

In support of HB 5412

The policies of the past 50 years have fostered serious overabundance of white-tailed deer in Connecticut. In recent years, there have been DEEP aerial surveys showing deer densities as high as 105 deer per square mile in Fairfield County, whereas the goal density for eliminating Lyme disease is about 10-15 per square mile and the goal for avoiding forest damage is about 20 per square mile.

Deer are the keystone species in the life cycle of the black-legged tick, also known as the deer tick. When the tick reaches the adult stage, it seeks a final blood meal and mates. The female tick drops off and subsequently lays 2,000 to 3,000 eggs. Some 94 percent of all adult female deer ticks get their blood meal *from a deer*. (It is true that the rest of the tick's life cycle involves larval and nymphal stages that mainly feed on small mammals such as mice, which are the main reservoirs for Lyme disease; however, there are no viable strategies to reduce these small mammals and doing so would not reduce our huge overabundance of deer.)

Connecticut, due to the long-standing overabundance of deer going back 30-40 years, has been hyperendemic for Lyme disease for several decades. Connecticut consistently ranks in the top few states with regard to incidence of Lyme disease. In addition, the same ticks carry other, serious diseases, such as anaplasmosis (formerly called ehrlichiosis), and babesiosis. The latter, babesiosis, has seen a sharp increase within the state in the past decade. More of these zoonotic diseases are potentially in store if we do not address the combined problems of deer and tick overabundance.

Studies have clearly shown that reducing deer density down to about 10-15 per square mile will result in a dramatic drop (approximately 90 percent) in tick abundance. This can have dramatic effects in reducing tick-borne disease.

Over the years, DEEP has instituted a number of changes in hunting rules in an attempt to increase the annual deer harvest. But these rules were originally designed to keep deer population high and they have succeeded too well. Small incremental changes have not resulted in any substantial decrease in deer populations. What we need now, in many areas of our state, is a sharp reduction in deer.

This law would give landowners the ability to help reduce deer in a substantial way. It would ease the burden on the landowner from deer damage and reduce his or her risk of tick-borne diseases. It is important to pass this law without delay.

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