

BLUE HILLS STATE RESERVATION

WHITE-TAILED DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

2017
Deer Management Plan

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



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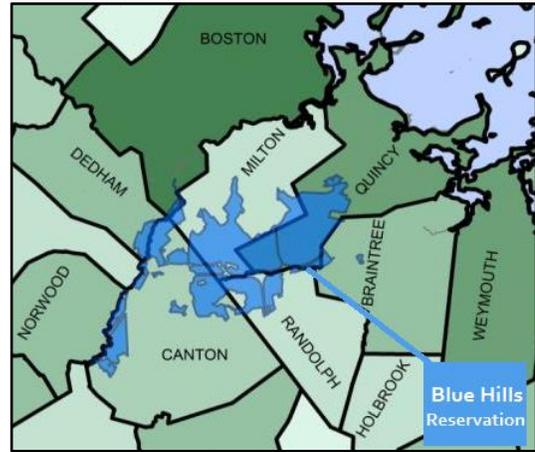


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1.0 The DCR Blue Hills Reservation

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. 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 Reservation

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 survival of forests and their ability to recover from natural disturbances. Forests that contain high deer population densities prohibit forest regeneration as deer over-browse on young tree seedlings. In addition, extremely high deer densities can promote the spread of some invasive species and significantly reduce biodiversity.

As manager and steward of the Blue Hills 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. 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. 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. In addition, the RMP explicitly recommended that the agency work with MassWildlife to ascertain the size of the deer population, determine its impacts on the Reservation's natural resources, and discuss deer management options.

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 Reservation

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 [Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#) that recommended the phased implementation of an annual controlled deer hunt similar to the very successful annual hunt managed by DCR’s Division of Water Supply Protection at the Quabbin Reservation. The Quabbin hunt successfully reduced and has maintained deer densities of less than 20 deer per square miles over the course of more than two decades.

It is important to note that the decision to manage the overpopulation of deer in the Blue Hills Reservation is not dependent upon perceptions regarding the role of deer in relation to Lyme disease or other tick-borne illnesses. DCR recognizes the myriad of research that has demonstrated mixed results over the last several decades with regard to the correlation between deer densities, tick abundance, and Lyme disease contraction rates among humans. Furthermore, attempting to solve Lyme disease or reduce contraction rates is not a primary 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.

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

In deciding to undertake a deer management program in the Blue Hills Reservation, the primary objective and rationale for intervening 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. Moreover, 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.

4.0 Context & Need for Continued Deer Management

In the [2015 Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#), DCR and MassWildlife noted that most deer management programs designed to address extremely high deer densities typically start with an aggressive reduction phase during the initial years. Once densities are reduced to a suitable level, a long-term management phase can be implemented utilizing more moderate hunting effort in order to maintain the accomplishments achieved during the reduction phase. This model was successfully implemented as part of the Quabbin Reservoir Watershed deer management program, which began in 1991 with nine (9) days of shotgun hunting. Within a few years, deer densities at the Quabbin were substantially reduced and the program moved from a reduction

phase toward a maintenance phase. Today, the Quabbin hunt takes place using a rotation system over the course of only four (4) days in an effort to maintain current deer densities.

In the Blue Hills, however, hunting had not been allowed for over 100 years. As such, DCR decided in 2015 to implement a controlled hunt on a more limited scale with the goal of working toward expanding the controlled hunt program in order to achieve more aggressive reductions in future years. This phased approach was explicitly outlined in the [2015 Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#) and in accordance with this plan, DCR expanded the size of the huntable areas from 2,980 acres in 2015 to 3,721 acres in 2016. In addition, while the 2015 hunt only allowed for use of shotguns, the limited use of archery was introduced in certain designated areas during the 2016 hunt.

DCR and MassWildlife also made it clear within the [2015 Blue Hills Deer Management Plan](#) that successful deer management would require a long-term effort and commitment since any reductions achieved can be quickly erased through deer reproduction and migration in the absence of any management. The Quabbin Reservoir provides a prime example of how long-term commitment to deer management is essential. The program has been in operation for 25 years and has worked to successfully maintain densities below 20 deer/mi².

