

Wildlife Solutions

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A few years ago, I remember asking my father what it was like to see a deer when he was a boy. He said, "Son, when I saw a deer for the first time it was the talk of the town. And I can remember when someone actually had a picture of a deer that they had seen and it made the newspaper." I remember being stunned as he told me that because I had just taken a bike ride through one of Warsaw's cemeteries and had seen the cages made out of chicken wire to protect the bushes from being eaten by the deer. How could such an explosion in the deer population happen within the state of Indiana within the last fifty years?

This KLA white paper project will explore Indiana's deer hunting history, local city ordinances and barriers that have contributed to the explosion of an out of control deer population within the Warsaw city limits and a solution to that problem.

In 1951, Indiana's first deer season became a reality. 1,590 deer were harvested within the state of Indiana that year. In 1954, 68 deer were harvested which was the fewest deer ever recorded. After 1954, the deer harvest numbers began to rebound and record number of harvest totals were commonly established in each proceeding year.

In 1958, the city of Warsaw established a city ordinance which simply stated that there was to be no discharge of fire arms within the Warsaw city limits. Therefore, it became impossible to harvest a deer within the city limits with a gun unless you did not mind being arrested. The only way to harvest a deer until 1978 in Warsaw was with a bow and arrow. However, in 1978 a Warsaw city ordinance was passed which did not allow the discharge of a bow and arrow within the city limits. At this point in the deer harvest records for the state of Indiana, there were 9,896 deer taken in the state in 1978. Obviously, these two ordinances within the Warsaw city limits effected very few deer hunters since the population of deer was not very high.

In 1981, Albertson's Sport Shop, a local hunting and sporting goods store began to keep track of the number of deer taken within Kosciusko County. In 1981, Albertson's

reported that there were 396 deer taken within Kosciusko County. The state total bag was 18,127 deer. Those numbers would indicate that the deer kill had almost doubled within the last four years of hunting. Even though the state's deer harvest total had almost doubled, there was no change in the Warsaw city ordinance which thwarted deer hunting.

In the middle 1980s, most of the Indiana counties were becoming eligible for antlerless permits distributed by the D.N.R. With these antlerless permits a hunter could shoot either a doe or a fawn buck. With a more liberal bag limit that these antlerless permits allowed, by 1989 the deer kill for the entire state had soared to 79,318. By the end of the 1980s, deer were becoming a common sight and somewhat of a nuisance within the Warsaw city limits, but no one would budge on revoking the Warsaw city ordinance.

By 1990, Kosciusko County became well known for its habitat which was able to produce large numbers of deer and was identified regularly as one of the top ten counties to harvest a deer in Indiana. Still, no change in the Warsaw city ordinance.

Kosciusko County's popularity for deer hunting harvest totals definitely peaked in the 1996 season for Indiana hunters. Kosciusko County led the state with 3,231 deer harvested. This was a 715% increase in 15 years of keeping track of county totals since Albertson's had begun monitoring them in 1981. The state total also set an unbelievable all-time record with 123,086 deer harvested. Most of this harvest increase was due to the liberal antlerless permits that were available to any hunter wishing to purchase one over the counter. Any change in the Warsaw city ordinance? Not a chance.

However, in 1996 Mayor Jeff Plank began to recognize something needed to be done about the deer population within the city of Warsaw. A few of the common problems that were sited from residents of Warsaw included the inability to grow gardens, bushes around their homes, the inability to put flowers around tombstones in the city cemetery, and the cage enclosed bushes at the cemetery were somewhat of an eyesore. Increased traffic hazards were also on the rise. As Mayor Plank began to explore

solutions for this mounting problem, he discovered a local organization by the name of Wildlife Management Resources (WMR) which was composed of local men and women who were concerned about state and local mismanagement of the deer herd. A plan was formulated between Mayor Plank and WMR on a possible solution to the deer problems the city was facing. When this plan was sparsely discussed with the public, local hunters jumped to many conclusions without much information about the plan that was being discussed. These hunters then flooded the Mayor's office with complaints and selfish motives to the point that a possible deer hunting opportunity for all by the fall of 1997 was thrown out. Can you believe it? Hunters shooting themselves in their own feet? Most would ask why hunters would blow such an opportunity.

Here are a few reasons why the local deer hunters ended up pushing the self-destruct button instead of opening a door of opportunity:

1. With the high number of antlerless permits available since the 1980s, some farms were becoming void of deer. All of the hunters knew, however, that the Warsaw city limits were absolutely full of deer.
2. With the high number of antlerless permits, a lot of fawn bucks were being harvested. This resulted in fewer and fewer antlered buck sightings in each proceeding year. Again, all of the hunters knew that the Warsaw city limits were full of bucks.
3. With fewer bucks surviving, this meant fewer bucks were being harvested or even seen by hunters. However, you could drive by Lakeside Chevrolet in Warsaw or any other large area that had grass and clover in the city and sometimes see 10 or more bucks feeding leisurely in an area not much larger than a football field.
4. Large buck sightings had almost become a thing of the past because not as many bucks remained and the ones that did were quickly shot off. As hunters were becoming more aware of the number of bucks within the Warsaw city limits, they also were observing some of the largest bucks known to live in Kosciusko county.
5. There are 101 different ways to hunt deer and most hunters think their way is best and quickly wanted to share their demands on how to hunt deer within city limits that had not been hunted within the last 20 years.

