**Town of Pound Ridge Police Department**



**2012**

**POUND RIDGE DEER MANAGEMENT**

**FINAL REPORT**



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**2012 Pound Ridge Deer Management Program**

**FINAL REPORT**

**Introduction**

The Pound Ridge Deer Management program completed its 7th year of operation at the conclusion of the 2012 hunting season. Since the start of the program, the total deer take has been 432 deer on town managed hunting properties. This report provides a review and comparison of the 2012 statistics and those of the previous 6 years of the program. As with previous reports, some portions of this document are identical to those of previous years. Certain aspects of the Pound Ridge Deer Management Program do not change on an annual basis so this report simply describes those functions within the program as they currently exist. If there is no change in that particular area of the program, there is no need to change how it is reported.

This report provides no scientific data with respect to recovery of forest understory, rehabitation of small animals, insects or migratory birds. Data collected and photographs taken of identical locations each year will be incorporated in the years ahead to analyze any identifiable recovery in understory or reduction in deer density

Three Pound Ridge Land Conservancy properties (Bye Preserve, Clarke Preserve and the Armstrong Preserve) continue to be hunted as part of the program. The Eastwoods Preserve, owned by the Town of Pound Ridge continues to be hunted. In addition, approximately 1,166 acres of Aquarion property were available for hunting in 2012. Parts of these properties extend into the Town of Lewisboro. Upon completion and review by the Pound Ridge Deer Management Committee, recommendations by the committee will be made to the Pound Ridge Town Board as to the continuation of the program and any future goals with respect to Deer Management in Pound Ridge.

**BRIEF HISTORY**

In 2005, after review by local environmental groups and at the request of the Pound Ridge Town Board, a deer management plan was proposed. The plan was discussed at meetings in the town with local, environmental and state officials providing guidance and input. The Pound Ridge Town Board adopted a small-scale plan in 2006. The plan was simple; find a way to begin to cull the deer herd in Pound Ridge on a limited basis.

The Pound Ridge Police Department under the direction of the Pound Ridge Town Board and with input from the Pound Ridge Deer Management Committee, NYS DEC and the Pound Ridge Conservation Board would operate the program and maintain all records related to this program. This has been done since the start of the program in Pound Ridge and all data has been recorded and reviewed annually.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

No program like this can run without a dedicated group of individuals focused on researching and resolving this issue. Various conservation groups, the Town Board and the Deer Management Committee continue to do an excellent job in researching, assembling and maintaining a program when public opinion has not always been in their favor. Jon Powers and Bill Harding have been the recipient of many phone calls from this author when procedural or technical issues arise and advice is needed. In addition, Mark Weckel of the Mianus program and Dan Aitchison from Westchester County Parks and Recreation have been a tremendous resource and wealth of knowledge. We have partnered with Westchester County, a vital component of success and as a result an excellent working relationship has evolved with Dan Aitchison from Westchester Parks and Recreation. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the many hours of work put into this program year round by Sergeant Tom Mulcahy, Police Officer Anthony DiBernardino and Caroline Meyer. This program is not an October through December program. It is constantly being reviewed for improvements. There are weekly communications with current hunters and interested hunters with respect to the program. There is constant analysis of the properties and how to best cull the populations on each property. These individuals do much of the work and do it without compensation. They are dedicated to its success and should be commended for their work efforts.

**POUND RIDGE DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

The Pound Ridge Deer Management program is simple. Utilizing bow hunters to cull the deer herd thereby reducing the population density of deer to an environmentally sustainable number. Regulated deer hunting is a proven effective, efficient and inexpensive tool to manage a deer population. While bow hunting is not the quickest way to cull the herd**,**  it is effective and certainly safer than the hunting alternatives. Our program simply allows and controls hunting and gives access to lands that prior to 2006, were not previously hunted. Based on current county regulations, we utilize only bow hunters and operate only within the time limits of the traditional Westchester County NY bow hunting season. Some research indicates that a deer density of 11 – 15 per square mile density is one that is sustainable by the environment. Absent the invasion or introduction of natural predators in sufficient numbers or some level of deer management, the deer population would continue to grow. This results in a variety of consequences, all serious, some causing human health related issues, traffic hazards and the destruction or significant imbalance of an eco-system which effects not only plant life but other species of wildlife as well. In addition, according to DEP, water quality suffers dramatic increase of run off caused by lack of ground cover and understory. To what extent we cull the herd is determined by the deer density.

Why Bow Hunting? Shotgun usage for deer hunting is not permitted in Westchester County. There may be some circumstance where DEC may permit the use of shotgun as part of a deer management program but given the human population density, the public concern for safety and proximity of the hunted land to residential dwellings, it was not an option that was given much chance of success from a public perception of safety .

