

Winter proves tough on deer, states weigh hunting limits

May 6 2015, byPatrick Whittle



In this Dec. 1, 2014, file photo, a pair of deer move along the edge of the woods during the first day of Pennsylvania's white-tailed deer hunting season in Zelienople, Pa. A tough winter across the northern states killed off many deer, and wildlife regulators in many states are implementing or considering deep cuts to hunting permits. In Pennsylvania, wildlife officials are reducing the number of hunting permits for antlerless deer in 2015 by 30,000, or about 4 percent, following a 7-percent reduction the previous year. (AP Photo/Keith Srakocic, File)

Wildlife regulators in states where deer hunting is a way of life and an

important tourism draw are implementing or considering deep cuts to hunting permits after a tough winter killed off many of the animals.

Severe winters are perilous for deer because they risk running out of fat reserves and dying. Fawns, whose health determines the future stability of the herd, are especially susceptible.

A winter of heavy snow and bitter cold may have resulted in increased mortality rates from the upper Midwest to New England.

In Maine, biologists are recommending a cut of 23 percent to the state's deer hunting permits. In Vermont, the number of antlerless deer permits is being cut nearly in half. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, deer hunting could be halted altogether.

"This last winter was one of the worst that I can remember. I suspect that we lost a lot of deer," said David Trahan, executive director of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine. "Although it's disappointing to see permits go down, I would have to agree."

Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife biologists are recommending the state issue 28,770 "any deer" permits, which allow hunters to harvest bucks or does. The cut would come a year after the state reduced permits from 46,710 to 37,185, a 25 percent cut that was also motivated in part by winter die-offs.

Maine's deer herd was about 200,000 a year ago. State biologist Kyle Ravana said this year's estimate should be ready soon. The state Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Advisory Council is expected to vote on the permit recommendations this spring or summer.



A deer runs across the road, Wednesday, May 6, 2015 in Kinross Charter Township, Mich. Harsh winters the past few years have decimated deer herds across the Upper Midwest. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where the annual fall deer hunt is a way of life, the population has dropped as much as 40 percent after two bitterly cold and snowy winters. The state's Natural Resources Commission will discuss the situation Thursday during its monthly meeting in Lansing. A memo prepared by the Department of Natural Resources lists six options, including canceling this year's U.P. deer hunting season. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

"Generally you can expect a higher level of mortality than an average year," Ravana said. He added that the damage to the state's deer herd might not have been as bad as some fear because the [heavy snow](#) didn't arrive until late in the season.

In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where the fall deer hunt is an annual ritual, the population has dropped as much as 40 percent after two bitterly cold and snowy winters. The state's Natural Resources

Commission will discuss the situation Thursday during its monthly meeting in Lansing.

A memo prepared by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources lists six options, including canceling this year's Upper Peninsula deer hunting season. Spokesman Ed Golder said it's doubtful the commission would go that far, but the report says many hunters want something done in response to the peninsula's lowest deer numbers in about 30 years.



A deer stands on the side of the road, Wednesday, May 6, 2015 in Kinross Charter Township, Mich. Harsh winters the past few years have decimated deer herds across the Upper Midwest. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where the annual fall deer hunt is a way of life, the population has dropped as much as 40 percent after two bitterly cold and snowy winters. The state's Natural Resources Commission will discuss the situation Thursday during its monthly meeting in Lansing. A memo prepared by the Department of Natural Resources lists six options, including canceling this year's U.P. deer hunting season. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

In Pennsylvania, wildlife officials are reducing the number of hunting permits for antlerless deer this year by 30,000, or about 4 percent, following a 7 percent reduction the previous year. One commissioner said the harsh winter weather factored into his decision, but there's also a broader effort to boost deer populations in certain areas.

In Vermont, officials estimate there will be a deer population of 115,000 to 120,000 at the start of the fall hunting season—a decrease of more than 11 percent from a year ago. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is cutting its antlerless deer permits nearly in half, to 9,250.

New Hampshire officials are also concerned about the possibility of above average deer mortality and might consider trimming hunting days in 2016, said Dan Bergeron, a state wildlife biologist. Minnesota and Wisconsin also have taken steps in recent years to try to replenish [deer](#) herds hit hard by winter.

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