ZONE X-12 and Area-Specific Archery Hunt A-20

2026 General Deer Hunting Information

(No Additional Hunts Scheduled)

GENERAL INFORMATION

This information sheet has been prepared to assist deer hunters applying for, or planning to hunt in, Zone X-12 located in portions of Mono County. The following information should be useful to hunters for archery season (A-20; Zone X-12 Archery Hunt), Zone X-12 general season, and any "additional hunts" within this geographic area. For more specific information or additional questions regarding this area, contact the following California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) office(s):

- **Inland Deserts Region (Region 6), Bishop Field Office** (760-872-1171).

REGULATIONS

Laws and regulations are designed to conserve wildlife and to provide for an equitable distribution of game mammals. All hunters should read and be familiar with the Current Hunting Regulations. Remember, if you are hunting on private property you must obtain, and have in your possession written permission to hunt on private property. Hunter trespass laws are strictly enforced.

NON-LEAD RESTRICTIONS

As of July 1, 2019, all hunters must use nonlead ammunition when taking any wildlife in California, except when hunting with a pellet rifle for approved species.

- CCR T14 250.1(d)(3) Effective July 1, 2019, it shall be unlawful to use, or possess with any firearm capable of firing, any projectile(s) not certified as nonlead when taking any wildlife for any purpose in this state.
- CCR T14 475(f) The take or attempted take of any nongame bird or nongame mammal with a firearm shall be in accordance with the use of nonlead projectiles and ammunition pursuant to Section 250.1 of these regulations.

For more information including a list of certified non-lead projectiles/ammunition that may be used in firearms for the taking of deer or other big game mammals, and links to other related topics, visit CDFW's Nonlead Ammunition in California web page.

DEER HARVEST REPORTING

USED AND UNUSED TAGS MUST BE REPORTED

Accurate harvest information is a crucial element in developing population estimates, tag quotas, assessment of current hunt programs, and in the development of new opportunities. Regulations require all deer hunters to submit a harvest report card (online or by mail) to CDFW. Any deer hunter who does not submit a harvest report for each deer tag issued will be required to pay a non-reporting fee upon application for the next hunt season.

Successful hunters are reminded to immediately fill out both portions of the tag and permanently mark the date of kill; record the appropriate "Unit Number" where the deer was killed; attach the tag to the antlers, or ear, if antlerless; have the tag validated and countersigned; and return the completed report card portion.

WHEN TO REPORT

Successful deer hunters must report the take of a deer within 30 days of harvest or by January 31 – whichever date is first. Unsuccessful deer hunters (including hunters that received a tag but did not hunt) must report that they were unsuccessful or did not hunt by January 31.

HOW TO SUBMIT A REPORT

- Online – Both successful and unsuccessful hunters are encouraged to submit their harvest reports online. Hunters will be able to report their hunt results online via CDFW's Online License Service. Hunters logging into the system will be able to view all their tags requiring reports. Reporting through the Online License Service is easy, fast, and convenient. When you report online, you receive instant confirmation that your harvest report card has been received and accepted. You must record the confirmation number in the space provided on the harvest report card and retain the harvest report card until March 1 of that year. Tags reported online must be surrendered to CDFW upon demand.
- By Mail – Any deer tag holder who does not submit a harvest report for their deer tag online, must return the report card portion to CDFW to the following address: CDFW – Wildlife Branch, P.O. Box 944209, Sacramento, CA 94299-0002.

ADDITIONAL DEER HUNTS

There are no additional deer hunts scheduled in Zone X-12.

OBTAINING DEER TAGS

Beginning in late 2010, CDFW began implementation of the new Automated License Data System (ALDS). Under this computer data system, all licenses, stamps, and tags are applied for, and issued through Internet Point-of-Sale terminals (IPOS) located at various CDFW license offices, over 1,400 license agents statewide or online at CDFW's

Licenses and Permits page. Under ALDS, much less paperwork is required to apply for, and receive tags. In addition, licenses, tags, and entry into the Big Game Drawing can all be accomplished with one trip to a license agent. Once your personal information is entered and stored in the database, the database controls and tracks what you have applied for, or been issued, as well as preference points. For more specific information on ALDS, application procedures and zone/hunt information, check out the current Big Game Hunting Digest available online at: CDFW's California Hunting Digest page.

