

REPORT and PROPOSAL
of the Deer Remediation Advisory Committee to
the Village of Cayuga Heights Mayor and Board of Trustees:
June 15, 2009

Charged by the Village of Cayuga Heights (VCH/the Village) Mayor and Board of Trustees, the Deer Remediation Advisory Committee (the DRAC) submits the following report on deer management in the VCH. This report is based on information gathered by the DRAC from experts in the field of deer management, plus feedback from open committee meetings and two public forums. The DRAC shared this data with the community via its website //vchdeercommittee.com/ and an 8-page information sheet delivered to residents in early March 2009, a copy of which is attached to this report for reference. Residents referred their concerns to the DRAC via a dedicated email address at CayugaHeightsDRAC@gmail.com.

Proposal:

Acknowledging the need to reduce the number of deer in the Village, the DRAC proposes that the Village of Cayuga Heights Mayor and Board of Trustees implement a Phased Options Approach (POA) to deer management. The DRAC recommends that the Village begin the POA with Phase I: the surgical sterilization of 60 does within a two-year period; followed by Phase II: the culling of the remainder of the herd within the year subsequent to completion of the sterilization program; followed by Phase III: ongoing maintenance of the herd size through further sterilization and culling, as necessary.

It is expected that the sterilization and culling phases will, once implemented, result in a reduced and stable deer herd in approximately 3 years. Research supports this, noting that while male deer roam, females and their young stay within a smaller home territory. It is the growth and reproductive capacity of these young that necessitates the program of ongoing maintenance. And while there are very few male deer in our area, veterinarians are unwilling to castrate male deer due to the difficulty of anesthetizing them adequately before surgery. We would also like to point out that the VCH is surrounded by a number of communities with similar concerns and hope our efforts can be coordinated in the very near future.

Specific Recommendations:

The following specific recommendations of the DRAC (further detailed under the next heading of this report) urge the VCH to accomplish the following:

1. hire a part-time Deer Management Director (DMD).
2. adopt the goal of the cultural carrying capacity of 30 deer/square mile, which would result in a total deer population in the Village of Cayuga Heights of approximately 60 deer for the

Village's approximately 1.85 square miles.

3. establish guidelines for confirming that the POA is reaching its goal of managing the VCH deer herd to reduce ecological and other landscape damage, traffic accidents (deer-vehicle collisions), incidents of Lyme Disease, and other unwanted deer-human interactions.
4. implement the POA as soon as the VCH has determined that it has political and community support.
5. recognize that any approach to deer management must be implemented without fail for at least five and possibly 10 years, without which the program will fail.

Further Details:

1. The DRAC recommends that the VCH begin working toward implementation of the POA by hiring a part time DMD to carry out the following:
 - apply for grant monies with the understanding that the VCH's deer population problem is part of a larger concern;
 - identify owners who will make their properties available for culling and/or sterilization trapping sites;
 - work with the VCH treasurer and attorney to bid out and write contracts for all contractors hired;
 - work with Cornell University personnel, especially Paul Curtis, regarding capture and sterilization procedures as well as staff and facilities;
 - work with contractors to coordinate and implement timing, safety concerns, impact guidelines, etc;
 - work with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Cornell University personnel to file required permits and other paperwork;
 - and coordinate with surrounding communities.
- 2–5. The VCH Board must make a long-term commitment to the POA. It will take a minimum of 3 years to see the results of sterilization of the VCH deer population, but the maintenance phase (periodic culling and/or sterilization) must be ongoing. The Board also may wish to consider the use of additional methods to reduce deer-human conflict, such as roadway reflectors, education about ticks, and a re-examination of the VCH Fencing Ordinance (*see below regarding Lyme Disease and fencing*).
4. A survey, for which private funding has been offered, could be conducted to gauge public sentiment about deer, deer impacts and support for the POA. It could also be used as a tool to begin the process of identifying property owners who would allow their properties to be used for trapping for sterilization and/or culling.
5. Under the POA, the sterilization of approximately 60 does would be completed first, allowing for the capture of less wary does which is more efficient in time and cost. These are the does and families who would continue to live in our community and whose observation and maintenance would be ongoing. Paul Curtis' experience both in the VCH and at Cornell indicates that this first phase would take approximately two years at an average cost of approximately \$1000/doe.

