



DEER POPULATION CONTROL PERMITS, WINTER 2003-04



Forest Wildlife Information Series #04-2

October 2004

Introduction

Control of deer numbers by nontraditional means in the Chicagoland region began in the 1980's on a few arboretums and county forest preserve district properties. It has since expanded to several different sites and agencies (e.g., municipalities, park districts, federal properties, etc.) in northern Illinois (Figure 1). During the initial years of deer control, a couple of agencies experimented with nonlethal methods (i.e., live-capture followed by relocation to another site), but experienced very limited success. This technique is no longer allowed in Illinois due to concerns about the potential dissemination of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) to other parts of the State. One Lake County suburb is currently researching the feasibility of surgically sterilizing female deer. However, urban/suburban deer control is still achieved by hunting, where possible, during legal statewide seasons and on a more

Figure 1. Types of agencies applying for, and receiving, DPCPs.

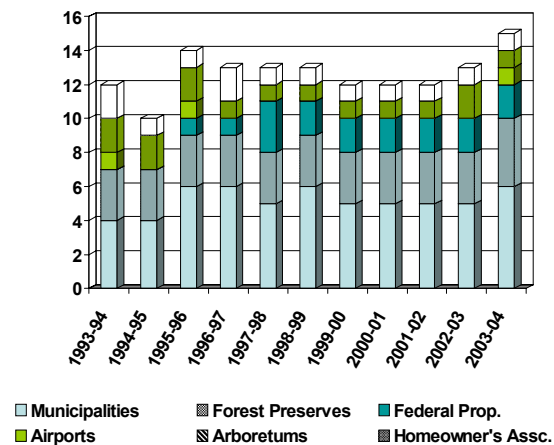
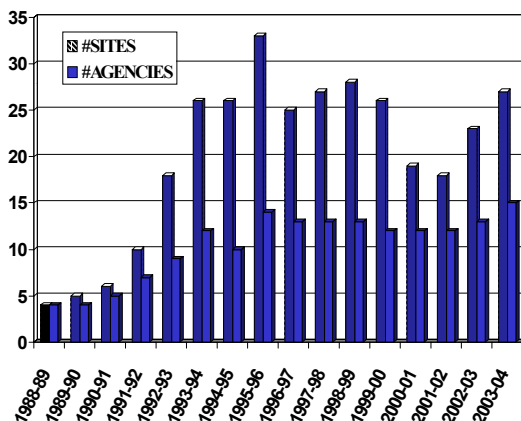


Figure 2. Number of agencies receiving DPCPs and number of sites permitted.



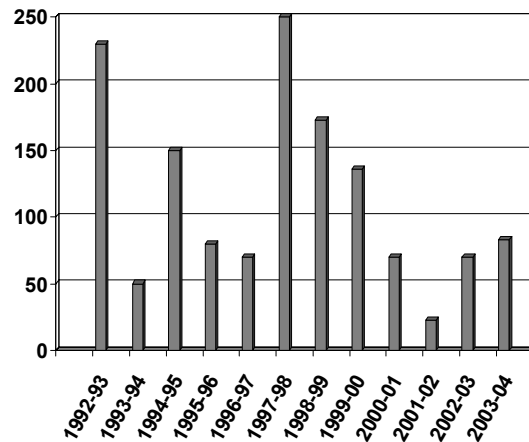
localized basis on unhunted properties by collecting deer under special Deer Population Control Permits (DPCPs) issued by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

Deer control activities, authorized under DPCPs, continued in northern Illinois during the winter of 2003-04. Twenty-seven DPCPs (not including extensions) were issued to 15 separate land management agencies and municipalities (Figure 2). These sites range in size from 55 acres to approximately 9,600 acres. "Preharvest" deer

densities, estimated via aerial counts, spotlight counts, and/or population modeling, ranged from approximately 9 to 294 deer per square mile among sites where density estimates were available.

