



For four months now, a group of citizens in the tri-cities area has been attending meetings, reviewing scientific research, evaluating the validity of claims being made by those who advocate a deer killing program, and investigating what's happening in other communities facing this issue. It is our mission to protect native vegetation, wildlife and their habitat. Therefore we have sought to understand the true sources of deer-human conflicts and how they might most effectively be reduced. In all our study, one clear truth has emerged: **Our community will be divided by any solution that doesn't respect both the needs of gardeners and the values of people opposed to a deer killing program.** ¹ **Safer roadways**

are good. Vibrant gardens are good. Respecting and protecting animals is good. Treating these things as mutually exclusive will only result in pitting well-meaning people against one another. Our community can do better. Some gardeners feel their interests will have been abandoned if an annual deer killing plan is not implemented. Meanwhile, those who care about the fate of the deer, and those opposed to bringing guns and violence into our community, will feel violated by an annual bait-and-shoot program. The right approach for our community should not leave some residents feeling ignored, and others violated. **It should provide direct assistance to those experiencing the greatest conflict with deer, while preserving the peaceful, non-violent culture our community is known for.** The right approach should be pragmatic, ethical and economically sustainable. It should bring people together, not tear neighborhoods apart.

Costly and Controversial

A bait-and-shoot program **will use valuable tax dollars to bring contracted deer killers into our community year after year.** Not to mention the ethical implications when pregnant doe and their fawn are killed. Other communities that have gone down this path have experienced turmoil and division, with local law enforcement officers placed in the middle, forced to provide security for shooters not under their command, in a setting where the killing of human-habituated animals provoked deep upset and anger. It became clear in January during the cemetery killing of the deer how poorly the city managed the process. Citizens were walking their dogs completely unaware that sharpshooters were shooting within range. Sharpshooters were filmed climbing the dune and shooting around the homes. They were not in tree stands of any kind as was reported. ² In Irondequoit, NY, where a deer killing program was implemented, resident Sandy Baker reported that wounded and bleeding deer wandered into people's yards, traumatizing children. **"Best friends don't even talk to each other anymore."** she said at a 2001 public meeting in Cayuga Heights. **"The killing programs are the ones that have polarized the community... All I can say is please try to resist any kill program."** The same situation occurred in Wisconsin during a bow hunt. The deer ran through town leaving a bloody trail behind it. Does it make sense to undertake an expensive, risk-laden program that some residents feel will be a violation of their values, and even traumatic? In fact, a bait-and-shoot program in Rochester Hills, Michigan, was recently cancelled after only one month. One Councilman said, **"The solution has become worse than the problem."**³ Another commented on the rush to cull, saying "Let's learn something from this, and not ever do anything like this again."

Impractical and Unsustainable

Wildlife biologists and hunters know that **killing deer does not necessarily lead to reduction in the size of a herd.**⁵ Whenever there's an abrupt, short-term drop in the deer population, as would occur following a bait-and-shoot operation, a phenomenon called "compensatory rebound" comes into effect. Since the same amount of food is now available to a smaller number of animals, **the bodies of the deer react by becoming more fertile, with more incidences of twin and triplet fawns, and with yearlings going into estrus early.**⁶ **This can actually lead to an even greater population of deer the following year.**⁷ So, wherever culling programs are implemented, the killing itself creates the need for even more killing, which must be maintained year after year after year, at great expense to tax-payers. In Princeton, New Jersey, a proposed 5-year program has now been going on for nine years straight. In Solon, Ohio, a proposed 2-year program is currently in its 5th year. In fact, **some bait-and-shoot programs have ended not when the deer population reached a desired level, but when the municipalities implementing the programs could no longer afford them, leaving them back where they started, only now considerably poorer.**⁸ Unlike many other communities implementing bait-and-shoot programs, the City of Grand Haven for example, has very few potential sites that are far enough from human dwellings for shooting to legally be carried out, and these few locations tend to be toward the perimeters of the village. Hence, **there is no guarantee that killing a number of deer on one end of the village will prevent deer from damaging landscaping in other parts of the village.** Furthermore, Grand Haven and surrounding areas are completely embedded within other municipalities. With no geographic barriers to overcome, **deer from surrounding neighborhoods are likely to move in as new territory is freed up by the village's temporary drop in deer population.**

Addressing Conflicts Directly: The safe, cost-effective, and pragmatic alternative

