

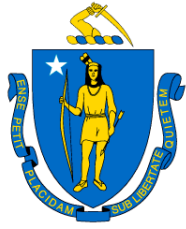


## *White-Tailed Deer Management Program*

*2020 Program Overview & Results*



A Joint Publication of the  
Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation and  
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife



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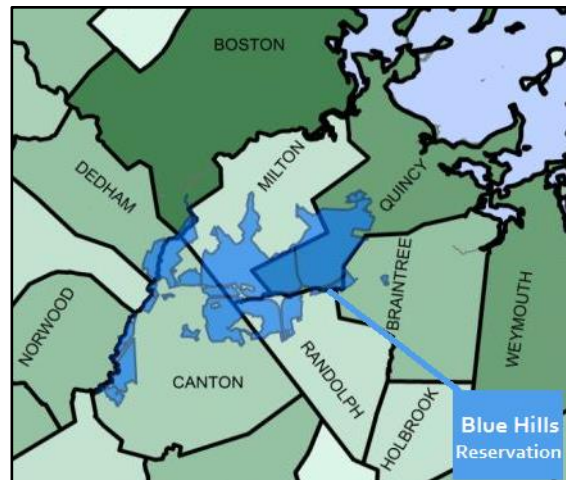
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## 1.0 The DCR Blue Hills Reservation

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) manages and stewards the Blue Hills Reservation. The Reservation encompasses an area of over 7,000 acres and is situated less than ten miles south of downtown Boston in the communities of Braintree, Canton, Dedham, Milton, Quincy, and Randolph. A small portion of Fowl Meadow (north and west of the Neponset River) is located within the Hyde Park neighborhood of the City of Boston. The protection of this area as public open space began over 120 years ago with its establishment in 1893 by the Metropolitan Park Commission (one of DCR's predecessor agencies). As a public parkland and forested area, the Reservation contains a wide variety of natural resources, vegetation, wildlife, and cultural and archaeological resources, and its topography includes prominent hills (Great Blue Hill and Chickatawbut Hill), as well as open fields and several ponds and streams.



## 2.0 Context for Deer Management in the Blue Hills

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) have legislative mandates and missions to protect and manage a myriad of natural resources including forests, wildlife, and the habitats upon which a diversity of wildlife depends. From the canopy to the understory, healthy forest ecosystems are made up of trees and plants of multiple species and age classes and the diversity of vegetation provides suitable and sustainable habitat for a rich and varied wildlife community. From the perspective of long-term forest management, tree regeneration is critical to the long-term survival of forests and their ability to recover from natural disturbances. Forests that contain high deer population densities are vulnerable to deer over-browsing young trees, which can prevent forest regeneration. In addition, extremely high deer densities can promote the spread of some invasive species and significantly reduce biodiversity.

DCR's management of the Blue Hills Reservation is guided by the existence of a comprehensive Resource Management Plan (RMP) that was approved by the DCR Stewardship Council in April 2011 following a robust planning and development process involving input from local residents, stakeholders, and the Friends of the Blue Hills.<sup>1</sup> The Blue Hills RMP noted a growing concern over the size of the deer population within the Reservation and the impact of over-browse on rare plants and other vegetation throughout the Reservation. DCR has become increasingly concerned with the long-term health of the Reservation's forest and the ecological impacts of sustained high deer densities on this natural resource. The RMP explicitly recommended that the agency work with MassWildlife to estimate the size of the deer population, determine its impacts on the Reservation's natural resources, and discuss deer management options.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Friends of the Blue Hills is a non-profit organization that works to preserve the natural resources of and enhance recreational opportunities in the Blue Hills Reservation. For more information visit: [www.friendsofthebluehills.org](http://www.friendsofthebluehills.org).

<sup>2</sup> To view a copy of the approved 2011 Blue Hills Resource Management Plan please visit: <https://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/rmp/bh/sections1-4.pdf>. Appendices can be viewed at: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/stewardship/rmp/bh/appendices.pdf>.

