

# Report to Council



**Date:** January 10, 2018  
**File:** 1840-05  
**To:** City Manager  
**From:** Blair Stewart, Parks Services Manager  
**Subject:** Urban Deer in Kelowna

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## **Recommendation:**

THAT Council receive for information, the January 10, 2018 report from the Park Services Manager regarding urban deer in Kelowna;

AND THAT Council forwards a request to the Regional District of Central Okanagan to consider becoming a member of WildSafe BC.

## **Purpose:**

To provide and update on urban deer within the City of Kelowna.

## **Background:**

Concerns regarding urban deer populations have increased in many southern B.C. communities over the last ten years. Mule deer and whitetail deer are two native species of deer in British Columbia, and mule deer are the main species seen in urban areas in the Okanagan.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that urban deer populations have increased in our region. There are several possible reasons for the growth in population including the availability of food, and increased safety and security.

Encroachment of new developments into natural areas may provide protection from natural predators. Typically, predators such as coyotes, cougars, wolves and bears will not travel into dense subdivisions which provides deer with a "human shield". Some wildlife researchers are also suggesting that fire suppression practices on adjacent Crown lands have contributed to an increase in urban deer, since deer prefer more open forest conditions that occur with regular wildfires.

In Kelowna, staff have observed a moderate increase in service requests related to urban deer concerns in the last two years. During this time, the city has received a total of 61 service requests.

Year	Number of Service Requests
2017	32
2016	29
2015	6
2014	3
2013	5
2012	6

The majority of service requests are coming from urban/wildland interface areas such as Dilworth Mountain, Knox Mountain and the south Mission area, but in the last few years the bulk of deer-related inquiries are from the Mission/south slopes. Most concerns are related to landscape damage on private property. However, a couple cases of aggression towards pets have been reported as well. Complaints seem to increase in the winter months when food is scarce.

Council has received a copy of a petition that was circulated this past summer asking Council “to create and implement a plan for the control of resident deer”.

The Province asserts that urban deer are the responsibility of local governments, however deer are protected under the Provincial Wildlife Act and local governments may not conduct any deer management activities without Provincial approval.

In 2017, in response to local government concerns, the Province began offering a new funding program to assist with the management of urban deer. A total of \$100,000 is available throughout the Province for cost-sharing with local governments, and individual projects are generally capped at \$20,000 per community. Four communities (Invermere, Cranbrook, Grand Forks and Elkford) received a total of \$56,000 funding in 2017, but final reports for these efforts are not available. For the City of Kelowna to be eligible to receive this matching funding, deer population estimates and a management plan would need to be developed first<sup>1</sup>.

Staff have contacted the Regional Wildlife Biologist (Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations), the BCSPCA, and several municipalities to gather information to learn from their experiences. A number of communities have explored options for urban deer control, including the cities of Cranbrook, Kimberley, Grand Forks and Invermere, Oak Bay and Penticton, among others (Appendix 1). Some of the findings from other communities may be summarized as follows:

- The issue is complex and to date no simple solutions have been found. Local governments have tried a variety of options including “No feeding” bylaws, public education, and direct control.
- Although complaints in Kelowna appear to be increasing (particularly in the Mission area), the number of complaint is still relatively low compared to other communities. For example, Cranbrook received 42 aggressive deer complaints in 2011 compared to 2 complaints related to deer aggression in Kelowna (2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication, Regional Wildlife Biologist, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.

- For communities that have attempted deer culling, the main concern cited has been “aggressive deer” (e.g. Invermere, Cranbrook) or safety concerns along busy roads (e.g. Oak Bay). This is not the case in Kelowna where the majority of complaints have been related to landscaping damage.
- Culling efforts have been very controversial and in areas where culls have occurred, there is no clear evidence that it successfully controlled the problem. The numbers of animals culled have been relatively low, the expense has been high, and there have been legal challenges and significant opposition in the community.
- In Cranbrook, deer counts and complaints have continued to increase in spite of four culls. In 2016, McCrory Wildlife Services was commissioned by Animal Alliance of Canada to carry out an independent review of deer culls in British Columbia. The report concluded that there may have been some short term results from culls, “but little or no evidence of long term value”.<sup>2</sup>
- Deer relocation or contraception are viewed as more acceptable options by animal rights advocates, however, the Province does not support either option at the present time<sup>1</sup>.
- A number of municipalities provide public education to help residents understand their role and implement strategies to reduce deer intrusion on private property. Some cities have also implemented a “Do Not Feed” bylaw for all wildlife. Municipalities dealing with human/wildlife coexistence concerns are also expected to conduct seasonal population studies to establish a baseline. Once a population estimate is determined, it is up to the City to determine if the population is within an acceptable range.

