



To: Park Commission

**From: Jane Greenway and Emma Campbell
Parks and Recreation Department**

Date: July 29, 2020

Re: 2020 - Deer Management Recommendation

The purpose of this memo is to update the Park Commission on the status of the deer management program.

Proposed 2020 properties for the Deer Management Program (see attached map for locations):

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Central Park | 30. North Ridge Preserve |
| 2. Towner Road Park | 31. Mandenberg Woods |
| 3. Wonch Park | 32. Tihart Preserve |
| 4. Ferguson Park | 33. Ponderosa Preserve |
| 5. Eastgate Park | 34. Nemoke Preserve |
| 6. Legg Park | 35. Glendale Cemetery |
| 7. Hartrick Park | 36. Riverside Cemetery |
| 8. Ted Black Woods | 37. Ingham County Farm |
| 9. North Meridian Rd. Park | 38. Transfer Station |
| 10. Red Cedar Natural Area | 39. Brattin Woods Park |
| 11. Forest Hills Natural Area | 40. Hillbrook Park |
| 12. Tacoma Hills Natural Area | |
| 13. Orlando Outlot B | |
| 14. Davis Foster Preserve | |
| 15. Hubbel Preserve | |
| 16. Lake Lansing North Preserve | |
| 17. Newman Equities Preserve | |
| 18. Towar Woods Preserve | |
| 19. Lake Lansing South Preserve | |
| 20. Central Meridian Uplands | |
| 21. Sower Woods Preserve | |
| 22. Tihart/Cornell Wetland | |
| 23. Southwest Meridian Uplands | |
| 24. Sumbal Preserve | |
| 25. Red Cedar Glen Preserve | |
| 26. Towner Wetland Preserve | |
| 27. Meridian Central Wetland | |
| 28. Red Cedar River East Preserve | |
| 29. Forest Grove Preserve | |

Background

Meridian Township’s tenth year of deer management will officially commence on October 1, 2020 and will run until January 1, 2021. This popular program places volunteer archery hunters on select Township and County owned properties to manage the deer population. Meridian Township has an over-population of deer that has resulted in an increase of damage to landscaping, reports of vehicle/deer accidents, concern for public health, and a disruption to the ecological balance of our natural areas. In response, the Meridian Township Board directed staff to develop and implement a deer management plan that outlines measures for a highly managed program to harvest white-tailed deer in a number of selected township-owned properties.

The program began in 2011 and has been conducted each year since that time. The harvest is held during the regular archery season, October 1st through January 1st. The managed harvest is NOT open to the general public. All hunters must be approved by the Township and are tested for proficiency at the MSU Demmer Archery Center. Only approved, qualified, competent and experienced hunters will be considered to access Township property for the managed harvest. Neighboring property owners are notified of the harvest each year. All parks and land preserves remain open to the public during archery season. The hunters have proven to be valuable partners and act as the eyes and ears on Township-owned properties. The program continues to receive accolades statewide and serves as a model for suburban wildlife management.

Deer Management Program Statistics

(Collision based on data provided on the MSP “Traffic Crash Reporting System – Crash Statistics Report Selection Criteria”)

	Total Hunters	Properties Hunted	Deer Harvested	Reported Deer/Car Collisions
2011	25	7	43	152
2012	50	18	90	153
2013	60	20	127	180
2014	73	21	150	137
2015	30	19	63	144
2016	73	31	73	164
2017	66	30	80	129
2018	74	38	57	129
2019	84	38	88	153
2020		40 proposed		

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

CWD is a deadly neurological disease found in the state's free-ranging deer population. Since the discovery of CWD deer in Meridian Township in May 2015, over 2,000 deer from Meridian Township have been tested for CWD in order to gauge the extent of the disease across the landscape. To date, ten deer in Ingham and Clinton counties have tested positive for the disease with five of them found in Meridian Township. To date, more than 61,000 deer in Michigan have been tested for chronic wasting disease, and CWD has been confirmed in 120 free-ranging deer in eight Michigan counties: Clinton, Ingham, Ionia, Jackson, Kent, Gratiot, Eaton and Montcalm.

In summary, the discovery of CWD somewhat complicated the Meridian Deer Management program because the hunters are no longer allowed to utilize bait to attract the deer. This has resulted in a significant drop in deer harvested (seen from 2014 to 2015). In addition, local processors who processed the Township's deer are no longer participating in the Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger program due to concerns over CWD. The World Health Organization has advised against consuming venison that is contaminated with CWD, although no link to harmful effects in humans has yet been proven. Many processors will not take deer within the core CWD zone to be sure they are not contaminating their equipment which would have to be thrown out if a CWD positive deer was processed. The DNR is unsure of when the CWD restrictions can be lifted but they advised it will be at least a few more years. Until that time, the closest processor that works with Michigan Sportsmen against Hunger is in Howell. However, many of our hunters donate their venison through other private programs or directly provide venison to families in need. A few local processors will still process deer in the core zone and then the hunters take it upon themselves to donate the meat to charity.

Michigan State University Research Project

Jonathan Trudeau, a PhD student with the MSU Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, is conducting a long-term research project on white-tailed deer movement that started in January 2018. This research is part of a large-scale collaboration between Michigan State University (MSU) and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) aimed at characterizing deer movement across a landscape with varying human development. With the emergence of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in mid-Michigan, it is crucial to understand deer movement patterns to best inform effective disease management practices. The study area spans Ionia, Clinton and Ingham counties. Jonathan's team successfully captured and fit global positioning system (GPS) collars on 20 adult white-tailed deer in 2018 and 39 adult white-tailed deer in 2019, of which 22 remain. The GPS collars allow Jonathan to monitor the survival and movement of each deer for up to two years.

The following properties are being utilized for the study: Central Park, North Meridian Road Park, Ted Black Woods, Nancy Moore Park, Towar Woods, Central Meridian Uplands, Davis Foster Preserve, Red Cedar River East Preserve, Tihart/Cornell Wetland Preserve, Legg Park, Forest Grove Preserve, North Ridge Preserve, the Transfer station, and Tihart Preserve.

Future Plans

The intention is to continue the volunteer archery deer management program in 2020 with the hope that our volunteer's efforts will continue to reduce the herd and provide valuable data on Chronic Wasting Disease to the Michigan DNR.

Conclusion

The Parks and Recreation office regularly fields calls from residents complaining about deer damage to personal property. Our environmental consultants and staff continue to report severe ecological damage to the natural areas due to over-browsing.

The onset of CWD has also raised concerns about the health of the deer herd in Meridian Township. While not its original intention, the deer management program now plays a vital role in providing the Michigan DNR and MSU with valuable data on the disease. Although, this now means one of the goals of the program to donate all harvested venison is not a possibility at this time. We will keep encouraging hunters to privately donate the venison they harvest and as soon as the CWD restrictions are lifted, we hope to resume all donations to Sportsman Against Hunger.

Attachment:

1. Meridian Township 2020 Deer Management Areas Map