



Village of River Forest Deer Frequently Asked Questions

Resources for this piece have been assembled from wildlifeillinois.org and dnr.illinois.gov

Deer in River Forest

1) Who owns Illinois' deer and other wildlife?

Illinois' white-tailed deer are a public resource residing on private lands as well as public lands. White-tailed deer are owned by the people of Illinois collectively and managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Landowners do not own the deer on their land. However, it is private landowners who hold the keys to deer population management.

2) Why shouldn't I feed deer?

It is **illegal** to feed deer in Illinois, primarily due to the concerns of disease. Additionally, not feeding deer (directly or indirectly, such as a bird feeder) is a basic tip for reducing property damage. Never feed deer and educate children to do the same. Deer do not need supplemental food to survive and can become acclimated to human presence and activity.

3) What is the ecological role of a deer?

Deer are primary plant-eaters and aid in seed dispersal. Impacts of deer on the ecosystem change as the population fluctuates. At healthy levels, deer maintain a balance in plant communities. When deer population is overabundant, over-browsing causes damage to habitats for native species.

Coyotes, and occasionally bobcats, prey on very young fawns, but white-tailed deer in Illinois have few remaining natural predators. Therefore, hunting is an important tool to help control deer numbers.

As deer populations have increased, citizens have become more concerned about damage to agricultural crops, deer-vehicle collisions, and damage to native ecosystems. When deer are present in large numbers they can damage or destroy the understory of a forest and can suppress populations of rare native plants.

4) What do deer eat?

Deer are herbivores. Deer are browsers in most of their range. Browsing is nibbling off the tender shoots, twigs and leaves of trees and shrubs with the deer's lower front teeth. In Illinois, farm crops and waste grain can also be an important part of the deer diet. Additionally, deer eat many kinds of vines, grasses, and clovers. Acorns are a preferred food. In an urban environment, deer may damage plants in vegetable gardens or landscaping while browsing.

Deer food preferences can also vary by season. Winter: acorns, twigs and buds, evergreens, landscaping, bird seed, waste corn, illegal feeding. Spring: wildflowers, anything green. Summer: wildflowers, new growth, corn and soybeans, landscaping, vegetable gardens. Autumn: acorns, bird seed, corn, fruits, landscaping.

5) How do deer in urban areas become overabundant?

A combination of factors leads to the overabundance of deer in urban areas. Deer have long life spans averaging over 10 years. Additionally, they have a wide variety of food preferences and adapt to food availability. In urban areas, they have particularly small home ranges, and predation is limited to coyotes (fawns only) and deer-vehicle accidents. Deer in urban areas have limited or no hunting pressure, and typically experience quality food availability year-round in the form of ornamental plants and gardens. Finally, deer are prolific breeders. Without population control, deer numbers in a given area can increase by 50-60% each year.

6) What concerns do overabundant deer present?

Overabundant deer present various public health and safety concerns as well as ecological damage. Deer contribute to deer-vehicle accidents, disease and parasite transmission (ticks and tick-borne diseases), property damage, and damage to residential and commercial landscaping. Ecological damage includes damage to plant and animal communities, loss of local plant populations, loss of wildlife shelter and habitat, soil compaction and erosion, and disease (Chronic Wasting Disease).

7) How should I report a sick or dead deer?

Landowners who find sick or dead deer are asked to report them using [this form](#). Please include your name, email address and phone number, as well as the county, the number of sick or dead deer and specific location details (distance/direction from the nearest town or intersection of two roads, etc.). Please indicate any obvious signs of sick deer and the proximity to water for reporting dead deer.

8) Should I report a deer-vehicle accident even if both the vehicle and deer are ok?

Yes. It is important for the Village to know when there has been a deer-vehicle accident even if it is minor or very little damage to the vehicle or deer. The Village encourages our residents to call the non-emergency number (708-366-7125) for minor accidents. In the cases of major or fatal accidents, please call 911 immediately.

9) Does the Village track deer-vehicle accidents now?

Yes. The Village currently tracks, when reported, all vehicle accidents involving deer. This information is shared with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and subsequent state agencies such as the IDNR. Unfortunately, many minor or near accidents are not reported. The Village encourages all residents to report minor and near accidents to the non-emergency number (708-366-7125). The report can be obtained through our Village Police Department.

