

Community Meeting: White-tailed Deer in Sifton Bog

June 13, 2001, Oakridge Secondary School

Written responses (17 forms returned) to the following: “Please describe your specific concerns, issues, questions and ideas concerning the White-tailed Deer in Sifton Bog.”

- a) I enjoy the deer but understand they must be controlled in some fashion.
- b) I think it is great that there is a deer colony in the bog, but I understand the negative side of over population. I'd be interested in the prevalence of Lyme disease related to the bog colony (if any). I like relocation, but I understand the cost associated and the poor results (deaths). Bow hunting in a controlled manner with carcasses used for research might be a good alternative. A healthy, sustainable colony would be ideal... for the bog and people.
- c) At present not a problem. However I am interested and live close enough to be concerned. Do see them on streets, especially early/foggy mornings. Concern: main concern - Lyme disease - as whole area exposed, Second, accidents, Thirdly feeding off shrubs. Are we endangering certain vegetation (like in Rondeau) by over population? Are there any plants specific to the bog that may be eliminated by overfeeding?
- d) Over population. Over browsing in residents' yards. Disease. Someone to take ownership of problem. UTRCA wants community and City to decide. City heads in the sand. No one wants bad press.
- e) How soon will actions be taken? Can we wait a year before taking any actions to see if this problem is related to seasonal differences from year to year? How feasible are lethal methods (i.e. hunting and killing) given the small size and proximity of residences/ extensive use of the area by the community? Doesn't seem like a safe option.
- f) Over population of the deer, in turn causing them to seek their food in neighbouring properties and destroying costly trees and shrubs. Some of these cedars will not regrow; if they do, it takes expensive care and treatment. Also, a concern is the collision with automobiles. My solution - a controlled cull.
- g) I have lived in Oakridge since 1961, I have been in wildlife rehabilitation for 20 years. Brian Salt and I will offer to tranquilize and remove and relocate the deer to a suitable area as the MNR sees fit. I would also like to be on the steering committee.
- h) We enjoy seeing the deer in our backyard and we don't have a problem with sharing our vegetation with them. Is Lyme disease a real worry? I might be concerned about this and how it could affect my family.

- i) My husband extended our fence 3 feet and it has stopped the deer coming in our yard. I think the City should do the same all around the bog and feed the deer all year round.
- j) Want to know how the deer should be managed that takes into account the health of the deer population, the well being of the bog's ecosystem; the concerns of neighbours. Want to have potentially divisive community issue tackled and resolved locally.
- k) Over the months, deer regularly come to our property, apparently for food. They ate a cedar hedge (approximately 12' wide) from the ground up to about 6'. Hedge has to be removed. As well, they ate many shrubs that have to be replaced. They also ate an ivy groundcover (about 8' radius around a maple tree); the leaves on this groundcover have fortunately grown back this spring. (This will require some kind of protective cover this winter.)
- l) I am concerned that with no natural check the deer population will become unmanageable. There will not be enough food. The damage they cause will increase and the deer themselves will suffer and the Bog will suffer.
- m) Why are people talking about culling a small herd of deer. The UTRCA should be more concerned with the permanent damage being done. By the runoff situation of calcium, salt and petroleum products due to the lack of storm sewers. The pH of the bog is being drastically changed, thus more permanently affecting the flora and fauna in the bog than any browsing by deer. In over 16 years of living on the bog, last year's severe winter is the first I have received any damage to my property and it was minimal. I have close to 30 evergreens and cedars of varying size on my property. Estimate summer resident deer 12. Estimated winter yard and transient deer 16-24. This include fawns, juvenile, does and bucks.
- n) Issue - eating the vegetation around our home and in the Sifton Bog. Control the size of the herd (don't tell us how, just do it).

Comments called in prior to the meeting:

- o) Have seen up to 9 deer in my yard. The deer have eaten my cedar hedge but I don't mind, I will plant something else there in the future. I don't want to see the deer killed. I am concerned that they will get hit by a car.

Comments sent in after the meeting:

- p) Are there new deer moving into the bog or are all deer the offspring of a permanent herd? If the deer are removed is there any reason more deer would not move in, especially with ongoing development to the west? Is it scientifically valid to make a decision following a colder winter, the deep snow cover, which may have made foraging more difficult? Should the surrounding human population (whose behaviour may be a contributing factor to the problem) be given a warning regarding the consequences of having food sources available to deer such as bird seed and ornamental shrubs, before any drastic action is taken? Should the UTRCA monitor or

survey the neighbourhood to determine how many people put out food, including bird seed? Would the city assume liability in case of any injury to persons accidentally during a hunt? Who would be responsible for clearing the area and surrounding roads prior to the hunt? How often would this need to be repeated? Additional comments: I am interested in knowing whether the deer are causing damage to the natural vegetation and ecosystem in the Bog. However, I wonder how this damage compares to the damage humans are causing in the Bog. There is too much traffic, trampling of vegetation, garbage, pesticides, herbicides, and storm sewage run off. Damage to non-native vegetation planted by humans living near the bog is a human problem, not a deep problem. *Please note:* Not all persons who are concerned as to whether a deer cull is necessary are “bambi lovers” as depicted in your video. I personally do not have any emotional attachment to deer! However, I am not sure if we are taking a scientific approach or simply responding to homeowners whose shrubs have been eaten.

