

## City of Eastport

### Request to Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Create a Special Hunt for Antlerless Deer DRAFT August 5, 2016

#### **Introduction and Background**

The City of Eastport requests that the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) authorize a Special Hunt for antlerless deer. Most of Eastport is located on Moose Island in Cobscook Bay and is connected to the mainland by two earthen causeways. The municipality has a total of 3.6 square miles (2304 acres) of land that includes a few smaller islands. The 2010 Census reported that Eastport has a population of 1,331 residents. Deer-related problems have been steadily increasing in Eastport for the past decade. In November 2015, a straw poll of residents concluded that:

- 78% of voters believe that the deer population density is a concern
- 76% of voters are in favor of working with MDIFW to reduce the deer population

In response to this straw poll, The Eastport City Council established a Deer Committee in March 2016 to recommend deer population reduction measures. The committee worked with Thomas Schaeffer, Regional Wildlife Biologist, to collect information about the deer population and devise effective strategies to reduce deer-related problems. The committee submitted its findings and recommendations to the Eastport City Council on August 10, 2016. *(A public hearing was subsequently scheduled on X that resulted in this request to MDIFW.)*

#### **Deer Population and Related Problems**

There have been no science-based studies to estimate the number of deer in Eastport and there is no indication that the population has reached its biological carrying capacity. The majority of deer appear healthy and females are often seen with two fawns. Indications that deer have reached their social carrying capacity in Eastport include:

- Residential property damage. Complaints of deer eating property owners' gardens, shrubs, and trees have steadily increased for the past 10 years. Control measures such as fencing and odor-repellants have shown limited effectiveness.
- Vehicle accidents. Eastport Police Department reported 20 vehicle accidents involving deer during 2015 at an estimated cost of \$40,000. Information on accidents in previous years has been difficult to source, however the committee found that 13 deer-related accidents were reported in 2012. These numbers are a conservative index to population density or changes, as they only represent reportable accidents for which insurance claims were

filed. Eastport police officers have increased their surveillance of vehicle speeds near heavy deer-crossing areas during 2016 and they have also requested larger deer-crossing signs from Maine Department of Transportation to help address this serious safety concern.

- Tame behavior: Numerous incidental observations and reports indicate that a growing number of deer are exhibiting tame behavior, such as approaching people and vehicles rather than retreating. Feeding deer by some residents is likely contributing to this behavior.
- Lyme Disease: Calais Regional Hospital reports that the incidence of Lyme Disease is trending upwards in eastern Washington County, however this increase has not yet been documented in Eastport.

### **Current Deer Hunting Constraints and Complaints**

Eastport transitioned to become part of Wildlife Management District 27 and subject to bucks only hunting in 2005. The municipality also has a no discharge of firearms ordinance that has been in place for decades. These two factors have likely contributed to the increase in deer numbers during the past decade. In 2015, 21 antlered deer were taken by archery during the regular hunting season. 17 archery licenses were sold to Eastport residents in 2014 and 2015. It is unknown how many non-resident archers have been hunting in Eastport during recent years.

Complaints of “road hunters” shooting arrows from their vehicles and targeting deer in concentrated residential areas resulted in a municipal bow and arrow safety ordinance in 2013 (Appendix A). The ordinance includes prohibitions on discharging an arrow from a vehicle or public way, or within 100 yards of a dwelling without written permission from the owner. Some sizable tracts of private land have been posted no trespassing due to the inconsiderate actions of a few hunters.

### **Methods of Deer Control Not Chosen**

The committee considered the following list of deer reduction methods and determined that they were cost and/or labor prohibitive for use in Eastport:

- Sharpshooting
- Live trap-and-transfer
- Neutering and contraception

In addition, the use of deer deterrents such as fencing and chemical repellants was found to have limited effectiveness at mitigating property damage. The committee still recommends the use of deer deterrents and has provided Eastport administrative staff with information about USDA Wildlife Services electric fence lease-to-buy program in Maine.

### **Proposed Special Hunt**

The Eastport Deer Committee proposes a special hunt for antlerless deer. Recreational hunting has been shown to be a cost effective and efficient management tool to control deer numbers. The committee has taken a conservative approach in developing this initial Special Hunt for the following reasons:

- The number of deer in Eastport is currently unknown
- Land available for hunting is less than 50% of the total acreage due to concentrated residential areas, industrial areas, and posted private properties. Also, no hunting is allowed at Shackford Head State Park (90 acres)
- Public concerns remain due to the negative social impacts of road hunters wounding deer in residential sections of the city

*Timing:* This proposed Special Hunt will be for two contiguous weeks during the month of December. *(It is proposed that this hunt occur for a period of at least three years with annual adjustments allowed for numbers of participating hunters and/or permits issued.) Note: Length of Special Hunt needs to be set by City Council as it was not determined by committee. Three years is a recommendation by MDIFW.*

*Hunting Locations and Methods:* All hunting will be archery only and will take place from a fixed ground blind or elevated stand. All hunting stand locations will be at pre-approved sites on identified properties consisting of both private and municipal lots. To be eligible, stand locations must be in conformance with city ordinance and state laws for required setbacks from other structures and dwellings unless appropriate permissions have been obtained. Hunters must provide stand locations and any documentation to prove compliance with City ordinance and State laws and must have written permission from property owners for stand locations.

The use of baits to attract deer at pre-approved hunting stand sites is allowed to increase hunting success, enhance shot placement, and reduce potential for wounding deer.

