



NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS

May 19, 2026

To Chairman Bennett and members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

Re: BHA Opposition to RI - 2026 – H8451 –New Shoreham Deer Hunting

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting. Our members believe that North America's fish and wildlife should be managed following the best available science, and we work to enact policies that keep wildlife management authority in the hands of the experts who are most familiar with the resources under management. With these things in mind, **the New England Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) urges the Committee to oppose H8451**, which seeks to transfer regulatory authority over deer hunting on Block Island from RI's Department of Environmental Management to the town of New Shoreham.

Throughout its history, RI's General Assembly has been constitutionally required to manage the natural resources of the state as a public trust. As it relates to wildlife, like white-tailed deer, the General Assembly has entrusted its obligation to DEM. Along with this, the General Assembly has provided for DEM to maintain a staff of experts who study and manage RI's wildlife utilizing a wide range of techniques, including facilitating hunting seasons for several species. While a handful of municipalities have regrettably chosen to enact ordinances that restrict hunting beyond the state's regulatory framework, we are not aware of any instances where the opposite is true. If passed H8451 would represent a significant departure from science-backed, expert-led state wildlife management that has served Rhode Islanders for decades in favor of political control of a state resource by a municipal body that is largely not accountable to the state's citizens.

While H8451 is troublingly vague on what regulations the town of New Shoreham seeks to specifically change, it is unambiguous in its rationale for pursuing the exemption. While BHA appreciates the severity and increasing prevalence of tick-borne illnesses, we contest that this is not an issue that exclusively or disproportionately impacts Block Island, nor does it constitute appropriate rationale to transfer authority to regulate deer hunting to any municipality. To the contrary, New Shoreham is unique in some ways, and there are steps that could be taken without legislation to better facilitate public access for deer hunting on the island. For example, it is excessively difficult during the winter months for the public to access the island and find lodging on weekdays during the non-tourist season. Currently, deer hunting regulations for zone 4 (New Shoreham), which are developed collaboratively between the town and DEM, provide no weekend days open to deer hunting whatsoever. In contrast, deer hunting is allowed on every weekend day from approximately October through January, inclusive, everywhere else within the state of Rhode Island.

BHA supports expanding public hunting opportunities as the most effective, balanced approach to managing overabundant deer populations and facilitating access to, and utilization of, the state's wildlife resource. Allowing any exemption from DEM's authority to regulate deer hunting, particularly when it is unclear what changes might be implemented, neither represents an expansion of public hunting access, nor an acceptable or appropriate step forward while numerous reasonable options are currently available. With that in mind, **BHA respectfully urges the Committee, and ultimately the entire RI General Assembly, to oppose H8451.**

Thank you for your consideration,

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