



2013 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS

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The leading reason many individuals participate in deer hunting is simply the opportunity to spend time outdoors with friends and family, but actually 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 2013 deer season is expected to be a successful year for many hunters, and as always, will certainly offer the exciting challenge we call 'hunting'.

Persistence can pay off for deer hunters. Nationwide, successful deer hunters hunt an average of eighteen days – slightly more than the average number of days that Michigan deer hunters spent afield last year. However, chances for success are greatest for those who are prepared. 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 and <http://deer.fw.msu.edu>. Please refer to the 2013 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.

Some successful hunting trips are just a result of being in the right place at the right time. 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.

What to Expect Across the State

The 2012 season proved to be a little better than the year before for many Michigan hunters. Statewide hunting success and hunter satisfaction increased, with the majority of the increase occurring in the Upper Peninsula (UP) and Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP). Increased harvest of deer in those regions was most likely due to slowly but steadily growing deer populations in many northern areas in recent years. The “wild card” for many Southern Lower Peninsula (SLP) hunters in some locations last year was the extensive outbreak of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) experienced in summer 2012. EHD outbreaks were ultimately confirmed in 30 Michigan counties – mostly in the SLP – and potential outbreaks were reported in 21 other counties. Those hunting in the immediate vicinity of EHD outbreaks saw substantially fewer deer in 2012, while many hunters just a few miles away from such outbreaks noticed no difference compared to past experience. Overall, about the same number of SLP bucks was harvested compared to the year before, but hunters took about 15% fewer antlerless deer.

Moving forward from the 2012 to the 2013 season, the winter of 2012 got off to a late start and continued to be mild through much of January and into early February. However, increased snowfall and a late thaw made for difficult conditions for deer, most notably in the Upper Peninsula. Some areas may see decreased numbers of deer (particularly fawns) as a result of that surge of severe conditions. Fortunately, deer survival and condition in the NLP appears minimally affected heading into the 2013 season. Effects of the nearly 15,000 deer that were found and reported to the DNR as mortalities likely due to EHD will continue to linger for some time in those areas of the SLP where the most substantial outbreaks occurred. However, very few EHD outbreaks were reported in summer 2013 (as of the end of September, only Muskegon County had a confirmed outbreak). Wherever the disease has emerged in the past, substantial long-lasting effects have never been noticed. Hunters in areas that appear to have been hardest hit by EHD are encouraged to continue to limit antlerless deer harvest, but hunters afield this season will have an opportunity to directly assess recovery of deer in these areas. Additional information regarding hunting expectations in each region is found below.

Upper Peninsula

The winter of 2012-2013 started off mild with melt offs occurring throughout December and January. However, the winter increased in severity quickly in February and continued until late April. This left many deer in poor condition coming into spring and as a result there were notable decreases in fawn sightings compared to recent years. Biologists

recommended closing a number of Deer Management Units to antlerless licenses this year in order to allow deer numbers to rebound, though there are still six units open for antlerless opportunities. Antlerless permits are available in Deer Management Units: 022 (Crystal Falls), 055 (Menominee), 121 (Bay De Noc), 122 (Norway), 155 (Gladstone), 255 (LaBranche).

The production of mast (fruit and nuts) in the Upper Peninsula (UP) has been plentiful throughout much of the region this year. Hunters should target these areas and will want to scout for producing oak and beech trees, as well as fruit producing shrubs and trees such as apple and sumac.

In general, hunters should expect to see fewer deer, especially in the younger age classes (fawns and yearlings) but still expect to see a decent number of 2 ½ and 3½ year old bucks this fall. 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 grow older.

Northern Lower Peninsula

The deer population for the Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) is expected to be higher than last year. The late start to winter made it possible for deer to come out of winter in fair to good conditions despite the extended winter months that went into late April.

High numbers of deer sightings have been reported throughout the summer months across the northern lower region. Reported pictures on trail cameras are giving many hunters high hopes for the coming season both for larger bucks and successful antlerless harvests.

