

Wildlife Management Committee  
Sunrise Beach Texas  
Meeting Summary June 18, 2016

1. Welcomed 15 citizens plus guests including Dale Schmidt, TPWD, Sam Padgett, Game Warden and Rufus Stephens, TPWD. Reviewed the purpose of the Committee to explore issues relating to the deer population in Sunrise Beach and possible actions to be suggested to the City Council.
2. Briefly reviewed what the Committee has learned to date including:
  - a. The results of the mail-in survey taken in April 2015 (consensus that the deer population is too large, no consensus if any action is necessary)
  - b. The results of the driving survey conducted in Aug and Sep 2015 to estimate the size of the deer population (1.27 acres/deer)
3. Briefly reviewed the Granite Shoals Bow Hunting pilot project to begin in Oct 2016 (details can be found on the GS web site). The geography within the main SRB city limits would most likely preclude using a similar process. However, lot size may be large enough in some SRB Ag lots for this to be considered.
4. John Cornelius and John Morrill reviewed the Orion Project to be considered as a process that could be utilized for SRB deer population control. Key points:
  - a. This is a 501 (c) 3 (Non-profit) organization that operates under a scientific collection permit from the State of Texas.
  - b. Has two objectives: deer population control and disease research
  - c. Utilizes a team of sharp shooters with special ammunition and sound suppression minimizing bullet pass-through and shot noise and maximizing effective and immediate kill capacity. Sick or injured deer would be harvested first.
  - d. Preliminary geographic survey of SRB indicates that there are several maximum safe areas where harvesting could be conducted according to Orion's protocols
  - e. Fee of \$300/deer harvested includes all costs as well as processing and disposal
  - f. Have been operating for several decades in Texas without incident or accident and are fully insured
  - g. Research information on disease factors derived from deer harvested in SRB would be made available to the community
5. Reviewed and confirmed suggestions made at the Jan 29 WMC meeting:
  - a. OK to consider changing the city ordinances prohibiting fire arm discharge and hunting within the city limits to be allowed under certain narrow and specific circumstances
  - b. Consider the bow hunting process being implemented in Granite Shoals for our Ag land properties and surrounding ranches – work with property owners.
  - c. Do not increase property taxes to implement deer population control measures.
  - d. Do not conduct a public referendum on the issue.
  - e. Do conduct the annual driving survey to estimate the size of the deer population (suggestion in June 18 meeting was to investigate using infrared drone technology to get a more accurate count)
  - f. Develop and distribute educational information about the ill effects of feeding the deer and the reasons to adhere to the existing 'no-feeding' city ordinance
  - g. Work on obtaining a depredation permit for the SRB airport (June 18 – TPW confirmed that this is a relatively simple process)
6. General discussion.
  - a. Noted that the goal of deer harvesting would be to get the doe population down to parity (1 to 1) with the bucks. At this point, a limited amount of harvesting should be

able to maintain a desired herd size. It was noted that it would take 5-10 years of moderate size doe harvesting to reach this kind of parity.

- b. Support for engaging Orion Research and Maintenance Services to help with deer population control in the form of harvesting and to participate in disease research. No specific number of deer to be harvested was specified. Orion was asked to submit a formal proposal including actions, methods, costs and responsibilities of Orion and the City of Sunrise Beach.
  - c. Support for asking neighboring ranches to consider increasing doe hunting on their properties. This tied into a discussion about the concern that does and bucks in areas around SRB can immigrate at will into the city limits.
  - d. Support for asking Ag Land property owners with greater than 10 acres to consider allowing bow and shot gun hunting on their properties if the city changes the restricting ordinance (perhaps using the Granite Shoals model).
  - e. NOTE: Fred has communicated with ranch and Ag Land owners and a majority have indicated a willingness to consider b and c above.
  - f. TPW rep noted that in some communities, police officers dealing with deer issues of various kinds actually takes away time from other police duties. This does not appear to be the case in SRB, however.
  - g. In depth discussion on the need or not for defining a target deer population size, e.g., we are currently estimate to be at 1.27 acres/deer. TPW sets ranch land targets at a minimum of 10 acres/deer, but does not specify a number for urban municipalities, citing 'cultural carrying capacity' as the driver, i.e., whatever the particular community is willing to accept. Our mail-in survey indicates that SRB respondents are ambivalent about our current herd size, split about half and half on a need to take any action to cull the herd or no action even though a solid majority feels that the size of the herd is too large. Several comments noting that the size of the herd will change regularly based upon many factors with the TPW rep stating his opinion that 1.27 acres/deer given our geography and natural limitations is probably the largest our herd can get.
  - h. Suggestion that we conduct a deer opinion survey of property owners annually to have an understanding of current feelings about the varying deer issues including population size.
  - i. Suggestion that we investigate the possible use of a small property owner Wildlife Management Assessment to help cover deer management costs that might be incurred.
7. Suggestions for next steps.
- a. Members of the Wildlife Management Committee present (in concert with suggestions made at the Jan 29<sup>th</sup> WMC meeting) supported forwarding to the SRB City Council for consideration and action as appropriate a proposal containing the following suggestions:
    - i. Conduct the annual driving survey to estimate the size of the deer population (suggestion in June 18 meeting was to investigate using infrared drone technology to get a more accurate count)
    - ii. Conduct a deer opinion survey of property owners annually to have an understanding of current feelings about the various deer issues including population size and management actions.
    - iii. Develop and distribute educational information about the ill effects of feeding the deer and the reasons to adhere to the existing 'no-feeding' city ordinance.

- iv. Obtain a depredation permit (deer harvesting) for the SRB airport (June 18 – TPW reps. confirmed that this is a relatively simple process)
  - v. Ask neighboring ranchers to consider increasing doe hunting on their properties.
  - vi. Ask Ag Land property owners with greater than 10 acres to consider allowing bow and shot gun hunting on their properties if the city changes the restricting ordinance (perhaps using the Granite Shoals model).
  - vii. Consider changing the city ordinances prohibiting fire arm discharge and hunting within the city limits to be allowed under certain narrow and specific circumstances (re items iv, v and vi above)
  - viii. Consider engaging Orion Research and Maintenance Services to help with deer population control in the form of harvesting and to participate in disease research. No specific number of deer to be harvested was specified. Orion was asked to submit a formal proposal including actions, methods, costs and the responsibilities of Orion and the City of Sunrise Beach.
    - ix. Consider a wildlife management property owner assessment to help cover costs that might be incurred.
- b. Fred Butler will forward these suggestions to the SRB City Council and ask that the Deer Management Issue be placed on the July 21, 2016 Council Agenda for discussion and possible action including these suggestions.