

SUMMARY OF DEER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

September 2019

There has been a significant amount of work done to develop and implement the Regional Deer Management Strategy (RMDS). The following notes are a high-level summary of activities and projects undertaken to achieve the shared goals around public education, population reduction, human-deer conflict reduction and to mitigate deer-vehicle conflicts.

Administration

- In 2011, the Capital Regional District (CRD) communicated with the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNR) and Ministry of Agriculture (AGRI) regarding numerous concerns raised by citizens around deer-human conflicts and requested that the Ministries manage the deer population, since wildlife management is a provincial responsibility. The Ministry's response was that managing deer was a local government responsibility, indicating the local government bylaws restricted the provincial government's tool to manage wildlife through hunting. On the basis of this response and continued public and municipal government calls for a regional deer strategy, CRD staff began collecting public input and coordinating with key stakeholders to quantify the economic, social and environmental impacts of deer and to develop a coordinated strategy.
- The CRD appointed an 11-member Citizens Advisory Group, supported by an Expert Resources Working Group, to guide the development of a regional deer management strategy and action plan in 2012. The resulting Regional Deer Management Strategy (RDMS) was endorsed by the CRD Board in December 2012 and the recommended actions and an implementation framework of roles for municipal, regional and provincial partners was adopted (Appendix A).

Liaison with Other Governments, First Nations and Stakeholders

- Staff shared the RMDS and the framework with municipalities, electoral areas and the Islands Trust to gain concurrence regarding matters within their jurisdiction and to focus on the agricultural sector.
- Staff made presentations to several municipal councils to determine the level of interest in moving forward with pilot projects. Oak Bay, View Royal, Central Saanich and North Saanich expressed interest in proceeding with pilot projects to manage deer populations.
- In 2012, CRD staff met with FLNR, AGRI and Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Strategy (ENV) to confirm expectations, roles, resources and interpretation of legislation. These meetings clarified provincial and municipal roles and opportunities regarding population reduction measures.
- CRD staff liaised with the Province on issues relating to regulations or permitting.
- Local First Nations, through their Douglas Treaty rights, actively seek out opportunities to hunt or acquire wildlife in their traditional territory, and have expressed an interest in partnering with municipalities to manage deer. The CRD continues to facilitate this conversation between the parties and coordinates education materials and outreach regarding the program and safety protocols.
- Since 2015, CRD staff have continued to receive complaints and requests for assistance from residents. Work on deer management with the agricultural sector has been operationalized, mainly through the implementation of the Regional Agriculture and Food Strategy.

Advocacy

An important approach to resolving the many deer management issues in the region has been and will continue to be ongoing advocacy to the provincial government on several issues, such as: encouraging the Province to play a stronger role in managing deer populations for more timely, consistent and comprehensive provincial assistance for the provision of equipment/expertise; establishment of permitting requirements; and to work with the local governments in the Capital Region, First Nations and other stakeholders on a longer-term strategy to address ongoing deer management issues.

The CRD has worked closely with the Province and advocated for changes in processes and policies to improve deer management opportunities in the region since 2011. A summary of this effort is provided below:

- The CRD lobbied the Province to provide needed equipment and expertise to support the implementation of the RDMS and to support the pilot projects.
- The CRD advocated via letter to the FLNR for changes to the 2014-2016 Hunting and Trapping Regulations Synopsis for Management Unit 1-1 to allow the number of deer within the Capital Region to be reduced through legal hunting activity during the legal hunting season. The CRD requested that the shotgun antlerless (females) season be increased from 10 days to four months; that bow-only season for antlerless be increased from 10 days during the season to 15 days prior to the season, in addition to the existing ability to hunt females with bow during the regular September 10-December 10 season; and that the bag limit be increased from two female deer of the three permitted to allow all three deer to be female. Each of these changes was accepted, except for the increase in the female bag limit.
- The CRD advocated via letter to the AGRI for greater fencing subsidies for farmers through the Environmental Farm Plan, a partnership between AGRI and the federal government. A response was received noting a new initiative – BC Agricultural Council's Agriculture Wildlife Initiative – that provides financial assistance to forage crop producers to address extraordinary costs of crop loss due to wildlife.
- In 2015, CRD representatives attended a Union of British Columbia Municipalities urban deer management workshop to share the CRD's perspective on deer management issues and lobby for increased provincial support.
- There exist opportunities to advocate to the provincial government on alternative population control mechanisms and potential regional projects and partnerships to pursue a coordinated approach to use ICs during the Union of British Columbia Municipalities Convention in September.