Deer hunters in the following 12 northern lower counties: Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Missaukee, Osceola and Wexford have new antler point restrictions this year. All hunters with the exception of the Liberty Hunt and Mentored Youth Hunters that plan to harvest a buck must only target bucks with at least 3 or more antler point on one side. If you plan to harvest two bucks at least one of those bucks must also have 4 or more points on one side which is the statewide rule. An overview of these Antler Point Restrictions is available on the Department's YouTube page (see www.youtube.com/user/MichiganDNR).

Mast production (fruits and nuts) has been very good throughout the region. High production of acorns, apples and beechnuts has been reported. Deer should be targeting these areas frequently. Scouting to find these areas will be very important. Contacting your local wildlife office may be a good first step; they may be able to give you insight as to which areas are producing.

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. Beginning with the 2009 deer season, much of southern Michigan was incorporated into a single Deer Management Unit (DMU) for allocation of private land antlerless deer licenses. This multi-county DMU 486 extended southward from Oceana, southern Newaygo, Mecosta, Isabella, Midland, and Bay counties, excluding only St. Clair, Macomb, Wayne, and Monroe counties. The multi-county DMU provided hunters with considerable flexibility regarding where antlerless deer could be harvested using any private land antlerless license valid for this area, and facilitated additional antlerless harvest and deer population reduction in these areas.

Since the creation of DMU 486, deer population estimates and indices (including deer/vehicle collisions, crop damage complaints, and observations of deer by the hunting community and field staff) in the area have stabilized or declined. Repeated outbreaks of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) have also occurred over this period. Though individual EHD outbreak sites affect deer at the scale of a township or smaller, these outbreaks have likely produced more variability in deer densities within the entire area of DMU 486 than has occurred in many years. Populations in a number of locations are likely now at or closer to goal than they have been for some time. At this point, management efforts would best be directed towards distinct areas at a smaller scale than DMU 486. The Department therefore defined new DMUs for southern Michigan – mostly ranging from one to four counties in size – starting with the 2013 deer season. An overview of these new DMUs is available on the Department's YouTube page (see www.youtube.com/user/MichiganDNR).

Important Changes

New Antler Point Restrictions

Deer hunters in the 12 northwest northern lower counties that include Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, Kalkaska, Grand Traverse, Benzie, Manistee, Wexford, Missaukee, Osceola, Lake and Mason should keep in mind that they will have new antler point restrictions this year. All hunters (with the exception of the Liberty Hunt and Mentored Youth Hunters that plan to harvest a buck) must only target bucks with at least 3 or more antler point on one side. If you plan to harvest two bucks at least one of those bucks must also have 4 or more points on one side, which is a restriction in effect statewide. An overview of these Antler Point Restrictions is available on the Department's YouTube page (see www.youtube.com/user/MichiganDNR).

New DMU Boundaries for Southern Michigan

Southern Michigan now has new Deer Management Unit boundaries. DMU 486, which encompassed most of zone 3, has been dissolved into several smaller DMUs. All DMUs follow county lines, though some consist of multi-county units. Please consult the 2013 antlerless digest at: www.michigan.gov/hunting for more information. An overview of these

new DMUs is available on the Department's YouTube page (see www.youtube.com/user/MichiganDNR).

Baiting in Iosco County

Iosco County was recently changed to a Bovine Tuberculosis Free status by the USDA. With this change all of Iosco County was opened to baiting (prior to this only certain townships were allowed to bait). Hunters must follow all statewide baiting rules and regulations if they choose to bait.

Bovine Tuberculosis Testing Efforts

The Department is urging hunters to submit their deer's head for bovine tuberculosis (TB) testing if it was harvested in the following nineteen counties: Alcona, Alpena, Bay, Cheboygan, Crawford, Genesee, Gratiot, Iosco, Isabella, Midland, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle, Roscommon, Saginaw, Shiawassee, and Tuscola. These counties include those in the traditional "TB area" in the northeast Lower Peninsula as well as several southern Michigan counties near an area where TB infected livestock were recently detected. Hunters are asked to submit deer carcasses with chest lesions suspicious for TB from anywhere in the state. The list of deer check stations is available on the DNR website at www.michigan.gov/deer. If you see a deer with this type of infection, please contact the DNR so the carcass and viscera, in addition to the head, can be examined. Hunters may check their deer or elk TB lab results at www.michigan.gov/dnrlab.

