

### **Why is a deer assessment important?**

- White-tailed deer are native to Arlington and are an essential part of its local ecology.
- But studies have shown that when the population gets too big, they can have an unintended effect on themselves and our environment. They compete for food which can lead to malnourishment, disease, and increased mortality rates. In this situation, deer end up eating important native plants in the forest faster than they can regenerate themselves. Too many deer will destroy the habitat impacting not only our forest's ability to regrow but also the many other species like birds, amphibians, and other animals that rely on the plants for food and cover.
- Arlington is committed to preserving its natural land parks for all native plants and animals.
- For this reason, when our naturalists started gathering anecdotal evidence showing an overabundance of white-tailed deer in Arlington initiated an assessment to determine their potential impact on our park natural lands.

### **What does the deer assessment say?**

- The results of the assessment indicate that there is an overpopulation of white-tailed deer and that it is having a negative impact on Arlington's parks' forest health.
- Specifically, the assessment shows that the deer are eating plants, including small trees, faster than they can regrow.
- Without active management and restoration, ecological health of Arlington's natural areas will continue to degrade, leading to a cascading loss of habitat for other living things.
- In addition, replanting and protection may be required for native plant species recovery to a previous natural state.
- The assessment recommends that Arlington consider implementing an active deer management program to reduce browse pressure and ensure management goals are met.
- Our effort right now is to share these findings with the community and discuss potential management options, and ultimately help us determine how best to move forward.

### **Are there too many deer in Arlington?**

- Yes, the results provided by an [aerial drone survey](#) in April 2021, and a deer vegetation impact assessment in 2023 show that the deer population exceeded

thresholds that many studies have determined to be unsustainable for forest function and regeneration.

- The aerial survey's conservative estimate is that there are a minimum of 290 deer County wide, with those deer primarily concentrated in natural areas such as woodlands and stream corridors.

### **Why do we need to manage deer population in County-owned natural parks?**

- At low densities, deer can improve forest health through seed dispersal, and by adding to the diversity of the forest structure – some plants browsed, some not. Their droppings can add fertility to the soil.
- But, as herbivores, a single adult deer consumes 5 to 7 lbs. of plant matter in one day. Over 1 ton of vegetation is consumed by one deer in one year.
- Because Arlington's deer population is not constrained by any predators, it is able to grow exponentially to levels at which it may no longer be in balance with our local ecology.

### **What happens if the County doesn't manage deer in its parks?**

- We will see an increase in white-tailed deer over-eating or feeding on too many plants including small trees leaving the forest empty of young trees, bushes and wildflowers. Typically, having over 15-20 deer per square mile doesn't allow native plants to reproduce successfully.
- The loss of the number and kinds of plants in the forest community reduces the complexity and biodiversity of the forest and makes it less resilient and more susceptible to stress.
- At this time, impacts to wildlife become more pronounced. Animals that live or nest in this part of the forest – from box turtles to birds - will decline with the loss of the habitat they depend on.

### **What is the difference between cultural versus ecological carrying capacity?**

- Cultural carrying capacity is the number and type of a given species that people will tolerate over time.
- Ecological carrying capacity is the point at which damage to normally renewable native plant resources occurs.

### **What deer management options will Arlington consider?**

- Management options will be released through upcoming community engagements.

## FAQs - Frequently Asked Deer Questions

[Project Page](#)

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- The County has not made any decisions about how or whether it will manager deer at this time.
- As part of the project engagement the County will be weighing various management options.
- Input from staff, the community, and contractor will help inform strategies.

### **How can people learn more or get involved with this project?**

- We encourage our community members to learn more and get involved by visiting our [project webpage](#).
- There you'll find the latest assessments and opportunities to provide feedback related to deer management on County owned natural land parks.