

4-1-1998

## Deer Management Task Force Status Report

Amherst Deer Management Task Force Report

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/belj>



Part of the [Law Commons](#), and the [Natural Resources Management and Policy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Amherst Deer Management Task Force Report, *Deer Management Task Force Status Report*, 5 Buff. Envtl. L.J. 436 (1998).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/belj/vol5/iss2/13>

This Symposium is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Buffalo Environmental Law Journal by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact [lawscholar@buffalo.edu](mailto:lawscholar@buffalo.edu).

Amherst Deer Management Task Force Report

**DEER MANAGEMENT TASK FORCE  
STATUS REPORT**

**January 23, 1998**

**Introduction:**

In May, 1997, Supervisor Susan J. Grelick created the Deer Management Task Force with the charge of developing a realistic and comprehensive deer management plan for the Town of Amherst. This Draft Preliminary Review of Recommendations describes the work of the task force to date, and sketches out the next steps the task force will take to develop a comprehensive deer management plan for the Town. Included are recommendations submitted by members of the task force for its consideration, which are listed without comment as a starting point for our discussions.

**Background:**

The members of the task force are drawn from several Town departments and the Amherst Conservation Advisory Committee (ACAC), and include several liaisons from the community with relevant professional expertise and experience. The members of the task force are a diverse group, willing to consider all sides of the issue and to work together toward a common, rational consensus on deer management in the Town. They are open-minded, and do not represent the strong commitments in support of or opposition to the controversial bait-and-shoot program that have polarized the previous, fractious discussions on deer management. These debates have unnecessarily and inappropriately narrowed the issue to a discussion over the pros and cons of bait-and-shoot, and have not led to any meaningful progress.

The task force recognizes the importance of producing a high quality report to gain wide public support, and at the outset, identified four tasks necessary to complete its work:

- The development of a mission statement and goals
- Data development and analysis
- Examination of management options
- The formulation of recommendations and an implementation plan

### **Mission Statement and Goals:**

A draft mission statement and goals were prepared during the first meetings of the task force to provide guidance for its work.

### **Mission Statement**

The purpose of the Deer Management Task Force is to develop a comprehensive perspective on the white-tailed deer situation in the Town of Amherst, and to create a workable policy that will find a solution to the ongoing issue of living with deer in a growing suburban community.

### **Goals for Data Analysis**

1. Compile and Analyze Current Data
  - a) review previous study
  - b) review Steve Parkansky's data
  - c) fill in the gaps, and bring the data up-to-date
2. Develop criteria for deer habitat
3. Evaluate Data
  - a) identify accident hot spots
  - b) identify agricultural loss hot spots

- c) identify garden loss hot spots
- d) identify health risks
- e) identify environmental damage (over-browse) hot spots
- f) identify deer habitat zones

### **Data Development and Analysis:**

The task force considers data development to be the key element in developing a rational, scientific approach to comprehensive deer management, and has made a concerted effort to develop a high quality database. After several months, this aspect of the project is nearing completion, and provides a solid foundation with which to analyze the data as the next step toward examining the management options available to the Town.

This solid foundation would not have been possible without the input, assistance, and resources of the State University of New York at Buffalo (UB), specifically, Steven Parkansky, a doctoral student in geography. Steve used his department's state-of-the-art Geographical Information System (GIS) to develop a white-tailed deer database for Amherst that includes data on:

- Basic Town infrastructure (roads, parks, deer warning signs, drainage ditches, etc.)
- Deer/vehicle accidents since 1991 from the Police Department
- Deer carcass pick-up from the Becker's, who are contracted by the Town
- Deer population and distribution from annual aerial surveys conducted by the NYS DEC.
- Land use
- Ground cover

This database has now been transferred to the Town's GIS system, refined and further developed by Jerry Galkiewicz. Although

his efforts have been hampered by equipment and labor constraints in the Town's Computer Services Department, the utility of his efforts to the work of the task force cannot be underestimated.

