



Wildlife Act amendments to deer hunting regulations

WHAT WE HEARD

July 2019

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Introduction

Starting July 1, 2019, new restrictions on importing live deer and specific deer parts from harvested animals came into effect under the Northwest Territories (NWT) *Wildlife Act* regulations. These restrictions will help prevent the introduction of chronic wasting disease (CWD) into local cervid populations, such as moose and caribou.

On the advice of its co-management partners, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) recommended allowing more harvesters to hunt deer as a proactive measure to help monitor and prevent the spread of CWD and reduce the risk of spreading other diseases from these species to NWT wildlife.

From March to May, 2019, ENR solicited public feedback on proposed regulatory amendments to increase harvesting opportunities for mule and white-tailed deer for General Hunting Licence (GHL) and Resident Hunting Licence (RES) holders in all areas of the NWT.

This change would also include a requirement for a (free) tag, mandatory reporting of the harvest as soon as practicable and mandatory sample submission of the head. New deer hunting seasons in the NWT would only be applicable to licensed GHL and RES harvesters. There are no changes for Aboriginal harvesters exercising their harvesting rights within their traditional use area – they can already harvest deer with no limits or conditions.

ENR received nine written or verbal submissions on deer harvesting from private individuals and organizations representing Indigenous governments and co-management boards. This document summarizes comments received and outlines what ENR will do next.

Summary of comments received

Public comments

ENR received four written submissions from the public, which noted:

- Increased sightings of deer in the South Slave region, in the Cameron Hills area and as far north as Hay River
- Support for a tag system with mandatory sampling and reporting
- White-tailed deer should be open for harvesting to all NWT residents, all year long
- Suggestion of a rewards program

“ I think this is a great idea and look forward to spending my deer hunting allowance in the NWT rather than the south! ”

ENR response:

Instead of a rewards program, ENR has removed all limits and associated tag fees for harvesting deer for General Hunting Licence or Resident Hunting Licence holders.

Non-governmental organizations

ENR received one submission from a non-governmental organization, which noted:

- Support for the proposed change
- A recommendation to identify all deer as “pest” species.

ENR response:

ENR will continue to monitor deer harvesting in the NWT and has deferred any decision to include deer as a pest for the time being.

Indigenous governments and organizations

ENR received two submissions from Indigenous governments and organizations:

- There was agreement with the creation of deer seasons, a tag system, mandatory reporting and mandatory sample submission as the means to monitor and control the deer population and potential diseases.
- There were also requests for clarity regarding the applicability to Aboriginal harvesters, as well as ENR’s current state of knowledge on deer populations and densities in the NWT.

ENR response:

It is not possible to predict the harvest of deer resulting from the proposed regulation change or the possible impact of harvesting on population numbers and densities. However, the proposed regulation is a proactive measure to help prevent the introduction and/or spread of CWD in the NWT.

ENR does not have specific population estimates or densities for mule or white-tailed deer in the NWT. Local knowledge first reported white-tailed deer in the 1940s in the Hook Lake area, and from Fort Liard to Fort Simpson in the early 1960s. Deer have become more common in all of these areas in recent years. Additionally, their range appears to be expanding. White-tailed deer have been harvested just north of Norman Wells and near Fort Good Hope.

Renewable resources boards

ENR received two submissions from renewable resources boards, which noted:

- Support for the creation of a harvesting season for deer
- A technical-level review determined no issues from a conservation perspective

Next Steps

ENR will work with the Department of Justice to amend regulations under the *Wildlife Act* to remove all associated tag fees for licensed white-tailed or mule deer harvesters, as well as provide conditions on the harvest that includes a mandatory tag, mandatory reporting and mandatory sample submission of the head.

Each renewable resources board, as per settled land claim agreements, will have time to formally review and recommend the final regulations before they are enacted.

ENR anticipates the proposed seasons and conditions for licensed harvesters will be enacted before the close of the 2019/20 hunting season.