
MEMO

TO: OFA Board of Directors
FROM: Danie Glanc, OFA Farm Policy Analyst
DATE: August, 2022
RE: Middlesex Federation of Agriculture Resolution- Deer Population

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the OFA lobby the Ministry of Natural Resources to allow farmers to employ techniques such as noise, lights, dogs etc. to harass and break up these large groups of deer on farm properties and/or provide compensation for all damages.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the OFA lobby the Ontario government to reduce red tape, by prescribing in regulation under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, to enable a person to harass white-tailed deer, on the person's land, for the purposes of deterring white-tailed deer from damaging the person's property without needing to first obtain the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's specific authorization, and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the OFA work with the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and Indigenous groups to increase the sustainable harvest of white tail deer in Southern Ontario through more tags, longer hunting seasons and more cooperation between landowners and hunters.

Background

The white-tailed deer is the most abundant cervid species in Ontario. Deer are highly valued and unique members of Ontario's wildlife heritage and are an important component of Ontario's biodiversity. Deer contribute substantial social, economic and ecological benefits to the people of Ontario.

In some situations, deer come into conflict with people, as they can damage agricultural crops, impact protected areas and are the most common big game species involved in collisions with vehicles. As a result, deer are one of Ontario's more intensively managed species. Deer can cause considerable damage to agricultural crops, impact protected areas, and have the potential to transfer diseases, such as Chronic Wasting Disease, to captive cervid populations.

OFA supports sustainable white-tailed deer management, recognizing that high deer numbers in specific Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) may, in part, reflect the availability of agricultural crops as a food source. The negative impacts on farms and farmers from crop predation and damage can be addressed by curtailing deer populations in areas where agriculture is the principal land use. This would lessen the likelihood that deer will rely on agricultural crops as a

key food source. Regulated hunting plays a critical role in the overall management of deer populations, and in reducing the risks associated with disease transfer between deer populations.

Wildlife Damage Compensation

Wildlife damage imposes a significant financial burden on some Ontario farmers; not all farmers suffer from wildlife predation equally. The impacts vary. A farm's location and the characteristics of the surrounding lands play a significant role. Similarly, farm type also drives predation losses. Based on the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association's 2000 *Wildlife Impact Assessment for Ontario*, subsequently updated in 2009 by the George Morris Centre, wildlife damage to both crops and livestock amounted to \$41M in 2007; equivalent to \$50M in 2019 dollars. This amount simply adjusts for inflation but does not reflect any increases in crop or livestock prices or increasing yields from new crop varieties or livestock genetics.

While Ontario does compensate farmers for livestock and poultry losses attributed to wildlife under the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program (OWDCP), there is no comparable compensation for wildlife damage to crops. Annual compensation payments for wildlife damage have ranged between \$800,000 and \$1.6 million, making the amount of wildlife damage borne by crop producers far larger than that incurred by livestock producers, and their "hurt" is further compounded by the reality that crop producers have no program compensating them for their losses equivalent to the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program. Crop Insurance only pays when yields fall below a predetermined threshold; between 70% and 90% of the farm operation's calculated Average Farm Yield. Wildlife damage to crops is rarely large enough or sufficiently extensive enough to trigger a payment. These losses occur year after year, continually eroding farm yields and farm earnings. Profit margins for many crops are extremely slim, making 10% to 30% annual losses unsustainable.

Options for Removing Deer

Regulated Hunting Seasons

Hunting is not only a pastime for many Ontarians but is also central to the traditions of Indigenous people across the province. Licenced deer hunters benefit from the food provided, but also play an important role in minimizing crop damage, providing valuable harvest data and reducing vehicle collisions through population management. Hunting reports provide data to the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (MNDMNR) to make well-informed wildlife management decisions, including tag quotas, seasons, and bag limits.

Ontario's White-tailed Deer Population Objective Setting and Harvest Management Guidelines outline the approach for determining deer population objectives and for identifying the appropriate harvest management strategies for deer management in Ontario. Harvest management strategies in these guidelines refer to the broad suite of tools employed by the MNR to influence the provincially regulated deer hunt. Harvest management strategies are the primary methods used to help achieve the desired range in abundance of deer (population objective) within a landscape.

The guidelines acknowledge the uncertainty and many ecological and socio-economic considerations involved in deer management. To address the uncertainty and considerations, an adaptive deer management process is described that involves establishing population objectives, implementing appropriate harvest management strategies and evaluating success in achieving the population objectives.

White-tailed Deer Seasons in Middlesex County

Middlesex contains WMUs 91A, 92A, 92B, which allow deer hunting only with bows during:
October 1 to November 6,
November 14 to November 20,
November 28 to December 4,
December 12 to December 31

Controlled Deer Hunt Seasons in WMU 91A, 92AB

(With controlled deer hunt validation, obtained through successful draw)

WMU	Dates	Quota
91A+	November 7 to November 13	700
91A~	November 21 to November 27	100
91A+	December 5 to December 11	450
92A~	November 7 to November 13	350
92A~	November 21 to November 27	250
92A~	December 5 to December 11	300
92B~	November 7 to November 13	900
92B~	November 21 to November 27	700
92B~	December 5 to December 11 3	650

+ indicates that only shotguns and muzzle-loading guns are permitted
~ indicates that only muzzle-loading guns are permitted.

