

Antler Restrictions - what's the point

July 2011

Volume One



Geoffrey Stafford, Jr. of Port Jervis, NY, proudly displays a 153 inch, 14 point buck taken in WMU 3H (Callicoon). WMU 3H implemented Antler Restriction in 2006. The deer was harvested in 2008. It was aged at 3.5 years.

Deer hunters in southeast New York have been expressing a growing interest in Yearling Buck Protection - or Antler Restrictions - as they are alternatively called. Even the DEC's recently released state-wide deer management plan seems to acknowledge what many hunter surveys have shown; hunters want to continue the program. The proposed 5-year plan continues the program in the four WMU's (Wildlife Management Units) where the program has already been

implemented and expands the program into an additional seven units. Hunters in favor of ARs believe the program will improve the quality of their hunt. But there are hunters who feel that the program should be built on voluntary compliance. They fear that ARs could become a state-wide regulation. We hope the contents of this publication will help you develop a better understanding of why ARs are being embraced by hunters in the eastern Catskills and mid Hudson Valley.



Jay Martin—Ulster County

Dear Fellow Sportsmen:

In 2003 the Ulster County Sportsmen's Federation decided to embark on a quest to improve buck hunting. We figured that if we did not shoot the yearling bucks there would be more adult males to harvest. Common sense tells you that if you pick an apple when it is small and green it will never grow to be big and red. In other words, wait a bit longer before you harvest and the quality of your crop will be improved.

We were able to adopt a new harvest standard that was expected to protect about 70% of the yearling bucks from harvest. In our area an antler restriction of 3 points on one side was implemented. Now our yearling harvest is only 15% of the total bucks. Bucks 2.5 years and older now make up a remarkable 85% of the total buck harvest. The program has exceeded our goal.

There has been much confusion on this issue. Yearling Buck Conservation is about one thing: allowing yearling bucks to mature a year or two before being harvested by moving the majority of the harvest from 1.5 year old

bucks to 2.5 year old bucks. It is not a habitat, doe harvest, food plot or trophy program.

Total deer numbers are still controlled by the number of DMP (antlerless) tags issued by the DEC. Deer numbers are controlled only through doe harvests.

The outcome of such a strategy is improved biology, a more natural herd structure with respect to sex ratio, improved age distribution, as well as increased hunter satisfaction and more table meat per harvest.

Region 3 has some unique problems. We are situated just a short drive north of the highest population densities in the state. Region 3 includes Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Rockland, Orange, Ulster and Sullivan Counties. As you can see, those counties cover most of the lower and mid Hudson Valley, as well as the Catskill Mountains.

Because of our proximity to the metropolitan area, many downstate hunters choose to come to our area. They are driven by the lack of places to hunt closer to home. There are none in New York City and very limited access is available even on the outer reaches of Long Island..

In their quest to find a place to hunt, many downstate hunters come to this area and in many cases they hunt in the proposed Yearling Buck Protection (YPB) areas.

However, Region 3 is already stressed. Urbanization, suburban sprawl, fragmentation of large land holdings into small wood lots are all taking their toll. Changing attitudes and cultural shifts regarding hunting continue to remove lands from the inventory formerly available for hunting.

The lack of sound management plans for our aging forests, reduced deer cover and habitat and a lack of browse, coupled with large areas of "Forever Wild" state land—also known as "forever dead," - that are nearly devoid of game and wildlife habitat, all further exacerbate the problem.

This is why we require area specific deer management that provides yearling buck protection.

Sportsmen's federations from our region have proposed that additional WMUs be added to the existing yearling buck protection areas. Various proposals have been introduced by at least 9 members of the New York State Conservation Council and five resolutions calling for yearling buck protection in WMUs were recommended by both the Archery and Big Game Committees at the April 16, 2011 meeting.

The Five Year Deer Management Plan released by DEC in June proposes the continuation of ARs in the existing WMUs and the expansion of the program into seven (7) additional WMUs. We support that plan. It is what the sporting community wants.

We hope that you will support us in our area just as we support our fellow sportsmen in their endeavors in their areas. The following information explains the program and why we are asking for your support.

Good fishing and good hunting. Keep your line tight and sights steady.

