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Arnold L. Randall

January 7, 2020

Eric Palm
Village Administrator, Village of River Forest
400 Park Avenue
River Forest, IL 60305

Mr. Palm,

I am writing this letter to provide supplemental information regarding the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's (the "District's") management of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*).

Overabundance of deer has been identified as one of the primary threats to the District's natural resources, with over 22% of threatened or endangered plant species being threatened by animal browse according to the District's Natural and Cultural Resources Master Plan, developed in cooperation with the Prairie Research Institute of the University of Illinois¹. As a result of increasing population size and limited management measures, deer have hindered the District's ability to fulfil its mission to restore its natural areas by significantly degrading native vegetation, the loss of which has led to additional concerns such as increases in invasive plants deer find unpalatable, soil erosion from denuded herb layers, and decreases in nesting success for ground-nesting birds.

In response to these concerns, the District has been managing white-tailed deer on our holdings for close to forty years. Our management program is active at select preserves across Cook County, but our resources are finite and we're required to prioritize management in areas with the highest ecological value that are simultaneously experiencing the heaviest deer impacts. These efforts have been highly successful, and resulted in significant improvements to the biodiversity of flora and fauna within the preserves.

Ecological restoration work has been occurring at Thatcher Woods, Grand Army of the Republic Woods and Thomas Jefferson Woods—collectively referred to as the Thatcher Woods Complex--in and around the Village of River Forest for over twenty years. The Thatcher Woods Complex has been identified as the 9th ranked landscape unit out of a total of 15 which comprise the 30,000 acres that will be the focus of the District's natural resource restoration and conservation efforts for the next 25 years as part of our Next Century Conservation Plan. These sites are recognized as higher priority due to their quality, and as such will be the focus of more extensive restoration efforts now and in the future.

1. <https://fpdcc.com/about/plans-projects/natural-and-cultural-resources-master-plan/>

Already the District has significantly increased the resources allocated to this site in the form of invasive species removal and introduction of prescribed fire. The next phase to sustain this investment is to manage wildlife densities at levels that are mutually beneficial to the land and the wildlife populations upon it. These three elements—vegetation management, prescribed fire, and deer control—are the foundations of a successful restoration, and are integral to the continued expansion of our ecological restoration programs.

Managing deer is essential both for the health and sustainability of the herds as well as the ecosystems they rely on for their survival. In Illinois, deer can easily exceed their carrying capacity—the number of living organisms an area can support indefinitely without degrading the environment. This is due to an abundance of available food sources and a lack of large carnivores, such as cougars or wolves, to naturally keep deer numbers in check. Growing deer populations also increase deer-vehicle collisions, disease and disease transmission.

In addition to these benefits, the District's deer management program contributes data used for monitoring the transmission of zoonotic disease; that is, diseases which can be transmitted from wildlife to pets or humans, some of which can only be sampled post-mortem. This in turn informs public health advisories and research.

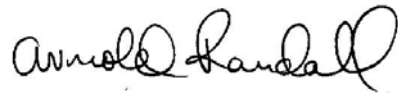
The Illinois Department of Natural Resources grants population control permits based on a demonstrated need due to excessive damage to property or risk to human health or safety. Biologists and ecologists from the District and the U.S. Department of Agriculture survey vegetation to ascertain the extent of deer damage to help determine whether a need for management exists. If the browsing pressure on native indicator plants exceeds threshold levels based on what would be expected to be present at a site based on its size, habitat type, and other factors, then a permit is granted. Likewise, the number of tags issued is scaled based upon the extent of damage observed. Following assessment of the Thatcher Woods Complex, it was determined that the impacts to the site meet the standards to warrant management.

The District is hopeful that a partnership formed with the Village will be used as a model to allow management on our holdings, where warranted, throughout Cook County. Additionally, this relationship would be helpful to the District for developing and initiating an extensive public education and engagement strategy with a special focus on neighboring landowners.

The District has investigated alternative control methods such as contraception and relocation. To date, we are unaware of any safe or practical non-lethal methods available to natural resource agencies for managing deer overabundance. Contraception methods either require repeat captures of individuals, which is harmful to all deer in the study area and very time and resource intensive making it impractical, or use of large doses of contraceptives that would pose a health risk if a treated animal were somehow eaten by humans, dogs, or coyotes. Moving deer to another location is not practical because no enclosed facilities are available to take them, and movement of deer and release to the wild is not allowed by the State of Illinois because of documented high levels of subsequent deaths and the potential for disease transfer. None of these methods are permitted by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources as means of population control.

In our professional experience, based on impacts to vegetation in the Thatcher Woods Complex, we believe management of deer populations is warranted at this location. We anticipate, based on our experiences in other locations, 3 to 5 years of intensive management will be required followed by routine maintenance operations. This work will promote a healthier, more sustainable deer population and provide additional benefits to adjacent residents of the Village as well as the motoring public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arnold Randall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Arnold" and last name "Randall" clearly distinguishable.

Arnold Randall
General Superintendent