BALTIMORE FISHBOWL

ENVIRONMENT

Baltimore to manage deer overpopulation with help from wildlife biologist marksmen

by Marcus Dieterle
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A deer jumps over a fence. Photo credit: Courtney Celley/USFWS.

Baltimore will enlist the help of sharpshooting wildlife biologists to reduce the deer population in city parks.

The city announced on Friday that it plans to launch a data-driven **deer management program** to address deer overpopulation, which is negatively impacting forested parkland.

“This is the first time Baltimore City has taken a comprehensive approach to managing deer overpopulation, and it reflects our commitment to ensuring our children and our children’s children inherit a healthier city,” said Dr. Reginald Moore, executive director of Baltimore City Rec & Parks, in a statement. “This program is

the result of extensive planning, scientific analysis and meaningful community engagement and public input."

In some areas, deer population densities are three to 21 times the recommended amount of 20 deer per square mile, data show.

Over the decades, deer overpopulation has gone unchecked, preventing young trees from being able to regenerate, accelerating the spread of invasive plants, increasing instances of conflicts between deer and humans, and raising the risk for tick-borne diseases, according to city officials.

"Our natural areas are critical infrastructure for Baltimore City," said Ashley Bowers, natural areas unit manager for Rec & Parks, in a statement. "Managing deer overpopulation is about protecting forest health, maintaining balanced ecosystems and ensuring these spaces continue to benefit communities. Without action, we risk losing the very forests that help keep our city cooler, healthier and more resilient."

Rec & Parks wildlife conservation biologist Shane Boehne developed a survey that found 58% of respondents believe deer are a threat to forest health. The survey also found that 62% believe the city should manage deer-related conflicts and 59% recognize deer management as an ongoing process.

Rec & Parks notes that its Forestry Division oversees more than 2,300 of forests, stream valleys, and wetlands across the city's public parks. Baltimore's goal is to have a tree canopy that spans 40% of the city by 2037, an increase from the current 28%. But climate change, nonnative invasive species, and deer overpopulation are threatening that goal and causing a citywide decline in forest health.

The new deer management program will launch in March and will focus on the city's largest forested natural areas, including in Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park, Herring Run Park and Druid Hill Park. Possible candidates for future activity include Cylburn Arboretum, Powder Mill Park, Hanlon Park, Farring-Baybrook Park and Moore's Run Park.

The city will coordinate with wildlife biologists who have firearms expertise from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS).

Parks will be closed to the public during the deer management activities in order to ensure the safety of members of the public and parks employees.

The program is funded by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service's Community Forestry Catalyst Fund.