10) Are deer a threat to pets?

While deer are not predators and a deer-pet incident would be highly unusual, deer do carry ticks and disease that could be harmful to animals if contracted.

11) How has River Forest handled deer population or overabundance in the past?

The Village is not aware of any deer population control programs in River Forest in the past.

12) Will the Village Board have another discussion before they vote on the deer management program?

Yes, the Village Board plans to discuss this matter and vote at an upcoming board meeting in September. The Village Staff will ensure that those meetings are posted on the Village's website.

13) Is the deer population migrating into the residential neighborhood attributable to river flooding?

No. Although river flooding could disrupt deer habitats, the Village has not experienced major river flooding in the recent past during this uptick of deer being reported in the residential neighborhood.

14) Are residents able to continue enjoying the forest preserve?

Yes. Even during a permit season for a deer management program, residents are still able to safely utilize and access the forest preserve as they would normally.

Habitat and Behavior

15) What is a normal habitat for deer?

Illinois deer occur in or near wooded areas, particularly those along streams or adjacent to farmland. Deer frequently forage away from woods but require wooded areas for survival. Deer are also commonly found in very developed urban areas of Illinois.

Researchers have reported average home ranges of 0.44 square miles for does living in agricultural areas of Illinois and 0.17 square miles for does living in forest preserves near Chicago, such as River Forest. However, ranges can shift due to extreme weather conditions or food availability. Bucks tend to have larger home ranges than does.

16) What is normal behavior for deer?

Deer are often found together. Family groups include an adult doe, her fawn(s) and her female young from the previous year (matriarchy). Bucks do not typically associate with the does except during the breeding season. Bucks may group together in small bachelor herds. Large numbers of deer may be seen together at prime food sources, particularly during late winter when food can be in short supply.

Deer are primarily active at dawn and dusk and follow predictable daily patterns. Behavior varies as the seasons change. Winter: form larger groups, bucks less aggressive, travel together. Spring: groups split up, does search for fawning areas, bucks grow antlers. Summer: Does drive off bucks and offspring from previous years, fawns are born and cover is needed. Autumn: bucks "rut", pursue females, more aggressive, rubs and scrapes, increase in deer-vehicle accidents.

It is not uncommon to see deer browse lines in natural areas or along fence rows in Illinois.

17) What is the reproduction cycle and habits of deer?

White-tailed deer mate from October through January, with the peak occurring in mid-November. Gestation is about seven months, with most fawns born from late May through mid-June. Fawns weigh four to seven pounds and can stand and run within a few hours of birth.

Does often use the same fawning areas they used in previous years. However, sometimes fawns end up in strange places, such as in window wells or on sunny porch steps. If you find a fawn by itself do not move it.

The fawn and doe make sounds and use their sense of smell to help them locate each other. If the fawn is threatened, the doe will snort and stamp her front feet, and will charge the predator to drive it away. As the fawn grows and gets stronger, it will begin following the doe as she forages. Fawns are weaned at four to five months of age.

Fewer than 25% of does breed in their first year. Bucks do not typically breed until their second year. Deer density and food availability help to determine whether or not young deer will breed. Adult does that receive adequate nutrition will produce twins, and may have triplets or quadruplets. Thus, it only takes a few years for deer populations to grow considerably in the absence of control measures.

Property Damage Caused by Deer

18) How can I help to control deer and prevent damage to my property?

Deer sometimes cause damage by browsing trees, shrubs or other plants. Bucks may also damage woody plants by rubbing their antlers on them. Deer are generalists and eat a tremendous variety of plants. When food is abundant, they will feed heavily on plants they particularly like, but when food is scarce they will eat almost any plant.

The following are a few ways residents can help to control deer and prevent damage.

Landscaping, Gardens, and other Habitat Modifications

- If adding ornamental plantings to your yard, select plant species that are less susceptible to deer browsing. Some of the plants that seem to be less susceptible to deer include ornamental alliums (*Allium*), daffodils (*Narcissus*) and wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*). Also try planting thorny, prickly or smelly plants. However, this approach does not always work. For example, deer will eat the buds, blooms and smaller stems of ornamental tea roses. They also eat raspberries, blackberries and poison ivy. Plant boxwood or short-needle spruces instead of yews or arborvitae. Illinois natives such as black-eyed susan and foxglove do not seem to be preferred by deer.
- For a more complete list of perennials that are deer-resistant, visit the [Gardening with Perennials website](#). Pachysandra is a good ground cover, and ferns tend to fair better than hostas. Deer love apples and cherries, so you may have to use tree protectors or fences to protect your fruit trees. If food is scarce due to a severe winter, or if the population of deer in your area is high, the deer may eat plants they do not normally prefer and usually leave alone. A deer will eat just about any plant if it is hungry enough.

