



## **All About Deer Hunting in Rappahannock County Rules and Regulations**

**Updated for 2025-2026 Season**

### **Sources:**

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### **Why Deer Hunting is Essential to Land Conservation**

Deer populations in Virginia have increased in the last several decades due to changes in habitats, often caused by converting forests to home sites and agricultural lands. Black bear, bobcats, coyotes, and hunters are the only existing deer predators.

With some of the most liberal deer hunting seasons in the country, Virginia is currently stabilizing and, in some places, reducing deer populations in parts of the Commonwealth. Still, deer require enormous amounts of forage, can potentially live for twenty years, and are capable of producing young throughout their lifetime. Currently, hunting is the primary means of controlling the deer population in Virginia.

Deer hunting helps to 1) maintain a healthy deer population (currently beset by chronic wasting disease (CWD))<sup>1</sup>; 2) diminish crop damage; 3) reduce deer-vehicle collision rates; and 4) minimize the impact of deer on the ecosystem.

Ecosystem impacts of uncontrolled deer populations include the following:

**Invasive Plants:** Invasive plants are spreading rapidly in Virginia and are capable of crowding out native species. Deer rarely eat invasive plants, but they do browse heavily on natives. This places even more pressure on the already struggling native plant population. Through their browsing, deer can also inadvertently spread the seeds of invasives.

**Forest regeneration:** Lack of forest management and prescribed fire inhibits the regeneration of certain tree species, especially oaks. But deer add to the problem of forest regeneration by browsing heavily on young native trees.

**Native Wildlife:** Deer browse also reduces the understory cover habitat for native birds and mammals.

<sup>1</sup>CWD is an infectious, fatal, neurological disease of deer which causes those infected to starve to death. Since 2009, 252 CWD-positive deer have been confirmed in VA. Most cases have been outside of Rappahannock (in Frederick and northern Shenandoah counties) but some have been confirmed in Rappahannock and nearby counties. Deer hunting helps reduce the spread of this disease. One of the most important thing hunters can do to help is to submit deer they kill for CWD testing. Testing is free of charge and hunters should drop off the deer head plus 3-4 inches of neck at a DWR refrigerator. See <http://www.dwr.virginia.gov/cwd> for an up-to-date map of voluntary refrigeration stations.

## Dates for Deer Hunting Season:

### Specific to Rappahannock County

- **Youth and Apprentice:** September 27 – 28, 2025
- **Archery (Statewide):**  
**Early:** October 4-November 14, 2025
- **Muzzleloader:**  
**Early:** November 1- November 14, 2025
- **Firearms (General, including Archery and Muzzleloader):**  
November 15, 2025 to January 3, 2026
- **Antlerless Seasons (due to Chronic Wasting Disease management) on private lands:**  
**Early:** September 6 to October 3, 2025  
**Late:** January 4 to March 29, 2026

For any questions about these dates, as applied to Rappahannock County, contact David Kocka, DWR District Wildlife Biologist or Tim Bostic, VA Conservation Police (see contact information for both on page 1 of this document)

## Deer Hunting Regulations -- Bag Limits and Exceptions

In Virginia, statewide “Bag Limits” set how many of what type of deer can be killed per day by a given hunter. Generally, the bag limit for deer taken East of the Blue Ridge is two per day/six per license year. Of the six-deer limit, no more than three may be antlered deer.

Note that in several counties in VA, including Rappahannock, hunters who have killed their first buck in a license year have to kill a doe before killing a second buck. This is the so-called “Earn a Buck” rule.

Deer hunters, including those exempt from purchasing a license (e.g., landowners hunting on their own land), may take more than the license-year bag limit of antlerless deer by purchasing bonus deer permits.

Because the above limits may not be sufficient to manage deer herds in certain areas, VA has established the **Deer Management Assistance Program** (DMAP) which allows, on a site-specific basis, more intensive management of antlerless deer. There is no acreage limit for participation in DMAP. Persons interested in participating in this program must apply by no later than September 15, for the following year.

Under DMAP, landowners and hunt clubs work together on a local level to manage deer herds in conjunction with wildlife biologists from DWR. Landowners and hunt clubs must apply to DWR to set their own deer management goals for specific properties and collect biological data on the deer they kill. They must provide this data to State wildlife biologists for analysis.

For more information on bag limits, and bonus deer permits, see:

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/hunting/regulations/deer/>

For more information on DMAP, see

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/deer/dmap/>

## **Blaze Color Clothing Requirements for Hunters**

In Virginia, deer hunters and anyone with them must wear blaze orange or blaze pink during any firearms deer season. This is a safety measure that makes hunters visible to other people but not to deer (who see the color as grey).

