

## **FINAL REPORT**

### **2009-2010 COMMUNITY BASED DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

To: Township Committee, Township of Bernards, New Jersey

From: Bernards Township Deer Management Advisory Committee

Subject: Final Report on 2009-2010 Community Based Deer Management Plan

Date: August 30, 2010

The following report is hereby submitted for the Township Committee's information, approval, and transmission as required by the State to the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife.

The 2009-2010 Bernards Township municipal deer management program was conducted from September 12, 2009 through February 20, 2010 under regular State sport hunting rules and regulations, and thereafter to its conclusion March 31, 2010 under a CBDM Permit approved by the NJ Fish and Game Council and issued by the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Bernards Township's request for a deer check station within the Township for use by the deer management program was again granted by DFW. This permitted local check-in of all deer from the 2009-2010 program and greatly expedited the culling efforts.

Similar to the preceding seasons, the program comprised the following elements:

1) controlled hunting via archery by qualified members of two Township-authorized and based private hunting groups, Whitetail Solution and Bernards Township Protective Association, on designated municipal or Somerset County owned tracts from September 12, 2009 through March 31, 2010, and 2) controlled hunting via firearm by the latter group on a limited number of the above tracts during the same time frame as permitted by State sport hunting regulations for firearms use. The Township Committee-approved program and the State permit authorized extensions of the Winter archery and firearms deer hunting seasons beyond February 20, 2010 for the Bernards Township deer management program. The same 35 tracts, 32 municipal and 3 on Somerset County lands, were approved for use. There were no incidents or accidents involving the program, and no shot deer went unretrieved.

The two authorized hunting groups took a total of 279 deer from Township and Somerset County lands during the 2009-2010 season, compared with 302 during the 2008-2009 season and 269 during the 2007-2008 season.

Of the 279 total, 44 deer, or 16%, were taken during the CBDM Permit's authorized extension of the regular sport hunting season. As the Township's deer population is reduced, extending the culling season via CBDM Permit therefore remains an important part of the Township's deer management program.

The 279 deer harvested under the program this past season represented 73% of the total number of deer taken (381) within the Township. The remaining 102 were taken by sport hunters on private lands during the regular 2009-2010 whitetail deer seasons.

The Township again agreed to cover the cost of butchering and transport to New Jersey food banks of the venison from surplus deer taken under the program. Venison from a total of 88 deer was donated to community food banks. Assuming an average dressed weight of 85 pounds per deer, this represents 3.74 tons of venison.

Although not part of the Bernards Township deer management program, both hunting groups also operated on private lands within the Township in 2008-2009, by owner invitation and during the State sport hunting season only. WS and the BTPA took an additional 56 deer on private lands in the Township, and other sport hunters took 46, or 45% of the 102 total taken from private lands.

After the last eight seasons it is evident that the Township's deer population has been significantly reduced. Our current projection is that the population density is now down to 20 or so per square mile, largely due to several large "pockets" of deer that have not been accessible to hunting. The overall deer density is clearly not yet at or near the desired figure of no more than 10 per square mile. The current situation is, however, a major improvement over the estimated 118 deer per square mile in 2002. Also, the recently approved reduction of the minimum allowed hunting distance (*for archery only*) from 450 feet to 150 feet from an occupied dwelling should finally enable access to most of the remaining large "pockets" of deer in the Township.

A full aerial census may be conducted in late December 2010, as part of a Deer Tick Population Study (funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)). Also, ground counting of heavily harvested areas and of un-accessed population pockets is still underway, using the five motion-activated wildlife cameras the Township has purchased for the program.

The deer control program's results continue to be encouraging, but the goal of reaching a balance between societal needs and a resident deer population has not yet been achieved. Wildlife biologists generally recommend a Biological Carrying Capacity (i.e., deer population) of no more than 20/square mile, and a maximum Cultural Carrying Capacity of no more than 10 deer/square mile. The former refers to the impact on the biosystem (the woodlands' "understory") and the latter to the effect of the deer population on vehicular accidents, property damage, and disease (most notably Lyme disease).

Moreover, whitetail deer are not migratory, and the Township still contains significant over-concentrations of deer in some areas that have not as yet been accessible to the program or other hunting.

The Deer Management Advisory Committee continues to use a Deer Biological Year standard, comprising 12-month periods from April 1 to March 31. Each DBY or bioyear thus commences just prior to the annual spring fawning season and concludes after the hunting season. We have police-logged (by date and location) road kill data from the fall of 1999 through the present.

For DBY 2010 (ending March 31, 2010) the roadkill total by actual Police Department count on municipal and county roads within the Township was 108 deer, which is similar to the previous DBY's total of 102, and a 63% reduction from DBY 2001's total of 289. We expect that the annual total of (actually counted) road kills will stay at around 100 or so until we can access the currently unreachable pockets of deer in the Mt. Airy Road vicinity and several other areas. The recent final enactment of the law permitting archery hunting within 150 feet of an occupied dwelling (rather than the current 450 foot minimum) should greatly facilitate access to such "deer pockets," however.

Cost of the 2009-2010 Bernards Township deer management program was \$21,953.21, or \$78.69 per deer harvested. The previous year's final cost was \$28,172.69 and the cost per deer was \$93.29. The 2009-2010 total cost includes \$6,651.67 for personnel costs (Deer Management Administrator and Secretary services). It also includes \$6,160.00 for the 88 surplus deer donated to community food banks (at \$70 per deer for butchering and transport). Bait cost was \$3,079.00. The remainder went for tract signs, legal ads and printing and mailing of notices, \$758.69; groundcount camera SD cards and batteries, \$56.15; disposal costs, \$2,122.70, and hunter cost defrayments, \$3,125.00.

Respectfully submitted,

William R. Darrow, M.D., Ph.D.  
Chair, Bernards Township Deer Management Advisory Committee