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DEC Proposes Hunting and Trapping Rule Changes for 2016

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Rule Changes Result of Public Input from Hunters and Trappers

Public Comments on Deer and Bear Hunting Regulations Accepted Through June 25, Fisher and General Trapping Regulations Through June 10

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is now accepting public comments on several regulatory proposals for hunting black bear and white-tailed deer and for fisher trapping and general trapping regulations, Acting Commissioner Basil Seggos announced today.

"These proposals are a result of our science-based management approaches combined with substantial feedback from hunters and trappers," said Acting Commissioner Basil Seggos. "We continue to focus efforts to provide more hunting and trapping opportunities in the state, and these proposed regulatory changes balance our management goals with public interests of hunters and trappers from across the state."

The proposed changes for deer and bear hunting will increase opportunities for junior hunters to take bears, rescind an antlerless-only rule from 2015 in portions of southeastern New York and the Lake Plains, reduce antlerless harvests in two management units in the western Adirondacks, and clarify when special season tags may be used by bow and muzzleloader hunters.

The proposed changes for fisher trapping reduce the trapping season in selected Adirondack Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) in Northern New York where populations have declined in recent years and establish a limited open trapping season in select WMUs in Central/Western New York to provide new opportunities for sustainable use of this natural resource.

Deer and Bear Hunting Regulatory Proposals

Proposal to Increase Opportunity for Junior Hunters to Take Black Bear

DEC proposes to allow junior hunters to take black bear as well as deer during the existing

youth firearms hunt over Columbus Day Weekend. "The youth hunt for deer has been popular for many families in New York, but junior hunters were limited to deer and couldn't take a bear if given the chance that weekend," Seggos said. "We'd like to see this changed to allow junior hunters and their mentors to harvest a bear if they so choose."

Proposal to Rescind an Antlerless-only Requirement for Several Wildlife Management Units (WMUs)

DEC proposes to rescind the antlerless-only requirement for portions of the bow and muzzleloader seasons in WMUs 1C, 3M, 3S, 4J, 8A, 8C, 8F, 8G, 8H, 8N, 9A, and 9F, again allowing take of antlered and antlerless deer during the entire bow and muzzleloader seasons in these units. In these WMUs, deer populations are above desired levels, and the antlerless-only rule was implemented in 2015 as part of a multi-phase process to increase antlerless harvest. However, reported harvest of female deer did not differ substantially between the WMUs with the antlerless-only periods and nearby WMUs without the rule, nor did the antlerless-only periods increase reported female take as desired.

"We are optimistic that hunters will embrace their role in reducing deer numbers in these areas for the benefit of local residents and habitats," Seggos said. "Over the next year we will be exploring options for hunters to increase their take of antlerless deer where needed and to engage more purposefully in our management processes."

Proposal to Reduce Antlerless Harvest in WMUs 6F and 6J

In response to recent declines in deer populations in WMUs 6F and 6J, DEC is proposing to prohibit harvest of antlerless deer during the early muzzleloader season in these units. Winter weather conditions are a primary driver of deer abundance in these WMUs, and the winters of 2013 and 2014 were especially harsh. Coupled with mild conditions this past winter, further reductions of the harvest of antlerless deer are intended to prevent further population decline and to stimulate growth.

Proposal to Clarify When Bow and Muzzleloader Tags May be Used

DEC proposes a minor technical correction to clarify that hunters who purchase both the bow and muzzleloader license privileges may use the Bow/Muzzleloader either-sex and Bow/Muzzleloader antlerless-only deer tags in either season or both in one of the seasons with the appropriate implement. This has always been DEC's intent, but ambiguity in the current wording could lead to confusion. Hunters who purchase just one of the special season privileges will still only be allowed to use the Bow/Muzzleloader tag during that particular special season.

Fisher and General Trapping Regulatory Proposal

The New York State Fisher Management Plan was completed in December 2015 and formed the basis for regulatory changes to provide sustainable fisher harvest opportunities in many areas of the state. The original regulatory proposal to implement these changes was published in March 2015. Based on the comments received on the plan and the proposed regulations, the department revised the proposed regulations, which are now available for review and public comment.

Comments on the plan and the original regulatory proposal expressed concerns about the extent of the proposed season reduction in the Adirondacks and the timing of that season, as well as the use of a bag limit in units that were proposed to be open to trapping in Central and Western New York. A fundamental part of the plan is that fisher populations can generally

sustain annual harvest rates of approximately 20 percent. The revisions made in the final plan and proposed regulations for the Adirondacks and Central/Western New York will allow managers to accommodate trappers' desires while meeting biological objectives for a sustainable harvest. Therefore, DEC is proposing the following adjustment to current fisher trapping regulations, beginning in fall 2016:

- Reduce the fisher trapping season from 46 days to 30 days in selected Adirondack Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) in Northern New York, where harvests may be exceeding 20 percent and populations have declined in recent years, with a season start date of November 1.
- Establish a limited six-day open trapping season in selected WMUs in Central/Western New York to provide new opportunities for sustainable use of this natural resource. There is no bag limit (same as in areas that have been open for decades). Surveys by DEC staff in collaboration with researchers at Cornell University used trail cameras at more than 600 locations to document that fishers are now well-established throughout the southernmost WMUs in this region.

The proposed changes to trapping regulations would remain in effect for at least three years and then be evaluated to determine if additional changes are warranted. No changes are proposed for Southeastern New York at this time because the current regulations provide ample trapping opportunities and populations are stable or increasing.

In addition to changes in the fisher season, minor modifications are proposed to general trapping regulations because current wording has led to confusion among both trappers and law enforcement personnel, complicating compliance and enforcement.

Because this is a revision of a regulatory proposal that was originally released for public comment in 2015, the comment period is 30 days rather than the usual 45 days.

The Fisher Management Plan is available on DEC's website. An Assessment of Public Comment for the draft plan that was released in early 2015 is available on the site, as is an Assessment of Public Comment for the original regulatory proposal that was published in spring 2015.

To Review Proposals and Submit Comments

For more detailed explanations of these proposed regulations and for instructions on submitting comments, go to DEC's website.

Comments on the proposed deer and bear hunting regulations must be received by June 25, 2016.

Comments on the proposed fisher and general trapping regulations must be received by June 10, 2016.

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