



Antlerless Deer Permit System Recommendations

Maine Dept of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW)



Presentation Overview

- Background information on permit system and why we're re-evaluating system
- Process used to re-evaluate system
- Recommended changes and justifications

Background



- Regulating doe harvest is the primary means of regulating deer population.
 - Any-deer permit (ADP) system has been in place since 1986.
 - ADP are allocated by lottery and allow hunters to take an antlered or antlerless deer in designated area.

- Doe harvests have been on average 21.9% below objective over last decade.

Background



- Compensatory adjustments to permit numbers are made in years following underharvest of does.
- Permit numbers have ballooned as additional issued permits are experiencing severely diminishing returns in some areas.
- In May 2021, in response to 3 bills related to antlerless harvest, The Committee requested IFW convene a stakeholder group to review the antlerless permit system.



Letter from IFW Legislative Committee



“In reviewing the antlerless deer permit system, the stakeholder group should consider recommending changes that will allow the Department to continue to meet deer management objectives while also providing a transparent system that has some predictability and equitable access for hunting opportunities. The stakeholder group may also consider recommending changes that will allow for increased participation in deer hunting by specific groups, such as youth hunters.

“In addition... examine restructuring the antlerless deer permit system to identify potential revenue sources to fund efforts to protect deer wintering areas...”





Summary of the Issues

- We are unable to achieve desired levels of doe harvest using ADP in C. and S. Maine.
- Issuing ADP works fine in lower deer density areas but not once # permits > # applicants.
- Many hunters are required to choose taking a buck vs. a doe in areas with high deer numbers, and hunters will tend to prefer to take a buck.
- Some districts already have multiple bonus permits per hunter and we're still not able to achieved desired doe harvest in these areas.
- The permit lottery is only reaching a little over half of hunters.

Information Gathering



- Regional ADP meetings
- Full group ADP meeting
- Internal meetings and discussions
- Review of other Northeast jurisdictions
- Stakeholder meetings

Solution Profile



- Improve ability to meet doe harvest objectives
- Do not negatively impact buck hunting opportunities
- Do not create major shifts in effort



Solution Profile



- Avoid adding complicated system components and do not change things that are already working and understood
- Create a fair and equitable system for allocating opportunity
- Improve our ability to recruit, retain, and reactivate Maine deer hunters





Recommendations Categories

- Methods for achieving doe harvest objectives
- Permit lottery
- Permit fees
- Youth Day
- Archery and crossbow hunting



Methods for Achieving Doe Harvest Objectives

- Proposal 1: Allocate permitted antlerless harvest opportunity by issuing antlerless permits instead of ADP statewide.
 - Eliminates choice between taking a buck or an antlerless deer that some hunters have to make with an any-deer permit.
 - Increases permit fill rate and willingness to use permits on antlerless deer.
 - May encourage hunters that did not care to apply for an ADP to apply for a permit if it allows for an additional deer.





Methods for Achieving Doe Harvest Objectives

- Proposal 1 (continued): Allocate permitted antlerless harvest opportunity by issuing antlerless permits instead of ADP statewide.
 - This would result in lower numbers of permits being issued, thus lower lottery odds.
 - In some WMDs, you'd still be 100% likely to get a permit, but in most WMDs, your likelihood would decline by ~40% (*e.g.- odds go from 50% to 30%, not 50% to 10%)





Methods for Achieving Doe Harvest Objectives

- Proposal 2: Grant the Department authority to designate WMDs as open to either-sex hunting on a regular license.
 - Just over ~1/2 of our deer hunters apply for permits in the lottery. If other changes do not result in desired doe harvest in a WMD, this option would allow all licensed hunters the option to take an antlerless deer on their regular license regardless of whether they chose to participate in the lottery.



Permit Lottery



- Proposal 3: Limit lottery applicants to selecting two preferred WMDs or subunits for their permit.
 - Reducing the number of preferred units that an applicant may select from will increase the likelihood that applicants will apply for permits in areas they are most likely to hunt. ~70% of applicants utilize all 3 WMD choices.



