



**ANIMAL
ALLIANCE
OF CANADA**



**TO: Chair and Members of the Planning,
Transportation and Protective Services
Committee**

**FROM: Liz White, Animal Alliance/Environment
Voters**

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**SUBJECT: PPS/RP 2012-01: Regional Deer Management –
Proposed Terms of Reference for a Regional
Deer Management Strategy**

DATE: February 20, 2012 Meeting

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

We submit the following comments regarding the CRD's staff recommendations:

Regional Deer Management Strategy (RDMS):

We support the development of a regional deer management strategy provided that the process is open, transparent, fair and unbiased. The composition of CAG must be balanced and include equal pro and anti-deer representation and a regional balance. If an expert advisory committee is to be established, the composition of this committee must be balanced as well. There must be opportunities for members of the public to appear before the various bodies developing the strategy. And other "experts" must have the opportunity to challenge the assertions made in the Ministry of Environment's two documents, British Columbia Urban Ungulate Conflict Analysis and the Summary Report for Municipalities because those documents are being used as the basis for the DMS.

The strategy must be non-biased, and fact-based, and represent a broad range of public opinion. The CRD needs to ensure that its own process is unbiased, in contrast to the Ministry of Environment staff, who favour population reduction or culling, at least in the initial stages.

Unfortunately, biased terminology has crept into the CRD staff report. As the Purpose and Objectives part of the report states, "The purpose of the terms of reference is to develop a RDMS that will guide the control of deer population in areas of conflict in the regional district." This suggests that CRD staff already consider the deer a "problem" and therefore, their population needs to be

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“controlled”.

The report goes on to describe the objectives as the preparation of a management strategy that will address “the impact of deer on agricultural crops, public health and safety concerns related to deer-auto collisions and risk of aggressive deer-human or deer-pet interaction or transmission of disease and deer encroachment on private urban residential properties resulting in vegetative loss and increased exposure to risk of deer aggression.”

Such wording suggests a negative view of the deer within the CRD and does not instill confidence that all possible approaches will be considered regarding human/deer conflicts. It also demonstrates that CRD staff are prepared to use the information provided by the Ministry even though most of it is biased and some of it is misleading. In fact, if the RDMS ToR are passed unamended by the Committee and the Board, we suggest that culling the CRD deer is a near certainty.

Recommendation #1: We recommend that the mandate of the RDMS be simplified to read, “To prevent, reduce and resolve human/deer conflicts”. We recommend that the Purpose and Objective be amended to read “The purpose of the terms of reference is to develop a RDMS that will guide discussion about how to prevent and resolve human/deer conflicts by examining:

- the effects of deer on agricultural crops and possible resolutions;
- issues related to deer/car collisions, review of the statistics, identification of the high risk areas and potential remedial action;
- deer/human and deer/pet conflict, when and where the conflict occurred, how often it has occurred and what can be done to prevent it;
- what transmissible diseases are carried by deer on Vancouver and what evidence is there that this represents a public danger; and
- the encroachment of deer on private urban residential properties and possible solutions.”

We urge you to adopt our recommendations which are designed to present a less biased approach in the RDMS ToR.

Stacked Deck - Expert Resource Working Group (ERWG):

The ERWG, as set out in Appendix A, has a very definite pro cull bias. As far as we are able to ascertain, of the 16 proposed members, 9 would very likely support a cull of CRD deer with two others who are likely pro cull but are willing to consider non-lethal options. We have not been able to identify the positions of the remaining 5 members.

Our concern is that the citizens’ group will be supported by an “expert” group who will promote the idea that a cull is necessary as the only option to bring the overabundant deer population under control before preventive and non-lethal measures can be applied.

Having participated in a citizens' group process in Hamilton, we can attest to the fact that it is very difficult for citizens to question "stacked-deck" experts. In a similar process, the Deer Management Advisory Committee of the Hamilton Conservation Authority heard from "experts" including staff from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the Hamilton Conservation Authority and independent biologists and ecologists about the "negative impacts" of deer.

In their report about the deer, Ancaster Wintering Deer Survey – With Management Recommendation March 2010, OMNR "deer management experts" made the following statements:

- A managed cull...will result in the quickest short-term solution." (pg 27-28)
- Lethal deer management techniques are the only practical method of eliminating deer herbivory, biodiversity impacts and socially unacceptable human deer interactions at a landscape scale." (pg 30)
- Consider managing specific deer over abundance through controlled gun hunting (i.e. deer cull)..." (pg 31)

These are strong statements and difficult for community citizens to challenge. In fact, at the beginning of the process, several community representatives complained that they did not know who to believe in the deer controversy. It took over a year for some in community and on the committee to challenge and ultimately dismantle the statements made by the "experts". Had there not been active participants willing to challenge "expert claims", we have no doubt that a deer cull at Iroquoia Heights Conservation Area would have taken place. Ultimately, members of the committee decided to implement a non-lethal alternative strategy and evaluate its effectiveness within a three-year period.