Experimental research on fertility control for white-tailed deer is ongoing, but as of this writing, there is no fertility control substance that is approved for general use, including immuno-contraception vaccines or ingestibles. Even assuming the future development of an effective fertility control substance, the costs of large-scale administration of these substances in the field would be prohibitive. In addition, serious field methodology concerns remain, such as human consumption of treated deer, incomplete administration to all target deer, the prevention of inadvertent multiple doses to previously treated deer, and inadvertent administration to other species. Individual field sterilization using immobilization and surgical techniques is inappropriate for large scale use. For these and other reasons, field fertility control is not a viable option for deer population control in Pound Ridge.

Bow hunting was chosen as it is an existing means of deer hunting already in Westchester County. While it may not be the most effective method for culling in the short term, it is the collective belief that it will have a positive impact but may take 15-20 years for that impact to take place. It is a program that, over time, will exponentially reduce the size of the herd. To what extent we can get ahead of the curve is yet to be determined. That will take research and time to determine the deer density and the return of the understory. In addition, there must be some level of bio-studies done along with a deer count to determine what the Biological Carrying Capacity (BCC) of the local forest actually is. Regardless, it is the safest and for our purposes the most effective method, short of doing nothing.

So where are we and where do we go from here? Studies of the population growth of deer have been conducted for years. Some show very dramatic results like those done in the State of Michigan. One common result is that doing nothing is not the answer. Deer proliferate. If we discontinue the program or scale it back, the greater the problem becomes and the more difficult and costly the solution the next time we address the issue.

As we continue in our program going into the next 10 years, we must assemble some level of reliable information to determine the deer density in Pound Ridge. A census for deer by an infrared study would be the best case scenario. This would provide information as to the distribution of deer, densities in residential areas versus large parklands such as the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation (4,500 acres), Aquarion Watershed properties (1,200 acres) and other large uninhabited lands such as Land Trust properties, Conservation properties and open space properties. Another alternative is a road count. This is completed by driving a series of transects along roadways throughout the town. Deer observations are documented and the data is entered into a pre-determined formula by DEC. This formula produces an estimated deer density based on the data entered. While it may not be a perfect method, it will provide valuable trend data over time to determine the success of the program. Absent any accurate information, the only way to address the issue is to over-cull the herd. This is not the best answer but given the proliferation of deer and the limited properties hunted, over-culling would be necessary to even maintain the status quo.

Ideally, and perhaps in conjunction with other entities currently involved in deer management, we should conduct infrared flyovers to get the most accurate count and the areas of greatest density. While there is an economic cost, perhaps some environmental grant funding could be utilized to allay the costs of such an undertaking.

Finally, after assessing the deer densities and distribution, we must look at another factor: The health of the herd. In 2009, The Northeast Deer Technical Committee published in its annual report their concept of carrying capacity for deer on a parcel of land. In that report, they defined Biological Carrying Capacity (BCC) as the number of deer that a given parcel of land can support in good physical condition over an extended period of time. Though the consensus may be an average deer density of 11-15 per square mile, that number is based on many factors. We must consider that some environments can maintain a higher density than others. Ultimately we must balance the deer density with the sustainable habitat in which it resides. When we achieve that goal, we must continue to hunt and cull the herd in order to maintain that level, remembering that deer proliferate and if we lose ground, (no pun intended) we will have to increase our efforts once again.

**SAFETY**

It was clear in the discussions at the Town Board meetings and public hearings that there was a consensus acknowledging the need to cull the deer herd in Pound Ridge and by extension, Westchester County. The issue was how to adopt a program with a goal of culling the deer herd while maximizing safety and keeping the economic impact on the taxpayers to a minimum.

Since Westchester County only permits bow hunting for the purposes of taking deer, this made the safety issue much easier to address. Bow hunting is much safer than hunting with any type of firearm. With a bow, the hunter must be close to the deer and have an unobstructed view of the deer. Unobstructed means that nothing, not even the smallest branch of a sapling must be between the deer and the hunter as this will deflect the arrow resulting in a failed shot.

While other methods may prove more effective in a shorter time period, this method will produce results over time and keep the economic impact to the taxpayer at a minimum. This is the only way a small municipality like Pound Ridge can attack this problem in a cost effective and productive manner.

