

6/20/19
Agenda

MINUTES WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WMAC)
June 5, 2019

At 9:00 AM the Wildlife Management Advisory Committee met at Borough Hall. Those attending were committee members Julette, Chairman, Canellis, Michaelis, Miller, Rubino, and Wellbrock. No residents or office holder of Watchung were present

The committee agreed several meetings ago that this committee waives the format of Roberts' Rules of Order at all future meetings and will conduct itself on an informal basis.

The minutes of the prior meeting of November 27, 2018 was unanimously approved by the committee members.

The direction of the meeting was set by the chairman who quoted one of the two deer population surveys, both of which stated that the deer density in Watchung was greater than 106 per square mile. The quotation from the Steward Green survey was as follows. "Healthy deer density is considered 5-15 per square mile by many wildlife biologists, ecologists, and environmental professionals. **ALL** (my emphasis), the areas surveyed in Watchung Borough have a **SEVERE** (my emphasis as to boldness) deer density that is beyond the threshold of carrying capacity, that has likely led to intensified invasive flora, depleted habitat for (tick eating) ground nesting birds (oven birds, grouse etc.) and possible starvation/disease for the deer. Woodlands do not appear to be healthy at all in Watchung, as there is severe lack of native flora understory and the next generation of trees (seedlings and saplings). Property owners likely experience deer in this condition eating landscape plants even beyond what deer will not normally ingest such as boxwood. This type of overabundance of deer often also results in increase vehicular accidents, injury and unfortunately, some even fatal. Somerset County remains one of the highest vehicular accident counties related to deer in New Jersey".

Each member of this committee was requested by the chairman to comment as to both the quotation and the committee member's reading of the two population survey documents which had been submitted to the members of this committee several days before this meeting. Such issues as safety, Lyme disease, water runoff, the pollution of waterways and the methodology of the survey process were discussed. Committee member Miller expressed his belief that the survey may not have taken into consideration that doe fertility rates may be declining. However, it was also pointed out that the fetuses recovered from the culled does indicated that on average most culled does still carried 2 to 3 fetuses. That rate would show no slow down in female fertility. Other members of the committee expressed the view that the count presented within the surveys represented a minimum count.

In addition to discussing the above mentioned vehicle safety, Lyme disease and stream pollution issues, the Committee also discussed the continuing loss of trees in our woods via disease, contractor removal and storms without any natural replacement of trees through sapling growth. A suggestion was made to consider a tree planting replacement

program for our woods; including a protection scheme for the new saplings from being browsed. Discussion followed that any woodlands restoration program should probably be addressed by the Environmental Commission. Therefore, the WMAC should try to meet with the Environmental Commission chaired by Karen Pennett.

Bottom line, all of the members of this committee agreed that Watchung is in the midst of an excessive deer population crisis. The majority of the members also agree that the Watchung Borough Deer Management Program for 2019-2020 should call for the reduction of the excessively high measured deer density. The pre-birthing 2019 Watchung deer density as determined by Steward Green is over Nine Hundred Percent (900%) greater than that recommended by professionals in the environmental field. Watchung measured 106 deer per square mile versus the average 10 per square mile recommendation.) Truly a crisis!

The reduction in deer density over the longer term may not be able to be accomplished via the current Firearms Sports Hunting Program, and may require additional Deer Management Techniques. The Committee agreed that there is a need to schedule additional meetings to address the severity of the deer density issue and to provide further Recommendations to the Mayor and Council on the possible ways to deal with this deer density crisis.

The meeting was concluded at about 10:00 AM.

Richard D. Wellbrock, Secretary