



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge
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Cambridge, MD 21613
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Opportunity for Public Comment on Proposed Changes to the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge 2016/17 Hunt.

APRIL 27, 2016 – 6-9 PM

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge is proposing updates to the current refuge hunt plan on federal land beginning during the 2016/17 hunting season and is seeking public comment on the changes that are being proposed.

The current refuge hunt plan was implemented ten years ago, and the refuge is now proposing to expand hunting opportunities with the goal of reducing deer herd numbers while still allowing for quality hunting experiences. Revisions to the refuge hunt plan are necessary given the continuing concern over deer crop depredation on both refuge and adjacent private lands. Agricultural crops grown on Blackwater and surrounding private lands during the past several years have been extremely damaged due to deer depredation, with some fields being a total loss. As a result the following changes are being proposed to improve deer herd management and concurrently reduce crop damage:

1. Increase the number of huntable firearm days on the refuge. We propose increasing the number of firearm days from 15 to 19 days during the 2016/17 hunting season. Table 1.
2. Increase deer harvest in the Key Wallace corridor. We propose to increase hunting opportunities on Wildlife Drive (between the entrance and the refuge headquarters building). In past years, the Wildlife Drive was only open to hunting for two quota shotgun days. For the 2016/17 season, we propose the Wildlife Drive be open to hunting (and hence closed to the general public) for a total of eight days. Table 1.
3. Increase hunter participation. Participation (and harvest) during the 2015-16 'antlerless only' non-quota muzzleloader was low compared to other hunt opportunities. To increase hunter participation, we propose allowing harvest of both genders during this 3-day opportunity. As this would be the only location within the state a hunter could harvest either sex, we believe it will draw more interest, realizing higher hunter numbers and subsequent harvest compared to prior 'antlerless only' years.

4. Change the 1st quota shotgun day to coincide with the opening day of the state season.

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge is holding a public meeting on proposed changes to the hunt program on April 27, 2016 between 6-9 PM at the refuge Visitor Center. **Comments should be submitted in writing to the attention of Mr. Nate Carle, Wildlife Biologist, at Chesapeake Marshlands NWRC, 2145 Key Wallace Drive, Cambridge, MD 21613; or nate_carle@fws.gov. Comments will be accepted until May 16, 2016.**

Table 1. Proposed Changes for the 2016/17 Refuge Hunting Season

Hunt	Year 2015/16	2016/17
Archery		Similar to last year
Muzzleloader quota	October 23	October 20*
Muzzleloader non-quota	October 24	October 21*
Muzzleloader non-quota	October 29 Antlerless	October 27* Antlered and Antlerless
Muzzleloader non-quota	October 30 Antlerless	October 28* Antlered and Antlerless
Muzzleloader non-quota	October 31 Antlerless	October 29 Antlered and Antlerless
Youth shotgun	November 3	November 5
Shotgun quota		November 26
Shotgun quota	November 30*	November 28*
Shotgun quota	December 4*	-
Shotgun non-quota		December 2
Shotgun non-quota		December 3
Shotgun non-quota	December 10	December 8*
Shotgun non-quota	December 11	December 9*
Shotgun non-quota	December 12	December 10
Muzzleloader non-quota	December 19	NQ Shotgun December 17
Muzzleloader non-quota	December 20	NQ Shotgun December 18
Shotgun non-quota	January 8	January 6
Shotgun non-quota	January 9	January 7
Shotgun non-quota		January 21, 2017*
Shotgun non-quota		January 28, 2017

*Wildlife Drive from the entrance to the Key Wallace exit is open for hunting and closed to the general public on these days. The remainder of the Wildlife Drive will be open to the general public.

Driving deer will be allowed on December 8, 9, and 10, January 6 and 7, and January 21 and 28.