



Deer hunt planned for Blandford Nature Center

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Howard Meyerson | The Grand Rapids Press

A special hunt to thin the deer herd at Blandford Nature Center in Grand Rapids got the go-ahead from center staff, which is partnering with members of the Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association, to reduce the size of the herd using the center's property.

The archery hunt is Dec. 18-19. Organizers say they hope to take 10 deer off the property.

"If we get 10 deer, I will be tickled," said Alan Pomranka, the GRWSA's archery director. "Realistically, it may be three to five."

Pomranka said he approached nature center staff this fall after hearing it was having deer problems. The idea, he said, was to create a hunt for physically disabled hunters and do something for the local ecology.

Blandford executive director Annoesjka Steinman said she liked the idea. Surveys of the property had estimated the deer count at more than 100, she said. The deer were browsing trillium and other wildflowers and shrubs. They migrate back and forth over the 143-acre property and reside in the surrounding landscape.

"Our goal is get the deer population down to 10 to 20 deer max," Steinman said. "I had been doing research on whether to hold a lottery like Hoffmaster State Park or use snipers like Grand Haven, but nothing felt right and then Alan approached me."

Stienman hoped for a January hunt, but that would have required a special permit from the state, which would have been difficult. Michigan's archery deer season runs until Jan 1.

State officials say holding a hunt on the property is fine.

"It's a worthy project," said Nik Kalejs, area wildlife biologist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. "Holding an archery hunt there is perfectly permissible if they do it within the regulatory framework and the hunters have a valid hunting license."

Kalejs said he was not familiar with the deer population at Blandford but wasn't surprised by the problem.

"We know that, as an average in Kent County, you are looking at 30 to 35 deer per square mile," Kalejs said. "They are not evenly distributed, and some of our highest densities are in the suburban areas. It's safe to say that the center has a population well above the county average."

"I'm all for legitimate deer hunting going on there. The nature center is a good example of where native flora grows. I think it is important that they manage the deer population for the ecology."

Pomranka said the hunt will be limited to the center's acreage in Walker. The property sits in Walker and Grand Rapids. A Grand Rapids City ordinance prohibits hunting on center property within its boundaries.

"We'll be hunting about 80 acres," said Pomranka, who scouted the property last week in a six-wheel motorized wheelchair.

Pomranka is paralyzed from the waist down as a result of an auto accident 20 years ago. He said the hunt will provide GRWSA members a valuable opportunity.

"We (GRWCA) want to get people involved in archery," Pomranka said. "I enjoy it and it's a lot of fun and a relaxing thing to do. There are 3-D target shoots and training for paralympians, but I want open the whole spectrum of archery to them."

Pomranka said GRWSA has four members who archery hunt. He plans to extend an invitation to other disabled hunters he knows and to disabled vets at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans.

He and Steinman see this first wheelchair archery hunt as a pilot program for future years. No one expects the deer problem to be solved this season.

"If we want to remain a nature center where people can come and visit and see what they should see, we need to have a healthy balance of animals and plants. And right now, the deer are impacting that balance," Steinman said.

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