
Originator

Item

Review City Deer Management Plan

Date

3/11/2015

Description

Date: February 13, 2015

To: Parks, Arts and Recreation Commission

From: Londell Pease, Senior Planner

Subject: **WILDLIFE RESOURCES IN BLOOMINGTON: DEER MANAGEMENT**

In the late 1980s, Bloomington and other cities found that an uncontrolled urban deer population stresses a City's open space ecosystem and can become both a nuisance and hazard to residents. Significant damage to vegetation created an ecological imbalance; the deer-car collisions increased to an average of one per week; the City received numerous nuisance complaints, all related to the rapidly growing deer population. The City received more than 100 complaints per year regarding residential landscape damage because food sources had been exhausted in the habitat areas. The City prepared a plan to address the concerns.

City staff and the Natural & Historic Resources Commission (NHRC) completed a two year study which included the establishment of the Deer Management Task Force (DMTF). The DMTF was comprised of representatives from:

- Minnesota Valley Humane Society
- Friends of Animals and Their Environment
- Minnesota Network for Animals Concerns
- Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
- Minnesota State Archery Association
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- City staff from Bloomington, Eagan, Burnsville, and Mendota Heights
- Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
- Hennepin Parks
- Izaak Walton League
- Dakota County Parks and Recreation
- Metropolitan Regional Parks

The study (a copy can be provided upon request) resulted in the Bloomington City Council adopting a Wildlife Management Program as part of the City's Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The program highlighted several key factors that necessitated managing the deer population, because natural predators for deer no longer exist in the urban area.

A key indicator evaluated was deer-car collisions. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, there are about 1.5 million car-deer accidents each year that result in \$1 billion in vehicle damage, 150 human fatalities, and over 10,000 personal injuries in the United States. The actual numbers are probably higher because the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's figures for deer accidents rely on inconsistent state reporting—the definition of a "reportable deer accident" varies significantly among the states. An insurance claims study conducted in 2004 and 2005 showed that Minnesota was sixth among the top ten states for deer-car collisions.

The initial Deer Management Program outlined a three year deer density/population reduction program. The approved removal method was City Police and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFS) conservation officers conducting sharp shooting at bait sites throughout the habitat areas. The sites were selected after data collection and analysis to determine whether they are within guidelines established for removals. The program's objective was to reduce Bloomington's deer population from 84 deer per square mile to 35 deer per square mile of habitat. This required removing approximately 350 deer per year for three years.

The NHRC reviewed the three-year deer reduction program in 1994. The program successfully reduced the City wide deer population density from 84 to 29 deer per square mile of habitat. Resident complaints declined from over 100 in 1990 to 11 in 1994. Deer-car collisions decreased at a slower rate from a high of 92 in 1989 to 53 in 1994.

The NHRC conducted four public hearings to develop an on-going deer management program. The NHRC recommended that the City Council continue actions to maintain the current ecosystem relationship among humans, deer, and vegetation throughout the City. The City Council adopted a five-year, 1994 to 1999 deer control program on September 6, 1994. The program focused on maintaining rather than reducing Bloomington's deer population. The program contained five guidelines:

- 1) Maintain a city-wide deer population under 300.
- 2) Fine tune deer density and distribution in the City using selective sharp shooting according to density standards and annual aerial survey reports.
- 3) Continue public education programs on how to live with an urban deer population including continuing the deer feeding ban.
- 4) Continue cooperation with other agencies and surrounding cities.
- 5) Continue data gathering to ascertain whether the current objective of 15 to 25 deer per square mile of habitat should remain the standard for measuring ecosystem balance.

On March 27, 2000, staff reported to the City Council that the 1994-1999 deer management program had successfully reduced deer-car collision and complaints. The report stated between 1994 and 1999, an average of 142 deer were removed annually by sharp shooters and deer-car collisions. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources predicted that if the sharp shooter program were discontinued, within 3 to 4 years the deer population would return to 1,000 deer, the number counted in 1989.

In addition, the effort to reduce the deer population to 15 to 25 deer per square mile (approximately 250 deer City wide, which is 50 fewer than the 1994-1999 program goal) resulted in a significant reduction in damage to property complaints and a reduction in deer-car collisions. (See Table 1)

TABLE 1: Deer Management Indicators from 1996 to 2014

YEAR	Survey Count	Estimated Population	Deer per Sq. Mile	City Removals	Car Deer Collisions	Damage Complaints
1996	272	354	36	58	NA	28
1997	318	413	42	75	62	21
1998	NA	NA	NA	78	34	8
1999	297	386	39	28	60	25
2000	386	389	40	0	38	16
2001	NA	NA	NA	61	44	17
2002	NA	NA	NA	54	41	11
2003	262	328	33	101	25	0
2004	NA	NA	NA	137	29	3
2005	240	312	32	99	40	0
2006	416	462	47	31	22	1
2007	448	493	50	42	12	1
2008	NA	NA	NA	76	22	2
2009	NA	NA	NA	78	15	5
2010	NA	NA	NA	0	16	3
2011	327	360	37	65	27	8
2012	NA	NA	NA	45	33	4
2013	NA	NA	NA	0	23	11
2014	273	313	32	66	26	5

NOTE: 1996-2005 surveys were post-removal surveys. 2006, 2007, 2011 and 2013 are pre-removal surveys.

In 1999 the City Council was asked to approve one or a combination of the following options:

- 1) Discontinue any deer management activities in the City of Bloomington.
- 2) Continue with deer management with the same guidelines, listed on page 1, adopted in the 1994-1999 Deer Management Program.
- 3) Continue deer management with a review of the methods of removal, criteria for selecting removal locations and criteria for numbers to be removed.
- 4) Appoint a task force to conduct public hearings and review the deer management program and report back recommendations to the City Council.

Based on the substantial decrease in complaints regarding damage to property and deer car collisions, the City Council selected an annual deer management program that followed the management practices identified in 1994, except the population goal was 250 deer (about 25 deer per square mile of habitat).

Staff continues to monitor indicators identified in the Deer Management Task Force Report and conducts removals to maintain balance at the recommended population densities of 15 to 25 deer per square mile of habitat city-wide (9.81 square miles). Therefore, the program goal is to maintain a total population of approximately 250 deer.

In addition to deer-car collision data and complaints, staff relies on aerial deer surveys to determine if removals will be necessary to maintain the ideal balance. These surveys are a reliable indicator of the population, dependent on the snowfall providing conditions which allow a survey to be conducted. Since 2007, only 2011 and 2014 had adequate snowfall to successfully complete an aerial survey. The conditions for 2014-2015 were no conducive for a survey to be completed.

Without a survey to determine the total number of deer and relatively low complaints and moderate number of deer/car collisions in 2014, no removal activities are proposed for the 2014/2015 season. With the recent changes in the

Department of Natural Resources policies regarding deer removal, the City may not be permitted any removal without a current aerial survey. If we do not obtain adequate snow cover, deer removal may be possible. As noted, only five of the past seven years provided adequate snow cover to complete a survey. Staff will continue to monitor the Deer Management Plan indicators and completed a survey in 2015/2016, if possible. If any removals are required, that determination will be made after the survey is completed

Requested Action

No action required.

Attachments: