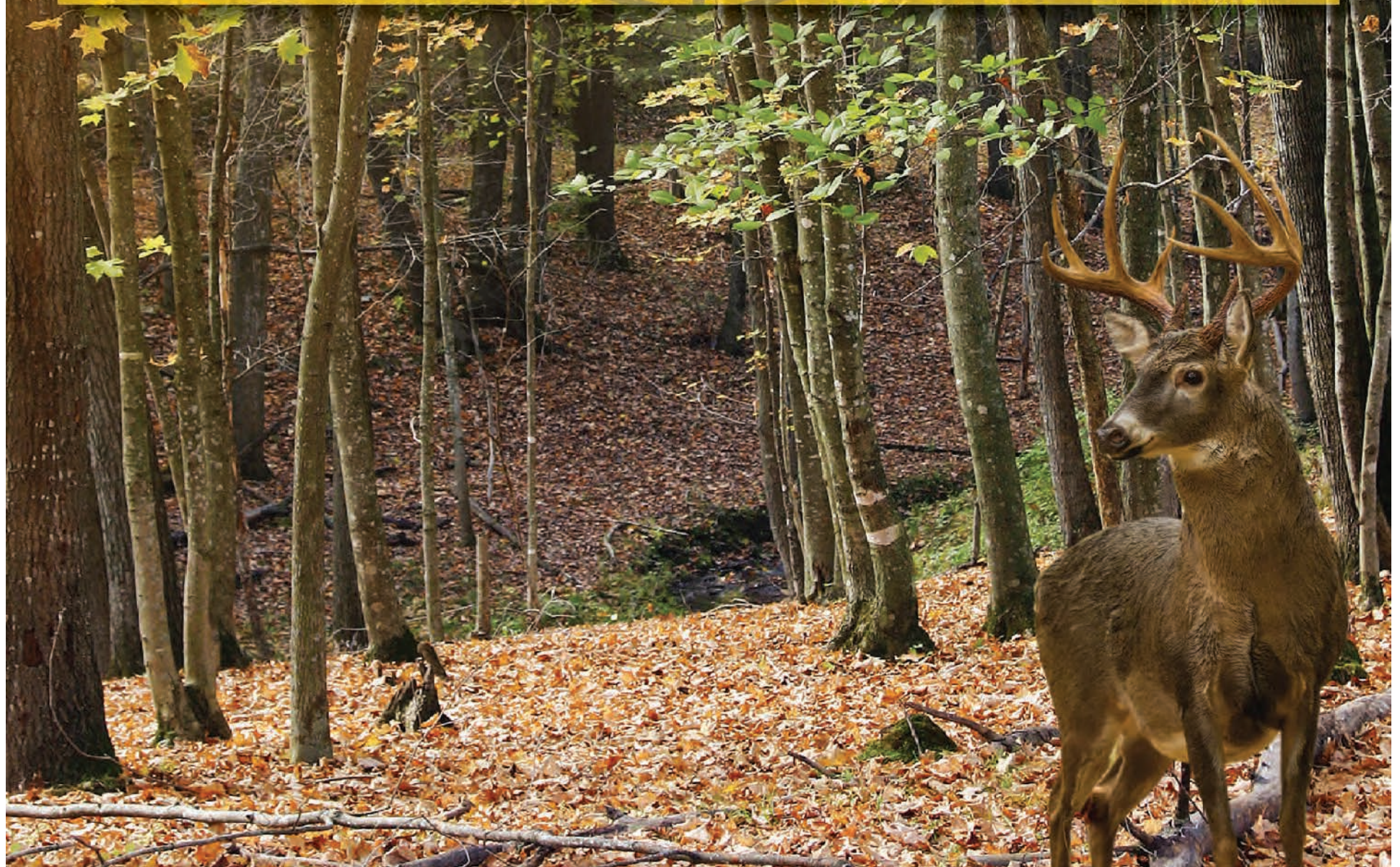


November 11, 2024

Hunting & Outdoors Guide



a special section of The Derrick. / The News-Herald

Gear up for the hunt

Tips, regulations, and opportunities for bowhunters

HARRISBURG, PA — It's probably safe to say that most people, given the chance to trade their cellphone for a landline, swap out their vehicle for a horse and buggy, or replace their washing machine with a bucket, a bar of rough homemade soap and a 100-yard walk to the nearest river, would opt to keep their modern conveniences.

Tools offering efficiency, ease and comfort are hard to forgo.

There are exceptions, though. Bowhunters — who represent one of every two deer hunters in Pennsylvania overall — each year willingly go afield with stick and string, albeit often modernized, finding attraction in the challenge and intimacy of close-range encounters.

More than 350,000 bowhunters will pursue whitetails across Pennsylvania this fall. Archery season began in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) 2B, 5C and 5D — those are the ones surrounding Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, respectively — on Sept. 21 and runs through Nov. 29, including two Sundays, Nov. 17 and 24, then comes back in from Dec. 26-Jan. 25. The statewide archery season kicked off on Oct. 5 and in-

cludes one Sunday, Nov. 17, before ending on Nov. 22. It reopens Dec. 26-Jan. 20.

"No other state has as many bowhunters as Pennsylvania," said Game Commission Executive Director Steve Smith. "And it's not hard to see why so many love the season. It's a special time, with the chance to hunt in mild weather against a backdrop of amazing fall color early on and the promise of the whitetail rut later."

"Hunters appreciate what's available and take advantage of it."

They take deer, too. Last year, in the 2023-24 seasons, archers harvested an estimated 154,850 whitetails (83,370 bucks and 71,480 antlerless deer). That was about 36% of the overall harvest.

That matched the most recent five-year average and is in line with what's occurring on a larger scale. According to the National Deer Association's 2024 "Deer Report," in the three seasons from 2020 to 2022, archers took, on average, about 34% of all deer harvested across what's considered the Northeast region, a 13-state area stretching from Maine to Virginia.

Hunters who want the opportunity to

fill a tag during archery season should hunt where deer want to be, said David Stainbrook, the Game Commission's Deer and Elk Section Supervisor. That's typically around food and cover. He recommends hunters scout for fresh deer sign around places rich in green browse and, later, hard and soft mast, which includes everything from apples and agricultural crops to acorns. If those places are close to thick escape and bedding cover, all the better, he said.

Often, though, the real key is just being out there. Deer have large home ranges, Stainbrook said, taking in hundreds of acres.