## 2.1 – Legislative Mandate

In addition to following the recommendations within the Blue Hills RMP, DCR and MassWildlife were issued a legislative mandate in the 2014 Environmental Bond Bill ([Chapter 286 of the Acts of 2014](#)), which was signed into law by former Governor Deval Patrick in August 2014. Specifically, Section 43 of the bond bill directs DCR (in consultation with MassWildlife) to “identify areas in which deer overpopulation is negatively impacting forestation, water resources, or plant growth on department-owned land” and “to develop and implement a harvest management plan for the identified areas.”

## 2.2 – Initiation of Deer Management in the Blue Hills

In light of each agency’s mission, the recommendations outlined in the Blue Hills RMP, the results of the deer abundance survey, and the legislative mandate detailed in the 2014 Environmental Bond Bill, DCR and MassWildlife began developing a deer management plan for the Blue Hills Reservation in late 2014. Recognizing that deer management activities can take several forms, both agencies worked together to analyze, assess, and consider the relative impacts and efficacy of several alternative management approaches for a location like the Blue Hills. This planning process and several public information sessions held in the fall of 2015 resulted in the release of a final [2015 Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#) that recommended the phased implementation of annual controlled deer hunting similar to the very successful annual hunt managed by DCR’s Division of Water Supply Protection at the Quabbin Reservation.



## 3.0 Rationale & Objectives for Deer Management in the Blue Hills

The primary objective and rationale for developing and implementing a deer management program is to maintain an ecologically sustainable deer density that allows for the continuous growth and development of forest regeneration. In particular, DCR is trying to reduce the negative impacts that high deer densities have on the regenerating forest to ensure a healthy forest composed of an adequate diversity of tree species and age classes. DCR’s program for white-tailed deer management is not intended to provide a new recreational opportunity in the Blue Hills. Rather, the program provides a concrete, practical, and workable solution intended to deal with a critical environmental problem.

The decision to manage the overpopulation of deer in the Blue Hills Reservation is not related to the role of deer in the transmission of Lyme disease or other tick-borne illnesses. DCR recognizes the myriad of research demonstrating conflicting results regarding the correlation between deer densities, tick abundance, and Lyme disease contraction rates among humans. Furthermore, attempting to solve Lyme disease (and other tick-borne illnesses) or reduce contraction rates among humans is not a goal of DCR’s deer management plan for the Blue Hills. Rather, as stewards of the Blue Hills Reservation, it is DCR’s objective to reduce (and in the long-term reverse) the negative impacts of high deer densities on the Reservation’s vegetation, promote the restoration of healthy habitat for other wildlife, and bring deer densities to a level more aligned with what the forest can sustain.



## 4.0 2020 Permitted Archery Hunt Program Logistics & Operations

As was acknowledged in the initial [2015 Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#), managing deer populations is a complex and dynamic process that is shaped and influenced by a variety of interdependent factors. As a result,

DCR recognizes that effective deer management programs must provide and maintain a good degree of flexibility in order to make modifications and adjustments that are based on in experience and results.

Building on the experience of the 2015 and 2016 controlled hunts, DCR and MassWildlife worked together to develop enhancements to increase the efficacy of the Blue Hills Deer Management Program. Specifically, the 2017 program separated archery hunting from shotgun hunting and established a separate permitted archery hunt in limited areas of the Reservation. In 2018 and 2019 DCR and MassWildlife continued this practice of maintaining a separate permitted archery hunt. In 2020, only a permitted archery hunt was implemented.

Over the last several years (and even prior to DCR's initiation of controlled deer hunting in the Blue Hills Reservation) several private property owners near or adjacent to the Blue Hills have voluntarily allowed archery hunters onto their land to hunt deer using archery. This informal program has been successful in harvesting a number of deer and highlighted the importance of cooperation between landowners and deer hunters. In many cases, archery hunting is the best practical solution to hunt smaller parcels. There are several areas within the Blue Hills Reservation that are challenging to hunt during the shotgun season but lend themselves well to limited archery hunting.

