

# Deer Management Project

John Marlin

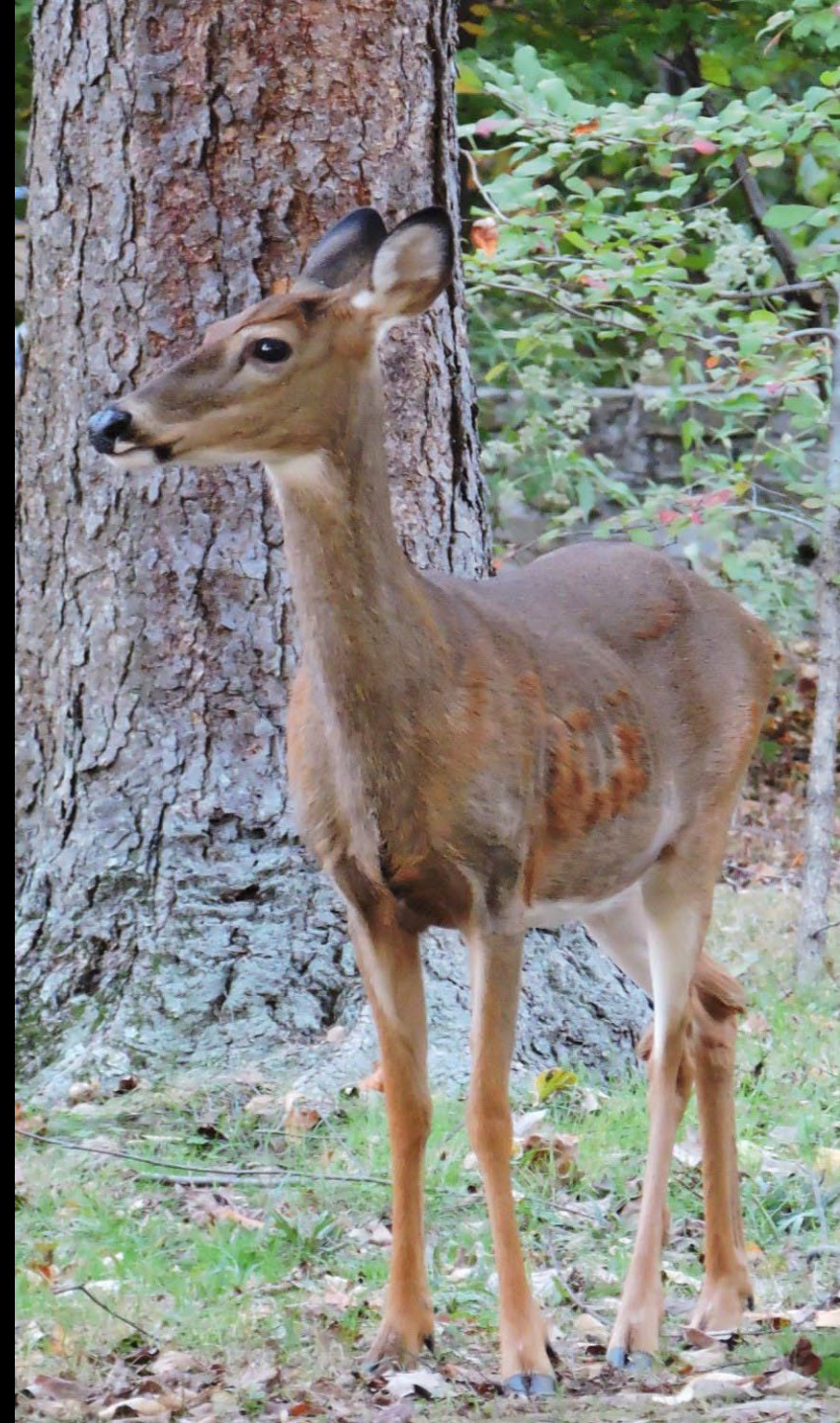
Department of Parks and Recreation  
February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024



