

Week of October 19, 2009



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Have a Safe, Successful Deer Hunting Season

The cooler weather and changing leaves signal that fall is here, which means harvesting crops, bundling up for football games and for many, the start of deer hunting season. This also means drivers will need to be on the lookout for deer on the road for the next several weeks, especially around dawn and dusk.

For many Missourians in rural parts of the state, the opportunity to head out in the woods on a cool fall morning in search of a deer is something to look forward to all year. Hunters took 238,819 deer in the 2008 firearms season and it looks like deer hunters have the potential to meet or exceed that number this year. The archery season is already underway and runs from Sept. 15 to Nov. 13, and again from Nov. 25, 2009, to Jan. 15, 2010. The main firearms season will be Nov. 14–24; early youth season will run Oct. 31 and Nov. 1; antlerless will be Nov. 25 to Dec. 6; muzzleloader will be Dec. 19 to 29; and the late youth season will be Jan. 2 and 3, 2010. Hunters can be in the woods from 30 minutes before sunrise until 30 minutes after sunset, and as always, each person is allowed to take one antlered deer during the firearms deer season.

Safety is one of the most important things to keep in mind before beginning to hunt. Hunters are required to wear a hat or cap and shirt, coat or vest that is hunter orange—camouflage orange does not satisfy the requirement. Also remember, hunters born on or after January 1, 1967, must have taken an approved hunter education program. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) recommends the following guidelines for a safe and successful deer hunting season:

- Be sure of your target and beyond before you shoot.
- Make sure your equipment is in good working condition and your firearm is properly sighted in.

- If you hunt from a tree stand, always wear a safety harness to help prevent a serious accident in the event of a fall.
- If you hunt on private land, be sure to obtain permission from the landowner and respect his or her property as if it were your own.
- If you do not kill your deer instantly, make every effort to find the wounded animal. Permission is required to enter private land.
- Clean and care for your game properly.
- Pick up all litter, including spent ammunition.
- Report observed violations of the law to a conservation agent or local sheriff as soon as possible.
- If you are involved in a firearms-related accident, the law requires that you identify yourself and render assistance; failure to do so is a class A misdemeanor.
- Know and obey all wildlife laws, and know and follow the rules of gun safety.
- Remember, hunting is not a competitive sport.

When the hunt is over, there is a way for Missouri hunters to give back to their communities and help those who suffer from hunger. A program called Share the Harvest originated in 1992 when a group of Missouri archers were concerned about people who were going hungry in their communities. From there, the MDC and Conservation Federation of Missouri got involved and began running a version of the program statewide, providing an easy way for hunters to donate venison to Missourians in need of red meat. Many families and individuals do not have a steady source of protein in their diets. Deer meat is a great source of protein, and even better, unlike most red meat, it is unusually low in fat. Through Share the Harvest, Missouri hunters can provide people in their communities with a vital part of a healthy diet.

It's easy to donate. Hunters take their deer to an approved processing plant and simply tell the processor how much venison they wish to donate—it could be a few pounds or the whole deer. The processor then packages and stores the meat until it's transported to a distributing agency, which will distribute the venison to ensure it is all used and goes to those who need it most.

Another incentive for hunters to participate in the program is that the Conservation Federation and its partners will reimburse processors, at an amount set each year, to process a whole deer donated to Share the Harvest. Additional local funds can further reduce the processing cost—in some instances the entire cost may be covered, particularly in areas of high deer density. For more information on Share the Harvest or to get involved in the program, or for a list of participating processors in your area, go to <http://mdc.mo.gov/hunt/deer/share/> or call (573) 751-4115. For more information about deer hunting season, go to <http://mdc.mo.gov/hunt/deer/>.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

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