



STAFF REPORT

DATE: November 12, 2019

DISCUSSION

AGENDA ITEM: Deer Management/Hunt

SUBMITTED BY: Kristina Handt, City Administrator

BACKGROUND:

Mayor Pearson requested the council discuss the options related to deer management and a special hunt in the city at the last work session. He had previously attended a public meeting in Birchwood about the topic.

The last time the city authorized a special hunt was in 2013. In conjunction with Washington County's Lake Elmo Regional Park, the City of Lake Elmo allowed a two-day firearm hunt in Sunfish Lake Park. There were six zones established for hunting in the park and only six hunters allowed to hunt at a time. The Parks Commission discussed allowing this again in 2017 but did not support it due to a lack of data about the number of deer and need for a hunt.

ISSUE BEFORE COUNCIL:

Should the City begin any deer management activities?

PROPOSAL DETAILS/ANALYSIS:

I reached out to the DNR personnel and Metro Bowhunters representative who had been involved in the public meeting in Birchwood. Unfortunately, due to the time of the year they were unable to attend our work session. However, they did send along written information. Attached to your packet is a two page summary from the DNR about options the city may pursue. There is also an attachment explaining what the Metro Bowhunters do.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Unknown at this time and dependent upon which option the Council would like to pursue.

ATTACHMENTS:

- DNR-Urban Deer Management
- Metro Bowhunters Resource Base Overview

Urban Deer Management Options

As a general rule of thumb, native plant communities start showing signs of deer damage at 20 deer per 640 acres (square mile) of suitable habitat. This number can vary and be less as higher density housing/industrial/retail areas are not suitable habitat, but this gives a starting point for a population recommendation.

Below are options for cities to consider when it comes to deer management. The city can manage their situation as they see fit. Option 4 is the only one the DNR requires a few more steps to be completed prior to the issuance of special removal permits.

Options:

- 1) Leave the situation alone and monitor citizen complaints.
- 2) Leave the situation alone, but implement a “no feeding of wildlife ordinance.” This is a good starting stage in the conversation of creating a deer management plan for the city. There are numerous variations of an ordinance, but one example “No person may place or permit to be placed on the ground, or within 5’ of the ground any grain, fruit, salt licks or edible materials which may reasonably be expected to intentionally result in deer feeding.” Feeding ordinances are hard to enforce, but is really good to have in place to work with citizen complaints and educating residents.
- 3) Allow hunting through the season structure already in place by the DNR. This option doesn’t need any approvals from the DNR or any special permits as the season structure is set-up. Metro hunting is typically archery hunting due to population levels and discharge ordinances. Many cities in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area fall within the metro 701 deer management zone, which is unlimited antlerless harvest throughout the archery season which typically runs mid-September – the end of December. An archery hunter can harvest unlimited antlerless deer, but only 1 buck. The city’s ordinance should be reviewed to see if a change or update is needed to allow this activity.

This is a good and less costly option for the city to start controlling deer within city limits. This can be structured however the council feels appropriate as there are a number of options. One example, landowners with XX amount of acres can bow hunt on their property. Another option is the city can host hunts by selecting hunters, hunt locations, times, etc. There is also the option to enlist an organization to assist the city with archery hunts. Metro Bowhunters Resource Base is a non-profit organization that has been working with cities in the metro for a number of years on setting-up hunts in parks, public and private land. The participants are hunters from the general public who buy archery licenses through the current season structure, have completed the bowhunter education course and also pass an accuracy shooting exam annually.

- 4) Request a deer shooting/removal permit from the DNR outside of the normal season structure. This option allows for contractors or city staff to remove deer via sharpshooting or trap/kill methods. This option requires the following to be done prior to issuing a permit:
- A. Deer population estimate. This is done by aerial deer survey flights during the winter months once every 2 years. This will give the city a snap shot in time of the population within the city borders. This is an excellent data source for defending a hunt or for not hosting a hunt. The city covers the cost and the area DNR wildlife office can provide contacts of contractors or city staff.
 - B. Deer population goal. The city can make and set a population goal based off public input and management goals.
 - C. Public involvement: an open process to allow citizen discussion/input, such as public meetings, hearings or committees.
 - D. A written plan to achieve and maintain the population goal, including information on non-lethal damage abatement techniques.
 - E. Keep and maintain accurate records of deer-vehicle collisions.
 - F. Institute and maintain a standardized system to record citizen complaints.

Upon completion of a deer management plan, if deer removal outside of normal hunting is proposed, the LGU must apply in writing for a DNR deer removal permit annually to remove a specific number of deer. Population control methods which may be approved are shooting with firearms or archery equipment, including trapping deer and dispatching them in the trap. Trap and relocation of deer is not allowed.

The LGU must provide DNR with data on sex, age and location of deer taken, as well as number and sex of fetuses present in females.

All deer taken must be field dressed and donated to charitable organizations or otherwise needy individuals. The recommended disposition plan is to have all deer processed at an MDA certified facility and donated to food shelves. The costs are paid for by the city conducting the removal.

Feel free to contact the Forest Lake Area Wildlife office at 651-539-3324 if you want to discuss further.



Metro Bowhunters Resource Base

"Specializing in Low-Cost Urban Deer Management"

Website: www.mbrb.org

The Metro Bowhunter Resource Base (MBRB) was established in 1995 to aid local municipalities in the Minnesota Twin Cities Metro area control deer numbers in a safe, efficient and cost-effective way.