For deer tag distribution purposes, zones and hunts are classified based upon the date in which the zone or hunt tag quota is filled in the prior year. The three tag categories include:

1) "**Premium**" zone/hunt tags are only issued through the Big Game Drawing using a First-Deer Tag Drawing Application, except that junior hunters may use their Second-Deer Tag Drawing Application to apply for Apprentice (J) Hunts. Hunters will lose all accumulated deer preference points if drawn for their first choice in the Big Game Drawing;

2) "**Restricted**" zone/hunt tags are available upon application with a First-Deer Tag, or a Second-Deer Tag after August 1; and

3) "**Unrestricted**" zone/hunt tags are available at any time using either a First- or Second-Deer Tag.

For Zone X-12 and associated hunts within the zone, the tag categories are as follows:

1) **Premium** Deer Hunts – **X-12, A-20.**

2) **Restricted** Deer Hunts – None.

3) **Unrestricted** Deer Hunts – None.

General Season Tags (Zone X-12): The deer hunting regulations specific to Zone X-12 and any additional hunts are listed at the end of this sheet. To hunt deer during the general season in Zone X-12, a hunter must possess a Zone X-12 tag. This tag is valid

in Zone X-12, but only during the prescribed general season. Zone X-12 tags may not be used to hunt deer during the Hunt A-20 archery season, even with archery equipment.

Archery Season Tags (Hunt A-20): To hunt deer during the archery season in Zone X-12, hunters must possess an Area-Specific Archery Hunt A-20 tag. This tag is only valid during the Hunt A-20 archery season and may not be used to hunt deer during the general zone season, even with archery equipment. Additionally, Archery Only Tags (AO Tags) are not valid in any X zone or archery hunt within an X zone.

Typically, tags for additional deer hunts are in high demand and distributed through CDFW's Big Game Drawing held in June. To receive tags for many of these hunts, hunters must plan ahead and apply before the midnight **June 2, 2026 deadline**. Information regarding application procedures and restrictions, ALDS, zone and hunt seasons, prior year drawing and hunt statistics are contained in the 2026 Big Game Hunting Digest available online at CDFW's California Hunting Digest page.

HARVEST INFORMATION

Information on deer harvest for this area is available in tables contained on the Department's Deer Harvest Data page. For the purpose of applying for hunts in a specific area, tables containing harvest success, antler class information, and Big Game Drawing statistics are the most useful in selecting a zone or hunt in which to apply. The harvest tables found on this web page may also contain more recent harvest analyses than information contained in the Big Game Hunting Digest due to the early production deadline dates for the publication.

LAND OWNERSHIP/PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

The majority of Zone X-12 is public land administered by the Toiyabe National Forest (USFS) or Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Large tracts of private land occur within

the zone primarily within the Bridgeport Valley, Bodie Hills, Sonora Junction, and Antelope Valley areas. For information regarding these lands, contact the following:

USFS Offices:

Inyo National Forest, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 200, Bishop, CA 93514 (760-873-2400).

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Bridgeport Ranger District, HCR Box 1000, Bridgeport, CA 93517 (760-932-7070).

BLM Offices:

Bishop Field Office, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100, Bishop, CA 93514 (760-872-5000).

Popular and well-known geographic features in the zone include the eastern Sierra Nevada and its numerous rivers, creeks, and lakes. Some of these drainages include Virginia Creek, Green Creek, Robinson Creek, East Walker River, Buckeye Creek, Molyebdnite Creek, Little Walker River, and the West Walker River. Other well-known areas include the Bodie Hills, Sweetwater Mountains, Bridgeport Valley, Antelope Valley, and the Slinkard and Little Antelope Valley Wildlife Areas.

