

WESTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF SELECTMEN
FROM: WESTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION
SUBJECT: DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
DATE: JULY 11, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with us on June 11th and discuss the Commission's recommendation to implement a bow hunting program for deer. Approximately 70 people attended the meeting. The format provided the opportunity for a balanced discussion of the many issues associated with deer populations and bow hunting.

After hearing our presentation and much input from members of the public you voted to support our recommendation, with the condition that before the program is implemented, regulations developed by the Commission will be subject to approval by the Selectmen.

The Commission discussed the attached draft Bow Hunting Regulations on Tuesday, July 10, 2012. After a lengthy discussion and hearing comments from the audience, the Commission voted to promulgate these regulations, contingent upon Board of Selectmen review and approval.

We have kept the regulations as brief and simple as possible, following models from successful programs in surrounding towns. Here we would like to elaborate on a few more details than are in the regulations themselves.

Which Conservation Lands will be open to hunting?

Although there are nine parcels that contain areas that could be hunted, the Commission judges that five present the best opportunities for hunter access with minimal conflict with other users for the initial year of the program: Jericho Town Forest, Ogilvie Town Forest, Dickson Fields, Blaney Aquifer, and Sears Land. Given a ratio of about one hunter per twenty acres (depending on habitat), we anticipate allowing about 20 to 30 hunters on these properties. We think this is a manageable size to start with. The Commission is not proposing to allow hunting at College Pond Recreation Area, Cat Rock and 80-acre

Conservation Area, Doublet Hill, or Highland Forest this year, though we may consider opening portions of some of these properties in the future.

How Will Hunters be Chosen?

In our view, making sure that only highly responsible and proficient hunters are allowed on our land is the absolute key to the success of this program.

The Commission will take applications from qualified hunters and then choose a pool based mainly on bow hunting experience. We will give priority to qualified Weston residents or town employees, but we doubt that will provide enough proficient hunters. Background checks will be run by the state Environmental Police. Selected hunters will then have to pass a stringent proficiency test, administered by volunteer hunting coordinators Gordon Smith and Matt Kelly, who have run a similar program in Framingham. The test consists of hitting a 9 inch target at 25 yards three times out of five.

Hunters will then be assigned to specific parcels and put in contact with others assigned to that parcel so they can scout the area and work out coordinated territories. Hunters will be given a map of the designated hunting property showing the 500-foot dwelling/roadway prohibition boundary. Hunters will be required to familiarize themselves with this map and to carry identification and the Town's permit with them at all times.

Unfortunately, illegal hunting takes place on our land. The Commission occasionally discovers deer stands and blinds, stray arrows, and on one occasion, hunters themselves. Despite our best efforts to police the properties, we do not have the resources to be ever-present. The Commission hopes that encouraging permitted hunters with a stake in the program will help deter illegal hunting and will give the Commission greater leverage to ensure that hunters follow the rules and regulations.

Within the past few years, Sudbury, Dover, Medfield, Andover, Framingham, and Duxbury have instituted bow hunting programs and have met with success in reducing the deer population. These towns have had no reports of accidents or resident dissatisfaction with the program, and have received information about illegal hunting activities from permitted hunters. We would pass such information along to the Environmental Police.

Restrictions on the Season or on Access

The Commission has discussed at length the interaction of bow hunting and other recreational use of conservation land. We believe that bow hunting is safe, or we would not recommend it. We also believe that we need to maximize hunter access to have success. For these reasons, we strongly urge the Selectmen not to limit hunting hours. Other towns that allow hunting tell us that Saturday is an important and productive day for hunters. We also believe that it would be highly impractical to close hunted parcels to other users, and that doing so would only increase fear and resentment of bow hunting—exactly what we are trying to avoid. No other public lands in the state that we are aware of are closed to other users during hunting season.

In Addition

We (together with Animal Control Officer Dick Murray) have met with the state Environmental Police to make them aware of our proposed program. They have agreed to run background checks on our hunter applicants, to help monitor the areas being hunted, and to be on call in the event of a wounded deer straying onto private property—all normal duties of the Environmental Police during hunting season.

We have also met with the Board of Health to discuss initiating a comprehensive town-wide approach to reducing tick-borne diseases, as beginning to reduce the deer herd alone will not immediately solve this problem.

Attachments

We have enclosed the following resources for your review:

1. Proposed Hunting Regulations
2. Proposed Hunter Permit Application
3. Town Map showing huntable areas of Jericho, Ogilvie, Dickson Field, Blaney Aquifer, and Sear's Land.
4. Massachusetts Fish & Wildlife Guide to Hunting (deer hunting section only)