# Project Background

Deer are essential but can be problematic

- **White-tailed deer are important for Arlington's ecology**
- **High deer population densities can harm local ecosystems**
- **Deer eat key native plants faster than they can regenerate (Ecological Carrying Capacity)**
- **Too many deer will destroy the habitat** impacting not only our forest's ability to regrow, but also animals that rely on the plants for food and cover



# A Tale of Two Forests



**Lacey Woods Park**

The forest is mostly untouched by deer

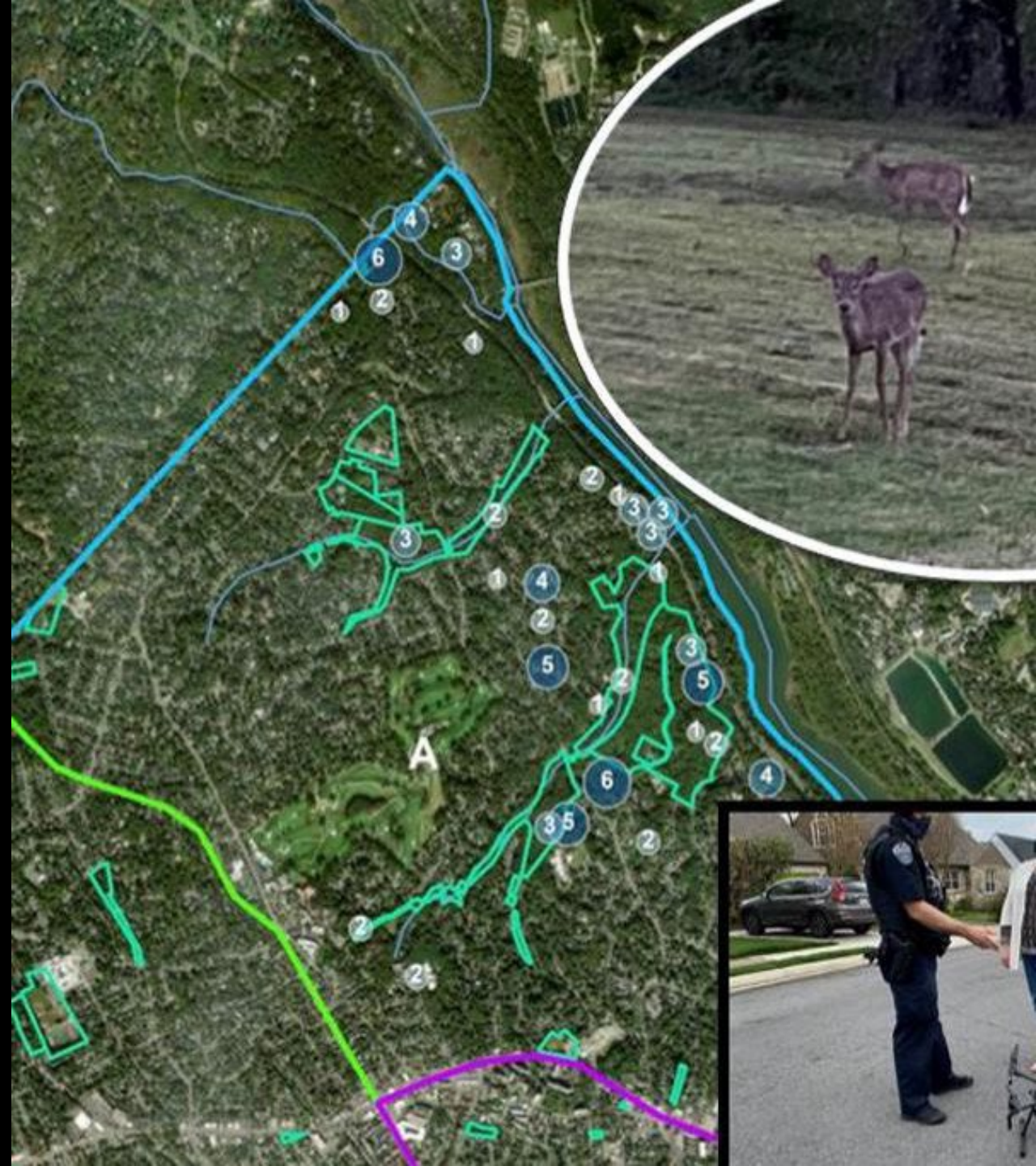


**Barcroft Park**

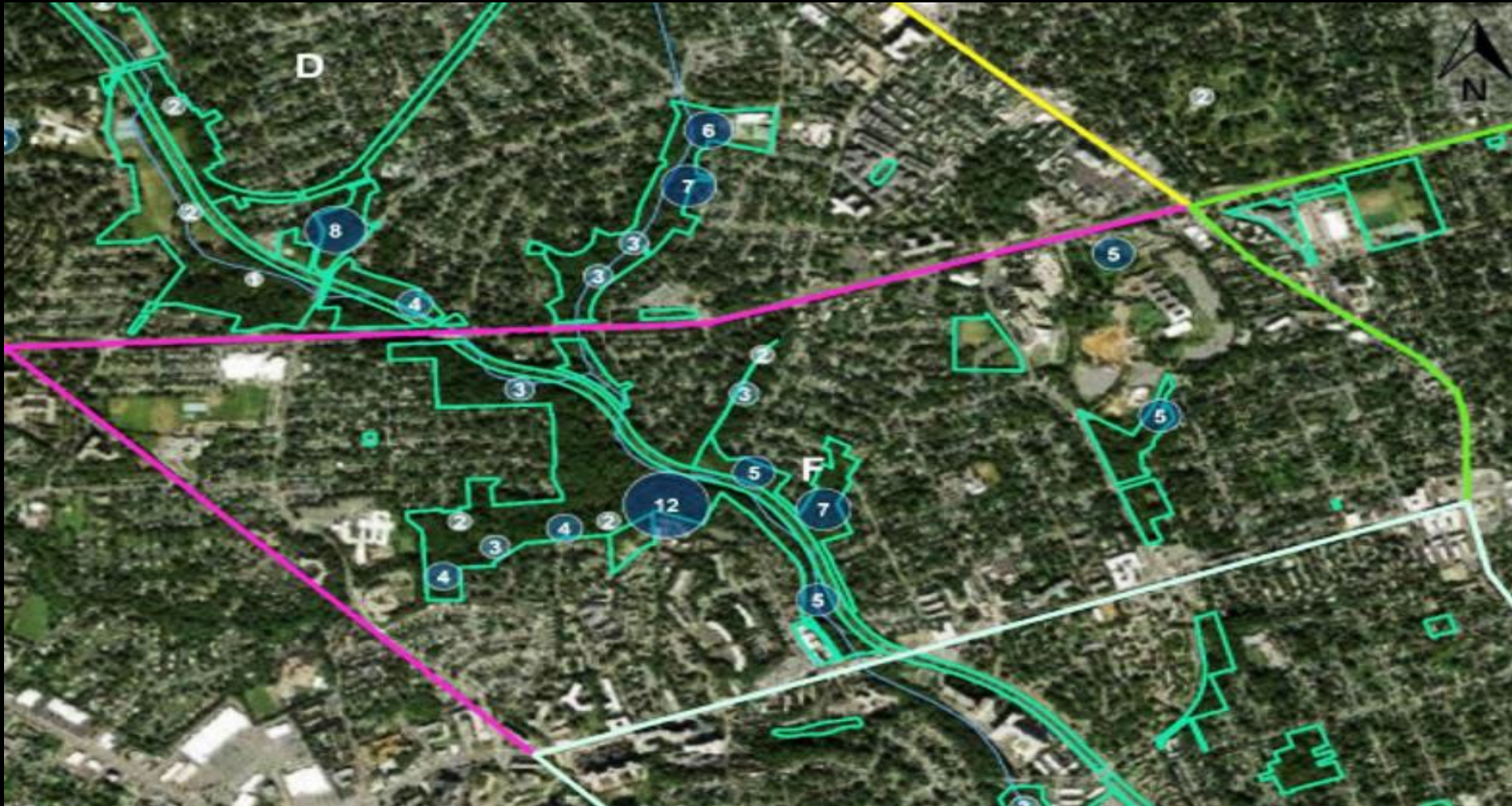
The forest is mostly eaten by deer

