



White Buffalo Inc.

Conserving Native Species and Ecosystems

**Summary Report
Griffy Lake Nature Preserve
Managed Hunt 2024
Bloomington, Indiana**

2 December 2024

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Introduction

Bloomington city officials have voiced concerns over habitat degradation and the potential loss of biodiversity and impacts to native vegetation because of a locally abundant deer population in Griffy Lake Nature Preserve (GLNP). The potential for the furtherance of these conflicts prompted Park Board Members to consider implementing strategies to address the abundance of deer.

A culling program was considered in December 2015, but a heavy oak mast crop undermined the potential for a successful outcome of the slated sharpshooting program, and the project was postponed. With a light mast crop and favorable weather, the successful removal of 62 deer was accomplished from 15–28 December 2017 using sharpshooting methodologies. Vegetation monitoring suggested minor positive impacts from the removal efforts and continued intensive deer management was determined to be necessary if habitat recovery and restoration goals were to be met.

In 2018, Park officials decided to implement a community-based deer hunt using the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Community Hunting Access Program (CHAP). CHAP provided communities with a financial grant award for providing access to hunters. The primary goal for the IDNR was to increase opportunities for hunting white-tailed deer and reducing human-deer conflicts. A City Council vote was needed to authorize the use of firearms in GLNP. However, the authorization was granted too late in the year to recruit enough hunters to successfully implement the project in 2018 and the hunt was delayed until 2019.

The first GLNP CHAP hunt commenced on 16 November 2019 and proceeded for three consecutive weekends during the regular Indiana firearms deer hunting season, resulting in the harvest of 26 deer. Implementation of the GLNP CHAP hunt continued for the next two years resulting in the harvest of 40 and 47 deer in 2020 and 2021, respectively.

On December 31, 2021, the IDNR ended the CHAP program. Bloomington Parks and Recreation board determined that the continuation of a hunting program in GLNP was the best option to provide deer management in the park. A supervised 4-day hunt was conducted during the Indiana Firearms Deer Season in 2022, 2023, and 2024 which resulted in the harvest of 46, 33, and 19 deer respectively.

Site Description

Griffy Lake Nature Preserve encompasses 1,200 acres in the north central portion of the city of Bloomington, Indiana. The preserve surrounds 106-acre Griffy Lake and contains an extensive hiking trail system and provides boating opportunities, creating a moderate to high seasonal user base. The area is dominated by mature hardwood forest and karst topography. Moderate density housing surrounds the southwest section of the park with low density housing, agricultural fields, a golf course, and additional wooded areas comprising the remainder of the park.

Methods

Recruiting Applicants

Recruitment was focused on existing hunters who participated in the program the previous year, individuals who expressed interest directly to the city, and personal recommendations from participants. Hunters were also informed about the hunt via hunting-specific social media platforms. Our efforts resulted in the direct distribution of 49 hunt solicitations. We spent 51 hours recruiting and proficiency screening applicants. Each solicitation requested that potential applicants share the letter and application link with others who might have an interest in being a GLNP hunt participant.

Participants who did not hunt at least 50% of their allotted time during the previous year's hunt were not provided an application for 2024. The goal is to have participants with the dedication and drive to achieve meaningful impact to the park's ecology. This is especially important as opportunities to harvest deer decrease.