After successfully implementing two controlled hunts, DCR and MassWildlife worked together in early 2017 to conduct two separate deer abundance surveys in the Blue Hills utilizing two different methodologies. These surveys serve as a follow up to the initial abundance survey conducted in 2013, which, at the time, conservatively estimated that there were about 85 deer/mi² of deer habitat within the Blue Hills Reservation (95% Confidence Interval [CI] = 59 – 118 deer/mi²). The first method used in 2017 – distance sampling – is similar in nature and scope to the method used in 2013. The second method – pellet -count surveys – is similar in nature and scope to the method used by DCR’s Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP) to estimate deer abundance at the Quabbin Reservoir Reservation.

While the 2017 distance sampling survey estimated 23 deer/mi² of deer habitat (95% Confidence Interval [CI] = 12 – 44 deer/mi²), the pellet-count survey resulted in an overall density estimate of 52 deer/mi² (95% Confidence Interval [CI] = 39 – 64 deer/mi²). It is important to note, however, when interpreting and comparing these estimates, that the distance sampling survey was unable to incorporate the Fowl Meadow section of the Reservation because of a lack of navigable trails. The pellet-count survey was able to incorporate data for this area and found that Fowl Meadow has the highest concentrations of deer of all the areas of the Blue Hills Reservation. Specifically, the pellet-count survey estimated that the Fowl Meadow/Little Blue areas of the Reservation contain an estimated 136 deer/mi² (95% Confidence Interval [CI] = 93 – 180 deer/mi²). Therefore, the difference between the results of the distance sampling survey and the pellet-count survey can be attributed to the fact that the distance sampling survey did not include the Fowl Meadow section of the Reservation.

The two years of deer reductions likely led to a population decrease within the huntable areas and a slight population reduction across the larger area. While both surveys show deer numbers that are lower than they were in 2013, deer densities still remain above the statewide goal of 6-18 deer/mi² of forest that is important for reducing impacts to the habitat and forest within and around the Blue Hills Reservation. For more detailed information regarding the 2017 deer abundance surveys, readers are encouraged to read the [2016 Program Overview & 2017 Deer Surveying Report](#).

In light of DCR’s stated goal to incrementally enhance its annual deer management program, its commitment to long-term management, and to continue the successful efforts undertaken in 2015 and 2016, DCR and MassWildlife will continue to implement controlled hunting in the Blue Hills in 2017. Based upon the experience of implementing and assessing the outcomes of controlled hunts in 2015 and 2016, DCR and MassWildlife have worked together to introduce additional enhancements to increase and improve efficacy of the Blue Hills Deer Management Program and supplement other deer management efforts currently taking place on private lands surrounding the Reservation.

The use of licensed public hunters in managing deer populations is one of the most widely used management methods employed throughout the United States. In Massachusetts, it is the primary management tool supported by MassWildlife and has been shown to be successful in addressing situations involving deer overabundance and vegetation over-browse. The Quabbin Reservoir controlled deer hunt is the most notable example. In addition, DCR manages thousands of acres of forest and parkland across the Commonwealth where licensed hunters are allowed to hunt game during the appropriate seasons. Moreover, regulated hunting is an activity that DCR fully supports by providing public land for hunters to engage in this management activity.

5.0 Phase 1: Permitted Archery Hunting During November

Over the last several years (and even prior to DCR’s initiation of controlled deer hunting in the Blue Hills Reservation) a number of private property owners near or adjacent to the Blue Hills have voluntarily allowed archery hunters onto their land during the annual archery season to hunt deer. In Massachusetts, the annual archery season typically starts in the middle of October and runs through the end of the year. As a form of hunting, archery hunting is performed from a fixed location in a tree stand and, due to limited range, hunters must wait for their target to come within approximately 20-30 yards. In addition, due to their high position from a tree stand, any arrow fired has a downward trajectory toward the ground.

