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DEC Launches Pilot Project to Improve Collection of Public Input about Deer Populations and Impacts

Overview

There will be an increased opportunity for the public to learn about deer and give input about deer populations under a pilot project launched by the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This new project will generate a public recommendation for deer population change based on input from a broad cross-section of New Yorkers gathered through a public survey and recommendations from a small group of citizens convened for the purpose of identifying and prioritizing deer impacts in their region. DEC biologists will base final objectives for deer population change on whether the public recommendation is compatible with existing levels of deer impacts on forests.

Results of the process, as well as the decisions pursuant to it, will be shared with the public broadly, serving as an audit on the pilot system, and providing feedback for improving the process before expanding it to other WMU aggregates in the future. Once refined, DEC intends to implement the new process on a routine cycle in each aggregate in the state to respond to changing conditions and attitudes about deer impacts over time.

The Human Dimensions Research Unit (HDRU) and the Cooperative Extension in the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell University are assisting DEC with the research and educational aspects of the pilot. In addition, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Seneca, Cayuga, and Tompkins counties will play a central role in implementation of the pilot process.

Pilot Region and New Wildlife Management Unit Aggregates

DEC has grouped the existing 92 Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) into fewer, larger WMU aggregates for deer management that will allow for better use of existing and new data and improved deer population monitoring. Public recommendations for deer population change will also be identified for WMU aggregates rather than individual WMUs. DEC is evaluating the best approach to engage the public at this larger scale.

The pilot effort will take place in a region consisting of a 1,325-square-mile group of three WMUs (7H, 8J and 8S) which encompass Seneca County and portions of Ontario, Wayne, Yates, Schuyler, Tompkins and Cayuga counties. This WMU aggregate is called the Central Finger Lakes Unit.

Opportunities to Learn about Deer and Provide Input to DEC

The pilot project will include a broad-scale education effort this fall to develop public understanding of the process, share results of the survey and convey information to the public regarding deer, deer impacts, and management issues and challenges. Following a number of educational events, a small group of interested citizens will be convened for the purpose of identifying and prioritizing deer impacts in the pilot WMU aggregate.

Upcoming Events and Opportunities to Get Involved

Join our Webinar series “Deer and Deer Management in New York State”. For more information about upcoming events and opportunities to get involved please contact Kristi Sullivan (kls20@cornell.edu) at Cornell University or Stefan Lutter (sml339@cornell.edu) at CCE Cayuga County.