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# Deer..must read article.

Posted by [Rose Kay](#) , February 16, 2014 at 10:41 AM

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## Why Deer Killing Programs don't Solve Conflicts with Deer

No correlation between deer densities and deer conflicts

- Deer numbers may drop after kills, but the populations quickly bounce back. USDA

The HSUS receives calls from people all around the country who are outraged by the prospect of deer kills in their communities.

Deer kills may involve inhumane methods, result in orphaned fawns, and usually do not achieve the intended management goals.

Often, a more comprehensive approach using non-lethal methods would better achieve those same goals while teaching people to peacefully coexist with deer.

Common arguments made to support killing deer  
Proponents of killing deer may argue incorrectly that killing is necessary to:

- [Reduce deer overpopulation](#)
- [Protect ornamental trees, shrubs, and gardens](#)
- [Prevent deer/car collisions](#)
- [Protect parks and wooded areas from "over browsing" and biodiversity loss](#)
- [Reduce Lyme disease](#)

Deer kills do not keep deer numbers down

Deer are highly prolific, and their high reproductive rate can quickly compensate for declines in their population. When deer numbers are reduced after killing programs, the remaining female deer will often respond to greater food abundance by giving birth to twins or triplets. Fawns also have higher survival rates and earlier onset of sexual maturity. The end result is a quick "bounce-back" in numbers.

To be successful, a killing program must not only significantly reduce the deer herd, it must sustain enough pressure to prevent this bounce-back effect, while also preventing deer from the surrounding area from wandering in. All of this usually poses an insurmountable challenge in most urban and suburban communities.

In addition, safety-mandated restrictions often limit where and how hunters can shoot. It isn't safe to hunt in most suburban areas where deer are causing conflicts, because there are too

many people and too much human activity. It's no surprise that many suburban deer kills—no matter what target level is set—end up killing very few deer, after which the population quickly recovers and bounces back to its previous level.

Killing deer will not protect gardens and shrubbery

Killing deer will not resolve people's conflicts with deer in their gardens. Certain plants like tulips and hostas are irresistible to deer. Even if the deer population could be brought to a very low level, these top-choice flowers would still be eaten by any remaining deer. That's why [effective solutions](#) focus on deterring deer and protecting flowers and ornamentals rather than trying to shoot every deer that may come along and eat them.

The key to success is for residents to understand that deer are here to stay. Once homeowners overcome their initial resistance and take steps to protect valued plants, "deer-proofing" will quickly become a normal part of life in deer country.

Killing deer will not stop deer/car accidents

One of the most distressing results of human encroachment into deer habitat is the frequency of deer/auto collisions. Killing deer will not solve the underlying problem, which is that we have trapped these animals within a network of highways crisscrossing their territory and have failed to construct wildlife underpasses or overpasses that allow safe crossings.

Studies have shown that reducing the deer population does not necessarily reduce the number of collisions between cars and deer. In some cases, collision numbers are actually lower in areas with more deer. [Many factors contribute to deer-vehicle collisions](#), such as traffic volume, speed limits, the extent to which roads bisect habits and migration routes, and the use of visual barriers. This is why reducing the number of deer alone does not work to reduce vehicle collisions with deer.

Deer kills are not the solution to forest regeneration

It is easy to point the finger at deer and blame them for our [forest regeneration woes](#), yet the reality is that our ecosystem issues are fraught with complexity and subject to human aesthetic preferences which are often not grounded in any sort of biological reality.

Nature is not static. A forest floor once carpeted with wild flowers can rapidly transition into another state as a result of forest succession. Certain plant species are shaded out as trees mature and the forest canopy closes. Later succession stages are, by their very nature, less diverse.

Forest are subject to [many influences](#) that affect their growth, some less visible than others. Arbitrarily killing deer isn't likely to bring back the type of forest people may want to see.

Deer kills will not reduce the incidence of Lyme disease

Scientific studies and health authorities have demonstrated that killing deer won't reduce people's risk of contracting [Lyme disease](#).

The tick that spreads the disease, the black-legged tick (or deer tick), feeds on many different hosts—almost all mammals, most songbirds, and even lizards.

Killing deer does not reduce the risk of contracting [Lyme disease](#) because deer kills do not

significantly reduce the tick population. In a study from Great Island, Mass., where up to 70 percent of the deer were removed, there was no marked reduction in the tick abundance.