#### 4.1 – Timing & Length

In 2020, limited archery hunting was permitted in certain designated areas of the Blue Hills Reservation for a total of eleven (11) days on **Mondays through Thursdays only between November 16<sup>th</sup> and December 3<sup>rd</sup>**. Hunting was not allowed on Thursday, November 26<sup>th</sup> in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday. In accordance with state hunting regulations, hunters were allowed to hunt one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

#### 4.2 – Hunter Interest and Participation

Licensed hunters were offered the opportunity to apply on-line using a web-based form. The application process was open from October 8 through October 17, 2020 and permittees were selected utilizing a random lottery system.

A total of 356 hunters submitted applications for the permitted archery hunt. From among this applicant pool, DCR conducted a random lottery to select a single group of 225 archery hunters to receive access permits. Of the hunters selected to participate 186 access permits were actually issued. This was due to scheduling conflicts or other unforeseen circumstances that prevented several selected applicants from completing the mandatory orientation or participating in the archery hunt. Access permits were valid on all eleven days in which archery hunting was allowed and permitted hunters were allowed to hunt based upon their schedule and availability.

The table below provides archery hunt applicants and permittees according to state of residence:

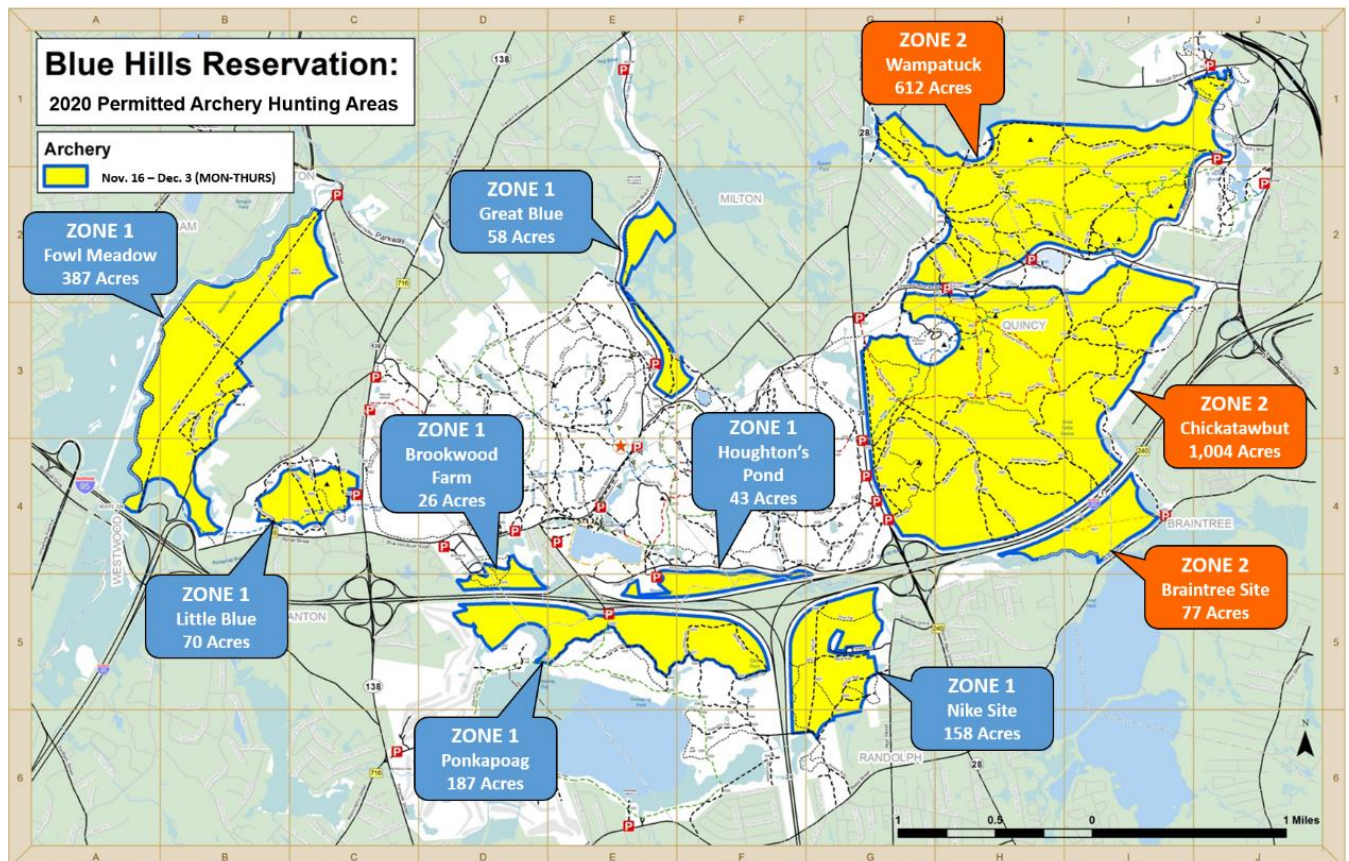
State of Residence	Number of Applicants	Number of Permittees
Connecticut	2	1
Massachusetts	347	182
New Hampshire	4	2
Rhode Island	3	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>186</b>



