

TO: NYS DEC – FWMR

FROM: Rich Davenport – Region 9 Rep NYSCC Big Game Committee

RE: Big Game Hunting Proposals – Southern Zone of NY

DATE: October 2, 2009

The following is a proposal for improving big game hunting in NYS, which will enhance deer management efforts, improve recruitment and retention opportunities for sportsmen and our conservation stewards, while simultaneously delivering additional opportunity for economic and revenue generating activity in Southern Zone of NYS.

Proposal 1: Early Archery Season Expansion

Move season opening date up 7 days to the Last Saturday before Columbus Day

Justification: Archery season length has been adversely affected by the 2005 Big Game season restructuring, resulting in some years where up to 8 days are lost on this important season. These periodic losses in time afield also adversely affect harvest potential and economic activity generated by approximately 205,000 bowhunters across NYS, which impacts many local economies, businesses and tax revenue. This one-week move will assure archers of a full and comparable season length during years where calendar dates create a shortened season. Further, moving the season opener to the last Saturday before Columbus Day follows the recommendations of the NYSCC Big Game Committee as voted on during the April 2009 Legislative Meeting in Herkimer, NY.

Why last Saturday before Columbus Day?

- Additional 7 days will restore time losses archers must endure periodically
- Retains resource equity for small game hunters, affording this group two weeks of good weather to work their sporting dogs in pursuit of grouse and rabbits
- Creates tremendous recruitment opportunity for YOUTH hunters, as Columbus Day is a school holiday, affording parents and youths an opportunity for the excitement of opening day of early archery to become a very family-friendly event
- Retains the Saturday big game opening strategy started in 2005
- Matches the recommendations from the NYSCC Big Game Committee at the April 2009 Legislative Meeting in Herkimer, NY

Proposal 2: Regular Big Game Season Opening Day

Set Opening Day of Regular Season as Last Saturday before Thanksgiving, 23 day season

Justification: Regular Season opener under 2005 restructured dates most often falls on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, however, on occasion the season will open the week prior. By setting the Regular Opener to always fall on the Saturday before Thanksgiving we assure all big game hunters of an opening week which is shortened by a Holiday. This move will allow for more consistent hunting vacation planning for NYS Big Game Hunters.

Why the last Saturday Before Thanksgiving?

- Sets season opener to always begin just prior to the start of a Holiday week
- Many hunters are pressed for time, and through opening the Saturday before Thanksgiving, this allows working hunters the opportunity to plan their vacations to coincide with a Holiday week, which preserves precious vacation time to be used on other family activities.
- Will afford archers the confidence in knowing the rut will most likely begin prior to end of archery season, while offering more effective protection of breeding deer from firearms hunter vulnerability

Proposal 3: Early Muzzleloader Season

Establish an early ML season, last 7 days of September, antlerless only deer, using “leftover” statewide valid tags, no leftover DMP, primitive ML only, no optics

Details of Season:

- To Commence on September 24, and run 7 days, with last day September 30.
- Eligible Hunters must possess a valid NYS Big Game Hunting License and ML Hunting privilege
- Primitive ML defined as a rifle or musket with a smooth or rifled barrel loaded through the muzzle and shooting a round patched ball. It will possess a side lock in the form of an external hammer design (serpentine, cock or hammer) that either holds a rope (slow match) or flint or has a hammer that fires a percussion cap. It will also possess a flash pan, touchhole or nipple that is situated on the side, top or bottom of the barrel with sights that are open or peep in design (no optics allowed), minimum bore size of .44 inches, single projectile only.
- Hunters may use only valid Regular Big Game Deer carcass tag, special ML carcass tag (s) for antlerless deer only. Use of DMPs prohibited.