Applicant Screening

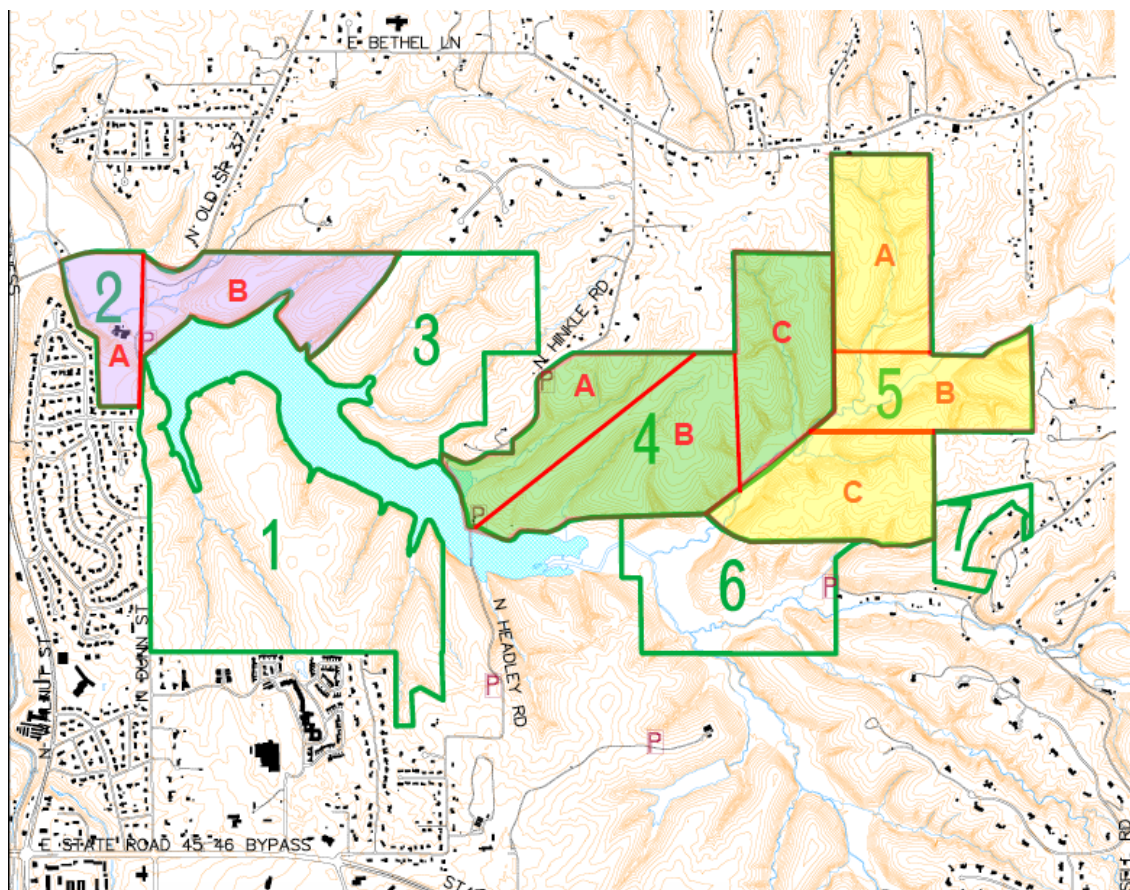
We received 30 hunt applications from recruiting efforts in 2024. Each new applicant was allowed to sign up for a safety and proficiency screening, which they needed to pass to be considered for the hunt. Proficiency and safety screening took place at the Panther Ridge Training Center in Solsberry, IN on 27 July 2024. A brief orientation was conducted for each screening group concerning the training center as well as an explanation of the rules of the range and expectations of the applicants. The safety portion of the screening consisted of an evaluation of firearms handling characteristics. The basic rules of safety were explained; treat all guns as they are loaded, never let the muzzle cross anything you are not willing to destroy, keep your finger off the trigger until you are on target and ready to fire, and be sure of your target and what is beyond. Applicants were **not** informed they were being critiqued during the safety evaluation portion of the screening. Specifically, we monitored for proper firearm muzzle control (firearm always pointed in a safe direction), basic familiarity of the firearm they were using, and trigger control (finger off trigger until ready to fire). Any violation of the basic safety rules would result in immediate dismissal. We wanted to evaluate each applicant on how they "normally" handle their firearms and did not want to influence their habit by allowing them to know they were being evaluated.

After each applicant demonstrated they were competent in the safe operation and handling of their firearm, they were required to pass the proficiency examination, which required placement of 3 out of 3 shots within a 2" radius of a bullseye at 50 yards (4" group). This could be completed from any field shooting position or from a rested position at a shooting bench. Firearms were expected to be sighted in before they arrived and presented in the condition in which they would be used in the field. Each applicant was provided one opportunity to pass the screening.

Hunter Field Distribution

Griffy Lake Nature Preserve was divided into 7 zones (Exhibit1). Each zone was delineated by landmarks (i.e., roads, pathways, or waterways), property boundaries, or topographical features (i.e., ridges or valleys). Zones 2, 4, and 5 were further subdivided, indicated by red subsection lines, to provide further refinement of hunter distribution.

Exhibit 1. Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Hunting Zone Map



We assigned hunters to zones based on questions they answered on their applications and their experience level. Hunters with more experience were generally assigned closer to the developed edges of the park. Hunter zone requests were also taken into consideration. Hunter allocations ranged from a high of 7 in Zone 5 to a low of 0 in Zone 7.

Every hunter was required to check in/out of their zone each day and report their harvest, if successful. Check in/out could be accomplished via in person communication or via text message.

Safety and Security

Notification of park closures for the hunt was accomplished via a media release. “Park Closed” placards were placed at all designated entry points and most unauthorized, but habitually used, entry points on the Friday evening before each hunt, and were removed early Monday morning before the park opened. Security personnel were stationed at the main entry points to the park (i.e., Dam area, IURTP, Lanam Road, and Boat Launch) to inform park visitors of the park closure during the hunt.

Each hunter was required to follow all Indiana firearms deer season hunting regulations. For example, hunters must wear “Hunter Orange” to be easily identifiable. In addition to state restrictions, we required each hunter to be a minimum of 50 yards from any developed park boundary. Moreover, each hunter was required to hunt from a treestand (using a safety line) with a minimum height of 12 feet to ensure a steep downward trajectory in the event of an errant shot. We allowed no ground hunting.