In 2012, TB was found in 23 wild white-tailed deer from four counties in Michigan: Alcona, Alpena, Montmorency, and Oscoda; and in one wild elk from Montmorency Co. Statewide 4,716 deer were tested. Since 1995, a total of 732 deer have been found positive from over 200,000 deer sampled in Michigan. For more information on bovine TB in Michigan, visit www.michigan.gov/bovinetb.

Deer Hunting Seasons Renamed and Changes to Hunts for Hunters with Disabilities

A Department work group conducted a review of some of the opportunities provided for hunters with disabilities and generated recommendations for changes. Acting upon these recommendations resulted in changes to the names of seasons providing opportunity for youths and hunters with disabilities, and updated to eligibility criteria for hunters with disabilities. The details of these seasons are provided below.

Liberty Hunt – Formerly the Youth & 100% Disabled Veteran firearm season

- Runs September 21-22
- Open on public and private lands
- Youth 16 years of age or younger may participate
- All hunters who are legally blind, have been issued a permit to use a laser-sighting device, OR permit to hunt from a standing vehicle, OR veteran with 100% disability as determined by Veteran Affairs OR veterans who are individually unemployable as determined by the Veteran Affairs may participate
- Deer of either sex can be taken, season bag limit is 1

Independence Hunt – Formerly the Special Disabled firearm season

- Runs October 17-20
- Open on private land only or the Freedom Hunt at Fort Custer
- All hunters who are legally blind, have been issued a permit to use a laser-sighting device, OR permit to hunt from a standing vehicle, OR veteran with 100% disability as determined by Veteran Affairs OR veterans who are individually unemployable as determined by the Veteran Affairs may participate
- Deer of either sex can be taken, season bag limit is 1

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, 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 becoming a mentor to 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. With the new mentored youth hunting program it is now possible to take a youth 9 or younger deer hunting. For specific program requirements please visit: 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.

Bring your Deer to a Checkstation

Michigan has some of the best historical data on deer in the country. The data we gather at checkstations 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 to a checkstation. As always, you also receive a successful hunter deer management cooperators patch.

For those hunting in the TB area, we strongly encourage all hunters to submit their deer head for testing. Your cooperation with this is the key to monitoring this disease and represents an important effort in eradicating it.

For a list of deer checkstation locations and hours please visit: www.michigan.gov/deer. Can't make it to a checkstation? Contact your local field office to see if there are any special events occurring that you could bring your deer head or jaw to be checked at that may be closer to your home or at a more convenient time.

Antler Point Restrictions

Those hunting within the UP and the multi-county Deer Management Unit (DMU) 487 in the bovine tuberculosis (TB) zone must decide, before purchasing their deer license, if they wish the opportunity to take one or two antlered deer. Those desiring the opportunity to shoot two bucks must purchase a combination license. Both bucks have antler point restrictions. One buck must have one antler with at least three (3) antler points; the other buck must have one antler with at least four (4) antler points. Those choosing to purchase a firearm deer license and/or an archery deer license are limited to taking only one buck from within these areas during all seasons combined.

Within most of the areas, a deer must have just one antler three (3) or more inches in length, but point restrictions are in place for some individual DMUs as well. These include DMU 117 (Drummond Island) and DMU 122 (southern Iron County, along the Wisconsin border) in the UP. In the Northern Lower the following DMUs have antler point restrictions: DMU 005 (Antrim), 010 (Benzie), 015 (Charlevoix), 024 (Emmet), 028 (Grand Traverse), 040 (Kalkaska), 043 (Lake), 045 (Leelanau County), 051 (Manistee), 053 (Mason), 057 (Missaukee), 067 (Osceola), 083 (Wexford), 115 (Beaver Island), 245 (South Fox Island), and one small DMU (DMU135 in Iosco County) in the TB zone.

In DMU 117, 135 and 245 bucks must have at least one forked antler. All other DMUs listed above must have at least one three-point antler.

Finally, within DMU 487 ONLY, hunters may harvest an antlerless deer with a firearm or combination license within the November 15-30 firearm season or the muzzleloader season (open December 13-22 in that region).

See the 2013 Hunting and Trapping Digest at www.michigan.gov/hunting for additional information on these regulations.