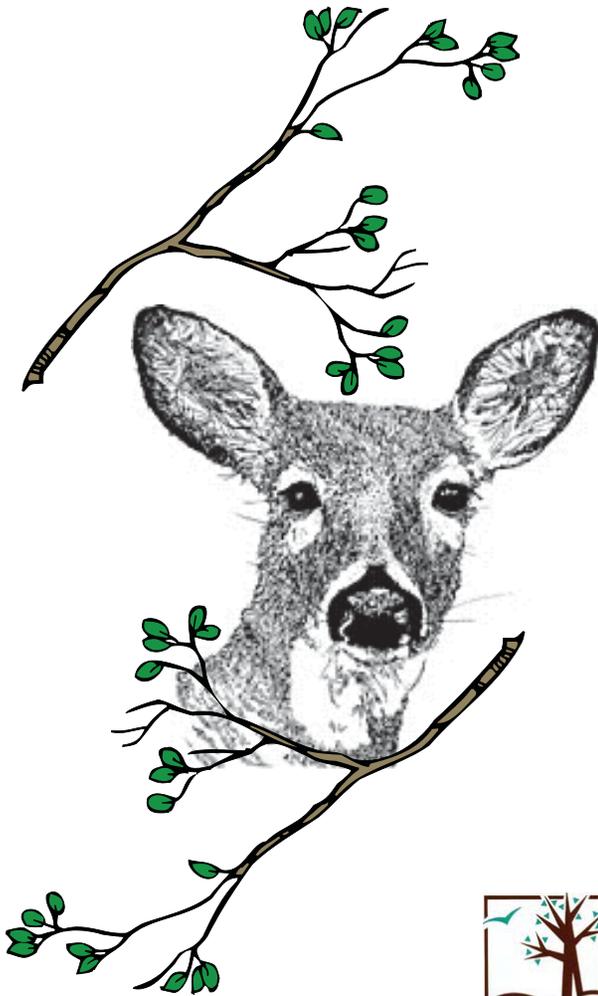


Deer Management Plan for St. Patrick's County Park

Did you know that deer eat a wide variety of plants, including wildflowers (such as trillium), fruits, nuts, farm crops, grass and succulent parts of trees and shrubs? An adult deer can eat up to 12 pounds of food a day, but can survive on 3 to 4 pounds.



Trillium

The Mission of St. Joseph County Parks

St. Joseph County Parks will enhance the quality of life for St. Joseph County residents by:

- Conserving significant natural areas.
- Offering quality programs that promote understanding and stewardship of our natural resources.
- Providing safe, well-maintained park facilities that enhance visitor experiences.



How long will the deer management plan last?

At this time we consider our deer management program to be a routine, annual resource management activity. We believe this is the best way to maintain a healthy deer population and forest ecosystem at St. Patrick's County Park in the long term.

How is the management plan evaluated?

The logistics and details of the program will be considered by staff when fine-tuning the management program. Annual surveys and harvest statistics will guide us as we proceed with the program in the future.

Will there be deer management programs at other St. Joseph County Parks?

At this time there are no immediate plans for deer management at other County Parks, however, it is not out of the question, as we continue to monitor the health of the woodland habitat at all the parks.



Healthy Habitats

St. Joseph County Parks strives to conserve significant natural areas by managing and interpreting these natural landscapes. We also make efforts to preserve these greenspaces for wildlife habitat as well as providing a natural experience for park visitors.

A healthy ecosystem is one that is comprised of a variety of flora and fauna, found naturally in a geographical location. The key to maintaining a healthy ecosystem is maintaining an area's biodiversity by maintaining the different species of plants and animals that are woven into a community.

Deer: Past, Present, Future

White-tailed deer were native throughout what is now eastern United States in the pre-settlement times. Their main predators were wolves, mountain lions and American Indians. With the destruction of habitat by farming and lumbering, and the unregulated hunting by increasing numbers of settlers, deer were eliminated from the state in the late 1800s. All of their predators were also eliminated.

Deer were reintroduced in the 1930s and 1940s and became well adapted to their surroundings. There was no pressure from human hunting or natural predators, thus no way to maintain the balance of the ever growing deer population.

The growing number of these large herbivores (plant-eaters) has been causing a negative impact on the natural community at St. Patrick's County Park. Over browsing by deer on vegetation has a trickle down effect on the natural community; not only is the diversity of plants reduced, but also the animals which rely on these same plants for food and cover.

Why do we feel the need for a deer management plan?

Our decision to consider a deer management plan was based on four factors:

- 1.** We believed we were observing more deer and deer trails within the park property, and more damage to landscaping trees and herbaceous ground cover and a decrease in key indicator species of wildflowers.
- 2.** Adjacent neighbors communicated they were suffering deer damage to landscaping, but during the hunting season efforts to cull the deer population were hampered by the fact the deer were retreating into the park property.
- 3.** The park acquired an additional 105 acres in early 2007, and that property has been hunted extensively for the past 7 years, resulting in a harvest of approximately a dozen deer.
- 4.** We wanted to act proactively, NOT reactively, to protect the forest ecosystem and wildflowers, and ultimately the health of the deer themselves.

What steps were taken to assess deer management needs?

Based on several factors including staff input, damage to landscaping trees and herbaceous ground cover, and concerns from nearby land owners, we determined an outside assessment of our deer populations would be beneficial. We contracted with a natural resource consultant, who toured St. Patrick's' County Park and nearby properties. He met with park staff, the Deer Stakeholder group and submitted a written report recommending a proactive approach to deer management in the park.

What other organizations were consulted?

We consulted with park interpreters at several state parks in Indiana that conduct regular deer management hunts. We also met with the District Wildlife Biologist for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and sought input and discussed our plans with the deer biologist with Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

We convened a Stakeholders Group consisting of local property owners, local officials and public property managers, including Izaak Walton League, Clay Township Park and Madeline Bertrand County Park. We also met with staff of other regional nature centers and parks to learn how they conducted deer management on their properties.

We also contracted with a private ecological consultant who provided input on strategies for managing the herd at St. Patrick's County Park.

What steps will be taken in the culling of the herd?

We will contract with a group of Indiana licensed archery hunters to reduce the herd by a specific number of deer during the Indiana archery season. The herd reduction will take place on a designated portion of the park, not currently open to public recreation. The perimeter of the area to be hunted will be signed.