

Deer are among the most graceful of all creatures walking the earth. In their natural habitat deer can be a delight to see, so it's not surprising that many people enjoy a special affinity with them. A healthily and well managed herd ensures people will enjoy these magnificent animals for many years to come.

A herd living and dwelling inside the city limits is a sign of serious problems, both for the herd and for the general public. It's the mission of the Deer Management Task Force to address these issues while ensuring sound conservation and herd management principals.

## **PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH AN OVERPOPULATION OF DEER INSIDE THE CITY LIMITS**

**Human Disease** - An overabundance of deer places City residents at a greater risk for [Lyme disease](#). More deer in more areas of the City increase the chance that deer ticks infected with the disease bacteria will come in contact with people. Feeding deer within the city limits may increase the chances of you or your pets coming into contact with Lyme disease. While Lyme disease is often easily treatable if caught in time, it can cause serious complications if early symptoms are overlooked.

**Road Safety** – Car/deer accidents are all too common inside the city limits. Collisions with motor vehicles often result in substantial damage to property, the potential for human injury, and the destruction of deer.

In 2004, Pierre Police investigated 10 car/deer collisions resulting in more than \$18,000 in property damage. By 2005 the number climbed to 13 collisions causing almost \$21,000 in damage.

From 2004 to 2006, motor vehicle collision with a deer resulted in an average of \$1,846 in damage to the vehicle and the destruction of the deer involved.

In 2007, the average damage to a motor vehicle has now climbed to \$1,980 per incident.

**Deer Health** – Deer living inside the city limits face strong competition for food and space. The result is that deer are more susceptible to weight loss, starvation, parasites, and [epizootic hemorrhagic disease](#).

According the [South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks](#), "EHD most often impacts white-tailed deer, especially larger bucks, and it can become prevalent at the driest time of the year - usually mid-August through September."

In the fall of 2005, Conservation Officers in Charles Mix County estimated the deer die-off due to [EHD conservatively at 250 head](#). Science suggest that deer inside the city limits are already

at a health risk due to a lack of food and natural habitat, thereby making them more susceptible to diseases such as EHD.

**Wildlife Habitat Destruction** –The deer herd inside the city limits forage on the city's natural plant life and vegetation. But in doing so, they not only destroy their natural habitat but also the habitat of birds and other wildlife that are necessary to sustain our natural environment.

If left unchecked, experts say that long term damage to the city's plant and wildlife diversity can be expected.

**Urban Forest Regeneration** – The City of Pierre is proud to have receive the designation of [“Tree City U.S.A.”](#) Maintaining a healthy urban forest is the work of many dedicated volunteers and staff, most notably those involved with the city arbor committee. A healthy urban forest should have an understory of trees and shrubs of diverse ages, sizes, and variety. An overabundance of deer clears green areas, yards, homes, and parks of needed and welcomed trees and young plants.

**Ornamental Plant Damage** - While deer eat many types of plants that are native to our area, they also appreciate non-native vegetation found in residential areas and parks.

The damaged caused by foraging deer is not, however, merely ornamental. Along with the frustration caused by this type of loss, the cost can be calculated in damaged or destroyed plants, gardens, fences, and other barriers.

**Devaluation of Deer** - Deer are one of the city's most treasured natural resources. In some areas of the city, however, an overabundance of deer has caused residents to view deer as pests. By implementing an on-going deer management program and reducing the pest aspects of their presence, the deer management task force hopes to help all residents enjoy the beauty of deer and live with them safely.

## **RESPONSIBLE HERD MANAGEMENT**

Herd management is the responsibility of all residents in the City of Pierre. Understanding and following city ordinances regarding wildlife in the city limits is the first step towards responsible herd management.

The Pierre Police Department Animal Control Officer is tasked with the primary responsibility for wildlife programs within the city limits, and the ACO works closely with state Game, Fish and Parks Conservation Officers in developing a sound conservation program.

The City of Pierre is dedicated to providing a safe, healthy community which respects and appreciates nature and the eco system of which we are all a part.

## UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNS OF DEER DAMAGE

Deer are not the only species responsible for damage to yards and gardens in the City of Pierre. Rabbits and rodents can also be the culprits behind a late night garden raid.

Deer leave “tell tell” signs of foraging; deer tracks are distinctive and the height at which deer feed often eliminates other wildlife as suspects. Deer also lack upper incisor teeth which results in a jagged or torn surface on twigs or stems. Sharp, clean cuts tend to indicate rabbits or rodents.

But it’s the human eye that tells us the most about foraging deer. As the size of the herd inside the city limits has increased, so has the number of reports of human contact. Deer in the city limits tend to be more active in the very early morning and again in the late night when neighborhoods are most quiet.

But visual contact with deer at other times of the day can indicate problems. Deer by nature will avoid close proximity to humans. A deer that does not flee humans may be desperate to defend much needed food or be attempting to protect an unseen fawn. Either can be dangerous to humans and no person should ever encourage deer to come closer.



