



MASSWILDLIFE

DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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Questions Asked During the January 23, 2025, Proposed Deer Regulation Hearings and Answers Provided by MassWildlife Staff

MassWildlife held two public hearings on January 23, 2025, on proposed regulations to change deer hunting seasons and to strengthen CWD prevention measures. MassWildlife took note of clarifying questions related to the proposed regulations that were raised by the public during the hearings and is providing answers to those questions below. The public can find the details of the proposed regulations by visiting the [Public Hearing webpage](#) and opening the draft regulations posted there. Written comments can be submitted [using this feedback form](#), or by mail to: MassWildlife, Re: Deer Public Hearing, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581. All comments must be received by 4 p.m. on February 5, 2025.

Q: Why isn't MassWildlife proposing to make changes to the laws that prohibit Sunday hunting, hunting with a crossbow, or discharge setback requirements?

A: MassWildlife does not have the authority to change the laws regarding Sunday hunting, hunting with a crossbow, or discharge setbacks. These laws are statutes (see [Sunday hunting statute](#), [crossbow statute](#), and [discharge setbacks](#)). Changing a statute requires a bill to pass in the legislature. Our Fisheries and Wildlife Board has the authority to change hunting regulations, known as CMRs, but can't change statutes or approve regulations which contradict statutes. Constituents should direct their questions about hunting-related statutes to their state representatives or senators.

Q: When do hunting licenses go on sale each year? Which licenses, permits, and tags will be required for hunting during the new proposed January season for primitive firearms in Zones 13 and 14, and what are the associated fees?

Hunting and sporting licenses in Massachusetts are valid for the calendar year (January 1–December 31). License sales for the next calendar year begin on December 1 of the previous year, so hunters have the full month of December to purchase their licenses for the next year. To hunt the January season, hunters will need a valid hunting license and primitive stamp for the new license year. There will be an either-sex Winter Deer Permit available that will only be valid for the January season. Hunters will also be able to use the antlered tags that come with their hunting license and have access to purchase unlimited Antlerless Deer Permits (ADPs). If these regulations are promulgated, the Winter Deer Permits, ADPs for WMZs 13 and 14, and Youth Deer Permits for the new license year, including the January primitive season, will also be available for purchase on December 1. Any unused antlered tags or ADPs left after the January season will be available to use during the fall seasons. Current license types and fees can be found [here](#).

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Q: What is the population/deer management goal for the Islands?

MassWildlife's statewide deer density goal, which has been approved by the Fisheries and Wildlife Board, is 12–18 deer per square mile. Above 18 deer per square mile, there are major ecological impacts that harm both plants and animals. The island deer densities far exceed this goal range at above 85 deer per square mile on Nantucket and 55 deer per square mile on Martha's Vineyard in areas with hunting access. Deer densities are even higher in areas that restrict hunting access. The proposed regulations are only one element of the plan for addressing the overabundant deer on the islands and there are several other initiatives that MassWildlife is working on with collaborating organizations to help with deer management on the islands. Each of these initiatives will likely have incremental impact and collectively they will help stall the deer population growth.

Q: Will shed hunting be allowed on Sundays?

Yes, searching for shed antlers is not actually hunting and is not limited by the statutory ban on Sunday hunting. The proposed regulation would allow anyone to collect and possess naturally shed deer and moose antlers without needing any permit, tag, or license.

Q: Is the proposed regulation allowing food plots limited to private property, or will this be allowed on WMAs and other lands?

This regulation clarifies that food plots are allowed on private property, or other locations with the permission of the landowner. Under current regulations, the public is not allowed to plant or alter vegetation or soil on WMAs ([See full WMA regulations at 321 CMR 3.01\(1\)](#)). If the new food plot regulation is approved, people would still not be allowed to plant food plots on WMAs without permission from MassWildlife's Director or their designee.

Q: Is the deboning of deer meat proposed for all out-of-state deer or just CWD-positive states?

The proposed regulation would expand deboning requirements to all states outside of New England, any Canadian province, and any other country, regardless of its CWD status. Deboning would also be required within New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine) if CWD is identified in that state in either wild or captive deer or other cervids.

Posted January 24, 2025; 2:05 p.m.