

Comments by Kurt Sonen, 314 Huntington Dr, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

I am a hunter and an outdoorsman. And I support continuing to allow research on deer sterilization.

If you read the DNR's urban deer policy, sterilization and immunocontraception are already clearly identified as prohibited options - with the only exception being as a restricted research project. The DNR wants proof of sterilization's effectiveness before it becomes an accepted option.

As you probably know, Michigan has a thriving deer population that is managed by hunting. Which works in rural areas, but not when deer live in urban areas where hunting is not allowed. Then you need an approach that allows access to the deer to keep the population in check. Without control, the deer population can double every two years. Culling or sharpshooting is the most widely accepted option and the most effective. And the most encouraged by the DNR.

But there are locations where there are legal restrictions, access issues, or safety issues. Then what are the options left? Not much. Trap and Euthanize is the only other option, but the DNR itself says this "is an inefficient, expensive, and controversial method".

Sterilization could be an effective option in those circumstances. By itself, it doesn't remove deer, but it stops the population growth. One of the stated reasons for outlawing sterilization in MI is that it's not effective. How would we know if we can't research it? Ongoing studies in six cities in the US show very promising population reductions. In my neighborhood, 50 does were sterilized last year. The preliminary results from this year show at least 10-15% reduction in the deer population. I still see deer, but this year we didn't have any fawns. No new deer is a welcome change.

Why do I support sterilization? Even though its use will always be limited because it's time-intensive and expensive, it has its place in the toolbox. It allows control of deer populations where hunters can't go. And it does not threaten hunting in any form - it is only used for deer that can't be hunted.

As an observer to last week's meeting, I heard a lot of misinformation about deer and sterilization. Which is exactly why it should fall to the DNR to make educated decisions on what they permit. The sponsor of the bill even stated this. When Representative Cole was asked whether he thought the wolves should be sterilized, he deferred and said that decision "should be left to our wildlife managers" to decide what's best. Yes, that is what should be done.

The DNR's job is to manage the state's natural resources, not just in the forest and fields, but also in cities and towns. The DNR should continue to have the authority to choose the most appropriate management tools based on empirical evidence and not have their hands tied by legislative restrictions.

Thank you.