

ONLINE LICENSING and Game Harvest Reporting: A New and Better Way

Computers and the internet have transformed how businesses and government serve their customers. Anyone with online access can now shop for almost anything, register a vehicle, or purchase a fishing/hunting/trapping license instantly right from home. Approximately 72% of Massachusetts residents now use the internet, and about 66% can access it at home.

The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) has been selling licenses, permits, and stamps online for over a decade, but current technology now allows us to offer expanded convenience to our license buyers while saving more funds for wildlife research and management. Like many other state fish and wildlife agencies, the DFW is going fully “electronic” in 2012. This means that all licenses, stamps, and permits will be obtained electronically, through an online computer. The transition to this new technology is necessary. The agency recognizes that 28% of the state’s residents don’t use the internet, however, hence we have worked diligently to maintain traditional methods while adopting new technology and procuring the great benefits it offers to all sportsmen and women.

Benefits of the *MassFishHunt* System

Starting in 2012, all licenses, permits, and stamps will be sold electronically through participating retail stores and town/city halls, DFW offices, or from any online computer. Perhaps you have already heard of or used ***MassFishHunt***, a “one-stop shopping” automated online license and game harvest reporting system that can be accessed from any online computer and will be available at participating retail stores, town/city halls, DFW offices, local libraries, or from home. By replacing the traditional license system with the electronic system, ***MassFishHunt*** offers new features and conveniences to *all* sportsmen and women in the Commonwealth – even those who *don’t* use computers or the internet. Among those new features are:

- **One-stop, online purchase of licenses, permits, and stamps** – As in a grocery store, you can select the items you would like to purchase, add more, or remove some from your “shopping cart” at any time before you pay for them. If you decide later that you want to buy additional items, you can always go back to the “store”.
- **Print electronic licenses, tags, stamps, and permits immediately** – You will no longer receive these items in the mail. Simply print your license, tags, and permits from the computer.
- **Duplicate certificates eliminated** – Lost or damaged your license or permit? All you have to do is visit any license vendor and ask for a re-print, or simply re-print from home if you have access to the internet. No more duplicate licenses to worry about.
- **Need a record of your purchases?** – You can check your account history if you have access to an online computer or visit any license vendor.
- **More permit sales locations** – With ***MassFishHunt*** you won’t have to drive to a DFW office to purchase turkey, bear, or antlerless deer permits. You can buy them directly through any license vendor or online computer.
- **No more waiting for the mail!** – The ***MassFishHunt*** system will provide quick and easy purchase of all your permits and stamps.

License buyers with a home computer, printer, and access to the internet will experience additional benefits:

- Purchase and print licenses, permits, or stamps any time of day or night.
- Save fuel and travel time to game check stations by reporting your harvest online.
- Receive important messages and updates from the DFW at your email address.

The new *MassFishHunt* system also provides benefits to the DFW, including improved data collection for our biologists, new communications options with license buyers, efficient license revenue collection and payment processes, and instant access to license and permit data for law enforcement.

All of these new features and benefits mean changes to the way some things have been done in the past. Change is always a little disconcerting, and it is likely there will be some unforeseen challenges in adjusting to the new system for all of us. But we will be monitoring the system, and we expect to make further improvements and adjustments as needed.

Changes to Buying your 2012 Fishing, Hunting, Sporting, and Trapping License

You do not need to know how to use a computer or the internet to purchase a license. You will still be able to purchase your license.

You will still be able to purchase your license at participating retail stores, town/city halls, and DFW offices, and agents will be trained to use the system. The changes are that your purchase will be electronic, your license will be printed immediately from a computer, and your information will be entered into the *MassFishHunt* system. When you purchase your license, you will also be able to purchase permits and stamps. “Stamps” will not appear as actual stamps, but will instead be listed on your license as among the items purchased. An obvious difference with your 2012 license is that it will be printed on plain paper, and it can be re-printed whenever necessary.

When you purchase your first online license, you will be issued a customer identification number. This is your unique, personal license number, and it will be yours for life. Those who have purchased licenses electronically in the past already have one. Use this number at any time to find your customer and purchase information and to purchase future licenses.

If you purchase a license online either from a home computer or from any license vendor or location other than a DFW office, you will be charged a service fee by Active Outdoors, the provider of this electronic licensing service. The fees pay for the development and maintenance of the *MassFishHunt* system and the new benefits it provides. The service fee includes a \$1.50 charge for each license purchased by the customer, plus a 3% internet handling charge on the total transaction. Prior to the processing of your payment, the Active Outdoors service fee will be itemized and clearly identified. Also, if you purchase a license from a participating license vendor or town/city hall, you may be charged an separate commission. *No service or commission fees will be charged if you purchase your license at any DFW office.*

Some hunters have expressed concern that plain paper licenses and tags will not last under field conditions, but commercial plastic license holders or simple Ziplock bags have proven reliable protectors under tough field conditions. Using them will help ensure that tags affixed to game are protected and readable during transport and possession.

Keep in mind that your ability to reprint or produce copies of licenses, permits, and tags does NOT authorize you to used more than the legal number of tags issued to you. Other nearby states (New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Connecticut) have successfully transitioned to plain-paper licenses and tags which can be printed from home, and based on their experiences. We do not anticipate any significant enforcement issues related to the *MassFishHunt* system.

