



Willowsford
CONSERVANCY

WHITE-TAILED DEER
POPULATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
2024-2025

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INTRODUCTION

Need for Deer Population Management

The purpose of the Willowsford Conservancy Deer Population Management program is to balance the deer population on Willowsford Conservancy property relative to land management objectives and human needs. Lower deer densities:

- support a healthier deer population
- reduce risk to human safety and health
- reduce damage to native vegetation, agricultural crops, and residential landscapes
- reduce the spread of invasive plants
- improve habitat conditions for other wildlife, and
- support a greater diversity of plants and wildlife overall.

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) inflict damage to crops and residential landscapes and are a safety risk on roads. As large herbivores, deer also have a profound impact on natural ecosystems. With their natural predators mostly eliminated and hunting pressure greatly reduced, deer densities in Loudoun County have increased significantly. Active deer management is necessary to maintain deer populations at levels that balance positive experiences (e.g., wildlife viewing) with negative impacts (e.g., damage, poor herd health, and loss of biodiversity).

Deer population management concerns in Northern Virginia are influenced by the rapid growth of the human population and the resulting large-scale land development, which fragments and reduces habitat. In addition, much land in Virginia is developed in exurban areas, among working farms and forests. Exurbia is a challenging landscape for deer management. Although land development reduces the deer habitat, deer often thrive in suburban and exurban landscapes which provide a good nutritional base, resulting in higher deer density.

Deer ecosystem impacts are a major management concern in Northern Virginia as the density of deer herds has increased. The damaging effects of deer on forest composition and regeneration, habitat structure and species diversity are well-documented. In certain areas, deer have removed much of the understory vegetation up to a level they can reach, leading to conspicuous “browse lines.” Voracious deer browsing can rapidly eradicate native plants from their natural habitat, displace wildlife communities that depend upon understory vegetation (e.g., neotropical migratory songbirds, small mammals), prevent the regeneration of valuable forest tree species (e.g., oaks), damage plant communities, and increase competitive success of non-native invasive plants over native plants. Over time, heavy deer browsing leads to a loss of biodiversity and significant alterations in natural ecosystems.

Deer Habitat

Like other animals, deer have specific habitat requirements, including food, water, cover and space. Of these, food is the most critical in Virginia. Soil fertility, habitat type, succession stage, and arrangement of habitat types affect the quality of deer habitat. Diverse forests, interspersed with openings and agriculture, characterizes better deer habitat. Habitat management practices that improve soil fertility, increase the number and interspersed of habitat types, or revert mature habitats to earlier succession stages can increase the carrying capacity for deer.

Deer and Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is a tick-borne human illness, caused by infection with the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferii*. As the principle host species for adult black-legged ticks, the primary vector for Lyme disease, deer play a role in the maintenance of Lyme disease but are not actually able to become infected with the bacterium. Black-legged ticks become infected with Lyme disease after feeding on an infected small mammal, such as white-footed mice. There are few robust assessments of a relationship between deer populations and incidence of Lyme disease.

Deer Management in Virginia

White-tailed deer in Virginia have a varied history. Deer herds at the time of European settlement around 1600 were plentiful and widespread. However, overexploitation during the next 300 years resulted in near extirpation of deer by 1900. Deer numbers began to increase significantly in the 1930s, following reforestation, farm abandonment, and protective game laws and restocking efforts under the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR); and in the late 1980s, Virginia's deer management goal changed from growing herds to controlling them.

Deer management in Virginia is predicated on the fact that herd density and health are best controlled by regulating harvest levels of antlerless deer¹. DWR closely monitors and manages the density, growth and health of deer populations, and regulates deer harvest based on management goals and the current status of the statewide deer herd.

Deer management in Virginia integrates *cultural carrying capacity*²—the number of deer that can coexist compatibly with humans—and potential ecological impacts of deer. The cultural carrying capacity for deer in an area is typically well below the *biological carrying capacity*—the maximum number of deer the habitat can support on a sustained basis, based on the quality and size of the habitat.

Under optimum conditions, deer populations can double in size annually. Lacking external regulation (e.g., predators, hunting), deer populations can expand to a point where they will surpass the ability of the habitat to provide sufficient food. As deer populations approach this point, herd health declines. The quality of habitat also diminishes, thereby lowering future biological carrying capacity for deer and other wildlife dependent on low-growing vegetation.

