MASSACHUSETTS

FISHING & HUNTING

2026



OFFICIAL FRESHWATER FISHING, HUNTING, AND TRAPPING LAWS

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BE SAFE, BE SEEN

GET YOUR ORANGE ON

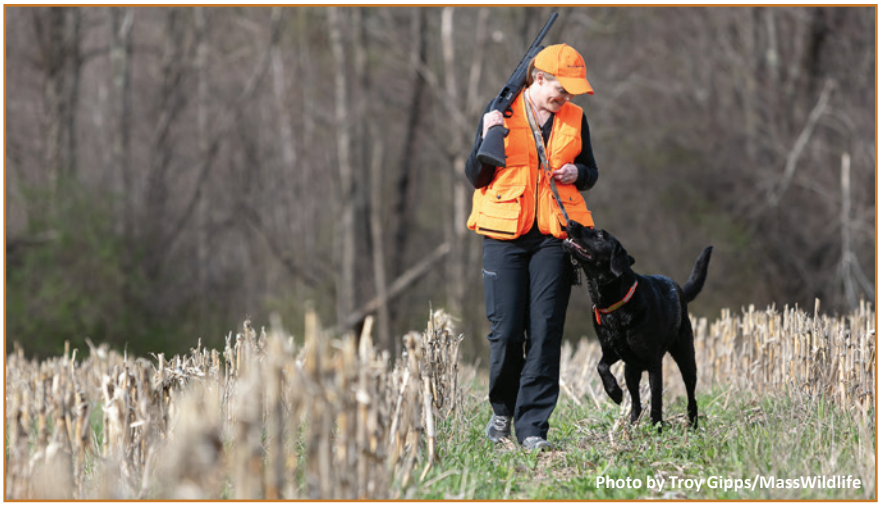

Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

ALL outdoor users who are in the field during hunting seasons are encouraged to wear blaze orange to increase their visibility. Hunters see page 22 for blaze orange requirements. Learn more at mass.gov/dfw/blaze-orange

NEW FOR 2026

BOATER EDUCATION REQUIREMENT: All Motorboat and Personal Watercraft operators in Massachusetts must complete a state-approved education course to enhance safety across Massachusetts' waterways (see page 19).

WINTER PRIMITIVE DEER SEASON: A new winter primitive deer season in January has been established in Zones 13 and 14.

DEER DECOYS: The use of deer decoys is now legal during archery season only.

SINGLE SEASON FOR BLACK BEAR: The three-part black bear season has been combined into one season from Sept. 7–Dec. 12, 2026.

YOUTH BEAR HUNT PERMIT: Youth hunters ages 12–17 can now hunt bear on the youth deer hunt day and throughout the bear season after obtaining a free youth bear hunt permit.

YOUTH DEER HUNT PERMIT: The youth deer hunt permit can now be used during any open deer season.

Have a question?

mass.wildlife@mass.gov
(508) 389-6300

Connect with MassWildlife!

On the Cover

Kyler Leslie, 14, of Petersham with his gold pin-winning northern pike, caught on the Connecticut River on March 6, 2024. The fish was 39 inches long and weighed 15 pounds. In 2024, Kyler and his brother, Ryker, 11, tied to win the Angler of the Year award in the youth catch-and-release category, as part of MassWildlife's Freshwater Sportfishing Awards Program, after they each caught 23 of the 24 eligible species.

Photo by Michael Leslie



Cover Inset

A group of does gather at dawn.

Photo © Dean Cerrati

MASSWILDLIFE

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Kimberley Driscoll, Lt. Governor

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Thomas K. O'Shea, Commissioner

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Mark S. Tisa, Director
(Retired, January 2026)

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Photo © Troy Gipps

WELCOME MESSAGE

Welcome to the 2026 Guide to Freshwater Fishing, Hunting, and Trapping in Massachusetts. This guide is designed to be your trusted companion in the field and on the water—whether you're a seasoned outdoors enthusiast or experiencing the excitement of your first season. Inside, you'll find everything you need to know about current regulations, seasons, and outdoor recreational opportunities across the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts offers an incredible variety of outdoor experiences. Whether it's casting for bass in a quiet pond, pushing through upland cover in pursuit of ruffed grouse, waiting patiently for a white-tailed deer, or calling for waterfowl in a coastal marsh at dawn, our landscapes provide countless opportunities for every type of angler, hunter, and trapper.

At MassWildlife, conservation and outdoor recreation go hand in hand. Our work extends beyond managing fish and game species; we are also dedicated to protecting habitats, restoring endangered and rare species, and expanding access so everyone can enjoy the outdoors. Thanks to your license, stamp, and permit purchases, excise tax contributions, and participation in the field, we can continue making critical investments in wildlife research, land protection, public education, and habitat management.

Today, MassWildlife manages more than 235,000 acres of conserved land open to the public, and that number continues to grow. Wildlife Management Areas provide places for hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, birding, and simply enjoying nature. If you haven't explored one recently, we encourage you to discover a new destination this year and experience firsthand the results of your support of conservation. The MassWildlife Lands Viewer, *mass.gov/dfw/wildlife-lands*, will help you find wildlife lands near you, and our Go Fish MA! online map, *mass.gov/gofishma*, will help you find boat ramps, trout stocked waters, pond and lake summaries, and digital depth information.

As you head into the woods and onto the waters this year, we thank you for your role in conserving the Commonwealth's natural resources. By participating in regulated fishing, hunting, and trapping, you are helping us ensure healthy wildlife populations and safeguarding traditions that connect us to the land and to each other. Together, we can continue to build a future where both people and wildlife thrive.

NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

MassWildlife prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, creed, ancestry, national origin, limited English proficiency, disability, veteran's status, or background. If you believe you have been discriminated against in a program or activity or need more information, contact Melixza G. Esenyie, ADA and Diversity Manager, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, 100 Cambridge Street, Boston MA 02114 Melixza.Esenyie2@mass.gov (617) 872-3270.



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MASSWILDLIFE DIRECTORY

A map showing the cities and towns in each of our Wildlife Districts can be found at, ***mass.gov/masswildlife-districts***.

FIELD HEADQUARTERS
1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough 01581
(508) 389-6300

WESTERN WILDLIFE DISTRICT
88 Old Windsor Road, Dalton 01226
(413) 684-1646

CONNECTICUT VALLEY WILDLIFE DISTRICT
341 East Street, Belchertown 01007
(413) 323-7632

CENTRAL WILDLIFE DISTRICT
211 Temple Street, West Boylston 01583
(508) 835-3607

NORTHEAST WILDLIFE DISTRICT
85 Fitchburg Road, Ayer 01432
(978) 772-2145

SOUTHEAST WILDLIFE DISTRICT
195 Bournedale Road, Buzzards Bay 02532
(508) 759-3406

BOSTON ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
100 Cambridge Street, Boston 02114
MassWildlife (508) 389-6300
Dept. of Fish and Game (617) 626-1500
By appointment only

SUNDERLAND FISH HATCHERY
559 Amherst Road, Sunderland 01375
(413) 665-4680

BITZER FISH HATCHERY
37 Hatchery Road, Montague 01351
(413) 367-2477

SANDWICH FISH HATCHERY
164 Rte 6A, Sandwich 02563
(508) 888-0008

ROGER REED FISH HATCHERY (CLOSED TO PUBLIC)
693 Ware Street, Palmer 01069
(413) 283-7440

MCLAUGHLIN FISH HATCHERY
90 East Street, Belchertown 01007
(413) 323-7671

TRANSLATION SERVICES

MassWildlife staff are available to answer your questions and help you understand hunting, fishing, and trapping laws. Use the link to request a call back from MassWildlife and an interpreter.

El personal de MassWildlife está a su disposición para responder a sus preguntas y ayudarle a comprender las leyes sobre caza, pesca y captura.

Os funcionários da MassWildlife estão disponíveis para responder às suas perguntas e ajudá-lo a compreender as leis de caça, pesca e captura.

Le personnel de MassWildlife est à votre disposition pour répondre à vos questions et vous aider à comprendre les lois sur la chasse, la pêche et le piégeage.

Anplwaye MassWildlife yo disponib pou yo reponn kesyon w genyen e pou yo ede w konprann lwa sou lachas, lapèch, ak pyèjaj.

Nhân viên của MassWildlife sẵn sàng giải đáp các thắc mắc và giúp bạn hiểu rõ các luật về săn bắn, câu cá và đặt bẫy.

Сотрудники MassWildlife готовы ответить на ваши вопросы и помочь разобраться в законах об охоте, рыбалке и звероловном промысле.

MassWildlife 的工作人员可以回答您的问题并帮助您了解狩猎、捕鱼和诱捕的相关法律。

MassWildlife 的工作人員可以回答您的問題並幫助您瞭解狩獵、捕魚和誘捕的相關法律。

MassWildlife कर्मचारी आपके सवालों का जवाब देने और शिकार, मछली पकड़ने और पकड़ने के कानूनों को समझने में आपकी मदद करने के लिए उपलब्ध हैं।

موظفو MassWildlife على استعداد لمساعدتك في الاستفسارات وتقديم التوضيحات بشأن لوائح الصيد وصيد الأسماك والمحاصرة.

mass.gov/masswildlife-translation

MASSWILDLIFE LANDS

Explore the MassWildlife Lands Viewer online to learn more about land and waters open to hunting, fishing, trapping, and watching wildlife.

Go to ***mass.gov/dfw/wildlife-lands***.



Photo © Troy Gipps

To contact MassWildlife staff visit, ***mass.gov/masswildlife-staff-directory***

CONTACT US
mass.wildlife@mass.gov

QUESTIONS?
Email us at mass.wildlife@mass.gov
Get MassWildlife's E-Newsletter:
mass.gov/dfw/newsletter

CONNECT WITH US!

Your Ripple Effect.

Manufacturer-paid federal excise taxes on fishing equipment and the portion of fuel taxes attributed to motorboat use and small engines — combined with state fishing licenses — help amplify vital fisheries conservation efforts and expand public access opportunities. Through the Sport Fish Restoration program, your participation generates powerful waves of benefits for fish, habitat, public access, and future generations of anglers and boaters.

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Reinforced conservation heritage

1 Billion+
Sport fish raised and stocked

Increased connection and access to wild places

200+
Species of sport fish studied and managed

748+
Clean vessel facilities constructed (2020-2024)

925+
Transient boat slips constructed (2020-2024)

9,000+
Public boating and fishing areas operated and maintained

850,000+
Students received aquatic and angler education

Strengthened community bonds through collaboration

Raised conservation and stewardship awareness

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Office of
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WILDLIFE & SPORT FISH RESTORATION

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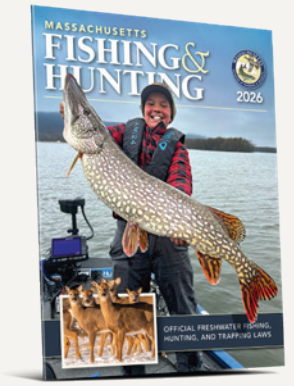
About This Guide

This high-quality guide is brought to you by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife through a partnership with Kalkomey, a trusted leader in outdoor safety education since 1995. In addition to producing this guide, Kalkomey also offers a suite of educational courses to help people enjoy the outdoors safely.

The revenue generated through ad sales in this publication significantly lowers production costs and generates savings. These savings translate into additional funds for other important agency programs and we thank the advertisers for their support.



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NOTICE

This *Guide* contains a summary of the laws and regulations in place as of October 10, 2025. Any changes in law or regulation enacted after October 10, 2025 are publicized by MassWildlife through releases to the news media, all license sales outlets, and on its website. These are not the complete laws and regulations. Laws and regulations (MGL Ch. 131 and 321 CMR) are subject to change.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICE

The mission of the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP) is to protect the environment and natural resources of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through enforcement, education, and public outreach.

TO REPORT VIOLATIONS

Emergency 24/7 Statewide Dispatch
(800) 632-8075
(617) 626-1665
mass.gov/ole

MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL POLICE BOSTON HQ

John Monaghan III, Colonel
200 Arlington Street, 1st Floor
Chelsea, MA 02150

BOAT AND RECREATION VEHICLE REGISTRATION OFFICES

Boston
(617) 626-1610

Fall River
(508) 679-8287

Hyannis
(508) 771-8382

Springfield
(413) 733-1642

Worcester
(508) 753-0603

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE (OHV) AND BOATING SAFETY COURSES

(508) 564-4961, *mass.gov/boat-and-off-highway-vehicle-ohv-safety-courses*

SALVAGE OF DEER, MOOSE, AND BEAR

ROAD-KILLED DEER may be kept by a Massachusetts driver or passenger of vehicle killing said deer if reported to MEP at (800) 632-8075 immediately and then tagged at a MassWildlife or MEP office within 24 hours.

ROAD-KILLED MOOSE OR BEAR may not be kept by a Massachusetts driver or passenger of the vehicle killing the said moose or bear. The disposition of any moose or bear carcass is only at the discretion of MEP or MassWildlife. To report a road-killed moose or bear, call MassWildlife at (508) 389-6300 or the MEP number listed above.

INTERSTATE WILDLIFE VIOLATORS COMPACT

Massachusetts is part of the Interstate Wildlife Violators Compact (IWVC). Through a cooperative interstate system, the IWVC allows Massachusetts to collaborate with all other states in the U.S. to stop poachers and other violators from taking their illegal activity from state to state. Specifically, non-residents that violate Massachusetts' wildlife laws can be processed more effectively and efficiently. Also, the IWVC ensures that anyone who has their license privilege suspended in one state would have their license privilege suspended in all states.

If any of an individual's recreational licenses are suspended in any other U.S. state due to the violation of reciprocal hunting, fishing, or trapping laws, their privileges in Massachusetts are also suspended, and vice versa. With any such suspension, the individual may not purchase any recreational license issued by the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (DFG). If the individual has a current Massachusetts recreational license issued by DFG, said license must be immediately surrendered to the Massachusetts Environmental Police.

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LICENSES

HUNTING, FRESHWATER FISHING & TRAPPING

Licenses are valid from January 1 through December 31
(except for limited term licenses).

Who Needs a License?

Hunting: Licenses are required for anyone 15 years of age and over for hunting any game bird or mammal. No person under the age of 12 may hunt (see Youth Hunters, pages 28–29).

Fishing: Licenses are required for anyone 15 years of age and over for fishing the inland (fresh) waters of Massachusetts. Anglers under 15 may fish, but do not need a license. A freshwater (inland) fishing license is not required on the Merrimack River seaward of the first upstream bridge (northbound traffic) of Route 495 in Haverhill, however, a saltwater fishing permit is required (see page 10).

Trapping: A license is required for all persons age 12 years of age and older. In addition, to trap on the land of another, a Trap Registration Certificate, which contains a number is required.

AGRICULTURAL LANDOWNERS: Any person who owns or leases land that is principally used for agriculture and any immediate family members who are domiciled on said land do not need a hunting, fishing, or trapping license to hunt, fish, or trap on that property. Permits and stamps are still required.

RESIDENT & NON-RESIDENT LICENSES: To obtain a resident hunting, fishing, or trapping license, applicant must reside in Massachusetts for six consecutive months immediately prior to purchase.

A valid Massachusetts non-resident license is required for all non-resident anglers and hunters ages 15 and older. A Big Game License is required of all non-residents to hunt deer, bear, and wild turkey and allows for hunting of small game. For hunting small game only, a non-resident Small Game license is required (see page 24 for non-resident hunter information).

Purchasing Licenses, Stamps & Permits

Licenses, stamps, and permits may be purchased online by anglers 15 years and older, and by hunters and trappers 18 years or older at *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

Minor hunters may purchase licenses, stamps, and permits online, at MassWildlife offices, and other license vendors. Minors must have parental consent (sworn affidavit online or written when in person) to purchase a license and must either attest that they will always hunt with licensed individual at least 18 years old, or have taken hunter education (see page 28). Licenses, permits, and stamps are not transferable. If you have difficulty purchasing these products through the MassFishHunt system, call (844) 595-2930.

Hunting/Sporting License

First ever hunting and sporting licenses for anyone aged 18 years or older can be purchased only if the buyer has successfully completed a Basic Hunter Education course from any jurisdiction or held a hunting license from any jurisdiction prior to 2007.

Falconry

Hunting with birds of prey is allowed under a special permit from MassWildlife. A hunting license is required. Federal and state waterfowl stamps and HIP registration required when hunting waterfowl (see page 46). A Pheasant/Quail Permit is required when hunting ring-necked pheasant or bobwhite quail. All other hunting regulations apply. Pheasant, bobwhite quail, ruffed grouse,



cottontail rabbit, snowshoe hare, and gray squirrel may be taken from the respective opening day **through March 14th**. Falconers may also hunt crows during the regular crow season (see page 42). Unprotected birds and mammals (see page 22, Open Seasons) may be taken by falconry except in areas closed for the taking of such animals. Falconers shall not practice falconry on posted land without permission. Contact MassWildlife at (508) 389-6300 for more information.

Trapping License & Trap Registration Number

To trap on the land of another, a Trap Registration Certificate, which contains a number, is required and may be obtained from MassWildlife by calling (508) 389-6300 only after successful completion of a Trapper Education course from any U.S. state. To obtain a trapping license, minors 12–17 years-old must have consent from a parent or guardian (see page 50).

LICENSE, PERMIT, TAG DISPLAY: All hunters, anglers and trappers must have their license, permits and stamps in possession while engaging in these activities. Hunters and anglers may display a true, complete and legible image of a valid license using a mobile device. Hunters must comply with all tagging requirements. If a tag is required, as it is for hunting deer, bear, and turkey, hunters must carry a paper copy of the license, permits and tags.

PERMITS

Fees for resident and non-resident permits have changed. (see page 12).

PHEASANT/QUAIL PERMIT: Required by all persons aged 15 years or older (including falconers) to hunt, take or possess pheasants or bobwhite quail harvested within Massachusetts, except for those hunting or possessing pheasants or quail harvested on licensed commercial shooting preserves. All birds harvested on commercial shooting preserves must be tagged with a MassWildlife supplied adhesive yellow harvest tag.

ANTLERLESS DEER PERMIT: Required to take an antlerless deer during archery, shotgun, and primitive firearms seasons in all zones. The deadline to apply for an antlerless deer permit is July 16 at any license vendor or online through the MassFishHunt system. Only one application per person. The application is free. Surplus ADP permits will be available in WMZs 10, 11, 13, 14 throughout the deer season without a daily or season purchase limit. Additional surplus permits may be available in other zones on a first come-first serve basis. Beginning sales dates will be announced in August (see page 32).

YOUTH DEER HUNT PERMIT: Youth hunters ages 12–17 are required to obtain a free youth deer hunt day permit to hunt deer on the designated day. The permit can also be used during any open deer season (see page 29).

WINTER DEER PERMIT: Allows the take of an either sex deer in WMZs 13 and 14 during the Winter Primitive Season. Over-the-counter sales begin on Dec. 1 for the new license year.

BEAR PERMIT: Required to hunt bear. Hunters may purchase this permit when purchasing their hunting/sporting license or at any time prior to the end of the third segment of the bear season through any license vendor or online through the MassFishHunt system.

YOUTH BEAR HUNT PERMIT: Youth hunters ages 12–17 are required to obtain a free youth bear hunt permit to hunt bear on the youth deer hunt day. The youth bear hunt permit can also be used for any open bear season (see page 29 and 36).





YOUR LICENSE DOLLARS AT WORK

Did you know your license dollars and a federal excise tax on your purchase of hunting and fishing equipment pay for most of MassWildlife's fish, wildlife, and habitat management and its other conservation programs? Since 1938, the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has partnered with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service; state license-buyers; and the fishing, hunting, shooting, and boating industries to fund fish and wildlife projects through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. Today, this pioneering program serves as a cost-effective model for fish and wildlife conservation by providing fish and wildlife access to those who both fund and directly benefit from the resource—licensed anglers and hunters. Their contributions through this "user pay, public benefit" conservation model—funded by license purchases and excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment—benefit all Massachusetts residents, and fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

TURKEY PERMIT: Required to hunt turkey. Hunters may purchase this permit when purchasing their hunting/sporting license or at any time prior to the end of the fall turkey season through any license vendor or online through the MassFishHunt system.

YOUTH TURKEY HUNT PERMIT: Youth hunters ages 12–17 are required to obtain a free permit/authorization to hunt turkey on the designated day. The youth turkey permit can also be used for any open turkey season. (see page 29).

SPECIAL LICENSES/PERMITS

Special authorization is necessary for sale, possession, importation or release of certain fish and wildlife, and for fur dealers, propagators, wildlife rehabilitators, taxidermists and/or fur buyers. Sale and importation of baitfish require separate dealer and importation permits. Special permits are required for hunting with crossbows, falconry, problem animal control, and shooting preserves. For more information, contact Field Headquarters at (508) 389-6300.

STAMPS

Fees for resident and non-resident stamps have changed (see page 12).

ARCHERY STAMP: Required to hunt deer during the archery deer season.

PRIMITIVE FIREARMS STAMP: Required to hunt deer during the winter primitive and primitive firearms seasons.

MASSACHUSETTS WATERFOWL STAMP: Required of all waterfowl (ducks and geese) hunters aged 15 and older. Massachusetts state stamps are valid Jan. 1–Dec. 31 and may be purchased online at *mass.gov/massfishhunt* or wherever hunting licenses are sold. This stamp is electronic, there are no physical stamps. Stamp purchase includes mandatory Harvest Information Program (HIP) Registration.

FEDERAL DUCK STAMP: ($25; plus $4 federal regulatory processing fee for electronic "eDuck" stamps) Required of all waterfowl hunters 16 years or older. Federal electronic "eDuck" Stamps no longer expire after 45 days following purchase and are valid from the date of purchase through June 30. They may be obtained online at *mass.gov/massfishhunt, https://duckstamp.com/e-stamp,* or wherever MA hunting licenses are sold. The Federal eDuck Stamp must be carried by waterfowl hunters in either digital or hardcopy format, but does not need to be signed. For those who purchase an eDuck Stamp, their physical Federal Duck Stamp will now be mailed via U.S. mail after the close of the season, on March 10. If it does not arrive, hunters should contact Amplex at duckstamp@amplex.com or (800) 852-4897. Physical Federal Duck stamps are also available for purchase at all National Wildlife Refuges and select post offices, and must be signed across the face in ink and carried while waterfowl hunting.