**Proficiency Testing**

As part of the Pound Ridge program, all hunters participating in our program are required to take a proficiency test in order to obtain the permits necessary to hunt on the properties controlled by the Pound Ridge program. This holds true even if the hunter has qualified in previous years. The proficiency test requires the hunters to fire 3 arrows into a target at a distance of 25 yards (75 feet) into a 9 inch circle. The three arrows must all hit the target. Any arrow that does not hit the target fails the hunter and they are disqualified. Keep in mind that target shooting during proficiency testing can be much more difficult than the actual hunt. When target shooting and having an instructor standing directly behind you observing and knowing that there is no room for error, the stress of the proficiency test is at least equal to the pressure of taking a deer. As a result of the proficiency testing and inspection of the hunting equipment, we are getting a highly qualified hunter but only from the perspective of accuracy. In addition to the proficiency testing, there is mandatory meeting for all hunters prior to the start of the season. At this meeting, our goals and objectives are distributed as well as a discussion on potential obstacles for that particular season. These obstacles include but are not limited to weather, food source, etc…

The issue we continue to face and must begin to address as we move forward is the skill of our hunters and not just their ability to hit a target.There is an old saying that rings so true: The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. This is, in my opinion, the textbook definition of why a hunter can be unsuccessful. If you're hunting the same stand season after season, if you're not hunting enough hours, if doing the exact same thing over and over isn't producing a successful harvest then you need to change your tactics, change stand locations, do some more scouting, do some stalking, go into the area from a different direction, speak to other local hunters about their observations, use cameras and confirm your observations. All of these tactics are what turn proficient and accurate target shooters into very successful hunters. Success will come to those who are willing to adjust their thinking, then their hunting tactics and actions. If your goal is only a trophy buck, then you are probably not interested in a controlled hunt deer management program. However, hunters who are willing, over time, to learn the skills needed to successfully harvest deer can benefit tremendously from a deer management program. It is an opportunity to study a particular land parcel over time. You can learn the deer patterns even as they change, cull the herd and then over time, cull to a healthy herd which will produce healthy bucks which are why most hunters go out in the first place.

This is where we must now direct our efforts. It is clear that in most, if not all, of the DMAP programs we see, 20 percent of the hunters take 80 percent of the deer.

This is, once again, where we should look to improve in 2013. You will see in the charts later in this report that our hunting times were less than 20% of the available time to hunt. Our stated goal was 20-30 % which is the highest we expected to achieve from most hunters. You will also see that 5 of our 42 hunters were responsible for more than 50 percent of our total harvest. You will see that less than 30% of our hunters spent more than 20% of some portion of the season in the woods hunting. You will see that less than 10 percent of hunters scouted their properties prior to the season which probably resulted in poor stand placement given the limited food source.

It is extremely difficult to be assigned a hunting property in June, spend no time scouting and then enter the property in October to place your tree stand. Without spending time in the woods, studying the browsing patterns, looking for scrapes, rubs, footprints, pellets, food sources, weather, and nibbling signs you are limiting your chances of success in a hunt much less a culling program. Scouting is as important a component of hunting for deer as is the hunt itself. Since deer are typically most active near dawn and dusk, scouting efforts should be concentrated in the middle of the day to minimize disturbing the deer.

Summer is a great time to start observing potential food sources to figure out where the deer will likely be feeding during the hunting season. Scouting should be completed at least two weeks before the hunting season opens. If you spend too much time in your hunting area in the last week or two before the season, you risk scaring the deer off or at the very least, changing their patterns which will have an impact on your success.

A dedicated hunter realizes that the end of hunting season just means the beginning of scouting season. During the post-season, tracks become more visible in the mud and snow, and drag marks can now be seen clearly.

One final note on the proficiency exam: All hunters are required to pass our proficiency test. Many local hunters and friends of public officials that attended were not given any professional courtesies. All were held to the requirements set forth by the committee. This ensures the quality and legitimacy of the proficiency testing and the program itself.

It is also strongly recommended that all hunters wear safety harnesses while in tree stands. This is simply another mechanism of safety for the hunters

In 2012, proficiency tests were conducted and 49 hunters were approved as part of the program. As is always the case, during the course of the hunting season, hunters are unable to participate due to health reasons, family matters that arise, work related issues and other events that prevent the hunters from acceptable levels of participation. These are addressed on a case by case basis. They can also have a significant impact on success or failure of the program in the short term.

**Tree Stands**

In 2012, hunting on all Pound Ridge DMAP properties was only permitted from a tree stand. Ground hunting was prohibited. This was done as safety was a major concern at the initial public hearings and board meetings. Without getting in to the hunting advantages of tree stands, there is a distinct public safety advantage when hunting from a tree stand. The trajectory of the arrow is at a significant down angle. This prevents stray arrows and maximizes the safety of the local property owners and other individuals who may be in the immediate area.

