

2026-2027
HUNTING GUIDE
MARYLAND DISTRICT



Assateague Island National Seashore
National Park Service

INTRODUCTION

Public hunting within the boundaries of Assateague Island National Seashore (Seashore) is recognized as a recreational activity in the legislation that established the Seashore (*Public Law 89-195*). Regulations for hunting within the National Seashore are designed to provide a safe and meaningful experience for hunters.

Hunting is legal **only** in specifically designated areas of the Seashore and during specifically designated dates and times (36 CFR 1.5(f)). State and federal regulations governing hunting within the legislative jurisdiction of the Seashore include the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), Code of Federal Regulations (CFR 36 & 50), and United States Code (Title 54).

Note: Only those species listed in this plan may be hunted by the indicated weaponry during the designated season within the Maryland portion of Assateague Island National Seashore.

Hunting will be in accordance with the following special Assateague Island National Seashore regulations and applicable state regulations.

New for 2026-2027

- **Sunday Hunting is now open for all deer hunting seasons**
- **Deer hunters are no longer required to sign in or sign out when deer hunting within the National Seashore.**
- **Deer Hunters are no longer required to report their deer harvest(s) information to the National Park Service. Harvest reporting is still required by federal and state law to be reported to the State of Maryland's Department of Natural Resources. Deer hunters must report deer harvest information immediately upon kill or field tag harvested deer prior to moving the carcass from the field.**
- **Duck Hunters can continue to text their hunting locations for Boat-in Only zones. Hunters must include the following information in every text message:**
 - **Name,**
 - **Location,**
 - **DNR ID number**
 - **Waterfowl Harvest information**

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Hunting License:

A Maryland State Resident or Nonresident Hunting License (printed paper or electronic copy) with additional stamps for deer and waterfowl is required to hunt on the seashore. Licensing information can be found in the **2026-2027 Maryland Guide to Hunting & Trapping** or at <https://www.eregulations.com/Maryland/hunting/>

2. Southern Hunt Zone Vehicle Access:

An entrance pass is required when driving into the park's fee area. Passes can be purchased in advance through Recreation.gov or at the entrance booth when it is staffed. If the entrance booth is unstaffed, scan the QR code posted at the booth to purchase a pass.

An Oversand Vehicle Zone (**OSV**) **Permit is required** to enter the OSV Zone. Hunters who plan to drive on to the beach to access the Southern Hunt Zone must possess a valid OSV Zone permit **before** entry. Hunters without an OSV Permit are required **to walk** into the Southern Hunt Zone. Those hunters must park in the South Ocean Beach parking lot and walk 1/3 mile south along the Life of the Dunes trail until coming to the two-track dirt road where the hunt zone begins. "OSV Permits must be purchased online at Recreation.gov. Permits must be picked up at the North Beach Ranger Station within 10 days from the date of purchase. If you do not have access to the internet, an online application can be completed at the North Beach Ranger Station during business hours.

3. Southern & Northern Hunt Zone Boat Access:

Hunters may boat (motorized/nonmotorized) from the mainland into the Southern and Northern Hunt Zones.

4. Closures and Restrictive Project Areas:

Due to park research, management projects and species protection efforts, portions of the hunting area may be closed for the season or on a day-to-day basis. It is the hunter's responsibility to check with North Beach Ranger Station regarding possible closures. **Hunters are responsible for being aware of any closures in the hunting zone.** It is prohibited to enter and/or shoot into any signed or closed area.

5. Scientific Research:

Hunters are prohibited from interfering with scientific research within the Seashore. Fenced, posted and/or signed areas are not to be disturbed. Hunters should avoid moving or altering any study equipment, including PVC pipes, various posts, buckets, fencing, antennas or small cages. **If there is any doubt as to what an item is, leave it alone.** Researchers and other staff will be actively working at all hours in the field throughout the hunting season.

6. Parking Areas:

Hunting areas have designated parking areas. Parking areas are noted on the accompanying maps and are marked by signage in the field. Waterfowl hunters are to park in the designated locations and **not** in front of gates restricting road access.

DEER SEASON & BAG LIMITS

- Season takes are independent.
- Each season is separate. Takes during one open season **do not** count towards another season.
- All deer taken on Assateague Island **will not** count toward Maryland State bag limits.

Note: One (1) of the first two (2) Sika deer harvested under the bag limit for each independent season must be **antlerless**.

