A chronology of Wisconsin deer hunting from closed seasons to antlerless permits

Weekly News Article Published: November 8, 2011 by the Central Office

MADISON - Wisconsin has a long and storied tradition of regulated gun deer hunting, going back to 1851. There have been many changes over the years, but none more dramatic as those experienced by hunters during the 1990's and early twenty-first century.

1834 - Lafayette County, first reported crop damage by deer.
1851 - First closed season for deer, Feb. 1 - June 30; Indians permitted to hunt anytime.
1876 - Hunting with dogs prohibited statewide.
1887 - Two game wardens appointed by governor at a monthly salary of $50; night hunting prohibited statewide.
1888 - Game laws published in pamphlet form.
1890 - First chief warden appointed.
1892 - Lawful to kill any dog running or hunting deer.
1895 - Sheboygan first county closed to deer hunting; deer cannot be transported unless accompanied by hunter; last October deer season in state.
1897 - First bag limit for deer, two per season; resident license costs $1, nonresident license costs $30; estimated license sales total 12,000.
1900 - Twelve hunters killed by firearms.
1903 - Estimated 78,164 licenses sold.
1905 - Salt licks prohibited.
1909 - Season 20 days long, limit one deer; first civil service exam given on a competitive basis for prospective wardens.
1910 - Deer populations drop to record low numbers due to unregulated hunting and market shooting.
1914 - Twenty-four hunters killed, 26 injured; license sales at 155,000
1915 - First buck only season.
1917 - Shining deer illegal while possessing a firearm; Conservation Commission delegated some powers related to deer season, but legislature retains authority to set seasons; deer tags (paper) required for the first time...they cost 10 cents.
1919 - Estimated kill is 25,152.
1920 - First use of metal deer tags...they cost 10 cents.
1921 - Wardens are instructed that "all deer found in possession...with horns less than three inches in length, is a fawn and should be confiscated."
1924 - Estimated kill is 7000.
1925 - Legislature passes law closing deer season in alternate years.
1927 - No open season.
1928 - Deer hunters required to wear official conservation button while hunting; Game Division formed with Conservation Department; estimated kill is 17,000 with 69,049 deer tags sold.
1929 - No open season.
1930 - Estimated kill is 23,000 with 70,284 deer tags sold.
1931 - No open season.
1932 - Deer tag price is raised to $1; estimated kill is 36,009 with 70,245 deer tags sold.
1933 - No open season; Conservation Congress, an advisory group representing public opinion registered at annual county hearings, begins to assist the Conservation Commission in establishing a deer management policy.
1934 - First bow deer season; estimated gun kill is 21,251 with 83,939 deer tags sold.
1935 - No open season.
1937 - Shortest deer season on record, three days.
1938 - Use of .22 rifle and .410 shotgun prohibited.
1939 - Licensed children between ages 12 and 16 must be accompanied by parent or guardian; buckshot prohibited statewide.
1941 - Deer predators rare, timber wolves nearing extinction; estimated gun kill is 40,403 with 124,305 deer tags sold.
1942 - Back tags required while deer hunting.
1943 - First doe and fawn season in 24 years.
1945 - First year of 'shotgun only' counties; wearing red clothing required while hunting deer.
1950 - First 'any deer' season since 1919; estimated gun kill is 167,911 with 312,570 deer tags sold.
1951 - 100th established gun deer season; deer hunting license and tag cost $2.50; orange clothing now included under red clothing law; Wisconsin leads nation in whitetail deer kill for third consecutive year.
1953 - First season gun deer hunters required to register deer at checking station.
1954 - Two-thirds of bucks harvested are less than three years old; portions of Walworth and Waukesha Counties and all of Jefferson County open for the first time since 1906.
1956 - Registered gun kill is 35,562 with 294,645 deer tags sold.
1957 - Legislature authorizes party permit.
1958 - Longest deer season since 1916, 16 days; Rock County open for the first time since 1906; first harvest by deer management unit (in northwest and northeast only); registered gun kill is 95,234, of which 44,987 taken by party permit; 335,866 deer tags and 58,348 party permits sold, respectively.
1959 - First statewide deer registration by unit; Game Management Division of Conservation Department assumes responsibility for coordinating the state's deer program; first open season in Kenosha County since 1906.

