By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

As of mid-morning Tuesday, area deer hunters during the first few days of the firearm season had checked in 302 animals at Laker's in Enders.

That's a little under last year when 323 had been bagged by mid-afternoon Tuesday of the first week, but still a good number, said Ron Schoenberger of Laker's, an official Game & Parks check-in station in Chase County.

Schoenberger said many of the hunters have been saying deer are hard to find this year, even though the area corn harvest is nearly completed. Weather was cool and crisp opening weekend.

They evidently are having to work a little harder to find them, he said.

The biggest animal checked in so far has been the 8 x 5 muledeer shot by Seth Spicer of Enders. The nicest whitetail checked in so far was the 6 x 7 bagged by Merle Griess of Champion.

Schoenberger said he has seen a lot of good-looking animals come through both muledeer and whitetail.

Last year after the nine-day season concluded, 574 deer had been checked in at Laker's. That was up from 479 in 2010.

Schoenberger said one new bit of information he is reporting to Game & Parks this year is whether the antler spread is under 11 inches or over 11 inches.

Hunters who still want to hunt in the Frenchman Unit that includes Chase County can still do so. There are plenty of whitetail permits still available through the Game & Parks website: outdoornebraska.org

The firearm season concludes on Sunday. Deer must be checked in by 1 p.m. Monday.

The archery deer season continues until the end of the year. Other permits including antlerless and season's choice firearm continue through Jan. 18, 2013. The state's muzzleloader season runs Dec. 1-31.