

December 12, 2024

Town of Ithaca Deer Management Program Proposal

February 1 – March 31, 2025

Deer Management Program Approved by the Town of Ithaca Town Board on February 11, 2019
Ithaca Town Board Resolution No. 2019-021

Authorization to apply for DDP for 2025 by the Town of Ithaca Town Board on December 9, 2024
Ithaca Town Board Resolution No. 2024-137

In May 2017, the Town of Ithaca Conservation Board presented a report (“Deer Management: Recommended Actions for the Town of Ithaca”) to the Ithaca Town Board regarding the overabundance of White-tailed deer in the Town of Ithaca. This report outlined the history and justification of deer management (health and human safety, ecological, agricultural losses, car-deer collisions, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Deer Management Focus Area), a review of local deer management programs in Tompkins County (Village of Trumansburg, Cornell University, Village of Cayuga Heights, Village of Lansing), and provided recommendations for a potential Town of Ithaca deer management program (form sub-committee, utilize NYSDEC Deer Damage Permits (DDP) for a Town program, measure impacts of deer to assess effectiveness of program, coordinate efforts with adjacent municipalities and Cornell University, etc.). The Ithaca Town Board reviewed and discussed this report and in September 2017, formally established a Deer Management Committee. This Committee met several times in the spring and summer of 2018 and held a public meeting in May 2018 seeking feedback on the report and the potential of a deer management program. The public feedback received was very positive regarding deer management in the Town and the Town Board agreed to move forward with establishing a program. The Town received a DDP from NYSDEC in February 2019 to use three properties through mid-April, but only harvested one deer. The Town has continued to received DDP from NYSDEC using different sites around Town (2020 – 6 locations and harvested 20 deer; 2021 – 9 locations and harvested 42 deer; 2022 – 9 locations and harvested 40 deer; 2023 - 9 locations and harvested 17 deer; 2024 – 8 locations and harvested 10 deer). The Town Board designated \$3,000 in the 2025 Town budget for this program.

Based on input from the Town’s Conservation Board, the Town’s former Deer Management Committee, and representatives from Cornell University and other local municipal deer management programs, the use of NYSDEC approved Deer Damage Permits (DDP) – also known as nuisance permits – is recommended to reduce deer numbers. This approach is not considered regular hunting and for the Town of Ithaca program it proposes to use proficient archers (including crossbows) at baited locations as the preferred low-cost method. Firearms could also be used at selected sites in the more rural areas of the Town. What follows is believed to be the best approach to significantly reduce the deer population and negative impacts of the high deer level in the Town of Ithaca.

It is anticipated that for this 7th year, nine sites again will be used that are concentrated in a couple areas of the Town. It is proposed (pending DEC approval) that implementation of the deer management program will start on February 1, 2025 and continue until March 31, 2025. A map showing the properties where activities will occur will be available at Town Hall and will be posted on the Town of Ithaca’s website (<http://www.townithacany.gov/Deer>). The Town will continue to review properties throughout the Town

that are ideal locations given their size, expected deer traffic, and availability of trees and cover for this and future years. The following is detailed information on the Town of Ithaca deer management program.

1. Activities are proposed to occur from February 1, 2025 to March 31, 2025. The activities are coordinated by the Town. The Town will review the success of the program and will reduce or expand activities as needed based on deer harvests and assessment on ecological and other indicators. All landowners will be kept informed about management activities (including who the participants are on their property) in regular updates.
2. Tree stands will be placed (no screw in steps, ladder stands are preferred) at landowner approved locations prior to the start of the program. A few branches may need to be trimmed to improve shooting lanes. Shooting from elevated positions directs arrows/bullets into the ground after passing through a deer. If needed, locations may need to be shifted slightly or abandoned. Each landowner will be informed about any activities on their properties, as indicated by landowner preferences.
3. Participants will primarily be using vertical bows or crossbows, but could potentially use a firearm in selected locations in the more rural areas of the Town.
4. Activities will occur as needed to allow for variations in weather conditions, deer movement patterns and participants' availability. There will be the use of supplemental lights after dark that will allow for safe, highly accurate shots at very close range. Several of the participants are experienced in using this approach and any new ones will be trained if they desire to use supplemental light. Deer use patterns at bait will be monitored using cameras to target the best possible times to utilize locations.
5. All participants are required to follow all Town rules and laws, NYS laws, and any expressed landowner preferences. It is the right of each landowner, if so desired, to select participants who may be permitted access to their property, the times or dates participants are allowed on properties, stand locations, parking locations, or access routes as desired. The agreement to use properties can be terminated by landowners at any time by notifying the Town of Ithaca Town Clerk (clerks@townithacany.gov).
6. Which days and stands will be used cannot be predicted in advance, as this will depend on individual time schedules, wind direction, weather, and previous use of stand locations. To prevent overuse, the use of resting periods between activity periods will allow deer to fall back into their usual use patterns. Baiting will continue during the resting periods.
7. Participants will be in trees using camouflage and will use flashlights to locate shot deer or to walk in or out of the woods; therefore, landowners may notice a slow-moving flashlight. If deer cannot be readily retrieved due to poor blood trails, approved tracking dogs are available to help in locating the wounded deer. In very rare circumstances, tracking may occur the next morning with better light. Landowners will be alerted to any of these possibilities.
8. In most instances, landowners and neighbors will not notice activities or the killing of a deer, since it happens fast. However, despite all precautions and skills, deer may be wounded, may not expire immediately, collapse on neighboring properties, or may not be found. All participants will have information about property boundaries when in the field. This information will include phone

numbers of landowners and neighbors who need to be notified if a search extends beyond the approved properties. If necessary, the participant will ask permission to retrieve a deer, unless pre-authorization to retrieve deer from a property exists. Every effort will be made (including the possible use of a trained dog) to recover all animals.

9. Participants will keep track of and report all shots (arrows/bullets) using a secure website.
10. All shot deer will be removed discretely and not be field dressed on properties, unless previously approved by the landowner. Arrows usually pass through deer and fall close to the spot where a deer was hit, but occasionally will remain in the deer. Every effort will be made to retrieve arrows.
11. All harvested deer will be consumed by participants, landowners, or donated.
12. The Town will review activities and success in regular intervals and determine if activities should continue or be terminated based on activities and number of deer harvested.
13. Regular updates will be provided to the Town Board, including the number of deer harvested, which will also be posted on the Town's website (<http://www.townithacany.gov/Deer>).
14. The goal of the program is to reduce deer numbers to levels where forest regeneration and survival of browse sensitive plants within the Town of Ithaca is once again possible. In addition, the program seeks to reduce deer tick populations to levels where Lyme disease risks are minimized, reduce vehicle collisions with deer, reduce damage to residential landscaping and gardens, and reduce agricultural crop damage. With assistance from the Town of Ithaca Conservation Board and/or Cornell University, the ecological success of deer reductions in the Town may be assessed using oak sentinels or other methods.
15. Given the high deer densities and the articulated ecological and health goals, the program will aim to target both antlered and antlerless deer. This requires approval by the NYSDEC. Participants shooting bucks will be required to saw off antlers and antlers will be delivered to the NYSDEC by the Town.

Town of Ithaca Contacts:

Michael Smith, Senior Planner
Email: msmith@townithacany.gov
Office Phone: 607-273-1721 (ext. 123)
Cell Phone: 607-592-6006

Rod Howe, Town Supervisor
Email: rhowe@townithacany.gov
Office Phone: 607-273-1721
Cell Phone: 607-592-9908