USDA-APHIS-WILDLIFE SERVICES
PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT

Town of Dewitt White-tailed Deer Damage Management Program

Cooperators
Town of Dewitt

USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services
5757 Sneller Rd
Brewerton, NY 13029

Effective Date
12/09/2021

Completion Date
04/01/2022

Background

The Town of DeWitt is approximately 40 square miles in size and has approximately 124 miles of maintained paved surface streets. The town is comprised of residences interspersed with dense wooded areas, as well as numerous parks and greenspaces. Most of the homes feature landscaping, with ornamental plantings throughout. These factors along with native food resources and bedding areas create an ideal habitat for white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus)*.

Despite residents using best management practices to defend against deer damage, the deer herd continues to damage the local flora. Ornamental plants and shrubbery have been heavily browsed, causing residents an inordinate amount of economic damage. There is a visible browse line and little understory in the native foliage. In addition to the damage to vegetation, the abundant deer population also poses a threat to human safety in the form of vehicle collisions and tick borne diseases.

Objectives and Expected Results

The town of Dewitt has agreed to work together with Wildlife Services and private property owners to reduce the local white-tailed deer herd. The expected results are decreases in damage to private property and natural resources by browsing deer. Another expected benefit would be a reduction in danger of deer-vehicle collisions and tick borne diseases (Kilpatrick et al. 2014).

Methods

Properties belonging to the town of Dewitt and residents of the town were surveyed for use by deer and evaluated for safety of firearms use. Once suitable properties were identified, bait (kernel corn) was placed in safe shooting zones. Deer were removed in the evening and night using suppressed, center-fire rifles with frangible ammunition and the aid of Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) devices and spotlights.

Results

Wildlife Services personnel made an initial visit to the town of Dewitt in December of 2021, to identify areas of deer usage. During the months of December, January, February and March, over a 16 night period, 58 white-tailed deer were removed from the town of Dewitt. This resulted in an average of 3.6 deer removed per night. A total of 71 staff hours were spent baiting and 280 staff hours to remove the deer. After processing, approximately 1,414 pounds of venison were delivered for donation providing 5,656 meals for the local community.

Summary

The 2022 white-tailed deer damage management program in the town of Dewitt was successful and resulted in minimal conflicts with neighboring property owners or the general public. Overall, the removal of 58 deer this year, 73 deer in 2021, 62 deer in 2020, 132 in 2019 and 53 in 2018 aided in reducing a portion of the deer population. There were, however, several challenges that had a negative impact on the project. The main challenge was interference with baiting activities at several locations by the public in effort to discourage deer from using the bait stations.

Recommendations

Due to the large number of deer observed and removed from the properties within a 3 month period, WS recommends that additional properties be added to the program to increase the overall coverage. The additional access would increase the number of deer removed and in turn lower the amount of damage that is being incurred by the residents of the town of Dewitt.

Wildlife Services also recommends that the town of Dewitt continue tracking damage that is being inflicted by white-tailed deer. Types of damage such as deer/vehicle collisions, the number of phone calls received from the town residents concerning deer damage and the number of deer carcasses removed from roadways can be easily tracked. Tracking damage caused by white-tailed deer can help provide valuable data to the DEC to help determine the reasoning behind a deer damage management program, as well as the overall success of the program.

Literature Cited

Kilpatrick, H. J., A. M. LaBonte, and K. C. Stafford, III. 2014. The relationship between deer density, tick abundance, and human cases of Lyme disease in a residential community. Journal of Medical Entomology 51:777-784.