

**Establishment and Organization of a Volunteer Managed Hunt:  
Lessons Learned From Four Successful Seasons**

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Accokeek, MD—May 2011

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Salient notes on community: All properties are 5 acres or more. The community association owns some parkland. In total, the community comprises 3 sq mi. The area is bounded by national park land (54%) of which 12% is operated by environmental education non-profits; privately owned farmland and woodlots (42%); and housing on less than 5 acres (4%).

**PROCEED WITH CAUTION:** Organizing a safe, effective managed hunt is an enormous undertaking especially when staffed solely with volunteers. Unless a significant proportion of acreage in a sufficiently large area is available, a managed hunt will not be able to control the deer population. One alternative to a managed hunt: individual landowners can be encouraged to engage individual hunters to harvest a few deer for comparatively little organized time and energy. However, safety is the responsibility of many more individuals and risk of accident is greater.

**ESTABLISHMENT**

Team:	Has to be established prior to anything else	
	Community organizer	Person respected in the community who believes enough in the need for a managed hunt that they will persist in the face of a small, angry anti-hunt contingent
	Organization manager	Person who can competently organize volunteers and data
	Hunt manager	Person who has or can gain respect of the community and who will assume responsibility for the actions of the hunters.
Community	The landowner, not the “community”, is the legal entity who engages in a managed hunt. The community association may support, condemn, or remain neutral about the hunt but often cannot prevent it since the decision to participate is usually entirely that of the landowner. If the community association owns significant property and control of the deer population cannot be achieved without inclusion of the property in the hunt, of course the approval of the association will need to be acquired before proceeding.	
	Introductory Meeting	Invitation to members of the community to a meeting to determine whether there is sufficient support to develop a managed deer hunt. Program includes presentation by state Department of Natural Resources of problems created by too many deer and possible remedies, a presentation by the Team for what is being proposed, and a well moderated discussion among people in the community on both sides of the issue. DNR personnel and Team respond to questions, promising to find answers when they aren’t immediately available. Unless sufficient support of hunt is evident from meeting, insufficient properties will be available to reduce deer population.
	Communication	Factual written material circulated throughout the community is a necessity. In addition, the Team needs to thoughtfully respond to individual queries or rumors of inaccurate information with accurate information and sympathy for everyone’s concerns. The telephone is very effective with some individuals; email with others. The Team needs to keep in mind that everyone has the right to decide for themselves whether or not to allow someone on their property with a weapon

Community	Anti-deer hunt contingent	Every community will have a group that is against killing deer. Those who are very upset will attempt to interfere with the hunt by convincing others in the neighborhood not to participate by spreading misinformation, convincing immediate neighbors that they will lose their good will, attacking those on the Team at least verbally, and illegally interfering with the hunt. The most upset will never give up their attempts to stop the hunt. Reducing their influence in the community is imperative. This may include ensuring that factual information is circulated, being sympathetic with their point of view, not allowing a discussion to turn into argument, and attempting to maintain relations with them on other community issues. Reducing their effect may also include communicating hunt dates and locations only to participating landowners and working with law enforcement to prevent interference with the hunt
	Independents	There are members in any community who will never partake in a group effort. Each will have their own reasons but the more empathy expressed for their point of view, the less probability they will undercut support for the hunt.
	Poachers	If poaching is occurring, it will provide another reason to support safe hunting in the form of the managed hunt. An advantage to having the managed hunt is that poaching activities are more visible and thus more easily prevented by the community.

## PREPARATION

Hunters	It is critical for safety and the development of landowner trust that the hunters in the managed hunt respect and obey rules and regulations established for the managed hunt.	
	Selection	Hunters with previous experience in managed hunts know the importance of obeying regulations established by the managers of the hunt. They are willing to hunt from a site someone else has selected; they are very aware of safety issues when there are many hunters in the field; they are unlikely to chance unsafe or unsure shots because they have many other opportunities to hunt and because of peer pressure to be a good hunter. Many hunters without previous managed hunting experience are unwilling to leave the scouting to someone else and are not experienced in working with a team.  Because of pressure to open the hunt to friends of landowners, an application process may need to be developed that includes a completed application form, managed hunt questionnaire, and interview. Criteria for those invited to join the hunt include clearance of a criminal record check, valid hunter safety card, valid state hunting license, valid state shooters qualification card, and photo id.
	Mandatory pre-hunt meeting in the community	Although every hunter has previously been informed at length as to the particulars of the managed hunt, this meeting introduces the hunters to the location and to those in the community actively working to provide a safe and profitable hunt and who are deeply appreciative of the hunter's contribution in solving the problem of the overpopulation of deer. Through a description of the people and properties of the community, review of the rules and regulations, and description of particular examples of problems and their solutions, hunters and landowners both come to a deeper understanding of the operation of the hunt.
	Organization	The number of hunters invited to participate is directly related to the number of sites available and the ability to capably handle hunt assigning sites, getting the hunters to those sites, any hunting or community issues, and check-out on the day of the hunt.
	Scheduling	The managed hunts are scheduled for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday (where possible) when hunters are most likely to be available—not on the first and last days of hunting season when they are likely to be hunting their favorite spots. Hunters are invited for all days of the hunt and are scheduled for days for which they indicate they are available. If requested, small groups of hunters are assigned adjacent sites.

Hunters	Retention	Hunters who feel appreciated by the landowners, feel that the hunt is well organized, safe, and fairly run, and that they probably will be successful the next year in taking a deer, are likely to return.
Rules and Regulations	The community has, in addition to State laws, rules and regulations that increase the safety and the success of the hunt.	
	Safety	Managed hunts on relatively small properties with a relatively high density of hunters must go further than state law to safeguard landowners and their families, pets, property, and the hunters themselves. Rules and regulations may include, for example, that all shots fired must be directed to a suitable, safe backstop and hunters must maintain a minimum of 10 ft elevation in their tree stands.
	Population Control	Preferentially culling does is a necessity for the managed hunt to successfully control the deer population. Every doe removed from the population also removes the number of offspring produced by that doe over the remainder of an average 10 year life-span. Removing young does reduces the population more effectively than removing older does.
Landowners	Property owners have many reasons for not wanting on their property someone they don't know who is carrying a weapon. The role of the community organizer is to empathetically answer questions, emphasize the safety of the managed hunt, and to give in gracefully when the landowner, in the end, refuses to participate in the managed hunt. For some, it is worth approaching them another year; for others, permission may be obtained when the property changes ownership.	
	Hunting permission	Each landowner must sign a permission to hunt form to allow access to the property for the managed hunt to establish a hunting site and to place a hunter. In areas with many landowners, 5 year permission forms are incredible time savers. However, 1 year permission forms will always be preferred by some landowners. Landowners who do not want hunters on their property but are not against the hunt may sign permission forms that allow hunting within 150 yards of their house but no hunting on their property. This enables neighboring landowners to participate in the hunt even though houses on adjacent properties are too close to legally place a hunter without the 150 yd permission.
	Property access	Each landowner should, at minimum, be informed of when the managed hunt is operating in their neighborhood and if a hunter has been assigned to their property. Landowners should also be informed that there is some possibility that the assigned hunter won't be able to come.
	Communication	Announcement of the dates and neighborhoods where the managed hunt will be operating probably should be made to the community at large, even though there is no legal or safety necessity to do so. However, the more specific details about the hunt that are included the announcement, the greater the probability that anti-hunt individuals will organize to disrupt the hunt. If there is sufficient volunteer support, some proportion of landowners like to be informed when the managed hunt will be on their property prior to the hunt marking trails and hunting sites. As this cannot be determined with any precision, landowners can be called alerting them for what week to expect someone—although they may need to be re-called—or a “communications” volunteer can be assigned to the volunteer marking the properties and can call landowners as properties are approached.
	Contributions	Asking for contributions to Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry emphasizes a result of the managed hunt that encourages participation in the hunt. It is an excellent tool to combat anti-hunt sentiment. Contributions are also solicited to support the managed hunt for trail and site markings, paper and printing, some postage, bait corn, etc.
Site setup	The selection of hunting sites is critical in maintaining safety, achieving harvest goals, and gaining and maintaining hunter participation.	
	Timing	Site setup should be in place and activity in the hunting areas minimized at least one month prior to the hunt and preferably 6 weeks. Later activity will cause the deer to change behavior, becoming more nocturnal and moving them into other areas. Take proper precautions to minimize tick bites.

