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[Coming soon: bow hunting in White's Woods](#)

Posted on [September 12, 2022](#) by [David Loomis](#)



Ryan Shaffer, recreation director, White Township. Photo: township website

Following is an edited transcript of an interview with Ryan Shaffer, White Township recreation director. The interview was conducted by phone on Sept. 8 and by follow-up emails on Sept. 11 and 12. The subject was township supervisors' [approved plan](#) for archery hunting in the 245-acre [White's Woods Nature Center](#) and in about 15 acres adjacent to the [White Township Recreation Complex](#) on East Pike Road.

The hunt is scheduled to begin Oct. 1.

By Sara Stewart

Question: Is the hunt set to take place in October?

Shaffer: We're proceeding on schedule. I think our first day hunting, at this point, is planned for the open of archery season [[Oct. 1](#)].

Q: And how long will the hunt be for?

Shaffer: It would be the PA Game Commission standard [archery season](#).

Q: Which is?

Shaffer: I'm looking it up right now.

Q: It was my understanding, initially, that the board was talking about having a few specific days set aside for hunting in White's Woods, not that it would be the entirety of the season.

Shaffer: So that's what I'm saying. It's just archery, no rifle, no muzzle loaders, nothing, you know, gun-related. It's restricted to just the archery season, which opens Oct. 1 and goes through Nov. 12. *(Editor's note: In a Sept. 12 email Mr. Shaffer acknowledged that archery season extends beyond Nov. 12 to include Nov. 13-18 and Dec. 26- Jan. 16, as reported on the state game commission's [website](#).)*

Q: There's nothing on the White Township [website](#), as far as I can see, about the hunt. Is there a plan to put some information on there?

Shaffer: You could probably find [the program that was developed and approved](#). It was being developed last November and December, and I believe it was approved in January. But you're probably correct. I don't think we've put up — let me put it this way: We don't have an open campaign.

Q: But for public safety, wouldn't you want to put something on the site for people to know that it's going to happen?

Shaffer: That'll be part of our process in the next couple weeks, yeah.

Q: What's the plan for the next couple weeks, in terms of alerting the public?



Shaffer: Assuming my supervisors want me to continue down this path, I will post signage at all the entrances to the parks, as well as, we'll have some form of digital notification. A week before, there'll be signs that are posted that start to warn our customers that hunting will be in progress. That's also a requirement of using the PA Game Commission tags. They want the site marked as a deer-management area site. Beyond that, it's yet to be determined. I'm not sure if my board will want me to put anything in the paper or, you know, as far as additional media goes. I'm not sure what they'll request I do.

Q: There was some language in the draft of the deer management plan about changing the way the hunters identify themselves. Initially it was to identify your vehicle as belonging to a hunter. There was some discussion of making that digital instead, the implication being that this was because it was expected to be unpopular. Is that correct?

Shaffer: We're not requiring hunters to identify their vehicles. That is correct.

Q: Is there a reason why they're not requiring them to do that?

Shaffer: I guess I don't have a comment there. We don't see the need for it. To call that out. But we've come up with a plan to have the hunters interact with us and let us know they're in the woods. And that does not include them clearly marking their vehicle.

Q: How many hunters are going to be allowed in White's Woods and at East Pike?

Shaffer: The total allowed under the program was up to 15 in White's Woods, and at the East Pike location, above the ice rink, the maximum allowed is five.

Q: Will they all be required to hunt six times?

Shaffer: That's correct.

Q: Have the hunters already been selected?

Shaffer: No. We are in an application process right now. We have some people that are interested that we expect to apply. But there have been no people chosen yet.

Q: What are the requirements? Will there be an accuracy test, or an experience requirement?

Shaffer: As part of our program, we are organizing a qualification day where a certified archery instructor — and I would prefer not to say those names — will be performing essentially a certification-type of course, where hunters will have to prove they understand their equipment, are safe with their equipment, and can use it effectively, meaning they can hit a target downrange consistently. So, yes, that is part of our program plan.

Q: As far as the tree stands, who is choosing those locations?

Shaffer: That will be part of my discussions with the hunters, helping them choose locations. So ultimately, it'll be up to the hunters to choose the exact spots where they put their tree stands. Under my guidance, the goal will be to put them in places that minimize their interaction with other park-goers.

'It'll be up to the hunters to choose the exact spots where they put their tree stands.... The goal will be to put them in places that minimize their interaction with other park-goers.'

— *Ryan Shaffer, recreation director, White Township*

Q: Is there going to be a minimum distance from hiking trails for stand locations?

Shaffer: We did not set anything specific in stone, no. That could be something we do. Let's say we get through the first season and we encounter issues. Maybe that's something we can consider in the future. But no, there's no distance requirement at the moment.

Q: How long do the tree stands stay up for?

Shaffer: Once they're approved, they can put their tree stands up. Their stands will have identification tags on them, so I will know who owns what stand in the woods. The number on the stand will correspond with the data I have on that hunter. We will know the locations of the stands. That's going to be part of the communication. And if someone moves a stand, they'll have to tell us where it is. That way, if we do get a complaint or something, we can quickly identify which hunter, which stand, in relation to where the complaint came from. After the season is over, there is about a two-week grace period to have that stand removed and out of the woods.

Q: Are there going to be any areas of White's Woods that are off-limits to hunting?

Shaffer: At the moment there's nothing that is set in stone off-limits. But again, that'll be part of my discussions with hunters, that we want to stay off of trails, away from interaction. And I expect I will vet this very closely the first couple years and make sure I'm on top of it to address those concerns. I think it's very important for me to be very engaged these first couple seasons, to make sure that, you know, we're mitigating any fears and risks that any park-goers have.

