

REPRESENTATIVE POLICY BOARD

**LAND USE COMMITTEE**

MARCH 13, 2024

MEETING TRANSCRIPTION

Peter:

All right, so we'll get started then. If a few come in, they come in. It's our Land Use meeting for Wednesday, March 13th, 5:30. Your safety moment, everyone study it. I'm looking at it, it says "conserve water." I think we want to use water. But it's just getting into tune with the environment, so I'm all about the environment. So study that and move on. Approval in the minutes?

Greg:

So moved.

Joe:

Second.

Peter:

Second. All in favor?

Committee members:

Aye.

Peter:

Aye. Opposed?

Brian:

This is Brian, I'm abstaining on the first one, because I wasn't at the meeting. The February 14th.

Peter:

Okay. Got that?

Jennifer:

Yes.

Peter:

Okay, thanks, Brian. All right, so we have our Deer Hunt Update. Nicole Smith. It's been a year, right?

Nicole:

It has been.

Peter:

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

It's all yours, Nicole.

Nicole:

Thank you. Well, most of this is stuff you guys mostly know, so I'll go quickly through the first slides. A reminder of why we do this. So, just a quick reminder, the deer hunt takes place on 4,327 acres of our land over four properties. Lake Gaillard being the largest, with Ansonia/Seymour being in this next. Same as last year. We do this because excluding deer from forestry really helps the regeneration. In combination with trying to battle invasive species, the deer really do prefer a native species, so when there's nothing else to eat, they really do prefer a lot of the young [inaudible 00:02:53]. Advance slide, please.

And so you can see this little lovely picture from Josh, showing exactly what happens when we don't exclude deer from an area. They pretty much chew and needle down everything that they can eat, leaving very little new plants for regeneration. It's pretty dead [inaudible 00:03:17]. All right, so just a quick review of the season this year, who we had. I sent out a total of 360 applications. 164 people, hunters, participated after we got the applications returned. Including new people who passed the proficiency test. We only had one person that failed the proficiency test for the large duration of those years. He was not allowed to participate. We had 114 hunters in Gaillard, 23 at Bethany, 19 at Prospect, and again 8 at Ansonia/Seymour.

Again, we had the 10 days of scouting from October 7th to October 16th. And we had exactly 30 days of hunting from October 27th to November 30th. And the hunt ends on November 30th, every year, same as last year. This year, we had a different outcome where those hunters actually harvested 54 deer this year. They harvested 33 bucks and 21 does. I'll get into the breakdown of where that happened in a little bit if I don't lose much time. We had the surveys come back January 31st, and we had about an 86% return rate, which is great. So I got some interesting data for that. Again, we had the two check stations. And this year I'm happy to report we had no accidents or injuries, and I did not have to throw anyone out of the hunt.

Peter:

That's good.

Nicole:

Everyone behaved.

Joe:

Just a quick question.

Nicole:

Sure.

Joe:

Are there really only 30 hunting days in the season?

Nicole:

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

It's because we don't allow hunting on Sundays. So it brings the number down to that.

Joe:

Okay.

Nicole:

30 days, it's probably one or two depending on when I start. I try to start it the last weekend in October and sometimes that's on a Friday. This year, weirdly, October 28th is a Monday, so I didn't want to start it too early. So, we'll get approximately 30 days of hunting.

Peter:

Who helps...

Nicole:

Just me.

Peter:

Just you?

Nicole:

I mean, Jeff does a lot with the archery because he's an actual hunter. So Jeff Yale, who is the program manager for the recreation program, he helps me coordinate the proficiency test. And he'll come to help me hand out the, what do you call it? Release forms, when we do the safety meetings that are mandatory in October.

Peter:

Yes. So the tests and the meetings. Obviously, the safety meetings are mandatory.

Nicole:

Correct.

Peter:

And you do the test first?

Nicole:

Correct. Because if you don't pass the test, you don't get to go to the safety meeting. So it's one mechanism we have to...

Peter:

You give them more than one chance to take the test?

Nicole:

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

Nope. They got to pass on the first try. So what I do is I usually have several sessions that you can attend. So for the archery test, it's two Saturdays plus a rain date. And if it doesn't rain on those two Saturdays then the rain date goes away. But if you don't pass the test, like say on the first date? You can't come back on the second day if you don't pass. You have to practice and then you have to come back next year.

Peter:

It's no joke, right?

Nicole:

Well, because we had that accident the first year, and so I strongly feel like having a layer of safety, it sort of weeds out the people who just kind of show up every once in a while thinking that they can hunt, when really you at least have to prove that you can be a consistent shot. It's not everything, but I think it is something to kind of weed out the people that think that they can hunt, and you take the shot.

Charles:

Nicole, you said somebody didn't pass? Or one of the applicants didn't get approved this year. Did they fail the proficiency test?

Nicole:

They did.

Charles:

Okay. All right. So, it's working. I mean...

Nicole:

It's good to know what people can do out there. Go ahead?

Joe:

Okay. During the 30 days in the hunting season, if it rains, do hunters actually come out?

Nicole:

They do.

Joe:

They do?

Nicole:

Yes. We don't cancel unless there is... I mean, since I've been here, there hasn't been a weather event that would require me to cancel a day. I tell hunters, safety first. So they have to exercise caution. If it's down-pouring, yes, you can be out there. Is it a good idea for you to be out there climbing a tree stand? Probably not. But if you're a hunter and you're an experienced hunter and you're doe hunting at this

point, then that's something that you should automatically know. You shouldn't need me to tell you don't do it.

