

Antler restrictions do work elsewhere

My last column on the state Department of Environmental Conservation's mishandling of the proposed expansion of antler restrictions prompted a number of reader responses.



The most common question was focused around the results of antler restrictions here or in other states where they have been used. Does the data back up the so-called "theory" of antler restrictions?

First, you need to understand that antler restrictions alone are not the recipe for deer herd management.

Antler restrictions are just part of a larger strategy that includes managing the hunt for does at the same time.

Another element is wildlife management areas chosen, especially with regard to how much natural food is available to support local deer populations.

To sum it up, deer management is a complex business and a combination of both art and science.

Missouri has been testing antler restrictions since 2004 in 29 counties that require a buck to have four points. The counties in the New York pilot program have a three-point requirement.

Missouri chose a group of counties that were mostly agricultural with high deer densities and another group that had moderate deer densities in a mostly forested area. According to Missouri biologist Lonnie Hansen in a recent article in the Missouri Conservationist, the antler restriction data from those counties is positive. He concluded that although Missouri did not achieve all its biological objectives, the antler point restriction counties increased the hunt of adult bucks and does in central counties and was generally popular and well supported.

While initial buck hunts after the first two years were smaller, the hunts increased after that and included larger bucks.

So successful was this initial pilot of 29 counties that in 2008 Missouri expanded the antler restrictions to include



Photos provided

Scott Jacobs of Greenville caught his first bass July 10 using a lure at a pond in his hometown. He's pictured with fellow angler Renee Hustins and his brother, Sean Jacobs.

FOR MORE INFO

Details on Missouri and Texas antler restrictions are available online at:

Missouri: <http://tinyurl.com/knhbp5>

Texas: <http://tinyurl.com/ngqrav>

65 counties.

Texas is a state well known for its excellent deer hunting.

In a study conducted after antler restrictions were introduced in the Kerr wildlife management area a few years ago, biologists concluded the restrictions reduced the killing of 1½ and 2½-year-old deer from 80 percent of the animals shot to 45 percent. Conversely, the shooting of bucks older than 3½ years increased from 20 percent to 55 percent of the six-county total.

Well-respected and recently retired New York DEC big game biologist Dick Henry sent me a note recently on this subject.

"Hunter retention is very closely tied to hunter satisfaction," Henry stated. "Every Cornell HDRU Hunter satisfaction survey in the last two decades points out that among the highest deer hunter satisfactions are 'seeing deer' and 'seeing bucks.' Put more overall bucks on the landscape and it has to have an impact on hunter satisfaction, and the willingness to want to continue to hunt."

Henry went on to say that, "the flip side of the situation is that by maintaining the



David Degrodt of Pine Bush caught a 6½-pound, 23-inch largemouth bass at his grandparents' campsite this summer in Deposit. If you have a big fish photo you'd like to share, e-mail a high-resolution jpeg to sports@th-record.com.

status quo, by doing nothing, the downward trend in hunter numbers will, with absolute certainty, continue. One of my favorite axioms is 'the definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over again and expecting the results to be different,' and that is exactly the trap that the Department is falling into now with regard to the future of deer hunting' in New York.

David Dirks' outdoors column appears weekly. Contact him through his Web site at www.dirksoutdoors.com, or write P.O. Box 87, Westtown, NY 10998.