



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov. 21, 2023

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First of Iowa's popular gun deer hunting seasons opens Dec. 2

Iowa's most popular hunting seasons are less than two weeks away when more than 100,000 blaze orange clad hunters will be walking, posting, sitting and standing in Iowa's timber and field edges hoping to tag an Iowa deer. The first deer gun season is Dec. 2-6; the second deer gun season is Dec. 9-17.

The good news is, that Iowa's deer population is stable to slightly increasing across much of the state, with the exception of certain parts of northwest, west central and

southwest Iowa.

“The gun seasons are the most popular of all of our hunting seasons, a lot of great tradition and memories are made during this time,” said Jace Elliott, state deer biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “These two seasons also play an important role for our deer herd management with more than 50 percent of the total harvest typically occurring during these 14 days in December.”

In 2022, hunters reported harvesting 109,600 deer and Elliott is predicting a similar harvest this year. So far in 2023, more than 25,000 deer have been harvested, which is slightly higher than each of the last two years’ harvest up to this point.

“Based on the reported harvest from our earlier seasons, we are expecting a similar harvest total again this year,” he said. “Data from our population surveys suggest there should be just as much, if not more, opportunity to harvest deer as past years in most regions of Iowa.”

While hunter success in earlier seasons has been good, Mother Nature can play a role when hunting opportunities are much shorter. Cool weather with snowfall on opening day leads to higher harvest; warm weather with rain leads to lower harvest. The way too early forecast calls for above normal temperatures.

Method of take for the gun seasons

Over time, the type of firearm allowed in the gun season has expanded from the original shotgun-only, to include muzzleloaders, handguns and, most recently, rifles.

Rifles shooting expanding type bullet with a maximum diameter of no less than .350 of an inch and no larger than .500 of an inch with a published or calculated muzzle energy of 500 foot pounds or higher are allowed as a method of take in the gun season. The hunting regulations has a list of allowable cartridges that has generated the most questions.

Based on the recent deer hunter survey, the method of hunting during the gun season is split nearly 50-50 between hunters who prefer drive hunting (pushing deer towards hunters on post) and those who prefer stationary hunting (sitting in a tree stand, ground blind, etc.).

Changes to deer seasons

- The antlerless deer quota has been adjusted in 24 counties.
- The Population Management January antlerless-only season will be offered in Allamakee, Winneshiek, Decatur, Appanoose, Monroe, Lucas and Wayne counties if the number of unsold antlerless licenses on the third Monday in December exceeds 100 tags. This season allows the use of any legal method of take, including shotguns, handguns, muzzleloaders, bows, crossbows, and center-fire rifles .223 and larger.

- The Excess Tag January antlerless-only season will be held in any county that still has unsold county antlerless tags by January 10. Only centerfire rifles .223 caliber and above are allowed during this season.
- A new requirement for hunters who harvest an antlered deer is reporting the length of the main beam of each antler.

Phone use while hunting

Reminder to hunters that the use of cellphones, one or two-way radios to communicate the location or direction of game or furbearing animals or to coordinate the movement of other hunters is prohibited.

Outside of very few and specific exceptions, modern technology, including social media and instant messaging apps, is not allowed to assist with the hunt. Hunters are encouraged to keep their phone on their person and not in a backpack for safety reasons.

Be sure to report your harvest

Hunters who harvest a deer are required to report their harvest by midnight on the day after it is tagged or before taking it to a locker or taxidermist. The hunter whose name is on the transportation tag is responsible for making the report. If no deer is harvested, no report is necessary.

Successful hunters have the option to report the harvest by texting the registration number to 1-800-771-4692 and follow the prompts, through the Go Outdoors Iowa app, online at www.iowadnr.gov, by phone at the number listed on the tag, or through a license vendor during their regular business hours.

Main beam antler length added to harvest reporting requirement

Beginning this year, Iowa deer hunters who harvest a buck will have a quick, additional piece of information to report as part of the harvest reporting requirement – the length of the main antler beam. Specifically, hunters will be asked if the main beam length is below or above 14 inches, but will not be required to provide the exact length.