In Zone X-12 and other zones throughout California, additional deer hunting opportunities may exist on private property licensed through the Department's Private Lands Management Program (PLM). For more information on the PLM and to obtain a list of participating ranches, visit CDFW's PLM web page.

MAPS

For general maps detailing individual zone or additional deer hunt boundaries, visit CDFW's Deer Hunting web page.

The most comprehensive map of the area is the Toiyabe National Forest map. USFS maps are available locally at most USFS offices; by contacting the USFS Pacific Southwest Regional Office at: 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, CA 94592 (707-562-8737); or ordered by phone (406-329-3024), fax (406-329-3030), or mail at USDA Forest Service,

National Forest Store, P.O. Box 8268, Missoula, MT 59807; or online at the National Forest Map Store website.

BLM surface management maps may also be useful. The Bridgeport Valley and the Excelsior Mountains BLM maps are good sources. These maps can be purchased at local BLM district offices; the BLM at 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623, Sacramento, CA 95825 (916-978-4400); or online at BLM's California Maps web page.

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps are very helpful, especially for topographic features that are not displayed on USFS or BLM maps. The Bridgeport California-Nevada 1:100,000-scale topographic map is a preferred choice of many outdoorsmen. The Walker Lake, Nevada-California and the Mariposa, California 1:250,000-scale topographical maps also include the zone. Some specific 7.5-minute quadrangle maps of the zone are Twin Lakes, Bridgeport, Bodie, Kirkwood Spring, Fales Hot Springs, Pickle Meadow, Dunderberg Peak, Sawmill Ridge, Big Alkali, Dome Hill, Buckeye Ridge, Matterhorn Peak, Mount Jackson, Mount Patterson, Chris Flat, Lost Cannon Peak, Tower Peak, Coleville, and Wolf Creek. USGS maps may be available from many sporting goods, backpacking or engineering stores; by contacting the USGS directly at: Rocky Mountain Mapping Center, Branch of Information Services, Box 25286, Denver, CO 80225 (888-ASK-USGS); or online at the USGS Store website.

ACCESS/MAJOR ROADS

U.S. Highway 395 is the primary route of access through Zone X-12. This major highway bisects the zone in a north-south direction, passing through the communities of Coleville, Walker, and Bridgeport. Other major highways within the zone that can be accessed from Highway 395 include Highway 167 (Pole Line Road), Highway 108 (Sonora Pass Road), Highway 89 (Monitor Pass Road), Highway 270 (Bodie Road), and Highway 182 (Yerington Road). These highways provide access to numerous improved and unimproved dirt roads (Forest Routes) that penetrate portions of the zone's interior. Many areas of quality deer habitat located on public lands are readily accessible by vehicle using these forest routes. These routes are depicted on the

Toiyabe National Forest Bridgeport Ranger District Map and topographic maps of the area.

WEATHER CONDITIONS/TRAVEL TIPS

The weather in this region is highly variable, so BE PREPARED. Warm days and cold nights with below freezing temperatures are common during the first half of the season. During the latter half of the season, cool days and cold nights are the general rule, with snow often developing at the higher elevations. Thunder showers are common. You should be prepared with appropriate clothing and equipment for a variety of weather conditions.

Zone X-12 encompasses a large geographic area with topography ranging from flat in the lower elevation valleys to very steep and rocky in the higher mountains of the Sierra Nevada. Most services are located within the various towns scattered along the base of the Sierra Nevada escarpment, including Lee Vining, Mammoth Lakes, Bridgeport, Walker, Coleville, and Bishop. Hunters are advised to have full gasoline tanks when entering the field and to carry snow chains, shovel, serviceable spare tire, and extra food and water. Four-wheel-drive vehicles should be used when traveling on unimproved roads within the zone. Be sure to use extra caution when driving off-road, and check with USFS or BLM regarding any vehicle travel restrictions that may be in place.

