

A Time to Hunt?

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More than half of respondents to a Great Falls Citizens Association survey on deer are in favor of having trained and licensed archers culling deer on private property.

Great Falls Grange Reopens

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Scoring Baskets for Haiti

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PHOTO BY JOAN BRADY PHOTOGRAPHY/CONTRIBUTED

One reason the deer population is out of control is that most does give birth to twins, and sometimes triplets, every year from the time they are one year of age for as many as 10 years. This pair was photographed in Great Falls in the Spring.



PHOTO BY GERALD PETERS/CONTRIBUTED

This photo from the back of Gerald Peters's home in Great Falls shows a buck very close to his house, with his neighbor's house in the background.

Oh Deer! What Can the Matter Be?

Support for archery hunting increases with deer population.

BY KEN MOORE
THE CONNECTION

First in an occasional series on deer and deer management.

Joan Brady added to the tally of deer-vehicle collisions a few days after she received notice of the Great Falls Citizens Association's deer survey results.

"I don't think I've even hit a squirrel before," the Great Falls resident said. "It was awful to see it coming and to know I wasn't going to be able to do anything to stop in time."

Deer-vehicle collisions are almost commonplace; an average of 4,000 to 5,000 Fairfax County residents hit a deer with their vehicle each year.

Nobody stopped to see if Brady or the deer was all right, she said, although many responded to her message on social media that night.

"I just hit a deer, and it sucked," Brady wrote on Facebook.

Brady didn't weigh in on deer management problems and solutions, but she didn't like her role. "There's got to be a better way to kill the deer than the car," Brady said the next day. "I'm just hopeful I didn't kill him."

Great Falls and McLean, with large lots and many parks, can be seen as the bullseye in the exploding deer population and the debate on what to do about it. Before the beginning of a county program to "manage"

Deer and Airplanes

The county Park Authority used aerial infrared surveys via fixed-wing airplanes to count the number of deer inside parks and within a small distance in the surrounding neighborhoods on Feb. 6, 2014 and Dec. 27, 2013, according to the 2014 Annual Report on the Environment for Fairfax County. To get the estimated population densities, authorities divided the counts by the number of square miles surveyed.

Deer management methods at the parks have included archery, sharpshooting, and management hunting, occasionally in combination.

"While many of the data are limited, taken collectively, the observations of professional park staff, poor health of evaluated deer and high deer densities indicate that deer are overabundant and are negatively impacting the ecology of sizeable areas of Fairfax County," according to the report.

2014 Aerial Infrared Surveys

Park	Est. Deer Per Square Mile	First Year of Deer Management
Riverbend	32	1999
Scotts Run Nature Preserve	40	2012
Lake Fairfax	43	2007
Fred Crabtree	92	2013
Old Colchester	13	2013
Laurel Hill	107	2010
Burke Lake	66	2002
Lake Accotink and Accotink Stream Valley	46	2012
Wakefield	60	2012
Frying Pan Farm	18	N/A
Ellanor C. Lawrence	15	2001
Sully Woodlands	35	2006

SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

the deer population in parks, Riverbend Park in Great Falls had a deer population estimated at 213 deer per square mile, more than 10 times what is considered healthy.

Deer management, by way of sharpshooting and bowhunting, which began in 1999 in Riverbend, has helped reduce the deer

density to 32 per square mile. Nearby in Scotts Run Nature Preserve in McLean, that number is 40.

DEER DENSITY is still at least two times greater than it should be in the Great Falls/

