

News

Hastings-On-Hudson Sees Slow Start To Deer Contraception Program



A white-tailed deer (credit: Getty Images)

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HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON, N.Y. (CBSNewYork/AP) — Heavy snow and red tape resulted in a disappointingly slow start for a pioneering program in Westchester County [to use birth control as a no-kill way to thin the numbers of deer](#).

Hastings-on-Hudson Mayor Peter Swiderski said that out of 180 deer, only eight doe were tranquilized, tagged and injected with birth control over the monthlong program in March, seven in the final week alone. That was far short of the goal of injecting 40 to 50 does in the first two years.

“It was certainly a humbling [experience](#) , but we were encouraged in that it was such a strong finish,” the mayor said, adding that officials were committed to the program and trying again next year.

Deer have overrun the 2-square mile village of 7,900 people, scouring foliage in the park, munching gardens and causing more than a dozen car crashes a year. But residents have resisted lethal methods of culling the herd.

Announced last year, the project is the first birth-control study of a free-roaming deer population in an open, suburban area in the U.S. Workers from the Humane Society of the United States had hoped to start tranquilizing the doe with air guns in February and obtained permission from the state, but they were delayed by both the harsh winter and bureaucratic regulations.

Allen Rutberg, director of the Center for Animals and Public Policy at Tufts [University](#)

and the architect of the program, said heavy snows pushed the deer out of public Hillside Park, where the team hoped to do most of its work, and into mostly private yards. That meant officials had to launch a door-to-door effort to get consent from every property owner. It resulted in permission from 340 households and just two rejections, Swiderski said, reflecting broad support for the program, along with some skepticism about whether it will work.

“They know there’s no alternative for us,” the mayor said. “You can’t walk around on quarter-acre zoning with a crossbow.”

Last month, many residents applauded the mayor for choosing an alternative to hunting, but some weren’t sure the measures would work.

“It is humane, but I’m not sure if it will be that effective,” resident John Spikarich told WCBS 880’s Sean Adams. “I think it’ll be a 50-50 chance of working out.”

People who agreed to let the Humane Society’s experts on their property were given red flags to display.

“There’s a flag in my yard and most of my neighbors, to the left and the right, have little red flags,” said resident Nancy Balaban, who has had to surrender her garden to the deer.

Villagers are now being asked to report on a website any sightings of deer with numbered yellow tags on their ears — and not to be surprised if they see a tagged doe with a fawn this summer.

“These deer are already pregnant,” Rutberg said. “The vaccine will be effective for the fall mating season.”

Stephanie Boyles Griffin, a [senior](#) director at the Humane Society, said that with more time and experience, next winter should go better. She said success could mean the program will work all over the country.

“This [technology](#) was designed to help communities like Hastings-on-Hudson manage their deer populations in a way that is beneficial to everyone, including the deer,” Griffin said.