MARINE FISHERIES

MarineFisheries
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Have any questions regarding saltwater fishing regulations?
Call the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries information hotline at (617) 626-1520, visit *mass.gov/marinefisheries,* or email: marine.fish@mass.gov

SALTWATER FISHING PERMITS

Saltwater anglers in Massachusetts are required to purchase a state recreational saltwater fishing permit. The fee for this permit is $10 and is the same cost for all anglers, including non-residents. Anglers younger than 16, or disabled, or who fish only on charter boats or "head boats" are exempt from this requirement. Anglers aged 60 and older will need to obtain a permit, but the saltwater permit is free. The permit is available online, by mail, and in person at participating vendors and the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries offices in Gloucester, Boston, and New Bedford. For more information, please visit: *mass.gov/dmf/saltwaterpermits.*



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

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2026 LICENSE, STAMP & PERMIT FEES

LICENSES	FEE
Resident Fishing[1]	40.00
Resident Minor Fishing (Citizen, Age 15–17)	FREE
Resident Fishing (Citizen, Age 65–69)[1]	20.00
Resident Fishing (Citizen, Age 70 or over) Or paraplegic, blind, intellectually disabled[2]	FREE
Non-resident Fishing[1]	50.00
Non-resident Minor Fishing (Age 15–17)[1]	8.00
Resident Fishing (3-day)[1]	20.00
Non-resident Fishing (3-day)[1]	30.50
Quabbin 1-day Fishing	5.00
Resident Hunting[1]	40.00
Resident Minor Hunting (Citizen, Age 15–17)[1]	6.50
Resident Hunting (Citizen, Age 65–69)[1]	20.00
Resident/Non-resident Hunting, Paraplegic[2]	FREE
Non-resident (adult/minor) Hunting, Big Game[1]	112.00
Non-resident (adult/minor) Hunting, Small Game[1]	78.00
Resident Sporting[1]	75.00
Resident Sporting (Citizen, Age 65–69)[1]	37.50
Resident Sporting (Citizen, Age 70 or over, includes trapping)	FREE
Resident/Non-resident Sporting, Paraplegic[2]	FREE
Resident Trapping[1]	40.00
Resident Minor Trapping (Citizen, Age 12–17)[1]	6.50
Resident Trapping (Citizen, Age 65–69)[1]	20.00
Resident Commercial Shooting Preserve (1-day)[1]	10.00
Non-resident Commercial Shooting Preserve (1-day)[1]	20.00
STAMPS & PERMITS	**FEE**
Wildlands Stamp, Resident and Non-resident	5.00
Antlerless Deer Permit (when issued), Resident	10.00
Antlerless Deer Permit (when issued), Non-resident	30.00
Archery Deer Season Stamp, Resident	10.00
Archery Deer Season Stamp, Non-resident	30.00
Primitive Firearms Deer Season Stamp, Resident	10.00
Primitive Firearms Deer Season Stamp, Non-resident	30.00
Winter Deer Permit	FREE
Youth Deer Hunt Permit	FREE
Bear Permit, Resident	10.00
Bear Permit, Non-resident	30.00
Youth Bear Hunt Permit	FREE
Pheasant/Quail Permit, Resident	20.00
Pheasant/Quail Permit, Non-resident	30.00
Turkey Permit, Resident	10.00
Turkey Permit, Non-resident	30.00
Youth Turkey Hunt Permit	FREE
Massachusetts Waterfowl Stamp, Resident	10.00
Massachusetts Waterfowl Stamp, Non-resident	30.00
Trap Registration[2]	20.00
Non-resident Trapping Permit[2]	215.00
Resident Fur Buyer Permit[2]	45.00
Non-resident Fur Buyer Permit[2]	105.00



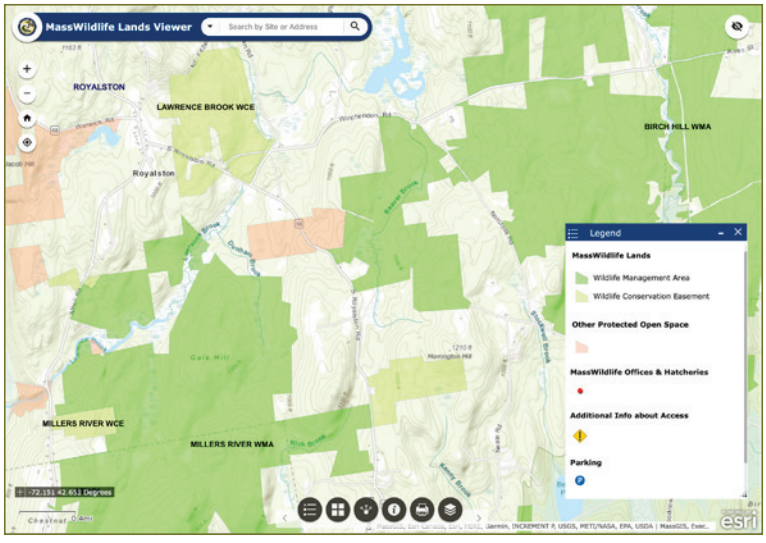
WHERE TO BUY: Most licenses, permits, and stamps can be bought online using MassFishHunt (*mass.gov/massfishhunt*) with a computer, tablet, or smartphone. To purchase in-person, use *mass.gov/fishhuntlicensemap* to find a license vendor near you.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BILL: All funds from freshwater fishing, hunting, and trapping licenses go directly into the Inland Fish and Game Fund, which can only be used to support MassWildlife's programs and services. Depending on where you buy your license, additional fees may apply that are not collected by MassWildlife. If you buy your license online, administrative and convenience fees will be added by the company that operates the online MassFishHunt licensing system. If you buy your license in person at a sporting goods store or town office, agent fees will be collected by these license vendors. There are no additional fees charged for licenses purchased at offices of MassWildlife or the Division of Marine Fisheries, where only cash and checks are accepted.

1 Price does not include the $5.00 Wildlands Conservation Stamp that is added to the first resident license and all non-resident licenses purchased.

2 Requires pre-approval for first-time applicants or cannot be purchased online; contact MassWildlife for instructions at (508) 389-6300.

LOOKING FOR PLACES TO HUNT, FISH, OR TRAP?



Wildlife lands, open to hunting, fishing, and trapping, can be viewed using the MassWildlife Lands Viewer, *mass.gov/dfw/wildlife-lands* This new tool shows land owned jointly by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and MassWildlife throughout the Commonwealth. Maps can be customized and printed using the Viewer. Users can search for land by town or by property name.

These lands are protected primarily to provide habitat for wildlife and to give people a place to relax and explore the great outdoors. For the most part, wildlife lands are open to hunting, fishing, trapping, birdwatching, and other wildlife related recreation. Users can explore unmarked paths or woods roads with simple, unpaved parking lots. Many of these properties are actively managed through mowing, cutting, prescribed burns, or other activities that benefit wildlife. Regulations govern the activities allowed on these lands and focus on passive recreation. Note that these maps are provided for recreational use and show approximate rather than legal descriptions of property boundaries.

Explore Your MassWildlife Lands





FISHING SEASONS AND LIMITS

SPECIES	OPEN SEASON (ALL DATES INCLUSIVE)	DAILY CREEL LIMIT	MINIMUM LENGTH[1]
Trout [2]			
Lakes, ponds, major rivers [3, 5, 6]	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	3	—
Housatonic River [4]	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	1	20"
All other rivers and brooks	Apr. 1–Sept. 10 Sept. 11–Mar. 31, 2027	8 3	—
Lake Trout			
Wachusett Reservoir [6]	(see note 6)	3	—
Quabbin Reservoir [6]	(see note 6)	2	18"
Landlocked Salmon [6]	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	2	15"
American Shad [7] (Connecticut and Merrimack rivers only, including their tributaries.)	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	3	—
Chain Pickerel	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	5	15"
Black Bass (Largemouth and Smallmouth, singly or combined):	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	5	12"
Northern Pike	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	1	28"
Tiger Muskellunge	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	1	28"
Walleye	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	5	14"
Smelt [8]	Jan. 1–Feb. 28 May 16–Dec. 31	—	—
All Other Freshwater Species [9]	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	—	—
Striped Bass and Herring: For season, size, and possession limits call the Division of Marine Fisheries at (617) 626-1520, or visit *mass.gov/saltwater-regulations*.			
Possession of: Sturgeon (all species), American Brook Lamprey, Atlantic (sea-run) Salmon, Bridle Shiner, Burbot, Eastern Silvery Minnow, Lake Chub, Longnose Sucker, and Northern Redbelly Dace is illegal! **If caught, release immediately.** This means remove hook or cut line and return fish to water **immediately** — do not pose for photographs, place on a stringer, hold in a net, or delay in any way the immediate return and release of these rare fish to the water!			

1 **Minimum length** is measured as the straight line (not curved over the body) from the tip of the snout to the tip of the tail. The tips of any forked tail may be squeezed together for the final measurement.

2 **Trout** applies to Brook, Brown, Rainbow, and Tiger Trout (a cross between a female Brown and a male Brook Trout). From Apr. 1 to Sept. 10, no more than 8 trout (as defined) may be taken daily, and only 3 of those trout may be from lakes, ponds, or major rivers. From Sept. 11 to Mar. 31, no more than 3 trout (as defined) may be taken daily.

3 **Major Rivers:** Childs, Coonamessett, Deerfield, Farmington, Green (Colrain), Green (Great Barrington), Ipswich, Jones, Mashpee, Millers, Nissitissit, North (Colrain), North (West Branch), Parker, Quaboag, Quinapoxet, Quinebaug, Seven Mile, Santuit, Scorton Creek, Shawsheen, Squannacook, Stillwater (Sterling, Princeton), Swift (East Branch), Swift (Winsor Dam to Ware River, except as posted), Tully (East and West Branches), Ware, Ware (East Branch), Westfield (all branches).

4 **Mainstem Housatonic only,** from the confluence of the East and West Branches to the MA–CT line, exclusive of the catch-and-release areas where no trout may be kept.

5 **Special Brown Trout water:** South Pond (Quacumquasit), Brookfield. Total daily creel is 3 trout but only 1 may be a Brown Trout and it must be at least 15".

6 **Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs:** Opening and closing dates are set by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The Quabbin Reservoir Fishing Season generally opens on the third Saturday in Apr. and runs through the third Saturday in Oct., but these dates may be adjusted due to weather and other factors. Quabbin Reservoir and its tributary streams within the Quabbin Reservation are closed to all fishing except during the open season as set by DCR. The Quabbin Fishing Guide is available at: *mass.gov/dcr/quabbinfish* or by calling (413) 323-7221. The Wachusett Reservoir fishing season normally opens the first Saturday in Apr. and closes on Dec. 31. The Sudbury Reservoir and West Waushacum Pond fishing seasons normally open the first Saturday in Apr. and close on Nov. 30. The DCR/DWSP may alter those dates depending on ice conditions. At Wachusett Reservoir, shoreline fishing only is allowed from Gate 6 on Route 70 to Gate 36 on Route 110. A Wachusett and Sudbury Reservoirs Fishing Guide is available at: *mass.gov/dcr/wachusettfish* or by calling (508) 792-7806.

ICE FISHING

All anglers are allowed up to five hooks through the ice at one time. A hook is defined as an angling device attached to the line of a tip-up or jig stick that is designed to take one fish at a time. This includes plain hooks, treble hooks, spinners, spoons, bait harnesses, jigs, or plugs. The device in question is not restricted to a single hook—lures with multiple treble hooks count as one hook in the water. Hooks can be on any combination of tip-ups or jig sticks, but no more than five hooks total.

All anglers must be able to tend their own hooks (tip-ups or jig sticks). Adults may assist minors with cutting holes or removing hooks, but minors must be capable of tending tip-ups or jig sticks on their own. See ice strength and safety tips on page 18.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

7 **American Shad** are catch-and-release ONLY on all waters except the Connecticut and Merrimack rivers, including their tributaries.

8 **Smelt** may be taken by hook and line only.

9 Excluding the state- and federally-listed species listed after the "Possession of:" heading in the bottom row of the table shown above.

10 **Jurisdictional Boundary for Merrimack River:** For the purpose of determining inter-agency jurisdictional boundaries between the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Division of Marine Fisheries, a marker is hereby established on the Merrimack River. The marker shall be the first upstream or easternmost (i.e., northbound traffic) bridge of Rte. I-495 in the city of Haverhill. Waters of the Merrimack River downstream from said bridge shall be subject to the authority, rules and regulations, of the Division of Marine Fisheries. Waters upstream from said bridge shall be subject to the jurisdictional authority, rules and regulations, of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

BAIT

It is unlawful to take baitfish for the purpose of sale from the inland waters of the Commonwealth. Individuals trapping fish for personal use as baitfish may use only one trap.

BAITFISH may be taken by licensed anglers at any time for personal use by all lawful methods, including a rectangular net not exceeding 36 square feet of net area or by a hoop or circular net not exceeding 6 feet in diameter or with a fish trap with openings not exceeding one inch. Nets designed to gill fish are prohibited. Only the fish species listed below may be taken for personal use as bait, live or dead, by licensed anglers.

- Banded Killifish
- Fallfish
- Fathead Minnow
- Golden Shiner
- Mummichog
- Pumpkinseed
- Rainbow Smelt*
- Yellow Perch
- White Sucker

* SMELT may be taken **only** by hook and line. Using smelt as bait in inland waters outside of the smelt season is prohibited.

HERRING: For regulations on herring contact the Division of Marine Fisheries, (617) 626-1520 or *mass.gov/saltwater-regulations*.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

SPECIES	OPEN SEASON	DAILY BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT	SIZE LIMIT
For Personal Consumption				
Bullfrog, Green Frog	July 16–Sept. 30	12	24	none
Snapping Turtle	Jan. 1–Apr. 30 July 17–Dec. 31	2	2	at least 12 in.*
For Bait				
Bullfrog, Green Frog, Pickerel Frog, Wood Frog	Jan. 1–Dec. 31	10	10	less than 2½ in.**

*Straight line carapace (shell) length **Snout to vent length

No reptile or amphibian may be taken from the wild in Massachusetts for purposes of sale. No reptile or amphibian may be taken with a firearm.

Fishing license required.

For Personal Consumption: Snapping turtles may be taken by hand, hand-held dip net, or gaff.

For Bait: Bullfrogs, green frogs, wood frogs, and pickerel frogs may be taken by hand or hand-held dip net.

FREE FISHING WEEKEND

June 6–7, 2026
No freshwater license needed!



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife



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CATCH-AND-RELEASE AREAS

Artificial lures only. No bait in possession. Go to *mass.gov/dfw/cr-areas* for maps of catch-and-release areas.

HOUSATONIC RIVER: From the Rte. 20 bridge in Lee downstream to Willow Mill Dam AND from Glendale Dam downstream to the railroad bridge in Great Barrington. No fishing from June 15–Aug. 31 inclusive within 100 feet of the mouths of posted tributaries: Beartown Brook; Goose Pond Brook; Hop Brook; and Mohawk Brook.

RED BROOK: From the outlet of White Island Pond to the inlet of Buttermilk Bay.

NISSITISSIT RIVER: From the New Hampshire border to the Prescott St. Bridge. FLY FISHING ONLY (year-round).

SWIFT RIVER: Winsor Dam to Rte. 9, catch-and-release FLY FISHING ONLY (year-round). Rte. 9 to Cady Lane, catch-and-release, artificial lures only (July 1–Dec. 31); fish harvest and bait allowed (Jan. 1–June 30).

DEERFIELD RIVER: Fife Brook Dam to Hoosac Tunnel, and the section extending from Pelham Brook to the Mohawk Campground.

QUASHNET RIVER: From the outlet of John's Pond to the sign 0.1 mile below Rte. 28.

WESTFIELD RIVER, EAST BRANCH: Immediately below the Chesterfield Gorge parking lot in Chesterfield to the gate north of the Corps of Engineers parking lot at Knightville in Huntington.

MILLERS RIVER: Templeton/Athol RR bridge to the first dam in Athol and from Wendell Rd. bridge in Orange to the breached dam in Erving center.

FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORIES

The Mass. Dept. of Public Health (MDPH) has issued a statewide advisory for pregnant women, nursing mothers, women who may become pregnant, and children under 12 to refrain from consuming fish caught in freshwater due to elevated levels of mercury in fish. MDPH has also issued fish consumption advisories for the general public on selected bodies of water due to elevated levels of mercury in fish. These mercury advisories DO NOT apply to stocked trout. MDPH has also issued consumption advisories for PFAS in fish in selected bodies of water. For more information or a list of waters with fish consumption advisories contact MDPH at (617) 624-5757 or *mass.gov/dph*. For the list of trout stocked waters visit *mass.gov/trout*.

INTERSTATE POND LICENSE REGULATIONS

WALLUM LAKE, DOUGLAS: Fishing permitted by persons duly licensed in Massachusetts or Rhode Island. Rhode Island regulations apply.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

LAKE MONOMONAC AND ROBBINS POND, WINCHENDON; LONG POND, TYNGSBORO AND DRACUT; BENT POND, WARWICK; TUXBURY POND, AMESBURY: Fishing permitted by persons duly licensed in Massachusetts or New Hampshire. New Hampshire regulations apply.

COLEBROOK RESERVOIR, TOLLAND; PERRY POND, DUDLEY; MUDDY POND, SOUTHBRIDGE; BREAKNECK POND, STURBRIDGE; CONGAMOND LAKE, SOUTHWICK; HAMILTON RESERVOIR, HOLLAND: Fishing permitted by persons duly licensed in Massachusetts or Connecticut. Connecticut regulations apply to Colebrook Reservoir, Breakneck Pond, Perry Pond and Muddy Pond. Massachusetts regulations apply to Congamond Lake and Hamilton Reservoir.

SHERMAN RESERVOIR, ROWE: Massachusetts regulations apply and MA license required in MA. Vermont regulations apply and VT license required in VT.

FISHING PROHIBITIONS

- **More than two hooks** for fishing open water or more than five hooks when ice fishing. A hook is defined as an angling device attached to a fishing line that is designed to take one fish at a time but is not limited to devices commonly called spinners, spoons, bait harnesses, jigs, or plugs.
- The taking of any fish from the inland waters of the Commonwealth for the purposes of sale.
- **Lead Sinkers, Lead Weights, and Lead Jigs Weighing Less Than an Ounce.** Any sinker or weight made from lead that weighs less than 1 ounce, and any lead jig (meaning any lead-weighted hook) that weighs less than 1 ounce, is prohibited for use in all inland waters of the Commonwealth. The term lead sinker shall not include any other sinkers, weights, fishing lures or fishing tackle including, but not limited to, artificial lures, hooks, weighted flies, and lead-core or other weighted fishing lines.
- **Possession of** Sturgeon (all species), American Brook Lamprey, Atlantic (sea-run) Salmon, Bridle Shiner, Burbot, Eastern Silvery Minnow, Lake Chub, Longnose Sucker, and Northern Redbelly Dace is illegal! If caught, release immediately. This means remove hook or cut line and return fish to water immediately—do not pose for photographs, place on a stringer, hold in a net, or delay in any way the immediate return and release of the fish to the water.
- **Releasing** fish or spawn into inland waters, except by permit.
- **Transporting** live fish (except bait for personal use) without a permit.
- **Jug,** toggle, or trot line fishing.
- **Snagging**
- **Poisons, explosives**
- **Littering** in inland waters.

SPEARS, BOW AND ARROWS

May be used to take White Suckers and Carp only. Fishing license required.

GO FISH MA! WITH ONLINE FISHING MAP

Plan your next fishing trip using MassWildlife's online fishing map. Find boat ramps, trout stocked waters, pond and lake summaries, and digital depth information. The fishing map also highlights over 100 featured fishing sites that offer easy access to great fishing in all areas of the state. Once you're at your fishing spot, use your mobile device and the *My Location* feature on the map to see depth information in real time. Go to *mass.gov/gofishma* to start exploring.

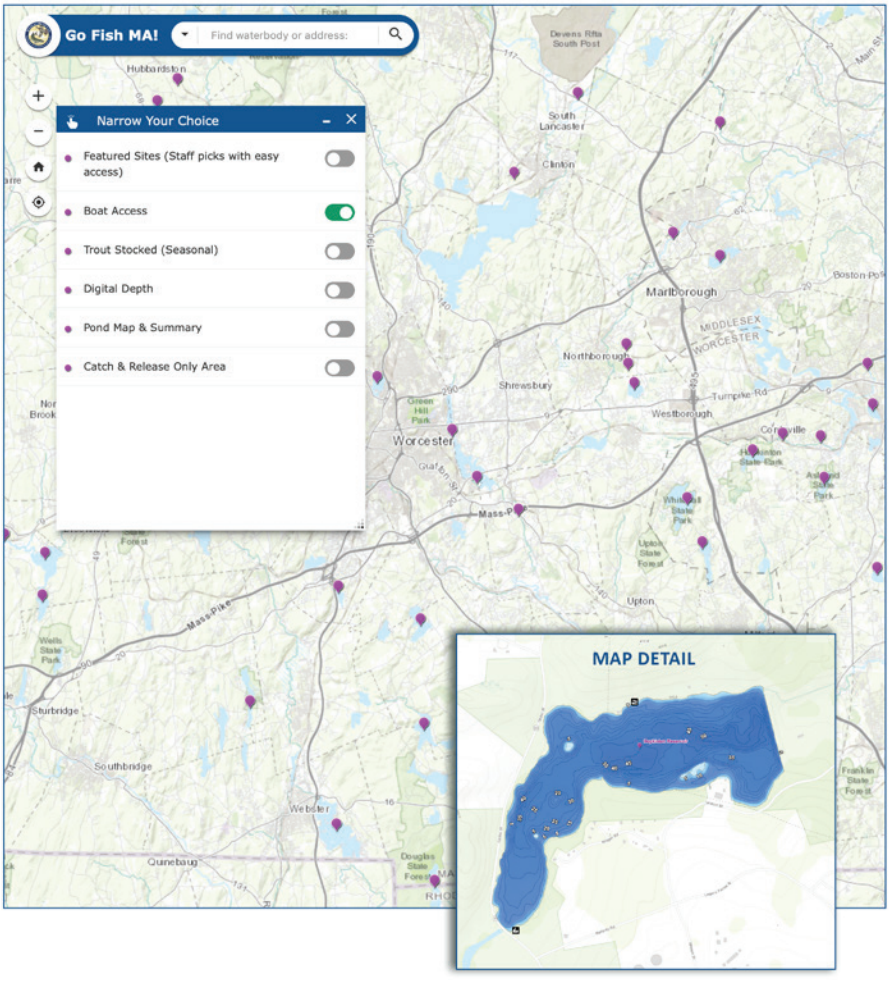
TROUT STOCKING REPORT

Massachusetts anglers can go to *mass.gov/trout* to view a list or a map displaying trout stocking information. The report is updated daily during the spring and fall trout stocking seasons. Anglers seeking stocking reports for a particular waterbody or town should use the table to locate information. Type the name of the waterbody or town into the search window to find stocking reports for that location. The table also allows users to sort by town, waterbody, stocking date, or type of fish. The map component of the stocking report allows users to discover new destinations for fishing! Zoom and pan to various regions of the state. The default map view shows trout-stocked waters for the entire state. Zoom to the area you would like to explore and click on any thumbtack icon to view the dates and species of trout stocked at that pond or stream reach. Stocked reaches on streams are accurate, but fish swim, so be sure to investigate other reaches of the streams.

