

DEER MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT ROCHESTER HILLS, MICHIGAN

Jim Kubicina, DMAC Chairperson

September 28, 2009

The Deer Management Advisory Committee (DMAC) was established by the Rochester Hills City Council on February 29, 2009, to review the city's September 2008-2009 Deer Management Implementation Plan and make recommendations for a 2010 Deer Management Plan. This committee consists of seven (7) citizen members (Monique Balaban, William Carlson, Allen Decker, Jim Kubicina, Thomas McDonald, Joseph Podvin, Linda Raschke), two (2) Rochester Hills City Council members (Martin Brennan, Michael Webber), one (1) Youth Council member (Rachel Schlagel), and two (2) Parks & Forestry Department staff members (Michael Hartner, Lance DeVoe).

The DMAC held their first meeting on April 7, 2009, and met every two weeks afterward.

Additional input was provided by:

- ◆ Sandra Jean Van Allen Baker, "The Deer Doctor" from the Monroe County Alliance in Rochester, New York, who presented "*How to Deer-Proof Your Garden in Five Easy Steps.*"
- ◆ Tim Payne, Supervisor of the Southeastern Management Unit of the Wildlife Division for the State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources
- ◆ Brent Rudolph, Wildlife Research Specialist for the State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources
- ◆ John Niewoonder, Big Game Specialist for the State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources
- ◆ Shawn Riley, Ph.D., Professor from the Department of Fisheries & Wildlife at Michigan State University
- ◆ Krishnan Sudharsan, Specialist for Wildlife Problems in Communities and Consultant for Public Policy from Lansing, Michigan

Every DMAC meeting was open to the general public; and citizens were afforded the opportunity to present their thoughts, views, feelings, opinions, and personal recommendations.

DMAC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2010

After spirited discussion and debate, the DMAC makes the following recommendations for the 2010 Deer Management Plan.

RECOMMENDATION #1

FEEDING BAN ORDINANCE

The DMAC unanimously agreed (7 yes; 0 No) to continue this component of the plan that bans feeding wildlife (with the exception of birds) throughout the city and recommends strengthening the enforcement of this ordinance. They further recommended (7-0) increasing the number of public reminders to city residents to ensure awareness of, and compliance with, this ordinance.

RECOMMENDATION #2

EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT

The DMAC unanimously agreed (7 Yes; 0 No) to continue this component of the plan and recommends the following modifications:

- ◆ The city should target their educational focus on the peak deer activity months of September through December and the peak hours of dawn and dusk.
- ◆ The city should designate October as “Deer Awareness Month.”
- ◆ The city should offer more homeowner tactics, seminars, and programs on dealing with the city’s deer population.
- ◆ The Parks & Forestry Department should report to the Mayor and City Council in June 2010 on the status of the educational components, aerial flyover results, and SEMCOG deer/vehicle crash (DVC) data.

- ◆ The city should disseminate updated deer information on its website and cable station and provide a range of deer resources for residents. The website should provide a link to SEMCOG's "*Don't Veer for Deer*" program.
- ◆ The city should continue to seek developing information on deer/vehicle crashes and deer count surveys.
- ◆ The city staff should keep a log of deer calls/complaints and include that information in future reports.

RECOMMENDATION #3

IMPROVED SIGNAGE AND ROADSIDE DETERRENTS

The DMAC unanimously agreed (7 Yes; 0 No) to continue this component and recommends the following modifications:

- ◆ The city should identify areas alongside major roads where high growth brush clearing would be helpful to increase visibility and notify the property owners with recommendations on how they could improve the sites and reduce DVC's.
- ◆ The city should identify areas alongside major roads where deer fencing could be an effective deterrent to DVC's and notify property owners on how that could help reduce accidents. This could possibly be a good program for donations or grants.
- ◆ The city should identify high deer/vehicle crash areas and publicize them better.
- ◆ The city should consider only placing deer signage during the peak deer/vehicle crash months of September through December and removing them the rest of the year. If signs must be kept up year-round, the DMAC suggested using flashers (similar to school crossing signs), lights, or flags during the peak months (September-December) and times of 5-8 am and 5-8 pm to make them more effective. This should also be a good idea for a grant or study program.
- ◆ The city should encourage Oakland University to consider additional fencing and/or brush removal along the high deer/vehicle crash areas adjacent to their property.

RECOMMENDATION #4

RECREATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BOW HUNTING BAN

The DMAC unanimously agreed (7 Yes; 0 No) to keep the ban on recreational bow hunting in Rochester Hills.

The Committee split their vote (3 Yes; 4 No) on permitting qualified, bow-hunting businesses on private property with appropriate city and DNR restrictions and at the homeowners' expense. This idea was considered as a possible alternative to allow homeowner associations that had large deer populations to deal with the problem on a localized basis using the best bow-hunting practices with city and DNR concurrence.