The black-legged tick is very adaptable. Where deer are scarce, the ticks switch to other hosts or congregate in higher numbers on the remaining deer. Deer killing programs have little effect on the tick population—and don't reduce human disease risk. [Better alternatives](#) include using products like [4-Posters](#) and [Damminix Tick Tubes](#) to lower the tick population as well as taking [proper precautions](#) to avoid contact with ticks.

What does work?

Communities should first do objective public surveys to define and assess the nature, scope, and location of the particular deer problem so solutions can be tailored to particular sites. Then a community should develop a [comprehensive plan](#) using applicable non-lethal methods, along with setting up a robust data collection and evaluation system to monitor if deer damage mitigation strategies are achieving set goals, and adapt the programs accordingly.

## Comments

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**Benja Schwartz** February 18, 2014 at 07:09 PM

What could be better than protecting and promoting a healthy environment?

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**Janet Lapey** February 18, 2014 at 07:32 PM

The letter posted by Rose Kay states that deer reduction programs do not reduce the risk of Lyme disease. This is a lie which ignores the success of these programs as well as their scientific basis. This is sheer propaganda. Once one community reduces the deer population, other communities will join in so that there will be an easily sustainable regional program. Hunters can play a role in keeping the deer numbers down to the required level. Forest undergrowth will regenerate, and the song birds, trillium, and lady slippers will return. We won't have to spend a fortune on anti-deer road fences and special lights. Those of us who are nature-lovers will be able to really enjoy the great outdoors as we did in the past, before the deer epidemic.

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**John J. Rasweiler IV** February 18, 2014 at 07:53 PM

Thank you Rose Kay for the information on Cayuga Heights, NY. Now for a reality check. According to NYS Health Dept records, Suffolk County has a much more serious problem with tick-borne diseases than Tompkins County (the location of Cayuga Heights). In 2012 Suffolk reported 25 cases of anaplasmosis, 139 cases of babesiosis, 30 cases of ehrlichiosis and 689 cases of Lyme disease. Tompkins reported no cases of the first three diseases and only 87 cases of Lyme. Thus, we have much more reason for concern

in Suffolk. It is great to suggest taking precautions, but application of even the strongest concentration of DEET cannot be relied upon to deter ticks. It is also well known that many people never know they have been bitten. While much attention has been focused upon Lyme disease in these discussions, it deserves to be noted that babesiosis can also be a very nasty disease. Overall, it has a mortality rate of about 5%, but in high risk groups (that would include many people on the North Fork) the mortality rate can be 10-30%. Furthermore, this can be transmitted to high risk patients such as premature infants or elderly hip transplant recipients by blood transfusions. As there is no test for the presence of Babesia in donated blood, this is now the most frequently reported transfusion-transmitted parasite in the United States. Why should we subject ourselves to such risks by failing to control a greatly excessive deer population? Finally, there is a major difference in the risk of deer-vehicular collisions between Cayuga Heights and the Town of Southold. Cayuga Heights is a residential community with low, strictly-enforced speed limits. During 2010-2013, annual deer accidents there ranged between 12 and 23. In contrast, there were 444 road killed deer collected in the Town of Southold in 2012 alone. The Strieter-Lite System might sound like a great way of reducing such collisions; however, actual deployment in the United States has been very limited, probably because the cost of equipment and installation is \$10000 - 15000 per mile.

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 **D L F** February 18, 2014 at 07:56 PM  
Rose Kay is correct. First, Adult black-legged ticks feed on raccoons, skunks, opossums, and other medium-sized mammals. When deer are scarce, ticks don't necessarily become scarce, because they have alternative hosts. Indeed, several studies (e.g., Jordan and Schulze, 2005; Ostfeld et al., 2006; Jordan et al., 2007) on mainland sites in New York and New Jersey found no correlation between deer and ticks. Second, ticks and Lyme disease are rare or absent in parts of the United States (the Southeast, most of the Midwest) where deer are abundant. Third, ticks are only dangerous if they are infected, and deer play no role in infecting ticks. Ticks become infected with the Lyme disease bacterium by feeding on small mammals such as white-footed mice, chipmunks, and shrews.

