

Strategies for Managing Deer Populations



Hunting: Hunting is used by wildlife agencies as a tool for managing some species of wildlife. Human activities in much of North America have greatly reduced the natural predators of many animal populations, which in some cases has led agencies to rely on hunting to keep the population growth of prey species in check. Hunting is highly regulated based on population data collected by wildlife biologists that help determine how many licenses should be sold based on location, species, and gender. Hunters apply for licenses based on location, species, gender, season, and method of take (i.e. archery, rifle, etc.).

People hunt for a variety of reasons. Most hunters say they hunt because they enjoy spending time in the outdoors. Some hunt to feed their families. Other hunters may find emotional, mental, and spiritual value in hunting. Many do so as part of their family or cultural heritage. Most hunters believe they are making a significant contribution to the perpetuation of wildlife species and habitat.

Culling: Culling wildlife involves the targeted removal of animals from a particular population, typically by professionals with advanced wildlife identification and shooting skills. Culling is often utilized in areas where hunting is not feasible or permitted, and focuses on a specific species and sometimes even gender (e.g. removing only females). When a population of animals has exceeded the carrying capacity of their habitat and that habitat has deteriorated to the point of negatively impacting other species, culling is a conservation tool that can be used to address the issue.

Birth Control/Sterilization: In areas where hunting or culling is not feasible (e.g. highly populated urban and suburban cities), some decision makers have opted to sterilize animals or use contraception to prevent population growth. Surgical sterilization, hormones and contraceptive vaccines have had mixed results in diminishing wildlife population sizes; additional research is needed to determine the efficacy and feasibility of this management tool.

Relocation: Relocation involves trapping or tranquilizing an animal in order to move it to a more suitable location. Wildlife managers relocate wildlife for a variety of reasons (e.g. a young predator establishing its territory travels into a highly human-populated area). In most cases relocation is not the preferred method of wildlife managers due to the cost and effort involved, as well as difficulties finding appropriate locations to move certain species. In some cases, wildlife do not survive the relocation due to stress or unfamiliarity with the territory; in other cases, wildlife may return to their initial location.

Predator Introduction: Some groups and individuals may propose re-introducing extirpated (locally extinct) predators as a means of population control for wildlife species. Proponents of this strategy believe bringing natural predators back returns the land to its natural order before human expansion caused many predators to become extirpated.

Do Nothing: Some individuals believe the life and death of animals is a natural cycle that humans should not interfere with. An individual may feel that disease or lack of resources will naturally control the population without needing human intervention.