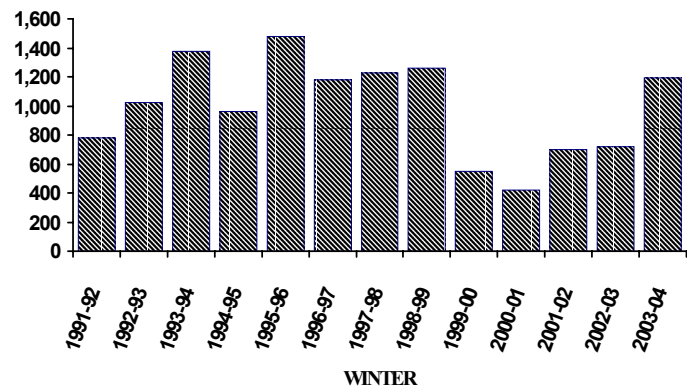
Sites with lower initial deer densities are currently in the “maintenance phase” of deer control (as opposed to a “herd reduction phase”) and require removal of smaller numbers of deer per winter. However, deer herd control cannot be treated like managing the number of marbles in a jar (i.e., deer are counted, usually from a helicopter during periods of snow cover, the number of deer desired on the property is subtracted from the number counted, and the remaining deer are removed). This strategy places an inordinate amount of faith in the reliability of aerial counts (even if deer population modeling/ estimation is used to augment the counts) and can lead to lower than needed herd reduction and roller coaster removal numbers over time (see Figure 3). In some instances this very conservative method of deer control has been imposed upon wildlife biologists, animal ecologists, and natural area managers due to past confrontations with animal rightists. In order to minimize these “controversies” and appease those who want to see more deer more easily, elected officials and agency administrators implement this “count and subtract” methodology under the guise of not removing any more deer than necessary from an area.

Figure 3. Deer removed from a large residential area. Number of deer to be removed is based upon aerial counts.



All DPCPs, and associated permit extensions (for additional time and/or number of deer), authorized the removal of 1,509 deer during Winter 2003-04; 1,196 deer (79.3%) were actually collected. Figure 4 shows the numbers of deer collected under DPCPs in northern Illinois since Fall 1991. During Winter 2003-04, DuPage County programs accounted for 48.7% of the deer collected under DPCPs, followed by Winnebago County (25.1%).

Figure 4. Numbers of deer collected under DPCPs by all agencies.



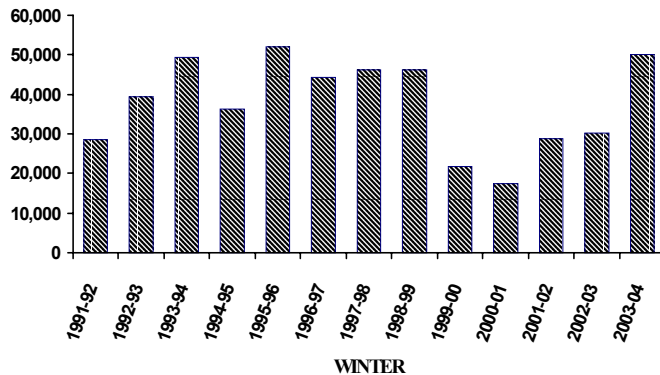
All herd control programs employed sharpshooting this winter. A total of 32 individuals were tested and (seasonally) qualified as sharpshooters by IDNR. Since these programs are to reduce and control deer numbers, all attempts are made to cull female deer. During the Winter of 2003-04, 698 (58.4%) does and 498 bucks were collected. At least 193 (38.8%) of the bucks were antlerless fawns, and many of the yearling and older bucks had already lost their antlers when they were collected.

Lethal deer control programs during winter 2003-04 resulted in approximately 50,147

pounds of processed venison being donated to charities. Since the winter of 1991-92, approximately 245 tons of processed venison from deer population control programs have been donated to charities (Figure 5).

Benefits of Deer Control

Figure 5. Pounds of processed venison donated to local charities.

