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Dec. 3 Iowa Outdoors

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IOWA OUTDOORS

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES | CONSERVATION AND RECREATION DIVISION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: DECEMBER 3, 2013

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IOWA'S SHOTGUN DEER SEASON PREVIEW

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Iowa deer hunters likely will step out into single digit cold Saturday, the opener for the first shotgun

season. That's closer to 'typical' weather than the balmy 30s and 40s last weekend. What better way to kick off the 60th anniversary of Iowa's deer season, than by stocking up on hand warmers?

Like many other wildlife species, deer were pretty well wiped out by European settlement and overhunting by 1900. Slowly recovering, there was still more than a decade of controversy before the first season was approved across 45 counties in 1953. With a herd estimated at 12,000-15,000 statewide, differing sides warned of not enough deer to warrant a season...or too much crop damage. Still, hunters took 3,782 in that December 10-14 season.

Compare that now, to a yearly harvest of 115,000 or so; spread across several seasons and nearly four months in the fall and early winter. There is a lot more science, information...and *interest* in hunting Iowa's big game.

That interest peaks, as about 140,000 shotgun deer season hunters head to the woods and fields; either December 7-11 or December 14-22.

"Shotgun hunters account for more than half of Iowa's deer harvest. Much of our deer management hinges on the shotgun seasons," notes Tom Litchfield, DNR deer research biologist.

That interest means money in the bank for a variety of businesses and conservation measures. The U.S Fish & Wildlife Service in its latest (2011) outdoor recreation survey says Iowa deer hunters account for \$197 million in retail sales. That supports 3,300 jobs. The state and local governments take in \$21.4 million in fees, sales taxes and other sources. Another \$23.5 million goes to the federal government. Most of that returns in the form of funding for wildlife and habitat protection and enhancement.

Hunter success rates this year should reflect lower overall deer populations. Liberal use of antlerless tags for a decade have increased the doe harvest; thus reducing reproduction. Hunters should consult with property owners, to see if deer numbers are acceptable. It may be prudent to back off on doe harvest for a couple years.

Another unknown, as more boots hit the ground, is the effect of Epizootic Hemorrhaging Disease (EHD). Landowners and early hunters report finding more than 1,000 deer carcasses, possible victims of EHD. More will turn up as shotgun hunters cover new territory.

"With the season in its latest possible (start) scenario...most crops will be out. Also, it could be colder. A lot of hunters like having a little snow on the ground, so the potential for that is higher, too."

Snow helps with tracking deer. Still, you need to be in the right place to begin.

That's where party hunting has advantages...and carries extra responsibility. "Iowa's hunting tradition has evolved with party hunting, in conjunction with drive deer hunting," says Litchfield. "That enables shotgun hunters to be very effective in taking greater numbers of deer over a shorter time... important with seasons of only 5 and then 9 days."

As you move those deer, keep the wind in mind. The deer do.

"You don't want to push deer into the scent of your blockers. Set them up so the wind is in their favor. Move the deer into a crosswind. Or have the wind at the back of the drivers," suggests Litchfield. It encourages the deer to move earlier and more slowly. Then, they are not running as they come by the blockers."

That means less chance of a shot going astray. With friends and family in close proximity, safety has to be your first concern. Blaze orange outerwear — covering your torso— is mandatory in shotgun season. More of it — gloves, a cap, coveralls— is better. The same advice that is repeated each year...is good one more

time. Know where your gun is pointing and know what lies beyond your target.

1953...That First Hunt

"I remember it was snowy and cold. I went with my father and some others, to a farm in Sioux City. It had quite a few deer on it. I had one of those regular (traditional) bows," recalls a then-16 year old Des Moines youth. Six decades later, he tells me he would just as soon stay out of the spotlight.

"I sat in a ravine with a lot of little trees and brush...to see what came along. It was hard to get a clear shot. The (first) arrow didn't go the direction I wanted. Eventually, I got lucky."

And so came one of Iowa's first modern season deer kills; perhaps the first with a bow.

