

HISTORY OF THE DEER ISSUE IN RIVER FOREST

Beginning around 5 years ago, the Village Administration and at least one Village Trustee began to hear complaints from various residents about the increased number of deer in the village. Most often, these complaints were from residents whose landscapes and gardens had been destroyed by foraging deer. On June 24, 2019, in response to this increasing volume of deer complaints from residents, the Village Board held a Committee of the Whole meeting at which Timothy Pruess, the District 9 Wildlife Biologist for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources gave a presentation on deer in suburban environments. Around 95 residents attended that presentation and almost uniformly asked the Village to do something to help manage the deer population in our community. Thereafter, the administration worked with the Cook County Forest Preserve to understand the options the Village had to manage the deer population. At its November 25, 2019 meeting, the administration discussed the options (IGA and permit) and process the Village would need to take if the Board wanted to move forward with any deer management. Also the administration presented a FAQ document in order to address some of the residents' concerns and to provide an understanding of the process such as but not limited to the relationship between the Village, Forest Preserves, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the US Department of Agriculture.

The Village Board discussed deer management over the course of the next few meeting where it heard from a number of residents, both those who favored a controlled culling of the deer herd and those who opposed it. Ultimately, the Board voted to create the Deer Management Ad Hoc Committee.

THE DEER MANAGEMENT AD HOC COMMITTEE

On January 27, 2020, the Village Board of Trustees passed Resolution 20-03, establishing the Deer Management Ad Hoc Committee. The Committee was charged with 1) drafting a community survey and reviewing the results; 2) researching alternative ways to manage/reduce deer conflicts; 3) planning at least one community forum to educate residents on the importance of a deer management program; and 4) preparing a written report with the Committee's findings and recommendations to the Village President and Board of Trustees regarding deer management strategies to use in the Village.

The Committee consisted of the following members: Chairperson Tom Cargie, Julie Armstrong, Katharine Christmas, Jack Flynn, Laurie Gillard, Dan Hollenbach, Cathleen Hughes, Marta Kozbur, Ron Lemar, Ingrid Liu, Joel Lueking, Annette Madden, Dawn Mizgala, and John Roeger. (Note: Members Christmas, Gillard, Kozbur, Liu, and Madden resigned on February 8, 2021 and stated their intention to submit an alternative report.)

The Committee created three subcommittees to break up the work: survey, multidisciplinary, communications.

The Committee met in 2020 as follows:

February 26 to discuss Committee expectations and introduce members.

April 30 to create subcommittees and begin discussions of the questionnaire.

May 13, June 2, June 9, June 16, June 23 to continue discussing and finalizing the questionnaire.

August 25 to discuss preliminary questionnaire results and how to analyze the data.

November 17 and December 15 to continue discussing the questionnaire findings.

Over the course of its meetings, the Committee heard from Timothy Pruess, the District 9 Wildlife Biologist for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Mr. Pruess informed the Committee that the only permits the IDNR issues for deer population control are sharpshooting and, depending on the program, live capture and mechanical

euthanization. He explained that these are the only programs that are proven to be effective in reducing deer related issues. He noted there are logistical issues with contraception and sterilization and that these are experimental methods and not effective from the IDNR's perspective.

Regarding sequential approaches, Mr. Preuss stated nonlethal methods are methods applied by residents. He stated that the driving factor of deer population control methods is based on deer damage being experienced and that estimates of a deer population size are unnecessary for permits. He confirmed that the entity submitting a permit is required to submit data related to deer damage, noting that in this community, the Forest Preserves would submit data based on plant damage.

Mr. Preuss explained that the survey data the Village will be collecting will help determine whether to enter into an agreement with the Forest Preserves, who will submit the permit application based on deer damage to the Forest Preserves' property. He suggested conducting the survey annually to track trends, noting that it is not very labor intensive. He stated a research program to capture deer and treat for sterilization could cost between \$200,000-\$300,000 per year. Referring to a Highland Park sterilization study, he stated it was not effective long term, increased deer-vehicle accidents, and increased the doe mortality rate.

Mr. Preuss stated he does not know what data the Forest Preserves has since a permit has not been submitted but that they know they would need to submit data to substantiate the permit. Finally, he stated some municipalities implement their own deer feeding ban to make it more easily enforceable, though it is already against State law.

A member of the Committee also spoke with a wildlife specialist from the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. The specialist noted Thatcher Woods has three principal issues: it is overstocked with trees (too many trees per acre); an encroachment of invasive plants (buckthorn/honeysuckle); and more deer than the forest can support. The first two issues can be addressed by thinning, brush removal, and controlled burning. Such management would then support a flush of vegetation, were it not for the disproportionately high deer density.

Deer overabundance is apparent by the presence of a deer browse line that is observable in Thatcher Woods, such as the forest edge along the Thatcher Pavilion field according to the specialist. All palatable vegetation from the ground up to approximately one meter is absent due to the heavy deer browse. Such a browse line typically indicates a deer herd that is 40 to 60 per square mile--a number far greater than a forest ecosystem can support. The deer herd would need to be less than 10 to achieve significant vegetative recovery. Individual Committee members noted multiple sightings of 20 or more deer per occurrence. When asked about deer migration across the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, the specialist stated historical radio collar studies performed in the District found deer live within their home range and do not relocate to new areas. Deer home range is small and varies from 40 to 150 acres. The deer home range in Thatcher Woods may extend into River Forest with Thatcher Woods as the primary base.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was launched on www.RiverForestDeer.com on June 30 and closed on August 31. It contained 15 questions and was open to all River Forest residents 18 and older. At the Committee's direction, the Village mailed postcards to all residents and publicized the availability of the questionnaire on social media and in Village newsletters. The Committee voted to remove responses of those indicating they were not residents, leaving a total of 1,522 responses.

The majority of respondents provided their addresses, and maps were prepared by the Village's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) consultant to provide geographic context to the responses of certain questions. The questionnaire results and maps are appended to this document.

The following are the substantive questions that were asked as well as the answers provided.

Q4 In the past 12 months, have you seen deer on your property?

Answered: 1,513 Skipped: 9

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Frequently (once a week or more), seasonally	17.51%	265
Frequently (once a week or more), all year long	23.07%	349
Occasionally (once a month or more), seasonally	15.53%	235
Occasionally (once a month or more), all year long	9.19%	139
Rarely (only a couple times a year)	15.86%	240
Never	8.84%	285
TOTAL	1,513	

Q5 In the past 12 months, have you seen deer within River Forest outside of your property?

Answered: 1,516 Skipped: 6

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Frequently (once a week or more), seasonally	30.08%	456
Frequently (once a week or more), all year long	34.04%	516
Occasionally (once a month or more), seasonally	16.09%	244
Occasionally (once a month or more), all year long	11.28%	171
Rarely (only a couple times a year)	7.12%	108
Never	1.39%	21
TOTAL		1,516

Q6 In the past 12 months, if you've seen deer seasonally, please indicate which season(s).

Answered: 1,184 Skipped: 338

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Summer	87.58%	1,037
Fall	62.25%	737
Winter	38.94%	461
Spring	78.63%	931

Total Respondents: 1,184

Q7 Are you experiencing any deer issues currently? If no, please skip down to Question 13.

Answered: 1,440 Skipped: 82

ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		48.96%	705
No		51.04%	735
TOTAL			1,440

Q8 What deer-related issues have you experienced in the last 12 months? (Check all that are applicable)

Answered: 836

Skipped: 686

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Lyme disease and tick-borne infections	2.99%	25
Deer-auto collision or near miss/dangerous distraction	23.92%	200
Damage to vegetable gardens / flowers / lawn / shrubs /plants	87.32%	730
Human-habituated “too tame” deer	48.68%	407
Neighbor feeding deer and attracting them to my yard	5.98%	50
Harm to pets	3.11%	26
Feces in yard	62.08%	519
Other (please specify)	18.54%	155

Total Respondents: 836

Q9 Have you taken any actions to alleviate the deer issues? If no, please skip Question 10.