John:

The other aspect of that is that hunters will know if you hit something and it's raining, you try to follow the blood trail. The rain will erase a lot of the blood trail. So it doesn't really make sense to go out when it's raining. Apart from the safety step. Is that it's a lot harder to track a deer, should you get a good shot off.

Nicole:

Yes. That was my other... But thank you. But yes, so they don't come out, really. And then if it looks like it's pretty bad out there, I will try to dismiss the check station volunteers a little bit early, like by 1:00. Because they're usually expected to be there by 3:00. So if it's a quiet day, we just kind of hang out until 1:00 and then I release them and then everyone goes home.

Joe:

If someone does hit a deer in the rain, how far do they actually travel?

Nicole:

The deer or the hunter?

John:

If it doesn't bleed out fast, it could go for a ways.

Nicole:

Yes. When I took the hunter safety class, you basically want to hit the deer in broadside, basically, lung or heart because it's a quick kill. You don't want to hit them in the gut because they can be stressed and still able to run away from you. And it makes it harder to track, especially in areas that are smaller where they could potentially, the deer could move offsite and go to a state forest like in Ansonia/Seymour.

So I think hunters want to recover the deer. We have a lot of hunters who use the meat. So, shooting a deer, especially in non-ideal conditions like in the rain where they might have a harder time tracking a blood trail through heavy brush, is not something they want to do because they want to recover that deer.

Peter:

A silly question, I'm not hunter. We don't have just bowsties do we?

Nicole:

Yes.

Peter:

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

Like, that's it? Yes, okay.

John:

No firearms.

Nicole:

No firearms for us. But there are, obviously, firearm and bows that are in other areas.

Peter:

Oh. Okay. Because I... Right.

Nicole:

Yes. Just us is...

Peter:

Just us. Because other places, they let you.

Joe:

They're trying to make it safer.

Peter:

Well, that's a good feeling.

John:

And the other aspect, apart from the safety thing, is that we went with the bow hunt because it's silent. If you are bow hunting behind my house, you are up in the tree and a deer comes by and you take a shot, it runs away. You hit it and you track it. It's really quiet. I can't tell that you're really hunting back there. But if you're hunting by gun, I'm going to be able to tell that you're back there because I'm going to hear the boom. So when we opted for this in 2008 to 2009, 2009 was our first, we opted that we were just going to do it by bow. Because it would be less complaints from the neighbors. And the safety aspect of it.

Peter:

Bows, from what I hear, is really hard.

John:

It's harder than guns, certainly.

Nicole:

Well, I feel like we attract... I've been doing a little bit of some demographic studies on our hunters because I thought it would be interesting. So the median age between last year and this year is someone between 53 and 55, who has been hunting for quite some time. So I think they appreciate the challenge of having to shoot by archery. Because they've just been doing it in other ways. And plus, they also have

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

other places they can hunt with firearms if they so choose, because that usually starts in the middle of November.

Peter:

Because I knew that bow was earlier.

Nicole:

Yes. Ideally, it attracts an older crowd. We have a few younger people coming and that's also interesting to me. But for the most part, most of the hunters who have been here have not only been hunting twice the time, participating in this [inaudible 00:12:01] by archery for the same. Like, for a long time too.

John:

Now, do the hunters have to live in our footprint?

Nicole:

Nope. We have hunters coming from Waterbury, we have hunters coming from Massachusetts. The only thing we require is that they have a 2024 or a current year's hunting license to be able to participate. Some people come from out of town and want to hunt with their families, especially around Thanksgiving. So they sign up for the hunt. They just have to be able to have a Connecticut license. And a valid driver's license for ID purposes and stuff.

John:

Are we still overpopulated with deer at the lake?

Nicole:

I don't know. I mean, the problem is... Well, I should say not the problem. The issue is that we, Connecticut, doesn't do deer population surveys anymore, so we can't tell you, I guess, deer density. There's no way to really know unless we conducted a survey. All I can tell you is that from the self-report of the hunters, they are seeing a lot of deer out there. Some hunters who have had a shot, they'll say, "Oh, we saw like six doe, or we saw a buck, or we saw a herd, or we saw a bunch." It was very consistent this year, and I can talk a little bit about why I think that is, in a later slide. But for the most part, I think the hunters have... It's a combination of hunters wanting to take an ethical safe shot, so you don't have an injured deer out there, so they're not shooting at anything that moves.

And also, we've been having a hunt on these properties for a while, so the deer have gotten a lot smarter. I can tell you, I would go out before the hunt and I'll be flagging and deer will be everywhere. I scared one up on the ridge last year. It was bending down and I was putting up a sign. It just jumped and I was like, I didn't see it there. During the hunt, if I've gone to fix something, I can't find a deer. I don't see them. They're hiding. I will go out to take all the signs down maybe the day, day after the hunt. What do I see jumping across the road? 30 deer, 20 deer. They're back.

Peter:

They're smart.

Nicole:

They're not... Well, I mean, think about it. Prey has to evolve and I think the reason the hunt was super easy in the first couple of years is that they've never been hunted on that property. Hunters have told me they've gone and they've seen beautiful deer, and they're like, "Man, they're really skittish. I moved and they just took off." So I feel like the deer are probably getting smarter because they're being hunted. They know. How could they not? So I think that's an interesting relationship that's happened.

Peter:

That was a good question, the population of the deer. Because I thought somewhere along the line we had some kind of record of more deer or less deer.

Nicole:

They used to do it, but I think... I was listening to just a random yarn from Jeff Ward who used to be the forester at the AG station, and he just, as an aside in his presentation talking about forest regeneration and deer hunting and invasive species. It's on YouTube if you ever want to watch it. It's a pretty hour and a half. But he basically just mentioned in passing that Connecticut DEEP stopped doing actual deer density counts because the people who were anti-hunting were yelling at them, and the people who were pro-hunting were yelling at them. So they were just like, "No, we don't do it anymore." And that was the case in 2020 when they stopped. Go ahead? Someone had a question?

