

What is the history of deer in New Jersey?

Before European colonization of the Americas, white-tailed deer populations were hunted and managed by native peoples for food and to protect crops. Deer populations rose after plagues devastated Native American tribes. Colonists were greeted by abundant deer populations and a market for their meat and hide erupted. After centuries of unregulated harvest, populations dwindled. The first hunting regulations were put in place in the 1800's and deer populations recovered. In areas without hunter access, deer populations are at unsustainable high densities.



Suburban Colonists

Deer have become extremely well adapted to living in close proximity to humans. By nature, deer thrive in "edge habitats" - fragmented landscapes providing a balance between the sanctuary of forest and solar-fueled fields and meadows. Suburbia provides this mosaic of habitat and towns often ban hunting.

A Demanding Diet

Deer can consume 2% to 7% of their body weight daily - about 8 pounds of vegetation depending on the size of the deer. Forests have fairly fixed rejuvenation rates and deer browsing on saplings can overwhelm a forest when deer populations are high. Likewise, farmers experience significant financial losses to deer as they feed on their crops.

Learn more from NJDEP Fish & Wildlife!

About the White-Tailed Deer



NJ Hunting Regulations



Community Based Deer Management



Contact NJDEP Fish & Wildlife Bureau of Wildlife Management



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Deer Management in Your Community



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Is there really a problem?

An overabundance of deer can impact people in ways that exceed certain social tolerances, or “the social carrying capacity”. In extreme cases, when a deer population size exceeds what the land naturally supports, deer have exceeded the “ecological carrying capacity”. This affects the health of deer with symptoms including disease, intraspecies social stresses, malnutrition, and death during food droughts.



Symptoms of Excessive Deer

- **Safety** - Deer-vehicle collisions and aggressive deer.
- **Public Health** - Propagation of tick and insect borne diseases.
- **Forest Health** - Over-browsing of native desirable species and establishment of nonnative undesirable species.
- **Agriculture** - Destruction of crops plus the costs associated with preventative measures means high financial losses.
- **Quality of Life** - Damage to ornamental plants, backyard gardens, damage to bird feeders, and excessive feces.



What is the State of New Jersey doing about deer?

In order to address increasing deer populations and the problems associated with them, NJDEP Fish & Wildlife, together with the New Jersey Fish and Game Council, have established long and liberal deer hunting seasons. This framework has been successful at reducing populations. NJDEP Fish & Wildlife biologists work with local officials to design a suitable hunting format for their community. NJDEP Fish & Wildlife also provides information concerning deer control methods and damage mitigation techniques to private landowners. Utilizing hunters within the current hunting regulations framework is often the most cost effective way for a community to remedy its deer abundance problem.



It is estimated that about two million wildlife-vehicle collisions occur in the U.S. annually.



Controlled Hunting

Landowners can tailor hunting under current regulations to meet their individual needs. For instance, bow hunting has proven to be a particularly suitable method of reducing deer numbers in suburban areas where firearms cannot be used. Landowners have flexibility when restricting existing hunting regulations, however, they may not make hunting requirements more liberal than what current hunting laws allow without a special permit. Community Based Deer Management Permits provide communities with an overpopulation of deer additional control measures.

How NJDEP Fish & Wildlife can help:

Technical Assistance

- Assessment of deer impacts
- Estimation of deer population size
- Identification of factors impacting the deer population
- Ordinance review which potentially impact deer populations

Public Outreach

- Access to NJDEP Fish & Wildlife’s body of literature and outreach materials
- Public deer management presentations
- Support at meetings with stakeholders

Planning Assistance

- Creation of a local deer management plan
- Site specific hunting program development
- Special deer management permits

