What is happening with Minnesota's shotgun zone for deer hunting?

During the 2025 session, the Minnesota Legislature eliminated the state's shotgun-only zone for deer hunting. Counties in the shotgun zone have the option of passing an ordinance to remain shotgun-only. Except in counties that pass a shotgun-only ordinance, beginning in 2026 deer hunters will be able to use all legal shotguns and rifles throughout the state where deer hunting is allowed.

What options do counties have under this new law?

Counties in the current shotgun zone have the option to pass an ordinance to remain shotgun-only for deer hunting.

What counties are remaining shotgun-only?

The DNR asked counties for notification by May 5, 2026, if they plan to pass an ordinance to remain shotgun-only so the information can be reflected in the 2026 hunting regulations synopsis. However, there was no statutory requirement for counties to pass an ordinance by that date, so it's possible additional counties could do so. As of May 5, 2026, the following counties have adopted an ordinance to remain shotgun-only: Brown, Clay (shotgun-only ordinance in part of county), Cottonwood, Dodge, Faribault, Houston, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Nobles, Pope, Rock, Watonwan, Wilkin (shotgun-only ordinance in part of county).

How will I know if my county remains shotgun-only?

Hunters should contact their county boards to determine how their individual counties plan to proceed. The DNR will have up-to-date information on its website before the 2026 deer-hunting season, and in the 2026 hunting regulations synopsis. This information will be complete as possible, but counties do not have a statutory deadline for adopting an ordinance or requirement to notify the DNR of adoption. We also recommend hunters contact the county in which they hunt to learn exactly what the ordinance allows.

When do changes to the shotgun zone go into effect?

Changes to the shotgun zone will go into effect beginning with the first deer-hunting season in 2026 that firearms are allowed to be used.

Did the DNR push for elimination of the shotgun zone?

The DNR was not the driver behind this legislation. It took a neutral position on the elimination of the shotgun zone so long as it was done in a way that didn't create a patchwork of different rules that might confuse people. The DNR supports having counties make the decision that best meets the needs of their communities.

Does the DNR have concerns about the elimination of the shotgun zone?

From a safety and wildlife-management perspective, the DNR does not have concerns about the elimination of the shotgun zone. Whatever type of firearm they use, it's up to hunters to always prioritize safety. From a wildlife management perspective, the DNR focuses on the number of animals harvested, not the type of firearm used to harvest them.