2026–2027 DEER SEASONS & BAG LIMITS – ANTLERED & ANTLERLESS DEER

Portions of Duck Seasons will be **closed** in the Southern Hunt Zone during the Late Season Hunt:

Season	Dates		Notes
Archery	<u>Northern and Southern Zone:</u> Oct. 1–Jan. 31 (Different than State of MD)	<u>Sika:</u> 2 antlered, 4 antlerless <u>White-tailed:</u> 1 antlered, 1 antlerless	Archery hunters must wear fluorescent orange during firearm seasons.
Muzzleloader	<u>Southern Zone:</u> Oct. 22–Oct. 31	<u>Sika:</u> 2 antlered, 4 antlerless <u>White-tailed:</u> 1 antlered, 1 antlerless	Inline, flintlock, percussion cap & matchlock
General Firearms Season	<u>Southern Zone:</u> Nov. 28- Dec 12	<u>Sika:</u> 2 antlered, 4 antlerless <u>White-tailed:</u> 1 antlered, 1 antlerless	Straight-walled cartridge rifles and muzzleloaders can be used during the Firearms Season.
Late Season Firearms	<u>Southern Zone:</u> Jan. 8– Jan. 10	<u>Sika:</u> 2 antlered, 4 antlerless <u>White-tailed:</u> 1 antlered, 1 antlerless	Bag limits are for Firearms even if taken by straight-walled cartridge rifles or muzzleloaders.
Junior Deer Hunt	<u>Southern Zone Only:</u> Nov. 14-15	<u>Sika & White Tailed:</u> 1 antlered, 1 antlerless	Refer to page 6

DEER HUNTING REGULATIONS

1. **Legal Shooting Hours:** 30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset.
2. **Antler Definitions:**
 - a) An **antlered white-tailed deer** is defined as a deer with two or more points to one antler, or a deer with one antler three or more inches long, measuring from the top of the skull as the deer is in life.
 - b) An **antler point** is defined as any antler projection one inch or more in length and includes the brow tine. The tip of the main beam is also considered a point.
 - c) An **antlerless white-tailed deer** is a female deer or a male deer with no antlers or spike antlers less than three inches in length, measuring from the top of the skull as the deer is in life.
 - d) An **antlered sika deer** is a deer with at least one antler visible above the hairline.
3. **Deer Tagging and Checking:**
 - a) Before moving a deer from the place of kill, complete a deer field tag at the place of kill in ink and attach it to the deer; **or**
 - b) Check in the deer at the place of kill and receive a confirmation number online via Maryland Outdoors Portal, that can be furnished upon request. If a confirmation number is obtained at the place of kill, the deer can be moved/transported untagged. (Place of kill is the location where the deer expired and was recovered.)
 - c) Hunters must register their deer through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' MD Outdoors licensing portal or by calling **888-800-0121**.
 - d) The Public Land Code for Assateague Island National Seashore is **585** and the County Code for Worcester County is **23**.
 - e) Deer must also be tagged when giving, putting, or leaving them in possession of another person or when left unattended; whether or not a confirmation number has been received.
4. Game Cameras are authorized to be utilized within the National Seashore. Game cameras can only be utilized from the first day of deer season until the last day of deer season.
5. **JUNIOR DEER HUNT DAY:** **November 14-15, 2026**

Junior Deer Hunt Days are for hunters age 16 or younger only. To hunt during this day:

- Junior hunters must have a hunting license or be exempt from the license requirement. Refer to the state of Maryland regulations.

- They must be accompanied in the field by an individual who: is 21 years old or older. Possesses a valid Maryland hunting license (an Apprentice Hunting License does not meet this requirement) or is exempt from hunting license requirements and must be unarmed.
- Junior Deer Hunt Days have a separate bag limit. Deer taken by junior hunters during these days do not count towards the regular Archery, Muzzleloader or Firearms seasons bag limits.
- Daily deer shooting hours for Junior Hunt Days are one half hour before sunrise to one half hour after sunset.
- Junior Deer Hunt Day will take place within the Southern Hunt Zone only.
- Hunters Orange is required for all hunters and companions.
- All park approved archery equipment, firearms and muzzleloaders can be used during the Junior Deer Hunt. See page 8 for additional information on approved weapons.

DEER HUNTING ZONES

The accompanying hunting maps show the designated hunting zones for Sika and White-tailed deer. Public hunting is prohibited in all of the hatch-marked areas unless otherwise indicated. Legal hunting areas are as follows:

1. SOUTHERN HUNT ZONE: Archery, Muzzleloader, and Firearms

a) Northern Boundary

The northern boundary of the deer hunting zone is the two-track dirt road that runs east to west and is located south of the Life of the Dunes trail. Hunting is permitted south of the two-track dirt road.

b) Southern Boundary

The southern boundary is the Maryland–Virginia State Line. A beach-to-bay fence line delineates the boundary.

c) Eastern Boundary

The white markers on the beach east of the primary dunes define the eastern boundary. These white markers also indicate the western limits of the OSV Zone. Hunters may not hunt east (ocean side) of these markers.