Answered: 993 Skipped: 529

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	49.65%	493
No	50.35%	500
TOTAL		993

Q10 What actions have you taken? (check all that apply and indicate how successful the action was on a 1-5 scale—with 1 being ineffective and 5 being highly effective)

Answered: 690

Skipped: 832

	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	TOTAL
Tolerance/no action	35.98% 163	5.30% 24	6.40% 29	2.65% 12	14.57% 66	35.10% 159	453
Switched to planting deer-resistant flower/ plant varieties	13.29% 74	18.85% 105	17.95% 100	12.57% 70	12.03% 67	25.31% 141	557
Used fencing / netting / barriers	13.35% 67	11.55% 58	12.55% 63	9.76% 49	14.34% 72	38.45% 193	502
Used repellents	22.16% 125	15.78% 89	15.25% 86	9.57% 54	6.03% 34	31.21% 176	564
Using scare tactics	27.81% 146	11.24% 59	9.71% 51	4.76% 25	4.76% 25	41.71% 219	525

Q11 Rate the potential deer concerns below by using a scale of 0-5 (0 meaning no importance and 5 meaning very important)

Answered: 1,049 Skipped: 473

	0	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
Lyme disease and tick-borne infections	18.16% 185	11.97% 122	7.65% 78	10.89% 111	8.93% 91	42.39% 432	1,019
Deer-auto collision or near miss/dangerous distraction	16.44% 166	12.18% 123	8.91% 90	13.17% 133	12.97% 131	36.34% 367	1,010
Damage to vegetable gardens/flowers/lawn/shrubs/plants	19.61% 202	11.94% 123	8.93% 92	10.68% 110	12.91% 133	35.92% 370	1,030
Human-habituated "too tame" deer	29.38% 290	11.04% 109	7.60% 75	12.26% 121	12.66% 125	27.05% 267	987
Neighbor feeding deer and attracting them to my yard	65.18% 599	9.14% 84	6.09% 56	5.88% 54	4.03% 37	9.68% 89	919
Harm to pets	60.78% 564	10.56% 98	7.33% 68	7.11% 66	3.99% 37	10.24% 95	928
Feces in yard	34.17% 341	10.52% 105	9.22% 92	11.52% 115	9.32% 93	25.25% 252	998

Q12 If you have had property damage, can you share if your experience was one of the following?

Answered: 687 Skipped: 835

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very acceptable	14.56%	100
Acceptable	27.22%	187
Unacceptable	35.08%	241
Very unacceptable	23.14%	159
TOTAL		687

Q13 What kind of deer conflict management program is acceptable to you (with use of public funds)?

Answered: 1,509 Skipped: 13

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Do nothing and leave deer alone	22.80% 344
Prefer non-lethal (no killing of deer) options only (i.e. more traffic signs, education)	27.83% 420
Prefer lethal (killing of deer via professional sharpshooting) option only *Note: The number of deer to be killed under this option would be limited by the number of deer that has to approved by Illinois Department of Natural Resources based upon local needs.	22.00% 332
Prefer a combination of both options above for managing issues	18.56% 280
No opinion/do not care	2.19% 33
Other option (please specify)	6.63% 100
TOTAL	1,509

Q14 How do you feel about the current number of deer in your neighborhood?

Answered: 1,488 Skipped: 34

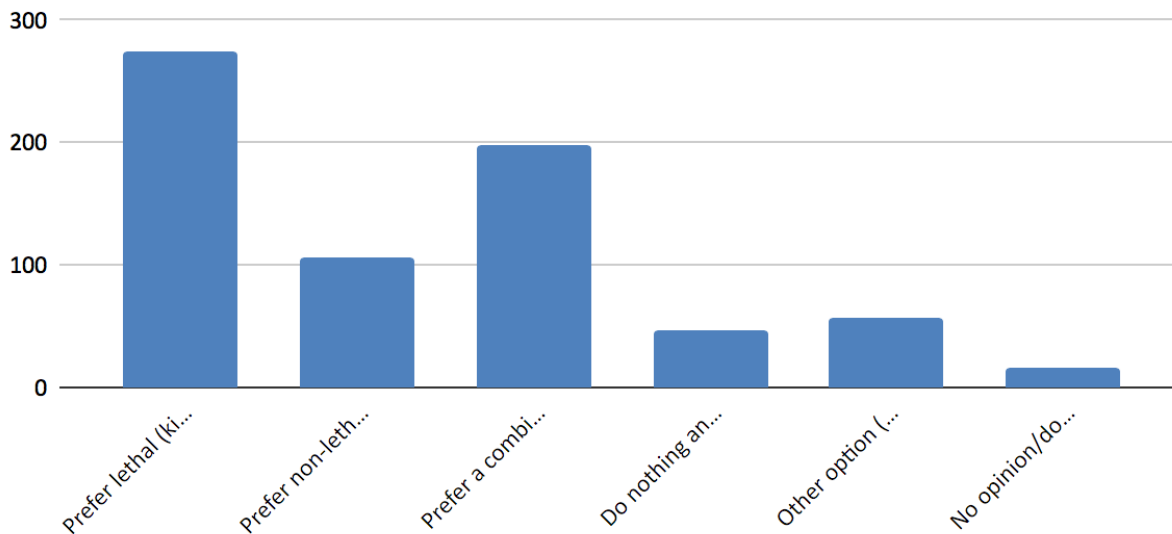
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Would like to see many more deer	7.06%	105
Would like to see a few more deer	8.40%	125
Would like deer to remain at present numbers	35.48%	528
Would like fewer deer	30.38%	452
Would like no deer in residential areas	18.68%	278
TOTAL		1,488

For the majority of the Committee, the most telling question was number 13, which asked residents what approach they favored to control the deer population in River Forest. 420 residents or 27.83% of the responses preferred a non-lethal solution. However, 612 residents or 40.56% of the respondents wanted the Village to cull the deer herd. That number is a combination of those who just wanted a culling program with those who wanted a culling program in conjunction with non-lethal measures such as educating residents on deer resistant plants and improved traffic signage.

Moreover, the comments of those who preferred non-lethal measures indicate that a significant number of those residents want a reduction of the herd population as they suggested that the deer either be relocated from Thatcher Woods or that the village engage in a program of deer sterilization or contraception. The committee notes that the former is not permissible by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the latter is both cost-prohibitive and largely ineffective. Both of these facts were confirmed by Mr. Pruess. Thus, the majority of the Committee has determined that a majority of the residents who responded to the questionnaire prefer a program that reduces the number of deer in the Thatcher Woods Complex. Only 344 residents or 22.80% of the responses unequivocally wanted the deer to be left alone.

Another thing that influenced the Committee's recommendations was a statistic that was produced by a member of the Committee. He compared the number of residents who indicated that they had experienced problems with deer with their proposed solution to that problem. That showed of the 705 people who were currently experiencing problems, approximately 550 of them wanted the village to cull the herd, either as a singular solution or in combination with non-lethal measures. The following is a graph of that subset of data from the questionnaire:

Count of Are you experiencing any deer issues currently? If no, please skip down to Question 13./Response



Count of Are you experiencing any deer issues currently? If no, please skip down to Question 13./Response

For the majority of the Committee, this graph shows that those residents who are having problems with the overabundance of deer, want the village to reduce the herd in order to address that problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEER MANAGEMENT AD HOC COMMITTEE

1. Enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County to authorize a controlled culling of the deer herd in the Thatcher Woods Complex. The majority of the committee bases that recommendation on a number of factors. First, the majority of the committee concluded there are too many deer in the forest preserves surrounding River Forest and as such, the forest preserves cannot sustain the herd. This can be seen both anecdotally and based on the opinion of wildlife experts in the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. The anecdotal evidence is that deer are everywhere in our village. This can be seen by the “plot point” map that was derived from the questionnaire and shows that deer have been observed nearly everywhere in the village. The map is attached as Exhibit 1. Moreover, a member of the committee who is a longtime resident and who lives near the Thatcher Woods Complex informed the committee that in the 55 years that he has lived here, he has never seen as many deer roaming the streets as he sees now. Many other members of the committee agreed that the number of deer in the village has increased dramatically in recent years.

