

April 12, 2016

Mr. Greg Sheehan, Director
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
1594 W North Temple, Suite 2110
Box 146301
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-6301

Dear Director Sheehan:

Over the last few years, Sandy City residents have complained about the number deer located in urban environments. We continue to hear from residents about extensive landscape damage, and deer-vehicle incidents around residential areas.

It has come to our attention that staff from the Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) has informed residents that control of the urban deer population is a municipal issue. Several callers have noted that after speaking to a representative from DWR, they were advised to call their Council Member and request approval of either an urban archery program or a deer relocation program. It appears that DWR's primary response to deer population is to delegate responsibility to the city governments for a regulatory task that under normal conditions would be the exclusive authority of the State of Utah. We are not wildlife experts, nor do we desire to be and do not appreciate your staff giving our residents misleading information.

We do find it odd that while cities are being encouraged to hunt or relocate deer due to population increases, DWR seems to be taking action to increase the herd sizes near our communities. The May 2014 Unit #17 (Wasatch Mountains) Deer Herd Unit Management Plan suggests a goal of increasing the deer population from a 2013 model estimate of 35,500 to 40,800. In fact, the plan for the Wasatch West subpopulation represents a desired increase of 3,900 deer, which is nearly 75% of the planned increases unit-wide.

We have followed DWR's advice to enact a prohibition on feeding urban deer. However, the programs delegated under R657-65 remain problematic.

The archery program is attractive due the minimal cost involved as reported following the pilot program in Highland. Whether real or perceived, safety concerns in effect make this program option extremely challenging. We may be successful at killing some of the problem deer, but doing so would undoubtedly fracture neighbourhoods and increase apprehension. In addition, many residents are simply yet adamantly opposed to killing wildlife. For example, after news became available about the Highland hunt program, a group of frustrated residents requested similar action in Sandy City. Within two days, a counter-petition was formed and submitted by another group of residents.

On the other hand, there is less citizen opposition to the deer relocation program. Yet, as best

as we understand the results of the pilot project in Bountiful, this option is personnel (and therefore cost) intensive. It is our understanding the DWR has never formally released any of the cost data collected in the pilot project, and expects that cities would bear the cost of any future effort. Sandy City cannot embark on a new program with undetermined costs. New programs generally require a commensurate increase in property taxes or a reduction in some other area of City service.

Another concern with both programs is the indemnification required. As R657-65 is currently written, DWR delegates its responsibility to cities but accepts none of the liability. Finally, while DWR staff has shared with us the number of deer removed under each pilot project, there has been no assessment of the efficacy of each program. In other words, while it is clear that a number of deer were removed from each jurisdiction, how has that reduction translated in terms of reduced complaints, collisions, or forms of property damage?

While there is much interest in Sandy City in helping our residents address this concern, none of the options currently available through DWR are workable. We trust that DWR is aware of these program shortcomings and will work to enhance its own efforts to address the urban deer population, and afford other options to partnering agencies that work at a municipal level. In the meantime, creating false expectations in the minds of Sandy residents that City government is responsible for wildlife issues, or can “solve” this problem for them is impractical and troubling. It gives the impression that DWR is, in more ways than one, simply “passing the buck.”

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions about this matter please contact Council Chair Kris Coleman-Nicholl or Council Office Director Mike Applegarth at (801) 568-7141.

Sincerely,

Kris Coleman-Nicholl, Chair
Sandy City Council

Scott Cowdell
District 1

Maren Barker
District 2

Chris McCandless
District 4

Linda Saville
At-large

Steve Fairbanks
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