OSV users may not drive west (bayside) of these markers, except at designated crossings and routes. Parking west of these markers is prohibited unless it is in a designated parking area. The hunting zone is primarily accessed by vehicles which have a valid OSV permit. Hunters without an OSV Permit are required to walk into the Southern Hunt Zone. Hunters must park in the “South Ocean Beach” parking lot and walk 1/3 mile south along the Life of the Dunes trail until coming to the two-track dirt road where the hunt zone begins. Before entering or exiting the hunting area, hunters must unload their weapons.

2. NORTHERN HUNT ZONE: ARCHERY ONLY

a) **Northern Boundary:** The northern boundary is the Ocean City Inlet. Archery hunting is permitted south of the inlet.

b) **Southern Boundary:** The southern boundary is the dirt road that runs east to west (towards Blind A) from the clam shell road. This is also the jurisdictional boundary between Assateague Island NS and Assateague State Park. Hunter parking is available along this dirt road.

c) **Eastern Boundary:** The eastern boundary is marked by the wooden kilometer posts that run north to south from the Ocean City Inlet along the dune line to the southern boundary.

The northern 10 kilometers (6 miles) of Assateague Island National Seashore that lies north of Assateague State Park to the Ocean City Inlet is too flat and narrow to permit the use of firearms. This portion of the island is designated as an **archery only** Sika and White-tailed deer hunting area. These 10 northern kilometers are open to hunters to walk-in from the southern boundary or boat-in from the mainland. Walk-in hunters are prohibited from driving in to retrieve game.

FLUORESCENT CLOTHING REQUIREMENTS

For Deer Hunt (Firearm Season(s))

1. Archery hunters in the Southern Hunt Zone will be required to wear fluorescent clothing during the Firearms and Muzzleloader Seasons.
2. When hunting, both hunters and companions **must wear either:**
 - a) A **cap of solid daylight fluorescent orange or pink** color worn as an outer garment on the head at all times.
 - b) A **vest or jacket containing** back and front panels of at least 250 square inches each of solid daylight fluorescent orange or pink color worn as an outer garment at all times **or**
 - c) An **outer garment of camouflage daylight fluorescent orange or pink** worn above the waist which contains at least 50% daylight fluorescent color.

Note: Persons **hunting from a ground blind** that has four sides, a top, and is placed four (4) feet or less above the ground **must display** – on or within 25 feet of the blind – a cap of solid daylight fluorescent orange or pink color, or a panel band, strip, or garment containing at least 250 square inches (approx. 16 inches x 16 inches) of solid **daylight fluorescent orange or pink** color.

FIREARMS

All firearms to include straight-walled cartridge rifles, shotguns and muzzleloaders are approved to be used during Firearms Season(s). All firearms must comply with the State of Maryland hunting regulations.

The Following are *Prohibited* for all Deer Firearm Season(s):

- The use of air guns to take game.
- Use or possession of buckshot.
- Using laser sights.
- Hunting with a shotgun–rifle combination.
- Use of rifle calibers considered bottleneck cartridges.
- Hunting with handguns of any kind. Muzzle-loading handguns are not permitted during Muzzleloader Season.
- Discharging any weapon for a purpose other than hunting, except for making a muzzleloader safe at the end of an unsuccessful hunt.
- When exiting any hunting zone, weapons **must** be unloaded (including the magazine or bolt), cased, and stored in a manner that will prevent their ready use.

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

1. Constructing or using permanent blinds or tree stands.
2. Hunters may use portable hunting stands that do not damage vegetation; however, stands and ground blinds must be removed at the end of each hunting day.
3. Using “screw in” steps.
4. Using trail- and route-marking devices such as reflective tacks and flagging.
5. Cutting, thinning, pruning, removing, or damaging any vegetation.
6. Dogs cannot be used to hunt deer.
7. Pursuing, shooting, shooting at, lying in wait for, or killing any deer within 300 yards of a waterfowl blind or a waterfowl hunter during the Waterfowl Season.
8. Baiting, hunting over an area known to be baited, and failing to report baiting (Deer and Waterfowl).
9. Driving deer: i.e., two or more hunters driving deer through an area towards stationary positioned hunters.
10. Failing to report all wounded deer to the Assateague Hunt Line. Hunters are required to make a concerted effort in locating (tracking) wounded game and are required to call or text **443-669-7039**.
11. Field dressing game in the campgrounds/developed areas of the park. The field dressing of game must be completed in the field.
12. Hunting from within 10 feet of the public access roads known as Fox Hills (kilometer 23.4) and Fox Hill Levels (kilometer 25.3) or discharging a weapon across the Fox Hills and Fox Hill Levels access roads within the Southern Hunt Zone.
13. Launching, landing, or operating an unmanned aircraft from or on lands and waters administered by the National Park Service within the boundaries of Assateague Island National Seashore is prohibited. Exceptions (e.g., model airplanes, quadcopters, drones) need to be approved in writing by the superintendent.

MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASON & BAG LIMITS

Only shotguns that are 10-gauge or smaller may be used to hunt migratory birds.
Shotguns must be plugged and cannot hold more than three (3) shells.
Nontoxic shot must be used.

2026 –2027 MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASONS & BAG LIMITS

Species	Open Season	Daily Bag Limit
Regular Duck Season	Nov. 14–Nov. 27 Dec. 15–Jan. 30 Certain Areas of the Southern Hunt Zone Closed On Jan 9-10 For Deer Hunt	6 ducks, no more than: • 4 mallards (only 2 hen) • 3 wood ducks • 1 scaup per day (2 per day Jan.9 – 30) • 2 redheads • 3 pintails • 2 canvasbacks • 2 black ducks • 1 fulvous tree duck • 1 mottled duck • 4 sea ducks: no more than 3 scoters, 3 long-tailed ducks or 3 eiders. (Only 1 eider hen). All other species of ducks may be taken up to the 6 duck limit. In addition to the duck bag limit, 15 coots may be taken per day.
Black Duck Season	Nov. 14–Nov. 27 Dec. 15–Jan. 30	2 black ducks
Youth, Veteran & Military Waterfowl Hunt	Nov. 7 & Feb. 6	Refer to page 12

2026–2027 GOOSE AND BRANT SEASONS & BAG LIMITS

Species	Open Season	Daily Bag Limit
Atlantic Brant	Dec. 28–Jan. 30	1
Light Goose	Nov. 14–Nov. 27 Dec. 15–Jan. 30	25
Migratory Canada Goose Atlantic Population	Nov. 24–Nov. 27 Dec. 15–Jan. 30	2

MIGRATORY GAME BIRD REGULATIONS

1. **Legal Shooting Hours:** Shooting hours are 30 minutes before sunrise to sunset.
2. **Hunter Registration:**
 - a) All duck hunters and observers accompanying hunters are required to sign in and sign out at the Hunter Registration building each time they enter or leave the hunting zone (except designated Boat-in only sites).
 - b) Hunters must be physically present in the blind/area they signed-in for.
 - c) All persons accompanying hunters and not hunting should write the word "Observer" in the DNR ID number box.
 - d) **No more than three people**, including any observers, total in blinds or areas. Hunters may hunt outside of these blinds with three people but must be within 100 yards of the blind.

Note: **Hunters must report any wildlife taken.** Failure to properly check out of sites or report any wildlife taken may result in restricted or revoked hunting privileges, and/or fines.

3. **Designated Blind and Area Sites for Waterfowl:**
 - a) Most constructed blinds have been removed and replaced by PVC posts to delineate "Areas" to allow waterfowl hunters the use of portable blinds and anchored boats.
 - b) Designated hunting "Areas" will be identified by PVC posts marked with the number or letter.
 - c) Hunters **must hunt within 100 yards** of the marked post or blind (except Blind A). Rangers can provide information regarding the type of blind site or hunting areas.
4. **Assignment of Designated Blind and Area Sites:**
 - a) Hunters must register for all blinds and hunting areas in person at the Hunter Registration building **except** for the following Boat-in sites: Area F, Area G, Area 3, Area 6, Area 8, Area 19 (first-come, first-served).
 - b) Hunters cannot arrive before 4:00 am. Self-registration will take place in the Hunter Registration building on a first-come, first-serve basis.
 - c) Hunters wishing to switch blinds in the field can do so by contacting a ranger at North Beach Ranger Station via phone after 9:00 a.m., at **443-669-7039**. Hunters are required to speak to an employee at North Beach Ranger Station to switch. **Messages/voicemails are not a valid format for switching blinds.**
5. **Designated Boat-In Sites:** Area F, Area G, Area 3, Area 6, Area 8, Area 19 are designated as Boat-in sites and will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. Hunters boating into these sites are **not** required to sign-in. Hunters who take migratory game birds at these sites are required to call or text in their take at **443-669-7039**. A voicemail or text message must be left with your name, DNR ID number, and the species, sex and number of migratory game birds taken.
6. **Alternate Hunt Areas for Migratory Game Birds:** Two additional hunt areas (designated by PVC post) have been established along existing hunt area trails at Area C and Area 21. These additional hunt areas will provide more options for hunters, to adjust their location based on habitat, weather conditions and/or waterfowl movement. Accessibility will also be improved by the shorter distance to travel to reach the alternate locations.

