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Heights suspends plan to cull deer

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CAYUGA HEIGHTS -- In an abrupt reversal, the Village of Cayuga Heights has suspended plans to cull the deer population this year and will instead ramp up its sterilization program.

At a special meeting Tuesday, the Village Board of Trustees announced that after sending written consent forms to the owners of the roughly 900 land parcels in the municipality, owners of about 90 parcels said they would not allow culling on their property.

The board said that while this constitutes only about 10 percent of the land in the village, it would limit the number of feasible sites necessary for the culling strategy to succeed.

According to state law, a firearm cannot be discharged within 500 feet of a dwelling without the dwelling owners' consent. The location of these nonconsenting properties, in combination with the 500-foot radius surrounding them, would cover the majority of the village, the board said.

"The strongest action we can take at this point is to put into place a very intensive sterilization process," Mayor Kate Supron said at the meeting.

Last Friday, the state Department of Environmental Conservation modified the village's license to increase the number of does it may sterilize from 60 to 145, and at Tuesday's meeting, the board passed an amendment to the State Environmental Quality Review to reflect the change.

"Even though that will not reduce the number of deer immediately on our landscape, it will certainly reduce them relative to what we would've had next spring," Supron said. "It's the best we can do for now."

Controversy over proposed deer-control strategies extend back more than 10 years, when the village began studying deer remediation due to overpopulation. Since then, there have been numerous public hearings and a lawsuit challenging the village's plan. The Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court ruled in favor of the village in June.

Greater cost

The village has previously estimated the cost of culling at \$400 per deer, versus \$1,000 per sterilized doe. While sterilization will be more expensive, it still could have a major impact on the deer population because of the scale of the operation and the condensed nature of it, Supron said.

Surplus funds in the village budget will pay for the sterilization program. At Tuesday's meeting, the board authorized Supron to sign contracts with White Buffalo Inc. and Cornell University to carry out the program, pending final approval by village attorneys.

Paul Curtis, extension wildlife specialist at Cornell's Department of Natural Resources, serves as a consultant for the village's deer management program.

He said White Buffalo will handle the capture, tagging, sterilization and release of the deer while Cornell experts will prepare the capture sites by baiting them with whole-kernel corn.

Three to four weeks after the deer are sterilized and released, Cornell will begin monitoring the deer population with infrared equipment.

Supron said she expects the initial capturing phase to last 15 days. Between changing weather conditions and the difficulties inherent in capturing deer, "there are a lot of variables. ... Our goal is to be as efficient as possible."

While the culling option is currently off the table, that doesn't mean it will be ruled out in the future. Supron said the village will need to examine the results of the sterilization and population survey before they decide how to proceed.

"No matter what you do with deer management, it's an ongoing process," she said. "You can't stop, or it will all come undone."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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