

2026 Illinois Youth Deer Hunting Information

SEASON DATES: October 10-12, 2026

SHOOTING HOURS: ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset

OPEN COUNTIES/PUBLIC SITES: All counties except Cook, DuPage and Lake Counties, and that portion of Kane County east of State Route 47. A list of public sites open to the 2026 Youth Deer Hunt begins on page 3.

A statewide-issued youth deer hunt permit will authorize the holder to hunt in *any* of the open counties of the State, on property where permission to hunt has been obtained from the property owner, or at any of the public land sites listed on pages 3-5.

AGE RESTRICTIONS: The Youth Deer Season is open only to hunters who have not reached their 18th birthday prior to the opening date of the season.

RESIDENCY: The same youth deer hunt permit is available to eligible resident and nonresident youths regardless of residency.

PERMIT INFORMATION:

Purchase Dates: August 4 – October 12, 2026

Method of Purchase: Must purchase in-person at a [DNR License Vendor](#).

Fee: \$10.00 (additional charges apply)

Permit Limit: One combination (1 either-sex and 1 antlerless-only) youth deer hunt permit

Valid Dates to Use Permit: October 10-12, 2026. An unfilled youth deer permit is also valid to use on private land during the first and second firearm deer seasons (November 20-22 and Dec. 3-6, 2026); but, on public land, the permit may only be used on sites that allow unrestricted hunting. Unfilled permits are not valid on public land sites that limit the number of hunters during the firearm season via the use of a site permit quota.

LICENSE REQUIREMENTS: In addition to a current, valid youth deer hunt permit, all eligible youth hunters must have an apprentice or youth hunting license, or they must have completed a State-approved Hunter Education course and have a hunting license, unless exempt.

SUPERVISOR REQUIREMENTS: Each hunter participating in the Youth Deer Hunting Season while using an Apprentice Hunter License or a Youth Hunting License must be accompanied by a non-hunting, validly-licensed (Illinois hunting license) adult who is 21 years of age or older. All other hunters (using other types of hunting licenses or license-exempt) participating in the Youth Deer Hunting Season must each be accompanied by a non-hunting supervisor (parent, guardian or responsible adult). A nonresident supervisor must have a valid Illinois hunting license.

The non-hunting supervisor must wear the solid blaze orange/pink garments required of gun deer hunters and must remain with the hunting youth so as to have the youth under immediate control. Youths participating in the first or second firearm deer seasons using only an unfilled Youth Deer Permit (i.e., youths without a firearm deer season permit for that county) must be accompanied by a supervisor as described in this subsection (b), but, during the firearm deer season, that supervisor may also hunt so long as he/she has the appropriate licenses and permits. Each supervisor may only accompany a single youth at any given time during the hunt. The supervising adult shall be criminally liable for the actions of the youth in the hunting party and be subject to the criminal penalties provided by law.

BAG LIMITS: The bag limit is one (1) deer per legally authorized permit. All either-sex permits are subject to the following restrictions: no hunter, regardless of the quantity or type of permits in his/her possession, may harvest more than two (2) antlered deer during a year, including the youth, archery, muzzleloader and firearm seasons. Deer seasons are considered to be in the same year if their opening dates fall within the same 12-month period that begins on July 1.

LEGAL HUNTING DEVICES:

1. Shotgun, loaded with slugs only, of not larger than 10 nor smaller than 20 gauge, not capable of firing more than 3 consecutive slugs; or
2. A single or double-barreled muzzleloading rifle of at least .45 caliber shooting a single projectile through a barrel of at least sixteen inches in length. A muzzleloading firearm is defined as a firearm into which the projectile is incapable of being inserted from the breech end. Allowable ignition systems are limited to percussion (cap or primer), wheellock, matchlock, flintlock, or electronic ignition. 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.
3. Centerfire revolvers, centerfire single-shot handguns, and centerfire single-shot rifles as specified in 520 ILCS 5/2.25
4. On private land only, archery equipment as defined by 17 Ill. Adm. Code 670.30 may be used during the Youth Deer Season while hunting with a valid youth deer permit.

Muzzleloaders are considered “unloaded” **IF:** the percussion cap/primer is removed; **OR** prime powder has been removed from the frizzen pan with the frizzen open and hammer all the way down; **OR** prime powder has been removed from the flashpan and wheel is unwound; **OR** prime powder has been removed and match is not lit; **OR** the battery is removed from the electronic ignition.

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 part of the projectile. 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.

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. Full metal jacket bullets may not be used to harvest deer.

REPORTING HARVEST OF DEER: Successful hunters must register their harvest by 10:00 p.m. on the same calendar day the deer was taken by calling the toll-free telephone check-in system at 1-866-ILCHECK or by accessing the on-line check-in system at <https://www.exploremoreil.com/wildlife/harvest>. If a hunter is not able to locate a harvested deer in sufficient time to enable reporting the harvest by 10:00 p.m., the hunter must immediately report the harvest upon retrieving it. They will be provided with a confirmation number to verify that they checked in their harvest. This number must be written by the hunter on 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. 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:

- 1) For a buck: head with antlers attached to carcass or attached testicle, scrotum or penis.
- 2) For a doe: head attached to carcass or attached udder (mammary) or vulva.

The 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 and final processing is completed. 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 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.