Even aside from the anecdotal evidence of an overabundance of deer in the village, the Committee also heard from subject matter experts on wildlife management. The first

came from Arnold Randall, the General Superintendent of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County in a letter to the Village dated January 7, 2020, a copy of which was distributed to the Committee. He wrote:

In our professional experience, based on impacts to vegetation in the Thatcher Woods Complex, we believe management of deer populations is warranted at this location. We anticipate, based on our experiences in other locations, 3 to 5 years of intensive management will be required followed by routine maintenance operations. This work will promote a healthier, more sustainable deer population and provide additional benefits to adjacent residents of the Village as well as the motoring public.

In addition, the majority of the Committee concluded from the comments of the FPDCC wildlife specialist that there are indisputably too many deer in the Thatcher Woods Complex for the preserve to support. The Committee also concluded that a detailed research project to determine whether or not there was an overabundance of deer was not necessary because the browse line exists and sightings of high numbers of deer is unequivocal proof of overabundance.

Another factor that informed the Committee's recommendation regarding a culling program was the questionnaire. As noted above, it is clear that a majority of the respondents favored a reduction of the herd in the Thatcher Woods Complex. This includes those who favored culling only, those who favored both a lethal and non-lethal response as well as those who favored only non-lethal measures but who believed that such measures could include contraception, sterilization and or relocation of the deer.

Finally, what was most influential for many members of the committee was the fact that a vast majority of those residents who disclosed that they were having problems with deer want some sort of culling program to address the problem. As noted above, of the 705 resident who were experiencing problems with invasive deer, nearly 550 wanted some form of a culling program. It is the view of the majority the committee that the village has an obligation to address a problem that is so wide-spread throughout the village.

Another factor that the committee considered in its decision was a wide-spread fear that many of the respondents to the questionnaire shared, namely that the overabundance of deer posed a distinct risk of transmitting Lyme disease to our residents. This issue was debated at the committee and no consensus was reached on whether an overabundance of deer would lead to an increased incidence of Lyme disease in River Forest. However, for more than 50% of the respondents to the questionnaire, the risk of Lyme disease and tick-borne infections from an overabundance of deer in the village was rated either important or very important to them. Because of the justifiable fear that many residents have that the deer roaming the village may expose them or their children to what can be an

incredibly debilitating disease, the committee believes that the village must do whatever it can to alleviate those fears.

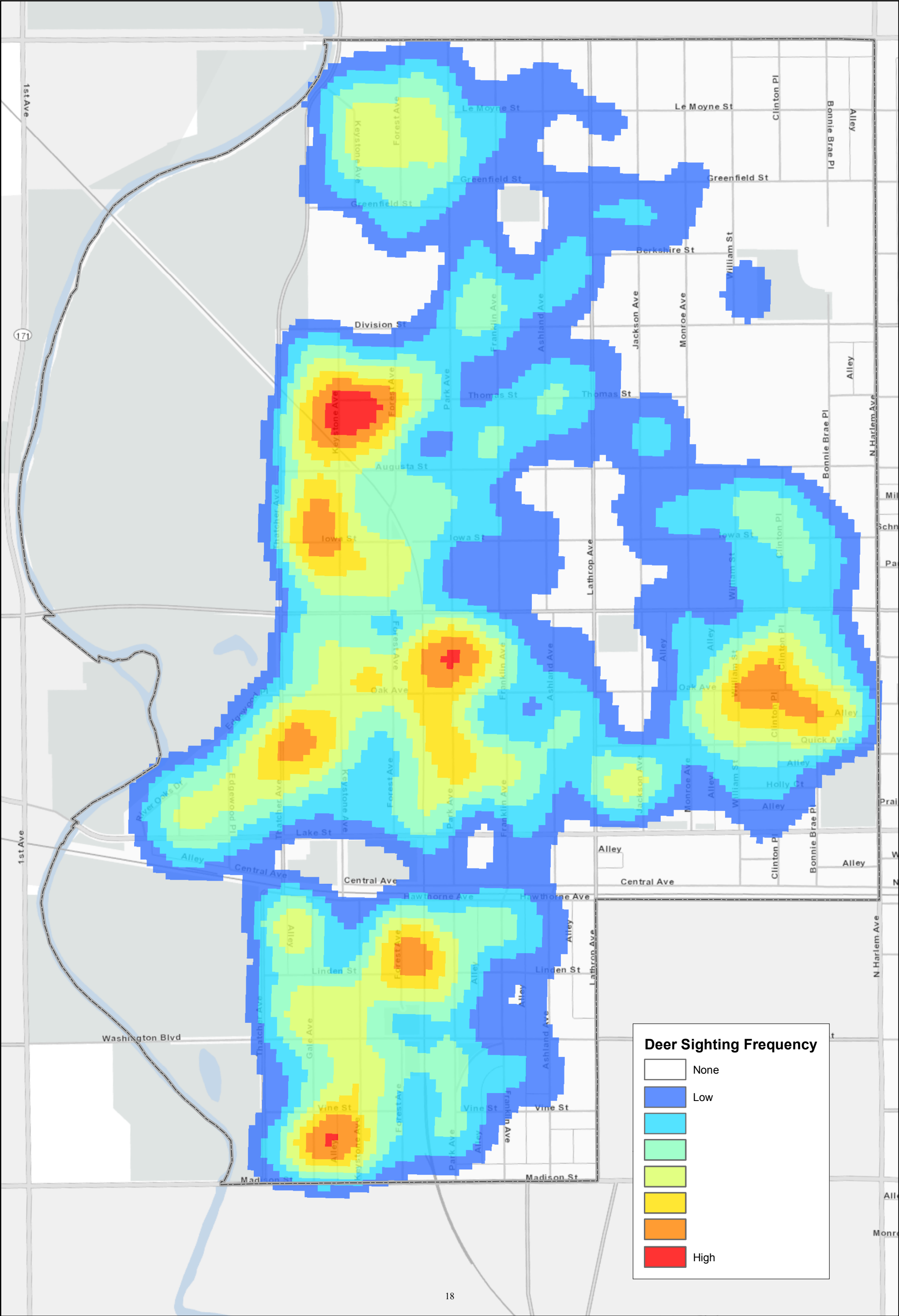
2. The committee also recommends that the village engage in a program to educate the village residents on steps they can take to avoid property damage from deer. This includes suggesting deer resistant plants and the use of deer repellants. One suggestion that was proposed would be to partner with the Good Earth Nursery to educate residents and to stock deer resistant plants. One member of the committee proposed that the village subsidize such plants offered at Good Earth. Also, the committee thinks that the village needs to better promote and make more accessible the vast library of deer management information that it already has on its website. While the information contained in the website is valuable, it is too difficult to navigate to at present. To make the best use of the information, the availability of that information should be advertised on the village's homepage and reminders about its availability should be mentioned in the village correspondence with residents. The committee also thinks that the village should specifically ban the feeding of deer by residents. While it is already illegal under Illinois law, the questionnaire disclosed that many residents are nonetheless leaving food out for deer. A village ordinance would reinforce that this behavior is not acceptable.
3. At least one member of the committee believes that the village should make the Deer Management Ad Hoc Committee a permanent standing committee. This committee could be charged with overseeing the education program and assessing the effectiveness of the culling program. At the very least, the committee thinks that the village should reissue the questionnaire (or create a new one) each year as one metric that can be used to assess whether to continuing the culling program.
4. The Committee recommends that the Village Board obtain an understanding of all the safety measures prior to entering into the Intergovernmental Agreement.

