

A PROFILE OF

Howard Kilpatrick

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Howard Kilpatrick is a Supervising Wildlife Biologist. His responsibilities include all aspects of Connecticut's deer management program, including deer population management, research, education, and administration. He has been involved in all aspects of a management case in the community of Mumford Cove, Connecticut.

I am going to talk about Mumford Cove; it's a community in Connecticut. Actually, it's two relatively wealthy communities on a peninsula—Mumford Cove and Groton Long Point. The area is a mix of residential development and open space surrounded by Long Island Sound on three sides. No hunting was occurring in either community, and the deer problems had escalated over the previous five to ten years.

Beginning in 1991, individual residents in the area contacted us, asking what they could do about the deer. They were concerned about Lyme disease and deer damage to shrubs and gardens. I tried to give them advice over the phone as to what they could do to reduce deer damage on their properties. At the same time, I thought that this would be a good opportunity to learn more about urban deer because what was happening there was happening everywhere. I thought that by learning more about deer populations in urban-residential areas we would be able to pro-

vide better suggestions as to what could be done in any urban setting. There were some unknowns out there. For example, where were these deer coming from?

My predecessor had gone to a community meeting where they had talked about deer management. The community in general was interested in trying to do something. We (the Wildlife Division) contacted the president of the Mumford Cove Homeowners' Association, and proposed capturing and marking deer to learn more about their movements. They were receptive to the idea, and we initiated a deer study in March of 1995. We captured deer and put radio collars on them to learn more about movement patterns and home-range size.

I am very interested in research because when you do a research project you really learn about the issues—compared to just reading literature. You learn a lot from the research that can improve the program and you look for new ways of getting the job done.



Hunters were placed at pre-determined, fixed locations in Mumford Cove. Homeowners signed waivers that permitted hunting in close proximity to homes.

The research occurred from 1995 to 2001. Initially, it was a three-year project but we kept on learning more and more, and that justified extending the project. The objective of that project was to learn about urban deer—where they come from, the size of their home range, and their population growth rate. That was the initial objective of the project. But things changed before the project ended. Some residents in the area supported hunting and wanted the deer shot. They didn't want to wait until the project was over.

In 1996, a person from outside the community heard about the desire of some to shoot the deer and didn't want the deer to be shot. That person contacted the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to inquire about birth control, and arranged for an HSUS representative to come to Mumford Cove and give a presentation on contraception research. The Homeowners' Association liked the idea of doing a birth control study in their community, but they weren't willing to pay for it. The person who initially contacted HSUS then made an offer to pay for a study if the community agreed to it.

Later, HSUS came to the Mumford Cove Board of Directors with a formal proposal to conduct a study in the community. The Board of Directors is the governing body for the community. They accepted that study proposal at an annual meeting of the Homeowners' Association. So the community was involved with approval for

the research proposal, but they didn't design the research or provide funding for the study.

In the fall of 1997 the immuno-contraception study was initiated. It became a cooperative study between the Wildlife Division, the University of New Hampshire and the Humane Society of the United States. The HSUS, through donations, paid for the graduate student and paid for some of our staff to continue doing telemetry. The project expanded to look at the effects of immuno-contraception on deer movement, the effects of immuno-contraception on reproductive rate, deer activity, and a few other things. I was the contact person for the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and my staff collected most of the telemetry data. We gave the community updates—one presentation and one written update.

In 1998 they convinced the adjacent community at Groton Long Point to join in the project as well. They decided that while we were treating the Mumford Cove deer, we could treat their deer, too.

In 1999 Mumford Cove formed a "Tick Committee" to try to address what could be done to manage ticks in the area. The committee was comprised of six or seven citizen volunteers, and they couldn't agree on recommendations for their community. All but one person agreed with reducing the deer population, but since they could not all agree, they decided to provide information and let the community vote.

In July 2000, ten days before the vote, the Tick Committee sent out information that summarized the committee's findings about different aspects of deer and tick management. The community was to vote yes or no on the following recommendations: (1) To eliminate the no-hunting ordinance, (2) To implement a hunt in cooperation with the Department of Environmental Protection, (3) To continue the current immuno-contraceptive study, and (4) To begin a new insecticide-4-poster study (the deer would rub against the posts, getting this substance on them). Two-thirds of the people who voted wanted to eliminate the no-hunting ordinance, initiate a hunt, and terminate the contraception study. So, the contraception study was terminated and a volunteer committee called the Mumford Cove Wildlife Management Commit-

tee (MCWMC) was established to help develop the details of the hunt.

