

Why manage deer?

Deer are an important part of Lake County's natural areas. Like other native species, they are beautiful and play a vital role in the ecosystem. But in some of our highest-quality preserves, deer numbers are so high that their populations are not in balance with the habitat. These large plant-eaters are consuming a great number of plants. Left unchecked, overbrowsing by deer damages habitat for other native plants and animals, including endangered species.

One of Lake County Forest Preserves' key roles is to preserve a diversity of habitats for future generations. To maintain a balance between deer and other species, our policy is to manage deer numbers in the most humane and effective way possible.

Ovenbird, © USFWS



Wood frog, © Evan HC Grant

A habitat recovers following deer management, once again providing cover for ground-nesting birds, woodland frogs and salamanders, and other wildlife.

Trillium - cover,
© Anna Buckard

Lake County Forest Preserves

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Printing Green The Lake County Forest Preserve District is committed to protecting the environment, conserving our natural resources and incorporating the best green practices in projects whenever possible.

This eco-friendly brochure was printed using vegetable-based inks on FSC certified paper made of 100% post-consumer waste fiber. The Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international organization founded to ensure sustainability of our natural resources and management of the world's forests.

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Natural Resource Management: Deer Populations



BALANCE



PRESERVE



RESTORE

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Spotted salamander
© Scott Albert

Nature's delicate balance

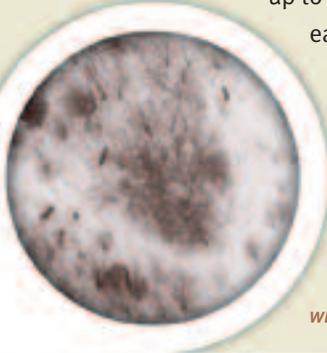
Deer populations increased dramatically as this region gradually became settled. Loss of natural predators and expansion of the edge habitat deer prefer have caused a major increase in their populations.

Lake County winters are not severe enough to naturally reduce herds, and automobiles are now the only significant "predator" of deer in Lake County. People can compound the problem by feeding deer, thereby supporting an even larger deer population.

Most female deer start to produce offspring when they're just two years old. They can breed for up to 12 years, some having twins each year.

All these factors cause population growth which greatly affects habitats.

Aerial surveys are one method of counting populations. They are conducted during winter when deer are most visible.



Extensive browse line from deer foraging illustrates damage to habitat and shelter for other wildlife species.

How do we monitor the deer's impact?

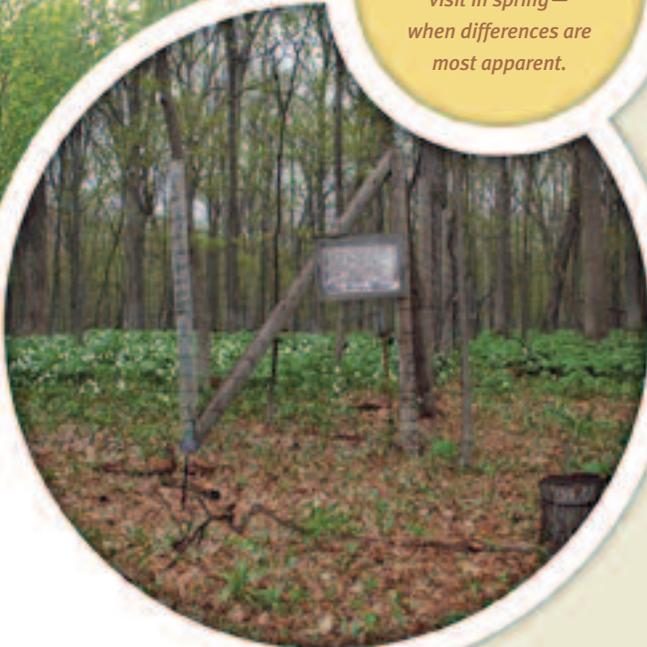
Our wildlife biologists have built "deer exclosures" at several preserves. Deer cannot get into these fenced-off areas, but squirrels, groundhogs and other plants-eaters can. Outside these exclosures the deer roam free. We measure and compare the plants in both areas to assess the impact deer have on the habitat.

Data collected since 1988 show that deer do pose a threat to the abundance and diversity of plants. Also, species favored by deer are less vigorous and produce fewer flowers outside the exclosures.

Humane removal

Lake County Forest Preserve staff keeps up-to-date on developments in the field of deer management. This ensures that our program is conducted using the most effective, efficient, and humane methods currently available. All methods used are approved by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Deer exclosure at Ryerson Conservation Area. To see a good example, visit in spring—when differences are most apparent.



It's all connected

Our goal is to manage the preserves for overall health of the ecosystem. Giving preference to one species would be irresponsible. Deer are a valuable part of a balanced ecosystem, along with all other native plants and animals, but their populations must be monitored.

Overabundant white-tailed deer populations can eliminate understory vegetation, directly impacting the plant community. Reduced

understory also decreases

cover that serves as nesting locations for ground-nesting birds, cover for woodland frogs and salamanders, and sheltered resting sites for other wildlife species.

Ultimately, deer can reduce vegetation so much that they no longer have adequate food to sustain their own population. When this occurs many deer die from starvation.

Fecal pellet counts and vegetation monitoring are completed to count populations and assess impact.



Overabundant deer populations also increase the risk for disease transmission (e.g. Chronic Wasting Disease), parasite transmission (e.g. deer ticks, which can carry the bacteria that causes Lyme disease), and deer-vehicle accidents.

At the preserves where deer are currently managed, research shows the overall health of the deer herds and plant communities have improved. Areas that were once almost void of vegetation now flourish with a diversity of flowering plants in the forest understory.