Changes to Buying your 2012 Bear, Turkey, and Antlerless Deer Permits

There will no longer be any need to mail in a bear or turkey permit application. Now you can purchase these permits when you buy your license, or at any time up to and during the regular season. Likewise, for antlerless deer permits, you will no longer mail in your permit application. Instead, you will follow a simple, two step process: 1) Apply for the permit online. You can do this when you buy your license, or at any time prior to the traditional July 16th application deadline. As always, you can apply for only one deer management zone. You are then be eligible for a chance at drawing a permit for that zone. 2) At any time during a prescribed sales period after the application deadline has passed, you access the online system again to enter a random instant award process and find out immediately if you have drawn a permit. The dates for the sales period for entering the instant award process have not been set as of this writing, but will be announced when the details are finalized. As always, your chances of drawing a permit are based on the number of applicants and the number of permits allocated for that zone.

Remember: You must enter the *MassFishHunt* system during the instant award process for a chance to draw an antlerless deer permit. The instant award process will immediately notify you if you were selected for a permit. If selected, you may pay for your permit immediately, or at any time until the end of the instant award process period. Issuing these permits through an automated, online process makes the system fair and efficient while eliminating the need to mail an application and wait for notification.

Changes to Tagging, Reporting, and Sealing Game

Tagging, reporting, and sealing deer, turkey, black bear, or furbearers provides valuable harvest and biological data as well as physical evidence of legal possession of game for law enforcement officers. DFW biologists have used these data for decades to track and monitor harvest trends and to manage and conserve game species.

Tagging Game: As always, hunters must tag the same game species as in the past immediately after killing the animal. Tags are printed along with your license at the time of purchase.

Reporting and Sealing Game: There are changes to how hunters and trappers will report and seal their harvest. Starting with the 2012 spring turkey season, you will have two options for reporting and sealing harvested game: 1) Bring your deer, turkey, bear, or furbearer to a traditional check station location, or 2) Report your harvest online using the *MassFishHunt system*.

If you bring your game to a traditional check station, an official metal or plastic seal will be attached to the animal. As currently required, the seal must remain on the animal until it is butchered, skinned, or otherwise processed (Note: Otter and bobcat pelts may require an additional seal. See specific requirements for pelt sealing, page 46).

Reporting your harvest online should prove a great convenience, as it can be conducted from home or anywhere else an online computer is available. Traditional check stations may also choose to use the online system to eliminate conventional paperwork, and the DFW will assist those stations who would like to use the *MassFishHunt* system. If you check your game at a DFW office, the online game reporting system will most likely be used.

If you choose to use the online game harvest reporting system yourself, you will see a form asking for basic information: the same information sportsmen have always been asked to provide at traditional game check stations. For example, if you check in a turkey, you may be asked to measure and report the spur length and indicate if the bird is an adult or a juvenile. The DFW will provide helpful guides/information online on how to collect this biological information. Biological data on deer, however, will only be collected by biologists. Although harvested deer can be reported online during the archery and primitive firearms seasons, online checking will be closed during the shotgun season, and all deer hunters will be required to check their deer at a traditional check station during this season.

In addition to saving the sportsmen time and money, online game harvest reporting also benefits DFW biologists and the Environmental Police. For example, once the hunter submits the game harvest

report, a law enforcement officer in the field can call in or access the computer database for an instant enforcement check, much as a police officer can check driver license and vehicle registration information. DFW biologists will also have instant access to game harvest reports, enabling a significant increase in the efficiency and speed of harvest data collection. Under the traditional system, biologists have had to enter and analyze data from over 15,000 handwritten “kill cards” every year. With online reporting, they will receive the data more quickly and in a form they can readily analyze, thus reducing data entry costs and speeding the release of harvest data to the public. It’s a win-win situation for hunters, biologists, and law enforcement officers.

Waterfowl and Woodcock Hunter Harvest Information Program (H.I.P.) Survey

All woodcock, waterfowl and other migratory game bird hunters are required to complete a Harvest Information Program (H.I.P.) Survey. This survey will only be available on the *MassFishHunt* system; the traditional telephone survey will no longer be offered and you will not be assigned a H.I.P. number. Once you have completed the H.I.P. Survey online (typically when you are buying your license and/or Massachusetts waterfowl stamp) a “H.I.P. Survey completed” notation will appear on your hunting/sporting license. This is all you will need to prove that you have completed the survey.

Transition to the Future – Managing Wildlife while Adapting to Technology

With all these changes, the challenge is to embrace the best of the new while retaining the best of the old. We expect there will be some growing pains as we transition to the new system, and to ensure the success of this change, the DFW will monitor the system and make necessary refinements and improvements over time. We believe the *MassFishHunt* system strikes a balance by accommodating and offering benefits to ALL the sportsmen and women of the Commonwealth, online or not. We appreciate your support during this period of technological advancement, and look forward to improving our service to you while continuing to provide sound stewardship of our state’s fish and wildlife populations and the habitats on which they depend.