### 4.3 – Management Areas and Hunter Distribution

Archery hunting was limited to the areas of the Reservation listed in the table and outlined on the map below. Of the Reservation's more than 7,000 acres, a total of 2,622 acres were opened to permitted archery hunting across ten (10) management areas. In order to organize and distribute hunters effectively, archery hunters were separated into two groups and each group was assigned to one of two archery zones. Each zone included several management areas. Hunters assigned to Zone 1 were permitted to hunt in any of the management areas listed within that zone. Hunters assigned to Zone 2 were permitted to hunt in any of the management areas listed within that zone.

Archery Zone	Management Area	Acres Open to Hunting (Per Management Area)	Acres Open to Hunting (Per Zone)	Number of Hunters
ZONE 1	Fowl Meadow	387	929	100
	Little Blue	70		
	Brookwood Farm	26		
	Great Blue	58		
	Houghton's Pond	43		
	Ponkapoag	187		
	Nike Site	158		
ZONE 2	Chickatawbut	1,004	1,693	125
	Wampatuck	612		
	Braintree Site	77		
TOTAL		2,622	2,622	225



#### 4.4 – Hunter Orientation

As outlined in the [2020 Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#), all permittees were required to complete an online orientation. Selected permittees were provided a link to the online orientation and required to watch the orientation video/presentation. After completing the orientation, permittees were then required to complete an online confirmation form indicating that they had completed the orientation, had reviewed and understood the archery hunt rules, and would abide by those rules. Permittees who completed the orientation requirements were issued DCR access permits to participate in the permitted archery hunt.

As part of the orientation, permittees were provided an overview of the [2020 Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#) and the rationale and objectives for conducting a controlled deer hunt. In addition, information on COVID-19 considerations, public safety, hunter safety, and archery hunting safety was provided.

Management zone maps and boundaries and the specific rules and regulations that would govern the conduct of the eleven-day archery hunt were also reviewed (see Appendix A). Details regarding pre-hunt scouting, field dressing and tagging of harvested deer, and how to obtain antlerless deer permits specific to the Blue Hills controlled hunt were also presented.

#### 4.5 – COVID-19 Considerations

Permitted hunters participating in the 2020 archery hunt were required to practice social distancing by remaining at least 6 feet away from other people while hunting in the Blue Hills. In addition, per Governor Baker's order regarding the use of face coverings, all permitted hunters were required to wear a face covering at all times. Any elements of the administration of the Blue Hills archery hunt that in previous years required face-to-face interaction between permitted hunters and DCR staff (such as check-in, harvest reporting, etc.) were modified to reduce or eliminate the need for such interactions.



