

A PROFILE OF Dave Riehlman

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Dave Riehlman started his career with the Bureau of Wildlife more than 20 years ago on Long Island. He began specializing in deer management around 1989, when he took a position in the central office as the Deer Program Specialist in the Big Game project. In 1997, he transferred from the central office to DEC Region 7, and took responsibility for deer management in that region of Central New York. Dave discussed a management case that he became involved with in the late 1990s in a village called Cayuga Heights.

Cayuga Heights is bordered on the west by a steep slope down to Cayuga Lake. On the north it is bordered by a highway. It's locked up on the south by the university (Cornell). So geographically, it is almost like a fenced community. It is a pretty well defined unit to work with.

When I moved to Region 7 in 1997, I learned that Cayuga Heights was a little bit of a problem spot. The town just north of Cayuga Heights (Lansing) had established an ordinance that prohibited the discharge of firearms, so deer hunting pressure in that area was low.

I became involved with the Cayuga Heights case in April 1998. Several residents had become concerned about problems with deer and had organized themselves into a community group. One of the original organizers of this community group called me in early 1998 to discuss the groups' concerns and to ask for assistance. That first contact led the community group to convene a public meeting in April of 1998. The pur-

pose of that meeting was to gauge community interest in the topic of local deer management. They invited 3 or 4 people to talk about deer and deer issues, including Paul Curtis and Sharon Anderson of Cornell Cooperative Extension. The intent was to see if they could achieve a critical mass of village residents who would pursue the matter further. They left that first meeting with the goal of creating a petition and circulating it around their community for signatures. Signatures on the petition would indicate the number of village residents who wanted something to be done about the problems deer were creating.

At the beginning of this process, my interactions with the group were rather limited. I would periodically respond to calls or emails and I attended a few of the group's early meetings. I offered comments and answered a few questions. I tried to clarify the expectations of the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and define what I saw as DEC's appropriate role when interacting with communities concerned about



PAUL CURTIS

A research technician handles a tranquilized deer in Cayuga Heights. The deer was part of an experimental fertility control project implemented at the recommendation of a village-sanctioned deer study committee.

local deer management. For instance, I clarified that DEC couldn't be involved in their petition process. I clarified that we were happy to serve the community as a technical advisor. I explained that DEC staff could describe what was biologically and ecologically feasible, and what was allowed within the laws and rules of the state. However, I explained that the DEC didn't find it appropriate to be deeply involved in every community discussion about what the issues were. I tried to make it very clear to them that this was a community issue and that they as a community would need to define the issues of concern. They seemed to accept this stance and they invited me to very few of the regular meetings where they worked on defining problems and potential solutions.

At one meeting, I was one of several people urging them to make the deer study committee as diverse as possible. I advised them not to set up a committee that could be criticized for excluding some group. There was quite a bit of re-

sistance to that from some of the early members of the group, but eventually their minds were changed and I thought they put together a good committee—all intelligent, reasonable people, and a good mix of interests.

The Deer Study Committee started with a lot of unknowns over who could do what and who *should* do what. We tried to clarify this right away. We said, "this is *your* community, it's up to your people to decide what the issues are and then try to see if we can come to some agreement as to what acceptable solutions might be." We also made it clear to them that in all likelihood, anything they decided to do would require permits from the DEC, and that we were going to have certain demands on them in order to conform to what was legal and biologically sound. We had some constraints as to what we ultimately might let them do. Once we relayed that to them clearly, then it was their ballgame to sort out where they wanted things to go.

Sharon Anderson and Paul Curtis (Cornell Cooperative Extension) were major players in the Cayuga Heights case. Sharon Anderson's role of trying to keep people focused and on task was really important. Paul was certainly a great source for the Deer Study Committee as a technical advisor. He likely ended up filling that role more than me, because he knows the subject and he was invited to attend more of the committee's meetings.

There was an early letter from the Deer Study Committee stating that they wanted to reach conclusions as to what could or should be done, and that they would forward those recommendations to DEC to act on. My Supervisor and I looked at that letter and we both decided that it was inappropriate for us to be members of a citizen's group developing recommendations for DEC. It really didn't seem appropriate for us to be involved in any way except as technical advisors.

Once again, we presented the idea that it was their community, their properties, their issue to contend with. We reiterated that we had no interest in forcing solutions on them. We'd advise and issue permits if necessary as long as things were ecologically and biologically sound, and legal.

