

Did You Know That the risk of becoming infected with a tick-borne disease is directly related to the density of deer? The higher the density, the greater the risk of infection.

Researchers agree that the abundance and distribution of the blacklegged tick or the deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) has been related to the size of the deer population. It has been estimated that over 90% of adult ticks feed on deer, each laying up to 3,000 eggs. Therefore deer are the key to the reproductive success of the tick. Experts responsible for effective deer management programs strongly agree that once deer density levels are reduced to 8-10 deer per square mile (as recommended by the Department of Environmental Conservation), that the incidence of tick-borne illnesses are almost eliminated as a public health threat. This was well documented in both the Mumford Cove and the Monhegan Island Studies in Connecticut and Maine respectively.

Nevertheless, many people living on Shelter Island are consumed with knowing the exact number of deer on the island. Many local hunters and some residents who enjoy seeing the deer in their backyards, feel that the current rate of culling is sufficient. But a majority of those who reside on Shelter Island feel that there are still way too many deer. Shelter Island's Deer and Tick Committee is strongly shares the views of the majority and has challenged both local and off island hunters to help cull the herd. In addition, the committee has scheduled

periodic meetings with hunters to help in this endeavor and to listen to their suggestions. When it is possible and consistent with existing laws, the committee has helped to act on these suggestions. Hunters have increased their harvest rates in the last two years.

The committee also supports the implementation of an “incentive program” designed to reward those hunters who have done their fair share. This incentive program will most likely be enhanced for the coming year. Additional efforts are needed to open up more areas on the island for hunting. The number of hunters has continued to decline sharply in New York State and here on Shelter Island. That is why the committee supports programs designed to increase the availability of hunters here on Shelter Island.

Discussions involving the possible use of “sharpshooters” is still on the table and may be used as a last resort to achieve those recommended deer density levels.

Obviously, poor weather conditions hurt 2014’s culling efforts during the nuisance hunt held in February and March. Currently, the most effective and cost-efficient mechanism for controlling overabundant white-tailed deer is lethal removal, most commonly controlled hunting and sharpshooting.

Experts now know that deer may alter their behaviors when controlled hunting or sharpshooting methods are utilized. Many remaining deer seek out safer environments after being hunted in defined areas, such as Mashomack Preserve and Sylvester Manor. Opening up additional

hunting areas will be needed and requires the support of individuals and/or group of homeowners in the culling efforts. Remember, this is NOT about eliminating deer from Shelter Island. It is about gaining control of tick density levels and tick-borne diseases. The D.E.C. acknowledges that a systematic and cyclical schedule for re-evaluating deer management objectives is appropriate. To that end, the D.E.C. is committed to evaluate deer population objectives on a five-year cycle, typically including a CTF (Citizen Task Force), which is similar to our Deer and Tick Committee. The use of contraceptives, to include immunocontraceptive vaccines and sterilization techniques may be useful in the future but not until those levels are greatly reduced and approach the desired goal of 8-10 deer per square mile.

References:

Managing Urban Deer in Connecticut: A Guide for Residents and Communities. Ct Dept of Env. Protection. H. Kilpatrick and A. LaBonte. 2007

Ticks and Lyme Prevention/ Fairfield County Municipal Deer Management Alliance. Municipalities Working Together To Promote Health, Safety and Balance in Nature Through Smaller Deer Numbers. 2010

New York State's Deer Management Plan – Goal1: Population Management. 2012