Repellents

- There are several products approved for use in deer damage control. Repellents will reduce the damage that deer cause to vegetation but will not eliminate it. The repellents' effectiveness depends upon local deer density, the availability of other foods, the palatability of the plants being protected, and the regularity with which the repellent is

used. Repellents may prevent deer from eating the plant, but they will not deter damage caused by antler-rubbing. Repellents can be expensive and must be reapplied as the plant grows and after heavy precipitation events. Always read and follow label instructions of the product. Some repellents are not for use on plants intended for human consumption. Below are some commonly available repellents. To be most effective, it is best to start using repellents before damage begins. Researchers have found the following products to be effective at reducing deer damage.

- **Deer Away® Big Game Repellent (powder or spray)** The active ingredient in these products is putrescent whole egg solids.
- **Deer Away® Deer and Rabbit repellent (Get Away Deer and Rabbit Repellent)** The active ingredient in this product is capsaicin and isothiocyanate.
- **Plantskydd™** The active ingredient in this product is edible animal protein.
- **Bye Deer® Sachets** The active ingredient in this product is sodium salts of mixed fatty acids. To be fully effective, this product should be placed at the top of the plant so that rainwater that dissolves the product will fall onto plant surfaces.
- **Deerbuster's™ Sachet** The active ingredient in this product is meat meal and red pepper. To be fully effective, this product should be placed at the top of the plant so that rainwater that dissolves the product will fall onto plant surfaces.
- **Hinder®** The active ingredient in this product is ammonium soaps of higher fatty acids. This product is the only product approved for direct application to plants intended for consumption. However, this product was not as effective in trials as the products listed above.

Home Remedies

- Home remedies are not generally effective, but do work in some cases. Some people have had success in deterring deer browsing by hanging bars of deodorant soap around valuable plants. While bars of soap can be effective, the protection they offer extends only about three feet around the bar. Human hair, blood meal and bone meal all weather very quickly and lose their effectiveness.

Fences and Exclusion

- White-tailed deer are excellent jumpers. In order to keep deer off of your property a fence will need to be at least eight feet tall. The IDNR recommends various fence types including seasonal and electric fences. Always check with the Village of River Forest Building Department for fence regulations prior to designing or installing a fence.
- Individual trees or plants can be protected by placing a five-foot tall wire cylinder around the plant. Tree protectors such as Vexar, Tubex, plastic tree wrap or woven wire cylinders can all help protect new plantings. Placing netting over bushes or other plants can also be used temporarily on a seasonal basis to deter deer.

Deer Population Control Programs

19) Why is the Village of River Forest considering a deer population control program?

The Village of River Forest is considering a deer population control program due to the overabundance of deer in the Village that create potential public safety, public health, and property damage concerns. Resident complaints and reports have increased in quantity and are citing more deer than recent years.

20) Can the Village of River Forest cull deer?

Due to land constraints to safely conduct a deer removal or deer population control program, the Village's only option to conduct such a program is to partner with the Cook County Forest Preserve.

21) Is a deer population control program effective?

Yes. Such a program is an effective and legal way to control the deer population in a specific geographical area. In order to ensure effectiveness, programs are typically long-term, multi-year commitments and evaluate deer populations by using metrics, such as but not limited to, the number of deer-vehicle accidents over a period of time in the area to determine the scope of the program for that given year.

22) Where and when would a deer removal or deer population control program take place?

The proposed program would be a partnership with the Cook County Forest Preserve and would take place only on forest preserve property in River Forest. This includes the property west of Thatcher and east of the Des Plaines River throughout the entire Village. Programs are typically conducted in the winter months.

23) How many deer are culled in a year?

The Cook County Forest Preserve specifies a number of deer when applying with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources based on a survey of the population, impacts on vegetation, and their professional expertise in natural resource management.

24) Who is permitted to cull deer?

