



2026 Deer Management Program Mentorship Pilot Program

Program Overview

For the 2026 Deer Management Program (DMP) season, the Willowsford Conservancy will pilot a Mentorship Program designed to support residents who are new to hunting or looking to build additional experience before participating independently in the program.

This program pairs less experienced hunters (mentees) with experienced DMP participants (mentors) to provide hands-on learning in the field. The goal is to help participants develop the skills, confidence, and judgment needed to safely and effectively contribute to the DMP.

This is a pilot program, and participant feedback will help shape how the program evolves in future seasons.

Mentees Eligibility & Requirements

Mentees are Willowsford residents who want to gain experience in deer hunting. This program is intended for individuals who are:

- New to deer hunting
- New to hunting from tree stands
- Looking to build experience before joining the full DMP

To participate, mentees must:

- Be 18 years of age or older
- Be a Willowsford resident
- Obtain, no later than September 15, either:
 - A valid Virginia hunting license and completed Hunter Education ([DWR resources](#)), or
 - A [Virginia Apprentice Hunting License](#)

Participants who do not meet this requirement by September 15 will not be eligible to participate in the Mentorship Program.

Mentees using a Virginia Apprentice Hunting License must be accompanied and directly supervised by their assigned mentor during all active hunting activities.

Volunteer Hours:

Mentees are not required to complete volunteer hours during the mentorship season. Participation in Conservancy volunteer or stewardship activities is encouraged as part of the learning experience. Mentees who transition into the full Deer Management Program in future seasons will be expected to meet standard volunteer hour requirements.

Mentors Eligibility & Requirements

Mentors are experienced hunters currently participating in the DMP who are interested in teaching and supporting new hunters, or who may already know a prospective mentee. Resident and non-resident hunters can be considered.

Mentors must:

- Be approved DMP hunters in good standing
- Have participated in the DMP in at least one of the past two seasons
- Demonstrate strong safety practices and judgment

Mentors are responsible for guiding mentees through the hunting experience and ensuring all program rules are followed.

Volunteer Hours:

Mentors who actively participate in the Mentorship Program will receive full credit toward the DMP's annual 10-hour volunteer requirement.

Mentorship Pilot Program Expectations

Each mentor/mentee pair is expected to complete at least 3–5 hunts together during the season.

Mentorship includes demonstrating and coaching on the following:

- Safe firearm or archery handling
- Tree stand setup and safety
- Shot placement and ethical decision-making
- Deer behavior and scouting
- Tracking and recovery
- Field dressing
- Hunting etiquette in a residential setting

Mentors are responsible for confirming safe shot opportunities and approving all shots taken during mentorship hunts.

Equipment & Support

To support the mentorship experience and improve safety and learning outcomes, the Conservancy will provide:

- **Two-person (double) tree stands** to allow mentors and mentees to hunt side-by-side
- **Safety harnesses and related equipment**, as available

All hunters must use an approved safety harness when hunting from elevated stands, consistent with DMP requirements.

The use of double stands allows mentors to provide real-time guidance, reinforce safe practices, and support shot decision-making during hunts. Mentors are responsible for ensuring that all equipment is used safely and in accordance with DMP rules.