

Politics Above Science

Grand Haven City Council members John Naser, Geri McCaleb and Ed Nieuwenhuis, Pat McGinnis, City Manager and Lisa Sutterfield, Assistant City Manager believe deer need to be killed. This is based purely on the lack of social tolerance of a small fraction of the city's population. 70 people out of the 10,682 tax payers called in to complain about the deer. The phone log is comical and is public information should you wish to see it. The biological carrying capacity of the land has not been exceeded. The slaughter of pregnant doe and their fawn was not based on science. This has been confirmed by Sara Sheaffer, DNR Wildlife Supervisor for Southwest Michigan. As documented elsewhere on this site, there are serious questions about the quality of information and reasoning used by the city to evaluate these potential risks, not to mention the safety and ethics of their preferred approach. Reports created by Miss Sutterfield are full of inconsistencies and outright errors. For example, on page 5 of the report found at GrandHaven.org, she states that after observing deer in the city on 23 separate nights it was determined that 34% of them were fawns. She went on to say that this is very alarming because that means that the population of the deer in 2008 has increased by 34%! Obviously that is a categorically incorrect use of logic and reasoning but alarms she does raise. That said, it is important to know that if our community wishes to address the concerns that the city has raised, in every case there is a safer, more ethical, and more sensible approach than a program centered on annually baiting and shooting deer in the midst of our densely settled community.

The city of GH has made a case that deer should be killed for reasons of social intolerance and public safety. A common sense analysis of the specific concerns they raise demonstrates that in several cases, the risks are less significant than is being implied by several members of the city, and that in every case, killing deer is not the best option for reasons of safety, effectiveness, and ethics. It is not possible to eliminate all risk from life, and since our time and financial resources are limited individually and as a community, it makes sense to carefully prioritize our risk reduction efforts. When, as in the case of a bait and shoot program, the solution introduces even more serious risks than the purported problem, isn't it time to step back and think a little more about where we are going?