Recommendation #2: We recommend against the formation of an Expert Resource Working Group because of its substantial pro cull bias and its likely dominance over the Citizens' Advisory Group (CAG). Instead we recommend that CAG invite interested people, experts in the field, representatives from jurisdictions who have implemented a range of approaches to resolving deer conflicts, area residents and residents from communities who have experienced culls, in order to seek a variety of options that might be considered to prevent and resolve human/deer conflicts. This places everyone, experts and residents on an equal footing and allows for the committee to access broad public opinion.

Role of Regional staff:

Recommendation #3: The Board should clarify the role of staff in relation to CAG. Every attempt should be made to engage staff who are neither for nor against culling the deer. Neutrality is imperative if staff are acting in a supportive role to CAG.

Communication and Consultation Strategy:

Recommendation #4: The Board should defer any decision about a communication and consultation strategy until the formation of CAG. Establishing an online campaign pre-empts the CAG and its approach to the issue and has the potential to provide conflicting results.

Attachment 1 - Terms of Reference (ToR):

We are deeply concerned with the description of the Terms of Reference for the CAG. The committee should be broadly representative. The “suggestions to date” include agriculture, First Nations and citizens from areas most affected.

There are two significant problems with these suggestions. The first involves dual representation with agricultural and First Nations being represented on both CAG and the expert committee. If the Board decides to set up an expert committee, it should only allow representation on one committee or the other, but not on both.

The second problem is that such a composition would again be viewed as a “stacked deck” approach to the deer “problem” with the majority of the committee in favour of a cull. Such bias on CAG would be compounded if the ERWG composition also remains as proposed by staff. The CRD Board ought not to be seen as stacking the deck on either committee but must make every effort to be open and transparent, to seek broad citizen representation from across the region

Recommendation #5: We recommend that CAG have equal representation for those affected by the deer and those who love and enjoy the deer. The Board should amend the proposed ToR to require this balance in choosing the CAG membership.

Recommendation #6: We urge the Board to amend the ToR to allow for delegations. Community discussions about the deer are important in assisting CAG members and the CRD Board to find resolutions to human/deer conflicts that are supported by the broader community. The right for delegations to appear before CAG holds even greater importance if ERWG remains as staff have proposed. Otherwise, discussions about how to deal with human/deer conflicts will be confined largely to CAG and ERWG.

Appendix B – Project Activities:

We are concerned with 3.1 in Step 3 of the Project Activities section, titled “Finalize Deer Management Plan”. Subsection 3.1 states, “Finalize RDMS with the direction of the CAG, ERWG and input from communications and consultation.”

This approach seems to conflict with the Citizens Advisory Group Terms of Reference (Appendix C) which states:

The proposed Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) will be the body that guides the development of the Regional Deer Management

Strategy (RDMS). Effectively the CAG will be tasked with preparing and recommending the management strategy and action plan to meet the objectives set out in the ToR and address the deer-human conflicts in the region. The CAG will be assisted by the expert working group and regional staff and will be provided with input/feedback from the online campaign, as set out in the RDMS terms of reference.”

Recommendation #7: The CRD Board needs to clarify which entity, CAG or ERWG, is the lead in this process.

Summary of the problems with the Ministry of Environment’s Urban Ungulate Conflict Analysis Report:

- 1. Overabundance:** Based on the Ministry’s own definition of overabundance, all evidence in the reports suggest that deer populations on Vancouver Island are healthy and in good physical condition, and therefore the biological carrying capacity has not been approached or reached. In fact, the Ministry’s 1985 report, titled Integrated Wildlife Intensive Forestry Research, states that “The population of black-tailed deer on Vancouver Island was estimated in 1979 to be within the range of 150 000 to 300 000 (49% of the provincial deer herd).” (pg 28) Therefore, over the past 30 years, the number of black-tailed deer on Vancouver Island has declined by between 105,000 and 235,000 animals. Nowhere in the Ministry’s report is this population decline mentioned, as though urban deer do not contribute to the overall provincial deer herd robustness and health and belies the claim of overabundance.
- 2. Damage to the environment:** The Ministry also claims that deer browse can have “severe consequences on the variety, composition and abundance of native plant communities, community forests and forest bird species” without providing a shred of evidence that any such problems have occurred. More importantly, despite repeated claims of deer damaging the environment, the Ministry fails to show that any species of native fauna has been exterminated, or even extirpated from a significant part of its natural range, as a result of deer activity. In addition, the Ministry fails to discuss the effects of non-native plant and animal species on populations of native fauna and flora and the impacts of companion animals and human activities on the natural environment.
- 3. Damage to gardens and bedding displays:** Damage to gardens and bedding displays are also mentioned. The Ministry suggest that deer ought to be killed to prevent this sort of damage without considering the alternatives. First, if the Ministry and the CRD are in fact interested in impacts on the environment, they should consider a prohibition on the planting of non-native species both on public and private properties. Where deer are known to browse, the Ministry and the CRD should launch an education programme to promote a tolerance of the affects of browse or to encourage the planting of deer resistant plants combined with the use of enclosure fencing.

