



Honorable Libby Garvey, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

October 26, 2020

RE: White-Tailed Deer and Compromised Forest Health in Arlington

Dear Chair Garvey:

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) received an informative presentation by Arlington Regional Master Naturalists (ARMN) at our August 27, 2020, meeting detailing the many problems that the over-population of White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) create for forested and other natural areas in Arlington County. The presentation made clear that despite their beauty and grace, excessive deer population is a significant factor that must be addressed if the County is to preserve, let alone expand, Arlington's tree canopy.

ARMN provided a lengthy presentation that provided considerable evidence that deer are severely damaging our urban forests. They browse and feed on tree seedlings (and plants) in that forest, and as a result, tree seedlings are unavailable to take the place of canopy trees when the latter die.

Deer are a prey species that require predation--either from other animals or hunting--to control their population. Without predation they can double their numbers in as little as one year. With abundant food in rural and suburban

landscapes, and almost no hunting pressure in suburban areas and many rural areas, deer numbers have skyrocketed across the Commonwealth. In many areas of the state, deer population numbers are at more than three to eight times the densities that native plant communities and healthy forests can sustain. If left unchecked, deer browsing of the forest will, in addition to its



From ARMN presentation. Left: Forest with healthy understory. Right: Over-browsed forest cannot regrow. Photos by Charles Smith


severe and permanent negative impact on trees, adversely affect bird, butterfly, reptile and amphibian species that depend on trees and forests for food and habitat. Deer also promote the spread of invasive plant species by transporting the seeds on their coats, hooves and in their feces, eliminating competition from native plants and disturbing soils. In short, the whole forest ecosystem is severely compromised as a result of the over-population of deer. Moreover, deer also cause extensive personal property costs to homeowners and undermine county investments in park restorations, they also pose a direct threat to the safety and health of Arlingtonians by causing automobile crashes as the deer cross the County's roads.

The ARMN presentation drew attention to how deer over-population can be deleterious to the deer themselves and best practices that we can learn from neighboring jurisdictions to mitigate deer impact, virtually all of which utilize comprehensive programs annually to reduce the deer population. The UFC recommends that the Board direct staff to develop a deer management program and incorporate best practices for addressing excessive deer browsing and overpopulation, including:

- Engage with neighboring jurisdictions to learn details of costs, organization, oversight, and public education strategies;
- Develop and initiate a public engagement strategy to inform and educate the public about the issue;
- Review current county ordinances that might restrict actions to lethally control deer population;
- Collect and publish comprehensive data on deer-vehicle collisions;
- Develop a pilot program in a limited area to gain experience with lethal control procedures.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,



Phil Klingelhofer
Chair, Urban Forestry Commission

Cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager