

### ON THE ANTLERS OF A DILEMMA

We, on the Conservation Board, find ourselves in an unusual position. Our first instinct is to protect all things natural. If they're beautiful, like deer, our emotions make this even easier. But when we step back and look at the changes deer have caused to the environment of Pound Ridge we are forced to rethink.

Although deer vs. automobiles and lyme disease are important consequences of the increasing deer population, we have not concerned ourselves with them. We limited ourselves to deer vs. the environment. The environment is losing.

We believe the white-tailed deer population must be controlled.

### THE SIZE OF THE PROBLEM

Most environmental biologists believe that a deer population of 12-15 per square mile is a healthy one. Pound Ridge Reservation did a count and found 30 per square mile but believe the count was flawed and the number is greater. The Department of Environmental Conservation estimates that Westchester has a population of 30-50 deer per square mile.

A deer lives about 10 years. A doe can mate at the age of 2-3 years and gives birth in late Spring, usually to twins. The DEC states the the annual population growth, without management, is 40%. The number of deer which realistically can be expected to be present in Pound Ridge by 2015 is astounding. The chances for starvation and disease are equally as great.

The deer problem is not unique to us. As the National Wildlife Federation writes, it is a problem from Minnesota to the Smokey Mountains.

### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Our concern is not so much for the gardens or landscaping that we purchased and planted, but for the woods and wetlands that have drastically changed. Many wild flowers have gone. Mianus Gorge is conducting deer exclosure studies. They are trying to determine which plants will come back if the deer can't eat them. They are very concerned that some of our native flowers may be lost forever.

Aquarion, the water company, is concerned that since seedling trees are being eaten before they can become saplings, the woods are not getting the forest regeneration they need. There is no longer enough ground cover to hold back the soil during heavy rains. The ability of the soil to

absorb rainfall is also threatened. A key concern for us since we rely upon water tables and wells.

As the understory of our woods disappears so does the habitat of other animals. A quote from the Ridgefield deer study:

"Native plants are just one link in the chain of life affected by overbrowsing. Insects that depend on the plants for food and shelter are disappearing. Birds, amphibians, reptiles, and small mammals that depend on the insects as well as on plants can no longer find food, and are disappearing.

"Migratory songbirds, in particular, suffer from the lack of insects. Whether they are birds that arrive from the South to nest here, or stop by for food on their way north, they are finding fewer native insects to eat. This lack of food is especially affecting nesting populations.

"Native woodland plants that bear berries and seeds that feed many birds are also being destroyed.

"In addition, many understory plants provide nesting sites for songbirds. When the understory is gone, so are the nesting sites. There are indications that some bird species, formerly regulars in our woods, are now disappearing." The NYSDEC agrees. Greenwich Audubon has used sharp shooters on their property. The New Jersey Audubon Society, in March 2005, cites over-abundant white-tailed deer as an "alien disruption" threatening the integrity of the natural ecosystem.

As our woods become bare stands of mature trees and an understory of alien species supporting little biodiversity moves in, the deer move to the wetlands, a protected daytime shelter.

We do not know the effect of 30-50 deer per square mile upon the quality of the water in our wetlands.

### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Since there are no natural predators left to balance the deer population, we must intrude. Fittingly so, perhaps, since we caused this in the first place. Sadly, none of the effective solutions are nice.

**Fencing.** Deer can jump fences up to 10 feet in height. Fencing is costly and can be unsightly. Regular fence maintenance is essential. Fencing pushes the deer onto neighbors' property. It only helps an individual home owner not a community. Fencing can prevent the migration of other wildlife through land necessary for the continuation of their species.

RESIDENT, TOWN OF POUND RIDGE  
POUND RIDGE, NEW YORK 10576

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WHITE PLAINS, NY  
Permit No. 7624

Pound Ridge Conservation Board  
Town House, Westchester Avenue  
Pound Ridge, NY 10576

# WHITE TAILED DEER AND POUND RIDGE

That Pound Ridge has been affected by our large population of white-tailed deer is irrefutable. What, if anything, should be done about it is open for discussion. Join us Saturday, December 10 at 10 AM at the Town House to express your views.

The Pound Ridge Conservation Board was asked by the town to study the effect of deer on our environment. Here is a brief synopsis of our findings and the references and sources we used as a basis for a public discussion.

**Repellents.** The effectiveness of chemical repellents and frightening devices decreases with increasing deer density. Deer often ignore repellents as food becomes scarce and competition increases. Repellents must be reapplied frequently and may cause plant damage.

**Feeding.** Feeding programs are self-defeating and do not prevent deer damage. Concentrating deer at feeding stations increases disease transmission problems. Deer can become overly dependent on supplemental food. It is against the law to feed deer in New York State.

#### NON-LETHAL POPULATION CONTROL

Any deer control method will have to be sustained or repeated at intervals. Most methods involve the removal of deer.

**Habitat Alteration.** To remove the deer's food source would destroy the environment.

**Capture and Relocation** Costs range up to \$800 per deer depending upon methods used. Capture and transport cause stress. Many of the tranquilizers used on deer pose a substantial health risk to humans accidentally exposed to them. A DEC permit is required to capture and relocate deer

**...to the wild.** Three-quarters or more of relocated deer usually die within one year since they are unfamiliar with their new range. Permits are not issued to relocate deer to the wild because the low survival rate does not justify the risk.