Many of Virginia's deer herds are managed through hunting at moderate or low population densities, in fair to good physical condition, and below biological carrying capacity. However, deer herds are above cultural carrying capacity in much of the Northern Virginia region, including Loudoun County, where deer population densities on private land are the highest in Virginia.

¹ Antlerless deer include does, male fawns approx. 6 months old (referred to as button bucks), and antlered deer that have shed their antlers, usually in late December/early January (shed-antlered bucks).

² Human demands related to deer are based on positive or negative experiences with deer. Cultural Carrying Capacity (CCC) can be viewed as the deer population at which positive demands for deer (e.g., recreation) balance negative demands (e.g., damage) in a given area. CCC can vary widely between communities and over time, and is challenging to determine. Generally, Virginians desire a smaller deer population where they live, with hunters supporting higher deer populations than other stakeholders (based on statewide surveys).

Deer Population Management Options

Lacking natural predators, hunting³ is the preferred population management method, where appropriate and feasible. Although non-lethal methods can reduce problems at specific sites, hunting (except for sharpshooting) is the most practical, cost-effective, and publicly supported means to control free-ranging deer populations in most landscapes. Non-lethal alternatives are typically limited in applicability, prohibitively expensive, logistically impractical, or technically infeasible.

PROGRAM GOALS

Even at population levels below the cultural and biological carrying capacity, deer can cause significant damage. However, removing deer completely would deplete the ecosystem of a keystone herbivore. The challenge is to manage deer impacts within limits that permit a biologically diverse ecosystem as well as meet human needs. In accordance with the Willowsford Conservancy's Mission and Principles, goals for the Deer Population Management Program include:

1. Ensuring that healthy deer exist on Conservancy property

Human demands related to deer can vary widely between communities and over time and are challenging to determine, while the size and health of the deer population depends on a variety of factors, some outside the Conservancy's control⁴. The Conservancy is committed to maintaining healthy deer and will monitor deer-related factors and adjust the deer management program to maintain acceptable population levels on Conservancy land.

2. Sustainable management of the deer population that balances the requirements of a biologically diverse ecosystem with the needs and expectations of the human community

The Conservancy uses hunting as the primary deer population management method, where safe and appropriate, within the guidelines set forth by DWR, to achieve a long-term steady reduction of the deer population relative to land management goals. Hunting opportunities are designed to be safe, ethical, and consider the needs of residents and trail users. An additional benefit is the potential deterrence of unauthorized hunting and trespassing on Willowsford property.

3. Stakeholder support for deer population management through education and engagement.

Deer management and hunting related communication and education programs keep Willowsford residents informed and raise awareness about the complexity of deer population management and of the benefits of hunting for the community and the ecosystem. A Wildlife Management Task Force provides program oversight and management.

³ For this document, hunting refers to the legal pursuit and/or taking of wild animals under fair chase conditions for management purposes.

⁴ Many deer using Conservancy land have home ranges that overlap adjacent lands. In addition, deer populations vary based on weather, food supply, herd health, and other factors, in addition to hunting.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The **Wildlife Management Task Force** provides expertise and supports the Conservancy's wildlife management efforts. Current Task Force members include:

- Taryn McFarland, Willowsford Conservancy Director of Land Stewardship
- Mark DiLuigi, Master Conservation Police Officer, Virginia DWR
- Chris Hansen, Willowsford Resident

Hunt Team Leaders, assigned by and accountable to the Wildlife Management Task Force ensure compliance with the Deer Management Program, respond to and resolve basic issues and complaints, and help manage the hunt day-to-day. 2024-2025 Hunt Team Leaders are **Taryn McFarland and Chris Hansen**.

