

City of Oneonta Deer Reduction Program for 2023-2024

City Council approval date: _____

Over many years the City of Oneonta has experienced high deer populations that have resulted in ecological and economic damage as well as increased health issues. In the summer of 2022, the Deer Management Task Force was formed to research problems caused by the overabundance of deer in the city as well as potential solutions. The following issues have been identified:

- A. Landscaping damage and economic impact
- B. Frequent deer-vehicular incidents
- C. Impacts on forest vegetation including erosion, stormwater runoff, and loss of forest understory and regeneration
- D. Increased deer/human/pet interaction
- E. High tick population and increased tick-borne disease in humans and pets
- F. Health of the deer herd impacted by limited resources and interaction with human environment

While some mitigating measures, such as fencing and applying deer deterrents, have been taken, increasing problems have reached a crisis point. The plan's focus is on the reduction of these impacts by reducing the deer population within the designated project areas. What follows is what we believe to be the best approach to continue to significantly reduce the negative impacts of the high deer level within the city of Oneonta.

Based on input from the City's Deer Management Task Force and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC), the use of NYDEC-approved Deer Depredation Permits (DDPs) – also known as nuisance permits – is recommended to reduce deer numbers. This approach is not considered regular hunting. This preferred low-cost method uses proficient crossbow hunters at baited locations. The activities will be coordinated by the program supervisor.

Note: Some communities have enlisted the USDA to manage the deer population. This approach, however, is costly; we could expect to save well over \$20,000/year by using volunteers proficient with crossbows.

Program Start Up

In the first year of this program, we anticipate using properties owned by the City of Oneonta and potentially adding new sites in the future. The Deer Management Oversight Committee will continue to review properties across Oneonta that are ideal locations given their size, expected deer traffic, availability of trees and cover.

What follows is detailed information on the Deer Management Plan.

Activities are anticipated to occur from January to March. The City of Oneonta Deer Management Oversight Committee will review the success of the program and will reduce or expand activities as needed based on deer harvests. All participating landowners will be kept

informed about management activities (including who the participants are on their property) in regular updates.

Equipment Needed

Tree stands or ground blinds will be placed (no screw in steps, ladder stands are preferred) at landowner approved locations. A few branches may need to be trimmed to improve line of sight. Shooting from elevated positions directs arrows into the ground after passing through a deer. Seven to ten days before activities are to begin, bait (corn) will be placed 15 to 30 yards away from tree stands to attract deer to these locations. Trail monitoring cameras may be installed to capture deer activity. If needed, locations may need to be shifted slightly or abandoned. Each participating landowner will be informed about any activities on their properties, as indicated by landowner preferences. If an elevated position cannot be used and the area is found to hold deer the use of a ground blind can be implemented.

Activities will occur as needed to allow for variations in weather conditions, deer movement patterns and participants' availability. There will be the use of supplemental lights after dark that will allow for safe, highly accurate shots at very close range. All our participants are experienced in using this approach and any new ones will be trained. Deer patterns at bait will be monitored to target the best possible times to utilize locations.

Participant Requirements

All participants are required to follow all city rules and laws along with state laws, in addition to expressed participating landowner preferences. It is the right of each participating landowner to restrict the number of individuals on their property, the times or dates participants are allowed on properties, stand location, parking locations or access routes desired. The agreement to use properties can be terminated by landowners at any time by notifying the project supervisor.

Which days and stands will be used cannot be predicted in advance, as this will depend on individual time schedules, wind direction, weather, and previous use of stand locations. To prevent overuse, the use of resting periods of 1-2 weeks between activity periods will allow deer to fall back into their usual use patterns. Baiting will likely continue during the resting periods.

Participants will be in trees using camouflage and will use flashlights to locate shot deer or to walk out of the woods, therefore, landowners may notice a slow-moving flashlight. In very rare circumstances tracking may occur the next morning with better light. Landowners will be alerted to any of these possibilities and will have access to cell phone numbers of participants or the project supervisor. The Oneonta Police Department will be apprised of locations, dates and times of activities.