Site setup	Location	Hunting sites may only be set up on properties for which a written permission to hunt form has been collected. The sites must be 150 yds minimum from occupied houses on properties for which forms have not been obtained. Sites should be established by hunters accustomed to setting up sites for managed hunts. Using GPS is time consuming, especially since site locations are established when trees are in full leaf. However, readings are helpful in locating sites in following years and helpful in determining safe distances from adjacent sites and buildings.
	Marking	Trails to sites are marked from parking with brite eyes (luminescent thumbtacks) and orange flagging. Sufficient marking with brite eyes is critical for the hunter attempting to find the site in the dark. Orange flagging is important in daylight hours for finding sites and returning to parking but is also considered an eyesore by many landowners and should be used with discretion.
	Parking	Hunters parked on public or community roads may be a target for anti-hunters. Parking in driveways is best if possible without interfering with landowner activity. Hunters are reminded to keep noise and lights to a minimum when adjacent to houses.
Viscera	Viscera should not be left in the field for landowners or their dogs to discover. Authorities should be consulted for disposal. Local farms may be interested in composting the viscera.	
	Removal area	The area needs to be visually shielded from passersby. Hunters need to be able to unload their vehicles within the area. Establish an efficient traffic pattern. The area should be relatively easy to clean.
	Equipment	No equipment is necessary; hunters can clean the deer on the ground. However, waist-high tables with a significant slant and side boards is easier on the back. Plastic buckets can be used to transport viscera.
Paper work	Although paperwork is usually everyone's least favorite task, a managed hunt cannot operate without it. On hunting days, if all the paperwork is not available and well organized, the hunters will not get to their sites before daylight.	
	Landowner permission forms	Each landowner needs to receive a hunting permission form. These can be emailed with a cover letter but there will be very low return. The only truly successful way to collect forms is by showing up at the door, form and clipboard in hand, and have them sign it right there. Some will want to think it over, in which case you'll need to again show up at their door with a form and clipboard.  You will need to be able to answer any questions a landowner has about the managed hunt. Some landowners will tell you politely that they aren't interested and it is important to find out why. Sometimes they have a misunderstanding about the hunt but it is important to take notes. After some years of a managed hunt's spotless safety record, they no longer have pets, their children have grown, or whatever, they might be approached again.  Some landowners will be against hunting deer and will be quite nasty. Take a deep breath, smile, say something innocuous, and leave. Make note so no one else approaches them on the subject! This is a surefire way to lose most volunteers.
	Directions & maps	Each hunter must receive written directions on how to get to the parking area from the staging area, how to find the trail to the hunting site from the parking area, information about the trail, and information about the hunting site. A basic map is included.
	Parking permits	A dated parking "permit" is issued to each hunter which states that the vehicle is associated with the managed hunt.
	Information cards	Each hunter receives an index card with telephone numbers for the hunt manager and the organization manager. County and private land codes for check-in are included. As a reminder, the emergency number 911 is also included.
Law enforcement	Inform all law enforcement entities that have jurisdiction in the immediate and nearby areas of the managed hunt. This includes local DNR police. They will be responding to calls from citizens reporting gunfire and need to know the exact area being hunted and the safety precautions set in place. If there is any cause to believe that people against the hunt will attempt to interfere, a protocol to deal with the issue should be developed with the appropriate policing entity.	

Volunteers	Working with volunteers is time consuming, occasionally frustrating, but must be done well or the managed hunt can't be accomplished. Anyone working with volunteers should like people and be able to work with a large variety of personalities.	
	Recruitment	General appeals for volunteers through newsletters, emails, voice mail messages may bring in a few. Most volunteers have to be called or talked to in person. If someone sounds as though they would like to say no but says yes, see if you can get them more enthusiastic about another task. If not, tell them that they don't have to say yes and ask whether they might be able to help if you get into a real bind. Take no for an answer or you won't be able to approach them another year when they might be able to say yes.
	Management	Appreciate them! Give volunteers specific tasks and training. Often, they will have ideas or know more than you about what needs to be done. If that is the case, work through the tasks with them, taking careful notes for future reference. Because of legal and safety issues that volunteers may not be aware of, volunteers should not make ad hoc decisions. The hunt manager, the person ultimately responsible, must make those decisions. Illegal actions taken will, in all likelihood, permanently close down a neighborhood hunt. And that is not the worst scenario.
	Task assignment	It is easier to get volunteers to help during the hunt than before or after. For anyone who is at all squeamish, their assignment should keep them separate from the deer. It is too easy to gross out and lose a volunteer who might have been very helpful at other tasks.

