


# Unwritten (until now) RULES OF HUNTING AND TRAPPING

By Brandon Butler



**In most sports there seem to be as many unwritten rules as written ones. In football, for example, there's the unwritten rule that defense wins championships when in reality it's whoever scores the most points. In basketball, some will say if there's no harm, there's no foul. And baseball players are told never to throw behind a runner or to mention a no-hitter when it's in progress.**

Hunting and trapping in Indiana is a privilege available to residents and non-residents provided they follow rules and regulations outlined in this guide.

As important as these rules and regulations are, they are just the beginning of ethical behavior for hunters and trappers. In the end, it is up to individuals to be considerate of one another and the general public.

The following guidelines – or unwritten rules – were compiled from interviews with hunters and trappers just like you.

While they may not apply to every situation, they deserve serious consideration in most.

**Spread out.** While there is no legally required distance of separation necessary for hunters, remember this rule of thumb: If you can see another hunter, you're probably too close.

**Ride with respect.** ATVs and other off-road vehicles can help hunters, but they also can quickly ruin another's time in the woods. If you know someone else is hunting in an area, avoid riding until the other hunter has left.

**First-come, first-served.** If you arrive at a location you intended to hunt or trap and

someone else is there, move on. Don't try to squeeze in. Always have a reserve location.

**Know your neighbors.** Get to know others who hunt or trap adjoining lands. When tracking wounded game, establish parameters with neighbors. Don't enter private land without first obtaining permission from a party responsible for the land or from a conservation officer.

**Respect personal property.** If it's not your tree stand, trail camera, trap or other equipment, leave it alone.

**Be aware of your surroundings.** Before pulling the trigger, know what's beyond your target, over the hill and on the other side of the woods. Never shoot in the direction of a visible person, building, road or vehicle. A slug or bullet may ricochet or travel much farther than you anticipate.

**Promote a positive image.** Avoid traveling through town with a dead deer on the roof or hood of your vehicle. Consider the message that might send to non-hunters and children. Do not enter stores or restaurants with blood on your hands. Avoid sharing graphic details of your hunt within public earshot. Respecting non-hunters may keep them from becoming anti-hunters.

**Have concern for conservation.** A bag limit of five doesn't mean you have to kill that many. Never take more than you can use. Judge time in the field by experiences rather than the number of animals you take home.

**Don't hog the area.** If you share land with other hunters or trappers, don't try to keep the area for yourself by placing stands or traps all over. Develop a strategy with other users to encourage equal satisfaction from time spent hunting or trapping.

**Leave no trace.** Beyond the obvious rule of not littering, go the extra mile to minimize your impact on the surroundings. Make no ruts in roads or fields. Don't shoot holes in signs or trees. Avoid crushing fences or gates – don't climb on them. Retrieve spent shells or cartridges and carry them out with you. Cut down as few trees or tree branches as possible to clear shooting lanes.

Be proud of being a sportsman or sports-woman, but remember your actions will affect how others perceive all hunters and trappers. Act accordingly.

