

outdoors

Opening weekend brings cold temps, smaller deer

By **Beckie Gaskill**
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Many hunters were excited to have snow for the start of the 2022 gun deer season, but most did not expect, or look forward to, below zero temperatures and wind.

Kurt Justice from Kurt's Island Sports in Minocqua said the cold and wind likely caused hunters to move around less than they would have if the weather had been warmer.

Justice reported more hunters signed up for his Big Buck Pool this year than did so last year. However, as of Monday morning, only four bucks were registered on the board and three of those bucks were brought in by youth hunters.

Justice said the rut was still on, but it was starting to come to an end. He reported seeing bucks still chasing does throughout opening weekend.

Laurie Paugel of Lake Tomahawk is not a hunter but she owns property that backs up to public lands where hunting is normally fairly busy during opening weekend. She said she heard shots while walking her dog, but not as many as in previous years. She didn't see as many hunters as usual but she did find a blood trail and hunter's tracks following the blood trail back into the woods.

Rich Hirman of Starks said there were many hunters in his area, and he did see several deer. Of the 25 he saw on Saturday, though, only five were bucks and he let them all go by. He saw eight deer on Sunday and, as of approximately 10 a.m. on Monday, 12 deer had passed by his stand, with only one being a buck. He let that buck go as well, waiting for something of better quality.

Travis Strasburg of Strasburg's North Country Taxidermy said "a lot" of calls were starting to come in on Monday morning from hunters wanting work done. Both he and his wife, Balie, reported the weekend as fairly quiet where they were hunting.

Neither heard a large number of shots ring out in the woods.

Gregg Kizewski of St. Germain was able to bag a buck over opening weekend. He also reported hearing only two more shots, with an eight-pointer taken by a nearby hunting party on Saturday, and a spike harvested on Sunday. Kizewski saw two deer on Saturday and 12 on Sunday. Hunting pressure was not high, from what he could see. He counted 13 trucks on the power line easement where he was hunting and estimated there may have been 30 hunters on the approximately 800 acres of public land.

Department of Natural Resources warden supervisor Chris Bartlett said it was a relatively safe weekend in the Northwoods, however there were two incidents that resulted in a party heading to the hospital. One hunter was shot in the hand and another in the foot. Neither shot was fatal.

The biggest issue wardens saw over the weekend was feeding and baiting. It was not surprising, Bartlett said, given that baiting of deer is so heavily ingrained in the culture of deer hunting in the Northwoods.

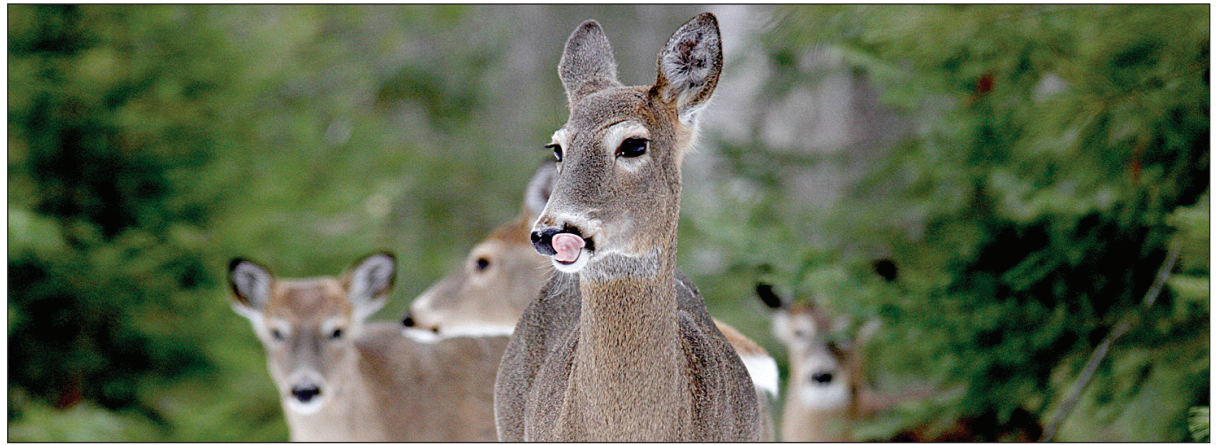
"It's a hard pill to swallow for some," he said.

Bans on feeding and baiting of deer are put into place, by state statute, when a deer is found, in either the wild herd or in captivity, to be positive for CWD. This has been the case in both Oneida and Vilas counties.

Bartlett noted that hunter success varied widely throughout the Northwoods. Many hunters reported low deer numbers while others, such as groups in southern Oneida County to which he talked over the weekend, were seeing plenty of deer.

One deer camp in Price County was approaching a 50% hunter success rate for their party, he noted.

Full registration numbers will be available in the Outdoors section as soon as they are released by the DNR.



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