The task force recognizes the importance of public participation in the policy-making process and has actively pursued the input of the community as part of the data development phase of its work. All meetings of the task force have been open to the public and written comments are always encouraged and welcome. The task force also invited local stakeholders to participate in three roundtable discussion groups. The participants were asked to share their knowledge of relevant issues with the task force and to apprise the task force of any concerns they may have. The first roundtable discussion focused on deer/vehicle interactions (accidents, collision repair, insurance, driver awareness, etc.). The second focused on the extent and costs of vegetation damage (residential, commercial, golf course, etc.). The third focused on the impacts of a large deer population within the Town on agricultural interests (farms & nurseries). These forums provided lively discussions, many ideas and much valued perspective from those stakeholders immediately concerned and impacted. The roundtable discussion could serve to inform the task force, to educate the public on the issues, to build a constituency of supporters in the community, and to inform the public on the activities of the task force.

The roundtable discussions were, by all accounts, successful and have resulted in several direct outcomes:

- Cooperation with the WNY Nursery and Landscape Association to develop materials for its members regarding best landscaping practices to minimize deer damage
- Preparation of an article for Destinations, the American Automobile Association (AAA) newsletter for Central and Western New York, highlighting driver education and awareness

- Meetings with State, County, and Town highway officials to discuss highway safety improvements, including better signage, reflectors, and roadside brush clearing.

Other outcomes of our efforts to collect and refine data include:

- A visit to Irondequoit, NY to compare and contrast our efforts with their approaches to deer management, including lethal (bait-and-shoot, bow-hunting) and non-lethal (immunocontraception) population control
- The preparation of four notebooks available to the public containing information and minutes of the task force meetings. These notebooks are available at the Williamsville, Clearfield and Audubon Libraries and also in the Supervisor's office; notebooks with correspondence pertaining to the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) immunocontraception research project are also available
- An agreement by Captain Kevin Cafferty, Erie County Sheriff, to assist our efforts to develop a deer population baseline by flying their helicopter-based infrared technology over the Great Baehre Swamp and the portion of the UB north campus that is the control site for the immunocontraceptive research study.
- An offer by a deer whistle manufacturer to provide enough deer whistles to conduct a study of their efficacy in a suburban setting.

### **Deer Management Options and Recommendations:**

Like many communities across the country, Amherst has had to make difficult and often controversial decisions on what deer management options to choose. While the discussions have often been heated, Amherst, to its credit, has for the most part been spared the ugly scenes suffered by other communities. The task force has

only just begun to turn the task of determining a deer management strategy for the Town, but is confident that its recommendations will be grounded in a sound scientific approach utilizing the Town's unique deer database.

The task force has identified that the important issues to be considered are deer-related vehicle accidents, damage to gardens, and damage to commercial agriculture. Another important issue is deer over-browsing and the subsequent threats to hardwood forest succession and biodiversity. The task force is presently considering preliminary recommendations made by its members as a starting point for our discussion and will consider all options. These recommendations are listed below without comment:

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Deer Car Collisions:**

1) Continue coordination efforts with agencies such as the County Department of Public Works, The NYS Department of Transportation, The County Sheriff, and The NYS Police. Such coordination will continue to improve signage and roadside deterrents as necessary and to keep the GIS database collision locations accurate. Possibly form a working group with these agencies to be chaired by Paul Justin and Enzo Villalta.

2) The Town should encourage the enforcement and assist in the education of recent State legislation making the feeding of deer within 300' of a public right-of-way illegal.

3) Continue coordination efforts with the AAA and timely "deer data" press releases for the purpose of educating the public (not just residents) about driving defensively in areas of high deer concentrations.

4) Installation of traffic safety devices throughout the Town as indicated by the GIS maps targeting those areas of highest numbers of car/deer collisions. In addition, warning signs should be

installed in areas where visibility, topography, vegetation, and physical evidence of deer presence/passage are a concern.

