

ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP DEER REPORT, 2021

BY HOWARD P. MARVEL

The Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) was formed at the beginning of the new millennium to seek solutions to an out-of-control deer population that was resulting in serious degradation of our beautiful dunes environment and stunted, malnourished deer in and around town. We have now broadened our mission to include battling invasive species, encouraging native plantings, and extensive environmental education activities, but we remain vigilant for deer overpopulation problems. Our aerial census this year was carried out on March 1, following February's heavy snow. The results showed near average deer numbers in the Beverly Shores "island," but much reduced numbers in the Indiana Dunes National Park property that surrounds us [see graph].

For comparison, our in-town aerial infrared deer counts at the height of the deer population were 140 in 2001, 121 in 2002, and 166 in 2003. Last year's disturbingly high numbers have receded somewhat, so there will be no deer hunt in town this year. We continue to collaborate with the National Park, meeting with their wildlife biologist, providing our census counts and deer location information, and purchasing tree stands for their hunting efforts. We also share information with the Indiana Dunes State Park and with other local communities.

This year the National Park took 10 deer from the Dune Ridge area that surrounds us, up from nine in 2020 but down from the totals in prior years. No hunt took place in the State Park. Dune Acres conducted a deer cull.

There is reason for vigilance. In 2018, the most recent year for which data are available, Porter County had 20 confirmed cases of Lyme disease, the highest number ever observed and the second highest among Indiana counties. The actual number of cases is likely much higher, as the Centers for Disease Control estimates that the ratio of actual to confirmed cases is ten to one. Tests of adult *Ixodes scapularis* ticks (known commonly as deer ticks or black-legged ticks) collected in Porter County have found more than a third are infected with the bacteria that carry Lyme disease. Deer are a crucial part of these ticks' life

ERG will continue to monitor and report on the local deer population and will move to active deer control efforts if and when they are warranted.