# Project History

- Anecdotal evidence of deer overbrowsing has been seen over the years
- April 2021 - Arlington County conducts an aerial drone survey
  - Survey found at least 290 deer County wide or 13 deer per square mile.
- Fall 2022 – Arlington County conducts browse surveys in 12 forest parks to evaluate deer impacts to vegetation. 12/12 parks showed deer damage



# Deer Population



Concentrated in our Natural Areas

# Our Forests Have Too Many Deer

- 12 out of 12 field surveyed parks showed damage from deer overpopulation.
- The 12 surveyed parks had an average deer density of 124 deer per square mile in 2021. Research recommends no more than 15-20 per square mile.
- Population densities were 1.9-17 times the recommended levels in 11/12 of the surveyed parks in 2021.



# Suitable Options In Arlington

- Sharpshooting
- Fertility control (surgical)
- Controlled Archery hunting
- Fencing
- Repellents



# Sharpshooting





# Surgical Sterilization



# Controlled Archery Hunting



# Fencing



# Deer Repellent

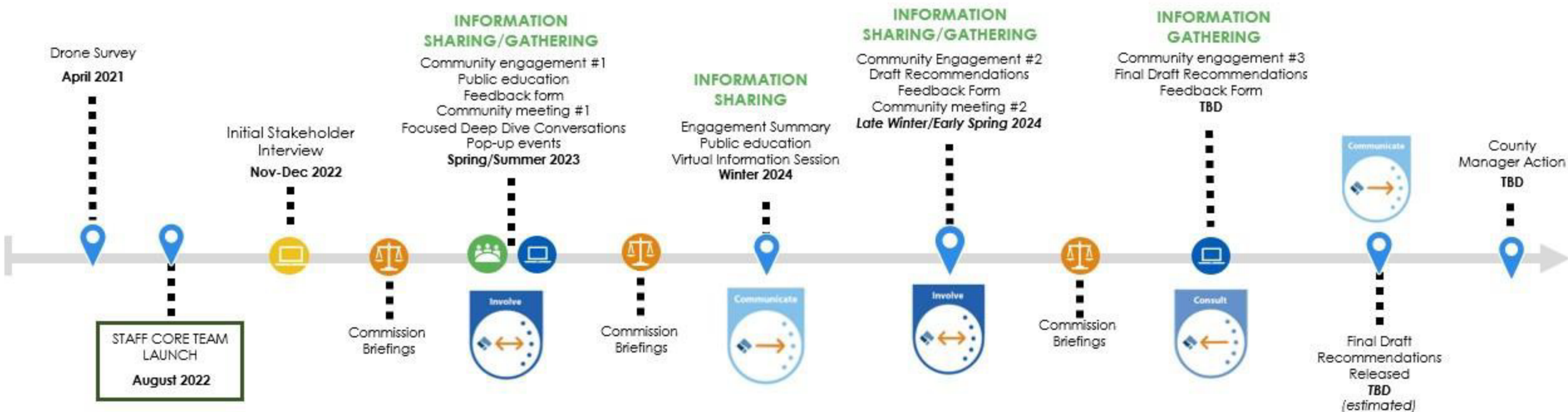


# Deer Management Project Timeline

**Origin:** Natural Resources Management Plan

**Funding:** General Fund

**Staff Contact:** Alonso Abugattas  
AAbugattas@arlingtonva.us



**Online Feedback**  
(e.g., questionnaire, feedback form, etc.)



**In-Person Engagement and Pop-Ups**  
(e.g., community meeting, roundtable, tabling, walking/bus tour, deliberative dialogue, etc.)



