

Youth to pursue deer next weekend

by Lee Keck

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Illinois youths will be heading afield next weekend (Oct. 7 thru 9) for the annual Illinois Youth Deer Hunt. Unfilled Youth Permits are also valid during the first weekend of the Firearm Deer Season Nov. 17-19. This special hunt is set aside for youngsters possessing the valid \$10.50 youth permit for the special six-day season.

And as in recent years, the young hunters can harvest bucks as well as does. Prior to 2007, youths were permitted to take only antlerless deer.

The permits are offered through over-the-counter sales at all Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) license sales offices. Each permit is only valid for a specific county.

The youth deer season is open only to Illinois residents who have not reached their 18th birthday by the first day of the hunt (Oct. 7 this year). All participating youngsters must have completed an IDNR-approved hunter safety education course.

The outlook is indeed bright for young hunters participating in the youth hunt.

Though the crop harvest is still underway, biologists say whitetail numbers are excellent throughout west-central Illinois.

As a reminder, young hunters must be accompanied by a non-hunting parent, guardian or responsible adult who has in his or her possession a valid Firearm Owner's Identification (FOID) card. However, the adult may hunt during the first segment of the regular firearm season with valid firearm permit while accompanying a Youth Deer Season permitted hunter.

Both participants must wear the required blaze orange cap and upper garment with a minimum of 400 square inches of solid blaze orange material. Shooting hours are a half-hour before sunrise to half hour after sunset.

This rule also applies to archers and squirrel hunters heading out during the first long weekend of the special Youth Firearm Deer Season scheduled for Oct. 7 thru 9 (squirrel and archery season temporarily closes Nov. 17-19). During these six days and in counties open to the youth hunt, all hunters (except waterfowl hunters) are required to wear a cap/hat and upper outer garment of solid blaze orange covering at least 400 square inches.

A number of local IDNR sites in our local counties are also open to youth hunting during the special deer hunt. However, participants heading to these sites are encouraged to contact the site for other special site regulations. Some of these sites require special permits, or are limiting the number of hunters for safety purposes.

The Mississippi River State Fish and Wildlife Area in Calhoun County will open for the hunt, as well as the Copperhead Hollow State Fish and Wildlife Area in Jersey County. Parts of Pere Marquette State Park in Jersey County are also open.

The Ray Norbut area and Mississippi River Pool 22 & 24 sites in Pike County. The Kaskaskia River State Fish and Wildlife Area in Randolph, Monroe and St. Clair counties is also offering youth hunting.

Youth hunters with Schuyler and Brown county permits counties may wish to consider the Weinberg King State Park including the Scripps and Spunky Bottoms units.

Participants are reminded that all Illinois residents who buy or possess firearms are required by law to have a valid FOID card. FOID applications can be obtained from any firearms dealer, law enforcement agency, including the IDNR, or printed from the Illinois State Police website at www.isp.state.il.us.

To obtain a FOID card, complete an application and forward it along with the appropriate fee and a photograph to the Illinois State Police, Firearm Owner's Identification Unit, PO Box 19233, Springfield, IL 62794-9233.

Youth hunters should keep in mind that archery deer season will be underway and archery hunters will be afield during the first long weekend of the youth hunt.