

East River Preserve Deer Study Committee
Management Plan Recommendation to Board of Selectmen

5/12/2014

Introduction and Summary

Goal: To ensure that the ecological values and uses of this protected open space are managed to sustain and, where necessary, restore the property's natural resource values. Overriding goals are to:

- (1) Conserve a diverse and healthy suite of habitats;
- (2) Promote ecological and outdoor recreation connections to adjacent lands and waters;
- (3) Provide public access to a variety of water-dependent and terrestrial nature-based recreation opportunities;
- (4) Preserve cultural heritage;
- (5) Protect water quality, both estuarine and fresh water;
- (6) Support a healthy balance of wildlife, especially those species of 'greatest conservation need' as defined in Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy;
- (7) Encourage scientific research;
- (8) Promote educational opportunities.

Deer Study Committee Recommendations

Charge: "To establish a safe and practical Deer Management Policy that is consistent with the (8) goals of the East River Preserve Management Plan to be recommended to the Board of Selectmen."

Background: We took our charge seriously, met monthly and as appropriate, and did due diligence. We focused on our charge, and worked to help the community find common ground across a wide diverse of perspectives. We felt overall that our job was to aid the community, not "recycle" our personal views and argue for them. We followed "rules for finding common interest." They are "speak and listen, use reliable information, and be practical, use common sense, and draw on the experience of others." We worked to ensure fairness, inclusiveness, respect, factuality, comprehensiveness, timeliness, and effectiveness. We were attentive to ecological integrity as the overriding goal, and many related issues including technical and scientific factors, animal welfare and humane concerns, and human safety issues. We sought agreement as practicable transcending personal views.

Our Work: We met for more than 2 years and heard from and read papers by CT Department of Energy and Environment Protection-Wildlife Division, Audubon Greenwich, Yale University-Forestry and Environmental Studies, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Forestry and Horticulture, and Southern CT Regional Water Authority. We also read widely including scientific reports and management plans from the Fairfield County Deer Management Alliance plan, CT The Humane Society of the United States-CT Office, The Wildlife Society, and others. We also made site visits to the Preserve, and other locations. And we had discussions among ourselves and with the ecological, conservation, and deer experts that we interviewed. We deliberated seriously and committed considerable time in meeting our charge.

Recommendations and Findings:

Based on the above, our recommendations follow and are consonant with deer management policy considerations in the 2001 Preserve report:

- Remain committed to the **goal of ecological integrity** (i.e., environmental health, maintaining or restoring species population viability, community interactions, and ecosystem functions) in perpetuity for the citizens of the Guilford Township, the State, and Nation.
- (1) There is overwhelming historic, scientific/ecological, and experiential evidence from many localities along the CT shoreline, throughout CT, and across all of the eastern United States that deer can and do overpopulate. Data are also available from the East River Preserve. Deer overpopulation producing high densities is caused by the historic removal of deer predators and creation of habitat highly beneficial to deer (i.e., edges, food, and cover). Humans, many argue, must assume responsibility for keeping deer in check given the goal of ecological integrity. In fact, restoration ecology is a widely recognized and well-established professional field. Human responsibility and appropriate action relative to wildlife is deeply rooted in the American conservation tradition.
 - (2) Deer density in the ERP should be actively reduced and monitored through a bow hunting program administered by the Town of Guilford in compliance with CT DEEP regulations. The deer reduction program should maximize safety, efficiency, and humane standards and be adjusted periodically according to a continuous monitoring and learning process.
 - (3) Ecological monitoring should be undertaken by establishing deer exclosures, browse transects/plots, and related monitoring of species sensitive to effects of deer over-browsing as a basis for learning and effective management. It is recommended that the Guilford Conservation Commission perform such monitoring continuously and report as needed/requested to The Board of Selectmen with a mandatory report and grading of the program tri-annually. Naturalists groups, the CT DEEP, The Department of Forestry and Horticulture, Yale University, other colleges and schools, and citizen volunteers may be given opportunities to contribute. Numerous educational opportunities exist through such activities.

- (4) Deer reduction through a bow hunting program and ecological monitoring should be carried out at least three years and these recommendations should be reviewed at the end of that period.