HUNTER RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Eligibility:

To be eligible to participate in the Conservancy Deer Management Program, individuals must:

- Be **18 years of age** or older at the time of the mandatory orientation
- Possess **valid Virginia Hunting, Big Game and Archery Licenses**. All applicable licenses are mandatory and will be checked at the orientation.
- **Meet Virginia's Hunter Education Requirements** (proof of completed education is required). Mandatory Hunter Education Courses provide instruction in hunter safety, principles of conservation, and sportsmanship. Virginia accepts all states' official hunter education credentials.
- **Comply** with all applicable Virginia DWR, Federal and local laws and regulations, along with the Willowsford Conservancy Deer Population Management Program.
- Qualify by **passing a proficiency test** for the weapon used for hunting (see Hunter Qualification) and provide a copy of the signed Hunter Qualification Card no later than the date of the mandatory hunter orientation (see Appendix for scheduled date). Qualification cards on file with the Conservancy are valid for the weapon(s) used for hunting for:
 - 1 calendar year – Bow
 - 3 calendar years – Muzzleloader, Shotgun.

Hunters are responsible for tracking their qualification expiration.

Equivalent qualification cards valid for VA DCR, VA Department of Forestry, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and Banshee Reeks hunting programs may be accepted.

- **Have no game violations** in the past three years.
- Have a **proven record of harvesting antlerless deer** within the previous 3 years. The commitment and experience of individual hunters continues to be a significant factor in the program's success. When selecting new and returning hunters for the upcoming season, priority is given to individuals with a proven, recent track record taking antlerless deer.

Registration: Eligible and interested hunters must register with the Conservancy and be selected to participate. Program dates and deadlines are provided in the Appendix.

Selection: The objective of the program is to manage the deer population primarily through harvest of antlerless deer. The program is not intended to provide recreational hunting opportunities.

To ensure program effectiveness, the Task Force selects eligible registered hunters and assigns hunters to hunting zones for firearms and archery hunting based on program needs. Priority will be given to hunters with recent successful records of harvesting antlerless deer, an excellent safety record, and exemplary sportsmanship. "Competition" among hunters is discouraged and may result in dismissal from the program. New applicants may be asked to participate in an interview process.

Selected hunters will be notified via email of their Zone assignment. Selected hunters must respond by email within five (5) business days of being notified and confirm their participation.

Selected hunters must:

- Attend the mandatory hunter orientation (see Appendix for scheduled date). Hunters failing to attend the orientation are disqualified.
- Complete 10 hours/year of Willowsford Conservancy land conservation related volunteer work prior to the date of the orientation. If unable to attend scheduled volunteer days, selected hunters must contact the Conservancy to arrange for and complete volunteer hours prior to the deadline. Hunters failing to meet the deadline for completing volunteer work are disqualified.

HUNTER QUALIFICATION

1. All applicants must pass a proficiency test using the weapon and ammunition used for hunting. Applicants can qualify at any Virginia range that has a Range Master and **must have the provided Hunter Qualification Card signed by the Range Master.**
2. Only the weapon and ammunition listed on the certification card may be used or possessed during the hunt. No permit will be issued to any person not verified on an approved range. All participants must qualify.
3. Signed qualification card(s) must be submitted by the date of the orientation to obtain a permit.
4. Proficiency qualifications are valid for:
 - a. One (1) calendar year from qualification date – Bow
 - b. Three (3) calendar years from qualification date – Muzzleloader, Shotgun.
 - c. Hunters may not add an additional qualification (i.e., qualified for Archery but wish to add Muzzleloader/Shotgun) during the season.
 - d. Hunters who acquire a new weapon and have qualified with a like weapon for the season may qualify with the new weapon.

See Appendix for printable copies of the Qualification Cards.

ANNUAL HUNT – POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The primary deer management methods on Conservancy property are archery hunting in selected hunting zones, and firearms hunting using a muzzleloader or shotgun in selected hunting zones on days approved for firearms hunting. Rifles or handguns are not permitted.

Conservancy hunting guidelines meet or exceed Federal, State and County laws and regulations. Hunting seasons, dates, policies, and procedures are established by Willowsford Conservancy in accordance with DWR hunting regulations.

Separate laws and regulations apply and must be followed by Conservancy employees and/or their designated agents related to animals causing damage to crops, livestock or property, or otherwise causing a nuisance.

General Guidelines

- Only deer and coyotes may be taken on Conservancy open space, following DWR regulations
- No All-Terrain Vehicle (ATVs) are permitted on Conservancy grounds except for the recovery of deer in designated areas, as determined by the Conservancy. Hunters must contact the Conservancy before using an ATV before deer recovery.
- Feeding of wildlife is always prohibited.
- Ground blinds are prohibited.
- Game/deer trail cameras may be used in designated areas as determined by the Conservancy. Cameras may not overlook established Conservancy trails. Hunters must label their cameras with their unique Hunter ID.

