

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Draft White-Tailed Deer Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

A brief summary

J. Doran

A deer management plan is needed for Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore because the local deer population has become a dominant force that negatively influences ecosystem components within the National Lakeshore. This includes both sensitive vegetation and other wildlife. The study identified the optimum level of deer to be 15/ square mile.

The study looked at alternatives in order to manage the deer population. These include:

- 1) No Action. Use current deer management techniques which include limited fencing and use of repellents.
- 2) Alternative 1 plus additional non-lethal controls. These include additional fencing, repellents, and reproductive controls (if available and effective).
- 3) Alternative 1 plus lethal action. This alternative would combine current deer management techniques with a direct reduction of the deer herd size through sharpshooting, along with capture and euthanasia in areas where sharpshooting would not be appropriate.
- 4) Combined lethal and non-lethal action. This alternative combines all of the above alternatives. Actions would include the direct reduction of the deer herd with sharpshooting, capture and euthanasia, and fencing/repellents. In addition, there would be the phasing in of birth control for long term management of lower herd numbers. This is the preferred alternative.

The focus of this analysis was to develop deer management methods and strategies for Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore in cooperation with local, state, and regional entities as well as other federal agencies. A science team consisting of scientists and other specialists from a variety of state and federal government organizations has helped to define components of the planning process. The team evaluated scientific literature and research on the topic of deer management strategies, establishing a monitoring protocol for National Lakeshore deer populations and other National Lakeshore resources, and established resource thresholds at which deer management strategies would be implemented. The science team also addressed the possibilities and implications of chronic wasting disease infecting the National Lakeshore deer herd.

Monitoring protocols and impact thresholds are a component of all action alternatives evaluated, helping to ensure that the deer population at the National Lakeshore become a balanced component of a functioning ecosystem, not a dominant feature or driving force that causes impairment to other National Lakeshore resources and values.

Deer Meetings Conclusions

Julie Doran

The meetings were certainly interesting and the information on deer management, ticks, lyme disease, and related topics is extensive and was reviewed and discussed in great detail by the committee.

There are many different points of view and plenty of controversy.

The reports that most influenced me were the National Lake Shore Draft Deer Management report and the actual Beverly Shores experience as reported by Bob Beglin. The main issue in both cases was the out of balance deer population and the resulting negative impacts on vegetation and other wildlife. This is also the case in Ogden Dunes. The recent deer count and the obvious deer damage in O.D. tell the story. Beverly Shores experience in which 700 deer were culled in the last 10 years and the resulting major recovery of native vegetation is a positive result which would be worth emulating in O.D. The National Lake Shore Deer Management report has been recently approved. The preferred alternative is to reduce the deer population with both lethal and nonlethal methods. No timetable is available for this effort. The cooperation of O.D., when appropriate, would pool valuable resources in order to accomplish mutual goals.

The more complicated and less apparent issue is the direct relationship between lowering the deer population and reducing the tick population and lyme disease. Nevertheless, the need to reduce the deer population in order to restore a more optimum balance is necessary regardless of the tick problem.