As part of the program, hunters are permitted to leave their tree stands in the woods during the season. Hunters are provided orange water proof tags and wire ties. These are attached to the bottom of the tree stand. Written on the tag and visible from 20 feet away are the hunters name, tag number and stand number. Any tree stand not properly marked is removed and the hunter’s permit to hunt on the town’s property is revoked. This is how we identify this stand as belonging to one of our hunters. All untagged stands are confiscated. This prevents illegal hunters from interfering with the program. One final note on tree stands. The tree stands must be safe, properly installed, properly sized and cause no damage to the tree when installed. This is part of what is inspected during the property inspections throughout the season by the police department. Additionally, GPS (longitude and latitude) coordinates for all tree stands must be provided.

**Alcohol consumption**

The consumption of alcohol by any hunters while on town property and hunting or scouting is strictly prohibited and will result in immediate revocation of the permit to hunt as well as the potential for arrest if in violation of any state hunting laws, penal laws or local ordinances. There have been no complaints or violations in this area.

**ID Cards and Parking Permits**

Identifying hunters and the concern over unfamiliar people parking cars and walking in and out of the designated hunting areas was an issue discussed at the public hearings by several residents.

All hunters that successfully complete the proficiency testing and equipment inspections are personally interviewed by the Chief of Police and the Police Sergeant assisting with the management of the deer program. All of the rules and regulations are carefully reviewed with every qualified hunter that participates. The Pound Ridge “HUNTER ID” cards given to each qualified hunter is a photo identification card signed by the Police Sergeant at time of issue. The hunters must carry the ID card any time they are on the property either hunting or scouting. The hunters must produce the ID card to anyone who requests to see it. The ID card contains their name, date of birth, photograph (without glasses if worn), permit number and police contact information. The parking permit is used to identify the hunters vehicle. This allows for quick and easy identification by residents and the police if a question exists as to why the vehicle is parked in a particular location. In addition, specific areas for parking were identified to every qualified hunter. These areas were designated by POUND RIDGE DMAP parking signs. Any hunters who fail to display their parking permits are given one warning. If more than one hunter came in a vehicle, each hunter is required to display his or her parking permit on the dashboard of the vehicle. From a safety perspective, this was done for three reasons. It allowed some comfort level with the local residents that lived near the designated parking location since they could quickly and easily identify the vehicle, it allowed the police to quickly confirm the occupants of the vehicle when comparing the parking permit numbers with the hunters assigned the property and it reduces the number of calls from residents for suspicious vehicles since they were identified by the parking passes. In 2012, no complaints were received by the police department involving hunters in the Pound Ridge program. In fact, many hunters received encouragement from residents on neighboring properties as well as users of the various preserves.

**Hunter Call-In /Out requirements**

All hunters are required to call in and call out each and every time they hunt, even if it is multiple times per day. The number they call goes to DMAP voicemail at the police station and the calls are confirmed and logged daily. This process is done for several reasons. The safety of the hunter. The comfort and safety to the residents knowing that the local police department knows exactly who is legally in the woods hunting or scouting. If a hunter was injured in the woods and did not call out at the end of the hunting day, his residence, place of business and cell phone were called to confirm that they had left the woods. This prevents any hunters from lying injured in the woods for more than a few hours. This safety issue was not negotiable as it was felt it significantly reduced any liability to the town. In 2012, all hunters complied with this policy. In addition to the safety reasons, we record the time of day the hunter is in the woods and compare the successful hunt data over time to determine if there is an advantage to a.m. or p.m. hunting success.

**Environmental Safety**

During the course of the season, members of the police department walk each of the properties. This allowed for the inspection of the properties and the tree stands to ensure no safety issues existed. It was also done to protect the environment from any waste or pollution by the hunters. There were no observed environmental issues during any inspections in 2012, including damage to any trees as a result of tree stand usage or by hunters trying to clear a line of sight from their tree stands. All hunters were very respectful of their assigned property and recognized their privilege to hunt on the property.

**Rules and Regulations violations**

There were no major violations of any program rules or regulations by any hunters during the 2012 hunting season.

We did notice a slight decrease by trespassers on the Aquarion properties. In previous years this issue was problematic and impacted the culling. To mitigate this issue, permanent signs (placed with Aquarion’s permission) were installed in 2010 on various Aquarion properties used by hikers and dog walkers on those same Aquarion properties. Hunters had reported a significant decrease and in some cases a complete reversal of the previous years encounters. However, in 2011, there was a noticeable increase in usage by hikers and dog walkers on some Aquarion properties, despite the signs. In fact in some cases, the signs were removed by persons unknown and replaced by member of the Pound Ridge Police Department. This situation was monitored a bit more closely in 2012 and the results were less public usage on the aforementioned property.