Standard Operating Procedures

1. Willowsford Conservancy sets high standards for hunter skills and behavior. Hunters participating in the Deer Management Program must demonstrate that they both enforce and maintain the following Standard Operating Procedures. Failure to abide by these rules will result in Suspension, per section 28.
2. Hunters may harvest deer only in their assigned Zones and must have on their person the following documents during hunting, set-up/take-down activities and when tracking wounded deer:
 - Valid Virginia Hunting License
 - Valid Virginia Big Game License
 - Valid Virginia Archery License, if applicable
 - Valid Willowsford Conservancy Hunting Permit
3. Each hunter is assigned a unique Hunter ID. **The Hunter ID must be visible, from ground/eye level on any personal equipment (e.g., tree stand, ladder, climbing sticks, game/trail cameras) left in the Zone**, and on every arrow carried onto the property.
4. Vehicles must be parked in designated parking areas. Parking passes must be marked with the Hunter ID and be placed on the dashboard, clearly visible from the outside.

5. Hunters must follow all sign-in and sign-out procedures. Hunters must communicate their location within the Zone to all Zone hunting team members, and to Taryn McFarland and Chris Hansen at the beginning and end of each hunt as well as when entering and leaving the Zone to scout, set up/remove tree stands, etc. **HUNTERS WHO FAIL TO SIGN IN/OUT THREE (3) TIMES WILL LOSE THEIR HUNTING PRIVILEGES FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE SEASON.**
6. Bag Limits: DWR bag limits and Earn-a-Buck (EAB) guidelines apply. Hunters can harvest as many deer as allowed under DWR regulations. Hunters must use their own DWR-issued tags for all harvested deer. Deer harvested on Conservancy land are on private land.
7. Upon harvesting a deer:
 - Hunters must follow DWR regulations pertaining to notching tags and checking deer.
 - Hunters must take each deer they harvest.
 - Deer must be moved from public view before field dressing. Gut piles are to be left in the woods away from the public and, whenever possible, covered with leaves or brush.
 - Remains should never be left near hiking trails.
 - Hunters must conceal harvested deer from public view while transporting.
 - Hunters are responsible for following VA DWR guidelines for the transport of deer across county boundaries.
8. Within 24 hours of a harvest, hunters must submit a harvest report for each deer that was taken, to include:
 - Hunter ID
 - Date
 - Zone #
 - Number of deer shot
 - Number of deer retrieved
 - Sex & age (fawn, yearling, adult) of deer retrieved
 - Comments; a brief description of any significant events or observations, if applicable
9. Hunters must report any question about, or violation of, these Operating Procedures to a Hunt Team Leader. Hunters must submit an **Incident Report as soon as is possible** for:
 - Non-retrieved deer
 - Lost arrow
 - Poaching or trespassing
 - Hunter injury
 - Theft or damage of equipment (e.g. tree stand, game camera)
 - Hunter harassment
10. In addition to informing a Hunt Team Leader, hunters must report the following to a law enforcement agency:
 - Poaching: VA DWR Wildlife Crime Line at 1-800-237-5712 and/or Loudoun County Sheriff's Office non-emergency number at 703-777-1021
 - Theft or damage of equipment: Loudoun County Sheriff's Office
 - Hunter harassment: VA DWR Wildlife Crime Line