5.1 – Timing and Length

To supplement the efforts already taking place on nearby and adjacent private property and to enhance DCR’s overall Deer Management Program for the Blue Hills Reservation, DCR will permit limited archery hunting in certain designated areas of the Blue Hills on Mondays through Thursdays between **November 6th** and **November 22nd**. In accordance with state hunting regulations, hunters will be allowed to start hunting one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

5.2 – Management Areas and Hunter Distribution

Archery hunting will be limited to the areas of the Reservation listed below and outlined on the map on the next page. Selected archery hunters will not be assigned to a particular area.

Management Area	Acres Open to Archery Hunting
Fowl Meadow	387
Little Blue	70
Brookwood Farm	26
Great Blue	58
Nike Site	158
Braintree Site	77
TOTAL	776

Blue Hills Reservation: 2017 Permitted Archery Hunttable Lands

**Fowl
Meadow
387 Acres**

**Great Blue
58 Acres**

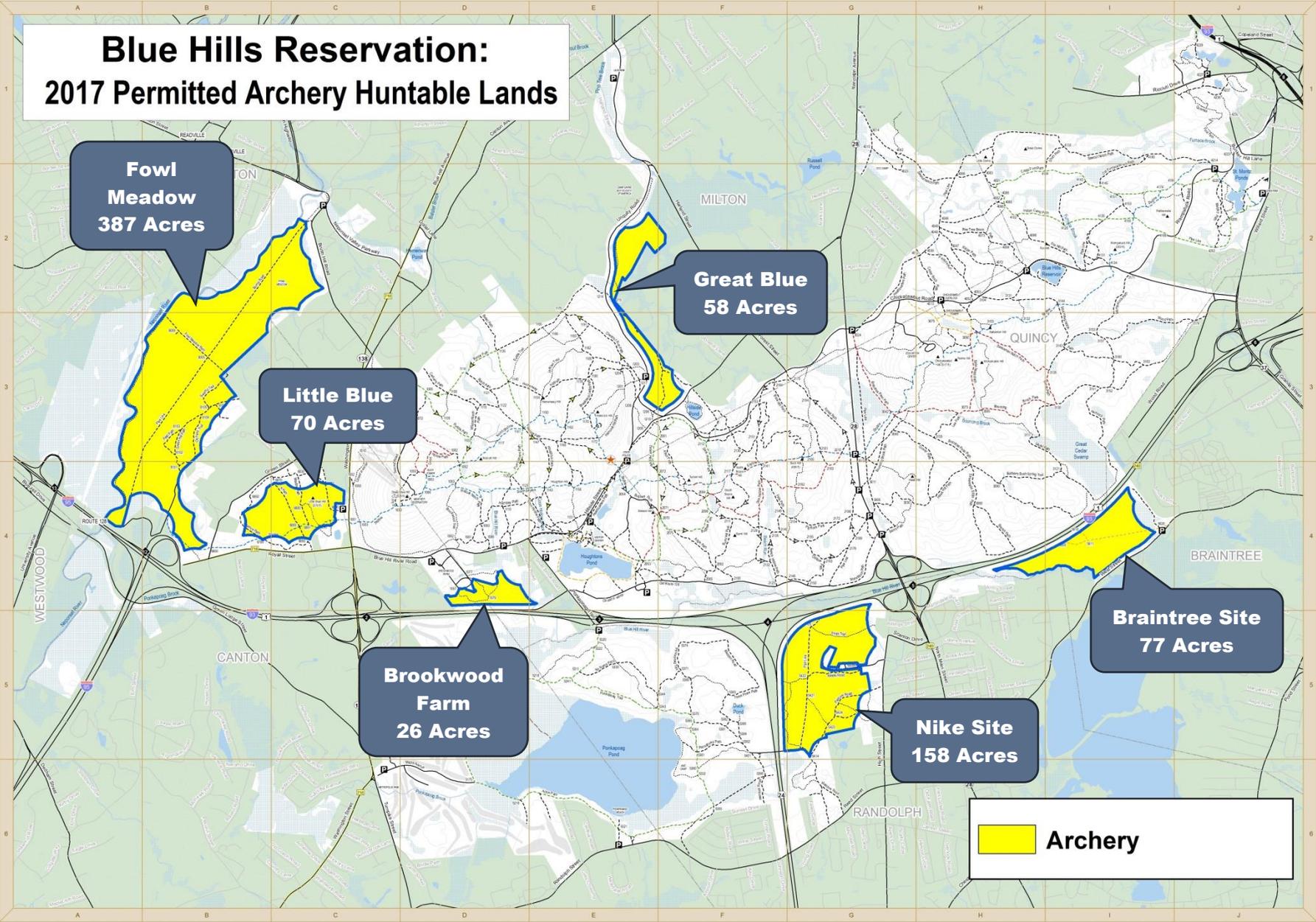
**Little Blue
70 Acres**

**Brookwood
Farm
26 Acres**

**Nike Site
158 Acres**

**Braintree Site
77 Acres**

 **Archery**



5.3 – Hunter Selection and Access Permitting

Licensed archery hunters must complete and submit an application to DCR to participate in this archery hunting opportunity. All applicants are required to have a valid 2017 Massachusetts hunting license.

From among the applicant pool, DCR will conduct a random lottery to select a single group of 75 archery hunters to receive access permits. These access permits will be valid on all days in which archery hunting will be allowed in designated areas of the Reservation (as outlined above) during the month of November and permitted hunters will be allowed to hunt based upon their schedule and availability. Given this flexibility, it is highly unlikely that there will be 75 archery hunters in designated management areas on any given day.

If selected to participate, any archery hunter under the age of 18 must be accompanied while hunting by an adult over the age of 21 who is also a registered hunter possessing a valid Massachusetts hunting license. The accompanying adult must attend the mandatory orientation session and will not be allowed to hunt.

5.4 – Antlerless Permits

MassWildlife will make antlerless deer permits specific to the Blue hills Reservation available to applicants selected to receive an archery access permit. Upon successful completion of a hunter orientation session, hunters will be able to purchase their antlerless permits online or at any licensed vendor. Hunters selected to participate will be required to purchase at least two (2) antlerless permits. The use of any Zone 10 antlerless permits will be prohibited from use in the Blue Hills.

5.5 – Hunter Orientation

