

# GUNS & GAME

2019

A black dog is shown in a close-up, holding a duck in its mouth. The dog's face is the central focus, with its eyes looking directly at the camera. The duck is held horizontally across the dog's mouth. In the background, another duck is visible, and the setting appears to be a field of dry grass. The title 'GUNS & GAME' is written in a large, orange, cursive font at the top, with a graphic of a rifle barrel and stock overlaid on the word 'GUNS'. The year '2019' is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font to the right of the title.

## No scents?

Using scents made from real deer now prohibited in S.C. so read the labels carefully.

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## Dove Season

Dove season begins in September.

Page 2C

## Antlerless tags

New antlerless tags eliminate specific hunting dates

Page 6C

## Deer harvest

SCDNR biologist talks about the 2018 deer harvest.

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# Colleton tops in turkeys

While remaining the state's second most popular game animal (behind only white-tailed deer) South Carolina's spring turkey harvest was down about six percent in 2018, when compared with 2017, according to the most recent numbers from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources' annual mail survey of Palmetto State Turkey hunters.

The survey was sent to 30,000 individuals who received a set of 2018 Turkey Transportation Tags, which are required in order to hunt turkeys in South Carolina.

Based on the survey results, an estimated 16,145 adult gobblers and 1,794 jakes accounted for a total harvest of 17,939 birds in 2018, compared with 19,171 birds estimated taken in 2017. Approximately 50,772 hunters participated in the 2018 spring turkey season in South Carolina versus 52,429 in 2017. While down, those numbers are still higher than they were in seasons prior to 2016.

"Keep in mind that legislative changes that went into effect in 2016 provided an earlier starting date and increased number of days in the turkey season in 34 of 46 South Carolina counties," said SCDNR Assistant Big Game Program Coordinator Jay Cantrell.

"The effect of this season change was a 50 percent increase in opportunity (days) for the majority (74%) of the state, so although the harvest was down slightly in 2018, the harvest under the three years of the new season framework has consistently been higher (18%) than in years prior to those changes."

Unfortunately, it's likely that this increase in harvest since 2016 is best explained by an increase in hunter effort (numbers of days hunted), rather than an increase in the overall turkey population, according to Cantrell. More hunter effort (which increased when the season was lengthened in 2016) can increase harvest numbers to a point, regardless of the number of turkeys on the landscape.

Statewide, turkey production, however, as measured by the SCDNR's annual Summer Turkey Survey, has been decreasing since before the new season was implemented. In fact, recruitment of new poults during the last five years has been the lowest of any five-year period since the harvest survey began in 1982.

Typically, low recruitment is followed by decreasing harvest, and good recruitment is followed by increasing harvest. With

recent turkey production being low, it seems clear that increased hunter effort, rather than increased turkey numbers, is the driving factor behind the increase in harvest that has accompanied the longer season.

"Again, the new (in 2016) season dates increased opportunity for hunters in 34 of 46 counties by 50 percent," added Cantrell, "and the data clearly indicates that hunters have taken advantage of that additional opportunity."

According to the survey, the top counties for total turkey harvest in 2018 were Williamsburg, Berkeley, Orangeburg, Fairfield and Colleton. However, because counties vary in size, a better method of comparing harvests between counties is the harvest per unit area, turkeys harvested per square mile for example. Using this method, the most productive counties were Union, Spartanburg, Cherokee,



Anderson and Fairfield. The average turkey hunter spent about six days in the field, with a success rate of about 23 percent in harvesting at least one gobbler. Hunter opinion on the turkey population in the mailed survey indicated that it was viewed as decreasing, and this opinion has been consistent the last few years.

The SCDNR has also begun a new voluntary online survey targeting "avid" turkey hunters in the state to help biologists

better understand the dynamics behind these harvest numbers. As a group, these hunters spend more time afield during the turkey season and have a significantly higher success rate than the average participant in the mailed survey. Through this augmented survey approach, SCDNR biologists hope to better understand the demographics, experiences, techniques and opinions of dedicated turkey hunter in South Carolina. The information collected in both

of these surveys, as well as biological and harvest data, will help biologists evaluate trends and make more informed management recommendations with the ultimate goal of maintaining sustainable, quality turkey hunting into the future.