### 5.0 2020 Harvest Results

A total of 19 deer were harvested from approximately 4.1 mi<sup>2</sup> of forest land opened to hunting. The table below provides more detailed information and deer harvest results for each of the management zones:

Management Zone	Square Miles Hunted	Male	Female	Total
Fowl Meadow	0.60	2	1	3
Little Blue	0.11	--	--	--
Brookwood Farm	0.04	--	--	--
Great Blue	0.10	--	1	1
Houghton's Pond	0.07	--	3	3
Chickatawbut	1.57	4	3	7
Wampatuck	0.96	--	--	--
Ponkapoag	0.30	1	2	3
Nike Site	0.25	--	--	--
Braintree Site	0.12	1	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4.12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19</b>



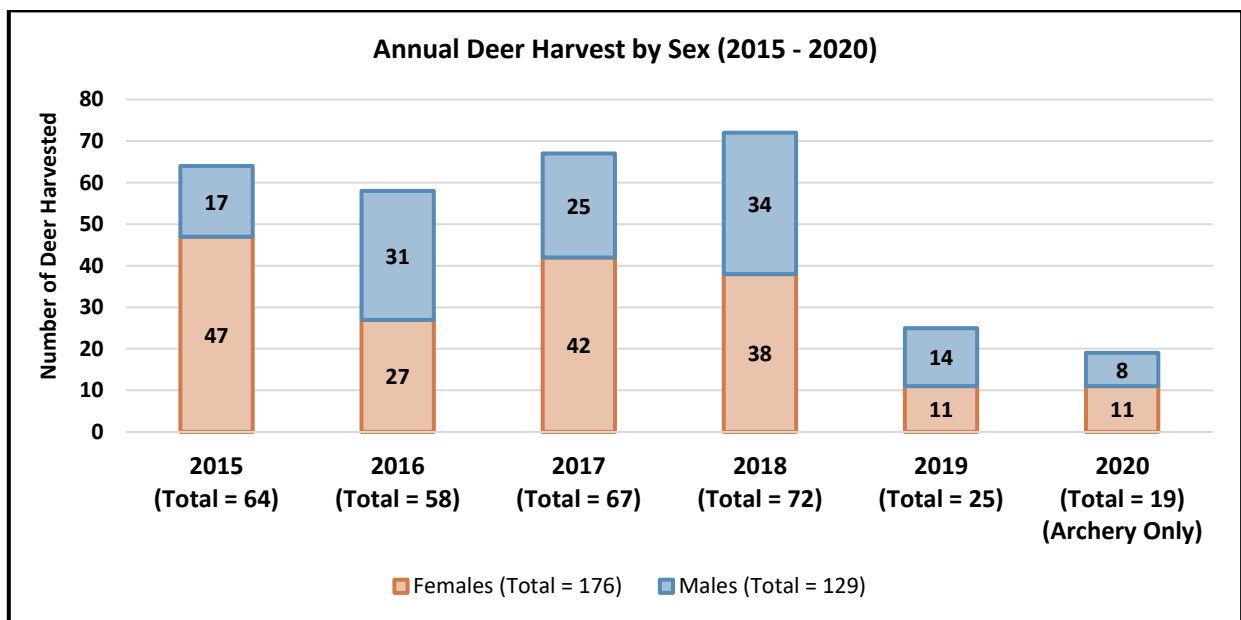


## 6.0 Synopsis of the 2020 Deer Management Program

As was acknowledged in the initial [2015 Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#), managing deer populations is a complex and dynamic process that is shaped and influenced by a variety of interdependent factors. As a result, effective deer management programs must incorporate and maintain a good degree of flexibility in order to make modifications and adjustments that are grounded in experience and ongoing assessment.

