

# CITY OF GRAND HAVEN

## URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN

### March 2008

#### **Background**

Over the last few years, the City of Grand Haven has been receiving a steadily increasing amount of Whitetail deer complaints from throughout the City. In order to evaluate the situation, a town hall meeting was held in early 2007. The population at the meeting was divided in their opinions. Approximately 50% of the attendees promoted the need to reduce the local deer herd, and the other half promoted the deer herd existence. Over the summer, professional advisors in Urban Deer Management met to discuss the subject. It was determined that a public deliberation needed to take place. The City Administration formed an Urban Deer Task Force in the fall of 2007. This Task Force was comprised of 5 City residents, along with professional representation from 9 individuals representing Michigan State University, Michigan State University Extension Services, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the United States Department of Agriculture and the Ottawa County Soil and Water Conservation District.

#### **A. Urban Deer Task Force Emerging Issues**

To begin the Task Forces' mission, three Public Forums were held by the Task Force. The main concerns that emerged from the forums included:

1. Social Perceptions / Tolerance Levels for the urban deer
2. Public Health (human and animal)
3. Ecological Damage (public and private) caused by the deer
4. Domestication of Deer

#### **B. Techniques to Address Urban Deer Management Concerns**

After meeting for six months, the Task Force presented the following recommendations to the Grand Haven City Council:

1. **Public Education** - The City of Grand Haven will continue to assemble resources that provide residents with information on deer habits and offer guidelines for limiting localized deer damage through the use of repellents, alternative plantings, and other techniques. Educational materials will be available at City Hall, on the City website and other venues as they are made available. Providing information on the technical aspects of deer management and deer damage abatement are important aspects of deer management.

- a. Educational information on the City's website

- b. Research and information developed by Michigan State University regarding Deer Resistant Plants, Deer Repellants and Wildfire Plants for deer/Dune Area education.
  - c. Lyme disease Information – tick-borne disease caused by bacteria. Deer and white-footed mice are hosts for the tick and the Lyme disease organism, but deer DO NOT get Lyme disease.
  - d. Video Online & Cable Presentations
  - e. Monthly News Update and/or editorials in paper to keep in front of public
  - f. Post frequent accident sites with deer crossing signs
  - g. Signage at Cemetery encouraging use of silk flowers
  - h. No Feeding Deer – State Law must be changed
  - i. Spring Educational Blitz's (Farmers Market, Memorial Day, Earth Day, etc.)
2. **Habitat Modification** - Deer damage due to browsing can cause extensive landscape damage on private property in some cases. Landscape plants and gardens are often more attractive to deer because they are fertilized and irrigated. Additionally, there are indications that extensive deer browse in natural areas may be detrimental to the health of other plant and wildlife species in the critical dune areas of Grand Haven. Deer damage abatement techniques are useful to control or lessen the amount of property damage caused by deer. Deer damage abatement does not reduce the deer population, but only focuses on lessening damage caused by deer in an area. The Task Force has recommended the following initiatives to better understand the effects deer have on our environment.
- a. Exclosures (Harbor Island, Cemetery, Duncan Woods and North Shore) used to examine the effect of deer browse on forests. Exclosures can be used to raise awareness of existing and potential deer browse problems.
  - b. Trial Gardens (deer resistant plants in Harbor Island, Cemetery, Duncan Woods and North Shore) are gardens grown specifically for the purpose of testing and evaluating plants. May be used to determine which varieties of annuals and perennials are best for the Grand Haven area.
  - c. Change ordinance to allow 6' to 8' fencing in the rear yards of effected homes.
  - d. Share results with surrounding communities
3. **Increased Social Tolerance** - The City will actively work with the community as well as the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) to fully understand and support efforts to control the deer population which affects the social tolerance, health, safety, and welfare of Grand Haven residents. Improvement efforts will include:
- a. Public Education

- b. Communication Plan
- c. Changed Perceptions
- d. Deer Herd Reduction

**4. Deer Herd Reduction** - Lethal deer management methods are used to reduce the deer population in a given area. Hunting and sharpshooting are methods often used to reduce or control deer populations. The following options are considerations to be measured in order to determine if a cull is warranted.

- a. Health Issues (human and deer populations)
- b. Disease outbreaks in deer population/health of herd/reduction in size of deer
- c. Documented local case(s) of Lyme disease in humans
- d. Deer Population Density - upward trends in deer population estimates
- e. Public Safety - upward trends in car/deer accidents
- f. Deer being Domesticated – loitering in yards, not scared by noise or movements
- g. Environmental Damage - bio-diversity, long-term ecosystem health
- h. Upward Trends in Valid Deer Damage Complaints

**C. Implementation of the Urban Deer Management Plan**

To aid in the implementation of the Urban Deer Management Plan, each spring the City Manager's office will review data for deer management, including but not limited to educational material, deer population numbers (current and projected), vehicle-deer accidents, citizen comments and an annual census. Any or all legal lethal methods available (including sharpshooting or bow and arrow culling) may be utilized after the City Council has deemed a herd reduction necessary.

**D. Research and Statistics Used in the Creation of the Urban Deer Management Plan**

The following research and statistics were reviewed and deliberated as a part of the decision making process for the Task Force.

1. Significant input from Citizens in four public forums as well as open meeting input.
2. Local Traffic Statistics of car/deer accidents – There has been a steady average of 5 per year in the City. 7 occurred in the first 10 months of 2007.
3. Lyme Disease Information – two cases occurred in Ottawa County in 06/07, however they cases were not locally contracted.
4. Helicopter Deer Count on February 14, 2007 – 156 deer

5. 2003 DNR estimate of 30 deer per sq mi in Ottawa County
6. 1996 DNR goal for deer population is 17 per sq mi in Ottawa County
7. Martinez Natural Resource Survey at Kitchel-Lindquist Dunes

**E. Future Research Necessary to Maintain the Urban Deer Management Plan**

The Task Force recommended that future research continue in order to make sure the urban deer population is kept in check, and under the biological and social carrying capacities. These endeavors would include:

1. Annual census of deer
2. Monitoring the results from the Exclusion Areas
3. Undertake a Natural Features Inventory to determine what may be missing from our ecosystem due to browsing
4. Perform Trial Gardens to test what plantings will work best in our deer environment