

**Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Heritage Service
January 26, 2012**

Hunting Season Regulation Concepts for 2012–13 and 2013–14

The Concepts below cover the regulation changes the Wildlife and Heritage Service (WHS) is considering for the 2012-14 hunting seasons. These Concepts are very flexible and several have changed as we have discussed their pros and cons within DNR. It is very possible that some of these will change again before our meeting, but the Concepts noted below show where we are today:

White-tailed Deer:

Create a STATEWIDE bag limit for antlered deer (bucks) and reduce the overall buck bag limit to three per year, one per weapon season (i.e. bow season, muzzleloader season and firearm season). The buck bag limit would be three per year for Deer Management Regions A and B combined.

Rationale/Goal: this change would simplify our regulations and is anticipated to result in a modest reduction in buck harvest. Limiting hunters to one buck per weapon season would remove the requirement for hunters to take two antlerless deer before taking a second buck (in Region B) and remove the need to purchase a Bonus Antlered Deer Stamp.

Comments: this change is based on hunter input stating that our current statewide bag limit for bucks is too high at nine per year (combined total for Region A and Region B). While this Concept would not change the buck bag limit for Region A, it would remove the option for hunters to take a buck in Region B and then one in Region A during the same weapon season, or vice versa.

White-tailed Deer:

Expand the current unlimited antlerless bag limit for bow season in the Suburban Zone to all of Deer Management Region B.

Rationale/Goal: to simplify regulations by dropping the current Suburban Zone bow season bag limit and making it apply to all of Region B.

Comments: the Suburban Zone formerly had special opportunities for crossbow hunting and a separate bag limit for antlerless deer during bow season. The crossbow opportunities were expanded to statewide in 2010, this would expand the unlimited bag limit to Region B, making the Suburban Zone obsolete.

Sika Deer:

Institute a branched-antler requirement for stags (males) during all sika deer seasons. Antlered sika deer would need at least one branched antler to be legal for harvest.

Rationale/Goal: yearling sika stags (1½ year old males) are almost exclusively spikes. The majority of the sikas harvested each year are yearling stags. A branched antler requirement would protect this age/sex class from harvest and shift harvest to hinds (females), helping us meet our management goals for this population (maintain them at the current density in the current geographic range). It would also improve the age structure of the stags.

River Otter:

Reopen a trapping season for river otters in Garrett and Allegany counties with a bag limit of one otter per season. All other counties in Maryland currently have an open season for otters.

Rationale/Goal: to provide a limited opportunity for trappers to take river otters in these counties. This will allow trappers that are targeting beavers more latitude to trap in areas where catching an otter in a beaver set is a possibility. Federal law requires all otter pelts to be tagged by DNR staff so we will gain valuable data on capture locations. We also would require trappers to surrender the carcass of any otters trapped in these counties to provide population data not otherwise available to DNR.

Comments: otters are present in most of the suitable habitat in Garrett and Allegany counties due to a successful reintroduction project conducted in the early to mid 1990's. Since that time, otter sightings have become increasingly common in Allegany and Garrett counties. Within the past few years, multiple otters have been reported in most sub-watersheds throughout the two-county region.

Cottontail Rabbit:

Keep the daily bag limit for rabbits at four, but limit it to no more than two rabbits per day may be taken on lands owned or controlled by DNR (public lands).

Rationale/Goal: to maximize the recreational opportunities for rabbit hunters on public lands by spreading harvest out over a longer period of time.

Comments: this concept was requested by rabbit hunters who report that their rabbit hunting opportunities on public land decrease rapidly soon after the season opens. They feel this is due in part to high harvests by hunters early in the season.

Crossbow Regulation:

To allow a cocked, but unloaded crossbow to be placed in, on or against any vehicle. The change would still prohibit a loaded crossbow from being in, on or against any vehicle. A loaded crossbow is one with a bolt or arrow in place on the shooting rail.

Rationale/Goal: to drop the requirement that a crossbow be shot (or otherwise uncocked) before being transported in a vehicle.

Comments: a regulation currently requires hunters to uncock all crossbows before placing them in a vehicle. This typically requires a crossbow to be shot (i.e. uncocked) at the end of the hunting period. This activity is arguably more dangerous than having an unloaded, cocked crossbow in a vehicle since it often means a crossbow is shot when other hunters may be in (or approaching) the area, in the dark, etc.

CWD Regulation:

To permit the transportation of a deer carcass or part taken in the CWD Management Area (CWDMA) to an approved taxidermist.

Rationale/Goal: a regulation currently allows a person to transport a deer carcass or part taken in the CWDMA to an approved deer processor outside of the CWDMA. Currently, there is no provision for taking the carcass or parts to a taxidermist outside the CWDMA. This Concept would allow that.

Comments: WHS would work with local taxidermists to train them on CWD management issues and develop a means for the proper disposal of any waste remaining after an item is mounted.

CWD Regulation:

To allow a person to remove deer front and hind leg quarters from the CWDMA.

Rationale/Goal: to broaden the current limitation on the removal of deer parts from the CWDMA to include 'leg quarters'. Leg quarters could include the bones, meat and hide of the legs, but no portion of the spinal column may be attached.

Comments: a regulation currently requires that all meat be removed from the bone before being transported out of the CWDMA. This requires a significant amount of work for hunters that intend to leave the CWDMA soon after harvesting a deer. Conversely, it would be much quicker to remove the deer leg quarters and backstraps with no portion of the spine attached – which still meets the basic requirements of avoiding the high risk areas of the carcass.

Hunter Orange Addition:

Require persons that are bowhunting deer in the bear hunting zone to meet the hunter orange requirements while the bear season is open.

Rationale/Goal: to improve the safety of the bear season by requiring bowhunters to wear hunter orange.

Comments: currently, bowhunters must wear orange when the deer muzzleloader and firearm season are in but not when bear season is open. Requiring them to wear orange would improve the ability of bear hunters to know when bowhunters are in the area. While there are a variety of hunters that do not need to wear orange, this change would result in the majority of hunters to be wearing orange during the bear season in the bear hunting zone.

Big Game Harvest Record:

Delete the requirement for a hunter to fill out the big game harvest record before moving a deer or turkey from the place of kill. A hunter would still have to fill out the big game harvest record, including recording the confirmation number, when checking in the animal.

Rationale/Goal: the requirement to complete the big game harvest record when field tagging a deer or turkey has been difficult to communicate to hunters and compliance remains very low. WHS efforts to stress this requirement via press releases and clear language in the Guide to Hunting and Trapping have not resulted in satisfactory hunter compliance. The harvest record would still be used to keep track of deer and turkeys checked in and would remain part of a hunter's license and thus available for inspection by the Natural Resources Police. The field tagging requirements would remain unchanged.