"So if I could give hunters one piece of advice, it would be to just hunt as much as possible," Stainbrook said. "Putting more time in the woods is going to increase your odds of harvesting a deer."

That's true throughout the season. Every week of the 2023-24 archery season contributed at least 10% to the overall harvest, with some weeks accounting for as much as 25%.

Smith, for one, will be out there, enjoying the season for all sorts of reasons, just like so many others.

"Pennsylvania's archery deer season is big on opportunity, and I wouldn't miss it," Smith said

Of course, bowhunters should always practice with their equipment before the season starts, shooting from the ground and/or an elevated stand, whichever mimics how they'll hunt. After it starts, hunters should only take responsible shots — broadside or quartering-away shots at deer within their personal maximum effective shooting range — to ensure quick, clean kills.

As for equipment, archery hunters may use long, recurve or compound bows, or crossbows. Bows must have a draw weight of at least 35 pounds; crossbows must have a minimum draw weight of 125 pounds.

Illuminated nocks that aid in tracking or locating the arrow or bolt after being launched are legal, but transmitter-tracking arrows are not.

Tree stands and climbing devices that cause damage to trees are unlawful to use or occupy unless the user has written permission from the landowner. Tree stands or tree steps penetrating a tree's cambium layer are unlawful to install or occupy on state game lands, state forests or state parks.

Portable hunting tree stands and blinds are allowed on state game lands, starting two weeks before opening day of archery season, but must be removed no later than two weeks after the close of the flintlock and late archery deer seasons in the WMU being hunted.

In all cases, tree stands on state game lands also must be conspicuously marked with a durable identification tag that identifies the stand owner. Those tags must include the hunter's first and last name and legal home address, their nine-digit CID number, or their unique Sportsman's Equipment ID number. Hunters can find their number in their HuntFishPA online profile or on their printed license.

Hunters who plan to be afield on private property on the Sundays open to archers must carry with them written permission from the landowner.

See **BOWHUNT**, Page 4

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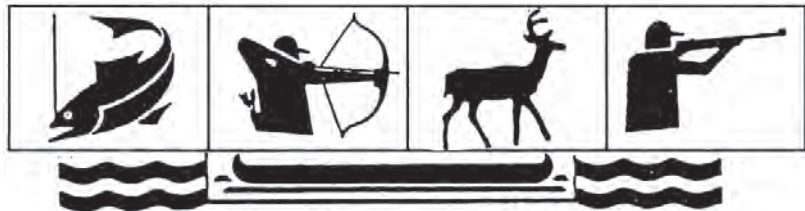
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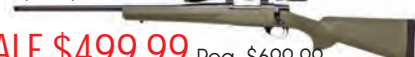
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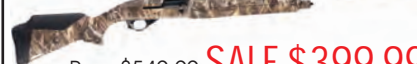
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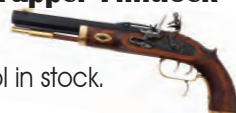


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Bowhunt

Continued from Page 2

Safety tips for bowhunters

Make sure someone knows where you're hunting and when you expect to return home. Leave a note or topographic map with your family or a friend. Pack a cellphone for emergencies.

Practice climbing with your tree stand before the opening day of the season, especially at dawn and dusk. Consider placing non-slip material on the deck of your tree stand if it's not already there.

Always use a fall-restraint device — preferably a full-body harness — when hunting from a tree stand. Wear the device from the moment you leave the ground until you return. Don't climb dead, wet or icy trees, and stay on the ground on blustery days.

Use a hoist rope to lift your bow and backpack to your tree stand. Trying to climb with either will place you at unnecessary risk.

Don't sleep in a tree stand. If you can't stay awake, return to the ground.

Keep yourself in good physical condition. Fatigue can impact judgment, coordination and reaction time, as well as accuracy.

Always carry broadhead-tipped arrows in a protective quiver, especially when

moving. Cocked crossbows should always be pointed in a safe direction. Know how to uncock a crossbow safely, too. If you use a mechanical release with a vertical bow, always keep your index finger away from the trigger when drawing.

In all cases, check your equipment before every outing and follow the manufacturer's recommendations for using it.

Venison care

While hunting in early fall often offers pleasant days afield, the warm weather also presents challenges for successful deer hunters.

One is making sure they wind up with high-quality venison for the table.

Deer harvested when the weather is warm should be field dressed quickly, then taken from the field and cooled down as soon as possible, preferably by refrigerating if temperatures are above 40 degrees.

Additional information on warm-weather venison care, as well as instructions on deer processing and other tips, are available on the white-tailed deer page on the Game Commission's website, www.pgc.pa.gov.

CWD regulations

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) — an always-fatal prion disease impacting deer and elk for which there is no cure — continues to spread across Pennsylvania both geographically and in terms of the number of deer infected.

"This illustrates the urgency of doing something to manage this disease," said Andrea Korman, the Game Commission's Chronic Wasting Disease Section Supervisor. "Our deer herd requires protection from this threat, and I think we can all agree we do not want to stay where we are now."

So this year, three Disease Management Areas (DMAs) — places with special rules in place to slow the human-assisted spread of CWD — have expanded. DMA 2 in southcentral Pennsylvania grew eastward; DMA 3 in western Pennsylvania expanded south; and DMA 8 in the southeast grew to the south and west.

Hunters who harvest a deer within the boundaries of a DMA or the Established Area (EA) can take them directly to any Game Commission-approved processor or taxidermist anywhere in the state.

Hunters who take a deer within a DMA or the EA may also leave the high-risk parts at the location of harvest, although this is not preferred, or they may take it home to process themselves so long as they also live within that DMA or the EA and dispose of the high-risk parts through a trash service. Hunters who live outside a DMA or the EA can quarter the deer to take it home, free of high-risk parts.

High-risk parts include the head (including brain, tonsils, eyes, and any lymph nodes); spinal cord/backbone; spleen; skull plate with attached antlers, if visible brain or spinal cord tissue is present; cape, if visible brain or spinal cord tissue is present; upper canine teeth, if root structure or other soft tissue is present; any object or article containing visible brain or spinal cord tissue; unfinished taxidermy mounts; and brain-tanned hides.

Deer management assistance program

The Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) allows hunters to get permits good for harvesting antlerless deer — one per tag — on the specific property or area for which the permit was issued.

