



MEMO

Subject: Technical Response to Public Comments Received Regarding 7 DE Admin. Code 3900 Wildlife

Date: October 1, 2025

To: Lisa Vest, Regulatory Specialist/Hearing Officer

Through: Pat Emory, Director *PJE*
Joe Rogerson, Wildlife Section Administrator

From: Rob Hossler, Wildlife Biologist

The Division of Fish and Wildlife has considered the public comments received regarding the proposed amendments to 7 DE Admin. Code 3900 Wildlife, as published in the Register on August 1, 2025, and it is the Division's opinion that the proposed amendments should be approved without modification based on feedback received and considered by the Division. Comments were received from 15 individuals and one organization. Fifteen of these comments were in writing and one was made verbally at the public hearing. Of those 16 comments, 4 were not relevant to the regulatory changes being proposed, as these comments were about legislation concerning youth and firearms. Comments were received on only 4 of the regulatory topics, so the Division's responses to these comments (**in bold font**) will primarily address those topics, while only briefly mentioning those regulations where no comments were received.

2.0 Method of Take

No comments were made relative to the minor edits made in this Section.

3.0 Federal Laws and Regulations Adopted

The Division received 3 comments in support of expanding the age range for the participation of youth hunters in the special youth hunt days for waterfowl.

4.0 Seasons

No comments were made relative to updating text related to hunting crows on Sundays or the removal of the gray fox harvest reporting requirement.



5.0 Wild Turkey

The Division received 3 comments in support of expanding the age range for the participation of youth hunters in the special youth hunt days for wild turkeys. No comments were received regarding updating text related to hunting turkeys on Sundays or updating the harvest reporting of wild turkeys.

7.0 Deer

The Division received 3 comments in support of expanding the age range for the participation of youth hunters in the special youth hunt days for deer.

8.0 General Rules and Regulations Governing Land and Waters Administered by the Division

The Division received 4 comments in opposition to permitting the use of motorized electric carts/wagons/wheelbarrows for the use of transporting hunting equipment or harvested game on lands administered by the Division. Opposition to the use of these devices pertained to them increasing hunter numbers and disturbances on state wildlife areas that already receive significant hunter pressure. One individual did not think it was appropriate to allow these motorized items while not allowing other motorized conveyances such as e-bikes. Finally, one individual indicated they should be permitted only for hauling game to minimize environmental impacts on the state wildlife areas.

The Division doesn't believe allowing the use of electric carts/wagons/wheelbarrows will increase hunter numbers on our state wildlife areas as we anticipate the hunters that might use these devices are most likely already hunting these public areas. The Division does believe that allowing the use of these devices on public areas might help retain individuals participating in hunting as our hunting population continues to age. Additionally, we don't think these devices will lead to environmental impacts on our public areas as they are extremely slow, unlike an e-bike, and any noise disturbance would be similar to an individual(s) dragging out a harvested deer or carrying in hunting equipment.

20.0 Game Bird Releases

No comments were received relative to fixing typos related to method of take and issuance of permits to release game birds.

23.0 Non-native/Invasive species

The extension of the coyote hunting season from six months to year-round received the most comments. This increased public feedback was not surprising as the Division received extensive feedback when the coyote hunting and trapping seasons were first established in 2014. Five individuals supported the extension, while 6 individuals opposed it. The



individuals who supported expanding the hunting season indicated it would allow hunters to better manage this invasive/non-native species, help prevent impacts to native wildlife, while increasing hunting opportunities. One individual indicated that because the coyote was an invasive/non-native species it should be eradicated from Delaware. Another individual supported the expansion of the hunting season because they had seen coyotes in their suburban 55+ community and being disabled, feared for their and their pet safeties.

The six individuals, including a 5-page letter from the Northeast Regional Director of the Humane World for Animals (formerly called the Humane Society of the United States) indicated numerous reasons why they were opposed to the expansion of the coyote hunting season. Three individuals indicated that coyotes as predators of deer and can help control Delaware's deer population and reduce agricultural crop damage. Three individuals indicated the importance of predators like coyotes in maintaining healthy ecosystems. One of these individuals indicated that coyotes are not a threat to pets and livestock, and that coyotes "like wolves in Yellowstone" can help create a balance of nature in Delaware. Another of these individuals mentioned the strong role that predators play in preventing the transmission of diseases such as Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in deer, and another individual was tired of the Division expanding hunting seasons to generate more revenue.

