



## **2018 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS**

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Michigan has a strong and proud tradition of deer hunting that dates back hundreds of years. The first designated deer season in Michigan was established in 1859. Since that time Michigan has been a proud leader in deer hunting across the nation. To this day, Michigan consistently ranks as one of the top five states in the nation for number of deer hunters and overall deer harvest. While deer numbers can fluctuate from year to year due to a variety of factors, Michigan deer hunters remain true to their passion. With the assurance of spending time with friends and family and the hope of harvesting a deer, they make their way out to hunt each year. This year is anticipated to be a successful year for many deer hunters with indicators showing deer numbers being up. Biologists are anticipating harvest to increase slightly from last year which was up over 10 percent across the state from the previous year.

Of course, success of harvest is never a guarantee but there are steps that can be taken to increase those chances for success. Scouting your hunting area can reveal current deer trails, changes in terrain or habitat types and other influences on deer movement. Familiarizing yourself with current regulations is another important step. The deer website of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – [www.michigan.gov/deer](http://www.michigan.gov/deer) – provides highlights of regulation changes, information about deer management, and links to additional resources, such as a list of deer check stations. Please refer to the [2018 Hunting Digest](#) and [Antlerless Digest](#), available at DNR Operations Service Centers, license vendors, or available in electronic formats through links at this site, for a map of all Deer Management Units (DMUs) and other regulation details.

With new cases of Chronic Wasting Disease being discovered during the 2017 hunting season a set of new regulations were put in place for 2018. Thanks to the input the DNR received from stakeholder engagement and the application of the best science, the DNR

was able to work with the Natural Resources Commission to develop regulations that would best address the disease. While many of these regulations may not be what some hunters would want, the decisions were made with the best intentions of limiting the impact of the disease in our deer herd as we work to understand the scale of this disease across Michigan. For more information on CWD please visit- [www.michigan.gov/cwd](http://www.michigan.gov/cwd) and for a list of the new regulations please read on or see the [2018 Hunting Digest](#).

## **What to Expect Across the State**

The 2017 season, while seeing a significant drop in hunter numbers, ended up with a significant increase in harvest from 2016. Overall hunting success increased across most of the state in 2017 with nearly 50 percent of hunters harvesting a deer.

The winter of 2017 was average across the entire state. Despite the snowfall and temperatures being normal it appears that deer came through the winter in good to excellent condition. Spring had relatively mild weather as well which is a major factor in both deer fitness and fawn survival. Due to these circumstances, this year has seen an increase in both the overall number of fawns and deer seen.

With the favorable conditions throughout the winter, spring, and summer, there is an opportunity for hunters to experience increased success rates in 2018 from last year. Though, this forecast may help to get you started with what to look for there is no substitute for scouting. The opportunity to find out which trees are producing fruit and mast, what deer trails are being utilized and what activity patterns deer are following this year is priceless information for a deer hunter before they go out hunting. So, whether your goal is to get meat in the freezer, go for a wall hanger or simply get outdoors, Michigan's deer seasons offer something for everyone. Best of luck to you hunters and have a wonderful and safe deer season.

## **Upper Peninsula**

The Upper Peninsula (UP) appears to be rebounding well from the harsh winters observed in 2013 and 2014. Deer numbers are increasing across the entire peninsula and harvest numbers increased over fifty percent across the region in 2017. With recovery under way some units will be offering an increase in antlerless opportunities including one unit that was opened to public land antlerless licenses. Increased antlerless licenses this year are available in the following Deer Management Units: 055 (Menominee), 121 (Bay de Noc), 155 (Gladstone) and 255 (LaBranche). Deer Management Unit 122 (Norway) is now open on public land and had an increase in the number of private land antlerless licenses. The increases are in the south-central portion of the UP which typically has higher deer populations than anywhere else in the UP. All other areas in the UP will continue to not have antlerless licenses available.

Continuing for 2018: Since much of the UP still hopes to see deer numbers increase over the next several years the decision was made to continue to no longer allow the harvest of antlerless deer with either the single deer license or a combination deer license during the archery season. Archery hunters may only harvest antlerless deer if they have an

antlerless license. This change does not affect the Liberty or Independence Hunt and does not impact Mentored Youth.

In general, hunters should expect to see about the same number of deer they saw last year. Always keep in mind that each area is influenced by local factors and conditions that affect deer density and sightings in that area. The largest bucks (heaviest and largest antlers) typically come from agricultural areas, but nice bucks are also taken from forested areas where access is limited, and they have an opportunity to get older.

### **Northern Lower Peninsula**

The deer population for the Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) is expected to see an increase in harvest this year. With the average winter from last year and little impact from the previous winter, deer populations have been increasing steadily across much of the NLP in recent years. Deer sightings have been good throughout the region and many have reported seeing healthy fawns including many sets of twins and even some triplets. Antler development appears to be very good across the region as well.