Archery Hunting in 27 Fairfax County Park Areas in 2015

Park(s)	Town(s)	Acres
Riverbend Park, Scotts Run Nature Preserve	Great Falls, McLean	785 acres
Colvin Run SV, Difficult Run SV	Great Falls	220 acres
Fred Crabtree Park, Little Difficult Run SV, Garnchayne, Waples Mill Meadow	Reston, Herndon, Oak Hill	603 acres
Sugarland Run SV, Shaker Woods Park, Folly Lick SV	Herndon	214 acres
Difficult Run SV, Clark's Crossing & Lahey Lost Valley Parks, Tamarack Park, Eudora Park	Vienna	419 acres
Accotink Stream Valley South	Springfield	490 acres
Patriot Park, Popes Head Park, Piney Branch SV, Fairfax Villa Park	Fairfax Station	371 acres
Fountainhead Regional Park, Sandy Run Regional Park	Fairfax Station	1156 acres
Laurel Hill Park, Laurel Hill Golf Course, Newington Heights Park, Old Colchester Park*	Lorton	904 acres
Pohick Bay Regional Park	Lorton	998 acres
Sandy Run Regional Park	Fairfax Station	307 acres
South Run SV, Lake Mercer Park, South Run District Park, Burke Lake Park	Springfield, Burke, Fairfax Station	579 acres
Pohick SV, Burke Station Park, Shannon Station Park, West Springfield Village Park	Burke, Springfield	579 acres
Bull Run Marina	Clifton	
Johnny Moore Stream Valley	Clifton	492 acres
Cub Run SV, Ellanor C. Lawrence Park*	Chantilly	626 acres
Ellick Preserve, Mountain Road Park, Sappington Tract	Centreville	802 acres
Bull Run Regional Park	Centreville	871 acres
Poplar Ford Park, Hickory Forrest Park	Centreville	460 acres
Sully Historic Site	Chantilly	113 acres
Huntley Meadows	Mount Vernon	537 acres
Lee District Park, Island Creek Park, Amberleigh Park	Mount Vernon	258 acres

SV=Stream Valley

* 3 month season 9/6-12/6; otherwise 9/6/14-2/21/15

SOURCES: FAIRFAX COUNTY ARCHERY PROGRAM; FAIRFAX COUNTY 2014 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

McLean area, said Fairfax County Wildlife Biologist Dr. Katherine Edwards, citing a number between 15-20 deer per square mile as healthy for deer and the environment.

SEE SUPPORT, PAGE 4

Increased Support for Archery Hunting

FROM PAGE 3

Fairfax County recently used aerial and infrared technology to study deer population in county parks, she said, including Scotts Run Nature Preserve, Riverbend and other parks around the county.

Other parts of the county have even more deer. Lake Fairfax Park in Reston has 43 deer per square mile while Fred Crabtree Park in Reston has 92 deer per square mile. Burke Lake Park in Fairfax Station has 66 deer per square mile. Laurel Hill Park has 107 deer per square mile.

At those densities, 4,000-plus deer-vehicle collisions a year are only part of the problem in Fairfax County. Lyme disease, agricultural damage and damage to suburban landscaping are rampant. Deer also damage the environment and other species by decimating the understory in the forests. Young trees can't grow up to replace older trees. Birds and other species that need cover decline because of lost habitat.

The county began the deer management program in 1998, and while there was considerable negative public response to archery hunting and other methods at first, a lot of concerns have died down, said Dranesville Supervisor John Foust, who represents Great Falls, McLean and Herndon.

"We initially had a lot of concerns about deer management when we started in the parks," said Foust. "There is some opposition, but not really as much as there used to be. ... We run a very very tight ship. Our hunters are very well monitored."

While the management efforts in the parks have reduced the number of deer, (the FY2014 "harvest yield" was 848 deer from 27 park sites) many believe that it's not enough. Most of the deer habitat is private property, and deer management will need to move onto private property to be effective, they argue.

"I've accepted we've got to do more," Foust said. "I think we will get the same results on private property because the hunters have conducted themselves with professionalism."

THE GREAT FALLS Citizens Association recently took the unusual step of surveying its residents about experiences with deer and opinions of what to do about it.

Part of the mission of the Great Falls Citizens Association is to preserve the semi-rural nature of Great Falls. The Committee on Environment Parks and Trails, "observed that the next generation of our forests has in many places disappeared under pressure from deer herds, raising questions about the sustainability of our highly-prized natural environment. ... The objective was to seek residents' views so that the GFCA could evaluate support for new initiatives to protect local woodlands and streams."

Jerry Peters, a retired ecologist who lives in Great Falls, is spearheading a program in Great Falls to connect licensed, professional archers to homeowners who permit archery on their land.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Christine Sullivan, Bill Canis, Matt Allison and Jerry Peters spoke to Great Falls Citizens Association in January about deer.