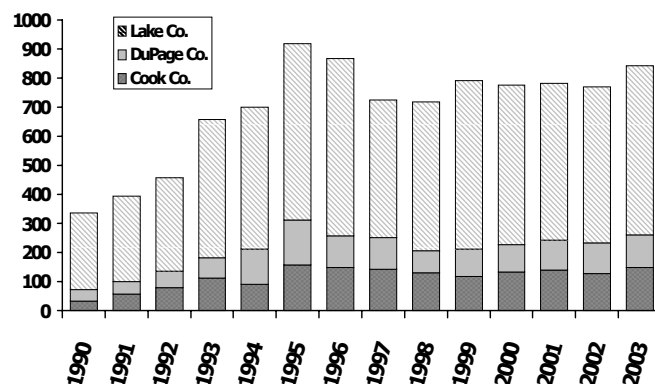


The conservation and management of native plant life on remnant natural areas in suburbia not only means the preservation of representative plant communities but also provides for the continued existence of all the animals (including deer) that depend on these plants and areas. However, plant recovery on areas degraded by many years of over-browsing by deer is slow and is hampered by increases in non-native plants (e.g., buckthorn, garlic mustard, purple loosestrife, etc.). The absence or infrequency of controlled burns to impede the spread of non-native plants and reduce shading of forest understories exacerbates problems with native plant

recovery. Ever-continuing development of suburban open spaces increases ecological stresses upon the remaining natural areas through encroachment, contamination, overuse and abuse by a greater number of users, changing drainage patterns and underground water tables, sedimentation, potentially concentrating animals onto smaller areas, etc. Therefore, controlling deer numbers is only a small part of the large challenge of preserving and restoring natural ecosystems in metropolitan areas.

Sharpshooting programs implemented by land management agencies and municipalities along with archery hunting during the legal statewide season (see Figure 6), and possibly predation by coyotes upon fawns and injured deer, have helped moderate deer numbers locally. This, in turn, has presumably helped moderate the number of deer-vehicle accidents on a localized basis (Figure 7). Hunting remains a viable, and less costly, means of controlling deer numbers. Some midwestern and north-eastern states have adapted hunting programs for controlling deer populations in urban/suburban areas. Unfortunately, it is an alternative that is just now receiving more serious consideration by some Chicago suburban communities.

Figure 6. Deer harvested in NE Illinois during the legal statewide archery season.

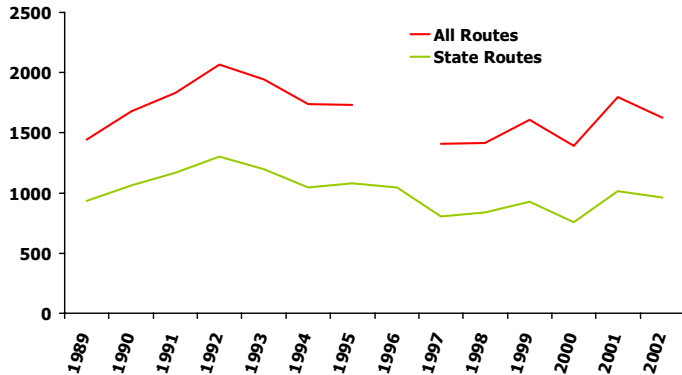


With the appearance of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Wisconsin (2001) and Illinois (2002), DPCP programs were also important in assisting with sample/data

collection for IDNR's statewide CWD surveillance program. A total of 637 deer, collected under DPCPs in 5 counties during winter 2003-04, were tested for CWD. Only 5 animals from Winnebago County were found positive for CWD. Sampling and testing of "DPCP deer" will undoubtedly continue in the future.

For more information about urban deer ecology, management, and damage abatement, contact the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Urban Deer Project:

Figure 7. Reported deer-vehicle accidents in Cook, DuPage, and Lake counties.



IDNR Urban Deer Project
28W040 State Route 58
Elgin, IL 60120-9223
(847) 798-7620



The Illinois Department of Natural Resources receives federal financial assistance and therefore must comply with federal anti-discrimination laws. In compliance with the Illinois Human Rights Act, the Illinois Constitution, Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended and the U.S. Constitution, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, please contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Offices, Department of Natural Resources, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271, (217) 782-7616, or the Office of Human Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, DC 20240. Department of Natural Resources information is available to the hearing impaired by calling DNR's Telecommunications Device for the Deaf: (217) 782-9175. The Ameritech Relay Number is (800) 526-0844.