All archery permittees will be required to attend an orientation session. Among other topics, the orientation will cover the elements of the Blue Hills deer Management Plan; the goals and objectives of the program; an orientation to the area; and safety considerations. Any selected archery hunter who fails to attend an orientation session will not receive an access permit and will not be allowed to hunt in the Blue Hills.

5.6 – Check-in Procedures:

Hunters selected to participate in this archery hunt will be required to check-in on those days in which they choose to hunt. Daily check-in will allow staff to know which hunters are in the Reservation each day.

5.7 – Scouting

Permitted archery hunters will be allowed to scout the designated management areas beginning October 16, 2017. During the month of November, permitted hunters will be allowed to scout on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Any hunter who is scouting within the Reservation must carry on their person their hunter identification and the letter they receive from DCR indicating that they have been selected to hunt. Any hunter engaged in scouting is not allowed to enter the Reservation with bow and arrows.

5.8 – Tree Stands

Permittees will be allowed to install tree stands on any day in which they choose to hunt. Hunters will be allowed to keep their tree stands in the forest if they wish and only if they intend to hunt during two or more consecutive days. All tree stands must be removed on Thursday of each week.

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

In accordance with DCR's regulation at 302 CMR 12.11 (10), the installation of a permanent tree stand will not be 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.

5.9 – Deer Cleaning and Checking

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. Hunters who harvest a deer are responsible for transporting the deer to their vehicle. Hunters who harvest a deer will be required to report the deer via MassWildlife's online reporting system. In addition, hunters will have 24 hours to report the deer harvest to DCR. There will be no on-site deer check station during the archery hunt.

5.10 – Violations

Any violation of the rules of this limited archery hunt program will result in the immediate removal from the property and suspension of access to hunting in the Blue Hills Reservation in future years. In addition, any person found to be hunting within the Reservation without a valid access permit will be immediately removed from the property, may be prohibited from applying to participate in any future hunts, and may be subject to any fines or penalties prescribed by applicable state laws and/or regulations.

5.11 – Parking & Vehicular Access

Permitted archery hunters will **not** be allowed to park along the sides of I-93 or Route 24. In addition, vehicular access will be prohibited on the Reservation's trails. During the hunter orientation sessions, DCR will provide permittees with maps identifying available parking areas.