Great Falls Deer Survey Results

Strongly oppose	Oppose	Open (if sensible)	In favor	Strongly in favor	Total
Monitoring of deer activity on private property					
52	41	176	125	202	596
Trained and licensed archers activity culling deer on private property					
96	52	87	89	291	615
Hunter training program for local residents					
129	92	136	67	174	598
Use of non-lethal methods such as sterilization or birth control drugs					
43	57	154	91	267	612
Enforcing current laws against feeding wild deer					
33	33	100	119	320	605
Trained and licensed firearm marksman culling deer on private property					
119	64	124	79	231	617

"This is really deer heaven, and we have made it that way," said Peters. "We took away their predators." Deer used to be hunted in Virginia by bobcats, black bears, eastern gray wolves and eastern mountain lions.

For the past seven years, Peters has studied the deer grazing the understory of forests, the overabundance of deer in the Great Falls and Northern Virginia area, and the declining deer health because of the inability for the habitat to support the growing population.

A 125-pound deer requires approximately 6.5 pounds of forage per day, or some 2,370 pounds of vegetation per year, according to the Fairfax County Park Authority. Multiply more than a ton of vegetation by as many as 100 deer per square mile, and the resulting decimation of forest understory and suburban landscaping is not surprising.

About 95 percent of respondents to the Great Falls Citizens Association's Deer Survey have seen deer feeding on their property; 45 percent see deer multiple times each day in their yard and 27 percent more see deer daily on their land.

Bill Canis reported results of the citizens association's survey.

"The car is the only predator and that's

not very humane to the deer," said Canis.

The citizens association is studying and learning all sorts of options to educate Great Falls residents, said Canis. "Hunting is an effective way to control the herd."

HOMEOWNERS OF any size property in Fairfax County can give permission to hunt to qualified, licensed archery hunters. Archery hunting is permitted from the last Saturday in September through the last Saturday in March. The county encourages homeowners to notify their neighbors "as a courtesy," but that is not required.

Matt Allison moved to Great Falls two-and-a-half years ago.

"One of the first things that stuck out was the number of deer. ... There were too many deer for the habitat to support. I was energized to do something about it," he said.

Allison, an archer, grew up in Pennsylvania. His father hunted, his grandfather hunted, they hunted all together. The school system gave students a day off on the first day of deer hunting season.

Allison was surprised at first by anti-hunting sentiment, even at home. "My wife doesn't understand how I can kill them," he said.

"I love watching deer. I love seeing deer

Prior to Deer Management Program

Deer Density	Estimated Deer/ Square Mile
Huntley Meadow Park	90-114
Riverbend Park	213
Meadowbrook Gardens Park	90-115
Bull Run Regional Park	419
Fort Belvoir	90

SOURCE: VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND INLAND FISHERIES

in my yard, but I want the habitat to support the deer. When I see deer coming up to the flowers right by the front door, I know they are starving."

The impact on shrinking understory in the woods and forest impacts more than pretty views, said Allison; it impacts birds and migratory patterns of birds as well as other wildlife.

Archery season is an effective way to reduce the herds, he said.

And archery is safe, according to Peters, Allison, and all data kept by Fairfax County, the state, and the state of Maryland.

No injuries have occurred to non-hunters because of bow-hunting, according to Fairfax and Montgomery counties. There are occasional injuries to bow hunters who fall from deer stands.

ALLISON AND PETERS have joined forces to try to institute Peters's program called Green Fire to cull deer in Great Falls.

Allison is gathering archers, and Peters is working to set up a database to track deer throughout Great Falls where landowners can add data, and a database that permits archers to know which landowners permit hunting on their properties.

"I'm going to set up a pilot program. ... It's been an obsession. It's almost like an intellectual puzzle," said Peters. "It's not about hunting and killing deer. I've come to really enjoy the challenge."

Christine Sullivan of Great Falls has made use of Green Fire's services.

"Seeing deer was nice initially, but then I noticed that all the foundation plants were being eaten," said Sullivan. "I was primarily using recommended lists of supposedly deer-resistant plants. ... Local landscape nurseries told me that there's hardly anything the deer would not eat if there are too many, or food is scarce."

Sullivan contacted Peters and Allison about hunting the deer in her yard.

"They showed me the well-worn deer trails and how the deer had completely eaten the understory of the forest. I started monitoring when and where I saw the deer to let Matt know where to best place his deer stand." Some of Sullivan's neighbors also gave Allison permission to hunt on their land.

"What is not acceptable is to do nothing," said Canis. "Great Falls is a heavily wooded area, but in 20 to 25 years, the understory will be gone. That's not the legacy we want to leave behind."