

Balch Hill Deer Hunting Survey 2016 - Results

Purpose

The Balch Hill Stewardship Committee of the Hanover Conservancy sought neighbors' opinions in order to plan for the 2016 hunting season in accordance with our Management Plan.

Method

Gail McPeck and Rebecca Kohn drafted a survey and committee members reviewed and tested it. Laura Rosenthal created the survey with Google Forms.

Laura reviewed tax maps and created a mailing list of streets abutting and near Balch Hill. Neighbors were informed about the online survey via a postcard (Fig. 1) mailed on April 14; 269 postcards were delivered and 15 were returned due to vacant homes. The Hanover Conservancy's Balch Hill e-news subscribers (85) received email invitations to the respond to the survey. The survey was open from April 15 to May 1, 2016.

Response

We received 86 responses (roughly 32% response rate -- depending on the basis).

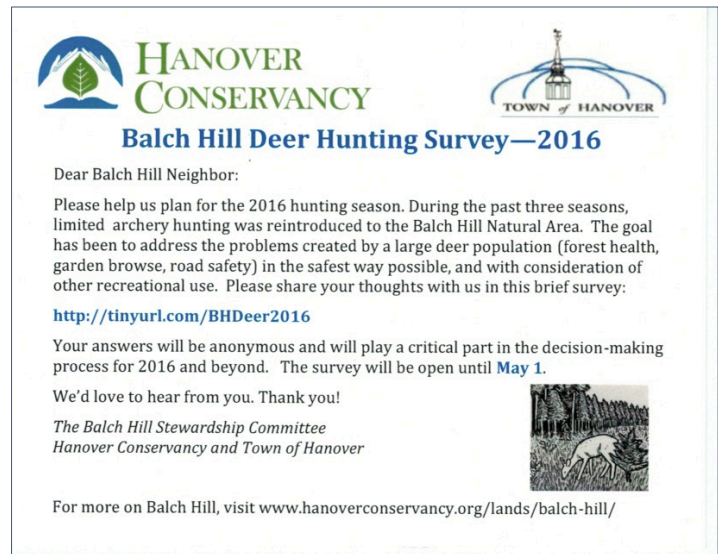


Figure 1 Postcard mailed to neighbors.

Introduction in Online Survey

Dear Balch Hill Neighbor:

Please help us plan for the 2016 hunting season. During the past three seasons, limited archery hunting was reintroduced to the Balch Hill Natural Area. The goal has been to address the problems created by the large deer population (forest health, garden browse, road safety) in the safest way possible, and with consideration of other recreational use.

The information you provide is anonymous and will play a critical part in the decision-making process for 2016 and beyond. The survey will be open until May 1.

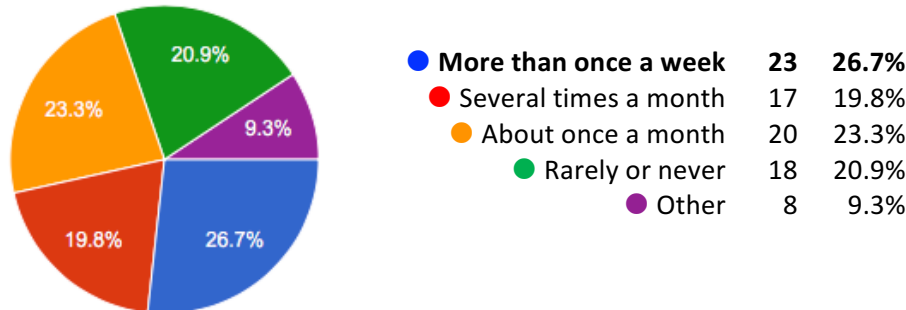
There is space at the end of the survey for longer comments.

