

# 2026 SMALL GAME MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR QUÉBEC

SUMMARY DOCUMENT



Ruffed grouse © Thomas Pham-Van



## IMPORTANT

The territories governed by the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), as well as beaver reserves, retain their status. Accordingly, in zones 17, 22, 23 and 24, the hunting and trapping of furbearing animals, hunting with a bird of prey, and snaring (with a few exceptions in zone 17) remain prohibited.

At all times, consult [Québec.ca](https://www.quebec.ca) to find out about the harvesting conditions in effect.

### Legal deposit

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2025

ISBN : 978-2-555-02695-7 (PDF version)

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Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre  
les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs

# Introduction

## Context

A management plan is a structuring document that guides action toward optimal management of species and their habitats, ensuring the maintenance of healthy populations while promoting their development. It identifies species-related issues, defines wildlife management orientations and objectives, and proposes actions and harvesting conditions adapted to regional realities. The development of a management plan is carried out in collaboration with various provincial and regional partners and stakeholders.

The 2026 Small Game Management Plan reflects current realities, such as declining populations of certain species, particularly in southern Québec. The work was guided by the intention to re-establish sustainable management informed by species ecology at the core of decision-making.

The 2026 Small Game Management Plan aims to:

- ensure sustainable species management based on the best available knowledge;
- improve knowledge on population status, harvest levels, and the ecology of the main species, including the ruffed grouse, the spruce grouse, the snowshoe hare and the ptarmigan species;
- optimize the development of small game within a framework of sustainable population management and in keeping with harvest potential;
- support harmonious coexistence between humans and small game.



## Small game in Québec – a diverse group

The ruffed grouse, the snowshoe hare, the spruce grouse and the gray partridge are the small game species most familiar to Québec residents. In fact, this category comprises [29 species under provincial responsibility](#)<sup>1</sup>. Most of these species are distributed across the entire province, from the far south to the far north. They are generally productive, resilient, abundant and common. As a result, most of these species present significant harvest potential.



Sharp-tailed grouse © Jean Lapointe

The main small game species are:

- galliformes, namely:
  - > ruffed grouse;
  - > Spruce grouse;
  - > sharp-tailed grouse;
  - > rock ptarmigan;
  - > willow ptarmigan;
  - > and gray partridge;
- lagomorphs, namely:
  - > snowshoe hare;
  - > Arctic hare;
  - > and eastern cottontail.

They are found throughout our forests and fields and are highly prized by hunters. Small game management efforts focus primarily on these species, while not neglecting the others.

The Small Game Management Plan also governs the harvest of other small game species, including the red fox (red, crossbred or silver morphs), the coyote, the wolf and the raccoon. These species are also classified as furbearing animals, and their management falls primarily under the [Furbearer Management Plan](#) (in French). Hunting conditions for these species reflect the orientations and objectives of that plan.

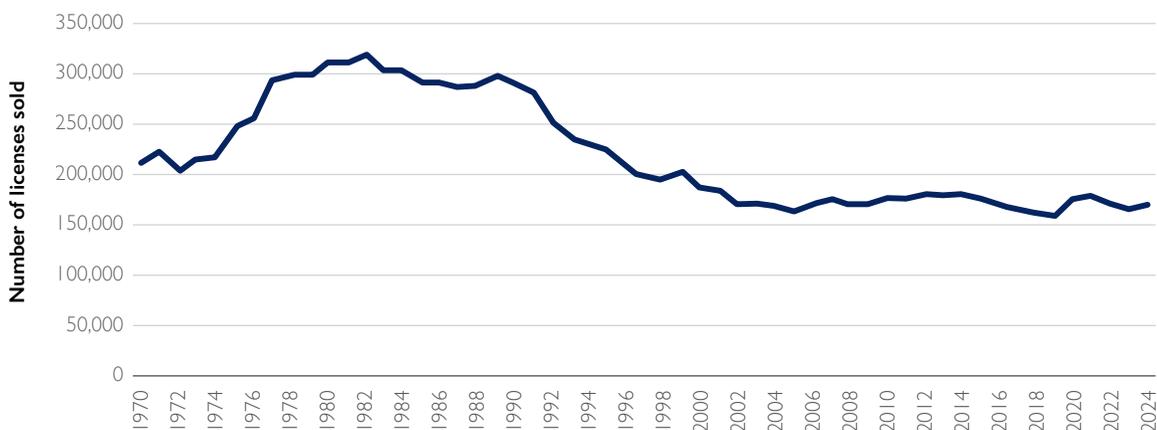
<sup>1</sup> Additional migratory birds considered small game, whose hunting requires holding a small game hunting licence, are also included; however, their management falls under federal jurisdiction.

