NY Big Game,

DEC has proposed rules affecting deer hunting to implement the state’s Five-Year Deer Management Plan.  Here is the press release to announce the changes, followed by some additional links to more background information.

“Regulation changes are needed to implement many of the strategies of the recently adopted Management Plan for White-tailed Deer,” Commissioner Martens said.  “The changes to the deer hunting seasons, mandatory antler restrictions, use of Deer Management Permits (DMPs), and development of Deer Management Focus Areas will increase opportunities for New York hunters, consistent with input we’ve received from the public and deer management goals.”

DEC adopted the five- year deer management plan in October 2011 following extensive public input and can be viewed at: [www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife\_pdf/deerplan2012.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/deerplan2012.pdf).

Comments previously submitted on the draft deer management plan were important in finalizing the deer plan and developing this rulemaking proposal.  DEC will accept public comments on this proposal through May 21, 2012.  Comments on this rule should be specific to the proposals herein and should not be resubmissions of previous comments submitted on the full deer management plan or previous regulatory proposals.

This rule also proposes some adjustment of bear hunting seasons, which are generally concurrent with deer seasons.  DEC is proposing to:

* Establish a three-day youth firearms season for deer to occur during Columbus Day weekend in portions of the Northern and Southern Zone where deer may be taken with a firearm which will increase opportunities for junior hunters.  Junior hunters (ages 14 and 15) will be authorized to take one deer of either-sex with a firearm during the youth season.  DEC anticipates participation by approximately 16,000 youth hunters, roughly one youth hunter for every two to three square miles of deer habitat in New York.  The youth season will run concurrently with early bowhunting season and is not expected to have any noticeable impact on deer behavior or bowhunter success, particularly in light of the more than 100,000 small game hunters also afield during the early fall. Youth deer hunts are held concurrent with bowhunting seasons in many other states, including Connecticut, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Opinions of potential participants about a youth firearms season can be found at [www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife\_pdf/ythdeer2012.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/ythdeer2012.pdf).
* Lengthen bowhunting seasons in the Southern Zone by moving to a fixed opening date of October 1 to increase bowhunting opportunities.  This will lengthen bowhunting seasons in the Southern Zone, and lengthen the regular season (bowhunting only) in Westchester County by an average of 15 days and include an additional four weekend days in most years.
* Adjust the Northern Zone muzzleloader and regular season start dates by up to one week later certain years to increase bowhunting opportunities and accommodate the proposed youth firearms season. This rule will begin the Northern Zone muzzleloader and regular seasons one week later in 6 of 10 years allowing for a longer early bow season these years.
* Establish a late bowhunting season in the Northern Zone, concurrent with the late muzzleloading season, to increase bowhunting opportunities. This rule will increase bowhunting opportunities in the Northern Zone by an additional seven days and will be similar to the concurrent bow and muzzleloader seasons in the Southern Zone.
* Allow DMPs to be used during Northern Zone bow and early muzzleloader seasons to simplify regulations and increase hunter opportunity and choice.  Current regulations allow use of DMPs in the Northern Zone only during the regular season and late muzzleloader season.  This change will only affect those portions of the Northern Zone where DMPs can be issued (Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) 6A, 6C, 6G, 6H, 6K), and this change will not affect the number of DMPs issued.  WMU locations can be identified at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8302.html>.
* Establish mandatory antler restrictions in WMUs 3A, 4G, 4O, 4P, 4R, 4S, and 4W to reduce harvest of yearling (1.5 year old) bucks.  The mandatory antler restriction will prohibit hunters during all seasons in all portions of the listed WMUs from taking an antlered deer unless it has at least 3 points on at least one antler.  Hunters less than 17 years old will be exempt from the restriction. In 2011, yearlings comprised 49 percent of the total adult bucks taken in these units. This rule is expected to change harvest composition so that 15-20 percent of the adult bucks taken in these units are yearlings. The restriction is expected to decrease total buck harvest approximately 35-45 percent initially.
* Simplify the description of the area open for deer hunting during the January firearms season to include Suffolk County, subject to local discharge restrictions.  Current regulations include a complex and lengthy description of open areas that are unnecessary considering existing local ordinances and legal setbacks from structures for discharge of firearms.
* Establish provisions for designation of Deer Management Focus Areas to intensify use of traditional hunting in specifically designated geographic areas to assist communities with the burden of overabundant deer populations.  This rule will increase bag limits to two antlerless deer per hunter per day and establish a Deer Management Focus Area deer hunting season in late January. This rule will establish specific permit, tagging and reporting requirements in focus areas. This rule also defines the first such focus area in Tompkins County that includes portions of the towns of Caroline, Danby, Dryden, Enfield, Ithaca, Lansing, Newfield, and Ulysses. This area has very high deer populations and relatively poor access for hunters.  Deer management focus areas will enable greater harvest opportunity for hunters who are able to gain access to lands for hunting, and are intended to augment on-going management activities in the affected area.
* Adjust bear seasons in the Northern and Southern Zone to remain consistent with bow, muzzleloader and regular seasons for deer.
* Correct a road name in the boundary descriptions for WMUs 5A and 5C, where Franklin County Route 24 was incorrectly identified as State Route 24.

To see more detailed explanations of these proposals, including instructions for providing comments, visit the DEC website at [www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/propregulations.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/propregulations.html).  The proposed rulemaking can also be viewed in detail in the April 4, 2012 publication of the New York State Register, which is available at [www.dos.state.ny.us/info/register/2012.html](http://www.dos.state.ny.us/info/register/2012.html).

The **public comment period will remain open until May 21**.  Please do not submit comments by replying to this email message.  Rather, please review the proposal documents and use the mailing address or email link provided with the proposal documents at [www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/propregulations.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/propregulations.html) (see Parts 1 and 4 - Single Species and Species Management Areas [White-tailed Deer and Black Bear]).

For additional background on these proposals, I encourage you to review Appendix 2 (Proposed Deer Hunting Season Structure) and Appendix 3 (Alternative Buck Harvest Strategies) in the Management Plan for White-tailed Deer in New York State, and the Assessment of Public Comment on the Draft Deer Management Plan, all available at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7211.html#DeerPlan](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7211.html#DeerPlan).  You may also find information regarding some of the proposals, including the youth hunt, changes to bowhunting seasons and mandatory antler restrictions, on our website at: Deer and Bear Hunter Surveys ([www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/74971.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/74971.html)) and Antler Restrictions in New York ([www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27663.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27663.html)).

 Jeremy Hurst

Big Game Biologist

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