

## **From the Ecological Stewardship Committee: Things to know about eradication of fallow deer**

### **1 It's about recovery**

Parks' proposal is broader than eradication, which is only the first step in allowing Sidney Island to recover from hyper-abundant deer degradation. Their budget includes all the funding support for recovery. Parks will contribute to our recovery projects—time, talent and money for invasive species and species diversity. Eradication and restoration open the way for us to leave a legacy.

*For an excerpt from Parks' multiyear Statement of Work, click [here](#).*

### **2 Recovery has begun**

Thanks to aggressive deer management since 2010, there are many plants flourishing. This may seem like 'mission accomplished'. But that is to overlook the imminent threat to our forest: many of the trees we love (arbutus, maple, oak, alder, cottonwood and even ocean spray, in fact, virtually *all* our deciduous trees) are aging and dying and not being replaced. And there are scores of plants we don't miss because we never see them: understory shrubs that are habitat for birds and masses of spring wildflowers.

*For a report by UBC's Peter Arcese (and others) on Sidney Island's ecosystem up to May 2018, click [here](#).*

*For a report created by the UBC student monitoring project in 2018, click [here](#)*

### **3 Community harmony**

Deer management has been a community project, funded and supported by owners, for many years. It has consumed our resources—volunteer hours and money by the thousands. If the fallow deer are removed we will be able to move forward, beyond costly fallow deer management, with an alignment of goals that includes ecosystem recovery and control of blacktail deer.

*For Peter Pearse's March 2018 letter to Council outlining our long, arduous history of deer management, click [here](#)*

### **4 Hunting has helped**

Recreational hunting has steadily removed fallow deer for at least 36 years, but in years with *only* recreational hunting, the deer population has invariably increased. If we keep fallow deer, we need to supplement hunting indefinitely with some combination of paid culls and/or capture culls. The former are expensive; the latter arduous and inhumane.

*For a graph illustrating the effectiveness of deer management methods click [here](#)*

### **5 How many deer?**

The science says that an island our size can handle 100 or so deer while maintaining an ecological balance. It appears there are now perhaps 500 deer, fallow and blacktail combined.\* We cannot eradicate blacktail, but we can eradicate fallow. Now, suppose we don't, and instead try to manage the fallow population down to 100. We will still have overabundance with the combined species, we'll have taken all the competitive pressure off the blacktail deer population, and we'll face not one but two ungulate species that need to be controlled.

*For an article using data from 25 nearby islands to show how many deer the ecosystem can sustain, click [here](#).*

*Ken Poskitt describes a scenario without eradication: Click [here](#)*

### **6 How deer multiply**

During the last period in which recreational hunting alone was used to control fallow deer (2004-2008) they spiked from around 1200 to around 2200. In the next three years capture culls removed over 2000 animals just to get back to the 2004 level. Blacktail deer also multiply, and could pose a problem in due course. But keeping enough fallow deer to suppress blacktail (that, is, a *lot*) would be throwing in the towel, giving up on a project the island has worked at for over three decades.

*For Ken Poskitt's informative paper on deer management numbers, methods and prognosis, click [here](#)*

### **7 Hunters want to hunt**

We are lucky to have a small but committed group of hunters on the island. Because of native blacktail deer, hunting will remain an ecological necessity after eradication, and we have been given assurances by the Wildlife Branch that they will allow us the tools to deal with problem levels of blacktail.

## **8 Invasive species**

Fallow deer used to contain the spread of broom and English hawthorn on the island. Actually, both plants are deer resistant, but when fallow deer are hyper-abundant they approach starvation and eat unaccustomed food (sallal, bullrushes and mosses, for instance, as well as broom and hawthorn). Using hyper-abundant fallow deer to suppress broom and hawthorn would be like using fallow deer to suppress blacktail deer: a solution that is worse than the problem. Humans are the best option for removing broom and hawthorn, and this is work that is already underway with Parks' technical support and will continue with more substantial report after eradication.

## **9 Protecting native species**

We can use exclosures (that is, structures to keep the deer out) in specific small-scale circumstances such as scientific control experiments like the one being managed by UBC on the southern bluffs or the demonstration "what should be here" exclosure on Sallas Lane. But exclosures are not effective tools for ecosystem-scale recovery. They are expensive and difficult to maintain, especially when built in rocky areas where many of our threatened native plants and trees belong.

## **10 Parks is our good neighbour**

Sidney Island is easily the largest in the Southern Gulf that can readily make co-ordinated plans for its environment. Other islands have many owners and many agendas. Our Strata and Parks can work together because for both the highest priority is the environment, as asserted in our Community Plan.

*For the Sallas Forest Community Planning Document, click [here](#).*

## **11 Other stakeholders**

There are other stakeholders who have an interest in the deer population and the recovery of the forest on Sidney Island. In addition to Parks Canada, these include Islands Trust Fund, the Wildlife Branch and First Nations. All support eradication of the fallow deer.

*For the letter of support from Islands Trust Fund, click [here](#).*

## **11 Eradication is free to us**

Eradication is a one-time opportunity. The alternative is an ongoing drain on resources, both financial and human. If we change our minds and decide to eradicate in future, raising the money will be, to say the least, a challenge.

## **12 Eradication will be intrusive**

Eradication will involve hunting throughout the island (but not on owner lots without owner permission) and may use methods such as baiting, trapping, herding deer, and indicator dogs. All these methods have been used in recent years in deer management and/or cougar hunting. The process promises to be professional, transparent and once-and-for-all.

## **13 Eradication is not the end of hunting**

Be assured that deer hunting on the island will continue after eradication. While our hunters may prefer fallow deer, 90,000 other BC hunters hunt blacktail deer every year, suggesting that it is far from unpalatable.

*For a Vancouver Sun article on the popularity of hunting in BC, click [here](#).*

*\*There are differing numbers indicating ideal target population required for ecological recovery and different estimates of current population. Discrepancies are due to the fact that it is difficult, if not impossible to precisely calculate a deer population. The Ecological Stewardship Committee relies instead on monitoring the impact of deer on vegetation.*