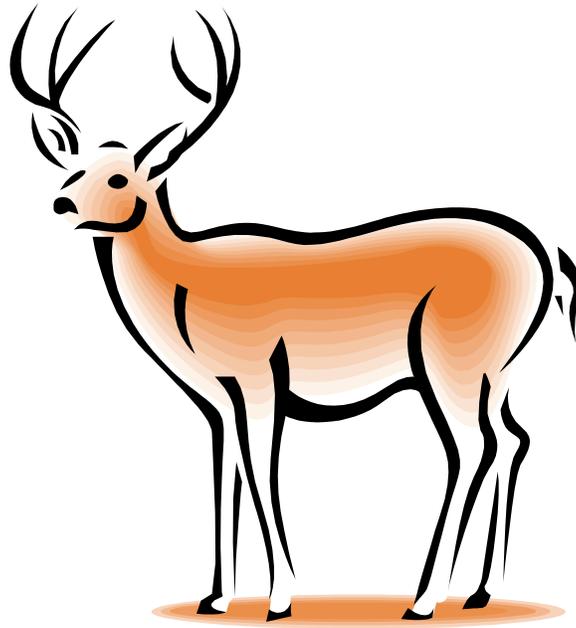


# Lake Lansing Park-North Deer Management Plan



## **INTRODUCTION**

Located in the northeast corner of Meridian Township, Lake Lansing Park-North is comprised of 530 acres of diverse habitat, rich with wildlife and unique flora. Lake Lansing Park-North is a part of the Ingham County Parks system. It is used year round by visitors for nature hikes, trail running, picnicking, and cross country skiing. Efforts from park staff, the Mid-Michigan Stewardship network, volunteers, and other organizations help keep the parks clean, operational, and natural. It has become increasingly apparent that all of these efforts will be in vain, however, if we do not do something to keep the deer population in check.

The whitetail deer is common across all parts of Michigan, and many Michiganders thoroughly enjoy watching the deer recreationally in nature. When deer populations grow out of control however, deer become looked upon as pests. This takes away from the enjoyment of nature. In most parts of the Lower Peninsula the deer have no natural predators. A coyote may take a young fawn or sickly deer, but there is nothing to keep the healthy adult population in check. For many years this has helped the deer population continue to grow, but the deer are not the only thing growing. Our cities have been growing as well, pushing deer back out of the newly developed land into what remains of their natural habitat. The growth of our cities, lack of natural predators, and the fact that there is no hunting within park property has made Lake Lansing Park-North essentially an ideal shelter for the local deer population.

We are very proud of the natural beauty of our parks. Deer are certainly a part of the natural wildlife that we are proud of and want to preserve, however, it is important we make sure they are in balance with the rest of nature. When one side becomes too much, it can have devastating effects on everything else. We wish to create equilibrium so that our parks remain “exceptional in nature” for everyone to enjoy.

## **HOW WE KNOW OUR AREA IS OVER POPULATED WITH DEER**

- Increased deer crash accidents in our area
  - o 1,076 total deer crashes in Ingham County in 2009
  - o From 2006-2011 there was a 5% increase in deer crashes in Meridian Township. That’s an average of 1% each year.
- Negative effects on vegetation in the park
  - o According to a study done by state biologist Chris Reidy, many of our native plants are being grazed on and destroyed by the deer.
  - o Since deer have a browsing preference for native plants, many of them are in recession, while invasive, non-native plants are flourishing and invading the forest.
  - o Reduction in biodiversity
- Increased complaints from neighbors about deer browsing on gardens and other landscaping and many residents are demanding the park take action
- Neighboring communities are also dealing with the same high deer volume problems

## **PROBLEMS WITH DEER**

- Too many deer in a certain area causes greater competition for food, leading to smaller, more underweight, and malnourished deer.
- Being underweight and malnourished make deer more susceptible to diseases and less likely to survive the harsh winter months
- A high number of deer facilitates and accelerates the spreading of diseases, including Eastern Equine Encephalitis, Lyme's Disease, Bovine TB, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), and the recent epidemic of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD). Some of these diseases pose a potential threat to livestock and humans.
- Due to a high concentration of deer in the forest, many deer wander into local neighborhoods and cause problems for area residents by eating plants in gardens and landscaping.
- Over browsing of native plants causes abatement or even extinction of those plants, while allowing invasive, non-native plants to flourish.
- Deer help facilitate the dispersal of invasive plants by browsing native plants and becoming a conduit for invasive seed transportation
- Destruction of native plant communities has cascading effects on associated wildlife species and ecosystems
- Increased deer populations causes increased deer/car crashes

## **WHAT ARE OUR OPTIONS**

There are different ways of going about reducing and controlling our deer population. We wanted to weigh our options to see which would be the most practical, effective, and cost efficient. We have also looked into what other local communities have done to see what has worked the best and what problems they may have encountered.

### **Fencing Pro's:**

- Environmentally friendly
- Site specific would help homeowners

### **Fencing Con's:**

- Expensive and labor intensive for the park to put up fencing around perimeter
- Would not alleviate problems effectively as deer would still brows vegetation inside park
- Would do nothing to reduce size of deer population

### **Trap and Transfer:**

The Wildlife Division of the MDNR does not allow removal of live deer. The trapping and converting of deer to private ownership is also prohibited.

### **Contraceptives and Sterilization:**

The Wildlife Division prohibits use of contraceptives and sterilization. There is currently no method of contraceptives that is approved by the FDA. These methods are impractical and unaffordable. Furthermore, deer are susceptible to traumatic injury during handling, and moving deer has the potential for spreading disease.

