

Huron-Clinton Metroparks provides deer management program update

- Best practices to ensure deer health and welfare, along with native species and ecosystem preservation, are top priorities.
- The park system is committed to transparency and regular updates – including a thorough scientific review to be completed internally and a report shared by the end of 2021 – to ensure the latest, best and most humane practices are used.
- Threats of violence cross an important line and will be fully investigated and prosecuted to ensure public and staff safety.

BRIGHTON, Mich. – Huron-Clinton Metroparks leaders today provided an update on the park's early 2021 plans for managing deer health and the herd population across the system, which included canceling the cull at Kensington Metropark due to timing constraints and completing a cull on Thursday, Feb. 25, at Oakwoods/Willow Metroparks (the two parks are connected) as scheduled. The plan at Kensington had been paused while law enforcement authorities investigated credible threats of violence, ultimately leading to recent misdemeanor charges against an Oakland County man for malicious use of telecommunications services.

No Place for Violent Threats, But Respectful Dialogue Encouraged

Metroparks Director Amy McMillan noted that the park system is committed to both transparency and respectful dialogue, but violent threats cross a key line. "We respect that some have strong feelings about this wildlife management decision and always encourage feedback and two-way dialogue, but we can't stand by when threats of violence endanger park staff, visitors or community. An in-depth investigation was why we could not share a more specific and transparent update until now. We thank the Royal Oak Police Department and Livingston County Prosecutor's Office for their diligent work on this matter."

Sharing Specific Deer Management Updates and a Commitment to Science

Winter 2021 Deer Management Details:

- A February 2021 cull did not and will not take place at Kensington Metropark due to timing constraints of the investigation into threats of violence. Though Kensington's deer population has grown beyond the recommended carrying capacity of the 4,500-acre natural area, the Metroparks will not request a permit extension beyond the current Feb. 28 end date due to deer gestation cycles.
- The deer management program was completed as planned at the adjoined Oakwoods/ Willow Metroparks with a final winter 2021 cull that took place Feb. 25 between the hours of 4 p.m. and midnight.

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“The Metroparks team understands and appreciates the wide range of passionate viewpoints this issue evokes,” Director McMillan added. “We also wanted to help clear up inaccurate information that’s been circulating and let people know we weighed all options and available data carefully as we take our responsibility to the parks and our stewardship of them extremely seriously. The science will always guide and drive our decisions on the most effective, most humane way to protect the long-term health and welfare of the deer population as well as the ecosystem which sustains them.”

Additional Study Ordered to Ensure Latest, Best Practices

McMillan also directed the Metroparks Natural Resources Division to conduct a comprehensive review of best practices and alternative methods across the state and country. This additional study will be completed by the end of 2021 and made publicly available. Similar reviews will also take place about every three years to ensure the latest, updated science is always considered.

“We want to regularly assess and continually ensure the Metroparks is doing everything possible to humanely address overpopulation and ensure a healthy, thriving deer population that also sustains our diverse flora and fauna that play a role in sustaining the entire ecosystem,” McMillan said.

History and Rationale for Deer Management Program

Tyler Mitchell, Chief of Natural Resources for the Metroparks, explained that the deer management program at the Metroparks began in 1999 in response to an observed decline in the overall health of the deer herd and the loss of more than 70 species of native plants.

Third-party wildlife biology experts completed health studies on the park deer populations and concluded that, “data indicates herd stress due to lack of nutrition.” Maintaining a healthy balance between herbivores and native plants means achieving the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)-recommended deer population density of 15-20 deer per square mile.

Regular aerial surveys are used across the Metroparks system to help determine herd sizes and if any deer culls may be needed in a specific year at a specific park. This information led to the determination that the current estimated herd of 210 in the 5.1 square land miles of the adjoining Oakwoods and Willow Metroparks and the current herd of at least 120 across Kensington’s 5.1 square land miles needed to be reduced. Metroparks intended to reduce the herd at Oakwoods and Willow by 58 deer and harvested a total of 51 deer. Metroparks intended to reduce the herd at Kensington by 43 deer and the cull did not take place. Deer tend to proliferate at these parks due to multiple factors, including a lack of natural predators, surrounding agricultural settings and reduced hunting activity in the immediate area.

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Mitchell noted that all harvested deer will be processed for meat and donated to local food banks to help feed hungry families across Southeast Michigan.

For additional information, please visit www.metroparks.com/get-involved/about-natural-resources/.

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