To read or download complete versions of these surveys, as well as archived reports and other information pertinent to turkey hunting in South Carolina, please visit the SCDNR website.

## Dove season opens Sept. 2

It will probably still be quite warm, but nonetheless thousands of eager wing-shooters will be eager to take the field for the start of the mourning dove season in South Carolina in early September.

For many in South Carolina, the opening day of dove season is synonymous with the beginning of fall and all of the great outdoor activities that come with it, and if the weather cooperates, this year's birds promise to be plentiful, according to biologists with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

"We just recently completed our annual pre-season mourning dove survey," said Michael W. Hook, Coordinator for the SCDNR's Small Game program. "The current estimated dove population should provide very good September hunts provided we have no widespread adverse weather events."

Opening day of this year's early dove season in South Carolina will once again coincide with the Labor Day holiday on Monday Sept. 2. The S.C. Department of Natural Resources



Board has approved all migratory bird hunting seasons in South Carolina for 2019-2020 based on the federal framework for migratory gamebirds. The seasons, daily bag limits, and methods of harvest have been published in the federal register by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The daily bag limit for 2019-2020 will again be 15 birds, and legal shooting time for the early season (September 2-7) will begin at 12 noon. Legal shooting hours for the later seasons will begin at 1/2 hour before legal sunrise.

Legal shooting time ends at official sunset during all season dates:

- Sept. 2-7: 12 Noon until Sunset
- Sept. 8-Oct. 12: 1/2 Hour before Sunrise until Sunset
- Nov.16-Nov. 30: 1/2 Hour before Sunrise until Sunset
- Dec. 28, 2019-Jan. 30, 2020: 1/2 Hour before Sunrise until Sunset.

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# Hunters must obey state and federal waterfowl baiting laws

Waterfowl and other migratory birds are a national resource protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Federal regulations define key terms for hunters and land managers, and clarify conditions under which you may legally hunt waterfowl. As a waterfowl hunter or land manager, it is your responsibility to know and obey all Federal and State laws that govern the sport. Waterfowl baiting regulations apply to ducks, geese, swans, coots and cranes.

## CAN I MANIPULATE CROPS IN A FIELD WHERE WATERFOWL WILL BE HUNTED?

NO. Federal regulations are more restrictive for waterfowl hunting than for hunting doves and other migratory game birds. While unharvested agricultural crops may be manipulated to attract doves for hunting, manipulation of an unharvested agricultural crop to attract waterfowl for hunting creates a baited area.

## WHAT ABOUT NATURAL VEGETATION?

Natural vegetation is any non-agricultural, native, or naturalized plant species that grows at a site in response to planting or from existing seeds or other propagules.

Natural vegetation does not include planted millet (like browntop and Japanese millet) because of its use as both an agricultural crop and a species of natural vegetation for moist soil management. However, planted millet that grows on its own in subsequent years is considered natural vegetation. If you restore and manage wetlands as habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds, you can manipulate the natural vegetation in these areas and make them available for hunting. Mowing and burning of natural vegetation are common habitat management practices in South Carolina.

Natural vegetation does not include plants grown as agricultural crops. Under no circumstances can you hunt waterfowl over crops manipulated prior to a normal harvest. Nor can you hunt waterfowl over manipulated wildlife food plots or manipulated plantings for soil stabilization.

In South Carolina many hunters and landowners manage native vegetation and planted agricultural crops to attract waterfowl for hunting. The Federal law is different for the management of these two food sources and hunters should pay particular attention to the differences.

## SHOOTING HOURS

Shooting hours for waterfowl are 1/2 hour before sunrise until sunset except where noted during early seasons. Shooting hours are uniform statewide.

## LEGAL SHOT

The possession of lead shot is prohibited for all waterfowl hunting, statewide. Nontoxic shot (steel, bismuth or other Federally approved shot) is required for all waterfowl hunting.

## BLIND REGULATIONS

It is unlawful to take migratory waterfowl from blinds or positions where the floor level of the blind or the position is:

- more than ten feet above surface level in or around freshwater; or
- more than five feet above the mean high water in or around saltwater.

A blind on public lands or waters must be constructed from biodegradable materials.

Once vacated, a blind on public lands or waters may be used by persons on a "first come, first served" basis.