Appendices:

1. [Questionnaire results](#)
2. Maps (related to questionnaire results)
3. Pie charts (related to calls for services to the Village's dispatcher from 2017-2020)

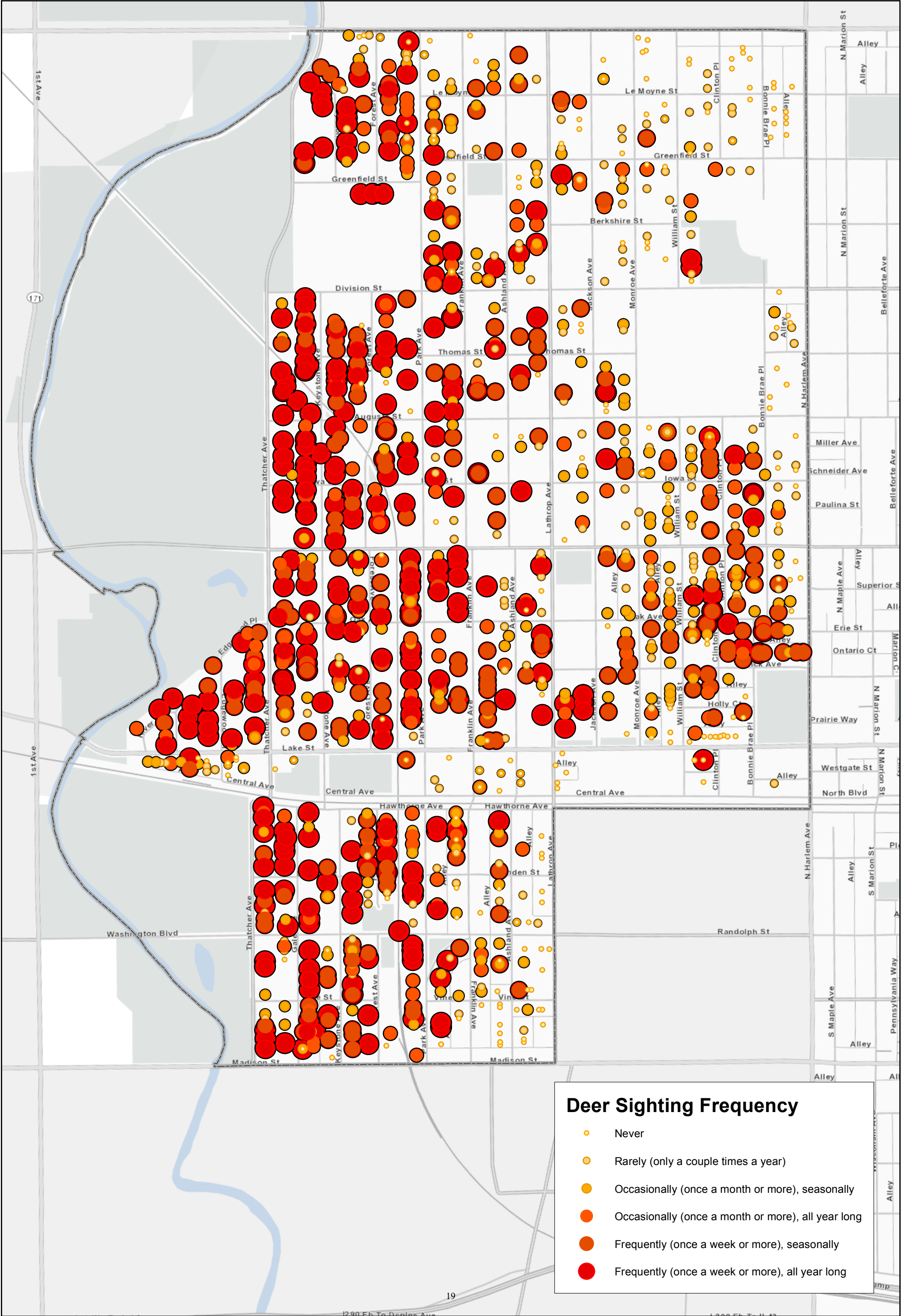
Deer Questionnaire Responses

Plotted 9/1/20



Deer Questionnaire Responses

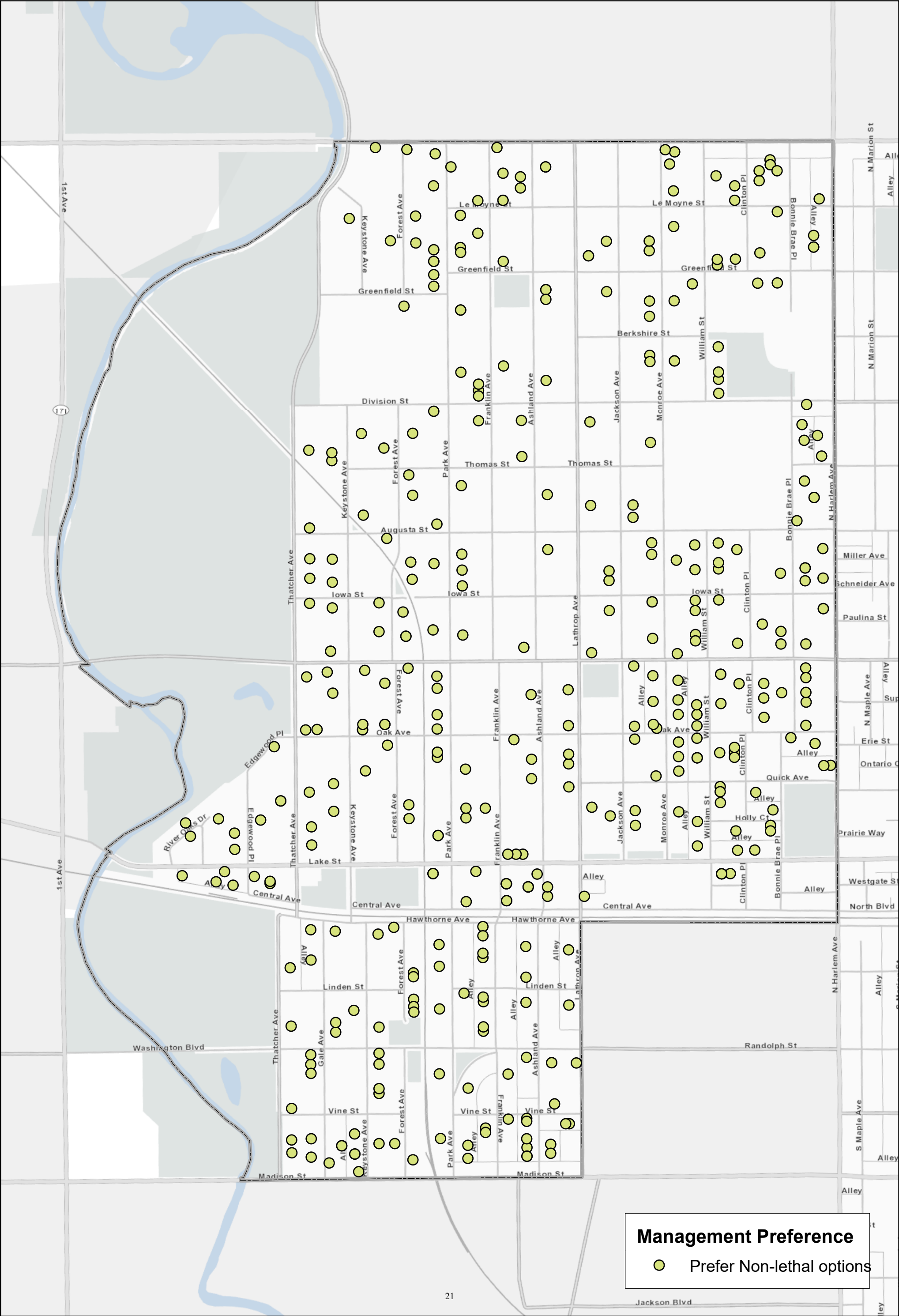
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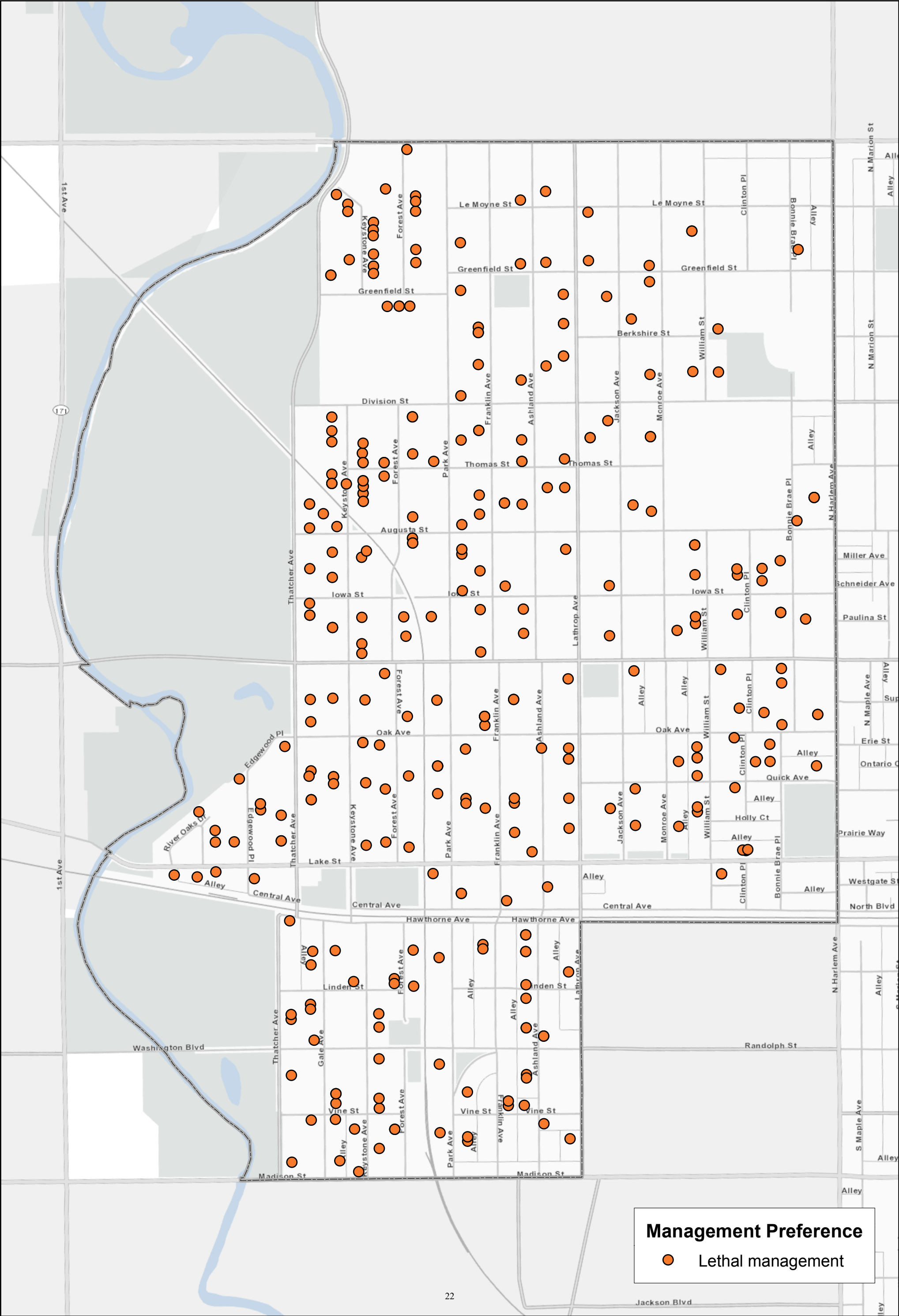
Deer Survey Responses: Question 13