1960 - Hunter not permitted to buy a license after opening day of gun season; Green and Racine Counties open for the first time since 1906; all counties now open except Milwaukee; registered gun kill is 61,005, of which 25,515 taken by party permit; 338,208 deer tags and 47,522 party permits sold, respectively.

1961 - Resident big game license increased from $4 to $5; first use of SAK - sex-age-kill population-reconstruction technique for estimating deer numbers; hunters required to transport deer openly while driving to registration station; legislation authorizing unit specific quotas for antlerless harvest established.

1962 - Deer population above 400,000; deer management unit specific population goals established.

1963 - First year of quota party permits in eight management units; assassination of President Kennedy lessens hunting pressure.

1964 - Party permit quota extended to 32 management units.

1967 - Hunter Safety Education Program begins.

1970 - Registered gun kill is 72,844 with 501,799 licenses sold; 13 hunters killed.

1973 - No deer season fatalities.

1978 - Record registered gun kill is 150,845 with 644,594 licenses sold.

1980 - Blaze orange clothing required; first season of Hunter's Choice permit; new law prohibits shining wild animals from 10pm to 7pm, Sept. 15 - Dec. 31; coyote season closed in northern management units to protect nascent wolf population.

1981 - Record registered deer kill of 166,673 with 629,034 licenses sold.

1982 - Another record registered gun kill of 182,715 with 637,320 licenses sold; three deer season fatalities.

1983 - Harvest continues to rise with another record registered gun kill of 197,600 with 649,972 licenses sold; experimental antlerless deer hunt in six southern management units to relieve crop damage.

1984 - Big jump in registered kill, fourth record harvest in a row of 255,726 with license sales totaling 657,969; handgun deer hunting allowed in shotgun areas; group hunting legalized.

1985 - Fifth consecutive record kill of 274,302 with 670,329 licenses sold; deer season extended in 21 management units; legislature further strengthens road hunting restrictions.

1986 - Gun deer season now nine days statewide; landowner preference program begins for Hunter's Choice permits.

1987 - First year of bonus antlerless permits; seven fatalities and 46 hunting accidents.

1988 - Handguns permitted statewide.
1989 - Record registered harvest of 310,192 with 662,280 licenses sold; pre-hunt herd estimate of 1.15 million deer; two fatalities and 37 hunting accidents.

1990 - Another record kill of 350,040, including 209,005 antlerless deer; record license sales of 699,275; pre-hunt herd estimate of 1.3 million deer; season extended for seven days in 67 management units.

1991 - Third consecutive year of record harvest, 352,330; hunters allowed to buy more than one antlerless permit; season extended to 72 management units, mostly in the north; first year of separate, seven-day muzzleloader season.

1992 - Though kill fourth highest on record, 288,820, many hunters voice discontent over lack of success and claim DNR raised expectations by pre-hunt harvest prediction of around 370,000; hunters allowed to apply for bonus antlerless permits in more than one unit; Natural Resources Board approves Secretary's recommendation to keep the gun season at nine days; new metro management units established around La Crosse, Madison and Milwaukee.

1993 - Harvest drops to 217,584, including 100,977 antlerless deer; pre-hunt herd population at 1 million with many units well below prescribed goals; 34 units, mainly in the north, designated as buck-only units; one fatality, 17 hunting accidents.

1994 - Hunters Choice permit availability jumps to 177,340 from 103,140 in 1993; six northwest management units remain buck only; herd beginning to build-up in southern agricultural range.

1995 - Harvest totals 398,002, a new state record; 32 accidents, one fatal; over 577,000 antlerless permits available with 414,000 plus applicants with 163,000 bonus permits offered to hunters; for the first time hunters can use their bonus or Hunter's Choice permits in either the gun, bow or muzzleloader seasons.

1996 - "Earn a Buck" requirement placed on hunters in 19 deer management units situated in agricultural range where existing deer seasons and permit systems aren't controlling herd growth; special four-day antlerless only season, state's first October hunt since 1897, takes place in 19 'Earn a Buck' units, resulting in a kill of 24,954 deer.

1997 - 'Earn a Buck' provision scuttled; early Zone T season in seven management units and three state parks results in over 7000 deer killed; the safest gun season even with one fatality and 10 accidents.