**AIRBOAT REGULATIONS** An "airboat" means a watercraft propelled by air pressure caused by a motor mounted on the watercraft aboveboard.

It is unlawful for a person to operate an airboat on the public waters of this State from the freshwater-saltwater dividing line, established by Section 50-17-30, seaward.

It is unlawful to operate an airboat on the waters of the Waccamaw, the Great Pee Dee, the Little Pee Dee, the Black and the Sampit Rivers in Georgetown and Horry Counties from one hour before legal sunset to one hour after legal sunrise and anytime during the season for hunting waterfowl.

It is unlawful to operate an airboat on the waters of that portion of Lake Marion and Santee Swamp west of the I-95 bridge upstream to the

confluence of the Congaree and Wateree Rivers during the season for hunting waterfowl.

The provisions of 50-21-860 do not apply to the operation of airboats by law enforcement, emergency medical, civil defense, noxious weed control, military personnel, state and federally approved wildlife banding, surveying, biological research programs and private waters.

## FEDERAL MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING & CONSERVATION STAMP

If you are 16 or older, you must carry on your person an unexpired Federal migratory bird hunting and conservation stamp. You must validate your duck stamp by signing it in ink across the face before hunting. You may also purchase a Federal Duck Stamp online as an Electronic Duck Stamp which is valid for 45 days from the date of purchase. Within that time, a physical Duck Stamp will be mailed to you. After 45 days, you must carry your current, signed Federal Duck Stamp while hunting. You must also have a valid South Carolina Migratory Waterfowl Permit or have proof of purchase before hunting.

## HUNTING ON CERTAIN BODIES OF WATER

Hunting waterfowl is prohibited within certain distances of residences on portions or all of the following bodies of water:

- Bear Creek in Lancaster County (200 yards)
- Broadway Lake in Anderson County (200 yards)
- Gills Creek in Lancaster County (200 yards)
- Lake Greenwood (200 yards)

- Lake Keowee (200 yards)
- Lake Murray
- Newberry & Saluda Counties (200 yards)
- Lexington & Richland Counties (350 yards)
- Lake Wateree (200 yards)
- Lake Marion
- Potato Creek (200 yards)
- Wyboo Creek (200 yards)
- Dean Swamp in Clarendon County and adjacent to Santee Cooper Resort in Orangeburg County. (200 yards)

Public waters in Calhoun County from the confluence of the Congaree and Wateree Rivers downstream to Poplar Creek. (200 yards)

The coves immediately to the East of St. Julien Subd. Extension and Cypress Shores Marina. (200 yards)

Taw Caw Creek in Clarendon County (No Hunting)

The cove immediately to the SE of the Indian Bluff Recreation site. (No Hunting)

- Lake Moultrie (200 yards)
- Lake Wylie (200 yards)
- Murrell's Inlet Creek in Georgetown County (100 yards)

It is unlawful to hunt waterfowl on the lakes listed above within the distances provided unless a person has written permission from the owner and occupant of the dwelling. There are no exceptions to the distance restriction on Lake Keowee.



Hunting season has begun!

Here are some tips for good hunting safety:

- Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.
- Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
- Be certain of your target, and what is beyond it.
- Keep your finger outside the trigger guard and off the trigger until ready to shoot.
- Always wear distinctive **Hunter Orange** clothing.
- Control your emotions when hunting or shooting.
- Always let someone know where you are hunting and when you plan on returning.
- Never carry a loaded gun in your truck or car.



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# New Rule: Scents made from deer parts can no longer be used

Check the labels because these scents are still being sold in some stores.

To take effect in the 2019-2020 South Carolina deer season, it is illegal to possess or use, for the purpose of hunting or scouting any wild animal in S.C., any substance or material that contains or purports to contain any excretion collected from a cervid (deer) including urine, feces, blood, gland oil, or other body fluid. This does not prohibit the use of synthetic products or substances collected by a hunter from deer legally harvested in S.C.

The majority of natural deer lures and attractants are made with fluids and secretions collected from captive cervids. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), a transmissible or contagious, always fatal, neurological disease has been documented in numerous captive cervid herds; therefore, the potential exists for these products to be contaminated with CWD prions.

