

## **SENATOR DALE M. VOLKER BILL ON JUNIOR HUNTING AND TRAPPING MENTOR PROGRAM SIGNED INTO LAW**

### *Program Will Groom New Generation Of Sportsmen and Ensure Safe Wildlife Management*

(ALBANY, NY) Senator Dale M. Volker (R-C-I, Depew) today announced that Governor David Paterson has signed into law his legislation (S.8228) to allow 14 and 15 year-olds, who already are permitted to hunt small game in New York State, to also hunt deer and bear with a firearm and only while supervised. The legislation also creates a trapper mentoring program.

"This is tremendous news for sportsmen, sportswomen, and their families throughout the State of New York who enjoy hunting and promoting safe and responsible wildlife management," said Senator Dale M. Volker, Prime Sponsor of the new law. "I would like to thank Governor Paterson for signing my legislation into law. His action on this bill embraces our strong hunting tradition in New York State. Both Assemblywoman Francine DelMonte and I have fought very hard over the years for this bill, and now families will have the opportunity to enjoy hunting with their younger family members and foster responsible wildlife management techniques for future generations of hunters."

New York's hunters have long advocated for the creation of additional opportunities for youth to hunt big game. Allowing interested youths to hunt deer and bear with a firearm can foster lifelong participation in this outdoor sport and help to increase recruitment of hunters. Requiring strict supervision by experienced sportsmen and sportswomen enhances opportunities to develop a strong safety ethic in young hunters.

New York is currently the only state in the nation where 14 year-olds cannot hunt big game with a firearm. Forty-six states allow 12 year-olds to hunt big game with a firearm. Moreover, 12 year-olds have been allowed to hunt small game in New York with a firearm while accompanied by an adult since 1991. This specific group of young hunters has demonstrated the best safety record of any age group in the State when accompanied by an adult, as required by law. Under current law, persons 14 and 15 years of age have been restricted to hunting deer and bear with longbows, even though they may use a firearm (including the same weapons that would be used to hunt deer and bear) to hunt small game from age 12.

"I am a firm believer that participating in hunting, fishing and the shooting sports can be extremely valuable by instilling in New York's youth an appreciation of the State's abundant natural resources and a responsibility to act as stewards to protect its precious resources for future generations," said Senator Dale M. Volker. "Sportsmen and women in New York have consistently supported the expansion of opportunities for youth and supported proposals that would enable them to hunt with their children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. This new law embraces this goal and instills a solid foundation for future New York hunters."

Permitting persons 14 and 15 years of age to hunt deer and bear with a firearm under the strict supervision of an experienced hunter-adult will afford New York families hunting opportunities that are already available in every other state in the nation.

With declining numbers of hunters and expanding deer populations, the recruitment of additional hunters is needed to ensure

DEC will be able to effectively manage deer populations in the future. The total number of big game hunters in New York State has been steadily declining by about 10,000 resident big game license holders every year. These declines are largely attributed to the absence of sufficient recruitment to

replace retiring hunters. The junior hunting program will provide an opportunity to bolster more effective hunter recruitment.

This new law also proposes a mentoring opportunity for youths to accompany and assist licensed, experienced trappers prior to completing the training requirements required for them to be eligible to purchase their own trapping license. Many older licensed trappers enjoy bringing their sons or daughters with them while they trap. However, an unlicensed child is currently only allowed to observe and may not assist in any manner without a license. For many parents, these times afield are viewed as potential "teaching moments" so that their children are better prepared for the trapper education course once they decide that they would like to enroll. The proposal would only permit youths to assist up to the age of 12, after which time they would be required to take a trapper education course and obtain a trapping license to continue to actively participate in any trapping activities.

This bill was passed in the State Assembly by Francine DeMonte.