



## **2012 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING: STATUS AND PROSPECTS**

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Over the last few years, around 700,000 individuals have purchased a license to hunt deer in Michigan. These hunters ultimately spend more than 9.6 million days afield and take more than 400,000 deer. Over 300,000 hunters participate in Michigan's archery season, about 600,000 hunt with a firearm and 200,000 with a muzzleloader. Although surveys show that the leading reasons many individuals participate in deer hunting is simply the opportunity to spend time outdoors with friends and family, harvesting a deer is still very important to many deer hunters. No amount of hunting guarantees a harvest, but preparation and hard work are keys to producing the best chance to see and take deer, or to mentor a new hunter through a safe and enjoyable season. The 2012 deer season is expected to be a successful year for many hunters, and as always, will certainly offer the exciting challenge we call 'hunting'.

Part of hunting preparations each year includes becoming familiar with the most recent regulations. The deer website of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and a collaborative website with the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at Michigan State University provide highlights of regulations changes, information about deer management, and links to additional resources, such as a list of deer check stations. These sites are located at [www.michigan.gov/deer](http://www.michigan.gov/deer) and <http://deer.fw.msu.edu>. Please refer to the 2012 Hunting and Trapping Digest and Antlerless Digest, available at DNR Operations Service Centers, license vendors, or available in electronic formats through links at these sites, for a map of all Deer Management Units (DMUs) and other regulations details.

For the 2012 season, the days open for hunting deer in September were reduced. The early antlerless firearm deer season (open only on private lands in select areas within the Lower Peninsula) was reduced from 5 days to 2, and the season was held on the same weekend as the statewide youth and 100% disabled hunt. These seasons ran from

September 22–23, 2012. The youth early antlerless firearm season that was held in southern Michigan in September 2011 was eliminated this year, though increased emphasis on youth mentoring opportunities and discounted licenses were made available through the new Mentored Youth Hunting Program.

Overall deer activity tends to be highest a few weeks prior to breeding. The peak of breeding activity for Michigan deer generally occurs just prior to the opening of the firearm deer season. These peak breeding dates are earliest in the southern Lower Peninsula, except that many does in the region that were born just this spring will already conceive their first fawns this year. Those breeding events for young does often occur a month or more later than they do for older deer, often not until mid-December. Hunters often seek to take advantage of these times of high deer movements, so archery hunting activity is often highest in late October and early November, followed by the busiest deer hunting day of the year -- the opening of the firearm season. In southern Michigan, another late period of deer activity can occur several weeks prior to the late breeding events among young does, which can coincide with the end of the firearm season.

As of mid to late October 2012, the number of deer brought to check stations was down slightly compared to the same point last season, which was expected due to the reduced number of days open for deer hunting in September and poor weather conditions throughout much of the state during the first few weeks of archery season. The number of individuals that had purchased deer licenses was up slightly (about 4%) compared to 2011, though this may not reflect final hunter numbers for the season, as a sharp rise in license sales occurs annually just prior to the opening of firearm season. The season appears to be progressing well overall, though noticeably fewer deer are being seen in some areas of Michigan heavily hit by an outbreak of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD), which has emerged in widespread areas throughout many Midwest States this year.

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

Hunting success and hunter satisfaction increased in the 2011 season across the state, though regional increases occurred only in the Upper Peninsula (UP) and northern Lower Peninsula (NLP). With three mild winters in a row and generally good past mast crop production, deer numbers across most of these northern regions have increased over the last three years. Many areas in these regions are forecasted to offer increased sightings and successful hunts this year. However, there are always exceptions in some areas that experience local population decreases. While hunters in northern regions are often used to observing sudden drops in deer populations following severe winters, some local areas in the southern Lower Peninsula (SLP) will see lower than usual deer populations during the 2012 season due to the EHD outbreak being most pronounced in this region. Information regarding expectations in each region is found below.

