

# WESTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
**FROM:** WESTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
**SUBJECT:** 2012 DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM SUMMARY  
**DATE:** 1/31/2013

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In July 2012, after a year of study, the Weston Board of Selectmen unanimously authorized the Conservation Commission (the Commission) to implement a deer management program on five town conservation lands during the 2012 fall hunting season (Oct 15-Dec 31). The issue was brought to the attention of the Commission and the Board of Selectmen by residents who had written letters in recent years urging the town to look into the problem of too many deer.

Below are summaries of the process leading up to the 2012 Bow Hunting Program, results from the hunting season, and the Commission's recommendation for 2013.

### The Process

- 2008 – 2010: The Board of Selectmen and Conservation Commission received a handful of emails/letters from residents with concerns about the burgeoning deer population and its effect on plants, public safety (deer-car collisions) and public health (Lyme disease).
- 2011: The Commission launched a 9-month public outreach effort to learn about deer issues. The Commission hoped to address two issues: (1) whether Weston has an overpopulation of deer; and (2) if so, whether the town should work towards establishing a sustainable level of deer density.
- October 2011: The Commission hosted an evening public program with presentations by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, the Dover Board of Health, and the Sudbury Conservation Commission.
- November 2011 – January 2012: The Commission ran online surveys requesting feedback from residents on their Deer Sightings and their assessment of deer impacts. Over 230 residents responded with 73% of the respondents in favor of the town taking steps to establish a sustainable level of deer density.
- December 2011: The Commission hosted a nature walk at the Sears Land with Tom Rawinski, Botanist with the US Forest Service. The goal of the walk was to look for signs of deer browse and to tag seedling trees for future growth rate studies.

- February 2012: The Commission hosted an evening forum with presentations by Brian Donahue, Commission member and Environmental historian, who discussed the long-term role of humans in controlling deer population; Tom Rawinski, US Forest Service Botanist, who discussed impacts of deer browse on forest health; and Michele Grzenda, Weston's Conservation Agent, who summarized the resident online deer sightings and impact survey.
- May 2012: The Commission held a public hearing which was well attended. The Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the Board of Selectmen that bow hunting be allowed on select Conservation Land parcels. The Commission published its "Deer in Weston Report" (attached).
- June 2012: The Board of Selectmen held a public meeting and voted to support the program contingent upon review of the hunting regulations.
- July 2012: The Commission drafted hunting regulations. The Board of Selectmen voted to authorize the Commission to undergo a bow hunting program on 5 conservation land parcels in the fall of 2012. Volunteer Hunting Coordinators were selected. The Commission's hunter access application period was open for 1 week; over 70 applications were received. The Commission and the Volunteer Hunting Coordinators reviewed hunter applications and selected 26 hunters to participate in the program. Preference was given to Weston residents and employees.
- August 2012: The Commission worked with the Town's GIS Department to create hunter maps showing a 500' buffer from structures, where hunting is prohibited under state law.
- September 2012: The Commission and the Volunteer Hunting Coordinators held proficiency tests, ran background checks, and distributed hunter packets and access permits to the 26 hunters (13 hunters in Jericho; 5 hunters in Ogilvie; 3 hunters in Dickson Fields; 3 hunters in Blaney Aquifer; and 2 hunters in Sears Land)
- October 2012:
  - The Commission posted "Hunting is Open" signs at trail entrances.
  - The Commission published a "Frequently Asked Questions" flyer on web and local paper
  - First day of hunting was October 15, 2012.
  - A local group of citizens organized "Weston Deer Friends" in opposition to the program.
  - People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), a national organization, sent out a mass email to their members. The Board of Selectmen received hundreds of emails from out-of-town PETA members.
  - In Defense of Animals, a California-based national organization ran an unsettling advertisement in local paper.
- November – December 2012:
  - Brandeis University students installed 3 deer exclosures on Conservation land to begin a long-term project to assess deer browse impacts over time.
  - The Conservation Agent presented a lesson plan on deer biology and management options at the Weston High School.
  - Opinion letters for and against the program were published in the local paper.

- Hunters logged their hunting hours, number of harvested deer, and forest observations on the Commission's electronic hunter log database.
- December 31, 2012: Hunting season closed and hunting signs were removed from Conservation Land.

### **Results based on Hunter Log Database**

- 13 hunters hunting in Jericho Forest harvested 9 deer.
- 5 hunters hunting in Ogilvie Forest harvested 4 deer.
- 3 hunters hunting in Dickson Fields harvested 3 deer.
- 3 hunters hunting in Blaney Aquifer harvested 1 deer.
- 2 hunters hunting in Sears Land harvested 1 deer.
- Hunting logs were received from 25 of 26 hunters.
- A total of 306 hunting days were reported from 25 hunters (a hunter day reflects a hunting event entered into the electronic hunter log database). On average, each of the hunters participated in 10 hunting days during the season.
- A total of 18 deer were harvested – 10 does and 8 bucks (see above for locations).
- Hunters donated a total of 47 hours of land management work clearing trails, removing signage, looking for illegal deer stands, and cleaning pond spillways of debris.
- Hunters discovered three illegal deer stands. These were removed from Weston Conservation land.
- Hunters often observed several deer at a time.
- Other wildlife observed by hunters included red-tailed hawk, fisher, owl, coyotes, red fox, turkey, raccoon, squirrels, and many ticks.
- Hunter/resident interaction – Many hunters reported many positive interactions with residents; one hunter was thanked by a resident who had Lyme disease. One hunter was confronted prior to hunting season while entering Blaney Aquifer off Sylvan Lane by a concerned resident who was opposed to hunting.
- Hunters expressed their interest in continuing the program next year.
- No hunting complaints were reported to the Police Department.
- No hunting complaints from Weston were reported to the Massachusetts Environmental Police.

### **Conservation Commission Recommendation**

The Commission deems that the program, including preparation, implementation, and follow-up, was successful. Eighteen deer were harvested on town conservation land and no conflicts between hunters and other recreational users of the land were reported.

On January 22, 2013, the Commission unanimously voted to request that the Selectmen allow the bow-hunting program to continue in 2013 at the same five properties.

The Commission is available to meet with the Selectmen to discuss this summary and recommendation.