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Deer Damage Management Options for Municipalities in Illinois

A Guide to Implementing a Controlled Deer Hunt



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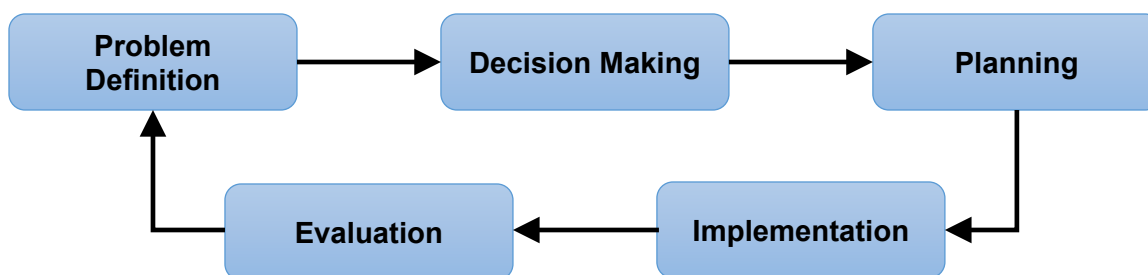


INTRODUCTION

This document was created by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to provide information to municipalities in Illinois seeking to address the complex issues associated with overabundant white-tailed deer while balancing the needs of diverse public interests.

For the purpose of this document, a municipality is defined as an entity with a governing board, such as a city, town, village, homeowner association, property owner association, park district, forest preserve/conservation district, etc. However, this document will certainly have applicability to a broader audience as well.

The management of deer populations in urban and suburban areas is challenging and often controversial. Since hunting opportunities are often limited in these areas due to safety concerns and few locations to hunt, deer numbers often increase to problematic levels. In addition to the safety issues associated with hunting in populated areas, there is also likely to be diverse groups of stakeholders with a wide range of conflicting viewpoints on how best to address the issues associated with deer. Municipal officials should follow a clear, transparent process for defining deer-related problems, making decisions, and planning, implementing, and evaluating a deer control program in order to navigate the complex and contentious nature of managing deer in urban and suburban areas.



Process for navigating the management of deer in urban and suburban areas (adapted from [Community Deer Advisor](#)).

Role of hunting in deer management – In Illinois, hunting during the regular statewide seasons is the primary method of effectively, safely, and inexpensively controlling numbers of deer. Prior to European settlement, the deer population in Illinois was kept in balance with the environment through hunting by indigenous peoples and predation by large predators, such as cougars and wolves. Hunting remains necessary because Illinois settlers disrupted the natural population controls on deer by extirpating large predators. In the absence of adequate population controls, deer can become too abundant and can damage property and cause a decline in biodiversity.

In agricultural areas deer can damage crops and orchards. In urban areas, deer can quickly decimate gardens or damage plants and other landscaping. In natural areas, deer can change the structure of the local plant community by reducing the diversity of plants, eliminating the forest understory, and extirpating local populations of rare plants. These negative impacts on the vegetation eventually impact the deer because there is no longer enough vegetation to provide them with sufficient food. The negative impacts on plants also negatively impact other species of wildlife that depend on them for food, cover, and nesting. And, more deer on the landscape means a higher rate of deer-vehicle accidents.

Another consequence of overabundant deer is possible disease transmission. Some diseases, such as [Chronic Wasting Disease](#) (CWD), are spread from deer to deer by direct contact or at contaminated feeding sites (e.g., illegal bait piles). Higher densities of deer lead to higher rates of disease transmission within the deer population.

Hunting during the regular statewide seasons is used to maintain the numbers of deer at a level where the damage caused by deer is reduced to an amount that is environmentally and socially acceptable.



More information about the management of deer in Illinois can be found on the [White-tailed Deer Illinois](#) website.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Due to the complex and controversial nature of managing deer populations in urban and suburban areas, it is important to define the problems being caused by deer and collect associated data to support the need for deer management.

Identification of the need for deer management – There are many reasons a municipality may decide to manage the local deer population, however not every municipality is the same and, therefore, should identify the specific deer-related issues they are experiencing. This can be done in a number of ways including the use of existing data, documentation of complaints from residents, conducting periodic surveys of resident attitudes, etc. The primary reasons that municipalities manage the local deer population are because of deer-vehicle accidents, damage to landscaping and gardens, and damage to natural areas.

Deer-vehicle accidents

Data on deer-vehicle accidents can be obtained from local police departments and transportation departments. This data can be used to evaluate annual trends in deer-vehicle accidents to determine if accidents are increasing over time and if accidents decrease in response to deer management efforts.



Information on deer-vehicle accidents can also be found on the [White-tailed Deer Illinois](#) website.

Damage to landscaping and gardens

A common issue related to deer in municipalities is the damage caused by deer to landscaping and gardens. Data on this type of damage can be obtained by keeping accurate records of complaints received via telephone, email, letters, etc. from residents or by conducting periodic surveys of residents to determine the types and extent of damage being experienced.



Damage to natural areas

Many municipalities have natural spaces, such as parks and wooded areas, within their jurisdiction. These areas often serve as refuges for deer and experience increased browsing pressure from deer. This results in damage to native plant communities, including understory vegetation, shrubs, and young trees. Vegetation surveys, such as browse surveys, exclosure and control plots, and monitoring of indicator plants, can be used to document the extent of damage caused by deer to native plant communities.



Other

Municipalities may identify other issues of concern, such as Lyme disease and tick-borne infections, feces in yards, harm to pets, and “tame” deer. It is important to identify and document these concerns if they are present, however issues such as these can be more difficult to quantify than the issues listed above.



DECISION MAKING

Municipalities often face substantial public scrutiny when making decisions regarding the management of deer within their jurisdiction. It is important to have a transparent decision-making process that involves setting goals and objectives and considering actions to achieve the objectives.

Defining goals – Municipalities should define general goals that address the long-term purpose for deer population reduction and/or control. Using the issues identified in the Problem Definition phase (e.g., deer-vehicle accidents, damage to landscaping/gardens, and damage to natural areas), goals can be defined that reflect attainable outcomes or desired future conditions to be achieved through deer population management.

Example:

- 1) During the Problem Definition phase, a municipality identified deer-vehicle accidents as an issue of concern
- 2) Data was collected that showed an increasing trend in deer-vehicle accidents on the roads within the municipality
- 3) Current rates of deer-vehicle accidents exceeded 30 per year
- 4) The municipality considered this level of deer-vehicle accidents to be too high
- 5) The municipality defined a goal to reduce deer-vehicle accidents on local roads to a level acceptable to the residents

This goal serves to communicate a desired future condition that can be achieved through efforts to reduce and control the local deer population.

