

Date of Hearing: March 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 1912 (Hadwick) – As Introduced February 12, 2026

SUBJECT: Deer: archery season: concealed firearms

SUMMARY: Allows a hunter to carry a firearm capable of being concealed on their person while hunting deer with a bow and arrow. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Removes the prohibition that a hunter attempting to take deer during archery season shall not carry or have in their possession a firearm of any kind.
- 2) Changes 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.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires a hunting license, issued by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) 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) Allows any resident of the state, 12 years of age or over, to possess one deer tag. Further allows that individual to possess a second deer tag if provided by regulations adopted by the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) (FGC § 4332).
- 4) Provides for an archery season preceding times when deer may be taken during a general open hunting season (FGC § 4370). Further,
 - a) Requires a minimum of three days between archery and general open hunting seasons on deer.
 - b) Prohibits a person hunting deer during archery season from carrying or having in their immediate control, any firearm of any kind.
 - c) Exempts active or honorably retired peace officers from the requirement in #4b, above. 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.
- 5) 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).
- 6) 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).

- 7) 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 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).

FISCAL EFFECT: None. This bill is keyed non-fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** 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. [This bill] 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.”

Background. California is home to two species of deer: mule deer and black-tailed deer. CDFW and the Commission have the authority to regulate the hunting of these species. To hunt deer, a hunter must first acquire a deer tag. Tags are critical for providing CDFW with accurate harvest information to develop population estimates, tag quotas, and future opportunities. A resident of California is currently allowed to have two deer tags for any season. Once a deer is harvested, a hunter has 30 days, or by January 31st, whichever date comes first, to report the take. If a deer tag is not fulfilled, the tag holder must also report “no harvest” by January 31. Reporting can be done online or by mail.

A tag is specific to a zone of the state. Each zone specifies dates in the fall during which hunting is legal (i.e., the hunting season). The fall is divided into an archery season and a general season. Archery season is two to three weeks long and is followed by a general season that begins at least three days after the close of archery season. During the general season, a hunter can use a firearm to take a deer or can still use a bow if desired. Archers taking deer during the general season under the authority of a general tag, however, may possess a firearm while intending to harvest a deer with a bow and arrow. Allowing archers to hunt before the general open season offers archers better odds of filling a tag. During the archery only season, a hunter can use a long, recurve, or compound bow, but not a crossbow [14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) § 354].

Currently, archers are not allowed to use or possess a firearm during archery season or during the general season with an archery-only tag, with two exceptions: (1) an archer may carry a firearm capable of being concealed when hunting big game, except deer, and (2) the lawful possession of a concealed firearm by an active or retired peace officer.

In 2024, CDFW estimated that 959 deer were harvested with “archery only” deer tags, resulting in a 13.7% success rate. Statewide, across all tag types, CDFW estimates that 33,015 deer were harvested, with a 19.3% success rate. There is considerable variation in number of deer harvested and success rate across zones.

History lesson. The provision restricting hunters from carrying a firearm during archery season was added to the statute by AB 1583 (Lindsay *et al.*), Chapter 221, Statutes of 1955.

The urgency measure that accompanied this change stated, “in order for this act to be effective during the 1955 archery season to protect other hunters and to insure enforcement of the present law this act must take effect immediately.” No other records in the State Archives indicate the historical context that necessitated this addition. SB 1367 (Fuller), Chapter 711, Statutes of 2012, provides the exemption from that restriction, allowing a peace officer to conceal carry a firearm while archery hunting deer, but prohibits the hunter from taking or attempting to take the deer with the firearm.

In context. A hunter may carry a firearm during archery-only seasons for all other big game (e.g., bear, pronghorn, elk, bighorn sheep), except deer, pursuant to FGC § 4370. Hunters pursuing small game (e.g., tree squirrel, rabbits) during archery-only seasons are prohibited from possessing a firearm unless they possess a concealed carry permit or are an active or retired peace officer (14 CCR § 311). This limitation may reflect the different risks associated with hunting big versus small game.

Hunters often venture deep into remote areas with little human presence. It is possible that hunters could face certain threats from other predators while hunting, so possession of a firearm may be helpful. An additional threat to bowhunters, and all hunters, has emerged over the last couple of decades. CDFW reports a significant increase in the presence of members of international drug trafficking organizations who illegally cultivate marijuana on rural public and private lands. Thousands of such sites exist on the landscape. These illicit growers are usually well armed and are treated as potentially violent by law enforcement. Since hunters go places where many others do not venture and have an increased probability of encountering these potentially dangerous circumstances, it is possible that possession of a firearm during an archery-only season would make a hunter feel more comfortable.

- 2) **Proposed Committee amendments.** The Commission has the authority to prescribe the manner and means of hunting animals (FGC § 203) and it is unlawful to take an animal in a manner that is inconsistent with Commission regulations (FGC § 2000). To further align deer archery season with other big game statutes, the Committee may wish the author take the following amendment:

Delete redundant authority (FGC § 4370):

~~(a)~~ In every area in which deer may lawfully be taken during the general open season there is an archery season for the taking of deer with bow and arrow. The season for each area shall be as the commission may prescribe, with a minimum interposing interval of three days immediately preceding the regular open season on deer in that area.

~~(b) A person may carry a firearm capable of being concealed on their person while engaged in the taking of deer with bow and arrow in accordance with subdivision (a), but shall not take or attempt to take deer with the firearm.~~

- 3) **Double referral.** This bill is also referred to the Assembly Public Safety Committee.
- 4) **Related legislation.** SB 1367 (Fuller), Chapter 711, Statutes of 2012, provides the exemption that a peace officer may conceal carry a firearm while archery hunting deer, but prohibits the hunter from taking or attempting to take the deer with the firearm.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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