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ITHACANS FOR SAFE, ETHICAL AND RATIONAL  
APPROACHES TO REDUCING DEER-HUMAN CONFLICT

**PUBLIC FORUMS COMING SOON**  
March 12 at 7:15 PM, DeWitt Middle School  
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APPROACHES TO REDUCING DEER-HUMAN CONFLICT  
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## Do we really want to bring guns and violence into our community?

Many members of our community value our local deer, and have come to know and care about some of them as individuals. One local resident wrote, "I enjoy the deer in my yard. I have watched them grow up and feel like they are part of my home now. I have watched a young buck take care of an orphan all year, with the fawn nursing at any mother that would let her. My deer friends are not aggressive but so gentle. It breaks my heart that they may be killed."



Following a bait-and-shoot operation, there are likely to be orphaned fawns and disoriented deer separated from their family groups. If performed during the winter months, as has been proposed, many of the does that are shot will be pregnant. The violence and its aftermath will be traumatic for many in our community.

The Cayuga Heights Deer Remediation Advisory Committee is currently getting pricing information from White Buffalo<sup>1</sup>, a deer killing outfit run by Anthony DeNicola, pictured at right.



• In 2004, former hunter Steve Hindi secretly videotaped White Buffalo's deer killing program in Summit County, Ohio. *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported: "Instead of showing quick deaths, six days of footage show deer suffering after they were shot, missed shots and rangers putting plastic bags over animals' heads as they thrash, Hindi said."<sup>2</sup> The video footage appears on Hindi's web site, along with **testimony from several veterinarians who described the method of killing as "inhumane."**<sup>3</sup>

• Regarding the killing of deer, DeNicola of White Buffalo is quoted in a *USA Today* article as having said, "**I do this every day. For me it's like brushing my teeth.**"<sup>4</sup>

• In 2008, White Buffalo and the City of Solon, Ohio settled a lawsuit with Belinda Geiger for \$25,000. According to *The Solon Herald Sun*, Geiger claimed "**the city and White Buffalo conspired unlawfully to silence her and deprive her of her right to free speech.**"<sup>5</sup>

• White Buffalo's Sharpshooting Protocol states, among other things, "**Deer are shot from a vehicle with a rifle during the night with the aid of spotlights.**"

• Regarding bringing in deer killing contractors, Cayuga Heights Police Chief Boyce has said, "Making things safe for the community is, to a large part, making the decision to shoot or not shoot and **if CHPD is not shooting I can not guarantee that safety.**"<sup>6</sup>

1. DRAC meeting, Feb. 5, 2009. 2. *Group calls Summit deer kill cruel; cameras that caught suffering seized*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Mar. 3, 2004. 3. <http://www.sharkonline.org/?P=00000004312>. 4. *Why deer hunts can be humane*, *USA Today*, Dec. 19, 2005. 5. *Geiger settles lawsuit against city, culling firm*, *Solon Herald Sun*, Dec. 18, 2008. 6. Memo from Chief Thomas L. Boyce to Deer Committee Members, Feb. 10, 2009.

For five months now, a group of citizens residing in Cayuga Heights and surrounding neighborhoods has been attending meetings, reviewing scientific research, evaluating the validity of claims being made by those who advocate a deer killing program, and investigating what's happening in other communities facing this issue. We have also sought to understand the true sources of deer-human conflicts and how they might most effectively be reduced. In all our study, one clear truth has emerged: **Our community will be divided by any solution that doesn't respect both the needs of gardeners and the values of people opposed to a deer killing program.**

**Safer roadways are good. Vibrant gardens are good. Respecting and protecting animals is good. Treating these things as mutually exclusive will only result in pitting well-meaning people against one another.** Our community can do better.

Some gardeners now feel their interests will have been abandoned if a deer killing plan is not implemented. Meanwhile, those who care about the fate of the deer, and those opposed to bringing guns and violence into our community, will feel violated by an annual bait-and-shoot program.

The right approach for our community should not leave some residents feeling ignored, and others violated. **It should provide direct assistance to those experiencing the greatest conflict with deer, while preserving the peaceful, non-violent culture our community is known for.** The right approach should be pragmatic, ethical and economically sustainable. It should bring people together, not tear neighborhoods apart.

### Costly and Controversial

A bait-and-shoot program **will use valuable tax dollars to bring contracted deer killers into our community year after year.** Other communities that have gone down this path have experienced turmoil and division, with local law enforcement officers placed in the middle, forced to provide security for shooters not under their command, in a setting where the killing of human-habituated animals provoked deep upset and anger. While it's still unclear how a bait-and-shoot program would be carried out here, **residents in other communities have described these programs**

**as resembling military operations**, with helicopter fly-overs and armed men taking over their public spaces.<sup>1</sup>

In Irondequoit, NY, where a deer killing program was implemented, resident Sandy Baker reported that wounded and bleeding deer wandered into people's yards, traumatizing children. "**Best friends don't even talk to each other anymore,**" she said at a 2001 public meeting in Cayuga Heights. "**The killing programs are the ones that have polarized the community... All I can say is please try to resist any kill program.**"

Does it make sense to undertake an expensive, risk-laden program that some residents feel will be a violation of their values, and even traumatic?