Defining objectives – Objectives are the detailed steps that must be accomplished to achieve the stated goals. Objectives describe specifically what is expected to be achieved through deer control activities. Quantifiable, or measurable, objectives are preferred and are critical for assessing the success of the management program. Using the goals defined earlier in the Decision Making phase (e.g., deer-vehicle accidents, damage to landscaping/gardens, and damage to natural areas), specific objectives can be defined for reducing the current level of damage to some specific lower value deemed by the municipality to be acceptable.

Example:

- 1) Earlier in the Decision Making phase, a municipality defined a goal of reducing deer-vehicle accidents on roads within the municipality to a level acceptable to the residents
- 2) The data showed that current rates of deer-vehicle accidents exceeded 30 per year, which the municipality considered too high
- 3) The municipality looked at historical records of deer-vehicle accidents and compared them with data obtained from resident surveys conducted over the past 15 years
- 4) The evaluation of that data showed that residents found the level of deer-vehicle accidents 7 years ago to be acceptable
- 5) Seven years ago, there were approximately 10 deer-vehicle accidents
- 6) To achieve a level of deer-vehicle accidents considered acceptable by the residents, the municipality defined an objective to reduce the number of deer-vehicle accidents to less than 10 per year on roads within the municipality

This objective serves as a quantifiable means of assessing the success of efforts to reduce and control the local deer population.

Safety considerations – Safety is one of the main concerns that municipalities have regarding the selection of a deer control method. Approaches for increasing safety for hunters and the public during controlled hunts are specified in the Implementation section below. Both controlled hunts and special deer control permits (primarily DPCPs) are safely implemented in municipalities in many areas of Illinois and throughout the United States. Contact the [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) for more information on how controlled hunts and special deer control permits can be safely implemented.

Consideration of local ordinances – Municipalities must examine any existing ordinances that restrict or prohibit the use of archery equipment or firearms within the municipality. If deciding to implement a controlled hunt, local ordinances must be changed accordingly.

Selecting a management option – There are many variables for a municipality to consider when selecting a method for managing the local deer population. There is no one-size fits all approach, so each municipality must consider its own unique situation. Integrating multiple options, including non-lethal and lethal, is often most effective for reducing deer damage issues.

The most basic option for responding to deer-related damage is to do nothing and hope that excess deer numbers and associated damage are due to a temporary disturbance or distribution of deer and/or that deer numbers will become self-limiting. However, this is rarely the case. Doing nothing, or “letting nature take its course”, constitutes conscious inaction or avoidance of the deer-related problem. Although doing nothing is very acceptable to some segments of the urban/suburban public and is inexpensive to implement, the deer-related damage will likely increase and may result in considerable financial loss to property owners and homeowners, and/or irreversible damage to natural areas.

When inaction is not sufficient to address deer-related damage, there are many non-lethal options for reducing damage caused by deer. Non-lethal options for addressing deer-related damage are primarily for use by individual property owners and involve the application of various repellents, deterrents, fencing, and installation of plants avoided, or not preferred, by deer.

When the extent of deer-related damage is greater than can be addressed solely by individual residents due to the abundance and distribution of deer, and non-lethal options have proven ineffective, active deer population control by the municipality may be necessary. There are four options to consider when selecting a management method to reduce and control the size of the local deer population in urban and suburban areas: 1) Regular Statewide Deer Hunting, 2) Controlled Hunting, 3) a Deer Removal Permit (DRP), and 4) a Deer Population Control Permit (DPCP). The DRP and DPCP are two types of special deer control permits issued by IDNR that authorize the lethal removal of deer outside the regular hunting seasons. The two methods most suitable and effective for use in urban and suburban areas are controlled hunting and the Deer Population Control Permit (DPCP), however all methods have advantages and disadvantages that municipalities should consider in the decision-making process (those presented here are not an exhaustive list).

The [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) can provide recommendations to municipalities and individual homeowners on the wide array of deer management options available, including non-lethal and lethal techniques, and which techniques are likely to be the most effective in a particular situation.

Non-lethal options

Non-lethal methods for abatement of deer damage fall into four basic categories: habitat modification; repellents; deterrents; and exclusion.

Habitat modification involves making alterations to a property to make it less desirable to deer

- In municipal areas, this often involves replacing ornamental plants that deer prefer with other species of plants that are less susceptible to deer browsing (planting thorny, prickly, or smelly plants can deter deer browsing)
- In some situations, habitat modification can also involve the clearing of wooded or shrubby areas (such as along roadsides) to reduce the amount of cover that is available to deer

Repellents are used to reduce the damage that deer cause to ornamental plantings and gardens, but do not eliminate damage

- The use of repellents involves the application of specific chemicals or other products designed to make vegetation smell bad, taste bad, or both
- The effectiveness of repellents depends upon local deer density, the availability of other foods, the palatability of the plants being protected, and the regularity with which the repellent is used
- To be most effective, it is best to apply repellents before damage begins
- Must be reapplied periodically and after rain
- Deer may become habituated to repellents resulting in diminishing effectiveness over time

Deterrents are products designed to make deer feel unsafe in a particular area

- The use of deterrents includes the use of products such as motion-activated sprinklers, ultrasonic pest deterrents, and inflatable scare crows
- There are also many home-made deterrents such as hanging bars of deodorant soap and hanging bags of human hair that can be effective in some cases
- The presence of a dog can also aid in keeping deer away from an area
- Deer may become habituated to deterrents resulting in diminishing effectiveness over time

Exclusion of deer from plants or areas where deer are unwanted is often the most effective non-lethal method for reducing damage caused by deer

- Exclusion options can include protecting individual plants or trees with a woven-wire cylinder or tree wrap, placing netting over bushes or other plants, protecting small gardens with 5'-6' fencing, and protecting larger properties with 8'-10' fencing (there are a number of possible fence designs depending on the size of the area to be protected and the population of deer in the area)
- Note that most municipalities have ordinances that limit the types and heights of fencing allowed, so it is important to make sure that any fencing used to reduce deer damage is consistent with local ordinances

Regular statewide deer hunting season

Harvesting deer during the regular archery and firearm deer hunting seasons helps keep deer from becoming overabundant. Hunting during the statewide deer hunting seasons is structured under the statewide hunting regulations. This is the primary method used in Illinois for the control of the deer population and allows any hunter, who obtains the appropriate license(s), stamp(s), and permit(s), and follows the rules set forth in the [Illinois Digest of Hunting and Trapping Regulations](#) (hereafter “Digest”), to harvest a deer.

The use of hunting to manage deer populations within municipalities is often limited by restrictions (e.g., ordinances) placed on the use of archery equipment and firearms within the municipality. If restrictions do not exist, there are several advantages and disadvantages to consider.

