

Helena Urban Deer Management, 2008-2023

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Due to increasing human-deer conflicts, there are a growing number of municipalities in Montana that are managing urban deer, and the methods include public hunting as well as trapping and lethal removal. This presentation will provide an overview of the City of Helena's trap and removal program from 2008 to 2023. Due to the number of nuisance complaints, vehicle collisions, and negative encounters, the City established a task force, developed a management plan, and selected a social-tolerance threshold of <25 deer/mi². The City covered costs for staffing, surveys, and trapping/removal. A local food bank paid for meat processing. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks provided technical expertise and collected samples for CWD testing. Trapping success varied with winter conditions and over time. Trapping success was greater in years with more snow and winter weather, and deer appeared to become trap smart over time. CWD sampling began in winter 2021-2022, and to date, all samples were negative. A distance sampling survey was completed in years 2009-2018 and 2021-2022. At the beginning of the program, density was estimated at 47 deer/mi² (CL: 35-64). Since then, estimates varied from a low of 14 deer/mi² (CL: 12-20) in 2013, to a high of 64 deer/mi² (46-88) in 2022. The program was suspended from 2019-2020, and density estimates increased. Overall, the City's management of urban deer was successful. Deer density decreased to below the social-tolerance threshold from 2013-2018, human-deer conflicts and deer-related 911 calls decreased, and 30,000-35,000 pounds of venison were donated.