Deer Population Control Permits (DPCPs) are issued by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to agencies, organizations, associations and municipalities, but are **not** issued to individual landowners. These permits authorize the reduction or control of deer numbers by non-traditional or non-hunting methods. For River Forest, the Cook County Forest Preserve would apply to the IDNR for a Deer Population Control Permit on behalf of the Village of River Forest. The Village would provide financial support for the program.

25) What is a Deer Population Control Permit (DPCP)?

A Deer Population Control Permit (DPCP) is the permit needed from the IDNR to conduct a deer population control program. For River Forest, this permit would be applied for and obtained by the Cook County Forest Preserve.

The application process for DPCPs is essentially a deer management proposal which documents the need for deer herd reduction by non-traditional means such as sharpshooting. The prevailing objectives for most current deer control programs under DPCPs are to:

- reduce damage to native plant communities or ecosystems,
- reduce deer-vehicle accidents on the property or adjacent roads, and
- reduce damage complaints from residents or neighbors.

DPCPs are issued for a maximum of 90 days, although time extensions are possible. There is no limit on the number of deer that can be taken, but the number proposed to be collected must be justified and documented.

26) What restrictions exist for Deer Population Control Permits (DPCPs)?

If the permit applicant is proposing to take deer at bait stations via sharpshooters, all sharpshooter candidates must be tested and seasonally-approved by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) prior to deer program implementation. There is no limit on the number of sharpshooters, but all sharpshooters, who are Illinois residents, must also have a valid Illinois Firearms Owner's Identification (FOID) card. Also to ensure public safety, all proposed shooting or bait sites must be viewed and approved by IDNR prior to their use.

The program must return all unused leg tags along with a deer removal summary within 30 days after permit expiration. The removal summary must list the tag number, location, sex, age and physical condition of each animal collected as well as the total amount of processed venison donated to charity (and to which charities).

27) What happens to the venison meat collected?

All DPCPs are required to use lethal techniques that result in deer carcasses that are suitable for human consumption. Providing carcasses suitable for human consumption means that most DPCP programs take place during the cooler late fall and winter months (November to March). All usable deer carcasses must be processed at an IDNR-approved meat processing facility and the processed venison must be donated to a bona fide charitable organization.

Unusable deer carcasses must be disposed of in accordance with the Illinois Dead Animal Disposal Act. The total amount of processed venison must be reported to the IDNR and must include where it was donated.

28) Can citizens or other private organizations be allowed to hunt or participate in the program?

No. The Cook County Forest Preserve contracts with the Department of Agriculture to complete programs throughout their properties. These personnel are subsequently the only personnel permitted by the Cook County Forest Preserve to complete a program for River Forest.

29) Can archery or other equipment be used?

No. The use of archery equipment, handguns, muzzle-loading rifles, etc. are not authorized. Only modern rifles or shotguns are permitted by the IDNR to be utilized for sharpshooting programs as part of a DPCP. These are determined to be the safest and most humane methods.

30) Can deer be captured and relocated or can birth control methods be used?

No. DPCPs cannot be issued by the IDNR for the live-capture and translocation of deer or for utilization of experimental techniques such as sterilization or immunocontraception. The IDNR has found these methods to be ineffective and prohibit their use.

31) Can fencing be used to keep deer out of River Forest?

No. White-tailed deer are excellent jumpers. In order to keep deer off of a property, a fence would need to be at least eight feet tall. In the application of River Forest, this would at the very least need to include fencing off the entire stretch of forest preserve property including along areas where the forest preserve is intersected by streets and railroad tracks. Fencing can best be used in localized applications such as a garden.

32) Does River Forest need to work collectively on culling with other towns?

No. Deer in urban areas typically have a small home range of .17 miles. The deer entering residential neighborhoods in River Forest are coming from forest preserves in River Forest and not from Elmwood Park or Forest Park. According to feedback from the IDNR, it is unlikely that deer are crossing North Avenue or Madison Street to establish residence in a new area.

33) How much would a deer population control program cost the Village of River Forest?

Costs associated with the program are for the Cook County Forest Preserve to contract with the appropriate professionals to complete the culling including the processing and donating of meat. While the total cost is dependent on the number of deer that are removed, the per deer cost is estimated to be up to \$1,000.