11. Hunters must use a TMA-approved safety harness, securing them to the tree from the time they leave the ground until they return to the ground. Screw in steps or similar devices that damage trees are not permitted. The use of “life ropes” is highly encouraged.
12. All structures are deemed to be unsafe. No existing structures may be used. Hunters must install and hunt from elevated hunting stands. If a hunter finds an existing tree stand without proper markings, the hunter should contact the Task Force. Hang on, climbers, tripods, and ladder stands are permitted. The desired minimum tree stand height over level terrain is 10 feet. Hunting stands and equipment **must be removed at the end of the hunting season, and no later than February 18.**
13. Each hunter will be assigned to a Hunting Zone. Only individuals assigned to the Zone are permitted in the Zone at the time of hunting. One non-hunting resident family member may accompany a hunter in the tree stand, to observe. Hunters must “sign in” and “sign out” the observer when entering and leaving the Zone. The observer must ALWAYS remain with the hunter. Only one hunting weapon per hunter is permitted. **The Task Force assigns hunting zones based on program needs prior to and during the season. Hunters are asked to refrain from requesting new or additional zones.**
14. Each hunter must hunt from an elevated tree stand within the assigned Zone. Tree stands in each Zone must be a minimum of 50 yards from a trail, road or path⁵ and at least 100 yards from a property line. Hunters may place their stands up to the edge of their Zone if facing into their approved Zone. Hunters may not shoot across the Zone boundary. During hunts using firearms, Conservancy trails are closed to restrict public access. Hunters must take all trash, shell casings, etc. with them when finished hunting that day.
15. While hunters are on the ground, arrows must be quivered. All arrows taken into the Zone must be accounted for before leaving the area or an incident report is required.
16. Blaze Orange and Blaze Pink: VA DWR rules and regulations apply.
17. Deer and coyotes are the only animals to be harvested. Hunters taking other animals without the Conservancy’s prior approval will be disqualified from the Willowsford Conservancy deer management program.
18. Hunters must identify targets with 100% certainty and may not take shots at moving animals. Shots must be limited to broadside and quartering away shots – no head, neck, or rump shots. If an animal is wounded and not recovered, it must be reported as soon as possible to both Hunt Team Leaders (Conservancy Lead and Resident Lead). An incident report must be filed for lost animals if not recovered the day of the hunt. Hunters must provide regular updates on tracking and recovery efforts and inform the Hunt Team Leaders when recovery efforts are abandoned, or the animal has been found. A harvest report must be filed for recovered deer, and an incident report for lost deer.

⁵ On firearms hunting days, hunting areas will be closed to any person not participating in the hunt, and hunters may set up tree stands near trails, roads or paths within their assigned Zone.

- 19.** Every effort must be made to recover wounded deer. If a deer leaves Conservancy or HOA land and goes on private property, landowner permission to recover the deer must be obtained before recovering the deer. If a landowner refuses permission to recover a deer, the hunter must call and inform a Hunt Team Leader. If a deer travels onto common ground after being shot, hunters may track and retrieve the deer but must not carry their hunting weapon.
- 20.** If a hunter must remain in their Zone more than 2 hours after legal hunting hours to recover a deer, they must text/call/email a Hunt Team Leader.
- 21.** Establishing good public relations is critical. Hunters are not required to make contact with the public and are encouraged to remain unseen. In case of confrontation hunters should provide their hunter ID number and a Hunt Team Leader's phone number. They should then disengage, notify a Hunt Team Leader and file an Incident Report. If the hunter feels their personal safety is threatened, they should call the Sheriff's Office non-emergency number at 703-777-1021 or, if it is serious, 911.
- 22.** If poachers are observed, hunters should immediately call the DWR Wildlife Crime Line at 1-800-237-5712 and/or the Sheriff's Office non-emergency number at 703-777-1021. Signs of poaching should be reported in an Incident Report as quickly as possible, including detailed observations, location and license plate numbers, to help law enforcement identify the individuals and vehicles involved and report such events to the DWR Crime Line. Cell phone images or videos can be helpful. **DO NOT CONFRONT ANYONE.**
- 23.** After shooting a distressed or diseased animal, hunters must report it by calling the DWR Wildlife Crime Line at 1-800-237-5712. Hunters should make every effort to move the animal out of public view. An appropriate tag from a game license must be used.
- 24.** Disciplinary Actions: Violations of program rules, unsportsmanlike behavior and/or incidents that could discredit the Conservancy Deer Management Program must be immediately reported to a Hunt Team Leader. The Task Force will review each incident and determine what actions, if any, will be taken, up to disqualification from the program. Decisions by the Task Force are final and may not be appealed. Actions taken by the Task Force may or may not be independent from actions taken by DWR.
- 25.** Only hunters who are licensed and permitted to hunt on Willowsford Conservancy property are permitted to pursue and take deer. Hunters may request help in tracking wounded deer from any hunter permitted to hunt on Conservancy property.
- 26.** Hunt time: Archery: From one-half hour before sunrise to 10:00 am and from 3:00 pm to one-half hour after sunset. No hunting between 10:00 am – 3:00 pm. Tracking and retrieving of wounded deer may continue. Firearms hunt: One-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset, in accordance with DWR regulations.
- 27.** Feeding and/or baiting deer is prohibited at any time.