**Road Signs and Determent Pro's:**

- Could reduce number of deer/car collisions by keeping deer away from the roads
- Many options for deterrents
- Ability to safeguard specific high volume sites

**Road Signs and Determent Con's:**

- Potential high cost for signs and deterring instruments
- Will not decrease the herd size and may actually help increase herd size by limiting deer fatalities
- Deterrents not proven 100% effective
- Signs and deterrents become less effective over time as people become accustomed to the signs and deer to the deterrents

**Bow/Gun Hunt Pro's:**

- Instant reduction in deer population
- Reduction in deer crashes and property damage
- A more balanced ecosystem
- Hunt to be executed by skilled and experienced hunters, which will be selected by park staff
- Deer meat will be made available to the needy

**Bow/Gun Hunt Con's:**

- Conflicts with pro-deer contingency
- Special permits and paperwork must be arranged
- Safety concerns are raised when weapons are permitted on park property

**PRECEDENT FOR DEER MANAGEMENT**

In 2010 the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) released a deer management plan, in which their goals, objectives and actions are outlined. The six principle goals of the MDNR are:

1. Manage deer populations at levels that do not degrade the vegetation upon which deer and other wildlife depend
2. Promote deer hunting to provide quality recreational opportunities, as the primary tool to achieve population goals, and as an important social and cultural activity
3. Manage habitat to provide for the long-term viability of white-tailed deer in Michigan while limiting negative impacts to the habitats of other wildlife species
4. Reduce conflict between humans and deer
5. Reduce the threats and impacts of disease on the wild deer population and on Michigan's economy
6. Enhance public engagement in and awareness of deer management issues and knowledge of deer ecology and management

Aside from directly promoting managed deer hunts as the best means for population control (see #2 above), the MDNR acknowledges that non-lethal means of population control, including habitat modification, feeding bans, repellants, fencing, roadside deterrents, hazing and frightening the deer, and others, are relatively unsuccessful. Furthermore, the MDNR also acknowledges that if properly done, a managed hunt can be very safe.

### **Meridian Township**

- Executed a managed hunt in October 2011 and extended it through February 2012 ~ Future hunts are scheduled at the end of 2012 with extended hunting locations and more hunters

### **Mt. Pleasant**

- Executed a 3-year special hunt program with assistance of the USDA Wildlife Services from 2010-2012

### **Hillsdale**

- Have a 3-year special hunt program that finalized in 2012

### **Ella Sharp Park in Summit Township**

- Have had 5 consecutive special deer hunts as of 2012

### **Two Harbors**

- Special deer hunt in January 2012

### **Independence Park**

- Has held special hunts for the past 10 years

### **Addison Park**

- Has held special hunts for the past 8 years

### **Rochester Hills**

- Proposed special deer hunt

### **Beaver Island**

- Proposed special deer hunt

### **Grand Haven**

- Proposed special deer hunt

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR A SPECIAL DEER HUNT (OUTSIDE OF REGULAR DEER SEASON)**

- Top priority of a special deer hunt will be to protect the safety of hunters, neighboring residences, and the general public
- All meat will be donated to Sportsmen Against Hunger
- Antlerless deer only
- Trails will remain open during hunts, with appropriate signs indicating hunt is in progress
- Hunting will be during the week to avoid the busier weekend days
- General public and neighborhood notification

### **PRE-HUNT**

- Park staff will pick 8 locations for deer stands that allow maximum safety for the public and are also prime hunting spots
- No hunting will occur within 450' of an occupied dwelling
- Hunters will be interviewed by staff and will have a background criminal record check prior to being accepted
- Park staff will assist hunters in site preparation
- Park will acquire up to 50 deer tags
- Hunters will be brought on location for training and to go over rules. They will check the blinds and become familiar with the area
- Signage will be placed at park entrances and along trails to inform the public about the future hunt
- Hunters are required to provide proper hunting licenses
- All sites will be baited 1-2 weeks prior to the hunt
- Map of Lake Lansing Park-North will be provided and will include labeled trails and blind locations

## **DURING HUNT**

- Hunters will hunt only at designated days, times, and at pre-determined locations
- There shall be only one hunter per blind
- All hunting will be per state laws and regulations and per Township regulations according to the deer management hunt guidelines
- Firearm hunting, shotgun only per MDNR regulations
- Hunters may be escorted to and from designated blind locations by staff
- Hunters must remain within 50 feet of the blind at all times
- Hunters will check in with park staff when they arrive each day and check out when they leave
- When hunters arrive they will be given a two-way radio and required to remain in radio contact with park staff at all times
- Hunters will wear hunter orange
- When a deer is shot it is the hunters responsibility to immediately contact park staff and then dress the deer away from hiking trails and out of public view
- It will be the Parks responsibility to remove the deer, record proper measurements as required by the DNR and transport to processor
- This will be a doe only hunt

## **POST HUNT**

- Park staff will transfer deer to processing location
- Blinds will be taken down to discourage further hunting
- Browsing, resident complaints, deer/car crash info will continue to be monitored
- Hunt should be a multi-year event

## **ACCOMPANYING EFFORTS**

- Informational kiosks are located through out the park to notify park patrons of the concerns with deer the park is facing
- A deer resistant garden was planted at the neighborhood entrance to our trails to help local residents determine which plants they should and should not plant in their landscapes
- Efforts are being made by Mid-Michigan Stewardship Initiative and volunteers to rid the park property of invasive species, including garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed, phragmites, buckthorn, and autumn olive to create greater biodiversity
- Prescribed burns have been done to help reduce invasive plant growth and allow for native plants to regenerate
- Park staff has constructed fenced-in deer exclosures, which keep a small area inaccessible to the deer, so we can monitor the vegetative growth in a deer free environment and compare it to the vegetative growth in the rest of the park