

# THE WAY WE SEE IT: White Township wisely halted deer management issue for the current hunting season

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The White Township Board of Supervisors was wise in its decision to hold off on bow hunting in White's Woods this hunting season.

It's not because we have concerns about hunting itself; rather because of the confusion it has caused for the past several months.

Confusion was the word of the day at the supervisors' last meeting at which they decided, 4-1, to hold off, at least for this "year," on allowing bow hunting of deer in White's Woods. It didn't boil down to one specific thing, but the totality of all things considered — including the fact that at least three of the supervisors were unaware of when the commonwealth's bow hunting (typically called "archery") seasons each began; some were unaware of the existence of separate "seasons" of bow hunting, the first of which set to begin was Oct. 1 to just short of Thanksgiving Day in White's Woods.

A "second season" refers to a time period that allows for archery (bow hunting) after Christmas (Dec. 26, 2022, to Jan. 16, 2023).

The confusion mostly lay on when and if hunting would take place. No one — supervisors or the public — could say for sure with any degree of certainty.

Township Supervisor Gene Gemmell summed it up best:

"I never heard anything said about hunting at any other time than the second season," he said. "Then ... I understood it to start on Oct. 1. That confused me. ... We decided to stop it, now we started it again. How are people not going to be confused? I don't want to go into something where there is confusion."

A check of the Pennsylvania Game Commission website spells out all of the hunting rules and regulations, as well as seasons and locations of where certain hunting is and isn't allowed. Even

if one is unsure of exactly what they're looking for, it's fairly easy to figure out and find on its website.

Still, a coalition of residents (Friends of White's Woods included) opposed to hunting of any kind in White's Woods threw everything but the kitchen sink at the supervisors — and we suspect that may have, at some point, also been in the arsenal, but cooler heads prevailed.

Residents raised a number of concerns regarding the bow hunting plan, from its lack of public input (false) and unclear objectives and goals (somewhat true) to unresolved property and safety considerations (true).

Some of the residents said they did not oppose hunting in White's Woods but rather the way in which the township was pursuing deer management, which they believed would negatively impact park-goers and property owners living around the woods.

Some of the safety concerns raised included not only when, but where, hunting would take place in the woods. We can certainly understand this. Establishing clear and concise (in other words, specific) communication about rules and regulations — the whens, wheres and hows of a deer management program — are paramount when it comes to people and where they live and play.

Because of the confusion among residents and the supervisors themselves, it's apparent it was not specific enough — but not because of a lack of effort. When you deal with people, you oftentimes deal with emotions of those people and it becomes part of the process.

A prime example: Many folks spoke in favor of hunting but “just not in White's Woods.” In other words, “It's a good thing. I do it. I just don't want other people to do it where I live.”

To be sure, the archery season in White's Woods wasn't a rushed decision by any means. According to a search of the Gazette archives, we first began reporting on it about 10 months ago. That is when the township adopted a deer management program that would have allowed bow hunting in White's Woods for a select few hunters who applied with the township.

At that time, we reported that “a deer management program” in White's Woods, similar to one in Murrysville's parks, was being “adapted to recreational properties in White Township” that “could begin after Christmas.”

For at least two of the supervisors, the bag limit (the number of harvested deer allowed) would have been insignificant to the deer management program. Supervisor Sandi Gillette was originally in full support of the White's Woods' deer management plan because, in her words, “I thought we were going to make a dent” in the oversized deer population.

But when Gillette learned that only four hunters were selected to harvest four deer (one deer per hunter), she soon realized that the deer management proposal would not make a difference as it had been proposed.

“I’m walking away from it,” she said. “I don’t want to spend any more (taxpayer) money on it, any more of my money on it.”

The township has other, more important issues to which to attend. Pennsylvania, like many other states, has an oversized deer population that must be managed. White’s Woods, despite people’s desire to “keep it the way it is,” must play its role as being part of a solution to help reduce that population.

Pennsylvania’s white-tailed deer population has grown from about 10 deer per square mile in the 1700s to an estimated 30 deer per square mile today, according to the state’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Sure, there are plenty of other places to hunt but we’re also certain people living in or near those other areas, despite their professed support of hunting, probably don’t want it in their backyard any more than the folks who live in and around White’s Woods.

Hunting, like it or not, is a form of conservation. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, deer management aids in maintaining “healthy deer, healthy forest habitat and acceptable levels of deer-human conflicts.” In fact, we spotted a deer Tuesday trotting along the south side of Water Street in Indiana (between the Indiana Gazette building and the Indiana Borough police, just prior to midnight) until our vehicle spooked it and the deer ran off onto a nearby residential yard.

All things nature are connected. The country’s Native American people who live on reservations (especially the Apache people in Arizona and New Mexico) fully understand this and use a combination of timbering and hunting to help keep nature in balance and avert, for the most part, natural disasters such as the out-of-control wildfires typically seen in California, and ever-growing species populations. While Pennsylvania’s climate and human population entirely differ from that found in the American West, it’s still basically the same; it’s all connected.

The supervisors were wise to hold off on “rushing” the bow hunting issue. The issues raised by residents and Friends of White’s Woods are real and valid, but the main issue became convoluted with those other issues. If the township plans to revisit deer management in White’s Woods, they already have a fantastic head start and plenty of time to work through those issues while still attending to its more pressing and more important priorities that will benefit everyone in the township and beyond.