

Deer Harvest Down 12% From 2012 Opening Weekend

News

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Hunters checked 61,446 deer during the opening weekend of the November Portion of Firearms Deer Season, in spite of awful weather conditions.



The Missouri Department of Conservation says the slow start doesn't diminish prospects for a normal deer harvest.

In North Missouri, the number of deer checked include Grundy county 411, Livingston county 500, Mercer county, 565, Daviess county 618, Sullivan county 749 and Linn county with 831 deer.

The opening-weekend harvest was down 12 percent compared to 2012. Conservation Department biologists predicted that this year's deer harvest would be smaller than last year's, due to a smaller statewide deer population and acorn abundance.

Last year's opening-weekend harvest of 69,614 was the smallest opening-weekend harvest in more than 20 years. Yet, in spite of that slow start, hunters shot enough deer during the remainder of the firearms deer season to post the third-largest total deer harvest in Missouri history.

"The distribution of our deer harvest over the course of the season has changed dramatically in the past 20 years," says Conservation Department Resource Scientist Jason Sumners. "Back then, people only had nine days to hunt with modern firearms, so a significant reduction in the opening-weekend harvest was almost certain to result in a reduced deer harvest for the year. Today, Firearms Deer Season spans 42 days, so there is no rush to shoot a deer the first two days of the November Portion."

That is not to say that hunters don't want to shoot deer on opening weekend. But this year's weather was challenging, even for highly motivated hunters.

"I didn't think it could get any worse than last year," says Sumners, "but it did."

"Worse" included temperatures in the 70s, rain on Saturday and winds so gusty that the eastern third of Missouri was under a tornado watch on Sunday morning.

"Those conditions are guaranteed to reduce deer harvest," says Sumners. "Deer are less active when the weather is warm or extremely windy, and rain keeps some hunters indoors. By noon on Sunday, I think a lot of hunters just gave up fighting the weather."

All the same, Sumners is optimistic about prospects for the rest of the season. He said he expects hunters to persevere throughout the remainder of the November, Alternative Methods, Antlerless, and Late Youth portions of firearms deer season — 36 days in all.

Top harvest counties for the opening weekend were Howell with 1,278 deer checked, Texas with 1,275, and Oregon with 1,109. The fact that three adjoining counties in the heart of the Ozarks had the highest harvest totals probably is no coincidence. The Ozarks' rugged terrain creates sheltered refuges from wind, making deer easier for hunters to find. Also, the Ozarks had the lowest

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acorn production of any region in the state, further concentrating deer around available food.

The Conservation Department recorded two nonfatal, firearms-related hunting incidents during the opening weekend.