Thank you,

The Balch Hill Stewardship Committee
Hanover Conservancy

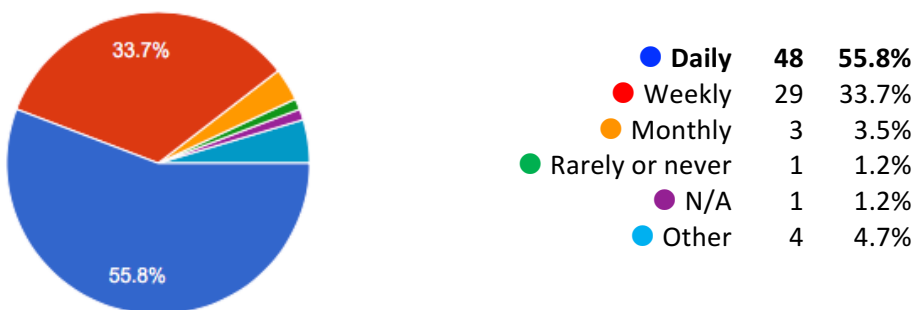
SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. How often during the year do you use the trails in the Balch Hill Natural Area? (86 responses)



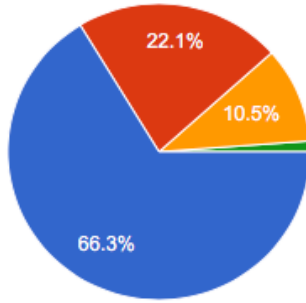
OTHER	
1.	A couple of times a year
2.	About 4 times a year
3.	I live there
4.	I recently moved back to hanover and haven't been for years. i'll be there for hawk migration if not sooner.
5.	More often in the fall but at least once a month
6.	Once/quarter
7.	Three times a year
8.	About once a year

2. If you live near Balch Hill, how often do you see deer in your yard or neighborhood? (86 responses)



OTHER (1 respondent left this blank).	
1.	2-3x a day (morning and night)
2.	In spring and fall nearly weekly, about every two weeks in summer and winter
3.	Live on MacDonald Drive: The number has decreased but still is close to weekly.

3. Do you consider deer to be a nuisance? (86 responses)



● Yes	57	66.3%
● Somewhat	19	22.1%
● No	9	10.5%
● Other	1	1.2%

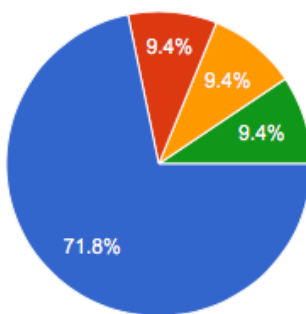
Other: yes, and a great health hazard (ticks)
 [Thus "yes" should really be 58 responses, or 67.4%]

4. Do you live in Hanover or nearby? (86 responses)



● Yes, I live in Hanover or nearby.	86	100%
● No, I don't live in Hanover or nearby.	0	0%
● Other	0	0%

5. Tree stands: In the past 3 seasons, archery hunting has been permitted on Balch Hill. Please tell us how you feel about permitting archery hunting--from tree stands only, i.e.hunters must hunt from a fixed point in a tree so arrows go down and not out. (85 responses)

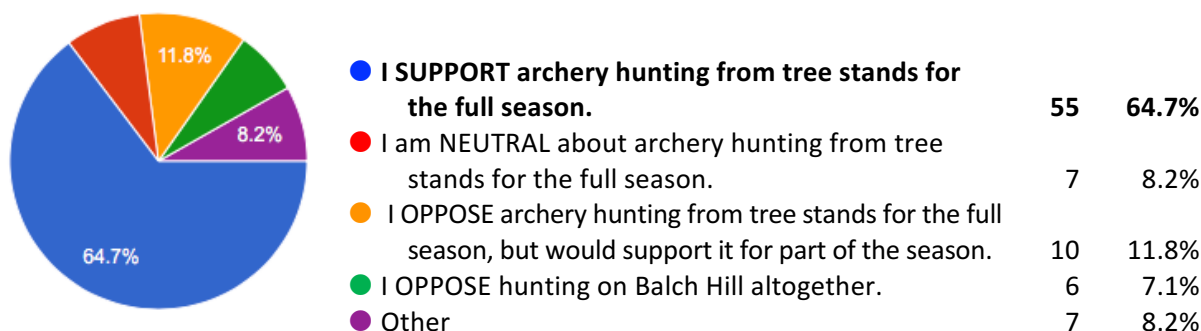


● In general, I SUPPORT archery hunting if it is limited to tree stands.	61	71.8%
● In general, I am NEUTRAL about archery hunting if it is limited to tree stands.	8	9.4%
● In general, I DO NOT SUPPORT archery hunting, even if it is limited to tree stands.	8	9.4%
● Other	8	9.4%

