

Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
October 5th, 2015
7:30 PM

Location: DCR Quabbin Visitor's Center, Belchertown, MA 01007

Members Present: Tom Barnes (North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association – Alternate), Tom Berube (MA Sportsmen's Council), Jim Boyko (Swift River Valley Historical Society), Tony Brighenti (North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association), Elisa Campbell (Sierra Club), Craig Cortis (Worcester County League of Sportsmen), Dennis Duguay (North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association - Alternate), Larry Gates (Quabbin Fisherman's Association), J.R. Greene (Friends of Quabbin, Inc.), Ralph Lapinskas (Public at Large), Tom Lautzenheiser (MA Audubon Society)

DCR Staff Present: Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor, Lisa Gustavsen, Kiana Koenen, Ken MacKenzie,

Public Attending: Rosemary Charron, Lexi Dewey, Bill Lunke, Laurie Pray

Superintendent's Report

Meeting Start Time: 7:32 PM

Approval of Minutes of Meeting on June 15th, 2015

J.R. Greene made a motion to accept the minutes from the QWAC meeting held on June 15th, 2015. Tom Lautzenheiser seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Quabbin Deer Report – Presentations by Dan Clark and Ken MacKenzie

Ken MacKenzie gave a presentation on the results of the 2014 deer hunt as well looked ahead to the upcoming 2015 hunt.

In 2014, Hardwick and Petersham were hunted Dec. 4th and 5th while Pelham and Prescott were hunted on Dec. 11th and 12th. Over those four days 105 deer were harvested. Best estimates are that the Quabbin deer herd averages 11 deer/mi² over the past 10 years. A handout detailing the 2014 hunt, 2014 hunt weather

conditions, Quabbin moose survey information, and moose exclosure information is attached at the end of these minutes.

Since the structure of the Quabbin hunt calls for a short, intense hunt over just four days, relying on harvest data alone to make conclusions about the population can be difficult. The way the Quabbin hunt is run and the information collected lends itself to an index called catch per unit effort (CPUE). CPUE simply measures the amount of effort it takes to harvest a deer. In general, if it takes more effort to harvest a deer over time, the population is going down, if it takes less, it is going up. Although deer density will still be calculated, CPUE trend data will be used more in the future to guide management.

DCR Biologists also have two harvest-independent indices to help better understand what is happening with the deer population: forest regeneration monitoring and deer/moose pellet count surveys.

Since the beginning of the deer hunt in 1991, the primary goal has been to maintain a deer density that allows for adequate and continued forest regeneration. Regeneration is monitored by our DCR foresters and described in their Regeneration Monitoring Reports. Based on the 2014 Regeneration Monitoring Report, forest regeneration continues to meet the management goal of 2,000 stems/acre above 4.5 ft (generally considered to be above deer browse height).

This year, DCR Natural Resource and Forestry staff began a pilot study to investigate whether a Pellet-Group Count Survey on Quabbin and Ware River watershed lands could provide insight into the number of deer and moose using DCR property. Line transects were walked through the forest where deer and moose pellet groups were counted at designated areas. This spring, Quabbin Park, the Ware River, and Pelham were surveyed. Densities ranged between 6.8-17.7 deer/mi² in Pelham, 18-47 deer/mi² in Quabbin Park, and 7.5-19.4 deer/mi² in Ware River.

Since 2006, moose survey cards have been given to hunters to fill out on the first day of each hunt. Over the past 9 years it has been estimated that between 45-90 different moose use the 4 hunt areas during any given year. This works out to a density of 1.2 moose/mi².

DCR continues to work with Umass Amherst on an Experimental Moose Exclosure study. A dissertation looking at data over the past 5-6 years was recently completed. Findings were that moose added to the effect of browsing by deer and appeared to set succession back by at least 3-4 years. The research also showed that no species of woody plants were eliminated from any of the plots by browsing. The exclosures will continue to be monitored.

For 2015, Petersham and Hardwick will be hunted on Dec. 3rd and 4th while New Salem and Prescott will be hunted on Dec. 10th and 11th. Hunter density will stay at around 1 hunter / 35 acres. DCR will continue to monitor hunter density by giving hunters GPS units to wear while they are out hunting.

Dan Clark gave a presentation detailing the online hunter orientation system that is new for 2015. Various slides, videos, and graphics from the online orientation session were detailed for the committee. In the past, hunters were required to attend an in-person orientation session once every few years to be allowed into the Quabbin hunt. All new hunters will still be required to attend an in-person session but if you've hunted Quabbin in previous years you will have the option to complete the online version of the orientation session. This has allowed DCR to cut down the number of in-person orientation sessions from 4 to 2. This year, one will be held at the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Office in Westborough and one will be held at the Chestnut Hill Community School in Belchertown.