- 4. Damage to agricultural operations:** The Ministry claims that a cull is necessary to protect agricultural operations without mentioning that in fact farmers already have the right to shoot deer in defence of property. The report is silent as to whether the farmers exercise this right and how many deer are killed for this purpose. The key is to exclude the deer in order to protect the crops and the only way to achieve this goal is through fencing. Short of killing of most or all of the deer, which is neither a viable nor recommended option, farmers are going to experience crop damage and will continue to complain about deer damage.
- 5. Deer/car collisions:** The Ministry fails to put deer/car collisions into a broader perspective. According to the ICBC's Quick Statistics for the Media document, the total number of incidents involving animals ranged from 9,300 to 10,600, with the largest number of incidents in 2006 and the smallest in 2009. The number of injured victims remained the same from 2006 to 2010 as did the number of fatalities. At the same time the number of active driver licenses increased by 6% between 2006 and 2010 as has the vehicle population. So the ICBC statistics do not show a rise in the number of accidents, in the personal injuries or the number of fatalities even without adjusting for the increase in the number of active driver's licenses and vehicles on the road.
- 6. Vehicular wildlife collision claims as a percentage of all collision claims:** As the authors of the 2003 final report to Transport Canada Road Safety Directorate, titled Collisions involving motor vehicles and large animals in Canada (pg 25) (<http://www.wildlifeaccidents.ca/docs/d6acdb93dfabc8c6.pdf>) point out, "The total claims for animal-vehicle collisions represent 1.5% of all collision claims for property damage in British Columbia. For all claims (fatality and injury), the percentage drops to 0.12% (Koganow, 1997)". This statistic shows that collisions involving wildlife comprise a tiny portion of all accidents in British Columbia.
- 7. WARS data:** The Ministry of Transport's Wildlife Accident Reporting and Mitigation reporting programme (WARS) produced a special annual report with vehicular/wildlife collision data from 1988 to 2007. In Table 5.1, titled Wildlife Accidents (Total and selected major species), the number of deer car collisions peaked in 2005 at 5,156 and declined in 2006 and 2007 to 4,473 or a 15% decline. The decline occurred at the same time as the number of active drivers increased in 2005, 2006 and 2007. In District 2, Vancouver Island, the number of deer/car collision peaked in 2005 and declined by 16% in 2007.
- 8. Little potential for disease risk even acknowledged by the Ministry:** The Ministry's reports suggest that the potential for disease transmission increases with an overabundant species and lists an extensive number of diseases the deer could potentially carry. While the report also shows that anthrax does not exist in BC, that TB has not been found in free

ranging wildlife populations in BC and the greater likelihood is transmission from farm animals to wildlife; and that Chronic Wasting Disease has not been found in BC, it does little to alleviate the fears of those who believe that deer are diseased and present a significant risk to human health. The same problem exists with Lyme disease and e-coli. A public health surveillance programme for Lyme disease demonstrates a consistently low rate of both infected ticks (less than 1%) and infections in the human population (less than 0.5% per 100,000). And, although e-coli is naturally occurring in the intestines of humans and all other species of mammals, transfer from deer to humans is considered a very low risk.

Other jurisdictions have resolved conflicts without resorting to culling. So can the CRD:

A number of jurisdictions have resolved human/deer conflicts without resorting to culling. The City of Ottawa implemented a “Speeding Costs You Deerly” programme that successfully reduced the number of deer car collisions in the Ottawa Regional area. The City of London reduced the deer density in Sifton Bog by embarking on a programme to significantly reduce the supplemental feeding of deer through an aggressive education programme. The Hamilton Conservation Authority agreed to a preventive and non-lethal intervention programme to reduce the number of deer in the Iroquoia Heights Conservation Area, including an education programme and active enforcement of a feeding ban.

We urge you to follow other progressive jurisdictions by using CAG to develop a progressive non-lethal approach to deer management in the CRD.

Sincerely,



Liz White



Barry MacKay