



Deer Management Program at Cowassock Woods, Framingham

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is SVT implementing a deer-management program at Cowassock Woods?

We are implementing a pilot project in the fall of 2015 in an effort to reduce the deer overpopulation that has significantly degraded the vegetation and wildlife habitat at Cowassock Woods. MassWildlife recommends that this area (Zone 10) have 6 to 8 deer per square mile; presently, Zone 10 has 18 to 20 deer per square mile. These recommendations are based on both human and ecological health.

What is the new policy?

Controlled hunting will be permitted to SVT-approved bow hunters at Cowassock Woods from November 18, 2015, through December 31, 2015. As per state law, hunting is not allowed on Sundays.

Is it safe to walk the trails during the hunting season?

Yes, absolutely. The trails will remain open. The bow hunters will be located in tree stands at least 25 yards from any trail. In bow hunting from tree stands, the hunters are aiming downward in a very limited radius. They will only be discharging arrows when they have a clear sight of the deer.

As an extra precaution, visitors may wear orange or other brightly colored clothing. Dog walkers should leash their dogs and put an orange vest or other bright-colored garment on their dog(s).

How does SVT select hunters?

We choose hunters that have a proven record of safety and success. Hunters must have a valid Massachusetts hunting license, pass a background check, and pass a proficiency test. SVT interviews the hunters to assure that they will conform to our policies and understand the goals of our program.

Will the hunters be using firearms?

No. Firearms are not permitted. The hunters will be bow hunters.

Can anyone with a license hunt there?

No. The property will NOT be open to hunting for the general public. Only SVT-permitted hunters may participate in this program.

Will the hunters be tracking the deer on the trails?

No. The hunters are required to use tree stands set at least 25 yards from any trail.

Will the hunters be hunting any other animals?

No. The hunters are not allowed to hunt any other forms of wildlife.

What will happen to the deer that are hunted?

The meat is utilized by the hunter and his or her family.

Do you allow hunting on other SVT properties?

SVT's Garfield Woods in Berlin has been open to all forms of hunting since its acquisition in 1991.

In the future, will hunting be permitted on other SVT properties?

The purpose of this hunting program is to begin to stabilize the deer population in a safe manner as part of our land stewardship obligations. Since land stewardship is site-specific, each SVT property will continue to be evaluated on an individual basis.

Isn't hunting inconsistent with the purpose of conservation land? Why can't nature take its course?

With few natural predators in this region, the deer population in Eastern Massachusetts is well above its natural level. MassWildlife recommends that our area, Zone 10, should have 6 to 8 deer per square mile for healthy forests and people; presently, Zone 10 has 18 to 20 deer per square mile.

An unrestricted deer population is a powerful disruptive force in our forests. A hands-off approach has allowed deer to threaten many native species and forest regeneration. To protect and preserve the diversity of plants and other animal species, we must reintroduce a control mechanism to keep the deer herd in check. Hunting has proven to be the most effective tool that is available to use.

What are the goals of the program?

- **To protect forest health.** The health of both deer and the forests is closely tied together. One of the most reliable indicators of a healthy forest is its "understory." In a healthy forest, the understory has several layers of young trees, shrubs, and wildflowers closer to the ground.

Deer feed primarily on the tender shoots and buds of young trees and plants in the understory. They also depend on a lush forest understory to hide from predators and protect their young. When the number of deer is out of balance for a habitat, they can very quickly overbrowse the understory and degrade the forest environment for themselves and other plants and animals.

In recent years, SVT staff and volunteers have observed degradation of the forest in Cowassock Woods from deer overbrowsing. The degradation is evident in the lack of tree regeneration and the loss of wildflowers and other ground-level vegetation. Forest birds that rely on these lower levels of vegetation for nesting and feeding have declined at this site.

- **To reduce tick-borne illnesses.** Several diseases are transmitted to humans by deer ticks, which are insects that depend on deer for part of their life cycle. Deer play a critical role in supporting large populations of adult ticks and spreading them throughout the landscape. Lyme disease is the best known tick-borne illness but others include ehrlichiosis and babesiosis. Research has shown that reducing deer densities may help reduce the population of deer ticks.
- **To reduce deer-car collisions.** In suburban Massachusetts, deer-car collisions are often the greatest source of deer mortality and suffering. Such collisions cause damage to vehicles and are usually fatal to the deer, while also causing injury and (rarely) fatalities for drivers and passengers.

How will SVT measure success?

According to MassWildlife, it is not feasible to 1) know exactly how many deer are on a property at any given time; 2) know exactly how many deer to hunt based on that number; and 3) to understand the specifics of the population growth rate and mortality rates at a site. That said, SVT will monitor the deer population and its impact at Cowassock Woods in two ways:

- **Vegetation assessments.** An accessible method to study deer impacts is to survey the plants that deer eat (or don't eat). Large impacts on plant communities are also likely to have an impact on local wildlife communities, so by monitoring plants we can get a sense of how deer are affecting the entire local ecosystem. SVT staff will set up monitoring plots and will survey these on an annual basis.
- **Hunter log.** Hunters will keep a log of their time spent at Cowassock Woods. This log report will track hours spent hunting, deer observations, and all deer

taken during a hunt. Not only will the log record deer taken, it will also record all deer observed on-site during the hours hunted.

What are the safety rules and regulations for bow hunters at Cowassock Woods?

- There will be no use of firearms.
- Two permitted hunters will be limited to the use of tree stands set at least 25 yards from any trail.
- Cowassock Woods will NOT be open to hunting for the general public.
- All hunters must provide a copy of their hunting license, license plate number, and contact information to SVT.
- Written permission from SVT must be carried at all times when hunting at Cowassock Woods and produced upon request from SVT staff and visitors.
- Hunters will receive a property map to be carried with them at all times while hunting Cowassock Woods.
- This season, authorized hunting is permitted 1/2 hour before sunrise all day until 1/2 hour after sunset from November 18, 2015, through December 31, 2015. No hunting is allowed on Sundays.
- All hunting will take place from elevated, temporary tree stands within designated areas.
- Hunters must report any deer taken to SVT within 24 hours.
- Hunters must use care and discretion for other property users when field dressing and removing a deer from the property.
- Hunters must be courteous to all property users and make a genuine effort to inform others about the hunting program when encountered. SVT must be notified of any negative encounters with visitors as soon as possible.
- SVT and the local environmental police must be informed as soon as possible about any injured deer that moves out of the huntable zone.
- Tree stands will be removed within 30 days of the close of hunting season.

How are you promoting visitor safety at Cowassock Woods during hunting season?

- SVT has limited the type of hunting allowed. We are permitting archery hunting only, not firearms.
- Only SVT-approved and permitted hunters are allowed to participate in this program.
- Per state law, hunting activity is not allowed within 500 feet of a residence, unless the landowner has given permission, or within 150 feet of a public way.
- Hunting activity is limited to a minimum distance of 25 yards from all trails.
- Signs explaining the program will be posted at each entrance to Cowassock Woods .
- Signage at the trailhead kiosk will list safety precautions, requirements, and rules.
- Visitors can wear orange as an extra-protection. Dogs should be leashed and be wearing some type of bright-colored garment.
- We will post advisories on our website and will issue press release advisories as well.
- By engaging legally-permitted hunters, we can also discourage illegal hunting that often occurs without our knowledge. Illegal hunting poses a greater safety risk to visitors.

**If you have additional questions,
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