



2026 Firearm/Muzzleloader Deer Harvest Reporting & Hunting Regulations Information Sheet

Your deer permit entitles you to participate in the privilege of deer hunting. Please review this information to ensure that you comply with all of the deer hunting regulations. While hunting, please respect the rules of good sportsmanship and the property of others.

Have a safe and successful deer hunt.

MANDATORY DEER HARVEST REPORTING

Successful deer hunters must register (report) their harvest by 10 p.m. on the same calendar day the deer was taken by calling the toll-free telephone check-in system at 1-866-452-4325 (1-866-IL-CHECK) or by accessing the online check-in system: <https://www.exploremoreil.com/wildlife/harvest>.

Note to cell phone users: The most common reason hunters are unable to complete their harvest report is because of a poor cell phone connection. Once you have properly tagged your deer, wait until you are out of the woods and receive a clear, strong cell phone connection before placing your call.

TAGGING: The temporary harvest tag (leg tag) shall be attached and properly sealed immediately upon kill and before the deer is moved, transported or field dressed. No person shall leave any deer that has been killed without properly attaching the temporary harvest tag (leg tag) to the deer in the manner prescribed on the permit.

HARVEST REPORTING: Hunters must register (report) their harvest by 10 p.m. on the same calendar day the deer was taken. If a hunter is not able to locate a harvested deer in sufficient time to enable reporting the harvest by 10 p.m., the hunter must immediately report the harvest upon retrieving it. When reporting, hunters will be asked a series of questions to help biologists manage Illinois' deer population (additional information below). Before checking in your deer, please look over the questions listed on the back of your permit and be prepared to answer them. Please have a pen or pencil on hand when making the call (an extra-fine-tipped permanent marker works best). Upon completion, the hunter will be provided with a confirmation number to verify that he or she checked in the harvest. The confirmation number must be written by the hunter onto the temporary harvest tag (leg tag). If the condition of the tag precludes writing on the tag in the appropriate space (i.e., bloody, etc.), the confirmation number shall be written elsewhere on the tag, or onto a piece of paper, and attached to the deer along with the temporary harvest tag (leg tag). The temporary harvest tag (leg tag) and confirmation number must remain attached to the deer until it is at the legal residence of the person who legally took or possessed the deer, the deer has been checked in, and final processing is completed. The deer must remain whole (or field dressed) until it has been checked in.

In instances where deer are checked in while the hunter is still afield, the deer may not be dismembered while afield beyond quartering the animal. If quartered, all parts of the carcass (except the entrails removed during field dressing) must be transported together and evidence of sex must remain naturally attached to one quarter. Evidence of sex is:

A) For a buck: head with antlers attached to carcass, or attached testicle, scrotum, or penis

B) For a doe: head attached to carcass, or attached udder (mammary) or vulva.

If the head/antlers are delivered to a taxidermist for processing, the confirmation number must be recorded on the "head tag" portion of the permit, and both must remain with the deer while at the taxidermist. If the carcass is taken to a meat processor, the temporary harvest tag (leg tag) with confirmation number must remain with the deer while it is processed, and until it is at the legal residence of the person who legally took or possessed the deer. Persons delivering deer/parts of deer to a tanner for processing must supply the tanner with either their deer permit number, their confirmation number, or a written certification by the person from whom the deer was received that the specimen was legally taken or obtained.

ANTLERED DEER - A deer having at least one antler of a length of 3 or more inches

ANTLERLESS DEER - A deer without antlers or a deer having antlers less than 3 inches long.

Notes:

