

2026 -- H 8451

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO FISH AND WILDLIFE -- DEER HUNTING

Introduced By: Representative Tina L. Spears

Date Introduced: April 15, 2026

Referred To: House Environment and Natural Resources

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Findings and Purpose.

2 The General Assembly finds that the town of New Shoreham, located on Block Island,
3 presents unique ecological, geographic, and public health circumstances with respect to deer
4 management that are not adequately addressed by the statewide regulatory framework established
5 under this chapter and § 20-1-12. The island's geographic isolation, limited land area, a deer
6 population exceeding ecologically sustainable levels, and the associated risks to human health from
7 tick-borne illness, to native flora and fauna, and to public safety, collectively constitute a distinct
8 management challenge. It is therefore the purpose of this section to create a mechanism by which
9 New Shoreham may seek a time-limited exemption from certain statewide prohibitions governing
10 deer hunting and management, subject to the oversight and approval of the director of the
11 department of environmental management.

12 SECTION 2. Chapter 20-15 of the General Laws entitled "Deer Hunting" is hereby
13 amended by adding thereto the following section:

14 **20-15-10. New Shoreham island deer overpopulation exemption.**

15 (a) Definitions. As used in this section:

16 (1) "Director" means the director of the department of environmental management or
17 designee.

18 (2) "Exemption period" means the time-limited period, not to exceed two (2) years, during
19 which an approved island deer management plan is in effect.

1 (3) "Island deer management plan" or "plan" means the written plan submitted by the town
2 council to the director pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

3 (4) "Town" means the town of New Shoreham.

4 (5) "Town council" means the elected town council of the town of New Shoreham.

5 (6) "Town lands" means all lands within the territorial jurisdiction of the town of New
6 Shoreham, including privately owned parcels for which written landowner consent has been
7 obtained, but expressly excluding any lands owned, managed, or controlled by the federal
8 government or the State of Rhode Island, unless the relevant federal or state authority has provided
9 written consent to inclusion.

10 (b) Authority to seek exemption. The town council is hereby authorized to petition the
11 director for a time-limited exemption from one or more of the prohibitions or restrictions set forth
12 in regulations adopted pursuant to § 20-1-12 including, but not limited to, restrictions concerning
13 allowable seasons, hunting hours, permissible methods of take, bag limits, and permitting
14 requirements, for the sole purpose of deer population control on town lands to mitigate tick-borne
15 illnesses. Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize an exemption from any prohibition
16 enumerated in §§ 20-15-(1)(i) and 20-15-(4), or from any requirement of federal law.

17 (c) Petition requirements. A petition for exemption submitted by the town council shall be
18 in writing and shall include, at a minimum, the following:

19 (1) A description of the deer population conditions on the island, supported by population
20 data, wildlife surveys, or other evidence acceptable to the director;

21 (2) A demonstration that the deer population presents a significant threat to public health
22 including, but not limited to, the high incidence of tick-borne illnesses, native ecological resources,
23 agricultural interests, or public safety on the island;

24 (3) A proposed island deer management plan specifying:

25 (i) The specific regulatory prohibitions or restrictions from which an exemption is sought;

26 (ii) The proposed methods of deer management and take to be authorized in lieu of or in
27 addition to existing statewide regulations;

28 (iii) The geographic boundaries of lands to be covered by the plan;

29 (iv) The proposed duration of the exemption period, which shall not exceed two (2)
30 consecutive years;

31 (v) Measurable population reduction targets and benchmarks;

32 (vi) Proposed public safety protocols;

33 (vii) A harvest reporting and monitoring program; and

34 (viii) Evidence that the town council has held at least one duly noticed public hearing on

1 the proposed plan prior to submission;
2 (4) A list of any local ordinances or regulations the town council proposes to adopt to
3 implement the plan during the exemption period; and
4 (5) A description of coordination efforts with adjacent landowners, conservation
5 organizations, and other affected parties.
6 (d) Review and approval by director. Upon receipt of a complete petition, the director shall:
7 (1) Review the petition and island deer management plan for consistency with sound
8 wildlife management principles, public safety, and applicable state and federal law;
9 (2) Hold at least one public hearing on the petition in New Shoreham within thirty (30)
10 days of receipt of a complete petition;
11 (3) Issue a written decision approving, approving with conditions, or denying the petition
12 within sixty (60) days of the public hearing;
13 (4) In approving a petition, specify the precise regulatory provisions from which an
14 exemption is granted, the exemption period, all conditions and reporting requirements, and any
15 provisions the director deems necessary to protect public safety and wildlife resources;
16 (5) File the approved plan as an emergency or limited regulation in accordance with the
17 applicable provisions of the chapter 35 of title 42("Administrative Procedures Act"); and
18 (6) The director may deny a petition upon a finding that the proposed plan is inconsistent
19 with public safety, sound wildlife management, or applicable law, and shall state the reasons for
20 such denial in writing. A denial may be appealed to the department of environmental management
21 office of administrative adjudication within thirty (30) days.
22 (e) Local regulations during exemption period. Upon director approval of an island deer
23 management plan, the town council is authorized to adopt local ordinances or regulations
24 implementing the plan solely within town lands, which may include provisions governing:
25 (1) Allowable seasons and hunting hours applicable on town lands, subject to the limits
26 authorized in the approved plan;
27 (2) Permissible methods of take, which may include methods not otherwise authorized
28 under § 20-15-(5), to the extent specifically authorized by the director in the approved plan;
29 (3) Landowner cooperative arrangements facilitating access to private lands for purposes
30 of deer management under the plan;
31 (4) Local permitting and certification requirements for persons engaged in deer
32 management activities under the plan; and
33 (5) The administration and disbursement of any local bounty, incentive, or reimbursement
34 program for deer harvested pursuant to the plan.

1 (6) Local regulations adopted under this subsection shall not conflict with any condition
2 imposed by the director in approving the plan and shall be filed with the director within thirty (30)
3 days of adoption.

4 (f) Continuation of state enforcement authority. Nothing in this section shall be construed
5 to limit, diminish, or transfer the enforcement authority of the director, environmental police
6 officers, or conservation officers under §§ 20-1-5 and 20-1-8. Environmental police officers shall
7 retain full authority to enforce state law and the conditions of the approved island deer management
8 plan within town lands throughout any exemption period.

9 (g) Reporting and monitoring. During any exemption period, the town shall submit to the
10 director annual written reports documenting:

11 (1) The number and sex of deer harvested;

12 (2) Progress toward population reduction targets;

13 (3) Any public safety incidents; and

14 (4) Such other data as the director may require. The director shall retain authority to modify
15 or revoke an approved plan at any time upon a finding that continued implementation presents a
16 threat to public safety or wildlife resources, or that the town has materially failed to comply with
17 the plan or its conditions, following written notice to the town council and an opportunity to be
18 heard.

19 (h) Expiration and renewal. An exemption period shall expire automatically at the
20 conclusion of the term specified in the approved plan. The town council may petition for renewal
21 pursuant to the same process set forth in this section. No exemption shall be in effect for more than
22 two (2) consecutive years without renewal. Upon expiration or revocation of an exemption, all
23 statewide regulations under this chapter and § 20-1-12 shall apply in full to town lands.

24 (i) Liability and indemnification. The town shall indemnify and hold harmless the State of
25 Rhode Island, the department of environmental management, and their officers, agents, and
26 employees from any claims, damages, or liabilities arising from the implementation of an island
27 deer management plan by the town or its agents.

28 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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RELATING TO FISH AND WILDLIFE -- DEER HUNTING

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