CAMPING

There are numerous campgrounds located on public lands within Zone X-12, many of which are open until the end of October. Mono County has a wide variety of camping opportunities on USFS, BLM, and county lands. For campground information contact the USFS (Toiyabe National Forest 760-932-7070), BLM (Bishop Office 760-872-5000); or for Mono County campgrounds, the Department of Parks and Recreation, 74 School Street North, Bridgeport, CA 93517 (760-932-5440). Overnight camping is not allowed on Los Angeles Department of Water and Power lands.

For areas where dispersed camping is allowed, you need to obtain a California Campfire Permit for the use of any open flame (including gas stoves, lanterns, wood fires, charcoal fires, or smoking). These permits can be obtained at no cost from any National Forest Ranger Station, BLM office, or Visitor Center. Open flame of any kind may be restricted during times of high fire danger; check with the local Forest Service office for current restrictions.

Please, DO NOT camp or hunt for prolonged periods near water sources important to wildlife and livestock. Remaining for over 30 minutes and within 200 yards of an artificial water source, including guzzlers or horizontal wells on public lands within California, is a Fish and Game violation (Title 14, Section 730). You can pack water, wildlife can't.

HERD CONDITIONS AND HABITATS

The deer population in Zone X-12 is considered to be stable to slightly decreasing, yet considerably below levels seen in the late 1960's and 1970's. As with most deer herds in California and other western states, the long-term population trend has been on a steady decline since the 1960's and 1970's. These long-term declines have been due to land management practices that have precluded fire, resulting in changes toward more mature and less diverse habitats, and reduced quality and quantity of deer habitats. Short-term fluctuations in deer populations are usually attributed to weather events that affect forage production and the availability of water.

The subspecies of deer inhabiting Zone X-12 is the Rocky Mountain mule deer. The deer herds found within the boundaries of Zone X-12 are the Mono Lake, East Walker, and West Walker Deer Herds. Deer in Zone X-12 are migratory, spending summers at higher elevations (7,500-11,000 feet) in the Sierra Nevada and winters at lower elevations (5,000-7,500 feet) in both the northeastern portion of Mono County, California, and the western Douglas and Lyon counties in Nevada. Deer migration between these winter and summer ranges occurs twice annually, once during spring and then again in the fall.

Migrations generally follow traditional routes oriented along major topographic features,

such as drainages or the bases of mountain ranges. Fall migration back to the winter range is generally patterned by snowstorms and freezing temperatures at the higher elevations. This migration generally begins in late October and follows the same traditional routes used by deer in the spring. During heavy fall snowstorms, deer will migrate together from the summer range, often making the trip to the winter range in just a few days. As the snowline lowers and the days become progressively shorter, deer concentrate on the winter range for the breeding season, which begins in mid-November. During the cold winter months, deer survive on their stored fat reserves and a subsistence diet composed mainly of a few select shrubs. Deer remain on the winter range until mid-April, after which they begin their spring migration to the higher elevations.

Deer in Zone X-12 occupy an ecologically diverse zone, supporting a variety of deer habitats distributed across elevations ranging from 5,000-11,000 feet. The zone comprises winter, summer, and transition ranges; however, during the archery and general hunting seasons, most deer are concentrated on the summer range. Some of the more conspicuous habitat types occupied by deer on the summer range include Great Basin sagebrush, pinyon-juniper woodland, Jeffrey pine forest, montane chaparral, montane riparian forest, quaking aspen, and subalpine conifer forest.

Great Basin sagebrush scrub is the dominant habitat type throughout many areas of the zone, including Conway Summit, Bodie Hills, the northern slope of the Sweetwater Mountains, and the Sonora Junction area, which includes Bircham and Wheeler Flats. This habitat type supports numerous shrub species that provide quality forage and cover for deer, including big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, snowberry, and gooseberry. Pinyon-juniper woodland habitat occurs in association with Great Basin sagebrush scrub on mid-elevation deer transition and summer ranges located on the north side of the Bodie Hills, the Mount Jackson area, the lower elevations of the Sweetwater Mountains, and the mountains adjacent to the communities of Walker, Coleville, and Topaz. Pinyon pine and western juniper, the dominant tree species, provide important thermal and security cover for deer. Jeffrey pine is a dry land forest habitat that dominates vegetation on Sawmill Ridge, near lower Twin Lakes, and many

of the major drainages that flow east from the Sierra Nevada. Jeffrey pine habitat typically supports understory shrubs that provide nutritious browse for deer.