### **Upper Peninsula**

The winter of 2011–12 was quite mild, and offered deer very favorable conditions for survival and spring fawn production. This was the third consecutive mild winter, allowing the deer herd to continue its rebound from the harsh winters of 2007 and 2008. Due to

these conditions and the resulting increase in deer numbers, antlerless permits were increased this year, and some areas previously closed to antlerless hunting are open. Antlerless permits were made available in Deer Management Units 022 (Crystal Falls), 031 (Nisula), 036 (Amasa/ Michigamme), 055 (Menominee), 117 (Drummond), 121 (Bay De Noc), 122 (Norway), 152 (Gwinn), 155 (Gladstone), 252 (Rock), 255 (LaBranche).

Buck hunting opportunities should also be good this year. The recent mild winters should lead to increased availability of yearling and 2 ½ year old bucks this fall, and in general, more bucks have been seen so far. However, local areas are influenced differently by factors that affect numbers of deer, deer condition, and sightings at a smaller scale. Body size and antler development is typically best within agricultural areas, but nice bucks are also taken from forested areas where access is limited and they have an opportunity to grow older. More deer tend to be found in the southern UP near Lake Michigan, with fewer in the northern UP near Lake Superior. The production of mast (fruit and nuts) in the UP appears to be limited this year due to the drought conditions from this past summer. This will make scouting all that much more important. Hunters will have to invest more time to find areas that may be producing mast or different areas that deer are targeting due to the lack of mast production.

### **Northern Lower Peninsula**

The deer population in much of the NLP is expected to be higher than last year. With three mild winters in a row, deer numbers have rebounded since the harsh winters of 2007 and 2008. Due to the increase in the population, some areas previously closed to antlerless hunting will be open this year. These include DMU 016 (Cheboygan), 069 (Otsego) and 072 (Roscommon), where antlerless licenses were made available for both public and private land. DMU 040 (Kalkaska) is also open this year for private land antlerless licenses only. However, in spite of more areas being open, the overall number of available antlerless deer licenses has decreased. This is primarily due a reduction in the eastern NLP multi-unit area DMU 487. The quota was reduced to a level closer to past demand for licenses. This will not affect the overall management goal of the area, which is to eradicate bovine tuberculosis (TB).

Mast production (fruits and nuts) is reportedly variable throughout the region. Despite poor conditions in much of the state, some NLP areas have reported good production of acorns and apples. Deer should be expected to frequent these areas, so scouting to find these locations will be important. The outbreak of EHD has affected deer in some areas of the NLP; fewer locations have been reported and have generally involved lower deer mortality levels in comparison to locations in the SLP. Consult the map and reporting figures available under the EHD section at [www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases](http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases) to identify NLP areas that have been affected by EHD.

### **Southern Lower Peninsula**

Abundant food and cover in the form of agricultural crops and scattered swamps and woodlots provide very good habitat across much of the southern Michigan landscape. This high quality habitat, combined with relatively mild winter conditions, results in a productive deer population. Southern Michigan has the overall highest deer densities in the state, but

the SLP deer population has been stable to decreasing over the last 5 to 10 years. The Department has desired to reduce deer numbers in much of the region while still maintaining suitable densities to provide ample hunting opportunities. Populations in a number of locations are likely now at or closer to goal than they have been for some time.

The “wild card” for SLP hunters in some locations this year will be EHD. As of late October, EHD has been confirmed in 30 Michigan counties and reported in several others, with a total of more than 12,000 deer having been found and reported to the DNR as mortalities likely due to EHD. This disease is caused by a virus that is transmitted by a type of biting fly called a midge. Deer can suffer extensive internal bleeding, leading to death just a few weeks after infection with the virus. Due to a high fever, infected deer often are found sick or dead along or in bodies of water. EHD does not affect humans, so edibility of the venison is not affected by this disease. There is no evidence that humans can contract the EHD virus either from the midge or from handling and eating venison. Cold weather reduces midge activity and frost kills the adults that bite and transmit the virus, so most outbreaks have slowed if not stopped completely.

