

## URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN

WHEREAS, natural habitat for deer in Onalaska and in surrounding areas is being continuously reduced; and

WHEREAS, the City of Onalaska is an urban environment with substantial wildlife habitat and this landscape creates the potential for conflict between residents and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, high deer populations may cause car/deer accidents, destruction of landscaping and yard plantings, which have a negative impact on the ecosystem of the City and an increased likelihood in deer diseases; and

WHEREAS, goal of the City Council is to create an acceptable environmental balance that will facilitate the co-existence of citizens and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has solicited and received recommendations from a study group and public informational meetings established to assess current conditions regarding an Urban Deer Management Plan,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Onalaska does hereby adopt the proposed Urban Deer Management Plan and Appendixes.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Council, to the extent necessary, grants an exception or permission regarding the prohibition against bow and arrows provided in Section 11-2-3 and Section 11-2-4 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Onalaska to the participants in the City of Onalaska Urban Deer Management Plan.

## HISTORY AND PROBLEM

**1. Issues and Concerns:** The issues listed below were brought to the City of Onalaska's attention starting early in 2008 by its citizens. The geographic locations of these concerns are subdivisions and high traffic roads in or near the coulee areas. Based on the City of La Crosse's deer population inventory completed by the WiDNR in 2007, the City of Onalaska can assume that populations are similar due to like habitat (Copy of the inventory can be found at the Library or Parks Department). The city has held public informational meetings, established a dedicated Urban Deer Hotline, an urban deer email account, and a poll for collecting input from citizens regarding concerns and possible directions. Additionally, the city created the Urban Deer Study Group made up of city staff, concerned citizens, and DNR personnel from the La Crosse District office to examine this information and seek a resolution.

**a. Human Health and Safety** – The potential number of car/deer incidents within the city and those with close proximity to the city, but under other jurisdictions, is concerning. Potential for deer physical interactions with humans or pets is deemed high in subdivisions that exist in the coulee areas. The growing deer herd increases the human risk of deer-tick borne diseases such as, but not limited to, Lyme disease, and ehrlichiosis, as well as other diseases affecting the health of the deer.

**b. Private Property Damage** – In addition to possible damage incurred with car/deer accidents, residents have complained of destruction of landscaping and gardens.

**c. Habitat Impacts** – Over-grazing of native flora by deer allows non-native plants to gain a foothold in forested areas. Once native plants have been forced out by competition with the non-native species, native fauna (birds, insects, small mammals, etc) are also forced from these habitats. The process to re-establish native species can take many years if it can be done.

**d. Herd Health** – Relative herd health is the condition of a white-tailed deer population relative to the ability of the habitat to support it. Herd health is an important component in any deer management scenario. At any point in time there is a finite supply of nutritional resources available to support deer. If the nutritional needs of the population exceed the habitat's ability to provide for those needs (i.e., a state of overpopulation), then both herd health and habitat quality or land health are compromised.

**2. Control Methods or Abatements:** There are two options of abatement, lethal and non-lethal, and both in turn provide several options for dealing with urban deer populations. In most options, non-lethal abatement should be tried before lethal. Urban deer control is a long term commitment or management. Some forms of abatement may be not viable under current DNR regulations or too costly at this time for the city to justify their use. Some lethal or non-lethal methods would require a special DNR permit. The City of Onalaska feels that public education, access, or outreach of these options, more detailed releases, and any future management options are necessary.

**a. Non-Lethal**

i. Habitat Modification

- (1.) Gardens and/or plantings can be screened or fenced (Note the use of electric fencing is prohibited in the City of Onalaska)
- (2.) Vegetation that is less desirable for browse by deer should be planted in place of other landscaping alternatives
- (3.) Deer Feeding must be prohibited

ii. Scare Devices

- (1.) Motion Activated Sensors attached to sprinklers or sound devices
- (2.) Dogs

iii. Repellents – are designed to repel deer via their sense of smell or taste when applied to vegetation. Repellants can be either commercial or non-commercial general home products.

iv. Birth Control – Is not legal according to current DNR regulations

v. Trapping & Relocating – Is not legal according to DNR regulations.

Studies show that some of these non-lethal considerations may be viable only for short periods of time. Deer become habituated to modifications or devices and can make adjustments to their daily activities.

**b. Lethal**

i. Sharp Shooting – The use of paid shooter contractors is an effective, safe, and efficient method of deer removal. Deer are coerced into areas that are laid out in safe shooting zones and shot from elevated platforms. At the time of this plan, estimated cost is \$100 and up per animal removed. Usually the deer carcasses are donated to area food pantries.

ii. Trapping & Euthanization – Commercial operators are hired to trap and bait target deer and euthanize the captured animals with bolt guns.

**b. Lethal (Cont.)**

iii. Hunting – Is the most cost effective removal abatement option. The use of controlled hunts can be done safely on both private and public lands. Participating individuals will be expected to follow all DNR regulations and required special City of Onalaska rules as laid out in attached Appendixes.

Resolve that the Council and/or its designee be authorized to implement the Urban Deer Management Plan including, but not limited to, the following elements:

1. The City may continue to assemble resources that provide residents with information on deer and offer guidelines for limiting localized deer damage through the use of repellents, screening, alternative plantings, and other techniques. Educational materials may be available at City Hall, the Public Library, City Access Channel #96, and on the City Web Site:

*<http://www.cityofonalaska.com/departments/urbandeer.html>*

2. The City may continue to work with the WiDNR to further the control of the deer population for the welfare of Onalaska residents, and the health of the deer herd and our natural areas.

3. In accordance with the guidelines of this report, the appropriate city officials may implement a deer population reduction program using bow hunters. Volunteer archery hunters must pass proficiency and background tests, including knowledge of special city regulations by passing the bow hunter exam, and retain a current WiDNR archery tag. Note, for hunting on private lands, no archer will be given back tags until that individual has returned to the city the UDA (Urban Deer Application) with signatures of participating landowners. Once authorized, these archers will be allowed to remove deer from both private and public holdings during these controlled hunts. The hunting activity dates and times may be controlled per drawings and/or any approved means in the future for both private and public lands.

4. The City may also encourage the City's larger private landholders, and adjoining municipalities and townships to support the Onalaska efforts to control the deer population. The Study group recognizes that deer herds migrate throughout the region and population control success will be limited without support from surrounding jurisdictions and private lands.

5. The City may continue to compile data for deer management, including, but not limited to, information about vehicle-deer accidents, citizen comments, volunteer surveys, and may include future aerial deer counts if needed. Periodic natural community inventories may be done to assess the impacts on the ecosystem.

6. The appropriate City officials shall periodically evaluate the effectiveness of this Urban Deer Management Plan and file a written annual report with the findings of the evaluation with the May Park Board meeting for forwarding to the City Council for review.