Tom Lautzenheiser asked if there were any thoughts about opening Quabbin Park up to deer hunting. Dan Clark answered that it is something that is continually thought about and that it would seem to make sense biologically.

Elisa Campbell asked about what the browse height limit for moose would be. Dan Clark estimated that it would probably be around 8 ft.; double that of deer.

Tony Brighenti asked about how forest regeneration is doing in the Quabbin Park. Dan Clark answered that regeneration in the park is not on par with the rest of the reservation where deer are hunted. Tony Brighenti talked about when the Quabbin Deer Hunt Program was being formed, that the park would remain a sanctuary; free of hunting. Elisa Campbell mentioned that she was in favor of

hunting Quabbin Park. Dennis Duguay was concerned that hunters would take the brunt of the criticism if the park was opened to deer hunting. Dan Clark mentioned that QWAC would be involved in the process if it was ever decided to move forward with a deer hunt in the park.

Craig Cortis asked about the potential upcoming deer hunt in the Blue Hills and what the public perception has been. Dan Clark answered that the public comments that he has seen have been overwhelmingly against the hunt.

Lisa Gustavsen talked about the large amount of DCR staff that are involved in the hunt and help to make it run so smoothly. Almost every department has a role; Natural Resource staff, Interpretive Services, Foresters, Watershed Rangers, Carpenters, Sign Makers, etc. It is a real team effort and part of the reason why the hunt has been so successful over the years.

Special Olympics

Tom Berube talked about the annual Special Olympics fishing event that happens at Gate 8 every year. The event was very successful; 45 Olympians took part and there were no problems to speak of. Watershed rangers, DCR staff, and all volunteers were thanked. The Quabbin Fishermans Association helped to provide meals for the event.

There was a request that some larger life jackets be available on site for the event next year.

Larry Gates mentioned a member of the public who provided free french fries and snow cones via his “fry shack” for people who took part in the event.

Super Troopers 2 Filming at Quabbin

Lisa Gustavsen updated the committee on some movie filming that is set to happen at Quabbin at the end of October. Super Troopers 2 is set to film in Quabbin Park and along Rt. 202 during the last week of October. The group has already gone through the permitting process through Boston and here at Quabbin.

Member Issues

Tom Berube mentioned that the paraplegic hunt will be happening along in Quabbin along Webster Road on October 29th, 30th, and 31st in the morning hours. There are at least 7 people expected to participate.

Tony Brighenti commended Tom Berube on this being his 35th year as the chairperson for QWAC. Lisa Gustavsen thanked all the QWAC and WRWAC members for their voice and input over the years.

Jim Boyko mentioned that he recently talked to someone from the Mill Valley Snowmobile club about a snowmobile trail that the group plans to propose to the QWAC. It was determined that Larry Tucker of the Mill Valley Snowmobile Club will be presenting at the next QWAC meeting to propose a new snowmobile trail west of Rt. 202.

Jim Boyko asked for an update on the new ultraviolet light disinfection project that the MWRA recently completed on Rt. 9. Lisa Gustavsen answered that the facility has been renamed the Bill Brutsch Disinfection Facility. Everything seems to be running successfully. There is a DEP inspection scheduled for the end of October and the first part of their inspection will be down at the Bill Brutsch facility.

Lisa Gustavsen updated the committee on a new recreational pressure being felt in the Ware River Watershed called “single track riding.” These groups are interested in creating small, narrow trails through the forest. In the Ware River Watershed many of these single track trails have been cut illegally and some go through wetlands, stone walls, and other sensitive areas. Our Watershed Rangers have been monitoring activity in the north end of the Quabbin Reservoir. Tom Lautzenheiser mentioned that MA Audubon has run into these types of trail problems as well on their land. Craig Cortis questioned why the people who are constructing and using these illegal trails haven’t been cited. Lisa Gustavsen answered that DCR have recently developed a new violation/ticketing process for DWSP, but that catching single track riders is hard. DCR is also trying to improve signage as well as increased public education on the issue. Jim Boyko thought that it would be a good idea to release an official PR statement on the issue.

