

The Wildlife Society

Georgia Chapter

"Excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education"

November 20, 2003



Statement of the Georgia Chapter of The Wildlife Society regarding the overpopulation of white-tailed deer at Red Top Mountain State Park:

The Georgia Chapter of The Wildlife Society is a professional organization dedicated to the scientific conservation of wildlife resources, and to furthering the education of those involved with, or interested in, wildlife conservation. The Society promotes rigorous professional ethics for wildlife scientists and managers, facilitates the exchange of technical information, and works to influence legislation impacting wildlife resources. We have more than 200 members representing universities, state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, and the general public.

The white-tailed deer is very important as a component of Georgia's diverse wildlife heritage and in particular as a big game animal. Restoration of Georgia's deer herd just a few decades ago was and continues to be a great conservation achievement. We, as members of the professional society of wildlife biologists, recognize that the issues related to deer overabundance are numerous and complicated, but accept that regulated hunting is now the primary mechanism for preventing deer overpopulation in most instances. Deer hunting is a very popular recreational activity and has a significant positive economic impact. When deer are protected from predation and hunting they can quickly become too numerous and acclimated to humans. Overpopulation results in unhealthy animals, damage to the habitat through over-browsing, and damage to property through collisions with vehicles and browsing of valuable crops and landscaping plants. Acclimated deer pose a potential danger to human safety through close interaction.

Red Top Mountain State Park has clearly become overpopulated with deer. At an estimated 120-180 deer per square mile, the park population is 4-5 times greater than the healthy deer population at nearby Allatoona Wildlife Management Area. Though many park visitors enjoy seeing abundant deer and other wildlife up close, what might not be readily apparent is that the deer are undernourished and have excessive parasite loads, and that over-browsing is damaging the habitat that is needed to support many species of wildlife. The Georgia Chapter of The Wildlife Society supports regulated hunting as a legitimate and beneficial recreational activity that provides essential control of the white-tailed deer population. Where limited available space and a high density of people, structures, roads, etc. in the nearby surrounding landscape preclude the use of firearms, archery-only hunting should be considered. However, because of potential conflicts in management objectives and between user groups, we recognize that hunting may not always be the best approach to population management of white-tailed deer in all situations. Even so, hunting should not be ruled out as a future option as specific circumstances evolve.