

## **Open Letter to Residents: by Eric Miller**

I own a home in a residential community in NW Wake County that is considering adopting the NCBA-BCRS program. I was encouraged to share a couple of thoughts with you.

I used to be opposed to hunting of any kind. It was my family who changed my mind.

Here's a list of things I learned from them:

By 1908, the entire population of all species of deer in the lower 48 was estimated at less than half a million, because of overhunting and indiscriminate killing of deer by farmers.

Conservation efforts by hunters - the creation of sanctuaries and preserves, moratoriums on hunting, proactive efforts to build deer populations were so effective that today, the deer population of North Carolina alone is estimated at 1.3 million.

While we've done a spectacular job at rebuilding deer populations, we haven't done the same for the mountain lion and wolf, so we've effectively eliminated the deers' natural predators. Without wolves and mountain lions, deer population is limited only by their food supply. Their population can double every 2-3 years, and long before deer start running out of food, they start destroying the health of the ecosystem they live in.

Deer overpopulation has been proven to destroy animal and plant diversity, and diversity is the lynchpin of any ecosystem's resiliency. Deer eat the seedlings of the trees, denuding the forest understory. That leaves only those plants and trees that are 'deer resistant.' Small animals and birds that feed off less resistant plants, or feed off of insects that live on those plants, disappear, as do many species of native trees.

An overpopulation of deer is in direct conflict with the current move toward local agriculture, co-op farms and neighborhood gardens, because hungry deer will destroy all of the above. Too many deer also mean higher rates of Lyme disease (it's not called a deer tick for nothing).

When people move into the deers' habitat, we must take on responsibility for controlling the deer population, because our presence is a large part of what causes that population to explode. Case in point - the deer census in many rural-metropolitan boundary areas is more than double that of more rural areas. Subdivisions in rural areas that were formerly farmland create a patchwork of forests and open land protected against wildfire and hunting.

Today, I don't hunt, but I now support it. The hunters I know, contrary to the stereotyped portrayed in the media, are naturalists and environmentalists who are deeply respectful of the animals they hunt, and innately respectful of the circle of life. They either eat what they kill or give it away to friends or to food banks.

Much of the leading research in deer nutrition, behavior, and disease prevention is funded by hunters, and most of the \$700 million collected each year for hunting licenses goes to protect deer habitats.

Also, too many people who watched Bambi as a child, or with their own children, abhor the idea of hunting does. Yet in many areas there are 7 or 8 does for every buck, and one buck can inseminate all of them, and they'll each average 1.7 fawns a year...

Many universities have done studies in using contraceptives to limit the deer population, but none have proven anywhere near as effective as controlled hunting.

Given that:

1. There are no natural predators that used to serve as a check on deer population
2. Subdivisions act as artificial sanctuaries that further imbalance the natural order
3. Too many deer means loss of habitat diversity and quality, more Lyme disease, and crop damage

A hands-off approach is not an environmentally sound policy, nor is it a responsible one.

I can fully understand someone not wanting a hunter on their property. But I think it's important for individual homeowners and the neighborhood as a whole to ask, What are we going to do to be responsible stewards of the environment? How are we going to restore and maintain a balance between the deer and rest of the ecosystem?

*Cornell University maintains an informative website on deer population and control:*

<http://wildlifecontrol.info/deer/pages/deerpopulationfacts.aspx>