Justification: Currently the Muzzleloading hunters do not have any season unto their own, despite showing approximately 230,000 special license holders, while spending the same cost level as Bowhunters do for their special license. The DEC also needs additional tools to help better manage antlerless deer and control herd growth while reducing crop damage and deer-car collisions. Early ML season would be recreational in nature, being self-limiting due to primitive implement and use of leftover statewide tags, with harvest potential being minimal and therefore showing very little, if any, impacts on current antlerless management strategies. The early primitive season will afford DEC the opportunity to study its effects and develop additional metrics based on current antlerless management plans. This season would also create an added value to the license, capitalizing upon the fact that carcass tags are valid through September 30, and while the Northern Zone enjoys an added value through archery season opening in late September, the Southern Zone hunters have no such added value opportunity. Due to the primitive nature of this season, fears over gunshots altering deer movement patterns and behavior in advance of early archery become unjustifiable, and coupled with the 10-12 day “break” would do nothing adverse to the bowhunting experience. The season in this proposal follows the unanimous recommendations of the NYSCC Big Game Committee by vote during the April 2008 Legislative Meeting in Herkimer, NY, and this period for the early ML season is supported by affirmed resolution of the NYSCC, September 2008 Annual convention.

Why a late-September early ML season?

- NYS now has approximately 230,000 ML hunters, yet this specialized interest does not currently have a special season of their own, and is sorely warranted, considering the growth in ML popularity and the funding this special privilege generates, despite the primitive nature of this proposed season
- NYS DEC is delivered an additional opportunity for study of the effects of early ML season on current antlerless management strategies without jeopardizing the current program (due to limiting nature of the early season,) as to best determine its effectiveness and potential success as an additional antlerless management vehicle
- Late September season delivers an added value to Southern Zone Hunters, increasing the opportunity of stronger hunter retention and recruitment
- Northern Zone currently offers an added value through season structure of early archery, where the Southern Zone has no such value
- ML hunters show the greatest willingness to harvest antlerless deer
- ML hunters show a higher ratio of adult does to fawns harvested, reducing incidental fawn buck harvest
- No conflicts exist with other big game hunting seasons
- Enforcement, due to the hard stop on the tags, is simplified
- Parents and youths may take advantage of this 7-day season due to extended daylight hours (after work/ after school hunting opportunity)
- Creates additional incentive for more ML licenses to be sold
- Creates the opportunity for local economies to reap additional economic and revenue growth

- 8 of 11 Northeast/ Mid-Atlantic States offer an early ML hunting opportunity
- Northern Zone of NY offers an early ML hunting opportunity
- The “closed” period of time between end of early ML season and start of early archery will allow any pressure-related changes in deer behavior to subside
- Provides older hunters no longer capable of archery hunting participation a deer hunting opportunity during warmer, nicer weather
- Creates a season close to harvest to help reduce crop damage sustained by farmers
- Follows the recommendations made by the NYSCC Big Game Committee during the April 2008 Legislative meeting in Herkimer, NY

Proposal 4: Regular Bear Season Opening Day Change

Open Regular Bear season in the former Allegany Bear Range (now western/ central southern bear range) to coincide with Regular Deer Season opener

Justification: Moving regular Bear Season to open with regular deer season is needed due to the rapid expansion of black bears throughout WNY. This additional week will make consistent all bear areas and their opening day coinciding with regular deer season, creating more opportunity at harvest, which should result in opportunity to better manage this burgeoning resource.

Why open Regular Bear Season with Regular Deer season in the West/ Central Southern Bear Range?

- Bear populations continue to climb in the West/ Central Southern NY Bear Range
- Current trends in population expansion mirror the Catskills area, only show to be about 10 years behind (in 10 years the numbers are predicted to be on par or exceed the Eastern NY Southern Bear Range)
- Increased bear complaints indicate and warrant additional time for management (87 complaints in Region 9 in 2008, 131 bear complaints in R9 in 2009, to date)
- Depending on weather conditions, many bruins are beginning to den by the season opener and offer little management opportunity for the DEC
- Crop damage continues to rise due to bear activity, and increased management opportunity should reduce problems for agriculture
- Expanding bear ranges into northern areas can be curtailed through additional time to manage bears

I thank you for your time and serious consideration of the above proposal. Through adopting this plan, we will enhance our abilities to better manage the resources, improve recruitment and retention opportunity, deliver additional help to agriculture and insurance concerns, while helping to that some of the “sting” out of the recent license fee increases NYS had to affect.

Sincerely,

Rich Davenport – Region 9 Rep NYSCC Big Game Committee