

The 2018 deer gun hunting season opened a half-hour before official sunrise this Saturday, Nov. 17. Based on field reports from each region of the state, the bucks will be cruising for the last few does that have not been bred during the peak of rut this week. Dallas Barber, big game biologist for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, said deer gun hunters have reason to anticipate a good season this year. He said deer will only be getting more active as the gun season opener nears. "I've heard reports of bucks chasing does in most areas of the state. And breeding activity is starting now," he said. "Weather for the opener is looking to be seasonal with highs in the 50s, so whether you see deer moving around or not, it will be a great time to enjoy getting outdoors." Barber said deer hunters in Oklahoma are off to a great start after several weeks of archery and muzzleloader hunting. "As of Monday, hunters have checked in more than 35,000 deer. Not only have we seen great harvest numbers, but quality has been good, too. Several impressive bucks have shown up in social media posts from across the state." Deer hunting plays a major role in the Wildlife Department's deer herd management strategy. For the past several years, the Department has stressed the role deer hunters play with the slogan "Hunters in the Know! Let Young Bucks Grow!" Barber praised hunters for their voluntary participation, because every time a hunter decides to pull the trigger, he or she is making a management decision. Biologists have noted improvements in the state's deer herd age structure over the past decade. To help hunters plan their opening-day outing in the deer woods, here are up-to-date regional reports from Wildlife Department field personnel. Southeast Region Reported by Jeff Ford, Wildlife Senior Biologist Current Buck Rutting Activity: Mature bucks are chasing does and running scrapes. Habitat Conditions: Great conditions with plenty of acorns in the bottomlands. Acorns are scattered along ridges. Plenty of moisture in the ground and creeks are running full. Hunter and Landowner Reports: Hunters are reporting deer activity at all times of the

day. Landowners are seeing some of their subordinate bucks leave the area as the larger bucks are moving in on the does. Public Land Best Bets: Ouachita (Le Flore and McCurtain county portions), Three Rivers and Wister wildlife management areas. Advice for Deer Hunters: Go early and be prepared to stay all day. Find fresh scrapes around a good food source where does will be hanging out and bedding. Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: Getting discouraged by other hunters moving through the hunt area. Try not to move around on scouting expeditions in early morning or late afternoon, which are the most active times of the day for deer movement. Opening Morning Expectations: Hunters should have high hopes about this year's deer gun season. The rut is going to be peaking, and the weather couldn't be more perfect according to long-range weather predictions. The deer herd is extremely healthy, and the deer are showing it with heavy weights and some exceptionally antlered deer. Central Region Reported by Jeff Pennington, Wildlife Supervisor Current Buck Rutting Activity: Rut activity is currently very high. Habitat Conditions: Plentiful rainfall the past 90 days, especially in south-central areas, made for good food production until the recent freeze killed warm-season forbs. There are spotty areas with good acorn production, but generally it is low overall in the region. Many areas have no acorns. Secondary mast crops such as persimmons and buck brush had spotty production. Wheat generally looks good in north-central areas. There is less wheat acreage than normal in south-central areas due to soils being too wet for planting. Natural cool-season vegetation is currently quite vigorous due to recent abundant rainfall. Hunter and Landowner Reports: Hunters and landowners are reporting high amounts of rutting activity since the last week of October. Public Land Best Bets: Kaw Wildlife Management Area is always the biggest producer in the central region. Keystone WMA provides a lot of access and opportunity. The Texoma WMA areas of Washita Arm, Love Valley, Fobb Bottom, Tishomingo and Hickory Creek collectively provide a lot of hunting access for southern Oklahoma hunters. Advice for Deer Hunters: Sit long on the stand. The rut is underway, so deer will be

moving a great deal in the early portion of gun season. Scout in the days before the season to find the latest food sources and areas of highest deer activity. Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: Leaving stand too soon. Underestimating the deer's sense of smell. Opening Morning Expectations: Hunters should expect the rut to be at or just past peak in the central region. If the weather is decent, deer movement and harvest opportunity should be high for Oklahoma hunters this gun season. Northeast Region Reported by J.D. Ridge, Wildlife Senior Biologist Current Buck Rutting Activity: According to most reports, buck activity across the region is ramping up. Deer activity in general has increased over the last several days. Bucks are being observed fighting, checking scrapes and cruising throughout the day in search of females. Habitat Conditions: Habitat conditions overall are fair to good. Acorn production appears spotty at best throughout the region. Black oak species were the most successful, according to most reports. While acorn crops are down from the past couple of years, mild temperatures and ample moisture in late summer and through the fall has encouraged a good crop of various browse species through most of the region. Persimmons have generally produced quite successfully. Reports of deer using open areas " food plots, fallow fields, pastures, etc. " for browsing are common.

Hunter and Landowner Reports: Hunters reported relatively slow deer movements early in the muzzleloader season, but recent reports are telling a different story. Weather fronts and decreasing day lengths have spurred deer movement. Bucks are being seen in daylight and in unusual places as they travel in search of females. Public Land Best Bets: Some Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) to consider in the region include Hulah, Fort Gibson (other than the Waterfowl Refuge Portion which is closed) and Eufaula WMAs. Several other Northeast Region WMAs are open to deer gun season as well and should not be overlooked.

