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## Fall Foliage

Schoharie Reservoir - New York City Water Supply System

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Hundreds Visit New DEP Hunting Area Near Ashokan Reservoir In Its First Year

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Christopher O. Ward announced today that the DEP's new Ashokan North hunting area at the Ashokan Reservoir has proven very popular with local hunters, who visited the property by the hundreds for the eight weeks of archery, regular and muzzleloader seasons from October to December 2003.

"The response to the new Ashokan North Unit in Ulster County has been very positive," said Commissioner Ward. "Our staff has spoken with many hunters who expressed appreciation for this opportunity. Well, we're happy to have them. Hunters have been responsible visitors to City water supply lands, which is very encouraging for the future of hunting and our forests."

Commissioner Ward noted that nearly 32,000 acres of City-owned water supply land is open for deer hunting this year, an increase of over 18,000 acres in the past five years. "The success of past seasons and the City's commitments with watershed towns under the 1997 Memorandum of Agreement have played an important role in increasing hunting opportunities," he said.

The Ashokan North Unit is 1,556 acres on the north side of the Ashokan Reservoir in the town of Olive. It is available for bow, regular gun and muzzleloader hunting during season to those with hunting tags from DEP. First-come first-served parking is available on Reservoir Road and Route 28 in limited areas to avoid possible overcrowding of the area. Hunting activities were carefully monitored by DEP staff. It is expected that this area will be available again for the 2004 season.

Bow hunter Doug Downie, 39, is one local resident who enjoyed a successful season on the new hunting area. The West Shokan resident, who had hunted on other water supply lands prior to this season, shot a 10-point buck with a dressed weight of 175 lbs. on the Ashokan North Unit during the opening week of bow season.

"I saw one doe earlier that day, and then the buck came through" Downie said. "There were always a lot of deer along the reservoir." Downie, who grew up in the area, has

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fished on the Ashokan Reservoir for many years. He noted that the many deer in the area are one reason he is glad to have the new hunting opportunities on the Ashokan.

"It's good they got it open after all these years," he said. "The browse line is high; the deer stand up to eat the leaves and you can clearly see the browse line. In the Adirondacks some trees have leaves right down to the ground, but not here." Research studies by DEP foresters support this observation and have established the effects of the deer herd as a significant threat to forest health and water quality throughout the New York City watershed. Severely damaging browse ratings have been observed on 93% of all forest inventory plots studied over the past several years.

To combat overbrowsing by deer, DEP Land Managers encourage hunters to harvest does whenever possible. Although many hunters still set out each season to "get their buck," studies have shown that harvest of does is one of the most important factors determining the size of deer population and, potentially, herd health and browse impact. One male can mate with many females, so bucks can remain at much lower numbers than does without reducing herd size. This can be detrimental both to the health of all of the deer and the plants they rely on for survival. Surveys of hunters using water supply lands indicate six or more does to every buck.

The City has opened over 43,000 acres of its watershed land to public recreation, including over 27,000 acres of the land acquired under its Land Acquisition Program. The DEP has issued over 67,000 Public Access Permits and over 6,300 hunting tags to people wanting to use City watershed property for recreation. There were also almost 10,000 boat tags issued in 2003 for people to take boats on City reservoirs.

Commissioner Ward urged those hunting DEP lands to return their end-of-the-season hunting surveys again this year. "We appreciate the time the hunters take to fill out those hunting surveys. They give us a good sense of the effect we're having on the deer herd and they provide feedback about these hunting opportunities," Ward said.

Hunters submitting their completed 2003 surveys by the January 22nd deadline will be automatically supplied with new 2004 hunting tags next year, provided their Access Permits remain valid. For more information visit the DEP Web site at [nyc.gov/watershed](http://nyc.gov/watershed) or call (800) 575-LAND.