

TIVERTON

Marksmen say town has lots of deer but few places to hunt

By Marcia Pobzezniak

Daily News correspondent

There are programs like “earn a buck,” but the buck doesn’t mean a dollar. In hunting circles, it means having to take down one doe before you’re allowed to shoot a buck.

The state Department of Environmental Management relies on hunters to manage the deer population in the state, and even specifies how many of each sex hunters are allowed to take. Some hunters at a workshop at the Tiverton Rod and Gun Club this week said they don’t have access to a majority of the open land in Tiverton.

Tiverton has more square miles of forested land than any other town in Newport County, according to Brian Tefft, a wildlife biologist with DEM who presented statistics at the workshop in the club’s hall. Several DEM scientists attended to answer questions about hunting and fishing throughout the state. More than 50 hunters and recreational fishermen were there to learn about proposed regulations for the 2011-12 hunting and fishing season, before a June 1 public hearing on the regulations at the Warwick Police Station.

“Too many deer are not good for the environment,” Tefft said, referring the Lyme disease they carry, the environmental damage they cause when too many deer are feeding in a particular area and the number of deer killed by vehicles.

Tiverton has 17.9 square miles of forested land, followed by Little Compton with 9.7 square miles, Portsmouth with 7.8 square miles, Middletown with 2.2 square miles and Newport with 1.1. There are an estimated 18 deer per square mile in Tiverton and Little Compton.

DEER A5

‘It’s like a deer farm in there. Coyotes are the only thing that manages the deer population in that area.’ RAYMOND LANDRY

Tiverton hunter



Daily News file photo

Large deer populations can be bad for the local environment, Brian Tefft, a wildlife biologist with the state Department of Environmental Management said at a workshop this week at the Tiverton Rod and Gun Club. Tefft said Tiverton has 17.9 square miles of forested land and an estimated 18 deer per square mile.

[See DEER on Page A05](#)

Deer

Continued from A3

Block Island has the densest population at 50 per square mile. Prudence Island has an estimated 34 per square mile, although the number used to be higher, Tefft said.

Helicopter flyovers are done throughout the state to estimate the populations in different areas.

The number of deer killed by auto strikes in the state during 2010 was 953, down from 1,224 in 2009. Tefft said a lot of food was available for the deer last year so they didn't move around as much. Hunting and the coyote population that preys on deer also impact the numbers. Fewer fawns are surviving and that could be directly related to the increasing coyote population.

"Our deer resource is not endless," Tefft said. Deer are more abundant in areas where they're protected from hunters. In an attempt to control populations on privately owned conservation land, there are now "cooperative hunts" that permit a limited number of hunters on the protected lands to thin out the population.

Tiverton's Weetamoo Woods was mentioned as a place hunters would like to be able to access, but the 620-acre open space tract in the south end of town is not open to hunting. The town manages the woods and the adjacent 220 acres called Pardon Gray Preserve, owned by the Tiverton Land Trust.

Tiverton resident and hunter Raymond Landry said he hunted in those woods years ago, before the land was dedicated to hiking trails and wildlife habitat and closed to

hunting. Coyotes and cars are the only things managing the deer population living in that wooded land, he said.

“Years ago, when you got a deer here, it rivaled anything you’d get in New Hampshire,” Landry said. It’s not unusual to see a couple of dozen deer grazing in the fields near Weetamoo Woods and Pardon Gray Preserve. Several are killed every year trying to cross Main Road.

“It’s like a deer farm in there,” Landry said of the wooded land. “Coyotes are the only thing that manages the deer population in that area.” John Means, president of the Tiverton Rod and Gun Club, said he’d like to pursue talks with the town about allowing hunting in the woods. Means said his members do have areas they can hunt in town, including 144 acres the club owns between Lake and Crandall roads, Eight Rod Farm off East Road that is owned by the state, and Seapowet Management Area owned by the state.


Tefft said the state would love to see Weetamoo Woods open to hunting.


Garry Plunkett, co-chairman of the town’s Open Space Commission and a volunteer caretaker of Weetamoo Woods, said there is a healthy deer population in the woods, but there’s also a healthy coyote population to counter the number of deer.

“I have not seen any sign that it’s a problem,” Plunkett said of the devastation highdensity populations of deer can cause to trees and forest floors by eating the vegetation. “If it became an issue, we’d go to Fish and Wildlife” and work out a plan for a controlled hunt to thin the population.

Plunkett said other areas in town are “deer factories,” mentioning the town’s Industrial Park off Fish Road, and land owned by the water districts in town on the western shores of Stafford Pond.

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