Councilman Erik Ambrozaitis, who cast one of the four votes responsible for canceling the cull, was correct when he said, "The solution has become worse than the problem."

*Deer cull was a catastrophe*  
The Rochester Eccentric  
Editorial, Feb. 19, 2009

In a 2001 survey, only 15-30% of Cayuga Heights residents said they'd approve of a deer killing program.<sup>2</sup> And at recent public meetings, **the vast majority of citizens speaking out have been vigorously opposed to killing deer. These numbers will only grow if a bait-and-shoot program gets put into place and people begin to witness firsthand the reality of a systematic killing operation.**

In fact, a bait-and-shoot program in Rochester Hills, Michigan, was recently cancelled after only one month, due to overwhelming citizen protest. One Councilman said, "**The solution has become worse than the problem.**"<sup>3</sup> Another commented on the rush to cull, saying "**Let's learn something from this, and not ever do anything like this again.**"<sup>4</sup>

1. *Sparks fly over deer kill*, *The Oakland Press*, January 28, 2009.  
2. *Judge sides with city on deer cull*, *The Rochester Eccentric*, January 21, 2009.  
3. "Community Attitudes About Deer Management In the Village of Cayuga Heights, New York," Human Dimensions Research Unit Publication Series No. 01-7, May 2001  
4. *Deer cull was a catastrophe*, Editorial, *The Rochester Eccentric*, February 19, 2009  
4. *Council votes to halt deer cull in Rochester Hills*, *Detroit Free Press*, February 9, 2009

## Impractical and Unsustainable

Wildlife biologists and hunters know that **killing deer does not necessarily lead to reduction in the size of a herd.**<sup>5</sup> Whenever there's an abrupt, short-term drop in the deer population, as would occur following a bait-and-shoot operation, a phenomenon called "compensatory rebound" comes into effect. Since the same amount of food is now available to a smaller number of animals, **the bodies of the deer react by becoming more fertile, with more incidences of twin and triplet fawns, and with yearlings going into estrus early.**<sup>6</sup> **This can actually lead to an even greater population of deer the following year.**<sup>7</sup>

So, wherever culling programs are implemented, the killing itself creates the need for even more killing, which must be maintained year after year after year, at great expense to tax-payers. In Princeton, New Jersey, a proposed 5-year program has now been going on for nine years straight. In Solon, Ohio, a proposed 2-year program is currently in its 5th year. In fact, **some bait-and-shoot programs have ended not when the deer population reached a desired level, but when the municipalities implementing the programs could no longer afford them, leaving them back where they started, only now considerably poorer.**<sup>8</sup>

Unlike many other communities implementing bait-and-shoot programs, Cayuga Heights has very few potential sites that are far enough from human dwellings for shooting to legally be carried out, and these few locations tend to be toward the perimeters of the village. Hence, **there is no guarantee that killing a number of deer on one end of the village will prevent deer from damaging landscaping in other parts of the village.**

Furthermore, Cayuga Heights is completely embedded within other municipalities. With no geographic barriers to overcome, **deer from surrounding neighborhoods are likely to move in as new territory is freed up by the village's temporary drop in deer population.**

5. *Restoring America's Wildlife: 1937-1987*, US Dept. of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service.  
6. *Reproductive Dynamics Among Disjunct White-Tailed Deer Herds in Florida*, Journal of Wildlife Management, 49(4):964-971 (1985).  
7. *Quality Deer Management: Guidelines for Implementation*, Ag. Extension Svc, Univ. of Tennessee.  
8. *Budget has job losses, no tax hikes in Mt. Lebanon*, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Nov. 6, 2008  
9. *A Study of the Effectiveness of Strieter-Lite Wild Animal Highway Warning Reflector Systems* by Robert H. Grenier, June 28, 2002; <http://www.strieter-lite.com>  
10. City Council meeting, Rochester Hills, Michigan, Jan. 28, 2009

## Addressing Conflicts Directly: The safe, cost-effective, and pragmatic alternative

Instead of annually paying large sums of tax-payers' dollars to an out-of-town deer killing contractor, why not hire an on-staff Community Deer Ranger whose job would be to directly assist residents experiencing conflicts? A Deer Ranger could collect and disseminate the latest techniques for protecting gardens, consult with property owners individually, assist with implementing deer repelling protocols, and arrange for group buying discounts on community-appropriate fencing and repellent technologies. In short, **a Deer Ranger could help bring the community together by offering a positive approach and seeing to it that concrete steps are promptly taken on behalf of those most impacted.**