NOTE: Trout stocking is subject to change depending on staffing, equipment, and weather conditions.

Don't forget your fishing license — available online at *mass.gov/massfishhunt* at MassWildlife offices, or at license vendors.

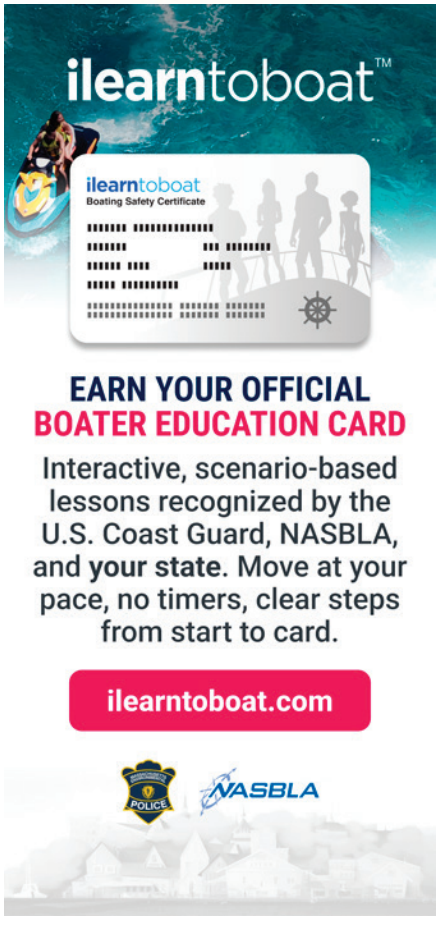
VISIT *MASS.GOV/TROUT* FOR STOCKING LOCATIONS AND DAILY REPORTS



COLDWATER STREAMS

A Coldwater Fish Resource (CFR) is a waterbody that contains at least one coldwater fish species (i.e., Slimy Sculpin, Longnose Sucker, Lake Chub, American Brook Lamprey, Burbot, Rainbow Smelt, Landlocked Atlantic Salmon, and Lake, Brook, Brown, and Rainbow Trout) that reproduced in that waterbody, or a connected tributary, and use such waters to meet one or more of their life history requirements. Protection of coldwater habitats is critical for maintaining the overall health of coldwater fish species, which are ecologically, and in many cases, recreationally important fishes throughout Massachusetts. Once designated as a CFR, waterbodies are then afforded a greater degree of protection from potential human-caused alterations to their health. A map and list of currently designated CFRs can be found at *mass.gov/dfw/cfr.*





ICE STRENGTH AND SAFETY TIPS

This ice strength and safety information is presented for the benefit of ice anglers and other winter sports people recreating on iced-over bodies of water.

The figures in the table to the right are for clear, blue ice on lakes and ponds. Reduce strength values 15% for clear, blue river ice. Slush or snow (white) ice is only one-half the strength of blue ice and can be very treacherous. "Honeycombed" ice, which occurs in the spring or during major winter thaws as the ice is melting, is the most dangerous type of ice and is best avoided unless the angler is certain there is a safe layer of solid ice beneath the honeycombed surface.

Anglers should also be aware that many lakes and ponds contain spring holes and other areas of current that may create deceptively dangerous thin spots in areas that are otherwise safe. Always use caution, and don't venture out onto unfamiliar waters without checking ice thickness frequently.

ICE THICKNESS AND STRENGTH

ICE THICKNESS (INCHES)	PERMISSIBLE LOAD (ON NEW* CLEAR/BLUE** ICE ON LAKES OR PONDS)
2" or less	STAY OFF!
4"	Ice fishing or other activities on foot
5"	Snowmobile or ATV
8"–12"	Car or small pickup truck
12"–15"	Medium truck

* New ice is stronger than older ice.

** White ice or "snow ice" is only about half as strong as new clear ice. Double the above thickness guidelines when traveling on white ice.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF ICE IS SAFE?

There are no guarantees. Always consider ice potentially dangerous. Assess ice safety by using an ice chisel to chop a hole in the ice to determine its thickness and condition. Make sure you continue to do this as you go further out on to the ice, because the thickness of the ice will not be uniform all over the pond or lake. Be aware that ice tends to be thinner on lakes and ponds where there are spring holes, inlets or outlets. Don't venture onto ice-bound rivers or streams as the currents make ice thickness unpredictable.

For other ice safety tips and winter weather preparedness, visit *mass.gov/mema.*

IF YOU, A COMPANION, OR PET FALLS THROUGH THE ICE

As with any emergency, don't panic! Call for help if there are people nearby. While it doesn't take long for the cold water to start slowing your physical and mental functions, you have more time than you might think; typically 2–5 minutes and perhaps longer if you are in good, physical condition. Air will remain trapped in your clothes for a short time aiding your buoyancy. Kick your legs while grasping for firm ice. **Try to pull your body up using "ice pins" that should be hanging around your neck.** Once your torso is on firm ice, roll towards thicker ice. This will better distribute your weight. Remember that ice you previously walked on should be the safest. After you reach safe ice, don't waste precious time, you need to warm up and dry out. If you are in a remote area, this means getting to or starting a campfire. If you are in a more urban setting get to a car or house. Once there, get out of wet clothes, change into dry clothes to get warmed up and seek advice from your physician on medical attention. You need to warm up quickly to prevent hypothermia.

If a companion falls through the ice remember the phrase "**Reach-Throw-Go**." If you are unable to **reach** your friend from shore, **throw** him or her a rope, jumper cables, tree branch, or other object. If this does not work, **go** for help before you also become a victim. Get medical assistance for the victim immediately.

When walking on or near ice, keep your pets on a leash. If a pet falls through the ice do not attempt to rescue the pet, go for help. Well-meaning pet owners can too easily become rescue victims when trying to assist their pets.

Outdoor recreation activities on the ice are safe pursuits. By using a little common sense, these activities will stay that way.

STOP THE SPREAD

of Nuisance Aquatic Plants and Animals

Boaters, anglers, and other lake and river users are reminded that many unwanted, invasive species can be transported and inadvertently introduced to new waters by hitchhiking undetected on your boat, trailer, motor, waders, diving equipment, and other fishing gear. Please **clean** and decontaminate your boat, motor, trailer, ropes, and gear; **drain** your boat, motor, and live well(s); and make sure your equipment is thoroughly **dry** before entering any body of water. For more information contact Massachusetts DCR Lakes and Ponds Program at (617) 626-1250 or mass.gov/lakesandponds.

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY

MASSACHUSETTS BOATING LAWS: A SUMMARY

NEW – BOATER EDUCATION REQUIREMENT: Starting April 1, 2026, all Motorboat and Personal Watercraft (PWCs) operators in Massachusetts must complete a state-approved boating education course to enhance safety across Massachusetts' waterways. Anyone born after January 1, 1989, has until April 1, 2026, to obtain their boater education certificate, provided that no operator shall be assessed a penalty until September 1, 2026. Anyone born on or before January 1, 1989, must obtain their certificate before April 1, 2028. Students must be 12 years of age or older to attend a course and be issued a safety certificate. Youth between 12 and 15 years of age who have completed a state-approved boating safety course may only operate a motorboat. Youth that are 16 or 17 years of age who have completed a state approved boating safety course may operate PWCs in addition to motorboats. Operators of motorboats and PWCs will be required to show proof of completion of an approved boater education course when underway on the waters of the Commonwealth. The program is available through a variety of convenient platforms, including online courses, in-person classes, and partnerships with local organizations. To get started, boaters can visit, *mass.gov/how-to/boat-safety-certificate-course*.

BOAT REGISTRATION: Registration and numbering of all motorized boats is required. This includes electric motors.

MINIMUM AGE RESTRICTIONS: No person under 12 years of age may operate a motorboat, unless accompanied on-board and directly supervised by a competent person 18 years of age or older. Personal watercraft (PWC) users must be at least 16 years of age in order to operate.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT: Personal Flotation Devices (life jackets) are required to be worn by: (1) youth under 12 years of age, (2) personal watercraft users, (3) Stand Up Paddle Board (SUP) users, (4) water-skiers, and (5) canoeists/kayakers from September 15–May 15 (including waterfowl hunters). A boat owner or a boat operator is responsible to ensure that all passengers on-board wear or have access to life jackets. When not in a bathing, swimming, or surf zone, all SUP users on inland lakes, rivers or coastal waters, are required by law to have a Type I, II, or III life jacket aboard. All motorboats (with the exception of personal watercraft) must be equipped with an anchor, manual bailer, and line. A paddle or an oar is required on boats less than 16 feet in length. Motorboats towing water-skiers must be equipped with a boarding ladder.

BOATING PROHIBITIONS

The following types of operation are extremely unsafe and are prohibited.

- Operating any vessel under the influence of alcohol (BAC of .08 or greater) or drugs.
- Operating a motorboat within 150 feet of swimming areas.
- Operating in inland waters at a speed greater than 45 mph or operating at an excessive speed without regard for weather conditions, boat traffic, and other hazards.
- Operating a motorboat without properly working navigation lights.
- Operating a motorboat during the nighttime while towing water-skiers, tubers, or others.
- Operating at greater than headway speed (6 mph or less) within 150 feet of a swimmer, water-skier, mooring area, marina, boat launch, or when the operator's vision is obscured in any way.
- Operating an overloaded vessel (carrying total weight that exceeds capacity plate recommendations or is excessive due to water conditions).
- Operating with passengers on the bow, gunwales, or any other place from which a person could fall overboard.

PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (JET SKI) OPERATION

By law, personal watercraft (PWC) operators are considered motorboat operators and must comply with all boating laws and navigation rules. In addition, PWC users must:

- Wear an approved life jacket at all times (operator and passengers).
- Attach the safety lanyard to the operator and the cutoff/kill switch.
- Always operate at slow, no-wake speed (6 mph or less) within 150 feet of swimmers, shorelines, water-skiers, boat launches, rafts or floats, and moored or docked boats.

PWC Operation is prohibited:

- By any person under age 16
- Between the hours of sunset and sunrise (i.e. night time)
- At high speed in congested areas
- On waterbodies under 75 acres
- Towing (water-skiers, tubers, boats, or others) is illegal.

ACCIDENT REPORTING: The operator of any motorboat involved in an accident which results in personal injury, death, or property damage (over $500) must immediately notify the Massachusetts Environmental Police and file the appropriate accident report within 5 days for most boating accidents, within 2 days for boating incidents involving fatalities.

For further information on boating laws, boating education, or to obtain accident report forms contact the Massachusetts Environmental Police Boat & Recreation Vehicle Safety Bureau at (508) 564-4961 or visit *mass.gov/ole*.

GOT LIFE JACKETS?



Boat Smart From the Start — Wear Your Life Jacket!
From September 15 to May 15 all canoe or kayak occupants **MUST WEAR** a U.S. Coast Guard approved Personal Flotation Device (PFD).

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHERE TO GO BOATING OR FISHING?

The Massachusetts Office of Fishing & Boating Access provides trailed and cartop boat access sites, shore fishing areas, and sport fishing piers at more than 300 locations on coastal waters, lakes, ponds, and rivers throughout Massachusetts. To view these access points, visit *mass.gov/ofba*.

FRESHWATER SPORTFISHING AWARDS

Awards for freshwater fish are offered in 24 categories. Each qualified entry receives a bronze pin. The largest fish in each category each year also receives a gold pin and plaque. There are also Youth (17 and under) and Adult "Angler of the Year" awards given to anglers who have taken the greatest variety of "pinfish" during the calendar year. Fish must meet minimum weight or length requirements. All entries must be submitted within 30 days of the date of the catch.

SUBMIT ENTRIES ONLINE!

Save time and a stamp by submitting your Sportfishing Awards Program entry using the online affidavit. Find the form at *mass.gov/fishawards*. It's easy—just enter information about you and your catch, upload a photo of your fish, and submit! Online forms are processed faster than paper forms, allowing us to award pins and update the leader board more quickly.

Catch-and-keep entries must be weighed on a scale certified by the State. Go to *mass.gov/fishawards* for a list of weigh stations and to download an affidavit. This information is also available at MassWildlife offices.

MINIMUM WEIGHTS AND LENGTHS

SPECIES	CATCH AND KEEP (WEIGHT)		CATCH AND RELEASE LENGTH (INCHES)	
	ADULT	YOUTH	ADULT	YOUTH
Bowfin	6 lb. 0 oz.	4 lb. 0 oz.	26	20
Brook Trout	2 lb. 0 oz.	1 lb. 0 oz.	16	14
Brown Trout	4 lb. 0 oz.	2 lb. 0 oz.	22	18
Bullhead	2 lb. 0 oz.	1 lb. 0 oz.	15	12
Carp	15 lb. 0 oz.	10 lb. 0 oz.	31	27
Chain Pickerel	4 lb. 8 oz.	3 lb. 0 oz.	25	20
Channel Catfish	6 lb. 0 oz.	5 lb. 0 oz.	25	20
Crappie	1 lb. 8 oz.	1 lb. 0 oz.	14	11
Fallfish	0 lb. 12 oz.	0 lb. 8 oz.	15	12
Lake Trout	7 lb. 0 oz.	5 lb. 0 oz.	30	25
Landlocked Salmon[1]	4 lb. 0 oz.	3 lb. 0 oz.	22	18
Largemouth Bass	7 lb. 0 oz.	4 lb. 0 oz.	21	18
Northern Pike	15 lb. 0 oz.	10 lb. 0 oz.	36	28
Rainbow Trout	3 lb. 0 oz.	2 lb. 0 oz.	20	16
Shad	5 lb. 0 oz.	3 lb. 0 oz.	22	18
Smallmouth Bass	4 lb. 8 oz.	3 lb. 0 oz.	20	17
Sunfish[2]	0 lb. 12 oz.	0 lb. 8 oz.	10	8
Tiger Muskellunge	10 lb. 0 oz.	7 lb. 0 oz.	34	26
Tiger Trout	2 lb. 0 oz.	1 lb. 0 oz.	16	12
Walleye	4 lb. 0 oz.	2 lb. 0 oz.	24	18
White Catfish	4 lb. 0 oz.	2 lb. 0 oz.	19	15
White Perch	1 lb. 8 oz.	1 lb. 0 oz.	14	11
White Sucker	2 lb. 0 oz.	1 lb. 0 oz.	19	16
Yellow Perch	1 lb. 8 oz.	1 lb. 0 oz.	14	11

1 Landlocked Salmon are recognized only from Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs.

2 Sunfish category includes Redbreast Sunfish, Green Sunfish, Bluegill, Pumpkinseed, and Rock Bass.

CATCH-AND-RELEASE ANGLERS: TIPS FOR MINIMIZING FISH STRESS

- If using bait, the use of circle hooks dramatically reduces the likelihood of gut-hooking a fish.
- Be attentive and set the hook immediately to prevent the fish from swallowing the hook (setting the hook is not necessary with circle hooks).
- Reduce the fight time. The longer the fish fights, the higher the stress level for the fish. This is particularly important when fishing for trout in periods of warmer water temperatures. If it takes you a long time to land a fish, your drag may be set too loosely or your gear may be too light for the fish you are catching.
- Use a fine-mesh landing net to reduce the amount of time required to land a fish.
- If the hook is swallowed, do not forcefully remove it. Cut the line as close to the mouth as possible and then release the fish.



FRESHWATER SPORTFISHING AWARDS

Catch-and-release Anglers: Remember to take a picture before releasing the fish at the site of capture. This photograph shows the proper method for measuring and photographing a catch-and-release awards entry.

- Wet your hands before touching the fish so you don't damage the protective mucous layer on the outside of the fish.
- Don't use the gills or eyes as a handhold. Support the belly of larger fish. Bass can be safely handled by holding the lower jaw, thumb in the mouth and forefinger under the chin.
- Quickly return fish to the water. Revive a fatigued fish by supporting it in a swimming position in the water; gently move it back and forth until it can swim off.



Photos courtesy MassWildlife/Freshwater Sportfishing Awards Program

GENERAL HUNTING REGULATIONS

Report all violations to the Massachusetts Environmental Police (800) 632-8075.

ACCIDENTS: All hunting-related injuries or deaths must be reported to the Environmental Police and state or local police.

AIRGUNS: Airguns may be used to hunt all species during their respective legal open seasons, with the exception of deer, bear, turkey, crow, pheasant, quail, and migratory game birds. Hunters should carefully select appropriate airgun models and ammunition and understand airgun limitations. The use of airguns by minors is limited (see M.G.L. Chapter 269 Section 12b).

BLAZE ORANGE:
During the pheasant or quail season on Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) where pheasant or quail are stocked, all hunters must wear a blaze orange hat. EXCEPTION: No orange hat required while hunting waterfowl from a blind or boat or night-hunting for raccoons or opossums (see page 23, Wildlife Management Area Regulations).

During the Youth Deer Hunt Day and throughout the Shotgun and Primitive Firearms seasons for deer, all hunters must wear 500 square inches of blaze orange on chest, back, and head (hat and vest). During these seasons waterfowl hunters on coastal waters and salt marshes must wear 500 square inches of blaze orange while hunting or in transit to their blind or boat during these periods. The orange may be removed once the waterfowl hunter is in a blind or boat.

SPECIAL HUNTS

- **DCR Deer Hunts,** see page 33
- **Military Lands Deer Hunts,** see page 33
- **Paraplegic Hunters Deer Hunt,** see page 33
- **Youth Pheasant Hunt,** see page 29
- **Youth Turkey Hunt,** see page 29
- **Youth Deer Hunt Day,** see page 29
- **Youth Waterfowl Hunt Dates,** see page 29
- **Special Pheasant and Quail Hunt,** see page 40

During the Primitive Firearms Season, all deer hunters must comply with the 500 square inch blaze orange requirement.

CROSSBOWS: May be used only by duly permitted hunters with certain permanent disabilities. For regulations and an application, visit *www.mass.gov/masswildlife* or contact MassWildlife at (508) 389-6300.

OPEN AND CLOSED HUNTING SEASONS: The following species may be taken year-round (except during shotgun deer season) by licensed hunters with no daily or seasonal bag or possession limit: English sparrow, flying squirrel, red squirrel, chipmunk, porcupine, skunk, starling, weasel, and woodchuck. During shotgun deer season all game hunting seasons are closed statewide except for deer, bear, coyote, and waterfowl.

RESTRICTIONS ON YOUTH DEER HUNT DAY: When hunting other game animals on the Youth Deer Hunt Day, (Oct. 3, 2026) additional requirements apply:

- Rifles and handguns are prohibited for hunting any game.
- Dogs may only be used for waterfowl hunting (ducks and geese) on coastal waters and salt marshes.
- All hunters must wear a minimum of 500 square inches of blaze orange on their chest, back, and head, except waterfowl hunters who are required to wear blaze orange in transit to and from their blind or boat.

TRAINING DOGS:

Hunting dogs may be trained at any time (except during the shotgun season for deer) provided that only pistols or revolvers and blank cartridges are used or possessed.

A sporting or hunting license is required to train hunting dogs off-leash on Wildlife Management Areas.

TREE STANDS: Written permission of the landowner (on either public or private lands) is required to construct or use any tree stand which is fastened to a tree by nails, bolts, wire, or other fasteners that intrude through the bark into the wood of the tree, or that is fastened or erected in any manner and is emplaced for a period exceeding 30 days. This includes hang-on tree stands.

WANTON WASTE: It is unlawful for hunters to intentionally or knowingly leave a wounded or dead game animal without making a reasonable effort to retrieve and use it. Each animal must be retained until processed or used for food, pelt, feathers, or taxidermy. This does not apply to animals unfit for consumption or use—animals and their parts that are damaged, destroyed, decayed, rotting, diseased, or infected.

OFF-ROAD RECREATIONAL VEHICLES (ATVS, OHVS, DIRT BIKES)

It is illegal to operate any motorized vehicle on any WMA or other property owned or controlled by MassWildlife. It is illegal to operate these vehicles on private lands without the written permission of the landowner. Age restrictions apply; operators under the age of 18 must take a safety course. For more information, contact the Massachusetts Environmental Police at 1-800-632-8075, or go to *mass.gov/ole*.

A portion of the revenue from vehicle registration is used to support legal riding opportunities; to find a list of State Parks and Forests that allow OHV operation visit: *mass.gov/dcr/orv.*

TRANSPORT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

It is a violation of Federal Law to transport illegally taken fish or wildlife across state lines. For additional information contact the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement, (617) 889-6616.