Yours in Sportsmanship,

Jay Martin

Big Game Chairman—Ulster County Sportsmen's Federation

The Changing Face of Deer Hunting in NY



Dick Henry

Hunting white-tailed deer is a time honored outdoor activity that over half a million NY sportsmen and women participate in each fall. The tradition of deer hunting has been passed on from one generation to the next for well over 100 years in the Empire State. As many of us who have been life-long hunters approach old age, we can all still vividly remember our first deer and the rites of passage that accompanied that day. Deer numbers and distribution have expanded throughout NY and we have witnessed changing deer hunting implements and bag limits that surpassed the expectations of our forefathers. Will future generations of sportsmen have the same opportunities that we have experienced?

Current efforts to promote and maintain deer hunting as the primary tool for controlling deer populations have included an effort to better balance the age structure of the buck population. The current statewide buck harvest standard, a single three-inch spike, was enacted in NY in 1912. It was intended to protect all female deer and allow the

restoration of deer numbers statewide following decades of unlimited subsistence hunting and habitat destruction. There was no biological basis for the three inch spike law as a buck harvest standard, yet it still remains throughout most of NYS. As a result some WMUs in NY still experience a buck harvest that is comprised of more than 80% yearlings.

Deer hunter numbers have shown a steady decline in NYS since the early 1990's. Recruitment of young hunters has been bolstered by the recent reduction of the hunting age, however the retention of hunters has not been addressed. We know from numerous hunter satisfaction surveys that "seeing deer", "seeing healthy adult bucks" and "seeing deer sign" are key hunter satisfactions.

The current antler restriction (AR) program in southeastern NY was implemented to produce a more diverse age structure within the buck population. Contrary to some opinions, AR's are not intended to create "trophy" hunting. Rather ARs are merely an effort to provide a more natural balance of the male age structure that existed prior to the return of white-tailed deer in NY. Yearling bucks are capable breeders, however they lack the courtship behaviors, sign-post communications and other breeding activities that mature bucks display. Having more mature bucks in the huntable population adds a considerable array of breeding activities that enhances hunter satisfactions and participation, and ultimately hunter retention. As an added benefit, having a high percentage of protected yearling bucks "standing at

stud" insures a shorter rut, and a quicker return to post-rut activities, lessening the likelihood of yearling buck winter mortalities and late fawn births.

If hunters and sport hunting are to remain the primary tool for controlling deer numbers on a landscape scale, then overall hunter retention is a paramount concern. If the current declining hunter trend continues as it has for almost two decades, we will rapidly approach a time when our society will look for other deer control methods. To maintain the status quo by embracing a buck harvest standard that was established before the science of white-tailed deer management ever existed, is a guarantee that deer hunting as we know it will remain only as memories.