Advantages:

- Low cost due to no administration of a hunting program
- Hunters can be distributed at multiple locations simultaneously
- Provides recreational opportunity for residents
- Hunters can keep the deer they harvest

Disadvantages:

- Municipality has no control over the amount of time participants spend hunting
- Municipality has no control over the number of deer harvested
- Safety and potential conflicts with non-hunters are an issue since there are no “controls” in place and no administration by the municipality of a formal hunting program
- No requirement for hunters to report harvested deer to the municipality, so the numbers of deer removed within the municipality is not known



Controlled hunting

Deer population management becomes more difficult as the proportion of the deer population accessible to hunters decreases. In developed areas, such as municipalities, a proportion of the deer population is often inaccessible to hunting due to restrictions (e.g., ordinances) on the use of firearms and archery equipment within the jurisdiction of the municipality. Further, parks, nature preserves, other natural areas, and larger properties are often closed to hunting, thereby providing refuges for deer. In these situations, safety is typically an even greater concern due to the dense human population and the density of residential and commercial development. Under these circumstances, municipal officials can still utilize the standard framework of the statewide hunting regulations but establish additional “controls” to increase the margin of safety for hunting within a municipality and increase program effectiveness. A few examples of “controls” that municipalities may implement include: to require prospective hunters to pass a shooting proficiency test; to require hunters to hunt from elevated stands to ensure downward trajectory of shots; to restrict the days of the week or hours of the day during which hunting can occur in order to minimize encounters with other users of the property; and to require that hunters harvest a doe before taking a buck in order to more effectively control the deer population.

Controlled hunting has been used by many municipalities to safely and effectively reduce and control the local deer population. It is generally a low-cost option that still allows the municipality a level of control over the participants in order to increase safety and encourage sufficient harvest to reduce and control deer numbers.

Advantages:

- Generally low cost
- Can charge participants a reasonable fee for participation
- Hunters can be distributed at multiple locations simultaneously
- Provides recreational opportunity for residents
- Hunters can keep the deer they harvest

Disadvantages:

- Municipality has little control over the amount of time participants spend hunting
- Municipality has little control over the number of deer harvested
- May take many years to sufficiently reduce the deer population



Deer Removal Permit (DRP)

[Deer Removal Permits](#) are typically issued to individual landowners, but also can be issued to municipalities to control damage caused by deer in localized areas, such as golf courses, nurseries, orchards, parks, or natural areas, at the time the damage is occurring

- DRPs are issued for a maximum of 30 days and allow the removal of ≤10 deer to augment other forms of damage abatement being used to reduce deer-related damage
- DRPs permit only the use of firearms to harvest deer, so municipalities must consider any pertinent ordinances restricting the discharge of firearms
- DRPs will not permit the use of archery equipment, handguns, or muzzle-loading rifles
- DRPs allow up to two shooters on the permit; shooters must have a valid Firearm Owner's Identification (FOID) card unless exempted by law (430 ILCS 65)
- IDNR recommends that deer collected under authority of a DRP be used for human consumption, but carcass disposition is at the discretion of the permittee (disposition must comply with provisions of the Illinois Dead Animal Disposal Act)

The applicability of the use of a Deer Removal Permit to reduce damage caused by deer in municipalities is limited to localized areas, such as an individual golf course, tree nursery, orchard, park, or small natural area. Since Deer Removal Permits are not intended for deer population control, they are only effective at reducing localized damage at the time it is occurring.

Advantages:

- Municipality can control the actions of the participants (shooters)

Disadvantages:

- Limited to 10 deer, so only applicable for deer damage issues in localized areas
- Does not control the deer population



Contact your local District Wildlife Biologist in the [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) to describe the type of damage and request a removal permit. The biologist will provide additional information about DRPs and conduct an on-site inspection to document and verify the occurrence and extent of the deer damage.

Deer Population Control Permit (DPCP)

[Deer Population Control Permits](#) are issued to agencies, organizations, associations, or municipalities to authorize the reduction or control of deer numbers by non-traditional or non-hunting methods such as sharpshooting deer at bait sites using rifles or shotguns with slugs, and live-capture followed by euthanasia.

- There is an application process which requires the agency or organization to submit a deer management proposal which documents the need for deer herd reduction by non-traditional methods, such as sharpshooting
- DPCPs only permit the use of modern rifles or shotguns for sharpshooting programs, and will not permit the use of archery equipment, handguns, muzzle-loading rifles, etc
- The prevailing objectives for most current deer control programs under these permits are to: 1) reduce damage to native plant communities or ecosystems; 2) reduce deer-vehicle accidents on the property or adjacent roads; and 3) reduce damage complaints from residents or neighbors
- DPCPs are issued for a maximum of 90 days (time extensions are possible) and are generally conducted during the cooler late fall and winter months (November through March), since deer collected under DPCPs *must* be used for human consumption
- There is no limit on the numbers of deer that can be taken, but the number proposed to be collected must be justified in the application
- If the permit applicant is proposing to take deer at bait stations via sharpshooters, all sharpshooter candidates must be tested and seasonally-approved by IDNR prior to program implementation (there is no limit on the number of sharpshooters, but all sharpshooters must have a valid FOID card unless exempted by law (430 ILCS 65))
- All proposed shooting/bait sites must be approved by IDNR prior to their use
- Lethal techniques authorized under DPCPs must be such that the resulting deer carcasses are suitable for human consumption (the permittee is required to have all usable deer carcasses processed at an IDNR-approved meat processing facility and to donate the processed venison to a legitimate charitable organization)
- Within 30 days of permit expiration, the permittee must submit to IDNR a summary of their deer removal activities including information on each deer collected
- DPCP programs are considered long-term management programs that typically operate on an annual basis in order to sufficiently reduce deer numbers and to maintain the benefits associated with herd reduction (applications for DPCPs are required annually)
- The permittee is responsible for all costs associated with the deer control program



A DPCP is the more costly of the four options discussed here, however they often are the most effective at quickly reducing and controlling deer numbers in localized or widespread areas provided a sufficient intensity of removal effort.