- (q) Is the white-tailed deer issue a problem in neighbouring open areas, e.g. close to the River Thames? Should a common management policy be developed for London as a whole or is a special approach needed for Sifton Bog because of its isolated location from other natural areas? How will impending development affect the deer (corner of Oxford/Hyde Park)?
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Discussion at Meeting

Steering Committee

- What will be the roles/responsibilities of this committee?
- The committee needs decision making power.
- The committee’s role is not to legitimize the Conservation Authority’s ideas.
- Someone needs to take ownership of the problem. The UTRCA wants the City and public to decide; someone needs to make the decisions.
- We need a steering committee comprised of all agencies and concerned residents.
- The Bog deer problem is happening throughout London. We can lead the way! This is like a pilot project, an opportunity to develop policy.
- Time lines are required for resolving this issue.
- There is a legal problem with stating that the committee need power. MNR and UTRCA are legally bound to handle this issue. The committee can simply make recommendations to them.
- The agencies can commit to implementing these recommendations.
- This meeting is an excellent beginning to solving the problem!
- We must recognize our role in creating/contributing to this problem.
- The committee will be gathering existing data and collecting new data.

Questions & Issues to be Explored

- We need to identify the problem. How many deer are there?
Answer: A pellet count conducted in the winter indicated an estimated 20+ deer.
- Is the population increasing gradually? The problems seems worse this winter but why?

- In a population of 20 deer what is the ratio of males to females?
Answer: In a healthy population of 100 deer the ratio is 49 males: 51 females.
- The Bog is a deer yard for a large area. The past winter was the worst with 20-25 deer in some backyards. Normally there are 16-24. The rest of the year, the population in the Bog is much lower. We need to study the population dynamics.
- The smaller animals are much bolder and no longer shy. The large deer are shy.
- There have been no changes in predators or hunting in the Bog. Is there a change in forage, i.e. ornamental shrubs, birdfeeders? We must consider changing our behaviour.
- Are there any other health concerns or safety (other than Lyme disease, collisions)?
- Can pets, etc. contract illness from deer/faeces/carcasses?
- Are you receiving complaints in other areas (ESAs)?
Answer: The other ESAs have large populations but these areas have corridors through which deer can emigrate. The main issue is those areas is harassment by dogs. There is a high potential for deer-car collisions throughout the city, especially around Adelaide and Windermere. At the present time there are no neighbourhood concerns around the other ESAs, although we are hearing many comments regarding the increase in deer numbers. The Bog is unique because it is small and enclosed entirely by homes.
- When did deer arrive in the Bog?
- The deer have always been there, just not in these numbers.
- Why are the numbers increasing so rapidly?
- A steering committee can drag on forever once it gets caught in the political process. We are also concerned that a grassroots effort will not be heard.
- The agencies and community have excellent relationships, but need more science and community input before decisions can be made.
- It took 12 months to get this process started; let's keep it moving now. The deer problem started last summer, not last winter.
- Is the food available in the Bog changing to drive them into our yards?
- What are the benefits of deer in the Bog?
- I don't appreciate requiring a "benefit."
- We should not be speaking of human benefits.
- What size is the Bog?
Answer: Approximately 140 acres.
- Are the deer having any impact on sensitive bog vegetation?
- We need to develop a time frame for the steering committee to meet and return with recommendations.
- If the actions are going to be quick then take longer to reach a decision. If the implementation will be slow then reach a decision more quickly. We need to make sound decisions.
- The steering committee could work together this summer and report back to the community in September.
- The UTRCA has no preferred options. So far we are simply telling people not to feed deer, to fence areas, etc.
- This issue also relates to liability. Whose responsibility is it if a deer falls in my pool?

- The deer's natural home area is 200 acres but the Bog is only 140 acres.
 - Deer metabolism drops in the fall, especially if there is less food and no salt licks. We need to communicate this to people so they providing food and salt for the deer.
 - Two methods to deter the deer from eating your plants are to place hair clippings around plants or spray plants with a mixture of beaten eggs and water.
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3. How did you hear about this community meeting?

- invitation mailed to my home (9)
 - newspaper (2)
 - community newsletter (7)
 - from a neighbour or friend (4)
 - other (--)
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4. I am interested in participating on a community steering committee.

- Jan - If I can help, I would be glad to. It's nice to use my biology degree and CA background every once in a while. I don't have a deer problem at house, more rabbits, raccoons and skunks. Interested in helping but being pregnant and soon to be on maternity leave I am not sure how much time I would have. Definitely get Health Unit involved.
- Wayne - yes
- Robin - yes
- Meryl - yes
- Brett - yes
- D'Arcy - yes
- Jaime - yes
- Barry - yes
- Sheri- yes
- Rosemary Dickinson - Oakridge Hazeldon Community Association Steering Committee will not be adopting any "position" on this issue. However, we do want to be kept abreast of discussions as we frequently get inquiries. Therefore, I don't want to be on the steering committee because I want to remain "at arms length". Would it be possible to be copied the minutes of the Steering Committee/Task Force's deliberations just for information?
- Dave- yes
- Don- yes
- Marion- yes
- John - mentioned during a phone conversation that he may be interested in serving on the steering committee
- Vivian - yes