Tracking & Harvesting

Occasionally a mortally wounded deer may run beyond property boundaries. All participants will have information about property boundaries when in the field. This information will include phone numbers of landowners and neighbors who need to be notified if a search extends beyond the approved properties. If necessary, the participant or Oneonta Police Department will call and ask permission to retrieve a deer unless we have pre-authorization to retrieve deer from a property.

Participants will keep track of and report all bolts shot. Each participant will be assigned a number that will be written on their arrows or bolts. Bolts usually pass through deer and fall close to the spot where a deer was hit, but occasionally will remain in the deer. Every effort will be made to retrieve bolts (they are expensive), aided with the help of illuminated bolts.

All shot deer will be removed discretely and not be field dressed on properties. The City of Oneonta will specify a location for field dressing.

All harvested deer will be consumed by participants or donated. We will drop off as many deer as we can to an approved venison donation processor for distribution to local food banks and pantries and to families that can benefit from the meat.

Possible Effects on Landowners & Neighbors

In most instances, landowners and neighbors will not even notice activities or the killing of a deer because it happens quietly and fast. However, despite all precautions and skills, deer may be wounded, may not expire immediately, collapse on neighboring properties or may not be found. We will make every attempt possible to recover all animals or assure that they will be fine (superficial arrow wounds heal quickly).

Monitoring

The City Deer Management Oversight Committee will review activities and success at regular intervals (weekly) and determine if activities should continue or be terminated based on activities and number of deer harvested.

The Deer Management Oversight Committee will provide regular updates to the Oneonta City Council, including the number of deer harvested.

The goal is to reduce deer numbers to levels where forest regeneration and survival of browse-sensitive plants within the City of Oneonta is once again possible. In addition, we aim to reduce or maintain blacklegged tick populations at levels where Lyme disease risks are minimized (5-8 deer per square kilometer according to recent studies in CT).

Definitions for the purpose of the Deer Reduction Program:

Deer Management Task Force:

A volunteer group of Oneonta residents who have been tasked with the mission of evaluating issues relating to the overpopulation of deer in the city. They report their findings and any recommendations to the QLIC.

Deer Management Oversight Committee:

A volunteer group of experienced hunters who will help finalize and implement the deer reduction program.

Deer Management Oversight Committee Supervisor:

A volunteer who will supervise the implementation of the deer reduction program. He or she will make final adjustments to the plan, recruit and evaluate participants, be on call during

events, delegate responsibilities within the committee, report back to the Common Council.

Participant:

Individuals who are proficient with the use of a crossbow and who volunteer to participate in the program.

Events:

A Controlled (time, location, people involved) event during which deer are reduced by qualified crossbow participants.

Shoot:

The discharging of a crossbow.

Landowner Agreement
City of Oneonta Deer Reduction Program

Street address and / or tax parcel number(s)

I / We agree to allow the following activities on the identified properties (cross out those that do not apply):

Deer Hunting as approved by the City of Oneonta during the City's deer reduction program.

Retrieval of deer from premises

Discharge of a crossbow within 250 feet of dwelling

Terms:

This agreement is in effect the date it is signed but can be terminated or changed at any time by the landowner (please notify the City of Oneonta). A new agreement will be necessary upon sale of the property.

Landowners will be notified annually for the duration of the deer reduction activities. Preferred mode of contact is by:

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Date

Landowner signature

Print Name

Adjacent Property Owner Agreement
City of Oneonta Deer Reduction Program

I/We agree to allow the retrieval of deer from our premises at (address):

Special conditions you may have (check any that apply):

call/text before retrieving deer, phone number: _____

email before retrieving deer, email address: _____

email later that you have retrieved a deer: _____

no need to contact us

Terms:

This agreement is in effect the date it is signed but can be terminated or changed at any time by the landowner (please notify the City of Oneonta). A new agreement will be necessary upon sale of the property.

