

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC HEARING COMMENTS

Hearing Officer: David Kalb, Supervising Wildlife Biologist

RIDEM Staff Present: Phillip Edwards, Chief of Fish and Wildlife
Melissa Curry, Administrative Assistant
Sarah Riley, Chief Implementation Aide
Christine Dudley, Deputy Chief of Fisheries
Alan Libby, Supervising Biologist, Fisheries
Christopher Thawley, Herpetologist/SGCN Coordinator
Charles Tappero, Chief Program Development

The public hearing for the 2026-27 Hunting and Trapping Regulations was held on May 12, 2026, at 6:21 PM at 1B Camp E-Hun-Tee Place Exeter, RI 02822. Thirteen (13) people from the public attended the hearing.

The hearing was called to order at 6:21 PM by Supervising Wildlife Biologist David Kalb.

D. Kalb – Supervising Wildlife Biologist, (DK): DK introduced himself and announced he was there to officiate on behalf of Terrence Gray, Director of DEM.

This hearing is being conducted as to the Rules & Regulations under the authority of chapters 42-17.1; 20-15; 20-18; Rhode Island General Laws 20-1-2, 20-1-4, 20-1-8, 20-1-12, 20-1-13, 20-2-37, 20-2-35, and 1-8-1 pursuant to the procedural requirements of Chapter 42-35, "Administrative Procedures" of the General Laws of Rhode Island of 1956, as amended.

In accordance with the above referenced requirements, a public notice of this hearing was posted on the Secretary of State and DEM computer websites on April 13th, 2026, with a copy of the notarized affidavit of such posting attached to the record of this proceeding as **Exhibit #1** and **Exhibit #2**.

For this regulatory proceeding, pursuant to the requirements of Section 42-35 of the Rhode Island General Laws, DEM has made the following determinations. DEM has complied with the requirements of Section § 42-35.1-3 of the Rhode Island General Laws. The DEM has provided prior notice to the Governor's Office and the DOA of the proposed promulgation of these Rules & Regulations and none of these offices has notified DEM that it has identified any of these proposed regulations as one that may have a significant adverse economic impact on small businesses. Despite the above, DEM specifically requests comments on the proposal as to how the proposed regulations can be changed so that the adverse economic impact(s) can be minimized or eliminated.

The purpose of this hearing is to afford interested parties an opportunity to submit data, views, or arguments orally and/or in writing on the proposed Rules & Regulations. This hearing is not intended as a means of providing a forum for discussing, debating, arguing, or otherwise having any dialogue at the time with members of the Division.

The procedure we will use for those persons who wish to speak is as follows:

1. Please register at the table.
2. Speakers will be called in the order of registration.
3. Five (5) minutes was allowed for a presentation unless the number of speakers allows for additional time.
4. When your name is called, please:
 - a. Come to the podium; and identify yourself by name and affiliation, if any.
 - b. Make your presentation; and then
 - c. Provide a written copy of your statement for the record if one is available.

The Public Hearing comment period for the Hunting and Trapping Rules and Regulations will close of business (4pm) on May 20, 2026.

After the time has elapsed for the submission of written commentary has been closed the Department has three (3) options:

1. File the rules and regulations with the Secretary of State as is.
2. File the rules and regulations with minor changes.
3. Make additional amendments to the rules and regulations and hold a new public hearing.

If filed, the rules and regulations become effective twenty (20) days after filing and have the effect of law.

D. Kalb calls on Michael Woods:

Thank you, Dave. My name is Mike Woods. I'm here today on behalf of the New England Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA). Generally speaking we're supportive of all the changes that have been proposed in this year's regulatory cycle. But I wanted to highlight a couple of them. And I do have one change that I would suggest the Division consider. First, I want to speak in support of the changes to the deer hunting season structure. I think particularly there are two things that we are excited about here. The first one is just the general simplification of the season. Under the previous structure it was broken up there were weeks of down time between this type of hunting and that type of hunting and I think that the way this is proposed where it just kind of flows through is going to be easier for hunters to understand and its going to provide a better experience for hunters in the state of Rhode Island. We are also excited about bringing zone 1 and zone 2 into similar timeframe. I know that understanding the deer populations has been a long term project for the division and were very glad that the data has started to come back on that and the division is choosing to open up the inland and northern part of the state and east bay on a similar timeframe with the coastal area. I think that's going to be another thing that provides a better experience for the hunters of Rhode Island and at this point were glad to learn that presumably it's also supported by the science that the divisions doing to understand the deer population. Another change we are particularly excited about is the inclusion of a special veteran's waterfowl season. This is something that the federal government has authorized for a couple of years. It hasn't been a possibility for a long time. But the other states