Once again this year, the Game Commission is offering DMAP tags on some state game lands, namely 41 spread across the Northwest, Northcentral, Northeast and

Southeast regions. Combined, 7,000 tags were made available across 360,014 acres.

All game lands in DMAP have one thing in common: they have too many deer for the habitat to support. This year — for the first time in a while — Game Commission foresters are erecting deer-proof fencing in every region of the state around new timber cuts. If they don't, overabundant deer eat the young seedlings so fast that the forest cannot regenerate a healthy habitat. DMAP can mitigate the need for that by targeting hunting pressure in areas where it's needed.

The Game Commission is also offering DMAP tags in places with CWD. There, the goal is to "increase CWD sampling through hunter harvest to determine the extent and sample prevalence of the disease," Korman said. Biologists would like to get 250 deer per DMAP unit, a target that hunters have hit in several units previously.

There are seven CWD DMAP units this year — three less than last year — though two of those that remain, DMAP units 6367 and 6396, are larger than before. Details on licenses per unit are listed at the same link as other DMAP tags.

Deer seasons to follow

While deer hunting in Pennsylvania kicks off with the archery season, a full slate of other opportunities follow.

The statewide regular firearms deer season runs Nov. 30-Dec. 14 and includes a day of Sunday hunting on Dec. 1.

And aside from after-Christmas archery deer hunting opportunities, properly licensed hunters may participate in flintlock deer season, which runs Dec. 26-Jan. 20 statewide and Dec. 26-Jan. 25 in WMUs 2B, 5C and 5D. There's also an extended firearms deer season for antlerless deer, which run Dec. 26-Jan. 25 in WMUs 2B, 5C and 5D, and Jan. 2-20 in WMUs 4A, 4D and 5A.

Each hunter receives an antlered deer harvest tag as part of a general hunting license. An antlerless deer license or DMAP permit is needed for each antlerless deer harvested. Valid licenses or permits must be possessed to lawfully hunt deer, and valid paper harvest tags must be carried afield while deer hunting, then attached to the deer's ear before the deer is moved.



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Game commission lists harvest report

HARRISBURG, PA — The Pennsylvania Game Commission reported results from the 2023-24 deer seasons, which ended in January.

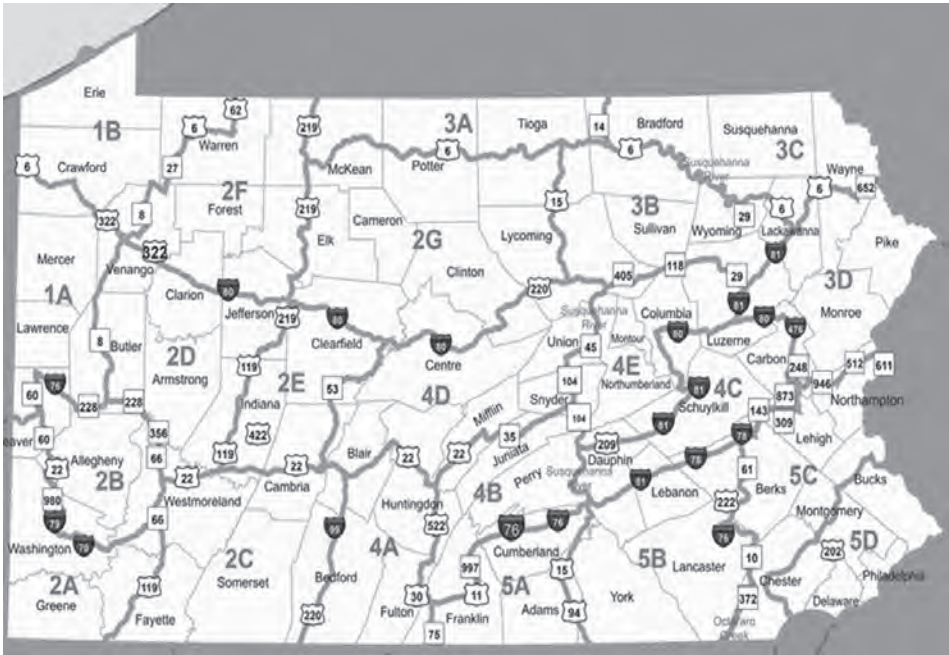
Hunters harvested an estimated 430,010 white-tailed deer. The statewide buck harvest was estimated at 171,600, while the antlerless harvest was estimated at 258,410.

The overall harvest is 2% greater than that from 2022-23, which was estimated at 422,960. It's 4% higher than the total harvest seen as a three-year average.

Game Commission Deer and Elk Section Supervisor David Stainbrook said harvest estimates are calculated using antlered and antlerless harvest reports by hunters in combination with data from deer checked by crews at processors across the state to estimate reporting rates.

"Last year, 31 teams of trained deer agers visited more than 400 processors across the Commonwealth during the statewide firearms season, to collect data, age deer based on tooth replacement and wear, and record information from harvest tags," Stainbrook said. "They examined more than 24,000 whitetails."

Hunters themselves, meanwhile, reported taking more than 134,000 deer,



most often using the Game Commission's online reporting system. That accounted for 74% of all reports received. Another 18% of deer harvest reports came via report cards, while 8% of reports were made by phone.

Taking a look at the buck harvest in par-

ticular, it was up in 2023-24 by 5% over the season previous and up 6% over the three-year average. Overall, 27% of deer hunters harvested a buck. That was a slight increase over 2022-23's 26% success rate, and up significantly from the 15% success rate seen as recently as 2007-08.

The majority of bucks harvested are older than in decades past, too. Before antler point restrictions, most of the bucks harvested were yearling deer, meaning those 1.5-years-old. In 2023-24, 64% of bucks taken were at least 2.5 years old.

As for the 2023-24 antlerless deer harvest, 69% of the harvest was adult females. Another 16% were button bucks and 14% were doe fawns. Those, too, are in line with long-term averages.

About one in four antlerless licenses issued for last season resulted in a harvest.

Game Commission Executive Director Bryan Burhans said the harvest numbers show the agency's deer management program is working, not just from a biological perspective, but for hunters, as well. That bodes well for those taking to the woods now and those who will follow.

"There's no denying this a great time to be a Pennsylvania deer hunter," Burhans said. "But best of all, these numbers show that we're managing deer and their habitat in ways that are sustainable over the long haul. That's not only best for deer, but for deer hunters, too."