Some Kelowna neighbourhoods are situated adjacent to prime mule deer habitats and it should be expected that residents will see and interact with urban deer. Staff have a number of recommendations to assist with urban wildlife coexistence going forward. However, staff believe that the Province needs to take a leading role, especially with regards to forest management activities in interface areas as well as modifications to current hunting regulations.

Ultimately the Provincial Government is responsible for wildlife in the Province of British Columbia. The funding announced in 2015/16 is a step in the right direction, but the province needs to do more to address urban deer concerns by municipalities throughout the province. Forest management activities such as fuel management close to town could help increase forage for deer in natural areas, making urban areas less attractive. The Province is starting to adjust hunting regulations and more should be done to add hunting opportunities within the Okanagan valley to help target low elevation mule deer. Provincial officials have also recommended that local governments consider membership with WildSafe BC. WildSafe BC is an education program designed to reduce human-wildlife conflict, which includes urban deer, bears and other wildlife. Since wildlife issues are not contained by political boundaries, staff are recommending that the Regional District of Central Okanagan board consider membership in this organization on behalf of all the municipal partners in the central Okanagan.

**Internal Circulation:**

Lisa Ruether, Communications Advisor  
 Stephen Fleming, City Clerk

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.animalalliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/report-24-Aug2017-final-DeerCullTechReport-2-mccrory.pdf>

**Considerations not applicable to this report:**

**Legal/Statutory Authority:**

**Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:**

**Existing Policy:**

**Financial/Budgetary Considerations:**

**Personnel Implications:**

**External Agency/Public Comments:**

**Communications Comments:**

**Alternate Recommendation:**

Submitted by:

B. Stewart, Parks Service Manager

**Approved for inclusion:**



Ian Wilson, Infrastructure Operations Department manager

cc: Joe Creron, Deputy City Manager

## Appendix 1. A few examples of BC communities dealing with urban deer.

### Cranbrook

- Since 2010, Cranbrook has had an Urban Deer Management Advisory Committee working on management plans. Public education and a No Feeding Bylaw have been part of the strategy.
- City of Cranbrook has carried out four culls since 2011 and removed 78 deer<sup>3</sup>. Some of the challenges encountered during this practice have included strong resistance from animal rights groups and theft or vandalism of traps. The 2016 cull cost about \$550 per animal.
- In spite of culling and other deer management efforts, the populations of urban deer have continued to increase since deer counts began in 2010. Deer complaints initially dropped in 2012 but have been increasing in the last few years<sup>4</sup>.

### Capital Regional District

- From 2013-2015 the CRD and Oak Bay spent a combined \$270,000 on a deer management pilot program, resulting in a cull in the Oak Bay area in 2015<sup>5</sup>. A provincial permit was obtained to remove 25 deer, but only 11 animals were removed in Oak Bay<sup>6</sup>.
- The cull was very controversial and criticized by the SPCA as well as animal rights groups.
- Oak Bay applied for \$20,000 funding from the Province for a deer contraception trial in 2016. Funding was denied, with the Province citing the need for more research.
- Central Saanich advocated for changes to the hunting and trapping regulations, to extend the season for female deer, and also advocated for fencing subsidies.
- City of Victoria is monitoring the situation but Council feel that it's a Provincial issue<sup>7</sup>

### Invermere

- A legal challenge was launched against the 2011 deer cull, but this was ultimately overturned by the BC Supreme Court in 2013. Invermere Mayor Gerry Taft said the lawsuit was one of the "nastiest experiences I've ever had", and that he and his council received petitions and emails from all over the world and even death threats throughout the case.<sup>8</sup>

### Penticton

- "Penticton has attempted to follow the Province's process to be allowed to cull deer, but in the end, public opposition and the threat of lawsuits caused City Hall to drop the idea."<sup>9</sup> Council is looking to the Province to provide more leadership.
- The Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen has taken the lead in the south Okanagan with regards to deer education, and is also a member of Wildsafe BC.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cranbrook.ca/our-city/city-departments/oic/urban-deer/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://docs.cranbrook.ca/downloads/urban\\_deer/2016-Urban-Deer-Annual-Report.pdf](http://docs.cranbrook.ca/downloads/urban_deer/2016-Urban-Deer-Annual-Report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/crd-directors-vote-to-leave-deer-management-to-municipalities-1.2009520>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/nothing-learned-from-oak-bay-deer-cull-b-c-sPCA-1.1788416>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/urban-deer-a-problem-councillors-say-but-it-s-not-victoria-s-to-solve-1.6550108>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/invermere-deer-cull-upheld-by-b-c-supreme-court-1.2252030>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pentictonwesternnews.com/news/deer-cull-not-likely/>