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 **Benja Schwartz** February 18, 2014 at 08:09 PM  
JJR IV I have yet to read a polite reply from you. You ask >> Why should we subject ourselves to such risks by failing to control a greatly excessive deer population? The Southold Town / USDA WS cull is not a sincere attempt to control overpopulation of deer. Even the agency doing the shooting admitted it may be a failure. Do you really believe it is a guaranteed solution?

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 **Frank T** February 18, 2014 at 08:14 PM  
Robert, if the deer were killed in daylight would you approve of that? As a hunter you should understand that the animal rights activists that you are encouraging will fight against hunting deer on LI if they succeed with stopping the cull.

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**Janet Lapey** February 18, 2014 at 11:24 PM

DLF: To take your points, 1) Dr. Sam Telford who runs the successful program in Great Island MA (where deer density is maintained at 8/square mile, where tick density has been reduced 80 percent, and where the Lyme epidemic was stopped), reports that raccoons, skunks, opossums, coyote, etc are all present but have not been able to replace the deer.

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**Janet Lapey** February 18, 2014 at 11:33 PM

DLF 1) cont. In science there are failed projects as well as successful ones. Deer removal projects can fail for a number of reasons: inadequate lowering and maintaining of deer density, faulty tick sampling, etc. The protocols and analysis can be unsound. The animal rights propagandists highlight failed experiments but ignore or misrepresent the successful ones. Spreading disinformation is a grievous disservice when human health and lives are at stake.

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**Janet Lapey** February 18, 2014 at 11:41 PM

DLF: 2) If you go to the CDC Lyme website and click on Statistics, then the Interactive Maps, you can see the spread of Lyme disease from 2001 to 2011. It is the bacteria which are spreading, not the deer, who are already there. It is expected that the bacteria will continue to spread into other states. However, it is also possible that some areas may escape for reasons of climate, etc.

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**Janet Lapey** February 19, 2014 at 12:45 AM

dLF: 3). Mice, etc. are the reservoir for the Lyme bacteria but not one tick egg comes from a mouse. It is the tick vector we must control. Over 90 percent of tick eggs come from ticks feeding and breeding on deer. When deer are removed adequately, there is a reduction in tick density since there is a reduction in tick eggs. Adult egg-laying deer ticks require a sizeable mammal to feed on and cannot feed on a mouse. Thus mice are dead ends for ticks. On the other hand, ticks from just one deer can produce a million tick eggs which carpet bomb our parks, neighborhoods and yards. It is preposterous that disinformation from the deer lobby prevents us from ridding our yards of the pestilential disease-spreading deer.

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**D L F** February 19, 2014 at 06:12 AM

As mentioned above, when deer are no longer present other mammals will continue to carry the ticks. Your only solution to slaughter the deer is faulty and will no doubt be a failure. You seem to not be able to see beyond the killing method. What will you propose to slaughter next - our horses too?

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 **John J. Rasweiler IV** February 19, 2014 at 06:26 AM  
Epidemiologic evidence from the North Fork fully supports what Janet Lapey has said. In my lifetime, racoons, opossums, squirrels and smaller mammals have always been abundant; however, deer ticks, lone star ticks and tick-borne diseases only became serious problems when deer reappeared and proliferated in tremendous numbers. The Town of Southold is not alone in deciding to reduce its deer herd because of the threat it poses to public health and safety. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management has recently and independently promulgated emergency regulations to do the same thing on Block Island for the same reasons. It is relevant to note that the head of that agency has impeccable credentials as a conservationist and environmentalist.

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 **D L F** February 19, 2014 at 07:04 AM  
The extermination of the deer is the quickest, easiest and least expensive solution, however is not a gaurenteed solution and is certainly not a humane solution. There are many communities of people who are opposed to this controversial pro-kill method. Southold is stand-alone in LI. There are many people who will not stand for the destruction of wildlife period. There are no exceptions. Sorry, but you can have impeccable credentials, but that doesn't make one righteous. They may tout themselves as "conservationist" and "environmentalist" but that doesn't give them the right, authority or entitlement to destroy wildlife. "If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men." ~St. Francis of Assisi

