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Comment on HB-5321 by Bernard A. Banet

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In opposition to prohibiting game sterilization as proposed in HB-5321

I am here to speak in favor of the ability of Ann Arbor and other Michigan cities to do research on surgical sterilization of does as a deer management technique. I oppose the proposed legislation that would prohibit the DNR from issuing permits for sterilizing deer. I live in one of the sterilization study areas in Ann Arbor and have been advocating for effective urban deer management for more than a decade.

I sympathize with the desire of some hunters to protect the sport of hunting by prohibiting all nonlethal game animal population control methods. Hunters are in fact essential to keeping game populations under control. Where hunting is practical, hunters can indeed control deer and other game populations at low cost to taxpayers.

However, the problem for city residents such as myself, and for many Michiganders in the densely populated parts of our state, is that deer are, in a sense, not actually "game animals" since they cannot be legally hunted through the DNR's normal deer seasons and licenses.

There is a growing deer overabundance problem in cities and suburbs. Ann Arbor's Wards 1 and 2 are an example, where the 600 deer we had in that part of the city before the January, 2018 culls began are well above the herd density limits recommended by wildlife biologists and ecologists for sustainable woodlands and public health.

But hunting has been prohibited there. This is unlikely to change. And even cull permits under the nuisance animal removal program cannot be used in many private residential parts of Ann Arbor and other cities because of legal restrictions from multiple levels of government. We have learned, too, that culls on public land, such as the deer culls in several of Ann Arbor's parks, are often not close enough to the neighborhoods to reduce the number of deer where the houses are.

Overabundant deer in public natural areas threaten the future of the forests, but deer wandering about the city neighborhoods cause deer-vehicle collisions and destroy landscaping. Deer also help to spread diseases such as Lyme by supporting the life cycle of ticks. Without predators and hunters deer double in population every two years, so there needs to be some way to manage the urban deer population in residential subdivisions to supplement culls in natural areas.

If the effect of the proposed legislation is to shut down even research use of nonlethal fertility control methods, I fear that this amendment would remove a potentially useful tool from the deer management toolbox in situations where the State and other government entities, through legislation and regulation, have left municipalities almost no other options for reducing or stabilizing the deer population.

Currently nonlethal deer management is not a DNR-accepted method of herd control and its use in Ann Arbor is permitted only in a research context. The research study aims to shed light on the question of whether surgical sterilization of does can stabilize and reduce an urban deer population and the damage they cause in a free-ranging situation where lethal methods are impractical. "Will too many fertile does from other areas wander in to make the technique ineffective?" is one question that is being addressed.

Please allow the study to proceed and do not rule out other research on sterilization. There is no reason to prohibit sterilization from going forward on a limited knowledge-gathering research basis or to prohibit completely at this time its eventual use in some urban and suburban locations.