

MINUTES OF THE NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL

TELEPHONIC MEETING

ROBBINSVILLE, NJ

DECEMBER 17, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chairman Virgilio.

Chairman Virgilio read aloud the following notice: In accordance with P.L. 1975, c.231 Notice of this meeting was filed and posted at the office of the Secretary of State on December 3, 2019 and delivered to the designated newspapers for the Division, The Newark StarLedger and The Atlantic City Press; published on December 12, 2019.

Roll call was taken in attendance:

Chairman Frank Virgilio

Councilman Phil Brodhecker

Councilman Joe DeMartino

Councilman Jim DeStephano

Councilman Agust Gudmundsson

Councilman Dr. Rick Lathrop

Councilman Jeff Link

Councilman Bob Pollock (1:05 p.m.)

Councilman Loren Robinson

Councilman Ken Whildin

Division employees included: C. Stanko, J. Powers, and D. Bajek.

Chairman Virgilio noted that the purpose of this emergency meeting is to consider as a matter of urgency, 3 Community Based Deer Management Permit applications in time for the planned January deer culling in Bernard's Township, Princeton Township, and Essex County Department of Recreation and Current Affairs. These three permit applications will be the only thing we will be discussing at this meeting.

New Business:

Community Based Deer Management:

Jodi Powers, Deer Biologist, read the permit applications aloud.

Bernards Township:

Bernards Township has applied for a Community-based Deer Management Permit. The Township's application requested that two hunting clubs consisting of six-eight members participate in a six-week extension of the hunting season on Township and County properties (ending March 31, 2020). The clubs being used are White-tailed Solutions which will use archery exclusively, and the Bernards Protective Association which will use firearm and/or archery. The hunting clubs will again conduct the shooting proficiency test, regulate the numbers of sportsmen on the lands at any one time, and run the deer check station.

The program goal is to reduce the number of deer-vehicle accidents to 40-50 per year.

There are three county-owned properties, totaling 646 acres, for which Bernards Township has obtained written permission to access. The other forty-three properties totaling over 1,126 acres are owned by Bernards Township.

During the extension of the Permit Shotgun, Permit Muzzleloader, and Winter Bow seasons, all sportsmen hunting in the township will have to check their deer in at the Bernards Township Police Department. Sportsmen hunting with shotgun or muzzleloader must have a 2020 Firearm License and Zone 9 and/or 13 shotgun and/or muzzleloader permit, or a 2020 Archery License to hunt during the extension of the Winter Bow season. Last year thirty-one deer were culled during the six-week extension, and 184 deer were harvested during the traditional season dates, for a total of 215 deer taken during the regular and extended season.

There were 45 deer-vehicle accidents through November 2018. For the same period in 2019, there were 35 deer-vehicle accidents. Bernards Township has successfully reduced the deer population as is evidenced by the decrease in number of deer vehicle accidents from a high of 275 accidents in 2000.

Based upon the number of deer-vehicle accidents, she recommends that the Council approve Bernards Township application for Community Based Deer Management Permit. This permit would allow for an extension of the Permit Shotgun, Permit Muzzleloader, and Winter Bow seasons until March 31, 2020 on Township, County, and private properties throughout Bernards Township.

Exceptions to the Game Code the Council would approve are the season dates listed in: **7:25-5.26** White-tailed deer winter bow season; **7:25-5.28** White-tailed deer muzzleloader riffle permit season and **7:25-5.29** White-tailed deer shotgun permit season.

A motion was made by Councilman Brodhecker to accept the Community Based Deer Management Proposal, seconded by Councilman Gudmundsson; vote taken, one opposed, motion carried.

Essex County:

Essex County has applied for a CBDMP permit. They propose to allow fifteen volunteer sportsmen to cull deer on Tuesdays and Thursdays during an eight-week period starting January 14, 2020 through March 5, 2020. Should bad weather require rescheduling a date, another weekday during this period will be chosen.