We, the DEP, sat down with the MCWMC and went through a series of six or seven meetings between July and November to figure out how to best design the hunt, how it was going to be administered, what restrictions there would be, and what the hunter density should be. It was a series of meetings over that five-month period.

There was a Chairperson, two committee members, and myself from the DEP. The Chairperson asked me what my thoughts were, and I went through a series of different thoughts based on experiences we had in other situations. The Chairperson facilitated the meetings. We worked back and forth over what we thought were reasonable options. They decided they were going to hunt; my job was to suggest how it could be most efficient and safe. For example, they had questions like, "what's the difference between a slug and buckshot?" They knew very little about hunting. I was there primarily to provide information and recommendations. They ultimately made the decisions.

Through some of the interactions I had at previous meetings, the committee had confidence that I knew what I was talking about and that I was giving them good information. Whereas when HSUS met with them, there was conflicting information and things didn't make sense. What was important to me was that every decision was their decision. I would give them my input on what I thought, but they had to come to their own decisions.

They settled on high hunter density, using shotgun hunting wherever they could, and hunting from tree stands initially. We basically wanted to (1) make sure it was extremely safe, (2) make sure it was extremely effective, and (3) try to get it done in as short a period of time as possible. What was important was that residents were happy with the whole experience.

One of the interesting things that we found was that some people changed their opinions about hunting. When we surveyed residents in 1995 and in 1999, one-third of the people did not support hunting. When the vote was held in July of 2000, one-third of the people did not vote for hunting. When we surveyed residents in

2001, after the hunt was completed, of that third that did not support hunting, half of the people who did not support hunting now said that they supported hunting in their community in the future. So we were able to change the minds of half the people who did not support hunting. My sense was that people had misperceptions about hunting, of arrows sticking in the door, of cats being shot, of hunters drinking beer and walking through their backyards. Those things never occurred. In fact, hunting was fast, it got the job done, and most people didn't even know it was occurring. I think that it was a much more positive experience than they had anticipated. I think that it is inevitable that lots of people won't know anything about hunting, just what they might read or what someone might tell them. Education is critical.

We had talked about how many hunters we wanted, how close to the houses they could shotgun hunt, when we would bow hunt, time and days when hunting would occur, and things like that. One of the other neat things that happened was the way they dealt with the 500-foot rule. In Connecticut, you've got to be 500 feet from a house to discharge a firearm. That would have closed much of the community to firearm hunting. The law also says that landowners can, in writing, waive that requirement. So, they talked to about 40 people in the community and got almost everybody to agree to waive that restriction. We were able to get firearms hunting in very close proximity to houses.

The next stage was selecting the hunters. A letter was sent to all certified hunter safety instructors in Connecticut, saying that this hunt was going to occur. They were looking for candidates. Those who participate would have to pass a shooting proficiency test and participate in a screening interview. A local sportsmen's club ran the shooting proficiency test. We didn't want to do it ourselves because we didn't want to show any favoritism towards any of the individuals. The Wildlife Management Committee conducted the interviews. If they passed the shooting test, they went to the interview. There was a questionnaire that they asked of the candidates, and they ranked their scores based on their responses.



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Mumford Cove hunters were identified through a two-stage screening process, which involved a shooting proficiency test and an interview conducted by a community committee. This process gave the community control over decisions about who would be allowed to hunt.

They also had a category ranking the person's character. This item gave them the option of excluding people who they didn't feel comfortable having in their community hunting.

After they did the shooting proficiency and interviews, there was a pre-hunt meeting in which they went through the guidelines, the hunting requirements, the property boundaries, and actually showed people where the tree stands were going to be. People were assigned to specific tree stands and the first day or two was all in tree stands. Then, as deer sightings began to drop, they started to go in and disturb patches of cover where there may have been no hunters. They started moving deer around and that jumped the success up quite a bit. In six days hunters had removed 92 percent of the deer population. People went from seeing deer everywhere to deer being almost scarce. They couldn't believe it, especially after doing immuno-contraception for two years and not seeing any change. I think they were really thrilled with that.

