



Fact Sheet 3.4 What have we learned from Yale University?

As mentioned on page 1.1-2 of this report, one of the 2005 key recommendations from the Deer Management Committee to the BOS was to “follow up with Yale University (or other institutions).” As part of the RCC effort to prepare this report, we followed up with Yale and others.

Angela Rutherford (Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies)

“By treating deer as an independent variable in our statistical analysis, we explicitly assumed that deer are the direct determinant of environmental impacts. However, it may be that deer impacts are an indirect consequence of other factors that encourage deer effects...land management and land development.... habitat fragmentation can create habitat that is attractive to deer, leading to local impacts.

That is, deer would be a proximate cause of damage, not the ultimate cause, which is attractive habitat created by human land use... We are not trying to imply that deer cannot have significant environmental impacts. However, the evidence from our study in comparison to other published studies suggests that deer densities anywhere on the western Connecticut landscape may be below levels needed to cause strong impacts on the environment.” (Rutherford et al, 2010).

Dr. Oswald Schmitz, Professor of Population and Community Ecology (Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies)

“It is possible to have longer intervals between deer hunts (say 2-3 years between hunts). This would mean that individual hunters should have higher success rates than if they kept populations low by hunting every year. Authorizing a controlled hunt every 2 to 3 years should keep the deer population at similar numbers as an annual hunt.”

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Dr. Ed Faison, PhD in Environmental Conservation from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst

“I think there are a lot of advantages to letting nature takes its course. It avoids the very challenging process of establishing objectives for a deer management program that are actually measurable. How do you decide the state of the ecosystem that you want to manage towards? It is ultimately arbitrary. It's important to remember that herbivory by deer is a fundamental ecological process, so we should not be alarmed if we see browsing by deer in the woods. Deer are part of a forest and they eat plants.”

Ed Faison, with Kevin J. Barrett, M.F.S. in Forest Science (from Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies)

“We found minimal evidence that deer activity density consistently affects forest plant communities. ... Instead of using conventional deer management strategies to meet forest regeneration objectives, it may be more effective to implement forest management strategies to address the effects deer herbivory has on forest regeneration... Forest management can mitigate browse impact.” (Barrett et al, 2013).

The Bottom Line

Authorizing a controlled hunt every 2 to 3 years should keep the deer population at similar numbers as an annual hunt.