- Unfilled Property-Only Hunting (Landowner) Firearm Deer Permits are valid during the Muzzleloader Season (with a muzzleloading rifle) and during the Late-Winter and Special CWD Seasons (**if open in that county**).
- Any unfilled Firearm or Muzzleloader permits *except* Special Hunt Area permits that were valid during the previous Firearm or Muzzleloader-Only Seasons are valid during the Late-Winter Antlerless-Only Firearm Season (**if open in that county**), but the holder may only harvest antlerless deer. Unfilled Youth Firearm Deer season permits, issued as part of the statewide Youth-Only Deer Hunting Season Pilot Program, are valid for all of the open Late-Winter Season counties, but the holder may only harvest antlerless deer.
- Any unfilled Firearm or Muzzleloader permits *except* Special Hunt Area permits that were valid during the previous Firearm or Muzzleloader-Only Seasons are valid during the CWD Firearm Season (**if open in that county**). Unfilled Youth Firearm Deer Season permits, issued as part of the statewide Youth-Only Deer Hunting Season Pilot Program, are valid for all of the open CWD Season counties.
- Hunters shall not have in their possession, while in the field during deer season, any deer permit issued to another person.
- It is illegal to use salt, corn, or any other kind of bait. An area is considered as baited during the presence of and for 10 consecutive days following the removal of bait. NOTE: Feeding deer is also illegal, although there are certain exemptions such as food plots. Consult the Hunting Digest for more complete information.
- Permits will not be reissued in cases involving deer taken which are found to be diseased or spoiled due to previous injury. Legal disposal of unfit deer taken shall be the responsibility of the hunter.
- In those counties where deer hunting is permitted, it is unlawful to hunt or trap any species protected by the Wildlife Code, except migratory waterfowl, unless the blaze orange or blaze pink clothing required for deer hunters is worn during the firearm deer seasons.
- It is unlawful to take or attempt to take deer: a) in excess of the legal limit; b) during closed season; c) by use of dogs*, horses, automobiles, aircraft, boats or other vehicles. ***This does not prohibit the use of a leashed dog to track wounded deer.***
- Totally white white-tailed deer are protected by Illinois law and are illegal to kill.

For more information:

- Visit our website at www.dnr.illinois.gov
- Refer to the Illinois Digest of Hunting & Trapping Regulations
- Contact one of the offices below:

Springfield Permits Office:	217-782-7305
Springfield Law Enforcement Office:	217-782-6431
Springfield Wildlife Office:	217-782-6384
Hunter Safety Education Classes:	1-800-832-2599

FIREARM OWNERS ID CARD (Issued by Illinois State Police):

Regardless of who owns the gun, anyone who has a firearm, including muzzleloaders, or firearm ammunition in their possession must have in their possession a valid Firearm Owners' ID (FOID) Card unless he or she is: a) A licensed out-of-state-sportsman hunting in Illinois, or b) Under the age of 21 and under the immediate control of a parent, guardian, or responsible adult who has in their possession a valid FOID Card.

For further FOID Card information, contact ISP at 217-782-7980.

DNR TTY: 217-782-9175

Permits are not transferable. "Transfer" means the modification or changing, by the Department or any other person, individual or group of the name or the location on an issued permit to another person or location.

2026 Firearm/Muzzleloader Deer Hunting Rules and Regulations

Season Dates

- 1st Firearm Season: Nov. 20-22, 2026
- 2nd Firearm Season: Dec. 3-6, 2026
- Muzzleloader-Only Season: Dec. 11-13, 2026
(Hunters may also use a muzzleloader permit with a muzzleloading rifle during 2nd Firearm Season Dec. 3-6, 2026)

Hunting Hours

One-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. Persons hunting deer must have gun unloaded during hours when deer hunting is unlawful. See "Legal Hunting Devices" for description of an unloaded muzzleloading rifle.

Permit, License, & Habitat Stamp Requirements

Permit: Recipients of Deer Firearm and Muzzleloader permits shall record their signature on the permit prior to hunting and must carry it on their person while hunting.

License: In addition to your deer permit, you must have a valid Illinois hunting, sportsman, youth, or apprentice license unless you are:

1. A person who is disabled and able to show proof of disability in the form of one of the following:
 - A State Disabled Person ID card (available from the Secretary of State through the Drivers License Examining Station) showing a P2, P2A, H2 or H2A disability; or
 - Veteran's disability card (at least 10% service related) - available from local Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs offices).

OR unless you are:
2. An Illinois resident on active duty and on leave from the U.S. Armed Forces.
3. A landowner or tenant residing on farmlands, or the children, parents, brothers, and sisters permanently residing on such lands, and hunting only the lands resided on. Landowners/Tenants are required to obtain a Habitat Stamp, unless exempt.

Habitat Stamp: Before any person 18 years of age or older takes, attempts to take, or pursues a deer, he or she shall first obtain a State Habitat Stamp. Disabled veterans and former prisoners of war shall not be required to obtain a State Habitat Stamp. Any person who obtained a Lifetime License before January 1, 1993, shall not be required to obtain a State Habitat Stamp.

Licenses/stamps are available at exploremoreil.com.

Clothing

Any person taking or attempting to take deer by use of a firearm shall wear, when in the field, a cap and upper outer garment of solid blaze orange or solid blaze pink color, displaying a minimum of 400 square inches of blaze orange or blaze pink material.

