

Diminished interest in local deer hunt?

Is the participation in the annual controlled deer hunt in Wildlife Management Units 78 and 79 on the decline?

It's a question the Ministry of Natural Resources Aurora District Office raised after conservation officers conducted their survey of the first five-day session of two controlled hunts that took place during the timeframe of Nov. 6-10.

Based on his observations in patrolling an area in Halton Region, Tim Boyd, Aurora District enforcement supervisor, said he came into contact with anywhere from 250 to 300 hunters.

Those numbers, he observed, were down from years gone by.

"We didn't come into contact with a lot of individuals," he revealed. "Is the pattern of hunting changing? We don't know."

While the numbers surveyed appeared to be down, Boyd said those that did take the time to go out during the first five days were, for the most part, rewarded.

"The area which I worked, most groups were getting deer," he said.

What worked in favour of the hunters, Boyd said, was timing as the annual rut appeared to be on schedule.

"The bucks were in the rut. We saw lots of rubs and got reports of bucks fighting," he noted.

Although Boyd did not see what he felt were many big bucks that might have weighed over 200 pounds dressed, he cited a good number of deer taken were young bucks.

As for why hunter participation might be declining, Boyd speculated several factors might come into play.

One, he said, is the dwindling amount of crown land that hunters at one time had access to is now in the possession of private ownership. In many instances, these lands often become forbidden to hunters.



Mike Hayakawa

"Is the access to public property decreasing?" Boyd asked. "Because of this people can't get access to new properties? People might be more reluctant now to go on private property where they once did."

"We didn't see many hunters driving the roads that we used to see," he pointed out.

Another possible reason, he said, is the hunter orange legislation that went into effect three years ago. Under this law, hunters must don at least 400 square inches of hunter orange material above the waist and be visible from all sides. A hunter orange vest and hat usually meet this requirement.

"There were a lot of guys who would take a chance and go out without wearing hunter orange," Boyd said.

Other changes to regulations, such as the availability this year of a second stamp for archers to purchase and use, might also factor into one's decision to forego the first week of the controlled hunt.

What began on Oct. 1, the archery season for deer is closed during the two, five-day controlled hunts and resumes until Dec. 31.

"There's now lots of opportunities for people to hunt deer and a lot of the controlled hunters are archers," cited Boyd.

As in past years of the controlled hunt, Boyd noted his crew were put to work.

This year, he revealed that close to 35 charges were laid.

This number, he said, was slightly higher than other years.

Of the charges laid, Boyd estimated that about a half dozen were due to hunters not wearing the minimum amount of hunter orange required. Another eight or so were charges relating to trespassing. Some charges, he said, were laid for those who were stupid enough to hunt without a licence. As well, Boyd said his crew handed out just as many warnings.

Whether the number of participants will increase during the second five-day controlled session, which will run from Dec. 4-8, remains to be seen, Boyd said.

However, the ministry is curious to see why the trend is declining.

Ice fishing teams wanted

While signs of Old Man Winter are beginning to creep into the area, Mike Burrows is busy making preparations for this year's seventh annual Canadian Ice Fishing Championships.

A spokesman for the upcoming event, which will be held on Lake Simcoe from Feb. 22-24, is looking for two-person teams to take part.

Burrows noted no special prerequisites are needed.

"All you need are two people who can fish for five hours for three days," he said.

So far, he notes that 20 teams have signed up.

In past years, teams have come from across Canada and the United States.

The event is a live release competition and cash prizes are guaranteed for teams that finish in the top 10. Those wishing further information can call Mike Burrows at (905) 722-7272.

RACE TO THE FINALS



PHOTO/CELIA BRONKHORST

Markham High Marauders lost 45-33 to Richmond Hill in a York Region senior girls' high school semi-final basketball game Tuesday at Bayview in Richmond Hill. Above, Richmond Hill's Neda Vujcic closes in on the ball, with Markham's Robyn Cooper in pursuit. Bayview beat Brother Andre 44-33 in the other semifinal.

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