

14 July 2017

Dear Bloomington Parks Board

On behalf of the Environmental Resources Advisory Council (ERAC), which advises the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department (BPR) and the Board of Park Commissioners, we encourage you to authorize a cull of deer at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve (GLNP) during this winter of 2017-2018.

The members of ERAC strongly, and unanimously, agree that overabundance of deer at GLNP is one of the most important issues facing our city parks. Management of the deer population at GLNP has been a top priority of ERAC since 2008. The Deer Task Force was formed in 2010 and held nearly two years of monthly meetings, conducted a community poll, held several public forums, and actively sought public input. The Deer Task Force issued their final report in October 2012, which was approved by the City Council in December 2012. In March 2014, the Parks Board voted to hire a contractor to conduct a deer cull.

The city hired the wildlife management firm, White Buffalo, to conduct a cull two years ago, in the winter of 2014-15. Unfortunately, the cull could not be conducted because deer were not attracted to the bait rapidly enough for the cull to be effective, so it was cancelled. The likely reason for the deer not immediately consuming the corn used for bait was that 2015 was a mast year for oak trees. Oak trees produce acorns annual in relatively low numbers, but every few years oaks synchronously produce large numbers of acorns (a mast year), resulting in more nuts than can be consumed by the animals that eat their seeds. Acorns are a favorite food of deer and provide high amounts of energy. When acorns are present in high numbers, deer are much less likely to be attracted to corn, which provides less energy and is typically a less preferred food. Data collected by Bloomington Parks and Recreation showed there were more oak seedlings in 2015 (107 seedlings) compared to 2014 (49 seedlings).

Data collected between 2008 – 2012 at the IU Research and Teaching Preserve's property connected to the GLNP, comparing fenced and unfenced areas, showed that spring plants, summer vegetation, tree seedlings, and abundance of small mammals were all reduced in unfenced areas compared to fenced areas.

BPR has tracked the number and size of spring wildflowers and tree seedlings in 24 plots around the Griffy Lake Nature Preserve. In 2017, BPR surveyed 22 linear plots at GLNP, Morgan Monroe State Forest, and Brown County State Park in order to compare vegetation between GLNP and two similar forests that are regularly hunted for deer. These surveys counted and measured the heights of six spring plant species that are considered good indicators of deer browsing and forest health in Indiana and the Midwest. All six of the species examined were smaller and had fewer flowering plants at GLNP compared to the other two sites. Spring wildflowers are perennials that take several years to reach a large enough size to flower, and flowering is strongly associated with plant size. When plants do not flower, they cannot sustain the population.

These plant species are one indicator of overall forest health. Previous research from the IU Research and Teaching Preserve showed very strong decreases in growth of tree seedlings outside of deer exclosures. In addition, numerous species of insects, small mammals, birds, and other species

depend on the diversity and abundance of plant species. Both of these factors appear to be strongly affected at GLNP compared to similar nearby forests where deer are regularly managed by hunting.

GLNP is the largest City park and has great biodiversity, including at least 565 plant species, almost 100 mammal species, 160 bird species, and 50 reptile and amphibian species (Griffy Lake Management Plan 2008). However, this biodiversity is being threatened by an unnatural abundance of a single species, white-tailed deer.

Again, we urge you to take active management by authorizing a contract to reduce the deer population at GLNP and preserve the biodiversity and ecosystem integrity of this valuable preserve

Sincerely,
 Environmental Resources Advisory Council for
 the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department