Results

The duration of the hunt was restricted to two weekends to minimize the amount of time park patrons were excluded from “normal” park activities. Nineteen deer were harvested over the two hunting weekends. The overall harvest demographics are summarized in Table 1. Harvest by day is summarized in Table 2. Harvest by zone per year is summarized in Table 3.

Table 1. Sex and age class of deer harvested in Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Bloomington, Indiana, 16–17 and 23–24 November 2024.

AGE	# MALE (%)	# FEMALE (%)	# COMBINED
Yearling/Adult	5 (26%)	9 (47%)	14 (74%)
Fawns	3 (16%)	2 (11%)	5 (26%)
Total	8 (42%)	11 (58%)	19 (100%)

Table 2. Number of deer harvested by day during the 4 hunting days of the Griffy Lake Nature Preserve, 16–17 and 23–24 November 2024.

DATE	# Harvested	DATE	# Harvested
11/16/24	4	11/23/24	6
11/17/24	5	11/24/24	4



Table 3. Deer harvested by zone during the Griffy Lake Nature Preserve managed hunts.

	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6	Zone 7	Totals
2019	9	2	0	1	8	4	2	26
2020	12	3	0	7	13	5	0	40
2021	18	3	5	3	14	2	2	47
2022	15	4	3	4	14	6	0	46
2023	14	2	0	1	11	5	0	33
2024	6	1	1	1	8	2	0	19

Sixty-six percent of new hunt applicants in 2024 were authorized to participate in this year's program. One applicant did not attend the proficiency screening and was automatically removed from consideration. Of those who attended the screening, 75% passed and were integrated into the hunt. No safety violations occurred during the screening.

Six new hunters were integrated into the program for 2024. Eighteen applicants from the 2023 program participated again this year. The overall number of hunters participating, 24, was identical to 2023 when 24 hunters participated. One authorized hunter did not participate in 2024.

Harvest per hunter for the 2024 GLNP hunt was .79 (19 deer/24 hunters), a 56% decrease from 2023. Deer harvest on the first day of the hunt was ~76% lower than 2023. Harvest on the next 3 hunting days was similar to the 2023 hunt. Harvest per hunter per day ranged from a high of 35% (6 deer/17 hunters) on 23 November 2024 to a low of 18% (4 deer/22 hunters) on 16 December 2024 (opening day). Harvest per individual hunter ranged from a high of 3 to a low of zero. Eleven hunters harvested one or more deer. We spent 73.5 hours organizing and supervising the hunt. Twenty-nine hours were allocated to hunter communication and administration.

Overall, 25 hunters were given permission to hunt during the two weekends, providing 100 unique hunter opportunities. Seventy-one of the 100 opportunities were used, resulting in a participation rate of 71%. This was an 8% increase over 2023 (71/112). Twenty-four participants (96%) spent at least one-day hunting. Six participants (36%) hunted all 4 days, a 15% increase over 2023.

Discussion

Deer harvest decreased ~42% in GLNP from 2023 to 2024. With reasonable weather, and similar hunter participation rates, the cause for a sharp reduction, again in 2024, does not appear to be weather or participation-related. Several hunters reported seeing fewer deer and having fewer opportunities to harvest deer during the 2024 hunt. Hunter success decreased ~30% (1028 vs 1457) in Monroe County through the



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first two weeks of the 2024 Indiana firearms deer season¹. This number will change as the season progresses, but it demonstrates how limited-duration hunts can be affected by environmental events (e.g., status of the rut, agricultural crop harvest, external human activities, etc.). We are hopeful that the reduction in harvest opportunities in GLNP, beyond what was observed on a county-wide level, is reflective of a site-specific reduction in the deer population resulting from hunting activity over the last 5 years.

The hunt harvest quota is enhanced by the inclusion of GLNP as an Indiana Deer Reduction Zone (DRZ) which began in 2020. This effectively increases the harvest total for this specific property by 10 deer per hunter. Numerous hunters took advantage of the DRZ tags to record their harvest.

Overall, we believe that the GLNP supervised hunt was successful again in 2024. We demonstrated that with the right screening and oversight, a hunt can be conducted in GLNP safely and effectively. The hunt was limited to ~1% of the available recreation days to regular park visitors. The limited duration of the hunt appears reasonable based on the importance of the park's goals of increasing biodiversity and restoring threatened and endangered native species. In addition, after five years of implementation, we have a good base of participants to serve as a foundation for the program.

The challenge moving forward is keeping participants motivated when lower deer densities lead to reduced harvest opportunity. One consideration for any future program would be to lessen the financial burden on the hunters. This could be accomplished by providing reimbursement for deer processing costs or providing a stipend for tagging fees.

We would like to thank Bruce Wilds Security and Bloomington Natural Resources Staff for their assistance during the hunt.

¹ Between 26 November and 1 December 2024, the last week of the Indiana firearms deer season 2024, harvest totals in Monroe County recovered to within 10% of the 2023 totals.