

Great Parks Controlled Bow Hunting Program Rules for 2026–2027 Season

Updated May 2026

One threat to native species and their habitats is the overpopulation of white-tailed deer. For the past 20 years, Great Parks of Hamilton County (Great Parks) has monitored how white-tailed deer impact the lands its stewards. In response to significant increases in deer populations and the severe ecological damage that resulted, Great Parks began a Deer Management Program in 2003. This management includes continued population monitoring, vegetation surveys, culling and a lottery bow hunt, called the Controlled Bow Hunting Program. Since implementing this Program, several years of data have shown it to be successful in protecting native plant populations as well as providing benefits to the health of deer populations.

All Great Parks Controlled Bow Hunting Program rules are in addition to Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) rules and regulations. Each applicant may receive a permit to hunt in the Controlled Bow Hunting Program and must read, acknowledge, and follow the rules and regulations. Failure to comply with rules and regulations will result in possible criminal citation and a revoked permit to participate.

Applicants are defined as persons who have submitted applications for consideration in the Great Parks Controlled Bow Hunting Program but have not completed all steps of the application and qualification process. Participants are defined as persons who have successfully completed all steps of the application and qualification process.

Applicant Requirements

1. Applicants certify that they understand and will comply with all current hunting rules, licensing requirements and regulations established by the State of Ohio, Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Great Parks.
2. Applicants must hold a valid hunting license in the State of Ohio by the first day of the official ODNR white-tailed deer archery season.
3. Applicants must have completed a hunter safety education course.

Application Process

All steps must be completed by the applicable deadlines for applicants to be eligible to participate in the program.

1. Applicants must apply through [Great Parks' website](#) by July 1st.
2. Applicants must log in to the My Impact website before attending qualifications to complete all application requirements.
3. Applicants must successfully complete the Bow Hunting Program Orientation module and pass the Bow Hunting Program quiz with a score of 100%.
4. Applicants are required to upload proof of successful completion of a hunter safety education course from one of the following:
 - A. A previously held State of Ohio hunting license.
 - B. Evidence of having successfully completed a hunter education course (from any state)
 - C. Attest they are 21 years of age or older and previously held a legal hunting license (from any state).
 - D. An apprentice license from ODNR.

Additional instructions will be provided via email once application and fees are submitted. Applicants that meet necessary requirements and complete all steps are assigned a qualification time slot via email at least one week prior to qualification date.

Qualification Process

In this stage, applicants attend a qualification day at the assigned time to demonstrate proficiency with a bow. Field qualification results determine whether applicants qualify for the program and can choose their packet. The date of qualification is set before applications open and is available on Great Parks' website.

1. Applicants' qualification time will be determined by Great Parks using a random lottery to assign the order of qualifiers. All applicants will be subject to this random order.
2. Applicants absent from the range during their assigned qualification time will lose their place in the lottery. They are not guaranteed a later qualification time and may be ineligible to hunt that season.
3. Applicants may only participate in the program with the bow(s) used to qualify.
4. Applicants may qualify with up to two (2) bows.
5. Applicants have one (1) opportunity per bow to attempt to pass qualifications.
6. Each opportunity to qualify consists of target placement of five (5) arrows or bolts.

7. Applicant must place a minimum of four (4) out of five (5) arrows or bolts in a 10" diameter target from an elevated position at 20 yards per opportunity.
8. Any part of the arrow tip touching the outer black line of the 10" diameter target will be considered a miss. Great Parks rangemasters will make the decision on whether the applicant has completed the qualification successfully. Their decision is final.
9. Applicants must have a minimum of five (5) arrows or bolts at the time of their qualification or will not be permitted to attempt qualifying.
10. Applicants must be able to draw their own crossbow without help from another.
11. Cocking devices are allowed, but no assistance is permitted for compound bows, regardless of age or ability, due to safety concerns.
12. Upon completion of the qualifying event, applicants are to secure their bow(s) in their vehicle.
13. Those who successfully qualify must bring the signed target documenting successful completion to the next stage.

Requests for additional accommodation may be made by contacting:

bowhunting@greatparks.org at their time of application.

Packet Selection

In this stage, applicants who qualify become program participants and may select a location and session by choosing a packet. Packet selection occurs on qualification day, immediately following qualifications. Each packet includes session dates and area assignments, which tell a participant when and where they may perform hunting activities. The rules below explain how packets are assigned, what limits apply, and what is not permitted once packets are selected.