In counties where Chronic Wasting Disease surveillance is occurring during the firearm deer season (see 17 Ill. Adm. Code 650.45(a)), successful hunters using their Youth Deer Permits during the first weekend of the firearm season may, at their option, register their harvest at a designated firearm deer check station by 8:00 p.m. on the day the deer was killed. In this situation, the "head tag" portion of the permit will be retained at the check station and a permanent harvest tag will be attached to the deer upon registration. Tagging requirements for deer delivered to taxidermists, meat processors and tanners are described in 17 Ill. Adm. Code 650.45(a). Youth hunters required to report under this subsection (c), but who are unable to locate a harvested deer in sufficient time to report the harvest by 8:00 p.m., must report the harvest as described in subsection (a).

Site specific reporting requirements must be followed in addition to this Section.

Public Land Sites Open to 2026 Youth Deer Hunt

The following sites are open to youth hunting during the Youth Deer Season. Contact the site for other special site regulations; some sites may have hunter quotas and require participation in a drawing: [Hunting Site Directory](#)

Site Name	County Location
Apple River Canyon SP (Salem/Thompson Units)	Jo Daviess
Argyle Lake SP	McDonough
Big Grand Pierre Glade SNA	Pope
Big River SF	Henderson
Burning Star SFWA	Jackson
Cache River SNA	Johnson//Massac/Pulaski
Campbell Pond SHA	Franklin/Jackson
Cape Bend SFWA	Alexander
Carlyle Lake SFWA	Clinton/Fayette
Cave-In-Rock SP (Kaegi Tract)	Hardin
Cedar Glen SNA	Hancock
Chauncey Marsh SNA	Lawrence
Clinton Lake SRA (only in area between County Hwy 14/Friends Creek Road & State Route 48 - both sides of lake)	DeWitt
Coffeen Lake SFWA (Upland Management Area only)	Montgomery
Copperhead Hollow SFWA	Jersey
Crawford County SFWA	Crawford
Cretaceous Hills SNA	Pope
Cypress Pond SNA	Johnson

Deer Pond SNA	Johnson
Devil's Island SFWA	Union/Alexander
Dixon Springs SP	Pope
Dog Island SWMA	Pope
Eldon Hazlet SP (North Allen Branch Unit only)	Clinton
Ferne Clyffe SP (Cedar/Draper Bluffs Hunting Area)	Johnson
Ferne Clyffe SP (Ferne Clyffe Hunting Area)	Johnson
Fort Massac SP	Massac
Fox Ridge SP	Coles
Giant City SP	Jackson/Union
Glass Hill SNA	Johnson
Goose Lake Prairie SNA/Heidecke Lake SFWA	Grundy
Green River SWA	Lee
Hamilton County SFWA	Hamilton
Hanover Bluff SNA	Jo Daviess
Hidden Springs SF	Shelby
Horseshoe Lake SFWA (Public Hunting Area)	Alexander
Iroquois County State Wildlife Area	Iroquois
Jim Edgar Panther Creek SFWA	Cass
Kankakee River SP	Kankakee
Kaskaskia River SFWA (except south of Hwy 154 and north of Hwy 13)	Randolph/St.Clair/Monroe
Kinkaid Lake SFWA	Jackson
Lake Shelbyville Project Federal Lands (not including Eagle Creek and Wolf Creek State Recreation Areas)	Shelby/Moultrie
Lake Shelbyville SFWA – Kaskaskia and Okaw Units	Moultrie
Mackinaw SFWA	Tazewell
Marshall SFWA	Marshall/Peoria
Mazonia SFWA	Grundy
Meeker SHA	Jasper
Mermet Lake SFWA	Massac
Mississippi River (Pool 17)	Mercer
Mississippi River (Pool 18)	Henderson
Mississippi River (Pool 24)	Pike
Mississippi River (Pools 21 and 22)	Adams
Mississippi River SFWA	Calhoun/Jersey
Newton Lake SFWA	Jasper
Oakford CA	Menard
Pere Marquette SP	Jersey
Prairie Ridge SNA	Jasper
Pyramid SP (Captain, Denmark, East Conant, Galum, and Park units)	Perry
Rall Woods SNA	Jo Daviess
Ralph Clover SNA	Jackson
Ray Norbut SFWA (including the Dutch Creek unit)	Pike
Rend Lake SFWA and COE managed areas of Rend Lake	Jefferson/Franklin
Sahara Woods SRA	Saline
Saline County SFWA	Saline
Sand Ridge SF	Mason

Sangamon County CA
Seilbeck Forest SNA
Siloam Springs SP
Skinner Farm SHA
Spoon River SF
Tapley Woods SNA
Ten Mile Creek SFWA
Trail of Tears SF
Turkey Bluffs SFWA
Union County SFWA (Firing Line Unit)
Wards Grove SNP
Weinberg King SFWA (including Scripps and Spunky Bottoms units)
Wildcat Hollow SHA
Winston Tunnel SNA
Wise Ridge SNA

Sangamon
Massac
Adams/Brown
Johnson
Knox
Jo Daviess
Jefferson/Hamilton
Union
Randolph
Union
Jo Daviess
Schuyler/Brown
Effingham
Jo Daviess
Johnson

Please call **217-782-7305** or email DNR.Permits1@illinois.gov with any questions.