

“Federation Corner” column  
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## **The rat-with-antlers problem**

By Peggy Dennis

On February 12, 2012 the Civic Federation passed the following resolution:

*Whereas* the Deer Management Work Group has been in effect since 1993, and managed hunts in selected parks have taken place since 1999, and

*Whereas* the County’s population of white-tailed deer has increased despite these management efforts, and

*Whereas* upward trends in deer population coincide with increased Deer Vehicle Collisions, pervasive destruction of natural habitat in parks and stream valleys and landscaping in private yards, and increasing incidents of Lyme disease including sufferers living in suburban areas,

*Therefore*, be it resolved that the Montgomery County Civic Federation urges our county and state officials to expand funding and to work collaboratively towards liberalizing appropriate regulations to extend the hunting season for deer and facilitate controlled and safe hunting on both public and private lands.

At all levels, our government has been responsive to our requests regarding the need to reduce the deer population in the county. The Montgomery County Parks Department has added more parks each year to those where managed hunts and sharpshooter programs cull the herds. These programs will be carried out in 41 sites around the county including state parks and several federal facilities like NIST and NIH during the coming hunting season. The Department is also initiating a pilot program to allow carefully selected groups of organized archery hunters to work in the Great Seneca and Watts Branch stream valley parks. And they have collaborated with us and with the Superintendent of the C. & O. Canal National Historic Park to write language and regulations for hunters working on private land to track and retrieve wounded deer that may wander into public park land.

Our delegation to Annapolis passed legislation in 2014 to decrease the “safety zone” for archery hunters from 150 yards to 100 yards. This allowed the County Council to pass corresponding legislation making it somewhat easier for archery hunters to work in suburban neighborhoods.

At the federal level, U.S. Representative Chris Van Hollen asked Superintendent Brandt to take steps to reduce the number of deer in the C.& O. Canal NHP. This is badly needed, particularly in the area of the Gold Mine Loop at Great Falls where the forest understory has been destroyed by overbrowsing. Superintendent Brandt has partnered with the Superintendent of the NHP at Harper’s Ferry to apply for permission to carry out an Environmental Assessment (EA) of deer damage to both parks. Their application has been approved and they expect the EA to be completed by the summer of 2016 at which time they will make recommendations on steps to reduce the herd size.

All these measures are helpful, but the deer do not limit their browsing to public parks. Many of our downcounty neighborhoods are overrun with hungry and starving deer. As the old expression from the 1960s goes, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." Many homeowners would welcome an archery hunter into their yard to shoot from a balcony, elevated deck or tree stand. This form of hunting is one of the safest sports in the U.S. But all it takes is one neighbor within 300 feet of the shooting area to refuse to sign the consent form, and the hunt cannot be carried out. Fairfax County by comparison has no safety perimeter requirement. Any homeowner may hunt in his/her yard or authorize another archery hunter to do so. They are not even required to notify neighbors that hunting will be going on. Even with this very liberal approach to hunting, Virginia, like Maryland, has no record of any person or pet being accidentally killed or injured by an archery hunter,

How can you help? First, get your local civic association working with you in this effort. We can help organize an informational program with expert archery hunters to speak to your members and address concerns about how, when and where archery hunting on private property may take place.

Next, see if you have a place in your yard which may be appropriate for hunting. The position must be elevated and allow the hunter to shoot at a downward angle. This allows for an arrow which misses the target to go safely into the ground where it can be easily retrieved by the hunter. And it means that arrows will not go into your neighbor's yards. If you think you have a safe hunting location, talk to your neighbors and see if they will support you. If you have their backing, contact a reputable archery hunting association. Three such groups in Montgomery County are:

Animal Connection Deer Management Team      [www.acdmt.org](http://www.acdmt.org)

Bow Hunting Fire Fighters of Maryland      [www.BHFFMD.com](http://www.BHFFMD.com)

Maryland Bowhunters Society      [www.marylandbowhunterssociety.org](http://www.marylandbowhunterssociety.org)

An expert hunter will know all the legal requirements and regulations, advise you on the suitability of your location, and help with paperwork. This has worked miracles in my own neighborhood. A skilled hunter has taken out 17 deer over the past three seasons and left us with a much smaller, healthier and less voracious herd. One last tip: a property that backs onto parkland or a public utility corridor will require half as many permissions from neighbors as a home surrounded by other homes.

Find current regulations, Q&As and much more information on suburban hunting, at the Montgomery County Civic Federation's website: <http://www.montgomerycivic.org/currentissuesEnv.html>