

**USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
Activities Summary Report
2012 White-tailed Deer Management
Oregon Ridge Park
and
Cromwell Valley Park**



Submitted by:

United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Wildlife Services
1568 Whitehall Road
Annapolis, MD 21409
410-349-8055

White-tailed Deer Management

Baltimore County (County) and USDA APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) have partnered to manage the white-tailed deer population at Oregon Ridge Park and Cromwell Valley Park. The overpopulation of white-tailed deer in these area have negatively impacted the native plant and animal diversity of the Parks forest ecosystem, caused damage to ornamental plants on neighboring properties, posed threats to the traveling public due to deer/vehicle collisions on adjacent roads, and created a possible Lyme's disease reservoir threatening public health. An operational control program at these two parks was designed to reduce deer densities and the resulting damage and public health threats in the area. WS conducted operations under a deer cooperater permit from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and removed 60 deer from Oregon Ridge Park and 75 deer from Cromwell Valley Park between January and February of 2012. The following report includes program methodology, results, analysis and recommendations.

Methods

WS conducted deer removal activities according to the work plan established in the Cooperative Service Agreement with Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Management and the Safety Plan for the Sharpshooting of Deer. Removal operations consisted of three nights of work at Oregon Ridge Park and four nights of work at Cromwell Valley Park from January 31st through February 28th, 2012.

Deer were removed by mobile shooting teams. Bait sites were strategically established to draw deer out of dense cover and to position them for safe shooting. Shooting was conducted by trained wildlife biologists using suppressed rifles of different calibers (.22LR, .243, .270 and .308).

Deer observed were removed on a first opportunity basis provided safe shots could be taken. Adult does were targeted first when more than one deer was observed in a safe shooting location. Most bucks had already dropped their antlers by the time of the project, but any antlered deer were targeted for removal after antlerless deer had first been safely removed.

Removal activities, including biological data collection from the deer harvested were recorded on data sheets. Information collected from harvested deer included gender and location.

Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) technology was used during removal operations. WS utilized hand held FLIR units to locate and observe deer in complete darkness. These capabilities also further enhanced WS' ability to ensure safe removal operations by detecting human activity on Park property from greater distances after hours. Using

FLIR, as opposed to spotlights for general deer observation, allowed less public and neighbor disturbance from operations.

Results

WS removed 60 deer from Oregon Ridge in 2012. Of the 60, 36 were does, 22 were bucks and 2 were unrecovered so their sex is unknown. WS removed 75 deer from Cromwell Valley Park in 2012. Of the 75 deer, 50 were does and 25 were bucks. An additional 50 deer (29 does, 18 bucks and 3 unrecovered) were removed from the adjacent Loch Raven Watershed property.

Nothing out of the ordinary concerning the appearance and behavior of the deer was observed while conducting the removal operations.

Deer were transported from the Parks to the processor in a refrigerated trailer to preserve the quality of the meat. Venison from culled deer was donated to the Maryland Food Bank in Baltimore.

Analysis

The County had a comprehensive Forest Health Assessment and Management Plan completed for Oregon Ridge Park in 2007 (Oregon Ridge Park Plan). The Oregon Ridge Park Plan recommends that the deer population at the Park be controlled to 10 deer per square mile and strongly advocates hunting and sharpshooting as methods of deer control. During the spring of 2008, the County recorded an average deer density in Baltimore County at 81 deer per square mile and an average deer density in Oregon Ridge Park at 67 deer per square mile (113 deer observed). The County and WS goal for the 2012 deer management project at Oregon Ridge Park was to remove 60 deer.

The County had a comprehensive Forest Health Assessment and Forest Management Plan completed for Cromwell Valley Park in 2011 (Cromwell Valley Park Plan). Deer control was recommended in the Cromwell Valley Park Plan for forest regeneration. The Cromwell Valley Park Plan recommends a deer population of 15-20 deer per square mile. During the spring of 2008, the County recorded an average deer density at 81 deer per square mile county-wide. Deer population data was not available for Cromwell Valley Park although, deer population surveys at the adjacent Loch Raven Reservoir Watershed have provided deer density estimates of 80 deer per square mile. During an informal FLIR survey in January of 2012 WS observed 131 deer at Cromwell Valley Park. The County and WS goal for the 2012 deer management project at Cromwell Valley Park was to remove 75 deer.

WS met the goals for removing the number of deer as established in the Cooperative Service Agreement. The 135 deer removed from the Parks and the additional 50

removed from adjacent Loch Raven Reservoir Watershed, represent progress toward the County's target density of 15-20 deer per square mile on the Parks.

Recommendations

WS recommends a deer management program to continue to establish and maintain deer densities at or near 20 deer per square mile. Continued deer surveys and monitoring of deer populations and distribution will be essential for strategic planning of deer population management at Oregon Ridge Park and Cromwell Valley Park. If deer populations continue to remain above 20 deer per square mile, further control will be necessary.

Acknowledgements

WS would like to thank John Markley, Manager, Finance and Administration, and Don Outen, Natural Resource Manager, Forest Sustainability Program and their staffs with the Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Management at Baltimore County. John and Don were instrumental in securing funding for this project and coordinating the project with Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks

WS would also like to thank Courtney Peed, Naturalist, and staff at Oregon Ridge Nature Center for operational planning and assistance for the Oregon Ridge Park project. Similarly, Leo Rebetsky, Naturalist, and staff at Cromwell Valley Park provided invaluable information and assistance at Cromwell Valley Park.

George Timko, Assistant Deer Project Leader with Maryland Department of Natural Resource, Wildlife and Heritage Service coordinated permitting for the project.