**Wounded Deer / Deer Carcasses / Gut piles**

There were no gut piles observed on any of the properties 2 days after an animal was taken.

In 2012, there was 1 deer wounded and not recovered immediately. We have developed a great relationship with Deer Search, an organization that uses dogs to track wounded deer. We utilized them on 1 occasion in 2012. We ultimately did not locate the wounded deer. At the end of the day, our wound loss/not recovered percentages are well below the national average**.**

**COSTS**

To keep the costs to a minimum, one salaried employee had responsibilities added to existing responsibilities which has a net cost of zero. The remaining employee costs were limited to the dates of the proficiency exam where personnel were needed to conduct the exam, organize and distribute paperwork for each hunter that qualified and distribute the identification tags. All other operations involving property checks were conducted according to work schedules so no overtime costs would be incurred. In our 2007 study, the average cost to run this program was approximately $53.58 per deer. That included initial equipment purchases. In 2012, the average cost per deer taken was approximately $26.16.

**PROPERTIES**

**Sach’s Park**

* **19.08 acres +**

Sach’s Park continues to be a property that should be hunted given its location and activity. Given it’s proximity to the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, this property should be hunted permanently since whatever is taken will be replaced by the abundant herd in the Reservation. Westchester County did permit our hunters assigned to Sach’s Park to enter and hunt a large portion of the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation that was otherwise inaccessible to their hunters. It will eventually prove successful and is a valuable addition to both our program and the county program since a large land mass was now being hunted. It is a rugged property that should be assigned to seasoned hunters and those willing to learn from them which was the case in 2012. Though the results were low, the value of the education to the newer hunters will prove itself in the years to come.

**Horseshoe Hill**

* **16.73 acres**

This property is probably the textbook definition of a travel corridor. There is virtually no under-story anywhere on this property. There are few saplings or any other small plant life that could support a deer population. There are no areas on this property that provide cover or concealment for deer, especially male deer. The lack of any cover or concealment also makes it difficult for the smaller species to survive as they easily fall victim to predation. The deer markings (hoof prints, scrapes and rubs) on this property enter and exit through three particular locations. For all intents and purposes, there is no consistent deer population that “resides” on this property. Hunting this property is simply a means of culling deer that move from perimeter properties through the Horseshoe Hill property making it a true travel corridor. Each year, we try to determine the best method for hunting this property, if at all.

**Winterbottom / Indian Hill / Aquarion**

* **84.689 acres**

There were many sightings but tree stand placement was constantly adjusted to get to the areas where the deer were active. It is a property that presents challenges to an unseasoned hunter. More experienced and more frequent hunting is needed on this property to increase the take.

**Pound Ridge Land Conservancy Properties**

**Clarke Preserve**

* **69.19 acres**

With the acorn crop almost non-existent in 2012 as was the case in 2011, we saw a decrease in activity within the borders of the Clarke Preserve. The number of deer taken in 2012 was still impressive given the constant usage by hikers. There were temporary signs placed at the entrance to the preserve. This continues to be one of the most successfully hunted properties. It is fairly clear to us that the herd on this property travels in from the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation and the patterns here for the past 7 years have all indicated that particular browsing pattern by both the male and female deer. In addition, adjoining properties that remain fenced create a corridor for this pattern. Two of our hunters have been given permission to hunt one of the adjoining properties though those numbers were not included on the final numbers for our program.

**Bye Preserve**

* **23.58 acres**

The Bye Preserve was hunted more in 2012 than in all previous years combined. The Bye Preserve presents as a fairly rugged property to hunt and although there is a definite population of deer on the property, they are difficult to hunt. The deer tend to populate the lower and rear portion of the property which abuts the Hsu/Oceanic Navigation property. While there is activity on the upper portion of the property, the greater activity is in the lower area.

**Armstrong Preserve**

* **41.47 acres**

The Armstrong Preserve was hunted by individuals not controlled by the Pound Ridge DMAP program. There was no reporting to us and therefore I have included no numbers with respect to culling. We should be looking to connect the Armstrong Preserve, the DEP property and the Richards preserve to make this one large hunted land mass for the 2013 season. We must begin this process early and meet with DEP to arrange this. I believe that we can accomplish this with the help of DEC and the Pound Ridge Committee as well as the Conservation Board supporting this idea. I have suggested this approach for the previous three years with no decision or assistance to complete this collected hunt. I believe that the abundance of deer in these locations, coupled with a controlled deer management hunt would result in a deer take similar to or better than the best years in the Clarke Preserve.