5.12 – Public Recreational Access

General public access for recreation will not be restricted in those areas in which hunting will take place. Members of the general public who choose to enter those areas in which hunting will be taking place are advised to take proper precautions by wearing blaze orange clothing, vests, and hats.

6.0 Phase 2: Controlled 4-Day Shotgun Hunt

As was done in 2015 and 2016, DCR and MassWildlife will implement a controlled shotgun hunt during the annual shotgun season in 2017. This four-day controlled hunt will be shotgun only. Furthermore, archery hunting will not be permitted during these four days of hunting.

6.1 – Timing and Length

The timeframe for the 2017 controlled shotgun hunt will be during the annual shotgun season in late November/early December. Although the shotgun season in Massachusetts lasts approximately two weeks, the 2017 controlled hunt will feature a total of four (4) days of hunting on the following days:

- Week 1: Tuesday, November 28th and Thursday, November 30th
- Week 2: Tuesday, December 5th and Thursday, December 7th

6.2 – Hunting Implements

During this four-day hunt, participants will be allowed to use shotguns with slugs only. Buckshot will be prohibited from use in the Blue Hills. No archery hunting will be allowed during these four days of hunting.

6.3 – Hunter Selection and Access Permitting

The 2017 Blue Hills controlled shotgun hunt will feature an access permitting component whereby interested hunters will need to complete and submit an application to DCR. All applicants must have a valid 2017 Massachusetts hunting license and those who live in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts must also have a valid FID card. Using a random lottery system, permittees will be selected from among the pool of applicants. There will be no fee to apply to the 2017 controlled hunt.

DCR will select two (2) separate groups of 131 shotgun hunters and each hunter will be permitted to hunt for two (2) days. Group 1 hunters will be permitted to hunt on Tuesday, November 28th and Thursday, November 30th. Group 2 hunters will be permitted to hunt on Tuesday, December 5th and Thursday, December 7th.

Applicants will be required to choose which days they prefer to hunt on their application. For purposes of the random lottery, applicants will be grouped and selected according to the dates chosen on their application.

Applications for shotgun hunting will allow for up to two (2) applicants (one “primary applicant” and one “co-applicant”). To promote fairness, hunters listed as the “primary applicant” on one application **cannot** be listed as a “co-applicant” on another application. Similarly, hunters listed as a “co-applicant” on one application **cannot** submit a separate application in which they are the “primary applicant.”

Hunters who are under the age of 18 and possess a valid Massachusetts hunting license may apply as either a “primary applicant” or a “co-applicant” on one application. Any hunter under the age of 18 who applies as the “primary applicant” must list a “co-applicant” who is over the age of 21 and is also a registered hunter possessing a valid Massachusetts hunting license.

