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 **Fairfax City – Virginia’s First Ever Deer Sterilization Project**Fairfax City, located in northern Virginia, is a suburb of Washington, DC.  The 6.3 square mile jurisdiction contains a high density of homes and wooded corridors.  In December 2013 the Fairfax City Council endorsed the Deer Spay Project and also provided logistical support by offering space within the city police station for a surgical site.  Each night a police officer accompanied the field biologists and was present for the darting of each deer.

Public support has been overwhelmingly positive.  Local press and television provided frequent public information on the project. To accurately determine the size of the deer herd in the city, population monitoring was required.  A motion detection camera survey was conducted for thirty days by the lead biologist. The city was divided into twelve quadrants in which deer were likely to roam and each quadrant’s motion detection camera ran twenty-four hours a day. This survey resulted in over 5,000 images and led to an estimated deer population of ninety-one, of which thirty-seven were female. Using this data the professional team mapped out their project plan for capturing and performing surgery on the does.

The project ran from January 31 to February 6, 2014, and resulted in eighteen does being darted and surgically sterilized via ovariectomy (only ovaries were removed). Approximately 48% of the estimated females in the survey were sterilized. Because of restrictions on baiting deer and shining spotlights, capture rates were lower than in other research locations.

Deer were captured using a remote immobilization darting technique. Additional sedatives and localized pain blocks were administered prior to/during surgery. Veterinary staff constantly monitored the does for distress; a long-term pain killer and a long acting antibiotic were given prior to release.  Ear tags and radio-tracking collars were placed on the deer for future tracking. No deaths or injuries occurred.

In winter 2014-15 the professional wildlife team will conduct the same process with the goal of capturing and sterilizing all or most of the remaining does.  The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has granted approval for the use of bait stations and spotlighting throughout the city to make the capture of deer easier. This should greatly increase the success of phase two of the project. With two years of sterilization performed on all/most does the remaining year(s) will focus on any that may migrate into the city. Suburban deer remain in an established, compact home range so migration should be minimal.

We will quantify the local survival rates by closely monitoring the radio-collared females; normal mortality among deer in suburbia is approximately 10% to 15%.  With sterilization of most of the females and normal deer mortality there will be fewer deer in Fairfax City that might cause animal/human conflict.  We will continue to monitor the population using remote camera surveys and be able to accurately quantify immigration by identifying unmarked females that enter the city limits. (Nearly all females will have been tagged so future untagged females will stand out as immigrants). Non pregnant deer don’t require as much food or calories as pregnant ones so their feeding is substantially reduced.  Also, with females not coming into annual reproductive cycles male deer will not be as interested, give chase, be distracted, and possibly cause traffic accidents.

Most importantly, the deer population will be reduced in a humane and effective manner. Environmental issues will be minimized due to fewer deer foraging. The project will demonstrate that environmental impacts can be minimized. Deer will co-exist with other species creating a healthy ecosystem in a targeted residential jurisdiction. We will be able to appreciate wildlife in our community and avoid the use of lethal methods of population control. Non lethal deer management is a humane, permanent, safe, and pro-active approach with strong public support.  *Observing* *wildlife is an American tradition we all cherish.*

**Please visit our website at** [**www.humanedeermanagement.org**](http://www.humanedeermanagement.org)

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