Landowners will be notified annually for the duration of the deer reduction activities. Preferred mode of contact is by:

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Date

Landowner signature

Print Name

City of Oneonta
Deer Reduction Program
Proficiency Test and Requirements

Participants must complete and pass a proficiency course (the "course") developed and approved by the Deer Management Oversight Committee and/or their designees. Prior to taking the course, participants must have a current and valid NYS hunting license and a current NYS bowhunter education certificate.

Participants must show proficiency with a crossbow to pass the course. For each participant, proficiency will be determined based on the following:

- Participants must complete and pass the course with the same crossbow that the participant will be using during the program.
- Bolts and arrows used during the course will be equipped with field (practice) points.
- The course will consist of three simulated foam deer targets, which will be placed, at the discretion of the person running the test, at varying distances and elevations.
- Participants must address each target with two bolts or arrows, and the participant will need to accurately shoot into the marked vital area of the simulated deer target.
- Participants must successfully strike the marked vital area with at least five of the six shots to qualify for the program.
- Participants must pass the course in the first year. Thereafter, they do not need to participate in the course as long as they participated in the program each year. All participants must have all current NYS hunting licenses necessary to participate in the program.

At no time shall the total number of participants participating in the program exceed 15 participants in a given year. (This number can be expanded or limited based by the Deer Management Oversight Committee). A waiting list of prospective participants will be maintained by the committee for any openings that might become available.

The oversight committee may, at any time, deny or revoke a participant's ability to participate in the deer culling program. By voluntarily participating in the program, each participant acknowledges and agrees to be bound by these requirements.

Code of Conduct

City of Oneonta Deer Reduction Program

Our deer reduction program is designed to maximize both participant and public safety, reduce potential confrontations or objections by the public while facilitating deer removal from the city of Oneonta. All participants are required to follow all instructions and rules set forth below (and any updates). Failure to follow these rules will result in immediate and permanent removal of violators from the program.

General

1. All participants must submit their vehicle information (license plate numbers of all vehicles that may be used during permit activities) and contact information (hunting license number, email, cell phone).
2. We will maintain a database of participants and their contact information that will be made available to all participants, Oneonta PD as well as DEC Environmental Conservation Officers (ECO's). This should reduce the possibility for interruptions as ECO's check reports for potential poaching activities. All participants will be provided contact information for ECO's as well.
3. Due to the high sensitivity and potential for objections to our activities from some community members, please refrain from public advertising of this program; particularly stand locations and names of participants.

We will ask for more extensive reporting of participant activities to allow us to better manage this program to maximize deer take while maintaining stand productivity. In addition, we will ask for your observations (similar to the bow hunter observation log) while in the stand, as well as your activities (number of arrows used, deer taken or wounded etc.) and potential confrontations. This will need to be reported within 24 hours.

Program Details

Permit activities will be allowed according to the DEC permit and will last from January 2024-March 2024. The oversight committee will frequently review program status and may make changes or cancel the entire program.

Shooting days are all days of the week with resting periods in-between.

Sites should not be used more than 2x/week - longer resting periods will improve opportunities and reduce deer learning. Shooting hours are 24 hours/day to allow individual participants to target their locations at maximum deer activity.

Do not shoot when other people are within 200' of the treestand. This potential interference is likely kept to a minimum due to the shooting hours. Nobody has the right to interfere with the approved activities. Call the Oneonta Police or the coordinator from your tree if this is happening. Remember to use your cell phone to take video and sound of the interference if it does occur.

Activities will only be conducted at pre-determined and approved locations (tree stands or ground blinds). You will be provided with maps to the stands you are able to use. No stalking or shooting while walking in or out of stand; no driving of deer. The only time this does not apply is if you need a follow-up shot and need to walk up to a downed deer. Weapon discharge

restrictions still apply. Participants must be aware of a downed deer's location with respect to restricted area boundaries and are required to carry program maps when in the field.

Certain locations are only available for select participants. We will provide a stand location determination that will be in effect and finalized as we have a full tally of locations and participants. We will adjust this as needed based on participation and may experiment with various "designs."

All locations will overlook bait sites approximately 20 yards from tree stands or ground blinds. We will continue baiting through the activity period.

