



STATE OF MICHIGAN



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LANSING

REBECCA A. HUMPHRIES
DIRECTOR

November 26, 2008

City of Grand Haven
Attn: Lisa Sutterfield
519 Washington Avenue
Grand Haven, Michigan 49417

Dear City Commissioners:

Historically, wildlife managers, in Michigan, concentrated on managing deer to reach the biological carrying capacity of the area being managed. This means that they tried to maximize the number of deer in a given area based upon what the habitat could support and also what the internal mechanisms of the deer itself could withstand. In order to manage for biological carry capacity you have to monitor the number of deer you have on the landscape as well as the quality of the habitat. In southern Michigan, deer are rarely limited in their population numbers by the habitat, and therefore, the biological carrying capacity is not as important to deer managers.

In southern Michigan, modern wildlife managers primarily make deer management decisions based upon the effects of human/deer interactions. Determining deer managements strategies based primarily on human/deer interactions is referred to as managing for “social carrying capacity”. For instance, if people desire more deer and the deer are not causing economic losses outside desirable ranges, then wildlife managers infer that the human/deer interaction is positive. If the interaction is positive, then they implement management strategies to increase the deer herd in that area. However, if people are complaining about economic losses by deer, or other negative interactions, then the interaction is negative and wildlife managers implement strategies to decrease the deer herd in that area.

In urban areas especially, the number of deer on the landscape is not as critical as the social effects of human/deer interactions. If the number of deer do not interfere with the quality of life desired by the citizens of Grand Haven, then the deer herd is likely at numbers within desirable limits. However, if the number of deer is causing an undesirable number of negative human/deer interactions then the deer herd is no longer within desirable limits.

It is difficult to estimate the number of deer on a small geographic area the size of Grand Haven because deer move around great distances. Any estimates at that scale have large margins of error and are not reliable to stand on their own in order to make decisions about deer herd management. As I have already stated, the number of deer on the landscape is not critical for making deer management decisions in an urban area. The most important factor that the City of Grand Haven should consider is the level of negative human/deer interactions and the effect of this on the quality of life of the citizens.

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

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I have been involved with the issue of deer management in the City of Grand Haven for over three years. I have attended public meetings and listened to the citizens talk about deer and their interactions with deer. These interactions are primarily negative in most of the Grand Haven area. There are a few people willing to tolerate additional economic losses and wish to maintain higher deer numbers, but these individuals are in the minority. I have monitored the vehicle/deer accident rates inside the city and in my opinion, these numbers are higher than what should be desired. I have observed the ecological effects of the deer on the green space areas of the city and this evidence points to an over abundant deer herd and unsustainable ecological damage to the green space within the city. For these reasons, I support the proposal being considered to implement deer reduction strategies inside the city limits of Grand Haven.

I would be happy to discuss this situation with you if you have additional questions. I can be reached at 269-685-6851, Ext. 114. Thank you for this opportunity to provide technical guidance related to deer management.

Sincerely,

Sara M. Schaefer, Supervisor
Southwestern Management Unit
Wildlife Division

SMS/vlc