

## **Why Not Consider the Commercialization of Deer Harvests?**

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### Why Not Consider the Commercialization of Deer Harvests?

Overabundance of white-tailed deer in eastern North America is as much, or more, of a conservation issue today than was the near absence of the deer in the same landscape only 70 years earlier. As Sharon Levy's (2006) review of the problem in *BioScience* suggests, overabundance of deer has multifarious and pernicious ecological ramifications. Changes occurring in the landscape because of deer have become the "new normal" for exurban landowners and recreational users of the outdoors. Many people can no longer conceive of a landscape unaltered by an overabundance of deer; they have no experience with it.

There is a solution to this problem of overabundant deer, one that wildlife managers are reluctant to consider: namely, a commercialized deer harvest. The problems associated with instituting a commercial harvest of deer are many, but none of them is ecological. The foremost difficulty is that commercialization would be competitive with two long-standing constituencies, deer hunters and deer farmers.

An example of how a commercialized deer harvest might be implemented is that of the salmon harvest in the

northwestern United States. Constituencies associated with this harvest, which are arguably more diverse than those associated with the harvest of deer, include recreational anglers, nearshore commercial gillnetters, and pelagic trawlers, each further divided by national, tribal, provincial, and state jurisdiction. A further layer of complexity is the coincidence of wild and pen-reared salmon. Interactions among these constituencies are governed by a complex set of laws and policies. Such complexities should not be used to justify the continued absence of this additional tool for removing deer from the landscape.

If this example of salmon harvest is not convincing, then consider the commercialized harvest of seven taxa of deer in New Zealand. Nugent and Choquenot (2004, p. 482) suggested that "deer populations are now often held well below...ecological carrying capacity." The

New Zealand example also shows that there is substantial demand for wild venison.

The biggest stumbling block to the consideration of commercial harvesting is not ecological. It is the human perspective. As Levy (2006) correctly describes, this problem of overabundant deer cannot be solved until this perspective is addressed. In addressing these political problems, consideration should be given to commercial harvest.

WAYNE THOGMARTIN

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#### Letters to the Editor

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