

Harvard Conservation Commission Deer Management Subcommittee

Background: The Conservation Commission is concerned that densities of white-tailed deer are sufficiently high to be having an impact on the forests in town. Heavy browsing and grazing of native ground flora and understory growth is inhibiting regeneration and affecting forest composition on conservation land. Mass Fish & Wildlife has conducted a handful of browse surveys in town and found these areas “moderately impacted” by their criteria. While Harvard is not characterized by the State as “heavily impacted” like towns in southeastern MA, the Commission feels the time has come to start the process of monitoring and managing the deer population before this becomes an even greater challenge. In addition to having impacts on native flora, invasive plants and forest ecology, high deer densities result in more deer/car collisions and play a role in the ecology of tick-borne diseases. The Commission does not believe or suggest that deer densities could be reduced sufficiently to lower the incidence of Lyme and other tick-borne disease, but higher deer densities may aggravate that situation and its impact on public health.

Mission: The Deer Management Subcommittee will investigate the available options for monitoring and managing the population of deer in Harvard with the goal of protecting the ecological integrity of its forests. With public education and opportunities for discussion, it will engage townspeople in the development of a plan and set up the necessary structure to safely implement, supervise and evaluate an ongoing deer management program. The goal is to phase in a program starting in the fall of 2019. The Town will pursue the MA Division of Fish and Wildlife’s goal for this region of 12-18 deer per square mile.

Membership and terms: Five members shall be appointed by the Conservation Commission for two-year renewable terms. The Harvard Conservation Commission and the Harvard Conservation Trust will each maintain a representative on the subcommittee.

Revised August 4, 2018