Date: 11/9/2020



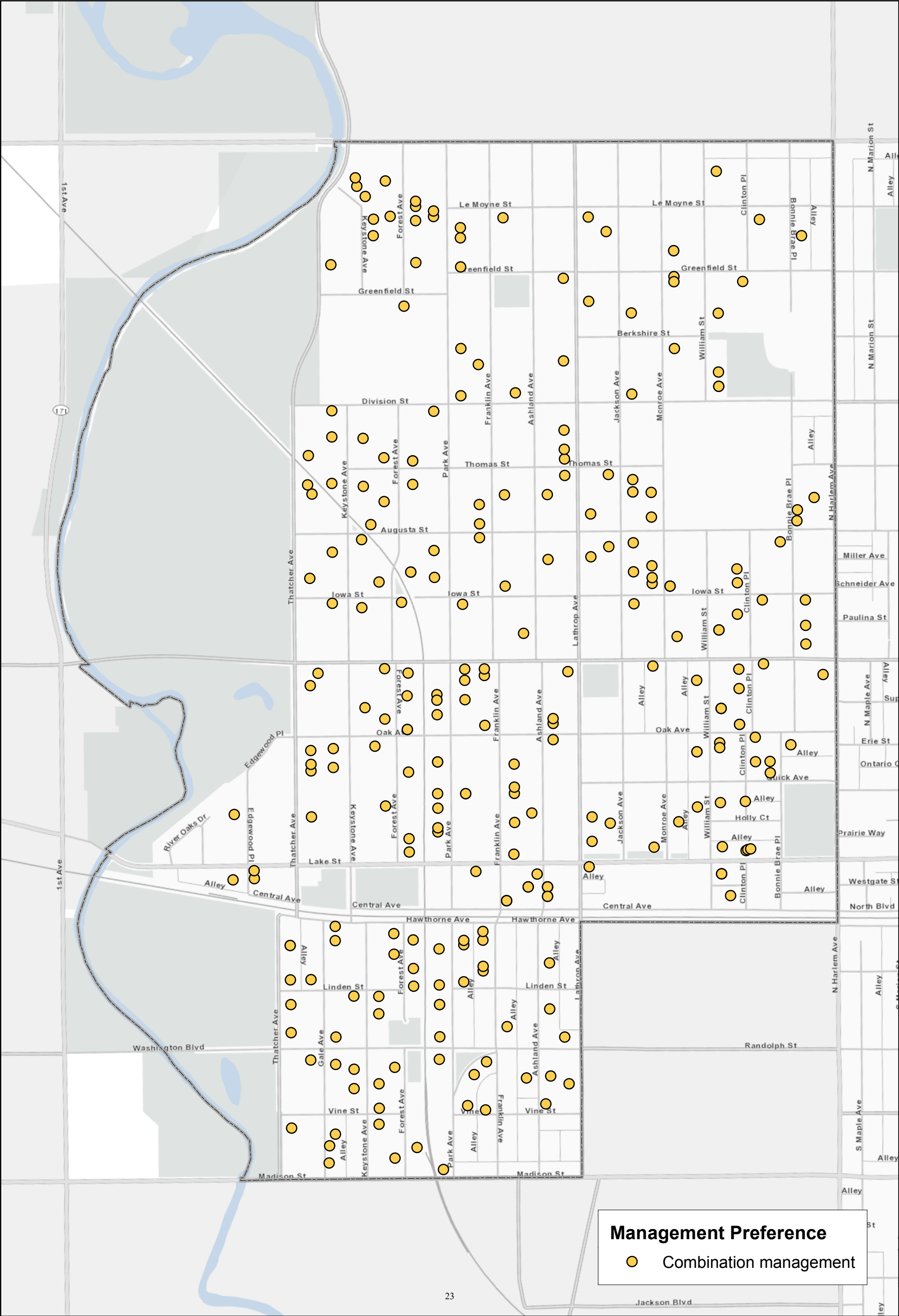
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Date: 11/9/2020



