

**STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE**

Notice of Agency Rulemaking Proposal

AGENCY: Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Advertise: May 6, 2026

CHAPTER NUMBER AND RULE TITLE: Chapter 16.07 - Deer Hunting

TYPE OF RULE: Routine Technical

PROPOSAL FILING NUMBER:

BRIEF SUMMARY: The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) is proposing its annual permit numbers for the hunting of antlerless deer. Also, as directed by the Legislature in Resolve 2025, Chapter 35, DIFW has assessed the ability of additional WMDs to support a 2nd week of muzzleloader hunting, and the addition of 3 WMDs is included in the proposal. A reference to the hunting closure in the town of Frenchboro is also being removed as this is a town ordinance and does not need to be presented in rule. Please contact the agency contact person for a complete copy of the rule proposal.

PUBLIC HEARING: May 26, 2026 @ 4:00pm – Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, 353 Water Street, Room 423, Augusta. An online option for attending via Microsoft Teams will also be available. For those wishing to attend remotely, please contact the Agency Contact Person for this filing.

COMMENT DEADLINE: June 5, 2026

CONTACT PERSON FOR THIS FILING:

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CONTACT PERSON FOR SMALL BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT: Click or tap here to enter text.

FINANCIAL IMPACT ON MUNICIPALITIES OR COUNTIES: None anticipated

STATUTORY AUTHORITY FOR THIS RULE: 12 MRS Section 10104, 11152, 11402, 11404

SUBSTANTIVE STATE OR FEDERAL LAW BEING IMPLEMENTED: Click or tap here to enter text.

AGENCY WEBSITE: www.maine.gov/ifw

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Choose one of the following:

The summary provided above is for publication in both the newspaper and website notices.

STATE OF MAINE
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Rulemaking Fact Sheet

(see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1))

Agency: Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Name, Address, Telephone Number, and Email Address of Agency Contact Person:

Becky Orff

353 Water Street, 41 SHS, Augusta, ME 04333

207-287-5202

Becky.orff@maine.gov

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Comment Deadline(s): June 5, 2026

Principal Reason(s) or Purpose for Proposing this Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(A)]:

Antlerless deer permit numbers and either-sex hunting opportunities are adjusted by MDIFW on an annual basis, and we present recommendations for 2026 in this proposal. At the direction of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, MDIFW has assessed the ability of additional WMDs to support a 2nd week of muzzleloader hunting, and the addition of 3 WMDs is proposed. Lastly, we remove a reference to the hunting closure in the town of Frenchboro as this is a town ordinance and does not need to be presented in rule.

Is Material Incorporated by Reference into the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8056(2-A)]? No

Analysis and Expected Operation of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(B) & (D)]:

For 2026, we recommend issuing antlerless permits in 27 WMDs and one deer management subunit. In addition, we recommend designating 6 of the 27 WMDs (21-15 and 29) as open to either-sex hunting with a hunting license in all seasons except expanded archery, which provides additional antlerless harvest opportunities in WMDs where we have an excess of antlerless permits. We also recommend allowing antlerless harvest without a permit in all WMDs during the Youth Hunt and regular archery seasons.

WMDs 1 and 4 will be open to buck harvest only (aside from the Youth Hunt and regular archery season) as they remain under population objective, have low growth potential, and we feel the archery and Youth Hunt antlerless opportunities are adequate to satisfy demand currently. We recommend issuing a small number of permits in WMDs 2 and 5, which are typically allocated no permits, to provide a small amount of antlerless harvest opportunity after successive mild winters. We anticipate minimal impacts associated with this and that deer taken with these few permits will be localized around the few developed parts of these WMDs where deer are common.

We recommend issuing an “Unlimited” number of permits in those WMDs (21-25 and 29) that routinely have permits left over at season’s end. This will not impact removal rates, as demand is lower than our harvest goals, but it will more accurately reflect our intentions with permits in those WMDs, which is to satisfy demand for permits.

After analyzing winter mortality rates, estimated winter migration dates, anticipated harvest impacts, and staff support, we recommend adding a 2nd week of muzzleloader hunting to WMDs 14, 27, and 28.