Education & Outreach

- In 2013, the CRD partnered with the Peninsula Agriculture Commission to host workshops for farmers. Workshop topics included Nuisance Wildlife Permitting and evaluation process (more commonly referred to as the Crop Protection program), led by FLNR staff; safe hunting practices (ENV). CRD staff also hosted a booth at the Farmer2Farmer Conference at the Saanich Fairgrounds
- Two information brochures were developed for public outreach that provide general information on deer behaviour and conflict reduction measures, such as deterrents, deer resistant plantings and suggestions for how drivers can avoid deer-vehicle collisions. These

conflict reduction and public education tools were provided to all municipalities. Since the conclusion of the RDMS projects, the CRD has continued with its commitment to public education across the region on all aspects of the Regional Deer Management Strategy. These brochures were distributed to all municipalities and electoral areas in the region

- A Regional Deer Management website was created. It provides a chronological summary of the project and process updates.
- Staff continue to provide presentations to highlight tools for farmers at food and agricultural events.

Pilot Projects

Local governments, stakeholders and the agricultural community worked together to implement the recommendations of the RDMS and to achieve the population and conflict reduction and to minimize deer vehicle conflicts. A number of pilot projects were implemented. In 2013-2014, Central Saanich and District of Oak Bay participated in a rural and urban pilot project to test the implementation of urban and rural management option for reducing deer populations. In 2018-2019, Oak Bay initiated an immune contraception project and a fallow deer reduction pilot project was completed on Mayne Island. A high-level summary of this work is provided below.

Rural Pilot Project – Central Saanich

- A practical rural pilot project was planned and implemented in Central Saanich in 2013. The municipality and community members undertook public education of conflict reduction and deer-vehicle collision mitigation. Sixteen site visits to farms were conducted to survey crop damage, provide information packages and tools for estimating deer fencing requirements, constructing effective fencing, completing municipal and nuisance wildlife permit form, and using scaring and hazing tactics.

Oak Bay Pilot Project (urban)

- In 2013, the CRD and District of Oak Bay collaborated on a pilot project, which included population reduction through capture and euthanization. The project was highly controversial and comparatively expensive. While the project was ended early due to public pressure, only 11 deer were removed but the goal to test this management option was achieved.
- The urban pilot project in 2013 resulted in an opportunity for urban First Nations to receive traditional foods and cultural elements from their traditional territory, with the meat distributed amongst community members and the skins and hooves utilized for cultural purposes.
- The Districts of Oak Bay and Central Saanich conducted deer counts in 2018 that revealed the respective populations are increasing. A 2018 deer count in Oak Bay concluded with high confidence there are between 70-130 deer in Oak Bay.

Oak Bay Immunocontraception Project

- Oak Bay is currently working with the Urban Wildlife Stewardship Society (UWSS) on a program to administer an immunocontraceptive (IC) vaccine, which induces the does to produce antibodies that prevent fertilization, beginning in fall 2019. Several mayors met recently to discuss a more regional 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 trial/experimental stage and are currently only available for trial use in Canada. Permitting requirements for these experimental trials are underway.

- The District of Oak Bay, in collaboration with the Province and the UWSS, has used funds from the provincial Urban Deer Cost-Share Program (UDCSP) to collar deer and study their patterns and behaviour. Oak Bay and UWSS have also received funds from the UDCSP to fund trial immunocontraceptive treatment (IC) for research purposes in fall 2019. This work will test the feasibility of using ICs to manage urban deer populations, although there are no approved ICs available for commercial use.

Mayne Island Fallow Deer Reduction Pilot Project

- The fallow deer population on Mayne Island and black-tailed deer populations on other Southern Gulf Islands have surpassed their cultural carrying capacities and are significantly impacting the health of the islands' ecosystems. Over-browsing limits the growth of the forest understory, which can destabilize banks around water courses and increase the risk of erosion.
- Since 1996, some permits to hunt fallow deer have been issued (approximately six/year). From 2003-2011, 438 fallow deer bucks and 311 fallow deer does were hunted on Mayne Island.
- In 2013, the Mayne Island Conservancy Society and the Mayne Islands Ratepayers Association formed The Mayne Island Fallow Deer Committee that consulted with the Province about how to handle the over-population of deer on Mayne Island.
- Staff have worked closely with Mayne Island stakeholders, including the Fallow Deer Committee, to manage the increasing populations of fallow deer and conducted a pilot project funded with support of the Provincial Urban Deer Cost-Share Program (UDCSP) in 2018. The resulting ecocultural restoration partnership achieved its goals, reduced the fallow deer population by 70 individuals in a very short timeframe, and increased capacity for fallow deer management solutions on Mayne Island. The engagement of WSANEC hunters from Tsartlip Nation provided extensive learning and partnership opportunities on Mayne Island. The project has laid the foundation for supporting ongoing community based fallow deer management work in partnership with the Mayne Island residents, the Fallow Deer Committee and First Nations communities.
- There is an RFP process currently underway to develop a fallow deer management strategy to manage deer populations on Mayne Island over the long term.