



Let the little bucks go so they can grow

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In a few weeks, the Department of Environmental Conservation will release the numbers on the deer harvest for the past hunting season.

Over the years, the DEC has been proud of the record number of deer taken as opposed to the number of record deer taken. Times have changed. It's no longer quantity; it's quality.

When the harvest figures are released, the number of deer shot this past season will be down. Why? The reason is simple. The number of hunters is down. The dollars that deer season generates to the upstate communities are down. Yet, I feel the number of deer wandering our hills and meadows is up.

A few years ago, Pennsylvania started a three-point antler restriction. Hunters were furious. Gary Alt, who implemented the program, was nearly crucified for even suggesting such a ludicrous plan and was eventually driven out. Hunters couldn't understand why they couldn't shoot any buck they wanted.

Pennsylvania stuck with Alt's plan and today, its deer hunting is outstanding. I talked to some hunters from our neighboring state and they raved about the quality of the deer they see in the woods. The antler restriction worked. Today, hunters are flocking to Pennsylvania to hunt quality deer while they are leaving New York in droves.

I've told hunters for many years that they have to pass up the little bucks. Let them grow. Usually, the response has been, "Well if I don't shoot them, someone else will." That mindframe has to change, and it has with many deer hunters.

A similar situation happened in Colorado. A four- or five-point antler restriction was placed on elk and it worked. Residents complained in the beginning, but today, they realize the difference and they love it. They see more and better elk than they ever did before.

New York needs some changes. Instead of managing wildlife for the insurance companies, they have to manage deer for the hunter. It goes back to the old saying, "If you build it, they will come." If we have better deer hunting, the hunters will come back.

We need a three-point antler restriction. We have to let the little bucks grow up. The average deer shot in New York is 1 1/2 years old. In Ohio, the average buck harvested is 4 1/2. That's why hunters go there. They have big bucks, as does Illinois, Iowa, etc.

Every state except New York is trying to grow big-antlered deer. They know that hunters will come and they will spend big dollars, boosting their economy. It's that simple. Why did hunters used to go to the Adirondacks to hunt? Big bucks. Now the deer are gone and so are the hunters.

If today's hunters were surveyed, the majority of them would favor an antler restriction. Sure there are some

who will resist the idea, but within three years, they'll change their minds.

I think we have to call and write the DEC. Point out to it that we want deer hunting to improve in New York. It's good for everyone. It's good for the economy as well.

I wouldn't feel so bad spending a hundred dollars for my licenses if the hunting was better. It's time we took a stand. Let me know what you think and pass the word on to the DEC.

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