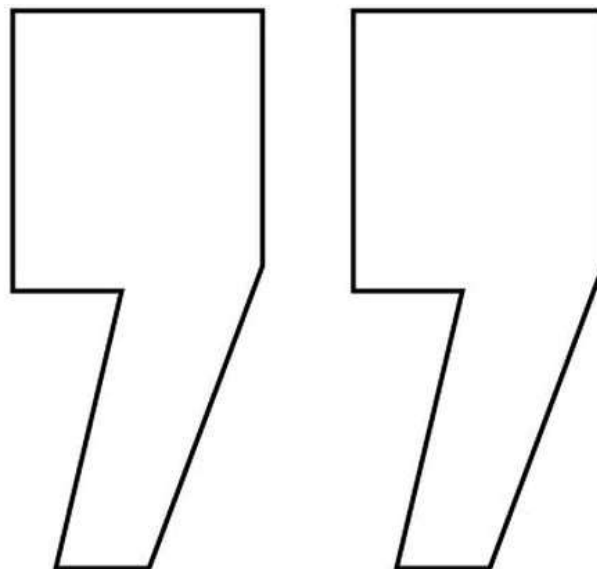


THE ARGUMENT

Should the state permanently end the annual deer hunt at Blue Hills Reservation?

Read two views and vote in our online poll.

By **John Laidler** Globe Correspondent, Updated August 5, 2021, 6:22 p.m.



YES

Bill Driscoll, Jr.

State representative, Milton Democrat



Bill Driscoll, Jr. OFFICE OF REPRESENTATIVE DRISCOLL

It is time for a new approach regarding how the deer population is counted and managed. I've passed and proposed legislation to do both. Why? Because I'm concerned primarily with safety, stewardship of taxpayer dollars, and ensuring the Blue Hills Reservation is properly managed so it can be enjoyed for generations.

Last fall, 186 hunters entered the Blue Hills with one mission: to harvest as many deer as possible. Hunters searched 4.12 square miles and left with 19 deer. That's a 10 percent

“success” rate. In 2019, 25 deer were killed. Since the annual controlled public hunt began in 2015 most hunters have left empty handed — only 18 percent have harvested a deer. Despite an estimated 850 deer living in the forest in 2015, only 64 were culled. The program cost over \$140,000 to operate that year. The pre-hunt population estimates used to legally justify herd reduction don’t seem to align with the actual numbers encountered by hundreds of annual participants.

The herd has been reduced significantly but has it made a difference in forest health? How many deer are left? It’s time we found out. I passed legislation in 2019 for an independent study of the forest ecology and in 2020 funding was earmarked to have deer counted through methods that must include aerial infrared cameras. Despite being law for several years and the funding earmarked for the aerial survey, neither has yet occurred.

I have also proposed legislation that would replace the controlled public hunt in the Blue Hills with an approach that mandates administering contraception and tagging and tracking deer, rather than killing them. This option improves safety by removing weapons from our trails, many of which are close to neighborhoods and roadways. It also achieves the same goal of the harvesting program to reduce the harmful ecological impacts of deer overpopulation. The non-lethal population control bill provides for a feedback loop where one currently doesn’t exist. The proposed tagging and tracking system would have the added benefit of offering DCR ready data going forward to evaluate the management of the deer population. This information will help reveal to us what’s going on in the forest.



NO

John Fabroski

*President and founder of the Standish Sportsman's Association of East Bridgewater;
President Emeritus, Plymouth County League of Sportsmen*



John Fabroski HANDOUT

I am opposed to a proposed bill (H888) known as “An Act relative to non-lethal animal population control.” In my opinion, the title disguises its true purpose: anti-hunting. The intent is to stop the annual controlled hunt at Blue Hills Reservation.

The state Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife were concerned about the overpopulation of deer and the depletion of the new growth in the Blue Hills. Their solution in 2015 was to initiate an annual controlled deer hunt. After several public hearings it was agreed on, with the support of the Friends of the Blue Hills. The first hunt was not as productive as some hoped, possibly because hunters were waiting for that “trophy deer.” The DCR modified the program after that year to make it more efficient. After six years, the program has succeeded in reducing the density of the deer population in the reservation, showing that the plan is working.

DCR manages over 450,000 acres (sq) of lands across the state. The Division of Fish and Wildlife owns and maintains over 200,000 acres of land which is also open to the public. Both are experts at what they do. I trust that if those agencies thought that the special hunt was a detriment to the Blue Hill forest they would stop it.

Alternative methods of controlling the deer population, such as birth control and sterilization, have been mentioned, but the state has found these would not work. Concerns about hunters being too close to people's homes are unfounded. In 2015, there were no incidents of hunters being close to homes. The only vandalism was done to hunters' vehicles.

Opponents of the hunt point out that Massachusetts is not Maine when it comes to the abundance of wildlife. But in the 1950s we didn't have turkeys, we didn't have the deer population that we now have. How about the over 4,500 bears that inhabit our state? No we are not Maine but we have plenty of wildlife and a great state program to manage it.

Keep the special hunt going until DCR is satisfied. Hunters, be smart, observant, and safe.

As told to Globe correspondent John Laidler. To suggest a topic, please contact laidler@globe.com.

This is not a scientific survey. Please only vote once.

Should the state permanently end the annual deer hunt at Blue Hills Reservation?

Yes

No

Vote

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