

Phase One Deer Regulation Justifications

- The face of deer management is changing in Michigan and across the country. The DNR has frequently heard about the complexity of deer regulations. With current and anticipated changes at the landscape level and with hunter numbers, the regulations brought forward this year are meant to be simpler and more easily allow hunters to participate in deer hunting in Michigan.
- The DNR uses existing and projected data to gauge the impact of the projected regulations. In each instance, regulations were developed with the understanding that the changes:
 - Will not have an overwhelmingly negative impact on the deer resource.
 - Will provide additional opportunity and cost savings for hunters.
 - Will provide flexibility in how hunters pursue deer in Michigan.
 - Will not hurt the quality of the deer hunting experience in Michigan.
- In 1998, the DNR reported the harvest of 597,988 deer with an estimated 837,000 hunters participating. In 2018, 554,331 hunters participated in the deer hunting season, harvesting about 361,000 deer.
- Michigan is likely to lose over 100,000 deer hunters over the next decade. The recommended changes recognize this loss will continue and will begin to account for fewer hunters on the landscape.
- Hunters largely self-regulate. In 2018, less than 49% of hunters were successful at harvesting a deer, with about 15% taking two or more deer, and less than 4% taking three or more deer. Only 1% of Michigan's hunters take more than four or more deer.
- The DNR will be taking a further, in-depth review of deer regulations and will propose additional changes later in the year that provide a more long-term perspective, but those will not be implemented until at least 2021 deer hunting season.

Statewide Proposed Regulation Changes:

- Changes to Liberty and Independence Hunt qualifications.
 - Hunters who are deaf and communicate solely through lip reading, sign language, finger spelling or reading are proposed to qualify to participate in these hunts.
 - Recommended by the DNR Accessibility Advisory Council.
- Requirement for hunter orange to be visible on occupied ground blinds.
 - Hunter orange is required during any season in which firearms are legal. However, current language states that hunters can wear orange clothing, but be completely concealed behind a camouflage tent or blind.
 - The proposed change would require 144 square inches (12x12 inch square) to be visible from all sides if hunting within an occupied ground blind. Wearing orange can substitute if it can be seen from outside of the blind.
 - This regulation does not apply to elevated stands, nor does it apply to seasons where firearms are not included (ex. archery).
 - Developed to ensure safety for hunters and maximize visibility for other hunters in close proximity.

- Standardized private land antlerless purchase limits.
 - Currently, different parts of the state have varying limits to the number of private land antlerless licenses an individual can purchase. Most of the state limits license purchase to 5, while our disease areas allow the purchase of up to 10 licenses.
 - In order to simplify regulations, we propose a statewide purchase limit of 10 antlerless licenses per hunter. This limit offers maximum opportunity for those who wish to manage abundant deer on their property.
 - 60% of hunters do not purchase antlerless licenses, and an additional 30% only purchase one, and only 1% purchase four or more licenses. The DNR believes increasing this purchase limit will not have adverse effects on deer populations, but will simplify and standardize regulations across the state.

- Antler Point Restriction (APR) work group changes
 - Current APR exemptions are confusing to communicate to hunters.
 - An APR work group was formed in the summer of 2019 to discuss updates on APR regulations, as directed by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC).
 - Mentored youths (age 9 and younger), junior license holders (age 10-16), and apprentice license holders are proposed to be exempt from antler point restrictions in all seasons, in all Deer Management Units (DMUs), and under all licenses.
 - As part of this work group, the group decided that a 60% support threshold from a survey would be required to prompt the Department to recommend APRs to the NRC. This replaces the 66% support threshold recommended by previous work groups. Additionally, failed APR initiatives would face a 10-year moratorium before another initiative would be considered.

- Standardize baiting practices during the Liberty and Independence Hunts.
 - An exemption currently exists for eligible hunters in the Liberty (2-day hunt) and Independence (4-day hunt) hunts to use bait in the LP. In the previously defined CWD Management Zone, hunters would be limited to using single-bite baits.
 - There is no evidence that single bite baits present less risk of disease transmission than multi-bite baits. Eliminating the requirement to use single bite baits in select counties standardizes regulations across the entire Lower Peninsula.