Alternate sites are only available to hunters having designated primary hunt areas. For example, only hunters who have drawn or registered for Area 21 will be able to hunt Area 21 "alternate."

7. **Temporary Blinds:** Same day set up and removal of temporary (portable) blinds is permitted in designated hunting areas. Portable blinds or blind materials brought into Assateague Island National Seashore **must not** contain any forms of live or dead vegetation (i.e., Realgrass, Instagrass, Fastgrass, Raffiagrass, etc.). Camouflage cloth or material is recommended. **The use of common reed (*Phragmites australis*) is prohibited.**
8. **Blind A:** Is no longer available for reservations. This blind is first-come first-serve only. This allows an opportunity for other hunters to use the blind.

Youth, Veteran and Military Waterfowl Hunting Days – November 7, 2026 & February 6, 2027:

For hunters aged 16 or younger, military veterans (as defined in sect. 101 of Title 38, USC) of any age and members of the Armed Forces on active duty, including members of the National Guard and Reserves on active duty (other than for training). To hunt during these days' youth hunters, military veterans and active-duty personnel **must have a hunting license or be exempt** from the license requirement. Military Veterans and Active-Duty Military Personnel must also carry appropriate credentials identifying them as such and a printed receipt showing the proof of purchase of the 2026-2027 Maryland Migratory Game Bird Stamp and HIP certification. A Federal Migratory Bird and Conservation Stamp **is not required** for people **under 16 years of age**. The stamp, or proof of purchase of the stamp, **is required** for people **who are 16 years old**.

Youth waterfowl hunters **must be accompanied in the field** by a licensed (or exempt from license requirement) unarmed adult age 21 or older. The accompanying adult may not possess a hunting weapon and may not participate in other waterfowl seasons that are open on youth days. They may assist with decoys, call waterfowl and retrieve downed birds.

Note: Active-duty military and honorably discharged veterans at least 21 years old may possess hunting weapons and hunt while also providing assistance to eligible youth hunters.

Daily bag limit for the Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days are six (6) ducks, no more than:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| a) 4 mallards (only 2 hen) | i) 1 mottled duck |
| b) 3 wood ducks, | j) 4 sea ducks (no more than 3 scoters, |
| c) 2 redheads | 3 long-tailed ducks, or 3 eiders) |
| d) 3 pintails | k) 1 Canada geese |
| e) 2 scaup | l) 1 brant |
| f) 2 canvasbacks | m) 25 light geese |
| g) 2 black ducks | n) 15 coots |
| h) 1 fulvous tree duck | |

Waterfowl Hunting Regulations:

- a) Waterfowl shall be hunted only from within 100 yards of a numbered NPS-owned blind or numbered hunting area (except Blind A).
- b) Trained dogs are permitted for waterfowl retrieval but must be leashed elsewhere in the park.
- c) Hunters under 16 years of age must be accompanied by a licensed adult 21 years old or older.
- d) Hunters shall remove spent shells and garbage from the blind or hunting areas.
- e) Hunters using NPS-owned blinds or areas on the island shall enter and leave the hunting area via designated routes (refer to Hunt Map).
- f) The leaving of decoys or equipment at a blind site for the purpose of holding occupancy is prohibited.
- g) Shooting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

PUBLIC LANDS

Please remember that other recreational activities (e.g., backcountry camping, kayaking, bird watching, etc.) may be occurring in the same area and at the same time as hunting. Hunters must remain situationally aware while hunting on Assateague Island National Seashore and always remember there may be multiple uses occurring at the same time in the hunting zones.

ASSATEAGUE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information please visit: <https://www.nps.gov/asis/planyourvisit/hunting-at-assateague.htm>
and the "*Maryland Guide to Hunting and Trapping 2026-2027*" found at
<https://eregulations.com/maryland/hunting/>

For any questions on the hunting season regulations please contact
U.S. Park Ranger Andrew Brady
Hunting Program Coordinator at Assateague Island National Seashore
E-mail: Andrew_Brady@nps.gov

In case of an emergency dial 911
To report a violation call 757-898-0058

How to Contact Us
Assateague Island National Seashore
7206 National Seashore Lane
Berlin, MD 21811
www.nps.gov/asis

Approved By: _____ Date: _____
Superintendent, Assateague Island N.S.