# Sociocultural and economic importance of small game hunting

Small game species hold significant cultural value for Indigenous communities. Small game hunting has been central to the subsistence practices of certain communities for thousands of years.

This type of hunting is the second most popular in Québec, ranking just behind moose hunting. It requires little equipment and preparation and is inexpensive, making it the ideal activity to introduce new hunters to the practice.

After a significant decline, the number of licences sold has stabilized since the early 2000s, with an annual average of 172,000 licences.



**Figure 1: Number of small game hunting licenses sold annually (residents and non-residents)**

Small game hunting contributes to the economy of several regions. In Québec, it is the type of hunting that generates the greatest economic benefits, both in terms of job creation (2,098 jobs annually) and value added (\$206.9 million)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (MELCCFP) (2023). *Retombées économiques des activités de chasse, de pêche, de piégeage et d'observation de la faune au Québec en 2022* [Report].

## Small game management

### Status of the main small game populations

For information on the status of wolf, coyote, fox and raccoon populations, consult the [furbearer harvesting reports](#)

Populations of grouse and ptarmigan species can undergo major annual fluctuations that influence harvest levels and hunting success. These species—as well as the snowshoe hare—also experience cyclical variations in abundance, meaning that their populations rise and fall on a regular basis over time. These cycles can last from a few years to more than a decade and are mainly caused by natural factors such as food availability and predation.

Assessing the status of small game populations is therefore challenging. Monitoring populations of galliformes (ruffed grouse and spruce grouse) and snowshoe hares relies on calculating indicators based on harvest data available in the activity reports of structured wildlife territories (TFS)<sup>3</sup>.

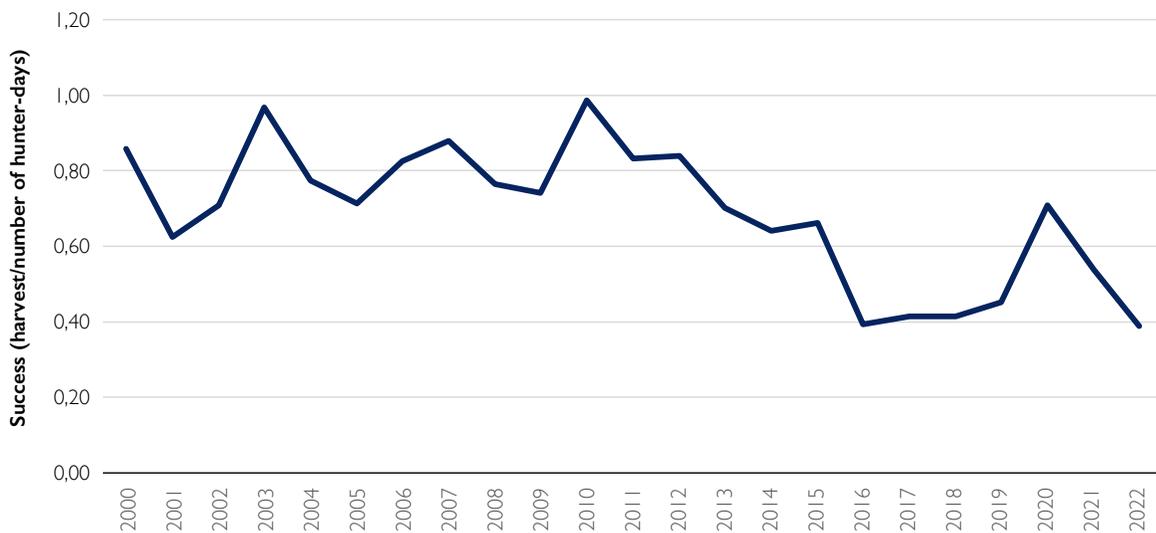
**Hunting success is the main indicator used. It considers both the number of individuals harvested and the number of days hunters spent hunting (hunting pressure).**

Over the past decades, TFS data show a significant decline in hunting success, indicating a decrease in populations in Québec. However, success appears to have stabilized since 2015 for galliformes and since 2017 for snowshoe hare.