Farmer and Landowner Controlled Hunt Validation

Farmers and landowners (or an immediate relative) may be eligible to receive a controlled deer hunt validation for one controlled deer hunt season if they meet one of the following criteria:

- they own a parcel of 20 hectares (50 acres) or more of land in a WMU with a controlled hunt or,
- their occupation is farming and they have an OMAFRA Farm Business Registration Number (or letter of exemption from the Farm Organization Accreditation Tribunal) in a WMU with a controlled hunt or,
- they are the owner or the sole designated representative (president, vice-president, treasurer or secretary) of a company which owns a parcel of land of 20 hectares (50 acres) or more in the WMU with a controlled deer hunt.

Farmers and landowners who meet the eligibility criteria may submit one application for a controlled deer hunt validation by completing an attestation statement online or in-person at a participating ServiceOntario or licence issuer. An immediate relative of the farmer or landowner meeting the above criteria also qualifies to receive a controlled deer hunt validation tag.

Protection of Property

Under section 31 of the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997*, a person who believes on reasonable grounds that wildlife is damaging or is about to damage the person's property may:

- harass the wildlife for the purpose of deterring it from damaging the person's property; or
- capture or kill the wildlife.

However, this section *does not* apply to white-tailed deer; Special approval is required to harass, capture, or kill white-tailed deer that are damaging property, called an Agricultural Deer Removal Authorization.

Agricultural Deer Removal Authorization

Farmers suffering white-tailed deer damage to field crops, vegetable crops or orchards can apply to their MNDMNRF District Office for an Agricultural Deer Removal Authorization. A Deer Removal Authorization allows for the harassing or killing of deer, outside of the normal deer season. Additional authorizations can be issued if damage persists. Farmers who do not have the time or ability to shoot deer on an Agricultural Deer Removal Authorization can use an agent to act in their place. You must possess a valid FBR number, and own or occupy the farms where the deer removal will occur. Anyone with a valid hunting licence can be your agent(s).

Work by OFA on White-Tailed Deer and Wildlife Conflict

White-tailed Deer Hunting Seasons

MNDMNRF continues to focus on the management of white-tailed deer as an ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially important part of Ontario's natural landscape. There has been recent work done by the Ministry to update, simplify, align deer season types and duration across the province. These changes provide more clarity to hunters, maintain, and increase hunting opportunities, and improve consistency in wildlife management efforts.

Most recently:

ERO 019-4637: Proposal to simplify and align provincial white-tailed deer hunting seasons

The proposed amendments to O. Reg. 665/98 (Hunting) and O. Reg. 670/98 (Open Seasons) under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997* simplify and align deer seasons across the province to deliver a modern, efficient, and sustainable provincial deer harvest management system. The changes to specific WMUs included extending gun hunting seasons to provide a consistent end date, expanding the use of bows during gun hunting seasons, and aligning and simplifying season types and duration. However, WMU 91 and 92 were not included in these changes, which would make them the only areas in the province that would not permit the use of bows during the gun seasons. Feedback on this proposal suggest interest to make the same change in WMUs 91A-B and 92A-D.

ERO 019-5034: Proposal to align white-tailed deer hunting seasons in wildlife management units 91A-B and 92A-D

Based on feedback received from ERO 019-4637, MNDMNRF proposed amendments to regulations under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997* to permit the use of bows during the gun seasons in WMUs 91A-B and 92A-D. No decision on this proposal has been posted as of this date.

Human-Wildlife Conflict Advisory Group

OFA has been involved with the provincial government's Human-Wildlife Conflict Advisory Working Group (HWCAG). HWCAG was developed by the Ministry of Natural Resources in response to multi-stakeholder consultations in 2005 and 2008. The purpose of HWCAG is to examine the broad range of human-wildlife conflicts in Ontario including those that pose public safety issues, economic concerns, biodiversity impacts, or urban conflicts. Additionally, the group recommends priority actions for the implementation of the province's *Strategy for Preventing and Managing Human-Wildlife Conflicts in Ontario* and *Strategy for Preventing and Managing Human-Deer Conflicts in Southern Ontario*. The intent is to ensure a transparent, balanced, and comprehensive approach to human-wildlife conflict prevention.

Recommendations

- Recommend improvements to the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program to provide compensation for crop damage and losses caused by Ontario wildlife, or
- Recommended that the Ontario government create a wildlife damage compensation program to compensate crop producers for losses they experience due to Ontario wildlife.
- Engage Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and Indigenous groups on how to increase cooperation between landowners and hunters
- Await decision notice on ERO 019-5034, and provide feedback based on decision.