



## ST LAWRENCE ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK WHITE-TAILED DEER MANAGEMENT

**Population Management:** White-tailed deer have a high reproductive potential and few natural predators. In the absence of significant mortality (e.g., disease, predation, or successive harsh winters), deer populations can double in two years. High deer populations can significantly alter forested habitats, reducing plant diversity and habitat availability for other wildlife species. In addition, deer can damage flower and vegetable gardens and landscape plantings. They pose a threat to motorists on roadways and high populations of deer are sometimes associated with increased rates of Lyme disease.

### Why is Parks Canada organizing a deer herd reduction on Hill Island?

White-tailed deer have become so numerous (hyperabundant), that overgrazing is degrading ecosystems on Hill Island. For example, the forest understory has been dramatically reduced and few tree seedlings survive. In time, there will be few new trees to replace the aging forest. This also affects other species such as insects, birds, and mammals that rely on these plants for food and shelter.

Reducing deer densities will help Hill Island's ecosystems recover.

### What does 'hyperabundant' mean?

The term hyperabundant is used to describe a wildlife population that exceeds the ecosystem's ability to support it.

### What species are considered hyperabundant in the Thousand Islands area?

In Eastern Ontario, raccoons, skunks and deer are hyperabundant in certain areas.

### What causes hyperabundance?

Most hyperabundant issues are a result of human use or impact on the landscape. Species are linked through food chains and other habitat needs. When one species becomes hyperabundant, these links are compromised because natural processes (e.g., grazing and predation) can overtake species unable to withstand them.

### What has caused the hyperabundance of white-tail deer in the Thousand Islands area?

#### Abundant food sources:

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sections of land in the Thousand Islands area were cleared for farming. When these farms were abandoned, forest communities with lots of leafy and woody food became available for deer, which boosted their populations.

#### Lack of predators:

Natural predators of deer are carnivores such as wolves, cougars and large coyotes. Due to conflicts between carnivores and humans, few carnivores persist in the Thousand Islands region. Therefore, deer have few predators to help control their populations.

### What are the major impacts of hyperabundant deer?

The high numbers of deer in the Thousand Islands area have harmed plant communities, including species at risk.

- Diversity is declining.**  
There are fewer types of plants than before. When the composition an ecosystem is altered or parts of it are removed, all species that rely on those components for habitat and food are also jeopardized.
- Forest structure is being negatively affected.**  
Seedlings and saplings are unable to persist with overbrowsing. As the forest matures, there are very few new trees to replace those that die. The 'building blocks' of the forests are changing and/or being eliminated including, eventually, the seed bank needed for forest regeneration.
- Non-native plant species are being encouraged.**  
Deer are selective browsers and will eat certain plants and leave others to grow and expand in range. Some non-native plants are successful because they are not palatable to deer whereas some native species are very palatable. When deer feed preferentially on native plants, it can provide opportunities for some non-native species to flourish. Other non-native plants are palatable and produce a lot of seed that can pass through deer guts or get attached to their fur. When deer are abundant, they spread these plants to new areas more quickly.
- Increased automotive collisions and decreased property values.** Increased deer populations lead to more automotive collisions. Hyperabundant populations also have the ability to decrease property values by foraging on landscaping and preventing surrounding forests from regenerating.

### When will the deer herd reduction take place?

The deer herd reduction will occur on successive Saturdays starting November 22, 2008 until the success rate declines (likely mid-December with a possible extension in to January after Christmas).

**Don't feed the deer!** Concentration of deer around human food sources leads to increased risks of disease transmission, local habitat destruction, aggression among deer, and the potential for deer-human conflicts.



White-tailed fawn and doe

For more information contact the St Lawrence Islands National Park on 613-9239-5261