

JOINT PUBLIC SAFETY AND HEALTH / CONSERVATION COMMITTEE REPORT
Wednesday, April 11, 2012 1:05 PM – 2:25 PM
Council Chambers, 140 West Pine Street, Missoula, Montana

Members Present:, Dave Strohmaier, , Adam Hertz, Cynthia Wolken, Bob Jaffe, Jon Wilkins, Caitlin Cople, Dick Haines, Ed Childers, Marilyn Marler

Members Not Present:

Other Present: Jason Wiener, Alex Taft, Mike O'Herron, Jim Nugent, Mark Muir, Mark Lerum, Terry Cestnik, Amy Fisher

I. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

1. Approve minutes from [April 4, 2012](#). Minutes approved unanimously.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

III. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

1. (Joint Meeting with Conservation) Safety aspects of management of the urban deer population in the City of Missoula. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Dick Haines and Jon Wilkins) (Referred to committee: 03/26/2012) **(HELD IN COMMITTEE)**

Jon Wilkins discussed the referral. He stressed the importance of public input regarding this issue.

Dick Haines discussed the importance of this issue to his constituents.

Mark Muir introduced former Helena Assistant Police Chief and current Helena deer management program coordinator Mark Lerum.

Mark Lerum provided background on the evolution of Helena's deer management program. The option of shooting or tranquilizing the deer was rejected. In 2008, the City trapped deer with clover traps. They started off using six traps. An Environmental Impact Statement was required. Initially, 50 deer were caught. Fawns were releases back to the wild. The State Fish and Game Department provided equipment for the program. Culled deer have been provided to Helena Food Share for charitable distribution. The organization pays for the processing of the meat. The Police Department runs the program because they have the appropriate training. The Police Department runs the program using volunteers. Officers not removed from normal duties. Officers are paid overtime for their participation. Some citizens opposed implementing the program. The Fish and Wildlife Department projected a spike in the urban deer population if nothing was done.

Jon Wilkins asked about the differences between managing Mule Deer and Whitetail deer.

Mark Lerum replied that the main problem in Helena is Mule Deer. Helena just began track Whitetail Deer populations.

Jon Wilkins asked about using birth control methods.

Mark Lerum replied that a shot can be administered to deer, but the logistics are prohibitive.

Jon Wilkins asked about the total number of captured deer.

Mark Lerum replied that 531 deer have been removed from the city limits

Jon Wilkins asked if it has made a difference.

Mark Lerum referred to the statistic contained in a [handout](#). Mark discussed distribution of the Helena deer population density. He described the decrease in public complaints regarding the deer issue. Public perception is taken into consideration when operating the program. Local newspaper editorials have praised the program.

Mike O'Herron asked about the methods that are used.

Mark Lerum responded that trapping is done on private property. He provided images for the committee with a [PowerPoint](#) presentation while describing the entire process. Deer are dispatched with a bolt gun. The City reviewed maps of the city and expanded the trapping area to include other parts of the City. He described how the traps are cleared.

Ed Childers asked about the total annual cost of the program.

Mark Lerum replied that the collapsible clover traps cost \$1000 each. Only one minor injury has occurred so far. The average cost for the program is \$160 per deer. After the initial investments, the main costs are for labor, fuel, and bait.

Dick Haines asked how this program affects the performance police department

Mark Lerum replied that he is retired reserve. One other officer works on the days that they trap. Traps are prepared for the next operation. Officers are performing these duties on their days off using overtime. The program has no impact on normal assigned duties. All participants volunteer for the program. Nine officers are currently involved.

Bob Jaffe asked about the method of trapping versus using projectiles.

Mark Lerum replied that archery and sharpshooting were considered. Fear of ricochets and public safety issues surrounding archery caused the consideration of those options to be dropped.

Bob Jaffe asked if a Taser could be used.

Mark Muir replied that traps are much more efficient. Tasers would be too labor intensive.

Bob Jaffe asked if it was possible for Missoula to borrow the traps.

Mark Lerum responded that they belong to the City of Helena, and it was not his decision.

Bob Jaffe asked about the timeframe they use for trapping.

Mark Lerum replied that they are allowed to trap from October through March 31. He noted that deer are harder to trap when natural food sources are abundant.

Bob Jaffe asked Marilyn if the local deer population was ever determined.

Marilyn Marler replied that no population estimates have been determined.

Bob Jaffe wondered if the local solid waste disposal company was really picking up 2000-3000 dead deer per year.

Mark Lerum discussed deer versus vehicle accidents in the Helena City limits. Low speeds result in injured deer. He discussed urban deer count training provided by White Buffalo of New York. Officers in a small SUV spotlight the deer. They use a rangefinder. They record information regarding the deer's gender and general age. Information is compiled for five days. The cost to the City was \$3000 for training and \$2000 for analysis of the raw data. The results indicated a deer population of 47 per square mile with a target population of 25 per square mile.

Marilyn Marler stated that trapping deer makes sense. She asked how funding could be provided to start a program in Missoula.