Mark:

I got here a little late. How does this compare to last year?

Nicole:

The hunters shot a lot more deer this year. I'll talk about that in a minute. It's in the presentation, so I'll just go through and I'll answer your question then.

Mark:

Okay. Thank you.

Nicole:

Okay. No problem. Okay, so like I said before, we had 164 hunters. Out of that 164, 143 returned surveys. Even though they were self-reported, we got some interesting data about what they were seeing out there. What I recently asked on the survey, is if any hunters are seeing any sick or emaciated deer? And I was happy to report that they didn't see any this year. So just to keep track of any deer that possibly could have any kind of disease.

One of the things that is sort of concerning is just the presence of chronic wasting disease in other states, not in Connecticut. So, because that is a disease that could devastate deer populations and change hunting and everything, it's another thing for hunters who are out there who are looking for us just to be aware of what's going on. So they didn't report any sick or emaciated deer. In fact, they said the deer were very happy and fat. Mostly because of the acorns. So that was good to hear. Overall, we had 300 days of scouting. We had 1,100 days of hunting. And we had as much as we could guess from the self report, 5,503 hours of hunting.

Joe:



I could see Mike was out in Seymour and Ansonia hunting.

Nicole:

Oh.

Mark:

You have the wrong date there, to send your report. Did you see that in the second slide?

Nicole:

Oh.

Mark:

It says January 23, right? It would have been 24, right?

Nicole:

Yes, they were due January 24. This year it was Wednesday, so thank you. All right, so now the harvest. So overall, the hunters harvested a total of 54 deer, 33 buck and 21 does. In North Branford, that was the area as it has been in past years, where hunters have taken the majority of deer. They took 24 bucks and 15 does. Prospect, 5 does and 2 bucks. Bethany had 1 doe and 7 bucks, and Ansonia and Seymour had no deer harvested that year. This year.

Joe:

Now do you think it's worth doing in Ansonia and Seymour?

Nicole:

I don't know if it's a problem for the deer. As I was looking at the surveys, the hunters did not spend a lot of time in Ansonia/Seymour. So some people had family commitments, some people had family emergencies. One person just had work coming up. It's a small area, so if the hunters aren't out there as much as they are in Gaillard, it's hard to get a sense of how many deer and how successful they would be if they were hunting more.

Peter:

I thought I heard something where the hunters said they didn't see as many deer there.

Nicole:

Yes. They didn't see as many last year and they didn't see as many this year. But this is only... I've only been tracking this for three years. It's really hard to know if we should take a site offline based on two years of data. So, I mean, not seeing any deer, it also could be a function of when they're going out to hunt. The deer could be out there later, they could be out there earlier. They could be out there on other days. Because they don't seem to be out there as much as other hunters, like in Gaillard. At least from the self-reports that I've seen, it's really hard to get a sense of how many deer are actually in Ansonia/Seymour.

Joe:

Well, how about the foliage in Seymour and Ansonia. Is there indications that the deer were eating it?

Nicole:

I mean, when I went to flag it, there was deer poop everywhere.

John:

There's deer out there.

John:

The other aspect about Seymour and Ansonia, number one, Nicole said it is the smallest of the areas. North Branford is about 3,300 acres. Prospect and Bethany are 400 to 500 acres each.

Nicole:

Something like that.

John:

The spot for Seymour and Ansonia is only about 160 acres. That's why we only have eight people there. We try to do about one person per 20 acres. But the other important aspect about Seymour and Ansonia is that it is up against the state forest, which is also hunted. The other places are up against state land in some instances, but they're not hunted. Like the property to the east of Prospect, which is in Cheshire, a lot of it's town-land, or state-land and our land-trust land. There's no hunting there. But next to the Seymour and Ansonia property, there is hunting. In fact, there's some tree stands that are right up against the property line from state hunters.

So I think there's more pressure there and fewer deer in general. To answer your tangential question there, is it worth it doing it there? In my opinion, it'd be great if we could get to a point, like the firewood program, where we have spots all around and we've got 20 acres here, we've got 40 acres there, and we could put people in small areas to push the deer down across the system. However, the difference between this and the firewood program is that for this, the DPH considers this recreation. So we would need a recreation activity permit for wherever we were having people hunt. Which now makes it a much bigger lift than the firewood program, which they don't... That's not a requirement for that.

Nicole:

So we just went over the deer counts. I think someone had asked about that. So yes, as compared to last year, where we harvested only about 24 deer, I have a graph coming... If you can move the next slide [inaudible 00:21:36], thank you. Yes. So if we looked at 2022, which is two years ago, you can see the big difference in what made the harvest so much less was there was a real lack of being able to harvest does in Gaillard. So most of the numbers didn't really change that much. It was just the fact that in 2022 there was basically, virtually no does harvested from Gaillard, and that's what brought the number down so much.

Peter:

Why is that, do you think?

Nicole:

I could speculate. This would need a study. You probably want a biologist if you really want to throw a lot of money to really dig down into these numbers. I have a few hypotheses, but nothing is proven. I was looking at some of the temperature data because I actually was starting to keep track of that. Last year was a... Sorry, when I say last year, I should say 2022. I can be very specific. So 2022 was a lot hotter and a lot drier. When I was looking at the average temperature for the month of November, it was about 50-point-something degrees. Which doesn't sound like a huge difference, but the minimum temperatures in the morning were a lot higher and the maximum temperatures in the day were a lot higher. Scattered in with a few days where it was super, super cold. So that brought it down.

I suspect that there were just not a lot of acorns out for the deer and there was not a lot for them to eat at that point. Also, because it was hot, the hunters were reluctant to take shots because the deer meat can spoil pretty quickly. The ideal situation is to have it just above freezing, maybe around 35 to 40 degrees, so your hands aren't cold to shoot the bow. But you have to drag the deer out and then, to process the meat, especially if you're going to use it and you're not just trophy hunting, as soon as you've dressed the deer out in the forest, you have to take it back to your property, let the blood all sort of drain out. And most guys don't have refrigerators, so they have to leave it out overnight. And if it's really hot outside or it's too warm, they're reluctant to harvest deer under those conditions because the meat spoils.

So, that's one hypothesis, that it was just too warm for them to do it. The other thing is it also, because there were not a lot of acorns as there were in 2023, they saw less deer overall. I heard a lot from the surveys that they just saw a lot fewer deer during that time. But again, these are only just conditions that I can be aware of. Again, you need a lot longer time period to track all this to see if there are any trends worth following up on to make changes to the program.

Now, what was different in 2023, last year, this recent hunt, was that it was much colder in the mornings. There was much more consistent frost and cold weather, like under 40 degrees. So one of the differences I saw between 2022 and 2023 was that, in 2022, it got cold in October pretty quickly, and we had people harvesting deer the first weekend. And then it kind of dropped off for two weeks when it heated back up again. What I saw this year, in 2023, was that there were more deer shot over the whole course of the hunt.

So it was pretty consistent that a hunter would either shoot a doe or a buck at least one day. So there were days when we just had a consistent hotness, which was interesting. Again, there's no way to really know, unless you set up an experiment, but the conditions that were different were colder days consistently all throughout November, and also there were just a lot of acorns. I don't know if it was a max year this year or just a function of them not putting out acorns in 2022 because it was so drying. So those were the two things that stood out as being much more different. 2024, we'll have to see if any of that tracks again.

Peter:

One or two years... You might not have been here. Wasn't there an incentive for the hunters to go after a doe?

John:

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

It's still there.

Nicole:

It still is.

Peter:

Oh, there still is?

John:

Yes.

Nicole:

Yes, doe incentive, it's always been in effect. So we do try to have hunters shoot as many doe as possible. This year they were able to shoot a lot more doe, possibly because they just saw more deer because the conditions for them to be out moving around were a little bit better. But again, it's hard to tell. This is only a difference between 2021, 2022, and '23. This is something we'd have to track long term to see.

John:

You can see that the table on the lower left corner shows the numbers of doe versus bucks per year. And almost every year there's more does taken than bucks. But, the weird thing was, in 2021 and 2022, where there was an exceptionally low number of those harvested. We didn't know that, and Nicole and I talked a lot about it. And I said, "Well, I think it's just an aberration." So far, this year, went more back kind of towards normal. But we still had more bucks than does, which is not indicative or not the same as what it was early in the hunt. So we'll keep an eye on it and see how things go in the future.

Peter:

Maybe we're thinning them out too much.

John:

I don't think that. As Nicole said... And then I had the same experience in that, actually it was in year two, 2010. So we took almost 100 animals out of blood. In that year it was only Gaillard, and we had gone around the lake. The first year we only did about half a way around the lake. And I was like, "Wow, we took out a lot of deer here. I wonder if there's any left?" And the day that I was taking the signs down, which was right afterwards, I had exactly 24 deer cross in front of me on the Eastern Lake Road. And I'm like, "Well, I guess we didn't get them all." It was amazing to see.

Peter:

You mention acorns. And what else do they...

Nicole:

Well, they love stuff. They love acorns, though.

John:

Anything green.

Peter:

They will eat... But you keep...

Nicole:

That's something that's a huge part of it. If you, especially in places like down south in other areas where they are... They actually plant acorns. A combination of red and white. Basically, this is a little fun fact about acorns. So white acorns, all the animals like to eat them right away because they don't have any tannins and they're not bitter. But because they don't have those tannins, they don't stick around very long. They can rot faster. So the animals just kind of go for those. The red acorn stick around all season because they have a little bit more chemical preservatives. So the animals eat those throughout the winter. It's just a bunch of their acorns. But deer really, really like acorns. It's like a huge thing in hunting. With getting a lot of mast for the deer to eat.

Peter:

Now, do we allow tree stands and stuff?

John:

Yes. We require tree stands.

Peter:

Oh. So can they set up any food for them?

Nicole:

No.

Peter:

Is that, it's like a state law?

John:

No. That is a function of the zone that we are in.

Nicole:

Yes.

Peter:

Okay.

John:

No baiting.

Peter:

No baiting.

John:

In some zones in the state, you can shoot over bait.

Nicole:

Yes.

John:

In the towns where we have our hunt, that is not allowed.

Joe:

Is it true that turkeys like acorns also?

Nicole:

Yes, everything likes acorns. In fact, that's kind of a huge thing with oaks. That's why they're considered like a keystone species because so many animals depend on so many parts of all oaks, red and white, in the red and white group. But that's a whole other presentation about the different kinds.

Joe:

It's kind of interesting because where I am in North Madison it's more woods than anything else. And I have on many occasions seen somewhere between 20 and 30 turkeys, together. Just sweeping the area. So if the deer are around, the acorns are probably gone in that area.

Nicole:

Well, it's both. And especially that's why they think that oaks have such a mast process we're reproducing. Where, in a few years they don't produce a lot, but in one year every 9 to 11 years, sometimes it's like, well, they produce a ton. Because they're such a high value food that all the animals are just going to eat them all at once, and then won't have any baby oaks. So they drop them all at once and then some years it's a little bit less and it's not as predictable. So that's one of the hypotheses why we think oaks reproduced that way.

But in terms of being a high value food to attract deer, it's a big enough deal that hunters notice when they believe that there's not enough acorns in nature, because... So the deer will like to basically move around when it's cold in the morning to forage for food. And one of the things they'll forage for is acorns. So if you have a combination of cold days and a lot of acorns, in theory, you're going to get a lot more movement of deer. So that's why a lot of people, at least a lot of hunters who responded to the survey, believe that that's one of the reasons they saw a lot more deer this year. Because their word is high value food items plus the right county in charge of that. But again, it's hard to tell unless we have long-term tracking and numbers with us. It's only a hypothesis and just an observation of what we've seen. And what was moving between 2021 and 2022 and 2023.

Okay. So these are just our final thoughts. So last year in March, our 15th year for the deer hunt, to collect and analyze data. So some impacts from the hunters, and this is from the survey. So this is some

information that I pulled from just the comments. So more localized deer sightings in Bethany, Prospect and Gaillard. Many more deer were observed in this season than it was in the two previous seasons. The hunters, basically, as we talked about briefly before, even though they saw a lot of deer, it was a little bit more challenging to take ethical shots because the deer seemed a lot more skittish. Which makes sense because they've been hunted for 15 years.

Hunters are seeing just increased presence of some invasive species like barberry, which makes sense because it's pretty fast forming, and multi-floral rose. So some of the areas are becoming slightly more inaccessible to hunters. It's just very difficult to drive a large animal through some of those areas where you're passing over this foreign brush. And then hunters at Ansonia and Seymour continue to report seeing almost no deer. But again, that's just since I've been here. Things could be different next year. Again, it's hard to say after only three years of surveying that piece of it.

So Casey, the forester, is comparing the data collected. They've got the plots, they'll go out and check them, and spraying again to see what's going on in terms of deer crossing and how that's affecting forestry regeneration. And we completed the DPH annual reporting requirement as soon as the surveys came in on January 31st. I sent the report to DPH on February 1st. So that was done and we satisfied their requirement. The permit does not expire until 2031, so we have ample time.

Peter:

Did any hunters see any bears out there?

Nicole:

Yes. Actually, in Bethany, we don't know if it was the same bear, but there was a bear that got caught on the trail cam. Because that's... Yes.

Peter:

Is that an issue with the deer?

Nicole:

No, no, no. I mean, well, funny that you should mention that, because an other thing that's been around is that the bear population has been very good at killing brushes.

Peter:

We should start bear hunting.

Mark:

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman.

Peter:

Yes?

Mark:

Do you see how this increased invasive species is hurting the deer hunters? In the report here?

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

Nicole:

No, it's not supposed to [inaudible 00:33:57].

Mark:

I think we should have a report from our invasive species expert and find out why he's not getting rid of more invasive species so the deer hunters can get through it.

Nicole:

No. They're just reporting that it's harder to drag the deer through the brush. It's good-

Mark:

I know that. We got to get rid of that brush so the deer hunters will have an easier thing. There's another reason for getting rid of invasive species, not only choking the woods. I think, Mr. Chairman, we should have him come in front of our committee and explain why.

Peter:

Okay, we'll take a note of that. I have a question.

Nicole:

Sure.

Peter:

When you get a deer, you can't go in with a quad and pull them out?

Nicole:

No.

Peter:

You got to drag it, right? I mean...

Nicole:

Yes. You have to Joe McKnives vehicle...

Peter:

Really? I mean, right to your car?

John:

We do have some provisions where... Like at Gaillard, it's a big area. And you can drive certain roads, but you can't park there. We do say that if you parked in a legal area where you are and you've gone to your deer stand, you shot the deer, you tracked the deer, you find the deer. The deer is now near a road that you can't park on. You can drive around. You don't have to drag it back up the hill to your car. You can



Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

drive it there and then load it into your car, to that point. But no, we do not allow people to bring ATVs onto the property. There's enough of that without-

Peter:

Good education I'm getting here.

Joe:

Peter wants to do it for the evening. He wants to have a big out there... I'm all for these quads out there.

Jennifer:

Well, that's what I think...

Peter:

This is too much.

Jamie:

On the survey, were there any observations of fishers on the property?

Nicole:

Fisher cats?

Jamie:

Fisher cats.

Nicole:

Nope. The hunters saw a lot of bobcats this year, which is cool.

Peter:

Yes, Bobcats.

Nicole:

There were definitely coyotes out there. And then just the small game animals, like lots of turkeys, lots of squirrels. But what was interesting were the bobcats. So that was different. I think Dylan reported as many as they saw. I get the sense that there have been way more of them since COVID. I think we're seeing a lot of bobcats. They're also very good at hunting fawns.

Peter:

I guess peripheral to [inaudible 00:36:09].

Nicole:

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

Yes. Before somebody had the question, bear are pretty good at killing fawns. So that could also be a reason. Like the deer population has fluctuated, but we don't know what it is to compare it to. But it's just a point that, Yes, they are really good at...

Joe:

We're not overpopulated to worry about bear at the moment.

Nicole:

No. I mean, the bear are just doing well. Black bears overall in America, like North America, I think there's something like 800,000 of them.

Joe:

They're coming back though. They're increasing.

Nicole:

Yes, they were pretty healthy from other regions. [inaudible 00:36:48].

Peter:

Any other questions?

Nicole:

No, I feel like-

Mark:

Were there any sightings of trespassers on the land?

Nicole:

Yes. Always. So we had a bunch of trail cameras catch people on ATVs. Especially at Gaillard, on the Tilcon ridge.

Peter:

Trying to hunt? Or just...

Nicole:

No, they're just trespassing.

Peter:

Trespassing.

Nicole:

They tried, around.

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

Peter:

Throw one at me, Mark.

Mark:

Do we put up signs that for the next 30 days there'll be hunters in the woods?

Nicole:

We pretty much let people... We let a lot of the researchers at Connecticut experiment station know. We let the firewood cutter folks know. But on these properties, they're not going for recreation anyway, so nobody should be there.

Mark:

I know, but I think we should post some signs or something. Saying it's hunting... I hate to see even a trespasser get killed. I mean maybe, I don't know. I guess I would.

John:

Highly unlikely with a bow hunt.

Nicole:

Yes.

Peter:

No, you're not going to... Guns.

John:

More likely in a firearm hunt, Yes.

John:

Do the hunters think where their preference to hunt is?

Nicole:

Yes. I mean, they choose to wet the lottery, an application goes out. You have a choice between the four sites. You can label them 1, 2, 3, 4. You can circle whichever one you want. It's not guaranteed. The only time we reserve spots within a certain area is if you volunteered the year before at the check station or you shot a doe. So that's part of the doe incentive is that, if you shoot a doe, you automatically get waived into the hunt.

John:

You don't have to pre-qualify again.

Nicole:

Pre-qualify? You mean taking the...

Joe:  
Proficiency?

Nicole:  
No, no.

Joe:  
Once you're passed, you've passed.

Nicole:  
Yes. Once you pass the proficiency test, you pass the proficiency test. It's only once, your first year.

Joe:  
Once in your lifetime?

Nicole:  
Yes. It's only for first year participants.

Peter:  
Just like a hunting license. Right?

John:  
Yes. That changed. In the beginning, we used to qualify everybody every year.

Peter:  
But your lifestyle can change.

John:  
Right. And just your practice. A lot of things can change. The doe incentive was really a big thing in the beginning because we had a lot more applicants than we had spots for hunters. So if you got in, if you got your doe in 2010, you were automatically through the lottery. Not through the proficiency test, but through the lottery in 2011. Now, we only test the people who are coming into the program. So once you pass the proficiency test, you're done. You don't have to do it again. And now... This year, did we have more applicants than spots or it was about the same, right?

Nicole:  
So there's 205 spots overall, if it's all full. We usually have... So between 20... I feel like 2021, COVID rules were still in effect, so we didn't have the safety thing. All those spots were filled, but not everybody hunted. So after the accident in 2021 where the man fell out of the tree stand, we put all the safety stuff back in place and then that started weeding out people more so. I think last year, maybe we had 170. 2022, we had less. So we didn't fill up the whole thing. And this year, it's the same thing, where Gaillard usually can hold 152 hunters, but we had 114.

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

John:

You ever catch any of the hunters drinking alcohol?

Nicole:

I have not. Thank goodness.

Joe:

It's also plenty of other things.

Peter:

That's the reason the guy fell out of a tree.

Nicole:

No.

Peter:

No?

Nicole:

Not to our knowledge at all.

Peter:

Oh, okay.

Nicole:

Nobody knows why. So I mean, he's not in the program because that's just too much. But I don't want to cast discursion on the gentleman. We don't know what he was doing or why he was doing it. We just know he fell and that it was not something that we wanted to repeat.

John:

I mean, my hypothesis, and I don't know if Nicole or Jeff had the same... When you're there, the guys get there early in the morning, before dawn. And after a while, if you're just sitting there and you have lots of layers and it gets warmer, you start nodding off.

Peter:

He might have.

John:

Now, you're supposed to have a harness on, so that, should you fall, you get caught. But he didn't have the harness on right, but he had something on.

Nicole:

Correct. Yes.

John:

So I believe that he probably fell asleep, did not have the harness on properly, and got stuck there.

Peter:

Thank you.

Nicole:

But there's no way to know because, obviously, he was alive. So [inaudible 00:41:37]. Safely, okay. Then doing the forensic analysis of the site. But we instituted that sequence of equipment when that happened in '22, when everybody has to have the emergency automated, hands-free device. So that seems to be working well because most of the hunters, when we first implemented that, didn't even know that the device existed. And so, as part of the proficiency test, all the first-year hunters have to bring that device with them to show me that they have it. And then everyone should have one by the time they get to the front.

Peter:

Awesome. Learned a lot tonight.

Jamie:

Nicole, can you explain how that device works?

Nicole:

Yes. So it's not in place of any existing safety measure that we have that we require for them at this point. Basically, if you... Okay. It's hard to describe because I don't have one. If you want to Google it. We don't recommend a specific device because we don't want to look like we're endorsing a particular product. There's several. But the one that seems to be pretty popular, it kind of functions like a bicycle helmet in the sense that if you have to use it, you have to replace it. You can't just keep using it over and over.

Although there's some more expensive models that you can use over and over. You basically hook it to the tree and hook it to yourself and then it will lower you automatically to the ground. So if you take any of the hunter safety classes, they're really big on trying to prevent suspension trauma. So what happens is you fall out of the tree and then you're dangling and that could be a real problem because it really messes with your circulatory system. Sometimes, like one of the recommendations is that you cut yourself off of the line. That's like, "Well, our hunters are a little older, maybe they might not be able to do that." The hands-free device actually automatically allows you to just lower yourself to the ground. And you don't have to cut anything or climb.

Because a lot of these guys want to hunt by themselves. So we encourage people to hunt with a partner. Not everybody wants to do that. And that's also the bind. There are plenty of competent hunters who could be out there, alone in the forest, but this is just like an added layer of protection in case people do fall out. They don't have to cut or they don't have to get hung up in a weird way. They're just on that line and it just lowers you to the ground.

