

SCDNR URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM GUIDELINES
ADOPTED JANUARY 1999
AMENDED MAY 2010

Background

Removal of deer through traditional hunting is an effective management tool and it forms the basis for deer management in South Carolina. However, as complaints related to deer in resort/residential communities increased in the mid-1990's, it became clear that hunting was not practical in all instances. In an effort to assist communities, the department began to consider nontraditional techniques, such as sharpshooting. During the initial attempt to employ nontraditional techniques, the department and property management group of one resort community became involved in a significant lawsuit over deer management issues.

This lawsuit pitted the department and the property management group against a number of animal rights groups. In the end, the South Carolina Supreme Court found that the plaintiffs had no standing in the case and it reaffirmed the legal charge given to the department as it relates to coordinating with private property owners in order to manage deer. Based on this case and the experience the department gained from working with various communities, Urban Deer Management Guidelines were adopted by the department in January of 1999. These guidelines were developed by Wildlife Section staff in order to provide communities with guidance in managing deer in developed areas where hunting is not practical.

Since adopting the guidelines, approximately 18 communities have participated in deer management activities. Most of these communities are located in Beaufort County on, or just off of, Hilton Head Island. Over 4,000 deer have safely and efficiently been removed from these communities. Satisfaction with deer management results has been very high with deer-vehicle collisions, damage to landscape plantings, and other problems associated with deer being reduced to benign levels. Additionally, thousands of pounds of high quality meat have been donated to eleemosynary institutions as required by the program.

The current Urban Deer Management Guidelines are relatively stringent and place a considerable burden on communities in order to develop and maintain their deer management program. Currently, communities are required to develop an initial background and justification which is submitted to the department for review prior to the issuance of a permit to remove deer. A certain amount of expertise is obviously required to complete this "management plan". To date, all communities participating in the program have had to hire a consultant to complete this work at a cost of \$3,000-5,000. Additionally, annual updates must be submitted and communities are spending \$1,400-1,800 annually to produce these updates. Current guidelines also specify that contractors who perform the actual deer removal (sharpshooting) must meet certain qualifications. As a result, average cost to communities is \$150-200 per deer, including processing fee.

This program now has an established track record. Results have been excellent and controversy has subsided. Communities, particularly those that have been in the program, are beginning to ask for revisions in the guidelines that will streamline the process and allow them to save money. It is important to understand that communities seeking Urban Deer Management Permits are highly structured. They have a process and entity (P.O.A or B.O.D.) that is charged with making decisions that are in the best interest of the community. Additionally, the department has recently been contacted by two municipalities related to deer management. Municipalities clearly have a charge to make decisions in the best interest of its citizens.

Wildlife Section staff believe that this program is highly self regulating. Communities simply will not put forth the effort and expense to reduce/manage deer unless there is a significant problem. Therefore, staff is not concerned that the program will be abused if the guidelines are streamlined.

Action

It is recommended that Urban Deer Management Guidelines be amended to streamline the process and to reduce associated costs. Communities that make the decision to actively manage deer through sharpshooting or any other technique that involves the death, capture, chemical immobilization, etc. of deer must comply with the following amended guidelines.

1. Unless exigent circumstances exist, permits for alternative techniques will only be considered in areas where the recreational harvest of deer is not practical or not allowed by local laws/ordinances.
2. The governing entity of the community will be responsible for providing SCDNR with written information describing the problems that it is experiencing with the local deer population. This information must specifically state that the governing entity: (1) has made the decision to seek a permit to reduce the number of deer using sharpshooting, (2) has the authority to make this form of decision, (3) acknowledges all of the guidelines contained herein, and (4) assumes responsibility for any actions that it takes pursuant to a permit issued by SCDNR.
3. The governing entity of the community will be responsible for providing SCDNR with a deer population survey prior to the issuance of any permit to remove deer. The survey must be replicated a minimum of two times within the same month. The survey and the description of the problem will form the basis for the number of deer the community requests permission to remove. Based on the information provided by the community, the department may consult with the community to ultimately determine the number of deer to be removed.
4. Sharpshooters must be employed by, or under contract to, the governing entity of the community. The governing entity of the community will be responsible for determining the qualifications and experience of sharpshooters, however, sharpshooters must have completed a SCDNR hunter safety or similar course. Only firearms may be used in sharpshooting programs (no bows etc.) and all firearms must be sound suppressed. SCDNR reserves the right to require submission of credentials related to sharpshooters and suppressed firearms.
5. The governing entity of the community will be responsible for resolving all local legal restrictions that may preclude the proposed course of action (e.g. discharge of firearms).
6. The governing entity of the community will be responsible for carcass disposal including required processing and donation of edible meat to eleemosynary institutions.
7. The governing entity of the community will be responsible for submitting a report in writing following execution of any permit to remove deer. This report must include the number and sex of all deer taken and the approximate number of man-hours expended in the effort. The department may require submission of additional information at its discretion.
8. Permits for sharpshooting will be limited to the period September 15-March 1. These dates are subject to modification by SCDNR.
9. Due to documented high levels of stress and mortality, capture and relocation techniques will not be permitted.