

**Date:** December 10, 2019

**To:** Sallas Forest Strata Council

**Re: RESTORING A PRECIOUS ECOSYSTEM:  
The value to Sidney Island of removing invasive deer**

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### **Sharing an island, sharing a vision**

Parks shares our deep commitment, as asserted in our community plan, to ecosystem recovery. They want to work together to achieve it, perhaps an unbalanced working relationship in that Parks contributes so much money, but we retain our property rights, gain a restored biodiverse ecosystem, and lose only the invasive deer we have struggled to control. The restoration budget that includes eradication will be used to help us remove invasive plants, notably hawthorn and broom. So Parks is not manipulating us: we have worked for decades to remove invasive deer. We are lucky to be of one mind with our neighbour on ecological restoration, and doubly lucky that Parks has the resources to achieve what we both seek.

### **The first step in restoration**

Ecological restoration is the work of facilitating a functioning ecosystem following degradation. In every case, the first concern is to remove the source of the degradation. Although restoration is patterned on the historic conditions prior to degradation, the discipline of ecological restoration recognizes that some disruptions (such as human infrastructure, naturalized exotic species, and climate change) cannot be reversed or removed. Invasive deer, however, can be removed.

### **Guardians of the environment support eradication**

Islands Trust, the BC Wildlife Branch, and Parks Canada all see the sad contrast between Sidney's ecosystem and rest of the archipelago. They are promoting eradication because invasive fallow deer are uncannily well adapted to degrade our ecosystem. Invasive deer have the ability to digest a vast range of seedlings, leaves and needles, shrubs, flowers, sedges, and grasses. Invasive deer reproduce at a high and constant rate, simply extending their diet to include more and more plant species as their abundance increases. This makes them peculiarly prone to hyper-abundance, a fact that has proven devastating to native ecosystems: if you are new to Sidney Island, ask anyone who was here before 2008.

### **Invasive deer and social harmony**

Freshwater ponds were created in the 1960s and 70s and liberated the invasive deer population, previously suppressed by summer drought. Since then, great expense in money and volunteer time have been required to defeat hyper-abundance. This has never really succeeded: invasive deer abundance has proven to be a relentless force. Even so, measures that make the difference (captures and subsidized culls) have been vigorously opposed at various times by a minority of owners, as eradication is today. This has been divisive. If we preserve invasive deer for some reason, we sentence ourselves to continued deer management. The very intense volunteer effort after 2008 cannot be readily repeated, so we face high costs in money as well as volunteer hours. And, predictably, we face more vigorous opposition and more divisiveness.

## Removing invasives, keeping natives

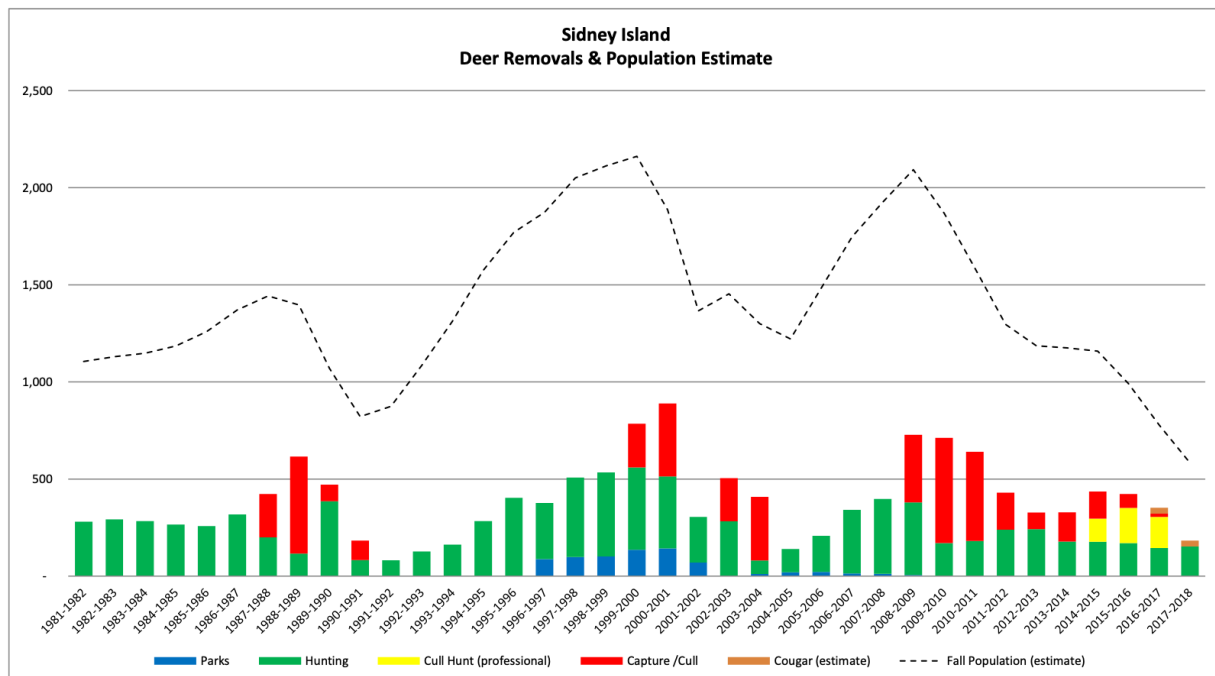
Native deer co-evolved with our ecosystem, and they are protected by BC Environment's Wildlife Branch regulations. By contrast, invasive deer are treated as virtual pests by the Wildlife Branch: we are free to remove any number at any time. We have only so much ability to control deer, and we should use it in the most efficacious way. There is an opportunity to simply remove all the invasive deer at minimal cost to us. We can take this one-time opportunity and then focus hunting efforts on removing any over-abundant population of native deer. The Wildlife Branch has already significantly relaxed black tail hunting regulations on Sidney and James Islands, which supports this approach.

## Ungulate population growth

Some owners predict a hyper-abundant population of native deer after removing the invasive deer. Here are three reasons to feel this is manageable threat. 1) We have a sustainable hunting program on Sidney Island that can be directed at native deer. 2) The solitary, territorial native deer do not tend to hyper-abundance as do herds of invasive deer. 3) Native deer have more selective diets and may slow their reproduction when their chosen fodder is in short supply. In addition: consider how futile it would be to sustain a population of invasive deer large enough to degrade the ecosystem in order to suppress native deer. Makes no sense.

## How we have managed invasive deer

The alternative to eradication is continuing management of invasive deer. We are lucky to have detailed records on over 35 years of this activity. This graph shows invasive deer population and removals over the decades. It plainly shows that recreational hunting has been a necessary but



insufficient tool in deer management. Recreational hunting has been uninterrupted over the decades, but we have been intermittent in other methods of deer removal. Clearly, when we leave it to hunting alone, invasive deer populations respond by increasing rapidly. Of course we could find ways to increase hunting pressure on the invasive deer population: more days of hunting, fewer restrictions on hunt boundaries, more subsidized cull hunts. But will an increasingly residential island (we've gone from less than 10 homes at the time of subdivision to over 50 today) welcome a lot more hunting?

### **Recovery so far**

Aggressive volunteer captures and subsidized cull hunts supplemented recreational hunting in the years 2008 to 2015, and the results are easy to see. There is a lot more biomass, especially grasses, across the island. It's a greener place. The browse line has softened. But recovery of species is only beginning. Many shrubs, flowers and small trees that have been essentially extirpated are still missing on Sidney Island, and so is the wildlife that they should support. Our species diversity has been heavily damaged and has not significantly recovered. There are almost no young specimens of deciduous trees. The plants most tasty to deer have the hardest time coming back: it takes many deer to extirpate an established species, but only a few to destroy the first few recruits that would re-establish the species. And the many shrubs that are missing from the island would improve water retention and raise our water table, important concerns as climate change progresses.

### **The best is yet to come**

It may seem that the debate over eradication is all about a few flowers. But no. It is about a million flowers, and about innumerable shrubs and berries and flowering native trees like dogwood and ocean spray. It is about keeping deciduous trees—maple, alder, cherry, Garry oak, arbutus—that are dying out because they cannot recruit. It is about the habitat and food sources that support songbirds and pollinators. It is about a level of species diversity simply unknown to Sidney Island in recent decades. You don't miss what you don't know. Eradication is a first step in the restoration of a precious ecosystem that you will gift to your children and grandchildren.

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*In supporting these arguments in favour of eradication, the undersigned acknowledge that some owners cherish the opportunity to hunt and consume fallow deer. Eradication is a loss to them, and we recognize that.*

Lot 32, Susan MacLean

Lot 33, Roy Smitshoek & Janice McLeod

Lot 34, Phoebe Gilday & Mike Stask

Lot 40, Gaire & Lorraine MacLean

Lot 43, Michael Law & Carolyn Russell

Lot 44, Jeff & Debbie Paul

Lot 61, Russ & Marna Iwanson

Lot 62, John Mawdsley & Lisa Brattland

Lots 63 and 64, Mark Allison & Stephanie Holmquist

Lot 65, Peter, Penny & Sarah Pearse

Lot 67, Judith Fisher

Lot 68, Julia Hedley

Lot 72, Stan Semrau & Maureen McDonald

Lots 75 and 110, Ken & Val Poskitt

Lot 76, Bruce & Dianne Ledingham

Lots 98, 99 and 100, John Palmer

Lot 107, Mike Parfit & Suzanne Chisholm

Lots 128 and 129, Kirk & Rhonda Caza

Lots 132 and 133, Paul & Holly McNally