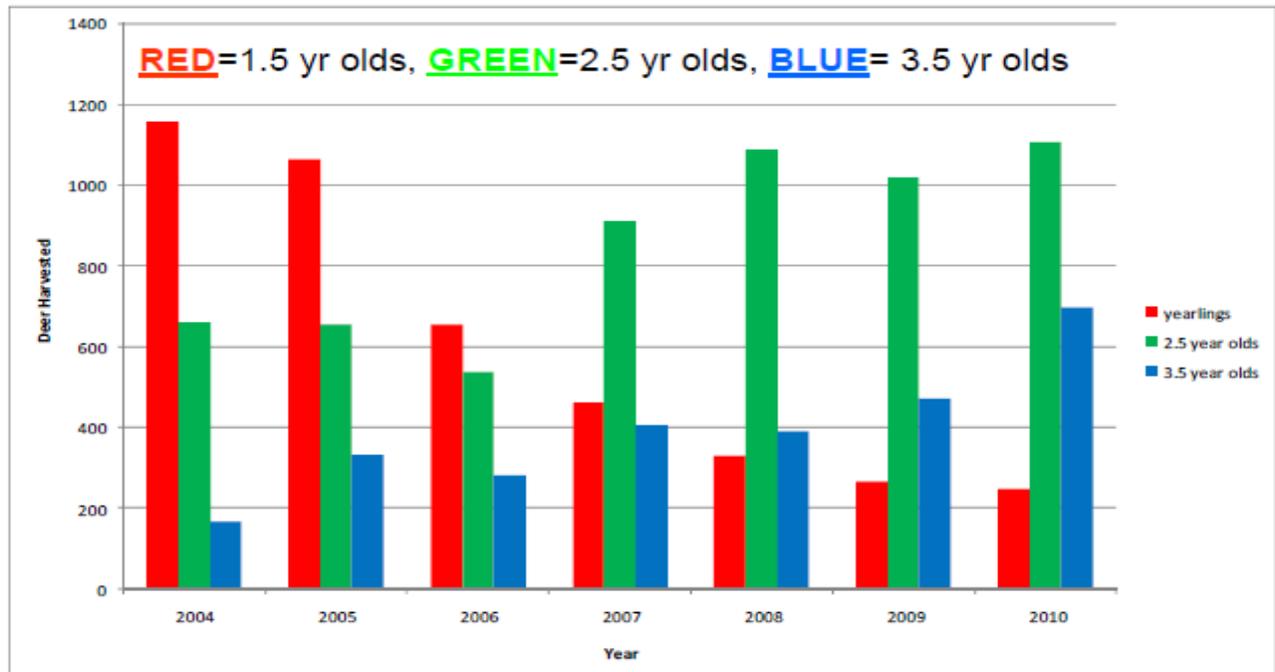
Hunters in the AR WMU's in southeastern NY are experiencing a deer herd with mature bucks that many generations of NY hunters have never seen. No single deer initiative in NYS has excited and invigorated hunters as much as the AR program as the results become apparent.

We owe future generations of deer hunters a better legacy than 100 years of tradition, unhampered by progress, lacking in biological support and short on common sense.

Editor's note: Dick Henry of Stone Ridge, NY, is a professional biologist. Dick retired from NYS DEC after forty years of service. He was for many years the Region 3 Big Game Biologist before going to Albany as the Central Office Big Game Biologist. At the time of his retirement Dick was the Region 4 Wildlife Manager.

