

URBAN GAME MANAGEMENT

In 2003, the Legislature authorized cities and towns to adopt plans to control, remove, and restrict game animals within their boundaries for public health and safety purposes. Proponents testified about traffic hazards, roadkill removal, and deer jumping off parking structures, crashing through sliding glass doors, and drawing mountain lions into town.¹

Now add managing the risk of chronic wasting disease (CWD) to the list. In January, a newly formed subcommittee of the Libby City Council met and decided to focus its wildlife management efforts on developing a plan for deer within city limits.²

Under current statute, urban game plans may include hunting opportunities and restrict the feeding of game animals (defined as deer, elk, moose, antelope, caribou, mountain sheep, mountain goat, mountain lion, bear, and wild buffalo). The legislature added the hunting allowance in 2005 based on the recommendations of a working group established to help implement the 2003 policy.

Statute requires Fish and Wildlife Commission approval of a plan. Currently, the communities of Fort Benton, Colstrip, Glendive, Ekalaka, Roundup, Helena, and White Sulphur Springs have approved plans. Many use hunters in “open space” portions of the community or areas outside or adjacent to city limits. The Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks says larger communities typically have fewer or no opportunities for hunter participation and often struggle reconciling diverse citizen input on how or if deer should be lethally removed.

The city of Helena has used both police and contractors to live-trap and euthanize deer, giving the meat to the local food bank. In 2019, the city suspended its efforts due to budgetary constraints, but appears poised to resume activities in 2020. On May 28, the Fish and Wildlife Commission will consider establishing a 2020-2021 quota for Helena's deer reduction efforts.

¹Stockwell, Hope, Wildlife Conflict Management Program Evaluation, August 2015, page 15.

²Adams, Duncan, "Libby Wildlife Committee to Focus on Nuisance Deer", The Western News, January 21, 2020.