Advantages:

- Municipality can control the actions of the participants (shooters)
- Municipality can control the intensity of the removal effort
- Capable of reducing the deer population more quickly than other methods
- Processed venison from harvested deer is donated to charities, benefitting people in need of assistance with food

Disadvantages:

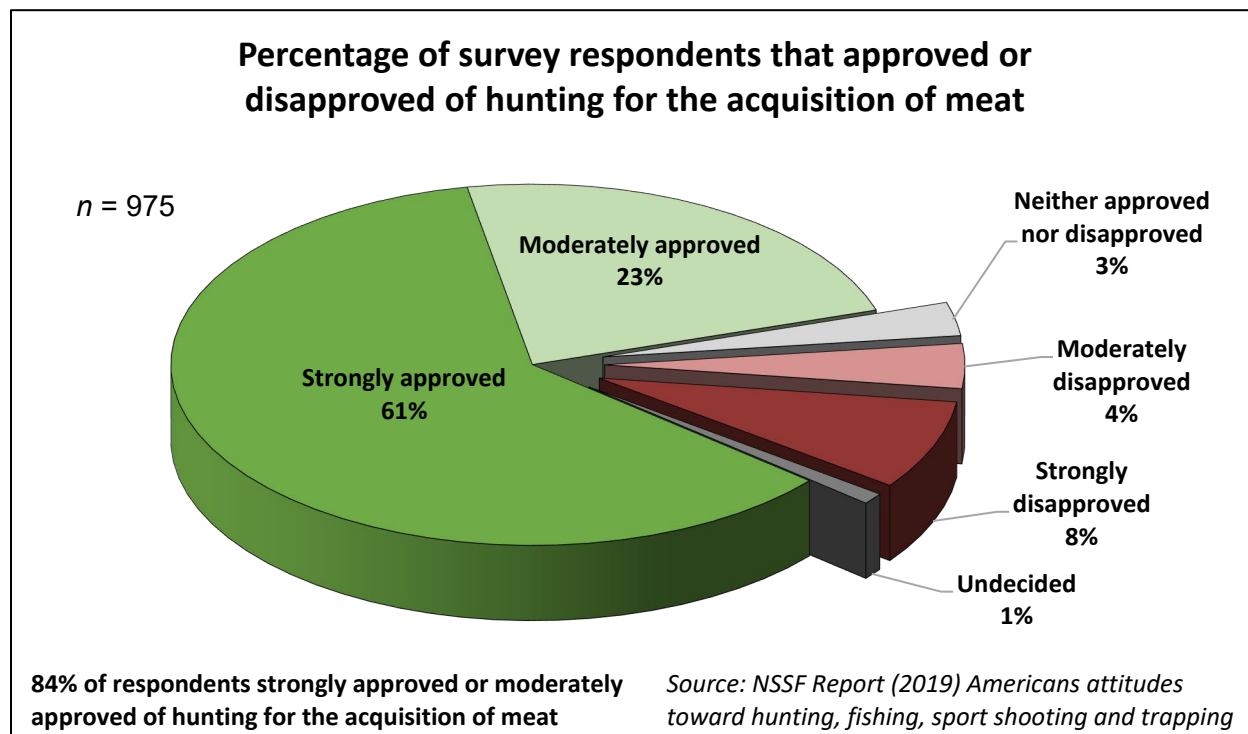
- Shooting is generally limited to a few sites at a time due to staff/contractor limitations
- Tends to be expensive
 - Program costs often range between \$200 and \$600 per deer
 - Municipality must pay for staff time and/or a contractor
 - Municipality must pay for transportation of deer to a processor
 - Municipality must pay for deer processing

To apply for a DPCP, or for more information about controlling the local deer population, contact the IDNR Urban Deer Biologist at (847) 798-7620.

Note: DPCPs are not issued for experimental techniques, such as fertility control (e.g., sterilization or immunocontraception), or for the live-capture and translocation of deer. These techniques have not been proven effective in reducing numbers of deer in wild populations. Additionally, fertility control methods often cost 2-3 times more than lethal control techniques.



Garnering and sustaining public support for hunting – Public acceptance of a deer hunting program is one of the greatest challenges to implementing and sustaining a program long-term. There will always be some constituents that do not support hunting, but most will. Several national surveys have reported at least 77% of Americans approve of hunting for ethical reasons, such as acquisition of natural meat.



Many municipal deer hunting programs have continued successfully because public acceptance was considered from the following perspectives:

Biological

Focus on public awareness of how deer hunting can improve health aspects of deer, other wildlife and humans (for example, harvesting deer can decrease risk of deer contracting [Chronic Wasting Disease](#), which helps the long-term outlook for the entire deer population and preserves a source of healthy meat for hunters).

Environmental

Focus on public awareness of how too many deer can cause negative impacts that can cascade throughout the environment (for example, when deer are too abundant, they commonly over-consume plants that are important habitat for other wildlife, and loss of plants can then lead to increased soil erosion and possibly pollution that can have negative impacts on water quality and organisms that live in water).

Sociopolitical

Anticipate what benefits and constraints a deer hunting program would face in the current political landscape and discuss the program purpose from biological and environmental perspectives during the decision-making phase. Also, identify how deer management is necessary to increase satisfaction of most constituents and communicate that to municipal and local policymakers

Research – One or more methods of research can be used to bolster the efficacy of implementing and sustaining a deer hunting program. Some municipalities with long-term hunting programs have found research is critical to public acceptance. These activities may also be suitable for assistance from hunters, particularly if using a volunteer point system for determining participation.

Resident surveys

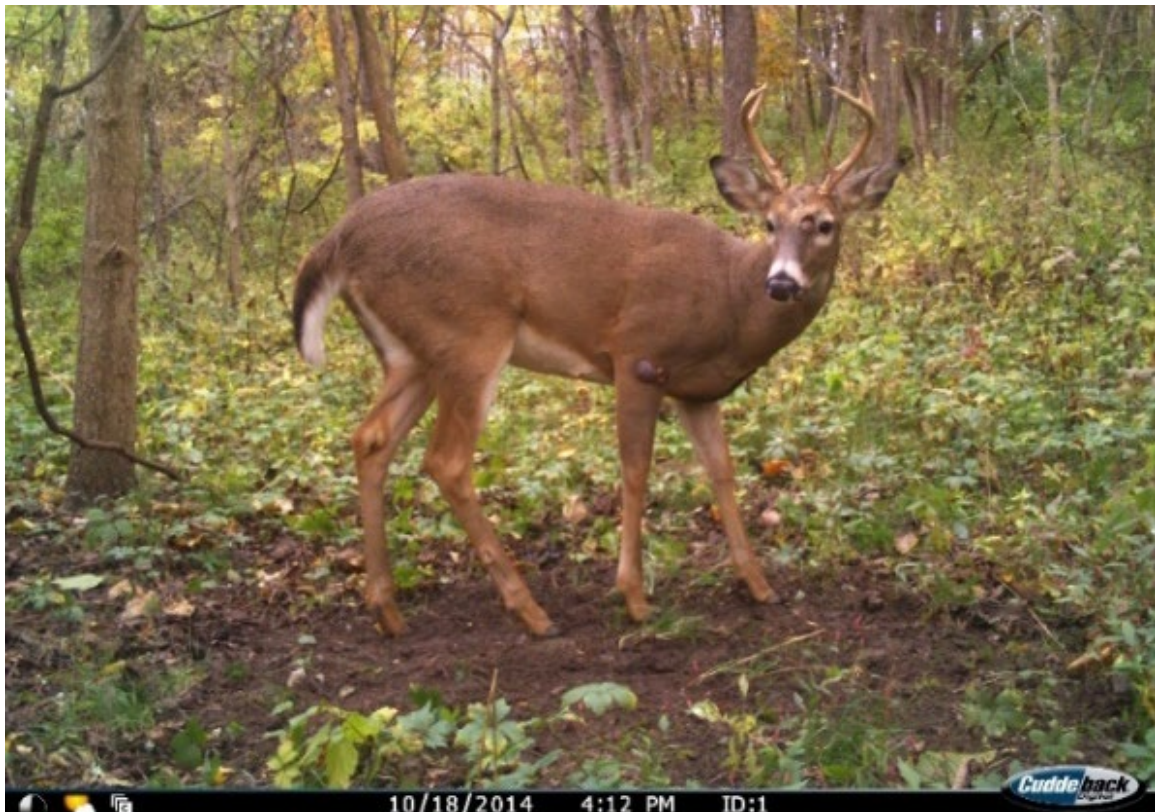
- Surveys of local constituents prior to and after program implementation is a good way to gauge how the public would most accept a hunting program and issues they may or may not have with deer (a survey could be administered annually to monitor public acceptance of the program over time)

