

YOUR FIRST NSW STATE FOREST DEER HUNT

A practical beginner's guide to getting legal, booking your hunt, reading the country and coming home safely.

PLAN WELL. HUNT ETHICALLY. RESPECT THE COUNTRY.

Prepared for NSW hunters by Escaping the Plain. Rules can change: always check current DPIRD, Forestry Corporation and NSW Police information before leaving home.

STEP 1

Get legal before you plan the hunt

A NSW State forest hunt is not a turn-up-and-hunt trip. Start with the licences, accreditation and permissions that apply to your chosen hunting method.

The basic pathway

- Hold a current NSW Restricted Game Hunting Licence (R-Licence). It authorises hunting on declared public land that is open to hunting.
- Be accredited for the method you will use. R-Licence categories include firearms, bows and dogs.
- Remain a member of an Approved Hunting Organisation, as required for an R-Licence.
- If using a firearm, also hold the appropriate current firearms licence and use a registered firearm you are authorised to possess.
- Book the hunt and obtain written permission for that forest, date and approved method. Carry the permission and your game hunting licence digitally or physically.

DO NOT RELY ON THIS GUIDE AS PERMISSION

Your written permission and the current official map control where, when and how you may hunt. Read every condition attached to your booking.

Your pre-booking check

- ■ R-Licence is current
- ■ Correct hunting-method endorsement
- ■ Hunt NSW login works
- ■ Approved Hunting Organisation membership is current
- ■ Firearms licence and registration checked
- ■ Permission conditions read in full

Official starting points

DPIRD Restricted Licence: https://www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/hunting/hunting-licences/restricted
Hunt NSW portal: https://www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/hunting/online-portal

STEP 2

Choose a forest and book the right hunt

For a first trip, choose simplicity over reputation. A manageable drive, clear access and terrain you can navigate safely are more valuable than chasing stories about a 'hot' forest.

How to narrow it down

- Use Hunt NSW to view declared State forests and available dates.
- Check Forestry Corporation closure notices before booking and again immediately before travel. A forest closure overrides hunting permission.
- Study public roads, legal entry points, terrain, watercourses and the size and shape of exclusion zones.
- For your first trip, plan a short loop or out-and-back route rather than trying to cover the whole forest.
- Have a backup area and a firm turnaround time. Do not push deeper simply because you have not seen deer.

BOOKING PATH

Log in to Hunt NSW, choose 'Public land hunting', then 'Book a hunt'. Download the written permission and the current PDF/KMZ hunting map after the booking is complete.

Pick a first-hunt forest using these questions

- ■ Can I arrive without driving fatigued?
- ■ Can I identify legal access and parking?
- ■ Is mobile coverage limited or absent?
- ■ Where is my safe turnaround point?
- ■ Is the terrain within my fitness and navigation ability?
- ■ Are current maps available on my GPS device?
- ■ What will recent rain, fire or forestry work change?
- ■ What is my backup plan if the forest closes?

Forestry Corporation closures: https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/visit/activities/hunting

STEP 3

Make the map your most important tool

NSW public-land hunters must carry an operational GPS-enabled device showing the current hunting and exclusion-zone maps, and must be able to show their position while hunting.

Before leaving coverage

- Download the current PDF and KMZ files from Hunt NSW while you have internet access.
- Import the map into a GPS-enabled mapping app or compatible GPS device. The Hunt NSW app stores downloads but does not itself provide GPS mapping.
- Test the map in airplane mode. Confirm your live position appears against the correct hunting and exclusion zones.
- Carry backup power and, ideally, a paper overview map and compass.
- Mark the vehicle, legal entry, route, turnaround point and any hazards before walking in.

Rules that shape your route

EXCLUSION ZONES	Hunt only inside mapped hunting areas. Never enter a total public exclusion zone. Obey temporary and operational signs even when they are not on your downloaded map.
BUILDINGS & ASSETS	Do not hunt within 100 m of an occupied residence, dwelling, fire tower or building, or within 100 m of a radio tower, transmission tower, quarry or pump house.
DAYLIGHT	A daytime written permission allows hunting from 30 minutes before sunrise until 30 minutes after sunset.
VISIBILITY	Wear blaze orange externally on the upper body, visible from all sides, while hunting or while hunting equipment is in your immediate possession.

Current permission conditions: https://www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/hunting/where-can-i-hunt/permission-conditions-hunting-in-nsw-state-forests

STEP 4

Build a simple, safe hunt plan

Your first hunt is a reconnaissance trip with a hunting opportunity attached. The win is learning the forest, finding sign and returning safely - not forcing a shot.

A practical first-day plan

BEFORE DAWN	Park legally, confirm your GPS position, note the wind and move quietly toward a planned glassing point or likely feeding edge.
EARLY MORNING	Glass more than you walk. Use tracks, droppings and trails to decide whether to slow down, relocate or mark the area for another visit.
MIDDAY	Check time, water, weather and route. Still-hunt shaded gullies or bedding cover only where terrain and visibility allow safe movement.
AFTERNOON	Set up downwind of likely movement, but leave enough daylight to recover an animal and return without rushing.