- 28. Suspension:** In any/all suspension scenarios, the Task Force reserves the option to also contact Virginia DWR Law Enforcement.
- Minor Offenses: unmarked gear, incorrect safety gear, etc. – Two strikes (one per offense) - immediate 2-week suspension (or next hunt cycle) whichever comes first.
 - Serious Offenses: Three (3) strikes, etc. – immediate suspension for the remainder of the hunting season.
 - Major Offenses: baiting, poaching, etc. – immediate three (3) year suspension from the program up to indefinite suspension.
- 29. Youth Hunt Week** is an opportunity for registered hunters within the program to accompany a youth family member on a hunt within that hunter's assigned zone. This opportunity is to encourage an appreciation and understanding of hunting in recent generations.
- Youth hunters are designated as hunters under 16 years of age and are required to be in holding of a Junior Hunting License.
 - Youth hunters must always be accompanied by a registered hunter participant in the program while in the zone.
 - Hunters must notify Hunt Team Leaders of any youth participating in the Youth Hunt Week by September 1st, along with the submission of the youth's name, age, copy of license and weapon qualification card.
 - The reporting of harvests collected by Youth Hunters follow the same procedures as the primary hunters.
- 30. Each hunter will be permitted to take one (1) coyote per season.** Coyote hunting will be conducted within the same hours as deer hunting and hunters will only use the weapon(s) they have registered. The weapon used must mirror the program's deer hunting regulations (e.g. archery only archery)
- Coyote hunting is being permitted in response to increased adverse human-wildlife encounters with coyotes in Willowsford.
 - The same rules and regulations apply to harvesting and reporting coyotes in Willowsford Conservancy as white-tailed deer.
 - Hunters are **not** permitted to hunt coyotes after dark.

APPENDIX

Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions:

Why do we need to manage deer? **Answer:** Deer populations have increased beyond sustainable levels in Loudoun County. Habitat modification, loss of natural habitat, and a loss of natural predators have led to an overabundant deer population. Conflicts between deer and humans have become a concern of many communities including safety risks associated with deer-vehicle collisions, environmental damage to natural habitats resulting in loss of plant and animal biodiversity, and damage to private properties.

I love deer and enjoy watching them. Will I still be able to see deer at Willowsford? **Answer:** Yes. The goal of the Deer Management Program is not to eliminate deer from Conservancy property, but to reduce their population size to a healthier, more sustainable level.

What role do deer play in the transmission of Lyme disease? **Answer:** Lyme disease is a tick-borne human illness, caused by infection with the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferii*. As the principle host species for adult black-legged ticks, the primary vector for Lyme disease, deer play a role in the maintenance of Lyme disease but are not actually able to become infected with the bacterium. Black-legged ticks become infected with Lyme disease after feeding on an infected animal, often small mammals including white-footed mice and eastern chipmunks. There are few robust assessments of a relationship between deer populations and incidence of Lyme disease.

What are the impacts of white-tailed deer on forested habitat? **Answer:** Deer feed primarily on 'browse,' the tender shoots and buds of young plants. Overabundant deer populations impact ecosystems by preventing forests and other habitats to naturally regenerate. If native vegetation is over-browsed, invasive species move in to take their place. Severe damage to forest understory can have a long-term negative effect on native plant communities and the wildlife that depends on them including songbirds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects. The loss of native plants contributes to a loss of biodiversity and a broad decline in forest-dependent wildlife. As forests become degraded, deer may also suffer from malnourishment and starvation.

Who determines the hunting season and limits on deer harvested in Loudoun County? **Answer:** The Willowsford Conservancy Deer Management Program must comply with regulations set by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) including hunting seasons and harvest limits.

How are residents notified of deer management activities? **Answer:** Education sessions, the Conservancy and HOA website, e-mail notices and meetings will keep residents informed. Signs will be placed on trailheads to notify users; program dates and maps of hunting zones will be posted online.