Hunter surveys

- Have hunters provide data on the number of deer seen during hunting and collect data on the sex and age of harvested deer to provide detailed information on the effectiveness of the program over time (contact the [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) for guidance on collecting these data)

Trail camera surveys

- Trail camera surveys can be used to count the number of deer and assess the trend in deer numbers over time



- Generally, one camera should be placed for every 40 acres hunted; contact the [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) for guidance on designing a camera study
- Trail cameras are also a good way to photograph other wildlife and useful for outdoor education purposes

Deer exclosures

- Square deer exclosures (at least 5'W x 6'H) made of small-mesh fencing are a good way to measure and visually show if hunting is reducing deer damage to plants



- Ideally, exclosures should be placed near trails where the public can read signage about the purpose of the exclosure
- Exclosures placed around sensitive plants or purposely placed plants (e.g., oak seedlings) are also useful for monitoring the need for deer control relative to native habitat restoration

PLANNING

Before implementing a controlled hunting program, a municipality should educate themselves on the current state regulations and requirements for deer hunting, as well as what is important for selecting hunting locations, hunting seasons, and proficient hunters.

General deer hunting information – To aid in the planning of a controlled hunting program, it is important to understand existing deer hunting regulations. **For the most up-to-date information on current rules, equipment regulations, and clothing requirements, refer to the current edition of the [Digest](#) and the [Hunt Illinois](#) website.**

Deer hunting seasons – Municipalities have the option to tailor hunting to several seasons that occur during fall and winter, with each having slightly different rules. **For the most up-to-date information on deer hunting seasons refer to the current edition of the [Digest](#) and [Hunt Illinois](#).**

Archery

- Season dates generally run from October 1st to mid-January
- Archery season is suspended during firearm season in counties with firearm hunting

Firearm

- 7-day split season with dates generally occurring at the end of November and the beginning of December
- Shotgun, muzzleloader, or handgun
- For regulations on legal firearms, refer to the most current [Digest](#)

Muzzleloader Only

- Season dates generally occur at the beginning of December and middle of December
- For regulations on legal muzzleloaders, refer to the most current [Digest](#)

Late Winter Antlerless/Special CWD

- Season dates generally occur late December through mid-January
- Counties included in the late-winter antlerless season and special CWD season can change annually and are posted each October (check for eligibility before allowing hunting during this season)
- Shotgun, muzzleloader, or handgun
- For regulations on legal firearms, refer to the most current [Digest](#)

License/stamp requirements – To hunt deer, residents and non-residents are required to possess a current Illinois hunting license, a Habitat Stamp, and one or more deer permits. Some exemptions exist; refer to the Deer Hunting Credentials table in the current [Digest](#).

Deer permit requirements – Various types of permits exist depending on the season, hunter age, veteran status, and other characteristics. **For current information on deer permit requirements, including dates and guidelines, refer to the Deer Hunting section in the current [Digest](#).**

- Hunters may apply for a [deer permit online](#) or by contacting the IDNR Springfield permit office at 217-782-7305

Selection of suitable properties/zones for hunting – Selecting huntable areas should be done with the consideration of biological, social, and environmental factors.

- Up-to-date browse surveys and herd estimates can assist in selecting the best suited areas for harvest and hunter satisfaction (suggestions are provided under Research in the Decision Making section of this guide; also an [IDNR District Wildlife Biologist](#) may provide additional guidance)
- While hunters are the main constituents in a controlled hunting program, they are not the only property users to consider
 - Hikers and other recreationalists need to be considered when delineating zones
- Areas where minimal to no interactions occur between hunters and non-hunters (while hunting and/or tracking) are ideal to reduce conflicts
 - Choose suitable properties where the only access available is for hunting
 - Close off or limit access to trails through hunting areas during hunting seasons
 - If an area with access must remain open or limited access maintained (not recommended for firearm hunts), make sure to communicate this clearly with the hunters and the public to avoid negative interactions
- Properties of adequate size must be selected to meet the requirements for the minimum distance from an inhabited dwelling for each hunting method
 - Archery hunters must be a minimum of 100 yards from an inhabited dwelling unless written permission has been obtained from the owner or tenant
 - Firearm hunters must be a minimum of 300 yards from an inhabited dwelling unless written permission has been obtained from the owner or tenant
- Zones and hunting locations should be designated to allow deer to travel 200 yards in any direction from the location of the hunter without entering another zone or private property (deer do not often travel this far after a lethal shot, but preparation is important)



Selection of appropriate deer hunting seasons –The IDNR has established several seasons that permit the use of only particular types of hunting methods, such as archery or firearm. The selection of seasons to utilize for a controlled hunt depends on several factors including safety and properties of adequate size to meet the minimum distance requirements for that particular hunting method.

Archery

- In urban areas where the discharge of firearms may be an issue, archery hunting is the safest option (ensure compliance with local ordinances)
- A long season allows more opportunity and program flexibility
- Archery equipment is quiet and more discrete
- Simpler to plot hunt areas and plan for number of hunters per unit
- Some counties have restricted antlered only harvest, this list can be found in the latest issue of the [Digest](#)
- May need to account for sufficient area for deer to run after being shot to prevent traveling onto an adjacent property or road
- Potential wounding of deer may cause concern for adjacent neighbors (implementing shooting proficiency qualifications can help minimize this)

Firearm (Muzzleloader Only Season included)

- Best suited for less populated areas with large properties
- Firearms seasons are attractive to many prospective hunters
- Allow for increased harvest numbers during these seasons, helping to increase hunter satisfaction and/or achievement of management goals
- Tree stands are encouraged to keep shot trajectory toward the ground, but stand density may need to be controlled to prevent any negative interactions between hunters
- In urban areas, ensure compliance with local ordinances

Late Winter Antlerless/Special CWD

- Only if the county is open to the annual late winter antlerless or the special CWD season (a current list can be found in the [Digest](#))
- Utilizing this additional season can help achieve management goals



Selection of hunters – The selection of hunters involves the consideration of whom, when and where hunting will occur to meet the needs of the controlled hunting program.