See **HARVEST REPORT**, Page 6

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► Harvest Report

Continued from Page 5

As in years past, the regular firearms deer season accounted for the largest part of the 2023-24 deer harvest. Fire-arms hunters took an estimated 254,710 deer, with 86,260 of those bucks and the remaining 168,450 being antlerless. Bowhunters accounted for a little over a third of the total deer harvest, taking an estimated 154,850 whitetails (83,370 bucks and 71,480 antlerless deer) with either bows or crossbows. The estimated muzzleloader harvest was 20,450 (1,970

bucks and 18,480 antlerless deer).
Total deer harvest estimates by Wild-life Management Unit (WMU) for 2023-24 (with 2022-23 figures in parentheses) are as follows:
WMU 1A: 8,000 antlered (9,000), 13,800 antlerless (13,800).
WMU 1B: 10,300 antlered (9,100), and 13,600 antlerless (15,300).
WMU 2A: 10,000 antlered (8,700), and 13,300 antlerless (11,000).
WMU 2B: 7,000 antlered (6,600), and 16,000 antlerless (15,000).
WMU 2C: 10,600 antlered (10,000), and 20,600 antlerless (16,600).
WMU 2D: 11,800 antlered (14,000), and 21,400 antlerless (23,000).
WMU 2E: 6,900 antlered (6,700), and 12,800 antlerless (10,600).
WMU 2F: 9,100 antlered (8,800), and 13,900 antlerless (11,800).
WMU 2G: 8,100 antlered (8,800), and 6,500 antlerless (5,100).
WMU 3A: 5,200 antlered (5,700), and 6,000 antlerless (5,600).
WMU 3B: 7,700 antlered (7,300), and 7,600 antlerless (8,900).
WMU 3C: 8,900 antlered (8,000), and 10,600 antlerless (12,000).
WMU 3D: 6,200 antlered (5,500), and 7,300 antlerless (7,400).
WMU 4A: 5,700 antlered (3,800), and 9,300 antlerless (11,100).
WMU 4B: 5,000 antlered (4,800), and 9,500 antlerless (8,400).
WMU 4C: 8,200 antlered (6,900), and

6,700 antlerless (8,200).
WMU 4D: 8,400 antlered (7,900), and 13,500 antlerless (12,200).
WMU 4E: 8,100 antlered (8,000), and 13,700 antlerless (12,400).
WMU 5A: 4,100 antlered (3,100), and 7,800 antlerless (7,400).
WMU 5B: 9,700 antlered (10,900), and 14,300 antlerless (16,300).
WMU 5C: 9,100 antlered (7,200), and 13,100 antlerless (16,700).
WMU 5D: 2,900 antlered (2,500), and 6,700 antlerless (6,700).
Unknown WMU: 600 antlered (1,090), and 410 antlerless (1,470).
Season-specific 2023-24 deer harvest estimates (with 2022-23 harvest estimates in parentheses) are as follows:
WMU 1A: archery, 4,400 antlered (4,730) and 3,800 antlerless (3,810); and muzzleloader, 100 antlered (70) and 1,000 antlerless (1,390).
WMU 1B: archery, 5,040 antlered (3,970) and 2,610 antlerless (2,950); and muzzleloader, 160 antlered (30) and 790 antlerless (1,250).
WMU 2A: archery, 4,530 antlered (3,620) and 2,600 antlerless (2,060); and muzzleloader, 70 antlered (80) and 1,200 antlerless (1,240).
WMU 2B: archery, 5,320 antlered (4,830) and 8,750 antlerless (6,750); and muzzleloader, 80 antlered (70) and 650 antlerless (850).
WMU 2C: archery, 5,100 antlered (4,410) and 5,040 antlerless (3,900); and muzzleloader, 100 antlered (90) and 1,660 antlerless (1,700).
WMU 2D: archery, 5,610 antlered (6,690) and 4,130 antlerless (4,450); and muzzleloader, 190 antlered (110) and 1,770 antlerless (2,650).
WMU 2E: archery, 3,040 antlered (2,540) and 2,530 antlerless (1,900); and muzzleloader, 60 antlered (60) and 1,070 antlerless (1,100).
WMU 2F: archery, 3,400 antlered (3,250) and 2,090 antlerless (1,930); and muzzleloader, 100 antlered (50) and 1,310 antlerless (1,470).
WMU 2G: archery, 2,670 antlered (2,840) and 1,170 antlerless (1,230); and muzzleloader, 130 antlered (60) and 630 antlerless (1,070).
WMU 3A: archery, 1,830 antlered

(2,070) and 970 antlerless (1,030); and muzzleloader, 70 antlered (30) and 530 antlerless (670).
WMU 3B: archery, 3,090 antlered (3,050) and 1,530 antlerless (1,830); and muzzleloader, 110 antlered (50) and 770 antlerless (1,070).
WMU 3C: archery, 3,220 antlered (2,870) and 2,020 antlerless (2,170); and muzzleloader, 80 antlered (30) and 780 antlerless (1,330).
WMU 3D: archery, 2,630 antlered (2,260) and 2,020 antlerless (2,030); and muzzleloader, 70 antlered (40) and 480 antlerless (770).
WMU 4A: archery, 1,820 antlered (1,170) and 1,750 antlerless (1,970); and muzzleloader, 80 antlered (30) and 750 antlerless (1,130).
WMU 4B: archery, 2,470 antlered (2,070) and 2,530 antlerless (2,100); and muzzleloader, 30 antlered (30) and 570 antlerless (800).
WMU 4C: archery, 4,220 antlered (3,450) and 1,770 antlerless (2,170); and muzzleloader, 80 antlered (50) and 430 antlerless (830).
WMU 4D: archery, 3,400 antlered (3,020) and 3,380 antlerless (2,840); and muzzleloader, 100 antlered (80) and 1,020 antlerless (1,260).
WMU 4E: archery, 3,930 antlered (3,610) and 3,310 antlerless (2,800); and muzzleloader, 70 antlered (90) and 990 antlerless (1,100).
WMU 5A: archery, 1,970 antlered (1,390) and 2,480 antlerless (2,460); and muzzleloader, 30 antlered (10) and 520 antlerless (540).
WMU 5B: archery, 6,490 antlered (6,730) and 6,100 antlerless (6,600); and muzzleloader, 110 antlered (70) and 800 antlerless (1,400).
WMU 5C: archery, 6,470 antlered (5,020) and 6,200 antlerless (8,040); and muzzleloader, 130 antlered (80) and 600 antlerless (760).
WMU 5D: archery, 2,480 antlered (2,080) and 4,560 antlerless (4,760); and muzzleloader, 20 antlered (20) and 140 antlerless (140).
Unknown WMU: archery, 240 antlered (100) and 140 antlerless (90); and muzzleloader, 0 antlered (0) and 20 antlerless (0).