**Aquarion Water properties**

* **Approximately 1,166 acres**

We have, over the course of our 7 years of deer management, developed a strong relationship with the Aquarion Water Company. Aquarion has allowed us complete oversight of the hunters on all Aquarion properties in Pound Ridge during the hunting season and permits us to conduct the program in a manner we deem necessary for success. Any changes or alterations to the program are filtered through Aquarion so that they are aware of the changes and can run them past their staff and administration as well. Aquarion has a member of their organization participate as part of our Pound Ridge Deer Management Committee. It is this continued relationship that will allow us to demonstrate our successful efforts in trying to establish partnerships with entities other than the Town of Pound Ridge to expand and improve our program. Aquarion is a remarkable partner in this effort and their coordination and cooperation is critical to the success of our program given the acreage they own in the Town of Pound Ridge.

The Aquarion property in all of Pound Ridge continues to remain opened for hunting as part of the Pound Ridge DMAP program. The hunters qualified in the Pound Ridge program were the only hunters permitted to hunt on the property in NY. The total acreage hunted on Aquarion property is difficult to determine. All Aquarion properties in Pound Ridge are hunted. This totals about 1,166.94 acres which translates to approximately 1.823 square miles. Realistically, only about 1/3 ½ of the actual property is hunted. This is for several reasons. There is a buffer zone around the property. This is an imaginary perimeter approximately 100 feet from the complete property line around each entire parcel. Hunters are not permitted to hunt within this space to allow a buffer from private residences and other neighboring properties. In addition, we do not “over-hunt” the properties by assigning too many hunters per property. This results in smaller areas within the property being hunted. Based on our property checks, the placement of the tree stands and the areas hunted and not hunted, we estimate the total property actually hunted. In addition, we do not consider water sources (the reservoirs) as part of the parcel for obvious reasons. As a result of all of this, there is about one third to one half of the property that is actually hunted. We do not believe changing that procedure will result in an increase in productivity. In fact, we believe it will reduce our productivity. We have found that more hunters do not necessarily mean more deer taken.

Many of the deer taken in 2012 were on Aquarion properties though hunters consistently reported smaller herds of deer as compared to previous years in the program. We should continue to hunt these properties and maintain our relationship with Aquarion in order to do so. We cannot be sure why the smaller herds were observed. While we would like to believe our efforts have started to bear fruit, the reality is without conducting the necessary studies, we are only looking at one half of the equation and totally eliminating that portion of the program that validates our success or failure. Deer density studies, bio-assay’s and whatever other methodologies exist must be introduced immediately to see what effect we are having.

**D.M.A.P. Tags**

In 2012, the Pound Ridge Deer Management program was issued 150 D.M.A.P. Antlerless Deer Carcass tags by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Deer Management Assistance Program. The hunters were instructed as to the process for reporting and then issued the tag. The value of these tags is that we are permitted to distribute them as part of our program which in turn allows us to take many more deer. DEC has been very cooperative and worked closely with us to monitor our program and without their assistance, our program would have no chance of success to the level needed. The tags are distributed as deer are taken. Each tag is inspected for accurate completion and each deer is inspected to confirm the information on the tag. In addition, our own Pound Ridge Deer management harvest tags are completed as part of the DMAP program. It provides us with information and is also a check against the DMAP tags issued by DEC to ensure accurate counts. We must continue to use these tags in order to be successful and it is anticipated that DEC will continue to issue them to us annually as requested. It would be helpful to receive additional either-sex tags to make life easier for our most successful hunters, but DEC, which distributes the tags, is reluctant to do so at this point.

**ANALYSIS**

The 2012 season presented some significant obstacles which impacted the success of the DMAP program. The most obvious obstacle was a total lack of food source in most areas within the forest. Simply put, the acorn crop was non-existent for a second year in a row. Deer had to change their browsing patterns to find adequate food source.

In addition, unseasonably warm weather, Hurricane Sandy and the aftermath, as well as no appreciable snow fall and primarily nocturnal activity made the hunting even more difficult.

Hunters that understood the obstacles and adjusted to the changing browsing patterns had some success. Hunters that could adjust their schedules towards those times of movement also had greater success. That said, even our consistently high performing annual hunters did notice fewer deer in the woods.