Is there more than one kind of deer hunting and is one better than the other? **Answer:** Yes, and it depends on the circumstances. Common methods of deer management include sharpshooting, firearms hunts, and archery hunting. Sharpshooting is performed by professionally trained shooters with special permits. Sharpshooting is *not* hunting. It is designed to be as efficient as possible and eliminates fair chase, which is a key ethical concern of hunting. The area is closed during the event. It is more effective at reducing populations quickly but is also more expensive. During firearms hunts an area is closed to

the public. During short-range archery hunting, the area is not closed to the public while the hunting takes place. Archery is considered the safest method.

What if a hunter is observed outside the approved areas? **Answer:** If poachers are observed, call the DWR Wildlife Crime Line at 1-800-237-5712 and/or the Sheriff's Office non-emergency # at 703-777-1021. Report details including location and license plate numbers, to help law enforcement identify the individuals and vehicles involved. DO NOT CONFRONT ANYONE. Phone images or videos can be helpful.

What if a wounded deer comes into my yard? **Answer:** Hunters may not track and retrieve deer on private property without the property owner's permission. If no hunter contacts you, notify Willowsford Conservancy. Please note that hunting takes place on properties around Willowsford and outside the Conservancy deer management program. Injured deer may enter Willowsford from outside the community.

How many deer are estimated to occupy Conservancy areas and how many of those deer are expected to be hunted? **Answer:** The objective is not a specific number. Measures of effectiveness include improved environmental health and reduced negative human-deer interactions.

Where can I find more information on deer management? **Answer:** The website of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, <https://dwr.virginia.gov/> has more information.

Will hunters hunt in all Conservancy areas? **Answer:** No. While the Conservancy manages approximately 2,200 acres, only certain open space "Zones" that can be hunted safely will be hunted. Only authorized hunters are permitted to hunt.

Can I use the trails while the hunters are hunting? **Answer:** Yes, during the Archery Hunt. This is similar to other Northern Virginia archery programs where public areas remain open for use. Hunted areas will be closed on the days of the firearms hunt and residents are prohibited from entering trails and open space closed for firearms hunting.

How will you prevent harvesting does that may still be nursing fawns? **Answer:** White-tail deer fawns are usually weaned by eight weeks of age. Fawns are usually born in late May and June. As a result, fawns can be expected to be weaned by the end of August. In Northern Virginia, the deer season begins in September, a date selected by DWR to preclude this. The Willowsford Conservancy deer management program begins in October.

Can anyone participate in the Willowsford Conservancy Deer Management Program? **Answer:** No. Only qualified, pre-approved hunters are authorized to hunt on designated Conservancy property.

Can a hunter come on to my property? **Answer:** A hunter cannot come onto private property without permission by the property owner or tenant.

Questions regarding safety and bow hunting

Safety is a key element of the Willowsford Conservancy Deer Population Management Program involving both the hunters and residents.

Should residents be concerned about personal safety? **Answer:** Archery is one of the safest methods for managing deer in urban and suburban areas. It is compatible with other land uses, including parks

and residential areas. No safety incidents have been reported during the urban archery season, which started in Virginia in 2002 and now includes 42 cities, towns, and counties throughout the Commonwealth. Every hunter in the Conservancy deer management program must pass a target proficiency test every three years using the same equipment they will use to hunt. Every hunter is required to follow specific procedures and rules of conduct during hunting.

How is archery hunting conducted? What makes it safe? **Answer:** Archery is a short-range endeavor. Due to the relatively slow speed of arrows, deer are normally shot while standing still, at a range of about 20 yards. The target area for archery is the heart and lungs, an area smaller than a 9" paper plate. These factors underscore positive identification of the target. Hunters must hunt from tree stands with platforms at least 10' above the ground. The resulting downward trajectory means that the ground acts as a natural backstop. Additionally, archery tackle is only effective at short range, which means that the hunter is close to the target, allowing clear views and positive identification of the target.

