

"Federation Corner" column
The Montgomery Sentinel - September 4, 2014

Managing the county deer population

by Peggy Dennis
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The topic of the program for the Civic Federation meeting on Monday evening, September 8, will be "Strategies for Managing the County's Whitetail Deer." The meeting will begin at 7:45 p.m. in the first floor auditorium of the County Council Building in Rockville.

Speakers for the program will be Bill Hamilton, Principal Natural Resources Specialist, and Ryan Butler, Senior Natural Resources Specialist. Both men work for the Montgomery County Department of Parks and serve on the County's Deer Management Work Group. George Timko, Assistant Deer Project Leader, Wildlife and Heritage Service of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, will also participate.

This program will cover a variety of strategies for dealing with deer. Animal lovers and rights advocates ask us to feed the deer and administer birth control. Gardeners try stinky sprays and fences to minimize damage to yards and landscaping. What works and what does not work? What is most cost effective? And how can we help to control and shrink the herd size down to sustainable levels? Do we need additional changes in county, state and/or federal laws?

In August, 2012, Bloomberg News wrote: "Looking over the American landscape, it's hard to think of a more insidious threat to forests, farms and wildlife, not to mention human health and safety than deer. Yet when it comes to reducing this costly infestation, too many elected officials sit on their hands or deflect effective control measures. There were about 1.09 million deer vehicle collisions from June 2010 to June 2011, State Farm Insurance reports, with average property damage of more than \$3,000 an accident. Add to that a billion or so dollars for agricultural damage. Deer carry ticks that spread Lyme disease. And their voracious chomping has resulted in "ghost forests" -- particularly in the Northeast."

You can read the full article at:
www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-08-08/deer-infestation-calls-for-a-radical-free-market-solution.html

A more scholarly article on the negative impacts of deer overpopulation is available at:
<http://blog.nature.org/science/2013/08/22/too-many-deer>

In February, 2012 the Civic Federation passed a resolution "urging County and State officials to expand funding and to work collaboratively towards liberalizing appropriate regulations to extend the hunting season for deer and facilitate controlled and safe hunting on both public and private lands." This resolution bore fruit, and our elected officials did not sit on their hands.

Enabling legislation was passed in Annapolis in 2014 which permitted the Montgomery County Council to pass Bill 35-14. Did we get everything we sought? No. With the backing of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, we had asked that the "safety perimeter" be decreased to 50 yards--a measure already implemented in Frederick and Carroll Counties. We accepted a compromise of a reduction to 100 yards.

Residents should know that bow and arrow hunting for deer, even in our suburbs, has been legal for many years, but under conditions that are so strict that it is rarely done. Hunters had to be licensed

and had to have written permission to hunt from both the owner of the property where the hunting would take place and the owners of neighboring homes within 150 feet of the hunting location. Responsible bow and arrow hunters work only during the hunting season and at the permitted times of the day. They shoot from an elevated position such as a tree stand, balcony or deck guaranteeing that an arrow which misses its target lands harmlessly in the ground. Archery hunting is therefore one of the safest of all sports.

In Maryland, there has not been a single recorded incident in which a person or pet has been injured by a stray arrow. The only recorded accidents have been to hunters who occasionally (but rarely) fall out of a tree stand. In Fairfax County there is no safety perimeter, and homeowners may permit a bow and arrow hunter to hunt on their property with only verbal permission and no requirement that surrounding homeowners consent. Fairfax has a similar and admirable safety record--no recorded accidents or injuries to non-hunters.

A discussion of the new 100 yard "safety perimeter" and all related laws and regulations will be held. Information will be provided on how residents can contact hunting organizations, link up with qualified hunters, and negotiate an agreement with a hunter to work on their property. A "question and answer" session will follow the presentations by our speakers. As always, the public is invited and encouraged to attend.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to montgomerycivic@yahoo.com