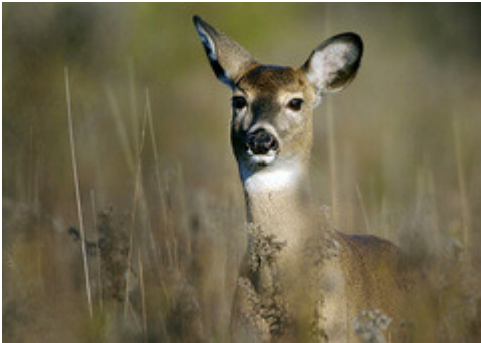


Officials to unveil plan for deer hunting at For-Mar

by Elizabeth Shaw | The Flint Journal

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Stuart Bauer | The Flint Journal



A deer checks out a human in For-Mar Nature Preserve and Arboretum on Friday Nov. 2, 2007.

BURTON, Michigan -- The Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission is finally ready to share with the public its proposed wildlife management plan for For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum.

Two meetings will be held to present the proposal for a possible managed bow hunt in October.

The informational sessions will explain the background research leading up to the proposal as well as specifics on the pilot project itself.

"People need to keep in mind that the commission hasn't voted on it yet. This is still just what's proposed, and we want the public's opinion on it," said Parks Commission member Bob Ranger, who also serves on the wildlife management committee that formulated the plan.

The announcement was greeted with enthusiasm by local hunting and conservation advocates.

"I'm glad to hear they're moving forward on it. The main goal is to have a healthy deer herd, and the only way you're going to do that is to match the number of deer with the habitat you have to support it," said Tom Wright, owner of Williams Gunsight & Outfitters in Davison Township.

The process began two years ago, sparked by requests from hunters that bow hunting be allowed at the Hogbacks, part of the Holloway Reservoir Regional Park in Richfield and Oregon townships.

The question quickly grew beyond the issue of recreational sports, however, when studies on the size of the local deer herd and its impact on the habitat indicated that the balance of the parks ecosystem was seriously out of whack.

"We're not trying to dodge the issue of hunting, but this is first and foremost a wildlife management

issue," said parks director Amy McMillan. "The entire project was to determine if deer were having a negative impact on the environment, and if so, what we should do to address it."

Of the three areas studied -- For-Mar, the Hogbacks and Genesee Recreation Area -- the commission will focus its initial action plan on For-Mar where the worst impacts have occurred.

A 2007 Michigan Natural Features Inventory reported deer at For-Mar had caused heavy to severe damage to tree saplings, seedlings and shrubs along Kearsley Creek and south of the DeWaters Education Center. Soil was trampled and eroded in the floodplain area. Impacted species include false spikenard, common trillium, black cherry, white ash, green ash, sugar maple, jack-in-the-pulpit and mayapple.

The last two aerial surveys have estimated the herd size in the square mile around For-Mar to be about twice the density recommended by the state Department of Natural Resources.

The wildlife committee studied several possible options to control the herd before settling on a managed bow hunt.

Relocation of deer was banned by the state departments of Natural Resources and Agriculture last year to control the spread of bovine TB and chronic wasting disease.

Birth control involves anesthetizing and injecting the does with a contraceptive on two separate occasions, a process considered to be extremely traumatic to the animal. Costs are about \$1,000 per deer.

Harvesting the deer was determined to be the most economical, humane and practical method, McMillan said.

"I'm glad to hear they want to use hunters to control it," said Wright. "That's been proven all around the country as the most effective way to manage that issue. I think they'll find, if done appropriately with responsible hunters, it can be a very effective and efficient way to control the deer herd."

Bow hunting was chosen over firearms largely as a safety consideration since For-Mar is slightly more than a half-square-mile in size and is surrounded on three sides by residential neighborhoods.

"One of our main concerns is to make sure the people who live in that neighborhood are safe," said McMillan.

The meetings are not formal public hearings, but participants will each have three minutes to speak after the informational portion is finished.

Answers to any questions raised will be posted on the parks Web site. The commission plans to take formal action on the proposal sometime between now and August.

The proposed plan:

- Harvest goal: 20 deer.
- Only does will be taken.
- The controlled hunts will be scheduled on consecutive Mondays and Tuesdays in October, for a total of 12 dates or when the quota is met.
- Bow hunters must be Genesee County residents ages 14 and up and possess a valid Michigan bow hunting license for deer.
- Bow hunters must prequalify, demonstrating the ability to consistently hit an 8-inch target at 25 yards.
- The nature preserve will be divided into 10 hunting areas as determined by park staff based on observed deer movement.
- Qualified hunters will be selected by lottery and assigned to a specific date and hunt area.
- Only portable ground blinds will be allowed.
- Scouting will be allowed prior to the hunt.
- Hunters may keep their deer. Free processing will be available for deer donated to local food bank programs.
- All other state hunting regulations apply.
- If the hunt is unsuccessful in reaching the management goal, park rangers will be used as sharpshooters in February.
- An aerial survey will be conducted in January 2010.
- Once the pilot project is completed, park staff will evaluate the program to see if it should be continued or expanded on an annual basis.