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What to do with your venison after a hunt

After a successful hunt, the question is always “what am I going to do with the venison meat?” There are plenty of options you can choose from when it comes to the use of the venison meat. Here are some great ideas for using the meat!

Venison steaks

Venison steaks are one of the most popular choices. The inner loin cut makes for great, tender steaks that you can fire up on the grill. The meat is tender and tasty, so you don’t necessarily have to add many spices. Salt and pepper will suffice.

Backstraps are also some amazing cuts you can choose from to grill up at camp on the grill or over the fire.

Sausage

Another great idea is to use your venison meat for making sausage. Especially for the holidays, sausage is a great meal to have at Christmas. The great thing about making sausage is you can mix meat like ground pork, which will increase the fat for juicier links. There are many deer sausage recipes you can look



up to get different tasting meals.

Jerky

This is especially a fun option. This makes a great snack for you on hikes, car rides, etc. This requires the process of marinating thin strips of meat with the flavor of your choice. This process is a little more complicated than the other two options, but it is definitely worth it in the end when you have plenty of treats and snacks for the family.

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Hunting Season and Bag Limits

Deer

DEER, ARCHERY (Antlered and Antlerless) WMUs 2B, 5C and 5D: Nov. 16, Sunday Nov. 17, Nov. 18-23, Sunday Nov. 24, Nov. 25-29 and Dec. 26-Jan. 25, 2025. One antlered deer per hunting license year. One antlered deer, and an antlerless deer with each required antlerless license.

DEER, REGULAR FIREARMS (Antlered and Antlerless) Statewide: Nov. 30; Sunday, Dec. 1; and Dec. 2-Dec. 14. One antlered deer per hunting license year. An antlerless deer with each required antlerless license.

DEER, ANTLERED or ANTLERLESS, FLINTLOCK: WMUs 1A, 1B, 2A, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F, 2G, 2H, 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, 5A and 5B with required muzzleloading license: Dec. 26-Jan. 20, 2025

(WMUs 2B, 5C and 5D) with required muzzleloading license: Dec. 26-Jan. 25, 2025.

One antlered deer per hunting license year, or one antlerless deer and an additional antlerless deer with each required antlerless license.

DEER, ANTLERLESS EXTENDED REGULAR FIREARMS (WMUs 2B, 5C and 5D): Dec. 26-Jan. 25, 2025. An antlerless deer with each required antlerless license.

Black Bear

BLACK BEAR (Statewide): Nov. 23; Sunday, Nov. 24; and Nov. 25-26. Only 1 bear may be taken during the license year.

BLACK BEAR (WMUs 2B, 5B, 5C and 5D): Nov. 30, Sunday, Dec. 1, and Dec. 2-Dec. 14. Only 1 bear may be taken during the license year.

BLACK BEAR — ARCHERY (WMUs 2B, 5C and 5D): Nov. 16; Sunday, Nov. 17; Nov. 18-23; Sunday, Nov. 24 and Nov. 25-29. Only 1 bear may be taken during the license year.

Small Game

BOBWHITE QUAIL: Nov. 16; Sunday, Nov. 17; Nov. 18-23; Sunday, Nov. 24; Nov. 25-29; Dec. 16-24 and Dec. 26-March 31, 2025. No limit.

CROW: Through March 23, 2025, on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday only. No limit.

PHEASANT: Nov. 16; Sunday, Nov. 17; Nov. 18-23; Sunday, Nov. 24; Nov. 25-29; Dec. 16-24 and Dec. 26-Feb. 28, 2025 (2 daily, 6 possession) Male and female pheasants may be taken in all WMUs. There is no open season for taking pheasants in Wild Pheasant Recovery Areas, except as authorized by executive order.

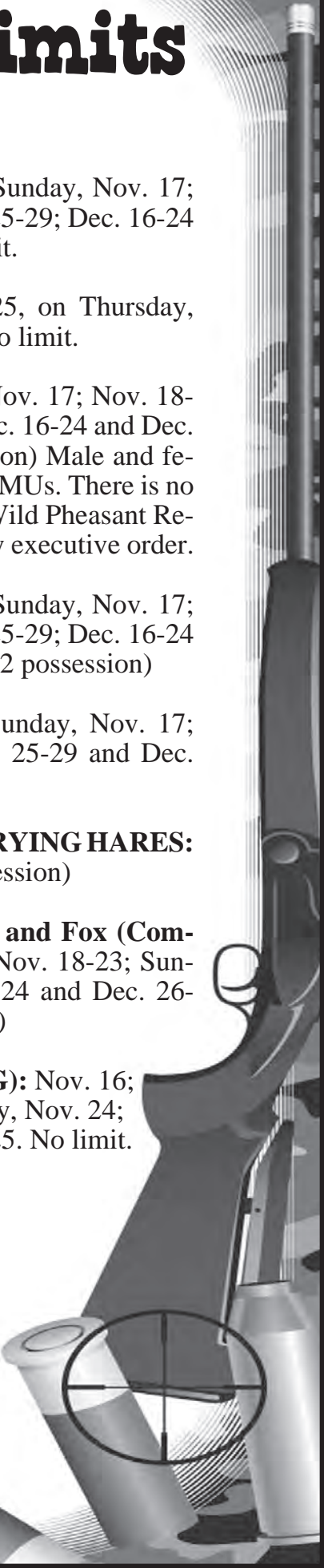
RABBIT (Cottontail): Nov. 16; Sunday, Nov. 17; Nov. 18-23; Sunday, Nov. 24; Nov. 25-29; Dec. 16-24 and Dec. 26-Feb. 28, 2025 (4 daily, 12 possession)

RUFFED GROUSE: Nov. 16; Sunday, Nov. 17; Nov. 18-23; Sunday, Nov. 24; Nov. 25-29 and Dec. 16-24 (2 daily, 6 possession)

SNOWSHOE RABBITS OR VARYING HARES: Dec. 26-Jan. 1, 2025 (1 daily, 3 possession)

SQUIRRELS, Red, Gray, Black and Fox (Combined): Nov. 16; Sunday, Nov. 17; Nov. 18-23; Sunday, Nov. 24; Nov. 25-29; Dec. 16-24 and Dec. 26-Feb. 28, 2025 (6 daily, 18 possession)

WOODCHUCK (GROUNDHOG): Nov. 16; Sunday, Nov. 17; Nov. 18-23; Sunday, Nov. 24; Nov. 25-29 and Dec. 16-June 30, 2025. No limit.





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Fall-proof your hunt

Follow these simple safety tips for tree stand hunting

STEPS to safe tree stand hunting

Hundreds of Pennsylvania hunters have been seriously injured in tree stand-related accidents.

By remembering these STEPS to tree stand safety, you can reduce your risk of falling and be prepared to signal for help if you do fall.

Safety harness or belt: Always wear a full-body safety harness whenever your feet leave the ground.

Tree stand maintenance: Check your stand for missing or broken parts before each use.

Evaluate your stand site: Select trees that are alive and will support your weight

Partners and plans: Hunt with a partner and have a plan in case of an emergency.

Signals: Carry a whistle or other signaling device should you need assistance.

Hunters should also:

- Use a haul line to bring gear up
- Make sure firearms are unloaded with the action

Before climbing in your stand this season, remember to **HUNT SAFELY. WEAR A HARNESS.**

Hunting safety tips

- Positively identify your target. Be sure you are shooting at legal game. Never shoot at sounds or movement.
- Stay in the zone! Hunters should be spaced 25 to 40 yards apart, and always in sight of one another. Each hunter's zone of fire spans about 45 degrees directly in front of the hunter. Never shoot at game moving between you and someone else.
- Plan your hunt! Let someone know where you're hunting and when you'll return.
- Buckle up! If you hunt from an elevated stand, always wear a full-body, fall-restraint device as soon as your feet leave the ground until they return.
- Keep fit! Hunting is hard work.



Don't become a statistic. keep physically fit. Start with a check-up and follow your doctor's advice.

• Stay found! Become familiar with your hunting area. Learn how to use a map and compass or GPS unit. Be prepared for emergencies. Carry a basic survival kit and know how to use it.

• Be seen! Wear or display the required amount of fluorescent orange clothing.

Fluorescent orange requirements

- Orange is required during firearms seasons, regardless of your sporting arm.
- Hunters must wear 250 square inches of fluorescent orange that's visible from 360 degrees on the head, chest, and back. A hat and vest satisfy this requirement.
- Whenever orange is required, it must be worn at all times while hunting.
- Even when orange isn't required, such as archery seasons, it's still strongly recommended.

See **SAFETY TIPS**, Page 11

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► Safety Tips

Continued from Page 10

Big-Game drive tips

- **Plan your drives.** Stay organized and make sure everyone knows their role. Decide how many drivers are needed and where standers will be located.
- **Communicate.** Stay in constant communication with other drivers so you know where everyone is at all times. Keep in mind the use of handheld radios or cell phones to alert other hunters of the presence or movement of wildlife while hunting is prohibited.
- **Know your zone.** Identify the areas where you can safely shoot and remember your zone of fire changes as you move.
- **When in doubt, don't shoot.** If forced to make a split-second decision about whether it's safe to take a shot, err on the side of caution and don't shoot.

Transporting firearms

- Always make sure firearms are unloaded before putting them in a vehicle. Never put a loaded firearm in or against a motor vehicle or any attachments, even if the vehicle is stationary.
- A firearm is considered loaded when live ammunition is in the chamber or attached magazine.



- Loaded muzzleloaders should be safely discharged before being transported in a vehicle.

Primary firearm safety rules

When using a firearm, be sure to follow

these five primary safety rules. You can remember these rules by thinking **SMART**
Safe Direction: Keep your firearm pointed in a safe direction at all times.
Make sure: Positively identify your target.

Always check: Know what's beyond your target before shooting.

Respect firearms: Treat all firearms as if they are loaded.

Trigger caution: Don't touch the trigger until you are ready to shoot.



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Women of the Wild trains next generation of female hunters

While some people are born into a culture of hunting — typically through their fathers or grandfathers — Women of the Wild founder Felicia Marie became an avid hunter on her own accord in her late teens.

“At that time, it was very hard for a female to find her way in the outdoors, with it being so male-dominant,” she said. “It seemed like every time I encountered a female, they would offer to take me under their wing and be a mentor.”

Felicia Marie works as a full-time

pharmacy administrator. Just for fun, in 2021, she started to actively post on Facebook and Instagram about her hunts, with the intention of drawing like-minded women into her circle.

“Little did I know! There was a huge outpouring of interest and it has really exploded since then,” she said.

Her Facebook page-turned-business, Women of the Wild, currently has 5,000 followers from across the country and the globe. Her Instagram account is approaching 2,000 followers.

The online social media platforms are managed by Felicia and seven representatives stationed in Ohio, New York, Michigan and Kansas, among other states. Each representative has a different hunting or outdoor niche. Together, they coordinate and schedule social media posts on the shared account.

Based in southeast Michigan, Women of the Wild is primarily an online platform that teaches women the “how tos” of hunting, fishing and trapping. But they are working toward becoming a non-profit organization.

Through her second social media handle — Felicia Marie’s Wild Endeavors — she leads a hunting and guide service in Michigan for women, children and veterans.



Women of the Wild provides women with educational opportunities related to hunting and enjoying the outdoors as well as camaraderie.

And, Felicia recently added exotic hunting trips to her portfolio.

But first, education

The goal of Women of the Wild is simple — to bring more women together in the outdoors and provide educational opportunities related to hunting, specifically for women.

Each month, the Women of the Wild group hosts educational seminars both online and in-person. These include topics such as canning meats, trapping, bowfishing, waterfowl field hunting, pheasant hunting, doe hunting, fly fishing, catch ‘n cook, and a plethora of other

topics. The seminars are always led by a licensed or certified professional, according to Felicia.

“For me, it’s all about the connection with the outdoors. I don’t even care if I’m hunting,” she said. “A lot of times when I do these events, I’m perfectly fine just being another hand to help. I have found such gratification in instructing women — that’s been my drive and purpose.”