Once introduced, the disease agent can remain viable in the environment, in the soil for example, where local deer may become infected. There is no way to either test the products for CWD or destroy CWD-causing prions. With the high level of uncertainty surrounding the use of such products, the department is following the lead of other states in proactively prohibiting the use of them in order to minimize the potential for CWD introduction into South Carolina.

## WHY IS THE USE OF THESE PRODUCTS RISKY?

The infectious proteins (i.e., prions) known to transmit CWD have been found in the urine, feces and saliva of infected individuals. CWD research conducted in Colorado showed that mule deer were able to be infected with CWD after exposure to just the urine, feces and saliva of infected deer.

To make these commercial scents, urine from captive elk and/or deer is collected over a grate system that does not prevent contamination from feces, saliva or other bodily fluids. Urine products are frequently batched/combined from multiple locations and distributed across the country via retail, internet and catalog sales.

Many of these captive cervid facilities are located in areas or states with CWD. In fact, nationally, CWD continues to be found in captive cervid facilities, with 40 facilities testing positive since 2012 in nine states.

The "urine" product is not treated chemically or with heat to kill the infectious proteins because these treatments would also secondarily destroy the desired scent characteristics.

Urine production and sales are not regulated by any agency or entity, nor are there any testing or

marking requirements related to the source of urine products.

There is no commercially available test that can be used to test these products for the presence of CWD prions prior to distribution for sale to the public.

The infectious proteins causing CWD are extremely resistant to degradation and if introduced may persist in the environment for years in contaminated soil, thereby posing a disease transmission risk to deer for extended lengths of time.

## WHY DID SCDNR BAN THESE URINE-BASED PRODUCTS?

SCDNR took a proactive approach to this issue and banned the use of products containing urine or scent gland secretions collected from deer or elk until such time that it can be proven that prions are not distributed across the landscape through the use of such products while afield. SCDNR's intent with this regulation was to protect South Carolina's deer hunting heritage by ensuring that future generations have the same opportunities to deer hunt as are available to South Carolinians today and to protect the long-term health and stability of the deer herd in the state.

## IF USING THESE PRODUCTS IS BANNED, WHY CAN I STILL BUY THEM IN SOUTH CAROLINA?

Unfortunately, SCDNR does not have the authority to ban the sale of these products, just their usage in the field for hunting or scouting purposes.

## WHAT DOES "POSSESS OR USE" A NATURAL DEER URINE



## ATTRACTANT MEAN?

It is still legal for products that contain natural deer urine or other bodily fluids to be purchased and sold in South Carolina, as SCDNR does not have authority to regulate the sale of these products. However, it is not legal for individuals to have these products in their possession or on their person while afield for the purposes of taking, attracting, or scouting any wild animal in South Carolina.

## ARE THERE ANY LEGAL ALTERNATIVES TO NATURAL DEER URINE LURES THAT I CAN USE?

Yes, there are many synthetic products that can be used to attract or lure deer that do not pose any secondary risks for CWD transmission to South

Carolina white-tailed deer. These products are readily available at sporting goods stores and online retailers.

## CAN I USE URINE OR GLANDS THAT I COLLECT FROM A DEER I HARVEST?

Yes, the use of urine or glands collected from legally harvested deer in South Carolina may be used by hunters in South Carolina.

## HOW DO I DISPOSE OF MY OLD PRODUCTS WHICH CONTAIN DEER BODY FLUIDS?

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## Improvements to antlerless tags

South Carolina deer hunters should start seeing deer tags for the 2019 season in their mailboxes soon, and there are significant changes to the antlerless tagging system that all hunters need to be aware of before taking to the field.

New for this year are improvements to the Antlerless Deer Tag program. A new law was passed by the General Assembly, resulting in the elimination of the eight date-specific antlerless tags, replacing them with two antlerless tags that may be used on any day beginning Sept. 15 in Game Zones 2, 3, and 4, and Oct. 1 in Game Zone 1.

"Hunters in the past were limited by specific days to harvest antlerless deer," said Jay Cantrell, SCDNR big game biologist. "This improvement gives people more opportunity and the flexibility to harvest deer when it is convenient for them. SCDNR and numerous legislators had heard from hunters over the last two years who were limited by tags that were only valid on certain Saturdays. A lot of folks have to work on Saturdays or have athletic events, family obligations and other constraints that limited their ability to hunt on Saturday. Throw in some weekends of bad weather or bad luck and opportunity was severely limited for the

date-specific tags."