With a harvest increase in 2017 of over fifteen percent from 2016, as well as other indicators showing population increases across the region, the Department did increase some antlerless quotas and added several deer management units into the early and late antlerless seasons for 2018. Deer Management Units with increased antlerless licenses include: 018 (Clare), 043 (Lake), 053 (Mason) and 067 (Osceola). Deer Management Units that are now included in the early/late firearm antlerless season include: 018 (Clare), 026 (Gladwin), 053 (Mason) and 067 (Osceola).

Expect to see increased deer numbers compared to last year throughout most of the NLP. Many areas may see more 2.5-year-old and 3.5-year-old bucks this year but especially the northwest area which has a 3-point antler point restriction (APR) in place. All NLP Deer Management Units are open for antlerless hunting so be sure to look in the [2018 Antlerless Deer Digest](#) if you are interested in obtaining an antlerless license.

### **Southern Lower Peninsula**

Abundant food and cover in the form of agricultural crops and scattered swamps and woodlots provide very good habitat across the southern Michigan landscape. This high-quality habitat, combined with relatively mild winter conditions, typically results in a more abundant and productive deer population compared to other regions of the state. The 2018 harvest forecast is hoped to be increased from last year due to some recent changes which were made to help combat chronic wasting disease. Harvest in the SLP can depend heavily on the percentage of standing corn. If corn harvest is delayed going into the firearms season, a reduced harvest can be expected.

Deer biology in Southern Michigan is generally defined by high reproductive output by female deer which can lead to rapid growth of the deer population. In many instances, the Department has liberalized opportunities to hunt deer and maximize harvest to reduce conflicts that can occur when deer populations are high, though the Department still desires to keep adequate deer for enjoyable hunting and viewing experiences. Southern

Michigan has some of the best habitat in the state and with that, has the highest deer numbers as well. Keeping this in mind and in light of disease management goals across parts of the SLP, hunters are encouraged to take antlerless deer when given the opportunity. With abundant antlerless licenses available in most areas, hunters will still have the opportunity at a wall hanger as well with either the single or combination deer licenses.

With the discovery of CWD in new counties this past year, the Department wants to emphasize the importance of having your deer tested for CWD. Test results from the Department's monitoring program helps understand the true scope of the disease and implement management activities specific to those areas. Though CWD has no proven link to human health, officials with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend not consuming animals that have tested positive for CWD. Please be sure to look and see what areas are actively requesting samples but know that anyone in Michigan may submit their deer for testing. For more information please visit: [www.michigan.gov/cwd](http://www.michigan.gov/cwd)

## **Important Changes**

### **Chronic Wasting Disease Regulations**

In 2018, the Department began an extensive process with a goal of collecting input from the public to better understand what changes should be considered in combating the spread of CWD in Michigan. Using this input along with the best science available, a series of regulations were developed by the Department and passed by the NRC in August of 2018. A summary of those regulations is listed below.

- A statewide ban on the use of all natural cervid urine-based lures and attractants, except for lures that are approved by the Archery Trade Association.
- An immediate ban on baiting and feeding in the 16-county area identified as the CWD Management Zone. This area includes Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Ingham, Ionia, Isabella, Jackson, Kent, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Ottawa, and Shiawassee counties.
- A ban on baiting and feeding in the Lower Peninsula, effective Jan. 31, 2019, with an exception to this ban for hunters with disabilities who meet specific requirements. The start date on this regulation is intended to allow bait producers and retailers time to adjust to the new rule.
- Effective immediately in the CWD Management Zone and four-county bovine tuberculosis area, hunters with disabilities who meet specific requirements can now use two gallons of single-bite bait, such as shelled corn, during the Liberty and Independence hunts.
- Allowance of all legal firearms to be used in muzzleloader season in the CWD Management Zone.
- A purchase limit of 10 private-land antlerless licenses per hunter in the CWD Management Zone.
- Restrictions on deer carcass movement in the five-county CWD Core Area (Ionia, Kent, Mecosta, Montcalm, and Newaygo) and the CWD Management Zone.
- Antlerless options on deer licenses/combo licenses during firearms seasons in the five-county CWD Core Area.

- Expansion of early and late antlerless seasons in select counties.
- Changes to regulations regarding wildlife rehabilitators.

For more information on CWD, please visit our [www.michigan.gov/cwd](http://www.michigan.gov/cwd) webpage.