We recommend removing reference to the hunting closure in the town of Frenchboro as this is a town ordinance and does not need to be presented in rule.

Brief Summary of Relevant Information Considered During Development of the Rule (including up to 3 primary sources relied upon) [see 5 M.R.S. §§ 8057-A(1)(E) & 8063-B]: We analyze datasets describing winter severity, hunter effort, yearling frequencies, yearling antler beam diameters, recruitment estimates, harvest density, and ages of harvested deer (among others) to develop informed recommendations for permit numbers. We hold regional meetings with regional biologists and local game wardens and a larger meeting open to all Department staff to develop and discuss recommendations and input from the deer specialist, regional biologists, and game wardens.

Estimated Fiscal Impact of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(C)]: None anticipated.

FOR EXISTING RULES WITH FISCAL IMPACT OF \$1 MILLION OR MORE, ALSO INCLUDE:

Economic Impact, Whether or Not Quantifiable in Monetary Terms [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(A)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Individuals, Major Interest Groups and Types of Businesses Affected and How They Will Be Affected [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(B)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Benefits of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(C)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Note: If necessary, additional pages may be used.

Chapter 16: HUNTING

16.07 Deer Hunting

1. Deer Hunting Seasons/Days
2. Antlerless Deer Hunting Restrictions
3. Application Process for Antlerless Deer Permits
4. Antlerless Deer Permit Allocations by WMD or portion of WMD
5. Application and Allocation Process for Landowner Antlerless Deer Permits
6. Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) Permits
7. Expanded Archery Areas Open to Hunting of Deer
8. Deer Hunting Special Regulations and Closures

1. Deer Hunting Seasons/Days

F. **Muzzleloading Deer Hunting Season:** There shall be an open season on deer statewide on the first six hunting days after the regular deer hunting season for the purpose of hunting with a muzzleloading firearm, as provided within 12 M.R.S. §11404. In Wildlife Management Districts (WMDs) 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29 the season extends for an additional 6 hunting days.

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4. Antlerless Deer Permit Allocations by WMD or portion of WMD

A. **Number of Permits in each WMD and Exceptions Allowing for Antlerless Harvest without a Permit:** Except as otherwise provided in Sections 16.07- 1 and 6 (expanded archery area antlerless deer permits), the number of antlerless deer hunting permits to be allocated in 2025 2026 for each WMD or deer management subunit shall not exceed the numbers listed in section B below.

B.

WMD or Subunit	# of Permits
1	0
2	0 25
3	75 100
4	0
5	0 25
6	310 460
7	1,430 1,565
8	885 890
9	180 210
10	120 150
11	150 185

12	1,025 900
13	1,570 1,230
14	800 860
15	9,835 9,480
16	11,460 13,045
17	18,980 19,710
18	510 525
19	25
20	8,115 8,940
21	12,085 Unlimited
22	11,690 Unlimited
23	17,515 Unlimited
24	4,050 Unlimited
25	14,455 Unlimited
26	6,175 7,030
27	335 405
28	45
29	1,390 Unlimited
26a	485 510
Total Permits	123,695

(1) Antlerless harvest without a permit will be permitted in the following WMDs during all seasons (not including expanded archery): 21-25 and 29.

(2) Antlerless harvest without a permit will be permitted in All WMDs during the Youth Hunt and the Regular Archery Season.

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8. Deer Hunting Special Regulations and Closures

The following special regulations and closures are provided in accordance with the commissioner’s authority under Title 12, M.R.S. §11402.

B. Hancock County:

(1) **The whole of Cranberry Isles:** shall be open to the hunting of deer with a shotgun or archery equipment during any open hunting season that allows a shotgun or archery equipment to be used to hunt deer.

~~(2) **The whole of Frenchboro:** is open to the hunting of deer during any open deer hunting season. All other laws and rules relating to deer hunting shall apply.~~

~~(3) **Mount Desert Island:** shall have a continual closed season on deer.~~

~~(4) **Swans Island in the Town of Swans Island:** is open to the hunting of deer during any open deer hunting season. All other laws and rules relating to deer hunting shall apply.~~