

**USDA-APHIS-WILDLIFE SERVICES
PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT**

2019-2020 City of Syracuse White-tailed Deer Damage Management Program

Cooperators

City of Syracuse

USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services
5757 Sneller Rd
Brewerton, NY 13029

Effective Date

12/01/2019

Completion Date

04/01/2020

Background

The city of Syracuse is approximately 25.6 square miles in size and has approximately 411 miles of maintained paved surface streets. The City is comprised of highly developed urban areas, residences interspersed with dense wooded areas, as well as numerous parks and greenspaces. Many of the homes feature landscaping, with ornamental plantings throughout. These factors along with native food resources and bedding areas create an ideal habitat for white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*).

Despite residents using best management practices to defend against deer damage, the deer herd continues to damage the local flora. Ornamental plants and shrubbery have been heavily browsed, causing residents an inordinate amount of economic damage. There is a visible browse line and little understory in the native foliage. In addition to the damage to vegetation, the abundant deer population also poses a threat to human safety in the form of vehicle collisions and tick borne diseases.

Objectives and Expected Results

The city of Syracuse has agreed to work together with Wildlife Services and private property owners to reduce the local white-tailed deer herd. The expected results are decreases in damage to private property and natural resources by browsing deer. Another expected benefit would be a reduction in danger of deer-vehicle collisions and tick borne diseases (Kilpatrick et al. 2014).

Methods

Properties belonging to the city of Syracuse and residents of the city were surveyed for use by deer and evaluated for safety of firearms use. Once suitable properties were identified, bait (kernel corn and apples) was placed in safe shooting zones. Deer were removed in the evening and night using suppressed, center-fire rifles with frangible ammunition and the aid of Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) devices and spotlights.

Results

Wildlife Services personnel made an initial visit to the city of Syracuse in November of 2019, to identify areas of deer usage. During the months of December, January, February and March, over a 20 night period, 159 white-tailed deer were removed from the city of Syracuse. This resulted in an average of 8 deer removed per night. A total of 156 staff hours were spent baiting and 312 staff hours to remove the deer. After processing, approximately 4,062 pounds of venison were delivered for donation which provided 16,248 meals to the local community.

Summary

The 2019-2020 white-tailed deer damage management program in the city of Syracuse was successful and resulted in minimal conflicts with neighboring property owners or the general public. Overall, the removal of 159 deer this year aided in reducing a portion of the deer population. There were several challenges that had a negative impact on the project. The main challenge was interference with baiting activities at several locations. The project had both intentional and unintentional interference at baiting locations by the public and both types discouraged deer from using the bait stations.

Recommendations

Due to the large number of deer observed and removed from the properties within a 4 month period, WS recommends that additional properties be added to the program to increase the overall coverage. The additional access would increase the number of deer removed and in turn lower the amount of damage that is being incurred by the residents of the city of Syracuse.

In areas where deer densities are high and shooting is not a feasible option, the live trapping of deer will provide increased deer take and enhance the programs overall effectiveness.

Wildlife Services also recommends that the city of Syracuse continue tracking damage that is being inflicted by white-tailed deer. Types of damage such as deer/vehicle collisions, the number of phone calls received from the town residents concerning deer damage and the number of deer carcasses removed from roadways can be easily tracked. Tracking damage caused by white-tailed deer can help provide valuable data to the DEC to help determine the reasoning behind a deer damage management program, as well as the overall success of the program.

Literature Cited

Kilpatrick, H. J., A. M. LaBonte, and K. C. Stafford, III. 2014. The relationship between deer density, tick abundance, and human cases of Lyme disease in a residential community. *Journal of Medical Entomology* 51:777-784.