

**New Shoreham Town Council and
New Shoreham Deer Task Force
Meeting with Representatives of the RI DEM
Thursday, November 19, 2009
12:30 p.m.**

Present: Town Council members present were First Warden Kimberley H. Gaffett, Second Warden Raymond J. Torrey, Town Councilor Richard P. Martin (Councilors Peter B. Baute and Kenneth C. Lacoste were absent). Deer Task Force members present were Patricia Doyle, Christopher Blane, Rebecca Ballard, William Wilson, Mary Sue Record, Paul Deane and George Mellor (members Christopher Blansfield and Margaret Komosinski were absent). Town Clerk Fiona Fitzpatrick was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

DEM representatives present were Associate Director of Natural Resources Larry Mouradjian, Chief of Forestry Division Cathy Sparks, Chief Legal Counsel Mary Kay, and Deputy Chief of Environmental Police Kurt Blanchard.

First Warden Gaffett welcomed the guests, and spoke about the Council's resolution to reduce or eliminate the deer herd and the charge of the Deer Task Group. Mary Sue Record explained the work of the Citizens Concerned About Lyme Disease, and the local support for eliminating the deer to eliminate Lyme disease.

Deputy Director Mouradjian discussed the DEM's statutory authority to manage the deer herd, based on science. He said the DEM allows New Shoreham more influence on local hunting decisions than any other town. He offered to listen to suggestions to change state law or regulation to allow the elimination of the Island deer herd. He did not say he would support an initiative to eliminate the deer. He said he answers to a statewide constituency which hunts, and which would welcome an opportunity for greater reduction through current management techniques (hunting). As an initial step, he suggests more hunting consistent with environmental carrying capacity and public safety. The Deputy Director said off-Island hunters would boost the local economy. He said more off-Island hunters would come if there were more deer hunting days in a row, and if hunting was allowed on weekends. Techniques such as driving and baiting are not currently allowed under state law. In response to a question, he said he wants to exhaust other options before entertaining night hunting as a mutually agreed upon last resort.

Ms. Gaffett and Mr. Mouradjian have been working on the first complete management plan for the Black Rock/Rodman's Hollow area, which is state owned with Town held easements, and a deed requirement for joint management.

Everyone agreed the size of the herd needs to be determined. Mr. Mouradjian said the DEM will conduct a deer count before next fall. He pointed out the DEM lost more than 30 years of institutional memory when Lori Suprock (Gibson) retired recently from the Wildlife Division. Cathy Sparks will manage the count, supervising Jason Osenkowski, who replaced Lori Suprock. The staff deer biologist is newcomer Brian Tefft. The health of the local herd was questioned, but Mr. Mouradjian did not offer an opinion.

Discussion of hunting near an occupied dwelling: Deputy Blanchard explained any shed, shack or barn which may conceivably be occupied is considered an occupied dwelling under DEM regulations. Bowhunting is allowed more than 200 feet from a dwelling. Crossbows are regulated as firearms. Firearm hunting is allowed more than 500 feet from a dwelling. Homeowners may grant permission to allow the discharge of a firearm (not hunting) within 500 feet of a dwelling. The DEM allows cooperating landowners to combine smaller properties into areas large enough to hunt; property boundaries will not create a barrier if landowners on both sides allow hunting.

Deputy Blanchard also pointed out the mainland hunting season allows 123 archery days, 33 muzzle loading days, and 13 shotgun days. Block Island has 26 archer days, 4 muzzle loading days and 46 shotgun days. Only the archery and muzzle loading overlap. The mainland season begins with archery, muzzle loading is added first, then shotgun hunting is allowed along with archery and muzzle loading. Blanchard said mainland conditions are safe for three types of hunting at once. Chris Blane discussed hazards of combining archery and shotgun hunting on the typically small Block Island hunting parcels.

There was discussion of increasing the deer take by facilitating the Block Island process of obtaining landowner permission countersigned by the NSPD. A map and list of hunting land with owner contact information could be provided to hunters. Chris Blane said a list could have the unintended effect of reducing hunting land because he has seen landowners close their properties after only one or a few unpalatable hunting incidents (not by him) such as improper disposal of entrails, or discharging weapons when or where the property owner did not expect. Tourist hunters without the incentive of a long term relationship might be less scrupulous than resident hunters. Tourist hunters might have trouble locating boundaries. He said it is important to have a long term relationship of respect between property owners and hunters. He does not recommend streamlining the present process.

Weekend hunting was discussed. Kim Gaffett said the majority of people do not want weekend hunting, and in general there are good reasons to prevent weekend hunting. She would like to try weekend hunting with a managed hunt for two weeks in February which includes a weekend.

John Fournier spoke in support of allowing bow hunting all season long. He discussed a plan to organize safe, proficient bow hunting packaged vacations which would help the winter economy. He plans for everything including transporting the harvested deer off Island under cover.

Pat Doyle described the successful eradication of deer from Monhegan Island, including three years of night hunting over bait. She asked Deputy Director Mouradjian whether night hunting would ever be allowed. He said he is ready to discuss expanding the hunting opportunity through a deer reduction program, not night hunting, and said deer are a harvestable natural resource for all the citizens of Rhode Island. He said expanding the archery season is preferred solution: it is quieter, and safer than shotgun hunting, but has the disadvantage of not appearing to be the most humane way of taking deer. He suggested the Town follow through on the opportunities to expand and overlap the hunting dates, and look at additional hunting areas created from adjacent properties. The Task Force should facilitate a list of hunting properties.

He suggested the group could strategize and collaborate with the DEM to create greater opportunity for hunters to come to Island, including weekends.

Mary Sue Record described the CCLD's research which found that elimination of Lyme disease required elimination of the deer herd. She pointed out the environmental carrying capacity for deer is distinct from the optimal number for public health and safety issue. She said the group has been in contact with Dr. Peter Krause, who is interested in following the deer reduction process to see whether it can be correlated with a reduction of tick bourn illnesses. Mouradjian and Sparks were very interested; the Deputy Director asked that Dr. Krause coordinate with Dr. Mather.

First Warden Gaffett will continue to work with Deputy Director Mouradjian on the Black Rock area management agreement and other issues.

At 2:10 Ms. Gaffett moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Martin.

Ayes: 3 (Gaffett, Torrey, Martin) Nays: 0 Absent: 2 (Baute, Lacoste)

December 7, 2009

Fiona Fitzpatrick
Town Clerk