**Virtual Meeting**  
(e.g., TEAMS, TEAMS live, Zoom, etc.)



**County Board Engagement**  
(e.g., public hearing, Board work session, open door Monday, commission meeting, etc.)



**Key Milestone**

# How can you participate?

- Sign up for updates on the Deer Management Project Page.
  - <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects/Project-Types/Parks-Projects/Deer-Management-Project>
  - (Search 'Arlington Deer Management Project')
- Participate in upcoming engagement and events in early 2024.

# White-tailed Deer in Arlington- Naturalist's View



*Photos: Steve Young*

Steve Young  
Arlington Civic Federation  
February 27, 2024

# Deer Are Cool Animals!



We probably all agree that deer are wonderful native animals that belong in our ecosystem.



# However, it's complicated



Deer eat a lot and reproduce rapidly.

They have no effective natural predators here.

Their population has grown beyond the carrying capacity of our limited natural areas.

Most credible experts agree that the deer population needs to be managed to sustain the health of the whole ecosystem.

Arlington's 2022-3 White Buffalo expert study documented:

“... overabundant deer browsing...”

“Without active deer management, ecological health of Arlington County's natural areas will likely continue to degrade.”

“Preservation of Arlington's natural resources will require an active deer management program to reduce deer browse pressure and concomitant long-term monitoring to ensure management goals are being met.”





Closeup of heavily browsed strawberrybush



Buck antler rub destroys  
planted trees

# Overabundant deer also impact private landscaping and gardening



# Strawberrybush Mini Case Study



Native. Scientific name  
*Euonymus americanus*



Why it's also called "Hearts-a-bursting"



Heavily browsed "deer candy"

# Other Native Organisms



Pinxter Azalea



Eastern Towhee

We need to do what we can to restore and sustain the entire ecosystem, complete with its native biodiversity.

Healthy ecosystems are good for our own well-being and the planet, including the climate.



Thank You.

Steve Young

Certified Master Naturalist

Volunteer Park Steward, Glencarlyn Park

Frazmo@gmail.com





# A Brief Overview of Deer Management in Arlington County



**Chief Jennifer Toussaint**

*Animal Welfare League of Arlington, Arlington County Animal Control*



# Resolving Wildlife Conflict Concerns

- AWLA has been humanely resolving this communities conflicts with wildlife since 1983.
- We keep close statistical data to ensure we are meeting appropriate benchmarks and to catch any new developments or patterns.
  - For example, we track motor vehicle collisions and report our data to the County's Transportation Engineering Bureau to ensure appropriate signage for deer crossings are posted on roadways
- We respond to over 1500 cases of wildlife related calls for service annually including overseeing concerns on private and public property

# White-Tailed Deer Facts

- Matrifocal groups- doe and her offspring.
- Deer are highly adaptable in urban environments.
- Fawns are born in the spring and the mother “parks” them until around a month old.
- Deer do have predators in Arlington - coyotes, foxes, high privacy fencing, construction sites, and motor vehicles.
- Reintroduced in Virginia from the 1930’s through 1980’s due to dwindling populations



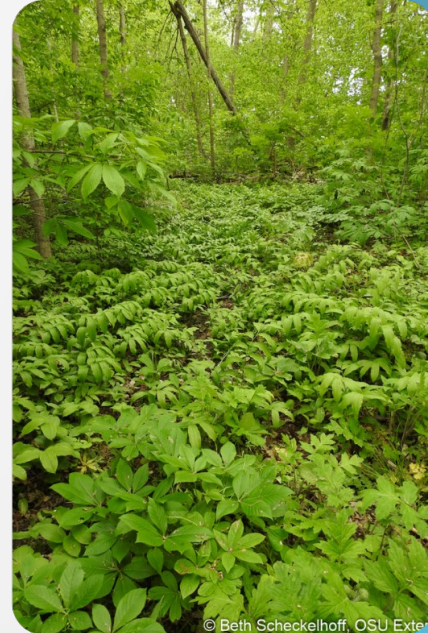
# But What About the Understory?

