

memorandum

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex

P. O. Box 21

Shirley, New York 11967

DATE: September 28, 2000

TO: Deputy Project Leader

FROM: Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex

SUBJECT: Proposed changes in Seatuck NWR deer cull

This is a proposal to alter the Seatuck NWR deer cull in order to better meet resource objectives and improve interagency relations. Last season the DEC raised its collective eyebrow when we requested 14 nuisance deer tags; in the 4 previous years we had taken between 6 and 9 deer. For the first time, I believe DEC also indicated a sex preference, stating that antlerless deer should be taken with 12 of the 14 tags issued. My concern is that we are taking deer well out of proportion to what is recorded in the deer drive and that by not culling an adequate number of females, we are needlessly taking more deer each year.

For example, last year's deer drive tallied 13 males, 12 females, 7 fawns, and 1 unknown sex/age deer, for a density of 110 deer/sq mile over a 200 acre area. The cull removed 13 total deer of which 3 were adult females carrying a total of 2 fetuses. This resulted in a density of 67 deer/sq mile, above our stated goal of <50 deer/sq mile. In 1999, we culled 8 deer of which 1 was an adult female with 1 fetus. Of the 6 deer culled in 1998, 2 were adult females with a total of 4 fetuses. In contrast, in 1996 and 1997, adult females constituted approximately 70% of the cull. Again, my concern is that we are removing more deer without attaining our overall goals, and at the same time lessening our credibility with DEC.

I propose that we harvest a greater proportion of females by becoming more selective in the deer we choose to remove. As performing the cull in a single day can cause us to be relatively non-selective, I propose to extend the culling over several days. To aid in deer identification, I would also recommend performing the cull before antler drop has started. ARM Stewart reported that in the act of baiting each morning, deer were already "on bait" and relatively unconcerned by his presence. Therefore, I propose that we cull deer as part of the daily baiting process.

The disadvantages to this proposal are as follows:

- Deer will be unwilling to visit a bait set after deer have already been shot at that location.
Possibly an issue, but numerous deer are culled from a single bait set currently.
Under this proposal, we could span several days before the next cull event.
- Notifications to local authorities will have to be made each day, instead of once.
- Public safety could be compromised with fewer staff to man the Refuge perimeters.
We are going into the sixth year of the program and I am not aware of any instances where the public entered the Refuge or that the media made an issue of the project

The advantages:

- We can be more selective in the deer culled because we aren't limited to one day and we can therefore better control densities.
- It is more efficient because ~3 staff would be involved for ~2 hours each day instead of ~11 staff for a full day.
- Culling can be completed before the ES and SEA offices open for business.
- Culling can be completed during whatever daylight hours were most advantageous in terms of community issues.

These recommendations are consistent with the existing vertebrate pest control plan. The plan does not specify the time period under which the cull is to occur. For safety reasons, the plan notes that 2 Service LE will patrol the Refuge; 1 on the inside and 1 on the western perimeter. We can meet this item with our Refuge Ranger and an officer from the Valley Stream office. Although the plan calls for shooting to occur from elevated stands, it seems that through practice, vehicles have effectively served as "stands".