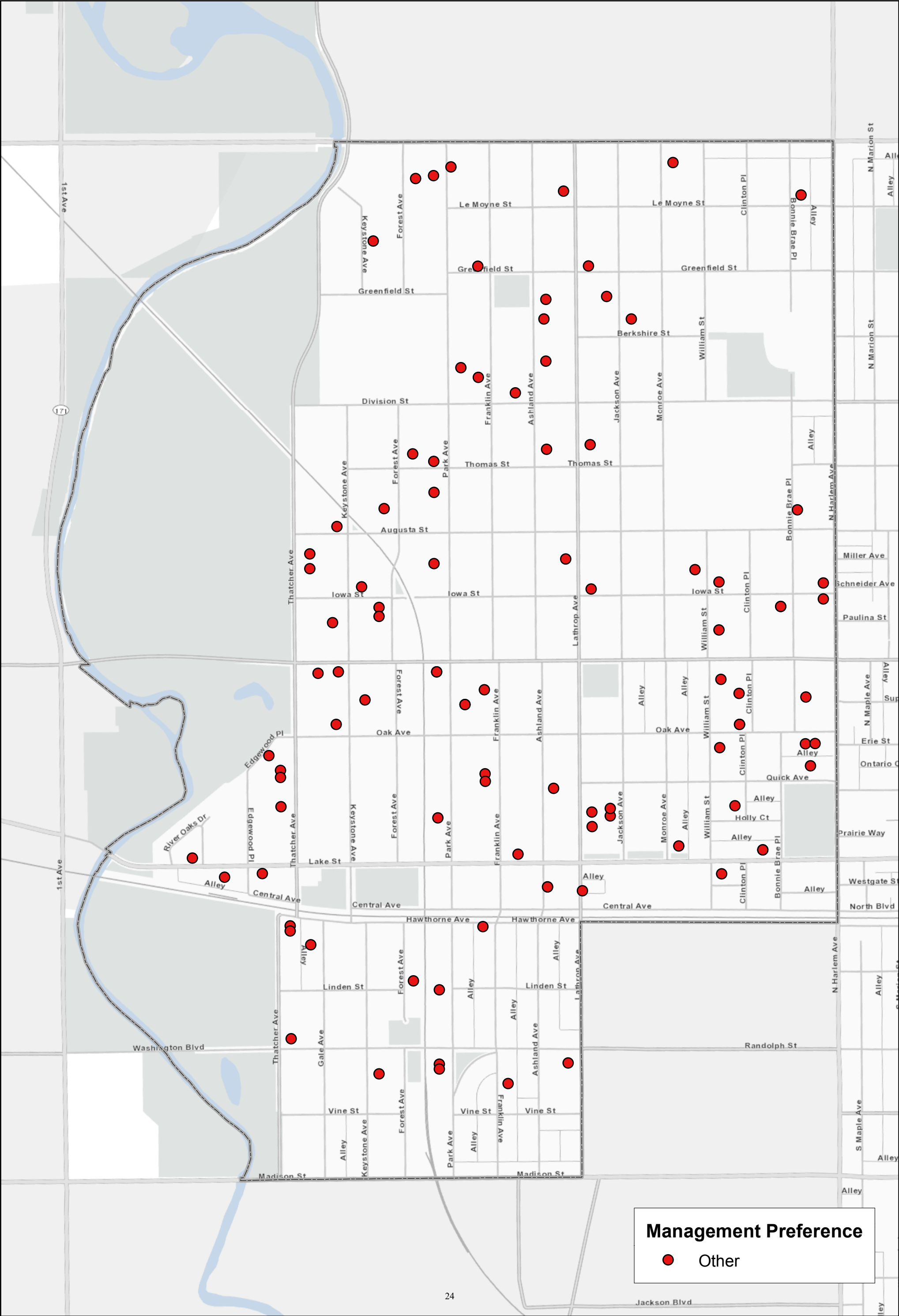
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Date: 11/9/2020



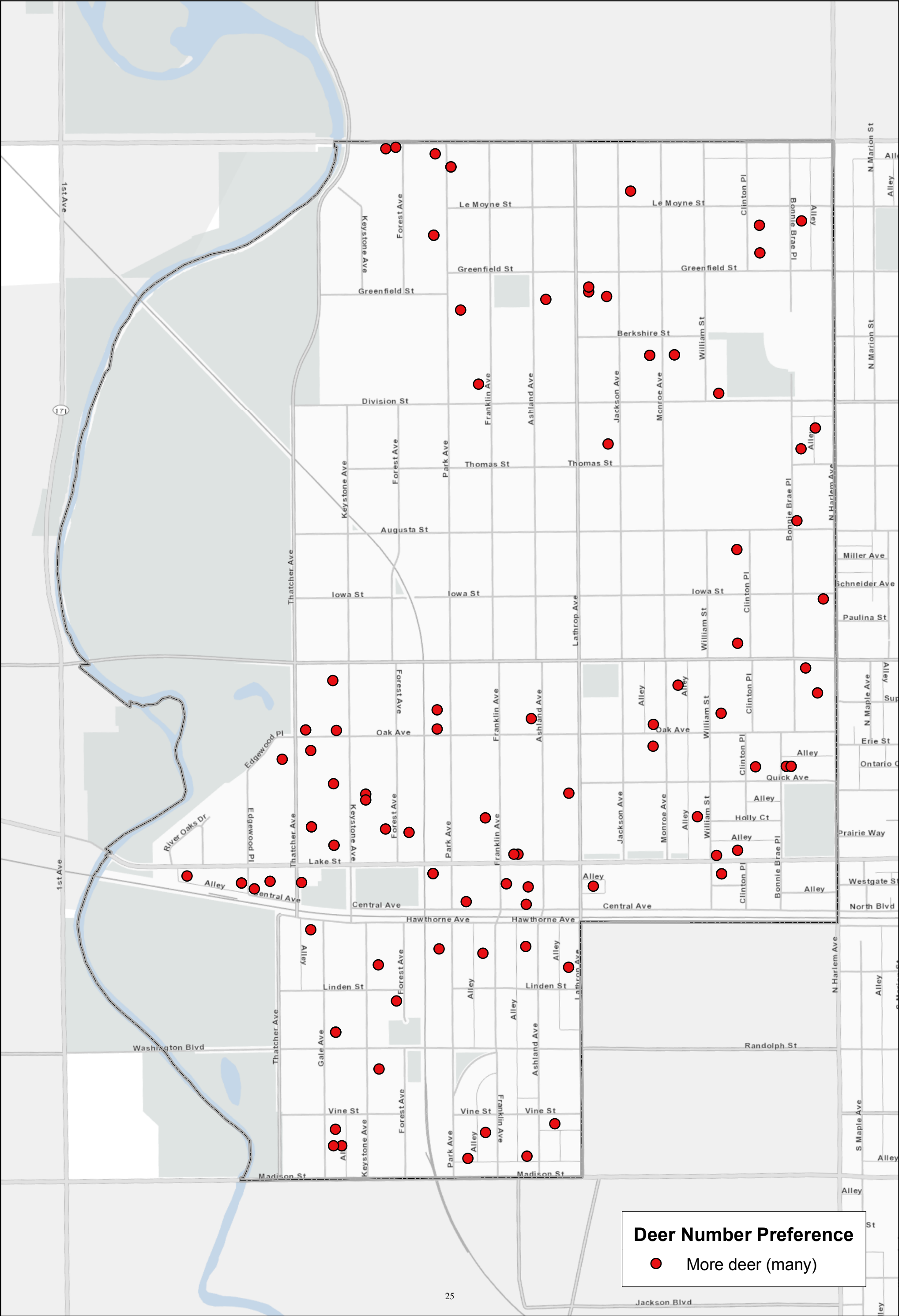
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Date: 11/9/2020