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

Peter:

That makes sense.

Jamie:

Thank you. Nicole, to go back to something you mentioned earlier about the oak trees, I would be very interested, John, in having a presentation about the various tree types and benefits or liabilities to the water company for those tree types and for wildlife. And don't have anybody go out of their way, but if we need a presentation for some meeting, that would be very interesting.

John:

Yes, we can do that.

Peter:

Thanks, Jamie. Any other questions for Nicole? Any other questions? Anyone? Thanks, Nicole.

Nicole:

Thanks, guys, for having me. It was nice to see you.

Peter:

Good to see you again.

Nicole:

Yes. See you next year.

Peter:

Yes, let's see you next year. All right.

Joe:

Don't be a stranger.

Nicole:

I won't. Call me anytime.

Peter:

I think I'm fine. I got educated here. I might start hunting.

Nicole:

Don't do it, safely, you'll have to pass the proficiency test.

Peter:

I'll pass.

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

Nicole:  
Okay.

Peter:  
All right. Thank you.

Nicole:  
Thanks, guys.

Peter:  
All right, John, take over. Updates on our land and regional water properties?

John:  
Yes, so within the monthly summary for you guys. At the end of February, we were at 95% for the surface water supplies, last year we were at 92. Long-term average is 82. I can tell you that, as of today, because we've had a lot of rain already in March, that we are completely filled, including the largest spilling slightly. So at the end of February, February was actually a dry month, believe it or not. It was 1.6 inches of rain at Whitney. Last year it was even less, 0.88. And the long-term average is 3.31. For the fiscal year, 45.42 inches. And the long-term average is 34.11.

Already in March, I think we've had 5.5 inches of rain at Whitney. And the long-term average for the whole month is like 4.3, something like that. So we got more than a month's worth of rain in two weeks. Later we need, for the water reuse program, I can state this now that the Bis/Bowman property, we have signed a purchase and sale agreement and will encompass about 78 acres. We don't know exactly the size [inaudible 00:46:33] survey of it, but from what we believe, it's about 78 acres.

And we think, Bob, that some of this does go over the town line. So there might be a little bit in Prospect that we acquired as well. Other people or properties that we've been talking to. Two in Cheshire, worth 20 and 16 acres, and two in Bethany of 16 and 35 acres. One in Hamden of 10 acres. For the North Branford Beech Street and Poms Lane property, we corresponded with the land trust about that purchase. Still working on the purchase of sale agreement there. I saw that Joey just sent their attorney an email yesterday. I did not hear a reply back.

At Squantuck road, Mike, this is for you. We continue the attempts to get the towns plans for the property in order to prepare the disposition application. I could say that, by today, a week or two ago, I did talk to Kurt Miller. So he told me what the town's plans are, and I started work on getting the materials prepared for getting the disposition application together. A long way to go on that, but we've got more information so we can get started. Nothing to report on rental houses.

Forestry update. The only change from last month is what's in bold. The Menunketuc high grade rehabilitation cut is up to 20% complete. Casey conducted the LSR grant planning and administrative duties related to the revised budget for the steam weeder, capital spending, and also the award letter amendments. They compiled and submitted a land value survey report for the USDA and sent out permit renewal packets to all the woodcutters and maple tappers.

Mark:  
Excuse me, John?



Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

John:

Yes?

Mark:

What is that steam weeder for? Is that for invasive species?

John:

Yes, it is. So, as part of the grant, we are having two interns, basically, two seasonal people come in who are going to be specifically looking at invasive species and invasive plant control. And as part of our grant application, we said we would buy this steam weeder device that kills it by steam. And so the interns as well as Casey and Josh are going to be using this machine to help control the invasive plants.

Mark:

Will that help the invasive plants that the deer are having a problem with or that we're having a problem with that?

John:

Yes. I mean, it's going to help all the way around. Including for deer management, the deer program.

Mark:

Okay.

John:

Yes.

Mark:

Thank you.

John:

Yep, you're welcome. And Casey arranged for delivery of the partial resistant chestnut from the American Chestnut Foundation. In recreation, we had a few events in February. The invasive plant walk by Josh had 12 people on it. My owl walk at Chamberlain had over 50. And the maple sugaring tour that Casey did over in Guilford had 34 people. Jeff has been recruiting new staff for this year's fishing season.

Peter:

How many owls did you see?

John:

Zero. Yes, it was a perfect night for owls. It was very cold, not much wind. The moon was about a half moon, so you could see a lot. Just didn't find them that day. Pine Hill permit for DPH was renewed. Permit renewals were submitted to DPH for the activities in Saltonstall, Big Guelph, Hammonasset, Sugarloaf and Genesee. We had a customer service rep attend a meeting where we talked about the pin pad usage for payment at places like the Lake Saltonstall fishing dock.

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

So at the end of February, we were at 4,771 permittees. That's actually up from January, which was 4,743. Linda issued four special activity permits in the month of February, you can see them there. Nothing out of the ordinary. One is up by Bob's place there. Are you going to be attending that? I don't know.

Peter:

I hope to.

John:

Okay. Where they are going to be teaching members of the fire department how to correctly fell trees. And this helps with forest fires as well. And other items, moving down. Encroachments and agreements. We have a large number of bullets this month because the winter leaves off, or when we're out there doing our boundaries. So at West Haven Shingle Hill tanks, we answered questions from Yale about the draft agreement. That's for their radio repeater there. At 67 Woods Hill Road in North Branford, we discovered a tree house over the property and sent letters to the abutter.

