

**REPORT TO PARKS & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2019**

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**SUBJECT**     **Deer Management Update**

**ISSUE**

To provide information following a request for an update on previous deer management activities in the Capital Region.

**BACKGROUND**

During a discussion about regional invasive species at its July 10 meeting, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board directed staff to bring back information on historical and current activities around management of deer population in the region.

Urban deer populations and associated conflicts have been increasing over the past decade. In 2011, the CRD formally contacted the BC Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Strategy and began coordinating with key stakeholders to identify the various issues to develop a strategy.

In 2012, the CRD appointed an 11-member Citizens Advisory Group to guide the development of a Regional Deer Management Strategy (RDMS): [https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/regional-planning-pdf/Regional-Deer-Management/regional-deer-management-strategy.pdf?sfvrsn=bc228ec9\\_2](https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/regional-planning-pdf/Regional-Deer-Management/regional-deer-management-strategy.pdf?sfvrsn=bc228ec9_2). The Board endorsed the RDMS and adopted a framework of roles for municipal, electoral areas, regional and provincial partners (Appendix A) in December 2012. The Board, through the Planning & Protective Services Committee, received several progress reports through to 2014 (Appendix B).

There was and is no formal CRD service to address coordinated wildlife management functions. In August 2015, the Board directed staff to address strategy recommendations through delivery of individual services.

**ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

In part due to the CRD's advocacy, the Province established the Urban Deer Cost Share Program in 2015. Some local governments in the region have accessed these funds to conduct pilot projects to research deer behaviour, reduce deer populations, minimize deer/human conflicts and increase public awareness. However, to access these funds, local governments are required to provide matching funds, conduct deer counts and deliver public education and outreach, which requires staff time and taxpayer funds to deal with an issue under the jurisdiction of the provincial government. In the meantime, farmers continue to experience significant crop losses due to heavy deer browsing on their agricultural lands.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

Deer counts in Oak Bay, Esquimalt and Central Saanich indicate that deer populations remain significant. A 2018 deer count in Oak Bay concluded there were between 70-130 deer in that

municipality. Other local governments are undertaking census work within their boundaries. The fallow deer population on Mayne Island and black-tailed deer populations on other Southern Gulf Islands have surpassed their carrying capacities and are significantly impacting the health of the islands' ecosystems.

The Province's tool box for deer population control has focused primarily on traditional wildlife management techniques, such as hunting. While hunting in rural areas and on agricultural lands through crop protection permits can be permitted and effective, hunting is not safe in dense urban environments, where municipalities have created smaller parcels of land and established firearm discharge bylaws.

To address the pressing deer population in an urban setting, the CRD and District of Oak Bay collaborated in 2013 on a pilot project that included population reduction through capture and euthanization. The project was highly controversial and comparatively expensive. The project ended early due to public pressure, and with many lessons learned, only 11 deer were culled.

Oak Bay is currently working with the Urban Wildlife Stewardship Society on a program to administer an immunocontraceptive (IC) vaccine. Several mayors met recently to discuss a more coordinated approach for using ICs as a potentially more effective population control measure that is likely more publicly acceptable, efficient and cost-effective. However, ICs are still in the trial/experimental stage and not available for commercial production in Canada. Permitting requirements for these experimental trials are underway.

### **INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Citizens Advisory Group and the Regional Deer Management Strategy identified roles and responsibilities for all levels of government. Local governments are addressing actions on an individual basis; there is no service mandate at the regional level to coordinate this work.

Wildlife management remains a provincial responsibility. Opportunities exist to advocate to the provincial government on alternative population control mechanisms and potential IC projects and partnerships to pursue a coordinated approach.

### **CONCLUSION**

The regional deer population appears to be increasing and leading to more conflicts in urban settings and more impacts on agricultural lands. Key stakeholders came together in 2012 to develop a regional strategy. However, there is no regional coordination of actions being taken by various local governments because there is no mandate or service specific to regional wildlife management. Despite the efforts of municipalities and electoral areas, advocacy to the provincial government is still necessary to request resources and coordinate actions to manage deer populations across the region.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Parks & Environment Committee recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

That this report be received for information.

Submitted by:	Glenn Harris, Senior Manager, Environmental Protection
Concurrence	Jeff Leahy, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
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Attachments: Appendix A – Citizens Advisory Group Recommendations Proposed for  
Implementation/Jurisdictional Roles for Regional Deer  
Management Strategy

Appendix B – Summary of Deer Management Activities