It Is Unlawful:

- to use or possess any other firearm or ammunition in the field while hunting white-tailed deer except as provided in the Firearm Concealed Carry Act;
- for any person having taken the legal limit of deer by firearm to further participate with a firearm in any deer hunting party;
- to drive deer, or participate in a deer drive, on all Department-owned or managed properties. A deer drive is defined as a deliberate action by one or more persons (whether armed or unarmed) whose intent is to cause deer to move within firearm range of one or more participating hunters.

For more details regarding deer hunting laws, please refer to the **Hunting Digest**, or contact IDNR Office of Law Enforcement at 217-782-6431.

Legal Hunting Devices

- Shotguns, loaded with slugs only, of not larger than 10 nor smaller than 20 gauge, not capable of firing more than three consecutive slugs; or
- Single- or double-barreled muzzleloading rifles of at least .45 caliber shooting a single projectile through a barrel of at least 16 inches in length; or
- Centerfire revolvers, centerfire single-shot handguns, and centerfire single-shot rifles. The barrel of a handgun shall be at least 4 inches.
- On private land only, archery equipment may be used with a firearm permit.

*** Additional Muzzleloading Regulations***

- A muzzleloading firearm is defined as a firearm into which the projectile is incapable of being inserted from the breech end.
- Only black powder or a "black powder substitute" such as Pyrodex may be used. Modern smokeless powders (nitrocellulose-based) are an approved black powder substitute only in muzzleloading firearms that are specifically designed for their use.
- Only percussion (cap or primer), wheellock, matchlock, flintlock or electronic ignition may be used.
- Removal of percussion cap/primer; removal of prime powder from frizzen pan with frizzen open and hammer all the way down; removal of prime powder from flashpan and wheel unwound; removal of prime powder and match with match not lit; or removal of the battery from the electronic ignition shall constitute an unloaded muzzleloading firearm.

Legal Ammunition

- For shotguns and muzzleloading firearms, the minimum size of the projectile shall be .44 caliber. A wad or sleeve is not considered a projectile or a part of the projectile.
- The only legal ammunition for a centerfire handgun or rifle is a bottleneck centerfire cartridge of .30 caliber or larger with a case length not exceeding one and two-fifths inches, or a straight-walled centerfire cartridge of .30 caliber or larger, both of which must be available as a factory load with the published ballistic tables of the manufacturer showing a capability of at least 500 foot pounds of energy at the muzzle. The barrel of a handgun shall be at least 4 inches.
- Non-expanding, military-style full metal jacket bullets cannot be used to harvest white-tailed deer; only soft point or expanding bullets (including copper/copper-alloy rounds designed for hunting) are legal ammunition.

Bag Limit

The bag limit is one deer per legally authorized either-sex, antlered-only or antlerless-only permit. All either-sex permits and antlered-only permits are subject to the following restriction: No hunter, regardless of the quantity or type of permits in his/her possession, may harvest more than 2 antlered deer during a year, including the Youth, Archery, Muzzleloader and Firearm Seasons. For purposes of this bag limit, deer seasons are considered to be in the same year if their opening dates fall within the same 12-month period that begins July 1. A hunter in possession of an either-sex permit after having harvested 2 antlered deer during a year may only use the permit to harvest an antlerless deer. Subject to this restriction, an either-sex permit holder is allowed to take a deer with or without antlers and an antlered-only permit holder is allowed to take only a deer having at least one antler of a length of 3 or more inches. An antlerless only permit holder is allowed to take only a deer without antlers or a deer having antlers less than 3 inches long.

Hunting Area

The specific county or hunt area for which the permit is issued. Permission to hunt on private property must be obtained from the property owner or tenant. Landowner permits are valid on all properties owned by that permittee, regardless of in which county the property is located, so long as that county is open for the specific hunting season for which the permit is issued. This includes all permits issued to: 1) A landowner, tenant, bona fide current income beneficiary, or the immediate family of a landowner, tenant, or income beneficiary; or 2) A bona fide equity shareholder, bona fide equity member, or bona fide equity partner and on all lands owned by the corporation, limited liability company or partnership. All tenant permits issued under this Part are valid only on lands rented/leased for commercial agriculture in the counties open for the specified hunting season. A hunting rights lease, or other nonagricultural lease, is not valid as a basis for obtaining a landowner or tenant permit.