



Hingham Deer Management Program 2017

The goal of the deer management program in Hingham is to manage the deer population. Although there isn't any data on the number of deer in Hingham specifically, it is estimated that in Wompatuck State Park, the population is about 50 deer/sq. mile. According to MA Fisheries and Wildlife, once deer numbers rise above ~20 deer/sq. mile, the forest habitat is impacted. Since the natural predators that kept the deer population in check are no longer around, it is up to people to step in.

Overpopulation of deer negatively impacts humans, vegetation, and deer themselves. A single deer eats about 5 lbs. of forage each day. Some communities have experienced extensive browse, resulting in declines of native wildflowers and shrubs, a decline in the regeneration of trees, and yard damage. With an increase in deer, more vehicle collisions occur and the risk of Lyme disease rises. With a growth in deer population, many deer die due to starvation, disease, and stress.

Currently, the deer management program only allows bow hunting on six parcels of conservation land, with a total number of 475 acres available for hunting. The program does not limit the number of hunting permits and only restricts hunters to place up to two stands per property. Hunters are asked to report the number of deer harvested to the Conservation Department.

In the past three years, the Conservation Department has given out a large number of hunting permits, but has seen little success in harvesting, based on reported numbers.

Year	2014	2015	2016
Number of Hunting Permits given out	62	66	55
Number of Deer Harvested	5	8	14

To improve the deer management program, the Conservation Department consulted David Stainbrook- the Deer & Moose Project Leader at MA Fisheries and Wildlife, Peter Gamache- Environmental Police Officer, and neighboring towns who run a deer management program.

Proposed Changes to the Deer Management Program

Goal: To manage the deer population in Hingham.

Limiting the number of hunting permits to 35.

According to MA Fisheries and Wildlife, the maximum number of bow hunters per acre of land is: 1 hunter per 20 acres. With 475 acres of land, 24 hunters can be permitted to hunt, and since not everyone hunts at the same time, that number can be increased to 35.

Selecting hunters: lottery system with those who harvested at least one doe in the year prior invited back.

All 2015 and 2016 hunters will be notified by email or phone of the changes to the deer management program and a posting will be made on the Conservation Commission website. Those hunters who reported *any* deer harvest in 2015

and 2016 will be invited to participate in the 2017 season (a total of 10 hunters reported a harvest in 2015 and/or 2016). The rest of the applicants will be randomly selected at a public drawing. All who were selected will be notified by email or phone. An annual beginning of the season meeting will be held and permits for the selected 35 hunters will be given out, along with the request to fill out log books (described below). Hunters who harvested at least one *doe* will be invited back to hunt the following season. Even if invited back, ALL hunters must reapply each season.

Limiting the number of stand tags to 4 maximum, with up to 2 stands per property.

Conservation properties have been experiencing an increase in stands left behind well after the season has ended. Currently the regulations allow hunters to place up to 2 stands on each property, 14 days prior to the start of the season. These stands must be taken down no later than one month after the end of the season. There is currently no way to track where the stands are placed or if they are removed. By limiting the number of stand tags, the Conservation Department believes it will reduce the number of stands that may potentially be abandoned. The Conservation Department anticipates that hunters will request more stand tags, and staff is open to the idea, but to help clean up conservation properties, staff would like to limit the number of tags given to four for now.

Allow stands to be placed 16 days prior to the start of the season, rather than 14.

Currently the regulations allow hunters to place stands 14 days prior to the start of the season. Many hunters hope to increase the number of days to 16 to allow for the extra weekend, since most hunters are only able to go out on Saturdays. This would allow hunters to set up stands and allow for deer to become comfortable with the recently disturbed area.

Volunteer Hours.

Currently, the Conservation Department encourages hunters to spend at least two hours a year volunteering to maintain conservation properties. These hours are expected to be done on an honor system and do not require hunters to report what work they have done. Many hunters expressed an interest in volunteering to help clear conservation properties of abandoned stands and clean up the paths. The Conservation Department would like to organize the hunters to remove the abandoned tree stands and clean up the properties, when necessary. Hunters will act as agents of the Town and will be given permission to go on the six Hingham properties that allow hunting, locate tree stands, record the GPS coordinates of each stand, and attach a card onto the stand or tree stating: 1) the date the stand was located, 2) that the stand may be removed by the Conservation Department, and 3) to contact the Department for information. Staff will confirm that the stand is indeed on conservation property, using the GPS coordinates. Once the stand location is confirmed, volunteers will be given the coordinates and permission to remove stands. The stands will be stored for one year. During this time, the stand owner is able to contact the Conservation Department and request their stand back. After a year, the unclaimed stands will be recycled.

Liability Waiver Form.

Currently, the Conservation Department does not ask hunters to sign a liability waiver form. To better protect the Town, a statement will be added to the application form stating that the Town is not liable for any injury or loss of property that may occur while hunting or volunteering on conservation property. This statement will be reviewed by Town Counsel before the 2017 application forms are finalized.

Log Book.

The Conservation Department would like to create a log book for hunters to fill out and submit at the end of the hunting season. The log book will request hunters to report:

1. Date when hunter went out hunting.
2. How many hours of hunting done on that day.
3. Conservation land visited.
4. Deer harvest and seal number.

5. Any volunteer activity done and the number of hours.
6. Other comments (wildlife observations, interactions with visitors or other hunters, etc).

This log book will create a record and generate data on how many hours a hunter typically spends hunting and volunteering, and which properties are popular to hunt on. The Conservation Department will also be able to see the seal number for the harvested deer and confirm it with MA Fisheries and Wildlife.

Fees.

Currently the Conservation Department does not charge any fees for hunting. Fees have been discussed, but at this time, staff does not feel that fees are necessary.

Staff has found that other towns with deer management programs do not charge fees in order to be protected by the Recreational Use Statute (MGL Ch. 21 § 17c), which provides liability protection to landowners who allow public access on their property for any type of recreation without charging a fee.

Conservation requests to amend the current hunting program to:

1. Limit the number of permits to 35.
2. Invite back successful hunters and have a lottery system to select up to 35 hunters.
3. Limit the number of stand tags given out to a maximum of four, with up to two stands per property.
4. Expand the placement of stands to 16 days prior to the start of the season. **(PENDING REVIEW)**
5. Allow hunters to form volunteer groups to assist with cleanup efforts on conservation properties.
6. Ask hunters and volunteers to sign a liability form.
7. Request that hunters keep and submit a log book.