## **Things to Consider for this Deer Hunting Season**

### **Where to Hunt**

As any deer hunter knows deer are not stationary animals, they are constantly moving to new places and just as often, they are returning to familiar spots. Michigan's deer herd is no exception. It is spread out across the state and often, locally pocketed in areas with the best habitat and resources available. For this reason, there is no better way to locate deer than by getting out on the landscape and scouting. Learning where this year's deer trails are, finding which oak trees are producing acorns and discovering where a group is bedding down each night are often the keys to a successful hunt. Michigan also offers a number of online interactive tools such Mi-HUNT, an interactive web application located at [www.michigan.gov/mihunt](http://www.michigan.gov/mihunt), to help you hone in on good habitat and potential hunting spots. If you find yourself short on time these tools are an excellent way to save some time and narrow down your selection.

### **Consider Mentoring a Youth Hunter**

Shared experience with family and friends is one of the most cherished aspects of hunting. We encourage you to share that heritage with a young person in your life. Under the Mentored Youth Hunting Program, it is possible to take a youth 9 or younger deer hunting. For specific program requirements please visit: [www.michigan.gov/mentoredhunting](http://www.michigan.gov/mentoredhunting)

### **Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger Program**

The Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger (MSAH) program is a wonderful way for hunters to share a part of their harvest this fall or donate a whole deer. Since 1991, MSAH has been working to help connect donors, wild game processors and charities that feed needy individuals. Together, they have assembled a network of processors and charities to help channel wild game donations into the hands of those in need.

If interested in donating, please contact your local field office. A list of field offices can be found at: [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

### **Bring your Deer to a Check station**

Michigan has some of the best historical data on deer in the country. The data we gather at check stations and from the hunter harvest surveys helps us to make future management decisions, monitor the health of the herd and the time spent talking with hunters is invaluable to field staff. You can be a part of this important aspect of deer management by bringing your deer or deer head to a check station, along with information about where and when the deer was taken. As always, you also receive a successful hunter deer management cooperators patch. Please see our [Deer Check station List](#) for locations and hours.

## **Local Cooperative Opportunities**

To assist hunters in better meeting their local hunting objectives, the MDNR has partnered with Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Quality Deer Management Association, and Pheasants Forever to create the Michigan Wildlife Cooperative Program, to equip and inform landowners to manage their habitat and wildlife using data, local knowledge, and neighborly communication. This program, which is housed within MUCC, is designed to assist neighboring landowners and hunters to work collaboratively with each other, the DNR, and other interested parties to achieve a common wildlife management objective. If you would like to learn more about this program or start a wildlife cooperative in your area, please contact the Wildlife Cooperative Coordinator Morgan Warda, at [mwarda@mucc.org](mailto:mwarda@mucc.org) or visit the website at [www.mucc.org/cooperatives](http://www.mucc.org/cooperatives).

## **Wildlife Health Issues**

### **Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)**

CWD was discovered in Michigan's wild deer herd in 2015. Since that time 61 deer have tested positive for CWD in 6 counties. CWD is a fatal nervous system disease found in deer, moose, and elk. It attacks the brain of infected animals creating small lesions in the brain, which result in death. There is no cure.

#### **What can YOU do?**

- Keep hunting
- Get your deer checked and tested. Find locations at [www.michigan.gov/deercheck](http://www.michigan.gov/deercheck)
- Avoid long-distance movements with your deer carcass
- Handle and dispose of your carcass in a responsible manner
- If you hunt out-of-state, only bring back allowed parts
- Stay up-to-date on latest hunting regulations

For the most up to date information please go to: [www.michigan.gov/cwd](http://www.michigan.gov/cwd).

### **Bovine Tuberculosis (TB)**

In the northeast Lower Peninsula, the prevalence of TB was 2.3% within the core area. The rate in DMU 452 increased from 1.0% in 2015 to 2.7% which was the highest it had been since 1998 and the trend has continued to be above 2% since that time. The 5 county TB Management Zone (DMU 487) saw a significant uptick in prevalence, from 0.3% to 0.6%, which is the highest it has ever been. The rate of apparent prevalence in DMU 452 has shown a continuing significant increasing trend for the first time since we've been keeping this information and the increase in prevalence in DMU 487 if allowed to continue will lead to spread of the disease outside the management zone. Hunters are still strongly encouraged to harvest antlerless deer to help maintain reduced deer numbers and keep TB in check. Older antlered deer should also be harvested and are especially important to take to a check station, as these animals are more likely to contract TB. Bringing in a deer or deer head to a check station for testing allows us to track the prevalence of the disease in the population and is an integral part to eventually eradicating the disease.

In 2017 there were three infected cattle herds identified, one in Alcona County, one in Newaygo County and one in Lake County. This has prompted increased testing around

each infected herd. Anyone hunting in these counties is encouraged to have their deer tested as part of the increased surveillance efforts.

We encourage anyone hunting in the following counties to please bring your deer head in for testing: Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Bay, Cheboygan, Crawford, Genesee, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle and Roscommon.

For more information on these and other wildlife health issues visit [www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases](http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases).