

VILLAGE OF RADIUM HOT SPRINGS

Ungulate Safety Policy

1. Introduction

Mule Deer and Bighorn Sheep in the Village of Radium Hot Springs (the ‘Village’) have been taking advantage of the excellent habitat found in our residential areas, and protection from hunters and predators, to become more and more habituated as urban dwellers. Increasing numbers of ungulates (especially Mule Deer), many born and bred in the Village, have led to increased conflict with human residents.

These conflicts include damage to gardens and landscaping, the fouling of property with fecal matter and urine, and aggressive behaviour towards humans and dogs. Ungulate vehicle collisions are an additional concern, especially in the outskirts of the municipality where traffic speeds are highest. Indirectly, the presence of these ungulates acts as an enticement for predators, especially cougar, to enter residential areas and potentially present a threat to public safety.

Urban deer and sheep populations are challenging to manage for biological, legal, jurisdictional and social reasons. Deer are very adaptable to changes in their environment, and both species thrive within our Village. Both the Village and the Provincial governments have overlapping roles and responsibilities that complicate management decisions. Municipalities generally have very little authority with respect to wildlife management and need to acquire permission from the Provincial government for management activities. In addition, public opinion varies widely on appropriate management methods and these perspectives are usually based on strong emotions.

2. Animal Safety Survey

In the fall of 2013, the Village invited property owners to complete a survey intended to assess concerns related to Mule Deer and Bighorn Sheep. The primary focus of the survey was to identify concerns with ungulate aggression, quantify incidents involving ungulate aggression, and obtain information regarding the circumstances of those incidents. A secondary objective was to identify other concerns specific to the Mule Deer population, obtain information with respect to property damage, and discern if there are differences in perspective between permanent and seasonal residents.

Approximately one third of respondents indicated concern with Mule Deer aggression while one in ten indicated that a family member had been threatened. Of those people that experienced aggressive behavior, the majority were walking a dog at the time.

Concern over Bighorn Sheep aggression was expressed by 25% of respondents while 8% indicated experiencing aggressive behavior. Again, the majority of these incidents occurred while walking a dog.

The survey also questioned residents on property damage with 24% indicating that they had experienced moderate to severe damage.

The survey provided the opportunity to submit comments. Fecal matter and aggressive behavior comments tied at 7% of respondents, while one third of comments indicated that people enjoy the presence of these animals within the Village. The tabulated results of the survey are available for review on our website: www.radiumhotsprings.ca

3. Discussion

The Village Official Community Plan (OCP) states that “We are intrinsically linked with our natural surroundings and wildlife in a harmonious relationship...” while affirming that our wildlife populations are “critical assets”. This vision is counter balanced with the need to “protect life and property from natural hazards”. The OCP includes the following goals:

- Preserve wildlife corridors within and adjacent to the Village.
- Incorporate wildlife corridor establishment and management in long term strategic planning.
- Work with partners in the creation, restoration and management of wildlife corridors.
- Harmonize human use and wildlife corridors where practical.
- Provide opportunities for nature appreciation.

The Village has an active wildlife safety program that has, until now, focussed on Black Bear issues.

Recommended practice is that urban ungulate management strategies focus on the reduction of conflicts and management of populations to acceptable levels, as opposed to the complete elimination of a problem or herd.

There are four ungulate management methods: conflict reduction, population reduction, fertility measures, and administrative options. Conflict reduction methods may prevent ungulates from accessing property, minimize damage if animals access property, or reduce face to face conflicts. These methods may include public education regarding face to face strategies, landscape and plant selection that minimize attractants, preventative measures that reduce the development of unwanted behaviour, and the use of repellents and scaring devices. Fencing appears to be the only method to insure that damage does not occur.

Population reduction methods attempt to reduce the number of animals to the point where the degree of conflict reaches an acceptable level. Once a desired population has been achieved, a reduction program must be maintained. The capture and relocation of deer has not often been implemented due to concerns about animal mortality during the capture process and after release. Capture and euthanization, and controlled public hunting have been used successfully to reduce ungulate populations.

Fertility control options are currently limited because the available and experimental drugs have not been approved in Canada. It is hoped that this will become a viable option in the future.

Administrative options include regulatory controls that the municipality may impose to help mitigate conflicts. The direct feeding of wildlife is not permitted under bylaw but this does not speak to indirect attractants like the kinds of plants, trees and landscaping permissible. Public education and monitoring are additional methods under this option.

4. Policies and Strategies:

- (a) The Village of Radium Hot Springs, being located in the heart of a wilderness area, will remain susceptible to ungulate infiltration, and therefore, will require an ongoing ungulate management program.
- (b) The Mule Deer population and Bighorn Sheep herd are considered wildlife assets that provide aesthetic enjoyment for our residents and visitors. As such, the Village will seek opportunities to promote cohabitation and minimize human/ungulate conflict rather than attempt to eliminate these animals from our boundaries.
- (c) The Village supports Parks Canada habitat restoration efforts as these encourage the Bighorn Sheep herd members to spend less time within urban areas.
- (d) The Village acknowledges that interface fire mitigation projects provide the secondary benefit of providing alternate habitat for ungulates.
- (e) The Village will undertake a public education program to help reduce human/ungulate conflict and to provide residents with strategies for dealing with aggressive ungulates.
- (f) The Village will work with Provincial authorities to develop a Mule Deer control program that targets specific individuals who have exhibited aggressive behavior.
- (g) The Village will consider bylaw options that reduce ungulate attractants.
- (h) The Village will continue as a member of the 'Bighorn in Our Backyard' working group to achieve objectives such as minimizing Bighorn Sheep mortality from vehicular accidents and increasing habitat restoration.
- (i) The Village will make efforts to clean ungulate fecal matter from sidewalks and from within Parks, to the best of our staffing capacity, while keeping budget and cost factors in mind.