The mother of two has taken her boys, ages 13 and 9, hunting with her since they were 6 months old — at that time in a backpack.

See **FEMALE HUNTERS**, Page 13


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► Female Hunters

Continued from Page 12

“I say they’re wild, feral, wonderful children ... they love the outdoors,” she said. “My oldest is obsessed. With waterfowl hunting, my youngest actually ran the trap line with me for his first year. Last year, he mentored with me and wasn’t allowed to harvest any animals or set any traps, he had to just go with me and learn.”

She continued, “That’s typically how I do a mentor process with anyone — for one full season they just follow along, shadowing, and then the next year I put it in their hands. This year, he got to actually run the trap line and caught his first raccoon, and he’s pretty hooked on trapping now.”

Felicia said she traps wildlife primarily for farm management and often donates the animals to local universities for research.

Over the past two years, she has learned how to leverage mutual interest into cash and trade sponsorships. An avid turkey hunter, Felicia met the owners of Feathermoon Outdoors in Millville, Pennsylvania. She started using their calls, and now they are a sponsor on her social media channels.

From small game to trophy hunting

While big game trophy hunting was never really on her radar, Felicia said there were women in her network who expressed interest in it. Then a stroke of luck fast-forwarded her plans.

“I ended up winning a trip to Africa in December 2021 through an online contest hosted by Girls with Guns clothing, Ruger Firearms and Vortex Optics — and it had to be used within one year. I had never won anything in my life. I didn’t know what to do and I didn’t even want to go,” she said. “I asked them if I could just take the camo and the gun and donate the hunt back, so they could raffle it off and make some more money. The woman said, ‘We can, but why don’t you sleep on it, because this is an incredible opportunity,’” Felicia said.

Felicia called her mom, in tears, who suggested she take her dad. She called him and he immediately agreed.

“We bought our tickets and went. The experience, the culture, the humbling feeling you get from being in a third-world country — it fed my soul. I thought, I have to

share this with other women. I started working for that outfitter as their stateside representative to provide a discounted rate for more women to experience it. For the girls that go, there’s an option for them to hunt or they can bring a non-hunter,” she said.

The newest project that Women of the Wild has undertaken is a bi-weekly podcast, available on streaming platforms such as PodBean and Spotify. They are listed under “Women of the Wild Outdoors” and listeners can meet a featured woman discussing why she loves hunting in the great outdoors.

Felicia has some advice for women hunters and non-hunters alike: “Keep your feet moving forward and your head held high and you’ll get through anything you want to. When you have the drive and the passion, it just feeds itself.”

Felicia continued, “As long as we’re providing education and opportunities to women, we’re succeeding,” she said.

For more information about Women of the Wild, search for the group on Facebook, Instagram or on your favorite streaming platform.

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Hunters bagged 600+ pound bears in 2023

HARRISBURG, PA — No other Pennsylvania hunting season offers such a potentially big payoff as this one.

Last year, hunters harvested 2,920 black bears across Pennsylvania, getting at least one in 58 of the state's 67 counties and 20 of its 22 Wildlife Management Units (WMUs). They took seven in the early season, 695 in archery season, 541 in the muzzleloader and special firearms seasons, 1,086 in the regular firearms season, and 591 in the extended seasons.

Some were massive, too.

The average female bear checked in by hunters weighed 152 pounds; the average male went 198. But bigger bears — much bigger — showed up in the harvest.

Last year's largest was a 691-pounder taken in Pike County by Mitchell Jonathan, of Quakertown. But five other hunters got bears exceeding 600 pounds, and each of the top 10 heaviest bears weighed at least 576 pounds.

That's hardly surprising. Pennsylvania generally produces bears weighing more than 600 pounds every year, and often at least one or two topping 700. Pennsylvania's even seen seven bears exceeding 800 pounds harvested since 1992, the largest of them an 875-pounder taken in 2010 in Pike County.

"Those are some of the biggest bears you'll find anywhere in North America," said Game Commission Executive Director Steve Smith. "But that's just part of what makes Pennsylvania bear hunting so exciting.

"We've got lots of bears in lots of places, and a slate of seasons offering all sorts of opportunity throughout the fall, too."

Bear archery hunting got underway in WMUs 2B, 5C and 5D on Sept. 21, and will run through Nov. 29, including two Sundays, Nov. 17 and 24. In WMU 5B, the season kicked off on Oct. 5 and runs through Nov. 22, with one Sunday, Nov. 17. Everywhere else in the state, the archery bear season began Oct. 19 and run-



ning through Nov. 9.

The regular statewide firearms bear season comes in on Nov. 23, continues on Sunday, Nov. 24, and runs through Nov. 26. Finally, the extended bear season — which runs concurrent with portions of the firearms deer season — goes from Nov. 30 to Dec. 7, including Sunday, Dec. 1, in WMUs 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 4C, 4E and 5A, and from Nov. 30 through Dec. 14, including Dec. 1, in WMUs 2B, 5B, 5C and 5D.

Melanie Weaver, the Game Commission's Game Mammals Section Supervisor, estimated the population right now at somewhere around 18,000. That's up over recent years and close again to a record high.

Still, the odds of any one particular hunter getting a black bear are admittedly long. More than 200,000 people chase Pennsylvania bears each year — no other species except deer puts more hunters in the woods — but fewer than 3% fill their tag.

Hunters who want to join that select group are wise to focus on two things: food and cover. Weaver said that in autumn, bears consume as many calories as possible before denning for the winter, preferably close to thick, gnarly hiding places.

"The best thing that you can do is put yourself in an area that a bear is likely to visit when you are planning your hunt," Weaver said. "Since gaining weight is important in the fall, look for food sources. But think, too, about places where they might rest, like swamps, mountain laurel, hemlock stands, regenerating clearcuts, riparian thickets and areas with downed trees."

Hunters should also go into the woods with a plan for how to get a bear out if they harvest one. Even smaller bears can be difficult for one person to handle.

But that's a good problem to have.

"Regardless of size, any bear harvested in Pennsylvania is something to be excited about," Smith said.

Looking back

Hunters took more bears in Tioga County than anywhere else in 2023, with 176. Counties rounding out the top 10 for harvest, in order, were Lycoming with 170, Potter with 155, Pike with 142, Bradford with 138, Luzerne with 135, Monroe with 127, Wayne with 124, Clinton with 108 and Carbon with 101.