Specific requirements include wearing a solid blaze colored hat (either orange or pink) a solid blaze colored upper body garment (visible from 360 degrees) and displaying 100 square inches of solid blaze colored material at or above shoulder level, visible from all directions.

The blaze requirement does not apply to hunting with a bow and arrow during an open firearms season in areas where firearms are prohibited. For more information, please go to:

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/hunting/regulations/general/#blaze-color>

## Special Considerations for Hunting Deer on Your Own Land

Landowners in VA are not required to obtain licenses to hunt on their own land. However, landowners must register with VA DWR any deer they kill on their own property by using DWR's mobile app, internet, or telephone harvest reporting system. For information on how to do this go to <https://dwr.virginia.gov/hunting/game-harvest-reporting>.

Landowners hunting on their own land are subject to the same bag limits discussed in the section above unless they obtain bonus tags or have entered into a DMAP arrangement with DWR. (See DMAP discussion in the previous section.)

VA law prohibits all hunters (including landowners) from shooting deer and leaving the deer to decompose or be consumed by other wildlife. Doing so is considered “wanton waste” under VA statute. However, if the deer is boned and the meat removed for consumption, sale or giveaway, it is possible to leave the carcass on the ground where the deer was field dressed. Alternatively, the hunter or landowner must field dress the deer and take it to a processor so that the meat can be used or donated.

## Allowing Hunters to Hunt Deer on Your Land

If a landowner prefers to have others hunt for deer on their land, they should consider taking the following steps:

- Assure that any hunters allowed on the property have a license to hunt deer.
- Request past references from other landowners where the hunter has hunted.
- Request proof of insurance.
- As a courtesy, let your neighbors know when hunting will occur on your land. Also ask that if a deer is shot on your property and runs off the property, whether the hunter can cross to the neighboring property to retrieve it.
- Discuss the boundaries of your land so the hunter is clear on where he/she can and cannot go.
- Have the hunter sign an agreement setting out the rules for hunting on your land and agreeing to waive any liability for injury incurred by the hunter.

VA law exempts landowners who provide recreational opportunities to the public (including hunters) from liability for injuries or damages, provided the landowner does not charge a fee and there is no gross negligence or “willful or malicious failure to guard or warn against a dangerous condition, use or structure on the property (such as open wells, falling down buildings, etc.). However, a landowner may want to consider obtaining comprehensive liability insurance as an addition to their standard and homeowner insurance policies.

For more steps a landowner can consider to guard against liability see the following link from VA DWR: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/hunting/regulations/general/#Landowner>

## **Finding a Hunter to Hunt on Your Land**

Please refer to Deer Hunting Resources for RLEP Members:

<https://rlep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Deer-Hunters-in-Rappahannock-County-2025-web.pdf>

## **Processing Deer**

Once a deer is killed it should be “field dressed” as quickly as possible, especially if the animal was shot in or near the guts. Field dressing entails removing the internal organs (guts) of the deer and is necessary to preserve the meat as it ensures rapid body heat loss which prevents bacteria from growing on the carcass.

This You Tube video demonstrates how to field dress a deer:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duU6ILBWa0Y&ab\\_channel=KentuckyAfield.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duU6ILBWa0Y&ab_channel=KentuckyAfield)

Most deer killed by hunters or landowners are taken to processors. There is a charge by the processor to prepare the meat for consumption by the hunter or the landowner. However, if the deer is going for donation to a food bank there is no charge to the hunter or landowner. The average cost for processing a deer is approximately \$100 according to the VA DWR.

Many processors require that deer be field dressed before they will process the meat. However, some processors may be willing to field dress the deer (for an additional fee) if they receive it as soon as possible after the kill. There is a strong risk of contamination if a deer is killed by a shot to the gut area and the deer is not immediately gutted in the field.

Therefore, one should check with their chosen processor to confirm that they will accept a deer that has not been field dressed and that they are open and ready to receive the deer when you plan to drop it off.

For processors around the Rappahannock County area, click on this map prepared by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and zoom into our region:

[https://maps.app.goo.gl/VbyGLQJg4ivVvTcF6?g\\_st=i](https://maps.app.goo.gl/VbyGLQJg4ivVvTcF6?g_st=i)

**“Hunters for the Hungry”** is a program whereby landowners and/or hunters can take deer they have killed to authorized processing facilities to be processed for a fee and given to food banks. This organization works with some processors in counties surrounding or near to Rappahannock (including Madison, Page, Fauquier, Orange, and Frederick). To find the names of these processors go to: <https://h4hungry.org/how-to-donate-deer/>

## **Additional Resources**

VA DWR hosts numerous workshops and online classes regarding hunting and processing. Check this link for information on these offerings:

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/events/category/hunting/>