Permit Lottery



- Proposal 4: Eliminate permit swaps and transfers.
 - This will limit the ability of hunters to collect more permits than they intend or are likely to use, and disincentivize applying for permits in WMDs with little intent to use them.
 - Eliminating swaps and most transfers would relieve a significant administrative and law enforcement burden.



Permit Lottery



- Proposal 5: 2.5% of permits to Superpack applicants in WMDs with 2,000+ permits.
 - With a change to antlerless permits, fewer permits overall will be issued. This proposal is intended to ensure the WMDs that currently have Superpack permits will continue to have them.



Permit Fees



- Proposal 6: Charge a \$12 fee for each permit received via the lottery, plus a \$2 agent fee.
 - Places an appropriate value on permit allowing for the take of a 2nd deer.
 - Increases the likelihood that permit applicant is serious about taking antlerless deer.
 - Fee consistent with current expanded archery antlerless permit fee.
 - Generates income for deer management fund and efforts to acquire and manage deer wintering areas in northern, western, and eastern Maine.

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Permit Fees



- Proposal 7: Distribute excess permits “over the counter” for \$12 (plus \$2 agent fee) rather than distributing them as bonus permits through additional rounds in the permit lottery.
 - Provides opportunity to acquire a permit for applicants that are not successful or do not participate in the lottery.
 - Provides opportunity for hunters that use their permits to get another.
 - Generates income for deer management fund and efforts to acquire and manage deer wintering areas in northern, western, and eastern Maine.

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A cartoon illustration of a bearded man wearing a hat, a red and black plaid shirt, and orange overalls. He is holding a fishing rod in his right hand and a rifle in his left hand. He is also carrying a fishing net. The illustration is set against a white background.

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Permit Fees



- Considering preliminary estimates of the # of antlerless permits that would be issued, this would likely be ~\$750,000/year.

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Permit Fees



- While other proposals seemed to be widely supported during stakeholder process, fees generated some disagreement. Stated reasons for opposition included:
 - Permits have historically been free and should remain free.
 - Permit fees would be counterproductive if we're trying to encourage doe harvest.
 - A hunting license cost increase might be better than creating a new fee.



Youth Day



- Proposal 8: Grant Department authority to designate which WMDs will allow either-sex hunting without a permit during Youth Day rather than coupling this with the issuance of permits. Initially, statewide.
 - Continues to prioritize youth hunting opportunities while simplifying regulations.
 - Eliminates situations where small numbers in permits in some WMDs are competing with youth day antlerless harvest.



Archery and Crossbow Hunting



- Proposal 9: Grant Department authority to designate which WMDs will allow either-sex hunting without a permit during October archery rather than coupling this with the issuance of permits. Initially, WMDs 12, 13, 15-18, 20-26, and 29.
 - Refer to coming report on Public Law Chapter 98 (LD 27). With increased crossbow antlerless harvest, we need to be discerning with which WMDs allow this without a permit.
 - Focuses archery and crossbow antlerless harvest on WMDs with highest doe harvest needs.
 - Initially consistent with the WMDs open to the second week of muzzleloader hunting.



Our Mission

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife protects and manages Maine's fish and wildlife and their habitats, promotes Maine's outdoor heritage, and safely connects people with nature through responsible recreation, sport, and science.



Overview

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries of Wildlife (MDIFW) preserves, protects, and enhances the inland fisheries and wildlife resources of the state. Established in 1880 to protect big game populations, MDIFW has since evolved in scope to include protection and management of fish, non-game wildlife, and habitats, as well as restoration of endangered species like the bald eagle. In addition to its conservation duties, MDIFW is also responsible for enabling and promoting the safe enjoyment of Maine's outdoors — from whitewater rafting to boating, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation. The agency's constituents include the fish, wildlife, and people who call Maine home, as well as the visiting outdoor enthusiasts and ecotourists who call Maine Vacationland and contribute hundreds of millions of dollars each year to the state's economy.