RECOMMENDATION #5

AERIAL DEER COUNT SURVEYS

The DMAC unanimously recommended (7 Yes; 0 No) keeping this component of the plan.

The Committee also unanimously recommended (7 Yes; 0 No) that the city have the deer count data from the aerial surveys evaluated by an outside agent for consistency and statistical verification.

RECOMMENDATION #6

MONITORING DEER-VEHICLE COLLISIONS

The DMAC unanimously recommended (7 Yes; 0 No) keeping this component and agrees the city should continue monitoring the deer/vehicle collisions as provided by SEMCOG and/or Oakland County and encourage more timely reports even if the data is only preliminary numbers. The final audited (by Michigan State Police) report should be included in the Parks June 2010 report to City Council.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION – SHARPSHOOTING

Due to the apparent reduction of the deer herd identified by the January 2009 flyover and recent SEMCOG DVC data, the DMAC is unanimously (0 Yes; 7 No) opposed to continuing sharpshooting or the use of any other lethal culling methods in 2010 to reduce the deer herd in Rochester Hills.

OTHER ITEMS TO CONSIDER

The DMAC unanimously (7 Yes; 0 No) would like the city to consider adding the following three recommendations to the 2010 Deer Management Plan:

1. That City Council continue the Deer Management Advisory Committee as presently structured in 2010 to review the numbers of deer/vehicle crashes and aerial counts and make any recommendations to City Council for future modifications to the Deer Management Plan. The current citizen committee members unanimously agreed to serve.
2. That the Mayor forms a Citizens Resource Group of qualified volunteers to assist residents in implementing helpful practices for dealing with landscaping problems.
3. That City Council, through the Parks & Forestry Department, initiate and guide the formation and continuance of a standing Wildlife Management Committee involving members from communities contiguous to Rochester Hills (i.e. Auburn Hills, Troy, Oakland Township, Rochester, Shelby Township) and invite the DNR, MSU Fisheries and Wildlife Department (i.e. Prof. Shawn Riley), Oakland University, and other wildlife management agencies for the purpose of ensuring proper suburban wildlife management in our areas and for the sharing of information and “best practices” available to our residents.

OTHER TOPICS DISCUSSED

The following methods were also discussed by the DMAC as possible tools for reducing the community's deer population, but were not available or recommended at this time:

IMMUNO-CONTRACEPTIVES

The DMAC discussed and determined that the technology is currently not available for the effective use of immuno-contraceptives in free-ranging deer populations, and this method is currently not permitted by the Michigan Department of Agriculture. The Committee, however, recommends that this potential tool continue to be monitored for new developments that may prove effective in the future.

TRAP AND TRANSFER

The DNR reports that the method of trapping deer and transferring them to another location is currently not allowed in the state of Michigan because of the potential for spreading disease.

TRAP AND EUTHANIZE

Although this method is allowed and could be approved by the DNR, it is time-consuming, expensive, and is minimally effective in reducing the total deer population in a community. This method is not recommended at this time.

REFLECTORS AND DEER WHISTLES

More in-depth research and review of available data has shown that reflectors and deer whistles are not effective deterrents to deer/vehicle crashes.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2010

Due to the reduction in the latest number of deer/vehicle accidents reported by SEMCOG, and in conjunction with the 2009 flyover and other data, the DMAC recommends no deer culling by sharpshooting or any other lethal means take place in Rochester Hills in 2010. The discussion on signage led to the recommendation that the signage would be more effective if the deer

crossing signs were lit or had flashing lights during the peak deer/vehicle crash season of September through December and from 5:00-8:00 am and 5:00-8:00 pm. Reminders to residents on the wildlife feeding ban and increased enforcement of this city ordinance could lead to fewer deer crossing roads to reach these feeding sites. Additional information and assistance could be given to residents on techniques that can be used to deer-proof their yards. The city's website should be utilized for disseminating deer-related information including aerial survey results and SEMCOG's deer/vehicle accident numbers. The DMAC further recommends that the city continue to monitor the accident rates with the understanding that if the trend increases and reaches the 200 annual deer/vehicle accident number and if the previous annual aerial survey trends up by 20% or more, the city should seriously reconsider the use of lethal methods or reassess solutions to reduce the deer population and implement a plan accordingly. The DMAC also recommends that City Council should consider citizen complaints as a major factor in determining future actions. Finally, since the wildlife problems are not confined to Rochester Hills alone, the DMAC recommends that a Regional Wildlife Committee with representatives from Rochester Hills, adjacent communities, the DNR, MSU, Oakland Parks, Stony Creek Metropark, and others be created to ensure effective suburban wildlife management and the sharing of the latest "best practices" information for our residents.