Core day-hunt gear

- Licence and written permission
- Blaze orange upper-body item
- PLB or satellite messenger
- Water, food and emergency reserve
- Binoculars and rangefinder
- Appropriate firearm/bow and ammunition/arrows
- GPS device with current official map
- Phone, offline files and power bank
- First-aid kit and personal medication
- Weather layer, headlamp and batteries
- Knife, gloves and clean game bags
- Rubbish bag and basic recovery gear

SHARE A TRIP PLAN

Tell a reliable person your forest, vehicle, route, companions and return deadline. Agree on exactly when they should raise the alarm if you do not check in.

STEP 5

Read sign before chasing sightings

Deer are often easier to confirm by what they leave behind. Fresh sign tells you where deer have been; the wind and terrain help predict where they may be now.

TRACKS	Look for sharp edges, disturbed soil and a clear direction of travel. Rain and soft ground make age easier to judge.
DROPPINGS	Fresh pellets are usually darker and softer. Record whether they are scattered feeding sign or concentrated near bedding.
RUBS	Bark damage, shavings and polished branches can show repeated use. Do not assume every rub is recent.
BEDS	Flattened vegetation, hair and nearby droppings suggest resting cover. Back out quietly if sign is fresh and the wind is wrong.
TRAILS	Look for narrow, repeated paths linking cover, water and feeding areas. A trail is a clue, not proof of current movement.

The beginner's decision loop

- Check the wind before every approach. If your scent is blowing into likely cover, change the route or back out.
- Move slowly enough to see before you are seen. Pause at cover edges and glass into shade.
- Confirm the animal, what is beyond it and whether the shot is within your proven ability.
- Never shoot at movement, sound, colour or an unclear outline. Do not take a shot without a safe backstop.
- Let the animal walk if the angle, distance, stability, light or recovery window is wrong.

A SUCCESSFUL FIRST HUNT

You navigated legally, identified fresh sign, tested your gear and learned where to return. An empty esky does not make the trip a failure.

STEP 6

After the shot: slow down and finish well

Good decisions after the shot protect the animal, the meat and the hunter. Your exact response depends on the observed hit and conditions, but rushing usually makes recovery harder.

Immediate sequence

- Stay controlled and watch the animal's reaction and direction of travel.
- Mark your shooting position and the animal's last known position on your GPS.
- Make the firearm or bow safe before moving.
- Assess the shot honestly. Allow appropriate time before following unless you can see the animal is down and it is safe to approach.
- Start at the exact hit site. Look for tracks, hair, disturbed vegetation and blood; mark each confirmed sign.
- Approach a downed animal cautiously from behind, confirm death safely and begin clean, rapid field care.

MEAT RECOVERY IS PART OF THE SHOT DECISION

Before shooting, consider temperature, terrain, distance to the vehicle, daylight and how you will cool and carry the animal. If you cannot recover it responsibly, do not take the shot.

Before leaving the forest

- ■ Firearm/bow secured correctly
- ■ No rubbish, cases or markers left behind
- ■ Vehicle and route safe for exit
- ■ All meat and equipment accounted for
- ■ Companion/contact told I am leaving
- ■ Notes saved: sightings, sign and conditions

After every written permission

Lodge the required public-land harvest return, including relevant animals harvested and seen. Outstanding returns can prevent further bookings. https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/lodge-a-public-land-harvest-return

TAKE IT WITH YOU

First hunt trip planner

Write the essentials down before you leave coverage.

FOREST	
HUNT DATE	
BOOKING / PERMISSION	
RETURN DEADLINE	
HUNTING WITH	
EMERGENCY CONTACT	

Final legal and safety check

- ■ Current R-Licence
- ■ Written permission downloaded
- ■ Current map loaded on GPS device
- ■ Forest closure status checked
- ■ Blaze orange packed
- ■ Trip plan shared
- ■ Correct method endorsement
- ■ Permission conditions read
- ■ Offline map tested
- ■ Fire and weather conditions checked
- ■ Firearm licence/registration confirmed
- ■ Return deadline agreed

REMEMBER

The goal is not to prove anything. Hunt within your ability, protect the meat, respect other forest users and leave the country better than you found it.

KEEP IT CURRENT

Official sources and update check

This guide was prepared in September 2026. Public-land permissions, maps, closures and firearms requirements can change. Recheck the official sources before every trip.

NSW DPIRD - Restricted Licence

https://www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/hunting/hunting-licences/restricted

NSW DPIRD - Hunt NSW portal

https://www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/hunting/online-portal

NSW DPIRD - Public-land permission conditions

https://www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/hunting/where-can-i-hunt/permission-conditions-hunting-in-nsw-state-forests

NSW DPIRD - GPS download guidance

https://www.dpird.nsw.gov.au/hunting/education-and-training-for-hunters/gps-download-guides

Forestry Corporation - Authorised hunting and closures

https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/visit/activities/hunting

Service NSW - Public-land harvest return

https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/lodge-a-public-land-harvest-return

NSW Police - Transportation of firearms fact sheet

https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/131184/Transportation_Fact_Sheet.pdf

IMPORTANT

This is general educational information, not legal advice or formal hunting instruction. Your licence, written permission, current maps, signage and applicable law always take priority.

ESCAPING THE PLAIN

Real trips, honest gear and practical inspiration for people who refuse to let work define the whole week.