

TOWN OF HARVARD DEER MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

***ZOOM MEETING 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Wednesday November 8, 2023***

Attending: Tom Cotton, Bob Douglas, Jessie Panek. Joe Polido joined partway through. Also attending: Mass Fisheries and Wildlife biologist Chalis Bird and members of the public

Bob opened the meeting.

Joe was delayed, so started with report from liaison with ConCom. Jessie said there had been no discussion related to DMS at recent Conservation Commission meetings.

Bob said environmental police were happy with process of hunt so far this season; and said it has been our best season so far.

Tom gave a report on the log. Said “it is running well”.

Bob asked that any hunters not hunting their areas – or any examples of harassment – should let DMS know.

Don – said he has in past years seen non program hunters on the Great Elms parcel.

Bob introduced guest Chalis Bird, who is a Mass fisheries and wildlife biologist, based in Ayer. Harvard is technically not her district (W. Boylston is center for our region). But since so close she is quite familiar with Harvard. Works with all wildlife from songbirds to turtles to bear to deer. She does research, arranges learn to hunt programs, etc.

Chalis reports that we are definitely in the rut... rut typically bell shape, usually peak sometime in Nov. Most activity in week of Halloween. Pre rut both does and bucks are eating as much as possible. Once in rut, they hardly eat at all. Right before shotgun season starts rut starts to taper, deer start to eat more, bucks don't move as much. During rut Bucks are hyper focused on chasing females so more clumsy, good for stand hunting.

In comments on the state form that hunters fill out each time they harvest a deer, they should indicate Harvard *controlled* hunt. Or Harvard conservation *controlled* hunt'. The word *controlled* is important so that searches of the state system will pick up all hunts done for management of deer.

Donating deer to food pantry program was launched partway through last year. Last year over 1500 meals, this year already 3000 meals donated. To qualify for program, after a deer is killed, it needs to be dressed within 4 hours, and taken to one of specified butchers within 24 hours, (the Country Butcher in Groton is closest to us). This program is funded by donations. If hunters donate at least 15 pounds they can get \$50 off their butchering fees.

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Massachusetts Deer and Moose Project Leader Martin Feehan handles the distribution part. All meat is ground, packaged in 1-pound packages. Not sure if organizations pick up or is delivered to them. Most food pantries to date are for veterans. If interested, reach out to Martin. Or email Chalis for more info.

Next year all archery will open statewide at same time, zones all same.

Oct. 7 is already set as 2024 statewide archery opening. Goal is to provide more opportunity, especially for youth. Warmer temps make easier to start learning to hunt.

DMS sends a survey to hunters at end of season. Give any ideas for questions to Tom.

It would be good to start now to identify new land that might be added to hunt in 2024. Don Osmer said many years ago Fruitlands had hunters. Might be possible again. Check with Trustees and see if open to a controlled hunt like ours. I also mentioned we might check with Green Eyrie.

Joe P. reported that one of our hunters Zach asked if he could get a longtime hunter buddy to hunt with him on Great Elms. Joe put Patrick through qualifying. Last week, he did fine. Has all the credentials, doe tags, all vetted. Joe made a motion to bring Patrick on as part of a team on Great Elms. The other hunter on the property is also in favor (Zach and one other). Team hunting has been successful, is encouraged.

Tom seconded, motion approved unanimously. Jessie will send request to Liz/Eve, ask to put on next CC agenda. Bob will provide hunter info to the Agent.

Joe reported great season to date: 3 from Damon/Stephenson, 1 Barrett, 1 Tripp, 1 Coke, 1 Willard-Poitras. Tom only remembered 6. Need to check logs.

No hunters have experienced new issues with vandalism, harassment, encroachment, or unauthorized hunters. Last reported incident was Tuesday Nov. 7, when an unauthorized gun hunter on Tripp/Stephenson West who was caught on live webcam, reported immediately to both local and Environmental Police. Harvard police reported that this investigation was ongoing.

Walter Bickford a commissioner from Mass wildlife. Hunting is a critical tool for deer management and provides important food for many.

Vote to approve minutes from Aug 7, all in favor.

Vote to approve minutes from Aug. 28 as amended. All in favor.

Next meeting Wed. Dec. 13.

Motion to adjourn; all voted in favor.

Adjourned 7:59 pm.

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