Memorandum

Joint City of Bloomington-Monroe County Deer Task Force
Monday, 17 September 2012, 3:00 PM
Council Library (#110), City Hall, 401 N. Morton St.

PRESENT: **Guest**: Stephanie Boyles Griffin (HSUS). **Task Force Members**: Stefano Fiorini, Bob Foyut, Thomas Moore, Laurie Ringquist and Dave Rollo. **Staff:** Stacy Jane Rhoads and Dan Sherman. **Public**: Danna D'Esopo Jackson, Kasey Husk, James McNamara, Eric Ost, Kirby Waldrip,

Special Teleconference with Stephanie Boyles Griffin, Senior Director for Wildlife Response, Innovations and Services for the Humane Society of the United States.

I. WELCOME

Rollo welcomed Boyles Griffin and all present. Task Force members introduced themselves. Boyles Griffin introduced herself and said that she has been working in wildlife conflict resolution for 15 years. In her work for her Master's thesis, she worked with the Virginia Department of Transportation in addressing human-beaver conflicts.

II. LOCAL ISSUES

Rollo opened the meeting by explaining the formation of the Task Force and its work over the last two years. He relayed that the group is in the process of wrapping up recommendations, but welcomes HSUS input. He said that the Task Force's recommendations include a palette of lethal and non-lethal approaches.

Rollo relayed that there are two areas within the City limits where deer have expanded: the southeast quadrant of the City and in a nearby forested areas called Griffy Woods. A group of ecologists have been studying the effects of deer herbivory at Griffy and have concluded that deer are re-shaping the forest. The group has also been looking at ways to manage deer in the county areas, outside of the city limits.

III. DISCUSSION

Boyles Griffin stated that she is on her way back from Charlottesville, Virginia where she is consulting with local leaders and law enforcement about growing concerns with deer damage to landscaping and with deer-vehicle collisions. She said that when it comes to wildlife conflict resolution, any method – be it non-lethal or lethal—needs to be maintained every year. The key is to try to invest as little money as possible to achieve a balance so that those people who are experiencing damage are satisfied and the people who enjoy the animals and don't want them killed unless it is actually going to solve the problem are satisfied too.

Boyles Griffin said that, as biologists, the tendency is to focus on solving the problem by focusing on the animals, but the problem has been created by us. She stated that in talking to Charlottesville today, most people observed that the community did not have a deer problem until about five years ago, about the time the community experienced more development and replaced forested areas with golf courses. This pattern of development creates an even more favorable environment for deer.

Boyles Griffin said that in Charlottesville, the deer issue is what she calls an "emerging issue." The community is 10 square miles and is experiencing about 4-5 deer-vehicle collisions per year.

Rollo relayed that the county is experiencing 100 deer-vehicle collisions per year and 40-50 deer-vehicle collisions are occurring per year in the city.

Rollo commented that based on scat studies, deer at Griffy are likely 10-13 times more numerous than in nearby forests. Hunting is not allowed at Griffy, but is allowed on adjacent properties of comparator forests. Rollo said that the effects on the understory are severe.

Boyles Griffin said that one thing that deer task forces grapple with is the human dimension. She said that the human dimension is explained in the local leaders guide issued by the HSUS. She said that communities do not always go into the development and implementation of a deer management plan knowing what the consequences will be. It is good to know at the start: how many deer-vehicle collisions there are per year; how many people are impacted both positively and negatively; how much the city may be spending responding to deer-vehicle collisions. It is also good to know how many deer a community has and if IDNR has said there is a deer overpopulation. If there is an overpopulation, it is good to know where IDNR thinks management should occur. Without that, you leave yourself vulnerable and you open yourself to criticism by people who don't want deer managed in any way, lethal or non-lethal. That can compromise your efforts to get things done in a positive way.

Boyles Griffin said that there are three methods of fertility control: surgical sterilization (being used in Highland Park, IL), use of PZP (being used in Gaithersberg, MD, Fire Island, NY and Fripp Island, SC) and GonaCon.

Rollo said the Task Force has reviewed those methods. Indiana DNR does not endorse the use of immunocontraception in a free-ranging environment, in part because the bioaccumulative effects are not known.