The proposal would allow for culling by volunteer sportsmen on two county-owned properties this year. Culling will take place on the South Mountain Reservation and the Hilltop Reservation. Hunting will occur in the afternoon through the evening daylight hours only. Only slugs (no buckshot) will be used. Agents will shoot from tree stands, over baited sites. There will be no limit on the number of deer culled. Essex County is once again asking that their volunteer agents be permitted to use unplugged guns. In an effort to increase the number of deer culled, the Division is supporting that request.

The basis for this application is a significant amount of damage to the forest understory caused by an over-abundance of deer. Over 50,000 native tree seedlings, shrubs, and herbaceous plants have been planted in 41 deer exclosures in South Mountain. A recent Forest Health Evaluation was completed in August 2017. Findings showed some progress in regeneration.

Last year 249 road-killed deer carcasses were picked up along Essex County roads. This year 74 deer have been picked up through June, 2019. This is below the 363 picked up in 2008. The decline is likely attributable to the deer management program.

Based on the need to reduce the deer population to 20 deer per square mile to reduce the significant amount of damage done to the forest understory and allow for regeneration, biologist Powers recommends that the Fish and Game Council approve this application from the Essex County Parks and Recreation and Cultural Affairs.

Exceptions to N.J.S.A. the Council would approve are: 23:4-45 Hunting by daylight and at designated times only (hunting beyond season dates) **23:4-24.1a** Transport or possession of a firearm in a motor vehicle; **12:4-13** Regulations concerning guns (unplugged); **23:4-13.1** Outer garment of fluorescent hunter's orange. An exception to the current Game Code the Council would approve is **7:25-5.23 (c)** Firearms and missiles, etc. and **7:25-5.29 (c)** White-tailed deer shotgun permit season bag limit.

A motion was made to accept the Community Based Deer Proposal by Councilman Brodhecker and seconded by Councilman DeMartino; vote taken, one opposed (Robinson), motion carried.

Princeton Township:

Princeton Township is requesting a CBDMP that would allow the township to hire White Buffalo Inc. to cull deer through March 31, 2020. Princeton Township is proposing to allow White Buffalo to cull deer using silenced bolt-action .223 centerfire and .22 Rim- fire rifles on nine private, five township and one county property. To accomplish the goal of increasing cull numbers, White Buffalo will attempt to acquire access to new and/or more properties and re-implement the use of the net and bolt management tool.

The Division is **not** recommending approval of .22 rim-fire rifles. Permission to use suppressors has been granted by the Mercer County Prosecutors Office on October 30, 2019.

Last year a total of 263 deer were culled and donated to Hunters Helping the Hungry. Since 2016, Princeton’s council has retained the services of a hunting group that has successfully managed deer in the Duke Estate. This group continues to hunt public and private properties during the regular hunting season.

No chemical fertility control booster or initial vaccinations will be administered this year. The township experienced deer-vehicle collisions as high as 342 in 2000, when the first Community Based Deer Management Permit was issued to Princeton. Deer-vehicle accidents have dropped to an average of 106 per year over the past six years. The goal is to maintain deer-vehicle accidents below 60-70 per year.

Based on the significant number of vehicle accidents caused by an over-abundance of deer, biologist Powers is recommending that the Fish and Game Council approve Princeton Township’s application for a Community Based Deer Management Permit. Exceptions to N.J.S.A. the Council would approve are: **23:4-13** Regulations concerning guns; **23:4-44** Weapons authorized for hunting deer; **23:4-45** Hunting by daylight and at designated times only; and **23:4-13.1** Outer garment of fluorescent hunter’s orange.

A motion was made to accept the Community Based Deer Management Proposal by Councilman Gudmundsson, seconded by Councilman Brodhecker. Vote taken, one opposed (Robinson); motion carried.

Public Comment: No public in attendance.

A motion was made by Councilman Brodhecker and seconded by Councilman Link to adjourn the meeting at 1:27 p.m. Vote taken, all in favor, none opposed; motion carried.