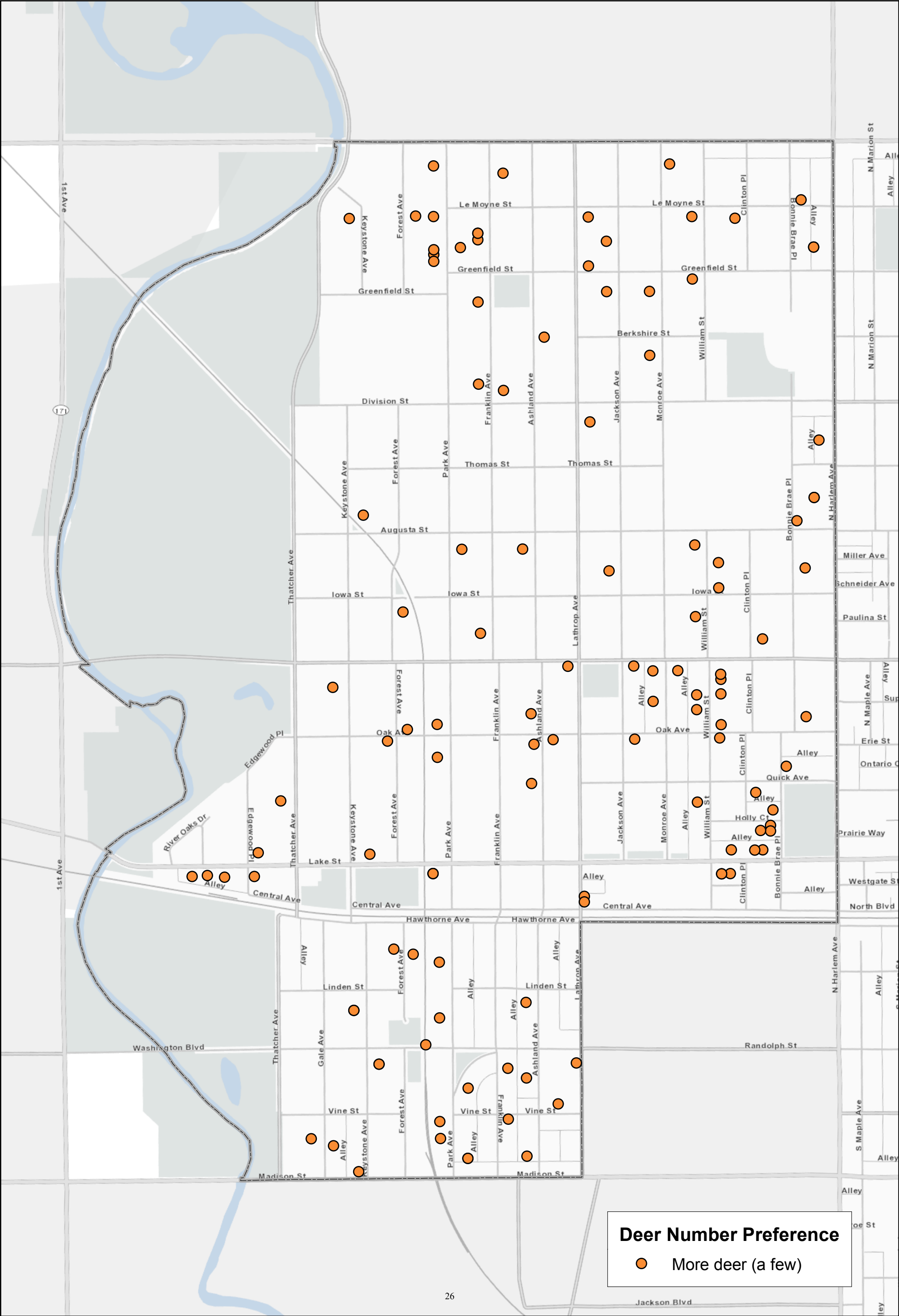
Deer Survey Responses: Question 14

Date: 11/9/2020



Deer Survey Responses: Question 14

Date: 11/9/2020

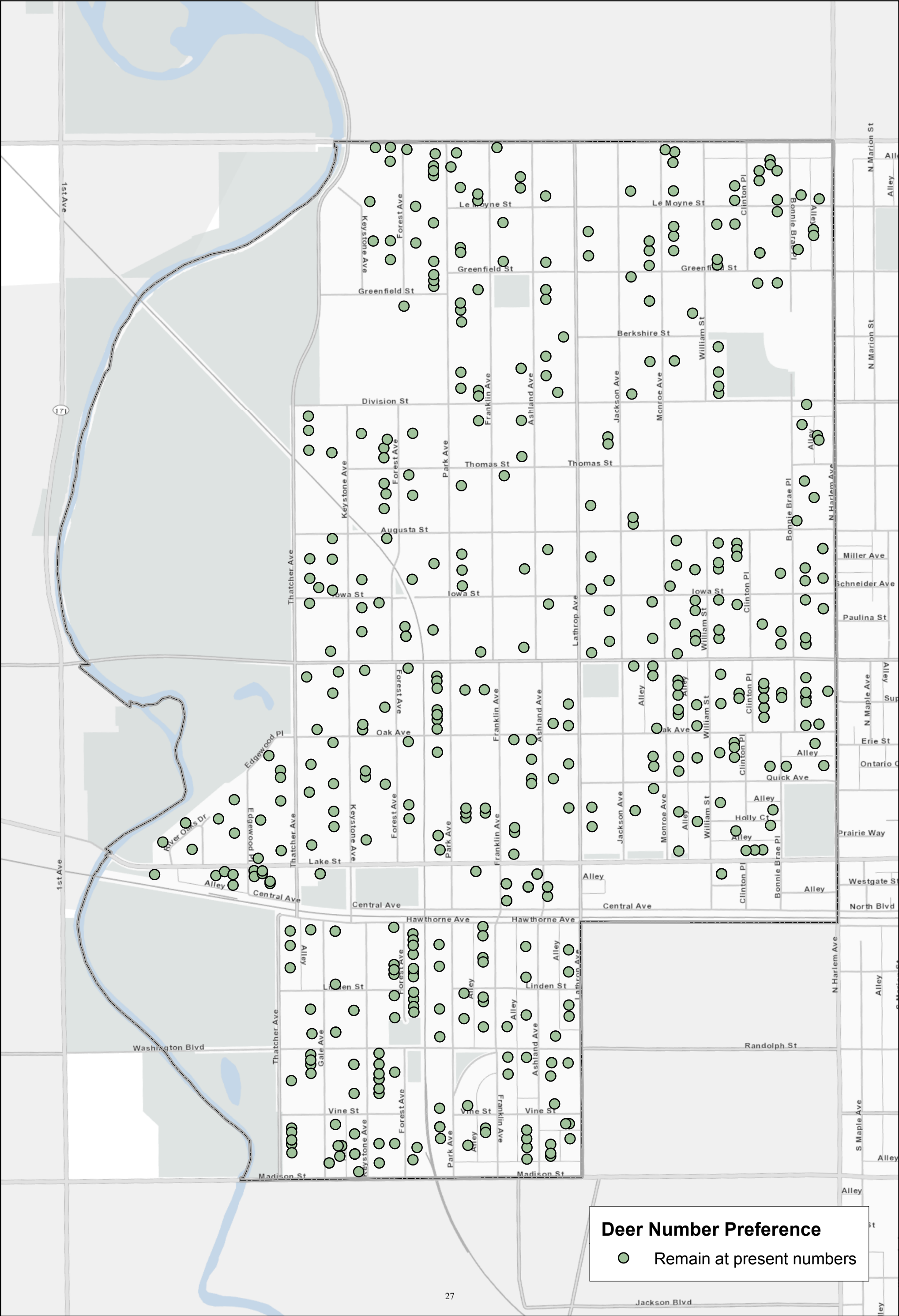


Deer Number Preference

- More deer (a few)

