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Urban and suburban deer management are among the most pressing challenges for state wildlife agencies and local municipalities. Many states struggle to reduce and/or maintain deer populations at appropriate levels in rural areas even with the willing aid of hunters. Some deer populations are difficult to control even with property access, proficient hunters and favorable hunting seasons and bag limits. Add restricted property access, landowner unfamiliarity with hunting, safety zones and weapons discharge ordinances and you have made a difficult task even tougher.

Goals for managing deer in urban and suburban environments are similar to rural environments; balance the deer herd with the available habitat, balance the adult sex ratio, and have a complete age structure for bucks and does. However, there is generally a much higher emphasis on balancing the herd with the habitat to reduce deer-vehicle accidents and other deer-human conflicts. Unfortunately, controlling herd growth in these areas is often more difficult than in rural landscapes. Expanding deer herds in rural areas often increase until they degrade the habitat to the point where it can no longer provide enough food or cover to support the deer population. The quality of the habitat then declines and generally brings the size of the deer herd down with it. Many of these areas ultimately end up with poor quality habitat and low density deer herds. This is a no-win situation for the habitat, deer herd and other wildlife species. There are many examples of this scenario in the traditional “big” deer states like Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania.

In urban and suburban areas, as deer herds climb and degrade the habitat, you end up with poor quality habitat but you rarely get the corresponding drop in deer numbers. For example, look at Valley Forge National Historic Park in southeastern Pennsylvania. Despite severe habitat degradation, the deer herd has increased from approximately 155 to 240 deer per square mile over the past decade. In such instances the deer population continues increasing despite the loss of habitat because of two factors: 1) low mortality rates and 2) alternative food sources. Across their range, hunter harvest is the number one mortality source for deer. Other important sources include predation, deer-vehicle accidents and disease. In many urban/suburban deer herds, hunter harvest is low or nonexistent, as is mortality from predators. From a food perspective, urban/suburban environments offer abundant gardens, shrubbery and other landscaping, as well as supplemental feed from some homeowners. The point is that urban/suburban deer populations can remain high even in poor habitats, and the number one mortality source – and management tool - is not as easily applied as in rural areas.

To be able to use hunting as a management tool in urban/suburban areas we need to understand the barriers currently preventing or limiting its use. One major barrier is a property owner's unwillingness to allow anyone - hunter or otherwise - access to his/her property. Recent court cases like Pennsylvania's Burns vs. Haas where a landowner was held liable for a shooting accident that occurred on his property do little to increase property access for hunting. Fortunately, current legislation (PA HB13) is attempting to protect landowners from future liability suits. Additionally, as managers and hunters we need to demonstrate the utility of hunting to these property owners. “Bubba hunters” need not apply. We need to make these property owners feel safe and comfortable about having hunters in their woods. Look sharp and be polite when asking for permission.

Another barrier is urban/suburban residents' views toward wildlife management. Many residents in urban/suburban municipalities receive inaccurate information on potential strategies for managing the “town's” deer population. Some may want fewer deer but fear for their family's safety if weapons are discharged in their neighborhoods. Others may feel the situation can easily be addressed by trapping deer and releasing them elsewhere. Still others have heard about contraceptive techniques that work well in horses on Maryland and Virginia's Assateague Island. Not everyone will support hunting and hunting is not appropriate for every situation, but hunting can be used in far more areas and to a much greater degree than it is currently being used. The key to making this happen is education.

The best way to educate urban/suburban residents on deer management is to provide them with unbiased, scientific information on deer management strategies and let them decide which option(s) they prefer, or at least can live with. The two best published documents with this information are *An Evaluation of Deer Management Options* by Ellingwood and

Caturano and *Managing White-Tailed Deer in Suburban Environments: A Technical Guide* by DeNicola, VerCauteren, Curtis and Hygnstrom.

An Evaluation of Deer Management Options is an excellent publication and is intended for distribution to the general public. *Managing White-Tailed Deer in Suburban Environments* is also an excellent publication and is intended for professional biologists and managers, community leaders, and others involved with suburban deer management. A new publication, the community version of QDMA's *Living with White-tailed Deer* (LWWTD) educational program uses information from these documents to provide the most up-to-date scientific information available. The community version of LWWTD is written in laymen's terms and specifically targets urban/suburban residents and community leaders. The community version includes a one-page information sheet on each of the seven most commonly used strategies, including advantages, disadvantages and associated costs for each. The document covers contraception, predation, allowing nature to take its course, fencing and repellents, trapping, hunting and sharpshooting. The document does not tell the reader which option is the best, rather it provides the facts and lets the reader make his/her own decision – based on factual information – about which management strategy(s) is appropriate for them. LWWTD removes the emotion and misinformation from the decision-making process and will help remove barriers to managing deer in urban/suburban environments.

Urban and suburban deer management have been emerging challenges for state wildlife agencies and local municipalities. Given our country's rate of development and increasing human population, these deer management arenas will necessitate additional time and resources in the near future. The sooner we begin educating urban/suburban municipalities and other nontraditional hunting groups on the benefits of hunting, the sooner we'll begin adequately managing urban/suburban deer populations.

DeNicola, A.J., K.C. VerCauteren, P.D. Curtis, and S.E. Hygnstrom. 2000. *Managing white-tailed deer in suburban environments: a technical guide*. A publication of the Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Wildlife Society-Wildlife Damage Management Working Group, and the Northeast Wildlife Damage Research and Outreach Cooperative. 52pp.

Ellingwood, M.R. and S.L. Caturano. 1988. *An evaluation of deer management options*. Publication Number DR-11, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Wildlife Division, Hartford, Conn. Revised and reformatted, NH Fish and Game Department, 1996.

Kip's Korner is written by Kip P. Adams, a certified wildlife biologist and Director of Education and Outreach for the Northern Region for the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA). The QDMA is a non-profit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to promoting sustainable, high-quality, white-tailed deer populations, wildlife habitats and ethical hunting experiences through education, research, and management in partnership with hunters, landowners, natural resource professionals, and the public. The QDMA can be reached at 1-800-209-DEER or www.QDMA.com.