*Hunters:* A total of 25 permits will be issued to qualified applicants. Property owners, residents, and their immediate family members who hold an active archery license and meet all the requirements for participation will receive a maximum of 22 of the 25 available permits. Immediate family is defined as a partner/spouse and children of a property owner or resident. Property owners with sufficient land for hunting purposes and who intend to hunt and/or allow hunting on their property as part of this special hunt will be entitled to 1 of the 22 permits per household, if requested, regardless of the number of eligible hunters within the immediate family of that household. All other property owners, residents, and immediate family will be chosen by lottery to participate in this special hunt.

A minimum of 3 permits (12%) will be issued to non-Eastport residents who are not property owners or immediate family. Non-Eastport residents must hold an active

archery license and meet all the requirements for participation. If less than 22 residents, property owners, or their immediate family apply, then the remainder of permits will be available to non-Eastport residents. All non-Eastport residents will be chosen by lottery to participate in this special hunt.

All hunters will apply by a certain date to be determined. Eastport City administration will verify an applicant's status as a resident, property owner, or immediate family and will assist with linking hunters to land owners that allow hunting for this specific purpose. Municipal lands will be accessible for the Special Hunt that are not accessible during the regular hunting season.

*Qualifications:* Applicants must pass a proficiency test that consists of 10 arrows (two groups of five) shot at a nine-inch target at a distance of 20 yards. An archer must score eight (8) arrow hits out of 10 shot to pass the test. Robert Dore, a certified archery instructor and owner of Wabanaki Wilderness in Perry, Maine, will administer the proficiency tests at no charge. Certification of passing the proficiency test will be submitted to City of Eastport administrative staff.

The name and personal information of applicants determined by Eastport officials to be eligible to participate in the Special Hunt will then be provided to MDIF&W for background checks and permitting. Additional names will be drawn from the lottery pool if some applicants do not meet all eligibility requirements. All participants must possess valid and current archery hunting licenses as required by the State of Maine and must follow all applicable hunting laws.

*Number of deer:* One permit will be issued to each of the 25 qualified hunters or participating landowners for a total possible harvest of 25 antlerless deer.

*Regulations:* MDIFW hunting regulations will apply to this Special Hunt with the exception of season timing and the use of bait at approved locations.

*Violations:* Anyone not hunting under MDIFW regulations/permits and City of Eastport ordinance/criteria will be violation, terminated from participation in the Special Hunt, and subject to appropriate legal action by the City and/or State.

*Tagging Station:* A tagging station will be established in Eastport at a location yet to be determined. (Two local businesses have expressed interest in serving as a tagging station at this time and MDIFW has provided applications to the committee.) All deer taken during the Special Hunt are required to be registered at the tagging station within 16 hours of harvest.

*Biological Samples:* Tagging station staff and trained volunteers will extract a tooth from each deer for submission to MDIFW with corresponding registration information to assess the age composition of the deer herd. MDIFW will assess the viability of collecting other biological data to aid in assessing the status of the local deer herd in Eastport.

### **Assessing Success of Special Hunt**

Achieving success with this Special Hunt is contingent on a number of social and empirical factors. The overall objective is to reduce deer-related damage in Eastport. The following parameters will be monitored in conjunction with MDIFW to assess the success of the Special Hunt on an annual basis:

- Track number and age of antlerless deer removed
- Track number of vehicle accidents
- Track complaints of damage to vegetation
- Gauge anecdotal changes in deer behavior towards people
- Assess landowner satisfaction
- Assess general public perception

### **Conclusion**

The proposed Special Hunt was created in response to voter approval for increased deer reduction measures because the regular hunting season for bucks-only has not sufficiently controlled deer-related problems. The Deer Committee has taken a conservative approach in developing this Special Hunt and will continue to work with MDIFW to evaluate its effectiveness. The key to success of this initial effort is to have the process run smoothly and to gain social acceptance of the program. It is the committee's hope that demonstrating a well-run program will encourage additional property owners to open more land for hunting in subsequent years, and City resident's support for increased hunter participation and permits. The number of deer harvested could be adjusted according to evaluation results. The Eastport Deer Committee encourages MDIFW to authorize this Special Hunt to start in December 2016.

Respectfully submitted by Eastport Deer Committee

Christopher Bartlett

Robert Bean

Scott Emery

Chester Jenkins

Dale Maddocks

David Morang

Dana Turner

And Eastport City Council (*Names*)

APPENDIX A

**City of Eastport**

**Bow & Arrow**  
**Ordinance**

**(Effective: September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013)**

*Improper use of Bow and Arrow*

*Within the City of Eastport a person is in violation of this Ordinance if that person is or has been found to have committed any of the following:*

- 1) Discharging any arrow or possesses a nocked arrow for any purpose from or over any public way or within 10 feet of pavement to include inside or on a motor vehicle.*
- 2) Discharges any arrow or possesses a nocked arrow within 100 yards of a dwelling or other publicly held or occupied structure without written permission from the owner of such.*
- 3) Discharges any arrow or possesses a nocked arrow within 500 feet of any City School property without written permission from the governing body of said School.*

*For purposes of this Ordinance:*

*A public way is considered any and all defined public ways as defined under Title 29 Section 101 of Maine Revised Statutes.*

*Definition of Dwelling: "Dwelling" means a structure, all or part of which is Designed or used for human habitation, including a dwelling unit.*

*Definition of nocked arrow: "nocked arrow" means to fit an arrow on a bow string.*

*The penalty for violating this ordinance is forfeiture of all apparatus and/or equipment used in violation of this Ordinance and a fine of \$500.*

**ATTEST:**

*Ella C. Kowal, City Clerk*

**Public Hearing Held: 9/11/2013 Ordinance Approved**  
**& Adopted by Council: 9/11/2013**