

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM – BOW HUNTING

BACKGROUND:

Like many other urban areas, Ames has experienced damage due to high concentrations of whitetail deer within the City. In an attempt to reduce the City's deer population, a Special Urban Deer Task Force (SUDTF) was convened in 2006. Since that time, Task Force recommendations to the City Council have included an annual survey of the deer population, a ban on deer feeding, public education efforts, and limited urban bow hunting of deer. Urban deer hunting has been conducted in a limited number of locations under special rules administered by the Police Department. All participants must purchase a special tag and register. City regulations also require participants to pass a safety course and a proficiency test, to hunt only from tree stands situated at least 85 feet from trails, and to limit shots to 75 feet or less.

During 2011, there were 23 hunters registered with the program and eight deer were harvested. An aerial count in January identified 274 deer in the survey area as compared with 417 deer in the same areas last year. This was a 35% decline from the previous survey and may have been affected by the mild winter weather. Deer densities exceeded 30 deer/square mile in five of the nine areas surveyed. Densities exceeding 30 deer/square mile are generally thought to be the most likely to have human-deer conflict at a level where intervention is warranted.

During this past year, hunting was allowed on private property if there were three or more acres available and hunting was supported by the adjacent property owners. Because of the broad array of opinions in the community, staff proposed to the Special Urban Deer Task Force that two classes of private property hunts be created. In the first category, hunts on wooded or agricultural tracts would be reviewed by the Police Department and, if the property met the program criteria, it could be approved for hunting after meeting the criteria. In the second category, locations that are primarily residential would be reviewed by the Police Department and then publicized in a manner that would seek additional input from other residents in the neighborhood. While there were a couple of private wooded/agricultural tracts approved for hunting, there were no residential properties approved for hunting in the last year.

The Urban Deer Task Force met to consider this year's deer count, as well as other data collected about whitetail deer within the City. Discussion from Task Force members and visitors illustrated the broad range of public attitudes toward deer and deer hunting. One perspective supported bowhunting of deer as a safe intervention that allows property owners in specific neighborhoods or locations to address a problem with deer concentration. Others felt that deer hunting is unnecessary and fails to control the

population of deer causing problems within the City. Five items were circulated to the 2012 Special Urban Deer Task Force members for votes. These recommendations and votes of the task force members are as follows:

1. Continue City bowhunting locations.
Favor (5) Oppose (1)
2. Continue City hunt rules. Favor (5) Oppose (1)
3. Continue current private property process distinguishing wooded/agricultural locations from residential locations. Favor (5) Oppose (1)
4. Continue DNR buck incentive. Favor (5) Oppose (1)
5. Continue annual helicopter survey.
Favor (6) Oppose (0)

A majority of the Task Force members support the continuation of hunting in designated City parks (South River Valley and Gateway Parks and Homewood Golf Course) and non-park/public locations (landfill in east Ames off Edison Street and the City property south of the Hunziker Youth Sports Complex). Dates for these locations were recommended by the Parks and Recreation staff. It should be noted that the voting regarding these actions included thoughtful commentary, both pro and con, regarding the benefit of urban bowhunting. Even after lengthy discussions on this topic, the task force was not unanimous in its view.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) establishes legal hunting hours (one-half hour before sunrise that continue to one-half hour after sunset) and the dates (September 15 to January 31) for the City of Ames. However, the City can modify these hours and dates as long as they fall within the overall DNR timeline noted above.

Subject to City Council action and taking the DNR established hours and dates into consideration, staff recommends the following locations, dates, and times for deer hunting this coming year:

NON-PARK / PUBLIC AREA

Wooded City property south of the Hunziker Youth Sports Complex:

Weekdays: One-half hour before sunrise and ending at 11:00 AM, from September 15 to November 5

Weekends: No hunting until November 5

Daily beginning November 5, DNR legal hunting hours (following conclusion of the youth sport seasons)

City property north of the landfill in east Ames off Edison Street:

DNR legal hunting hours beginning September 10

PARKLAND AREAS

South River Valley Park:

Weekdays: One-half hour before sunrise ending by 4 PM, from September 15 to October 29 (hours not used by sport leagues)

Weekends: One-half hour before sunrise ending by 8 AM, from September 15 to October 29 (hours not used by sport leagues)

Daily beginning October 29, DNR legal hunting hours (following conclusion of the sport leagues)

Gateway Park: Restricted to the west timber

Daily beginning September 15, DNR legal hunting hours

Homewood Golf Course:

Daily beginning November 5 (following course closure for the season)

Inis Grove Park

Daily Beginning after the close of Homewood Golf Course, in limited locations designated by Parks and Recreation staff

All dates are subject to adjustment by the Ames Police Department for safety related issues. Hunting may be temporarily suspended by the Ames Police Department in any location for safety-related reasons.

In addition, the Urban Deer Task Force recommends continuation of the process allowing private property or other non-City, public property to be enrolled as urban deer hunting locations. The process of establishing eligibility requires the owner or lawful agent in control of the property to submit a written request for participation to the Police Department. Requests must include owner/agent permission for at least three contiguous acres, a map of the property, and a listing of any additional rules or restrictions being proposed. This may include limitations on who may hunt on the property. The City Hunt Manager (Police Department) will evaluate the property and treat it as one of two types:

1. **Wooded/agriculture property** will be reviewed to ensure the suitability of the proposed location, proximity to adjacent properties, and any special hazards or concerns.
2. **Residential locations** will receive a similar initial review by the City Hunt Manager, followed by notification of adjacent property owners. This will be done by the property owner or hunter(s) using City forms. For residential locations to be approved, neighbors within 200 yards of the stand must approve of the hunting. This will involve the signature of one owner or resident of the affected

property. Neighbors within 400 yards of the stand must be notified of the proposed hunt.

One or more signs will be posted at these locations and all other rules will apply.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve bow hunting within the park system, City property, and other eligible property as detailed in the Urban Deer Management ordinance and rules and as listed above.
2. Approve bow hunting only in the City locations specified in this proposal from the Urban Deer Task Force, and do not allow additional properties to be considered.
3. Do not approve bow hunting as proposed in the Urban Deer Management ordinance and rules listed above.

MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The Iowa DNR, Special Urban Deer Task Force, and Parks and Recreation Commission, as well as staff members within Parks and Recreation, Police and Animal Control, all support the continuation of the Urban Deer Management ordinance and rules outlined above.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council approve Alternative #1, thereby approving bow hunting in designated locations including the park system and City property as detailed in the Urban Deer Management ordinance and rules.

Continuing a process for designating additional hunting locations on private property will provide a tool for private landowners and other public entities to participate in efforts to control the deer population. Additional notice requirements will ensure that neighboring property owners are formally notified of a property being considered for hunting.