OTHER	
1.	All hunting approved
2.	I do not support and, regardless, how would you ever ensure/enforce this?
3.	I support archery hunting both in and out of tree stands, but defer to you to identify the safest way for the neighbors

4. I support archery hunting in stands and walking.
5. I support it, It is highly needed to reduce intensely growing herd, and we might think of a week's extension. Plus, the deer are smarter and just "sit in our backyard" until its over!
6. I support rifle hunting
7. I'm fine with hunting with a rifle.
8. Strongly support any culling method as the current situation is OUT OF CONTROL

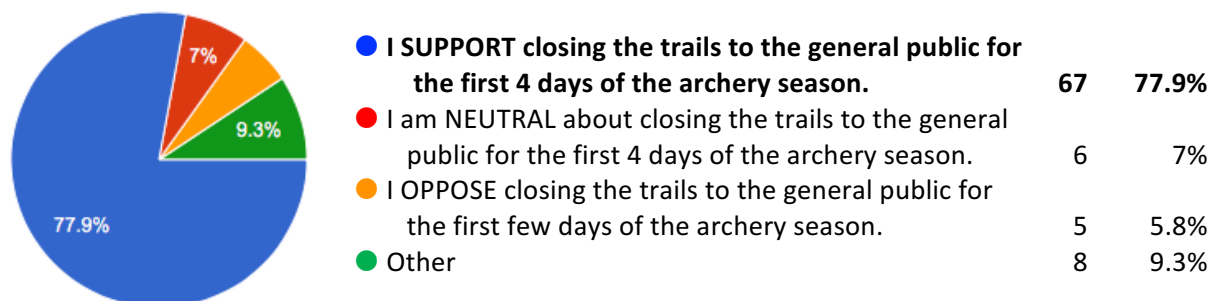
6. Season: The archery season runs from Sep 15 - Dec 15. Allowing hunting for the full season increases opportunity. Please tell us how you feel about allowing hunting from tree stands for the FULL archery season. (86 responses)



OTHER

1. Hunting season is prime hiking time, so I oppose the long hunting season.
2. I must admit its sad to avoid the area
3. I oppose altogether: Many hunters are parking and hunting well beyond the designated range of Balch Hill.
4. I support all hunting for the full season.
5. I support rifle hunting
6. see comments (2)

7. Closure: In 2015, Balch Hill was closed to the general public for the first 4 days of the archery season. The goal was to give hunters greater opportunity for success. As a result, more deer were taken in 2015 than in 2014. Please tell us how you feel about closing Balch Hill for the first 4 days of the archery season. (86 responses)



OTHER	
1.	Close Trails for 8 days is my suggestion
2.	I oppose hunting on BH
3.	I strongly oppose all hunting on Balch Hill as my children play in the woods behind our home that is part of the Balch Hill network. I worry that pets and children whose yards abut the woods may not realize there is a closure and could be in great danger, especially on designated hunting days.
4.	I support closing the trails for two weeks.
5.	If there are so many deer "requiring" the killing of some, why do we need to artificially entice them to their death by closing public access to the Hill?
6.	It depends - how many deer were taken during the season altogether, and how many during those 4 days? I would like to know how many deer are killed through this program. If it's just a handful then it seems very inefficient. We often have 8 deer in our hard at a time (on Balch Hill), and I'd like to see a big reduction! mostly because the tick population is increasing. I would be ok with closing it for longer if it really helped reduce the deer population.
7.	more than 4 days OK too
8.	Trails should be closed at several times during the hunting season, not just the first four days.

8. Notification: During the 2015 hunting season, the public was notified about hunting in the Balch Hill Natural Area through letters from the Town of Hanover, trail signs, and the Hanover Conservancy website and electronic newsletters. Do you feel you were adequately informed about archery hunting on Balch Hill before the archery season began? (85 responses)



OTHER	
1.	Could use frequent reminders
2.	No, because there was little to no actual enforcement of the plan. Hunters were parked from Balch Hill to the highpoint of Reservoir Road, scattered on foot, and hunting well beyond Balch Hill proper.
3.	Yes, informed but honestly the signage is WEAK. MANY VISITORS to the area still miss this and many have young children.

