

To: Community Services Advisory Commission Members
From: Megan D. O'Callaghan, P.E., City Manager
Date: September 6, 2023
Initiated By: Emily Goliver, Management Analyst
Re: Deer Management Options

Background

At the February 8, 2022 meeting of the Community Services Advisory Commission (CSAC), staff provided a presentation regarding the City's wildlife management program, including management of white-tailed deer. Since that time, staff has conducted additional research regarding deer management. At the June 13, 2023 CSAC meeting, staff provided an update on a herd population survey conducted by the Ohio State University (OSU).

Based on the data collected by the students at OSU, the survey team estimates there are approximately 50-85 deer per square mile within Dublin. A healthy population of deer is around 20-25 per square mile. The report also indicates that the population of deer is negatively impacting reforestation. A community-wide survey was open for five days from May 19th to May 23rd and received 297 responses. The responses indicated that the community's attitudes towards the white-tailed deer population and management of it was mixed. The materials from both meetings, including the report, are provided for reference.

Summary

The City of Dublin is not the only central Ohio city considering this issue. The City of Worthington has a task force to address concerns related to its herd population. Additionally, according to representatives at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Franklin County has seen an increase in deer over the years. As a species, deer are transient animals. Thus, ODNR is working to increase education on potential management tactics for all cities. Potential options to manage the white-tailed deer population can be categorized as non-lethal and lethal.

Non-lethal Management Options

No-Feed Ordinance

A common non-lethal management option is instituting a No-Feed Ordinance. Residents feeding deer on their property can lead to higher deer concentration in residential areas. Additionally, feeding deer can lead to increased comfort for the deer in that area. In some cases of aggressive deer encounters, residents in the neighborhood have admitted to either leaving food out for the deer or not using deer-proof bird feeders. Chapter 96.17(C) of the City's Code of Ordinances prohibits feeding wildlife in parks but does not prohibit it on private property. The City also prohibits feeding geese and other waterfowl on public property within the boundaries of the city (Chapter 91.12).

In city's that have adopted a no-feed ordinance, the legislation typically defines "feeding" as intentionally feeding or causing to be fed. This is consistent with Chapter 91.12 of Dublin's code. In many cases, violators are guilty of a minor misdemeanor. Each day is considered a new violation. These practices could be implemented in a no-feed ordinance adapted for Dublin.

No-feed ordinances must be coupled with community education programs. It is important for residents to understand the purpose of the ordinance and the negative impact that feeding deer can have. Should a no-feed ordinance be passed, staff will work on an educational campaign with the City's Communications and Public Information Division.

Contraceptives

Another non-lethal option that is more difficult to implement is sterilization. This involves injecting females with infertility drugs or surgically sterilizing them. These programs have not been proven effective when implemented. A doe that does not have children lives longer than does that do. For example, the City of Columbus attempted this management tactic in the early 2000's and are still observing the sterilized does to this day. Additionally, when the fawn output decreases due to sterilization of half of the does, the other half will begin producing more offspring in one cycle. For instance, a typical doe has one or two fawns per year. If the fawn population decreases due to sterilization of does, the does will begin having litters of three or four to repopulate the herd.

Contraceptive programs are also expensive. It costs about \$1,000 to surgically sterilize a doe or to immobilize a deer to administer the infertility drug. The ODNR will only permit this when it is coupled with a lethal option.

Relocation Programs

Trapping and relocation of a deer is not permitted by ODNR. Deer mortality rates of these practices are upwards of 60% due to the stress it causes the animal. Additionally, relocation can lead to disease spread in a new area, which is not desirable to the relocated or native deer.

Lethal Management Options

Below is a summary of two lethal options that have been implemented in other cities to manage the deer herd. Chapter 91.08 of the City's Code of Ordinances currently prohibits hunting of any animal within the city's boundaries. Any lethal options need to be seriously considered with the input of the Dublin Police Department (DPD). The safety of residents and visitors is a top priority. In the past, DPD has expressed concerns regarding lethal methods of deer management.

Urban Bow Hunting Program

An urban bow hunting program is one of the lethal management options that some cities, including Gahanna, OH, have implemented. Urban bow hunting programs are very restrictive. For instance, a common requirement in these programs is maintaining a suitable distance (200 feet, in many cases) from a school, walking path and residential neighborhood. These are typically implemented on public property but could be applied to private property with permission from the owner. Based on the location and size of many public lands in Dublin and the aforementioned restrictions, there would be very little space in Dublin that would be appropriate for an urban bow hunting program. Additionally, a program like this requires hunters to obtain permits through the State of Ohio, register with the police department, pass an archery proficiency test, and to submit a background check. These programs require staff resources, particularly through the police department, to screen applicants and monitor the hunters for compliance.

Sharpshooting Program

Some Ohio cities, particularly in northeast Ohio, have implemented sharpshooting programs to manage their deer herds. In order for this to be successful, the sharpshooting would occur overnight on specific properties with a high level of deer-related activity, typically a city park. This management option would require the city to hire a contractor to conduct the culling. These

programs typically cost over \$60,000 for just the sharpshooting. Another cost related to sharpshooting programs is the cost to harvest the deer meat to be donated. This fee depends on the number of deer and the contractor hired to do this work.

South Euclid, OH has been given permission by ODNR to implement a sterilization program because it is being done in conjunction with a sharpshooting program. This is part of a research project that includes tracking the movements of deer after sterilization. The sterilized deer are tagged and prohibited from being culled.

Recommendation

Staff is seeking feedback from CSAC regarding management options.