5) Install "Welcome to Amherst - Drive Safely! You are now in Deer Country" signs along the Millersport Highway and the I-990, as visual variety. The "Drive Safely" comment can be changed for awareness variety on specific roadways (Slow Down, Drive with Caution, etc.).

6) Cut back roadside vegetation from August - October on easements in Deer Habitat Zones as identified by the GIS database. Adequate manpower and equipment from the Highway Department would require additional budgeting.

7) Research road salt as an attractant to bringing deer to the roadside when ground is covered with snow.

8) Define a "hot spot" zone as a road segment wherein five or more deer/car collisions have occurred in one calendar year.

9) Evaluate and recommend whether or not to purchase and install more deer warning roadside reflectors.

10) Investigate different species of grasses not preferred by deer to be planted along right-of-ways.

### **Biodiversity:**

1) Prevent damage by over-browsing to the habitat to the detriment of other plant and animal species.

### **Damage to Private Property:**

1) In Deer Habitat Zones where damage is occurring in excess of suggested thresholds, appropriate management techniques should be implemented.

2) Continue coordination with the WNY State Nursery and Landscape Association to establish a printed list of plant materials not preferred by deer, as well as a list of deterrents for homeowners and contractors to use. Both lists would be endorsed by



the WNYSN/LA and made available to the public and landscape contractors through the Town of Amherst and garden centers.

**Damage to Crops:**

- 1) Aid agricultural enterprises in minimizing damage to crops by maintaining a proactive approach to evaluating crop damage by deer.
- 2) Maintain communication with the Cooperative Extension for recent crop damage reports.
- 3) Monitor and evaluate the issuance and effectiveness of nuisance permits and their ramifications on neighboring areas.

**Universal Plan (concept stated in introduction):**

**a) Education:**

- 1) Develop policy for handling complaints of residents routinely feeding deer, potentially causing a "hot spot" accident zone, based on an educational approach using the database in the GIS.
- 2) Print and distribute one educational brochure to be distributed via the Amherst Welcome Wagon, libraries, Town Hall, and realtors containing information on the following topics:
  - Why deer should not be fed
  - Living with deer in a suburban environment - why they are so numerous
  - Tips on avoiding deer/car collisions
  - Tips on minimizing deer damage to residential/ornamental plants including a list of deterrents and plants not preferred by deer for residents and contractors to use.
  - What is the Town of Amherst Deer Management Plan?
- 3) Develop an audio-visual presentation available to the community.

4) Have an education campaign that is continuous. Small advisory articles and maps every week in the Amherst Bee during the rut season and possibly once a month during the rest of the year.

5) Develop a presentation format for introducing the Deer Management Plan to the community.

6) Continue education efforts with the AAA and WNY State Nursery and Landscape Association.

7) The video "Suburban Deer Management" by Cornell Cooperative Extension will be made available at the Clearfield Library.

**b) Deer Habitat Zones:**

1) Cut back roadside vegetation at right-of-ways (State, County, Town) in habitat zones as identified by the database in the GIS.

2) Define thresholds at which removal or population reduction in Deer Habitat Zones would be recommended. For example:

What is an acceptable number of accidents?

What is the acceptable amount of damage?

What is the acceptable number of deer the habitat can support in each Deer Habitat Zone?

3) Define methods for achieving deer population size within these Deer Habitat Zones.

**Management Plan Strategy:**

1) Recognize the Supervisor's Deer Management Task Force as an on-going project.

2) Gain vote of recognition and endorsement from the full Town Board. In doing so, the name of the task force shall be

changed from Supervisor's Deer Management Task Force to Amherst Deer Management Task Force.

3) Retain charter to examine, make comment on, and make recommendations from, as wide a field of options as is feasible.

4) Budget a GIS Technician in the Computer Services Department.