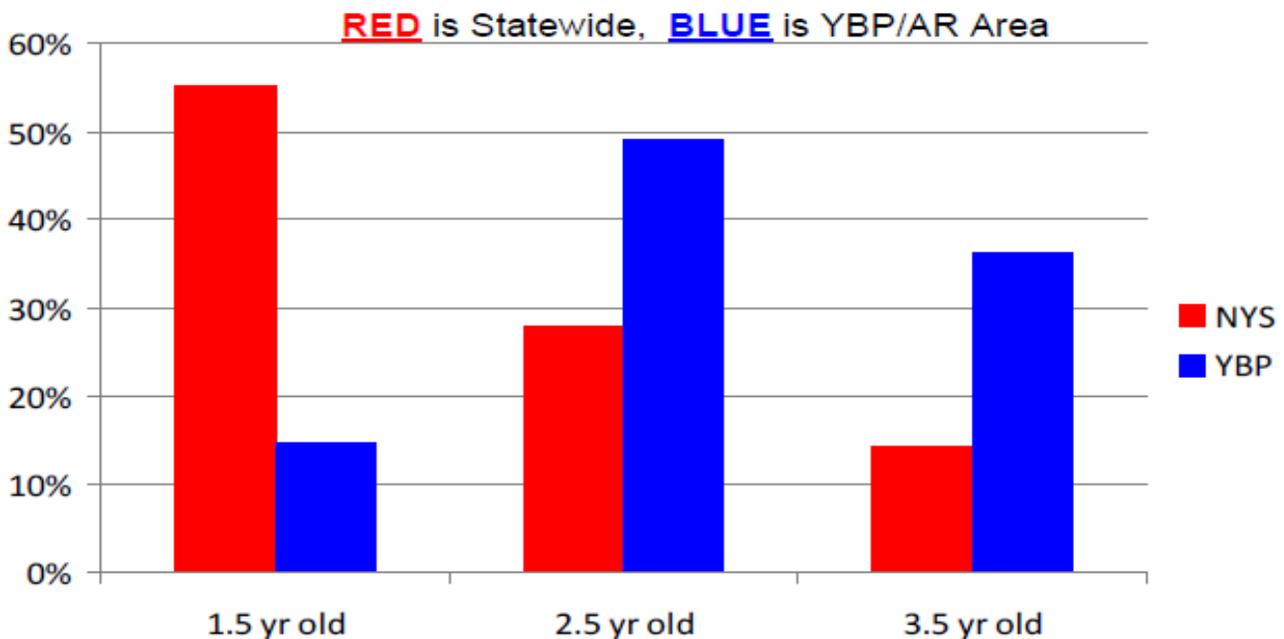
Number of Bucks Harvested 3H/3K

Adult 2.5 and 3.5 buck harvest continues a steady and dramatic rise



Source NYS DEC Harvest Report Data

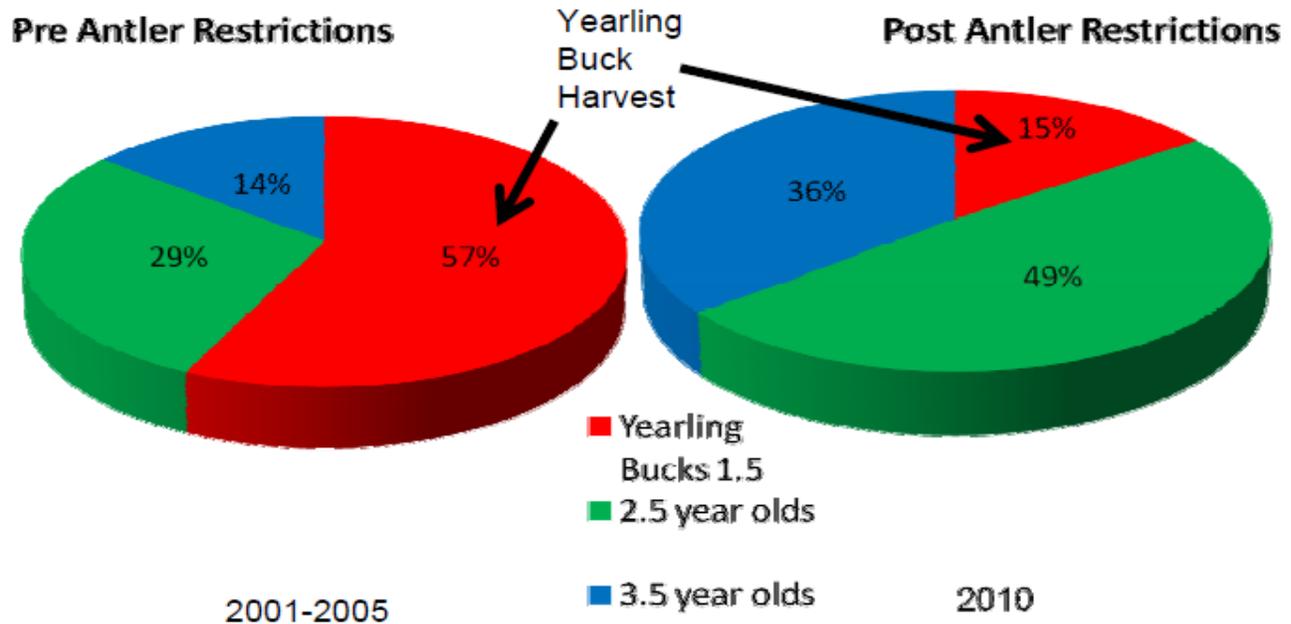
Age of Bucks Harvested: NY Statewide vs. YBP/AR Area 2010