have promulgated BHA has noticed this in other places and so for at least the last couple of years we've pushed the division to promulgate a similar season here. Were very glad to see that in this year's proposal. And this is something that for the veteran community we think is going to give them a couple opportunities as a simple thanks for their service to this country for active duty and veterans. We are also in support and excited about some of the clarifying language that's being added to the guide permit. As the Division knows this is a program the BHA urged the division to create for several years we were very glad that it was created during last year's regulatory cycle and we think that the changes that are included this year will help to make it a little bit more enforceable and hold people accountable who might be breaking the rules. The one clarification and I think this is, my hope is it would fall under category of minor changes that could be included, is a clarification as to whether hunting guides and potentially even first mates or additional helpers are a part of a hunting party whether they are inclusive to the statutory five person requirement for maximum hunting party size or whether they will be outside of that five person hunting party. I know that for some of the types of hunting we do in RI deer drives are I think are the one that's really the only place in the regulation right now that that statute is reflected that it's important to make that clarification but it's also not rare for duck hunting parties particularly on bigger boats that are pursuing sea ducks to run up against that 5 person limit. So, I think the division should make a determination and provide some regulatory clarity whether hunting guides are inclusive or whether exclusive of that 5-person statutory requirement. I do, I know I have a couple more days to submit written comments, I'm not going to put them in today, but BHA doesn't intend to put in written comments. That concludes my comment on behalf of BHA. If you would allow me to Dave, I'm also interested in submitting comments in a different capacity as a board member for the Narrow River Land Trust if I could.

D. Kalb: Absolutely.

M. Woods: Thank you. Again, Mike Woods, this time on behalf of the Narrow River Land Trust where I serve as a board member. The Narrow River Land Trust doesn't have a providence stance on anything in the hunting regulations but what we did want to put in the record as part of this year's regulatory process is that over the last year or so we have expressed an interest and we've worked with the fish and wildlife division to enroll one of our properties in the hunting co-op. We currently allow hunting on several of our properties but one of them in particular we felt was very suitable and appropriate for the hunting co-op largely because it has an established parking area and is adjacent to a current hunting co-op property that many of the members of the public frankly don't even realize that the two properties are owned separately because they share a tail system and you have the people go from one to the other freely. And for that reason, we worked with the division to go through the MOU process, get the signatures and notarizations, and things of that nature. So, that stuff is all I believe completed as of today and we are very hopeful that that can be included in this year's regulation as a minor change. The property is about 43 acres in the town of North Kingstown. As I mentioned we allow hunting on our properties we see that as an appropriate and efficient to help with the deer populations and the impact they have on our forest and through the hunting co-op program we are also interested in providing recreational opportunities to members of the public to come enjoy our property and that way, in addition to the many other ways, hiking and things of that nature, that they do currently so with that I thank you for the time to comment on behalf of both organizations.

D. Kalb calls on members from the public to see if there is anyone else who wishes to make public comment.

Jeff Gross: Yes. Jeff Gross, I'm a writer for Rhode Island news today dot com and New England outdoors. I want to thank you for coming up with the veterans hunting program. As a veteran myself, and I can speak for my fellow veteran's, we greatly appreciate that. And I would like to go on record endorsing and commending the fish and wildlife people, all of them, for the outstanding job they're doing. Apparently, I missed out on a spicy meeting at the Warwick Public Library but nonetheless you guys are doing a fantastic job, and I wanted to note that. Thank you.

Oral portion of the 2026-27 Hunting and Trapping Regulations closed at 6:33 PM.

DK states we will now enumerate all exhibits and received comments for the public record.

Exhibit 1: the "Affidavit of Posting" of the public notice of this hearing a public notice of this hearing was posted on the Secretary of State and DEM computer websites on April 13th, 2026.

Exhibit 2: a copy of the draft regulation.

Exhibit 3: Michale Woods public comment

Exhibit 4: Jeff Gross public comment

On behalf of the Department of Environmental Management and the Division of Fish & Wildlife, I would like to thank you for attending and for your comments. Since there are no further statements to be presented at this time, and since all interested parties present have been heard, I declare this public hearing is closed.

Public Hearing closed at 6:33 PM.

Transcribed by Melissa Curry.