

Significant Wildlife Habitat

Deer Wintering Areas

A Winter Refuge

White-tailed deer in Maine are at the northern limit of their geographic range. During winter months, deer are exposed to cold temperatures and deep snow that make it difficult to travel. Deer adapt to Maine winters by congregating in a deer wintering area (DWA), or habitat that offers reduced snow depths, accessible food, and protection from the wind. Larger wintering complexes with higher deer use may also provide improved escape from predators during deeper snow conditions. White-tailed deer are an important part of Maine's landscape and heritage. The well-being of Maine's deer population depends on the availability of suitable wintering areas.

Deer wintering areas, commonly referred to as deer yards, consist of forested stands with a dense softwood canopy interspersed with mixed stands of hardwoods and softwoods. The dense softwood (spruce, fir, cedar, and hemlock) core areas provide shelter for deer by reducing snow accumulation and wind within the stand. The mixed hardwood and softwood cover provides food close to the core area. Red, sugar, mountain, and striped maple are winter staples for deer as well as arboreal lichens and litterfall from high in the forest canopy. Hemlock and cedar provide both cover, and food when pieces of foliage break in the winter and are available as litterfall.

Use of wintering areas is traditional, and specific sites may receive annual use by many generations of deer. In some instances, continuous use of specific areas has been documented for 50-100 years. As winter weather varies greatly from year to year, however, so too does the area that deer occupy within and beyond the DWA in response to variations in snow cover, sinking depth, and temperature. When the winter is severe and deer mobility is poor, deer occupy a smaller portion of their winter range and are largely confined to the most dense softwood por-

tion of the DWA. Under less severe conditions, deer may travel widely, even far beyond the normal boundaries of the DWA.

Habitats suitable for deer in winter also provide quality habitat for numerous other species associated with mature forest.

Significant Wildlife Habitat Regulations

Deer wintering areas are one of the natural resources recognized by the Maine Legislature to be of statewide significance and eligible for protection as Significant Wildlife Habitat (SWH) under the Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA). Permits from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) may be required if you are proposing work within a deer wintering area that results in soil disturbance. The DEP permit review process ensures that activities are done at a time or in a way that minimizes harm to deer wintering areas. The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife has preliminarily mapped deer wintering areas throughout the state. Maps are available from MDIFW.



What You Can Do

- If you are planning to build or conduct other regulated activities a Deer Wintering Area or in other Significant Wildlife Habitat, contact your local DEP office for more information about the permit process so you can efficiently plan your activities and get advice about steps you can take to avoid impacts.
- If you are working on local land conservation efforts in your town or region, learn more about Deer Wintering Areas and other Significant Wildlife Habitats in your area by looking at SWH maps from the Maine DEP website (www.maine.gov/dep) or by consulting your town's High Value Plant and Animal Habitat Map from Beginning with Habitat (www.beginningwithhabitat.org).
- Landowners interested in timber harvesting can manage their property to sustain quality deer wintering habitat. For more information contact MDIFW and review [Guidelines for Wildlife: Managing Deer Wintering Areas in Northern, Western and Eastern Maine](#).

For More Information

Natural Resources Protection Act

www.maine.gov/dep/blwq/docstand/nrpapage.htm

Department of Environmental Protection

www.maine.gov/dep

Bureau of Land and Water Quality (Augusta)
(207) 287-3901 or (800) 453-1942

Southern Maine Regional Office (Portland)
(207) 822-6300 or (800) 769-1036

Eastern Maine Regional Office (Bangor)
(207) 941-4570 or (888) 769-1137

Northern Maine Regional Office (Presque Isle)
(207) 764-0477 or (888) 769-1053

Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

www.mefishwildlife.com

For questions about SWH regulations, contact the Environmental Coordinator (207) 287-5258

For questions about SWH in your area, please contact MDIFW Regional Biologists

Region A: (207) 657-2345

Region B: (207) 547-5300

Region C: (207) 434-5927

Region D: (207) 778-3324

Region E: (207) 695-3756

Region F: (207) 732-4132

Region G: (207) 435-3231

For questions about deer, contact Lee Kantar, Deer Specialist (207) 941-4477

For questions about wildlife and habitats, please contact staff at Beginning with Habitat (207) 287-5254 or visit www.beginningwithhabitat.org



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