



MULE DEER/WHITE-TAILED DEER MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN FOR THE CITY OF LEWISTOWN, 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 Lewistown and Montana. Deer hunting and viewing in areas surrounding Lewistown 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 Lewistown may threaten human safety and health, injure pets, and damage property.

HISTORY:

A number of Lewistown residents have complained that the risk of human safety and property damage caused by mule- and white-tailed deer living within the city limits has reached unacceptable levels. The City of Lewistown Police Department, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and city staff regularly respond to incidents of deer acting aggressively towards humans or pets, or damaging residents' homes and landscaping. In September 2021, the Lewistown News Argus printed an article in the paper regarding Urban Deer, and how the high number of deer within the city limits is impacting citizens in a negative way.

In October 2021, the Lewistown Police Department conducted spotlight deer surveys across several patrol areas in Lewistown over a period of nine nights. They observed 321 deer total (across repeat locations) with an average 36 deer observed each night. These were not complete-coverage surveys of Lewistown, and it is unlikely all deer present were observed.

At their October 5, 2021, meeting the Lewistown City Commission discussed what avenues were available to manage the deer population within the city limits. Several Commissioners and a few citizens expressed frustration about the number of deer within the city limits, especially during the winter months.

The complaints covered many different areas including, deer negatively impacting private property, deer becoming aggressive towards pets and the number of deer vs vehicle collisions that occur each year within the city limits.

During this meeting two main options were discussed amongst the City Commission, City Manager and Chief of Police. The first option discussed was the potential of implementing a deer hunt within the city limits by local citizens. This option was discussed thoroughly, including the many pros and cons that may be associated with allowing citizens to harvest deer within the city limits.

The second option discussed was the plan as outlined in this Action Plan. The plan that is in place in White Sulphur Springs Montana was used as an outline for how the City of Lewistown may control the deer population within its own city limits. After a lengthy discussion the City Commission asked the Chief of Police to explore the details of how this Action Plan could be implemented. The Chief of Police worked with Montana FWP Biologist Sonja Andersen to develop the proposed Action Plan as outlined here. This plan was presented to the City Commission's July 18, 2022 meeting and approved. Opportunity for public comment was provided, but no public comment was received.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE ACTION PLAN:

- 1) Reduce the negative impacts to people caused by mule- and white-tailed deer within the City of Lewistown, Montana.
- 2) Provide the City of Lewistown and Lewistown Police Department with the management tools necessary to effectively respond to individual deer-human conflicts and to limit overall 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 Lewistown.

ACTIONS TO MEET GOALS:

- 1) Mule- or white-tailed deer within the Lewistown city limits which have become habituated to human activity and are behaving aggressively will be dispatched by Lewistown Police Department or Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 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. Public complaints need to be first directed to Central Montana Dispatch at (406) 535-1800.
- 2) The City and Chief of Police may choose to trap and euthanize a number of deer residing within city limits each year between August 15 and February 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 City of Lewistown by the Fish & Wildlife Commission.
- 3) All deer removed under this Action Plan must be documented and a record of those removals maintained by the City of Lewistown. An annual report will be provided to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks which includes the date and nature of any public complaints, the responding Lewistown Police Department officers, the number, age class, and gender 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 Community Cupboard (Montana Food Bank Network) for charitable distribution. Carcasses processed for human consumption will be tested for CWD prior to being distributed. Deer which

have been killed due to vehicle-deer collisions within city limits will be removed by Lewistown Police Department, Lewistown 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 City of Lewistown by the Fish & Wildlife Commission.
- 5) Citizens of Lewistown 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 limits are less likely to become resident and/or remain in town when artificial feed is contained.

MONITORING RESPONSIBILITY:

The City of Lewistown and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will jointly monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this Action Plan. The Lewistown Police Department will accept, and forward complaint calls and will provide assistance of an officer to respond to complaints about aggressive deer. The Lewistown Police Department, Fergus County Sheriff's Department, or Montana Highway Patrol will continue to respond to deer-vehicle conditions. The number and type of complaints received, as well as the action taken will be recorded and provided to the FWP Region 4 Office in Great Falls in an annual report.

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

PROGRAM LONGEVITY:

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

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