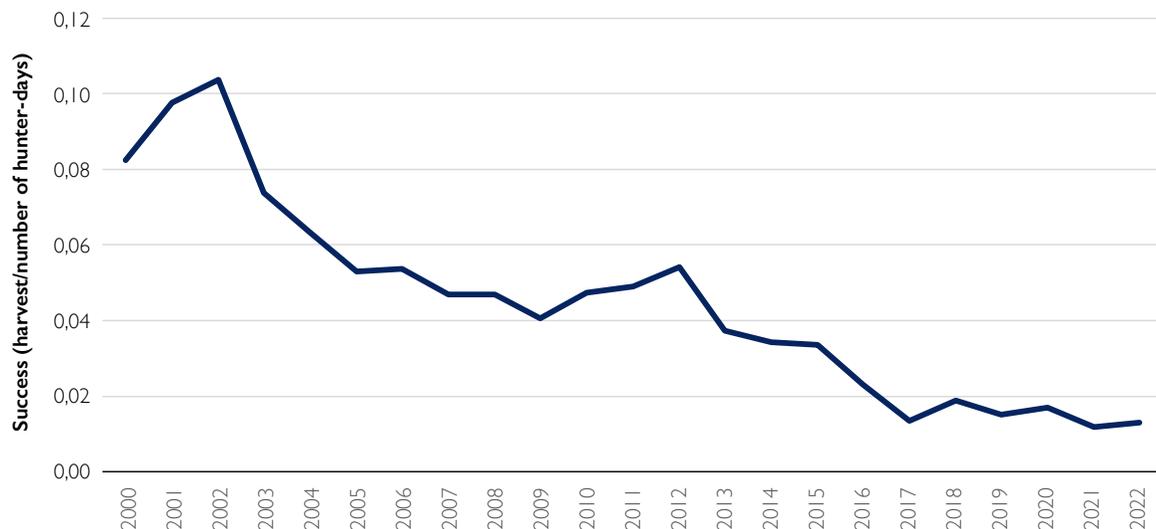
Even though hunting success has decreased across Québec in recent decades, these species are generally considered common and abundant.

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<sup>3</sup> The TFS concerned include controlled harvesting zones (zecs), outfitting operations and wildlife reserves.



**Figure 2: Hunting success for galliformes (ruffed and spruce grouse) in structured wildlife territories**



**Figure 3: Hunting success for snowshoe hare in structured wildlife territories**

At the Québec scale, populations therefore appear able to support harvesting through hunting. Regional concerns do exist, however, regarding the status of certain populations or the level of exploitation of specific species. Available data raise concerns for the ruffed grouse and snowshoe hare in southern Québec, where hunting pressure is high. Concerns have also been raised for the spruce grouse and ptarmigan species. The Ministère remains attentive to the status of these populations to ensure sound management.

## Management tools and key principles

Since small game populations experience significant annual fluctuations, sometimes cyclical, and vary spatially, particularly according to habitat, small game management must be carried out at a broad scale (bioclimatic domain, province) and over the medium or long term.

Given the abundance of these populations, no annual limit applies to small game species; only daily bag limits and possession limits are in effect for certain species. The main management tool is the application of an authorized hunting season, which protects small game during periods of vulnerability, such as the breeding season. For furbearers, the hunting season is also intended to enhance the value of these species by targeting the time of year when their fur can be marketed. Daily bag limits and possession limits help ensure more equitable access to the resource among its users.

The following key principles also guide small game management:

- Decision-making based on the best available knowledge concerning the biology and ecology of species, including population status, with a view to sustainable management;
- Recognition of the intrinsic value of the various small game species, which play an essential role in ecosystems;
- Recognition of the importance of small game hunting, particularly through the optimization of harvesting opportunities when population status permits;
- Respect for the ancestral rights of Indigenous communities.



## Issues

Analyses conducted by the Ministère, as well as regional dialogues held with the national and regional wildlife advisory tables and with Indigenous communities, have identified many concerns. Nearly 20 issues were retained and grouped under four main themes.

### Sustainable management of populations and habitat

- The abundance of most species appears adequate to support hunting. However, a downward trend in populations is observed across all bioclimatic domains. Available information also raises significant concerns regarding the status of certain species, including the ruffed grouse, the spruce grouse and the snowshoe hare, particularly in southern Québec.
- Knowledge on population status and harvest levels is partial, as data are available only for structured wildlife territories. This limits the Ministère's ability to make a clear diagnosis of species status and to detect emerging issues.
- Gaps exist in the dissemination of information on small game management, and certain myths and misconceptions persist regarding specific hunting practices or species.



