

Free hunting days offer Californians opportunity to connect with the hunting experience

November 18, 2023



It's the thrill of seeing a high-octane pointing dog slam to a standstill. It's having a front-row seat as a wetland comes to life at dawn. It's the chaos of a valley quail covey erupting from cover; the heart-pounding excitement of a tom turkey somewhere in the distance answering your call. It's the chance to share with friends and family a wild game meal they can't get in any grocery store, farmer's market or five-star restaurant.

Californians will have two ideal opportunities to acquaint themselves with the hunting experience during California's Free Hunting Days. Stemming from a revised California law newly implemented this year, each year the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Director will designate two Free Hunting Days. In this license year, they are Nov. 25, 2023, and April 13, 2024. On these days, eligible California residents may hunt without purchasing a California hunting license, provided other requirements are met.

Those requirements include proof of completion of a hunter education course, possession of a valid Free Hunt Days Registration, and any required tags, federal entitlements, and entry permits. All hunting participants in Free Hunting Days must be accompanied by a mentor at least 21 years of age who holds a valid California hunting license.

“The dates were chosen carefully and intentionally to provide the widest variety of hunting opportunities and options for anyone interested in hunting a try,” said Taylor Williams, the Recruit, Retain, Reactivate (R3) Manager at CDFW.

“On Nov. 25, waterfowl seasons and many upland game seasons, from rabbit and squirrel to dove, pheasant, quail and fall wild turkey, will be open in various zones throughout the state,” Williams said. “It’s also a holiday weekend when friends and family get together so it can be a great time to take out a friend or relative who has been interested in giving hunting a try.”

California’s second Free Hunting Day will be April 13, 2024. This date was chosen with wild pig and wild turkey in mind, two popular species to hunt in the spring.

“We encourage California residents to try Free Hunting Days and discover their own connection to nature and wild food in our state,” Williams said. “Free Hunting Days provide opportunities for people interested in hunting to finally give it a try at little cost, and experienced hunters the chance to mentor someone new.”

With the possession of a valid Free Hunt Day Registration, residents wishing to hunt on the two designated days are not required to possess a California Hunting License, a California Duck Validation or a California Upland Validation. All hunting regulations, including bag limits, gear restrictions and shooting times remain in effect for Free Hunting Days. Participants must also possess any additional requirements, including passes for state-operated wildlife areas, tags and federal entitlements such as a Federal Duck Stamp for those hunting waterfowl who are 16 and older. Those choosing to hunt wild pigs will need to purchase and possess a Wild Pig Tag.

More information is available at CDFW’s Free Hunting Days webpage. The Free Hunting Days Registration is available at no cost at CDFW license sales offices, from license agents and through CDFW’s Online License Sales and Services website. Hunting seasons, regulations, places to hunt and other resources are available at CDFW’s Hunting in California webpage. For additional information on participants hoping to get started hunting this season, visit CDFW’s R3 webpage.