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 **John J. Rasweiler IV** February 19, 2014 at 07:08 AM  
Benja, nothing I said are grounds for anyone to take offense. I stand by my view that our excessive deer population constitutes an unacceptable risk to public health and safety. I do have the credentials to make that assessment. Early in my career, I was a scientist with the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, where I did research on the epidemiology of zoonotic diseases (i.e., transmittable between animals and man). I have continued my work on parasitic and viral diseases to this day. I have to be familiar with zoonotic diseases, because I work with exotic wildlife known to carry them. Furthermore, for much of my career I ran animal quarantine facilities under permits issued by our Centers for Disease Control. The CDC would never have issued the permits were they not convinced that I knew what I was doing. Most scientific evidence supports the connection between excessive deer populations and high levels of tick-transmitted diseases in humans in the northeastern U.S. The severity of the public health crisis attributable to these diseases necessitates that our response not be dictated by a minority of studies that disagree. We have already dithered on this issue for too long.

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 **John J. Rasweiler IV** February 19, 2014 at 07:48 AM  
DLF, you have expressed emotionally appealing sentiments, but the presence of too many deer are destroying our forests and other desirable wildlife species. A healthy forest contains more than deer. No one opposed to culling has proposed a non-lethal solution that is legal and proven to be effective in NYS. By itself, fertility control is not a NYS DEC-approved deer management option. None of the

experimental/scientific studies testing this approach in NYS have significantly reduced deer numbers to environmentally-sustainable levels.

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 **Benja Schwartz** February 19, 2014 at 08:57 AM

The proposed deer cull is not being done properly. Instead of promoting a deer cull by Out-of-Towners as the only available solution. A well planned deer cull should be recognized as an important part of understanding that humans should be protecting rather than destroying the natural environment. It is naive to think that hunting and culling deer as currently being done will solve any problem. We all agree the rules for hunting should be revised. Can we agree that the rules for culling should be followed?

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 **D L F** February 19, 2014 at 09:55 AM

John, the opposed have presented other options. Trap-sterilize-release is an effective option that seems to be overlooked due to the expense, however I'm sure there are some local veterinarians who are willing to donate some of their time. This method has recently been implemented in Fairfax City, VA. At least they are making an effort to develop and implement a humane, effective and sustainable deer management program. Perhaps this program will serve a model for LI.

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 **John J. Rasweiler IV** February 19, 2014 at 10:46 AM

DLF, I have communicated extensively with the experts (Anthony DeNicola and Paul Curtis) doing trap-sterilize-release in Cayuga Heights and on the Cornell campus. This has not yielded any reduction in deer numbers. Indeed, the Mayor of Cayuga Heights has recently indicated the deer density there remains over 100 per square mile. This is environmentally unacceptable and unsustainable by any measure. Given the abundance of deer in the Town of Southold and the size of the Town, Drs. DeNicola and Curtis have indicated to me that deer sterilization is not a viable option for us. Furthermore, the NYS DEC will only consider fertility control as part of a scientific study that must have some purpose. Any research proposal must also include a description of lethal control measures that will be used within or around the study area, or justification of why lethal control is not feasible. Fertility control is not a NYS-approved deer management option. The Town of Southold should not be criticized for failing to consider all options. They have been exhaustively explored. There is a highly-trained reproductive physiologist on the Town Deer Committee.

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 **D L F** February 19, 2014 at 11:38 AM

In view of the fact you believe there is only one option and no other and have dismissed all other options it seems to me you can stake your claim to fame for supporting the largest deer slaughter in US history.

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 **John J. Rasweiler IV** February 19, 2014 at 01:06 PM  
DLF, it is not my choice to restrict the options. Even if NYS law permitted the unrestricted use of fertility control (which it does not), the available techniques are extraordinarily difficult to use in the field. For very good reasons, 90% of the does would have to be rendered infertile within a short period of time to eventually (after some years) have a meaningful effect upon herd size. That is an insurmountable hurdle, when you have large numbers of deer dispersed over a sizable area, and the treated deer have to be permanently tagged. A program of that scope has never been successfully undertaken. Furthermore, the cost per treated animal would be extremely high (see: <http://legalinsurrection.com/?s=deer+cull&image.x=8&image.y=7>).

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 **Janet Lapey** February 19, 2014 at 03:07 PM  
DLF, you keep saying that deer removal projects can't work because other animals like raccoons will take the place of the deer in contributing tick eggs into the environment. Over and over I have pointed out that you are wrong because deer removal projects have been successful even when these other hosts of the adult deer tick have been present. Why do you keep repeating a lie?