5) Initiate grant-funding request to financially support the Town of Amherst Deer Management Plan.

6) The task force should retain charters to review all petitions for development and zoning change requests. Each petition is to be reviewed for impacts on available deer habitat and potential for increased or decreased deer/car collision rates i.e. Youngs Road extension.

7) Explore the need to write an environmental impact statement in accordance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act for the total perspective of the deer management program.

8) Establish a working group to examine the desirability of establishing zones within the Town of Amherst, and desired population figures within those zones. The zones could be known as separate but related Deer Habitat Zones. Incorporate deer habitat zones in the Town Master Plan.

- 9) Consider thresholds for:
- Deer population
  - Damage to private property
  - Damage to crops
  - Acceptable number of deer/car collisions.

**d) Reduction Methods:**

1) Evaluate and determine whether or not to recommend removal of deer to reduce the population. Define thresholds that will trigger such a recommendation.

2) For statistical purposes in the immunocontraception study, methods for removing deer will not be used within a one-to-two mile radius of both the control and experimental sites for the immunocontraception project.

3) Implementation of bait & shoot only in Deer Habitat Zones north of North French Road as indicated by suggested thresholds.

4) Implementation of the 5-year immunocontraception project in the Great Baehre Swamp.

5) Define a limited program of bowhunting on the recommendations of the NYSDEC and in keeping with the Deer Habitat Zone concept as to the manner and location as indicated by suggested thresholds.

6) Evaluate and monitor the NYS DEC nuisance permit program for effectiveness in Deer Habitat Zones.

**e) Data Management:**

1) Define the goals of success anticipated by the immunocontraceptive research experiment ie., desired population size, accident reduction to threshold levels.

2) Add nuisance permit, bait and shoot, and crop damage data to the GIS database. Analyze each data for effectiveness of each program to impact deer/car collisions, deer habitat, property damage and deer nuisance permit.

3) Install traffic safety devices throughout the town as indicated by the GIS maps targeting those areas where the highest numbers of car/deer accidents occur.

4) The Town should give unqualified support to each of the programs for an extended period of time to allow a comprehensive evaluation of their effectiveness. Collected data and results of the Deer Management Plan should be reviewed annually for effectiveness of the programs set forth by the plan. Trends for succession of vegetation, estimated growth rate of the Town, and

estimated deer population growth should begin to be compared immediately.

5) Given the existing vegetation characteristics in the Town of Amherst, clearly classify which of those cover types are considered as "deer habitat." Project a vegetation succession factor that takes into account how available vegetation/browse will change over the period of 5,10, 15, 20, and 25 years to determine if changing vegetation cover types can support a larger or a smaller deer population size.

6) Allocate donated funds for acquisition of radio collars for the inoculated does, to track their range and mobility and their survival. Purchase the tracking equipment to find these radio collars.

7) Arrange/contract for a second deer aerial survey to back up the survey of the NYS DEC, reducing the 30% error factor to provide data if the NYS DEC is unable or unfunded to develop an experienced source of data if the NYS DEC declines to ensure population data for the Town of Amherst Deer Management Program.

8) NYS DEC aerial counts will be identified as the official and accepted population count for a designated area.

### **Next Steps:**

The next steps for the task force will involve the review and evaluation of these preliminary recommendations, including the development of a general framework for deer management. For example, the task force has considered a problem-centered approach based on the mitigation of the four areas of greatest concern to Town residents: Deer/vehicle accidents, damage to ornamental shrubbery, agricultural losses and damage to ecosystems. Specific recommendations will address these areas of concern. In addition, other issues will be considered as part of the overall framework and approach to deer management in the Town. These would include:

- The division of the Town into Deer Habitat Zones

- The merits of developing specific deer population levels in each zone
- The impacts of continued development in the Town on the deer population

These are all difficult issues to address and a meaningful consensus can only be reached through open, rational, and non-confrontational discussion and deliberation.