Fay State Forest Deer Wintering Area

Fay State Forest is adjacent to the Alpine Village Association, and a deer wintering area, also referred to as a “deer yard” exists on the Fay State Forest. Deer conserve their energy during winter months by congregating in conifer cover, or deer yards, to avoid deep snow, high winds and extreme cold. The conifers, which could be a mix of hemlock, balsam fir, spruce and white pine, provide a dense canopy for shelter against wind and snow. In these areas, deer move around very little, using a network of trails that provide access to feeding areas. Deer yards are important to the winter survival of the herd, and anywhere the snow is over 18 inches deep for an extended time, deer need yards. Use of the area in any particular winter, however, depends on many factors, including deer density, food availability, winter severity, and changes in land use nearby.

The dense conifers providing winter shelter are a special habitat requirement for the survival of deer. New Hampshire Fish and Game recognizes deer wintering areas as critical habitat. Fish and Game biologists conduct annual surveys of the state’s deer yards, and during the winter of 2021 several recently unauthorized blazed trails were seen on Fay State Forest. These trails were impacting the deer yard. Human presence and free roaming dogs in deer yards can alarm the deer and cause them to waste their vital energy reserves, which can lead to injury or death. Even the presence of cross-country skiers can have an impact because deer perceive their quiet approach as a predator. The general rule of thumb for everyone, stay away from deer yards until the snow is gone. Please see the attached map showing an outline of Fay State Forest, and an outline of the deer wintering area. The best place to walk in the winter would be in the vicinity of the patch cuts and avoid the deer wintering area (shaded in pink). Please call New Hampshire Fish and Game if you would like additional information on how to avoid impacts to deer in the winter, 603-744-5470.