9. Are there additional means we should use to inform the public about hunting on Balch Hill? And, is there is any specific information about hunting you would like to receive? (19 comments)

1. No
2. No
3. Email warnings about times of archery hazard would be useful.
4. I am curious how MANY deer are actually shot on Balch Hill by bow and arrow. It's the way my father preferred to hunt, as he believed it to be a lot more sportsmanlike, so I thoroughly approve. Could some of the resulting venison be made available to us neighbors as a special treat? Hmm...At the Lyme Road Coop? Or....
5. Let us know how successful the hunting effort was this year.
6. No. You did a great job.
7. Use an email notice.
8. I'd love to see some data about the impact - overall deer populations and disease, effect on cases of lyme, road strikes, etc.
9. E-mail to folks living in the neighborhood & fliers distributed to homes in the neighborhood in addition to above methods
10. Valley News
11. Some of the local list-serves, uppervalley-request and dailyuv. I saw the posters on the trails.
12. Notes in the mailboxes would be good, describing exactly what dates, days times etc. I remember seeing this the first time, but not since. I will sign up for the email newsletter
13. I realize the intense sensitivity to the "ugly" signage idea but honestly as I said above many visitors or college students either are walking up Hemlock or parking and if I did not personally inform them they would never be aware there is permitted hunting and they COMPLETELY miss the tiny sign. It is not sufficient in my personal opinion.
14. With no conditional, this questions smacks of a foregone conclusion that hunting in the area will continue with or without additional restrictions that are unlikely to be enforced.
15. I learned about it from the Valley News. An additional way may be to send a notice by mail as was done for this survey.
16. Post signs on the trails
17. Put a sign at the beginning and the end of Rip Rd that can be seen from a car, similar signs for Trescott and Grasse Rd.
18. Article in Valley News because many of the Balch Hill hikers would not be reached by the above means.
19. Present ones are adequate

10. Additional comments: (43 comments)

QUALITATIVE SUMMARY

- 9 mentions: want less hunting – safety concerns, other.
- 24 mentions: want more hunting / cull.
- 12 mentions: Lyme disease. Note that the survey never mentioned Lyme disease or ticks.

1. I would be in favor of both closing the hill for a few days the last week of hunting season and also a few days of hunting in January if NH would give us such a permit.
2. Friends have found arrows in their backyards adjacent to Balch Hill. I know children who are afraid now to play in their backyards, or to hike on the trails because of the allowance of hunting. It is too close to town, too close to homes, and generally not safe.
3. Why omit [limit] hunting to archery if the hill is closed for several days
4. The large numbers of deer in Hanover are a nuisance and a health hazard. A cull by professional hunters such as is done in many towns in states south of New Hampshire (CT, MA, NY, NJ) will eventually be required to solve the problem. At present I would not recommend casual hiking the Balch Hill trails because of the likelihood of being bitten by a Lyme disease bearing tick.
5. Please cancel all hunting in this residential neighborhood. The danger to neighborhood children far outweighs the nuisance of deer!!!!
6. My concerns are largely about the safety of hunting on Balch Hill. Two seasons ago I found an arrow lodged in a tree on the east side of Grasse Rd (shot from the Balch Hill side of the road. Clearly arrows should not be flying low over Grasse Rd - but I am unsure how to ensure that hunters who only practice SAFE hunting practices are allowed. This past fall I heavily restricted my children's access to the trails behind our house given my concerns for their safety.
7. Notification by a postcard in the mail was plenty of notice. The whole process was managed well. There are too many deer in the area (just recently saw 13 driving by a yard on East Wheelock St.). Keep up the good work!
8. Thank you for your creative and fair solutions. And...for keeping us well-informed
9. Good to thin out these destructive deer.
10. I'm glad you're working to get rid of these vermin. they are a proof of our "out-of- balance of nature" -- import balch hill catamounts to deal with this problem. --give venison and recipes to food shelves to win over the "bambi lovers" --have neighborhood meetings to discuss this so people are informed. --are we talking to other towns and states where this is a problem?
11. Thanks for doing this. We love to watch the deer in our yard, but they are a bit of a problem -- eating bushes and flowers, getting way too comfortable around people, bringing ticks to the neighborhood, and darting in front of moving cars.
12. Recommend town place deer feeders in forest area so that the deer don't need to travel to our yards for food.
13. Herd is out of control eating trees not previously eaten thus inflicting damage and also spreading lyme disease to in town backyards. Why is there not regular hunting allowed so herd can be properly culled.
14. The deer are a health hazard, spreading Lyme disease, a traffic danger on my road, and cause horrific damage to my landscape. I will support ALL measures to reduce their population.
15. The deer nuisance in the Rip Road area is increasing. This spring, numerous groups of 10 or more deer are in the yards and crossing the streets on a regular basis. In my opinion the length of the deer hunting season and the number of deer allowed per person should be significantly increased until this situation is under control. In fact, I would in full support of back-to-back years of "no limit" hunting in this area. I say this for a number of reasons, including car, motorcycle, and bicycle safety, the increasing number of cases of Lyme disease in our area, and the devastation of foliage.
16. Please rid this area of deer. They do more than garden "browse," the completely destroy gardens and flowers and a variety of trees. They also carry/spread ticks. They are a complete nuisance in a residential area. I would be fine with someone hunting in my back yard if it would help eliminate the population.
17. A couple of neighbors have been treated for Lyme disease in last two years, and my family removes ticks throughout the spring summer and fall -- between this ongoing threat to health, as well as the danger herds