This is accomplished by way of enlisting the services of qualified archery deer hunters managed by an experienced MBRB staff. The "staff" consists of the MBRB Board of Directors, who are the only permanent "members" of MBRB, along with a number of other experienced MBRB hunters who act in the role of hunt coordinators throughout the hunting season. Each hunt has at least one, and sometimes several (for a large hunt) coordinators, whose role is to ensure that the volunteer hunters follow all MBRB policies, along with organizing the hunt in a way that provides the most effective results. The Board members may also act as coordinators, but in addition. Each hunt has an assigned Board "supervisor" who is responsible for managing any issues that may be escalated by the hunt coordinator (Board members may not supervise hunts for which they are coordinators).

MBRB is a volunteer-based organization, except for some part-time staff costs incurred for maintaining our website and performing other administrative functions.

The MBRB program requirements for participant enrollment qualification include:

1. All MBRB hunters must receive certification through the Minnesota DNR Bowhunter Education Program (or other NBEF program); this is a one-time requirement.
2. All hunters must demonstrate ongoing proficiency with their equipment by passing an annual shooting test. The test has two levels of qualification:
 - a. Standard proficiency: 5 of 5 arrows in 7" target at 20 yards
 - b. Sharpshooter proficiency: 5 of 5 arrows in 4" target at 20 yards
3. The shooting proficiency tests are conducted by several local archery shops. MBRB provides a packet of testing materials early in the year, and hunters can stop by any time during the summer to take the test. The archery shop staff record the test results and fill out a form that the hunter must bring to the orientation meeting for any hunt for which they are drawn.
4. As part of the hunter's initial enrollment and for every subsequent annual renewal, the hunter must sign a pledge holding them to the highest level of hunting ethics. These requirements emphasize our commitment to both public and hunter safety.

We enroll over 750 volunteer hunters annually, and work to create and maintain hunt management standards and communication practices to be sure that all hunters are aware of, and abide by those hunt standards at all times.

We do not do any other special assessment of hunters for entry to the program. Since the organization has been in operation for over 20 years now, the objectives of the program are well understood among the local bowhunting community, so there is a bit of self-selection involved in those who choose to enroll with us. The key components to ensure that the hunters follow the program are:

1. All hunters must attend a mandatory orientation meeting for any hunt for which they are drawn. At the orientation meetings, Board members and/or other coordinators review the purpose for our hunts, all of the MBRB rules and policies and reiterate the importance of hunters maintaining the highest standard of conduct throughout the hunt. The landowner representative then provides any additional rules or requirements for the particular hunt covered in the orientation.

2. In conducting the hunts, all hunters must provide information to the coordinator regarding their stand location. Also, all hunters must sign in and sign out of a central location each time the hunter comes to or leaves from the hunt location.
3. MBRB maintains a strict “wounding” policy which places a hunter on probation if they have hit a deer which is not recovered, and if that hunter then has a second unrecovered deer, they are removed from the hunt. This policy is applied to all participants in the hunt, including Board members and coordinators themselves. If a coordinator is no longer able to hunt for this reason (a very rare situation), that coordinator is still required to staff that hunt and be onsite even though not hunting.
4. The coordinators are fully empowered by the Board to enact certain disciplinary actions directly with hunters, such as making a hunter sit out a day if found not using proper safety equipment. In addition, the coordinator can provide documentation to the supervising Board member regarding other infractions or lack of cooperation on the part of a hunter, and the Board member can then collaborate with the coordinator in applying more consequential disciplinary actions (removal from that hunt completely, removal for any hunt for that season, etc.). After the completion of the hunt season, the Board reviews appropriate disciplinary cases and may elect to inform a hunter that he/she can no longer participate in MBRB hunts.
5. However, the disciplinary issues are an infrequent part of the process. Far more common and helpful to the mission of MBRB is the role that the coordinators play during the hunt in providing guidance to the hunters by helping them to become better and safer bowhunters. There is a great spirit of camaraderie among the hunters and coordinators, and everyone pitches in to help identify good hunting locations, put up stands and track and recover deer. There is definitely a sense of common cause to make the hunts successful.

The results for MBRB are regarded to be generally successful:

1. For the past 10 years we have taken 250 to 300 deer each season, which represents about 10 deer per hunt, as we typically conducted about 25 hunts each season during that period. While not a huge number itself, if you are familiar with the population growth curve for deer, the hunts definitely help.
2. As a result of the success of the program over the years, most of the hunts we conduct have moved from a “doe before buck” requirement to an either-sex option. This is assessed by each landowner annually. However, the hunter base participating in MBRB is well in tune with the goals of deer management, and even in the either-sex hunts, there is still usually a 70% harvest of antlerless deer.

MBRB works with the Minnesota DNR, local police departments, and landowners to assure that the customer’s deer management needs are met. MBRB has successfully worked with many customers in the Metro area including:

City of Brooklyn Center	City of Shorewood
City of Burnsville	Dakota County Parks
City of Maplewood	Ramsey County Parks
City of Mendota Heights	Scott County Parks
City of Oakdale	Three Rivers Park District
City of St. Paul	City of Shoreview
City of Little Canada	Several private landowners
US Fish & Wildlife Service	

Finally, when we describe ourselves as a low-cost resource we mean that – there is no charge to the landowner for our services. The only expense that may be incurred is time for customer personnel in performing ancillary property management activities related to the conduct of the hunt. MBRB also carries liability insurance in the unlikely case that any damage would occur to customer property while a hunt is being conducted. Our record has no instances of property damage in any of our hunts.