



Fact Sheet 1.1

What is the history of the deer hunt in Ridgefield?

In 2004, the Board of Selectmen (BOS) considered several issues associated with the perceived overpopulation of white-tailed deer in Ridgefield. Of central concern to town voters were deer ticks and Lyme disease, car accidents involving deer, destruction of landscaping and the costs associated, and damage to the woodland “understory” and related adverse impacts to flora and fauna.

The Ridgefield Deer Committee was appointed by the BOS to investigate deer management and to study ways to manage the deer population in Ridgefield. The committee had 16 meetings and invited expert speakers on the topic. The committee issued its report to the BOS with its findings and several major recommendations. On June 27, 2005, the 19-member deer committee voted nearly unanimously to approve recommendations including controlled hunting on town open space lands. On July 6, 2005, a report was presented to the BOS.

On May 31, 2006, the Town of Ridgefield passed the Controlled Hunt Ordinance, by a vote of 531 to 94. This ordinance was voted on at a special town meeting following an extensive study and report by the Ridgefield Deer Committee. The ordinance (Section 4-75, Controlled Hunting) states:

“On open space lands under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission and owned by the Town, the Board of Selectmen, after written referral to and response by the Conservation Commission and after the Board of Selectmen’s review and approval of the procedures, practices and safety measures to be followed by the Deer Management Committee, may from time to time authorize the Deer Management Committee to initiate and supervise a controlled hunt of deer on open space lands.”

Note that Section 4-75 clearly states that the “Board of Selectmen...may from time to time authorize the Deer Management Committee to initiate and supervise a controlled hunt of deer on open space lands.” The ordinance does not require that the hunt be conducted annually.

After the ordinance was passed, the BOS created the Deer Management Implementation Committee (DMIC) to implement the controlled hunting recommendations, and Ridgefield had its first controlled hunt in the 2006-2007 season. Expanding in scope during 2007-2008 to include additional Ridgefield open space parcels and state-owned parcels, the hunt has remained in place for 13 consecutive years.

Key Findings from the 2005 Report

The findings of note included:

- Ridgefield does have a serious problem with deer overpopulation.
- Estimates of existing deer densities range from 40 to 80 per square mile in Ridgefield. Only one aerial survey had been conducted along the southeast boundary of the town, and DEEP estimated that there were 79 deer per square mile in that area.
- It was decided that 20 or fewer deer per square mile be the target density for Ridgefield. The report also states that for natural reforestation to take place, the deer population should be between 18 and 25 per square mile.
- The problem manifests itself in elevated rates of Lyme disease, unacceptably large numbers of auto accidents involving deer, and extensive damage to the plant life and, as a result, to the ecology and environment in the community.

- At this time (2006), the only effective tool to reduce the deer population is hunting.

Key Recommendations from the 2005 Report

The recommendations of note included:

- The town should establish a system of monitoring open spaces to determine the effect of reduced deer populations on vegetation. This would help determine the success of the proposed culling and/or hunting, and whether additional killing will be needed.
- The town should conduct an aerial survey to more accurately estimate deer densities in town, in order to help locate “hot spots,” and to help in assessing the effectiveness of culling efforts which will allow for a more focused and effective (hunting) program.
- The town should follow up with Yale University regarding their offer to identify areas of particularly high deer densities. In the event Yale University is unable to work with Ridgefield, such a survey should be pursued through other institutions. With information depicting areas with denser populations, the implementation committee could be more effective in educating residents and facilitating herd reduction in key locations.

The Deer Hunt Today

Over the last several years, there has been an increased interest on the part of the town as to the effectiveness and efficacy of the annual deer hunt to address the original set of deer-related problems that it was hoped would be remedied by implementing the hunt – auto accidents, ticks and Lyme disease, effects on open space understory, etc. Also, there is the key question of just how many deer are in Ridgefield and what is a good number to maintain.

The results of deer hunting are addressed in more detail in Fact Sheet 2.2.

