Irvington Woods Park

Woodland sustainability for all species of animals and plants

DESCRIPTION OF THE WOODS

* 259 acres of native woodlands
* Largest forest preserve south of I-287
* A rare upland swamp - the largest wetland south of I-287
* Over 50 acres of documented “Old Growth Forest”
* 300+ year-old trees, possibly New York State’s tallest documented tree

THE PROBLEM

Over the last 25 years the woods have lost:

* 95%+ loss of natural tree regeneration.
* 95%+ loss of its native understory including shrubs, young tree saplings, and small flowering plants growing underneath the canopy of the large trees.
* 65%+ loss of the ground and shrub nesting songbird population.
* Amphibians, reptiles, small mammals and insects who depend on a healthy understory are disappearing at a similar rate.
* The IWP has no peer in southern Westchester and is not comparable to the deer management problems of the significantly smaller woodlots of the villages surrounding Irvington.
* The understory of 25 years ago had a full carpet of native perennials including Mountain Laurel, Mayapples, Trillium and Maidenhair ferns. They are 99% gone.

THE CAUSE

* Over-browsing by white-tailed deer because of a spike in deer population over the last 25 years caused by lack of predators.
* An extensive profession survey of the IWP indicates a deer population 7+ times greater than a sustainable woodlands deer population
* The Irvington Woods have a documented deer density of 141 deer per square mile.
* Density above 20 per square mile is considered the tipping point of irreversible woodland destruction.
* The Audubon Society and the NYS DEC state a healthy deer density is 10-15 per square mile. The Audubon society cites "overabundance of white-tailed deer is the major disruption threatening the integrity of the natural ecosystem".

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

* **Contraception and sterilization:** not available in Westchester because of DEC regulations; extremely difficult to implement in a roaming population in a large woodland.
* **Repellent & frightening devices:** effectiveness is short lived as animals adapt.
* **Habitat alteration:** removal of vegetation goes against efforts to revitalize Irvington Woods Park. Inhumane for deer and other wildlife species.
* **Capture and relocation:** difficult and expensive. Capture and transport causes stress with 75% deer mortality rate within in one year. Tranquilizers that are used pose a health risk to humans if exposed. Not available in Westchester for deer management. Considered inhumane.
* **Poison,** parasite or disease introduction: unsafe for other species and severely inhumane.
* **Predator Introduction.** Coyotes now occupy habitat in parts of Westchester. Packs can kill deer but this is inhumane for deer and dangerous for humans and pets.
* **Capture and Kill.** Deer could be captured by use of deer drives, nets, tranquilizer darts etc. Once caught they could be shot. Highly stressful for deer and inhumane.

* **Bait and Shoot.** This is the technique used by the Town of Greenwich. Deer were baited to strategically located feeding stations and shot. Unsafe and inhumane.
* **Traditional Controlled Hunting.** Using less than proven highly expert marksmen is dangerous and can result in inhumane deaths.
* **Fencing.** Successfully protects that which it encircles but is only recommended for small parcels a tenth the size of the Irvington Woods. It is the most expensive solution estimated to cost upwards of $2,500,000 and will requires expensive annual maintenance. It does not solve the root of the problem. Fencing the IWP would double the population of deer for the surrounding properties, displacing IWP deer overpopulation into those properties and roads. This would essentially double those neighboring properties' burden and safety risks. It is not humane for a large group of deer to live in a suburban back yard with limited food sources. It is unsafe for children and pets.
* **No intervention:** accept consequences of increased damage to entire ecosystem, increase of car collisions and rates of tick-borne diseases. Inhumane to the deer and other species and will result in the entire loss of the woods ecosystem.

The Irvington Woods committee rejects any of the above solutions as inappropriate and inhumane.

THE SOLUTION SUGGESTION OF THE IRVINGTON WOODS COMMITTEE

* To rehabilitate the IWP ecosystem it is necessary to as humanely as possible reduce the number of deer to a level below the tipping point of 20 per square mile, not remove them entirely.
* Based on the research and the documented actual results from other Westchester properties comparable in size to the IWP, reducing the deer population would enable the forest ecosystem to regenerate naturally and all species to flourish and reproduce in harmony with each other.
* The Woods committee recommends a scientifically based, carefully managed, precise and surgically orchestrated program using a professional expert archer with significant experience working in a suburban woodland and a proven 100% safety record.
* Utilizing a single, highly skilled professional archer is safe, humane and fiscally responsible.
* The professional will study IWP's deer behavior and frequented locations.
* Studying the public use of the trails and weather patterns will ensure utmost safety.
* All management activities would occur during first light at sunrise when the park is not open to the public and done in park areas that are distant from park trails.
* Before and during the event IWP would monitor all park entrances.
* As catalogued in the NYS DEC Hunting Safety Statistics of the last three years, longbow hunting is the safest hunting method. There is no record of any accident causing a human death by bowhunting in all of NY State
* One skilled professional archer, in one tree, aiming with a bow downward, well away from all park trails with a proven 98% accuracy ensures the most humane solution to avoid the certain inhumane impacts of the other possible solutions
* Discreet covered removal and donation of deer to food banks.
* A multi-year program occurring one or twice a week, for a few hours at daybreak, over ten winter weeks will reduce the population by about 10 to 12 deer per year. Our Westchester neighbors with similar size properties have documented significant regeneration of the native understory and return of songbirds in the 2nd and 3rd years of this type of program.