

Staff Report

DEER HUNTING IN MUNN WOODS AND EMMA MCCARTHY LEE PARK

October 14, 2025

BACKGROUND:

Earlier this summer, City Council received several emails regarding allowing deer hunting in Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park (EML). Council referred this matter to the Parks and Recreation Commission as Section 3.602 (5) of Ames Municipal Code states the following:

Designation of a Deer Population Management Zone (DPMZ) within City park lands shall be first referred to the City of Ames Parks and Recreation for approval and then may be established by resolution of the City Council. Designation of a DPMZ on other City owned lands shall be by resolution of the City Council.

This was discussed at the July 17, 2025, Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) meeting and staff was directed to develop a survey to gather additional information from residents. Staff reviewed survey results with the Commission at its August 21, 2025, meeting. Also discussed was the current City of Ames Urban Deer Management Hunting Rules (Attachment A).

At the Commission's September 18 meeting, staff from Parks and Recreation and Police presented the information contained in this report along with a few options to consider. **After discussing this topic, a motion was made to approve deer hunting in a 5.39 acre parcel of Munn Woods (Option 1 presented later). The motion died for lack of a second. A second motion was made to not approve deer hunting in Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park (Option 2 presented later). This motion received a second, and passed 6-1.**

Commissioners acknowledged the concerns of property damage (e.g., landscaping, gardens, vehicles, etc.) that residents are experiencing and understand that deer are an issue in Ames. However, reasons to not approve hunting included: 1) the area being heavily used by residents; 2) Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park being surrounded by residential properties; 3) hunting in this area having little impact in reducing the overall deer population; and 4) the deer will just move to other areas of the community.

The Commission did encourage the Police Chief to convene the Special Urban Deer Task Force to review current policies and recommend potential changes to City Council for consideration. It was also encouraged to restart the winter deer counts within the City, which have not been done for several years.

Please note that the Commission was only asked to consider hunting in Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park. Any changes to policies and procedures must be recommended

by the Special Urban Deer Task Force which is described in Section 3.603 of Ames Municipal Code. **This information is being provided to City Council as it can agree with the Commission's decision or make a motion to approve one of the other options.**

AMES URBAN DEER HUNT PROGRAM:

This program has been in place for many years. Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) hunting regulations are followed with some exceptions and/or special requirements implemented through City of Ames ordinance (Attachment B) and the City of Ames Urban Deer Management Hunting Rules.

The City can issue 75 permits each year but the actual number of permits distributed are much lower. The data for the last six years is shown in Attachment C and summarized below:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Permits Issued	22	21	16	17	20	16
Deer Harvested	22	24	15	15	12	14

Hunters must pass a one-time Bowhunter Safety Course and pass an authorized archery proficiency test with the weapon they will use to hunt within Ames. Additionally, all shots must be made from an elevated stand (minimum 8 feet off the ground) at a deer no more than 75 feet away. Stands must also be located at least 85 feet from any maintained roads, recreation trails, organized activity sites, and at least 200 feet from any residence or building. Attachment D shows areas within Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park that could be available for hunting.

DEER SURVEY:

A survey was distributed to residents in a variety of ways: 1) emailed to approximately 12,000 people in the Parks and Recreation database; 2) mailed to approximately 1,500 properties within an area bordered by Hyland Avenue, Lincoln Way, North Dakota Avenue, and Ontario Street; 3) included in the Parks and Recreation weekly e-newsletter; 4) posted on the City's website; and 5) distributed through social media. The survey was designed so only one survey could be completed from a specific IP address.

The survey was completed by 1,095 individuals and the results are shown in Attachment E. Respondents were asked for their address so staff could stratify some of the data based on location. Staff also received comments through email and phone calls/messages, and these are shown in Attachment F.

Some highlights from the survey include the following:

- 40.5 % of respondents think the deer population within Ames is a concern, while 27.4% think no, 22.9% think it is a concern in some areas, and 9.3% are not sure.
- Respondents see deer in their neighborhood daily (37.3%), weekly (30.8%), monthly (13.2%), rarely (14.4%), and never (4.3%).