**Brandon Butler** is a public affairs specialist for the DNR Division of Communications.

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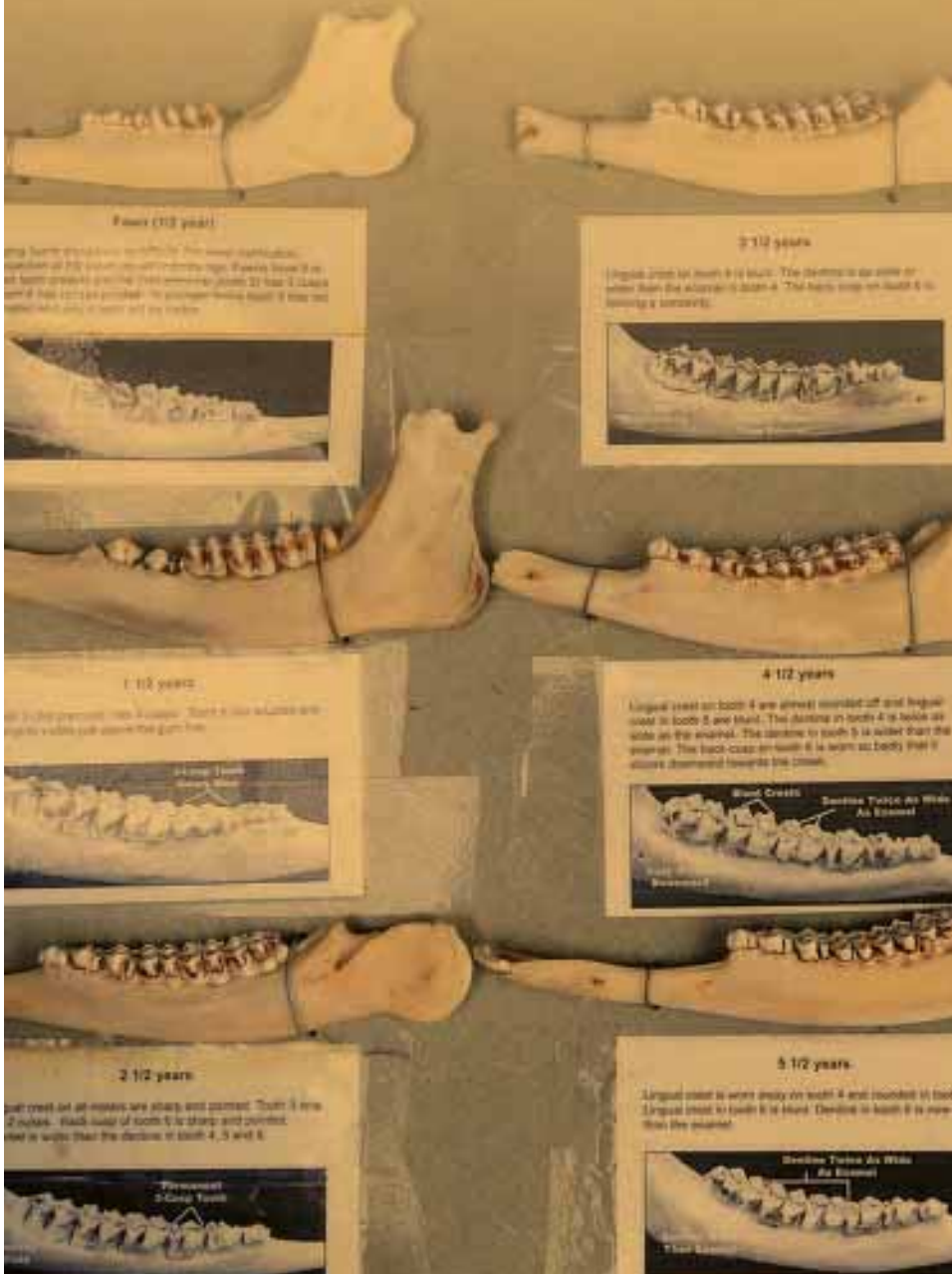
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# THE SCIENCE BEHIND HUNTING

By Brandon Butler

## Aging Deer By Tooth



Ever wonder why the state bag limit for rabbits is five? Or why the daily limit for quail is eight if you're south of Indiana 26 but five when north of that state highway? The reason is science.

"Scientific study of wildlife is the foundation for wise management decisions that help ensure sustainability of wildlife resources," said Glen Salmon, former director of the DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife, now with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Less than a century ago, deer loomed like ghosts in the deepest, darkest corners of the state. Seeing a deer track was a big deal. Turkeys had vanished, and bison drifted to memory. For generations, Hoosier hunters had no in-state opportunities to pursue big game.

Building on the vision of early conservation pioneers like Theodore Roosevelt and Aldo Leopold, DNR wildlife biologists have used continuous research and study to try to ensure that wildlife will never again suffer such a fate.

Proof of these biologists' work is evident. Deer populations thrive, wild turkeys are a major success story of reintroduction, and small game species are stable. These days, hunters and general wildlife enthusiasts can enjoy encouraging opportunities in every county.

DNR wildlife biologists and property managers have a primary professional responsibility to study and monitor wildlife, which is a never-ending process.

Most hunters understand the vital role hunting plays in controlling game animal populations. What may confuse some hunters and other wildlife enthusiasts is the reasoning behind how the DNR determines and sets game laws, including season dates and bag limits. Take turkey hunting seasons for example.