The General Assembly came to SCDNR with the idea, and staff helped by providing recommendations.

"In working with the General Assembly, we knew that this change could negatively impact sales of the optional tags which would affect revenue for the deer program," said Cantrell. "However, we believe this change is so important in terms of providing simplification to the tagging program and increased opportunity and flexibility for resident hunters to take antlerless deer that we will make necessary adjustments related to the potential loss of funds."

Harvest statistics show that 92% of South Carolina hunters harvest two or fewer antlerless deer each season. For hunters who want additional opportunity to take antlerless deer, they are still able to purchase up to four optional antlerless tags for \$5 each or participate in the property-based Deer Quota Program.

Residents who currently have an active annual or three-year hunting license and big game permit, combination license or sportsman license that will be valid when deer season begins on Aug. 15 should automatically receive a base set of deer tags at no cost.



Hunters are asked to please wait until at least Aug. 1 before inquiring about the status of their tags.

License holders unsure about the status/expiration date of their hunting license, big game permit, or other SCDNR hunting privileges can visit the customer privileges portal online to check a license status or to see when or if deer tags have been fulfilled.

Deer tags are not available over

the counter at point of sales vendors (Walmart, Dicks Sporting Goods, etc.), but they are available over the counter at SCDNR offices located in Charleston, Clemson, Columbia (Farmers Market), Florence, and York.

Optional tags may also be purchased by phone at 1-866-714-3611 or online. Hunters should allow 7-10 days for tags ordered or requested online, or by phone, to arrive in the mail.

## SCDNR answers to questions about deer tag sales and use

Effective in deer season 2017, all harvested deer in South Carolina are required to be tagged at the point of kill.

Deer tags WILL NOT be available over the counter at point-of-sales vendors (Walmart, Dick's Sporting Goods; etc.). They will be available over the counter at SCDNR offices located in Charleston, Clemson, Columbia (downtown and Farmers Market), Florence, and York after Aug. 7.

Tags may be purchased by phone after July 1 at 1-866-714-3611 or online at: <http://dnr.sc.gov/purchase.html>. Tags will not be mailed until early August.

Resident hunters who have active licenses/big game permits when deer season begins will automatically receive their base sets of tags about Aug. 1.

Residents whose licenses/big game permits expire before deer season begins should renew their licenses/big game permits at least 7-10 days prior to the start of deer season to ensure their deer tags arrive in time via mail.

Following are questions and answers from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources about deer tags:

### 1. I am a resident hunter. How will I get my tags?

If you are a resident of SC and you purchase a Hunting License & Big Game Permit OR if you currently have an active Hunting License & Big Game Permit that

will be valid when deer season begins, you will automatically receive a base set of deer tags at no cost prior to deer season or 7-10 days after you purchase the Hunting License and Big Game Permit if deer season has already started. That base set of tags includes: 3 unrestricted antlered buck tags and 8 date-specific antlerless deer tags. Each antlerless tag is only valid on one specific day and cannot be used on any other day (similar to past "doe days").

### 2. I have a Lifetime License. Will I automatically get a set of deer tags?

No. Lifetime Licensees will have to request their base set of free tags annually. Tags may be requested after July 1 by phone at 1-803-734-3833 or online at: <http://dnr.sc.gov/purchase.html>.

Tags will not be mailed until early August. Tags will also be available over-the-counter after August 1 at SCDNR offices located in Charleston, Clemson, Columbia (downtown and Farmers Market), Florence, and York. The reason you have to request the tags is it would be wasteful to send all Lifetime License holders a set of tags because many of them are not deer hunters. There are more than 200,000 of these license holders and it costs about \$1 to issue a set of tags. (Note: Lifetime License holders who now live out-of-state should contact SCDNR directly



The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources has begun mailing out this year's deer tags to hunters eager for the beginning of a new season.

at 803-734-3833 to request their base set of tags).

### 3. I have a Senior License (or Gratis License or Disability License). Will I automatically get a set of deer tags?

No. Senior, Gratis & Disability License holders will have to request their base set of free tags annually. Tags may be requested after July 1 by phone at 1-803-734-3833

or online at: <http://dnr.sc.gov/purchase.html>.

