

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM-BOW HUNTING

BACKGROUND:

Ames, like other communities, has experienced citizen complaints about deer damage due to high concentrations of whitetail deer within the city. In an attempt to address these concerns, a Special Urban Deer Task Force (SUDTF) was convened in 2006. Task Force recommendations to the City Council have included an annual survey of 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 with the Police Department. Rules also require participants to pass a safety course, proficiency test, hunt only from tree stands situated at least 85 feet from trails, and limit shots to 75 feet or less.

An aerial count in January identified 380 deer in the survey area as compared with 276 deer in the same areas last year. This increase from the previous survey is likely to reflect fluctuations in winter weather. Deer densities met or exceeded 30 deer/square mile in seven of the eleven 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.

Hunting was allowed on private property during the last year if there were three or more acres available and hunting was supported from adjacent property owners. Because of the broad array of views 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 was 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 were primarily residential properties would be reviewed by the Police Department and then publicized to 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 last year. **During 2012, there were 32 tags purchased and ten deer were harvested.**

The Urban Deer Task Force met to consider the deer count as well as other data collected about whitetail deer within the city. Following the Task Force meeting, seven items were circulated to the Task Force member for a vote. Comments from Task Force members 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. These recommendations and votes of the task force members are as follows:

1. Continue the current program rules regulating hunter proficiency
Favor (6) Oppose (0) Abstain (0)
2. Continue current private property rules including additional notice requirement for any proposed residential hunts
Favor (4) Oppose (1) Abstain (1)
3. Publicize the program so both private property owners and bowhunters are more aware of the options.
Favor (5) Oppose (0) Abstain (1)
4. Continue the current city property hunt locations.
Favor (5) Oppose (1) Abstain (0)
5. Continue to request the buck incentive to encourage hunter participation and harvest.
Favor (5) Oppose (1) Abstain (0)
6. Continue the annual helicopter population survey.
Favor (6) Oppose (0) Abstain (0)
7. Continue to support and encourage perimeter deer hunting on city and private property.
Favor (5) Oppose (0) Abstain (1)

A majority of the Task Force members support the continuation of hunting in designated City locations. Dates for these locations were recommended by the Parks and Recreation staff. It should be noted that in addition to the votes, the feedback 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. Comments in opposition to these recommendations included the view that urban hunting is entirely unacceptable while also noting that the urban harvest does not seem to be a major influence on whitetail deer population levels.

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 14 to January 19) for the City of Ames. However, the City can modify these hours and dates as long as they fall within the overall DNR timeline as 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.

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, September 14 to November 4

Weekends: No hunting until November 4

Daily beginning November 4, DNR legal hunting hours (following the anticipated conclusion of the youth sport season)

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

DNR legal hunting hours beginning September 14

PARKLAND AREAS

South River Valley Park:

Weekdays: One-half hour before sunrise ending by 4 PM September 14 to October 28 (hours not used by sport leagues)

Weekends: One-half hour before sunrise ending by 8 AM, September 14 to October 28 (hours not used by sport leagues)

Daily beginning October 28 DNR legal hunting hours (following the conclusion of sport leagues)

Gateway Park: Restricted to the west timber

Daily beginning September 14: DNR legal hunting hours

Homewood Golf Course:

Daily beginning November 4 (following course closure for the season)

Inis Grove Park

Daily Beginning after the close of Homewood Golf Course-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 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 as listed above.
2. Approve bow hunting only in the city locations specified in this proposal 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, Parks and Recreation Commission, staff members within Parks and Recreation, the Police Department and Animal Control all support the continuation of the Urban Deer Management ordinance and rules.

Therefore, staff recommends the approval of Alternative 1; whereby the Council would approve 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 continue to ensure that neighboring property owners are formally notified of a property being considered for hunting.