Mark Muir responded that Helena is spending about \$25,000 per year to run the program. Since Missoula's deer population is unknown and goals have yet to be set, it is difficult to estimate potential costs. He cited differences in personnel management between the two cities.

Mark Lerum stated that Helena recently had carryover funding to fund their program. He discussed the costs in Helena.

Jon Wilkins asked how long the Environmental Impact Statement took.

Mark Lerum replied that the first one took four months, and a second one took about a month.

Jon Wilkins asked why there were two Environmental Impact Statements performed.

Mark Lerum replied that the first was for the pilot program, and the second one was for subsequent operations. The second EIS was completed more quickly than the first since the initial EIS had already addressed most of the issues.

Jon Wilkins recognized that there will be a significant process required to start up this type of program in Missoula. He feels that concerned citizens may be willing to help cover the costs.

Mark Lerum noted that Pepper Pike, Ohio charges landowners a fee for trapping deer on their property.

Mike O'Herron asked about the representatives from British Columbia who visited Helena and observed the program.

Mark Lerum responded that the B.C. representatives were interested in founding their own trapping company, and they had heard of Helena's Deer Management Program.

Jason Wiener is interested in engaging biologists on this issue to address land use issues and wildlife distribution. He expressed concerns with bears getting caught in the traps. He discussed the Environmental Assessment. He discussed utilizing wildlife biologists from the University of Montana.

Mark Lerum clarified that the Fish and Wildlife Department's preference of using Police Officers for their program was related to Law Enforcement chain of custody issues due to the fact that the cooler being used for meat storage is also used to store evidence.

Jason Weiner asked about the locker usage.

Mark Lerum replied that they were allowed to use the cooler as a courtesy.

Dave Strohmaier asked if non-targeted wildlife was captured.

Mark Lerum responded that smaller animals are able to escape, but they have captured a few dogs.

Cynthia Wolken asked if the Missoula Police Department tracks deer incident data.

Mark Muir responded that the only statistics available would be from vehicle crashes and problem calls.

Cynthia Wolken would like to see more detailed information collected.

Dick Haines asked what the cost of the EIS was.

Mark Lerum responded that the Fish and Game provided the EIS.

Dick Haines asked who cleans the animals.

Mark Lerum responded that officers clean the deer, but that the deer are skinned by the meat processor. The deer are transported to the meat processor by the City.

Dick Haines discussed some of his experiences with urban deer.

Adam Hertz inquired as to who paid for the processing of the deer.

Mark Lerum responded that Helena Food Share pays for the processing using donated money.

Jon Wilkins did not feel that the Committee was ready to hold a public hearing. He feels more information is needed regarding costs, deer population numbers, and public feedback.

Dave Strohmaier agrees that this agenda item should be held in Committee.

Jerry Ballas discussed a prior committee that investigated this issue along with a feeding ordinance. He cited the number of vehicle collisions with deer. He noted that current deer populations create problems. He described herds of deer roaming the University area.

Amy Fisher expressed her support for this effort. She noted that deer populations have exploded. The deer have no fear of humans. She discussed some of her experiences with the urban deer. Amy provided a written [statement](#).

Terry Cestnik discussed how deer have become a nuisance. He stated that their numbers are growing. He feels that the deer attract predators such as mountain lions, wolves, and bears. He described the deer's consumption of landscaping shrubbery and trees. At times they can become aggressive. He noted that deer leave 'evidence' of their presence on the ground. Mr. Cestnik also provided a written [statement](#) for the Committee.

Dick Haines expressed his gratitude to Mark Lerum for taking the time to appear before the Committee.

Mark Lerum discussed a survey that Helena conducted to determine the public's level of support for such a program.

Dick Haines believes that the City needs to do a deer count and a public survey. He asked Mark about the composition of Helena's committee that contends with the deer issue.

Mark Lerum responded that the information is available at the City of Helena's website.

Mark Muir stated that he had sent that information to Council members.

Mark Lerum briefly described the composition and activity of Helena's committee.

Jon Wilkins discussed the involvement of neighborhood councils in conducting surveys. He feels that this issue needs to be addressed sooner than later.

IV. REGULAR AGENDA ITEM

V. HELD AND ON-GOING AGENDA ITEMS

1. Police Department Update – Ongoing in Committee. (Mark Muir)

2. Fire Department Update – Ongoing in Committee (Jason Diehl)
3. Health Department Update – Ongoing in Committee. (Ellen Leahy)
4. Eat Smart Coalition information. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Jason Wiener) (Referred to committee: 07/11/11)
5. Discuss air quality issues related to railroad operations in and through Missoula. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Dave Strohmaier) (Referred to committee: 10/24/11)
6. Authorize Discussion with Crime Victim Advocate Office. ([memo](#))—Regular Agenda (Jon Wilkins) (Referred to committee: 02/06/12)
7. Discuss revisiting cell phone restrictions. ([memo](#)) – Regular Agenda (Dave Strohmaier) (Referred to committee: 10/17/11)

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 2:21 P.M. Submitted by Gregg Schonbachler.