## DEER MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PLANNING

The City of Pierre, working closely with the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks is developing a herd management program. To this end, the City has created a Deer Management Task Force and has sought out considerable public input and discussion on this important topic. Among the findings of the citizen group:

Need For Deer Survey: The City of Pierre has requested the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks ascertain the approximate number and size of the deer herd now residing inside the city limits. GF&P Conservation Officers, working with the City ACO, will establish a scientific survey of deer numbers in September 2007.

Ban on feeding deer inside the city limits: The Pierre City Commission has adopted an ordinance that prohibits or restricts the feeding of certain wildlife:

“No person being the owner or occupant of any parcel of real property within the corporate limits of the city shall place thereon, or allow to remain thereon, any unnatural food source, nor shall any person place such unnatural food source upon the

real property of another. It shall be an affirmative defense to any prosecution hereunder that the unnatural food source was placed not less than five (5) feet above the ground and was placed in good faith for the purpose of feeding domestic livestock or pets by or at the request of a person owning or having responsibility for the domestic livestock or pets, or that the unnatural food source was placed in good faith for a purpose other than attracting deer and that the attraction of deer is only an incidental result”

Encourage non-lethal deer reduction practices: The use of various natural, chemical, and mechanical deer repellents will aid in discouraging deer from foraging in yards and gardens. The key to effective use of any repellent is to use them early and often, before deer become accustomed to foraging your plants and vegetables and to reapply often.

Some repellants are placed on the plant itself and deter deer with an unpleasant odor or taste. Most are short lived and wash off in the rain or wear off quickly, requiring them to be reapplied often to be effective deterrents.

Mechanical repellants may take the form of motion sensor lighting which turn yard lights on when deer enter the yard. Other motion sensors trigger an ultrasonic burst of sound when activated. The sound is inaudible to humans but distressful to deer.

Fencing and other barriers may restrict deer, but fences must be at least eight feet in height to be effective. Plastic barrier fencing will keep deer out of a garden but must be checked often for gaps.

Local landscapers or garden centers are experts in selecting deer resistant trees, shrubs, and plant species.

Unfortunately, most of these solutions only relocate deer to a neighbor’s yard or garden and do not address the number of deer foraging for food inside the city limits.

If you’d like more information on non-lethal deer repellants or practices, try logging onto the web and searching key words “wildlife control” “wildlife management” “or “deer repellants” or visit with your local gardener or landscaper.

## **TRAPPING AND TRANSFERING**

The obvious question for anyone who cares about deer is, “why can’t they be trapped and transferred back to the wild?”

The answer rests in the process itself. Deer can be relocated to other areas, but they must first be trapped. This process requires that the deer, already under stress due to lack of food or proper foraging, be trapped, netted, or immobilized with tranquilizers. This process places the deer under much greater stress and often results in high losses.

There is also concern for the health of the deer after transfer, particularly if tranquilized. Predators, a lack of knowledge of terrain, and undeveloped foraging skills all lead to unacceptable losses in many instances. The ethical treatment of deer is a priority to the City of Pierre and the Deer Management task Force.

Other factors considered include the high cost of trapping and transfer operations, locating areas willing to accept transferred wildlife, and the risk and safety of those conducting capture and transfer operations.

### **SOLUTIONS TO THE CITY'S CURRENT DEER OVERPOPLATION**

In September of 2007, Conservation Officers with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, and the City of Pierre Animal Control Officer will conduct a scientific deer survey of the City of Pierre. Those results will provide a detailed view of herd reduction numbers and thresholds for area neighborhoods.

With this information, the Deer Management Task Force will provide a recommended harvest number to the Pierre City Commission for review and consideration of approval.

With the approval of the Pierre City Commission, the Secretary of the Dept. of Game, Fish and Parks will then be contacted and asked to issue a harvest permit. It's anticipated that such an action will take place between December 2007 and March 2008.

### **ETHICS / SAFETY PARAMOUNT**

The Deer Management Task Force conducted lengthy deliberations regarding the process and principals to be used in the harvest of deer inside the city limits. With the input of citizens, conservation officials, and subject matter experts, the members of the task force have devised a harvest plan which emphasizes ethics and safety at all times.

To this end, harvesting of deer will be conducted only by highly trained and qualified city law enforcement staff. By baiting deer into pre-determined areas, city staff are able to maintain both sight and sound discipline. Operations will be carried out at night in a manner that will not disrupt the public peace. Processing of wild game will be conducted in a closed building and the meat will be distributed to requesting individuals.

### **FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

If you would like more information on this subject, or to report a wildlife issue or concern within the City of Pierre, you are encouraged to contact the Pierre Police Department, Animal Control Officer Orië Bamblee at 773-7410 or by email at [orie.bamblee@ci.pierre.sd.us](mailto:orie.bamblee@ci.pierre.sd.us)