Tags will not be mailed until early August. Tags will also be available over-the-counter after August 1 at SCDNR offices located in Charleston, Clemson, Columbia (downtown and Farmers Market), Florence, and York. The reason you have to request the tags is it would be wasteful to send all of these license holders a set of tags

because many of them are not deer hunters. There are more than 200,000 of these license holders and it costs about \$1 to issue a set of tags.

### 4. Are youth hunters required to have tags?

Yes. Youth hunters, regardless of age, will have to have deer tags to legally hunt. Youth can receive a free base set of tags by request. If you are

an adult requesting tags for a youth, make sure you have the youth's contact information, date of birth, and SSN. The youth will be given a customer ID for future use. Tags may be requested after July 1 by phone at 1-803-734-3833 or online at: <http://dnr.sc.gov/purchase.html>. Tags will not be mailed until early August. Tags will also be available over-the-counter after August 1 at SCDNR offices located in Charleston, Clemson, Columbia (downtown and Farmers Market), Florence, and York.

### 5. Are nonresident youth required to have tags?

Yes. Non-resident youth will receive a base set of tags for free by request just like resident youth. They may also purchase one antler restriction buck tag (\$50) and up to 4 individual antlerless tags

See TAGS, page 7C

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**TAGS**

Continued from 6C

(\$10 each).

**6. What is included in the base set of tags?**

That base set of tags includes: 3 unrestricted antlered buck tags and 8 date-specific antlerless deer tags. Each antlerless tag is only valid on one specific day and cannot be used on any other day (similar to past “doe days”).

**7. Can I buy my tags at Walmart?**

No. Deer tags will not be available over-the-counter at point-of-sale vendors (Walmart, Cabelas, Dick’s Sporting Goods, local hunting stores or hardware stores; etc.). They will be available over-the-counter after August 7 at SCDNR offices located in Charleston, Clemson, Columbia (downtown and Farmers Market), Florence, and York. Tags may be requested after July 1 by phone at 1-866-714-3611 or online at: <http://dnr.sc.gov/purchase.html>.

**8. I live in South Carolina. How many optional tags can I buy?**

Residents including youth hunters and Lifetime/Senior/Disability License holders may purchase 2 additional antler restriction buck tags for \$5 each. The restriction is the buck must have 4 points on one antler or a minimum 12-inch inside spread. You may also purchase up to 4 individual antlerless tags for \$5 each just like in the past. Tags are valid on any day beginning September 15 in Game Zones 2, 3, and 4 and October 1 in Game Zone 1 until the end of the deer hunting season.

**9. I'm a nonresident hunter. Do I get the free tags and how many tags can I buy?**

Non-resident adults receive no free tags with the purchase of their Hunting License & Big Game Permit and must also purchase deer tags in order to deer hunt. Non-residents can purchase up to 4 antlered buck tags (2 unrestricted antlered buck tags & 2 antler restriction buck tags, 4 points on one antler or a minimum 12-inch inside spread)). The cost is: \$50 for first antlered buck tag, \$20 for each additional (\$110 for all 4). After the purchase of an unrestricted buck tag, there is no particular order in which the buck tags must be purchased or used. You may also purchase up to 4 individual antlerless tags as in the past. Tags are valid on any day beginning September 15. Cost for nonresident antlerless tags is now \$10 each.

**10. What is considered an antlerless deer? Isn't that just a doe?**

Not necessarily. In SC, there are some bucks that are legally considered antlerless deer. An antlerless deer is defined as a deer with no antlers or a deer with less than 2 inches of visible antler above the hairline and would be tagged with an antlerless deer tag (this includes does, button bucks, and small spike antlered males with antlers of less than 2 inches). A deer with 2 or more inches of antler is considered an antlered deer and would be tagged with an antlered deer tag (buck tag).

**11. How will tags work with dog drives?**

Whoever kills the deer should tag it with their personal tag or, if the property is in the quota program, one of the tags issued to the property should be used to tag the deer. This is no different than it has always been.

**12. We split up the meat at our hunt club after the dog drive. What do we do about the tag?**

A deer only has to be tagged from the point of kill until it is processed and cut up. That means once you start cutting it into quarters or parts or boning it out and it's no longer a whole carcass or skinned carcass, the tagging requirement goes away. At that point, it is meat and no longer a deer carcass and does not need a tag.