FEDERAL WILDLIFE LAW INFORMATION

Please note that fishing and hunting laws on federal parks, refuges, and reservations, such as those controlled by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service or the National Park Service, may differ from state regulations. Contact the agency in question.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA REGULATIONS

MassWildlife's Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are open to hunting, fishing, and trapping. Maps are available for many of these properties on the MassWildlife website and at all MassWildlife offices.

- No person shall possess any alcoholic beverage except under permit, or dump or discard any can, bottle, or rubbish within the bounds of any WMA.
- No person shall illegally consume, use, cultivate, or possess any controlled substance of any schedule or class or any counterfeit substance within the bounds of any WMA.
- No person shall remove vegetation, soil, or stones from any WMA except under permit.
- No person shall use excessive speed in driving a vehicle.
- No person, unless under permit, shall drive or possess any motor vehicle except on roads or trails maintained for public vehicular traffic.
- No person shall deface or tamper with any sign, building, or equipment.
- No person shall build or maintain a fire without written permission from the Director or designee.
- No person shall camp within any WMA without written permission from the Director or designee.
- No person shall engage in target practice without written permission from the Director or designee.
- No person shall hunt during the pheasant or quail season on WMAs where pheasant or quail are stocked without wearing a blaze orange cap or hat except while night hunting for raccoons or opossums or while hunting waterfowl from within a blind or boat.
- No person, except under permit, shall dig or disturb any artifact or archaeological remains.
- The Director may make special regulations to handle special situations peculiar to any WMA. Controlled hunts are in effect at certain times on Delaney and Ludlow WMAs. Contact District Manager for details.
- Dogs on WMAs must be leashed. Dogs may be off-leash only when hunting or hunt training with licensed hunters or involved with permitted field trials. Dog feces in WMA parking areas and within 100 feet of the parking area must be picked up by all dog handlers and disposed of off the WMA. Dog feces in other parts of the WMA must be picked up by non-licensed dog handlers and disposed of offsite. Licensed hunters are exempt from this requirement.

Report all violations to the Massachusetts Environmental Police, (800) 632-8075.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

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HUNTING WITH FIREARMS

The following guidance does not include all applicable firearms laws and is subject to change. Massachusetts firearms licensing laws can be found in M.G.L. Ch. 140 sections 121-131Y. Please refer to the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security regarding the legal use of firearms in the Commonwealth. Contact the Massachusetts Firearms Records Bureau, 200 Arlington St., Suite 2200, Chelsea, MA 02150, (617) 660-4782, or *mass.gov/firearms-services* for information regarding firearms licenses, and firearms laws for the Commonwealth. MassWildlife will update online resources as guidance evolves (*mass.gov/hunting-with-firearms*).

FIREARMS LICENSING:

- A Firearms License is required to possess or carry firearms in Massachusetts.
- Massachusetts firearms licenses are issued by local Police Departments.
- A Firearms Identification Card (FID) entitles the holder to purchase, transfer, possess and carry rifles or shotguns that are not large capacity or semi-automatic and ammunition.
- A License-to-Carry (LTC) entitles the holder (age 21 and over) to purchase, rent, lease, borrow, possess and carry firearms, including large capacity and semi-automatic firearms and all handguns.
- Archery equipment does not require firearms licensing.
- Minors 12–14 years old hunting with a duly licensed adult do not need a firearms or hunting license (see page 28).

TRANSPORTING IN VEHICLES: All rifles and shotguns that are not large capacity must be unloaded during transport. Large capacity rifles and shotguns must be unloaded and in a locked case/container. Handguns may be transported, loaded or unloaded, when under the direct control of a person possessing an LTC. If the handgun is not under the LTC holders' direct control, it must be unloaded and in a locked case/container or secured with a trigger lock.

STORAGE: When storing a handgun, rifle or shotgun (including leaving them unattended in a vehicle), they must be unloaded and in a locked case/container (a locked trunk is acceptable) or secured with a trigger lock. All large capacity rifles and shotguns must be stored unloaded and in a locked case/container (a trigger lock alone is not sufficient). Muzzleloaders are exempt from this requirement.

NON-RESIDENT HUNTERS

- Non-resident hunters must obtain the same stamps and permits as residents. Permit and stamp costs for non-resident hunters may differ from resident hunters. See page 12.
- All non-resident hunters ages 15 and older must possess a valid Non-Resident Hunting License (Big Game or Small Game) to hunt. See page 12.
- To purchase a first-time hunting license, nonresident hunters 18 years and older must have successfully completed a Basic Hunter Education course from any jurisdiction in any year or held a hunting/sporting license from any jurisdiction prior to 2007.
- Non-residents must keep firearms unloaded and secured in a locked container while traveling in their vehicles.
- Non-residents may not purchase firearms in Massachusetts.
- Non-resident migratory game bird hunters must complete a Massachusetts H.I.P. survey to hunt.
- Non-residents under the age of 21 with a non-resident hunting license can be furnished a firearm for hunting while under the supervision of a person with the appropriate license for the firearm in use. Those under the age of 18 must have consent from a parent or guardian.
- No firearms license is needed by non-resident hunters 18 years and older to possess rifles or shotguns that are not large-capacity or semi-automatic to hunt with a valid Massachusetts Non-resident Hunting License.
- Non-residents (age 21 and older) can apply for a Temporary License to Carry which would entitle them to possess and carry semi-automatic rifles and shotguns. To learn more, contact the Massachusetts Firearms Records Bureau, *mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-firearms-license*.

FOLLOW S.A.F.E. GUN HANDLING RULES

- **S**afe Direction – Always point the gun in a safe direction.
- **A**lways be sure of your target and what lies in front of and beyond.
- **F**inger is outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot.
- **E**very firearm must be treated as if it is loaded.

ASK THE LANDOWNER

Hunting, fishing, and trapping are permitted on private land that is not posted against trespass; however, some towns have bylaws that require written permission. As a courtesy, ask the landowner for permission in advance. If you plan to use wildlife/trail cameras on private land, seek permission for that activity as well. Landowners with posted land may provide (written) permission for individuals to access their property. Written landowner permission is required to trap on posted land. Hunters should check for relevant town bylaws pertaining to any written permission requirements and restrictions on discharge of firearms.

LANDOWNER LIABILITY

Landowners permitting use of their property for recreation without charging a fee are not liable for injuries to recreational users of the property except in cases of willful, wanton, or reckless conduct by the owner. (MGL Ch. 21 § 17C)

HUNTING PROHIBITIONS

Report all violations to the Massachusetts Environmental Police (800) 632-8075.

The following are prohibited:

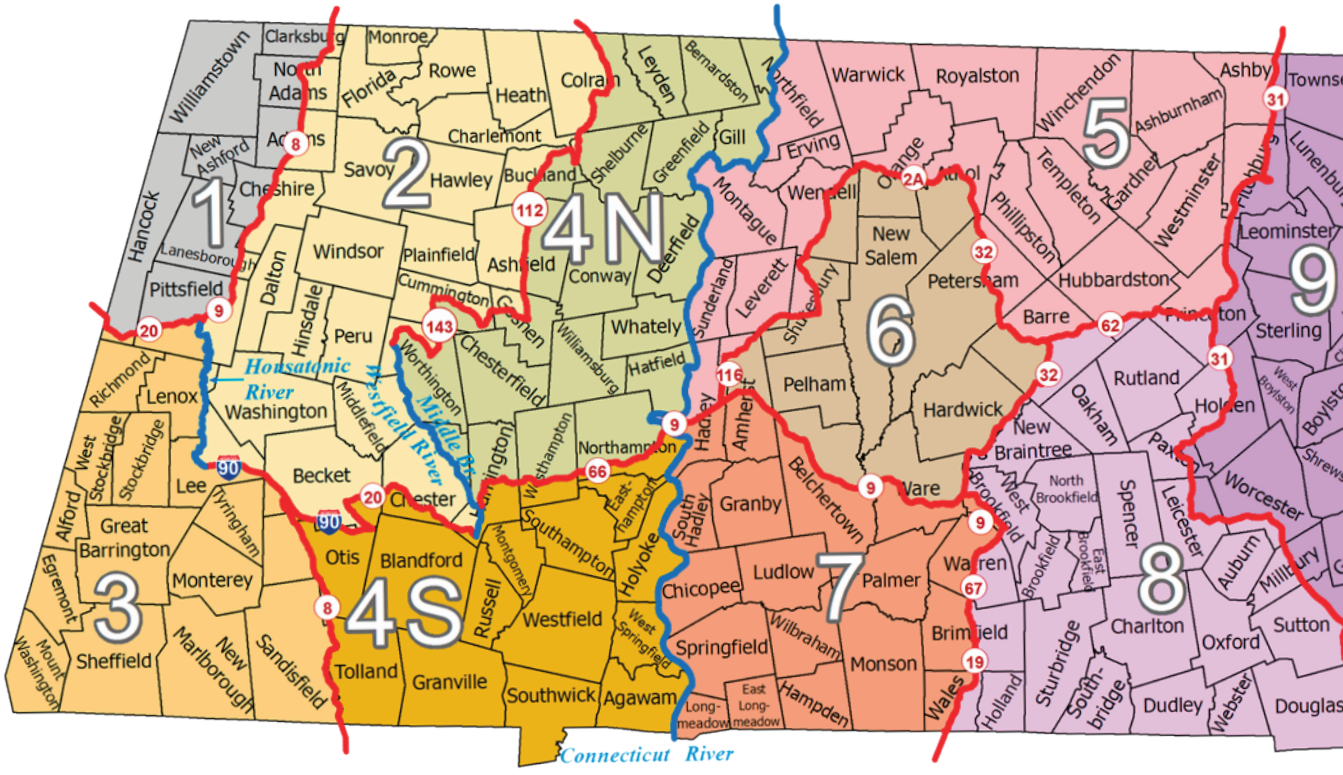
- Hunting, trapping or fishing for any birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, or amphibians not listed within this Guide or in the Massachusetts Migratory Game Bird Regulations.
- Airbows, arrow guns or any firearms or other devices which project or propel an arrow, dart or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air/gas, or by any other means except by the flexing and release of a bow string.
- Air guns for hunting deer, bear, turkey, crow, pheasant, quail, and migratory game birds. Air gun use by minors is limited (see M.G.L. Chapter 269 Section 12b).
- Poisoned arrows, or explosive tips, including firearms cartridges affixed to the end of arrows in such a way as they discharge upon impact with the target, or bows drawn by mechanical means, except for permitted crossbows.
- Artificial lights for hunting any bird or mammal except raccoon and opossum. Any device that projects light, of any wavelength (visible, IR, or other), onto an animal or onto an area for the purposes of illuminating that object, is illegal to use while hunting.
- Baiting migratory game birds, wild turkey, bear, or deer during or within 10 days of the start of their specific hunting seasons. See game species hunting pages for more details.
- Careless or negligent use of firearms.
- Discharge of any firearm or release of any arrow upon or across any state or hard-surfaced highway, or within 150 feet of any such highway.
- Possession of a loaded firearm discharge of a firearm, or hunting within 500 feet of any dwelling or building in use, unless permitted by the owner or occupant. See page 24 for additional gun laws.
- Electronic calls for hunting migratory game birds, wild turkey, or deer.
- Hunting with a ferret or possessing a non-vaccinated/unneutered ferrets/fitches without a permit.
- Furbearer Contests where participants are awarded prizes for harvesting coyote, bobcat, red fox, gray fox, weasels, mink, skunk, river otter, muskrat, beaver, fisher, raccoon, and opossum.
- Hunting on posted land without permission.
- Hunting on Sundays.
- Hunting, target shooting, or carrying a firearm, bow and arrow or other weapon when under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs.
- Interference of those legally engaged in hunting, fishing, and trapping.
- Carrying a loaded firearm in or on any motor vehicle, recreational vehicle (including snowmobiles), aircraft or motor boat, except as stated in the Migratory Game Bird Hunting Regulations AND M.G.L. Chapter 131 Section 65.
- Machine guns, fully automatic firearms, any tracer or incendiary ammunition.
- Motor vehicles, off-highway vehicles (including snowmobiles), and/or aircraft for hunting any bird or mammal except as stated in M.G.L. Chapter 131 Section 65.
- Possession of rifles, handguns, or dogs in any woodland or field, or use of same on any game, during the shotgun deer season, is prohibited. The use of dogs is lawful for hunting waterfowl on coastal waters.
- Possession of duplicate paper copies of licenses and tags.
- Hunting bear, deer, bobcat, or turkey with dogs, or training dogs on those species.
- Power or sailboats for hunting birds except when beached or tied to a blind or for retrieving injured birds.
- Removal of any mammal from walls, or holes in trees, ground, or logs.
- Rifles chambered to take ammunition larger than .22 caliber long rifle, and pistols and revolvers chambered to take ammunition larger than .38 caliber, between the hours of 1/2 hour after sunset and 1/2 hour before sunrise.
- Sale of all species of mammals and birds or parts thereof, except unprocessed heads and hides to a licensed fur buyer or taxidermist, and shinbones & hooves of deer to anyone.
- No species other than deer, coyote, and waterfowl/coot may be hunted with shot larger than #1 birdshot (.16" pellet diameter).
- No possession of a shotgun shell loaded with a slug, sabot, single ball, buckshot (any size), except during the open seasons when deer may be hunted with a shotgun, or on a skeet, trap, or target range between sunrise and sunset.
- Lettered bird shot may only be used for coyote hunting (.17 to .23" pellet diameter) and waterfowl/coot hunting (.17 to .19" pellet diameter); otherwise any lettered bird shot may only be possessed on a skeet, trap, or target range between sunrise and sunset. See migratory game bird and coyote hunting pages (46–47, 48), for details.
- Swivel or pivot guns for hunting any bird.
- Target shooting on Sunday except on one's own property or on a recognized shooting range.
- Training or running dogs on free-ranging wildlife on Sundays and during the closed season.
- Traps for taking birds except under permit. Bodygrip traps for furbearers except under permit. Snares, foothold traps, or nets for taking any bird or mammal.
- Vandalism or damage to property or livestock.

PENALTIES: License revoked for up to 5 years in addition to other penalties; fines of up to $10,000, restitutions, and/or 10 years in jail. Careless and negligent use of firearms; fines of up to $500 and/or 6 months imprisonment and loss of license for 5 years.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ZONES



ZONE 1: Northerly by the Vermont border; westerly by the New York border; southerly by a line running along Rt. 20 to the junction with Rt. 7 in Pittsfield, north on Rt. 7 to Rt. 9, and east on Rt. 9 to the junction with Rt. 8, and easterly by a line running from the Vermont border south along Route 8 to Rt. 9 in Pittsfield.

ZONE 2: Northerly by the Vermont border; westerly by Zone 01 and 03; southerly by the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) from the intersection with the Housatonic River in Lee east to the intersection with Algerie Road in Otis; and easterly by a line running from the Vermont border south along Rt. 112 to Rt. 143 in Worthington, along Rt. 143 west to the intersection with the Middle Branch of the Westfield River, then south along the Middle Branch of the Westfield River (also known as Trout Brook), to the intersection with the East Branch of the Westfield River, south along the East Branch of the Westfield River to Rt. 20 in Huntington, west along Rt. 20 to Bonny Rigg Hill Road in Becket, south on Bonny Rigg Hill Road to the intersection with Algerie Road, then south on Algerie Road to the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90).

ZONE 3: Northerly by Zone 01; westerly by the New York border; southerly by the New York and Connecticut border; and easterly by a line running south along Elm Street from the junction with Rt. 9 in Pittsfield to the Housatonic River, south along the Housatonic River to the junction with the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) in Lee, east along I-90 to the junction with Rt. 8 in West Becket, and south along Rt. 8 to the Connecticut border.

ZONE 4 NORTH: Northerly by the Vermont border; westerly by Zones 02; southerly by a line running north from the confluence of the Middle Branch and the East Branch of the Westfield River in Huntington along the East Branch of the Westfield River to the intersection with Route 66, along Rt. 66 to the intersection with Rt. 9 in Northampton, easterly along Rt. 9 to the intersection with the Connecticut River at the Northampton/Hadley town line; and easterly by the Connecticut River.

ZONE 4 SOUTH: Northerly by Zones 2 and 4N; westerly by Zone 3; southerly by the Connecticut Border; and easterly by the Connecticut River.

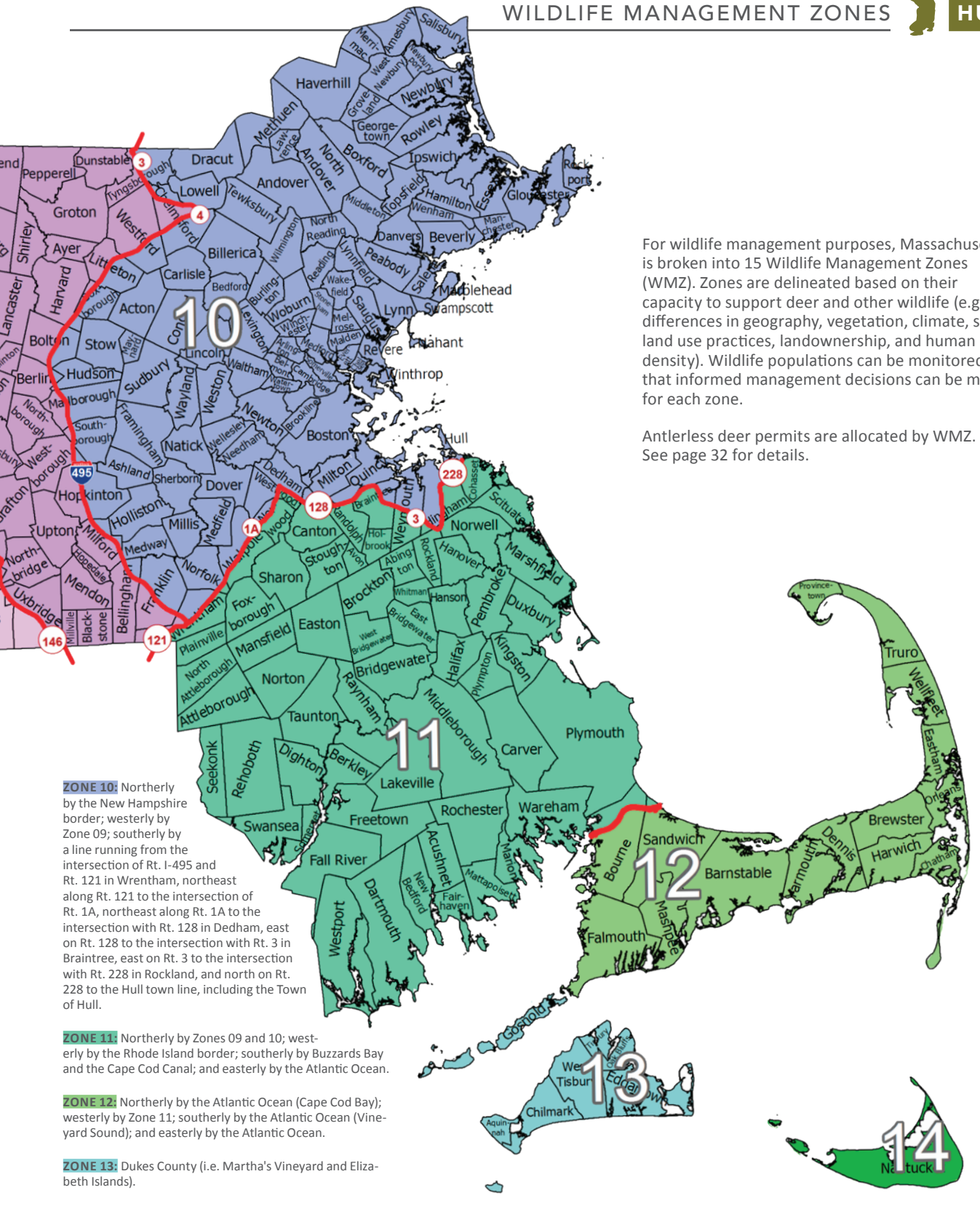
ZONE 5: Northerly by the New Hampshire border; westerly by the Connecticut River; southerly by a line running from the intersection of the Connecticut River and Rte. 9 at the Northampton/Hadley line east along Rte. 9 to Rte. 116 in Hadley, north along Rte. 116 to Rte. 63 in North Amherst, east along Rte. 63 and Pine Street to State Street, northeast along State Street and East Leverett Road to Cushman Road, along Cushman Road to Shutesbury Road in East Leverett, east on Shutesbury Road and Leverett Road to Wendell Road in Shutesbury Center, north along Wendell Road to Locks Pond Road, north on Locks Pond Road to Lake View Road, northeast on Lake View Road to Locks Village Road, north along Locks Village Road to Depot Road in Wendell, north on Depot Road to Rte. 2A in Orange, east on Rte. 2A to Rte. 32 in Athol, south on Rte. 32 to Rte. 62 in Barre, and east on Rte. 62 to the intersection with Rte. 31 in Princeton; and easterly by a line running north on Rte. 31 to the New Hampshire border.

ZONE 6: Northerly by Zone 05; westerly by Zone 05; southerly by a line running from the intersection of Rt. 9 and Rt. 116 in Hadley east along Rt. 9 to the intersection with Rt. 32 in Ware; and easterly by a line running from the intersection of Rt. 32 and Rt. 62 in Barre, south along Rt. 32 to the intersection with Rt.9 in Ware.

ZONE 7: Northerly by Zones 5 and 6; westerly by Zone 4S; southerly by the Connecticut border; and easterly by a line running from the intersection of Rt. 9 and Rt. 32 in Ware east along Rt. 9 to the intersection with Rt. 67, southwest along Rt. 67 to the intersection with Rt. 19 in Warren, and south along Rt. 19 to the Connecticut border.

ZONE 8: Northerly by Zone 05; westerly by Zones 06 and 07; southerly by the Connecticut and Rhode Island borders; and easterly by a line running from the intersection of Rt. 62 and Rt. 31 in Princeton south on Rt. 31 to Rt. 56 in Paxton, south on Rt. 56 to Rt. 9 in Leicester, east on Rt. 9 to Cambridge Street in Worcester, east on Cambridge Street to Rt. 146, and southeast on Rt. 146 to the Rhode Island border.

