

William Martinus  
Martinus and Associates  
17300 Beach ridge Way  
West Olive Michigan 49460

November 24, 2008

Lisa Sutterfield  
Assistant City Manager  
Grand Haven, Michigan

In the past two years, I have become aware of the increasing public concern about the ongoing problem of deer overpopulation within the City of Grand Haven, and have attended two of the fact-finding meetings.

While conducting various environmental projects and especially Natural Features Inventories throughout Michigan, dune habitat has become very familiar to me. My work within the dune community includes a vegetation habitat mapping for Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore in 2007, involving both the mainland and North and South Manitou Islands. On North Manitou Island in the 1980s, the white-tail deer population reached far into overpopulation to the point where starving deer actually waded into Lake Michigan to eat dead alewife fish to stay alive, as there was no vegetation left within reach on the heavily forested island; the understory of the forest was entirely stripped away by overbrowsing. Subsequent culling of the herd has now stabilized the deer population on North Manitou, resulting in a healthy rebirth of the forest understory. It may take decades more to fully recover and somewhat resemble the lush ground layer so prevalent on South Manitou where there are no deer (a mile separates the two islands).

Local dune projects conducted personally include Natural Features Inventories of Kitchel Dunes Preserve within Grand Haven (study found at library or City of Ferrysburg) and Ottawa County Parks and Recreation's North Ottawa Dunes Park (found online at Ottawa County Parks website). During extensive fieldwork, I have noticed a dire need to greatly diminish the local deer overpopulation as evidenced by extreme reduction of ground zone dune vegetation in both quantity of plants and variety of species (a comparison study was made by Grand Valley University in 1976), and in many locations, a terracing of the physical dune slopes by feeding patterns. What may be most disturbing and critical, is the almost complete lack of re-vegetation of the forested dunes; in many locations there are no seedlings nor saplings needed to eventually replace the trees that clothe our rare sand hills. Furthermore, the overbrowsing greatly encourages non-native shrubs and forbs to become invasively established, as is the case in some areas of local dunelands (the deer generally do not eat the non-native plant species).

I urge and encourage the City of Grand Haven to eliminate enough deer to eventually stabilize the local deer population and monitor the results. In order to allow the dunes and nearby woods to recover, the deer herd will need to be under normal sustainable population for possibly a lengthy number of years. To delay will be disastrous to our natural forested communities. Many nearby communities are looking for Grand Haven City to be a leader in dune conservation concerning deer management in the West Michigan area.

Sincerely,



Bill Martinus