**13. I process my own deer at home. When can I remove a tag?**

A deer only has to be tagged from the point of kill until it is processed and cut up. That means that it needs to be tagged in the field where you harvest it and remain tagged during transport and if it is being hung whole in a cooler (hide on or skinned & gutted). Once you start cutting it into quarters or parts or boning it out and it's no longer a whole carcass or skinned carcass, the tagging requirement goes away. At that point, it is meat and no longer a deer carcass and does not need a tag.

**14. I take my deer to a processor but, to save money, I skin and gut it myself and take it to the processor in a cooler already quartered or boned out. Does it need to be tagged?**

A deer only has to be tagged from the point of kill until it is processed and cut up. That means that it needs to be tagged in the field where you harvest it and remain tagged during transport and if it is being hung whole in a cooler (hide on or skinned & gutted). Once you start cutting it into quarters or parts or boning it out and it's no longer a whole skinned carcass, the tagging requirement goes away. At that point, it is meat and no longer a deer carcass and does not need a tag. However, if you are transporting those parts to a processor, it would probably be a good idea, even though it's not required, to have the tag(s) with the meat. It will make the processor feel better and may save you some time and questions if you encounter a law enforcement officer along the way.

**15. Do I have to buy all of my tags at the same time?**

No. You can buy tags at different times during the season. You can buy them one at a time if you wish. The system will keep track of what you have already purchased and which privileges you still have remaining to purchase.

**16. I hunt on Wildlife Management Areas (WMA land). How does this affect me?**

All deer must be tagged, including deer taken on WMAs. The statewide WMA bag limit for all seasons and methods combined is 5 deer (only 2 of those 5 can be antlered (buck) deer). This is the same statewide WMA limit that has been in place for several years. If you are hunting on a WMA lottery hunt, SCDNR staff will provide tags for harvested deer. Otherwise, you have to utilize your personal deer tags when hunting WMA land.

**17. How will this be enforced if deer don't have to be taken to check stations?**

Check stations are not a primary enforcement tool. They are simply a way to collect information regarding how many deer are harvested, where they are harvested, and some basic biological data. The primary enforcement tool under the new system is the requirement to

tag all deer. If someone chooses to take the risk of not tagging a deer, they are in jeopardy of being seen by a SCDNR officer, another law enforcement agency, or being reported by another hunter. Also, deer processors will not take untagged deer because taking possession of an illegal deer is a violation. Those who choose not to tag their deer are at risk of being caught from the time they move the deer from the location of harvest until they get it home and processed. That risk is significant with a fine that can reach \$1,080. Someone who chooses to take that risk is surely not going to stop at a check station.

**18) I'm a bow hunter and, in the past, have been able to take antlerless deer any day without tagging during archery and primitive weapons seasons. What about now?**

All harvested deer must be tagged regardless of the weapon. However, there was an effort made as part of the new tagging approach to afford archers opportunities similar to the past. Starting

September 15, during any archery-only or primitive weapons season in Game Zones 1 and 2, or on any WMA statewide during an archery-only or primitive weapons-only season, you can take an antlerless deer on any day as long as it is tagged. You can accomplish this two ways. The free date-specific antlerless tags that residents receive are dual purpose tags and have a section that you will fill out if used for archery during those seasons. You can use any of these date-specific tags that come with your Big Game Permit with the understanding that you would have to properly validate the tag for this special “archery” use and it would no longer be available for use on the actual day it was intended to be used. Or you could use one of the optional individual antlerless tags that most buy. Either way or any combination of ways will work as long as all deer are tagged.

**19. So I can kill 17 deer in a season now?**

If you hunt in Game Zones 1 and 2, there will

be a limit on the number of antlerless deer you can take regardless of how many tags you have. This is no different than when there were more than 20 “doe days” some years ago (you could only take a certain number of antlerless deer). The maximum number of antlerless deer that can be taken in a season in Game Zone 1 is 4, 5 in Game Zone 2. You will see this in the SCDNR Rules & Regulations guide when it comes out. So, if someone bought the 2 optional antler restriction buck tags, the limit would be 9 deer total in Game Zone 1 and 10 deer total in Game Zone 2. In each case, this is fewer deer than in the past when the ultimate limit was additive between the limits during the archery season + primitive weapons season + gun season.