ZONE 9: Northerly by the New Hampshire border; westerly by Zones 5 and 8; southerly by the Rhode Island border; and easterly by a line running from the New Hampshire border southeast on Rt. 3 to the intersection with Rt. I-495 in Chelmsford, south on Rt. I-495 to the intersection with Rt. 121 in Wrentham, and southwest on Rt. 121 to the Rhode Island border.



For wildlife management purposes, Massachusetts is broken into 15 Wildlife Management Zones (WMZ). Zones are delineated based on their capacity to support deer and other wildlife (e.g., differences in geography, vegetation, climate, soil, land use practices, landownership, and human density). Wildlife populations can be monitored so that informed management decisions can be made for each zone.

Antlerless deer permits are allocated by WMZ. See page 32 for details.

ZONE 10: Northerly by the New Hampshire border; westerly by Zone 09; southerly by a line running from the intersection of Rt. I-495 and Rt. 121 in Wrentham, northeast along Rt. 121 to the intersection of Rt. 1A, northeast along Rt. 1A to the intersection with Rt. 128 in Dedham, east on Rt. 128 to the intersection with Rt. 3 in Braintree, east on Rt. 3 to the intersection with Rt. 228 in Rockland, and north on Rt. 228 to the Hull town line, including the Town of Hull.

ZONE 11: Northerly by Zones 09 and 10; westerly by the Rhode Island border; southerly by Buzzards Bay and the Cape Cod Canal; and easterly by the Atlantic Ocean.

ZONE 12: Northerly by the Atlantic Ocean (Cape Cod Bay); westerly by Zone 11; southerly by the Atlantic Ocean (Vineyard Sound); and easterly by the Atlantic Ocean.

ZONE 13: Dukes County (i.e. Martha's Vineyard and Elizabeth Islands).

ZONE 14: Nantucket.

YOUTH HUNTERS

YOUTH HUNTING REQUIREMENTS

No one under the age of 12 may hunt in Massachusetts.

LICENSES, STAMPS, PERMITS

Youth Ages 12–14:

Do not need a hunting license or stamps/permits or firearms license to hunt, except when participating in the youth deer or turkey hunt programs for which specific permits are required.

May hunt only when accompanied by a licensed adult hunter (18 or older)

Only one youth per adult. If a firearm is being used, the adult and youth may possess/use only one firearm between them while hunting.

Adult and youth share a single bag limit and any applicable permits/tags.

The licensed adult must have:

- A valid Massachusetts hunting or sporting license
- Any required state or federal stamps or permits
- Firearms license if a firearm is being used (issued by local police department).
- All other hunting laws apply.

Youth Ages 15–17:

Massachusetts youths must have a minor hunting license; non-resident youths must have a non-resident big game or small game license. All licensed minors must possess required permits and stamps.

- If the youth does not have a government-issued Basic Hunter Education certificate they must be accompanied by a person 18 years of age or older.
- If the youth has a government-issued Basic Hunter Education certificate from any jurisdiction they may legally hunt without adult supervision and should carry their Basic Hunter Education certificate while hunting.
- If hunting with a shotgun or rifle Massachusetts youth must follow Massachusetts Firearms license laws and will need to obtain a Firearms Identification Card (FID). An FID is issued by local police departments.
- All other hunting laws apply.

See additional requirements for Youth Hunts (Turkey, Pheasant, Deer and Waterfowl).

PURCHASING A MINOR HUNTING LICENSE

A minor hunting license may be purchased online or in-person from available license vendors. A parent/legal guardian of a 15–17 year old must provide consent for the purchase and state either that the minor will be accompanied by an adult while hunting or the minor has earned a government-approved Basic Hunter Education Certificate from any jurisdiction.

Online purchase process:

- Visit *mass.gov/hunting-info-for-minors* for more information on minor licensing online.

In-person purchase: Provide written consent for the purchase and state either that the minor will be accompanied by an adult while hunting or that the minor has earned a government-approved Basic Hunter Education Certificate from any jurisdiction. A consent form for license vendors is available at *mass.gov/minorlicense*. Minors may need to obtain a Firearms Identification (FID) card to hunt with a gun (see Gun Laws on page 24).

YOUTH HUNT DAYS AND PROGRAMS

Special hunt days and programs for youth hunters aged 12–17 years old.

Hunter Education

Youths can take the Basic Hunter Education course, with parent or guardian permission. (Recommended for anyone ages 12 and older.) MassWildlife offers Basic Hunter Education in two formats. It is available year-round in locations throughout the state. For more details, visit the Basic Hunter Education Course schedule online or call the Hunter Education office at (508) 389-7820. To prepare for a Basic Hunter Education course, students have access to a free, online study guide at *huntercourse.com/usa/massachusetts*.



Lily Zimmer on Youth Deer Hunt Day in 2022, with her first deer, an 8-point buck.

Photo © Jason Zimmer

Youth Pheasant Hunt Program

For Hunter Education graduates 12–17 years of age and conducted by sporting clubs. Includes a seminar with instruction on firearms safety in the field, hunting ethics, regulations, game preparation, and supervised shooting practice. The program ends with a pheasant hunt under the guidance of an experienced adult hunter.

Youth Pheasant Hunt dates: Sept. 5, 12, 19 and Oct. 3, 10, 2026.

Requirements: Youths 12–17 must complete a basic hunter education course and a youth pheasant hunting workshop at a participating sporting club. Check MassWildlife website at *mass.gov/dfw/yaph*.

Youth Turkey Hunt Program

For Hunter Education graduates 12–17 years of age and conducted by sporting clubs with the support of the National Wild Turkey Federation. Includes a seminar with instruction on firearms safety in the field, hunting ethics, regulations, game preparation and supervised shooting practice. The program ends with a turkey hunt under the guidance of an experienced adult hunter.

Youth Turkey Hunt Day: Zones 1–13: April 25, 2026

Youth Turkey Hunt Day Hunting Hours: 1/2 hour before sunrise to 5:00pm.

Requirements: (Youth ages 12–14) Youth Turkey Hunt Permit.

Youth Turkey Permits for hunters ages 12–14 are valid for the youth day and the regular spring and fall turkey seasons.

(Youth ages 15–17): Minor Hunting license, regular Turkey Permit and tags, Youth Turkey Hunt Eligibility.

To be eligible for the youth turkey hunt day, youth hunters (12–17 years old) must complete 1) a basic hunter education course and 2) a youth turkey hunting seminar. Upon completion the youth can obtain the required permit or eligibility through MassFishHunt. For details visit *mass.gov/dfw/yath*.

Youth Deer Hunt Day

Youth Deer Hunt Day date: Oct. 3, 2026

Requirements: Youth Deer Hunt Permit

Permits are free and available online in August at MassFishHunt (*mass.gov/massfishhunt*), at MassWildlife offices, and other license vendors. Youth Deer Hunt Permit and tag is valid on Youth Deer Hunt Day and any open deer season.

Hunting Implements: Shotgun, muzzleloader, or bow and arrow may be used.

All other hunting laws apply.

Bag Limit: The Youth Deer Hunt Permit allows 1 deer (antlered or antlerless) to be taken statewide. Additional antlered and antlerless deer may be taken with valid antlered tags or antlerless deer permits for the specified permitted zones.

Youth Hunting Black Bear

Requirements: Youth Bear Hunt Permit. Youth Bear Hunt Permit is valid throughout the bear hunting season and on the Youth Deer Hunt Day.

Permissible implements on the Youth Deer Hunting Day: Shotgun (slug or single ball only), muzzleloader, or bow and arrow may be used. All other bear hunting regulations apply (see page 36).

Youth Waterfowl Hunt Days:

The two Youth Waterfowl Hunt days are not available until mid-May when they will be posted on the MassWildlife website.

Requirements: All Youth Hunt Day hunters must be accompanied by a licensed adult hunter (18 or older).

Licensed adult must have a valid MA Waterfowl stamp and may not hunt.

Licensed adult may carry firearm only when unloaded and cased.

All other migratory game bird regulations and bag limits apply.

LICENSE/STAMP REQUIREMENTS FOR RESIDENT* YOUTH WATERFOWL HUNTERS

	MINOR HUNTING LICENSE	STATE WATERFOWL STAMP	FEDERAL DUCK STAMP
Youths age 12–14			
Youths age 15	X	X	
Youths age 16–17	X	X	X

* If a non-resident, the youth hunter must possess either a non-resident small game or non-resident big game license, a state waterfowl stamp, and a federal duck stamp.

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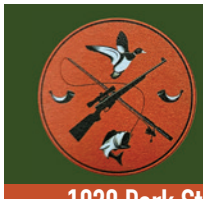

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DEER HUNTING

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Winter Primitive Season:
Zones 13 and 14: Jan. 1–31, 2026

Youth Deer Hunt Day: Oct. 3, 2026

Archery Season:
Oct. 5–Nov. 28, 2026

Paraplegic Hunt: Oct. 29–31, 2026

Shotgun Season: Nov. 30–Dec. 12, 2026

Primitive Firearms Season:
Dec. 14–31, 2026

All dates inclusive. Hunting is prohibited on Sundays. See Wildlife Management Zone map on pages 26–27.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end 1/2 hour after sunset.

REQUIRED LICENSES AND PERMITS AND STAMPS

To hunt white-tailed deer in Massachusetts you must have the appropriate license, permits, and stamps which you can buy or apply for through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*, or a license vendor.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or Sporting License (Includes 2 antlered deer tags valid statewide).
- Archery Stamp to hunt the Archery Season.
- Primitive Firearms Stamp to hunt the Primitive Firearms and the Winter Primitive seasons.
- No stamp required for the Shotgun Season.
- Antlerless Deer Permit – Required for hunting any deer without antlers or antlers less than 3 inches in length. (See Antlerless Deer Permit Information on page 32 for the application process).
- Winter Deer Permit – Allows the take of 1 additional deer of either sex in January only in WMZs 13 and 14.

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Non-Resident Big Game Hunting License (Includes 2 antlered deer tags, valid statewide).
- Archery Stamp to hunt the Archery Season.
- Primitive Firearms Stamp to hunt the Primitive Firearms and Winter Primitive seasons.
- No stamp required for the Shotgun Season.
- Antlerless Deer Permit – Required for hunting any deer without antlers or with antlers less than 3 inches in length (See Antlerless Deer Permit information on page 32 for the application process).
- Winter Deer Permit – Allows the take of 1 additional deer of either sex in January only in WMZs 13 and 14.

YOUTH DEER HUNT DAY

- Minors (resident and non-resident) must have a Youth Deer Permit (valid during any deer season).
- 15–17 year old hunters required to have a Resident Minor Hunting license or Non-Resident Big Game License.
- 12–14 year old hunters do not need a hunting license but must be accompanied by appropriately licensed adult hunter. See Youth Hunters (pages 28–29) for further requirements.

(Continued on page 32)

HUNTERS SHARE THE HARVEST PROGRAM

Over 15% of Massachusetts households do not have access to sufficient food to meet their basic needs. Through generous donations of harvested deer by hunters, more than 50,000 meals of venison have been distributed across Massachusetts through the program since 2022.

MassWildlife's Hunters Share the Harvest program provides an outlet for hunters, who already play an important role in wildlife management in Massachusetts, to donate venison to help combat food insecurity in their communities. Venison is distributed through partnering food pantries.

GET INVOLVED: *mass.gov/sharetheharvest*

Donate a deer. Deer must be recovered and field-dressed within 4 hours of the shot unless the ambient air temperature stays below 37°F. All deer must be legally reported and tagged with a confirmation number and must be dropped off whole at a participating processor within 24 hours of the shot. With the support of donors, hunters who donate their entire deer pay no processing or packaging fees. Hunters who want to donate a portion of their deer will pay a discounted processing rate, depending on the amount donated.

Donate money. Your monetary donation will help cover the processing and packaging costs for donated meat. A donation of $50 will provide about 75 servings of meat for families in need.

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- Preserving Sportsmen Rights
- Regulation Enhancements
- Fundraising & Education
- Donations for Youth and Share the Harvest Programs
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HUNTING IMPLEMENTS ALLOWED BY SEASON

HUNTING IMPLEMENT	ARCHERY SEASON*	SHOTGUN SEASON	WINTER PRIMITIVE/PRIMITIVE FIREARMS SEASONS*
Shotgun		X	
Archery	X	X	X
Muzzleloader		X	X

*stamp required to hunt during these seasons

NOTE: Handguns are not allowed for deer hunting and may not be in your possession while deer hunting. Youth hunters may only use the hunting implements allowed in each season.

(Continued from page 30)

BAG AND POSSESSION LIMITS

Bag Limit:

- 2 Antlered deer annually (any deer with at least one antler 3 inches or longer); the youth deer permit and winter primitive deer permit allow for the take of additional antlered deer.
- Antlerless deer (any deer without antlers or antlers less than 3 inches in length): Hunters may take as many antlerless deer as they have valid antlerless deer permits for the specified permitted zones (see page 32, Antlerless Deer Permit Information).
- Youth Deer Hunt Day: 1 deer (antlered or antlerless) using the Youth Deer Hunt Permit. Additional antlered and antlerless deer may be taken with valid antlered tags or antlerless deer permits for the specified permitted zones.

Possession Limit:

A hunter may possess as many deer as they have valid tags/permits for.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

ARCHERY: Archery equipment may be used during all deer hunting seasons. All bows, (recurve, long, and compound) except permitted crossbows, must have a draw weight of at least 40 lbs at 28 inches or at peak draw. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Arrows must have well-sharpened steel broadhead blades not less than 7/8 inches in width. Expanding broadheads and handheld releases are permitted. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, airbows and bows drawn by mechanical means are prohibited.

SHOTGUN: No larger than 10 gauge. May only be used during the shotgun deer season. Rifled barrel shotguns are legal.

PROHIBITED: Possession or use of rifles and handguns in any woodland or field, or use on any game during any season when deer may be hunted with a shotgun.

PRIMITIVE FIREARMS: Shoulder-fired muzzleloaders .44 caliber to .775 caliber; barrel length 18 inches or more with only one barrel operational. Inline ignition systems are permitted providing the firearm loads from the muzzle. Single projectile only (no buckshot). Sabot rounds, 209 primers, break/hinge-action muzzleloaders, and scopes are permitted. Powder limited to black powder or black powder substitutes. A muzzleloader is considered unloaded when cap or pan powder is removed. Encapsulated propellent muzzleloader rounds (like FireStick™) are not permitted for deer hunting.

ANTLERLESS DEER PERMIT INFORMATION

What is an Antlerless Deer? Legally, an antlerless deer is a female deer (doe) or young male (button buck) without antlers or a deer where both antlers are less than 3 inches long measured on a straight line from the center of the front base of the antler burr to the tip. A WMZ-specific antlerless deer permit is required in order to hunt any antlerless deer during any deer season.

ANTLERED DEER: Any deer (mostly bucks, but some does grow antlers) with at least 1 antler 3 inches long measured on a straight line from the center of the front base of the antler burr to the tip. Sporting, hunting, and non-resident big game licenses come with two antlered deer tags that can be used in any WMZ. Additional antlered deer can be harvested using the Youth Deer Permit and/or the Winter Deer Permit. It is legal to harvest a doe with antlers; it will need to be tagged with an antlered deer tag.

ANTLERLESS DEER PERMIT PROCESS

Antlerless deer permits are allocated by Wildlife Management Zone. In regions of the state where there are high numbers of deer per square mile, a larger number of antlerless deer permits are made available in those zones. Conversely, in regions with relatively fewer deer, fewer antlerless deer permits by zone are allocated for deer hunters.

An antlerless deer permit (ADP) is required to hunt antlerless deer during any deer season. Antlerless deer permits can only be used in the Wildlife Management Zone specified on the permit. The permit must be in the hunter's possession while deer hunting and it is not transferable to other hunters. Each antlerless deer permit is valid for 1 antlerless deer. A hunter may possess antlerless deer permits for more than one zone (e.g., drawing a Zone 5 with Instant Award and purchasing an additional antlerless deer permit for an undersubscribed zone, such as Zone 14).

Hunters must apply for an antlerless deer permit (ADP) online in a specific Wildlife Management Zone (see WMZ map on pages 26–27) through the MassFishHunt system or at a license vendor by July 16.

PERMIT SELECTION: Hunters must return to the MassFishHunt system to check whether they were awarded a permit and to purchase permits beginning August 3 and through December 31. Selection is random. The odds of drawing a permit depend on the number of antlerless deer permits issued for a given zone and the number of hunters that applied for that zone.

- **ADP Purchase:** Successful applicants will be assessed applicable fees and may print the permit immediately after purchase or at a later date.
- **Surplus ADP Sales:** If there are any surplus permits (permits for undersubscribed zones) sale dates for those permits will be announced in August.
- **Unlimited ADP Sales:** There is no limit on the number of ADPs that can be purchased in Zones 10, 11, 13, and 14. ADPs in Zone 13 and 14 for 2026 will go on sale beginning December 1, 2025 ahead of the Winter Primitive Season. Any unused permits will be available for use during the fall hunting seasons. The beginning sales date for Zones 10 and 11 will be announced in August.

All four zones will have ADPs available for purchase throughout the entire fall 2026 deer hunting seasons.

BLAZE ORANGE

All deer hunters, regardless of the hunting implement in use must wear blaze orange during the following seasons or Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs):

- **Youth Deer Hunt Day:** 500 square inches of blaze orange on the chest, back and head.
- **Archery Season:** A blaze orange hat is required when hunting on WMAs stocked with pheasant and/or quail during the pheasant and quail season (see WMA Regulations page 23).
- **Shotgun Deer Season:** 500 square inches of blaze orange on the chest, back, and head.
- **Primitive Firearms Season:** 500 square inches of blaze orange on the chest, back, and head.

NOTE: If using a blind during a season or on a WMA with a blaze orange requirement, all deer hunters must wear the required amount of orange while in the blind. **MassWildlife recommends that blaze orange be visible on the outside of the blind.**

HUNTING METHODS

Legal:

- **NEW:** Use of deer decoys during the archery season only.
- Use of non-food related scents, deer antlers or replicas, or grunt tubes are permitted.
- It is legal to drive (attempt to move deer in a coordinated effort) deer while hunting.

Prohibited:

- Rifles and handguns, electronic calls, and dogs.
- **Baiting:** Any natural or artificial substance, including but not limited to corn, wheat or other grains, hay, silage, apples or other fruits or vegetables, and salt or other chemical compounds of a like food-related nature to attract or entice deer. Baiting is defined as the deliberate placing, depositing, distributing, or scattering of bait so as to constitute for deer a lure, attraction, or enticement to or on any area where hunters are attempting to take them. A baited area is any area where baiting has taken place. Such area shall be considered a baited area for the period from 10 days prior to the opening of the archery season to the day following the close of the primitive firearms season. Food sources deposited by natural vegetation, from agricultural or gardening practices, or standing crops planted and left as wildlife food plots do not constitute baiting. NOTE: On the Youth Deer Hunt Day, it is prohibited to hunt deer in any area where baiting has occurred up to 10 days prior to the Youth Deer Hunt Day.

TAGGING, TRANSPORTING, AND REPORTING

Tagging: Upon killing a deer, hunters must immediately fill out the paper tag from the permit or license and attach it to the carcass. The deer must remain intact (other than field dressing), with the harvest tag attached until it is reported.

Transportation: When transporting a deer, some portion of the carcass must remain visible until it has been reported.

Reporting: Deer must be reported online through MassFishHunt or at an official game check station within 48 hours of harvest. If reporting online, a confirmation number will be issued. The number must be written on the harvest tag and re-attached to the carcass. If reporting at a check station, an official seal may be affixed to the carcass.

EXCEPTION: During the first week of the shotgun season, ALL harvested deer must be taken to an official check station for biological data collection. For information on Online Game Reporting, or a list of official check stations visit the Game Check Station page at *mass.gov/dfw/checkstation*.

Processing: Once reported, the harvest tag with confirmation number or the seal from the official game check station must remain attached to the carcass until it's prepared for food, taxidermy, or other use.

SPECIAL SEASONS AND HUNTS

Youth Deer Hunt Day: See page 29.

Paraplegic Hunters Deer Hunt: There is a special deer hunt for hunters with paraplegia from Oct. 29–31, 2026. "Paraplegic" is a person with permanent paralysis of the lower half of the body with involvement or loss of both legs. Contact MassWildlife Field Headquarters (508) 389-6300 for more information.

DCR Deer Hunts: Visit the Department of Conservation and Recreation's website at *mass.gov/dcr* for application details on their controlled hunts (Quabbin, Wachusett, and Sudbury Reservoirs, and Blue Hills Reservation: Typically updated in August).

Military Lands Deer Hunts: Special deer hunts are conducted annually on Camp Edwards and the Devens Reserve Forces Training Area. Information can be found online.

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KEEP MASSACHUSETTS CWD-FREE

mass.gov/dfw/cwd

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an untreatable disease that kills cervid species like white-tailed deer and moose. While CWD has not been detected in Massachusetts, it is highly contagious and has spread rapidly across North America over the last two decades. Hunters can help prevent CWD from being introduced into Massachusetts by embracing preventative strategies and following all regulations when hunting in Massachusetts and elsewhere.

PREVENT THE SPREAD

Dispose of harvested carcass parts properly: Limit the movement of carcass parts to reduce the risk of spreading disease pathogens to a new location. Dispose in a landfill or leave post-processing carcass remains near where the deer was harvested.

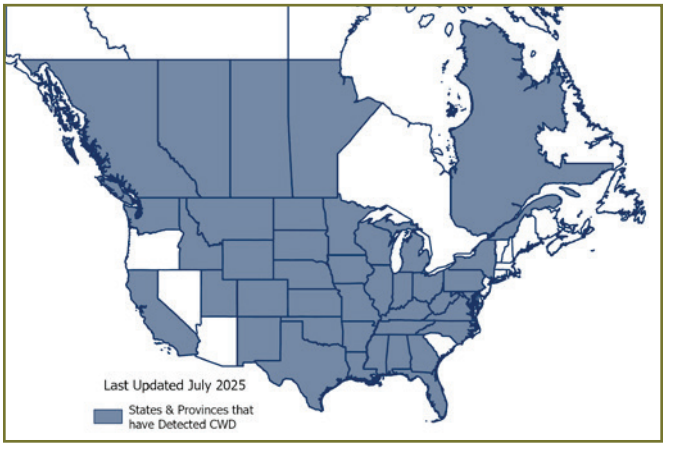
Don't feed deer: Supplemental feeding congregates deer and increases the risk of spreading diseases like CWD.