Already there are many Cayuga Heights residents who maintain vibrant gardens and beautiful landscaping through the creative use of fencing, plant selection, and repellents. If more residents were empowered with the proper tools and technologies, those who have struggled for years could finally get some relief. And this relief would come more quickly and reliably than the haphazard results of a killing program. While immuno-contraception and sterilization are non-lethal alternatives that have been implemented in other communities to reduce deer population, experience still demonstrates that **until residents have the ability to effectively protect**

**their gardens, it doesn't matter how many deer are in the village — all it takes is one eating their favorite plantings to bring some people back to a state of total frustration.**

Likewise, prevention should be the focus of any program aimed at reducing deer-vehicle collisions (DVC's). Fortunately, there are highly effective roadside warning reflector systems. **Strieter-Lite technology, for example, has a track record of reducing DVCs by 78-90% and is eligible for up to 90% federal funding.**<sup>9</sup> The traffic engineer in nearby Owego reported 100% reduction during their first year of use.<sup>10</sup> Police Chief Boyce has analyzed Cayuga Heights data and confirmed that there are DVC "hot spots." By installing warning reflectors in such areas, the collision rate can be significantly reduced — without any of the risks of a killing program, which may actually *cause* accidents. This happened in Rochester Hills when, **on the second day of shooting, a frightened deer ran into the road and was hit by a car.**<sup>10</sup>

We encourage you to look beyond the assumption that there are just too many deer, and that killing some will solve people's problems. Instead, consider that it is unresolved deer-human conflicts that make people so frustrated. Non-violent solutions exist to address these conflicts directly, allowing us to live in harmony with both our neighbors and our natural surroundings. **These alternatives promise to be more effective, less costly, and less divisive than a killing program that largely ignores existing data and research.**

A coordinated, community-wide, non-violent alternative:

- provides immediate relief to the people who need it most
- saves tax payers money
- opens up opportunities for federal & private assistance
- prevents risks of injury and law suits
- prevents community division

## Deconstructing the Myths about Cayuga Heights Deer

Thus far, the arguments presented to support a deer killing program have been largely unsubstantiated, and have proven to be especially weak when examined in light of data specific to Cayuga Heights. Here are a few examples:

### Killing deer to prevent Lyme disease?

**The incidence of Lyme disease in Tompkins County is low, as much as 10-20 times lower than some other New York counties.**<sup>12</sup> Of the small number of cases identified here, at least some are believed to be contracted by people traveling outside our region.<sup>13</sup> **None of the Lyme disease data from our county is linked specifically to Cayuga Heights.**<sup>14</sup>

People don't catch Lyme disease from deer, but from ticks. Neither the Tompkins County Health Dept. nor the American Lyme Disease Foundation support the killing of deer as a route to reducing Lyme disease risk. In fact, a recent study in New Jersey showed that **after three years of an aggressive deer killing program, no reduction in Lyme disease rates or in disease-carrying tick populations were found.**<sup>15</sup>

Instead, the Tompkins County Health Dept. focuses on tick bite prevention and identification, as well as diagnostic training for local medical professionals. They stress keeping lawns regularly mowed and removing brush piles. This helps eliminate habitats for ticks and their small animal hosts, such as birds and field mice, which, unlike the deer, are capable of contracting Lyme disease and passing it on to more ticks. In fact, a 2006 study found that **the density and infectiousness of ticks can actually INCREASE when deer numbers are suddenly reduced in an area**, since ticks then turn to smaller animal hosts, creating tick-borne disease "hot spots."<sup>16</sup>

### Collision rates: a sign of deer population spiraling out of control?

There is no data demonstrating that the deer population in Cayuga Heights is spiraling out of control, bringing with it more and more deer-vehicle collisions (DVC's). In fact, the village police reported 8 confirmed DVC's in 2008, down from 12 in 2007, and 11 in 2006.<sup>17</sup> In 2001, a report by Cornell's Department of Natural Resources found that the rate of DVC's in Cayuga Heights had been approximately 10 per year for the previous six years.<sup>18</sup> So, **for more than fifteen years now, the rate of DVC's has been remarkably stable.**

To keep things in perspective, **no DVC in recent years has resulted in serious human injury**, likely due to Cayuga Heights' relatively low speed limit. Most fatalities from DVC's nationwide happen in speed zones of 55 mph or higher, when the victims are not wearing seat belts or motorcycle helmets.<sup>19</sup>