Deer Survey Responses: Question 14

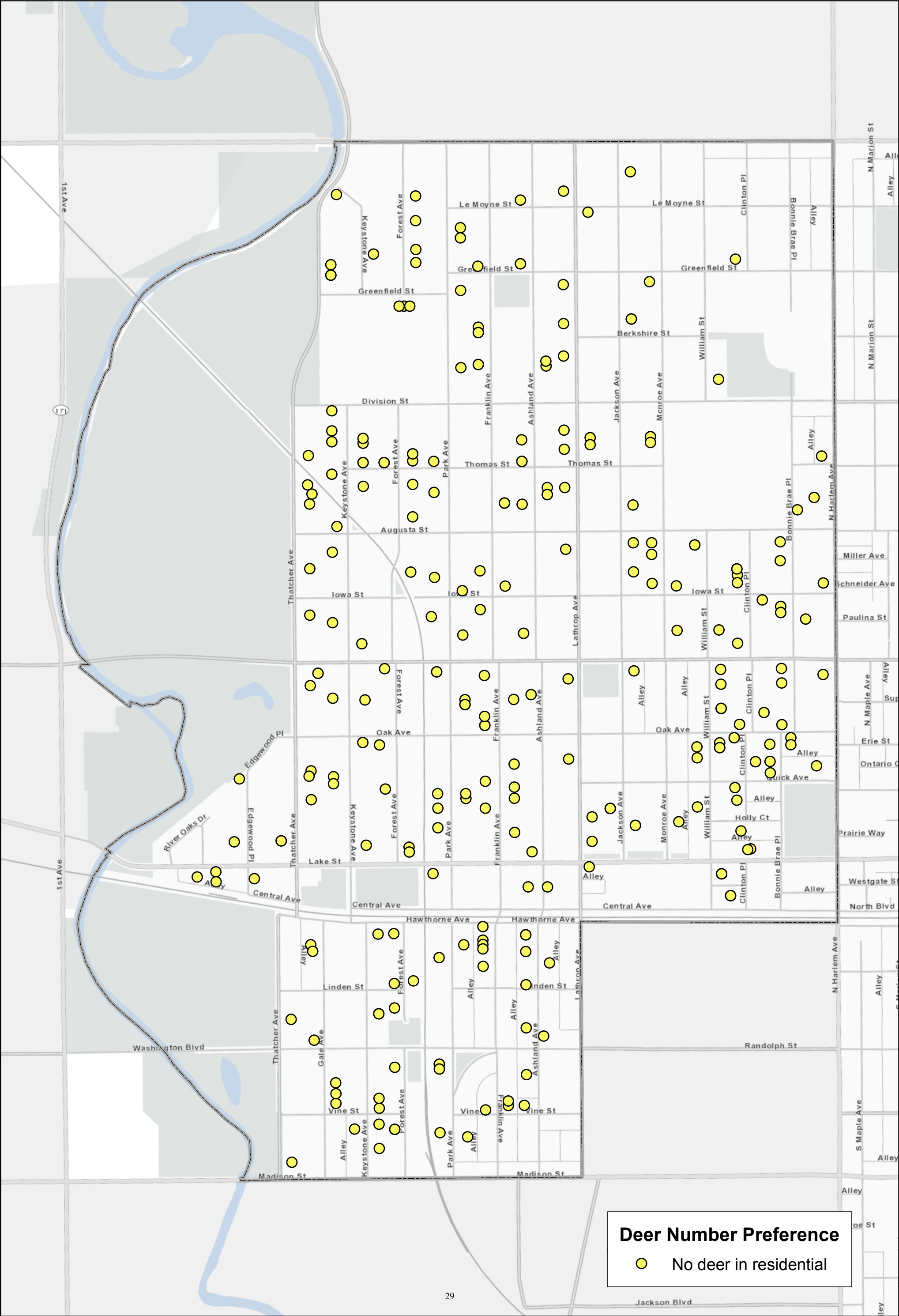
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Deer Survey Responses: Question 14

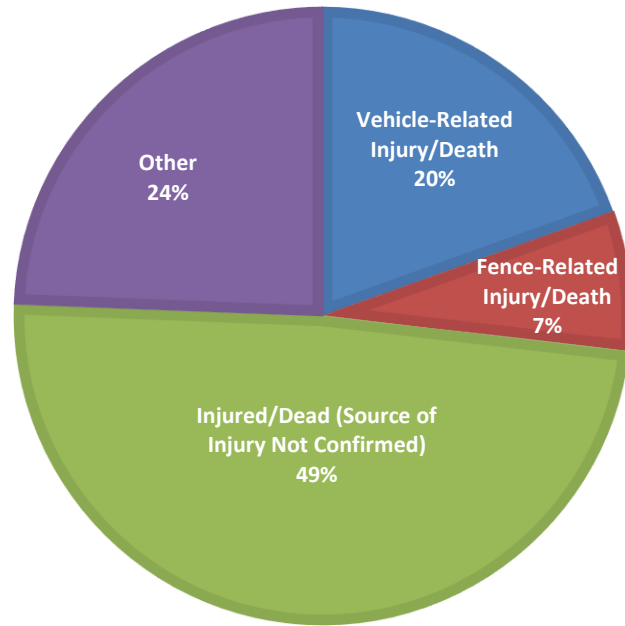
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2020 DEER CALLS TO DISPATCH

■ Vehicle-Related Injury/Death ■ Fence-Related Injury/Death ■ Injured/Dead (Source of Injury Not Confirmed) ■ Other

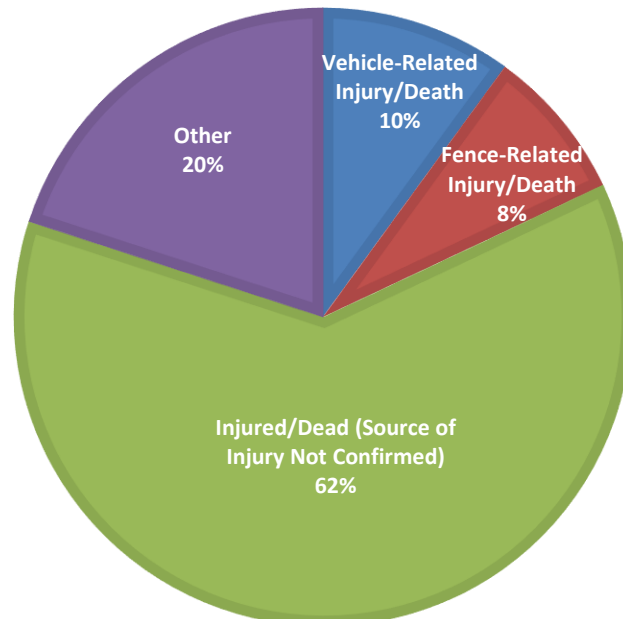
Vehicle-Related Injury/Death	8
Fence-Related Injury/Death	3
Injured/Dead (Source of Injury Not Confirmed)	20
Other	10
Total	41



2019 DEER CALLS TO DISPATCH

■ Vehicle-Related Injury/Death ■ Fence-Related Injury/Death ■ Injured/Dead (Source of Injury Not Confirmed) ■ Other

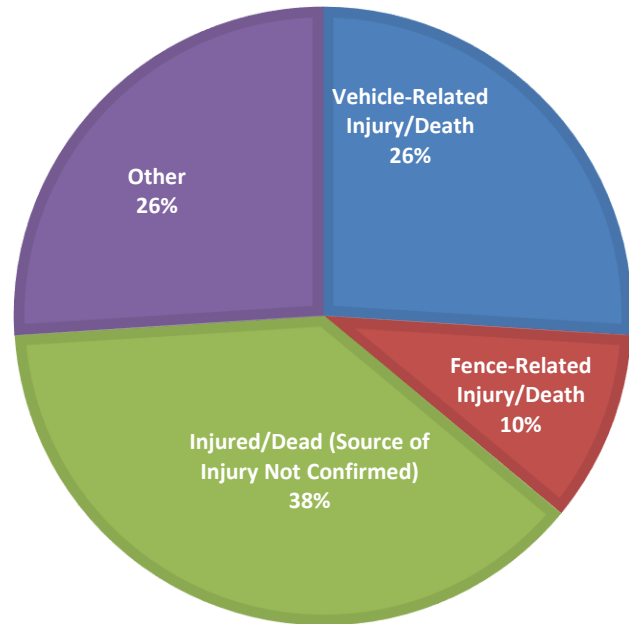
Vehicle-Related Injury/Death	5
Fence-Related Injury/Death	4
Injured/Dead (Source of Injury Not Confirmed)	31
Other	10
Total	50



2018 DEER CALLS TO DISPATCH

■ Vehicle-Related Injury/Death ■ Fence-Related Injury/Death ■ Injured/Dead (Source of Injury Not Confirmed) ■ Other

Vehicle-Related Injury/Death	13
Fence-Related Injury/Death	5
Injured/Dead (Source of Injury Not Confirmed)	19
Other	13
Total	50



2017 DEER CALLS TO DISPATCH

■ Vehicle-Related Injury/Death ■ Fence-Related Injury/Death ■ Injured/Dead (Source of Injury Not Confirmed) ■ Other

Vehicle-Related Injury/Death	12
Fence-Related Injury/Death	3
Injured/Dead (Source of Injury Not Confirmed)	7
Other	7
Total	29

