



## **Bolivar White-Tailed Deer Study**

We are fortunate to live in an area of spectacular scenic beauty, surrounded by our National Parks forested areas, and nestled between two rivers. However, this creates a haven for white-tailed deer who have no natural predators and thrive in forested areas, open fields and urban landscapes. Having wildlife in our community is aesthetically pleasing, and providing urban habitats that support abundant and diverse wildlife enriches our lives. However, we can have too much of a good thing. Having an overabundance of white-tailed deer poses risks for us and for the deer as discussed here.

Deer related diseases are part of the natural cycle and will occur with an overabundance of deer. In our state, these include Chronic Wasting Disease and Blue Tongue Disease, both of which are fatal, and miserable to witness. Chronic Wasting Disease has now moved close to our town including Frederick County, VA and Hampshire and Hardy, Counties in WV. Last year, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources banned all baiting of deer in hopes of curbing the spread of disease through saliva. We can help with these efforts by not feeding the deer.

Bird feeders provide excess food for the deer and other mammals. Interestingly, a study came out of New York that demonstrated Lyme Disease is not correlated to deer density, but to small mammals. The “deer” tick is the carrier of Lyme Disease, and while the deer do have deer ticks, the greatest number of Lyme Disease tick carriers are small mammals. So, watch your feeders not only for the birds, but also at night for the opossums, racoons, fox, mice and bear.

Many of you attended the vulture program at the Bolivar Community center a few years ago. Aesthetically, they are not an ideal species, or a favorite, but they provide a necessary role in the cycle of life with their ability to minimize waste of valuable resources. Having excess carnage from deer dying of natural causes or road kill, increases the population of vultures because of the availability of food. Our natural cycles are out of balance because there are no predators for deer, except us.

It is shocking that on Washington Street with a speed limit of 25 miles per hour, we have collisions fatal to the deer. And, Route 340, coming into the river valley, is worse, where we see multiple collisions each year. Automobiles are now a significant predator for deer.

Our forests are under assault. When the deer browse excessively, invasive plants take hold not allowing tree seedlings to flourish. The Smithsonian Center in Front Royal did a multiyear study of deer browsing of our forests using fence barriers for the deer. You can stand at the fence line and witness the effects of over browsing. In the enclosed area, there is an understory of young trees, and the unprotected area is filled with nonnative species, most notably, silt grass. The future of our forests is threatened without regeneration of trees.

Our urban landscapes are under similar assault. A drive around town to see the multiple, and creative use of fences and cages protecting gardens and plantings from deer gives you an indication of the extent of browsing. But, be careful not to blame the deer entirely, as ground hogs and rabbits are often culprits.



In 2012, the Town of Harpers Ferry made the decision to manage the deer using an archery program. The community made the decision after much thought into the alternatives to reduce the number of deer, our risks, and the risks to the deer. We completed a public opinion survey, and when results were compiled, the consensus was, “we like having deer, just not so many.” Since the management program began, we have sustainably and safely harvested deer for the community, and have reduced the deer herds. However, the deer know no boundaries, and it is a continued effort to ensure the deer population is not over abundant.

The naturalist Aldo Leopold, said “The urge to understand must precede the urge to reform.” We need to understand your experiences and thoughts on the deer. A survey form is attached, and we will be conducting a deer population study this fall to determine deer density in our shared peninsula.

Please take a few minutes to complete the attached survey and return it to the Bolivar Town Hall. Your input is valuable. We look forward to hearing from you.

Community Survey  
White Tailed Deer  
2017

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Address \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone or email \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you have deer on your property? Yes/No Average Number \_\_\_\_\_ Seasonally Yes /No  
Greatest Number of deer seen at one time \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Year \_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you had a vehicle collision in town? \_\_\_\_\_ Somewhere else Yes/No Where \_\_\_\_\_  
Have you had any vehicle encounters, i.e. did you stop to avoid an accident? Yes/No

3. Do you have deer browsing on plants in your yard? Yes/No Types of plants  
browsed \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (please name as  
many as possible)

4. Do you have a dog in your yard? Yes/No Does the dog bark or chase deer? Yes/No

5. Comments

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