Instead of annually paying large sums of tax-payers' dollars to out-of-town deer killing contractors, why not hire an on-staff Director of Wildlife whose job would be to directly assist residents experiencing conflicts? A Director of Wildlife could work with the Defenders of Urban Wildlife and collect and disseminate the latest techniques for protecting gardens, consult with property owners individually, assist with implementing deer repelling protocols, and arrange for group buying discounts on community-appropriate fencing and repellent technologies. In short, **a Director of Wildlife could help bring the community together by offering a positive approach and seeing to it that concrete steps are promptly taken on behalf of those most impacted.**

Already there are many residents who maintain vibrant gardens and beautiful landscaping through the creative use of fencing, plant selection, and repellents. If more residents were empowered with the proper tools and technologies, those who have struggled for years could finally get some relief. And this relief would come more quickly and reliably than the haphazard results of a killing program. Experience demonstrates that **until residents have the ability to effectively protect their gardens, it doesn't matter how many deer are in the vicinity — all it takes is one eating their favorite plantings to bring some people back to a state of total frustration.**

Likewise, prevention should be the focus of any program aimed at reducing deer-vehicle collisions (DVC's). Fortunately, there are highly effective roadside warning reflector systems. **Strieter-Lite technology, for example, has a track record of reducing DVCs by 78-90% and is eligible for up to 90% federal funding.**⁹ The traffic engineer in Battle Creek reported 94% reduction during their first year of use. Data from the local Department of Transportation and Sheriff departments have provided data that illustrates there are DVC "hot spots." By installing warning reflectors in such areas, the collision rate can be significantly reduced — without any of the risks of a killing program, which may actually *cause* accidents. This happened in Rochester Hills when, **on the**

second day of shooting, a frightened deer ran into the road and was hit by a car.¹⁰

We encourage you to look beyond the assumption that there are just too many deer and that killing some will solve people's problems. Instead, consider that it is unresolved deer-human conflicts that make people so frustrated. The same holds true for other wildlife whose habitats are increasingly squeezed. Non-violent solutions exist to address these conflicts directly, allowing us to live in harmony with both our neighbors and our natural surroundings. **These alternatives promise to be more effective, less costly, and less divisive than a killing program that largely ignores existing data and research.**

Deconstructing the Myths about Tri-City Area Deer

Thus far, the arguments presented to support a deer killing program have been largely unsubstantiated, and have proven to be especially weak when examined in light of data specific to the Tri-Cities. Here are a few examples:

Killing deer to prevent Lyme disease and deer feces?

Illness caused by contact with deer feces: When contacted about this issue, a staff member of the Ottawa County Health department did not know of any record of residents who have become ill through contact with deer feces, and had never heard of this being a public health issue in general. That said, most mothers generally teach their children not to play with feces, regardless of the source, and to wash their hands should they come in contact with feces. Following this time-tested rule seems more sensible than trying to reduce the aggregate amount of deer feces in our community by killing a large number of deer every year. After all, shall we contemplate eradicating the squirrels, birds, cats, dogs and other animals in our community in order to create a feces-free environment?

Lyme Disease: Between 2002 and 2007 the Michigan Departments of Agriculture and Community Health found a Lyme Disease incidence rate of 1.32 to 2.77 case per 100,000 residents of Ottawa County.¹² Regardless of the rate of infection, it's important to understand that people don't catch Lyme disease from deer. It is ticks that transmit the disease to humans. If a person is bitten by an infected tick, and does not remove the tick within 36 hours, they may contract Lyme disease. One study indicated that the risk of infection from a recognized tick bite was 1 to 2 percent. People don't catch Lyme disease from deer, but from ticks. Neither the Ottawa County Health Dept. nor the American Lyme Disease Foundation support the killing of deer as a route to reducing Lyme disease risk. A recent study in New Jersey showed that **after three years of an aggressive deer killing program, no reduction in Lyme disease rates or in disease-carrying tick populations were found.**¹⁵

Instead, the Ottawa County Health Dept. focuses on tick bite prevention and identification, as well as diagnostic training for local medical professionals. They stress keeping lawns regularly mowed and removing brush piles. This helps eliminate habitats for ticks and their small animal hosts, such as birds and field mice, which, unlike the deer, are capable of contracting Lyme disease and passing it on to more ticks. In fact, a 2006 study found that **the density and infectiousness of ticks can actually INCREASE when deer numbers are suddenly reduced in an area,** since ticks then turn to smaller animal hosts, creating tick-borne disease "hot spots."¹⁶

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