



## EA Deer Management Committee and the Agricultural Advisory Committee

When Europeans first came to the area we now call New Jersey, it's estimated that there were **10 deer per square mile**. A census conducted by the Division of Fish and Wildlife and Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FoHVOS) in March 2018 found there are now about **120 deer per square mile in East Amwell**. Our deer population has proliferated because our ancestors killed their natural predators and because we have created a perfect environment for them – a combination of forests, farms and landscaped yards.

Some impacts of the imbalance of deer are:

- The unchecked population of deer is destroying the Sourland Forest (Sourland Conservancy). In 50 years we will no longer have the beautiful, diverse forest we current have because the deer are eating the native shrub and replacement trees. Wood lot owners are finding they are unable to replace the trees they cut for firewood.
- Farmers are having an increasingly difficult time making a living in East Amwell. The deer cause tens of thousands of dollars in crop damage, limit what farmers can plant, and limit the places they can plant. (East Amwell deer management survey)
- Our car insurance rates are higher. Deer versus car collisions cost about \$2,000 per claim for repairs and injuries. How many of you have hit or have friends or family who have hit a deer?
- Lyme disease rates continue to climb in people and pets. Despite what you may have heard, deer serve as the 'reproductive host' of adult ticks and are a vital link in the chain that spread the pathogen that causes Lyme disease (Sourland Conservancy).
- Homeowners spend a great deal of money on landscaping, vegetable gardens, and flowers only to find them eaten by deer.
- Deer are destroying habitat for other species like our native birds. (Div. Fish & Wildlife)

If left unchecked, our deer population will continue to multiply. *FoHVOS* estimates that 20-25% of Hopewell's herd is taken by hunters every year and herd continues slowly to grow. We must all work together to save our forests and farmers and protect our other wildlife. We want to preserve this natural resource for the future and find the necessary balance so we can continue to enjoy the beautiful forests, wildlife, and farms we now have.

The most effective way to control the deer population is by hunting. Researchers at Rutgers have investigated non-lethal birth control methods for deer and have concluded that none are viable or effective for large populations. The best method known has a 30% failure rate, would need to be administered every year, and would cost about \$1000 per doe to administer. If we tried to inoculate 75% of our does, it would cost over \$1,250,000 for the first year alone and would likely take 12 years before there was any substantial reduction in the deer population.

How can you help?

If you are a home owner:

- Support and encourage efforts to reduce deer on public open space and private farmland. Ask open space managers about their deer management program and if they harvest at least one antlerless deer per 5 park-acres.

- Don't feed deer on your property. While feeding deer may enhance wildlife viewing, decades of research has clearly shown that supplemental feeding leads to increased disease risk, long-term **habitat destruction**, increased **vehicle collisions**, habituation to humans and alteration of other deer **behavioral** patterns and, ultimately, the demise of the value of deer and deer-related recreation. (PA Game Commission)
- Donate to Hunters Helping the Hungry. This private, non-profit program lets hunters donate deer to provide venison to food banks and is under-funded.
- Join/contribute to organizations like the Sourland Conservancy, FoHVOS, or the Audubon Society who are looking for solutions to our deer over-population and who work to restore forests by removing invasive species and by planting native trees and wildflowers
- Help our forest by installing native plants on your property (and protect them from deer) to support wildlife.
- Urge your legislators to fund Hunters Helping the Hungry and support other legislation addressing the over-population of deer. Help educate them about deer overpopulation.
- Support deer management hunters (see hunter tips below). If you have a large piece of property, allow them to hunt on your land. Bow hunting only requires a 150' safety zone from neighboring homes; gun hunting requires 450'.

If you are a hunter:

- Earn a buck by taking at least two does first. Better yet, commit to taking 10 antlerless deer each year.
- Hunt responsibly.
- If you don't bow hunt now, consider learning to hunt with a bow to extend your season.
- Make sure you have adequate insurance through a hunting group or the NJ Sportsman Federation.
- Check out Hunters Helping the Hungry (HHH). At different times it costs little or nothing to donate a deer in NJ, and it is always free if you go to HHH in PA.
- Consider teaching a young person to hunt and encourage them to take a Hunter Safety Course.

If you are a farmer:

- If you grow crops, consider getting a depredation license. Jodi Powers at the Division of Fish and Wildlife can help you through the process and answer questions you may have.
- Use management hunters as agents on your land and/or permit. Ask them to send you photographs of their deer to confirm they are harvesting does and track how many deer are taken. The East Amwell Deer Management committee may be able to help you find good management hunters. Contact the township office for more information.
- Coordinate your efforts with other landowners in your area. Deer drives are the most efficient way of reducing the deer population.
- Commit to an on-going management plan.

For your children and grandchildren's sake, please support our efforts to reduce our deer population to a more balanced level.

The EA Deer Management Committee