

Urban Deer Management Plan - Findings and Recommendations of the Helena Urban Wildlife Task Force

In 2007 the City of Helena “Urban Deer Management Plan - Findings and Recommendations of the Helena Urban Wildlife Task Force” (Plan) was adopted. This Plan states, *Over the past decade, the city of Helena has experienced an increase in the urban deer population that has threatened public health and safety, real and personal property, and welfare of the deer. In order to address urban deer issues, the Helena City Commission (Commission) passed a resolution to create the Helena Urban Wildlife Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force was charged with determining whether an urban deer problem exists and with identifying possible management options to be included in an urban deer management program (Program).*

The Task Force compiled the “City of Helena Urban Deer Management Plan - Findings and Recommendations of the Helena Urban Wildlife Task Force” (Plan) that summarizes the administrative process, technical information, and management options used to recommend specific management and administrative actions to the Commission. The intended use of the Plan is to provide the Commission with a starting point to move forward in adopting and implementing urban deer management actions through a Program.

This study found the following deer density in Helena: *At the current average density of more than 32.6 mule deer per square mile, the human social tolerance for urban deer appears to be declining.... Based on information from other cities that have established an urban deer density objective, the Task Force concluded that an urban deer density objective should be initially set at 25 deer per square mile. As additional urban deer inventory information is collected, this objective may be revised through the Adaptive Management Approach.*

At a density of 25 deer per square mile, Helena’s urban deer population would remain constant at approximately 380 deer. This current population estimate is considered conservative. ...Once the 25 deer per square mile density objective is reached, annual removal of urban deer to keep the population at the 380 population objective would be 166 deer.

The Plan summarizes the following about urban deer in Helena:

- *They are a natural and permanent part of the Helena community;*
- *They are currently a public health and safety problem in Helena;*
- *Lethal and non-lethal management actions are currently necessary;*
- *The population should be reduced and maintained through management actions;*
- *Management actions must be (1) safe, (2) humane, and (3) achievable;*
- *Management actions must build upon city ordinances and work to complement Helena’s values and quality of life; and*

- *Annual evaluation of management actions must include considerations for human health and safety, cost to implement, biological integrity, conflict resolution, and social / political realities.*

The Task Force recommends the Commission take the following actions:

- *Establish a permanent Urban Wildlife Advisory Committee;*
- *Create an administrative process to ensure the Plan remains current; and*
- *Implement immediate management actions to include a combination of: (1) conducting public education / outreach; (2) reviewing zoning / ordinances / laws; (3) promoting landscaping / repellents / barriers; and (4) hiring professional wildlife removers. Other management actions to evaluate over time include (1) fertility / sterility; (2) capture and euthanize; (3) certified public hunting; and (4) deer tracking & aversive conditioning. Future urban deer management actions will be determined following a full review of previous actions taken using the Adaptive Management Strategy.*