**...to deer farms.** There are several deer farms in New York that raise and slaughter deer for the venison market. There is concern that deer from the wild may introduce diseases to the domestic stock.

**Fertility Control.** Experimental efforts are still in a very early research stage. So far, it has limited success. It is expensive and ineffective when used on a free-range deer population.

Steroids and immunocontraceptives are being studied as well as vasectomy and tubal ligation. Techniques not involving handling deer offer the most hope. A major problem for all birth control techniques is treating enough deer in the wild to be effective. Since this does not affect the present population, it is a long term solution.

Because venison is consumed by humans any drug must have FDA approval. There is no drug currently on the market that is FDA approved.

#### LETHAL METHODS

**Predator Introduction.** Coyotes now occupy habitat in Pound Ridge. Packs can kill deer but they obviously are not controlling the population.

**Parasite or Disease Introduction.** Risks make this impractical. Other wildlife or livestock could be infected. That fact alone makes it unacceptable.

**Poisons.** There is no safe way to deliver lethal dosages to free-ranging deer. The dangers and associated risks to humans and other animals makes this also unacceptable.

**Capture and Kill.** Deer could be captured by use of traps, drive nets, rocket nets, tranquilizer darts etc. Once caught they could be shot and the meat used by food banks. The costs would vary with the method used.

**Bait and Shoot.** This is the technique used by the Town of Greenwich. Deer were baited to strategically located feeding stations and shot. Some believe that professional hunters are safer. This has not been tested. This option is less expensive than Capture and Kill but can still cost \$500 per deer.

**Traditional Hunting.** Hunters, whether using rifle or long bows, must have passed sportsmen education courses before being licensed by New York State. This is the most cost-effective method since the labor is supplied at no cost.

The problem with traditional hunting in Westchester is the decline of the number of hunters and that only bow hunting is allowed.

**Controlled Hunting.** Controlled hunts can be tailored to meet a variety of local conditions. Marksmanship requirements and restrictions on who may hunt, the methods, times and locations, and the sex, age and number of deer that may be taken are often employed. The DEC may be able to offer some assistance.

#### DEC RECOMMENDATIONS

Much of the information presented in this paper was taken from DEC writings. Their recommendations, in order of suitability, for dealing with an overabundant deer population in urban and suburban areas are:

1. controlled recreational hunting.
2. non-recreational shooting with use of meat and hides.
3. non-recreational shooting without use of meat and hides.
4. capture and relocation to deer farms.
5. capture and slaughter with use of meat and hides.

6. capture and slaughter without use of meat and hides.

The following factors were considered for each option:

1. Species perpetuation.
2. Safety.
3. Humane treatment.
4. Cost.
5. Public use and access.
6. Nuisance concentration or relocation.
7. Disease transmission.

#### HOW TRADITIONAL HUNTING CAN BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE.

The Pound Ridge Concentration Board has investigated ways to make traditional bow hunting more effective in controlling the deer population. Following are our recommendations to the town board.

##### **The Earn A Buck program.**

Require hunters to take a doe before they receive a buck tag. For each doe taken, they will receive an either sex tag. Many hunters pass up a doe to try for a trophy deer. (A buck with antlers.) This would insure that does are taken.

##### **Bringing homeowners and hunters together.**

If local landowners wish that their property be bow hunted they can register at the Town House, giving their name and phone number. They would be supplied with a questionnaire to assist them when interviewing potential hunters.

Hunters could contact the landowner and be interviewed. The hunter would receive written permission from the landowner to display on his dashboard.

The Town House will issue each hunter a number for each tree stand that would be posted on the stands tree and registered at the town house.

##### **Opening of town land for hunting.**

The Conservation Board recommends that town owned land be opened for hunting. Hunting would be limited to hunters who register at the Town House and are assigned certain days. All hunting must be from tree stands only. The days and hours of the hunting would be posted.

##### **Extending the season.**

The Conservation Board recommends that town petition the DEC to extend the season through January. We suggest a later season because bucks have shed their antlers and the hunters will be hunting for meat rather than trophies. Leaves will be off the trees increasing visibility.

#### Will it work?

Quite possibly. Wilton feels that their bow hunting program has been successful. For a program to work in Pound Ridge we need to open up more land for hunting. That includes: private land, town land, county land, water company land and local preserves.

We need to attract more bow hunters. Having a registration system will help the town monitor them. A longer season will increase the harvest.

#### FIRE ARMS IN POUND RIDGE

The NYSDEC has given permission to some residents of Pound Ridge to use shot guns with slugs to cull the herd after the residents proved to the DEC that the deer had damaged vegetation on their property.

#### THE QUESTION

Suburban development has created an abundant, predator-free environment for the white-tailed deer. As the deer population continues to grow, their increased appetite is severely altering the environment. The result is a loss of habitat and food supply that is necessary for the survival of many other species.

We changed the environment and allowed deer to flourish. Now, the deer are changing the environment causing other species to decline.

What should we do?

#### THE ANSWER?

It's for all of us to decide. Please come to the Town House December 10 at 10 AM and speak. Together, hopefully, we'll find a way to protect the environment of Pound Ridge.

#### REFERENCES

- A Citizen's Guide to the Management of White-tailed Deer in Urban and Suburban New York
- Monmouth County Park System Deer Management Background Report.
- NYS Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide.
- National Wildlife Federation
- Mianus River Gorge, Executive Director.
- Wilton Study.
- Greenwich Study.
- Ridgefield Study.
- Record Review.
- Lewisboro Ledger