- Consider designing the program to have several periods (e.g., 2 weeks per period) within the hunting season to allow more hunters to participate
- Prioritize selection of municipal or Illinois residents to promote serving constituents and likelihood of frequent hunting trips (note that if the property to be hunted was acquired through an [OSLAD](#) grant, restrictions cannot be placed on hunters' residency; maximizing opportunities for all constituents is a major IDNR initiative and designated opportunities for new hunters and minorities are encouraged)
- Specific zones and/or periods can be set aside for specific types of hunters
- Opportunities for physically disabled hunters should also be given consideration (developing at least one easily accessible blind for disabled hunters is a worthwhile contribution to a hunting program)
- The number of hunters selected to participate annually in the program will depend on several factors, such as the size of the hunting area, number of hunting zones or locations, and number of deer to remove (when selecting the number of hunters, assume they will harvest the maximum number of deer allowed so that the program does not exceed the annual harvest goal; annually rotating in hunters that have not previously participated in the program is encouraged)
- These steps can be used to screen and select hunters for program participation:
 - Use an online and/or paper application process to collect a pool of potential hunters (typically, more individuals will want to participate than can be accommodated; in the event fewer hunters apply than are desired, participation logistics may be flexed or the program advertised to a wider pool)
 - Hold an online or in-person drawing of applicants who are assigned a random number and ranked accordingly
 - Use an in-person two-stage process to screen hunters
 - Administer a short quiz on state hunting regulations and/or your hunting programs regulations to verify potential hunters have accurate and ethical knowledge (some hunters will not have taken a hunter safety course in several decades)
 - Require potential hunters to successfully complete a proficiency test using the method (archery or firearm) allowed during the hunt (IDNR recommends proficiency is met when the hunter can place 4 out of 5 arrows or slugs within an 8-inch diameter circle at a range of 20 yards for archery and 75 yards for firearm)
 - If there are more individuals passing both stages than can be accommodated, use their randomly generated number from step 2 to select the final participants
 - Collect a participation fee from selected hunters (if applicable) and have each hunter sign a form stating that they agree to adhere to the program rules
 - Municipal programs generally charge \$20-200 per individual (fees may be tiered based on place of residency, such as in- or out-of-county)
 - Volunteer workdays also may be used to offset, or in lieu of, program fees (some hunting programs use this approach and require hunters to participate in several hours of designated habitat management activities or other site improvement projects, including activities for disabled hunters; a participation waiver is used to cover liability of volunteers)
 - A point system can be used to screen and select hunters (for example, an individual could get a set number of points based on their residency status, hours of volunteer work, or years applying without being selected to participate)

IMPLEMENTATION

When hunting is the best option for managing deer, strong consideration should be given to how hunting will be implemented to maximize safety, effectiveness, and public acceptability. The [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) encourages municipalities to use deer management regulations outlined in the Planning section as a framework for controlled hunting. Deer regulations vary by county, so municipalities implementing hunting are advised to discuss regulations with [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) staff during the planning stage.

Safety – The safety of both the public and the hunters should be a primary consideration when implementing a hunting program.

Public safety

- Notify local law enforcement and [IDNR Law Enforcement](#) of program details prior to the start of the hunting season
- Provide notification of the hunting program on the municipal website or social media and possibly issue a press release
- If acceptable, close the hunting area(s) to non-hunters during the hunting period(s)
- Place barriers, such as sawhorses, at trailheads to limit access to the hunting area(s)
- Install highly visible signs during the hunting period that notify the public of concurrent hunting
- Do not allow archery and firearm hunters to hunt within 75 yards and 100 yards, respectively, of a designated walking trail or building
- Do not allow hunting of any other species besides deer, unless for wildlife management purposes
- Do not allow target shooting or random shooting in the hunting areas

Hunter safety

- Before hunting:
 - A few weeks prior to the beginning of the hunting season, hold a mandatory meeting with all selected hunters and go over the rules and regulations (during this meeting have hunters sign any necessary paperwork, including a form stating they agree to abide by all state and program rules)
 - Participants in the hunting program should provide proof of successful completion of a [Hunter Safety Course](#) in Illinois or another state (some Illinois hunting licenses (e.g., Youth) do not require the holder to have a hunter safety class, but these individuals are required to have a mentor with them during the hunt)
 - Firearm hunters with Illinois residency should provide their valid Firearm Owners Identification (FOID) card (a photocopy is recommended for municipal records)
 - Collect contact information, including an emergency contact, from all hunters
 - Provide hunters with a number to call if an issue arises, such as harassment
 - Require hunters to supply their own equipment, including tree stands or blinds
 - Distribute hunters throughout the property(ies) being hunted to reduce crowding, particularly if firearms are allowed (this can be achieved by requiring participants to hunt from predetermined locations or zones)
 - Do not allow hunters to hunt in locations or zones other than those designated to them during the stated period

- Let hunters know that hunting areas may be closed without prior notice for reasons of safety, security, or conservation
- Do not allow off-road vehicles (e.g., ATVs) to be used unless meeting municipal mobility device regulations
- No hunter shall be intoxicated, possess, or consume alcoholic beverages or drugs before or while hunting
- During hunting:
 - Require hunters to sign in and out daily using paper and/or digital logs to verify all hunters are accounted for in event of an emergency
 - Require hunters to have all bows and firearms unloaded while walking to and from their hunting location
 - When feasible, require participants to hunt from elevated stands, or ground blinds on hilltops, where shot trajectory is downward
 - Require hunters to wear a safety harness when using elevated stands
 - Require any hunter under age 18 to be accompanied by a non-hunting adult
 - Require firearm hunters to wear state-mandated blaze orange or blaze pink clothing and recommend archery hunters wear a hat with one of these colors when walking to and from their hunting location
 - Do not allow “driving” or stalking of deer
 - Require hunters needing to track a wounded deer outside of their designated hunting area to first contact the program representative or landowner
 - Have a program rule that the last person to shoot a deer, regardless if it was previously wounded, shall be the person determined to tag that deer; any disagreement between hunters shall be resolved by a single coin toss
 - Permanently remove hunters from the program that do not follow rules and prosecute individuals that break a state or federal law (wildlife violations should be reported to [IDNR Law Enforcement](#))



Note on Tree Stands:

- Tree stands a minimum of 6' in height promote the safety of the hunters and the public
- Tree stands ensure a downward trajectory of shots toward the ground, thereby preventing shots from traveling to areas where other hunters, or other users of the area, may be located
- More than one tree stand may be used by a single deer hunter within that hunter's assigned area in order to increase the harvest success rate
- The type and permanence of tree stands should be at the site owner's or manager's discretion (construction, semi-permanent vs temporary attachment, removal of branches, etc.)