Meeting End Time: 8:40 PM

Upcoming QWAC Meetings:

- Monday, December 14th, 2015 at 7:30 PM – DCR Quabbin Visitor Center, 485 Ware Road, Belchertown, MA 01007
- Monday, March 14th, 2016 at 7:30 PM – DCR Quabbin Visitor Center, 485 Ware Road, Belchertown, MA 01007

2014 Quabbin Deer Hunt Executive Summary

	Dec 4 & 5 Hardwick	Dec 4 & 5 Petersham	Dec. 11 & 12 Pelham	Dec. 11 & 12 Prescott	TOTALS
Hunters Selected	195	245	309	422	1,171
Eligible Hunters (Returning or Attended Orientation)	186	239	285	411	1,121
Scouting - % participating Day 1, % participating Day 2, (Total %)	31%, 26% (51%)	17%, 33% (46%)	27%, 24% (45%)	32%, 31% (53%)	27%, 29% (49%)
Attendance @ Hunt - Day 1/ Hunters Eligible to Hunt	155 (83%)	205 (86%)	234 (82%)	329 (80%)	923 (82%)
Attendance @ Hunt - Day 2/ Hunters Eligible to Hunt	105 (56%)	148 (62%)	157 (55%)	246 (60%)	656 (59%)
Participation Rate: (Day 1 and/or Day 2)	158 (81%)	211 (86%)	236 (76%)	345 (82%)	950 (81%)
Deer Taken - Day 1 (sex)	17 (6♀, 11♂)	18 (7♀, 11♂)	12 (6♀, 6♂)	26 (10♀, 16♂)	73 (29♀, 44♂)
Deer Taken - Day 2 (sex)	3 (1♀, 2♂)	7 (6♀, 1♂)	5 (3♀, 2♂)	17 (13♀, 4♂)	32 (23♀, 9♂)
Total - both days (sex)	20 (7♀, 13♂)	25 (13♀, 12♂)	17 (9♀, 8♂)	43 (23♀, 20♂)	105 (52♀, 53♂)
Success Rate	13.0%	12.0%	7.0%	12.0%	11.0%
Size of Hunt Area (Mile ²)	5636.7 acres (8.81)	6965.0 acres (10.88)	8487 acres (13.26)	12,019.9 acres (18.78)	33,108.8 acres (51.7)
Deer Harvest/Square Mile	2.27	2.30	1.28	2.29	2.03
Largest Deer Taken	M – 182 lbs, 3.5 yrs, 10 pt F – 131 lbs, 3.5 yrs	M – 174 lbs, 3.5 yrs, 9 pt F – 143 lbs, 3.5 yrs	M – 170 lbs, 3.5 yrs, 8 pt F – 138 lbs, 2.5 yrs	M – 178 lbs, 3.5 yrs, 8 pt F – 139 lbs, 3.5 yrs	M – 182 lbs, 3.5 yrs, 10 pt (HAR) F – 143 lbs, 3.5 yrs (PET)

2014 Weather Notes:

During the first week of shotgun season, Hardwick and Petersham (Dec 4th and 5th) saw average conditions with a mean temperature of 29° F (Low: 21°; Hi: 37°). There was a near full moon and clear skies followed by a light dusting of snow on the 5th. The second week's hunt in Pelham and Prescott (Dec 11th and 12th) saw fresh snow cover and constant temps with a mean temperature of 32° F (Low: 30°; Hi: 33°).

QUABBIN MOOSE SURVEY

Since 2006, DCR biologists have been collecting information on moose observations during the Quabbin controlled deer hunt. For the past 9 years (2006-2014), numbers of moose seen and reported by deer hunters have been conservatively estimated at about 45-90 moose on the 4 hunt zones during any one year. This translates to about 1.2 (SE = 0.12) moose per square mile, or about 100 moose on the managed watershed (excluding the reservoir). Despite some variations in conditions during the hunt, and rotating hunt zones during different hunt years, the population of moose on the Quabbin watershed appears to be at a low density compared to more northern parts of the range (such as Maine and New Hampshire) but relatively stable over time. In addition, bull:cow ratios have been very close to 1:1, which is indicative of an unhunted population (which is the case in Massachusetts), calves (including twins) have been reported each year, indicating good reproduction and thus good habitat. DCR has been working with wildlife ecology faculty, graduate students, and statisticians and modelers with the Massachusetts Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and the University of Massachusetts to further refine our moose population estimate.

MOOSE ENCLOSURES

DCR also continues to work with the Mass. Coop. Unit on the experimental enclosure study. A dissertation, examining the first 5-6 years of the enclosures research, was just completed and will be available soon. As expected, the presence of moose added to the effect of browsing by deer, and appeared to set succession back by at least 3-4 years. The research also showed that no species of woody plants were eliminated from any of the plots by browsing; i.e., trees and shrubs were present in browsed plots, but their rate of growth and growth form were altered by browsing by moose and deer. The enclosures will be continued to be monitored, and future research will address how browsing, and forest succession, shape the forests of the future.