



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Safe Hunting

Date: Friday, November 21, 2008

Location: Great Swamp Management Area, Kingston

Background:

With the archery and muzzle loading deer seasons currently underway and the shotgun deer season opening on December 6, the Department of Environmental Management is focusing its efforts on informing hunters about what steps they need to follow to ensure a safe and enjoyable hunt. Deer hunting hours remain one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

Hunters should check DEM regulations for specific regulations as to where hunting is allowed, and should also check with local authorities for additional hunting restrictions.

Persons applying for a hunting license or an archery permit for the first time must complete a course in safe hunting or archery practices, and must obtain a Certificate of Competency in order to obtain a RI hunting license. More than 50 years ago, the state enacted legislation that mandates training in safe hunting practices and the handling and use of firearms and bow and arrow for individuals applying for a hunting license. If an individual was granted a RI hunting license in a prior year, or if an individual can produce a hunter education card issued by RI or under an equivalent program of hunter education adopted by another state, they are excused from the course. Also, individuals who are presently serving or have been honorably discharged from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard are not required to take the course.

The hunter education course requires a minimum of 10 hours of classroom participation and features such topics as hunter responsibility, principles of wildlife management, firearms, wildlife laws and identification, game care, specialty hunting, outdoor emergencies and survival, water safety and hypothermia. The bowhunter education course is a one-day course featuring topics related specifically to bowhunting, such as fundamentals of bowhunting, safety issues, how an arrow works, bowhunting equipment, and tree stand use.

A list of hunter safety instructors, dates, and locations of classes is available from DEM's Hunter Safety Office (789-3094) and online on DEM's website, www.dem.ri.gov. The courses, and all materials, are provided free of charge.

Since the inception of the state's mandatory hunter education program, well over 50,000 individuals have completed the course, resulting in a significant decrease in hunting-related accidents. Injury rates have steadily declined over the years, as more and more individuals take advantage of this training course. The course has evolved over time to include subjects that have become increasingly important in current times such as landowner relations, hunter ethics, and wildlife management.

Fluorescent orange safety clothing is required during the hunting season statewide for all hunters. To meet this requirement, safety clothing must be solid daylight fluorescent orange. Fluorescent camouflage does not meet this requirement. The hunter orange must be worn above the waist and be visible in all directions. Examples that meet the orange requirements are a hat that covers 200 square inches or combination of hat and vest covering 500 square inches.

Fluorescent Orange Requirements vary by hunting season:

200 square inches must be worn by small game hunters during small game season; fall turkey hunters while traveling; by muzzleloaders during muzzleloader season, and by archers when traveling to/from stands during muzzleloader season.

500 square inches must be worn by hunters and other state management area users during shotgun deer seasons. Thereafter, the requirement drops to 200 square inches through the end of February, and during the spring turkey hunting season.

Individuals should educate themselves regarding the top health and safety concerns of hunters. These include: hypothermia, rabies, Lyme disease, chronic wasting disease (CWD) and avian influenza. Important precautionary information and procedures on these topics may be found in the 2008-2009 Rhode Island Hunting and Trapping Abstract.

Hunting Licenses Required:

Hunting licenses, pheasant permits, and abstracts that summarize the hunting and trapping seasons and bag limits by species, are available at various license vendors throughout the state (most city and town clerks and most sporting goods stores) and at DEM's Licensing Office, 235 Promenade St. in Providence. The fee for a resident hunting license is \$18. All money collected through licensing fees goes into a special restricted account used specifically to fund the state's wildlife restoration program. These funds benefit both game and non-game species.

Junior hunting licenses are issued to individuals 12-14 years old who have successfully completed the safety course. These individuals may hunt under the immediate supervision of a qualified licensed adult 21 years of age or older. An individual may hunt independently at 15 years of age.

Residents 65 years and older may obtain a free permanent hunting license from any city or town clerk or from DEM's Licensing Office.

Opportunities for Hunters to Help

Hunters can donate their surplus game, properly processed, packaged, and refrigerated, to a

number of local food kitchens through the [*Hunters and Fishermen for the Hungry*](#) program, coordinated by DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife in cooperation with the Rhode Island Food Bank. The Division maintains a list of locations, updated regularly, where fish and game may be donated, and has also prepared a booklet with guidelines on handling game and fish for donations, as well as a collection of [game and fish recipes](#) for the food kitchens. All of this information is available on [DEM's website, www.dem.ri.gov](#), by clicking on "[Topics](#)", then "[Wildlife/Hunter Ed](#)" under "[Outdoor Recreation/Fisheries](#)". An information packet is also available by calling the Division at 789-0281.

For the seventh year, DEM is joining much of the country in conducting a systematic Chronic Wasting Disease surveillance program, and will ask hunters at the state check stations to assist by donating heads of yearlings and adults harvested in state. However, hunters may also participate by contacting DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife's field headquarters at 789-0281 for approval to submit fresh samples labeled with the location of harvest. Hunters are also asked to call DEM's law enforcement office at 222-3070 to report any sick or emaciated deer, or any deer displaying abnormal behavior.

Interviews:

Karen Unsworth of DEM's Hunter Education Program talked about fluorescent orange requirements, the importance of hunter education and the Department's program, how to sign up for classes, requirements of minimum of 10 hours of classroom participation, and topics featured in class, as well as hunter ethics, wildlife principles, and how hunters can help manage wildlife populations.

Sergeant Wendy Knowlton, DEM Environmental Police Officer, talked about handling firearms and provided a review of practices that are prohibited during hunting; demonstrated safe firearm handling techniques: 2-hand carry (most stable position); offered safety tips including be aware of where muzzle is pointed at all times (down/straight up); keep finger out of trigger until you shoot; demonstrated loading and unloading of firearm; showed how to use a safety harness. Wendy also demonstrated fluorescent orange requirements – a hat for 200 square inches; and a hat and vest combo for 500 square inches.