- Respondents see deer in their yard weekly (28.3%), daily (22.5%), rarely (19.3%), never (16.5%), and monthly (13.4%).
 - Feeding deer is illegal in Ames however, 2.7% do this regularly with 1.4% of respondents feeding occasionally.
 - 36.9% feel deer are a nuisance in their yard, 15% sometimes, and 48.1% no.
 - Respondents have experienced damage to gardens (33.5%), damage to landscaping (31.8%), vehicle collision (10.5%), none (20.4%), and other (3.9%).
 - Only 17.3 % are aware of local deer management policies, 30.3% somewhat, and 52.5% no.
 - Responses related to what actions are supported (respondents could select more than one response):
 - Urban deer hunting (bow hunting) – 26.4%
 - Public education on coexistence – 20.9%
 - Fencing or repellents – 15.4%
 - Immunocontraception – 12.6%
 - Relocation (hazing) – 10.9%
 - Surgical sterilization – 6.5%
 - No action – 5.2%
 - Other – 2.2%
 - 37.4% favor changing/developing ordinances to control the deer population, 42.3% are unsure, and 19.7% no.
 - 54.1% favor bow hunting as a method, 30.8% no, 13.5% unsure, and no opinion 1.6%.
 - Attachment G Map 1 shows how respondents near Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park answered this question. It appears that more properties adjacent Munn Woods are in favor of hunting than against. For Emma McCarthy Lee Park, more adjacent property owners are opposed to hunting than in favor of hunting.
 - As far as bow hunting in parks adjacent to residential areas, 41.8% yes, 40.1% no, 16.9% unsure, and 1.3% no opinion.
 - Attachment G Map 2 shows how respondents near Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park answered this question. It appears that more properties adjacent Munn Woods are in favor of hunting than against. For Emma McCarthy Lee Park, more adjacent property owners are opposed to hunting than in favor of hunting.
- Additionally, the survey had an open-ended question to solicit additional feedback from respondents. All comments can be found in Attachment E. Key themes from this feedback are as follows:**

Supportive of Urban Deer Hunt:

- Many respondents favor continuing the hunt, citing deer overpopulation, damage to landscaping and gardens, and the need for herd control.

- Supporters emphasized that regulated bow hunting is a safe and effective management tool when conducted by trained, certified hunters.
- Several noted the importance of responsibility and accountability, supporting the program if safety protocols are maintained.

Opposition and Concerns:

- A significant number of comments opposed hunting within city limits.
- Main concerns include:
 - Public safety risks near homes, parks, and trails.
 - Ethical objections to killing deer in urban areas.
 - Belief that deer do not pose sufficient problems to warrant a hunt.
- Some expressed discomfort with hunting near neighborhoods where families, pets, and recreational activities are common.

Neutral or Conditional Views:

- Respondents referenced personal experiences, including yard damage, vehicle near-collisions, and sightings of deer in residential areas. Others reported no problems and enjoyment from seeing deer.
- Concerns were raised about pets and recreational users (e.g., dog walkers, runners) in or near hunting zones.
- Several emphasized that public engagement and feedback should remain central in decisions about expanding or continuing the program.

Conclusion:

Community feedback reflects a diverse range of views:

- Strong support from residents prioritizing population management and property protection.
- Strong opposition from those concerned about safety, ethics, and neighborhood impacts.
- Neutral or conditional support contingent on strict rules, oversight, and transparency.

DEER RELATED ISSUES:

The three most common concerns survey respondents have experienced with deer include 1) damage to gardens, 2) damage to landscaping, and 3) deer vehicle collisions.

There is no doubt that deer cause damage to gardens and landscaping. However, staff do not have the data to quantify the extent of this damage in Ames. The City Forester was asked if she could tell if Munn Woods is experiencing damage because of deer. Her response was that it is difficult to assess due to the amount of undergrowth throughout the woods.

Related to deer vehicle collisions, Attachment H shows the location of collisions for 2023 (77), 2024 (73), and 2025 (28 through August). Using previous years data, it is estimated there will be 65 deer vehicle collisions for 2025.

TECHNIQUES TO CONTROL DEER:

In the survey, respondents were asked what techniques for managing the deer population they would be in favor of. These techniques, with the exception of bow hunting, would require policy changes and must be recommended by the Special Urban Deer Task Force and approved by City Council. The techniques are explained below for information purposes only.

Relocation (Hazing) – This involves different techniques (i.e. noise, dogs, activity, etc.) to get deer to move out of an area. The downside to this is that deer just relocate to another area and they may become a problem for someone else.

Bowhunting – This is the current technique used in Ames and described earlier in this document.

