

Proposal for Village of Hamilton Deer Culling Program

Background

Residents in the Village of Hamilton have reached a consensus that the deer population has grown too large. This conclusion dovetails with extensive research conducted over the last two years at Colgate University, which has determined that we have a significant overpopulation of whitetail deer in the Village and Township of Hamilton (42 mi², 59 mi², 2013 and 2014 respectively). Such high deer densities increase the risk of Lyme and co-occurring diseases, deer-vehicle collisions, and ecosystem damage. In fact, 65% of households surveyed (16% of the Township) have had a deer-vehicle collision in the last 10 years, 13% have had a member of their family who has contracted Lyme disease and 71% have had garden and/or lawn damage. Overall, 88.7% of surveyed residents have had at least one negative interaction with the deer population. Significant reductions of deer densities have been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of each of these negative outcomes. In addition to the negative impacts upon Hamilton's inhabitants, the deer overpopulation threatens the area's ecosystems and their carbon storage, given that threshold level for a healthy forest is 7-10 deer/mi². In short, deer numbers now exceed both the area's "cultural" and ecological carrying capacities.

As a result of these issues, a Deer Task Force was established for the Village and Town of Hamilton and tasked with creating and implementing an effective deer management strategy. The Task Force includes Village Mayor Margaret Miller, Town Board member Peter Darby, Village Trustee Jen Servedio, Colgate faculty members Catherine Cardelus and Ian Helfant, Village resident and Lyme disease specialist Harvey Kliman, and others. More recently, we have benefited from the direct involvement of Village Police Chief Rick Gifford, as well as New York State's DEC large game biologist Courtney LaMere. We have also coordinated closely with Colgate University's administration, which approved a closely-related proposal for deer management on some of its properties in the Village in late March and reaffirmed that support in late May, assuming – of course – that the Village chooses to proceed with a cull. On March 24, 2015, members of the Deer Task Force, Chief Gifford, and DEC biologist LaMere conducted a forum attended by approximately 60 Village and Town residents, who expressed overwhelming support for proceeding with a cull.

Many deer management strategies are available for addressing overpopulation. After researching the effectiveness and cost of many alternatives, however, we have determined that lethal management strategies are ultimately the best choice. Sterilization, contraception, and translocation have all been shown to be ineffective and not appropriate for this Township. Fortunately, 86.6% of the Town supports hunting as a form of management and 74.3% believes the deer population needs to be decreased. The most effective technique for a densely populated situation such as the Village involves culling using carefully chosen archers who shoot does over bait during early morning/evening/early night hours from elevated tree stands (5-10 hours per

deer taken). This approach has been demonstrated to be an effective and safe management strategy for reducing deer populations in communities such as Trumansburg, Lansing and Cayuga Heights, NY.

Structure of Cull

We aim to follow the deer management model of the Village of Trumansburg, which was organized by Dr. Bernd Blossey (Cornell University). Dr. Blossey has been advising our working group and was instrumental in the Cornell (Cayuga Heights) culling program. The Village of Trumansburg (1mi²; <http://trumansburg-ny.gov/>) is similar in size to the Village of Hamilton (2mi²), and like Hamilton has a population supportive of hunting. Starting in September 2014, using 9 tree stands over 6 weeks, 11 archers culled 81 deer from the village with over 1,000 pounds of venison donated to food cupboards. These culls took place in the evening/early night, from tree stands positioned over bait, using lights. This method is permissible because of the Nuisance Permit program administered selectively through the DEC, which may be used only for does/antlerless deer. Our aim in the Village of Hamilton is to conduct a similar cull, but to increase the number of culling sites to 12-18 sites (6-12 on Village lands and 4-6 on Colgate lands within the Village). A January 27, 2015, report summarizing the Trumansburg cull notes that the average culled deer ran 50 yards from the site where it was shot (<http://www.trumansburg-ny.gov/docs/TDMPREPORT.pdf>). The sites we propose are situated in such a way that wounded deer will likely run away from roads and houses towards open space and thickets. We should note that the recovery rate for these cull programs has been substantially higher than is the average for bow-hunters during normal archery season, and that very few deer have not been recovered.

Firearm Type: Given that New York approved the use of cross-bows for part of the archery season in 2014, both Chief Gifford and Colgate's Associate Director of Grounds Mike Jasper suggest that cross-bows could be used alongside compound bows in the cull, as some hunters may achieve more consistent accuracy with them. Our Task Force supports this recommendation unless public opinion appears to be against it. In Trumansburg, only compound bows have been utilized.

Deer Processing: Successful cullers would not field dress their deer at the culling location, but would be required to transport the deer elsewhere for field dressing (as described in more detail below). In addition, per Chief Gifford, police officers will be available to facilitate the retrieval of any deer that might run onto neighboring properties if this would make those property owners more comfortable. Prior to the cull, and as part of the process of finalizing stand locations, we will contact all the landowners within approximately 500 feet of a prospective stand location to determine their stance on whether a) they would accept a stand on their property; b) would allow a deer to be retrieved from their property, and c) whether they would like to receive venison

according to the system of venison prioritization enumerated below in return for allowing a stand to be located on their property.