Up to 20,000 licenses...at \$15 each...were authorized that first year. In his book, *'Whitetail; Treasure, Trophy or Trouble?'* naturalist and author Larry Stone noted that biologists had estimated it might take a harvest of half the herd to keep the population in check. Still, there were post-season complaints from western Iowa that too many had been killed. Iowans disagreed back then, too!

The Iowa Conservation Commission spent several years ironing out whether to offer hunting as a deer control tool in certain areas or to provide sustained hunting. Over the years, the Commission and its successor, the Department of Natural Resources basically follow both courses. Each year, adjustments *are* made; be they 'buck only' tags, adjusting county by county antlerless quotas, adding or suspending short 'bonus' seasons...or other fine tuning.

And it started with a 16 year old kid, sitting on a cold, snowy hillside.

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[**EDITORS NOTE:** The Iowa DNR has an ice thickness infograph to accompany this tip list. To receive the infograph, send an email request to mick.klemesrud@dnr.iowa.gov]

ICE SAFETY REMINDER AS IOWA LAKES FREEZE OVER

- There is no such thing as 100 percent safe ice.
- The Iowa Department of Natural Resources recommends a minimum of four inches of quality ice for fishing and at least five inches for snowmobiles and ATVs.
- Ice thickness is not uniform on any body of water. Things like current and springs slow ice growth. Rocks, trees or docks that poke through the ice like will conduct heat and make the ice around it less stable.

- There could be pockets of thin ice or places where ice recently formed, so it would be wise to check ice thickness as you go out.
 - The insulating effect of snow slows down the freezing process.
- Safety items in the bucket: Ice picks, about 50 feet of rope and a throwable floatation seat cushion for use in case of rescue.
- Ice fishing is a social activity, don't go out alone. If the worst should happen, someone would be there to call for help or to rescue.
- Avoid off-colored snow or ice. It is usually a sign of weakness.
- Trust your instincts. If it doesn't look right, stay off.

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FOREST CITY MAN WINS ADVENTURE READY GIFT CARD GIVEAWAY

Paul Bartelt, from Forest City, is this week's winner of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Adventure Ready Gift Card Giveaway. Bartelt won a \$50 gift card generously donated by Mills Fleet Farm.

Hunters and anglers who purchase one of four new licenses in 2013 will be automatically entered into a weekly drawing for a \$50 gift card.

To participate in the drawing, Iowans can simply purchase one of the four qualifying licenses at any license retailer or on the DNR's website at www.iowadnr.gov. The four qualifying licenses are:

- **Bonus Line License** – resident and nonresident anglers can fish with one additional line (with the purchase of the annual fishing license, which allows two lines), for \$12.
- **Outdoor Combo License** – annual resident hunting/fishing/habitat combo license for \$47.
- **Angler's Special** – a three-year resident fishing license for \$53.
- **Hunter's Special** – a three-year resident hunting license with habitat included for \$86.

The DNR will draw every Monday at noon and announce the weekly winner on its website and through Twitter on Tuesday afternoon. The promotion will run through December 23, 2013.

Bass Pro Shops is sponsoring the Dec. 9 gift card drawing. Weekly winner announcements, gift card sponsors and complete drawing details can be found at www.iowadnr.gov/giveaway.

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MEMBERS SOUGHT FOR BRUSHY CREEK BOARD

Hikers, bikers and horseback riders interested in protecting, preserving and enhancing the trail system at Brushy Creek State Recreation Area are being encouraged to serve on the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Brushy Creek Trail Advisory Board.

The 10-member Trail Advisory Board is responsible for advising the DNR on issues and recommendations regarding the development and maintenance of 45 miles of trails at Brushy Creek, a popular equestrian and multi-use recreation area in Webster County.

The DNR is looking for qualified applicants who actively participate in recreational trail activities, from hiking, bicycling and horseback riding to snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. There are two board positions open, each serving a three-year term.

For more information about the board or becoming a member of the board, go to www.iowadnr.gov/bcreek. The form for serving on the board can be found in the middle of the page. Deadline for applications is 4:30 p.m., Jan. 20.

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