
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 1912 **Hearing Date:** June 9, 2026
Author: Hadwick
Version: March 25, 2026 Amended
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** No
Consultant: Katharine Moore

Subject: Deer: archery season: concealed firearms

SUMMARY

This bill would authorize a hunter to carry a firearm during the archery-only hunting season for deer.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

Hunting deer in California.

In order to hunt deer in California, a hunter must first meet the requirements for and obtain a hunting license and then acquire a deer tag. A resident of California is currently allowed to have two deer tags for any season. Deer are considered big game¹ in California, and deer hunts are generally categorized by location, method of take, type of deer, and popularity. Hunts with high demand are “premium deer” hunts, and tags for those hunts are available through the state’s Big Game Drawing. Tags for non-premium hunts and leftover premium tags may be obtained directly from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (department).

Deer season is in the fall. Typically, the archery-only season for deer in a particular location precedes the general hunting season. Hunting with bow and arrow takes considerable skill, and requires the hunter to get closer to the deer than while hunting with a rifle, for example. As take is prohibited with firearms during the archery-only season, there is less chance of the prey being spooked by the sound of gunfire. After archery-only season, multiple methods of take, including by firearms, are authorized during the general season. A hunter hunting deer with bow-and-arrow during a general season may possess a firearm.

Possession of firearms while hunting deer with an archery-only tag.

However, existing law since 1955 has prohibited a hunter hunting deer under the auspices of an archery-only tag from carrying a firearm (AB 1583 (Lindsay, Chapter 221, Statutes of 1955)). The urgency clause for AB 1583 included “to protect other hunters,” although it is not clear in the bill’s archived materials what prompted the change in the law. The required “field dressing” (i.e. gutting) of a deer could obscure the method of take prior to the required inspection of the carcass by an authorized party. In 2012, the strict prohibition on firearms was relaxed to allow certain peace officers to carry a concealed firearm during the archery-only season for deer (SB 1367 (Fuller, Chapter 711, Statutes of 2012)).

¹ While definitions vary, big game generally includes bear, deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, wild pigs, and bighorn sheep

Prior to 2019, regulation prohibited the carrying of a concealed firearm while hunting all big game species. In 2019, the regulation was changed to authorize the possession of a concealed firearm while hunting big game, with the exception of deer due to the statutory prohibition specific to deer. There were two incidents in 2018 that helped motivate the change in regulation. One incident occurred when an injured – but not yet dead² – bear attacked the archer who had shot, but failed to immediately kill the bear. In the other, a hunting archer was approached by a mountain lion. That hunter killed the mountain lion with a well-placed arrow. The revised regulation still prohibits the use of the firearm for take. In the justification for the change in the regulations, the department also cited the risk to hunters posed by the increased presence of illegal marijuana grows in the backcountry where hunting archers may venture in pursuit of big game.

Existing law:

- 1) Requires a hunting license, issued by the department for the taking of birds and mammals. (Fish and Game Code (FGC) §§3031–3040)
- 2) Prohibits the take (i.e., hunting) of a deer without first procuring a deer tag or permit. (FGC §4330)
- 3) Authorizes any resident of the state, 12 years of age or over, to possess one deer tag. Further authorizes that person to possess a second deer tag, as provided. (FGC §4332)
- 4) Provides for an archery season preceding times when deer may be taken during a general open hunting season. (FGC §4370)
 - a) Requires a minimum of three days between archery and general open hunting seasons on deer.
- 5) Prohibits a person hunting deer during archery season from carrying or having in their immediate control, any firearm of any kind. Exempts active or honorably retired peace officers from this prohibition. Allows those peace officers to carry a firearm capable of being concealed during archery season, but prohibits them from taking the deer with the firearm. (FGC §4370)
- 6) Prohibits a person, through carelessness or neglect, from leaving a game mammal or the flesh of that animal from going needlessly to waste. (FGC §4304)
- 7) Exempts a licensed hunter from the prohibition of carrying a firearm in a public place or on any public street while masked so as to hide the person's identity, as long as the licensed hunter is actually engaged in lawful hunting, or while going directly to or returning directly from the hunting expedition. (Penal Code §25300)
- 8) Exempts licensed hunters or fishermen carrying pistols, revolvers, or other firearms capable of being concealed upon the person while engaged in hunting or fishing, or

² The bear eventually died of its injuries. When attacked, the hunter failed to kill the bear with another arrow.

transporting those firearms unloaded when going to or returning from the hunting or fishing expedition from the crime of concealing a firearm. (Penal Code §25400)

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would:

- 1) Remove the prohibition that a hunter attempting to take deer during archery season not carry or have in their possession a firearm of any kind.
- 2) Remove an exception, previously only granted to peace officers, to allow a person to carry a firearm capable of being concealed while taking a deer with a bow and arrow, as a conforming change.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, "California's archery deer hunters often venture deep into remote wilderness where help may be hours away. While other hunters and anglers are allowed to carry firearms for personal protection, deer archery hunters are prohibited under current law. Assembly Bill 1912 simply allows these hunters to carry a firearm for self-defense while maintaining the integrity of the archery season by continuing to require that deer be taken with a bow. This commonsense reform ensures that hunters can protect themselves from dangerous wildlife and criminal activity while recreating in California's backcountry."

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

None received

COMMENTS

This bill is double-referred. This bill is referred to both this Committee and the Senate Public Safety Committee. Elements of this bill under the Senate Public Safety Committee's jurisdiction are included here for completeness and context only, and will be discussed before that Committee.

Hunting incidents. Beyond the two examples provided above in the Background section, no specific examples of an archer being challenged by another person or a wild animal were found. The SB 1367 bill analysis includes anecdotal information from department personnel regarding hunters being threatened by individuals at illegal marijuana grows. A review of information available on the department's web-site indicate that multiple firearm-related incidents occur during hunting annually, including during deer season. These are primarily due to carelessness, and, unfortunately, are sometimes fatal.

Related legislation

SB 1367 (Fuller, Chapter 711, Statutes of 2012) authorized a peace officer, whether active or honorably retired, to carry a firearm capable of being concealed on his or her person while engaged in the taking of deer during archery season so long as the firearm was not used to take deer.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: none

SUPPORT

California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association (co-sponsor)
California Deer Association (co-sponsor)
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Cal-Ore Wetland and Waterfowl Council
California Hawking Club
California Houndsmen for Conservation
California Rifle & Pistol Association
California Waterfowl Association
HOWL for Wildlife
National Wild Turkey Foundation – California State Chapter
Rocky Mountain Elk Association
Sacramento Safari Club
Safari Club International – California Coalition
Safari Club International – San Francisco Bay Chapter
San Diego County Wildlife Federation
Shasta County Board of Supervisors
Suisun Resource Conservation District
The Black Brant Group
Wild Sheep Foundation – California Chapter

OPPOSITION

None received

-- END --