May 27, 2020

Carlisle Board of Selectmen
66 Westford Street
Carlisle, MA 01741

Dear Carlisle Board of Selectmen,

The Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA) Deer Management for Forest Health Committee is in support of the Town of Carlisle's deer management program. The MCA is a regional conservation partnership between conservation non-profits and municipalities in the 36 communities that make up the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord River watershed. The success of our individual programs will depend on a regional coordinated, multi-strategy approach by municipalities, conservation organizations, and other landowners, which is why this past year we formed the Deer Management for Forest Health Committee. Our priorities include: improving public education on deer overabundance, the role of hunting as a management practice, sharing resources, and providing training events for staff and volunteers on how to assess deer populations in ways the state can use in their annual population assessments.

Abundant scientific evidence demonstrates that high deer densities severely degrade habitat on conservation lands through excessive browsing. Deer overbrowsing stunts forest regeneration by eliminating tree saplings, reduces plant diversity, endangers native plant species, tends to increase abundance of invasive plants, eliminates ground and shrub bird nesting habitat, and can have long-term negative consequences on soil and vegetation. We are not only losing the next generation of our forests, we are increasing potential areas for invasive plant species to invade, we are losing the needed ecological services a diverse herbaceous and shrub understory provides.

High deer densities contribute to a higher incidence of deer-car collisions and a greater incidence of tick-borne illnesses, such as Lyme disease. When deer populations are high, we tend to see a high abundance of the invasive plant, Japanese barberry, which is an ideal habitat to white-footed mice and the deer ticks they carry (both carriers of Lyme disease). Thus, forests with more barberry in the understory tend to have higher prevalence of deer ticks and potentially Lyme disease. Additionally, the deer can suffer when the landscape is not able to provide enough food for a large deer population. When prefered food is scarce they resort to eating vegetation that they typically would not, which can increase the rate of malnutrition, starvation and disease within the deer population (e.g. Chronic Wasting Disease).

Currently, deer densities in the MCA area are conservatively estimated to be from 10 to 40 deer per square mile whereas MassWildlife recommends a target density of 12-18 deer per square mile in zone 9 (western part of the watershed) and 10 (eastern part of the watershed, including Carlisle). These levels are based on the land's carrying capacity (how many deer the land can support while maintaining a functional ecological balance), and the point where the rate of conflicts with humans typically

decreases. A successful deer management program will reduce the deer population to a sustainable level where forest understories will be able to develop, and wildlife and plant biodiversity will increase. We anticipate that this will also reduce deer-car collisions and tick-borne illnesses.

While we understand that some of your residents may remain opposed to your deer management program, please know that the members of this committee feel that this management program is the right thing to do for the long-term health of our forests, and is not a decision taken lightly.

 Sincerely,

Members of the MCA Deer Management for Forest Health Subcommittee

Kristin O'Brien, Sudubry Valley Trustees Land Steward and MCA Coordinator

Harvard Deer Management Committee

Maeghan Dos Anjos, Ashland Conservation Agent/Director

Laney Widener Wilder, Concord Land Conservation Trust Executive Director

Rob St. Germain

Whit Beals, Southborough Open Land Foundation

Michele Grzenda, Weston Conservation Administrator