Montane chaparral habitat occurs primarily along the eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevada and in the Sweetwater Mountains at elevations ranging from 7,000-9,000 feet. This habitat type supports a variety of shrubs that provide deer with nutritious summer browse and dense concealment cover. Some of these shrub species include antelope bitterbush, mountain whitethorne, curlleaf mountain mahogany, tobacco brush, and bittercherry. Montane riparian forest is a tree-dominated habitat occurring along the many stream courses that flow east from the Sierra Nevada Crest. Common tree species associated with riparian forest habitat include quaking aspen, lodgepole pine, black cottonwood, and Jeffrey pine. This habitat type also supports various shrubs that provide important forage and cover for deer, including willow, wildrose, and gooseberry. Quaking aspen habitat occurs in scattered, small groves located throughout the Bodie Hills, Sweetwater Mountains, and the east slope of the Sierra Nevada. This important habitat type is heavily used by deer for cover and nutritious forage. Subalpine conifer forest is dominated by a mixture of evergreen tree species that occur at higher elevations of the summer range along the Sierra Nevada and in the Sweetwater Mountains.

Water is generally well distributed throughout Zone X-12, especially to the west of Highway 395 along the Sierra Nevada escarpment from the Virginia Lakes drainage, north to Sonora Pass. The multitude of streams and seeps that flow from the Sierra Nevada Crest not only provide water during the warm summer months, but also support the lush forage conditions favored by deer. Habitat conditions to the east of Highway 395 are generally much drier; water is primarily isolated to the meadows and small drainages within the Bodie Hills and the Sweetwater Mountains. Along with the occasional spring or seep, stock watering tanks in Bodie Hills and Sweetwater Mountains also provide important water sources for deer on the summer range.

HUNTING TIPS AND WHERE TO LOOK FOR DEER

Successful hunters often spend a considerable amount of time scouting pre-season, locating individual or groups of deer, recently used deer trails, and feeding and bedding areas. You may not see many deer from the roads in this area and, generally, the more successful hunters do more hiking to locate deer. Binoculars and/or spotting scopes can be very helpful for locating and identifying deer at greater distances. In general, attempt to hunt areas that are away from other activities such as concentrations of hunters, vehicles, and/or livestock.

Deer occur throughout the entire zone during the archery and general hunt seasons. The highest concentration of animals occurs primarily to the west of Highway 395 along the Sierra Nevada. This area is characterized by open sagebrush scrub and montane chaparral brush fields interspersed with lush meadows and groves of aspen and pine forest. Many tributary creeks flow east from the Sierra Nevada Crest and these drainages support perennial water and lush riparian habitat. Deer typically occur in close proximity to these riparian habitats, as well as other areas that provide adequate combinations of food, cover, and water. Vehicle access to the west of Highway 395 is generally limited to improved forest roads within major drainages, such as Virginia Lakes, Green Creek, Twin Lakes, Buckeye Canyon, and the Little Walker River, to name a few. These roads provide access to many smaller, unimproved dirt roads that penetrate into more remote sections of the zone.

Specific areas to the west of Highway 395 that hunters may want to investigate include Conway Summit, Dunderberg Creek, Dog Creek, Greek Creek, Buckeye Canyon, Ricky Peak, Flatiron Ridge, Mahogany Ridge, and Silver and Wolf Creeks. Hunters should be aware that significant areas of private land occur within the Bridgeport Valley, Huntoon Valley, Sonora Junction, and Antelope Valley areas.

