

Rifle hunting for deer allowed Move OK'd in southern counties

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Hunters will be able to use rifles - including certain assault rifles - to stalk deer in southern Iowa next winter.

The expanded hunting season, proposed by the state Department of Natural Resources, went unopposed Tuesday by a state legislative panel, which could have delayed it from taking effect.

"This is a unique opportunity," DNR spokesman Terry Little told the Administrative Rules Review Committee.

The rifle hunting for does will be permitted only in the two southern tiers of Iowa counties, where the deer population has been leaping ahead.

Stretching the width of the state, the counties are generally hilly, heavily wooded and thinly populated - conditions officials say have boosted the deer population.

The new rules add seven days to the antlerless hunting season in January when rifle hunting is permissible in those counties. The statewide deer-hunting season begins in September.

By allowing hunters to use .24-caliber or larger rifles, the agency has expanded the arsenal available to hunt deer in Iowa. Bows, shotguns, muzzleloaders and handguns had been allowed.

Little said the AK-47 assault rifle, sold legally in many gun shops, is allowed if it is semi-automatic and contains only six bullets.

"No banana clips will be allowed," Little said in a reference to the bullet-holding clips often seen on the rifles in combat. "There will be Rambos out there, but the vast majority of hunters will be law-abiding."

Joe Royce, lawyer for the review committee, said there have been phone calls from people concerned about the safety of rifles, which have a long range.

"They believe a rifle is inherently dangerous and should not be used," he said.

Little said that the dangers are overstated and that most rifle bullets begin losing altitude as quickly as 400 yards out of the muzzle. No opponents of the rule spoke at the meeting.

Laverne Schroeder, former state legislator and lobbyist for the Iowa Sportmen's Federation, praised the expanded hunting rules.

"It's a step in the right direction," he said. "The DNR has gotten the message to get the deer population under control."

Rep. David Heaton, a Mount Pleasant Republican and member of the review committee, said rifle hunting will be a shot in the arm for the region.

"In Minnesota, they like to say, 'Come fish for walleyes,'" Heaton said. In Iowa, the appeal could be "hunt deer in the state," he said. "It will support business," he added.

Little said all adjoining states except Illinois allow deer hunting by rifle.

The Department of Natural Resources said printed information on the new deer season, along with most other hunting and trapping regulations and instructions, will be available in early September.

The Associated Press contributed to this article.

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