Use synthetic scent products and avoid deer urine lure products: Urine of infected and asymptomatic deer can contain CWD-causing prions that stay in the environment for many years. "CWD-free" labels on urine-based lures may not be reliable.

WHEN HUNTING OUTSIDE OF MASSACHUSETTS

- Hunters who fail to follow out-of-state requirements could unknowingly bring CWD into Massachusetts.
- Hunters must follow all laws and regulations in the states and provinces where they hunt outside of Massachusetts.
- Regulations in or near areas where CWD has been detected can vary significantly and change frequently as jurisdictions try to prevent the spread of CWD.
- Follow all requirements for deer processing, disposal of carcass remains, and CWD testing. Requirements can vary state-to-state and even in different regions of a state.

Since 2024, British Columbia, California, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, and Washington have detected CWD for the first time. New CWD-positive jurisdictions may be added following the publication of this document. **It is the responsibility of the hunter to know the current CWD status of any jurisdiction where they plan to hunt.**



It is ILLEGAL to import whole carcasses or high-risk parts (head, brain, spinal tissue, bones) of any member of the Cervidae family (wild or captive) into Massachusetts including, but not limited to, white-tailed deer, mule deer, red deer, fallow deer, moose, caribou, or elk from anywhere outside of New England (CT, ME, NH, RI, or VT).

It is LEGAL to bring in deboned meat, cleaned skull caps, hides without the head, or a fixed taxidermy mount.

LEARN ABOUT CWD

- CWD is a fatal disease of the brain and nervous system caused by a misfolded protein called a prion. CWD kills cervid species including white-tailed deer, moose, mule deer, elk, caribou, and sika.
- The prions that cause CWD are found in tissues throughout the body of infected deer, particularly in the brain, eyes, spinal cord, spleen, tonsils, and lymph nodes, as well as in feces, saliva, and urine. Prions persist in the environment for more than 15 years.
- There is currently no evidence that CWD can infect humans, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends no one knowingly consume an infected animal.
- Once CWD is detected, it is nearly impossible to eradicate the disease. For this reason, keeping Massachusetts CWD-free is the best strategy to avoid the loss of mature deer, particularly bucks.
- People cannot visually determine if a deer has contracted CWD. Many deer will die before they show any signs of infection. Asymptomatic deer still spread prions into the environment.
- It takes more than 18 months after a deer is infected with CWD before showing any signs. Deer with advanced infection may exhibit progressive weight loss, decreased social interaction, loss of awareness, and excessive salivation.

CWD SURVEILLANCE AND PREVENTION

Preventing CWD from being introduced into Massachusetts is a priority for MassWildlife. The agency is involved in regional efforts to develop educational materials, share testing results, and optimize surveillance to prevent the spread of CWD across North America.

Testing: While new methods are being developed for live testing, definitive CWD tests can only be conducted on dead deer. MassWildlife biologists collects samples from a selection of deer at check stations but cannot accept tissue samples upon request for individual testing at this time. However, there are private commercial services available that charge a fee to conduct CWD testing for hunters.

Regulations: MassWildlife prevents the spread of infected deer entering Massachusetts by regulating the importation of deer harvested in other states. MassWildlife also maintains regulatory control over the captive cervid industry in Massachusetts by enforcing bans on captive white-tailed deer, elk, and caribou and by enforcing strict limits on other deer species.

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BLACK BEAR HUNTING

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Sept. 7–Dec. 12, 2026

All dates inclusive.

Hunting is prohibited on Sundays.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end 1/2 hour after sunset.

REQUIRED LICENSES AND PERMITS

You must have a license and permit to hunt bear which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license
- Bear permit

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Big game license
- Bear permit

YOUTH:

- Minors (resident and non-resident) must have a Youth Bear Hunt Permit to hunt bears on the Youth Deer Hunt Day. 15–17 year old hunters are required to have a Resident Minor Hunting license or Non-Resident Big Game License. 12–14 year old hunters do not need a hunting license but must be accompanied by appropriately licensed adult hunter. See Youth Hunters (pages 28–29) for additional requirements.

BAG LIMIT

1 bear per calendar year

HUNTING ZONES

All Wildlife Management Zones statewide.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS
(see table above)

Rifle: Rifles .23 caliber or larger are allowed only during the first and second segments of the bear season.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS ALLOWED BY SEGMENT

HUNTING IMPLEMENT	SEPT. 7–OCT. 3	OCT. 5–NOV. 28	NOV. 30–DEC. 12
Rifle	X	X	
Revolver	X		
Muzzleloader	X	X	X
Archery	X	X	X
Shotgun			X



Photo by MassWildlife Archive/Bill Byrne

Revolver: Legal for use only during the first bear segment. Restricted to a .357 caliber Magnum revolver with .357 Magnum cartridges only, or a revolver .40 caliber or larger.

Muzzleloader: Allowed during the entire bear season (all three segments). Must be .44 – .755 caliber, fired from the shoulder using a single projectile.

Archery Equipment: Allowed during the entire bear season (all three segments). All bows must have a draw weight of at least 40 lbs at 28 inches or at peak draw. Arrows must have well-sharpened steel broadhead blades not less than 7/8 inches in width. Expanding broadheads and hand-held releases are legal. You may use a crossbow only if you have a crossbow permit. Airbows, poisoned arrows, explosive tips, and bows drawn by mechanical means are prohibited.

Shotgun: Allowed only during the shotgun deer season (third segment) and includes shotguns with rifled bores. Must be no larger than 10 gauge. Slugs only. **Buckshot is prohibited**.

PROHIBITED: Bear may not be hunted with a rifle or revolver during any season when deer may be hunted with a shotgun.

BLAZE ORANGE

A blaze orange hat is required on WMAs stocked with pheasant and/or quail during the pheasant and quail season. You must wear 500 square inches of blaze orange on your chest, back, and head while hunting bear on Youth Deer Hunt Day, during the paraplegic deer hunt, and during the deer shotgun season.

HUNTING METHODS

The use of dogs and bait is prohibited. Bait includes the use of lure, scents, or any other substance that may attract a bear (including cover scents).

TAGGING, TRANSPORTING, AND REPORTING

Tagging: Upon killing a bear, hunters must immediately fill out the paper tag from the

permit and attach it to the carcass. The bear must remain intact (other than field dressing), with the harvest tag attached until it is reported.

Transportation: When transporting a bear, some portion of the carcass must remain visible until it has been reported.

Reporting: Bear must be reported online through MassFishHunt or at an official game check station within 48 hours of harvest. If reporting online, a confirmation number will be issued. The number must be written on the harvest tag and re-attached to the carcass. If reporting at a check station, an official seal may be affixed to the carcass.

Processing: Once reported, the harvest tag with confirmation number or the seal from the official game check station must remain attached to the carcass until it's prepared for food, taxidermy, or other use.

HUNTING TIPS

Are you new to bear hunting or looking for bear hunting tips? Please see our black bear hunting tips webpage, *mass.gov/info-details/black-bear-hunting-tips.*

ANIMALS TAGGED FOR RESEARCH

Some bear, deer, coyotes, and other animals may have ear tags or radio collars. It is legal to harvest them. If you find or take one of these animals, contact MassWildlife's Field Headquarters (508) 389-6300 immediately. You will be asked for information that will help biologists determine the source and status of these animals AND you will be asked to return the equipment to MassWildlife. Thank you for your cooperation.



Photo by Dave Wattles/MassWildlife

WE NEED YOUR BEAR'S TOOTH

MassWildlife is requesting a tooth from your bear. Teeth from harvested bears are used to determine the age structure of the harvest and to model the population. These data are important for our monitoring of the bear population. Biologists ask that you submit a premolar tooth from your harvested bear for aging. If you submit a tooth you will receive a letter in late summer with the age of your harvested bear and your "2026 MA Bear Hunter" sticker.

Follow the instructions below or visit *mass.gov/beartooth* to view a demonstration video.

1. The tooth you should remove is the first premolar on either the top or the bottom jaw (see photo below depicting the bottom premolar). This is a very small tooth, just behind the large canine tooth. It does not matter if you take the left or the right tooth. The root is the most important part, so the tooth **cannot be broken, whitened, or otherwise damaged**.

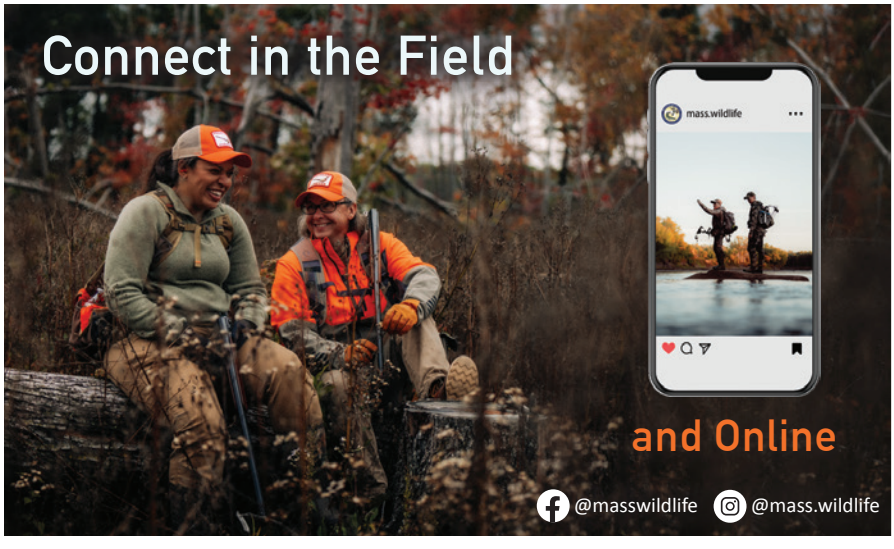


2. Using a small sharp knife, or a sharp ¼-inch wood chisel, carefully slide the blade down the side of the tooth and cut or separate the gum tissue where it sticks to the tooth. Using your fingers, wiggle the tooth slightly until you can pull it out of the jawbone and the gum. Do not use pliers to grip the tooth, as this can cause damage. The tooth is only about ½-inch (or less) in length, so be gentle when extracting it to ensure that you **do not break or crack it**.

3. Put the tooth in the small envelope provided, or other small envelope, and mark it with your **name, Customer ID number, and harvest confirmation number**. Put the small envelope in a regular mailing envelope and send it to:

MassWildlife
Bear Tooth Submission
1 Rabbit Hill Road
Westborough, MA 01581





WILD TURKEY HUNTING



Photo © Dean Cerrati

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Youth Turkey Hunt Day:

Zones 1–13: Apr. 25, 2026 (see page 29)

Spring season:

Zones 1–13: Apr. 27–May 23, 2026

Fall season:

Zones 1–13: Oct. 5–Nov. 28, 2026

*** During certain periods of the fall season, only archery equipment is permitted. See the Fall Hunting Implements table below.**

All dates are inclusive.
Hunting is prohibited on Sundays.

See Wildlife Management Zone map on pages 26–27.

HUNTING HOURS

Youth Day: Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end at 5:00 P.M.

Spring turkey season: Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end at noon.

Fall turkey season: Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end 1/2 hour after sunset.

REQUIRED LICENSES, PERMITS, AND SAFETY STICKER

A license and permit is required to hunt turkey which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS

- Hunting or sporting license
- Turkey permit
- Safety sticker*

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Big game license
- Turkey permit
- Safety sticker*

***Safety Sticker:** Turkey hunters using a shotgun or muzzleloader must place an official safety sticker on their gun. The sticker must be visible when hunter is sighting down the barrel. Contact a MassWildlife office for a free sticker.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

BAG LIMITS

Annual bag limit of 3 turkeys per calendar year as described below:

Spring season: 2 bearded birds; Two birds may be harvested on the same day.

Fall season: 1 turkey of either sex.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Spring season:

Shotgun: No larger than 10 gauge. No larger than #4 size shot.

Muzzleloader: No larger than .775 caliber smoothbore muzzleloading shotgun. No larger than #4 shot.

Archery Equipment: All bows must have a draw weight of at least 40 lbs at 28 inches or at peak draw. Arrows must have a well-sharpened steel broadhead blades not less than 7/8 inches in width. Expanding broadheads and hand-held releases are legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Airbows are prohibited (see Archery on page 18).

Fall season:

In WMZs 1–13, hunters can use shotguns, muzzleloading shotguns, and archery equipment as described above from Oct. 19–31.

During certain periods of the fall season **ONLY ARCHERY EQUIPMENT** is permitted (no shotguns or muzzleloading shotguns). See Fall Season Hunting Implement table below.

BLAZE ORANGE

Spring turkey season: Blaze orange is not required.

Fall turkey season: A blaze orange cap is required when hunting on a WMA stocked with pheasants or quail during the pheasant or quail season.

HUNTING METHODS

Use of electronic calls, dogs, bait and driving (attempt to move in a coordinated effort) turkeys are prohibited.

A licensed turkey hunter may call turkeys for another hunter. The caller cannot carry a firearm or archery equipment if he or she has taken a season limit of turkeys. Caller must have a valid license and turkey permit in possession even if tags are no longer attached.

* FALL SEASON HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

ZONE	OCT. 5–17	OCT. 19–31	NOV. 2–28
WMZ 1–13	Archery only	Shotgun, muzzleloading shotgun, and archery	Archery only

TAGGING, TRANSPORTING, AND REPORTING

Tagging: Upon killing a turkey, hunters must immediately fill out the paper tag from the permit and attach it to the carcass. The turkey must remain intact (other than field dressing), with the harvest tag attached until it is reported.

Reporting: Turkey must be reported online through MassFishHunt or at an official game check station within 48 hours of harvest. If reporting online, a confirmation number will be issued. The number must be written on the harvest tag and re-attached to the carcass. If reporting at a check station, an official seal may be affixed to the carcass.

Processing: Once reported, the harvest tag with confirmation number or the seal from the official game check station must remain attached to the carcass until it's prepared for food, taxidermy, or other use.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

IDENTIFYING HEN (FEMALE) AND TOM (MALE) WILD TURKEYS DURING THE SPRING HUNTING SEASON

A small proportion of female turkeys may have a beard and can be legally harvested. However, their loss reduces the reproductive potential of the turkey population. To avoid misidentification, use the following features below to accurately determine the turkey's sex.



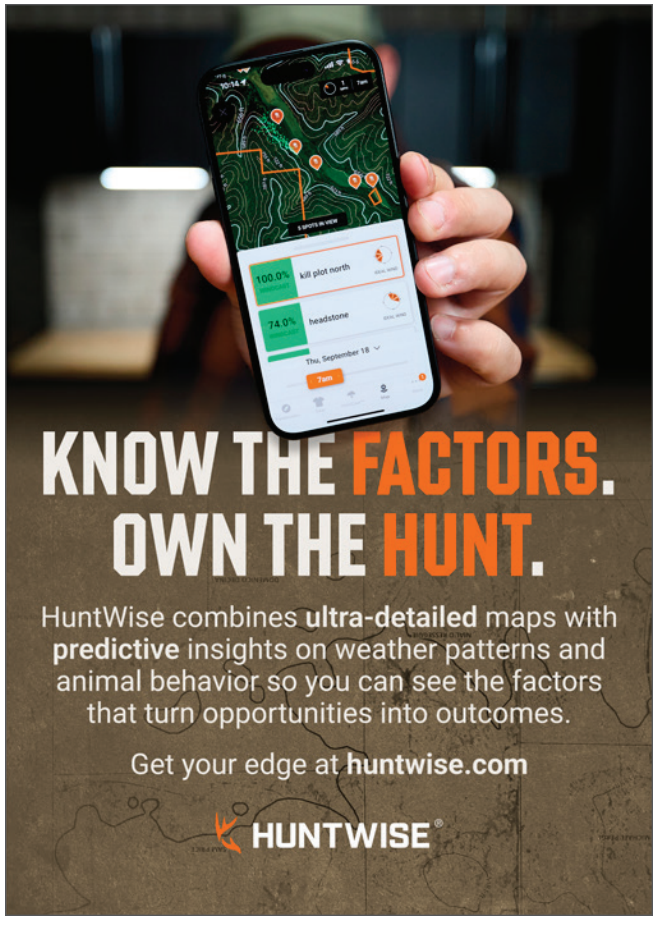


Photos by MassWildlife Archive/Bill Byrne

TOM	FEATURE	HEN
Red, blue, or white colors with snood (fleshy mass over the beak)	**Head**	Blue-gray, no snood
Dark, brown-black	**Body**	Light, rusty brown
Long bristle/filament-like beard	**Beard**	Usually no beard
Present	**Spurs**	Usually absent
Gobble, drum	**Calls**	Yelps, clucks, cuts
Strut with tail fanned and wings dropped	**Strut**	Do not strut or fan tail
Larger than hen	**Size**	1/2 to 2/3 size of tom

TURKEY HUNTING SAFETY TIPS

- Sit or stand still to call turkeys to you. Don't stalk birds!
- Avoid wearing red, white, blue or black where the colors might be seen by other hunters during your hunt.
- Don't hide in a place where your view is obstructed.
- Be completely sure of your target and what is beyond it before you shoot.
- Positively identify male vs. female turkeys. Although bearded hens are legal to hunt during the spring season, their loss reduces the reproductive potential of wild turkeys in your area.
- If another hunter approaches your setup, call out in a loud, clear voice. Make sure your presence is acknowledged before you move. Never wave to alert another hunter of your presence.
- Never assume that you are alone in the woods — even if you are the only one on the land with permission to hunt.
- Use hen calls. A gobbler call might attract other hunters.
- For further protection, always sit with your back against a tree trunk, big log or a boulder that is wider than your body.
- Avoid unnecessary movement. This alerts turkeys and could attract hunters.
- When carrying harvested birds or decoys, use a blaze orange covering or completely conceal them in a game bag.



PHEASANT AND QUAIL HUNTING



Photo © Dean Cerrati



Photo © Troy Gipps

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Pheasant

Youth Pheasant Hunt:
Sept. 5, 12, 19 and Oct. 3, 10, 2026

Statewide: Oct. 17–Dec. 31, 2026

Hen pheasants can be hunted statewide.

Quail

Zones 11–14: Oct. 17–Dec. 31, 2026

All dates inclusive for pheasant and quail seasons. Hunting on Sundays is prohibited. See WMZ map on pages 26–27.

Pheasant and quail hunting seasons are closed during the shotgun deer season.

PHEASANT/QUAIL STOCKED AREAS

Pheasant and quail are stocked from the Saturday after Columbus Day through the week of Thanksgiving.

Every year, MassWildlife stocks about 40,000 ring-necked pheasants statewide. These birds are stocked on public and private lands open to hunting. For a list of pheasant stocked WMAs and other locations visit, *mass.gov/pheasant*. MassWildlife also stocks about 4,000 bobwhite quail at two locations; Myles Standish State Forest in Plymouth and the Francis Crane WMA in Falmouth.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin at sunrise and end at sunset.

There are no tagging, transporting or reporting requirements for pheasant or quail.

REQUIRED LICENSES AND PERMITS

- You must have a license and permit to hunt pheasant and quail which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.
- Pheasant/Quail Permit: Required by all hunters aged 15 years or older (including falconers) to hunt, take or possess pheasants or bobwhite quail, except for those hunting or possessing pheasants or quail harvested on licensed commercial shooting preserves.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license
- Pheasant/Quail Permit

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Small game or big game license
- Pheasant/Quail Permit

If you hunt on a licensed commercial shooting preserve, you need a resident or non-resident license, or a 1-day commercial shooting preserve license.

BAG LIMITS

Pheasant

- 2 per day
- 4 in possession

Quail

- 4 per day
- 8 in possession

No season limit for pheasant or quail

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotguns (including smoothbore muzzle-loaders): No larger than #1 birdshot.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

BLAZE ORANGE

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.

SPECIAL PHEASANT AND QUAIL HUNT

Licensed hunters may submit an application to MassWildlife district offices for a free 1-day permit that allows the private purchase, liberation, and hunting of ring-necked pheasants and/or bobwhite quail on the following selected WMAs from Jan. 1–March 31. These hunts may be permitted on other WMAs at the discretion of the District Manager.

WMAs include:

- Frances A. Crane WMA and Erwin Wilder WMA (SE District)
- Bolton Flats WMA and Winnimusset WMA (Central District)
- Martin Burns WMA (NE District)
- Herm Covey WMA (CT Valley District)
- Housatonic Valley WMA (Western District)

Permits are issued on a first-come, first-served basis. Only one party can hunt on each WMA per day. There are no stocking limits, or bag limits.

Contact your local District Office for more information or to apply for a permit.

You will need a separate importation permit from the MassWildlife Boston Office (617) 626-1575 to purchase birds from out of state.

RUFFED GROUSE HUNTING



Photo by MassWildlife Archive/Bill Byrne

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Oct. 17–Nov. 28, 2026

All dates are inclusive.
Hunting is prohibited on Sundays.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end 1/2 hour after sunset.

REQUIRED LICENSES AND PERMITS

You must have a license to hunt ruffed grouse which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Small game or big game license

BAG LIMITS

- 3 per day
- 6 in possession
- 15 per season

HUNTING ZONES

All Wildlife Management Zones statewide.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotguns (including smoothbore muzzleloaders): No larger than #1 birdshot.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

BLAZE ORANGE

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.

There are no tagging, transporting or reporting requirements for ruffed grouse.



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CROW HUNTING

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Jan. 1–April 10, 2026

July 1, 2026–April 10, 2027

Crow hunting only on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Crow hunting season may coincide with the Youth Deer Hunt, special restrictions apply, see page 29. Crow hunting season is closed during the shotgun deer season.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end 1/2 hour after sunset.