Site Establishment: The Village would need to provide funds for various items such as the requisite number of ladder treestands, as well as for the corn that will be used as bait (we may also experiment with some non-baited stands, at least during the September cull). Additionally, it may prove necessary to purchase bow-mounted lights that allow for night-time culling, and programmable feeders for at least some of the sites if this turns out to substantially increase culler success. This should become evident as we gain collective experience. We anticipate that each site will cost between \$200-400 establish and approximately \$50/month to bait with corn, depending upon whether we simply provide ladder stands or additionally lights and feeders. Individual hunters accepted to the culling program would otherwise be expected to provide their own archery equipment, clothing, etc.

Data Management: We will also lease proprietary software from Dr. Blossey that manages participants and tracks data related to culls, including: the number of arrows shot, location and identity of participants during culls, number and percent of deer shot and recovered, distance travelled from shot site, and number of deer not recovered. Participants who do not have ready access to the internet would be able to report their findings by phone and/or extended tag deposit at the Village police station/offices).

Timing

We propose that the yearly culling of deer occur in two phases: for the last three weeks of September and when Colgate University is out of session for the winter break (approximately mid-December to mid-January). The December-January time period is when the largest number of deer were culled in in the Village of Trumansburg (<http://www.trumansburg-ny.gov/docs/TDMPREPORT.pdf>). The September portion of the cull would not involve the Seven Oaks Golf course lands that Colgate owns within the Village.

Participants

We will restrict participation to a small group of individual archers who have been carefully vetted and who have committed to an explicit and detailed written code of conduct. Only Town of Hamilton residents who are licensed bowhunters with a multi-year record of harvesting does would be eligible. Furthermore, only Colgate employees would be eligible to participate in the cull on Colgate's lands in the Village. Applicants will first fill out an application which will be vetted by Chief Gifford -- and in the case of Colgate employees initially by Mike Jasper and/or Ian Helfant and subsequently also by Chief Gifford -- who will have veto power over any applicant. The selection process will involve both interviews and a demonstration of archery marksmanship, as well as a background check conducted by Chief Gifford. If there are too many

qualified applicants, a lottery system may be implemented to determine participation in the cull for that season.

It's worth emphasizing that the cull within the village of Trumansburg involved only 11 bowhunters, which underscores the importance of maintaining careful oversight of the group. We propose to adopt in modified form the detailed Codes of Conduct employed by Cornell University and the Village of Trumansburg, which spell out a range of responsibilities and best practices that individual participants must uphold. These specify minimum setbacks of treestands from houses, guidelines for how hunters should interact with the public, emphasize that field-dressing of deer may not take place at the culling site, etc. We cannot stress enough the importance that the cullers' competence and conduct will have and envision a group meeting prior to the opening of the cull in which we reinforce this message.

Notification

The Village will keep residents updated on the progress and timing of the cull via their website (www.hamilton-ny.gov) as well as through social media outlets (e.g. Facebook, Nextdoor Hamilton), Radio Free Hamilton, and the MidYork Weekly. Colgate will additionally keep the campus community up-to-date through Campus Distributions.

Allocation of the Venison

Town of Hamilton resident and local deer processor Phil Roe has indicated his preliminary willingness to start his operations when the cull commences if the terms are agreeable. Cullers would be able to deliver field-dressed deer to Phil's processing facility if they do not prefer to process them on their own. In either case, field dressing would not take place within the Village, but rather on the culler's own property (or another appropriate location with that landowner's permission), or at the Town's Department of Public Works (DPW) site. We recommend this approach rather than processing the deer through the state venison donation program, as the closest processor who participates in that program is in Norwich, and no local processor has indicated willingness to join.

Given the importance of attracting responsible and qualified participants for the program, we recommend that cullers have first priority if they choose to keep the harvested meat, as permitted in the programs cited above. However, we also believe that the local community should benefit. Therefore, we recommend the following system of prioritization:

1. Cullers would have the right to the 1st and any subsequent odd-numbered deer they take (1st, 3rd, 5th, etc).
2. Any landowners who permit culling stands on their property would have rights to the 2nd deer taken (or the 1st if the culler did not want the venison). They would need to pay for processing.
3. Village residents would be able to sign up on a list indicating their interest in receiving venison in return for paying for the processing of the deer, and would have next priority.

4. Both Town and Village residents would be encouraged to donate to a venison processing fund that would be used to provide venison to the Hamilton Food Cupboard, which would have final priority. If sufficient donations are made, however, we could consider alternating the 3rd and 4th categories, so that one eligible deer would go to the 3rd, the next to the 4th, etc.

We recognize that prioritizing the allocation of the venison is an important issue and recommend the system above as an initial starting point. We will be prepared to modify these guidelines if experience indicates that they are not working optimally.

Plans beyond the Initial Village Cull

We believe that this first-year should be devoted to establishing a successful culling program in the Village. However, this is ultimately a town-wide and larger issue, as indicated by recent NY DEC initiatives to increase the yearly take of does in much of the state. We have therefore suggested that Colgate open certain of its lands in the Town and beyond to archery hunting by employees of the University. In addition, we believe that both Colgate and large landowners in the Township should consider utilizing Deer Management Permits (DMAP) permits to increase the doe take on their properties. These, of course, are different from the Nuisance Permits that permit culling, and may be utilized only during the normal yearly hunting seasons. Our Task Force will be ready to facilitate consideration of these further options at the appropriate time.