Boyles Griffin said that EPA approved the use of GonaCon knowing that people may eat the deer dosed with the drug. She said that the animals that have been treated are marked and ear-tagged. She said that any animal dosed with contraception in an open system would be marked.

Rollo said that the Task Force estimates that the cost of contraception is approximately $600-800/doe, he asked if that comported with Boyles Griffin's understanding.

Boyles Griffin said that she has never heard of an estimate that high, but said she can look into to it.

Boyles Griffin said that it is not her job to sway the Task Force either way. She works for an animal welfare organization, and the organization encourages people to coexist with animals where possible. However, the HSUS is pragmatic and realizes that if there is a population problem and the population needs to be reduced in a quick and expeditious way for human health and safety reasons, then they advocate for the most humane way possible. However, if the concern with deer is an aesthetic one, and not an issue of health and human safety, then HSUS encourages the use of non-lethal methods. She said that she wants to be a source of information for the community. She said contraception is something her organization works on, but she said that she does not want to give people false impressions of what it can or cannot do. The drawbacks include expense compared to some things but not others. For example, if a community has off-duty police officers sharpshoot deer, then that is a more cost effective way to euthanize deer than to hire a private company to do it. However, if you do that, then you may spend more money over time than you would spend by treating animals with immunocontraception drugs. It does not just depend on how you are doing it, but who is doing it and how much is spent on management.

Rollo asked if Task Force members had any questions.

Fiorini asked how Boyles Griffin defines human health and safety and how that is determined in other communities.

Boyles Griffin advised that typically threats to human health and safety are measured by the frequency of deer-vehicle collisions. HSUS encourages communities to take a progressive approach: to identify hot spots and engage in community education first. She has found that oftentimes deer-vehicle collisions are a function of how the vegetation is maintained. Similarly, some types of fencing along the roadway can help re-direct deer. She said that if there is something you can do in terms of public education and physical changes, try that first. She further advised that a controlled hunt may not bring about a reduction of deer vehicle collisions if the hunt does not focus on the groups of animals that have been involved in collisions in the past. She said that without doing a site evaluation in Bloomington, she cannot offer site-specific recommendations.

Fiorini asked if concerns with human health and safety extend beyond deer-vehicle collisions.

Boyles Griffin responded that some communities express concern with Lyme disease. She said that, as the CDC makes clear, deer are one of many hosts for the black-legged tick. There is no correlation between reducing deer populations and a reduction in Lyme disease. The ticks will find other hosts. She said that that is something that Fairfax County is grappling with right now. They are engaging in managed hunts and letting their guard down – residents are not checking for ticks as frequently, not wearing light-colored clothes nor taking other precautions that may be necessary. Residents are under the impression that they do not have to be as vigilant because the community is doing something to reduce the deer population.

Foyut asked what method is used to administer contraception.

Boyles Griffin responded that in some HSUS projects they administer the drug via airgun. They only time they dose the deer via hand injection is when they are conducting a study in an open system. In an open system, they ear tag the deer. To ear tag the deer, they tranquilize the deer, take vitals on the deer, test the deer for pregnancy and give the deer the primer. Any boosters are administered remotely. While mortality is low, bringing an animal down is traumatic and you don't want to have to do it if you do not have to. She said that she takes hunters out into the field to learn how to do this. Some have said that it was fun for them to experience the animal getting back up after they hit them with a dart. Hunters already have the skills necessary to stalk them and hit them with a dart.

Foyut asked about the long-term mortality of tranquilized deer.

Boyles Griffin said that Rick Nagel is the HSUS technician who has done work on Fire Island and Fripp Island. He is very good at what he does. He may have lost two animals of the hundreds of animals that have been treated. She said that she prefaces this statement with the fact that Nagel is someone who does this frequently and who is a professional. She said that whenever you bring an animal down, you put the animal at risk and risk losing them. That is something to keep in mind when you think about what sort of program you want. Nagel does not take a lot of risks; he keeps the welfare of animal in mind in conducting his work. Boyles Griffin added that the HSUS also uses GPS darts to find an animal that may have travelled when darted.

Foyut asked if HSUS was experiencing any long-term mortality due to capture mortality in the tranquilized deer.

Boyles Griffin replied deer tend to stay within a small home range; even 2-3 days after darting, they go back to see if they are around. The organization has not observed any capture myopathy in tranquilized deer.

