

2024-2025 Blackwater NWR Deer Hunt Regulations

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is one of over 570 national wildlife refuges in the United States. The primary objective of a national wildlife refuge is to provide habitat for the conservation and protection of wildlife.

Your hunt permit authorizes you to take deer only. Taking and/or collecting any other wildlife or plants, including shed antlers, is a violation of refuge regulations. The regulations listed on this page supplement the general regulations which govern hunting on national wildlife refuges set forth in [Title 50: Part 32, Code of Federal Regulations](#). Hunting will be in accordance with State regulations and subject to the following conditions and regulations. Failure to abide by any Federal laws, State laws or the terms and conditions under which a hunt permit is issued may result in the revocation of the permit and hunting privileges.

Application Guidelines

- Beginning July 9: Applications will be available online www.recreation.gov or by phone at (877) 444-6777 through Recreation.Gov.
- Permits are required for all refuge hunts.
- We require anyone who applies for a hunt permit in Areas U1 and Q2 (areas identified for hunters with a permanent disability) to provide their Federal Interagency Access Pass number. Passes can be obtained at the refuge visitor center or online at <https://store.usgs.gov/access-pass>.
- Only one hunter per permit.
- Be sure to use your DNR id number when applying for a refuge hunt permit. See image on the rec.gov website media gallery if you have any questions.

General Conditions and Regulations

Required Documents: Hunters are required to possess an electronic or printed copy of a valid Maryland hunting license and all required stamps, an original valid government-issued photo identification (no copies or photos), and a valid hunting permit issued by Recreation.gov, electronic or printed and signed, on their person at all times during refuge hunting and scouting days. The corresponding State stamps are required to participate in the archery and muzzleloader hunts, as well as to harvest sika. Hunters hunting from a vehicle must possess a Maryland DNR - issued Universal Disability Pass (formerly a “hunt from vehicle” permit).

Accessing the Refuge

- Only participants who possess an authorized hunt permit will be allowed to enter the hunt areas.
- Hunters may access the refuge on hunt days up to 3 hours before legal sunrise and must exit the refuge within 3 hours after legal sunset (including parking lots).
- Vehicles may only be operated on designated roads and parking areas indicated on the hunt map.
- Vehicles may not exceed 15 MPH on any refuge road.
- Parking in front of gates or impeding traffic is prohibited; all wheels must be completely off the roadway.
- We prohibit the use of ATVs, motorized off-road vehicles and amphibious vehicles. (See Hunt Area U1 and Q2 Regulations for ATV use in those areas.)
- Bicycles, including e-bikes, are authorized to access hunting areas; operating bicycles off designated roads and trails is prohibited. See refuge Deer Hunting web page for [more information on e-bikes](#).
- Boats may only be launched from private land or the Route 335 soft launch. During archery and open hunts, areas B1, M1, R, S, T and X may be entered by boat. Boat access is not allowed during limited hunts or into any other hunt areas. Boats must be operated in accordance with Federal and State law.
- We require hunters to notify a refuge representative and receive permission from the refuge manager or designee prior to entering a closed area to retrieve game.
- Hunters may only enter the area assigned to them during the limited hunts. [See the refuge Deer Hunt Map](#).

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Scouting

Scouting will only be permitted from 7:00 am to sunset on September 5 & 29, October 13 & 24, November 10, December 1, 5, 8 & 12, 2024 and January 2, 5 & 12, 2025. Scouting is not permitted outside of these dates and times.

Hunt Area U1 and Q2 Regulations

- Hunters with a permanent disability must possess their Federal Interagency Access Pass on their person at all times during refuge hunting and scouting days in addition to any other required documents.
- Hunters with a permanent disability who are permitted to hunt in U1 may have an assistant who must remain within 5 yards of permittee. Assistants are not required to maintain sight and normal voice contact while retrieving game.
- Assistants may hunt if they possess a valid hunt permit for that specific day (or group of days) for any hunt area.
- Persons who do not possess a hunt permit who are assisting a hunter with a permanent disability must sign the hunter's permit as the assistant, possess a valid government issued identification and obey all refuge, State and Federal laws and regulations.
- All refuge-provided hunt blinds are reserved for hunters with a permanent disability only; however, when a certified disabled hunter and their assistant occupy the same blind, both may take game. The assistant must possess all necessary documents listed under the **General Conditions and Regulations** section listed above in order to harvest deer.
- Assistants must adhere to State blaze orange or daylight fluorescent pink requirements during applicable hunts.
- ATVs are only permitted to be operated by Federal Access Pass holders. When the pass holder is unable to physically do so, the assistant may operate the ATV.
- If hunting from an ATV, hunters are required to also have the U (universal disability) designation on their Maryland State hunting license or a handicap placard and a Maryland Universal Disability Pass (formerly known as a "hunt from vehicle" permit).
- ATVs must only be operated on established roads and/or field edges; amphibious vehicles or Argos are not permitted. Cars and trucks may not be operated in the U1 Area beyond the designated parking area.
- Parking an ATV on roads or ATV access roads, or impeding other ATVs or vehicles, is prohibited.
- Parking an ATV in front of a gate is prohibited.
- Shooting from, across or down any ATV access road is prohibited.
- A DOT approved helmet and eye protection must be always worn while operating or riding an ATV.
- ATVs may not be operated above 10 MPH on the refuge.
- See the refuge Deer Hunting web page for a [map of Area U1](#).
- Stands and blinds must be removed daily from U1.

