



MISSOURI SENATE

Rob Mayer
25th Senate District

JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 331
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Column for the Week
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**Contact: Irene Murray
(573) 751-3859**

Deer Season is About to Begin

JEFFERSON CITY — This weekend marks the start of a Southeast Missouri tradition older than the bright lights of a Friday night football game and deeper than the waters of the Delta. I'm talking about the opening of the regular firearms deer hunting season. It starts this Saturday, November 10th and runs through the 20th. It's a great opportunity for folks to get out and enjoy our great outdoor areas, while putting meat on their tables and passing along a tradition to our youth.

The drought hit Southeast Missouri particularly hard this year. While farmers were able to scrape by and put lots of irrigation water on their crops, our deer population had to suffer through with whatever nature would give it. Some areas got good rains... some got missed. Despite the tough weather, the deer numbers are pretty much the same as last year, and the people at the Missouri Department of Conservation assure me there will be plenty of big bucks for the taking. The harvest should at least match the total 235,054 deer taken statewide last year.

The folks at Conservation want to pass along some tips they believe will make your outing more successful. First of all, think safety! You've got to wear the "hunter orange" so you can be seen by other hunters... and you can see them. Hunting is still one of the safest sports we have with fewer injuries per 100,000 participants than other sports such as cycling, tennis, golf, and even bowling. Much of that success can be attributed to the aggressive hunter education program Missouri offers. If you're an experienced hunter, consider taking along a youth who could learn from your years of experience safely pursuing deer. The conservation department also says to make sure you know your target and what lies beyond it before you shoot. Always ask for permission before you hunt on private land. Most farmers are more than willing to let you hunt. Just respect their property rights, and make sure to pick up any trash, including empty shell casings, before you leave. Courtesy goes a long way.

Finally, share the bounty of your harvest. If you like to hunt, but either already have plenty of venison for yourself or don't want it, the Share the Harvest Program gives you a chance to donate that meat to the needy. Last year, 6,500 hunters donated more than 320,000 pounds of deer meat to be distributed to food banks, feeding centers, and directly into the hands of those less fortunate. In some cases, the processing fee might even be waived, so please consider this worthy way of feeding the hungry in our state.

If you'd like more information on the rules and regulations about this weekend's start of deer hunting season, just go to the Missouri Department of Conservation's deer hunting web site, <http://mdc.mo.gov/hunt/deer/>. Good luck and be safe.

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Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.