

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 12, 2019
APPROVED: DECEMBER 5, 2019**

Conservation Commission Members Present: Don Ritchie, Paul Willard, Wendy Sisson, Janet Waldron, Joanne Waldron, Jim Burns and Mark Shaw

Deer Management Subcommittee Members Present: Bob Douglas, Jason, Cole, Tom Cotton, Ben and Paul Willard

Others Present: Liz Allard (Land Use Administrator/Conservation Agent), Nahid Rathore, Gordon & Rita Gibson, Desiree Ball, Mary Grimm, Daniel & Melissa Tracey, Pam & David Durrant, Marc Sevigny, Jennifer Sundeen, Lisa Frackiewicz, Lynn Thornton, Don Osmer, Bill Duckett, Julia Radford, Susan Curtin, Jim Lee, Ken Ashe, Barbara Kemp, Tom Philippou (Board of Health), Chris Dahlstrom, Stu Sklar and Bill Loehfelm

Wendy Sisson, a member of the Conservation Commission and chair of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee, introduced the members of the Conservation Commission and Deer Management Subcommittee (DMS). Ms. Sisson provided an overview of the conservation land and history of deer management.

Bob Douglas, chair of the DMS, presented the PowerPoint© presentation. Mr. Douglas detailed the mission statement of the subcommittee and the public forums, including the speakers and panelist.

Mr. Douglas explained natural deer populations are 5 -15 deer per square mile. During the 19th century habitat loss and over hunting brought deer populations to the brink of extinction. Populations rebounded in the 1900's with the decline of farming and the Legacy Act. Today there are 100,000 deer in Massachusetts, which are overabundant in many areas of the State. This overabundant population is causing over browsing of tree saplings, shrubs and herbaceous plants within the forests, causing the diversity and age distribution of plants to diminish. Deer-vehicle collisions kill one-million deer, 150 human fatalities, 29,000 human injuries and one-billion in property damage annually across the country. Although ticks, tick-borne illnesses and mosquitoes were not a focus of the DMS, factors relating to them were highlighted. Over-population of deer causes chronic wasting disease and bovine tuberculosis in deer.

The DMS, along with the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife (DFW), completed deer browse surveys on eleven parcels of conservation land between 2017 -2019 in order to get a sense of the impacts deer were having in Harvard. DFW concluded Harvard has 20 – 35 deer per square mile of non-hunted land, with a 4 – 10% growth rate, annually. The DFW ecological goal is for 10 -12 deer per square mile.

Crop damage by deer browsing has caused local farmers to spend collectively over \$300,000 to install protective deer fencing.

Management options for deer include: capture and relocate, contraception, professional sharpshooters, primitive firearms (muzzle-loader) and shotgun hunting and archery. Capturing and relocating deer is difficult and expensive, no relocation site, along with bating are all illegal in Massachusetts. Contraception costs are in the range of \$500 per deer, making it cost-prohibitive. Additionally, it is not allowed by the State. Professional sharpshooters are highly effective; however they too are not permitted within Massachusetts. Primitive firearms (muzzle-loader) and

shotgun hunting is currently allowed in Harvard on private land, the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge and the Delaney Wildlife Management Area, which has its own set of safety concerns. Archery from tree stands is currently practiced in Harvard on lands just mentioned. It is a safe and effective long-term strategy widely used in the suburbs. This method allows a hunter a clear view of their surroundings and a safe downward shot, with a maximum range of 25 yards.

Harvard sits within the eastern zone of Region 9 for deer population densities within the State. Zone 9 is considered slightly above range for the ecological goal of 10 – 12 deer per square mile. Over 70% of Harvard's forest are within the restrictive discharge setback in which no hunting is allowed under State regulations (MGL c. 131 §58).

Information from the Town of Weston in regards to their deer management program, the potential deer population growth rates with and without restricted archery hunting, and the program at the Quabbin Reservoir were detailed.

In conclusion, the DMS recommends the Harvard Conservation Commission authorize a controlled archery hunting program on selected portions of Town-owned Conservation lands during the regular archery hunting season each year, according to State hunting regulations, and that the DMS and their volunteers be authorized to organize and carry out this program.

The controlled archery program would be modeled after the following communities: Andover, Medfield, Dover, Framingham, Grafton, Weston, Carlisle and Sudbury. Hunters would be required to have successfully passed the State-mandated safety training course and qualify locally by hitting a 6-inch target from 75 feet away, three times. Hunting will only be allowed to be conducted from a known location tree stand and away from any existing trail. This program is at no cost to the Town. Hunters will assist the Town in its efforts by monitoring and reporting the deer activity they encounter. Illegal hunters will be removed and prosecuted. Monitoring will include the 10-tallest method, browse surveys and pellet counts. The DMS has identified fifteen potential locations for this program.

A majority of those in attendance took an opportunity to express their opinion and/or ask questions about the process, the value or non-value of the proposed program and the use of Town-owned land for this program.

The Commission took no vote on the recommendation of the DMS this evening, but will further discuss at the November 19, 2019 meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Allard
Land Use Administrator/
Conservation Agent

Document:

- PowerPoint© presentation – Town of Harvard, The Deer Management Subcommittee's Report to the Conservation Commission on the Management of White-tailed Deer, dated September 12, 2019