



## **Town Forest Committee**

Town of Hinesburg  
10632 Route 116 Hinesburg VT 05461  
802.482.2281 | [hinesburg.org](http://hinesburg.org)

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### **Trail Closure Announcement - 2020**

At our July 23, 2020 meeting, the Hinesburg Town Forest Committee voted to dedicate both the Hinesburg Town Forest (HTF) and LaPlatte Headwaters Town Forest (LHTF) exclusively to hunting for specified periods of the 2020 deer hunting season.

In order to promote the effectiveness of the hunt, the HTF and LHTF are closed to all non-hunting activity during these dates.

**October 2 - 4 (first weekend of archery season for antlerless deer)**

**October 23 - November 1 (archery and muzzleloader season for antlerless deer)**

**November 14 - 20 (first week of rifle season)**

**December 5-13 (muzzleloader season includes antlerless deer)**

The Committee received email comments from more than 100 users of the forests, in addition to oral opinions from 10-15 members of the public attending our July 9<sup>th</sup> public meeting. We're pleased that so many users took the time to thoughtfully and respectfully express their views about the hunting proposal and the impact of trail closures. A significant majority of those responding opposed restricting recreation during the fall and especially during the month of October. Many expressed concern that stay at home and social distancing restrictions this year only increase the importance of keeping the forest open to all users. No one on the Committee disagrees with the importance of the Town's forests for the spiritual and recreational opportunities they provide to an increasing number of users. That fact made the decision of whether to close the town forests for periods during the hunting season difficult.

Ultimately, the Committee's first responsibility is to the health of the forest itself. An excerpt from the management philosophy section of the Town's Forest Management Plan states that, "All uses and management must be compatible with sustaining water quality, wildlife habitat, and general

ecosystem function and health over the long term.” For further discussion on why we made this decision to help protect the ecosystem. Please read Ethan Tapper’s letter to the Town Forest Committee - [bit.ly/3aWU2dr](https://bit.ly/3aWU2dr). The Committee’s decision is not about choosing one user group over another; rather it is about balancing uses in an effort to maintain the long term health of the forest.

The Committee’s decision about exclusive use during parts of the hunting season is focused on reducing the deer population in an effort to mitigate the impact that browsing deer have on the early successional growth and understory regeneration in the forest. For more information about the history of deer management in Vermont and the problems an overpopulation deer cause for an ecosystem read Ethan Tapper’s article here - [bit.ly/2Flzznc](https://bit.ly/2Flzznc).

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department introduced revised hunting regulations for the 2020 hunting season that include rule changes specifically directed at decreasing the number of antlerless deer in areas of the State where there is an overabundance of deer. Chittenden County is one of those areas. Unfortunately, antlerless deer can only be taken during the archery and muzzleloader hunting periods which occur in October and December. Nick Fortin, Deer Management project leader for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, recommended closure dates based on historical deer harvest records on the State, regional, and local level.

The adopted proposal closes the trails for 12 days in October, a reduction of 9 days from the proposal originally being considered. The reduction reflects the Committee’s response to feedback from the public, acknowledgement of the extraordinary challenges the coronavirus has created, and the increased importance of access to the trails. Users should also know that at a meeting in June, the Committee chose to postpone the timber harvest planned for the 2020-2021 winter season, specifically to keep more of the forest open for recreational use during this stressful time.

Additional public comment should be addressed to [townforesthvt@gmavt.net](mailto:townforesthvt@gmavt.net) . Input from hunters regarding their hunting experience in the HTF and LHTF both last year and this year will be helpful to the Committee in our attempt to responsibly manage the forests. Please use the above email address.