That was in 2000. In 2001, the hunt area was expanded to include the adjacent community of Groton Long Point. There were some deer that

were getting pushed over there during the first hunt. In three days of hunting they removed about eighty-five percent of the population. This was another substantial reduction in the deer population for both communities. Currently, they are planning a third this year. The only difference this year is we (DEP) are now pulling away and the MCWMC will now run the maintenance program. Initially, it made sense for us to get involved because we had an opportunity to learn a lot about deer movements and hunt effectiveness in a residential community. Usually we don't get involved with administering a hunt. We'll get involved with providing guidelines and recommendations. But because we

had deer out there with radio collars as part of an ongoing research project, this gave us an opportunity to look at how hunting pressure would effect deer movement. Now that there are virtually no radio collars left out there and the population is very low, they are going to continue with a maintenance program. I will probably spend one day with them this year, going over my thoughts on what they should do based on what we did in the past year and how deer responded in the past years. About a month ago, I sent them a report that summarized the survey results of the community. I also sent a report that summarized what we learned about deer movements during the hunt. Both reports should give them what they need for an effective deer management program for this year. They will take over from here.

Looking back, I would say that our relationship with the local sportsmen's club and with the Wildlife Management Committee is a good one, and one in which we have credibility. We guided the Wildlife Management Committee through the process of developing the hunt and it was extremely effective. They were thrilled about that. In fact, they gave me an award after the first

hunt was completed. With the sportsmen's group, they were thrilled that they were able to be a part of the whole process. They got some hunting opportunities and we have worked with them in putting on some seminars. They felt that we've built a stronger relationship with them. My general assessment is it was a win-win situation for everybody.

This process was a success because we got the job done. We improved the community's perception about hunting and their acceptance of hunting. It was a positive experience for the community. People don't really know a lot about deer management or about hunting. You need to educate them. I think the bottom line is you need to stick to the facts. You need the science. You need to support whatever you are saying. You have to be factual and honest. I would say having good knowledge of deer, deer management, and deer behavior, was important. Also, I like to think that I'm personable. The challenge is to be really familiar with all the details of everything. One of the guys that was on the deer committee was certainly anti-management and he would try to twist me up whenever he could. He was unsuccessful. I think the key thing was that I stuck to the facts and was very familiar with the facts.

In this case, there were a lot of lessons, but whether I would do anything differently, probably not. I guess I couldn't imagine things working out better than they did. I think that one of the important things was that the Chairperson, was a "doer", someone who was good with people and knew how to get the job done. That was important. You need someone who can make decisions, who can work well with people, and who doesn't drop the ball. I'm not going to force a community to do something. They need to want to do it and I'm happy to help them out,

but it's got to be their program. They need to address their issues because they want to.

We always respond to requests from communities and deer committees to come and talk about deer management issues. In fact, in a different community we have been working with, I gave a presentation and several people asked if we had anything in writing. I said, no, I don't. What I am also seeing is that often when we go to different towns, different deer committees are asking the same questions. We have just finished putting together a booklet called "Managing Urban Deer in Connecticut." What it tries to do is give all the basic background information about deer in Connecticut. We try to address all their questions. If a community is interested in managing deer or obtaining information, we've got something in writing that they can distribute. It gets everyone at the same level of background knowledge. The last section of the booklet has examples of deer management programs in Connecticut. I thought it was important that we include examples of case studies from Connecticut. Although someone might read about something in West Virginia or somewhere else, the hunting laws are different and the landscape is different so it might not really apply here. I wanted to give some examples from Connecticut so they could better relate to the situation. And one of the recommendations was that they should contact these other towns with deer committees that have experience doing this, to help the education process go quickly. Otherwise, it seems like it's the same old thing where you can spend years educating these different deer committees. What I'm hoping is that everything we learned at Mumford Cove we can take to the next situation. That is part of why we put the book together. ■



This practitioner profile is part of an addendum to *Community-Based Deer Management: A Practitioners' Guide*. The full practitioners' guide may be obtained by contacting The Northeast Wildlife Damage Management Research and Outreach Cooperative. Electronic versions of this publication and others are available free of charge at the Northeast Wildlife Damage Cooperative website (<http://wildlifecontrol.info/NEWDMC/>). The Northeast Wildlife Damage Cooperative was formed to advance the field of wildlife damage management in its 13 member states. One goal of the cooperative is to support professionals with information needed to practice effective wildlife damage management.