



## **Understanding the impact of the White-Tailed Deer**

According to various studies done in our area of the state regarding the deer population, it is estimated that we currently have a density of between 70 to 120 deer per square mile and possible more in certain areas. A density of less than 20 deer per square mile for our habitat is considered to be the limit for a healthy herd and forest. The problems of a dense population are 1) health of the deer and the potential impact to human health and the economy, 2) the risk of Lyme disease to humans, 3) a higher incidence of deer/auto accidents - causing 200 human deaths per year and many thousands of dollars in damage, and 4) the ability of the forest to regenerate itself and support a diverse wildlife population. The deer eat much of the understory of the forest from the sapling, shrubs, wildflowers and the other low plants that would support birds, butterflies, reptiles, amphibians, and other mammals forcing these to look elsewhere for food and shelter. An unhealthy deer population is at risk of getting chronic wasting disease or mad deer disease – similar to mad cow disease. When a high deer density exists the population tends to be mal-nourished and have lower body weights. Humans feeding them have not shown to help them in this regard as they become dependant and don't eat as diverse a diet as necessary to promote a healthy animal. At high densities, the native plants such as trillium, bluebeard lilies, Canada mayflowers and the oak and hemlock saplings aren't able to survive and are overtaken by the less palatable hay fern and beech trees. This is an issue of long-term importance, as our trees will not live forever.

While deer management takes a complex, long-term approach and a recent report listed as many as 11 different management options, the most immediate and easily implemented option is for everyone to stop feeding the deer. Many organizations are looking into the idea of making it illegal to feed the deer and several of our neighbors have already done so. Our new rules and regulations, up for adoption, currently include a provision to make it illegal as well. Tobyhanna Township recently passed a proclamation "requesting that the public voluntarily refrain from feeding the deer".

Let's work together to maintain a healthy herd so we can all enjoy these 'wild' animals for years to come.