Final county harvests by region (with 2022 figures in parentheses) are:

Northwest — 357 (502): Forest, 68 (51); Warren, 65 (88); Venango, 64 (79); Jefferson, 50 (81); Clarion, 44 (80); Butler, 29 (40); Crawford, 24 (52); Erie, 8 (20); and Mercer, 5 (11).

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The importance of mastering shot placement

When it comes to hunting deer, there are many skills that hunters must master if they want to bring home a monster buck in a way that's ethical and humane. One such skill is correct shot placement, which is crucial to ensuring a quick and clean kill and preventing any undue suffering for the deer.

During their recent appearance on the National Land Podcast, Cole Cannon, Jeff Danker, and Daniel McVay from BuckVentures Outdoors spoke with Mac Christian on tips to master shot placement and the reasons that this skill is so important for hunters.

Different kinds of shot placements

This section will examine three common types of shot placements as well as a few benefits and drawbacks.

Broadside shot

This is the most straightforward and effective placement for a fast and clean kill. For this shot, the deer is standing perpendicular to the hunter, exposing the broad side of its body and allowing a clear view of its vital organs. The ideal target is located just behind the shoulder

where the heart and lungs reside.

Quartering away shot

In this shot, the deer is angled away from the hunter, which exposes more of its vital organs on one side. By targeting behind the shoulder and angling toward the opposite front leg, a hunter has a good chance of hitting these vital spots.

For a shot like this, hunters pick out small features on the deer such as markings or tufts of hair to hone in their aim and ensure a good shot. As the adage goes, aim small to miss small!

Quartering towards shot

The quartering toward shot is a more difficult shot than either the quartering away or broadside shots because the deer is angled toward the hunter and exposes less of its vital organs. This type of shot is typically not recommended for beginners, since it's hard to avoid non-lethal areas like the shoulder which would require a follow-up shot.

Advice for beginners

For those just starting out on their

hunting journey, Danker and Cannon provided a few insights as to how beginners can improve their shot placement skills and mentally prepare themselves to take that first shot.

Danker explained that understanding the different shot placements and learning which shots are right to take is crucial for any new hunter, stating, "So we know we've got broadside shots and know where to hit the deer. We've got quartering away shots, which is a very ethical shot and we know to shoot for the exit. We teach people to shoot for the exit, so if we've got a quartering away shot, we think about where that [bullet] is going to come out. And then we teach that we don't shoot quartering toward shots or frontals."

"One thing I would teach anyone is never shoot to miss a deer. We always aim for the perfect broadside shot, and I do teach to aim for the heart. The whole saying of aim small, miss small is no joke."

Mastering the basics

Danker and Cannon also stressed the importance of mastering the basics and putting in the work beforehand to

ensure that the deer experiences the least amount of stress and suffering possible.

Emphasizing the need for repeated practice, Danker suggested that new hunters can work on their shot placement by hunting does since it can be a good way to manage what many know as "buck fever," a state of overexcitement that comes about when inexperienced hunters see game that often causes them to miss.

It's also important for new hunters to understand their capabilities since new hunters lack the knowledge and experience of more seasoned veterans as Cannon explained.

Why is shot placement so important?

As mentioned above, shot placement is one of the most crucial skills for a hunter to master because proper shot placement ensures that the target game won't experience any undue pain or suffering. Many experienced hunters hold a deep reverence and respect for the game they hunt, instilled by countless hours spent tracking and observing these animals.

Black Bears

Continued from Page 14

Southwest — 141 (253): Armstrong, 41 (50); Somerset, 32 (64); Indiana, 24 (31); Fayette, 23 (34); Westmoreland, 13 (25); Cambria, 5 (44); Greene, 1 (3); Beaver, 1 (0); and Allegheny, 1 (2).

Northcentral — 1,034 (1,028): Tioga, 176 (187); Lycoming, 170 (152); Potter, 155 (119); Clinton, 108 (113); Elk, 90 (85); McKean, 90 (52); Cameron, 85 (52); Clearfield, 72 (114); Centre, 71 (122); and Union, 17 (32).

Southcentral — 162 (355): Bedford, 34 (71); Mifflin, 28 (34); Huntingdon, 25 (81); Juniata, 19 (26); Perry, 14 (29); Blair, 11 (33); Adams, 10 (7); Franklin, 9 (18); Cumberland 6 (8); Fulton, 4 (9); and Snyder, 2 (15).

Northeast — 1,067 (901): Pike, 142 (84); Bradford, 138 (126); Luzerne, 135 (126); Monroe, 127 (114); Wayne, 124 (81); Carbon, 101 (78); Sullivan, 75 (84); Susquehanna, 67 (47); Wyoming, 62 (50); Lackawanna, 57 (51); Columbia, 27 (46); Northumberland, 10 (10); and Montour, 2 (4).

Southeast — 159 (131): Schuylkill, 65 (65); Dauphin, 42 (27); Northampton, 21 (12); Berks, 16 (11); Lebanon, 10 (14); and Lehigh, 5 (2).

The final bear harvests by Wildlife Management Unit (with final 2022 fig-

ures in parentheses) were: WMU 1A, 19 (26); WMU 1B, 53 (115); WMU 2A, 3 (13); WMU 2B, 3 (4); WMU 2C, 87 (159); WMU 2D, 146 (202); WMU 2E, 41 (85); WMU 2F, 247 (258); WMU 2G, 565 (425); WMU 3A, 203 (174); WMU 3B, 343 (292); WMU 3C, 221 (165); WMU 3D, 451 (344); WMU 4A, 42 (114); WMU 4B, 47 (76); WMU 4C, 220 (190); WMU 4D, 124 (291); WMU 4E, 72 (109); WMU 5A, 18 (17); WMU 5B, 0 (2); WMU 5C, 15 (8); and WMU 5D, 0 (0).

Bear check stations

Hunters who harvest a bear must have it checked by the Game Commission. How to do that varies, depending on season.

During the four-day statewide regular firearms season and the extended bear season that overlaps with a portion of the firearms deer season, the Game Commission operates check stations at several locations.

Hunters who take a bear during any archery season must contact the appropriate Game Commission region office for details on how to have their bear checked. Contact information for region offices is likewise in the digest.

In all cases, hunters are encouraged to use a stick to prop open their bear's mouth soon after harvest and before the jaw stiffens. That allows agency staff to remove a tooth, used to determine the bear's age.



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