DCR and MassWildlife are pleased with the results and smooth operational implementation of the 2020 Blue Hills Reservation permitted archery hunt. Harvest results from this year's archery hunt (19 deer) were slightly higher than the archery harvest in 2019 (17 deer).

The 2020 permitted archery hunt represents continued progress toward addressing deer overabundance and its impacts in the Reservation. The chart below provides annual harvest results (by sex) for each of the six controlled hunts conducted thus far:



From the perspective of public safety, all agencies involved in the coordination and implementation of the 2020 controlled hunt were satisfied. Considerable time was spent assessing a myriad of operational aspects associated with conducting controlled hunting within the Reservation and developing a plan that addressed these operational concerns. The successful execution of this plan and support from permitted hunters for the overall goal of safety represents a significant achievement. Like the previous five controlled hunting programs, the 2020 program demonstrated that hunting can be safely conducted in a suburban/urban setting.

## APPENDIX A



### Blue Hills State Reservation

#### Deer Management Program 2020 Permitted Archery Hunt Rules

*All permittees are required to know and understand the information contained in this document. Please review and read this document carefully and thoroughly prior to attending your assigned hunter orientation.*

#### Background:

The Blue Hills Deer Management Program is part of the Department of Conservation & Recreation's (DCR) long-term effort to manage high deer densities within the Blue Hills Reservation. The primary objective and rationale for developing and implementing a deer management program is to maintain an ecologically sustainable deer density that allows for the continuous growth and development of forest regeneration. In particular, DCR wishes to reduce the negative impacts that high deer densities have on the regenerating forest to ensure a healthy forest composed of adequate diversity of species and age classes.

DCR and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) have concluded that the most practical, workable, and effective management option to accomplish the goal of reducing deer densities is through the use of controlled/permitted hunting. **As such, the Blue Hills Controlled Hunt is not a recreational hunt.** DCR and MassWildlife view the hunters selected to participate in the hunt as partners in successfully achieving the primary objectives of deer management in the Blue Hills. As partners in this effort, DCR and MassWildlife expect all selected permittees to abide by and comply with the rules of the Blue Hills Controlled Hunt Program, DCR's regulations for use of its parklands, MassWildlife's rules and regulations related to hunting, and all Commonwealth laws regarding the possession and discharge of firearms.

Selected permittees who violate any rules or regulations will be immediately removed from the property, ineligible for participation in future years, and subject to any relevant fines or penalties prescribed by applicable state laws and/or regulations.

#### COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2020

**In accordance with the Commonwealth's phased re-opening plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all hunting activities are still permitted in accordance with the regulations (including licenses) for the appropriate hunting season. In addition, hunting is listed within the "Lower Risk" category within the re-opening plan. The use of archery hunting also allows for greater maintenance of social distancing as archery hunters remain stationary and solitary on tree stands that are generally away from established trails. As such, the use of archery hunting**

**reduces the potential for interactions between hunters and between hunters and other members of the public.**

**Permitted hunters participating in the 2020 permitted archery hunt will be required to practice social distancing by remaining at least six (6) feet away from other people while hunting in the Blue Hills. In addition, Per Governor Baker's order regarding the use of face coverings, all permitted hunters are required to wear a face covering at all times.**

#### General Rules & Provisions for the 2020 Blue Hills Permitted Archery Hunt

1. **Hunting by Access Permit Only:** Hunting of white-tailed deer shall be allowed in designated areas of the Blue Hills Reservation by those persons holding an access permit issued by the DCR. All persons to whom such a permit has been issued are also required to have a valid 2020 Massachusetts Hunting/Sporting License issued by MassWildlife.

DCR-issued access permits are valid only for the person named on the permit and for the date/time period specified on the permit.

