

# New Enhancements to Hunter Reporting

When hunters report their hunting activities and harvest, it is an effective and efficient way for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) to collect critical information that supports wildlife management. The information that hunters provide complements the Ministry's other monitoring programs. Together, both streams of information help us understand wildlife population trends. Hunter information also supports wildlife research, the modeling of populations and the development of harvest quotas. The Ministry greatly values the information that hunters contribute and sees it as a fundamental input to managing sustainable wildlife populations.

Ontario depends on the information provided by hunters to support management decisions for many game species, often where there is a relatively high demand for hunting opportunities. While hunter reports continue to support sustainable management decisions, response rates from Ontario hunters have generally declined over time with many surveys having less than 50% response from hunters. High response rates from hunters lead to more reliable results and more optimum level of hunting opportunities that best reflect what wildlife populations can support.

Many other jurisdictions use hunters' reporting results to support wildlife management. They use a variety of collection methods to gather the information from hunters. Wildlife agencies are increasingly moving to electronic collection methods, including the internet and telephone. These types of electronic or automated collection channels are expected to be more convenient for hunters, help improve response rates and allow for more timely collection of information. With quicker turn around times, the Ministry can share the results with hunters sooner and undertake more timely harvest planning and communication of future quotas to hunters. Other jurisdictions have implemented incentives and penalties to boost response rates. These may include incentives and draws for prizes (e.g. offer draws for big game tags, gift certificates or equipment) for those that provide reports in a timely manner, as well as fines and system-administered penalties for not reporting.

Ontario is seeking to enhance and modernize hunter reporting through the new licensing system to collect critical information required to support sustainable management of harvested species. The Ministry wants to ensure hunters have easy ways to provide their important observations by making system changes to enable a new, convenient means of communicating and submitting information.

## Key Proposed Changes

- Require all hunters that purchase a licence/tag (whether they hunt or not) to provide information on hunting activity and harvest for black bear, moose, elk, white-tailed deer, wild turkey and wolf/coyote (where tags/seals are required).
- Maintain requirements for tourist outfitters and non-resident hunters to report black bear harvest and hunting activity and establish reporting requirements in regulation for non-resident moose hunters and tourist outfitters.
- Require hunter reports be submitted to MNRF within 14 days of the end of the hunting season.
- Move to hunter reporting by personal computer, smartphone or telephone systems and eliminate reporting by mail.
- Simplify the information that is collected where possible.
- Consider incentives (e.g. entry in draws for prizes) that could be offered to encourage hunters to report or to provide other key information (e.g. black bear teeth) that is not collected through the licensing system.
- Consider a phased in approach to administering system penalties when a hunter does not complete the required reports (e.g., prevent the purchase of a license or licenses for one year). This approach would be in addition to existing set fines for non-reporting offences that may also be applied.

## Potential Path Forward

The new licensing system is expected to be fully implemented beginning in 2019. If approved, the Ministry would seek to phase-in the hunter reporting changes in 2019 and beyond to ensure hunters are well informed and prepared. This could include a first year of increased communications and notices of non-compliance before any system-administered penalty in future years (e.g. preventing the purchase of a licence if the hunter has not completed the required report).

Prior to implementation and once fully operational the new licensing system will include opportunities for direct communications with hunters (e.g. to those who share email addresses) to remind them of reporting requirements, deadlines and consequences for not reporting.

Enhanced communications on the new hunter reporting approach would be provided online and in the hunting regulation summary to ensure all hunters are aware of when and how to report their hunting information.

The proposed approach would support more timely collection of data and wildlife management decisions. It would also facilitate prompt reporting of hunting season results back to hunters and the public.

The Ministry will continue to work with stakeholders to gather additional input on a number of details associated with this proposed enhancements, including potential incentives and hunter perspectives.