

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM – BOW HUNTING

BACKGROUND:

The community of Ames, like many other urban areas, has experienced damage due to high concentrations of whitetail deer within the city. In an attempt to reduce the deer population in town, 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 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 2010, 31 licenses were sold for the urban hunt and nine deer were harvested. An aerial count in January showed 417 deer in the survey area. This was an 8% decline from the previous survey and within the range of previous counts. Deer densities exceeded 30 deer per square mile in seven of the nine areas surveyed.

Hunting was allowed on private property during the last year if there were three or more acres available and hunting was supported by adjacent property owners. While this was generally well accepted, some controversy emerged over the appropriateness of two proposed private property locations in north Ames. Some property owners were advocates of the hunting while others in the neighborhood opposed efforts to hunt or remove the deer. Meetings with interested parties failed to reach a consensus. Based on the events in this neighborhood, 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 properties would be reviewed by the Police Department and then publicized in a manner that would seek additional input from other residents in the neighborhood.

In the Special Urban Deer Task Force's 2011 discussions, nine items were identified for potential recommendations. These recommendations and votes of the task force members are as follows:

1. Continue bowhunting on previously enrolled city properties. Favor (4) Abstain (1)

2. Continue to allow bowhunting on private property when citizens choose to enroll in the program. Favor (4) Oppose (1)

2a Maintain the 3 acre minimum. Favor (5)

2b Split the processes for proposed residential and wooded/agriculture with additional requirements for areas composed of residential lots. Favor (4) Oppose (1)

2c For residential locations, require approval of neighbors within 200 yards of the stand and notification of neighbors within 400 yards. Favor (4) Oppose (1)

3. Allow City property to be used to establish the 3 acre minimum if safe hunting can occur. (This would most likely affect private land adjacent to existing hunt locations.) Favor (2) Oppose (1) Abstain (1)

4. Allow the hunt administrator to waive the rules limiting how far from the trail or house a hunter must be if a private landowner chooses to enroll in the program and requests that the rule(s) be waived. Favor (3) Oppose (1) Abstain (1)

5. Continue to request that the DNR allow a buck incentive—for every five antlerless deer taken, one buck tag may be available. Request this option and each antlerless deer harvested allows one entry into the draw for the buck tag. Favor (4) Oppose (1)

6. Subject to approval by the Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council, recommend development of an urban hunting location within the Inis Grove Park area. Favor (4) Oppose (1)

7. Include an explanation of liability insurance and responsibility for accidents or injuries in the hunter packets. Favor (4) Abstain (1)

8. Continue to support and encourage perimeter deer hunting on City and private property. Favor (4) Oppose (1)

9. Expand the survey area to include additional property northeast of Ames (at additional cost to taxpayers). Favor (3) Abstain (2)

A majority of the Task Force members continue to 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 Hunziker Youth Sports Complex). Nonetheless, within the constituents represented in this discussion and voting, there is still opposition to hunting generally as well as to private property hunting. Any action will likely represent some degree of compromise on this issue.

Task Force members recommended that the season begin as early as possible (September 10) in locations where conflict with other park users can be minimized or, where necessary, at a later date recommended by the Parks and Recreation staff. 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 10 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 as noted above.

In terms of locations, dates, and times related to deer hunting on public property, the following regulations are recommended by Police Department staff based on consultation with Parks and Recreation Department staff. Implementation of these regulations is subject to City Council action and IDNR approval.

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 10 to November 7

Weekends: No hunting until November 7

Daily beginning November 7, DNR legal hunting hours (following the conclusion of the youth sport season)

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 September 10 to October 22 (hours not used by sport leagues)

Weekends: One-half hour before sunrise ending by 8 AM, September 11 to October 23 (hours not used by sport leagues)

Daily beginning October 24 DNR legal hunting hours (following the conclusion of sport leagues)

Gateway Park: Restricted to the west timber

Daily beginning September 10: DNR legal hunting hours

Homewood Golf Course:

Daily beginning November 1 (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 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.

PRIVATE PROPERTY

In terms of enrolling private property for hunting program, the Urban Deer Task Force, along with the staff, recommend continuation of the process. However, some changes are being recommended.

The process of establishing eligibility will continue to require 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. However, now the City Hunt Manager (Police Department) will be required to 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 still be required to 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 non-public property with regulations and dates/times highlighted above, along with the requirements of the existing Urban Deer Management ordinance.
2. Approve bow hunting only in the City locations specified in this proposal under the current rules, and do not allow additional properties to be considered.

3. Approve bow hunting in the park system, City property and other eligible properties under the current rules, and not approve any modification of rules for private property. This would prohibit any changes to the separation requirements between hunting locations and trails or buildings for private property.
4. 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, Parks and Recreation staff, Police Department and Animal Control staff all support the continuation of the Urban Deer Management ordinance and rules.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the Council adopt Alternative #1, thereby approving bow hunting within the park system, on City property, and on other eligible non-public property with regulations and dates/times highlighted above, along with the requirements of the existing Urban Deer Management ordinance.

Creating 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 that neighboring property owners are formally notified of a property being considered for hunting.