Upper Peninsula Proposed Regulations:

- Allow UP archers to resume pursuing antlerless deer in all DMUs on their deer and combination license
 - The antlerless option for archery hunters was removed in 2015 after several successive impactful winters.
 - Antlerless archery harvest dropped from >4,000 deer in 2014 to between 764-1,269 in four subsequent years (2019 results pending).
 - Since then, winter severity has been average with less over-winter mortality, as indicated by increasing antlered harvest over that time.
 - UP buck harvest now exceeds 30,000 deer, like what was seen prior to the hard winters in 2013 and 2014.

- The antlerless option was restored in part of the U.P. in 2019, due to the detection of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in the southcentral part of the U.P. in 2018.
- Currently, there does not appear to be significant over-winter kill associated with the winter of 2019-2020.

Lower Peninsula Proposed Regulations:

- Expand antlerless opportunities throughout the Lower Peninsula by allowing antlerless deer to be taken on the deer and deer combination license during the firearms and muzzleloader season.
 - Provides flexibility for all hunters and provides consistency for licenses across much of the Lower Peninsula.
 - APRs will still be in place in 13 Northwest counties, as well as special restrictions in the 5 county CWD Core area associated with a research project approved by the NRC in 2019.
 - The proposed regulations are like the regulations that are already in place in 11 Lower Peninsula counties (DMU 487 and CWD Core Zone). Over that time and under these regulations, both antlered and antlerless harvest have been relatively stable, especially compared to surrounding counties.
 - Though this regulation might increase antlerless harvest in the short term, the projected long-term response for this regulation is to either stabilize or slow the long-term decline of antlerless harvest in these areas that will be associated with fewer hunters over the coming years.
- Allow antlerless deer to be taken on a deer or deer combination license during both the early and late antlerless seasons in the Lower Peninsula.
 - This regulation already occurs in disease zones (DMU 487 and the CWD Management Zone) and standardizing the regulation across the entire Lower Peninsula will simplify regulations.
 - These seasons are open on private land and provide hunters the opportunity to utilize their tags as they see fit for management purposes.
 - In 2018, about 20,000 antlerless deer were taken during both the early and late antlerless seasons (out of an estimated 149,000 antlerless deer harvested, or about 13%).
- Opening muzzleloader in all SLP to all legal firearms
 - Currently, in the CWD Management Zone currently, all legal firearms can be used during the muzzleloader season. This regulation was developed to give additional opportunities to individuals who may not have muzzleloaders available to them.
 - Muzzleloader season historically has the lowest harvest success rates of any of our traditional seasons.
 - In 2018 (the first year for the regulation), hunters in the CWD Management Zone saw higher participation and increased antlerless harvest over the previous year when only muzzleloaders were allowed. Though this is simply one data point and it's not possible to determine a trend with limited data, the data shows that hunter participation and

harvest is not likely to change significantly, though it would make the season more accessible to more individuals.