This information will provide buck age structure to the DNR's harvest data, producing a better overall picture of Iowa's deer herd from year to year.

Online hunting atlas

Hunters have an online tool that may improve their in-field experience, even before opening day.

The Iowa hunting atlas is an interactive map that shows all available public hunting land that is managed by the state, county or federal governments. The atlas is online at www.iowadnr.gov/hunting. A mobile version is also available.

A click on an area will show basic information like size, habitat type and likely species available.

Deer donation program

The Iowa DNR, the Food Bank of Iowa and 34 meat lockers are participating in the Help Us Stop Hunger program for 2023. Hunters are encouraged to contact a participating locker before they harvest a deer to see if the locker has any additional drop off instructions.

Hunters may also sign up as a deer donor with the Iowa Deer Exchange at www.iowadnr.gov/deer then scroll down to Iowa's Deer Exchange Program link. There, donors can provide their information on what they are willing to donate. The database creates a map and table with information deer donors and deer recipients can use to get connected.

There are currently 23 hunters registered who are willing to donate deer, and 287 registered recipients wanting venison. Hunters and recipients who had previously registered for the Deer Exchange Program should review their information to make sure it is still accurate and active.

There is no cost to participate. It is illegal to sell wild fish and game in Iowa.

Media Contact: Jace Elliott, State Deer Biologist, Wildlife Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-249-7056.

DNR continues to monitor for Chronic Wasting Disease

The Iowa DNR will be working with hunters again this gun season to collect deer tissue samples to test for chronic wasting disease. So far this year, tissue samples from eight individual deer are suspected positive for the always fatal disease.

Hunters interested in participating in the surveillance effort are encouraged to contact their local wildlife biologist to arrange for sample to be collected. If the sample quota has filled, the DNR will assist them in submitting their sample through the hunter submission system, in partnership with Iowa State University. Submitting a sample through the hunter submission system comes with a fee of \$25.

Chronic wasting disease has been found in 16 Iowa counties: Allamakee, Appanoose, Clayton, Decatur, Dubuque, Fayette, Fremont, Greene, Grundy, Jackson, Jasper, Lucas, Marshall, Wayne, Winneshiek and Woodbury.

If hunting in an area where chronic wasting disease has been found, hunters are encouraged to hold the deer meat separately until the test results are available.

Hunters can check the results online at the Iowa CWD dashboard at www.iowadnr.gov/cwdresults.

“Hunters can either use their registration number or customer number to find the test results – both of which are contained on the tag,” Elliott said. “The only way to make informed decisions about consuming the venison you bring home is by getting your deer tested, and we try to make that very easy on hunters.”

If a hunter’s deer tests positive, the DNR will contact them to offer to collect the meat and any other parts of the animal for proper disposal.

Hunters in areas where the disease has been found need a plan for carcass disposal.

“We recommend a trash service or landfill that accepts deer carcasses, if that’s not possible, then we recommend leaving the deer carcass on the property where it was harvested. The idea is to avoid accidentally transporting the disease to a new area, and responsible carcass transport is the best way to prevent it,” he said.

Virtual meeting

The Iowa DNR is hosting a virtual public meeting on chronic wasting disease on Nov. 29, at 7 p.m., when staff will provide an update on the science of the disease, its status in Iowa, and current management efforts. There will be an opportunity to ask questions and staff will answer as many as time allows.

There is no cost to attend, but registration is required. Interested individuals can register through the link <https://bit.ly/IowaDNR-CWD>.

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease

Iowa is experiencing the third worst outbreak of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD), behind only the outbreaks in 2012 and 2019 in severity. The disease appears to have hit southeastern Iowa the hardest, but has been reported in 74 counties, which is the highest number of counties to report the disease in one year.

“Most of the highest-impacted counties have deer populations that exceed our management goals. Historically, Iowa deer herds impacted by EHD outbreaks have bounced back fairly quickly, typically recovering to prior levels within two or three years. Unless we detect a sustained decline in deer numbers, we don’t anticipate any changes to our management strategy resulting from this EHD outbreak,” Elliott said.

What's unique for the current outbreak is that it occurred later in the year due to the prolonged warm weather allowed midges to keep spreading. A killing frost will end the outbreak by eliminating the midges that cause the disease.

