

What about the Deer?

It seems there is a lot of misinformation going around about the Lakeway Deer. Let's look at the facts.

Lakeway has a deer problem. In the late nineties the citizens decided that for the safety of the citizens and the health of the deer a management program needed to be developed to reduce the population. The deer at that time were starving and unhealthy – their ribs showed and they carried cysts, ticks and were disease ridden. Many deer were hit by autos and the city leaders felt that was a significant safety issue. Luckily, this primarily pertains to the part of Lakeway bounded by 620, the Hills, Rough Hollow and the Lake. Other areas do not have the as much of an issue, so no management is yet required there.

First, the deer belong to the State of Texas, they are wild animals and there are many rules and regulations that control our deer population. The City of Lakeway is allowed to manage the deer in our community as long as we follow the State's rules.

The City formed a committee to study and come up with a plan that the State would agree to and we could implement and afford. We worked with Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Texas Legislature to come up with the rules we are expected to follow. Our goal was set at maintaining a deer herd of 500 or less deer. The first couple of years we found ranches willing to pay for the trapping and transport – a great saving to the city – and 650 deer the first year and 796 the second year were removed. We are now in a "maintenance" stage. – In the last few years, we have trapped an average of 120 deer per year. This was part of the "Long Term" plan developed by Texas Parks and Wildlife and the City and mimics what happens in nature with natural predators.

There are only two types of permits available from the state for deer management – Trap, Transport, and Transplant (TTT) and Trap, Transport, and Process (TTP). There are no other options or types of permits issued by the state at this time. TTT allows the City to trap then transport and release the deer on ranches and properties that have been surveyed by Texas Parks and Wildlife and

found to be capable and acceptable for release of deer. The City and its trapper actively search for properties of this category; however, it has become increasingly difficult to locate them because of the general overpopulation of White Tail Deer in the State.

The other permit – TTP – allows the City to humanely trap the deer and transport them to a processing plant that handles the deer in the same way cattle are processed. They are butchered and the meat is all donated to approved charities. This helps people unable to afford meat a means for better nutrition.

There are no permits available that would allow sterilization of deer – either by surgery or chemically. It is not an option in Texas. Remember, the deer belong to the State of Texas, the state makes the rules. The City is not able to go “rogue” and just start another process. Even if there was a way to permit sterilization, without an enclosed area, it is not feasible and would not reduce the population enough to stop trapping.

We have a professional trapper that works with the city each year, nets are dropped by remote control on the deer and they are immediately removed from the nets. Deer are never left under them for a prolonged period of time. The trapper is on site at the time of net drop. The trapper works under license of the state also and police and game wardens verify our trapping procedures and deer counts. It is a very professional operation. After the deer are trapped, their antlers are removed for their safety and by state regulation. This is not painful for the deer; it is like trimming a fingernail.

Our trappers and deer management committee members report that the deer are not injured during transport from the City to the processing plant. The deer settle down once put in the trailer and are calm after a few minutes.

The City held a public meeting in November 2015 where Texas Parks and Wildlife, and our trapper helped educate the public on the trapping process. We have also reached out to other professionals to improve our processes, including the USDA Wildlife Services. They have agreed to study our situation and try to come up

with a viable protocol to do a deer “census.” Although they told us there was no current effective way to this, they are willing to try to come up with a process.

Lakeway has been called the “poster child” of deer management in Texas. The state recommends our process of keeping track of our herd population. That process is keeping records of five different metrics. By this method, we can approximate the herd increase or decrease. We track the number of deer killed by auto or other causes, the number of calls to the police department, and the sex and maturity of animals. In 2015, we had 90 total deaths with 36 killed by auto.

A professional was suggested by the citizens that want a census – Dr. James C. Kroll, also known as Dr. Deer. He is an independent wildlife biologist that does deer management across the country. Dr. Kroll was very helpful and sent us a letter that said there was no reliable method to perform a deer census in an urban environment.

The City has no intention of eradicating deer from Lakeway. They are a part of the culture of the City. However, unmanaged, they can become a significant safety hazard for drivers and residents, and the health of the deer suffers. We have even had reports of folks being chased into their houses during rut when the bucks can become territorial.