<p>of deer crossing the road morning and afternoon/early evening present to drivers (and the pedestrians and bikers they could hit), I would STRONGLY support unlimited hunting for a few weeks in Balch.</p>
<p>18. There are far too many deer in the area - glad you're doing something to reduce their numbers. Frankly, as I pull lyme-disease carrying ticks off my children every few days, and as lyme can destroy their lives - not just for a few years, but lifelong impact - I'm surprised there's not more outcry to attack this issue - on many fronts. I'm also guessing that a yard full - full - of deer scat isn't particularly healthy. And why kind of animal eats rhododendron? Ok. Enough. Big supporter here.</p>
<p>19. Something needs to be done about the exploding deer situation.....our yard has been devastated by these animals and I contracted Lyme Disase two years ago, most likely from my backyard</p>
<p>20. Please take more aggressive action -- the deer situation is becoming progressively more untenable and dangerous to motorists in the neighborhood. It is clear that some are feeding that promotes increased interaction -- a bad outcome.</p>
<p>21. Hunt first 4 days, then no hunting until Nov. 1 - Dec 15. Hunters at least ~200 ft from trails, if possible. Thanks!</p>
<p>22. The tics in our yard are awful, we live on Rip Rd., the deer are abundant</p>
<p>23. I have had too many shrubs and other plants destroyed by deer, kill more.</p>
<p>24. The deer are a menace -- it would be great to see them all gone!</p>
<p>25. Last year we had a deer die in our driveway that had been shot with an arrow. It took some coaxing before anyone would haul away the body. Eventually HPD removed the deer. It would be nice if there was a plan in place for dealing with dead deer, and that the Hanover officials know about it. Especially if the deer is harder to reach than one that died in a driveway.</p>
<p>26. While I have never hunted, I support hunting and appreciate the efforts to decrease the deer population in the area. I live on property that abuts Balch Hill and walk my dog on the trails almost daily, except during hunting season when I don't feel comfortable with my deer-colored dog where hunting is allowed. I think it would be simultaneously less disruptive to hikers and more productive for hunters to lengthen the complete closure to hiking (beyond the 4 days) and shortening the amount of time that hunting and hiking are allowed simultaneously. I would anticipate that both of this change would be preferable to both hunters and hikers. I appreciate your asking for Balch Hill neighbors' input on this issue!</p>
<p>27. What is going on at Balch Hill doesn't seem to be making a dent in the situation, and has a disruptive effect on recreational users. I wish there was a way to be have a more effective cull. Obviously, the deer range beyond Balch Hill.</p>
<p>28. The trails on Balch Hill are a great community resource and many families with young children hike there. I spent a lot of time on those trails growing up. I think that hunting should only be allowed in more remote area to make sure that children will be safe there.</p>
<p>29. Can immediate surrounding neighbors be permitted to have a complete listing of individuals hunting who have been provided permission?</p>
<p>30. The problem is the deer and the resulting degradation of the environment. You are focusing on the bow hunting (a possible partial solution) rather than addressing the problem. The problem will continue.</p>
<p>31. This electronic form is NOT A SURVEY; it's simply a questionnaire. The survey is the overall study, i.e., the issue(s), the instruments used to collect feedback (in this case, a postcard referencing an online questionnaire), and the analysis of that feedback. My willingness to submit this questionnaire and participate in the survey is contingent upon survey results being published for public review (before hunting season), including an account of all anonymous responses (quantitative and qualitative) to the online questionnaire.</p>
<p>32. I would support hunting more if I knew WHERE the hunting stands are. I'm still reluctant to go on the trails during hunting season because I don't know where the hunting stands are. Support closing Balch Hill for 4 days. Would support even more days if it shortened the number of days hunters are allowed. Deer provide food for those who aren't as rich as most of us in Hanover are.</p>