2. **Organization & Timing:** The 2020 Blue Hills Permitted Archery Hunt will take place over the course of eleven (11) days on **Mondays through Thursdays from November 16<sup>th</sup> to December 3<sup>rd</sup>. There will be no hunting allowed on Thursday, November 26<sup>th</sup> in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday.** In accordance with state hunting regulations, hunters will be allowed to start hunting one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

Access permits for archery hunting will be valid on all days in which archery hunting is allowed. Permitted hunters are allowed to hunt up to a total of eleven (11) days.

3. **Hunter Distribution:** Archery hunters will be separated into two groups and each group will be assigned to one of two archery zones. Each zone will include several management areas. Hunters assigned to Zone 1 may hunt in any of the management areas within that zone. Hunters assigned to Zone 2 may hunt in any of the management areas within that zone.

The boundaries of the management zones have been delineated using not only the existing state firearms discharge setback laws, but also hard boundary delineations such as trails, roads, and pathways. All permittees are required to know the boundaries of their management zone and the management areas within each zone. All hunters should be respectful of other archery hunters already hunting in a certain area to avoid overcrowding. Absolutely no hunting or release of an arrow is allowed outside of the delineated boundaries.

**4. General Hunting & Discharge Prohibitions:** No hunting or release of an arrow is allowed outside of the boundaries of the designated management zones, within 500 feet of any building or dwelling, within 150 feet of any roadway, or in any area posted as no hunt zones.

**5. Hunter Orientation Required:** All permittees are required to complete an orientation in order to be allowed to participate in the Blue Hills Permitted Archery Hunt. Selected hunters who do not fulfill the hunter orientation requirement will not receive a permit and will not be eligible to participate in the controlled hunt.

**6. Deer Hunting Only:** The Blue Hills Permitted Archery Hunt is restricted to white-tailed deer only. The hunting or injury of any other bird or animal species is strictly prohibited.

**7. Hunting Implements:** Pursuant to 321 CMR 3.01(3), permitted archery hunters are allowed to hunt with a bow and arrows of the type and design specified for the hunting of deer. Crossbows may be used by permit only in accordance with 321 CMR 3.01(3).

**8. Scouting:** Permitted archery hunters are allowed to scout the designated management areas beginning November 1, 2020. Starting November 16<sup>th</sup>, permitted hunters are allowed to scout on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays only. While scouting, permittees are required to have the following on their person:

- DCR Notice of Selection
- 2020 Massachusetts Hunting/Sporting License
- Valid photo ID

The use of trail/game cameras for the purposes of scouting is prohibited. In addition, scouting will not be allowed on those days in which archery hunting is actually taking place. No scouting is allowed after Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup>.

**9. Tree Stands:** Permittees are allowed to use tree stands while participating in the permitted archery hunt. Permittees may use multiple tree stands. Tree stands must be either a climbing tree stand or a hang-on tree stand with climbing sticks (please be sure to bring the bottom section of the climbing sticks with you on the days in which you hunt).

Hunters will be allowed to keep their tree stands in the forest if they wish. Archery hunters may install tree stands beginning November 7, 2020. All tree stands must be removed by 6:00 PM on Thursday, December 3, 2020.

The installation of a tree stand does not entitle a hunter to a particular area of the Reservation. Hunters possessing a permit may hunt in any area within the boundaries of the designated archery hunting zones.

In accordance with DCR's regulations at 302 CMR 12.11 (10), the installation of a permanent tree stand is not allowed. Permanent tree stands are defined as a type of hunting platform or structure (emplaced for any period of

time) which is fastened to a tree by nails, bolts, wire or other fasteners which intrude through the bark into the wood of the tree.

**10. Hunting Blinds:** The use of on-the-ground hunting blinds is prohibited.

**11. Vegetation Cutting:** Cutting of branches, trees, or shrubs is prohibited.

**12. Minor Permittees:** Any permittee selected to participate in archery hunting who is also under the age of 18 years must be accompanied by an adult over the age of 21 years while hunting. The accompanying adult must also be a registered hunter possessing a valid 2020 Massachusetts Hunting/Sporting License. The accompanying adult must complete an orientation (with the minor permittee) and will not be allowed to hunt.