REQUIRED LICENSES AND PERMITS

You must have a license to hunt crows, which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*. No permits are required.



Photo © 2021 Gino Ellison@21

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Small game or big game license

BAG LIMITS

None

HUNTING ZONES

All Wildlife Management Zones statewide.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Rifles and handguns: All rifles and handguns are legal.

Shotguns (including smoothbore muzzleloaders): No larger than #1 birdshot.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

HUNTING METHODS

Bait, electronic calls, and manual calls are legal.

BLAZE ORANGE

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.

There are no tagging, transportation or reporting requirements for crow.

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RACCOON AND OPOSSUM HUNTING



Photo by MassWildlife Archive/Bill Byrne

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Jan. 1–31, 2026

Oct. 1, 2026–Jan. 30, 2027

All dates are inclusive. Hunting is prohibited on Sundays. Raccoon and opossum hunting seasons may coincide with the Youth Deer Hunt Day, when special restrictions apply, see page 29. Raccoon and opossum hunting seasons are closed during the shotgun deer season.

HUNTING HOURS

Raccoon and opossum may be hunted 24 hours per day. Exception: WMAs stocked with pheasant or quail during the pheasant or quail season, the hunting hours for raccoon and opossum are from 9:00 P.M. to 3:00 A.M.

REQUIRED LICENSES

You must have a license to hunt raccoon and opossum, which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Small game or big game license

BAG LIMITS

Raccoon:

- Individual bag limit, 3 raccoons (Between sunset of one day and sunset of the following day.)
- Group bag limit (2 or more hunters), 6 raccoons (Between sunset of one day and sunset of the following day.)

Opossum: No bag limit.

HUNTING ZONES:

All Wildlife Management Zones statewide.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotguns: Only shot size up to #1 birdshot.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

Rifles and handguns:

- Daytime hunting: During the period from 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1/2 hour after sunset there are no restrictions on size or caliber of rifles or handguns.
- Nighttime hunting: During the period from 1/2 hour after sunset to 1/2 hour before sunrise, rifles are restricted to those chambered not larger than .22 long rifle and handguns are restricted to those chambered not larger than .38 caliber.

Muzzleloaders: Smooth bore muzzleloaders: Only shot size up to #1 birdshot. Rifled bore muzzleloaders: no restrictions on caliber size.

HUNTING METHODS

Electronic and manual calls, artificial lights, and bait are legal. Use of dogs is permitted.

BLAZE ORANGE

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.

There are no tagging, transportation or reporting requirements for raccoon or opossum.

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RABBIT AND HARE HUNTING



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Cottontail Rabbits

Zones 1–14: Jan. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2026
Zones 1–14: Oct. 17, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027

Snowshoe Hare

Zones 1–14: Jan. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2026
Zones 1–14: Oct. 17, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027

All dates are inclusive. Hunting is prohibited on Sundays. See Wildlife Management Zone map on pages 26–27. Cottontail rabbit and snowshoe hare hunting seasons are closed during the shotgun deer season.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and ends at midnight.

REQUIRED LICENSES AND PERMITS

You must have a license to hunt rabbit and hare, which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*. No permits are required.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Small game license or big game license

BAG LIMITS

- Cottontail rabbit: 5 per day, 10 in possession, no annual bag limit
- Snowshoe hare: 2 per day, 4 in possession, no annual bag limit

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotguns (including smoothbore muzzleloaders): No larger than #1 birdshot.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

Rifles and handguns (including rifled muzzleloaders): Rifles and handguns are legal.

BLAZE ORANGE

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.

There are no tagging, transportation or reporting requirements for rabbit and hare.

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GRAY SQUIRREL HUNTING

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Zones 1–14:
Jan. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2026
*Sept. 8, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027

*The printed version of the guide contains an error. The squirrel season dates have been corrected in this online PDF.

See Wildlife Management Zone map on pages 26–27.

All dates are inclusive. Hunting is prohibited on Sundays. Gray squirrel hunting season may coincide with the Youth Deer Hunt Day, when special restrictions apply (see page 29). Gray squirrel hunting season is closed during the shotgun deer season.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end 1/2 hour after sunset.

REQUIRED LICENSES

You must have a license to hunt squirrels, which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Small game or big game license

BAG LIMITS

- 5 per day
- 10 in possession
- No annual bag limit

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotguns (including muzzleloaders): No larger than #1 birdshot.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

Rifles and handguns (including rifled muzzleloaders): Rifles and handguns are legal, except in Wildlife Management Zones 10–14.

Trapping or netting is prohibited.

BLAZE ORANGE

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.



Photo by MassWildlife Archive/Bill Byrne

There are no tagging, transportation or reporting requirements for squirrels.

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MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING



REPORT ALL BANDED BIRDS: Hunters recovering banded waterfowl are encouraged to report bird band information to *reportband.gov*

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Season dates and bag limits are set annually in late spring and will be available on the MassWildlife website and at license vending locations in August.

Active Military and Veterans Waterfowl Hunt

Two statewide Veterans Waterfowl Hunt season dates are open for waterfowl hunting by members of the Armed Forces on active duty, including members of the National Guard and Reserve on active duty (other than for training), and veterans. The term "veteran," is defined, per section 101 of title 38, United States Code, as a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable. Proof of eligibility is required and must be carried on person while hunting. All regular season waterfowl hunting regulations and bag limits apply.

Youth Waterfowl Hunt

May run concurrently with the Active Military and Veterans Waterfowl Hunt days (see page 29).

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end at sunset in most situations. Exception: Early Goose Season: 1/2 half hour before sunrise – 1/2 hour after sunset. See page 55 for sunrise-sunset table.

REQUIRED LICENSES, STAMPS, & HIP

Licenses, stamps and HIP registration are required and can be obtained through *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

HIP Registration: Harvest Information Program (HIP) registration required annually by taking the HIP survey.

Woodcock, snipe, coot, rail hunters

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS

- Hunting or sporting license
- Harvest Information Program (HIP) registration through MassFishHunt

NON-RESIDENTS

- Big game license OR small game license
- Harvest Information Program (HIP) registration through MassFishHunt

Waterfowl hunters (ducks, geese, sea ducks)

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS

- Hunting or sporting license
- MA Waterfowl resident stamp and HIP (purchase registers you with HIP)
- Federal duck stamp* (for hunting ducks, geese, or brant) for hunters 16 years and older; $25; plus $4 federal regulatory processing fee for electronic "eDuck" stamps.

NON-RESIDENTS

- Big game license or small game license
- MA Waterfowl non-resident stamp and HIP (purchase registers you with HIP)
- Federal duck stamp* (for hunting ducks, geese, or brant) for hunters 16 years and older; $25; plus $4 federal regulatory processing fee for electronic "eDuck" stamps.

* Federal electronic "eDuck" Stamps no longer expire after 45 days following purchase and are valid from the date of purchase through June 30. They may be obtained online at mass.gov/massfishhunt, https://duckstamp.com/e-stamp, or wherever MA hunting licenses are sold. The Federal eDuck Stamp must be carried by waterfowl hunters in either digital or hardcopy format, but does not need to be signed. For those who purchase an eDuck Stamp, their physical Federal Duck Stamp will now be mailed via U.S. mail after the close of the season, on March 10. If it doe not arrive, hunters should contact Amplex at duckstamp@amplex.com or (800) 852-4897. Physical Federal Duck stamps are also available for purchase at all National Wildlife Refuges and select post offices, and must be signed across the face in ink and carried while waterfowl hunting.

YOUTH WATERFOWL HUNTERS (12–17 years old) Dates and Requirements (see page 29)

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotgun: Shotguns no larger than 10 gauge, fired from the shoulder. Shotguns capable of holding more than 3 shells must be plugged with a one piece filler which cannot be removed without disassembling the gun, limiting the gun's total capacity to 3 shells.

Non-toxic shot: Required for all waterfowl and coot hunting. No lead shot in possession. Waterfowl and coot hunters must use non-toxic shot up to and including BBB shot while hunting waterfowl. Non-toxic shot is lawful for hunting woodcock, snipe, or rails.

Archery Equipment: Expanding broadheads are legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Airbows, poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means are prohibited.

HUNTING METHODS

Dogs: Dogs may be used to hunt migratory game birds. NOTE: During the shotgun seasons for deer (including Youth Deer Hunt Day) dogs can be used for waterfowl and falconry hunting **only** on coastal waters and salt marshes.

Falconry: Ducks and coot may be hunted by licensed and permitted falconers. No geese.

Wanton waste: A reasonable effort is required to retrieve all migratory birds killed or wounded. Wounded waterfowl should be killed immediately, and must be retained by the hunter as part of the daily bag.

HUNTING PROHIBITIONS

Baiting: No baiting (placing corn or any other food to constitute a lure or enticement) or hunting over a baited area. An area is considered baited for 10 days after bait removal. It is not necessary for the hunter to know that the area is baited to be in violation.

Motorized vehicles & boats: No hunting migratory game birds from or with the aid of

a motor vehicle or other motor driven land conveyance or aircraft. No hunting from or by means of any motor boat or sailboat unless the motor has been completely shut off and/or sails furled and all progress has ceased. A hunter may pick up or retrieve dead or injured birds from a craft under power and may shoot injured birds from powered craft in coastal waters seaward of the first upstream bridge. Exception: Paraplegics may take game birds from a stationary motor vehicle or other land conveyance.

Driving: Hunters cannot drive (herd) migratory game birds from or with the aid of a motor vehicle or other motor driven land conveyance or aircraft, or use any kind of motor or sailboat for self or others.

Electric calls: No pre-recorded calls, sounds or any electronic imitations of calls.

Other prohibited devices: Rifle, pistol, air gun, swivel gun, punt gun, battery gun, machine gun, trap, snare, net, fish hook, sinkbox, poison, drug, explosive or stupefying substance.

Live decoys: No use of live decoys (birds) or any domesticated fowl. These birds must be removed for 10 consecutive days prior to hunting and confined in an enclosure to reduce the audibility of their calls and conceal them from the sight of migratory game birds.

BLAZE ORANGE/PFD

No requirement to wear hunter orange except: 1) An orange hat must be worn while hunting in WMAs stocked with pheasant or quail during the pheasant and quail season, unless hunting from a blind or boat; 2) During the Shotgun Deer Season and the Youth Deer Hunt Day waterfowl hunters must wear a blaze orange hat and vest (500 sq. inches) in transit to their blind or boat, it may be removed once in the blind or boat.

Personal Flotation Device (PFD): Anyone in a canoe or kayak from Sept. 15–May 15 **must wear** a life jacket or vest.

Importation: No person shall import migratory game birds killed in any other country except Canada unless such birds are dressed and the head and feet removed. One fully feathered wing must remain on each bird transported between port of entry and the hunter's home or preservation facility. No one may import birds belonging to another.

CONSUMPTION ADVISORY

A Waterfowl Consumption Advisory is in effect for the Housatonic River due to PCBs. For more information call the Mass. Department of Public Health at (617) 624-5757 or visit *mass.gov/dph*.

TAGGING, TRANSPORTING, AND REPORTING

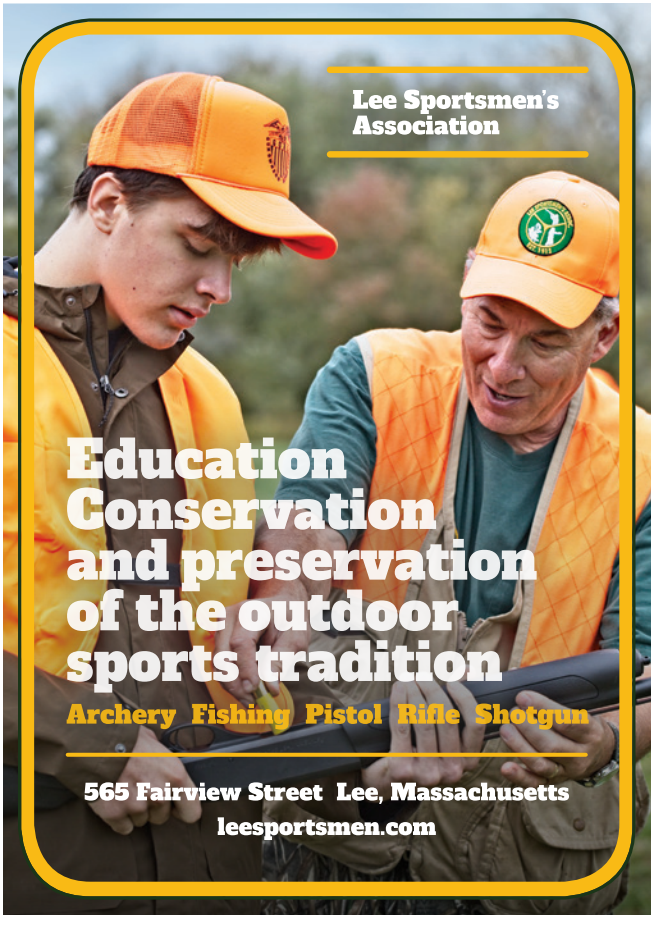
No reporting requirement.

No one may possess another hunter's migratory game birds unless the birds are properly tagged. Birds must be tagged with the hunter's signature, address, total number of birds by species, and dates birds were killed.

Field Dressing: The head and one fully-feathered wing must remain attached to each migratory game bird while it is transported to the hunter's home, preservation facility or port of entry.

Shipment: Any package containing migratory game birds must be marked on the outside with the name and address of the sender and recipient and number of birds, by species, contained inside.





COYOTE HUNTING

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Jan. 1–Mar. 7, 2026

Oct. 17, 2026–Mar. 8, 2027

All dates inclusive. Hunting on Sundays is prohibited. Coyote hunting is open during the shotgun deer season.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end at midnight. Exception:

- Hunting hours start 1/2 hour before sunrise and end 1/2 hour after sunset during shotgun deer season.

REQUIRED LICENSES

You must have a license to hunt coyote, which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Small game or big game license

BAG LIMITS

- None

HUNTING ZONES

All Wildlife Management Zones statewide.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotguns: Shot sizes up to and including FF. Slugs, single balls, and buckshot may only be used during the shotgun deer season.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

Rifles and handguns:

- Daytime hunting: During the period from 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1/2 hour after sunset, there are no restrictions on size or caliber of rifles or handguns.
- Nighttime hunting: During the period from 1/2 hour after sunset to midnight rifles are restricted to those chambered not larger than .22 long rifle and handguns are restricted to those chambered not larger than .38 caliber.
- Prohibited during the shotgun deer season.

Muzzleloader: Smooth bore muzzleloaders: Only shot sizes up to and including FF. Slugs, single balls, and buckshot may only be used during the shotgun deer season. Rifled bore muzzleloaders: no restrictions on caliber size.

HUNTING METHODS

Decoys and bait are legal.

Electronic and manual calls, and the use of dogs are legal, but prohibited during the shotgun deer season.

Artificial lights are prohibited. Any device that projects light, of any wavelength (visible, IR, or other), onto an animal or onto an area for the purposes of illuminating that object, is illegal to use while hunting.

It is illegal to train or run dogs on free-ranging wildlife on Sundays and during the closed season.

BLAZE ORANGE

During the shotgun season for deer, 500 square inches on chest, head and back is required.

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.

TAGGING, TRANSPORTING, AND REPORTING

Reporting: Coyote must be reported online through MassFishHunt or at an official game check station within 48 hours of harvest. If reporting online, a confirmation number will be issued. The number must be written on a tag and attached to the carcass. If reporting at a check station, an official seal may be affixed to the carcass.

Processing: Once reported, the harvest tag with confirmation number or the seal from the official game check station must remain attached to the pelt or carcass until that pelt or carcass is prepared for sale, taxidermy, tanning, or other use.



Photo by MassWildlife Archive/Bill Byrne

FOX HUNTING

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Jan. 1–Feb. 28, 2026

Nov. 2, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027

All dates inclusive. Hunting is prohibited on Sundays. Fox hunting season is closed during the shotgun deer season.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end at midnight.

REQUIRED LICENSES

You must have a license to hunt fox, which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS:

- Hunting or sporting license

NON-RESIDENTS:

- Small game or big game license

BAG LIMITS

- None

HUNTING ZONES

All Wildlife Management Zones statewide.

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotguns: Only shot size up to #1 birdshot.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

Rifles and handguns:

- Daytime hunting: During the period from 1/2 hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset, there are no restrictions on size or caliber of rifles or handguns.
- Nighttime hunting: During the period from 1/2 hour after sunset to midnight rifles are restricted to those chambered not larger than .22 long rifle and handguns are restricted to those chambered not larger than .38 caliber.

Muzzleloaders: Smooth bore muzzleloaders: Only shot size up to #1 birdshot can be used. Rifled bore muzzleloaders: no restrictions on caliber size.

HUNTING METHODS

Electronic and manual calls, decoys, bait, and the use of dogs are legal.

Artificial lights are prohibited. Any device that projects light, of any wavelength (visible, IR, or other), onto an animal or onto an area for the purposes of illuminating that object, is illegal to use while hunting.

BLAZE ORANGE

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.

TAGGING, TRANSPORTING, AND REPORTING

Reporting: Fox must be reported online through MassFishHunt or at an official game check station within 48 hours of harvest. If reporting online, a confirmation number will be issued. The number must be written on a tag and attached to the carcass.

Processing: Once reported, the harvest tag with confirmation number must remain attached to the pelt or carcass until that pelt or carcass is prepared for sale, taxidermy, tanning, or other use.

BOBCAT HUNTING

2026 HUNTING SEASON DATES

Zones 1–8: Jan. 1–Mar. 7, 2026

Dec. 21, 2026–Mar. 8, 2027

All dates inclusive. Hunting is prohibited on Sundays. See WMZ map on pages 26–27.

HUNTING HOURS

Hunting hours begin 1/2 hour before sunrise and end 1/2 hour after sunset.

REQUIRED LICENSES AND PERMITS

You must have a license to hunt bobcat, which you can buy through MassFishHunt, *mass.gov/massfishhunt*. No permits are required.

MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS

- Hunting or sporting license

NON-RESIDENTS

- Small game or big game license

BAG LIMITS

None

HUNTING IMPLEMENTS

Shotguns: Only shot size up to #1 birdshot can be used.

Archery: Archery equipment is legal. Crossbows may be used only by hunters with a crossbow permit. Poisoned arrows, explosive tips, bows drawn by mechanical means, or any device that propels an arrow, dart, or bolt by gunpowder, compressed air, or by any means other than the flexing and releasing of a bowstring are prohibited.

Rifles and handguns: No restrictions on caliber size for rifles or handguns.

Muzzleloaders: Smooth bore muzzleloaders: Only shot size up to #1 birdshot can be used. Rifled bore muzzleloaders: no restrictions on caliber size.

HUNTING METHODS

Electronic and manual calls, decoys, and bait are legal.

Use of dogs is prohibited.

BLAZE ORANGE

When hunting on a pheasant or quail stocked WMA during the pheasant/quail season, a blaze orange cap is required.

TAGGING, TRANSPORTING, AND REPORTING

Bobcat cannot be reported online. You must take your bobcat to an official furbearer check station at MassWildlife facilities only (see page 50), where you will be issued a federally-required seal.

You must report your bobcat harvest within 4 working days of the end of the season.

Seals must remain attached to the pelt/carcass until the pelt/carcass is prepared for sale, taxidermy, tanning or other use.

FURBEARER TRAPPING SEASONS

	OPEN SEASON (ALL DATES INCLUSIVE)
Beaver[1]	Jan. 1–April 15, 2026 Nov. 1, 2026–April 15, 2027
Bobcat[1,2], **Coyote**[1], **Fox**[1], **Weasel**	Nov. 1–30, 2026
Fisher[1]	Nov. 1–22, 2026
Mink[1], **River Otter**[1]	Nov. 1–Dec. 15, 2026
Muskrat, Opossum, Raccoon, Skunk	Jan. 1–Feb. 28, 2026 Nov. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2027

1 – Pelt checking/reporting required; see below.

2 – Bobcats may only be trapped or salvaged in Wildlife Management Zones 1–8. See WMZ map on pages 26–27.

LICENSING

A trapping license is required for all persons age 12 years of age and older.

TRAP REGISTRATION

All traps used on the land of another must have a valid Trap Registration Number embedded or cut into the trap. The trap must also have attached a metal tag bearing the owner's name, town and registration number. Letters and figures must be legible and no less than 1/8-inch high. The registration number must be renewed every two years. To trap on another's land, a trapper must maintain a current certification of that registration number. To obtain registration numbers, contact MassWildlife at (508) 389-6300 or mass.wildlife@mass.gov.

MANDATORY TRAPPER EDUCATION

Trapper Education is mandatory for first-time trappers and Problem Animal Control (PAC) agents in order to obtain for a trap registration certificate. Government issued Trapper Education certificates from any U.S. state, as well as the certificate earned by completing the North American Basic Trapper Course (available online), are accepted. Included in the Massachusetts Trapper Education course is the mandatory training required to use Bailey or Hancock traps. Both a Trapper Education Certificate and a Bailey-Hancock Certificate are issued to students who successfully complete this course.

TRAPPING IMPLEMENTS

Cage or box type traps may be used for the taking of all fur-bearing mammals. Common rat traps may be used, but only for the taking of weasels. Bailey and Hancock traps may only be used trappers who have been issued the Bailey-Hancock certificate of completion. The Bailey-Hancock certificate must be in possession when using such traps and such traps can only be used for the taking of beaver. There is a detailed procedure for obtaining a special permit to use bodygrip traps (e.g., Conibear™ traps) to address certain types of wildlife damage. Contact your local MassWildlife District office for details.

PROHIBITED: Use of steel-jaw foothold traps, padded jaw traps, body-gripping (Conibear) traps, snares, deadfalls, and any traps other than those specified in this Guide are prohibited. Such traps may not be set, tended, used, or possessed in the field.

STAKING is not a recognized practice and conveys no special trapping privileges.

STOLEN TRAPS: A trapper must report the loss or theft of a trap in writing to the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP) within 48 hours of the loss or theft, or remain responsible for its use. See MEP contact information on page 6.

