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Thursday, July 16, 2009

Despite DEC ruling, AR backers push on[Print Page](#)**By Steve Piatt
Editor**

Thursday, July 9, 2009 9:55 AM CDT

Grahamsville, N.Y. - Antler restriction supporters, stunned by DEC's decision to scrap a plan to expand those regulations into more wildlife management units, say they'll continue their efforts to have three-points-a-side regulations enacted.

"This decision has strengthened the group's resolve, and we will push forward with modernizing deer management practices such as protecting yearling bucks wherever it is supported," said David Hartman, a spokesman for a five-county coalition of sportsmen backing the proposal in southeastern New York.

"We will take whatever steps necessary for the sportsmen's voice to be heard."

Hartman said antler restriction advocates were shocked when DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis last month announced a proposal to add the regulations in eight additional units - WMUs 3A, 4G, 4O, 4P, 4R, 4S, 4W and 4X - was being scrapped.

"Over the last two years the coalition completed all steps required by the DEC to implement antler restrictions in the new areas," he said. "It is surprising that a process used in two previous counties was deemed inappropriate for the current proposal."

Hartman said hunter support for antler restrictions is clear, with 67 percent of the hunters favoring antler restrictions.

DEC officials, however, earlier this year set a pair of benchmarks for putting antler restrictions in place in the additional WMUs. More than two-thirds support was needed, but if more than 20 percent voiced strong opposition, the proposal would be dropped.

"DEC definitely changed the rules as we went along," Hartman said. "I have no idea how we didn't get this approved. It was an arbitrary decision against the sportsmen."

Grannis, in a letter to the Conservation Fund Advisory Board outlining the decision, said, "it is apparent that most people on either side of this issue have very strongly held opinions."

He added that DEC's decision not to go forward with antler restrictions in the additional units was largely based on that fact that department biologists "see no specific management benefit associated with the antler restriction program and do not consider antler restrictions as necessary to improve herd condition."

Grannis called the issue one of hunter preference, and said hunters are "deeply divided" on the issue. He also noted that antler restriction supporters may practice that on a voluntary, self-imposed basis.

But antler restriction supporters say DEC broke an agreement with them after they showed enough support to move forward with the regulations.

"The counties diligently completed all steps and the DEC breached the agreement, ignoring the wishes of the super majority of sportsmen," said Les Armstrong, a member of the Greene County Federation of Sportsmen and the New York State Conservation Council's big game committee.

David Wood, president of the Schoharie Conservation Council, said DEC "refuses to listen to the majority of hunters and improve the hunting, but wants us to pay more," noting the license fee increase set to take effect this fall.

"Supporters outnumbered opponents, so apparently by DEC's logic, the minority rules," added Jay Martin, big game chairman for the Ulster County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs.

And Charlie Fiscella, president of the New York State Chapter of the Quality Deer Management Association, contended that DEC "continues to advocate outdated (deer) management techniques."

One county sportsmen's federation - Delaware - did take a formal stance against the proposal.

"We know that we need to help to educate the rest of the hunting population as to the know facts about (antler restrictions)," said Dan Owen, the Delaware federation's representative to the New York State Conservation Council. "The fact is we still have a large pilot area with restrictions for continued studies. Those areas will help us arrive at an educated decision on where sportsmen should go with this issue in the future. For now we have the freedom to choose."

Similar antler restrictions are already in place in WMUs 3C, 3H, 3J and 3K, and have been met with a similar mix of support and opposition.

Support for antler restrictions has seemingly been strong - and perhaps growing - in the Catskills and surrounding areas of southeastern New York. But DEC earlier this year indicated it would expand the antler restriction zone only if "strong opposition" didn't top 20 percent.

DEC Chief Wildlife Biologist John Major said the proposal was withdrawn in its entirety because under DEC's rulemaking procedures, any altered proposal would have to be redrafted and a public comment period would then start again. Given the tight deadline for publication in the 2009-10

hunting regulations guide, that wasn't possible.

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