**13. Antlerless Permits:** MassWildlife will make antlerless deer permits specific to the Blue Hills Permitted Archery Hunt available to all permittees who successfully complete the mandatory orientation session. All hunters selected to participate must purchase at least two (2) antlerless permits. The use of any Zone 10 antlerless permits is prohibited in the Blue Hills. Antlerless deer harvested during the Blue Hills Permitted Archery Hunt are considered "bonus deer" and do not count towards state bag limits. Antlered deer will count toward the statewide bag limit of two (2) antlered deer.

**14. Parking & Vehicular Access:** Permitted hunters are not allowed to park their vehicles along the sides of Route 24 or I-93. In addition, vehicular access is prohibited on the Reservation's trails. Permittees should make use of designated parking areas.

**15. Hunter Check-In:** For the 2020 permitted archery hunt there will be no check-in requirement. Hunters may go directly to their management zone on days in which they decide to hunt.

**16. Documentation:** While hunting, all permittees must have the following on their person:

- DCR Blue Hills Controlled Hunt Access Permit
- MassWildlife Blue Hills Antlerless Deer Permits
- 2020 Massachusetts Hunting/Sporting License
- Valid Photo ID

Failure to provide any of these documents while hunting may disqualify a permittee from participating in the hunt.

**17. Deer Tracking:** Permittees are prohibited from tracking any wounded deer onto private property or a roadway. If you wound a deer and it crosses onto private property, use the phone number printed on your access permit to contact DCR. If necessary, an Environmental Police Officer will meet you at your location and accompany you onto private land to search for the deer.

- 18. Deer Cleaning:** Permittees who harvest a deer are required to move the deer at least 100 feet away from a trail for the purposes of gutting and cleaning the deer. Harvested deer must be legally tagged prior to moving. To the greatest extent possible, permittees are encouraged to select areas that are generally out of view for the disposal of deer parts.
- 19. Deer Removal & Check Station:** Permittees who harvest a deer must first legally tag the deer and then are responsible for transporting the deer to their vehicle (may not be concealed from view). There will be no deer check station set up in the Blue Hills during the archery hunt. As such, any permittee who harvests a deer is required to check the harvested deer online through the MassFishHunt website. In addition, DCR will provide permittees with a link to a DCR website where hunters must report each harvested deer directly to DCR. A separate online form must be completed and submitted to DCR for each harvested deer.
- 20. Compliance with Rules & Requests:** All permittees within the Blue Hills Reservation shall obey the directions of posted regulatory signs, any state or local law enforcement official, Environmental Police Officer, DCR Ranger, DCR employee, and MassWildlife employee.
- 21. Carry In – Carry Out:** No litter or refuse of any sort may be thrown or left in or on any land or water within the Blue Hills Reservation while hunting.
- 22. Conduct & Alcohol/Controlled Substances:** Any form of disorderly conduct is strictly prohibited during the controlled hunt. Possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages, marijuana, or any other controlled substance while participating in the controlled hunt is strictly prohibited.
- 23. Pets & Animals:** Permittees may not bring any pets or other animals with them during the controlled hunt.
- 24. Property Damage/Vandalism:** DCR is not responsible for any damage or vandalism to a permittee's property, vehicle, tree stand, or other possessions.
- 25. MassWildlife Rules & Regulations:** Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife rules and regulations related to hunting shall apply to the Blue Hills Reservation Permitted Archery Hunt. In the event of a conflict, the Blue Hills Permitted Archery Hunt rules and provisions take precedence over the rules and regulations of the MassWildlife.
- 26. Cancellation:** The permitted archery hunt (in its entirety or specific dates) may be cancelled at any time due to severe weather conditions or security situations. In the case of cancellation, DCR will make all efforts to provide advance notice to permittees.