Boil these 5 reasons down to a paragraph and you have a city absolutely full of deer, more bucks and larger bucks than any other place in the county, and a "tiger den"

full of drooling hunters that want absolute power in establishing who, when, where, and how to hunt these deer. Chaos? You bet!

The solution to this deer dilemma in the Warsaw city limits is not a simple one. I feel that a balance between ethics, duty, common sense and community enhancement should be of top priority when facing this challenge. As part of this wildlife solution proposal, I will attempt to balance these four aspects.

Before I attempt to balance these aspects, I want to share a solution that the residents of a Milwaukee, Wisconsin suburb are attempting to do with a very similar problem. The Deer Hunters' 1997 Almanac reports, "The Village of Chenequa, a community consisting of wooded estates, has a bulging white-tailed deer herd. With a lack of predators and a no-hunting ordinance, the village's deer herd has risen to a density of 75 animals per square mile." (p. 33). These residents are wanting to reduce the deer herd by approximately 70% and cite extensive damage to gardens, wildflowers and other greenery. Their solution is to pay 2 military snipers \$150 per hour to kill 200 deer. These snipers will also be reimbursed \$25 for each deer that they kill. The Village will also pay \$35 per deer to have the meat processed. The total tab for this project was estimated to be \$31,000. I would bet that the solution I am about to propose will be substantially more cost effective.

Ethically, the city has a responsibility to see that the deer are harvested in a quick and humane manner. I believe that any hunter that is given the opportunity to hunt deer, no matter where he hunts, needs to participate in a D.N.R. hunter education class and pass the educational criteria. Put this hunter in the city limits, and I would make hunter education and certification mandatory. We have a responsibility to the deer and community to harvest and conduct hunting as appropriately as possible. Obviously, I am proposing hunting the deer versus trapping them and transporting them out of town or some other expensive remedy.

Out of duty and respect we need to keep the city of Warsaw as close to balance for people and wildlife as possible. To ignore a rising deer population and watch people robbed of gardens, property investments and an ability to decorate a grave of a loved one is to blatantly cast respect and duty to the side.

Common sense would indicate that if you put up barriers to problems, you have a fertile field for stagnation and frustration. A definition of insanity I once heard was doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. I can tell you without a doubt that if we keep ignoring this problem the deer will not pack up and move to the Village of Chenequa, Wisconsin because they heard that their relatives are being thinned out a little and there is now more room up there for some more deer.

Finally, community enhancement is something this solution can hopefully bring as a result. I believe as the hunters harvest these city deer, they could be encouraged to donate the venison to the needy in Warsaw. Warsaw is a thriving community and sometimes we get so carried away in our own success, we sometimes forget people with needs, such as their meal, do live closer to us than we think. Let us give back some of our own "home grown" meat to those in need.

My wildlife solution proposal to the city of Warsaw, in light of the history, local ordinances and barriers that have been touched on, is as follows:

1. Any hunter allowed to hunt within the Warsaw city limits must present valid hunter education certification that they have passed through the Indiana D.N.R.
2. The city of Warsaw will distribute valid city hunting permits to these qualified hunters to enable the city to keep record of all of those participants for any needs that may arise.
3. All hunters that are allowed to hunt within the city limits must follow all deer hunting state regulations unless the city opts for an urban deer tag program for cities with deer problems and these issued tags do not go against the hunters' regular bag limits.
4. Eligible hunters must report back to the city of Warsaw the number of deer harvested within the city limits.
5. The city of Warsaw will strongly encourage eligible hunters to donate venison taken within the city limits to identified charities. The city of Warsaw will also

establish a distribution center and voucher system so that this donated venison ends up in appropriate hands.

6. All identified hunters will be required to harvest a doe before a buck while hunting in the city limits. This is to ensure that deer population control remains a priority instead of hunters just attempting to shoot bucks they cannot find in other places that they hunt.

7. The city of Warsaw would publish an annual report on the number of does and bucks harvested in the city and the pounds of venison donated to local charities. We owe it to our community to inform them on the progress that is being made on something that they have been so tolerant of in past years.

With these 7 items in place and a consideration for ethics, duty, common sense and community enhancement, I believe a wildlife solution can have an excellent beginning. But then of course, we can always still hope for the "big move to Chenequa". I just happen to believe Warsaw is ready for beginnings not barriers. This is my hopeful wildlife solution.

Deer Hunters' 1997 Almanac, Publishers of "Deer & Deer Hunting Magazine". Krause Publications, Iola, WI, 1996.