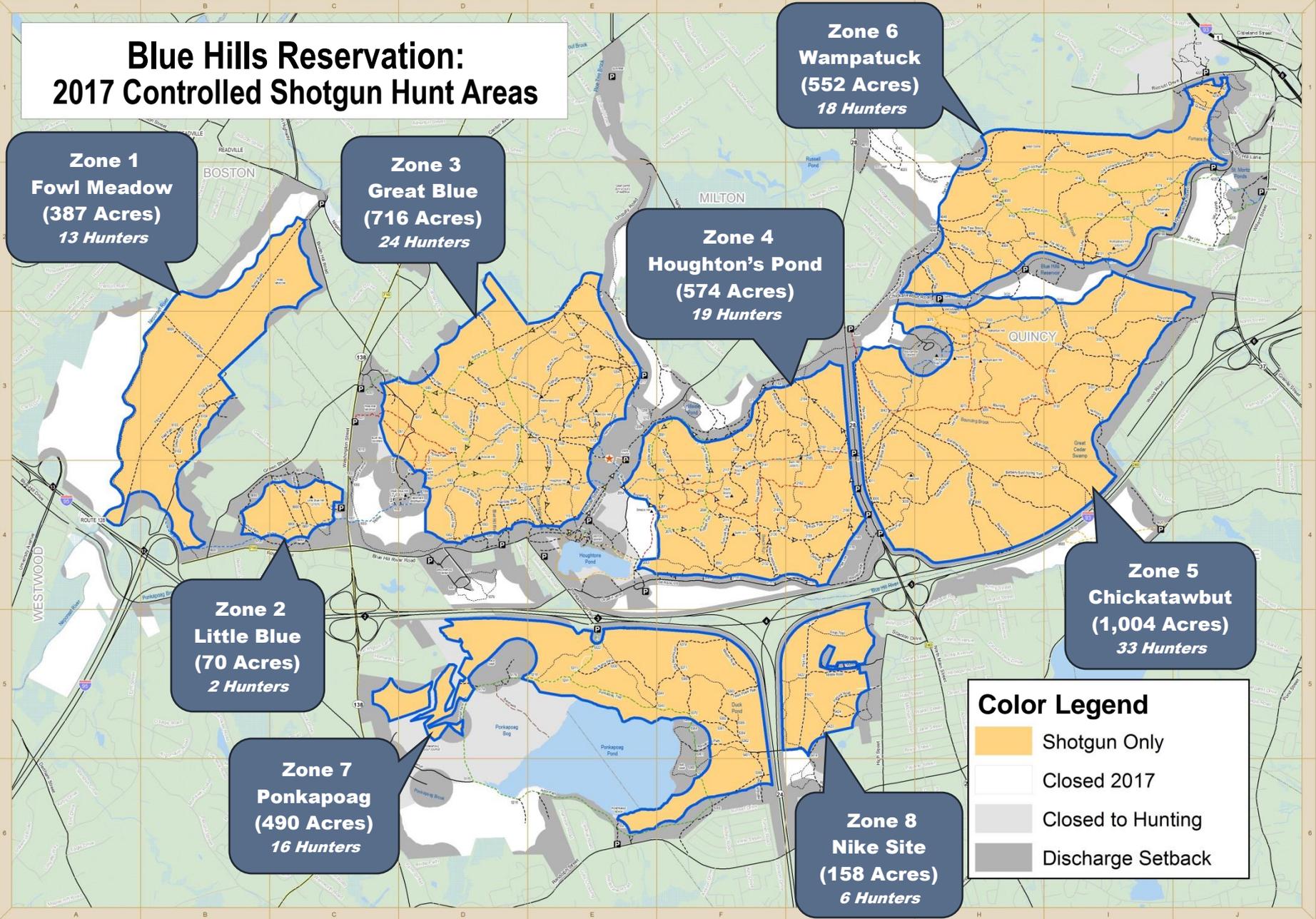
6.4 – Management Zones and Hunter Distribution

In order to organize and distribute hunters effectively, the Blue Hills will be sub-divided into several management zones. Permittees will receive their zone assignments upon issuance of an access permit. Once assigned, permittees will be required to stay within their assigned zone while hunting. Controlled hunting will only be allowed in designated areas of the Blue Hills Reservation and within the boundaries that have been identified on the map on the next page. In 2017, hunting will take place in areas both north and south of I-93. Hunter distribution shall be determined using a ratio of one (1) shotgun hunter per thirty (30) acres.

The designated hunting areas have been divided into the following eight (8) management zones and, based upon the acreage opened to hunting; each zone will have the following number of hunters:

Management Zone	Acres Open to Hunting	Number of Hunters
1 - Fowl Meadow	387	13
2 - Little Blue	70	2
3 - Great Blue	716	24
4 - Houghton’s Pond	574	19
5 - Chickatawbut	1,004	33
6 - Wampatuck	552	18
7 - Ponkapoag	490	16
8 - Nike Site	158	6
TOTAL	3,951	131

Blue Hills Reservation: 2017 Controlled Shotgun Hunt Areas



6.5 – Antlerless Permits

Similar to 2016, MassWildlife will make antlerless deer permits specific to the Blue Hills Reservation controlled shotgun hunt available to applicants that are selected for an access permit. Upon successful completion of a hunter orientation session, hunters will be able to purchase their antlerless permits online, or at any licensed vendor. As was the case in 2016, hunters selected to participate in the hunt will be required to purchase two (2) antlerless permits. The use of any Zone 10 antlerless permits will be prohibited from use in the Blue Hills.