The Village has initiated this partnership based on the feedback received by residents as it relates to public safety and public health concerns within our residential neighborhoods. As part of the Intergovernmental Agreement, the Cook County Forest Preserve would manage the program on behalf of the Village.

34) What other communities have implemented a deer population control program?

Community Deer Advisor, a partnership between Cornell University and The Nature Conservancy, has worked to document deer management programs throughout the country. In Illinois, these communities include Bannockburn, Glencoe, and Northbrook. Further information on Northbrook's program is available [here](#).

35) Will River Forest residents still see deer in the community after a population control program?

Yes. Deer population control programs will never extinguish deer populations in the community. The program will only consider the amount of deer that is overabundant and considered a threat to the current ecosystem so that the deer population maintains a healthy habitat.

Deer Disease Concerns

36) Do deer carry Lyme Disease?

Deer are an important link in the life-cycle of the black-legged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) (also known as the deer tick). Deer serve as hosts for the adult stage of the tick. Black-legged ticks can be carriers of a bacterium (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) which causes Lyme Disease. Humans can become infected when bitten by a tick that carries the bacterium. Deer do not transmit the disease, but coming into contact with deer can increase the risk of exposure to ticks. Lyme Disease can be treated with antibiotics if caught early. [Click here](#) for more information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about Lyme Disease.

37) Does a deer population control program eliminate ticks or Lyme Disease?

No. A deer population control program does not eliminate ticks or Lyme Disease. However, deer are a host for ticks to be transported to other species including humans. With less deer in the population, the likelihood of deer entering residential areas is reduced, thus reducing the chances of residents being affected by ticks and subsequently Lyme Disease. There are studies that indicate that with less deer the number of ticks per deer can double.

38) What is Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)?

Chronic Wasting Disease is a fatal neurological disease found in cervids (deer and elk). It belongs to the family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) or prion diseases. Though it shares certain features with other TSEs, like bovine spongiform encephalopathy (Mad Cow Disease) or scrapie in sheep, it is a distinct disease apparently affecting only deer and related species. CWD has been diagnosed in captive or wild free-ranging deer and/or elk in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, New Mexico, Texas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, West Virginia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, and Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

39) What are the signs of Chronic Wasting Disease in deer?

The disease attacks the brains of affected animals, causing them to become emaciated, display abnormal behavior, lose coordination and eventually die. Signs of the disease include excessive salivation, loss of appetite, progressive weight loss, excessive thirst and urination, listlessness, teeth grinding, holding the head in a lowered position and drooping ears. **Many of these signs can also be symptoms of other diseases.** CWD is a slowly progressive disease; infected deer may not show signs of the disease for 18 or more months. In fact, 94% of the deer from Illinois that have tested positive for CWD have otherwise appeared healthy.

40) Where has Chronic Wasting Disease been confirmed?

For many years CWD was known to occur only in a small area of northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. However, the distribution of the disease has expanded into a number of other states and Canadian provinces. In February 2002, CWD was discovered in wild deer in southern Wisconsin. In November 2002, Illinois confirmed that a CWD-infected deer had been found near Roscoe in Boone County, near the Wisconsin border. To date, CWD has been confirmed in 17 Illinois counties: Winnebago, Boone, McHenry, DeKalb, Ogle, LaSalle, Stephenson, Jo Daviess, Kane, Grundy, Kendall, Du Page, Lake,

Will, Livingston, Kankakee and Carroll. In Illinois, the disease is most common in eastern Winnebago, northwest DeKalb, west and central McHenry, most of Boone County, northeast Kane, central LaSalle, west and central Kendall and Grundy, and in the southeast and southwest corners of Jo Daviess and Stephenson counties, respectively. If left unmanaged, CWD prevalence will likely increase and the disease will spread throughout the state. There is currently no treatment or vaccination for the disease.

41) Is Chronic Wasting Disease transmissible to humans?

CWD has been known to occur in deer and elk in the United States for years. In spite of ongoing surveillance for similar disease syndromes in humans, there has never been an instance of people contracting the disease from butchering or eating meat from CWD infected animals. A World Health Organization (WHO) panel of experts reviewed all the available information on CWD and concluded that there is no scientific evidence that CWD can infect humans. However, there is much that scientists still do not know about CWD, and the IDNR cannot state that transmission of CWD to humans is absolutely not possible.

For more information on Chronic Wasting Disease, please [click here](#).