

## Town of DeWitt Deer Management Timeline

- **In 2014 the Town of DeWitt joined the Syracuse-Onondaga County Urban Deer Task Force.**
- The final Report and Recommendations were published in **September 2014**. Of the recommendations: “humane, non-lethal deer management methods -such as surgical sterilization—should be utilized whenever possible, although most agree that lethal means may need to be considered in the short term.”
- **The Town noticed a slight uptick in deer complaints in 2014** and began carefully tracking complaints; the highest concentration of complaints were north of I-481 and south of East Genesee Street.
- **Also in 2014**, the Town began to connect with organizations, agencies, and large parcel land owners to work in partnership to: look deeply more into the issue, obtain factual information, develop cost-effective, measurable, and publicly supported solutions.
- The Town then moved forward to organize an information sharing opportunity with various stakeholders: neighboring municipalities, governing agencies, and property owners/residents.
- **That meeting, “Finding Common Ground,” occurred on September 16, 2015.** Representatives from Onondaga County, the Village of Fayetteville, New York State Parks, the City of Syracuse, the Town of DeWitt, SUNY ESF, and other organizations attended. Among the issues discussed: public reaction to a cull, whether a cull reduces the incidence of Lyme and other tick-related diseases, the complexity of the issue, and the significant challenge of developing an optimal and cost-effective plan.
- **Also in the Fall of 2015** the Town began including information about the Deer issue and growing deer-human challenges in each Town Newsletter, and also seeking community involvement.
- **As of December 2015** LeMoyne College, Syracuse University, Green Lakes State Park, the City of Syracuse, and other local groups were opposed to lethal management.
- **In February of 2016** the Town tasked the DeWitt Advisory Conservation Commission with drafting a paper outlining problems and solutions; **the DACC organized a Deer Task Force** comprised of community members concerned about the issue,

including: animal rights advocates, hunters, farmers, parents of young children, gardeners, etc.

- **Also in 2016, SUNY-ESF received funding** through Assemblywoman Pam Hunter’s office to determine current deer densities and model future populations under specified scenarios. This information is the foundation of a management plan using factual, peer-reviewed, and scientifically relevant data.
- **On Saturday, April 29, 2016** the Town hosted a public forum and information sharing opportunity with residents at the Jamesville Dewitt Middle School. Representatives of lethal and non-lethal management were present.
- **Throughout 2016** experts presented to the DACC Deer Task Force information regarding, but not limited to: impacts to the environment and people, management options, benefits and costs, experiences, and challenges and opportunities.
- Due to the complexity of the issue, and public sentiment and concerns, the Task Force was unable to make firm recommendations and was disbanded in 2016.
- **In early 2017 community members from the Deer Task Force began a grassroots effort.** The DeWitt Neighborhood Deer Committee (DNDC) pro-actively sought guidance from Cornell Cooperative Extension, went door-to-door garnering neighborhood support, to date have collected over 500 signatures in support of a neighborhood cull, and have begun conversations with private land owners to host a cull location. They have also drafted a management plan.
- **The DNDC requested support from the DeWitt Town Board on June 26, 2017.** They coordinated several neighborhood planning meetings and hosted a public meeting at the JDMS on **Tuesday, September 19, 2017**. The DNDC again presented to the DeWitt Town Board on **Monday, September 25, 2017**, formally requesting the Town adopt the management plan and implement proposed strategies this winter.
- **Comments from the September 19<sup>th</sup> 2017 meeting were recorded and will be presented—along with the petition—to the DeWitt Town Board on Monday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>.**

## A Letter from Supervisor Ed Michalenko *(from the Sept. 2017 Town Newsletter)*

### 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.

**To give you an idea how significant our deer issue is, typically accepted “natural” levels for deer are 8.5 deer per square mile; in the Town of DeWitt we have approx. 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**