1998 - An early October gun season for third year in a row held in one management unit, 67A; harvest of 332,254 is fifth highest; accidents total 19 with two fatalities; most units in all regions of the state estimated to be above prescribed goals due to the mild winter of 1997-98.

1999 - Early antlerless Zone T deer season held in seven mainly east-central management units and one state park; early archery season is extended through Nov. 18 in Zone T units; pre-hunt herd estimate is 1.5 to 1.6 million deer; 33 management units in the central and southern part of the state are designated 'watch unit's that are above population goals and may be designated as Zone T units.
next year if quota numbers aren't filled; resident deer license costs $20; non-resident license costs $135; record harvest of 402,204 deer.

**2000** - Early four-day Zone T antlerless hunts produces kill of 66,417 deer; 97 of the state's 132 deer management units listed as Zone T; two free antlerless permits given to all hunters buying deer-related licenses; hunters kill a record 528,494 deer during the early antlerless only, nine-day, muzzleloader and late antlerless only gun seasons; nine-day gun harvest totals a record 442,581 (170,865 antlered, 271,573 antlerless); 694,957 licensed gun hunters.

**2001** - Wisconsin's pre-hunt population estimated at 1.5 million deer; free antlerless permit given to all hunters buying deer-related licenses; 67 deer management units and nine state parks designated as Zone T; October and December four-day, Zone T antlerless hunts results in kill of 58,107 deer; nine-day gun harvest is the state's fifth largest, totaling 361,264 (141,942 antlered, 219,260 antlerless); chronic wasting disease (CWD) later identified in three deer harvested in the Dane County Town of Vermont.

**2002** - Herd estimate at 1.34 million deer; DNR samples about 41,000 deer during the early Zone T antlerless hunt (Oct. 24-27) and opening weekend (Nov. 23-24) of the nine-day gun season to determine if CWD is present anywhere else in the state besides the Disease Eradication Zone in southwest Wisconsin; expanded hunting opportunities set-up in the CWD Management Zone and a gun deer season slated for Oct. 24 to Jan. 31 in the CWD Eradication Zone; October and November four-day, Zone T antlerless hunts in 25 deer management units produce a harvest of 36,228 deer; hunters register 277,755 deer during the traditional, nine-day season; number of licensed gun hunters drops about 10 percent with much of the decrease attributed to concerns about CWD.

**2003** - Fall deer population estimated at 1.4 million; landowners in CWD Disease Eradication Zone (DEZ) can request free permits to harvest deer without a license and receive two buck tags per permit; earn-a-buck (EAB) rules in effect and no bag limits on deer in the CWD management zones; deer hunting license sales up 14 percent over 2002, but down 13 percent when compared to 2001; overall, DNR collects 15,025 samples for disease surveillance with 115 wild deer testing positive for CWD; all but two positives are from the Disease Eradication zones (DEZ) of southwest Wisconsin and Rock County; hunters killed 388,344 deer during the early antlerless only, nine-day gun, muzzleloader and land antlerless only deer seasons.

**2004** - Many deer management units (DMU's) in all regions of the state estimated to be above prescribed management goals with 48 DMU's designated as Zone T and 26 units as EAB; fall deer population estimated at 1.7 million deer; hunters issued one free antlerless permit for each license type (archery or gun) up to a maximum of two; during all seasons, hunters in the CWD DEZ and much larger Herd Reduction Zone (HRZ) are required to kill an antlerless deer before harvesting a buck; hunters kill 413,794 deer during the early antlerless only, nine-day gun, muzzle loader, late antlerless only and CWD zone deer seasons; eight gun deer hunting accidents documented with two
fatalities; all accidents are either self-inflicted or shooter and victim were in the same party; hunters set a new record of venison donations by giving 10,938 deer yielding nearly 500,000 pounds of venison for food pantries to feed needy people across the state.

2005 - Forty-five DMU's designated as Zone T units with unlimited antlerless permits and expanded gun hunting opportunities; hunters issued free antlerless permits for both archery and gun licenses; permits valid in any Zone T and CWD units; hunters in CWD units could get an unlimited number of antlerless permits at the rate of four per day; hunters harvest 387,310 deer during the early October, regular gun, late December and muzzleloader seasons combined, the eighth highest kill on record; 195,735 deer harvested during the opening weekend (Nov. 19-20) of the nine-day gun season; gun deer sales total 643,676, down one percent from 2004; DNR conducts CWD surveillance survey in the agency's Northeast Region where 4500 deer are tested and CWD not detected; 14 accidents, including three fatals, during the nine-day season (Nov. 19-27); top five gun deer harvest counties - all located in central Wisconsin - are Marathon (15,871), Clark (13,918), Waupaca (12,260), Shawano (11,748) and Jackson (11,461).