Reducing trespassing and hunter harassment – It is important to minimize issues of trespassing and hunter harassment to maintain hunter participation and public support. This includes taking steps to keep hunters from trespassing on neighboring properties and to reduce the possibility of the public interfering with an on-going hunt.

- Clearly mark all boundaries of the municipal property (encourage owners of adjoining public or private property to also have clearly visible signs)
- Provide hunters with a detailed map of the overall area and the area they will be hunting
- Provide hunters with a form of identification as a participant in the program, such as a card or letter
- Require hunters to park in designated locations and provide them signage to display in their vehicle indicating they are a participant
- Require hunters to check in and out during every hunting trip
- Require hunters to clearly mark their tree stands or ground blinds with a unique ID number provided by the program or their IDNR hunter number
- Give hunters a list of others allowed to hunt during the specified period
- Ask law enforcement to patrol the area more often during the hunting period
- Consider placing flood lighting in hunter parking lots if not already present
- Prosecute all violators, including persons harassing hunters, per the state Hunter Interference Law (720 ILCS 125)

Program awareness – Generating awareness of a controlled hunting program requires a strategic approach that recognizes the broad spectrum of public opinions and attitudes toward hunting.

- Use low profile advertising to let hunters know about the program, such as integrating program details into the municipal website and connections to hunters via the IDNR and hunting organizations like the [Illinois Learn to Hunt](#) program (high profile advertising can occasionally increase likelihood of complaints or harassment from some citizens)
- Consideration should be given to diversifying the composition of hunter gender and ages (this could be done through focused advertising and establishing hunting periods that coincide with statewide seasons, such as the youth firearm season; the [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) can assist with this initiative)

Hunter efficiency – Maximizing hunter efficiency is important to the success of a controlled hunting program and the satisfaction of the participants.

- Allow selected hunters a scouting period prior to the season
- Allow hunters to select their hunting location within their designated area provided they are within property boundaries or buffers set by the program
- To track hunters' compliance with program rules, establish an email address where hunters can provide the program representative with the sex of the deer and confirmation code received when checking in their deer to the IDNR harvest reporting system (state rule requires this must be done by 10 pm the day of the harvest)
- A points system (see the Planning section) can assist in increasing compliance because hunters need to accrue points to increase their likelihood of staying in the program
- Conduct a survey of hunters after the season has ended asking how the program could be adapted to improve their success

EVALUATION

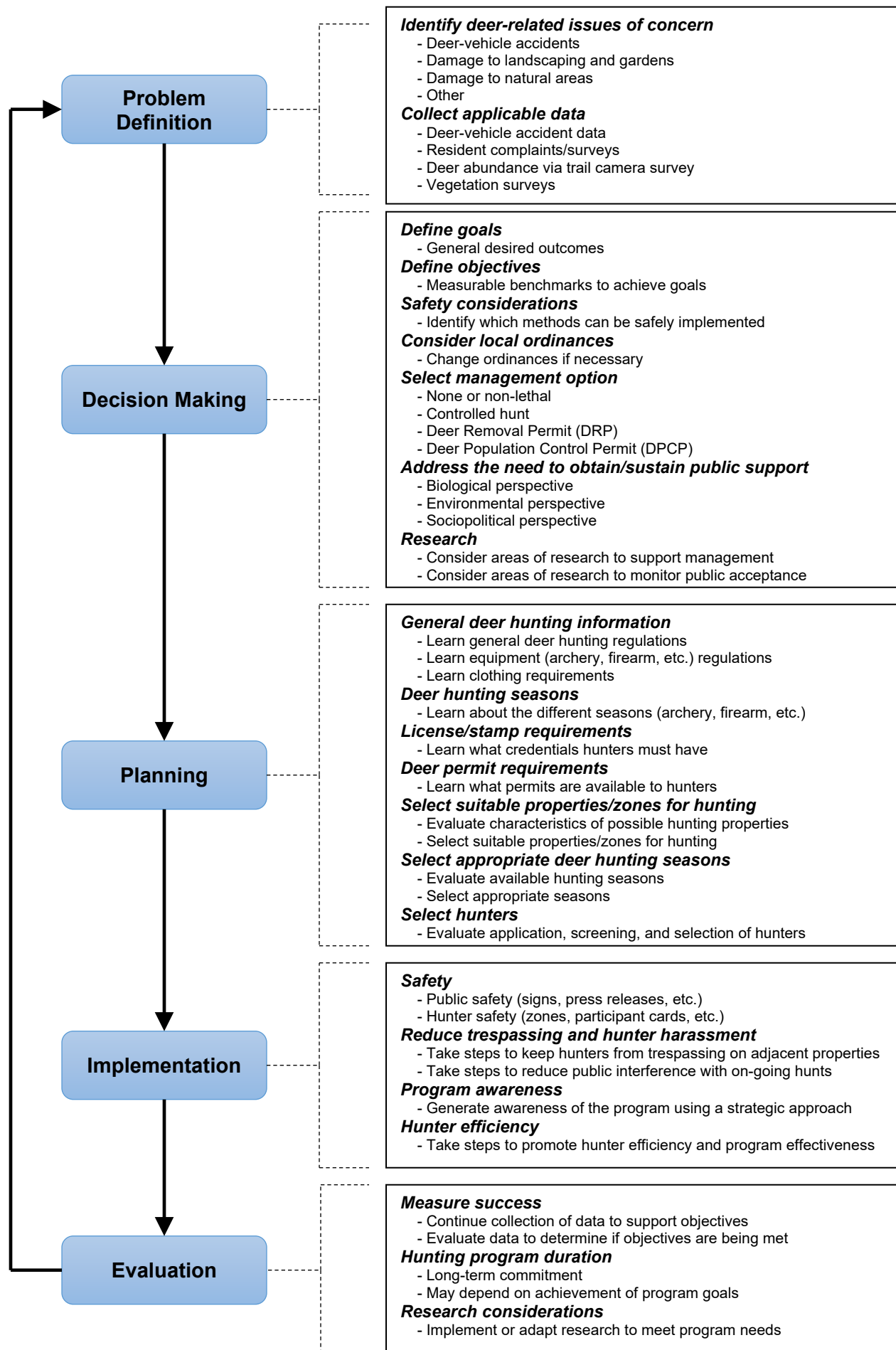
Regular evaluations of a controlled hunting program are important for measuring success, determining satisfaction levels of hunters, determining if continuation of the program is warranted, and identifying research needs that may help improve the program.

