

Georgetown Tick Committee FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: Is there any evidence that reducing the deer population lowers Lyme disease rates?

A: Yes, numerous scientific studies support this. In 2000, an annual controlled deer hunt in coastal Mumford Cove reduced the herd by 92% to about 10 deer/mi² and kept it at that level. A community survey found a large decrease in self-reported Lyme disease cases one year later. Other studies in Cape Cod found deer reduction resulted in 80% and 55% average reductions in larvae and nymphs on mice in the 3 years following; maintaining deer density at 6 deer/mi² reduced tick-borne diseases from 16% to only 3 cases since 1986. Many other studies showed that fewer deer leads to fewer ticks and less disease, once deer are below 20 deer/mi². Being an island increases our likelihood of success.

Q: Why don't we just target the mice since they carry the diseases, not the deer?

A: Targeting mice is an important part of an integrated plan, but because there are so many mice, it is unrealistic to be able to make an impact by only targeting the mice. It needs to be coupled with deer reduction.

Q: Why not just focus on having people protect themselves from disease (protective clothing, etc)

A: Many people cannot reliably comply with personal precautions, such as children. While personal precautions can be effective when used, they are not enough. Most infections occur in one's yard where one is unlikely to gear up. And personal protections alone will not guarantee that you will not get infected by a tick. Most people never saw the tick that bit them (they are easy to miss, especially the tiny nymphs).

Q: What exactly are you planning to do?

A: We developed a 4-part strategy: 1) target the mice (and other small rodents) with tick tubes that kill deer ticks on mice; 2) educate people about personal protection, with special programs for children and those over 65 who have the highest risk of tick-borne diseases; 3) deer herd reduction, aiming for about 10 deer/mi², by proposing a special hunt for Georgetown; and 4) environmental measures such as reducing barberry (which sustains ticks), widening trails, mulching.

Q: More and more people in town are applying pesticides to their lawn to protect themselves from tick diseases. Is this a good idea? Does your plan encourage pesticides?

A: We do not encourage pesticides because they can harm our fragile marine life and shellfish and kill pollinators. Any chemical that kills a tick will also kill a bee. Part of our program will help people understand the risks of pesticides (including so-called "green" pesticides) and provide safer and more effective solutions.

Q: Are you working with local land trusts and other neighborhood associations/groups?

A: Yes, we are working with Georgetown's health officer, Conservation Commission, Selectboard, School board, Shellfish Conservation Committee, and game warden; K.E.L.T., Maine's Lyme and Vector-Borne Disease Laboratory, UMaine's Holt Research Forest, and liaisons to neighboring Arrowsic. We hope to work with all town groups who have trails to help make their trails safer from ticks.

Q: Will the state allow the taking of multiple deer in our district (MWD 25)?

A: Yes, if we obtain approval by the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIF&W). We have been in discussion with them about how to proceed. Special hunts have been approved in other areas (e.g., Islesboro). Recent changes to state statutes allow the commissioner to regulate the taking of antlerless deer within a WMD as long as there are recognizable physical boundaries (e.g., rivers) demarcating the area, which pertains to Georgetown (and Arrowsic). See *Title 12 §11152. Antlerless deer*.

Q: How will the special deer hunt be conducted? Will it be restricted to Georgetown residents and/or landowners?

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A: The specifics of the special hunt will be proposed by the town working closely with our local hunters. During a special hunt, permits particular to the special hunt would be used to tag deer instead of one's regular hunting license. The cost of those permits, how many are issued and to whom, training requirements, timing, subsidies for deer cutting, distribution of meat to the needy, etc will all be proposed by the town.

Q: How many deer are there in Georgetown now? How many additional deer will need to be harvested to make the program work?

A: We do not know how many deer we have on the island now. Other coastal areas are estimated to have approximately 60 deer/mi².

Q: Can Junior Hunters participate in the special hunt?

A: That will be determined by the town.

Q: What will be done to ensure that people are aware that there is a special hunt if it is done outside of the regular hunting season?

A: The tick committee is aware that this is a concern and will work with the town to ensure that people are aware of the hunt and that hunters take extra safety precautions.

Q: Is it possible to get Lyme disease more than once?

A: Yes, you can get it again and again. There is no lasting immunity, and no vaccines. Even if there were a vaccine, there are several other tick-borne diseases that are just as bad or even worse than Lyme.

Q: Are there other benefits or harms to having a special hunt in Georgetown?

A: Yes. In addition to lowering risks of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases, we anticipate that lowering the deer herd should ultimately: improve the ecology of our woods by reducing overgrazing and damage to native species, improve the health of the remaining herd and result in larger bucks with bigger antlers, reduce the number of deer-car collisions and subsequent injuries, reduce the perceived need to use chemical pesticides on lawns and the resulting benefits to our ecology and marine life, reduce the need to apply insecticides to skin and clothes and health benefits resulting from lower exposure to these insecticides, reduce damage to home gardens and landscapes, enable more venison to be distributed to the needy, and encourage more people to spend more time outdoors with all the resulting health benefits. Potential harms include the cost and inconvenience of supporting the volunteer-based initiative, injuries that might be incurred during the special hunt, potentially fewer days of hunting-free outdoor activities if the hunting season is extended (although other options are available).

Q: How can I learn more or get my voice heard?

A: Email any questions to the tick committee at GeorgetownTickGroup@gmail.com. You can join NextDoor Georgetown Island to keep updated on the committee's activities (NextDoor.com). You can attend the next Tick Committee meeting.