Indiana's first wild turkey season was in 1970. Six turkeys were killed. Harvest num-

District wildlife biologist, Dean Zimmerman, examines the lower teeth of a deer taken in Tippecanoe County to determine its age. Each fall biologists take information from hundreds of deer taken by hunters that aids in understanding our deer herd and the setting of bag limits.

## ...we are making decisions that can have long-term impacts on wildlife populations ...

bers reached triple digits in 1984, with 104 killed, and hit the thousands in 1989, with 1,359. In 2008, 12,814 were killed—956 during the spring youth season, 11,248 during the regular spring season, and 610 during the fall season.

The successful reintroduction of wild turkey to Indiana has been a long, steady process of improvement rooted in scientific management. Biologists have carefully monitored individual counties and set hunting regulations based on population sustainability and growth.

In 2005, Indiana instituted a fall turkey hunting season. Biologists said the state turkey population was ready.

“A fall turkey hunting season in a state with a healthy, thriving turkey population, such as Indiana, allows additional hunting opportunity without adverse impacts,” DNR turkey and grouse biologist Steve Backs said.

Waterfowl regulations differ because they are controlled by a joint effort between the federal government and the state. The Indiana DNR controls which properties allow waterfowl hunting, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determines season dates and bag limits, consulting with state biologists and using research conducted at the state level.

“Waterfowl banding efforts and reported band returns have been integral in determining goose movement patterns,” DNR wildlife chief Wayne Bivans said. “This information has been key in the setting of the September and February goose seasons.”

With so many different types of hunters and so many different interest groups concerned about specific laws and regulations, it’s impossible to satisfy everyone. The DNR considers hunter preferences, using social science, as long as the desired result does not negatively affect wildlife. Take, for instance, the one-buck rule.

The DNR seeks to provide a positive hunting experience for all. The DNR hears and acts upon concerns of hunters, anglers and general wildlife enthusiasts, if they make biological sense.

After years of listening to some deer hunters’ perception that Indiana needed to improve the age class of its male deer, the DNR instituted a bag limit of one antlered buck per year.

“In Indiana, studies based on yearly averages show about 55 percent of all licensed deer hunters do not shoot a deer,” Indiana deer biologist Chad Stewart said. “Of the



At each biological check station, biologists remove the retro-pharyngeal gland from 10 randomly selected deer to have them tested for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). To date CWD has not been detected in over 10,000 samples tested.

deer hunters who are successful in taking an animal, around 65 percent shoot only one deer.”

The result of combining the one-buck rule with the antlerless tag policy has produced a harvest ratio close to one male to one female. Given this equal birth ratio and a nearly equal kill ratio, it’s easy to see why Indiana is close to having a balanced deer herd.

“Antlered to antlerless (ratio) harvest is about 1 to 1.55. Male (including button bucks) to female harvest ratio is 1 to 1.03, or nearly 1 to 1. It is a common misconception with hunters to think the sex ratio is off, but they fail to account for button bucks,” Stewart said.

Other species, such as ruffed grouse, are not faring as well.

“Grouse populations have declined over 90 percent in the last 25 years and they are currently disappearing from portions of their range in Indiana,” DNR wild game biologist Steve Backs said.

Loss of proper habitat is the main cause. Grouse thrive in early succession forest, commonly described as thickets. Natural disturbances, such as windstorms or firestorms, historically ensured occurrences of these new-growth areas. As man intrudes farther into nature’s control of the land, these areas have become scarce.

“In forest ecosystems, natural resource professionals have the knowledge to use timber harvests to mimic disturbance effects to accomplish habitat diversity objectives, but not to the level needed to meet the needs of historic populations,” Backs said.

Urban sprawl and clean farming have eliminated large portions of preferred grouse habitat. Biologists are working hard to create new areas conducive to grouse, while protecting what remains of their



original habitat.

The science behind hunting delves much deeper than most who take to the woods and water realize. Biologists work every corner of Indiana to protect and enrich wildlife, as well as the habitat necessary to sustain its existence.

“Hunting has deep roots in science,” Salmon said. “Science has to come first. Above all, we must remember that we are making decisions that can have long-term impacts on wildlife populations entrusted to us by all Hoosiers. Without scientifically based data, we would be unable to make sound management decisions regarding the future of wildlife populations.”

Next time you question a regulation, have confidence that sound scientific data support it. What’s in the best interest of wildlife, combined with what hunters’ desire, lies at the core of DNR hunting decisions.