

**Testimony of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), on House Bill 5321.
Hearing before the Michigan Committee on Natural Resources
January 17, 2018**

The HSUS has a long history of working to humanely and effectively address human-deer conflicts. We are committed to working with Federal and State agencies to generate sustainable, humane and fiscally responsible solutions to conflicts with deer. When issues involving the management of deer arise, we believe it is essential that authorities engage in a full and open dialogue with all stakeholders and that a fair and objective information collection and assessment process take place. As such, we are thankful for the opportunity to offer testimony to the House Committee on Natural Resources regarding House Bill 5321 (“H.B. 5321”) and hope that the Committee will consider our comments, below, in their consideration of this bill.

Passage of HB 5321 may prevent effective deer management programs

The Humane Society of the United States is concerned that the passage of this bill would restrict the ability of the Michigan DNR to fully manage deer populations within the state in future years. While many local communities are amenable and suited to managing local deer populations with lethal tools, there remain communities that are opposed to that approach - either from an ideological standpoint, or where the logistics of hunting or lethal removal programs would present significant safety concerns. For instance, in densely populated areas, Michigan’s designated 150 yard safety zones¹ from occupied dwellings may prevent effective lethal programs from being undertaken in some Suburban or Urban areas within the state.

Allowing management options for deer to exist within the state would allow the Michigan DNR to have a wealth of tools at hand and be better suited to contend with issues confronting certain communities based on a variety of factors including human density. As human populations increase and animals increasingly adapt to urban areas, it is important for agencies and communities to have a variety of tools, including nonlethal management options, to address conflicts with wildlife. Those choices should not be predetermined by law.

Passage of HB 5321 may negate Michigan’s ability to adopt new methods of deer management

The field of wildlife fertility control is expanding, with Universities as well as Federal and State agencies engaging in research on enhancing existing methods of wildlife population control, as well as researching new methods, techniques and remote delivery systems. The passage of HB 5321 would prevent the Michigan DNR and local communities from utilizing newly perfected or discovered techniques for deer management.

While we understand that the Natural Resources Committee has the authority to introduce a subsequent bill allowing for the use of new techniques or approaches, it is our belief that from a

¹ http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/hunting_and_trapping_digest_ada_593099_7.pdf

time-management perspective, it benefits this Committee to decline passage of HB 5321 and instead rely on the expertise of the Michigan DNR to determine what techniques are appropriate now, and for the future.

This would allow the Michigan DNR, local communities and interested stakeholders to work together to determine what current, or future techniques and approaches are most suitable for the management of their local deer populations.

Humaneness of Sterilization

The Humane Society of the United States recognizes surgical sterilization as a safe and humane practice for the management of white-tailed deer, when projects are undertaken by parties with the necessary training and expertise.

White Buffalo Inc., one of the nation's preeminent providers of surgical sterilization for white-tailed deer has noted that the mortality rate for its programs has been less than 2%.²

This Action is Premature

Surgical Sterilization studies in areas such as Cayuga Heights, NY, San Jose, CA, Town & Country, Missouri and Fairfax City, Virginia have demonstrated that high proportions of doe populations in urban/suburban areas can be immobilized via remote darting, surgically sterilized via ovariectomies, and released with relatively low injury and mortality rates, with many of those communities seeing stabilization or reduction in deer populations.

While projects in other states have shown successful preliminary results, only one permit for a surgical sterilization project has been issued in Michigan. The Ann Arbor sterilization project which was vetted and approved by the Michigan DNR is currently underway. As Michigan DNR has noted in press on the subject, it is too early to determine whether this sterilization project will prove effective in stabilizing Ann Arbor's deer population.³

It is our belief that the Committee on Natural Resources should allow for the completion of the study in order to determine the effectiveness of this approach on the Ann Arbor deer population before taking any legislative actions that proscribes surgical sterilization from being utilized within the State.

Conclusion

In light of these factors, we urge the Committee to decline passage of H.B. 5321 and instead work with Michigan DNR to ensure that the use of sterilization techniques within the state is

² https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/7d2503_02cd71aab82c4014b2917b5e06c121a6.pdf

³ http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2017/12/deer_sterilization_efforts_lik.html

available to communities that are interested in its use, and that it is conducted appropriately and humanely. Thank you for your consideration.

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