Boyles Griffin said had the HSUS has a deer in a control group that is 17 year old. It is only the last couple of years she has not been producing. She said that is an anomaly. Most deer live on average, 7 years.

Ringquist asked what experience Boyles Griffin has had using contraception in open populations and how many deer need to be treated to see a reduction in an open environment.

Boyles Griffin said that a large percentage of does would need to be treated. With wild horses, you must treat between 65 and 85 percent of females to stabilize and eventually reduce the population size. The same figure would be applicable to deer. In a closed system, (however there is some immigration/emigration on Fire Island), biologist follow the matriarchal groups to target females. Boyles Griffin pointed out that in a deer population of 300, you are only focusing on 150 does.

Ringquist asked if Boyles Griffin has an example of a community where this has been successful.

Boyles Griffin said that if Ringquist's question is about success in an open system, the answer is "no." Boyles Griffin said the most successful example is Fripp Island. Boyles Griffin said HSUS has worked on Fripp since 2007. When they started the project, there were 600 deer and the deer looked terrible. Now, the population has been reduced to 250 deer.

Boyles Griffin said that the USDA is looking at use of Gonacon in an open system.

Boyles Griffin said that they have not had an opportunity to work in an open system. Immunocontraception is emerging technology. HSUS is looking for places to use it and to find out if State wildlife agencies will embrace it as an alternative for communities who can't or don't want to implement lethal means.

Boyles Griffin said that everybody agrees that when the deer population grows and deer start to look bad, not doing anything is not the right thing either. She said that the benefit of embracing lethal means is a quick reduction in the population. But the cost is that if the community is split on employing lethal options, you will have to deal with people suing the city each time you implement lethal means. That is the human dimension that the Task Force should not dismiss.

Boyles Griffin relayed that Princeton NJ has spent millions of dollars on deer, and it has torn the community apart. The City is having a hard time getting business done. Deer is a polarizing issue for many communities. If a community has a 50-50 split on managing deer through lethal means, it can be a war that can consume a lot of time administratively, and that can cost the city a lot of money in litigation. It can become a big mess. She encourages Task Force members to think about who lives in the community and what sort of support or opposition may arise. She said let city leaders know what to expect; don't' sugar coat it. If you think people will go nuts, let city leaders know.

Ringquist asked if lethal means are determined to be the best course of action, does HSUS have a position on what are the most humane lethal means.

Boyles Griffin said that HSUS probably does have such a statement. She said that the organization could not be supportive of a lethal program unless they were convinced that lethal means were necessary. The only reason for lethal means is a real and imminent threat to human health and safety. She said that honestly, imminent threat to human health and safety does not occur often. If it was shown that all non-lethal methods had been exhausted and that there was an imminent human health and safety threat, then HSUS could issue a statement that would say that they do not like what the community is doing, and do not think it is warranted and that the HSUS would like to take a closer look at the situation; however, if lethal means needed to be implemented, a certain course would be the best course.

Rollo asked if HSUS has any perspective on the ecological impacts of deer. What if other organisms such as ground-nesting birds or amphibians are threatened. Does HSUS have a position on ecological damage?

Boyles Griffin said that was a good question. One thing she has learned from what is going on at Yellowstone is that predation has importance not just on numbers, but on animal movement. One reason deer in forests do damage is that they do not have a reason to move. They stay on a piece of land and browse rather than moving. One thing HSUS is trying to encourage, is to keep deer on the move. While Indiana may have coyotes, they are probably not having the same sort of impact as wolves in terms of deer movement.

Boyles Griffin said that you can reduce the population, but this reduction will not translate into effects on forest unless deer are moving around. Even hunting over bait will not necessarily get the deer moving. The remaining deer will reproduce and the offspring will have an impact on the land. While it may seem like an obvious solution, she wants someone to show her that hunting is actually working. The problem is, if you stop hunting, the problem recreates itself. Boyles Griffin said that you might get public support to do this one time, but getting support to do it over and over becomes harder and harder. Especially if hunting occurs in an area that people use a lot.

Boyles Griffin said that at Rock Creek Park, the National Park Service wants to reduce the deer herd. It is a huge catastrophe. People go to the park to specially see deer, so the idea of the Park Service killing the deer to save the forest means nothing to them. It is a really tough sell to people who are not educated about such things.