Over the past 7 years, we have collected a variety of data in the town’s deer management program. We continue to collect the same data and are adding other forms of data. In addition, annual photographs are being taken to determine any type of forest regeneration and return of the under-story that once existed in many of the areas now barren. As we conclude our 7th year and enter our 8th year of the program, we should conduct some level of study to determine the current deer density per square mile. It is my hope that we can utilize 4 hunters and the members of our deer management committee to conduct this count using the transect method that was discussed in early 2011. Clearly the impact of taking the number of deer we have over the past 7 years must have resulted in a change in deer density to some degree. Though we may not yet be close to our goal of 11-15 deer per square mile, we must begin to analyze where we are in this process. We must also determine if the 11-15 is the appropriate number. This information is necessary for us to determine how to proceed. Deer management may not be called for in areas where lower densities now exist and fewer deer do not threaten the environment. These areas may be simply served by allowing hunting to maintain the current population. In addition, having those deer density numbers would allow us something to compare to the original numbers, chart the changes and adjust our program to the areas of highest deer density if in fact the environmental data trends in that direction. Trend data is critical to our goals moving forward as it is this data which will give us more specific direction for hunting. We may achieve our goals in one area of town and simply allow hunting in those areas to maintain a herd size while focusing our efforts elsewhere to reduce the herd size in another area. While we are not quite there yet, without specific data, we simply do not know and are just guessing. That is unacceptable in our 8th year. The environmental side of this equation needs to begin and without it the program will fail simply based on missing data. Part of the issue is time demands needed for such a study. The increasing activity in the police department, reductions in the budget and man hour restrictions, make it difficult to conduct this particular study. The possibility of having an outside entity such as the Land Conservancy, QDMA or some other resource should be considered.

We have taken 432 deer in a 2.5 square mile hunting area (approx. 1,600 acres) during the seven years since the DMAP program began. We should have and could have taken more deer. Analyzing the data is easy if you simply count the deer. From 2008 through 2012 we have hunted the exact same properties and are averaging about 32.4 deer culled per square mile in each of the last 5 years on the exact same properties hunted. In the whole scheme of things that number has value. We will not know it’s true value until we have done the necessary scientific studying to evaluate the environment and any changes that have occurred. We need to have this data to give the DMAP program direction both locally and regionally. This is the most important need going forward into 2013.

In addition to the deer taken, we are also seeing trends in hunting patterns by the hunters. What we are seeing is that we have eliminated the selectivity of the hunters. We were seeing an improvement in the amount of time the hunters actually hunted prior to the 2011 season. Hurricane Sandy, and the aftermath, resulted in approximately 3 weeks of the late October and early November season going on without any time spent in the woods as most hunters were dealing with personal losses or increased work hours responding to the aftermath. This was similar to the circumstances with Hurricane Irene in 2011. Losing 3 weeks of each season will certainly result in lower numbers. Though we can only guess what the umbers may have been, the simple answer is we would have taken more deer had these events not occurred.

We must continue to solicit private landowners to open their properties to hunting if they have adequately sized property and if deer density studies show levels that require culling. Even if they do not, we know that deer proliferate. At the very least hunting should be conducted to keep those density numbers as low as we can.

We must continue to review our methods and discuss the program as an interactive program with our private land owners, the Mianus Program, the Conservation Board, the Westchester Land Trust, the County Parks Department, NYC DEP, NYS DEC and our neighboring towns. Any program that does not include all of these entities will not succeed.

As I indicated earlier in my report , it is difficult to determine the effects of our local Deer Management program in just 7 hunting seasons. There are so many variables to this type of program and one change can dramatically affect the results. In 2012 we maintained unseasonably warm weather throughout the hunting season. In 2009 as in 2008 we had unseasonably warmer weather in the early part of the deer hunting season. This had an obvious effect on the early results. Perhaps we should consider extending the hunting season. There was a very obvious shortage of acorns and other food source in the woods in 2012. As a result, most deer browsed the perimeter properties, feeding on landscaping, grass and other foliage outside the cover and concealment of the forest. Most of this activity appeared to be nocturnal, when hunting is not allowed.

In speaking with other members of the various organizations, there may be understory recovery to some degree. Some have mentioned seeing smaller saplings for longer periods of time. While they are ultimately consumed, it may be an indication we are making headway. We have culled approximately 300 doe in the past 7 years. Without knowing the age of each we can only guess as to the exponential growth we have slowed but best case scenario it is a good number of potential deer that are not there today given the culling of those doe.

As indicated earlier in the report, we must take a close look at not just the proficiency of the hunters ability to hit his target, we must also look at their hunting skills and their available time to hunt. This will become even more critical over time as the herd size reduces and hunting becomes a bit more of a challenge. There is still an abundance of deer out there to cull on these properties. Nature will either assist us in our efforts or work against us. Regardless, whatever each season brings whether it be low food source, unseasonably mild weather or any other elements that make hunting a bit more challenging, we must adjust early on to have a successful cull in that season.

