

Deer Informational Public Meeting

Portage Environmental Board

April 14, 2016

Urban Deer Management: Characteristics, Options, and Studies

Presentation by Chad Stewart, MDNR Deer Management Specialist

- North America, global problem
- Critical point: why is the community engaging/dealing with the problem (what problems are deer causing)?
- Good fitness, high reproductive success, high survival rates, smaller home range size: all means higher population size
- Approach to deer management program:
 - Authority (cities working closely with state agencies)
 - Background (understand population dynamics, objectives of community)
 - Recommendations (vary based on objectives)
 - Alternatives (make sure all options are explored)
 - Logistics
 - Evaluate (actions meeting goals)
 - (see presentation slides)
- Management options (see presentation slides for pros/cons of each)
 - Hunting (open or controlled)
 - Sharpshooting
 - Trap and removal (transfer or euthanize; transfer not allowed by MDNR currently)
 - Contraception (limited options)
 - Sterilization
 - Reintroducing predators
 - Fencing and repellants
 - Let nature take its course
- Case studies (limited success)
 - Controlled hunts: Williams et al 2013 (PA, NJ examples)
 - Sharpshooter: DeNicola and Williams 2008 (IA, NJ, OH examples)
 - Contraception: Rutberg and Naugle 2008 and Rutberg et al 2013 (NY, SC, MD islands)
- Conclusions
 - Look at biological and social data
 - Management strategies should align with goals and objectives
 - Consensus on deer mgmt. is impossible
 - All management requires maintenance
 - MDNR can provide technical assistance

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City of Portage Deer Survey

Presentation by Kalamazoo Christian High School Environmental Science Classes

Mr. Steve Dyk, Instructor

- Vehicle-Deer Accidents
 - 19% of crashes in Kalamazoo County in Portage
 - Portage 6% of county land area
- KCHS Survey Process
 - See presentation slides
- Data, Analysis & Interpretation
 - Total deer tracks observed 957
 - Area of Portage observed 29%
 - 2.5 Factor estimates city population at 2400 deer
 - See presentation slides
- Main areas of conflict
 - See presentation slides

Questions from public:

Q: Dates of survey?

A: 2-26-16

Q: Curious about range of travel and double counting?

A: Dyk – five hour window and traced steps spatially to avoid double-counting

Q: How much do they travel in urban area?

A: Very localized as far as winter travel; otherwise hard to determine

Q: Is 80 deer/sq mile OK number?

A: Chad – hard to say if number is OK; not equally distributed throughout city; depends on community goal(s) for population size/density

Q: Diseases and deer as host?

A: Chad – found in SW Michigan; have more to learn about relationship between deer and lyme disease (literature undecided, supports both positive and negative association); Chad's opinion is deer provide some habitat, although not main hosts/disease source (which is small mammal)

Q: Bovine TB?

A: Chad – is zoonotic disease that can be transferred between mammal species; highly effective treatments; MDNR employees tested and no one has contracted TB with high levels of handling

Q: Winter feeding is a problem, should counting be done in the spring?

A: Chad – Common to have them spread out in spring, but not easily traced

Q: Shining for deer survey?

A: Chad – Spotlight surveys are possible; not acceptable in neighborhoods

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Questions from public (cont'd):

Q: What does maintenance look like over time?

A: Chad – community often decides on approach and must adopt benchmarks and develop ongoing program and actions based on those benchmarks

Q: What happens to venison?

A: Chad – Depends on community; sharp shooter used and meat usually given to food bank; or controlled hunts and personal hunters can keep meat

Q: How safe is public hunting?

A: Chad – managed hunt requires input from local police force, other precautions can be taken

Q: Cost to process meat?

A: Chad – can get funds from nonprofit organizations to cover processing cost, could sell meat at markets, processor might provide discount, regular hunter might charge \$80-100 per deer

Q: Why doesn't state expand hunting season?

A: Chad – already have a liberalized framework that allows archery for extended period

Q: Individual deer size in urban area smaller?

A: Chad – no they should be comparable

Q: Buck to doe ration?

A: Chad – born 1:1 ratio, bucks tend to have higher mortality; easier to observe groups and those are often doe groups (or have young bucks or bucks that have shed antlers)

Q: Online survey data?

A: Tim – data corresponded with students' work

Q: Would coyote be included in cull?

A: Chad – up to community; could be included under regular season and permit (would not combine permits from MDNR)

Q: Will culling cause rebound?

A: Chad – deer can readjust by becoming more fit when population density is reduced, except in our area the deer are already at their peak fitness and reproductive rate

Q: Any studies on whether urban landscape food sources vs. natural food sources play a role in herd population?

A: Chad – No; could implement a ban on feeding as part of any management approach

Q: Does Portage have a feeding ban?

A: Mayor Strazdas – No

Q: Wild nuisance removal permit, would deer ever be added to that permit?

A: Mills, Chad – There is no discussion to add more species to the permit; Chad will mention it at an upcoming meeting

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Community comments:

- Scent repellent options: whatever works
- Controls for controlled hunts: options are available; safety number one concern above deer removal
- Information from humane society, lawsuits in Ann Arbor, safety concerns with hunting in communities, prolific and difficult to control, Rochester Hills has a nonlethal management plan
- Pro community hunting, no firearms
- Need more knowledge and data on outcomes of other programs, could be added to a future ballot to get community input
- Public health issue with deer droppings, gardener with concerns with deer predation (8' fence and 7' deer netting does not work; serious problem near Hill 'n Brook)
- Ann Arbor lawsuits filed by deer rights activists not because of accidents or problems with controlled hunts
- Are data available on deer accidents in our City? Portage Police Department has data if it is reported; EB can get from PD (as suggested by Mayor)
- Liquid fence is very effective
- Deer radar equipment to reduce accidents used in Northern Indiana, results unknown
- Lived on Oakland Drive since 1950s and seen fewer deer observed in the last two years than over many decades
- Holiday Lane resident has spent \$2-3K in landscaping costs to repair damage; shared scent repellent options
- Report of big die off near Mandigo, but deer are coming back
- Decrease in population published in August Portager by the EB, seems the students' info indicates opposite trend; Ruth responded by telling public that in August the EB had very limited data/information (only deer-car accident reports, which are in fact decreasing according to the records) and since that time we have been looking for more information and indicators, including working with the KCHS students to do the tracking survey and EB sponsored online citizen surveys
- Deer seem to be increasing in the Holiday Lane area/West Fork of Portage Creek; easy to see eight-plus deer at any time and they can be a nuisance
- Repellent options using ground black pepper
- Need to look at the long-term need to co-habitate with deer since they are a natural part of our environment

Deer question to the public in attendance (informal polling): Raise your hand if you think deer are...

- Not a problem: 9
- Moderate problem: 24
- Big problem: 41