The Committee

Harvey Smith (Chairman)
Susan Clark
Robert Davidson
Connie Frontis
William Logiodice
Harry Moscovitz
Elyse Santagata
Phil LoGiudice (alternate)
David Francis (alternate)

Selected References

- Brunner, R.D., et al. 2002. *Finding Common Ground Governance and Natural Resources in the American West*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- CT Department of Energy and Environment Protection. 2010. Connecticut Deer Program Summaries. Annual Reports. Hartford, CT.
- Doyle-Chapitman, C. 2013. The human dimensions of white-tailed deer hunting in the Northeastern US. Master's Thesis, Yale University. School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, New Haven.
- Smith H. R., and S. G. Clark. 2003. Wild animals in Connecticut's changing landscape. Pp.197-214 in Lamar, H. R., ed., and Cooper, C. C., associate ed., *Voices of the New Republic: Connecticut Towns 1800-1832. Volume II: What We Think*. New Haven: Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- The Wildlife Society. 2011. Animal rights philosophy and wildlife conservation. Final Position Statement of the Wildlife Society, Bethesda, MD. twswildlife.org

DRAFT - ERP Hunting Rules- DRAFT

1. Twenty hunters will be accepted into the program, chosen by lottery. Applicants will be solicited by mail and other means. Applicants must supply name, address, phone, driver's license, 2014 State of CT Archery Deer Permit and be over 18 years of age and sign a release for a criminal background check.
2. Applicants will be required to attend a pre-hunt meeting and pass a proficiency test. Applicants must demonstrate knowledge of hunting safety and shoot at least 4 of 5 arrows into a 10 inch diameter circle at a distance of 60 feet (20 yards). Test location and time TBA.
3. The pre-hunt meeting will review property boundaries, rules and safety. Permits, maps and dashboard passes will be distributed.
4. Participants may scout the area for 10 days prior to the hunt and must carry their permit with them.
5. Deer control season shall be October 15 through November 15, Monday through Friday. No hunting on weekends or on days when school is not in session. Hunters may enter the property at 4:30 am and must be off the property by 11:30 a.m. If a participant is successful and requires tracking and removal of a deer after 11:30 a.m., he must notify (TBA). Participants must carry cellphones.
6. Participants must hunt from temporary tree stands that meet standards of the Treestand Manufacturers Association installed per instructions provided by manufacturer.
7. Participants are required to use a full body safety harness.
8. Treestands must be at least 8' and no more than 18' off the ground. Lower sections of ladder stands must be removed each day to render them inaccessible to other parties.
9. Stands must be at least 250' from marked trails with 250' between hunting parties.
10. Shots shall not exceed 75 feet and arrows are to be retrieved if possible.
11. Use of bait as allowed according to CT State Hunting Regulations.
12. Required equipment: flashlight, pull rope for equipment, and cell phone.
13. Participants must comply with CT regulations for 400 inches of orange above the waist.
14. Participants are required to complete the daily log showing deer spotted, number of does, bucks and fawns. Deer kills will be reported on a separate deer kill form as well as wounded but not recovered.
15. Entrails must be covered following field dressing.
16. Participants are encouraged to donate meat from kills to soup kitchen or other charitable organizations.

17. Tree stands must be removed not later than the end of day, November 15.
18. A post hunt meeting will be held to review results and accept comments and recommendations for future hunts.

Monitoring Program to Assess The Impact of Deer Reduction Program in The ERP

The Committee recognizes that the recommended deer reduction program, though based on the best available evidence, is experimental in our unique environment. The Committee therefore recommends that periodic reports of a systematic monitoring regime be provided to the Selectmen prior to the initiation of the program and every 3 years in order to determine its success or failure. An initial report updating and confirming the findings of the ERP Management Plan 2011 that there is continued habitat destruction due to over-browsing by deer should be submitted by the Conservation Commission in order to launch the program. The subsequent reports should include the items enumerated below resulting in a grade indicating the need for a specific action by The Selectmen.

ELEMENTS OF TRI-ANNUAL REPORT

Sources of information to include: Guilford Conservation Commission, Citizen Reports, Police, Mandatory Hunter Reports, Town Finance Director

1. Impact on Vegetation
2. Impact on other wildlife
3. Impact on Deer Population
4. Impact on Recreational Use of the Preserve
5. Neighborhood Impact
6. Hunter Safety and Violations
7. Results of Charitable donation of meat to food banks
8. Cost of the program including law enforcement, monitoring progress of the program, permitting of hunters, fencing.

GRADING THE PROGRAM / ACTIONS

A. The program has resulted in noticeable improvement of the ecosystem but there is continued evidence of excessive destruction by deer overpopulation.

Action – Renew program for 3 years

B. The program has resulted in minimal improvement and has had no adverse consequences

Action – Modify the program and renew for one 3 year extension. If no noticeable improvement after 6 years then grade is F.

C. There is not evidence for excessive destruction of the ecosystem by deer.

Action – Suspend the program until need is demonstrated by next tri-annual report

F. The program has not resulted in improvement of the ecosystem or adverse consequences outweigh benefits

Action – Terminate program