Hunters are strongly advised to consult the annual Oklahoma Hunting Guide or the Wildlife Department website ([www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com)) before heading afield. Specific regulations such as open seasons or other restrictions may be different for each WMA. Advice for Deer Hunters: Scout,

scout and scout some more. Putting in time afield beforehand will almost always increase your odds. Keep an eye out for signs of buck activity, such as rubs and scrapes. Search out food sources and look for travel routes. If you are hoping to harvest a mature buck, let the young ones pass. When hunting public lands, it's a good idea to consider hunting weekdays if possible and don't overlook the second week of the season, as hunting pressure usually subsides considerably after opening weekend. Be patient. More time spent on stand means more chances of bagging a deer. Always be safety conscious and be respectful of other hunters.

**Biggest Mistakes to Avoid:**

1. Lack of preparation. This is a common and easily avoided mistake. Study up on possible locations to hunt and include backup areas if possible. Get out and scout potential hunting areas. Is your gun sighted in? Is your equipment and clothing ready to go? Do you have your hunter-orange vest and hat gathered up? Knife? Correct ammo? You get the idea.
2. Lack of attention to details. What direction is the wind from? Will you be looking directly into the sun? Sometimes the small stuff can get you.
3. Lack of patience. Once you have located a good spot, stay patient and put your time in on the stand. You likely won't bag that buck (or doe) of a lifetime sitting back at camp.

**Opening Morning Expectations:** Barring inclement weather, there is no reason to be anything other than optimistic for opening morning. Prepare, pay attention to the details, and be patient.

Good things will follow. Taking a deer is great, but just being outdoors and taking in all the experiences of the hunt should make it a great experience

either way. Good luck and be safe! Southwest Region Reported by Ron Smith, Senior

**Biologist Current Buck Rutting Activity:** Rut activity seems to be progressing slightly ahead of 2017. The weekend of Nov 3-4 showed many signs of increased rut behavior. Over the following week young bucks were seen chasing does, mature bucks began to show themselves during daylight hours, and breeding activity was observed in Tillman County.

**Habitat Conditions:**

Drought conditions across the region through most of the year may limit heavy cover, but recent rains have put habitat conditions well above expectations. Rains came just in time to boost native food sources. Mild weather has allowed a smooth transition into fall patterns. Winter wheat is coming along nicely with the exception of areas where continued rainfall put fall planting behind schedule. Deer have responded, showing impressive body condition. Hunter and Landowner Reports: Hunters through muzzleloader season reported a steady increase in activity. Young bucks were seen fighting and chasing does, and mature bucks have made themselves visible during daylight hours. Landowners report deer numbers are continuing to increase following drought recovery, and rut behavior is making them much more visible. Public Land Best Bets:

Black Kettle WMA is open to gun season for the first nine days. Packsaddle and Ellis County WMAs are open to gun season the first nine days, but closed to antlerless hunting. Altus Lugert WMA is open the first nine days for shotgun, muzzleloader or archery equipment, and Fort Cobb is open the first nine days with shotgun only. Advice for Deer Hunters: Scouting is the key to success. Allow as much time as possible to know your hunting area so you can plan your approach and tactics for diverse weather conditions and possible deer pattern changes. Always account for wind to give yourself the greatest advantage. Be prepared to stay in the field. Rut activity can keep deer moving throughout the day. Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: Be aware of property boundaries whether hunting private land or WMAs. Many mobile apps are available as well as good old paper maps to maintain awareness of your location. Be sure to get landowner permission if hunting private land. Always wear orange while in the field. Opening Morning Expectations: Hunters can expect a great experience on opening day. Rut activity should carry into rifle season and keep things interesting.

Be patient and enjoy the show. Northwest Region Reported by Eddie Wilson, Senior Biologist

Current Buck Rutting Activity: Rutting activity has definitely started throughout the northwestern counties and the Panhandle. Habitat Conditions: Habitat conditions are good to excellent in the Northwest, and

fair to good in the Panhandle. Lots of cover and good winter wheat for the most part. Hunter and Landowner Reports: Hunters are reporting increased buck activity over the past couple of days. Landowners have reported an increased number of deer using winter wheat and other agriculture crops as a primary food source. Public Land Best Bets: Hunters need to consult hunting regulations before hunting northwestern Oklahoma wildlife management areas. Some WMAs are closed opening weekend for controlled hunts, and some are closed to deer gun hunting entirely. If you have questions regarding hunting on a wildlife management area, you can consult the Oklahoma Hunting Guide or call the biologist or game warden responsible for the area you choose to hunt. Advice for Deer Hunters: Make sure your gun is sighted in before the hunt, and practice "you owe it to the game you are pursuing. If you have the opportunity, introduce hunting to a kid or a friend who has never hunted. Remember, it's not all about inches of antler. Take the time to have fun and enjoy your time in the outdoors. Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: If you have a rangefinder use it. Don't shoot past your practice distance, as there is a lot of open country in northwestern Oklahoma. Scout the area you plan to hunt before opening day if possible. Read the regulations specific to the WMA you choose to hunt. Opening Morning Expectations: All Northwest Region wildlife management areas open to deer gun hunting on opening day will likely be crowded. Freezing temperatures at night and cool days have encouraged rut activity to start a little early this year. I would expect rut to get serious throughout the week and be in full swing by opening weekend. Hunt safe! \* \* \* Oklahoma deer hunters may also be interested in these items from the Wildlife Department: [AGE MY DEER: Biologists Seek Deer Jaw Photos](#) [HELP FIGHT HUNGER: Deer Processors and Hunters Against Hunger](#) [BE LEGAL: Informed Hunters Read the Regulations](#) [BE SAFE: Hunter Education Teaches Safe, Legal Hunting](#) [GIVE BACK: Honor Vets Through Stars and Stripes Project](#) See much more information about deer

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