MULE DEER MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN FOR THE CITY OF WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, MONTANA

OVERVIEW:

Montana statute recognizes that cities or towns may, on occasion, need to manage wildlife within their boundaries in order to protect residents or their property.

MCA 7-31-4110 reads as follows: *A city or town may adopt a plan to control, remove, and restrict game animals, as defined in 87-2-101, within the boundaries of the city or town limits for public health and safety purposes. Upon adoption of a plan, the city or town shall notify the department of fish, wildlife, and parks of the plan. If the department of fish, wildlife, and parks approves the plan or approves the plan with conditions, the city or town may implement the plan as approved or as approved with conditions.*

A healthy, wild deer population is important to the people of White Sulphur Springs. Deer hunting and viewing in areas surrounding White Sulphur Springs is highly valued by residents and visitors, as well as an important component of the local economy. Minor or occasional property damage caused by wild deer within the city limits is an inevitable but acceptable consequence of the occasional deer roaming through the area. However, high deer densities within the city limits and the behavior of some individual animals can, at times, be problematic. Deer that live all or part of the year in the City of White Sulphur Springs may threaten human safety and health, injure pets, and damage property.

HISTORY:

A number of White Sulphur Springs citizens have complained that the risk to human safety and property damage caused by mule deer living within the city limits has reached unacceptable levels. The Meagher County Sheriff's Department, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), and city staff regularly respond to incidents of deer acting aggressively or damaging residents' homes and landscaping.

In 2017, the White Sulphur Springs City Council asked FWP to assess deer numbers and density within the City. A FWP biologist, warden, and city staff conducted two surveys of mule deer numbers during January and March of 2018 to obtain a census as to the City's deer population. Observers documented 104 and 119 mule deer within the 1.01 mi^2 city limits during those efforts. It is unlikely all the deer present during the surveys were observed.

At their August 5, 2019 meeting, the White Sulphur Springs City Council presented residents with a draft urban Mule Deer Management Action Plan and during their August 5, 2019, meeting took public comment on the proposed Plan. The Public Comment consisted of members of Council relating comments from citizens to the effect a plan was needed to control the deer

population in the City limits, although citizens did not wish to declare open season on deer within the City limits. No other comments were made by any citizens in attendance at the meeting.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE of the Action Plan:

1. Reduce the negative impacts to people caused by mule deer within the City of White Sulphur Springs, Montana.
2. Provide the City of White Sulphur Springs and the Meagher County Sheriff's Department with the management tools necessary to effectively respond to individual deer-human conflicts and to limit overall mule deer density within the city limits, as necessary.

GOALS:

1. Euthanize individual deer within city limits which threaten human safety or property.
2. Reduce the potential for human-deer interactions and conflicts by lowering the density of deer resident within the City of White Sulphur Springs.

ACTIONS TO MEET GOALS:

1. Mule deer within the White Sulphur Springs city limits which have become habituated to human activity and are behaving aggressively will be dispatched by the Meagher County Sheriff's Department or their agents as soon as possible after verifying the deer's behavior or activities pose a threat to human safety or property. Resident deer threatening the safety of pets confined to yards may also be dispatched. The Meagher County Sheriff, designated deputies, or their assigned agents are the only persons legally allowed to discharge firearms within the city limits. Public complaints need to be first directed to the Meagher County Dispatch Center (1-406-547-3397).
2. The City and County Sheriff may choose to trap and euthanize a number of deer resident within the city limits each year between 8/15 and 2/15 in order to reduce overall deer density. The number of deer removed each year will be limited by the terms of a ***Permit To Destroy Game Animals Causing Damage*** issued to the County Sheriff by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.
3. All deer removed under this Action Plan must be documented and a record of those removals maintained by the City of White Sulphur Springs. An annual report will be provided to Fish, Wildlife & Parks which includes the date and nature of any public complaints, the responding Meagher County Sheriff/agent(s), the number of deer dispatched, the method of removal, and the disposition of the deer removed. Carcasses will be disposed of in accordance with FWP rules and statutes; and venison fit for human consumption will be donated to the Meagher County Nutritional Coalition for charitable distribution. Deer which have been killed due to vehicle-deer collisions within city limits will be removed by the Meagher County Sheriff's Department, White Sulphur Springs

Animal Control, or city maintenance staff, and such will not be included in the permit numbers allowed to be taken. (salvage of game animals: §87-3-145 MCA)

4. All FWP regulations and Montana State Statutes and ARM rules apply, including terms of a ***Permit To Destroy Game Animals Causing Damage*** which may be issued to the Meagher County Sheriff's Department by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.
5. Citizens of White Sulphur Springs must refrain from artificially feeding or providing supplemental feed attractants to resident and wild deer pursuant to MCA 87-6-216. Artificial feeding is a misdemeanor and encourages deer to habituate to the urban environment and create human/deer conflict. Wild deer that enter the City are less likely to become resident and/or remain in town when artificial feed is contained.

MONITORING RESPONSIBILITY:

The City of White Sulphur Springs and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will jointly monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this Action Plan.

The Meagher County Sheriff's Department will accept and forward complaint calls and will provide the assistance of an officer or an assigned agent to respond to complaints about aggressive deer. The Meagher County Sheriff or the Montana Highway Patrol will continue to respond to vehicle-deer collisions. The number and type of complaints received, as well as the action taken will be recorded and provided to Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regional office in Great Falls in an annual report.

Fish, Wildlife & Parks will assist the City of White Sulphur Springs in determining the deer population within the city limits and advising the City in structuring effective management strategies.

PROGRAM LONGEVITY:

The City of White Sulphur Springs may modify this Action Plan as needed. However, any changes to stipulations regarding the harassment or lethal removal of Game Animals are subject to oversight and permitting by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

This Action Plan is effective upon authorization by Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the City of White Sulphur Springs. It will remain in effect until modified or terminated by any of those named parties.

SIGNATURE PAGE:

REPRESENTING OFFICIALS:

For Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Name:_____ Title: _____

Signature:_____Date:_____

For The City of White Sulphur Springs:

Name: Rick Nelson Title: Mayor

Signature: _____ Date: 8-6-19

Date ACTION PLAN Authorized: 8-5-19

Attachment: [FWP Permit To Destroy Game Animals Causing Damage]