It's easy to blame deer for any forestry growth woes, when the reality is that forests are affected by many factors:

- Insect damage
- Plant disease, parasitic organisms
- Pollutants (like harsh fertilizers)
- Invasive species
- Increased foot traffic
- Climate and weather extremes
- Over-development
- Wildlife-including deer

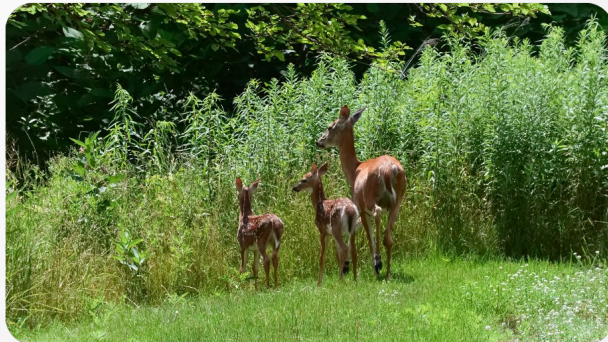
A Yale Forestry School study assessing deer impact on forests concluded that deer density within the studied area was not a leading factor in tree regeneration decline nor loss of plant diversity.

Solutions to consider include permanent or moveable fencing, overstory thinning, small patch cuts, liming, fertilization of soil, stem protectors, etc.



# What Do We Know Now?

- Allegations of numbers being higher than they have been before are not statistically proven.
- First time Arlington has counted deer - establishes a good baseline. We found 290 deer total in the count in April 2021.
- Arlington has always taken a measured, calculated, and humane approach to managing local wildlife populations. Arlington continues to go above and beyond in their research and efforts in decision making.
- Arlington County Animal Control has retrieved 122 DOA picked up since May 2021 and an additional 36 have been culled through hunting permits given by VA DWR. Meaning a minimum of 158 deer have been statistically removed from Arlington County
  - 54.5% of the initial deer counted
- As of May 1, 2023 Arlington County became part of the Chronic Wasting Disease Deer Management Area 2. This means deer coming from Arlington as no longer eligible for rehabilitation and considerations for testing are underway. There is also a restricted carcass transport in place.



# Factors to Consider

- Analyzing the entirety of the limited data we currently have.
  - Determining measurable impacts
  - Considerations for implications of CWD on our deer populations
- Create realistic benchmarks.
  - What are we trying to achieve and/or protect?
  - How do we measure success of implementation?
- Create an action plan that utilizes a range of options for site-specific application.



# AWLA Board Wildlife Policy

Consistent with our mission to improve the lives of animals, AWLA is committed to helping our Arlington community co-exist harmoniously with native wildlife. We adhere to the following principles in dealing with wildlife:

- . Respect for the environment
- . Tolerance and understanding of living things
- . Humane approaches to resolving conflicts using non-lethal means

*~ Adopted February 2017*



# Why Did AWLA Start Taking a Larger Role in Local Wildlife?

- Supports a humane based mission as an organization and community
- Provides a local solution to a local problem
- Protects citizens from misinformation and unnecessary expenses
- Prevents future situations caused by inaccessibility to proper information and response
- Plays a key role in OneHealth- the connectivity of wildlife, domestic pet, and human health and wellbeing
- High community need- over 50% of Animal Control yearly response calls are wildlife related





# AWLA's Wildlife Resource Center



The Wildlife Resource Center supports the needs of our wild neighbors by:

- providing supplies to rehabbers
- subsidizing training
- providing a corps of volunteer drivers to get wildlife to available rehabbers.

This ensures that rehabbers remain available, committed, and have what they need to fulfill their vital role in wildlife conservation.