Source NYS DEC Harvest Data

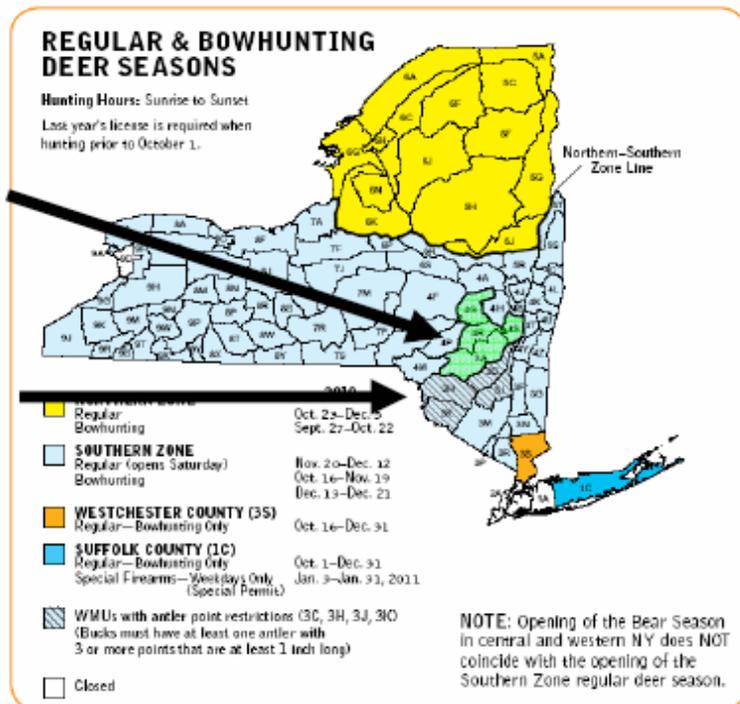
Five Years into the Antler Restrictions Program 85% of the Harvest is Adult Bucks

Before and After



Source NYSDEC Harvest Data

- Proposed in Schoharie, Greene, Sullivan and Ulster WMUs 3A, 4G, 4R & 4S.
- Currently it is in Sullivan and Ulster Counties WMU 3H, 3K, 3C & 3J.



Yearling Buck Protection has broad based support from federations and communities

Who is proposing Yearling Buck Protection with Antler Restrictions?

Yearling Buck Protection (YPB) with Antler Restrictions is proposed by the following New York Conservation Council County Members: Schoharie County Conservation Association, Green County Federation of Sportsmen, Ulster County Federation of Sportsmen and Sullivan County Federations of Sportsmen in their areas.

Support for yearling buck protection by Sportsmen's Organizations

Sullivan County Federation of Sportsmen, Ulster County Federation of Sportsmen, Greene County Federation of Sportsmen, Schoharie County Conservation Association, Federation of Dutchess county Fish and Game Clubs, Inc., SASI, Suffolk Alliance of Sportsmen, Nassau County Fish and Game, QDMA- local, statewide and national support, Conservation Alliance of New York, New York State Whitetail Management Coalition, Inc., New York State Big Buck Club, Inc. and New York State Brotherhood of Sportsmen.

County Legislatures, Farm Bureaus, Economic Development Agencies supporting yearling buck protection

Sullivan County Legislature, Greene County Legislature, Ulster County Legislature, Delaware County Board of Supervisors, Ulster County Farm Bureau, Sullivan County Farm Bureau, Delaware County Farm Bureau, Schoharie County Farm Bureau, Delaware County Chamber of Commerce, Delaware County Economic Development, and NYS FWMB Region 3.

Numbers Make Case for Yearling Buck Protection In Southeastern NY

	Population	Square Miles	Population Square mile
State of New York	19,378,102	47,214	410
Southeastern New York (Region 3, NYC, Long Island)	13,338,160	6,054	2,203
Region 3 (Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Ulster, Orange, Rockland, Sullivan Counties)	2,290,851	4,552	503
Regions 4 thru 9	6,039,942	41,160	146

Southeastern NY has a population density of **2,203** people per square mile whereas the balance of the state, Regions 4-9, only have **146** people per square mile. About 68 percent of the state's population lives, works and recreates in less than 13 percent of the state's land mass.

To further illustrate the pressure in Region 3, the DEC reports that one of every three hunters who visit the ever popular Stewart State Forest Cooperative Hunting Area in Orange County are from New York City and Long Island. This is typical for many of the available hunting lands in Southeastern New York.

All census data from U.S. Bureau of Census 2010 Census

Why is Yearling Buck Protection (Antler Restrictions) needed in Southeastern New York?

In Southeastern New York, we have a greater need for Yearling Buck Protection with Antler Restrictions due to high human populations and limited habitat. Unlike our area, many areas of Western and Central NY produce many times the number of bucks compared to the Catskills and Lower Hudson Valley. The buck take in Wildlife Management Units where ARs are being proposed is 2 per sq. mile, with total deer takes of 3.2 per sq. mile. In contrast, in WMUs 8R, 9H, and 9N, the average buck take is 4.6 per sq. mile with total deer take of 13.26 per sq. mile. Over 23 Central and Western units are more than 10% over the buck take objective set by the DEC.

