



Central District Activities – March 2020

Wildlife Activities – More detail regarding last months black bear research; four dens were visited in Worcester County (in addition to the two that were visited earlier in the winter). All of the expectant sows were found to be with cubs, with a couple of them having four newborns!

Spring barrel-trapping for black bears is underway in an attempt to catch bears in areas near urban centers and major roadways. The research is geared towards gaining an understanding of how bears use habitats that are fragmented by roads and urban sprawl.

Deer Pellet Count Transects have been completed in Mendon, Northbridge, Sterling, and Ashburnham. These surveys provide information on deer densities in a given area and, when combined with additional survey and harvest data, help give accurate deer densities within a management zone.

The yearly Bald Eagle Survey is underway. This survey documents established and new nesting pairs of Bald Eagles during the first half of April. A new pair was found near the Nashua River in Fitchburg. This is a first-year pair which means they will be focusing on nest building and typically will not lay eggs until next year.

Fisheries Activities – Fish stocking for the spring season is more than 90% complete. We were able to stock out in four weeks what would normally be spread out over three months' time. We staged both our District stocking trucks at the hatcheries in order to run multiple loads per day. This was instrumental in delivering all of our large fish to water bodies in such a short time. The crews went above and beyond accomplishing this mission during the coronavirus crisis. We will now be able to concentrate stocking the remaining allotment of several loads of fish into smaller streams throughout the District, and the hatchery system is relieved to have room for the next two years production (in process), and start a new cohort.

We have been getting many inquiries regarding the opening date of the Wachusett and Quabbin Reservoirs for fishing. Both of these waterbodies are controlled by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), *not* the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife/MDFW). DCR has published their decision to delay opening for fishing these waterbodies until **at least May 9th**. The DCR will re-assess at that time and decide whether to further delay the opening date. All inquiries regarding fishing these waterbodies should be directed to the DCR: Wachusett [\(508\) 792-7806](tel:5087927806) or Quabbin [\(413\) 323-7221](tel:4133237221)

Land Management – The Norcross Hill WMA timber cut is ongoing and we continue to monitor that project. We also participated, with Forestry/Habitat staff, in the timber sale showing at Quaboag WMA. The contract was awarded and the cut will begin at that site mid-April.

We supported Reality/Habitat staff on assessing a potential acquisition that would add to the Norcross Hill WMA; we are hoping that sale will close before the end of the fiscal year.

The temporary bridge at Muddy Brook WMA has been removed from Muddy Brook Rd. and returned to the DCR. Many thanks to them for allowing us to borrow it to accomplish our work there.

Our Stewardship Biologist has been busy addressing a few different vehicle and abutter encroachment issues. Staff have also been busy with boundary marking; both new boundaries and refreshing previously marked areas.

Administration – Due to the COVID-19 virus situation, there are some important changes for the upcoming Turkey season regarding purchasing minor licenses, obtaining stickers and how to report turkey harvests. Also, there are new regulations that were approved in 2019 that are taking effect for the first time this spring. Please go online to the following link for complete information:

[Mass.gov/turkey2020](https://www.mass.gov/turkey2020)

This link includes information on:

- How to purchase a license and turkey permit, including a new, temporary option for 15–17 years olds to submit parental consent and purchase a license online.
- How to report a harvest. All physical check stations are closed this spring. Hunters are encouraged to report online. Harvest reporting by phone is also available for those without internet access.
- How to request a new or replacement green safety sticker. Hunters should mail requests to FHQ by April 17 for delivery before the start of season.
- New turkey hunting regulations for 2020, including changes to daily and annual bag limits, shot size, and Youth Hunt Day hours.
- How to safely turkey hunt and maintain social distancing: Hunters should remain at least 6 feet away from others, avoid gathering in groups, and stay home if feeling sick. Mentors should only hunt with immediate family.
- Where to hunt: Access to hunting areas may be impacted by the COVID-19 emergency; hunters should check with landowners for special restrictions. Hunters are advised to avoid crowded areas and have a back-up plan if usual hunting spots are crowded. All Wildlife Management Areas are open to the public for hunting.
- Youth Turkey Hunt Day: All youth seminars were canceled for 2020. Only past participants who completed Basic Hunter Education and a previous Youth Turkey Hunting seminar can participate in the Youth Turkey Hunt on April 25 this year.
- Joint Base Cape Cod/Camp Edwards: Due to changes in the Camp Edwards training schedule as well as the COVID-19 situation, the Youth Turkey Hunt and the May Controlled Turkey Hunt have been canceled on Camp Edwards.
- Other Turkey Hunting Safety tips.

Respectfully Submitted,

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