12. NY State Dept. of Health: 2004-06 Bureau of Communicable Disease Control Data as of July, 2008  
13. and 14. Letter from Carol Mohler, Comm. Health Svcs Unit, Tompkins Co. Health Dept., 12/29/08  
15. *Effects of Sustained Reduction of White-tailed Deer on the Abundance of Ixodes scapularis (Acari: Ixodidae) in an Endemic Lyme Disease Area in New Jersey*, Jnl. of Medical Entomology, 2007  
16. *Localized Deer Absence Leads to Tick Amplification*, Ecology, 87(8), 2006  
17. Deer Remediation Advisory Committee meeting, Feb. 5, 2009; and "Statistics on Deer Accident and Incidents in Cayuga Heights," memorandum prepared by Police Chief Thomas L. Boyce, 2008  
18. Summary Report of Cayuga Heights Deer Study Committee, Cornell Dept. of Nat. Resources, 2001  
19. Highway Loss Data Institute, News Release, Oct. 30, 2008

Insurance reports have shown that DVC's spike 300-400% in some communities on the first weekend of hunting season,<sup>20</sup> likely due to startled and injured deer scattering into nearby roadways. This could explain why DVC's sometimes actually increase after bait-and-shoot programs are implemented.<sup>21</sup>

### Biodiversity and bird populations at risk?

Bait-and-shoot proponents have claimed that the deer are destroying the environment and decimating bird populations in Cayuga Heights. However, when contacted, neither the National Audubon Society nor Cornell's Lab of Ornithology knew of any documentation of bird species being adversely affected by the presence of deer in the village.<sup>22</sup>

Recent studies at Ohio State University found that **the presence of deer is actually helpful to other animal species, and that programs to reduce their populations may be detrimental to a region's biodiversity.** "Culling deer may cascade into affecting plants, salamanders and other creatures in ways we can't even imagine," said OSU researcher Katherine Greenwald. "Officials need to know more about the forest ecosystem before making decisions about wild-life management."<sup>23</sup> Another study showed that some forest understory-dwelling birds benefit from deer-grazing, and that the presence of deer decreased populations of rodents that preyed on ground birds' nests.<sup>24</sup>

### Donated venison will help those in need?

Few people realize that **venison obtained from deer killing programs is exempt from USDA inspection**, and is not necessarily safe. Venison from Irondequoit, NY's bait-and-shoot program, donated to Attica prison, was deemed unfit for human consumption and discarded.<sup>25</sup> The EPA states, "While it may seem that hunting your own game, catching your own fish, or gathering wild plant foods would reduce your overall exposure to pesticides, that isn't necessarily true. If you eat wild animals or plants from areas where pesticides are frequently used, this food may contain pesticide residues."<sup>26</sup>

Deer meat from a bait-and-shoot program is also likely to contain lead from the bullets used. Lead is a potent neurotoxin, and there is no safe level of exposure. It causes neurological, gastrointestinal and reproductive disorders, and can potentially cause brain damage or death in children that consume even small amounts.<sup>27</sup> **North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin recently discarded thousands of pounds of donated venison due to the discovery of lead contamination.**<sup>28</sup> Dr. William Cornatzer, a medical researcher at the University of North Dakota, found lead in 60% of samples of ground venison that had been donated to food programs.<sup>29</sup>

20. *Pennsylvania Deer-Vehicle Collisions Down Slightly*, PR Newswire, Sept. 24, 2008  
21. *City wants OK to cull 175 deer in '08*, Solon Herald Sun, Jan. 17, 2008  
22. Phone inquiries made in February, 2009  
23. *Indirect Effects of a Keystone Herbivore Elevate Local Animal Diversity*, Journal of Wildlife Management, 72(6), Aug. 2008  
24. *The impact of herbivory by deer on forest bird communities in Japan*, Acta Zoologica Sinica 52(Supplement): 684-686, 2006  
25. *Buffalo, NY Bait and Shoot*, The C.A.S.H. Courier, 2004 Fall/Winter Issue  
26. *Citizen's Guide to Pest Control and Pesticide Safety*, Environmental Protection Agency, Mar., 2005  
27. *Lead Exposure in Children Affects Brain and Behavior*, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Facts for Families, No. 45, updated Nov. 2004  
28. *Lead fragments in venison a hot topic*, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Nov. 16, 2008  
29. *Lead found in donated venison at food shelves*, Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune, Mar. 28, 2008

*CayugaDeer.org is a local citizens' group comprised of residents from Ithaca neighborhoods, including Cayuga Heights. Its spokespeople are James LaVeck, Jenny Stein and Eric Huang. Donations from local residents cover the group's out-of-pocket expenses, which are modest compared to the substantial value of donated volunteer time. If you would like to learn more, and be informed of opportunities where your input can make a difference, visit our web site, [www.CayugaDeer.org](http://www.CayugaDeer.org), or email us: [contact@cayugadeer.org](mailto:contact@cayugadeer.org)*