Parking in designated areas only (as specified by landowners).

Use your best judgment and be aware of your limitations for shot selection. Do not risk our long-term goals to reduce deer damage by taking poor shots. Double lung shots will reduce distances deer travel and avoid any landowner conflicts. Long distance shots are limited at night, anyway. Do not shoot at moving deer.

While in the field, each participant will need to be in possession of at least a single nuisance tag and a copy of the nuisance permit. Tags will be stored at the City Hall and you need to pick up tags and return unused ones. You can shoot more than a single deer as long as we as a group have sufficient permits available that day.

Be honest in your reporting. We will use this for reports to the City and scientific papers about wounding rates, distance traveled, success etc.

We have a strong preference for selection of which deer to shoot while you are in your stand. Ideally, we have individual deer or small groups approach the bait, but this is not always the case. If you have >5 deer at the bait, PLEASE DO NOT SHOOT. It educates too many individuals. Ideally you pick each individual off as it approaches the bait. Some participants wait for longer times to allow deer to settle down at bait - you determine the best approach.

Please be disciplined - our overall success will depend on it. You may have chances once some individuals leave the bait to take remaining ones.

If you have small family groups (doe and 2 fawns for example) approach the bait, please take the doe first. The young ones will hang around and you can take them as they come back to bait, or even stay there.

If you have a choice between two individuals, one of which one is a buck, please take the doe. We are allowed to take antlered deer. The antlers need to be delivered to the DEC every 10 days. Please saw antlers off and deposit them in a box provided. The coordinator will make sure they get to the DEC.

No field dressing is allowed on any properties so prepare sleds, carriers, etc. Using sleds and carriers also leaves less marks at sites, avoids contaminating the area. A place for field dressing is to be determined.

If you suspect a gut shot animal, please do let these animals sit, do not push them. They may end

up on unapproved properties or run very long distances. Usually they will bed down quickly, often within <100 yards. Leave them alone until they are dead. Call for help if necessary. All deer should be used by participants or donated. Depending on demand and take, we like for you to donate deer to local families in need or to food banks.

Notes on personal behavior while conducting activities:

- Have cell phones ready and text among participants for coordination.
- Knowledge of property boundaries, and respect for preferences by participating landowners are especially important. We will provide this landowner information as it is needed. Be as discreet and as silent as possible, use your best judgment and leave if a stand is compromised, do not confront others unless being approached but report to the deer oversight committee. Videotape or take pictures of people behaving inappropriately.
- Be friendly and cordial when approached without offering details.
- Within the area, there are certain landowners that do not support lethal deer management, or do not allow access to retrieve deer. Conflicts may arise. Make sure you are mentally prepared when confronted. Stay calm, do not try to win an argument or engage in a shouting match. Explain that you are part of the approved City of Oneonta Deer Management Program and then wait for support or the police to arrive. Alert the landowner to potential trespassers, should this occur.
- Do not gather in large groups in camouflage. If you need to track a deer long distance, do this with as few people as possible. If you need to venture out of approved areas, ask for help.

A few notes on suburban deer management:

- Deer used to be less cautious but now we need to conduct our activities as if hunting rural areas with deer checking for and being spooked by human scent or movement. It is important to not use a stand should your scent blow towards the bait or into the areas from where deer approach. Please follow these guidelines strictly - it will help us achieve management goals. Do not spook deer unnecessarily, but if you have deer at the feeder while walking into the stand, that is okay occasionally. They will usually return.
- Often there are multiple shot opportunities in a single sitting. Instead of immediately retrieving deer after you have taken a shot and see the deer fall, wait for additional deer to come by and retrieve them once you have 2 or 3 on the ground (except if you see more deer approaching).
- Experience has shown that deer have several waves of activity, and activity patterns may differ among locations. The first wave occurs around sunset. Then another about 30-60 min later, then a lull of an hour or so, and then another wave of deer may approach bait. Trail cams are a great help in patterning deer travel times and making use of the most productive times, including in the early morning hours before sunrise.