I do sometimes wonder whether we stayed too far in the background, but I usually conclude that our level of involvement in Cayuga Heights was appropriate. Basically, we made it clear that we were available and if the committee called and asked us to participate in meetings, we would. Every once in awhile I'd get a sense that maybe they were kicking around issues that I could have quickly cleared up for them if I had been a routine participant in the meetings. One thing that sometimes troubles me is that somebody from the outside might look back at this process and say, "where was the DEC? Where was this Dave Riehlman-deer-biologist guy?" But in my final analysis, I don't think that was a problem. I don't think things would have moved any more quickly if a DEC deer person had been plugged in more routinely. I'm convinced at this point that we are better off letting a community wrestle with their issues and try to come up with solutions independent of our presence. The whole process in Cayuga Heights cemented my beliefs that we are better off as technical advisors rather than being day-to-day participants of the exercise.

These processes always take quite awhile to play out. My guess is that every community is always going to want to re-invent the wheel. But we may be able to get them on track more quickly. Instead of a two- or three-year process, we may be able to help them get that wheel together in a year and half or two years. I think that should be the goal- to somehow provide information so that people can get comfortable taking a shorter course to a final product.

Looking back, we were one of a few players (including Cooperative Extension and Paul Curtis) who, benefiting from Irondequoit and our other efforts with using Citizen Task Force processes, were able to propose a process. We were able to give the Deer Study Committee a basic outline of how things could be done. We proposed a format for them to follow that encouraged them to try to get members of the affected community together such that the various stakes were represented.

What I've seen so far of the Cayuga Heights case cements the notions that I developed watching things evolve in Irondequoit. In order to accomplish something you really have to get a community effort going to look at the issue and try to see if you can't come to some agreements on how to approach things. From what I know right now and thinking that Cayuga Heights has progressed reasonably well, I think I'd take a similar approach with the next community that becomes a hot spot for deer management. For instance, I think it was really important to have other technical experts involved. Sharon Anderson was a technical expert on how to facilitate the exercise to keep people on track. That is important in any of these community efforts. You need a facilitator with credibility that comes from having some kind of presence in the community. It is really important to make sure that there's somebody there skilled at keeping people on task. Otherwise, the process could end up all over the board and just go on forever.

At this point in the Cayuga Heights case, our role in DEC is almost strictly a permitting role. Paul Curtis has been leading research activities down there, including some that they think might be the start of some management activities like the surgical sterilization of deer. Our department has had to issue permits to allow that



A deer movement study in Cayuga Heights improved understanding of deer and enhanced community interest in deer management. More than 600 reports of tagged deer were received, with reports submitted from 29 percent of all households in the village.

work to occur. We've done that. I have been down there to observe things and spend a day in the field once or twice.

Right now I'm satisfied with where things are. I think it's working. We haven't seen a final product yet in Cayuga Heights, so I don't know whether this exercise can be called successful. It's hard to say when we've reached a point where we can say, "this worked." But in terms of citizen activity, the community has certainly gone through a lot of the process. Now it's just a matter whether some of the actions that are carried out do in fact provide the relief that it seems a majority of the community wants.

Managing deer within the bounds people want is the ultimate success and we certainly aren't there. I don't believe the next round of research, sterilizing a few does, is going to get us there either. I think we certainly have the prospects of the year or two down the road, people again having their frustration built with losing their flowers, shrubs and gardens. So, we're not done.

I think we've been successful to the point we've gotten, but deer keep reproducing.

