

The author supports the current DEC regulations requiring three points on one side for harvesting.

# DEC may revert to harvesting yearling bucks

BY FOREST DARDER  
PLEASANT VALLEY ROD  
AND GUN CLUB, CALLICOON, NY

As a lifelong resident of Sullivan County and an avid whitetail hunter I have had the opportunity to witness the ups and downs of whitetail hunting in our area for more than 15 years.

As an active member in the NYS Whitetail Management Coalition, and a representative of the Pleasant Valley Rod and Gun Club in Callicoon, I find that many people are unaware of the battle that is now taking place between the New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and a group of dedicated sportsmen whose main objective is to improve deer hunting by protecting yearling bucks from harvest.

This hunting improvement is currently in place in Sullivan and Ulster Counties Wildlife Management Units (WMU) 3H, 3K, 3C and 3J, however, this program may be ending this season.

The yearling buck protection adopted in the WMU's in our area, also known as "antler restrictions" or "the 3 point rule" is a fairly simple concept: allow yearling bucks to live one extra year. Bucks must have at least 3 one-inch points on one antler to be eligible for harvest, youth exempt.

It's designed to protect juvenile bucks from harvest so that they may be harvested closer to adulthood, and it works. It has been adopted by other states and has overwhelming support by wildlife biologists and hunters alike.

Currently, New York is an island surrounded by Pennsylvania and Vermont, both of which practice statewide antler restrictions.

As a result of yearling buck protection in Sullivan County, juvenile buck harvest fell dramatically and mature buck harvest rose dramatically. The harvest composition is now

## NEWS ANALYSIS

made up of 79 percent bucks that are 2.5 years or older.

Hunters and wildlife viewers are experiencing this first hand. Many clubs in Sullivan County harvest more large bucks than in any year before. One club in Sullivan County harvested 8 nice bucks this year, all estimated at 2-1/2 years or older, where 6 of the 8 were sent to the taxidermist.

Another club said their take resembled the pictures on the clubhouse wall from the 1920s. They reported taking 12 nice bucks with 4 going to the taxidermist. Prior to the program an average of one 'rack buck' would be harvested per year and it would rarely ever go to the taxidermist.

The local taxidermists buck mounts alone speak volumes for the success of this program.

Gary Van Valkenburg, the winner of the 2008 Sullivan County Democrat Big Buck Contest is another prime example; no one in that area had ever seen such an impressive buck. And it was the second largest buck taken in the county since 1929.

This year during archery season a 170 inch, 3-1/2 year old buck was harvested in Ulster County. This 18-pointer is the largest buck taken in Ulster County since 1920. The second largest was taken in 2009. That's two recordbook bucks since the WMU was implemented in 2005.

It is indisputable that this program creates bigger bucks, more table meat, better quality hunting and a more balanced deer herd in general.

So why eliminate the program?

A select number of individuals within the DEC are showing no interest in improving whitetail hunting. An attempt

last year to expand the WMU's to include 8 other surrounding units was shot down despite 67 percent support in favor. A larger block of WMU's will yield better results.

PA is perfect example. But now the DEC is considering withdrawing the practice in our area based on false claims and misinformation.

Why would the DEC even consider discontinuing a practice that has been proven to work in our area for the past 6 years and has worked in 21 other states for many years?

It is critical that all sportsmen in favor of this management strategy (protecting yearling bucks from harvest) voice their opinion. If the DEC eliminates this program in our area it will surely be a step backwards and we may never get it back.

The NYS Whitetail Management Coalition is a non-profit organization designed to protect and expand this management strategy.

You can become a member, free of charge, by joining the website at [www.nyswmc.com](http://www.nyswmc.com) and they will even send a letter to Albany on your behalf.

If you are an unaffiliated hunter or represent a hunting club who either has yearling buck protection in place or would like to see it expanded in your area, please send a signed and dated letter, addressed to the DEC to the NYS Whitetail Management Coalition (address below) voicing your concerns as soon as possible.

The sum of these letters will be presented to Albany so that the true sportsman's voice may be heard. The DEC will be making this critical decision in the upcoming weeks and any unheard voices could lead to the collapse of this program in our area.

New York State Deer  
Management Coalition, Inc.  
PO Box 191  
Grahamsville, NY 12740