1. Once the applicant's bow(s) is secure in their vehicle, participants are permitted to select their packet(s).
2. Participants choose packets in the same order of assigned qualifications. Early qualifying participants will have a wider selection of packets available than those selected later in the random lottery.
3. A Participant will select at least one (1) packet. Additional packets may be available.
4. Participants may not select more than one (1) packet during the same hunting session.
5. Trading of packets is not permitted. Participants may not trade dates, times, or areas with another participant.

The controlled bow hunting program follows ODNR white-tailed deer archery season dates. Great Parks divides the archery season into 4 hunting sessions. Sessions do not overlap. Session 1 begins on the opening day of Ohio's Archery season. Each session is approximately 4-5 weeks long and is consecutive. Exact dates for the current year will be shared prior to packet selection.

Learning the Program:

In this stage, participants prepare for the hunt by meeting any required deadlines, reviewing selected packets, readying any equipment, and completing any allowed scouting activities. The rules below explain when a participant may access the area, what equipment a participant may place, and how to prepare within program requirements.

Area

1. New participants and participants who are new to a selected hunting area are required to become acquainted with parks where they will be participating by September 15.
2. Participants are responsible for knowing their location as it relates to bow hunting areas, boundaries, and safety zones.
3. Bow hunting areas are delineated in maps available on Great Parks' website. Participants have access to files they may upload to digital devices which also provide bow hunting area boundary spatial information.
4. Bow hunting activities, including scouting and placing equipment, are only permitted in designated bow hunting areas. Hunters found scouting or hunting outside their permitted time or area may be subject to citation and/or revocation of their hunting permit.
5. Participants must maintain a safety zone of no less than 67 yards (200ft) from any building, road, picnic area, official trail or developed area.
6. Participants must maintain a safety zone of no less than 31 yards (100ft) inside park boundaries.
7. Hunting activities are prohibited in the safety zone unless the following exception applies:
 - a. An injured deer may be shot in the safety zone provided the participant shoots towards the interior of the bow hunting area and the shot will be in a downward direction.
8. Participants are prohibited from hunting on private property as part of this program.
9. Participants understand hunting activities are on public property and that they may encounter the public or other staff.

10. If public or staff are encountered during activities, participants must cease activity and allow public or staff to pass through the bow hunting area.
11. Participants may explain their permission to be there, if questioned by a guest. Adjacent public uses will continue, and participants must accept that park users will continue use during their permitted time.
12. If the public or staff confronts the participant or knowingly interferes with the hunting activity, the participant must contact Great Parks Rangers by calling 513-825-2280. Participants may not engage the public in a confrontation.

Access

1. Participants may scout their specific bow hunting area(s) until September 20th. Outside of this scouting period, participants may only scout within the date range of their session.
2. No access to hunting areas will be permitted outside of a participant's selected hunting packet after September 20.
3. Participants must notify a Ranger if they plan to access the park more than 1 hour after sunset.
4. Access to bow hunting areas from private property is prohibited.
5. Participants must carry the Great Parks hunting permit, signed by the CEO, at all times. A digital copy displayed on a phone is acceptable.
6. Any unauthorized persons in a bowhunting area are subject to the revocation of their hunting permit and/or citation at the discretion of Park Rangers.
7. The creation of trails or paths is prohibited.
8. Limited clearing of shooting lanes is allowed. Cutting of sticks, branches, or bushes larger than ½" is prohibited.
9. Motorized vehicles are not permitted beyond designated parking areas.
10. Vehicles will not be allowed to access roadways closed due to hazardous conditions.

Parking

1. Participants may only park and access hunting areas from their assigned bow hunting parking locations during their permitted session.
2. Parking gates must be locked properly while participating to prevent unauthorized access to the hunting area. Be sure parking gates are locked and secured before leaving.
3. At all times, the parking ID card with your name and grid # must be displayed on your vehicle's dashboard along with a piece of paper indicating the grid location of where

you will be performing hunting activities. Bow hunting area maps with grids are available on Great Parks' website.