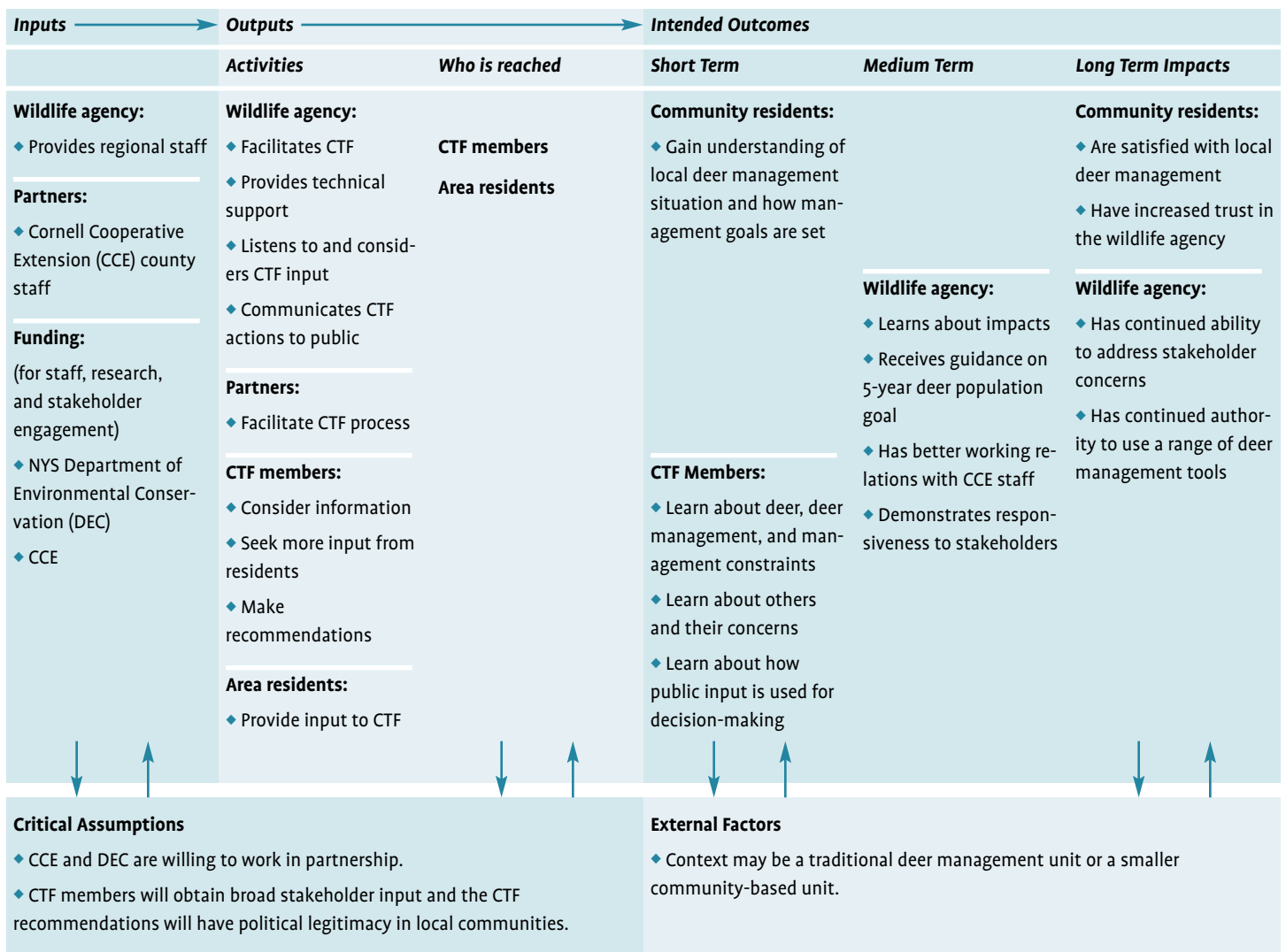
There has been a really good partnership between Cooperative Extension and DEC in this case. In Cayuga Heights, a lot of people are aware that Cooperative Extension and DEC are separate agencies. I don't think that when people think of Cooperative Extension they in any way link them with DEC. We are viewed as completely separate entities, which I think is important. I don't know which organization comes up the bigger winners. People may say Cooperative Extension is great to help you work through these things, and they may still think of DEC as this governmental agency that you don't really want to fool with until you finally need some permit. But whatever works is fine with me. I don't mind if it's Cooperative Extension that gets the communities through the problems and DEC stays in the background. I just hope that after cases like Irondequoit and Cayuga Heights, people are a little more willing to believe that DEC can be a reasonable agency to work with, to sort out issues and see if we can't reach solu-

tions. I hope that the people I work with learn that I have a knowledge base that comes from working with deer for years. I hope that the people on these committees won't have any reservations about approaching me with questions. I think

that's really critical in these exercises. If there are any walls that go up between the participants, both the committee members and the outside technical advisors of various types, that makes it really tough to move forward. ■

Citizen Group Model (New York CTF process)

Situation: As a routine part of deer management policy review, or in response to community concerns about deer-related problems, the state wildlife agency convenes a Citizen Task Force (CTF) and charges the CTF with specific tasks. The agency typically asks the CTF members to recommend a deer population goal for a local deer management unit, but they also may ask the CTF to recommend actions to achieve the recommended population goal.



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.