33. Balch Hill has been maintained beautifully and promoted as a family-friendly recreational area. It is located in a relatively populated residential neighborhood. The cost-benefit trade-off to allowing hunting doesn't seem worth it. There are a limited number of hunters who have a limited number of deer they can take in any given year. Whether they take deer in the Trescott Water Lands or across the street on Balch Hill surely doesn't matter to the overall harvest. In addition, deer move freely throughout the greater Hanover-Lebanon ecosystem. So it's hard to see that permitting hunting in this small recreational area will make the slightest bit of difference to the deer population seeking food on the Hill. Even if opening the Hill to hunting did encourage new hunters into the area, it can't possibly matter much if 8 or 18 deer are killed in one year. Because food is readily available to deer in the Balch Hill area, others will simply come to replace them until carrying capacity is reached. The costs—closure, confusion about the purpose of the area, discomfort about hunting in a populated area, time spent managing the hunting, etc.—hardly seem worth it. Moreover, it seems completely possible that hunting on the Hill will drive deer into people's yards.
34. It is sad to have to avoid the Balch Hill area in peak foliage time. Would there be adequate success if the hunting season were to start in mid October?
35. My family has had 2 deer tick bites in last 3 years. Loss of time for doctor visits, medical costs over one thousand dollars, deer droppings over my lawn, numerous hours spraying , hundreds of dollars replacing flowers and shrubs. Deer population should be depleted by optimal means as occurs in other communities: professional sharpshooters with baited feeding traps.
36. Deer herds have become a real nuisance around our house and are destroying the plants in addition to being a road hazard. They used to eat hostas and lilies. Now they have started even on rhododendrons and azaleas. They really need to be reduced in numbers around here for gardens, road safety and may be even deer ticks.
37. Why don't you bait the deer, destroy them and get the whole process over within a short amount of time?
38. Please just do SOMETHING about the deer population. We regularly have 10-15 deer in our back yard, often sleeping in the woods. I live off of Rip Road.
39. Subjectively, the deer population stills seems relatively high. That said, I believe that your approach represents a good balance between safety, population maintenance, and conservation.
40. Please, please, please get rid of as many deer as possible in this area.
41. I answered in my yard "weekly" because there wasn't an option between "daily" and "weekly" - I have them a few days per week
42. Deer at the present population are a huge nuisance-need more aggressive measures!
43. I would strongly support a limited deer season on Balch Hill: Totally closed to public for four days, but open to hunters, then totally closed to hunters after that. However, I would also request quite a bit more oversight from the conservancy, town, and DNR if this were to go through. A number of hunters accessed the trails from areas other than the main trailhead; I have seen shooting lanes cut through the understory, which I doubt were with the permission of the conservancy; and I see increased traffic in our neighborhood. I think hunting in this area is a great idea, but the high population density and high proportion of kids using the area (not necessarily staying on the trails) increases risk if it isn't well-managed.

11. Last thing: To sign up for the occasional Balch Hill News electronic newsletter (4-5 messages/year), please email info@hanoverconservancy.org or add your contact information here, in which case, your survey responses will no longer be anonymous. (13 email addresses—not published for privacy)

1. This unrelated item does not belong in the questionnaire, esp. where it may compromise the anonymity of the submitter. I would hope, too, that any publication of survey results would not eliminate the full questionnaire of all revealed submitters, but only their identity.