

# Hunters: DEC gets it wrong on Antlers

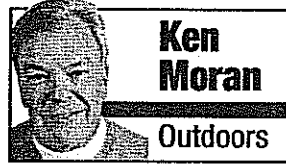
**T**HE decision to withdraw the antler restriction program in parts of the Catskills has riled many New York State hunters, the majority of whom it seems wanted the program.

The Five County Coalition of Sportsmen, a group that help initiate and support the program, say they feel betrayed by the Department of Environmental Conservation.

"Over the last two years the Coalition completed all steps required by the DEC to implement Antler Restrictions in the new areas" said David Hartman of the Sullivan County Federation and spokesman for the Coalition. "It is surprising that a process that was used in two previous counties was deemed inappropriate for the current proposal."

The proposed hunting changes would have expanded the existing antler restriction program to include eight additional wildlife management units in Sullivan, Ulster, Delaware, Greene and Schoharie Counties.

If enacted, the proposal would have required hunters in those areas to take bucks that have three or more ant-



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**Outdoors**

ler points on a side, instead of the current 3-inch spike horn law.

Similar changes have been enacted in 22 other states. In neighboring Pennsylvania, antler restrictions were enacted statewide in 2003, and as a result, hunters now take 2½-year-old bucks with larger bodies and more meat and say they enjoy seeing more bucks while hunting.

Jay Martin, Big Game Chairman for Ulster County Federation, a member of the Coalition, said that based on the DEC's own survey of big game hunters in the eight proposed WMUs, 67 percent supported antler restrictions.

"Supporters far outnumbered opponents; so apparently by the DEC's logic, the minority rules," Martin said.

Bill Willis of Delaware County Department of Eco-

nomic Development, a member of the Coalition, said that more than 80 percent of all male deer taken in Delaware County are yearlings and still are immature.

"This is a terrible waste of a valuable resource, and it is wrong to ignore the wishes of 7 out of 10 hunters in Delaware County," Willis said. Willis said that under the current laws, the chances of seeing and taking an adult buck are very low.

"The Five County Coalition approached the DEC and was given a list of requirements to complete in order to get Antler Restrictions," said Les Armstrong, of the Greene County Federation of Sportsmen. "The counties diligently completed all steps, and the DEC breached the agreement ignoring the wishes of the super majority of sportsmen and the counties requesting the management improvement."

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