

DRAFT

The meeting was called to order by Julie Lee at 7:34 pm.

Ms. Lee welcomed Bill Browning to speak on the over-population of white-tailed deer in Arlington County. Mr. Browning is an Arlington Regional Master Naturalist. Mr. Browning welcomed Glencarlynn citizen and Master Naturalist Steve Young to add his input.

Deer are the largest herbivores in Virginia. An adult male deer can weigh up to 400 pounds. In Virginia in 1600, it is estimated there were between 400 and 800 thousand deer. The deer provided food, clothing, and a form of currency (buckskins). By the mid-20th century, with urbanization and agriculture, nearly all of the deer were gone from the state. The wildlife authorities in the state started importing deer from the Midwest to replenish the herds. At present, we have taken away all the balancing forces controlling the deer population. There are almost no hunters or predators, so the deer population has exploded.

Deer are forest animals, but they prefer living on the edge, between the forests and the urban environment. They are in our public spaces, but they belong in the forests. An adult deer can eat 5 to 7 lbs. of vegetation in a day, about a ton of vegetation a year. A good, healthy forest can support 15 to 25 deer per square mile. Arlington, in total, has about 2.3 sq miles of parkland. Even if all of that land was good forest for deer, which it is not, we could only support about 35 to 45 deer, total.

The deer browse plants that make up the understory. In a healthy forest, the understory (6 to 8 feet from the ground) is dense with plants, shrubs and young trees. It absorbs rainfall which helps control runoff. It contains a wide range of habit for many animal species, including insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds and small mammals. In fall and winter, male deer rub their antlers on small trees, harming the bark and eventually killing the trees. Deer love to eat strawberry bush, a native plant which provides food for 11 different kinds of lepidoptera. Natural food sources are species specific. Destruction of understory food sources and habitat endangers animal species and the forest itself. When the tall canopy trees fade away and die, there aren't any midsize trees to take their places. Due to the over-population of deer in our parks and forests, both the deer and the forests are suffering. Some deer may be malnourished. Chronic wasting disease in deer has spread to 5 counties in Virginia, the nearest being Loudoun. (There is no evidence it infects humans.) Arlington County has yet to legislate a program to control their numbers, which double every other year or so.

The options for bringing balance would include:

- 1) Natural predators. The only effective ones are unsuitable - mountain lions and grey wolves.
- 2) Medical options. Contraception and sterilization, which are expensive. Wildlife Resources will not approve it at \$1,000 per deer per year. It would not be effective in an open herd, because they travel. Deer can die from capture myopathy, when lactic acid floods the deer's system when it is caught (for the treatment.) Capture myopathy causes weakened muscles and/or heart disease.
- 3) Hunting. In larger parks, by professional sharpshooters or volunteers with guns. In restricted urban areas, hunting with archery with trained volunteers.

In Fairfax County in 1997, a librarian driving to work hit a deer and died. After a survey of the population, and a vote, Fairfax instituted hunting. They use archery, shotguns and sharpshooting and have found them effective. They give the meat to a program for the needy. There is strict oversight. During the hunt, no patrons or pets are allowed in the parks. There have been no incidents or harm to citizens.

Montgomery County, since 1996 has been using all three methods of hunting on up to 50% of the parkland. They remove about 1,000 deer per year. The meat goes to the Capitol Area Food Bank.

They also have had no accidents. In addition, private organizations can be hired by citizens to hunt on their land.

According to the National Park Service, there were no deer in Rock Creek Park before 1960. The deer arrived in the '70's and '80's, and they stopped counting them in the '90's. In 2012, they instituted a deer control program. Professional sharp shooters from the Department of Agriculture were hired. They take out about 30 to 50 a year. Tree seeding density has more than doubled.

Actions individuals can take: don't feed the deer, educate yourself, educate your friends and neighbors, write letters to County Board members. Talk to neighboring jurisdictions. Collect data on deer/vehicle collisions. Ask the county to start a pilot program. We cannot expect nature to take care of the problem; human intervention is needed. By doing nothing, we favor deer over other species and jeopardize forests and landscapes.

Steve Young suggested that letters to Board members highlight the threat with cars and deer. Deer can fly through the windshield of a car.

Bill Browning said that deer prefer native plants but will eat other plants if desperate.

According to Steve Young, last year they were beginning to eat English ivy, multiflora rose bushes and burning bush because they were so hungry.

Comments and Questions

Concerns about problems with deer in our neighborhood were raised. Julie Lee recounted an incident at Maxine Backus's home when a large buck appeared to be taking a dominance stance toward her daughter. On one occasion Mr. Young saw 12 deer on the Emergency Medical Center property. Mr. Browning reported that volunteers shovel deer scat from the Williamsburg sports fields before games. An upsetting incident occurred at Barcroft Elementary School when a small deer was caught in a fence and badly injured while trying to escape.

