

DEC plays wrong antler card

After gun control, the next hottest topic for discussion among many outdoorsmen is antler restrictions.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation had proposed expanding deer antler restrictions to eight



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OUTDOORS

more wildlife management units – 3A, 4G, 4O, 4P, 4R, 4S, 4W and 4X – in the western and northern Catskills. The DEC recently stated it has decided not to introduce the proposal after many months of public review and discussion.

As I've noted in this column many times, I'm for antler restrictions and believe it is a solid, long-term plan to improve hunting conditions throughout the state.

The same DEC that approved the current pilot program for antler restrictions in four units – 3C, 3H, 3J and 3K – several years ago, now seems to have had second thoughts. Or a lack of courage. The DEC found "that the issue deeply divided hunters," and primarily on that basis, killed the proposal.

MORE ONLINE

YOU CAN ACCESS the data cited in this column by going to: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/52453.html>.

It looks to me as if the DEC has ignored its own recommendations and data. Here are two examples.

First, while the DEC came up with all kinds of reasons to withdraw the proposal to expand the pilot restriction program, it encourages hunters to consider the option of creating local "cooperative voluntary antler restrictions." By supporting a "voluntary" plan for antler restrictions, the DEC gives a multitude of reasons why antler restrictions should be considered.

"Protecting young bucks allows for more bucks to survive into older age classes," the DEC notes on its Web site. "Having more bucks, including older bucks, in the population may increase marking behavior (rubs and scrapes) during breeding season.

"Many hunters are already participating in successful cooperative programs to voluntarily protect young bucks through an antler restriction of some form."

By choosing not to shoot

young bucks, the DEC notes, the number of bucks killed each year "will be reduced, but you may see these deer the following year as larger, older bucks."

My interpretation: If you want to "voluntarily" introduce a cooperative effort on antler restrictions in your area, the DEC heartily supports it. If you want the DEC to mandate antler restrictions in the same area, the DEC loses its enthusiasm.

The real question is, are hunters really deeply divided on the issue of antler restrictions? This is where the DEC ignores its own published data.

For example, in a DEC survey of hunters across the state, it asked hunters if they would support an experimental regulation of antler restrictions in regions of Central/Western, Northern, and Southeastern New York, with 57 percent, 52 percent and 63 percent of those hunters surveyed saying they would support restrictions.

In a DEC assessment con-

"You just do it."



Provided

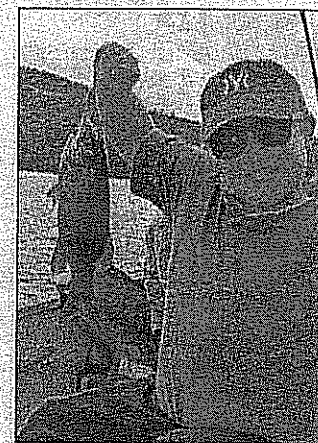
Luke Paulsen, right, shows off the bass he caught. Emma Pauls left, displays a nice trout she caught.

ducted in February 2009, the DEC noted that 67 percent of the hunters surveyed supported antler restrictions in the now-defunct proposal to add them to eight WMUs.

Does that sound like a divided group of hunters?

The DEC's credibility and reputation have taken a big hit on this issue. We haven't heard the last on this.

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.



Collin Canfield caught a 14-lb bass in the Rio Reservoir in Forestburgh.