In Game Zones 3 and 4, the limit could in fact be 17 deer because there is no “season limit” posted on antlerless deer. That being the case, the limit would be 5 bucks, 8 antlerless deer that would have to be taken using the date specific tags, and 4 antlerless deer taken

with the optional antlerless deer tags. Non-residents can take up to 8 deer (4 bucks, two of which have the antler restriction, and 4 does).

**20. I thought the state's deer population was down. Why are we able to kill so many now?**

This new approach is in fact a more conservative approach than in the past. Keep in mind that, in Game Zones 3 and 4, there has been no limit on antlered bucks. Now, it is a base limit of 3 with the option of getting the 2 optional antler restriction buck tags. In Game Zones 1 and 2, there has always been a limit of 5 antlered bucks “on paper.” Now, it is a base limit of 3 with the option of getting the 2 optional antler restriction buck tags. With the tagging requirement, this will be highly enforceable. As far as antlerless deer are concerned, the new approach is more conservative in Game Zones 1 and 2, whereas, in Game Zones 3 and 4, it is the same as last year (See question 19).

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# SCDNR study shows statewide deer harvest increases in 2018

Top Lowcountry counties were Bamberg, Hampton and Calhoun.

Results of the 2018 Deer Hunter Survey conducted by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) indicate that the statewide harvest of deer increased about 5% last season and was comprised of an estimated 109,208 bucks and 85,778 does which made up a total harvest of 194,986 deer, according to Charles Ruth, SCDNR Big Game Program coordinator.

The modest increase in harvest is likely due to some level of remaining "carry-over" of deer from 2015 and 2016. The 1,000-year flood spawned by Hurricane Joaquin in 2015 and Hurricane Matthew in 2016 each resulted in temporary season closures in some coastal counties and general access problems or decreased opportunity for hunters across much of the state. Also, each of these years saw unseasonably warm fall temperatures, and there was what many called a record acorn crop in 2016. This resulted in back-to-back decreases in harvest.

"That being the case, there were likely deer that would have otherwise been harvested during those years that were carried over and reproduced, thereby increasing the harvest in 2017 and 2018," said Ruth.

The fall of 2018 was the second season of the "all deer" tagging system and statewide limit on antlered deer.



"Interestingly, the 13% increase in harvest since 2016 is primarily a result of an increase in doe harvest (18.0%) rather than an increase in the harvest of bucks (9.5%). Increases in harvest are normally the result of increases in the buck harvest or a more equal increase in buck and doe harvest. This disproportionate harvest may be indicative of the new buck limit having the desired effect of decreasing pressure on bucks. It will likely take a few years for this to become clearer," Ruth said.

Top counties for harvest in 2018 included Bamberg, Hampton, and Calhoun in the coastal plain, Anderson and Spartanburg in the Piedmont with each of these counties exhibiting harvest rates in excess of 12 deer per square mile, which should be considered extraordinary. Although the harvest has generally declined in recent years,

South Carolina still ranks near the top among southeastern states in harvest per unit area.

All areas of South Carolina have long and liberal firearms seasons and most deer (158,134) were taken with centerfire rifles in 2018. Archery equipment (19,889 deer) and shotguns (16,184 deer) also contributed significantly to the overall deer harvest, whereas muzzleloaders, crossbows and handguns combined (3,705 deer) produced less than 2% of the

total statewide harvest.

Although the annual Deer Hunter Survey focuses on deer hunting activities, there are questions on the survey related to the harvest of wild hogs and coyotes in the state.

"Results of this year's survey indicate that approximately 22,731 coyotes were taken incidental to deer hunting. This figure represents a 1% increase from 2017 continuing what seems to be a moderating trend in coyote numbers in recent

years. On the other hand, approximately 39,347 wild hogs were killed statewide, representing a 4% increase from 2017," according to Ruth.

Other survey statistics indicate that approximately 129,477 South Carolina residents and 14,757 non-residents deer hunted in the state in 2018. Deer hunters reported an overall success rate of 67%, which is outstanding. Overall hunting effort was estimated at just over two million days. The number of days devoted to deer hunting in South Carolina is very significant and points not only to the availability

and popularity of deer as a game species, but to the obvious economic benefits related to this important natural resource.

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