"The vast majority of what we know about annual EHD outbreaks come from the public. Hunters and landowners who suspect EHD is on their property are encouraged to contact the DNR to improve our disease monitoring efforts," he said.

Safety first, during the gun deer seasons

The long wait is almost over. For an expected 100,000-plus deer hunters, the gun deer seasons are right around the corner and before they head to the timber, it's important that everyone go through their gear to make sure everything still fits and still works and takes time to review their hunting safety plan.

"Hunting continues to be a safe activity enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of Iowans," said Jamie Cook, hunter education coordinator with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "And part of making hunting safe is creating a plan for each hunt."

The hunting plan identifies the hunt location, who's on the hunt and outlines their role, describes how the hunt will unfold and when the hunters are expected to return home. Hunters are encouraged to leave a copy of the plan with someone in the event of an emergency. Cook said, "It's good to have someone who knows when to expect you home."

Hunters will also want to check their blaze orange gear to make sure it still fits and that that orange hasn't faded to the point of being ineffective. The minimum amount of blaze orange required by Iowa law to hunt in the firearm deer season is a 100 percent solid blaze orange vest, but Cook said they encourage hunters to wear blaze orange hats and gloves, too.

"Wear plenty of visible blaze orange," he said. "The more external blaze orange that's worn, the better the chance that hunters will be seen in the timber. We're not hiding from deer during the firearm seasons; we want to be seen by the other hunters."

He also reminded hunters to not only properly identify the deer before shooting, but also what is in front and behind it, and to avoid shooting at running deer.

"It's easy to allow yourself to get caught up in the moment and fixate on the deer, but hunters must remember to know what's in front of and beyond it in the event that the shot misses, that it will fall harmlessly to the ground," Cook said.

It's also a good idea to talk to the landowner or tenant to confirm permission to hunt and to see if anyone else has permission to hunt the same property.

Before setting foot in the timber on opening morning, Cook advised hunters to spend some time sighting in their firearm to get reacquainted with its accuracy and the range that the bullets and slugs can travel, to treat every gun as if it were loaded and to always point the gun in a safe direction.

He said there has been an average of 10 hunting related incidents over the past three deer shotgun seasons with around half involving personal injuries. The most common causes for hunting injuries including fatalities during the shotgun deer season is careless handling of a firearm and shooting at running deer.

“Remember that we hunt with those who we're closest to, our family and our friends. If there's any question about taking a shot, don't pull the trigger, because once you pull the trigger, you can't call the shot back,” he said. “No deer is worth taking an unsafe shot; another deer will come along. At the end of the day, we all want to get home safely.”

Media Contact: Jamie Cook, Hunter Education Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-350-8091.

Donated deer hides benefit disabled veterans

Hunters donated more than 4,500 deer hides to Elks Lodges across Iowa last year, which was an increase of nearly 600 hides from the 2022 season. The deer hides are used by the Veterans Leather Program to make professionally-crafted leather gloves for veterans in wheelchairs and also turned into leather used for therapy programs for recovering veterans.

The Veterans Leather Program relies on the charity of hunters to donate their deer hides. Hunters willing to donate their hides are encouraged to contact the local Elks Lodge for drop off locations or visit www.elks.org/lodges to find the nearest lodge. The therapeutic kits and gloves are distributed at no cost to the veterans. Contact Lisa Widick at 208-360-6294 or ozzywidick@gmail.com for more information.

Safety tips for paddling in cold weather

Winter paddling can provide solitude, exercise and an opportunity to see amazing winter beauty. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recommends that paddlers be prepared to paddle in cold weather.

Ice has started to form in many parts of Iowa. Always check the weather conditions before you head out on the water.

“Many paddlers, especially those just starting out, don’t realize how cold the water really is. The water is still dangerously cold, and cold-water shock and hypothermia can set in quickly,” said Todd Robertson, Iowa DNR River Programs Water Trails coordinator.

“Dress for the water temperature, not the air and expect to go into the water,” Robertson said. “A wet or dry suit and a life jacket are crucial to remain safe.”

