

**COUNCIL ACTION FORM**

**SUBJECT: ANNUAL URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM REPORT**

**BACKGROUND:**

Periodically the City has received citizen complaints about deer damage due to high concentrations of whitetail deer within the city. In an attempt to address those concerns, a Special Urban Deer Task Force (SUDTF) was created by the City Council in 2006. Previous Task Force recommendations to the 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 is 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 and proficiency test, to hunt only from tree stands situated at least 85 feet from trails, and to limit shots to 75 feet or less.

An aerial count in January identified 339 deer in the survey area as compared with 381 deer in the same areas last year. (The Council should understand that this decrease could have been impacted by the fluctuation of the winter weather at the time of the survey. Therefore, staff would caution against drawing any conclusions about the effectiveness of our deer management program from this decrease.)

Deer densities met or exceeded 30 deer/square mile in five 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. This is not a formal goal, it is, however, a reflection of the guidance that the DNR has given to the UDTF and serves as a "rule of thumb" to assist in evaluating the information.

Again last year, hunting was allowed on private property if there were three or more acres available and hunting was supported from adjacent property owners. Due to the broad array of views in the community, the Special Urban Deer Task Force had proposed that two classes of private property hunts be created. In the first category, hunts on wooded or agricultural tracts are reviewed by the Police Department and, if the property met the program criteria, it could be approved for hunting. 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 2013, there were 35 tags purchased and 18 deer were harvested.**

The Urban Deer Task Force met to consider this latest deer count as well as other data collected about whitetail deer within the city. Following the Task Force meeting, five

potential recommendations were circulated to the Task Force members 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 high deer concentrations. Others felt that deer hunting is unnecessary and fails to control the population of deer causing problems within the city. These recommendations and the votes of the task force members are as follows:

1. Continue the city hunt locations (city properties)  
Favor (6)    Oppose (1)    Abstain (0)
2. Continue current City rules (regulating hunting methods and locations)  
Favor (6)    Oppose (1)    Abstain (0)
3. Continue the current private property process distinguishing wooded/agricultural from residential with additional consensus required for hunting in a residential area...  
Favor (6)    Oppose (0)    Abstain (1)
4. Continue to request the buck incentive to encourage hunter participation and harvest.  
Favor (6)    Oppose (1)    Abstain (0)
5. Continue the annual helicopter population survey.  
Favor (6)    Oppose (1)    Abstain (0)

**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. 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 10) 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 this coming fall:

#### **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 13 to November 16

Weekends: No hunting until November 14

Daily beginning November 17, 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 13

**PARKLAND AREAS**

**South River Valley Park:**

Weekdays: One-half hour before sunrise ending by 4 PM September 13 to October 27 (hours not used by sport leagues)

Weekends: One-half hour before sunrise ending by 8 AM, September 14 to October 27 (hours not used by sport leagues)

Daily beginning October 27 DNR legal hunting hours (following the conclusion of sport leagues)

**Gateway Park:** Restricted to the west timber

Daily beginning September 13: DNR legal hunting hours

**Homewood Golf Course:**

Daily beginning November 10 (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 each affected property. Neighbors within 400 yards of the stand must also 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, on City property, and on other eligible property as detailed in the Urban Deer Management ordinance and rules as listed above. **This alternative continues the program under the same rules as last year.**
2. Approve bow hunting only in the City locations specified in this proposal by 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, and staff members within Parks and Recreation, the Police Department, and Animal Control all support the continuation of 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.

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