I can tell you now that the abutters have already taken down the tree house. It's off our property and dismantled. At Allen Road, which had a bunch of encroachments there. I did this one. Discovered stuff over the line at 821, 835, 845 and 849. All those are pretty simple. Just stuff that they were going to move back. The only difference was 845. It's a lawn that goes over the property line. And that one, we talked to the owner and offered them a license agreement, which they said they would sign. And we have executed that agreement at this point.

At Owen Road, which is in the same neighborhood, same thing. Just stuff that was over the line and sent a letter to them. Lake Whitney access in Hamden. We received an updated draft agreement from UI to review. We're all set with that. I've sent it back to UI, but I haven't heard back from them yet. Invasive plant updates for February. In the month of February, Josh treated and documented invasive plant populations in Branford, East Haven, and North Branford. Issued a PO for the steam weeder that we just talked about. For the grant and assisted engineering planning for vegetation removal over the water mains around the West River water treatment plant. So a total of 39 acres were mapped in the month of February and 5.4 acres were treated.

And other matters here, Hamden Hall, they want to put up a scoreboard on the leased area, so they notified Ron Walters that the planning and zoning application was submitted. I have not heard whether or not it was approved, but I told the attorney for Hamden Hall to send me the permit whenever they get that so we have it in our files. Tennessee Gas told us that they were going to be doing work on their gas line that crosses our property in Hamden. This is just east of Downs Road. And boundaries, me and my staff, we checked and remarked boundaries in a variety of places, including Madison, East Haven, North Branford, Branford, Hamden, West Haven, Orange, and Woodbridge.

The dam project, which is done by engineering, we replied to them about some questions they had about access off of Whitney Avenue. At 1955 Litchfield Turnpike we exchanged emails, and this is all in-house, about the fate of the barn, the house and other buildings at that location. The Genesee Tunnel inspection, our engineers are going to be doing inspection. Yes?

Mark:

Excuse me, what was that about? What was that about, the exchange about the fate of the house and barn? Did they have a problem there?

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

John:

Yes. All the buildings there are in various states of decay. Initially, we were keeping the house as a potential location to do business continuity that, if we had to bug out of here, that we could set it up as offices. But nothing has happened in the last 10 years. So it's just sat there. And, at one-

Mark:

Yes. When we were there the last time, it looks like it was decaying.

John:

Yes. And it continues to do that. We're keeping it sort of stable so that it doesn't collapse, but we're not improving it at all. So mold-eating moss get into the building, which creates problems. So we've just talked internally about what we might be able to do with these buildings, these improvements.

Mark:

Does that building have any historic value? Does it have historic value?

John:

Not really. I mean, it is an old house like some of the other ones, but not anything that's terribly old. Especially as some of the houses that we sold already were built in late 1700s, early 1800s. This one I think only goes back to the early 1900s. Maybe the late 1800s. It's actually not new.

Mark:

I thought they were going to use it for if they needed an exterior communications place for emergencies and stuff at one time, or to store equipment?

John:

Right. That was our business continuity potential plans, to use it as an office. But none of that has ever been pushed forward. It would take a lot of time and effort.

Mark:

It's a shame. It's a nice looking house too. I mean, we were there. It was getting really destroyed too.

John:

Correct. Yes. We met there on more than one occasion over the years. So the engineers are going to be doing an inspection of a portion of the Genesee Tunnel and we corresponded with them about their plans to do the inspection all east of Menunketuc so it's mostly in Guilford and Madison. Some of our staff was looking at a water main easement in New Haven off of Greenwich Avenue, and wanted to know how to get in there. The property was fenced off with a gate that was locked. It turned out to be UI property. So I contacted my peer, basically, at UI to get access to that. So that was worked out.

And then we had a question from our engineering staff about property that the state acquired from us in the 1970s where there's a sediment detention basin, which is at the intersection of Dillon Road and Route 69. And I looked up information for engineering and answered some of their questions. And then

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

there's only four articles for you to read from the month of February and I'm open to any other questions that you have.

Peter:

Questions for John?

Mark:

Good report, John. Good report.

John:

Thanks.

Peter:

I have one on that prospect here. Those are two separate dates for one and seven?

Jennifer:

It's a range.

Peter:

Huh?

John:

It's a range of dates to go. So in case it rains.

Peter:

Oh, okay. So they don't know exactly.

John:

Right. Just that, whenever they pick it and they're going to go on, then they're supposed to call the control room to let us know that they're there.

Peter:

Okay. We hired a new police officer?

John:

We did. Yes. I was supposed to meet him today, but then I got pulled away and he got pulled away. So I have not met him yet.

Peter:

New police officer, Mark. Thanks, John.

John:

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

You're welcome.

Mark:

Hallelujah.

Peter:

Where's he from?

John:

See, I haven't met him yet. I saw the little blurb, but I don't remember what department he came from.

Joe:

I don't think it said, did it?

John:

I thought it did. I could be wrong. Don't quote me on that.

Peter:

Any other land items management out there? Anyone?

Sunny:

I don't have anything, Peter, I think we are going to have a few more join the ranks in the next few weeks. So we should have the full budgeted police officers as of April, actually. Just that's some good news there.

Peter:

That's great news. All right. Very good. Thanks, Sunny. All right. We're busy. Upcoming meetings. We got finance committee regular meeting Monday, April 8th. It's a budget review. All RPB members are invited. Next regular meeting's April 10th, 5:30. Joint meeting of consumer affairs and land use. Monday, April 15th at 5:30. Budget review. All RPB members are invited to attend. Anything else, people? Make a motion to adjourn.

Sunny:

So moved.

Joe:

Second.

Peter:

Thank you. All in favor?

Committee members:

Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
March 13, 2024

Aye.