Review these simple safety tips before you head out on the water this winter.

- Don’t paddle alone. Especially in winter, use a buddy system.
- Always wear a life jacket.
- Choose a shorter paddling trip so you can adjust for any issues, like low water and falling temperatures.
- Check water levels to make sure you won’t need to get in and out of your boat and drag it.
- Make sure the entire water trail route and water body you are paddling is open on both rivers and lakes. Ice jams can form and water freeze as temperatures drop throughout the day.
- Stay away from wood/branch piles and debris, usually found on the outside of river bends, that can pull you underwater and hold you there with little chance of escape.
- Paddle with a group who is experienced in cold water paddling.
- Wear a dry suit or wet suit, along with layers, to help avoid hypothermia or cold-water shock. Do not wear cotton. Dress for the water temperature, not the air.
- Bring along a dry bag with a set of extra clothes you can change into if you get wet, a first-aid kit and a protected cell phone or weather radio.
- Let a friend or loved one know where you are going and when you are expected to return. It will be easier to find you if you need help.

Explore the Iowa DNR’s interactive paddling map at www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Where-to-Paddle to help you plan your trip or outing.

Media Contact: Todd Robertson, Iowa DNR River Programs Outreach Coordinator, at 515-205-6845.

2023 DNR Volunteer Fire Assistance Grants awarded to rural fire departments

More than \$415,000 in 50 percent cost-share grants were recently awarded to 131 Iowa rural fire departments to help their efforts to protect Iowa's and their property from wildfires. The grants offer valuable funding assistance for wildfire suppression, personal protective and communications equipment.

The following fire departments will receive 2023 Volunteer Fire Assistance grants: Alburnett, Allison, Amana, Anamosa, Anita, Aplington, Ashton, Atlantic, Audubon, Avoca, Baxter, Belle Plaine, Blakesburg, Brighton, Burt, Camanche, Cascade, Castana, Centerville, Centralia/Peosta, Chariton, Charlotte, Cherokee, Clarinda, Clermont, College-Ely-Putnam, College Springs, Colwell, Creston, Denmark, DeWitt, Dike, Dixon, Dow City-Arion, Elberon, Elliott, Estherville, Fairbank, Fort Atkinson, Garber, Gilman, Glenwood, Greeley, Greene, Grundy Center, Hancock, Harlan, Harpers Ferry, Haverhill, Hills, Hornick, Hospers, Houghton Cedar Twsp, Humeston, Independence, Indiana Twsp, Inwood, Ionia, Irwin, Jefferson-Monroe, Jesup, Jewell, Key West, Laurens, Le Claire, Libertyville, Little Sioux, Logan, Luana, Luzerne, Madrid, Manilla, Maquoketa, McGregor, Melbourne, Meriden, Millersburg, Modale, Montezuma, Moorhead, Morley, Morning Sun, Moulton, Merville, New Albin, New London, North Keokuk Co, Oak Twsp, Onawa, Ossian, Otho, Oxford Junction, Oxford, Pleasantville, Polk City, Postville, Prescott, Protivin, Quimby, Randolph, Ridgeway, Riverton, Saint Olaf, Searsboro, Sheldon, Shenandoah, Sidney, Sigourney, Solon/Tri-Twsp, State Center, Strawberry Point, Stuart, Tama, Tiffin, Toledo, Truro, Ute, Van Horne, Villisca, Vining, Vinton, Volga City, Wallingford, Washington, Waukon, Webb, West Union, Winfield, Woodbine, Wyoming and Yale.

These grants are made possible through Iowa DNR Forestry, in cooperation with US Forest Service - State and Private Forestry.

Gail Kantak, fire supervisor with DNR Forestry, reminds all fire departments of the importance of submitting Wildland Fire Reports whenever they respond to a wildland fire or provide assistance to a prescribed or controlled wildland fire. Wildland fire reporting forms are available at www.iowadnr.gov/fire.

Departments returning these reports receive priority points when the Fire Assistance grant applications are scored. These wildland fire reports are compiled locally and nationally and are reported to Congress.

Media Contact: Gail Kantak, state wildland fire supervisor, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-689-0083.