Those hunting in the immediate vicinity of an EHD outbreak may see substantially fewer deer this year, while those hunting just a few miles away may notice no difference compared to past experience. Wherever the disease has emerged in the past, substantial lasting effects have never been noticed. However, EHD has emerged more frequently in recent years. Hunters in areas that appear to have been hardest hit by EHD are encouraged to limit or curtail antlerless deer harvest. Consult the map and reporting figures available under the EHD section at [www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases](http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases) to identify SLP areas that have been affected by EHD, but be aware that outbreaks may vary in how significantly they impact local deer populations, and the numbers found and reported to the DNR are a minimum number of deer affected. The Department will be taking reports of dead deer that are likely EHD-related until January 1. To report the presence of dead deer, the DNR encourages residents to contact their nearest wildlife field office by consulting the list available at [www.michigan.gov/wildlife](http://www.michigan.gov/wildlife).

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

### **Where to Hunt**

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. Maps and computer-based tools are increasingly available to narrow in on the best locations to focus scouting efforts. Mi-HUNT is a DNR 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.

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

For many years, Michigan hunters have participated in a voluntary deer check system that produces one of the largest sets of data throughout the country on age and condition of harvested deer. The data collected at check stations helps the DNR monitor the health of the herd and make future management decisions; also, 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 to a check station. In return, hunters receive a deer management cooperater patch. For a list of deer check station locations and hours of operation, consult the list posted at: [www.michigan.gov/deer](http://www.michigan.gov/deer).

Can't make it to a check station at the end of your hunt? You may bring the head of any deer you take (or remove the bottom jaw and keep the antlers of any bucks), along with information on the date and location of harvest, to any check station at some point later in the season. You may also bring in deer harvested by other hunters (or send your deer with them), as long as all of the necessary information can be related back to the appropriate deer. Finally, some local clubs or organizations arrange deer check events near the end of or right after the season closes. Your local field office may be aware of such special events or may be willing to establish another event if you are a member of a club or other network of individuals with such an interest. A list of field offices and contact information may be found at [www.michigan.gov/wildlife](http://www.michigan.gov/wildlife).

### **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. The Mentored Youth Hunting Program offers youth under the age of 10 an opportunity to hunt deer, turkey, and small game, trap furbearers, and fish for all species with a qualified youth mentor who is 21 years or older. Complete program details can be at: [www.michigan.gov/mentoredhunting](http://www.michigan.gov/mentoredhunting). A deer kill tag issued under the mentored youth license is valid for any deer in any deer management unit, except during the antlerless-only season when only an antlerless deer may be taken.

### **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 make a financial contribution to support the processing of donated deer. More than 1.1 million Michigan residents annually seek food assistance. Last year, the venison donated to local food banks and food kitchens throughout Michigan supplied enough meat to provide more than 100,000 meals with a source of nutritious protein.

When purchasing a fishing or hunting license, tell the license vendor you would like to make a monetary donation to the Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger program. The vendor will simply add your choice of \$1, \$5, \$10 or \$20 donation to the overall purchase price. Hunters who would like to donate a deer should visit the MSAH website, [www.sportsmenagainsthunger.org](http://www.sportsmenagainsthunger.org), to find the nearest participating processor.

### **Thank a Hunter or Trapper for their Contributions to Conservation**

In Michigan, money raised from the sale of hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses pays for the bulk of fish and wildlife conservation, and those participating in these activities are justifiably proud of their reputation for paying their own way. But license fees aren't the only dollars that support conservation in Michigan. September 2, 2012 marked the 75th anniversary of the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (PR). PR is the program that directs funds raised from federal taxes on archery equipment, firearms, and ammunition

back to state wildlife agencies to pay for wildlife conservation, restoration, and hunter education. Since its implementation in 1937, PR has provided more than \$262 million to Michigan for wildlife management. Anyone who enjoys watching wildlife, hiking through forests, photographing birds or picking mushrooms is benefitting from people who have purchased hunting and trapping licenses. This year, take extra pride in your contributions, thank your fellow hunters and trappers, and spread the word about the way these activities support conservation of all wildlife that are so widely appreciated in Michigan.