Conditions are vastly different from one region to the next and this greatly influences the number of deer available for harvest. Central and Western NY have more deer, some of the best deer habitat in NY and relatively low human populations. Region 3 has extremely high population densities, as many as 500 people per square mile (3.5 times the upstate average) and is but a short commute from the highest populations in the state, Region 1 (Long Island) and Region 2 (New York City). (See demographics chart Page 6)

Driven by a lack of access, an extraordinary number of hunters from southern portions of Region 3 including Westchester County, as well as Regions 1 and 2, hunt in the northern sections of Region 3 and southern sections of Region 4. Large portions of this area are State owned "Forever Wild" Lands with very steep mountains which are inaccessible to many hunters and that are off-limits to motor vehicles. This concentrates most of the hunters in areas that are more accessible and less strenuous to access.

How do sportsmen in the current yearling buck protection areas feel about the program?

A Cornell University 2011 survey found continuing the AR program is acceptable to 77% of the deer hunters in Ulster and 90.5% of the deer hunters in Sullivan County.

A majority of the hunters in both Sullivan and Ulster Counties who support the program have expressed a preference for continuing the program "as is." They like the results to-date.

See: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/hdruar10.pdf

Additional survey results:

DEC Survey March 2009 found **67.1% Support Mandatory Antler Restrictions** in the proposed units while only 19.9% oppose. This meets the DEC criteria for implementing Antler Restrictions in new areas.

Cornell HDRU 2007 found **63% support yearling buck protection** while only 15% were against them in the proposed area. Of those in favor **59% said it would improve hunter satisfaction.**

NYS CC Survey found **80% for Antler Restrictions in the 4 proposed units** and 61% statewide for Antler Restrictions.

New York Bowhunters Survey 2010 found **65% of their members in favor of antler restrictions.**

Public Meetings Surveys all found over **90% support for Antler Restrictions** from Sullivan, Ulster, Delaware and Schoharie Counties.

Delaware Department of Economic Development Survey found **90.7% of deer hunters support Antler Restrictions** while only 9.3% of hunters oppose them.

Please Feel Free To Contact Us For Additional Information

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You May Also Visit Our Website at:

www.NYSWMC.com

Bucks Harvested in WMU's with Antler Restrictions

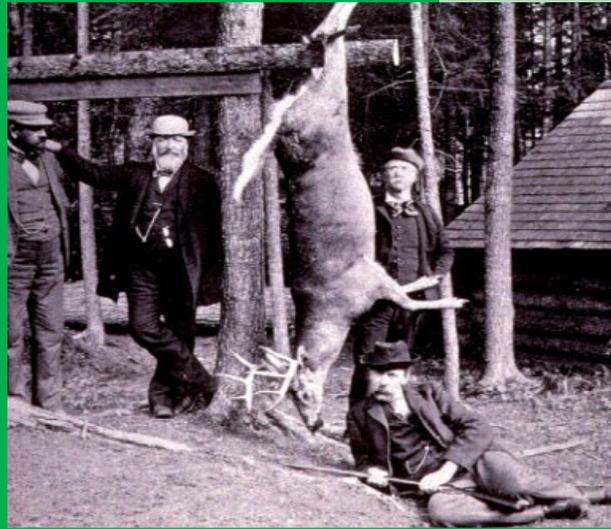


Above Left: Bleu Terwilliger, New Paltz. Buck was harvested in 2010 in AR WMU 3J.

Above Right: Duane Dunham with buck taken in Eastern Ulster County in AR WMU 3J.

Below Left: Bernie Antal displays an Ulster County buck taken in AR WMU 3J.

Below Right: Two bucks from Ulster's AR WMU 3C taken by Eric & Armand Hoppe of Ulster County.



Scenes like the one on the left do not have to fade into history. ARs provide yearling bucks with the opportunity to mature. The four original Catskill WMU's where AR's were implemented have already started producing large numbers of mature bucks.