Specific areas to investigate east of Highway 395 include the Bodie Hills and the

Sweetwater Mountains. Both areas are high elevation desert ranges supporting vast expanses of sagebrush scrub vegetation dissected by small seasonal meadows, riparian stringers, large aspen groves, and pockets of coniferous forest. In the Bodie Hills, hunters may want to investigate the Bodie Mountain, Potato Peak, and Mount Beideman areas. In the Sweetwater Mountains, hunters may want to explore Lobdell Lake, Swauger Canyon and the Burcham, Cottonwood, and Deep Creek drainages.

Some hunters are interested in hunting areas with good vehicle access, while others seek more remote, hike-in areas away from the opening weekend crowds. During late summer and early fall, many mature bucks can often be found above tree line, between 9,000-10,500 feet elevation, on open, sparsely vegetated, windblown ridgelines and mountaintops. This high elevation habitat is generally accessible only to backpackers and hunters with pack stock, and therefore, usually occurs in areas free of human disturbance.

For additional information about deer hunting in California, see CDFW's publication "Guide to Hunting Deer in California" under “Related Information”.

2026 ZONE AND ADDITIONAL HUNT SPECIFIC REGULATIONS

For more information, see the current Mammal Hunting Regulations.

§360. Deer.

Except as otherwise provided in Title 14, deer may be taken only as follows:

- (b) X-Zone Hunts.
    - (17) Zone X-12.
        - (A) Area: That portion of Mono County within a line beginning at the junction of the California-Nevada state line and Highway 167 (Pole

Line Road); west on Highway 167 to Highway 395; north on Highway 395 to Virginia Lakes Road; west on Virginia Lakes Road to the Virginia Lakes Trail (Entry Trail D11); northwest on the Virginia Lakes Trail to the Mono-Tuolumne county line; north along the Mono-Tuolumne county line to the Mono-Alpine county line; northeast along the Mono-Alpine county line to Indian Springs Road; northeast on Indian Springs Road to the California-Nevada state line; southeast on the California-Nevada state line to the point of beginning.

- (B) Season: The season in Zone X-12 shall open on the third Saturday in September and extend for 24 consecutive days.
- (C) Bag and Possession Limit: One buck, forked horn (see subsection 351(a)) or better, per tag.
- (D) Number of Tags: 350.

§361. Archery Deer Hunts.

- (b) Archery Hunting with Area-specific Archery Tags.
  Deer may be taken only with archery equipment specified in Section 354, only during the archery seasons as follows:
  - (18) A-20 (Zone X-12 Archery Hunt).
    - (A) Area: As described in subsection 360(b)(17)(A).
    - (B) Season: The archery season for hunt A-20 (Zone X-12 Archery Hunt) shall open on the third Saturday in August and extend for 23 consecutive days.
    - (C) Bag and Possession Limit: One buck, forked horn (see subsection 351(a)) or better per tag.

- (D) Number of Tags: 40.

- (c) Archery Hunting with Archery Only Tags.
  Deer may be taken only with archery equipment specified in Section 354, during the archery seasons and general seasons as follows:

  - (1) Number of Archery Only Tags Permitted. A person may obtain an archery only tag using a one-deer tag application and a second archery only tag using a second deer tag application.

  - (2) Zones in Which Archery Only Tags are Valid. An archery only tag is valid for hunt G-10, and during the archery season and general season in all zones except C-1 through C-4 and X-1 through X-12.

  - (3) Areas: As described in subsections 360(a) and (c).

  - (4) Seasons: The archery season and general seasons are provided in subsection 361(a) above and in subsections 360(a) and (c).

  - (5) Bag and Possession Limit: All bag and possession limits per zone are the same as those described in subsections 360(a) and (c).

- (d) Hunting Area Limitations. Archers not in possession of an archery only tag may hunt only in the zone, zones, or areas for which they have a general tag or an area-specific archery tag. (Refer to subsection 361(c)(2) for zones in which archery only tags are valid).

- (e) Crossbow Prohibition. Except as provided in subsection 354(j), crossbows may not be used during any archery season or during the general season when using an archery only tag.

****** GOOD LUCK! ******