## Development and management of the activity

- Due to its accessibility and simplicity, small game hunting remains the main gateway for new hunters and supports their retention. Moreover, the activity generates significant economic benefits.
- Some small game species are under-promoted, which can negatively affect the public image of hunting.

## Territory sharing and accessibility

- Access to the territory is becoming increasingly difficult for various reasons.
- Various users experience challenges related to territory sharing, including sport hunters, hunters using dogs, trappers, Indigenous hunters, and others.



## Coexistence with wildlife

- Many small game species live in proximity to humans, which can lead to coexistence issues:
  - > Damage to agricultural production;
  - > Damage to property and goods;
  - > Disturbance.
- Certain species can also transmit diseases to humans, such as [tularemia](#).



## Orientations and objectives of the Small Game Management Plan

National orientation	National objectives
1. Ensure the Ministère's leadership in promoting consideration of small game issues and implementing the management plan	1.1 Ensure rigorous monitoring of the management plan through periodic evaluation of progress achieved and implementation status, and communicate the results.
	1.2 Encourage the involvement of the Ministère's various branches, stakeholders in the field and Indigenous communities in implementing actions or initiatives that support the consideration of issues and achievement of the plan's objectives.
2. Ensure sustainable and responsible management of small game populations and their habitat	2.1 Ensure that small game management supports the maintenance of indigenous species populations and ecosystem integrity.
	2.2 Monitor small game populations and harvest levels using appropriate tools and indicators to support decision-making.
	2.3 Improve knowledge on species, their habitat and factors that may influence populations, and integrate this knowledge into small game management.
	2.4 Ensure the availability of quality habitats for small game and maintain connectivity.
	2.5 Ensure optimal development of species through adapted management measures.
3. Promote harmonious coexistence between small game species and the public	3.1 Reduce human-wildlife conflicts by ensuring an adequate understanding of the issues and intervening appropriately.

# Key actions to improve small game management

The Small Game Management Plan includes numerous actions. Five of these form the cornerstone of implementation and will be prioritized by the Ministère.

## **Develop and implement a monitoring system based on simple and efficient indicators**

An effective monitoring system will improve the available knowledge on the status of the main species' populations and will support informed decision-making for the sustainable management of small game and its hunting rules.

## **Implement a voluntary reporting tool for harvests and observations from hunters**

Hunters will be invited to contribute to this initiative, which will enhance our knowledge on population status, harvest levels and the degree of exploitation of small game. This approach, used successfully by many U.S. states, will provide essential information for all hunting zones. Hunting rules would therefore be better adapted to regional realities.

## **Continue efforts to promote consideration of small game habitat needs in land use planning**

Species management must take into account the preservation of quality habitats, and the Ministère will encourage ongoing efforts in this regard.

## **Make available and promote information on species, their habitat, ecology, management and harvest**

Sound wildlife management also requires effective communication. The Ministère intends to increase communication with its clientele to better explain wildlife management and certain management decisions.

## **Coexistence with wildlife: collaborate with relevant stakeholders to document existing issues, identify concerns and find solutions to reduce conflicts**

Issues related to human–wildlife coexistence are constantly increasing. An integrated strategy to address these issues has become essential and will be included in the Small Game Management Plan.