Hunt Area Q2 Only

- Hunters are required to have the U (universal disability) designation on their MD State hunting license or a handicap placard and a MD Universal Disability Pass (formerly known as a "hunt from vehicle" permit), and a Federal Access Pass.
- At any given time, Area Q2 is limited to five (5) hunters with permanent disabilities.
- Hunters must hunt in assigned areas from either the blind or their vehicle. Hunters may only shoot within the designated shooting lanes.
- Stands and ground hunting are prohibited.
- A sign-in/sign-out board is installed past the entrance gate within Q2 and must be completed every time a hunter enters or exits the area. If a hunter leaves the blind, it cannot be reserved for later use.
- For more information, see the [Area Q2 map and instructions](#) on the refuge's Deer Hunting web page.

Youth Hunt (Nov. 16 and 17)

Hunters 16 years of age or younger may participate in the youth hunt if the individual possesses a valid hunting license or is exempt from Maryland hunting license requirements. Youth must be accompanied in the field by one non-hunting adult/guardian age 21 or older. Only areas B1 and U are open for the youth hunt. Youth hunters and those accompanying them must wear blaze orange or daylight fluorescent pink in accordance with State

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law. If the non-hunting adult does not have a permit to hunt the refuge they must print and sign the permit of the youth they are accompanying.

Tree Stands, Blinds, and Trail Markers

- We only allow portable, temporary tree stands and blinds while hunting. Screw-in steps, spikes, and other objects that may damage trees are prohibited. All stands and blinds must be removed at the end of the hunt day, including U1.
- We require hunters to mark in plain sight the tree stand or blind with the hunter's Maryland DNR ID number. See image gallery on the rec.gov site for DNR id # location.
- We prohibit hunting from a permanently constructed tree stand or blind.
- We prohibit paint or any other permanent marker to mark trails, including the use of tacks.
- We require hunters to remove all marking devices, including flagging or tape, by sunset of the last day of their hunt. **Stands and blinds may not be left overnight.** Any stands and/or blinds left in a hunt area will be deemed abandoned property and confiscated.

Other Regulations

- Please note that for the 2026- 2027 hunting season Blackwater NWR will be transitioning to require the use of only approved non-toxic ammunition for the hunting all species, including deer, as codified in Title 50 Code of Federal Regulations 32.2(k).

- The use of rifles that fire straight-walled cartridges will be allowed on shotgun hunts only.
- A State sika stamp is required to hunt sika in Maryland.
- We prohibit the use of rimfire or centerfire rifles (except for rifles that fire straight-walled cartridges) and all handguns including muzzleloading pistols.
- The distribution of or hunting over bait is not permitted.
- Boats, bicycles or any other equipment or property may not be left on the refuge overnight.
- We prohibit leaving deer organs or other deer waste within 50 feet of any trail, road, or refuge structure.
- Camping and campfires are not permitted.
- Guiding, outfitting, advertising and/or audio or visual productions for commercial purposes are prohibited.
- Use and/or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited.
- Automatic, motion-activated, game or trail cameras are prohibited on the refuge.
- Driving deer is permitted only on designated days.
- Shooting or hunting within 150 yards of any occupied structure is prohibited.
- Shooting from, across, or down any designated refuge road is prohibited. An open gate designates a refuge road.
- All property must be removed at the end of each hunting day.
- Blaze orange or daylight fluorescent pink must be worn in accordance with State law during all shotgun and muzzleloader hunt days. Additionally, archery hunters must wear blaze orange or daylight fluorescent pink on the youth hunt day of Nov. 16.
- Pruning or cutting trees, plants, or use of natural vegetation is prohibited.
- Area U and B1 will be closed to archery during the youth hunts on November 16, 2024.
- No Sunday hunting on the refuge except the Nov. 17 youth hunt.
- Please note that Blackwater NWR will require the use of nonlead ammunition beginning September 2026.

Tagging and Checking Regulations

- Hunters must check deer taken on Jan. 25, 2025 as a firearms harvest.
 - Deer taken at Blackwater NWR **WILL** count against the Maryland state bag limit.
 - ALL deer killed must be field-tagged, recorded and checked in accordance with State regulations under the public land code for Blackwater NWR (543).
- Report illegal activity or related information to: USFWS Law Enforcement at 410-221-8814.