- With the understanding that there would be a perceived loss of tradition with many hunters, the DNR still believes this season would have limited participation, offering quiet opportunities for many hunters. Hunters preferring to hunt with muzzleloaders can still actively participate during this season with their chosen equipment.
- Throughout deer management history, there are examples of expanding equipment opportunities within existing seasons: crossbows have been expanded into archery season, straight walled rifle cartridges have been expanded into the Lower Peninsula firearm season, and muzzleloaders themselves have been improved from traditional flintlock and percussion to inline muzzleloaders with improved ballistics and range. The DNR views this as continued evolution of these expanding opportunities.
- Recommended date change for muzzleloader and late antlerless season.
 - Currently, the Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) has a 10-day muzzleloader season, while the Southern Lower Peninsula (SLP) has a 17-day muzzleloader season. There are opportunities to pursue deer in mid-December with firearms being missed currently in the NLP.
 - This change would shorten the muzzleloader season to 10 days and extend the late antlerless season to allow consistency between all regions of the state.
 - In 2018, there were about 137,000 hunters who participated in the muzzleloader season, down from over 200,000 just 10 years ago. By comparison, about 58,000 hunters participated in the late antlerless season in 2018. The 2018 antlerless harvest in muzzleloader season was about 15,000, while the corresponding late antlerless season antlerless harvest was just over 16,000.
 - This presents a seven-day loss of opportunity to pursue antlered deer in the SLP, and a loss of muzzleloader opportunity on public land in the SLP. It does add opportunities for NLP hunters on private land.
 - Muzzleloader hunters can still pursue antlerless deer with their muzzleloader during the late antlerless season on private land.
- Change in carcass transportation regulation
 - Current carcass movement restrictions are applied across a large area. The current regulations were developed with an abundance of caution as the distribution of CWD in the affected area was largely unknown.
 - The current movement restrictions still allow for movement of materials within zones that can facilitate the spread of the disease. For example, a carcass could be moved from Montcalm County, where CWD appears to be widespread, to Newaygo County, where it has not been detected, without restriction. Additionally, a carcass can be moved from parts of Jackson County where CWD has been discovered, up to Isabella County where CWD has not been discovered, without restriction.
 - With the increased testing over the past several years, the DNR has a much better understanding of where the disease is located and at what levels the disease exists in those areas.

- The proposed change is meant to align our current understanding of the disease with the area most affected by the disease.
 - Carcass movement restrictions are still going to be in place, which aligns with the Best Management Practices outlined by the American Fish and Wildlife Association, however the scale will be applied to where CWD is currently widespread.
 - Only material not connected to the spine and head (deboned meat, bone-in quarters, finished taxidermy mounts, antlers, antlers attached to the skull or skull cap, hides, upper canine teeth) may leave the zone. The proposed change would allow intact carcasses to also be allowed to leave provided they end up at either a taxidermist and/or processor. The Department frequently engages in discussions with taxidermists and processors on best practices for disposal. Hunters are no longer required to present their animal at a check station.
 - The DNR feels this rule change strikes a better balance between risk mitigation and hunter inconvenience. By applying the regulation to the area of highest risk, the DNR best aligns the measures without inconveniencing hunters who are at much lower risk of harvesting a CWD positive animal.
- All mainland Lower Peninsula Deer DMUs will be open to early and late antlerless season.
 - Early and late antlerless seasons provide additional opportunity to pursue antlerless deer, but often translates into limited harvest. Early antlerless season contributes about 3% of the antlerless harvest and 1% of the total harvest, and late antlerless season contributes about 11% of the antlerless harvest and 5% of the total harvest.
 - Changes in management philosophy to provide more opportunities with a declining hunter base would allow hunters in previously closed DMUs to pursue antlerless deer during these seasons.
 - Several of the areas previously closed (SW corner of the state for early antlerless season and several counties in the NE) are adjacent to areas with known deer diseases like Bovine Tuberculosis and CWD. Increasing the harvest in these locations could provide a benefit for testing as well as a proactive management strategy for these diseases. Increased testing in counties adjacent to DMU 487 is important to meet Memoranda of Understanding with the U.S. Department of Agriculture; increased harvest opportunities may support increased testing.
- Standardize regulations across the Lower Peninsula
 - Resumption of 4-point restriction on restricted tag of combination license.
 - Currently no evidence from data that removal of restriction has altered harvest dynamics of deer in affected area.
 - Desire for consistent regulations across affected area.
- Continue the expanded archery season through January 31 for one more year in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties.
 - Originally designed for three years, the pilot extension was developed to stimulate participation of archery hunting on private lands in communities needing deer removed.

- It is believed that though this extension provides additional opportunity, it does not have DMU level management value. In 2017, an estimated 477 antlerless deer and 52 antlered deer were harvested in this season, while in 2018, an estimated 295 antlerless deer were taken compared to 27 antlered deer.
- On the 2019 deer hunter survey, the DNR asked hunters their level of support for continuing this hunt. Results of the question are currently not available.
- Scheduling this hunt for one more year allows us opportunities to discuss the future of expanded archery hunting while collecting more information.