



About 85 farmers, state officials, and other citizens gathered in Gumboro earlier this week to discuss some of the changes being implemented to better manage the state's large deer herd.

NEWS:

Deer Present Ongoing Challenges for Delaware

AUGUST 17, 2018 – Deer in Delaware are fruitful and have been multiplying -- often to the detriment of farmers, motorists, and hikers.

In some ways, white-tailed deer are victims of their own success. They are highly adaptable, comfortable with living near humans, and have thrived with the changes that have come about as forests have given way to farms, housing developments, and cities.

According to [biologists](#), about 85 percent of mature female white-tailed deer will become pregnant each year, with two-thirds of pregnancies resulting in twins. Deer largely lack natural predators in Delaware, so populations can quickly expand in areas lacking sufficient hunting pressure to keep them in check.

Hungry deer often turn to planted crops for their forage, spelling big problems for farmers. Eating about six pounds a day per deer, a large herd can threaten the financial viability of a farm, causing tens-of-thousands of dollars in losses annually.

"Deer are considered a shared public resource, but a disproportionate amount their cost falls on the backs of Delaware's farm families," said State Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, who actively farmed for many years.

"The crop on which deer have the greatest impact is soybeans," he said. "On farms with high concentrations of deer, large sections of fields adjoining the woods are stripped bare of plants. With corn, deer like to eat the silk, which prevents the ear from developing."

In his 2018 State of the State Address, Gov. John Carney recognized the significance of the problem citing better deer management as one of his administration's goals.



State Rep. Rich Collins

It is not just farmers feeling the impact of the state's burgeoning deer population. Insurance company State Farm characterizes Delaware as "high-risk" for deer-vehicle collisions. A [report issued by the company](#) last year noted that in Fiscal Year 2017 Delaware motorists had a 1-in-132 chance of hitting a deer -- an increase of more than 12-percent from the previous year.

Deer also spread ticks carrying Lyme disease. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, Delaware has the [seventh-highest per capita incidence of Lyme disease](#) in the nation.

Earlier this week, Rep. Collins and State Sen. Bryant Richardson sponsored a public meeting in southern Sussex County to bring together farmers and hunters with representatives of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC).

DNREC Wildlife Section Administrator Robert Hossler told the crowd at the Gumboro Community Center on Wednesday evening that while some Delawareans perceive deer as iconic symbols of the state's natural beauty, others see them as "rats with hooves."

Harvesting deer he said is the only workable approach to keep the population in balance with carrying capacity of the environment. "Contraceptives do not work on deer in an open population," he said.

To that end, the number of hunting days is being expanded, new methods of taking deer have been approved, and steps are being taken to improve access to state lands open for hunting (see stories below).

[Three crop-damage assistance programs](#) are offered by the state, issuing qualified farmers tags to harvest additional deer during the traditional hunting seasons and at other times of the year. The most recent of the three, the Extreme Deer Damage

Assistance Program (EDDAP), was implemented this year.

"This is a moving target," Rep. Collins said. "State officials have taken some positive steps and are reaching out to farmers and hunters to better work with them. This is going to be an ongoing process of assessing what we've done, making improvements, and then reevaluating it again. It's going to take some time, but it seems like we're getting some traction."