



Division of Water Supply Protection
Natural Resources Section

DCR-DWSP Deer Harvest Summary: 2023

The Department of Conservation, Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP) manages 140,000-acres across the Quabbin, Ware River, Wachusett and Sudbury Watersheds. Forest health and tree regeneration are important land management goals for DWSP because the forest acts as a biological filter for water quality. In response to high deer densities and deer impact on forest regeneration, DWSP opened watershed lands to deer hunting to restore and maintain balance in the forested ecosystem. These deer hunts are all regulated according to the Department of Fish and Game, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife's (MassWildlife) and DWSP's rules and regulations. Changes to the deer hunts may be applied annually based on an adaptive deer management approach. A few changes were applied to hunts in 2023: (1) Wachusett Reservoir Zone required a five-year watershed hunting access permit (instead of one-year access) and were open to all game species per MassWildlife and DWSP rules. (2) Petersham Zone at Quabbin was open for a two-day controlled hunt to permitted hunters for the first time since 2019. (3) Quabbin Park Zone was opened for the first time in the history of hunting at Quabbin Reservation. DWSP honored the winners of the 2019 Quabbin Park hunt lottery. (4) Hunters in the Ware River Watershed lands are now required to hold a five-year access permit. This was not strictly enforced in 2023.

The following DWSP hunting zones were open in 2023:

- Quabbin: Hardwick, New Salem, and Pelham Zones (two-week shotgun season deer hunts)
- Quabbin: Prescott, Petersham and Quabbin Park Zones (two-day controlled deer hunt)
- Ware River watershed lands (all seasons)
- Wachusett Watershed lands (including the Reservoir Zone; all seasons)
- Sudbury Watershed (all seasons)

View the [DWSP Hunting Map](#).

Harvest data were analyzed from the MassWildlife harvest database (MassFishHunt). All hunters are legally required to submit their harvest information in-person at a check station or online to MassWildlife. DWSP biologists review the data and, based on information available, a list of confirmed and possible (unconfirmed) harvests on watershed lands is compiled. Due to the nature of the analyses performed, the 2023 DWSP harvest totals must be displayed as a range of deer harvested in each hunting zone (exception: Prescott, Petersham, and Quabbin Park Zones, where an in-person check station was present). The harvest analysis provided the following summary (confirmed number – total possible number) for 2023:

- Hardwick: 14-15 deer
- New Salem: 14-22 deer
- Pelham: 7-10 deer
- Petersham: 41 deer
- Prescott: 40 deer
- Quabbin Park: 37 deer
- Ware River: no data
- Wachusett Watershed Lands, including Reservoir Zone (five-year permit): 6-96 deer
- Sudbury: 16-38 deer

In total, there were 175 confirmed harvests across all DWSP lands. **The 2023 results by DWSP hunting area are further broken down in the table on the next page.**

	Hardwick (Quab)	New Salem (Quab)	Pelham (Quab)	Petersham (Quab)	Quabbin Park (Quab)	Prescott (Quab)	Wachusett Watershed	Sudbury Watershed
Wildlife Management Zone	6	6	6	6	6	6	5, 8, 9	9, 10
Deer season	Shotgun (Nov 27 - Dec 9)	Shotgun (Nov 27 - Dec 9)	Shotgun (Nov 27 - Dec 9)	Two Day (Nov 29-30)	Two Day (Dec 4-5)	Two Day (Dec 6-7)	All (Oct 16 - Dec 30)	All (Oct 2 - Dec 30)*
DWSP permit type	One-year access	One-year access	One-year access	Two-day access	Two-day access	Two-day access	Five-year access	Five-year access
Hunters applied (#)	603*	603*	603*	640*	355*	640*	3,318 (1,237 new)*	3,318 (1,237 new)^
Hunters selected (#)	603	603	603	265	93	375	3,318*	3,318^
Eligible hunters (returning or attended orientation; % of selected)	603/603 (100%)	603/603 (100%)	603/603 (100%)	247 (93.2%)	75 (80.6%)	341 (90.9%)	3318/3318 (100%)*	3303/3303 (100%)^
Hunter attendance (% of eligible)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	204 (82.6%)	72 (96.0%)	276 (81.2%)	Unknown	Unknown
Total deer taken (confirmed # - total possible)	14-15 deer	14-22 deer	7-10 deer	41 deer	37 deer	40 deer	6-96 deer^	16-38 deer
Success rate (deer taken / # hunters)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	20.1%	50.0%	14.5%	Unknown	Unknown
Size of hunt area	5,637 acres (8.8 sq. mi)	6,871 acres (10.7 sq. mi)	8,487 acres (13.3 sq. mi)	6,965 acres (10.9 sq. mil)	2,625 acres (4.1 sq. mi)	12,020 acres (18.8 sq. mi)	7,340 acres (11.4 sq. mi)	2,050 acres (3.2 sq. mi)
Deer taken / square mile	1.6 – 1.7 deer/sq. mi	1.3 – 2.1 deer/sq. mi	0.5 – 0.8 deer/sq. mi	3.8 deer/sq. mi	9.0 deer/ sq. mi	2.1 deer / sq. mi	0.5 – 8.4 deer/sq. mi	5.0 – 11.9 deer/sq. mi
Pellet survey results (most recent year surveyed)	13.5 - 35.6 deer/sq. mi (2022)	12.4 - 32.7 deer/sq. mi (2022)	15.0 – 39.6 deer/sq. mi (2023)	7.0 – 18.4 deer/sq. mi (2021)	31.0 – 81.6 deer/sq. mi (2024)	6.4 – 16.9 deer/sq. mi (2024)	11.5 – 45.1 deer/sq. mi (2024)`	20.2 – 53.2 deer/sq. mi (2024)
Notes	*# applicants for all Quab shotgun zones.	*# applicants for all Quab shotgun zones.	*# applicants for all Quab shotgun zones.	*Hunters applied for Pet/Pre hunt on same application and selected preference. Hunters who did not get into their first choice were put in their second	*2019 lottery winners were honored	*Hunters applied for Pet/Pre hunt on same application and selected preference. Hunters who did not get into their first choice were put in their second	*Due to a switch in DWSP application methods, the number may include some repeat applicants. ^Difficult to estimate deer harvest. Includes former Res Zone and remaining Wach watershed areas. `Estimate includes historically hunted areas and Res Zone (2024)	*Zone 10 start date was Oct 2. Zone 9 was Oct 16. ^Sudbury hunters were required to have 5-yr access permit (same permit as Wachusett watershed)