Equipment

1. Equipment may only be installed during a participant's defined session date and area, as outlined in the packet. Equipment includes tree stands, trail cameras, and blinds.
2. All hunting equipment must conform to the State of Ohio requirements.
3. All bow hunting equipment placed in the field by participants must be clearly labeled with an equipment tag containing legible information to include the participant's name and phone number at a minimum.
4. Marked equipment tags must be no higher than six (6) feet off the ground.
5. Equipment without legible contact information will be confiscated.
6. Tree stands that meet Tree Stand Manufacturers Association (TMA) safety specifications are permitted. Climbing, ladder, tripod stands and pop-up blinds are allowed. For a list of products that meet safety standards go to www.tmastands.com/product/.
7. Wearing of a safety harness is required with use of any tree stand. The harness must be worn while participants are off the ground.
8. It is prohibited to construct, place or use a permanent-type tree stand, or to place spikes, nails, wires, or other objects into a tree to function as steps or to secure a tree stand.
9. No more than two (2) tree stands/blinds per participant are permitted.
10. No more than three (3) trail cameras per participant may be installed.
11. Baiting is prohibited in accordance with [current laws and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources](#).
12. Hunter orange must be worn during Ohio's Youth Deer Gun Season, Deer Gun Season, and the Statewide Muzzleloader Deer Season.

Bow Hunting and Harvest:

1. Archery season hours are one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. The official times for sunrise and sunset are found in the Ohio Hunting & Trapping Regulations published each year. Be sure to use the times for Western Ohio.
2. Only participants are permitted in bow hunting areas during the season except for youth and participants with accommodation.
3. Participants may harvest as many deer as are allowed by State Law for Hamilton County.

4. If a deer is wounded and reaches the park boundary, contact Great Parks Rangers at 513-825-2280. DO NOT FOLLOW A WOUNDED DEER ONTO PRIVATE PROPERTY AND DO NOT SEEK PERMISSION OF ADJOINING PROPERTY OWNER WITHOUT A RANGER PRESENT.
5. Participants must legally check in the deer to ODNR when a deer is harvested.
6. Participants must notify Great Parks of the location, sex, date, and time of the kill on-line within 24 hours through our online reporting system. You can view your submitted harvests on this page. If you have any problems with the online form, contact bowhunting@greatparks.org within 24 hours of harvest.
7. Participants are required to report any unrecovered deer within 24 hours. Call Great Parks Rangers at 513-825-2280 to report injured or sick deer.
8. Participants must field dress harvested deer out of view of the public and away from roads or trails. Legally harvested deer belong to the participant. Field dressed deer from the program can be processed at no cost to the participant if the deer is donated to a local charity. Great Parks will direct the meat donations in these circumstances. Contact the program administrator for the deer processor currently accepting donations on behalf of Great Parks.
9. One (1) non-participating youth can accompany a participant in the Great Parks Wildlife Bow Hunting Program with appropriate apprentice license, at the participant's risk. Per ODNR Hunting and Trapping Regulations, "Accompany means to go along with another person while staying within a distance from the person that enables uninterrupted, unaided visual and auditory communications."
10. Participants with disabilities may participate in any bow hunting area. Requests for additional accommodation may be made.
11. Participants who meet the criteria for a mobility device established by ODNR's All Purpose Vehicle Permit will have the following opportunity:
 - a. Assignment to Winton Woods Area A bow hunting area.
 - b. Permission to be accompanied by a non-participating companion or one participating companion. Companions must also go through qualifications with the participant. Companions may only participate when a participant with disabilities is present and has requested a companion.
 - c. Companions must also display a parking ID card with their name and grid # on the dash along with a piece of paper indicating the grid location of where they will be accompanying the participant they are assisting. Grid locations can be determined from the topographic area maps on our website.

Removal from Program

1. Violation of ODNR and Great Parks laws, bylaws, rules, or regulations will result in temporary or permanent revocation of the participants' permit. Criminal charges may result.

How to reach a Park Ranger

- For emergencies, dial 9-1-1.
- To have a Ranger dispatched to your location 24/7, call the Hamilton County Communications Center at 513-825-2280. Ranger dispatch may have a Ranger call you back.
- For general information or to speak to a Ranger Dispatcher, call Ranger Headquarters at 513-521-3980. Office Hours: 8:00 am – 6:00 pm, 7 days a week.

Rangers	Great Parks Volunteer Bow Hunting Coordinators	Great Parks Program Staff
Dispatch: 513-825-2280 General Info: 513-521-3980	 coordinators@greatparks.org	General Info: 513-742-7623 bowhunting@greatparks.org
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To report violations • To report unsafe conditions (ex: open pits, illegal activity) or environmental issues • Before tracking a deer off Great Parks property • To report negative public contacts • Any time you are in the woods one hour past legal shooting times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For questions about scouting • For bow hunting advice/guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative questions •

