

Treeways

2020 - 8

Deer Population Update

About 10 years ago the City created a Deer Management Plan to reduce the size of the deer herd for human safety, property damage, and deer health reasons. During the second year of the Deer Management Plan **vehicles killed 12 deer** within and on the edges of the City due to the high population at that time. I am aware of 3 deer killed by vehicles nearby in 2019 and one was on I-494.

On February 12, 2020, Three Rivers Park District completed an aerial deer population count in the City of Sunfish Lake. The City Council authorizes a deer count about once each 4-5 years to document the City's deer population. This time the count was 18 and they do not tally the deer numbers by bucks or does. Previous counts were 60 and 58 the last two times counts were undertaken. It is hypothesized that the Deer Management Plan, plus substantial clearing of invasive species underbrush associated with home demolition and rebuilding, plus two long winters with long cold and wet spring weather have brought the Sunfish Lake deer population to its current level.

A healthy deer population in a non-urban area is somewhere around 10-12 deer per square mile so a population of 15-20 deer in the 1.7 square mile area of the City of Sunfish Lake is probably about right. After 10 years of working the Deer Management Plan it appears that the desired results have been achieved. However, given that in Sunfish Lake a doe typically births two fawns each year it is possible that the deer herd could double in size if our current winter is normal or mild. This assumes the population is in a 1:1 male/female ratio. The Management Plan should be continued into the future so that the City does not get back to an excessive population level within just a couple years.

Each fall the City sponsors a controlled hunt to control the deer population that is conducted in two parts. First the City has a contract with the Metro Bowhunters Resource Base (MBRB) where they provide a group of certified hunters (archery only) for several hunt periods. Second, residents may participate in the hunt (archery only) by obtaining the same qualifications as the MBRB certified hunters. Typically about 13 or so deer are taken each fall. More information can be obtained by contacting your City Forester at 612-803-9033 or jim@lstrees.com or Officer Matt Mullner with the West St. Paul Police Department. No safety issues have occurred during any Deer Management Plan hunt.

We don't know why but it seems that newly planted trees of any species, deciduous or evergreen are targeted by rabbits and deer for tasting and antler rubbing. The Forester recommends that all new trees planted on your property be protected from animal damage and examples of the protections recommended may be seen in Musser Park or at the Arbor Day Green Fair.