Immunocontraception – This involves tranquilizing does (female deer) and administering a contraceptive drug. Approval from the IDNR Director and the Natural Resources Commission would be required. In conversations with the IDNR, approval is unlikely as this technique has only proven successful in isolated herds i.e. islands, fenced (8-10 feet high) areas and is not successful in open herds.

Surgical Contraception – Does (female deer) are tranquilized and the reproductive system is removed or interrupted. Approval from the IDNR Director and the Natural Resources Commission would be required. In conversations with the IDNR, approval is unlikely as this technique has only proven successful in isolated herds i.e. islands, fenced (8-10 feet high) areas and is not successful in open herds.

Professional Hunters – Companies are hired to bring in sharpshooters at night and use night vision goggles and rifles to kill the deer. Iowa City used this technique and had success with thinning the deer herd. They have asked the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) for approval to use professional hunters again and their request has been denied as the NRC wants communities to have a more robust bow hunting program.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 - Approve hunting only in the 5.39-acre area in Munn Woods as shown in Attachment D.

Due to the amount of activity in Emma McCarthy Lee Park and opposition from adjacent property owners, staff does not recommend approving hunting in that park. There is a 5.39 acre section that meets the criteria in the City of Ames Urban Deer Management Hunting Rules. For reference, an acre is approximately the size of a football field (50 X 100 yards). This would be the first park area that is surrounded by residential properties to allow hunting. If this option is selected, staff will need to request approval to hunt from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation as the City has a Conservation Easement for Munn Woods with the Foundation. Paragraph 4(k) of the easement prohibits hunting or trapping except in cases where there are animals deemed to be detrimental to the personal safety or to the conservation values intended to be protected by this Easement may be removed with prior approval.

Many survey respondents favor continuing the hunt, citing deer overpopulation, damage to landscaping and gardens, and the need for herd control. Supporters emphasized that regulated bow hunting is a safe and effective management tool when conducted by trained, certified hunters, and several noted the importance of responsibility, accountability, and supporting the program if safety protocols are maintained.

Option 2 - Not approve hunting in Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park.

Based on the survey results, respondents are less in favor of bow hunting in residential areas than in non-residential areas. Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park are in a residential area and share a property line with many property owners. A significant number of survey respondents oppose hunting within city limits, cite public safety risks near homes, parks, and trails, have ethical objections to killing deer in urban areas, and believe that deer do not pose sufficient problems to warrant a hunt. Some expressed discomfort with hunting near neighborhoods where families, pets, and recreational activities are common.

Option 3 - Refer back to staff to convene the Special Urban Deer Task Force to offer recommendations regarding this issue.

Currently, there are no members of the Special Urban Deer Task Force. Should the City Council desire to pursue this option, new members must be appointed, and the task force requested to explore this issue and offer recommendations to deal with this issue.

Option 4 - Proceed with a combination of Options 1 & 3 or Options 2 & 3.

It should be noted that any recommendations brought forward from the Task Force will likely not be ready until the 2026 hunting season (September 20, 2026, through January 10, 2027). Therefore, a combination of options might be warranted.

STAFF COMMENTS:

There is a segment of the population that is in favor of bow hunting deer in the park system and feel Munn Woods and Emma McCarthy Lee Park should be included as a place to hunt. They would like to see the deer herd reduced to minimize or eliminate damage to their property.

More property owners adjacent Munn Woods appear to be in favor of allowing hunting in Munn Woods than in Emma McCarthy Lee Park and that is why EML is not included as an option.

There is also a segment of the population that does not approve of deer hunting for various reasons. This group feels we should coexist with deer and cite safety as a reason hunting in the parks, especially parks adjacent residential areas, should not be allowed.

As the Council reviews the information provided in this report, it must decide what is most important for the community. Is it reducing the deer herd as they are damaging gardens, landscaping, and involved in vehicle collisions, or is it to take no action at this time as deer are a component of the urban wildlife landscape? This is a difficult decision the Council will need to make as both opinions have merit.

ATTACHMENT(S):

Attachment A - City of Ames Urban Deer Management Hunting Rules.pdf

Attachment B - City of Ames Ordinance.pdf

Attachment C - Ames Deer Hunting Data.pdf

Attachment D - Munn Woods & Emma McCarthy Lee Park Maps.pdf

Attachment E - Deer Hunting Survey Results.pdf

Attachment F - Public Emails Phone Calls Messages.pdf

Attachment G - Bow Hunting Responses by Location Map.pdf

Attachment H - Deer Vehicle Collision Maps.pdf