Q: Is there going to be any vegetation removal to facilitate hunting?

Shaffer: The answer there is no. There's [language in the program](#) that says hunters can do minor trimming, meaning, let's say they put a stand in a tree that's well off the trail system and they just need a lane to shoot through. There's language that allows them to take a branch or two off a tree. But to be perfectly honest, those woods are so bare of foliage I don't even think it's a consideration. The forest floor is so devoid of seedlings and saplings, woody vegetation. But they're not allowed to cut down trees. They're not allowed to take down major limbs. It'd just be minor trimming of small branches.

Q: What's the plan for removing dead deer from the woods?

Shaffer: We have [language in our program](#) that explains some things. But a lot is going to be me making clear to hunters what is expected. There's language in there about, animals should not be dragged along trail systems. Crossing a trail is OK, to take a deer across the trail is OK, but you should mitigate that whenever possible. So there's that language in the program. Beyond that, essentially it's to get it to your vehicles as quickly as is prudent, and while interacting as little as possible with the main trail system. *[Editor's note: Mr. Shaffer said in a Sept. 12 email that hunters are not permitted to drive vehicles into the recreation areas to remove dead deer.]*

Q: Has public opinion been figured into this? I know there were a couple of surveys that showed the majority of respondents opposed hunting in White's Woods. Was this taken into account when making the decision about the hunting plan?

Shaffer: I'm going to question what survey you're referring to. A lot of the surveys that have been publicly presented were not township-commissioned surveys. They were surveys that a community group decided to do on their own, and we at the township have no way to vet if those surveys were done in a proper way. I'm not criticizing them, I'm just saying we didn't develop them ourselves. We didn't vet them ourselves. There has been data presented to us, but we were not involved in that process. Our process was the public forum process. We had that [community engagement event last fall](#), and we had several months of comments that could be made to the supervisors via email or in-person meetings. That was the process we used. The plan was based on that feedback, not on other surveys that we were not involved in.

'Our process was the public forum process.... The plan was based on that feedback, not on other surveys that we were not involved in.'

— Ryan Shaffer, recreation director, White Township

Q: So did you find that a majority of your respondents were in favor of the hunt?

Shaffer: There was a lot of good feedback of people that felt it would definitely help the park health.

Q: Do you have any numbers, in terms of how many people responded? How many people are we talking about?

Shaffer: I don't have that on me. I'd have to go back and pull that data.

Q: Was there in fact a deer population study that was done in advance of this hunt?

Shaffer: A deer population study was just completed. We're actually analyzing the data now.

Q: Could you give me a rough estimate of how many deer are in White's Woods?

Shaffer: I don't want to make assumptions. We're working with local groups, including IUP students who helped us perform that survey. We're currently reviewing that data.

Q: When will that be made public?

Shaffer: I don't have a specific date. A lot of it depends on how quickly the students are able to pull that data together. The survey itself finished a week ago Wednesday.

Q: So it stands to reason that it might not be made available before the hunt starts?

Shaffer: I don't have an answer yet. My goal is that it'll be made available sooner, but I don't have that answer.

Q: Is White Township planning to provide any sort of safety protection for hikers who go into the woods? in terms of leaving, perhaps, safety vests at the entrances for people who don't have orange clothing?

Shaffer: There is no plan in the program for that.

Q: How many deer is each hunter allowed to kill, in your program?

Shaffer: As part of our part of our relationship with the Game Commission, we have received 15 tags for White's Woods and five for East Pike. So those are the tags we will distribute. But the program also allows hunters to fill tags that they have received through their normal hunting application process. If they already bought their whitetail tag, they can also fill that tag in the woods, in addition to the antlerless tag we will provide. *(Editor's note: In a Sept. 12 email, Mr. Shaffer estimated that five to eight deer would be killed per hunter per season in White's Woods.)*

Q: And how many deer is the antlerless tag?

Shaffer: I'm not sure I can give you a good answer there. But in general, when you buy a hunting license you get your antler tag, and then in most cases there's an add-on tag which is antlerless. But there's all kinds of carve-outs, because the [Game Commission](#) feels that the deer herd is way overpopulated across the majority of the state. They do have lots of other sub-programs that allow hunters additional access to typically antlerless tags. So I can't really give you an exact tag count of each hunter. It's going to be variable. All I can say is we will provide one antlerless tag per hunter.

Q: Is there a contingency plan for when an injured deer escapes onto a property that's adjacent to the woods?

Shaffer: Under those terms, all normal [Pennsylvania Game Commission rules and regulations](#) apply. So the Game Commission has very robust guidance on deer that leave a property and enter another property that may or may not be posted or off limits. The Game Commission lays all that out. We say that in the program that all hunters must comply with all other Pennsylvania Game Commission codes, ordinances, whatever they call their policies. We do not address it in the program. We reference the PA code.

Q: Has White Township coordinated the hunting plan with people who live adjacent to the woods? Will they be made aware the hunt is going on?

Shaffer: At this point I don't think there is a plan to notify each resident. I'm not sure how that would be accomplished.

Q: If people want to find the deer hunt information, where exactly do they go on your site to get that?

Shaffer: Hang on. [long pause] There's a lot of documents on our site.

Q: I just want to make sure that people have access to the information somewhere public.

Shaffer: I'll get back to you on this.

Sara Stewart is a freelance journalist based in White Township who writes for Los Angeles magazine, the New York Post, CNN.com and other publications. She is a former member of the Indiana Borough Council. For The HawkEye, she has covered domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic and the White's Woods logging controversy.

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