Once 60 does are sterilized, the DMD would oversee the hiring of professional sharpshooters or bow hunters to shoot unsterilized deer at bait sites. It is estimated that approximately 8–10 sites will be required for culling. The DMD will work with VCH Police Chief Boyce and DEC officer David Riehlman to develop and oversee the culling protocol and hiring of professional sharpshooters/bow hunters. It is anticipated that the initial culling of the remainder of the herd will occur within a two–three week period within the year after sterilization has been completed. The cost estimate for a bait and shoot method is approximately \$400/deer.

It is estimated that an area of 18 acres will be necessary for each culling site. Permission will be needed from landowners to allow hunting within 500’ of their businesses and homes to assemble the required area. For safety reasons, the DEC recommends against publicizing culling sites and times, lest the information alert disruptive protestors to the culling sites. However, some Villagers would like the information to secure their own safety. The VCH Board may wish to consider enacting a local law making it illegal, and punishable by fine, to interfere in any portion of a culling operation.

Recommendations for Interim Action:

Given the length of time that will be required for the POA to significantly reduce the number of deer in the VCH, the DRAC recommends that the VCH Mayor and Board of Trustees immediately address concerns regarding Lyme Disease and landscape damage:

1 - Education Concerning the Transmission of Lyme Disease

Two species of ticks are responsible for transmitting Lyme Disease and conditions such as *ehrlichiosis*. Their larvae and nymphs pick up the bacteria when they feed on any small rodents whose blood has already been infected, and whose preferred cover is long grasses and shrubs. Adult ticks move on to feed on a variety of larger mammals including humans, and deer which are their preferred hosts. Studies show that all local deer would have to be removed to affect the number of locally transmitted cases of Lyme Disease, none of which would affect the ticks frequently picked up by travelers. But studies also show that the number of ticks in a local area are generally linearly correlated with the number of deer present. Recommended mitigation of deer-borne diseases includes fencing, reducing tick habitats (especially where properties are bounded by heavy vegetation), and the possible treatment of white-footed mice. Educating the public includes practicing “due diligence” in clothing for outdoor wear and learning to check for ticks after being outdoors.

2 - Amendment of VCH Fence Ordinance

Currently, property owners are allowed to erect a fence of up to 4’ high at the boundary line of their properties, or erect a higher fence the same distance from the property boundary as required for a building, that is, 25’ from the front boundary line of the property and 15’ from the side or rear of a property. The DRAC recommends the fence ordinance be examined. One scenario for change is that property owners be allowed to erect fences on the boundaries of their property up to 8’ high, provided that the portion above 4’ is 90% open and does not act as a solid visual

barrier. Permits for this higher fencing will be required in all cases to ensure the design is acceptable. For example, 8' high chain link fencing, solid fencing or walls would not be approved.

Alternatives:

Doing nothing

If no management of the deer population is implemented, research indicates that the deer population will continue to increase in number and density. Given the current degree of complaints about the deer population, it is expected that doing nothing will lead to increasing deer population numbers and increasing concerns with deer-human interaction in the VCH.

Culling only

While this is the most cost-effective method of reducing the size of the herd, it is also the most controversial. Maintenance of the herd would be required at a higher level, because the deer that have not been killed will continue to breed. Culling would be ongoing, would disrupt Village harmony, and would keep the controversy alive.

Sterilization only

This option is slower and more expensive than culling alone or even the combined approach of sterilization and culling recommended by the DRAC. It would take approximately 3-5 years to stabilize herd growth if target numbers of deer are sterilized annually, and herd reductions would not be evident for approximately 5-6 years.

Respectfully submitted by members of the Deer Remediation Advisory Committee:

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