2006 - Statewide harvest quota totals 469,385 antlerless deer; over 1 million antlerless deer permits issued to reach this quota; all hunters issued one free antlerless permit for each license type (bow and gun) with permits valid in any Herd Control, EAB and CWD units; hunters kill the fifth highest gun total (393,306) during the youth, regular gun, late December and muzzleloader seasons combined; 10 accidents, one fatal, with five self-inflicted and five with shooter and victim in the same party.

2007 - The 156th deer season; state's deer herd estimated between 1.6 and 1.8 million animals heading into the regular nine-day (Nov. 17-25) gun hunt and the 23-day (Nov. 17-Dec.9) hunt in the CWD Zones; 57 of Wisconsin's 130 DMU's have EAB rules; more than 65,000 hunters "prequalified" for a buck sticker in 2007 by registering an antlerless deer during 2006; 40 DMU's, many in the north, are on the "EAB Watch List" and may be EAB units in 2008 if antlerless kill isn't sufficient.

2008 - 57 DMUs under EAB regulations and hunters must "earn" a buck sticker authorizing them to shoot a buck by first killing an antlerless deer; 51 DMUs are on the EAB "watch list" meaning they could be designated as EAB units in 2009 if a sufficient number of antlerless deer aren't harvested; most of southern Wisconsin lies within the new CWD-Management Zone (CWD-MZ) boundary and rifles can be used to hunt deer in previously shotgun only areas of the CWD Zone; traditional gun season runs from Nov. 22-30, the second latest possible opening day under the current nine-day season; hunting conditions considered above average throughout the state for most of the nine-day season; over 642,000 licensed hunters kill 352,601 deer during all gun seasons (103,845 antlered & 248,756 antlerless); nine accidents, one fatal, all either self inflicted or shooter and victim in the same party, during the nine-day season.
2009 - Opening morning of the nine-day gun hunt had above normal temps with heavy fog throughout much of the state. No portions of the state had snow cover for the season's opening weekend. While conditions were conducive for hunters sitting in stands, deer activity and sight ability were probably reduced due to fog. Temps return to normal by mid-week, with little or no snow fall during the rest of the season. New Mentored Hunting Program permitted a licensed hunter 18 years or older to take out anyone 10 years and older for a hunt. Gun deer license sales 2.1 percent lower than in 2008. Hunters kill the 25th highest total during all gun seasons - 241,862 (92,754 antlered, 146,917 antlerless).

2010 - The 159th deer season. 19 DMUs in the north have buck only hunting during the gun and bow seasons. The total statewide antlerless harvest is likely to decline has the herd is allowed to grow in some areas. The buck kill will vary among units, but from a statewide perspective it likely will not change much. No EAB units except in CWD-MZ. Still, roughly half of the DMUs are in a herd control season structure where deer population estimates are currently 20 percent or more above goal. Hunters may now divide a deer into up to five parts (four quarters plus the head attached to the spinal column and rib cage) to facilitate removal from the field. Hunters harvest a total of 253,038 deer during the gun seasons and 83,833 during archery seasons.

2011 - The number of DMUs in the north restricted to buck-only harvest for most hunters has been reduced to 8 from 19 in the previous season due to herd growth; 96 DMUs are in Herd Control or CWD season structures; all other units have limited antlerless deer harvest quotas. The October antlerless deer gun hunt in areas outside the CWD Management Zone is suspended in 2011. Hunters in the CWD Management Zone may shoot a buck first before having to follow EAB rules. Archery season is extended through the gun deer season. It is now legal to hunt deer with a rifle in Waupaca County. A Deer Trustee has been contracted for a scientific review of Wisconsin deer management policies and procedures. The first year of a multi year study to determine causes of deer death by hunter, disease, weather, predator, vehicle and other causes is a success. Over 400 hunters volunteer time to help with the research.