

City of Grand Haven – Resolution for Deer Management Implementation

Whereas, after conditional assessments of the City’s forested land indicated poor regenerative conditions, in November 2022, the City Council of Grand Haven adopted a comprehensive Forest Management Plan, recognizing the urgent need to protect and restore the health of the city’s urban forests;

Whereas, the Plan identified significant threats to forest sustainability, including invasive pathogens and overgrazing by an unsustainably high deer population, and emphasized the necessity of a Deer Management Plan as a core strategy for ecological restoration;

Whereas, from November 2022 through October 2025, the Sustainability and Energy Commission, in partnership with City staff, conducted extensive research and data collection, including aerial deer surveys, resulting in clear, evidence-based recommendations for managing the deer population;

Whereas, the January 2025 thermal imaging flyover, exclusive of the entire City boundaries, recorded over 112 (68 confirmed, 44 possible) deer sightings in just the 200 acres of forested land in Mulligan’s Hollow, Lake Forest Cemetery, and Duncan Woods, confirming a significant overpopulation of the City’s herd;

Whereas, this overpopulation has directly contributed to:

- Severe degradation of forest undergrowth and regeneration, threatening the long-term health and biodiversity of the City's old-growth forest ecosystems;
- Increased human-wildlife conflict, including property damage to gardens, landscapes, and native habitats essential for other species;

Whereas, the City’s Fiscal Year 2025–2026 budget allocates \$25,000 to support the launch, implementation, and ongoing maintenance of a targeted Deer Management Program, with future annual budgets to continue funding the program’s sustained operations and maintenance.;

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved:

1. **Public Engagement and Transparency**
The City shall develop and distribute clear, accessible information on deer management strategies and outcomes annually, ensuring residents remain informed and engaged in the process.
2. **Annual Population Monitoring**
The City shall conduct annual aerial flyovers using thermal imaging or equivalent technology and/or conduct street counts, to estimate deer population and will assess the effectiveness of management efforts utilizing observable ecological enclosures to evaluate pressure from deer over grazing on the native ecosystem as measured by the reemergence and vitality of the forest understory.
3. **Annual Reporting**
An annual report shall be published each May, summarizing:

- Deer population data
 - Deer-vehicle collision statistics
 - Program outcomes and any recommended adjustments
4. Operational Implementation
City staff are authorized to permit the safe and controlled discharge of firearms by a licensed contractor during the designated cull period, ensuring all activities comply with safety and legal standards.
 5. Targeted Population Control
The City shall conduct an annual cull based upon guidance and licensing from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, considering ecological conditions, and in an amount not to exceed 40%, or 50 individual deer annually, whichever is less of the annual deer survey count.