What protocols does the Conservancy have in place to ensure accountability? **Answer:** Hunters must pass a marksmanship proficiency test, complete a Hunter Education Program, attend a mandatory hunter orientation, keep a log of each harvested deer, and uphold respectful behavior toward deer, property, landowners, and safety. In addition:

- Hunters must comply with all Federal, State and County laws as well as Willowsford Conservancy Deer Management Program rules and must possess all relevant Virginia hunting licenses.
- Hunting only takes place in selected Zones. Hunters must have written permission from the Conservancy to hunt and must hunt in their assigned Zone. Any material left in the Zone (e.g., tree stand) and all arrows must be marked with the Hunters ID number.
- Hunters may only hunt from ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset but may track and retrieve wounded deer after dark.
- Hunters may not cross private property to access their hunting zone or to track and retrieve deer without the property owner's permission.
- Hunters may not hunt from within 100 yards of property boundaries and from within 50 yards of a trail or road and may not shoot across a trail or property boundary.
- While the Deer Management Program is expected to deter illegal hunting, it is likely that some will persist. The Conservancy will notify the Loudoun County Sheriff's Department and DWR. Unauthorized hunters will be prosecuted.
- Conservancy property will be Posted in accordance with Virginia Law. This may include signs, and painted aluminum color vertical stripes. It is unlawful for anyone to hunt on posted land without written permission. Approved hunters receive written permission and only approved hunters may hunt on Conservancy property.

What else do I need to know as a resident? **Answer:**

- It is unlawful to willfully and intentionally impede the lawful hunting of game, including tampering with hunters' equipment, damage or theft.

2024-2025 Schedule (All dates are subject to change)

- May 17th: Finalized hunter contact list and zone assignments released.
- June 1st: Deadline to confirm zone assignments.
Hunters can check in to zones only AFTER this date
- August 31st: Deadline to complete annual volunteer hours and submit all paperwork.
- Sept 4th: Mandatory hunter orientation, 6:30 pm.
Deadline to submit all primary and junior hunter documents.
- Hunting Season Dates:

2024-2025 Hunting Schedule

To help manage the overpopulation of deer, Willowsford Conservancy's deer management program continues in The Greens, The Grant, The Grange, and The Grove. Following VA state guidelines, archery hunting on Conservancy property will be underway October 7 – January 6 in The Grant, The Grange, The Grove, and The Greens between ½ hour before sunrise to 10:00 am and 3:00 pm to ½ hour after sunset. All trails will remain open during archery hunting.

Trails will be closed during brief firearms hunting periods in all trails in The Grant and The Greens and Pinewoods Loop in The Grove, including

2024-2025 Hunting Zone Maps: see attached or back of document.

Qualification Cards

Archery Qualification Card 2024

Valid 1 year from qualification date

Hunter Name _____

Bow Make and Model _____ Serial # _____

Arrow and Broadhead _____

Qualification Date _____ Range _____

Range Officer (print) _____ Signature _____

Qualification consists of firing from an off-hand position, 3 shots at a 9" diameter circle target at 25 yards, with a passing score of all 3 striking within the circle. Compound bows and crossbows only. Must qualify with broadheads. Each hunter will be allowed 2 attempts per weapon.



Shotgun Qualification Card 2024

Valid 3 years from qualification date

Hunter Name _____

Shotgun Make and Model _____ Gauge _____ Serial # _____

Ammunition Make and Model – **Slugs Only** _____

Qualification Date _____ Range _____

Range Officer (print) _____ Signature _____

Qualification consists of firing from a standing or sitting position without support, 3 shots at a 12” diameter circle target at 50 yards, with a passing score of at least 2 striking within the circle. Each hunter will be allowed 2 attempts per weapon.

NOTE: Lead ammunition will begin to be phased out of many of the managed deer hunts in Northern Virginia. It is highly recommended that each hunter qualify with non-toxic ammunition.



Muzzleloader Qualification Card 2024

Valid 3 years from qualification date

Hunter Name _____

Firearm Make and Model _____ Cal. _____ Serial # _____

Ammunition Make and Model _____

Qualification Date _____ Range _____

Range Officer (print) _____ Signature _____

Qualification consists of firing from a standing or sitting position without support, 3 shots at a 12” diameter circle target at 50 yards, with a passing score of at least 2 striking within the circle. Each hunter will be allowed 2 attempts per weapon.

NOTE: Lead ammunition will begin to be phased out of many of the managed deer hunts in Northern Virginia. It is highly recommended that each hunter qualify with non-toxic ammunition.

