

## **A Letter from Supervisor Ed Michalenko...**

### **To our DeWitt Residents, regarding the Town of DeWitt Deer Population:**

The human and environmental impacts of the overpopulation of white-tailed deer in DeWitt and surrounding communities are deeply personal for me. My own young grandson was diagnosed with Lyme disease a few summers back, as was my son-in-law. My wife faces daily frustrations trying to sustain a garden and grow fresh vegetables. Fences or “plant prisons” are only moderately effective at protecting plants and property, can be unsightly, and are expensive.

I, along with the rest of the Town Board have listened closely – and with empathy and personal understanding – to residents facing challenges with a growing deer population. Town Councilor Kerin Rigney has spent many hours researching the issue, listening to concerns of our residents, and working on the development of a regional initiative. Community members packed a June 2017 Town Board meeting expressing their concerns and frustrations with deer eating vegetation, leaving piles of droppings, and the ever-present danger of ticks. Many young moms spoke about the internal conflict they face daily between allowing their children to play in the yard versus the fear of contracting Lyme disease and other tick borne diseases. They also feel in conflict about using pesticides, understanding that products containing Permethrin are excellent for managing ticks, but also have environmental and health risks. Needless to say, I am aware this is an important issue to our community, and a complex one as well.

In response to residential complaints, the Town Board tasked the DeWitt Advisory Conservation Commission (DACC) with drafting a paper outlining problems and solutions. In February of 2016 this group formed a Deer Task Force comprised of residents from the community. The group met monthly for roughly nine months. However, due to the complexity, very real emotion, and controversy regarding the topic, they arrived at a stalemate. At the same time, the Town began collaborating with SUNY-ESF in an effort to understand the current deer populations, as well as future forecasts for deer populations. SUNY-ESF is creating the foundation of a management plan using factual, peer-reviewed, and scientifically relevant data. My special thanks to Assemblywoman Hunter for obtaining the funding necessary for this effort.

Just to give you an idea how significant the deer issue is in our community, “natural” levels for deer are generally accepted to be around 8.5 deer per square mile. In some areas in the Town of DeWitt we have more than 85 deer per square mile. So, as I sit here at this moment, all indications are that lethal management must be implemented to stabilize our deer populations. I also understand that once that begins, it will require a long-term commitment of resources in order to sustain such a program.

We do anticipate being successful in reducing the incidence of Lyme disease, deer vehicle collisions, and damage to landscape plants. However, we also know we cannot completely eliminate these concerns. In DeWitt, professional hunters must be utilized to ensure human safety, meet state firearms setbacks, and achieve effective results. By contrast, rural communities can more readily utilize volunteer hunters, thus reducing costs. Currently there is county funding to help with the management costs for at least another year.

This is an issue that I take seriously and will do everything in my power to manage wisely and well for our community. But, deer do not recognize invisible municipal boundaries, therefore, a truly effective plan necessitates all impacted communities communicate, collaborate, and manage deer populations as a unified effort.

I extend my sincere gratitude to residents who have painstakingly organized efforts, collected signatures, and are drafting management plans for their neighborhoods; they are truly our “community champions.” The Town Board welcomes and supports these individual efforts and I am personally proud and moved when we work together to build our community. Moving forward, the Board and I will continue to support actions to engage other communities in developing a plan that will address the entire region.

Most sincerely,

*Ed Michalenko, Ph.D., Town of DeWitt Supervisor*