She asked if there is a creative way to solve the problem without polarizing the community by killing deer. Not everyone is convinced is that lethal is the only way to solve the problem, but moving the animals is a great idea. The question is: how do you do this in a consistent way that mocks what predators once did?

Fiorini asked about the issue of development. People in Bloomington have experienced something along the lines of Charlottesville. We have fragmented habitat through development. What would Boyles Griffin recommend to City planners?

Boyles Griffin said that Charlottesville is trying to minimize the problem by trying not to clear cut trees with new development, but to build underneath the trees.

Boyles Griffin said that she is willing to come to Bloomington with Rick Nagel to conduct a site visit to get a sense of where the hot spots are and what sort of public education programs the community could pursue. Nagel focuses specifically on immunocontraception and will tell candidly tell the community if immunocontraception would or would not work. The HSUS could tell the city where the hot spots are and could tell the city what sort of educational effort could be used to complement any population management efforts could use to complement comprehensive program.

Ringquist said that Boyles Griffin's offer is a generous one. However, the Task Force has been told that the IDNR does not endorse the use of immunocontraception in a free-ranging environment. Any research using immunocontraception in a free-ranging environment would require the okay by IDNR.

Boyles Griffin said a site visit would also focus on public education and site-specific deer recommendations for hot spots. She would do a site visit to recommend educational strategies as opposed to immunocontraception.

Boyles Griffin said that she would be willing to meet with IDNR. She said she just attended a international fertility control conference for wildlife in Jackson, Wyoming two weeks ago. She said she is anxious to share any information she learned at the conference with IDNR and to talk to them about considering the use of immunocontraception or sterilization.

Boyles Griffin relayed that in Lockraven Reservoir, outside of Baltimore, a private landowner has been using sterilization and has been successful. The landowner hired White Buffalo with the blessing of the State DNR. The effort is funded by this private landowner. The benefit of sterilization is that once an animal is sterilized, you don't have to worry about treating her again. Boyles Griffin said that sterilization is not appropriate in all situations. HSUS has considered it in really small closed systems, or on peninsula, where there is one way in and one way out. There may be a homeowner's association that wants to do something and then co-exist with the population they have left. This may or may not be applicable to Bloomington, but may be appropriate in other Indiana communities.

Rollo thanked Boyles Griffin for her input. He said the group is in the process of finalizing its report and that he will send her a copy of the report when it is finalized. Rollo relayed that the Task Force has developed a humane deer management

position statement.

Stephanie said she appreciated the opportunity and if can be of further assistance, let her know.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Kirby Waldrip said that he is concerned about chronic wasting disease (CWD) and blue tongue disease. Rollo said that CWD has not been identified in Indiana.

Waldrip said that it sounds like the Task Force is starting all over again and that IDNR should help. He can't believe the Task Force is so far behind. Rollo responded that an IDNR biologist is a non-voting member of the Task Force.

Waldrip said that government should create tunnels to help animals cross the road.

Danna D'Esopo Jackson said the problem is the people. She said that she recalls that in the discussion about developing Deer Park, an IDNR employee said that the deer at Deer Park will leave the area post development and migrate to Lake Monroe. To her, it is an education issue. She has lost all her hostas. If she has to choose between deer and hostas, she would choose deer. Children should be able to experience deer, not just at the zoo. She said the Task Force should work to educate the public.

Rollo clarified that the IDNR directs that deer should not be entirely eliminated from urban and suburban environments. Instead, the issue is living with the deer -- how to best co-exist.

Jackson said that a wildlife manager at the Vermont Veteran's Home in Bennington, VT manages a deer park. It is very small and very old. He can talk to the community about establishing a deer park.

Jackson said that the community should look at the choices in plants and the choices in fencing.

Eric Ost said that it is important to get benchmarks to assess impact. He said that metrics are important. He would like to have more information about deer-vehicle collisions. He pointed out that the community has very different ecosystems. He said much of the concern can be traced back to the development of Ramsey Farm. He said that the deer issue provides the community with an opportunity to dive deep and look closely at the ways that development impact deer.

V. NEXT MEETING: 19 September 2012 at 5:30 in the McCloskey Room.

VI. ADJOURNMENT: 4:15pm