

Maine Deer Harvest Highlights 2012

2012 marked the 27th season of the any-deer permit system. A total of 34,160 any-deer permits were allocated to 13 WMDs, including 442 Superpack any-deer permits issued in WMDs 15, 20, and 21 to achieve district specific doe harvest quotas. Of the permits available, 5,754 were issued to qualifying landowners in an early, separate lottery. Any-deer permits are WMD and hunter specific; they may be used during the regular firearms (October 29th-November 26th) and muzzleloader (November 28th -December 10th) seasons. Superpack licenses were allocated to 2.5 % of the any-deer permits in wildlife districts with 3,500 or more permits as “Bonus Deer” permits. This allowed Superpack license holders to take two deer, one of which must be antlerless.

Although antlered bucks (3” minimum antler length) were legal quarry for all hunters during all deer seasons, only hunters who possessed a valid any-deer permit could legally take a doe or a fawn during firearms seasons, with the exception of the youth day hunt. Sundays were closed to all hunting and the opening Saturday of the regular firearms season was reserved for Maine residents only.

Our expanded archery season targets locations in which deer populations are under-harvested primarily due to firearms discharge bans and residential sprawl. The expanded archery season had no limit on antlerless deer (either-sex) and ran for 79 hunting days (Sept. 8th to Dec. 8th); the statewide (Special) archery season from September 29th to October 26th.

Overall 21,365 deer were registered during 2012. During the expanded and special archery seasons 1,928 were taken. This equates to a 1% decrease in archery hunting from 2011; the Youth Day harvest of 567 increased from 2011 by 5%. Youth hunters were allowed to harvest antlerless deer in WMDs receiving any-deer permits. This rule change for Youth hunters occurred in WMDs that were most affected by 2 particularly difficult winters. The regular firearms season’s overall harvest of 17,939 was a 15% increase from the previous year. This year’s buck harvest of 15,271 animals represents an increase of 19% over last year. For the fifth year a special license allowed crossbow hunting during the regular firearms season with a harvest of 32 deer. Finally muzzleloaders experienced fair success with a slight increase over last year, taking 905 deer with muzzleloader.

A harvest quota of 4,398 adult does was set in 2012 to meet deer management objectives in Maine’s 29 WMDs. These quotas included anticipated harvests resulting from the either-sex archery and youth-day seasons. Doe quotas ranged from a low of 0 individuals in 16 WMDs (districts 1-11, 14, 18, 19, 27, and 28), to 901 does in WMD 21. Overall, 6,070 antlerless deer were registered by hunters and the statewide adult doe harvest totaled 4,267. Excluding WMD 29, the adult doe harvest was 10% below pre-season set quotas. Not meeting the doe quota may be attributed to an increased number of bucks on Maine’s landscape, as attested to by this season’s significantly higher buck harvest, leading to an increased likelihood of a hunter successfully intercepting a buck.

The statewide harvest of antlered bucks (15,271) in 2012 was 10% over of our projected buck harvest. The top 5 buck-producing WMDs (per sq. mi.) during 2012 were (in descending order) districts 29, 24, 21, 20 and 22, all in southern Maine. Among the 15,271 antlered bucks taken in 2012, roughly 7,788 (51%) were 1 ½ year-olds (yearlings), while more than 3,512 (23%) were mature bucks (3½ to 15½ years old). Male fawns are reported with antlerless deer.