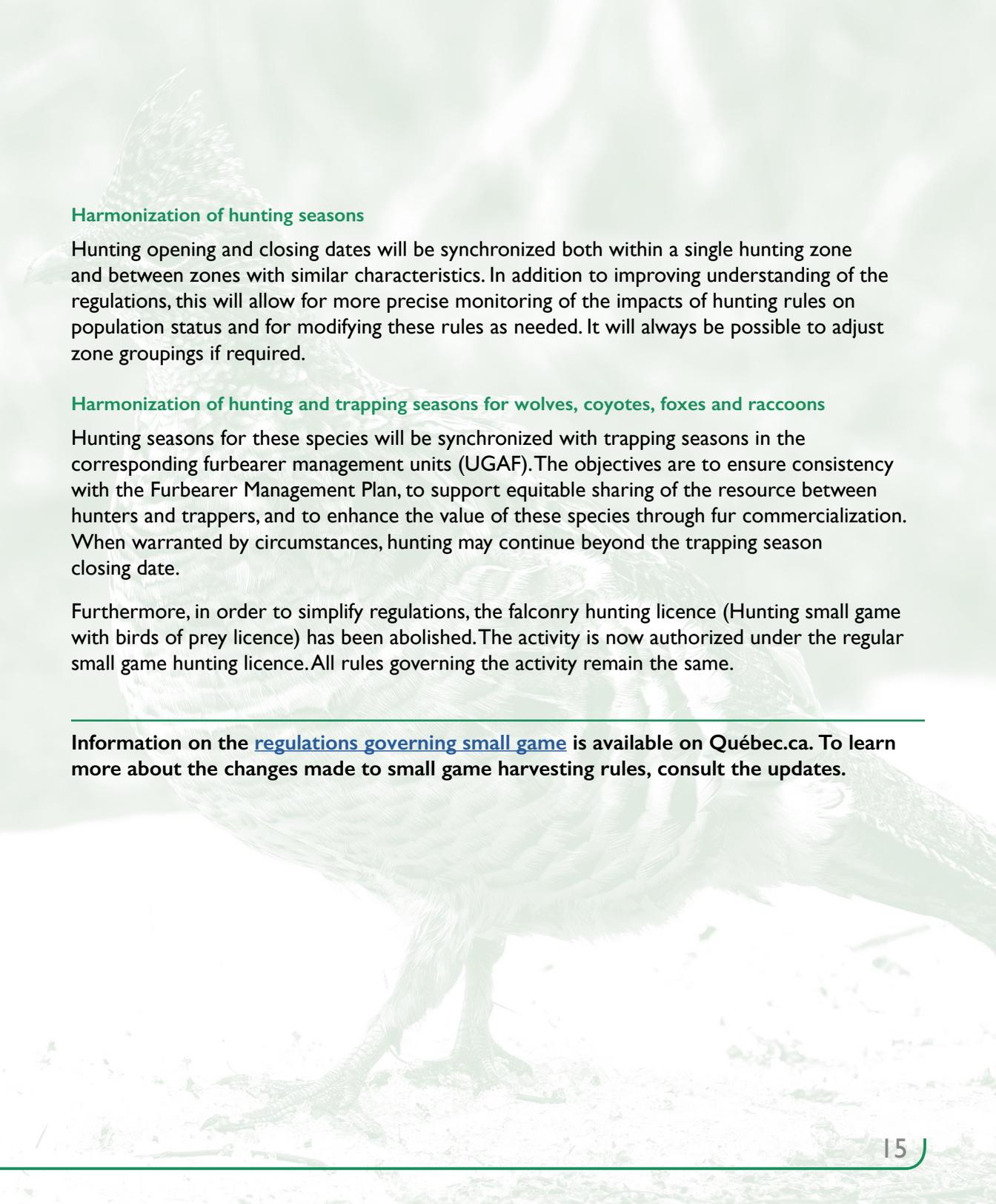
## Harvesting rules

The rules governing small game hunting reflect the principles, orientations and objectives of the management plan and comply with ministerial directions related to regulatory simplification. They aim to ensure the sustainable management of small game while maintaining attractive hunting opportunities. These rules also take into account the decline in certain species' populations, primarily in southern Québec.

In addition to protecting game during periods of vulnerability, sharing the resource among different user groups and hunters, and enhancing the value of harvested animals, the management plan establishes three provincial parameters to guide decisions on harvesting rules:

- Harmonization of rules for the main game species within the same zone;
- Harmonization of rules among zones with similar characteristics;
- Harmonization of hunting and trapping seasons for species with dual status (small game and furbearers).





### Harmonization of hunting seasons

Hunting opening and closing dates will be synchronized both within a single hunting zone and between zones with similar characteristics. In addition to improving understanding of the regulations, this will allow for more precise monitoring of the impacts of hunting rules on population status and for modifying these rules as needed. It will always be possible to adjust zone groupings if required.

### Harmonization of hunting and trapping seasons for wolves, coyotes, foxes and raccoons

Hunting seasons for these species will be synchronized with trapping seasons in the corresponding furbearer management units (UGAF). The objectives are to ensure consistency with the Furbearer Management Plan, to support equitable sharing of the resource between hunters and trappers, and to enhance the value of these species through fur commercialization. When warranted by circumstances, hunting may continue beyond the trapping season closing date.

Furthermore, in order to simplify regulations, the falconry hunting licence (Hunting small game with birds of prey licence) has been abolished. The activity is now authorized under the regular small game hunting licence. All rules governing the activity remain the same.

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Information on the [regulations governing small game](#) is available on Québec.ca. To learn more about the changes made to small game harvesting rules, consult the updates.



Snowshoe hare © Jean Lapointe

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