HARVEST REPORTING (PELT CHECKING)

Coyote and fox must be checked within 48 hours of harvest. Fisher, beaver, bobcat, river otter, and mink must be checked within 4 days of the end of their respective seasons. Bobcat and river otter cannot be reported online. Take all bobcat and river otter to an official furbearer check station, which are located at MassWildlife facilities only (see Furbearer Check Stations below), within 4 working days of the end of the season. You will be issued a federally-required seal for bobcat and river otter. For detailed information on Online Game Check, visit the Game Check Station page on *mass.gov/dfw/checkstation*; visit the MassFishHunt System online at *mass.gov/massfishhunt* to report your harvest online. Once issued a harvest confirmation number, write it on a tag of your own making and attach it to the pelt/carcass. Confirmation numbers must remain attached to all pelts/carcasses until the pelt/carcass is prepared for sale, taxidermy or other use.

SALE OF PELTS

EXPORTING RAW FURS: When shipping raw fur pelts by any carrier, the contents of the package and the shipper's hunting or trapping license number must be listed on the outside of the package. The destruction or removal of any identifying tag or label that is attached to a container in which skins are shipped is unlawful.

FURBEARER CHECK STATIONS

Check stations are open Monday–Friday (excluding holidays). Call check stations prior to bringing pelts in for sealing. Most deer check stations also check coyotes; visit our website at *mass.gov/dfw/checkstation* or call MassWildlife Field Headquarters for further information.

- **Western District:** Dalton (413) 684-1646
- **Connecticut Valley District:** Belchertown (413) 323-7632
- **Central District:** West Boylston (508) 835-3607
- **Northeast District:** Ayer (978) 772-2145
- **Southeast District:** Buzzards Bay (508) 759-3406
- **Sunderland Hatchery:** Sunderland (413) 665-4680
- **Bitzer Fish Hatchery:** Montague (413) 367-2477
- **Field Headquarters:** Westborough (508) 389-6300

TRAPPING PROHIBITIONS

IT IS ILLEGAL TO:

- Trap fur-bearing mammals with any trap other than a cage or box type trap, or a common rat trap for weasels.
- Intentionally or knowingly drown wildlife.
- Trap before 6:00am on opening day of any trapping season.
- Possess or have under control a trap on land of another in any place where fur-bearing mammals might be found between April 16 of any year and 6:00am on the following November 1, except with an emergency permit in accordance with M.G.L. Ch 131 Sec 80A and 321 CMR 2.08.
- Possess the green pelt of any fur-bearing mammal or any part of such pelt except during the open season for such mammal and for ten days thereafter.
- Possess or have under control an unregistered trap on land of another.
- Possess or have under control the registered trap of another, unless he or she has entered into a trapping partnership through the Boston Office.
- Trap on posted land of another without the written permission of the owner or tenant of such land.
- Trap in a public way, cart road, path or other way commonly used as a passageway for people or domestic animals.
- Tear open, disturb, or destroy a muskrat lodge, beaver lodge or beaver dam, except as provided in 321 CMR 2.08.
- Use poison or trap with a trap designed to take more than one mammal at a time.
- Trap on land with a Bailey or Hancock beaver trap or other trap of similar design, except when set upon a beaver dam or beaver lodge, snag, stump, rock, or other above-water protrusion entirely or substantially surrounded by water, or, when the pan of such trap is not completely submerged.
- Trap with a Bailey or Hancock beaver trap or other trap of similar design without having completed a training session and having been issued a certificate of completion, or to fail to carry such certificate on one's person when using such traps.
- Fail to visit all traps staked out, set, used, tended, placed, or maintained, and remove all animals trapped at least once in each calendar day between the hours of 4:00am and 10:00pm.
- Destroy, mutilate, spring, or remove the trap of another.
- Take any fur-bearing mammal from the trap of another unless he has on his person a specific written authorization to do so, signed by the owner of such trap. The owner of traps may give such authorization to any person licensed to trap for a period not to exceed one week from the day the traps were last tended, provided that notice of the giving of such authorization including the name and trapping license number of the person so authorized shall be given to the regional Environmental Police Officer and to the Director within 24 hours of the giving of such authorization.
- Set, use, place, locate, tend, or maintain a trap not bearing on a metal tag the name, town of residence, and trap registration number of the person or persons using the same in a manner as to be legible at all times. Said registration number shall be permanently embedded in or marked on the traps with letters and figures not less than 1⁄8 inches high in such a manner as to be legible at all times.
- Possess any road-killed furbearers during the closed season, or possess road-killed furbearers during the open season without a valid hunting or trapping license as appropriate to that species and season.
- Alter, tamper with, or reapply a furbearer tag or seal, or possess any altered or resealed tag, or possess any pelt bearing an altered or resealed tag or seal.

INCIDENTAL CATCH — EMERGENCY PERMIT

Catch of any species other than beaver or muskrat while trapping with a 10 day emergency permit must be turned over to MassWildlife.

PROBLEM ANIMAL CONTROL AGENTS

Problem Animal Control (PAC) agents are private individuals licensed by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to assist the public in situations involving sick animals or animals causing property damage. If you are experiencing wildlife damage and wish to contract with a PAC agent, a listing can be found on *mass.gov/masswildlife*. Individuals interested in becoming a PAC agent can obtain information on the permitting process from this same website, or call MassWildlife Field Headquarters at (508) 389-6300.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

RABIES

Rabies in wild mammals has been confirmed in all counties in Massachusetts except Dukes and Nantucket. Wear rubber gloves when skinning furbearers. If you believe you have been exposed to a rabid animal, scrub the area thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical advice immediately. If possible, isolate and preserve the dead animal by refrigeration as soon as possible. Contact your local Board of Health.

DEVELOP OUTDOOR SKILLS WITH MASSWILDLIFE

ANGLER EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Angler Education Program introduces people of all ages to fishing, educates them about the state's aquatic wildlife and habitats through fishing, and promotes Massachusetts' abundant waterways and freshwater fishing opportunities. Program elements include one-day family fishing festivals and short fishing clinics offered by volunteers and MassWildlife staff across the state. A Fishing Gear Loaner Program is available for groups and organizations that already have an event organized, but need equipment. Occasional specialty classes such as fly tying or ice fishing are also scheduled. Visit *mass.gov/learn-to-fish* for fishing information and current class offerings.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

LEARN TO HUNT PROGRAMS

Hunters with little or no experience can learn skills and techniques used to hunt different game animals. Courses are geared toward recent Basic Hunter Education graduates and include classroom learning and outdoor skills exercises. Taught by volunteers, the courses utilize the experience and knowledge of seasoned sportsmen and -women. Courses range from one-day condensed classes to three-day, in-depth courses. To learn more, to be notified about upcoming courses, or to volunteer as an instructor, visit *mass.gov/dfw/learn-to-hunt*.

EXPLORE BOWHUNTING

This program is designed to help instructors, program leaders, and educators teach students ages 11 and up the basic skills of bowhunting through 23 innovative lesson plans. Through these hands-on experiences students gain confidence interacting with the natural environment and strengthen their appreciation for wildlife and the woods. For more information about this program visit *mass.gov/dfw/explore-bowhunting*.

BECOMING AN OUTDOORS-WOMAN

Designed primarily for adult women, the Becoming and Outdoors-Woman (BOW) Program offers numerous outdoor skills classes. An example of previous courses include shooting skills workshops, fishing classes, hunting seminars, and mentored hunts. For more information and to view previous and upcoming courses visit *mass.gov/dfw/bow*.

HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Provides courses in the safe handling of firearms, and other outdoor activities related to hunting and firearm use. Designed for novices, courses in Basic Hunter Education, Bowhunter Education, Trapper Education, and others are offered statewide throughout the year. Certificates in certain courses satisfy hunting license requirements for Massachusetts as well as other states and Canadian provinces. For more information, call (508) 389-7820.

YOUTH HUNT DAYS AND PROGRAMS

Special hunt days and programs are designed for young hunters. Details can be found on pages 28–29.

MASSACHUSETTS JUNIOR CONSERVATION CAMP

This two-week overnight program, held in August for boys and girls ages 13–17, provides a solid grounding in outdoor skills. Participants learn about fisheries, wildlife, forestry, and camping, and become proficient in the use of shotgun, rifle, archery equipment, map and compass, and other outdoor activities. Basic Hunter Education and Boat Safety programs are included. For more information, call (508) 389-6300, or go to *juniorconservationcamp.org*.



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

ARCHERY IN THE SCHOOLS

The National Archery in the Schools Program in Massachusetts is an archery program developed for educators to provide students in grades 4–12 with an exposure to a fun, alternative sport that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities. Taught primarily by physical education teachers, the program also includes social studies, mathematics, and physics. This program is a partnership between MassWildlife, National Archery in the Schools, the Archery Trade Association, and local sporting groups. Training is provided by MassWildlife to educators. Participating schools may borrow archery kits for one month per year free of charge. Funding may be available for schools to buy a kit of their own. For more information, visit *mass.gov/how-to/archery-in-the-schools*.



PROJECT WILD IN MASSACHUSETTS

An international program of wildlife education workshops designed for educators of a wide range of ages, from pre-school to high school. Hours spent may be used toward professional development or other continuing education credit. Co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Sportsmen's Council. For information on attending or hosting a workshop, visit *mass.gov/dfw/project-wild*.

- **GROWING UP WILD**: Exploring Nature with Young Children (Ages 3–7 years). This workshop is designed for early childhood educators with activities that build on children's sense of wonder about nature and invites them to explore wildlife and the world around them. Educators experience a wide range of activities that provide a foundation for developing a child's positive impression about nature.
- **PROJECT WILD AND AQUATIC WILD** Professional development workshops are interdisciplinary, hands-on learning opportunities for educators of K–12 level students focusing on terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and ecosystems. The curriculums encourage problem-solving and decision-making skills concerning the environment. Scout leaders, youth group leaders, homeschoolers, and both formal and non-formal educators find the materials and workshops valuable.

MASSACHUSETTS ENVIROTHON

The Envirothon is Massachusetts' leading natural resource education program for high school students, emphasizing hands-on, team-oriented problem solving and community involvement that prepares young people for environmental careers and active citizenship. For over three decades, the Massachusetts Envirothon has engaged young people in hands-on exploration of soil, water, wildlife, and forest resources, and investigation of the important environmental issues affecting themselves, their families, and their communities. For more information, visit https://massenvirothon.org.



Photo courtesy Massachusetts Envirothon

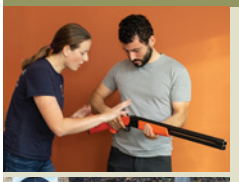
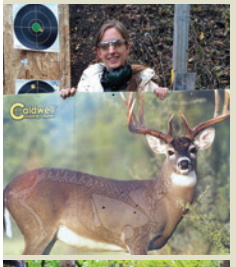
JUNIOR DUCK STAMP

The Junior Duck Stamp (JDS) Conservation and Design Program; *Connecting Youth with Nature Through Science and Art* is a dynamic arts and science curriculum for educators designed to teach wetland habitat and waterfowl conservation to students in K–12. Using scientific and wildlife observation principles, the program helps students to visually communicate what they have learned by creating an entry to the state's JDS contest. Guidelines and curriculum for students, educators, homeschool, and non-formal groups designed to spark youth interest in habitat conservation through science, art, math, and technology can be downloaded at *www.fws.gov/juniorduck*. Co-sponsored by the USFWS with support from the Massachusetts Sportsmen's Council. For more information, go to *mass.gov/dfw/jds*.



The colored pencil and pastel drawing of an American wigeon, by Annabelle Xu of Boxborough, won Best of Show and represented Massachusetts in the 2025 National Junior Duck Stamp Competition.

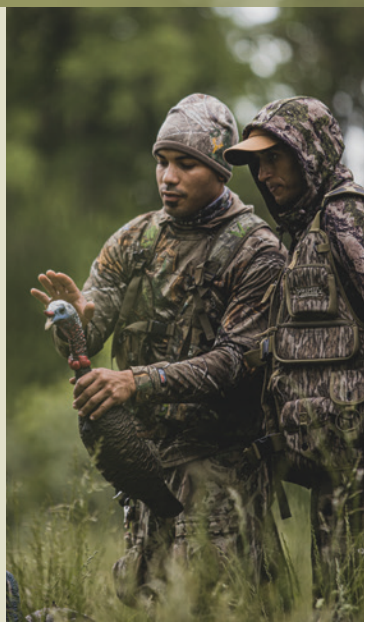
Take the first step to become a safe, licensed hunter
Find a Basic Hunter Education course at mass.gov/huntsafe


READY FOR MORE?

Register for hands-on hunting classes and access online learning resources at mass.gov/learntohunt

- Species-specific classes like turkey calling, deer hunting 101, and waterfowl ID
- Bowhunter and black powder education
- Detailed hunting tips and how-to videos
- Tutorials for digital and on-the-ground scouting
- Game preparation and recipes





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2026 SUNRISE-SUNSET TABLE

DAY	JANUARY		FEBRUARY		MARCH		APRIL		MAY		JUNE		JULY		AUGUST		SEPTEMBER		OCTOBER		NOVEMBER		DECEMBER	
	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET	RISE	SET
	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
1	7:16	4:26	7:00	5:02	6:22	5:37	**6:30**	**7:13**	**5:42**	**7:47**	**5:13**	**8:17**	**5:14**	**8:28**	**5:40**	**8:06**	**6:13**	**7:21**	**6:44**	**6:29**	6:20	4:40	6:57	4:16
2	7:16	4:27	6:59	5:03	6:21	5:38	**6:28**	**7:14**	**5:41**	**7:48**	**5:13**	**8:18**	**5:15**	**8:27**	**5:41**	**8:05**	**6:14**	**7:19**	**6:45**	**6:27**	6:22	4:39	6:58	4:16
3	7:16	4:27	6:58	5:04	6:19	5:40	**6:26**	**7:15**	**5:40**	**7:49**	**5:12**	**8:19**	**5:16**	**8:27**	**5:42**	**8:04**	**6:15**	**7:18**	**6:46**	**6:25**	6:23	4:38	6:59	4:15
4	7:16	4:28	6:57	5:05	6:17	5:41	**6:24**	**7:16**	**5:39**	**7:50**	**5:12**	**8:20**	**5:16**	**8:27**	**5:43**	**8:03**	**6:16**	**7:16**	**6:48**	**6:23**	6:24	4:37	7:00	4:15
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8	7:16	4:32	6:53	5:11	**7:11**	**6:46**	**6:18**	**7:21**	**5:34**	**7:54**	**5:11**	**8:22**	**5:19**	**8:26**	**5:47**	**7:58**	**6:20**	**7:09**	**6:52**	**6:17**	6:29	4:32	7:03	4:15
9	7:16	4:33	6:51	5:12	**7:09**	**6:47**	**6:16**	**7:22**	**5:32**	**7:55**	**5:11**	**8:23**	**5:19**	**8:25**	**5:48**	**7:56**	**6:21**	**7:07**	**6:53**	**6:15**	6:30	4:31	7:04	4:15
10	7:15	4:35	6:50	5:13	**7:07**	**6:48**	**6:14**	**7:23**	**5:31**	**7:57**	**5:10**	**8:23**	**5:20**	**8:25**	**5:49**	**7:55**	**6:22**	**7:05**	**6:54**	**6:13**	6:32	4:30	7:05	4:15
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16	7:13	4:41	6:42	5:21	**6:57**	**6:55**	**6:05**	**7:30**	**5:25**	**8:03**	**5:10**	**8:26**	**5:25**	**8:21**	**5:56**	**7:46**	**6:28**	**6:55**	**7:01**	**6:04**	6:39	4:24	7:10	4:16
17	7:12	4:43	6:41	5:22	**6:56**	**6:56**	**6:03**	**7:31**	**5:24**	**8:04**	**5:10**	**8:26**	**5:26**	**8:21**	**5:57**	**7:45**	**6:29**	**6:53**	**7:02**	**6:02**	6:40	4:24	7:10	4:16
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23	7:09	4:50	6:32	5:30	**6:45**	**7:03**	**5:54**	**7:38**	**5:19**	**8:10**	**5:11**	**8:28**	**5:31**	**8:16**	**6:03**	**7:36**	**6:36**	**6:43**	**7:09**	**5:53**	6:48	4:19	7:14	4:19
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29	7:03	4:58			**6:35**	**7:10**	**5:45**	**7:45**	**5:15**	**8:15**	**5:14**	**8:28**	**5:37**	**8:10**	**6:09**	**7:26**	**6:42**	**6:32**	**7:17**	**5:44**	6:54	4:16	7:16	4:23
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31	7:02	5:00			**6:31**	**7:12**			**5:14**	**8:17**			**5:39**	**8:08**	**6:11**	**7:23**			**7:19**	**5:42**			7:16	4:25

Table shows Eastern Standard Time and daylight savings time—seen in **bold**.
Data shown above is for Worcester, Massachusetts.
BOSTON subtract 3 minutes; SPRINGFIELD add 3 minutes; PITTSFIELD add 7 minutes.

HUNTING HOURS

Generally, hunting hours are from 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1/2 hour after sunset on each day of open season. There are exceptions:

- Rabbit, hare, fox, and coyote hunting hours close at midnight.
- During the shotgun deer/coyote season when hunting closes 1/2 hour after sunset. (see species hunting pages)
- Spring turkey hunting: 1/2 hour before sunrise and end at noon. (see page 38).
- Youth Turkey Hunt Day: 1/2 hour before sunrise to 5:00 pm (see page 29).
- Raccoon and opossum hunting (see page 43)
- Wildlife Management Areas (page 23): Hunters targeting game other than pheasant and quail on pheasant and quail-stocked WMAs are no longer restricted to hunting from sunrise to sunset. See each species' page for details. Pheasant and quail hunting hours on all public and private land statewide are now from sunrise to sunset.
- Migratory game bird hunting: 1/2 hour before sunrise to sunset. Exception: Early Canada Goose season hours are 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1/2 hour after sunset (see pages 46–47).

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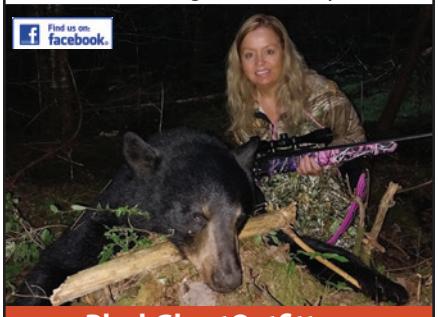

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HUNTING SEASONS SUMMARY

No hunting on Sundays. For further information regarding bag limits and seasons please visit the pages noted below.

		OPEN SEASON (ALL DATES INCLUSIVE)
DEER		SEE PAGE 30 FOR BAG LIMITS
Deer (Big Game)	Winter Primitive	Zones 13 and 14: Jan 1–31
	Youth Deer Hunt Day	Oct. 3
	Archery	Oct. 5–Nov. 28
	Paraplegic	Oct. 29–31
	Shotgun	Nov. 30–Dec. 12
	Primitive Firearms	Dec. 14–31
BLACK BEAR		SEE PAGE 36 FOR BAG LIMITS
Black Bear (Big Game)	Zones 1–14	Sept. 7–Dec. 12
UPLAND GAME BIRDS*		SEE PAGE 38–42 FOR BAG LIMITS
Crow	Zones 1–14	Jan 1, 2026–Apr. 10, 2026 July 1, 2026–Apr. 10, 2027 (M, F, Sat only)
Pheasant	Youth Hunt	Sept. 5, 12, 19 and Oct. 3, 10
	Zones 1–14	Oct. 17–Dec. 31
Quail	Zones 11–14	Oct. 17–Dec. 31
Ruffed Grouse	Zones 1–14	Oct. 17–Nov. 28
Wild Turkey (Big Game)	Youth Hunt: Zones 1–13	April 25 (special restrictions apply**)
	Spring: Zones 1–13	April 27–May 23
	Fall: Zones 1–13***	Oct. 5–Nov. 28

*** Crow, pheasant, and quail hunting are closed during shotgun deer season.** Migratory game birds (includes waterfowl, woodcock, snipe, rails): Seasons and bag limits set annually. For Migratory Game Bird Regulations see pages 46–47 and visit *mass.gov/migratory-game-bird*.

** Must have completed the Youth Turkey Hunt program (page 29)

*** Shotgun, muzzleloading shotgun, and archery from Oct. 19–31, 2026

RABBIT, HARE & SQUIRREL*		SEE PAGE 44–45 FOR BAG LIMITS
Cottontail Rabbit	Zones 1–14	Jan. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2026 Oct. 17, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027
Snowshoe Hare	Zones 1–14	Jan. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2026 Oct. 17, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027
Gray Squirrel	Zones 1–14	Jan. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2026 Sept. 8, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027

*** Rabbit, hare, and squirrel hunting are closed during shotgun deer season.**

FURBEARERS*		SEE PAGE 43, 48–49 FOR BAG LIMITS
Bobcat	Zones 1–8	Jan. 1, 2026–Mar. 7, 2026 Dec. 21, 2026–Mar. 8, 2027
Coyote	Zones 1–14	Jan. 1, 2026–Mar. 7, 2026 Oct. 17, 2026–Mar. 8, 2027
Fox (red or gray)	Zones 1–14	Jan. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2026 Nov. 2, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027
Opossum	Zones 1–14	Jan. 1–31, 2026 Oct. 1, 2026–Jan. 30, 2027
Raccoon	Zones 1–14	Jan. 1–31, 2026 Oct. 1, 2026–Jan. 30, 2027

*** All furbearer hunting seasons are closed during shotgun deer season, except for coyotes (Special restrictions apply. See page 48).**

The following species may be taken year-round (except during shotgun deer season) by licensed hunters and falconers with no daily or seasonal bag or possession limit: English sparrow, flying squirrel, red squirrel, chipmunk, porcupine, skunk, starling, weasel, woodchuck.

Falconers may hunt pheasant, bobwhite quail, ruffed grouse, cottontail rabbit, snowshoe hare, and gray squirrel from the respective opening day through March 14, and crow during the regular crow season.



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