## HUNT

Hunters		
	Staging	If possible, choose an area that is separate from other activity. Restrooms are a necessity; a building where hunters and volunteers can get warm is important. The group is again reminded of the rules and regulations and special conditions of the hunt. Hunters are informed of the contents of a paper packet they will be receiving and what they need to with each form.
	Site assignment	Site assignments are given out on the morning of the hunt only. This prevents hunters from checking out their sites ahead of time, illegally trespassing in the process.
	Directions, maps, & parking permit	A paper packet is given to the hunters specific to their assigned site. Since not everyone can visualize written directions, each hunter receives verbal directions from a volunteer as the route is marked on the map with a highlighter. Parking permits must be displayed in the vehicle.
	Legal paperwork	The paper packet includes copies of hunting permission forms for all properties that the hunter will be either hunting on, walking across, or parking on during the hunt. Hunters must keep these forms, their driver's license, and their hunting license with them at all times.
Check-out	Hunters coming out of the field must check out with a volunteer designated by the hunt manager. All paper work, especially permission to hunt forms, must be returned.	
	Reporting to state completed?	Killed animals must be checked-in with the state whether the hunter keeps or donates the animal. Tags must be attached to the head of the deer.
	Collection of data on harvest and on observed	Collect the number, sex, and antler points of deer harvested to inform the community and to plan future hunts. Collect the number and sex of observed animals to help set up future hunting sites.
	Evisceration	Depending on the schedule of the hunt, hunters often will eviscerate their own deer. However, especially on all-day hunts or with donated deer, volunteers will be needed to assist. Look for volunteers among hunters and train those interested in the community.

Check-out	Donated deer	All donations should be arranged through the hunt manager to assure legal procedures are maintained! Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry will not accept small deer as they are expensive to process commercially. Donations to landowners are feasible only in whole deer that individuals or groups of landowners take responsibility for processing. Donations directly to families in need are only feasible if a volunteer takes responsibility for processing.
Food	Volunteers especially need to be fed. Donations of pastries for the early morning are always appreciated. More critical is a source of protein for those who skip breakfast and a sustaining hot lunch. Peanut butter and crackers keep many volunteers and hunters from crashing. A big pot of stew for lunch is really appreciated by volunteers and hunters and keeps them going the rest of the day.	
Cleanup	Cleaning up all signs of harvested animals is critical to keeping anti-hunt elements in the community from gaining ground.	
	Indoor	In addition to whatever cleaning is required by the facility, evidence of evisceration should be removed by the managed hunt. Watch for foot and hand prints around doorways; restroom sinks are often well splattered. Because anti-hunt community members will use any excuse to complain, we super-clean afterwards, leaving the facility in better shape than in which we found it.
	Outdoor	We have not yet found a way to easily erase evidence of evisceration. Last year: scrubbing grass, especially at freezing temperatures, is pretty ludicrous, even if necessary. Sawdust and tarps, perhaps even a sawdust containment area, are planned for this coming season.

#### POST HUNT

	Reports to participants & landowners	Reporting to hunters, volunteers and participating landowners of the results of the managed hunt reminds them of why the managed hunt exists. Reports also enable those in the community to respond to anti-hunt neighbors with facts rather than fiction.
	Clean up, prep, & storage for next season	A post-hunt volunteer day seems to be necessary to clean and provide for dry, secure storage of any equipment. This day may also be used to process donated deer that were not claimed into ground venison for dissemination to whoever is appropriate.
	Problem solving for next season	Improving the success of the hunt and efficiency of the operations needs to be thought through immediately after the hunt before everyone's memories slip. Discussions with landowners, volunteers and hunters are critical to planning and implementing changes.

#### PLANNING FOR NEXT SEASON

	Greater efficiency	For example: hunting efficiency: What modifications can be made to increase the number of deer harvested? Last year we planned an early season bow hunt but ultimately cancelled it because very few of the gun hunting sites are useable because of pawpaw leaves blocking shots, we don't have sufficient volunteers, and bow hunting is less efficient. However, we now bait with corn to encourage deer to move past hunting sites; we hunt full days, not half days (this increased the need for volunteers helping with evisceration and hauling deer from the field); we were able to add an additional day.
	Problem solving	For example: Some landowners want to increase the number of deer taken off their property and give access to their property to individual hunters. One year, the woods were full of hunters, up until a week before the managed hunt, and our harvest was small, thanks to an educated deer population. Landowners agreed to curtail individual hunters for 6 weeks prior to the managed hunt and the harvest rebounded.