

# Hunting With An AR-Platform Rifle?



Photo Courtesy of Bill Waugaman

Windham Weaponry CDI rifle

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**A**R-15, Black Gun, M16, Assault Rifle and Modern Sporting Rifle... these are all names given to describe one of the most popular firearms currently on the American landscape. Recent tragic events have brought this style of rifle front and center in emotionally-charged arguments in the media, in the political arena, by organizations, and by supporters on both sides. There are two common outcries from gun control advocates, "...using an assault weapon for hunting deer" and "...who needs 30 shots for hunting".

I began to wonder where hunting with an AR-platform rifle is permitted. My home state of Pennsylvania does not even permit any type of rimfire or centerfire semi-auto rifle for hunting. In neighboring Ohio, centerfire rifles are not permitted for hunting deer. Thinking back to TV shows I've watched about hunting, the rifles used were primarily bolt action. Is the 'modern sporting rifle' as it is called by organizations like the NRA and NSSF a viable hunting rifle, or is its sporting use limited to competitive shooting events and plinking at the local range?

To satisfy my curiosity, a series of five questions were developed. These questions, framed in the context of hunting, were posed to every state in the United States. The questions were:

- 1) Are rifles permitted for any type of hunting in your state (small, large, varmint, predator)?
- 2) Are semi-auto rifles permitted for any type of hunting in your state?
- 3) Are rimfire semi-auto rifles permitted for hunting small game, varmints or predators?
- 4) Are centerfire semi-auto rifles permitted for hunting big game, varmints or predators?
- 5) Are AR-platform rifles (rimfire or centerfire) permitted for hunting?

One question did ask for comments about hunting with semi-auto rifles and another asked for general comments about hunting with a rifle. Here are the results from those questions.

State	Rifles	Semi Auto	Rimfire	Centerfire	AR-platform	Semi-Auto Mag Cap
Alabama	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
Alaska	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Arizona	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Arkansas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
California	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5 / 15
Connecticut	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
Delaware	No					
Florida	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Hawaii	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	10
Idaho	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Illinois	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Indiana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Iowa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Kansas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Kentucky	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
Louisiana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Maine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
Maryland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Michigan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
Minnesota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Mississippi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Missouri	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
Montana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Nebraska	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
Nevada	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
New Hampshire	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
New Jersey	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2
New Mexico	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
New York	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
North Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Ohio	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Oklahoma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	7
Oregon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
Pennsylvania	Yes	No				
Rhode Island	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
South Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
Tennessee	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Texas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Utah	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Vermont	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
Virginia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Washington	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
West Virginia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Wisconsin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Wyoming	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

*Note: The answers shown (see chart on facing page) are only general answers to the questions. Every state has rules and regulations that must be followed. Even though an answer may show 'Yes', it could very well be a 'Yes, however...' For the specific and current guidelines for any given state, contact their wildlife agencies. The states of New York, Connecticut and Maryland have proposed legislation that will affect firearms in general, and subsequently the hunters in those states. In these unsettled times, firearms laws can change very unexpectedly.*

What I thought were very simple 'yes/no' questions turned out to be an "oh my..." revelation when it came to how each state looks at hunting with rifles and the differences. Depending on the state, guidelines on the use of rifles can vary by obvious factors such as the caliber and the species. Other factors taken into consideration by some state(s) include: the muzzle energy, downrange energy, the size of the casing, county by county regulations, local ordinances, public land versus private land, weight of the gun with all attachments, bullet weight, the type of bullet, night-time hunting, whether the quarry is considered a big game animal or trophy game animal, and of course, magazine capacities.

So, to answer my own question about the sporting use of AR-platform 'modern sporting rifles', they are definitely not just for plinking at the range or used in competitive shooting events. Forty-eight of fifty states allow you to hunt with them (subject to regulations). One of the most befitting comments made from my contacts was, "...our state does not differentiate between semi-auto rifles based on cosmetic features."

I'm satisfied that the term 'modern sporting rifle' is a good description for AR-platform rifles.

### Fun Facts:

- Q. How many states do not allow any rifle hunting?  
 A. 1, Delaware  
 Q. Which state has an honor

system for loading the magazine, but not to exceed the maximum total rounds allowed by law in the magazine and chamber?

- A. New Jersey (only two rounds in the magazine even though the capacity is more)  
 Q. How many states have magazine capacity restrictions on semi-auto rifles?  
 A. 18  
 Q. Which 3 states have a minimum muzzle energy requirement for hunting with a rifle?  
 A. Hawaii, South Dakota, Maryland (for deer only in MD)  
 Q. Which states have a minimum energy requirement at 100 yards for hunting big game?  
 A. Nebraska and Nevada  
 Q. Which state does not allow the weight of a big game rifle/magazine/sling/scope to be over 16 pounds?  
 A. Idaho  
 Q. Which 3 states allow hunting with a centerfire rifle, but not for deer?

- A. Massachusetts, Ohio and Rhode Island  
 Q. Which state allows deer hunting with a rifle as long as the caliber is .357 or greater and the cartridge has a minimum case length of 1.16" and maximum case length of 1.8"?"  
 A. Indiana  
 Q. Which state allows hunting with a centerfire rifle, but the bullet weight must be over 55 gr. and the cartridge length must be 1.25" or longer?  
 A. Oklahoma  
 Q. Which state has two different magazine capacity limits for semi-auto rifles?  
 A. Colorado: 5 for big game and 15 for small game  
 Q. Which state has centerfire cartridge requirements based on: (1) the quarry and the caliber, or (2) the cartridge length, or (3) having over 500 ft. lb. of energy at 100 yards with a lead or expanding bullet?  
 A. Wyoming ■

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