As you review the charts that follow, you must carefully take the information provided and figure a way to once again increase the numbers to a point where we are statistically satisfied with our result. We must use that information along with the continued analysis and photographing of the understory in certain areas as well as the construction of an ex-closure as was discussed in 2009 and in 2010 and again in 2011 and 2012. We should pursue hunting Morgenthau Preserve in 2013. An exclosure exists there, which may start to provide information over time. This should be discussed as a committee and with representatives from Morgenthau so that our efforts are not conflicting. We must perform some level of deer density study to determine the population densities around town. Ideally the infrared study would be the best solution but if the transect count is our only option, we must do it and do it immediately. Again, I cannot speak enough to the needs for the environmental studies, the bio-assay, the soil studies and whatever other biological studies need to be done to give us the other half of the data that we are missing.

We have stated since day one that this is not a short term solution. It took many years for the damage to occur and we must therefore commit to many more years for the program to grow to see the successes, not just in the number of deer taken during the season, but the return of the plant and animal life that has been decimated by the deer population.

We must continue to nourish our relationships with other DMAP programs with the goal of sharing data, sharing best practices and analyzing trends to give us the greatest opportunity of success.

This leads us to the next section of the report which will be the recommendations of the author to the Pound Ridge DMAP committee. Regardless of the decisions as to the recommendations, we must continue what we set out to do in 2006. To cull the deer herd in Pound Ridge to that point where the population of deer is supported by the environment in a way that the two can continue to co-exist without further damaging and in fact, regenerating the plant and animal life that have fallen victim to the overpopulation of deer.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Conduct a deer count using several available measures for assessing deer density.**
2. **Conduct some level bio-assay to determine any level of regeneration to any degree for whatever period it may occur.**
3. **Continue to work with all regional DMAP programs so that we are collecting, sharing and analyzing the same data. In addition, we should look to the largest entity, Westchester County, as the collection point for all data collected to share and analyze that data and assist us in our planning as we move forward.**
4. **Consolidate the Richards preserve, Armstrong preserve and DEP property. This remains a large un-hunted and publicly owned land where large numbers of deer populate**
5. **Require hunters on privately owned properties in Pound Ridge to report takes not only to DEC but to the Police Department as well.**
6. **We should begin funding this program at a very small level so that we can begin to purchase equipment that can better help us collect data, Additional cameras, GPS units, construction of exclosures and other equipment that we can share with our partners and our hunters.**
7. **We should collectively look at the cost to conduct an overhead infrared study and share that cost. This is a once every 5-year cost but if we share it amongst our partners we can minimize the impact overall and all share in the results.**

**2012 Pound Ridge Deer Management**

**DMAP Managed Properties\***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Property Name** | **Acres** | **Square Miles** | **# Hunters** | **Deer Taken** |
| **Sach’s Park\*\*** | **19.079** | **0.029** | **7** | **1M** |
| **Winterbotton/Indian Hill/Aquarion** | **84.689** | **0.132** | **3** | **1 F** |
| **Horseshoe Hill** | **16.731** | **0.026** | **4** | **0** |
| **Eastwoods Preserve** | **48.67** | **0.076** | **2** | **3 F** |
| **Bye** | **23.58** | **0.036** | **4** | **2 F** |
| **Clarke** | **69.19** | **0.108** | **5** | **5 M 2 F** |
| **Old Mill River Peninsula** | **63.00** | **0.098** | **4** | **1 F** |
| **Old Mill River Upper** | **280.00** | **0.437** | **6** | **1 M 6 F** |
| **Old Miller River Lower** | **189.06** | **0.295** | **4** | **2 M** |
| **Fancher Rd Aquarion** | **63.27** | **0.098** | **3** | **6 F** |
| **Siscowit Gate 41** | **143.81** | **0.224** | **3** | **1 F** |
| **Siscowit Dann Farm** | **65.00** | **0.101** | **4** | **1 M 3 F** |
| **Siscowit Eastwoods** | **73.67** | **0.115** | **2** | **1 M** |
| **Trinity Lake Upper** | **60.00** | **0.093** | **5** | **1 F** |
| **Trinity Lake Lower** | **181.45** | **0.283** | **0** | **0** |
| **Aquarion Upper Shad** | **22.68** | **0.035** | **2** | **0** |
| **Armstrong** | **41.47** | **0.064** | **?** | **?** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** | **@1,445** | **@2.258** |  | **37** |

**\*\*Included a portion of Ward Pound Ridge reservation**











