



**HOUSATONIC VALLEY
COUNCIL OF ELECTED OFFICIALS**

OLD BROOKFIELD TOWN HALL
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Governor Jodi Rell
Office of the Governor, State Capitol
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

October 3, 2007

Dear Governor Rell:

We are writing to you in our role as chief elected officials of Connecticut municipalities that have been badly affected by deer overpopulation. Many of us are struggling with the issue of how best to alleviate the consequences of excess deer and some of us are trying to implement deer population control programs.

The State has effectively promoted the aggressive control of mosquito populations in order to combat West Nile Disease, but has failed to exert an equivalent effort to control deer populations in order to combat Lyme Disease.

This far more serious vector transmitted infection has severe short term and long term consequences for those who contract it. Difficult to diagnose, untreated Lyme Disease can cause chronic and disabling neurological damage.

We feel that a lack of factual information in the public realm is handicapping this effort, which is frustrating knowing that useful scientific studies have been performed and their results could be more widely distributed on a statewide level.

For example, the fact that communities in Maine and Connecticut have been able to dramatically reduce their tick populations and Lyme Disease rates by reducing their deer populations would be a powerful and yet straightforward fact to add to the state Department of Public Health's Lyme prevention educational material.

At present these data are buried in esoteric scientific journals not easily accessible to the public. Even our own local health departments are unaware of these studies and therefore unable to help educate the residents of our towns.

While the CT Department of Environmental Protection has made excellent progress in responding to the terrible increase in deer numbers over the last 30 years, they are struggling to make any real inroads. Lack of access to increasingly subdivided and privately owned land is one significant hurdle.

The Chief of Wildlife feels that this is due to lack of public understanding of the need to reduce the deer herd significantly. Public attitudes to hunters are still focused on sport and they have yet to see hunters as our partners in the battle against Lyme Disease and woodland destruction.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) statistics indicate approximately 56,000 new cases of physician confirmed Lyme Disease in Connecticut in 2005. Public health is perhaps the most important reason to want to get deer numbers under control but DEP feels they are not qualified to take on the role of public health educators- that should be the role of DPH.

So here we have a dilemma: DPH regards deer as the province of the DEP (despite the fact that deer are the critical animal hosts to the tick vector that spreads the disease to humans) and DEP regards health education as the province of the DPH.

However, if the state would set a policy direction and recommend that these two agencies work together on getting more information out to the public and perhaps setting a tick borne disease prevention goal to be implemented by DEP, then DEP could do a much more effective job at helping our communities avoid all the diseases spread by deer ticks.

Our towns want to be able to effectively reduce Lyme and the newer tick borne diseases. These illnesses are affecting too many of our residents and are having a significant economic impact on our communities through lost work days, increased health care costs, garden destruction and automobile accidents.

Furthermore the environmental damage being wrought by deer is an ongoing tragedy in our more rural towns where we have struggled for years to preserve open space only to see its ecological value degraded by deer over browsing and loss of native species while invasives are given a leg up by the deer themselves.

Our health officers don't know whether to encourage children to run through the woods and explore nature while combating obesity or to stay home and avoid picking up ticks outdoors.

Obviously the ideal would be to be able to tell parents that the woods are now safe again, the ticks are gone and the wildflowers and birds are returning, so go on out and enjoy nature, Can you help us achieve this goal before the current generation of children have grown old?

We recognize and appreciate your commitment to public health as indicated by your recent letter of concern to us on West Nile Virus and we respectfully ask that you now take a leadership role with the appropriate State Agencies to combat Lyme Disease in the State of Connecticut.

Sincerely yours:

The undersigned municipal
chief elected officials

Signed:

Andrea Connor

Title and Municipality:

FIRST SELECTMAN, SHERMAN

Signed:

Natalie Kitcham

Title and Municipality:

FIRST Selectman, Redding

Signed:

Robert C. Rosenthal

Title and Municipality:

FIRST SELECTMAN, NEWTOWN

Signed:

Robert E. Bnahe

Title and Municipality:

FIRST SELECTMAN Bethel

Signed:

Rudy Manton

Title and Municipality:

FIRST SELECTMAN RIDGEFORD

Signed:

Gregory Murphy

Title and Municipality:

FIRST SELECTMAN Brookfield

Signed:

John Horze

Title and Municipality:

NEW FAIRFIELD
FIRST SELECTMAN

Signed:

Will E. [Signature]

Title and Municipality:

Fire Selectman
Bridgewater

Signed:

Yuh Boston

Title and Municipality:

MAYOR OF DANBURY

Signed:

Pat Murphy

Title and Municipality:

³ Mayor of New Milford

Figure 1. Changes in deer and nymphal tick densities in Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1992-2002 (Stafford et al. 2003).

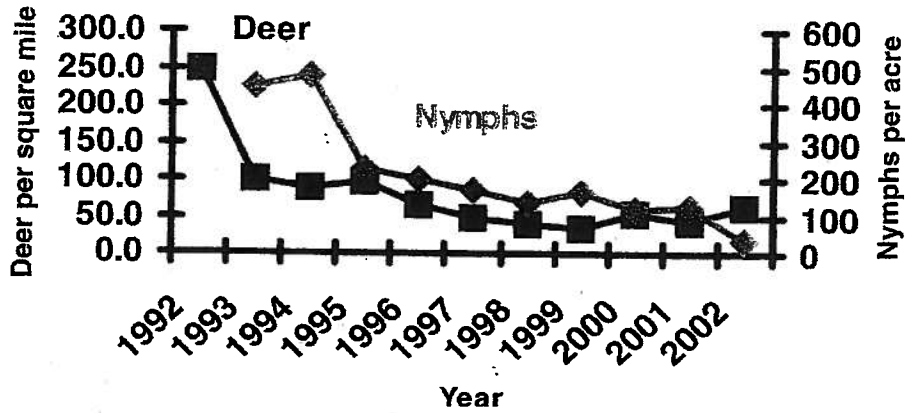
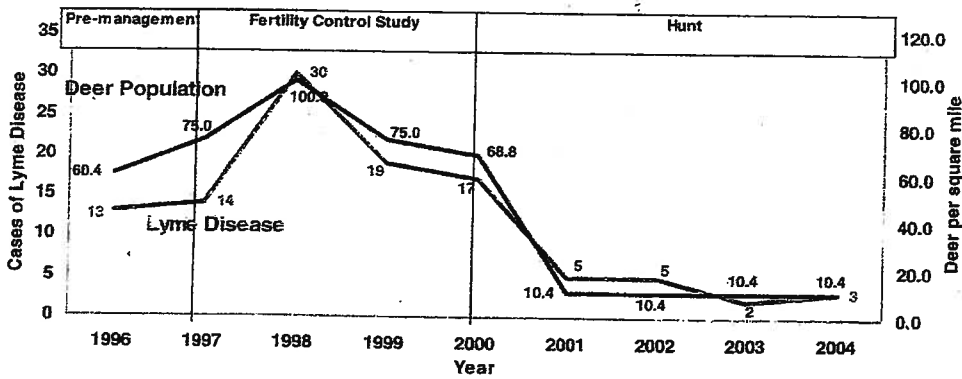


Figure 2. Changes in deer density and cases of Lyme disease in Mumford Cove, Connecticut, 1996-2004 (CT DEP data).



(Source of reference for graphics: *Managing Urban Deer in Connecticut*, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of natural Resources – Wildlife Division. June 2007)