



# Outdoors

By Larry DiDonato

## New opportunity available between Christmas and New Year's Day

DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos recently announced the adoption of a new regulation to establish a "Holiday Deer Hunt" by extending the late bow and muzzleloader hunting seasons for deer from December 26th to January 1st in New York's Southern Zone.

"As part of our ongoing efforts to capitalize on the growing interest in hunting, we're excited to announce that beginning this December, the Holiday Deer Hunt will provide new opportunities for New Yorkers and visiting hunters to venture afield during a time when families and friends are gathered together for the holidays and students are home on school break," said Commissioner Seggos. "The extended season is also a great time for younger hunters to go afield with experienced mentors and nurture their knowledge and skills as responsible members of the hunting community."

The new season provides an additional seven days of late season hunting with bows and muzzleloaders. Hunters must purchase a bowhunting or muzzle loading privilege to participate in the late bow or muzzleloader seasons and may use all deer carcass tags valid during those seasons.

The expanded hunting season will only apply to New York's Southern Zone. In the Northern Zone, DEC states deer may already be moving to wintering areas by late December and could be subjected to over harvest as deer concentrate

in the phenomenon known as "yarding."

DEC said they will "adaptively manage" this new program and assess any potential impacts to other outdoor recreational activities or localized deer herds.

DEC had requested public comment on the proposal to hold a holiday hunt and received more than 3,000 comments which they say were used to advance the idea to its adoption. A summary of the public comments and DEC's responses is available for review in the February 17th issue of the New York State Register.

DEC biologists anticipate many families may take advantage of this new opportunity. "Given the requirement for use of primitive weapons, biologists do not anticipate a significant effect on deer harvest or local deer populations."

The season will not begin until December

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26, 2021. Some opposed to the Holiday Deer Hunt cite its potential negative impact on DEC's program to reduce harvest of yearling bucks. Some yearling bucks could shed their antlers before the new extended season making them vulnerable to be shot as does/antlerless deer. Other objections note potential interference with small game or furbearer hunting.

Adoption of the Holiday Hunt is an example of a desired outcome derived from DEC's Bureau of Wildlife's 2021-2030 Deer Management Plan coming into fruition. If you'd like to read the plan in its entirety, its available on DEC's website.

Although the general comment period for the 2021-2030 Deer Management Plan closed in December 2020, it remains in draft form. While some elements of it are being acted upon presently, many others are to be evaluated to be phased in over the next ten years. These include potential expansion of a doe-only season in



September and other season and tag changes including more strict Deer Management Permit (DMP) use requirements.

That future flexibility makes it an "adaptive management plan" with many objectives still up for debate, especially those that require changes in legislation or regulation.



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Imminent changes included the Southern Zone Holiday Deer Hunt, which is a done deal given the recent regulation change establishing it.

Lowering the age to hunt big game with a firearm to 12 years of age and expanding crossbows as legal implements throughout the entire archery season, are currently in the state budget bill. If passed without amendment, they will become the law of the land in NY.

Consideration in expanding legal hunting hours by 30 minutes before sunrise and 30 minutes after sunset as well as facilitating community-based management to address urban and suburban nuisance deer issues, are still under review.

You can still voice your opinion by contacting your local legislator to weigh on these hunting proposals as they are not yet finalized by legislation or regulation changes.

The proposed change to allow shooting 30 minutes before sunrise and 30 minutes after sunset for all species in all seasons remains controversial.

One retired ECO put it this way, "I think it's a great idea for anyone while using an archery implement (long, recurve, compound, AND crossbow). I have reservations about muzzleloaders and firearms, but it would probably be better received if a hunter orange requirement went along with that. I hunt on private land most of the time so I am against being told what I have to wear on private land but would probably buy in if it got me 30 more minutes during the "golden hour". That being



said, I can recall times hunting deer when it was too dark to see during LEGAL hours, let alone ½ hour after. If it makes it, it will be short lived if HRSIs (hunting accidents) go up."

I would have to say I agree with that reasoning and those qualifiers. A rifle or muzzleloader can be shot accurately for hundreds of yards. Targets at that distance with in reduced light conditions can make them hard to discern. Visibility in dense or intermediate woods and even in open fields could be

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seriously impaired especially in certain weather conditions. If the hours are extended by 30 minutes for gun or muzzleloader season for deer, I believe hunters should then be required to wear orange for those seasons. If hours are only extended in the bow/crossbow season, no orange should be required to be worn during that season since most archery shots are at less than 35 yards.

One compromise could be to split the difference and only extend hunting hours by 15 minutes before sunrise and after sunset. That would be safer in my opinion.

What do you think? You can have your voice heard by following up with your elected representative or through an organized sportsmen's group. That way you can weigh in on this controversial topic as well.

Happy Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping until next time.

#### *News and Notes*

Last Chance to Weigh in on Circle Hook Regulation; Comments Due by March 8th

If you want to register an opinion on the proposed inline circle hook requirement, you only have until March 8th to comment. Personally, I think offset, not inline circle hooks are a good compromise. The inline circle hook can be tough to set whereas offset "J" hooks result in easier hookups, but are said to lead to increased mortality. Let them know your opinion on the topic. Comments can be sent via email to [fw.marine@dec.ny.gov](mailto:fw.marine@dec.ny.gov) or by mail to:

Division of Marine Resources, 205 N. Belle Mead Rd. Suite 1, East Setauket, NY 11733. After reviewing public comments, DEC will be adopting and publishing a final regulation.

**Remember to report poaching violations by calling 1-844-DEC-ECOS.**

*If you have a fishing or hunting report, photo, or event you would like to be considered for publication, send it to [huntnote@gmail.com](mailto:huntnote@gmail.com).*

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