Q. How many deer are in Arlington?

A. We don't know. We haven't had a successful census. Rock Creek has 120 per square mile. Montgomery had 140 per square mile in some areas.

Q. How about the health effects of the transmission of lime disease?

Answer: Deer ticks do reproduce on deer, but there is no direct link between deer and lime.

Tick feeding: 1st stage: Ticks breed on a large mammal and reproduce.

2nd stage: Ticks feed on small mammals. White footed mice are the best transmission vector to humans. All small mammals can host a tick that can carry disease.

Q. What steps is Arlington county taking now?

A. There is no official deer management program. Mr. Browning encouraged the GCA and our members to write to the County Board to get something started. There may be a collaboration between the police department and the parks department to look at county ordinances to enable a deer control program. There may be some movement in the parks department to collaborate with another jurisdiction.

Ms. Lee expressed our appreciation to Mr. Browning and to Mr. Young for providing the Civic association with valuable information.

Old Business

There was a motion to approve the minutes of the November 2020 GCA meeting, which was seconded. The minutes were approved.

Treasurer's report by Tim Aiken. There are 135 dues-paying members and an account balance of \$18,958.00. Ms. Lee reminded those present that people can pay dues through PayPal.

Civic Federation report by Tim Aiken. At the last meeting, there was an extensive briefing on civil forfeiture. The Association adopted a resolution to examine Arlington County's governing structure. A task force for this purpose is being formed and will be voted on at the January meeting.

Neighborhood Conservation Committee report by Kathy Reeder. The last 2nd St. sign was installed today. The next project, on 4th St S., will begin this summer. Residents are asked to return the Temporary Easement and Construction Agreement. These require notarization. Questions should be directed to Kathy or Laura Simpson, County Neighborhood Conservation Planner. For more information, go to the NCC activities tab at glencarlyn.org.

Village View report by Brandon Hemel. No Village View in January. The deadline for the February issue is January 10.

Steering Committee on Racial Equity and Inclusion, reported by Pippy Sickbert. Highlights of the past 2 months included an event called Glencarlyn through the Prism of Race: A Conversation. Thirty-five neighbors attended.

The GCA voted to adopt the Resolution on Equity and Inclusion at our last meeting. On November 11th, there was an action planning/brainstorming session which generated some good ideas. The committee is working on a sign-up for residents who want to engage with the committee.

Most notably, the committee has signed up as a partner organization with Arlington County's Dialogues on Race and Equity (DRE) Program. Three neighbors have trained as facilitators. We were asked and agreed to hold two 2-hour sessions following the curriculum "DRE in our Community" on January 9th and January 18th. Feedback from the sessions will be passed back to county managers. There will be a notification of the sessions in the GCA Updates.

New Business

Friends of Gulf Branch Nature Center in north Arlington are trying to get some long-term (CIP) funding (\$750,000 each for Gulf Branch and Long Branch Nature Centers). The Gulf Branch funding is for animals, audio stations and programming, and the Native American Room. Long Branch funding is for enhancing box turtle rehabilitation effort, to upgrade the children's playground to better incorporate environmental education elements and to evaluate a building expansion or a new building. Steve Young is working with the organizer and requested a GCA letter in favor. The motion to draft and send a letter was moved, seconded and passed.

There is a Forestry and Natural Resources Plan survey online, and the link has been posted in the GCA updates. Ms. Lee suggests citizens take the time to respond to the survey.

The tree canopy fund (offering Arlington homeowners free trees) application deadline is in January.

The last Neighborhood Directory update was in 2016. The executive committee will discuss the project at its meeting in January. The information can be collected on-line and door-to-door, but the directory itself not online. Any volunteers please get in touch with Julie Lee.

The Shirlington and Westover libraries will be opening with limited schedules. Ms. Lee expressed a concern about the Glencarlyn library being closed or eventually opening with reduced hours. Send messages (email) to County Board to open our library, as well as other branch libraries.

Julie Lee offered to draft a letter to the Arlington County Board on deer management. There was a motion to do so; it was seconded and passed. Pete Oliviere suggested emphasizing it as long overdue and mentioning programs of several surrounding counties.

The Luminaria display has been delayed to Saturday DEC 12th, weather permitting. When buying luminaria, people must wear masks. The sale is 9 to 2 at the Community Center, the lighting at dusk.

Upcoming GCA meetings in February, Takis Karantanos, the newest member of the County Board, will be the guest speaker. Samia Byrd, Chief Race and Equity Officer, Deputy County Manager, will be the speaker at the Mar 1st meeting. Let Julie Lee know about ideas for future speakers. She is working on April and May.

The meeting was adjourned at 9 pm.