

Hopewell Valley Deer Management Task Force

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HOPEWELL VALLEY DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN

Submitted to the Hopewell Township Committee

by the

Hopewell Valley Deer Management Task Force

PRIORITY READING



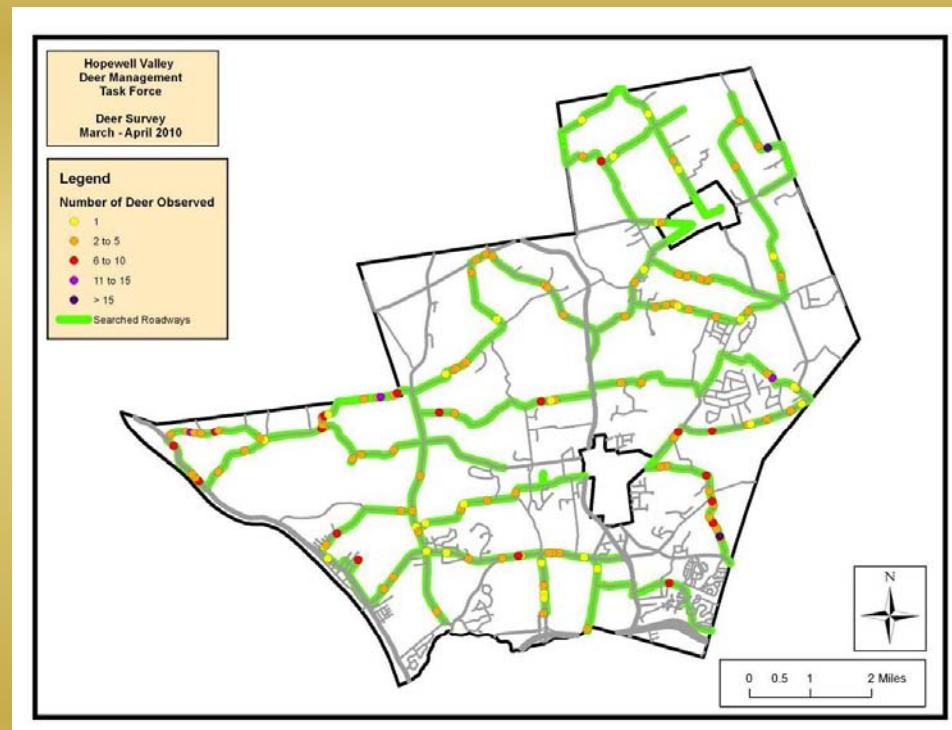
September 2010

Task Force History and Accomplishments

- Created by Township Committee – September 2009
 - 1) Initiating a public education program,
 - 2) Creating a comprehensive deer management plan, and
 - 3) Determining requirements for long-term sustainability of a successful deer management plan.
- Task Force Accomplishments
 - Conducted 8 public meetings
 - Published several informative articles in local newspapers
 - Creation, distribution and analysis of a public questionnaire
 - Night-time survey of Hopewell Valley deer population
 - Prepared comprehensive report - Hopewell Valley Deer Management Plan

Deer Population Estimate Results

- Estimated 37 deer per square mile (late winter/early spring)
- Calculations suggest a post-birthing population of 54 deer per square mile
- Published literature suggests that 10 deer per square mile is associated with low rates of Lyme disease, deer-vehicle collisions, and healthy forests.
- Historic estimates also report 10 deer per square mile prior to European settlement of North America



Public Survey Results

- **71% of responding households felt that “Deer cause many problems and solutions are needed”**
- 26% of responding households reported a case of Lyme disease
- 28% of responding households reported being involved in a deer-vehicle collision
- 55% of responding households reported severe to moderate landscape damage
- 27% of farmer respondents reported annual losses exceeding \$5,000; Other damages/costs were also reported.
- 10% of responding households hunt deer
 - Harvest would increase with more land access (43% of Valley is not open to hunting)
 - Harvest would increase with more time to hunt
 - Harvest would increase with outlet to donate venison

Summary of Goals

- **For all goals, the recommendation is a 25% reduction by 2013 and a 75% reduction by 2019.**
- **Goal #1: Reduce Lyme Disease Cases**
There has been an annual average of 170 reportable cases of Lyme disease from 2007-2009.
- **Goal #2: Reduce Deer Vehicle Collisions**
There has been an annual average of 567 deer-vehicle collisions from 2007-2009.
- **Goal #3: Reduce Agricultural Losses**
The public questionnaire results suggested that 27% of respondents had crop losses exceeding \$5,000 per year.

Summary of Goals

- **Goal #4: Reduce Landscape Planting Losses**

The public questionnaire results suggested that 55% of respondents had severe or moderate landscape damage.

- **Goal #5: Reduce Ecological Damage**

Local forest health has been monitored through two science-based protocols called ‘sentinel seedlings’ (measuring deer browse on planted tree seedlings) and ‘forest secchi’ (measuring the density of forest understory vegetation).

The average browse on planted tree seedlings has been 59% from 2006 - 2009. The average amount of native understory vegetation has been 21%.

Summary of Strategies

- **Strategy Set #1: Improvement of Hunting Access**

- 1A) Encourage and facilitate hunting access on public and private lands
- 1B) Develop strategies to access “pocket deer” in residential areas

- **Strategy Set #2: Improvement of Hunting Efficacy**

- 2A) Encourage and facilitate coordinated hunting activities among neighboring landowners
- 2B) Encourage and facilitate use of Agricultural Depredation Permits by farmers
- 2C) Encourage and facilitate Deer Management Programs that focus harvests on female deer
- 2D) Encourage and facilitate program for venison donation to local food banks
- 2E) Consult with the NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife and other wildlife professionals to facilitate strategies 1A through 2D

Summary of Strategies

- **Strategy Set #3: Avoidance of Deer Impacts**
 - 3A) Improve awareness of methods that reduce Deer Vehicle Collisions
 - 3B) Improve awareness of methods that reduce Lyme disease
 - 3C) Improve awareness of methods that reduce landscape damage
 - 3D) Discourage the intentional feeding of deer in non-hunting situations

Recommendations to the Hopewell Township Committee

- 1) The assignment of a permanent Deer Management Task Force to implement the plan. This body would meet periodically and have ongoing responsibility to implement strategies that achieve stated goals with assistance from Hopewell Valley municipalities and other stakeholders from public and private sectors.
- 2) The ongoing commitment of the Township Committee and staff to implement the plan. Examples include initiation of a Township-led deer management program on municipal lands and utilization of the Township website for public outreach/communication. Most recommendations are ‘budget neutral’, but all require commitment from elected officials and municipal staff.
- 3) Provide an annual contribution of \$5,000 as seed money to establish a venison donation program. This would allow the donation of 50 deer (equivalent to 5,000 pounds of venison or 20,000 meals). The Task Force would seek additional funding from public and private sources to grow the program.