

Hunting won't solve Lyme disease, tick issues in White's Woods

• October 3, 2023 14 hrs ago



Deer hunting in White's Woods Nature Center (WWNC) came up at the September meeting of the White Township Stewardship Committee. The continuing discussion would benefit from knowledge of some recent scientific research on deer, ticks, deer browse, and Lyme disease, and by an understanding of the realities of the White Township deer problem(s).

- 1) On islands and enclosed areas, complete deer eradication reduces tick and Lyme numbers. Unfortunately, WWNC isn't an island, and is surrounded by "no-hunting land."
- 2) One scientific study indicates that simply reducing the deer density by hunting does not impact Lyme disease, apparently because many ticks can blood-feast on a single deer. Only by eradicating almost all deer can we expect significant reductions in human Lyme disease. WWNC's open borders make near-eradication impossible.
- 3) Several studies indicate that reduction in deer density by lethal deer management does not significantly relieve browse pressure on oak seedlings. Apparently, hunting leads to fewer, better-fed deer, without significant reduction in browse. Despite years of recreational hunting, Duff Park, Murrysville, still shows signs of substantial deer browse.
- 4) If every huntable WWNC deer were killed, borough and township neighbors would still have browse-damage, ticks and Lyme. It may seem that all the deer "live" in WWNC, emerging nightly to munch on landscaping and spread "blood-fed" ticks. But deer also bed down on private land surrounding WWNC. Herds overlap and spend most of their time outside White's Woods. Most do not call WWNC "home." They are "community deer." Deer killed in White's Woods, will be replaced by some of the hundreds of community deer on all sides.
- 5) Fencing the entire perimeter of WWNC and killing all deer inside, won't solve the deer-browse-tick-Lyme problems outside WWNC. There are so many deer in White Township and northern Indiana Borough, that the remaining herds will fill the space right up to the fence.

In short, a lethal deer management program confined to White's Woods Nature Center will not solve the deer-browse-tick-Lyme problem for White Township and Indiana Borough neighbors.

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