The most extensive comments came from the Humane World of Animals. They were strongly opposed to the extension of the coyote hunting season to year-round and the elimination of the requirement for coyote hunters and trappers to report their kills. They stated in their letter that studies have shown that year-round killing of coyotes does not reduce their numbers and could even increase them. They indicated that the persecution of coyotes disrupts their social structure, which encourages more breeding and migration and ultimately results in more coyotes. They indicated that research has shown that the year-round killing of coyotes does not prevent livestock conflicts and could even exacerbate them, again based on the disruption of coyote pack structure. They also indicated that the year-round killing of coyotes, predator control and bounties do not increase populations of game animals, especially deer, as coyote populations are not limiting deer numbers. Finally, they stated that the indiscriminate and random killing of coyotes removes an ecologically important species from the landscape and can lead to the orphaning and starvation of dependent young.

Extensive scientific studies done in Pennsylvania as well as research done by the Division in collaboration with the University of Delaware, have shown that coyotes are not significant predators of deer in the Mid-Atlantic region. Unlike in New England areas, the Mid-Atlantic region does not typically have sufficient deep snow for an extended period making overwintering deer more vulnerable to coyote predation.



Additionally, unlike many southern states, deer in the Mid-Atlantic region have a synchronous breeding cycle, whereby the fawning season is relatively short. Although coyotes will prey on newborn fawns, because the fawning season is so short, by the time coyotes realize fawns are available and begin preying on them, most fawns have been born and are soon mobile enough to escape predation. Therefore, it is the Division's opinion that coyotes are not a significant predator of deer in Delaware and as such, the expansion of their hunting season is not being proposed to increase or decrease deer populations.

The Division has numerous questions related to the arguments being made by the Humane World for Animals that expanding the hunting season will likely increase the population of coyotes in Delaware, as some of their arguments are counter intuitive, i.e., increased harvest will cause disruption of the social structure leading to increased breeding, but a year-round hunting season expansion will also cause increased mortality of young coyotes. Pennsylvania and other nearby states have had year-round coyote hunting seasons for decades with little impact, positively or negatively, to the statewide coyote population. One thing the Division does agree with the Humane World of Animals is that there is over a century's worth of data showing that hunting, trapping and even extensive predator control methods (bounties and poisoning) will not control coyotes on a landscape or even statewide level. Ultimately what will determine how many coyotes are in Delaware is the coyotes themselves.

The Division's proposed hunting season expansion is not intended to better manage the species on a statewide population level but rather to improve management of coyotes at the local or land parcel level. Increase hunting opportunities for landowners can be very effective in reducing local numbers of coyotes as year-round hunting pressure provides more opportunities for harvest and can cause coyotes to abandon an area. Since 2014, DNREC has had a year-round (24/7) coyote depredation order; however, this depredation order is intended for use only when there is an imminent threat of injury to humans, livestock and domestic animals by a coyote. Currently there is no legal means for a landowner to remove coyotes from their property when there isn't an imminent threat outside the September – February hunting season. The proposed year-round coyote hunting season will provide these landowners another wildlife management tool not dissimilar to the tool that the Division's deer damage program provides landowners to protect their agricultural crops.

While the Division is proposing to eliminate the reporting requirement for hunter and trapper harvested coyotes, we do plan on estimating the annual harvest through our annual hunter and trapper harvest surveys. The Division believes that the harvest data



can be accurately calculated using these annual harvest surveys, which are used to estimate the harvest of all other furbearers such as red foxes, raccoons, muskrats and opossums. The Division believes that after 11 years of gathering coyote harvest data that the reporting requirement is unnecessary and by switching to the annual harvest surveys we will be better able to compare harvest and population trends of coyotes with those of other furbearers, something that would be important if population trends of these mesocarnivores was effected by a disease outbreak or a change in furbearers hunting or trapping pressure.

Finally, it is important to note that since the Division established a coyote hunting and trapping season and a depredation order in 2014, the reported coyote harvest in Delaware has remained stable and very low. During the four-year period between 2020-2023, the reported harvest has been 8, 4, 5 and 12 individual coyotes, respectively. It is not anticipated that a year-round hunting season will significantly increase the harvest or even double it, but as previously mentioned it will allow landowners an additional wildlife management tool in their “toolbox” and provide increased opportunities.