Measuring success – Municipalities should collect data associated with their objectives to evaluate the effectiveness of a controlled hunt. Monitoring of deer-vehicle accidents, damage complaints from residents, damage to native plants in natural areas, hunter success rates, and deer population characteristics are helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of a controlled hunt.

Hunting program duration – Deer management is a long-term commitment. Municipalities should be prepared to operate a program for multiple years in order to realize long-term reductions in the deer-related damage. Deer have a high reproductive rate in Illinois, so a program that is terminated will likely result in deer abundance and associated conflicts quickly returning to pre-hunt levels.

Research considerations – Over time, research may need to be adapted to best assess the efficacy of the hunting program and optimize use of staff and funding. For example, as deer numbers decline due to effective hunting, camera surveys may become less important, while continued monitoring of plant restoration plots can be beneficial to show the public the importance of the program. Municipalities should design a hunting program to always have a research component that can objectively show how effective the program is at maintaining a deer population that is healthy for the environment and acceptable to the residents.





IDNR's ROLE IN DEER MANAGEMENT

White-tailed deer, along with all other wildlife in the state, belong to the people of Illinois. While the IDNR is legislatively mandated to steward Illinois' natural and cultural resources, and meet the outdoor recreation needs of a large and diverse population, an assortment of interest groups (e.g., private landowners, sportsmen and women, farmers, wildlife watchers, etc.) have a stake in deer management. For IDNR, this often means balancing the conflicting interests of these groups while working to maintain a healthy deer population.

At the local level, various types of municipal ordinances limit IDNR's ability to provide for the management of the deer population through the regular statewide deer hunting seasons. Therefore, municipalities must balance the needs of their constituents in determining how best to handle issues associated with overabundant deer. Should a municipality decide to implement a controlled deer hunt, they can do so without the involvement of IDNR provided that they adhere to all of the statewide hunting regulations. However, [IDNR Wildlife Division](#) personnel are available to provide guidance and recommendations in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a controlled hunt.



INTERNET RESOURCES

Community Deer Advisor

<https://deeradvisor.dnr.cornell.edu/>

Hunt Illinois

<https://huntillinois.org/>

Illinois Department of Natural Resource – Deer Hunting

<https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/hunting/Pages/DeerHunting.aspx/>

Illinois Department of Natural Resource – Deer Management

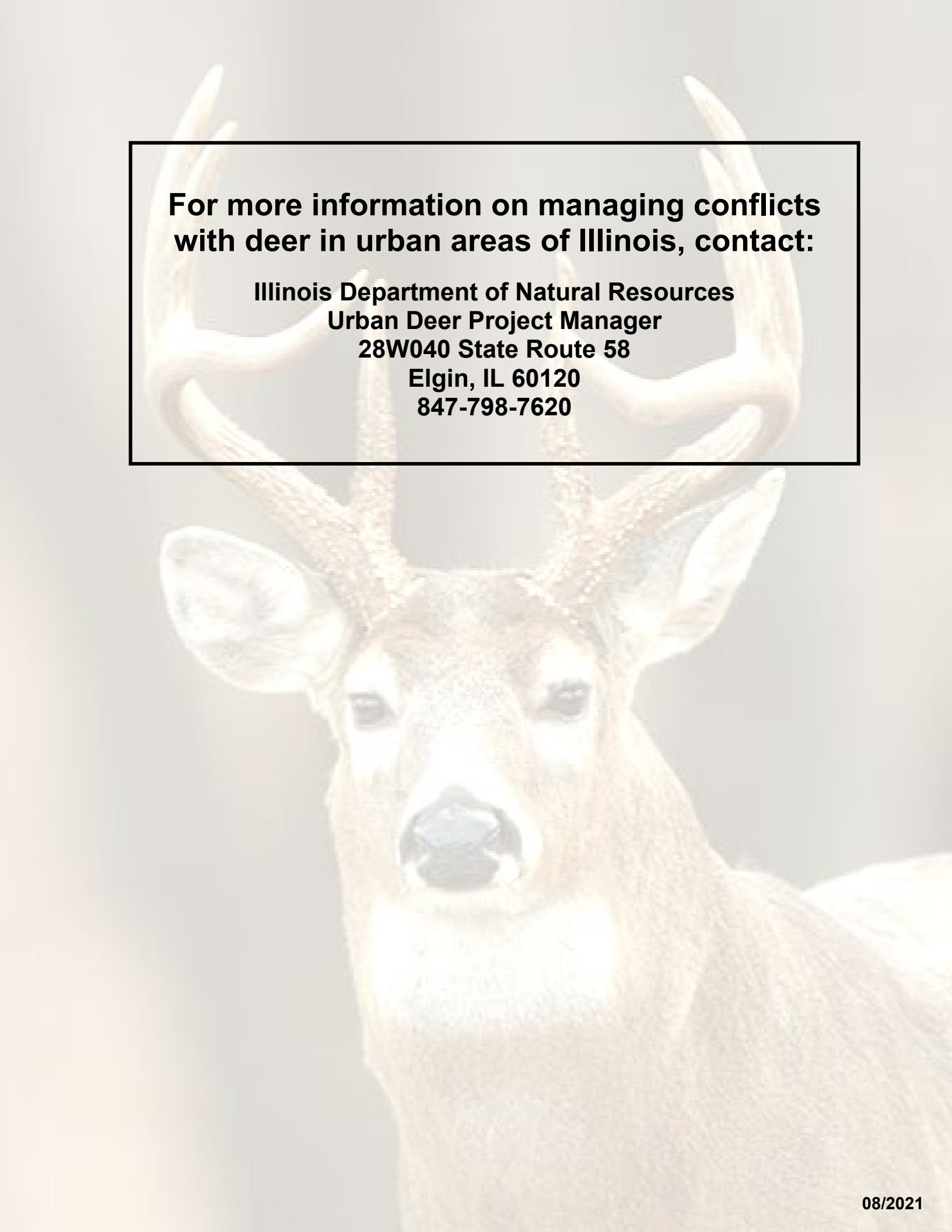
<https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/conservation/wildlife/Pages/DeerManagement.aspx/>

Illinois Digest of Hunting and Trapping Regulations

<https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/hunting/Pages/HuntTrapDigest.aspx/>

White-tailed Deer Illinois

<https://deer.wildlifeillinois.org/>



**For more information on managing conflicts
with deer in urban areas of Illinois, contact:**

**Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Urban Deer Project Manager
28W040 State Route 58
Elgin, IL 60120
847-798-7620**