

DEER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
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TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897

**Deer Committee
Special Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2013**

In attendance: Mike Russnok, Chairman; Scott MacQuarrie, Donna Merrill, Steve White, Loretta Foley, Frank Mabley

Also in attendance: Patricia Sesto, director of environmental Affairs; Bruce Beebe, president Wilton Land Trust; Howard Kilpatrick, CT DEEP, Wildlife Division

- I. Scott MacQuarrie called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m.
- II. Mike Russnok joined the meeting and introduced Howard Kilpatrick, CT DEEP, Wildlife Division, who was in attendance at the invitation of the committee. Russnok provided background on Wilton's program and asked Kilpatrick to share his thoughts of how to improve the program.

Kilpatrick stated that prior to this meeting he has reviewed documentation describing the logistics of the hunts. He identified one of the larger issues as being too few hunters per acre. Depending on the configuration of the parcels, more hunters can be assigned. Second, Kilpatrick strongly encouraged hunters use timed feeders to induce daytime feeding of deer and to use game cameras to get an understanding of the deer patterns.

In Redding, a survey of bait vs. no bait vs. timed bait was conducted. Untimed baiting produced a 50% improvement in harvest over not using bait. Timed baiting produced a 150% improvement in harvest over not using bait. The additional advantage of timed baiting is there is no longer the need for scouting; the hunter pulls the deer in rather than trying to find the deer. There are a number of other parameters that make timed baiting successful. The bait station should be located in a place to create the least amount of disturbance in the woods. Likewise, the hopper should be of ample size to limit the number of times the hunter has to refill it. Hunters should plan on a 3-week period of baiting to allow the deer to acclimate to the station. The hunter's stand should be located such that access to the stand does not require the hunter to pass by the bait station. And the bait station needs to be placed with consideration to the location of the deer stand to ensure easy shots. Once the acclimation period is over, hunters should allow a 3-5 day rest period between hunts. The current program where hunters are in the stands

3-5 times a week is too much. Deer get “hinky” with so much human activity.

Frank Mabley questioned if hunters have been receptive to this advice. Kilpatrick has not given this lecture to a group of hunters as of yet, but hunters should be willing to try a protocol that increases harvest while decreasing the amount of time needed. Deer need to be trained to feed during the day to facilitate an effective harvest. The baiting needs to start at night and the timer set to progressively move the feeding time to daylight hours.

The feeders cost under \$100 for the timer and hopper. The hopper should be metal as squirrels will eat through a plastic one. Six bags of corn are needed per feeder approximately every 3-4 weeks. Bait stations should be placed in the core area of the home range. Feeders can be set up prior to the opening of hunting season.

The use of game cameras is also essential to understand when the deer are coming in.

When asked, Kilpatrick agreed to conduct a training session for the program’s hunters.

Kilpatrick was asked what changes to hunting regulations are expected in the coming year and beyond. Crossbows will be legal for the entire bow season and to all hunters. The efficacy of crossbows can be seen through a survey of Redding hunters. Twenty nine hunters, using compound bows killed 15 deer. Seven hunters, using crossbows killed 17 deer. The crossbow increases efficiencies due to reduced human error, less movement in taking the shot, and far less sound being generated by clothing movement. He went on to review the various regulatory and statutory changes made to generate stronger harvest totals in overpopulated areas. Long sought Sunday hunting has a reasonable chance of passing the legislature this year due to a concerted and organized movement. Members asked why the season isn’t longer, to which Kilpatrick answered hunters have an aversion to taking pregnant does and/or orphaning fawns.

Questions pertaining to sharpshooting ensued. Kilpatrick described the program, noting it is open to municipalities, land trusts and home owners’ associations. A major downside to professional sharpshooters is the cost. The cull is not a onetime action, rather it is an exercise that must be repeated periodically. In order to incur widespread benefit, the cull would have to take place on multiple properties.

Chairman Russnok noted the town’s experience has been that the gun season is the most productive. Is there any initiative to lengthen the gun season?

Laws would have to change to allow a longer gun season. Alternately, the committee could use the special act to facilitate this via a permit. Kilpatrick reiterated that it is not the amount of time a hunter spends in the woods that equates to success, it is the wise use of timed bait and cameras to make the time in the woods the most effective.

The deer density counts were reviewed. In 2009, it is estimated CT had 62 deer/sq.mi. This number rose in 2011, likely due to the extreme snow totals that caused deer to herd up and expose themselves on sun-filled lawns while grazing. Statistically speaking, 2009 and 2011 were equivalent. In 2013, there was a statistical difference showing the numbers have been reduced. This is consistent with a decline in road kill and increase in hunter complaints about there being too few deer. Kilpatrick agreed to pull out the numbers for Zone 11, which includes Wilton.

Members conveyed the hunters requests for more buck tags, noting the hunters have had to pass on bucks because they didn't have enough tags. Kilpatrick shared his strategy which is to take three or more does in January in order to bank role either sex tags for September. The town could also use the special permit to remove bag limits set under recreational hunting regulations.

Sesto asked if the town was using the data gathered by the state to its fullest. After some discussion Kilpatrick agreed to provide the committee with the number of hunters registering a kill in Wilton.

Members thanked Kilpatrick for joining them and assisting in improving their program.

III. Minutes

Due to the late hour, approval of the minutes was tabled.

IV. Scott MacQuarrie made a motion to adjourn at 8:20, seconded by Loretta Foley, and carried.