6.6 – Hunter Orientation

All shotgun permittees will be required to attend an orientation session. Among other topics, the orientation will cover the elements of the Blue Hills Deer Management Plan; the goals and objectives of the program; an orientation to the area; safety considerations; and area assignments. Any selected shotgun hunter who fails to attend an orientation session will not receive an access permit and will not be allowed to hunt in the Blue Hills. Non-attendance of this orientation will automatically result in a permittee's removal from the program.

6.7 – Check-in/Check-out Procedures

All permittees will be required to check-in and check-out of the Reservation each day that they hunt. Check-in will take place in the parking lot at the Houghton's Pond Recreation Area. Check-in will begin at 4:30 AM and in accordance with state hunting regulations, hunters will be allowed to start hunting one half hour before sunrise. In addition, hunters will be allowed to hunt no later than one half hour after sunset – as stipulated in state hunting regulations. Hunters will be asked to check-out each day by 6:00 PM.

6.8 – Deer Cleaning and Checking

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. Hunters who harvest a deer are responsible for transporting the deer to their vehicle and all harvested deer must be taken to the deer check station to be officially sealed.

6.9 – Scouting

Permitted hunters will be allowed to scout the Reservation prior to the controlled shotgun hunt. Any hunter who is scouting within the Blue Hills must carry on their person their hunter identification and the letter they received from DCR indicating that they have been selected to participate in the controlled hunt. During the month of November, permitted hunters will be allowed to scout on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Scouting will not be allowed after Wednesday, November 22nd.

6.10 – Tree Stands

Permittees will be allowed to use tree stands while participating in the controlled hunt.

- Hunters selected to participate on November 28th and 30th will be allowed to install tree stands beginning November 26th and must remove the tree stand by December 2nd.
- Hunters selected to participate on December 5th and 7th will be allowed to install their tree stand beginning December 3rd and must remove the tree stand by December 9th.

The installation of a tree stand does not entitle a hunter to a particular area of the Reservation. Hunters possessing a permit to hunt in a particular management zone may hunt in any area within the boundaries of that zone.

In accordance with DCR's regulation at 302 CMR 12.11 (10), the installation of a permanent tree stand will not be 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.

6.11 – Violations

Any violation of the rules of this controlled hunt program will result in the immediate removal from the property and suspension of access to the Blue Hills Reservation hunt in future years. In addition, any person found to be hunting within the Reservation without a valid access permit will be immediately removed from the property, may be prohibited from applying to participate in any future controlled hunts, and may be subject to any fines or penalties prescribed by applicable state laws and/or regulations.

6.12 – Roadway Restrictions

As was the case in 2015 and 2016, DCR will once again institute a closure of Chickatawbut Road (from Route 28/Randolph Avenue to Route 37) on those days in which hunting is taking place. In addition, DCR will also close Wampatuck Road (from Chickatawbut Road to Route 37) to regular vehicular traffic. Road closures will be in effect each day of the controlled hunt until 6:00 PM. If circumstances and conditions allow, DCR may reopen these roadways sooner.

After checking in, permitted hunters will be allowed access onto Chickatawbut Road and Wampatuck Road and will be allowed to park along these roads while hunting. DCR will work with other state and local agencies to announce (via the web, press/media, social media, etc.) the road closure in advance. In addition, DCR will post variable message boards at appropriate locations in advance of the hunt to announce road closures.

6.13 – Vehicular Access

Permitted hunters will not be allowed to park along the sides of I-93 or Route 24. In addition, vehicular access will be prohibited on the Reservation's trails. Hunters with a valid access permit will be allowed to park along Chickatawbut Road and Wampatuck Road while hunting. During the hunter orientation sessions, DCR will provide permittees with maps identifying available parking areas in each of the management zones.

6.14 – Public Recreational Access

General public access for recreation will not be restricted in those areas in which hunting will take place. Members of the general public who choose to enter those areas in which hunting will be taking place are advised to take proper precautions by wearing blaze orange clothing, vests, and hats.