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 **John J. Rasweiler IV** February 19, 2014 at 03:08 PM  
Somehow deer numbers have to be reduced. How many of you adamantly opposed to recreational hunting or culling by gunshot would consider humane euthanasia by anesthetic drugs a much better alternative? Some of us have proposed this as an option, but presently it is not permitted by the NYS DEC.

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 **D L F** February 19, 2014 at 03:38 PM  
No one disagrees that deer numbers need to be reduced. This needs to be done in a humane, NON-LETHAL way. The trap-sterilize-release program is successfully being implemented in Fairfax City, VA ([http://www.wildliferescueinc.org/#2013\\_UPDATE\\_-\\_3rd\\_Phase\\_Completed\\_for\\_Maryland's\\_First\\_Non-Lethal\\_Sterilization\\_Spaying\\_Birth\\_Control\\_Project\\_for\\_Deer](http://www.wildliferescueinc.org/#2013_UPDATE_-_3rd_Phase_Completed_for_Maryland's_First_Non-Lethal_Sterilization_Spaying_Birth_Control_Project_for_Deer)). We do not have to slaughter these animals. It is not the only option as you may try to convince and justify others. Change is in order and we believe it is possible. Members of many communities in LI believe it is possible. The other towns wouldn't have backed out of the cull if they didn't believe there are alternatives to consider. We do not want our farms and fields stained with the blood of innocent animals. It is our fault for not properly managing the deer population and allowing it to get to this point. We need to fix this, however that does not mean we take away life in the process.

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**John J. Rasweiler IV** February 19, 2014 at 04:58 PM

Careful examination of the Fairfax City deer sterilization program provides little hope that this would be a viable option for Southold for the following reason: 1) Fertility control is not an approved deer management option in NYS. 2) Fairfax City has only a small deer population estimated at 50-75 animals, of which 18 were sterilized in Year 1. We have considerably more deer. 3) The expert directing the Fairfax program (Dr. DeNicola) has said that sterilization is not a viable deer management option for Southold. 4) Catching and surgically sterilizing 90% of the does in the Town of Southold within any reasonable time period would be impossible. Most of the remaining, fertile deer would continue to produce young. 5) Catching and sterilizing deer is expensive (estimated at \$1000-1200+ per animal). 6) Most sterilized deer will live moderately long lives during which they will continue to ravage our natural environment, damage crops, promote tick proliferation and the spread of tick-transmitted diseases. Some will be killed in collisions with vehicles. 7) It is doubtful that a sterilization project could pass a New York State Environmental Quality Review, because the sterilized deer will continue to inflict devastating damage upon the environment, and there are other more productive deer management options.

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**Benja Schwartz** February 19, 2014 at 06:17 PM

I think the key acronym here is D.J.D.S.: "Don't just do something." It is a reminder to resist the urge to simply act without considering all potential impacts.

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**Janet Lapey** February 19, 2014 at 07:22 PM

Benjamin, you say don't just do something, but deer removal programs have successfully stopped Lyme epidemics. This is not just doing something. Deer removal projects are the only interventions shown to be successful. None of these communities has said they want their Lyme epidemics back. You can't argue with success. This is why the Massachusetts State Lyme Disease Commission recommends deer removal to combat Lyme.

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**Janet Lapey** February 19, 2014 at 07:55 PM

DLF, you wrote, "No one disagrees that deer numbers need to be reduced. This needs to be done in a humane Non-Lethal way." Herein you exemplify the illogic of the animal lobby. There is no non-lethal way to reduce deer numbers. Sterilization which you favor is non-lethal but does not reduce the deer population. Actually, a precision shot to the head is much more humane than what happens in the wild kingdom. Would you rather die of a quick gun shot to the head or be carried up to a hawk's nest and slowly torn apart? A raccoon on a friend's property killed some baby kittens by first eating off their faces. The wild kingdom is not so pretty as you imagine. This is not a world of vegetarians. You say you do not want our farms or fields stained with the blood of innocent animals. Have you seen videos of coyotes killing deer? It's not bloodless. The deer would have preferred a quick shot to the head to put them out of their misery.

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 **Benja Schwartz** February 19, 2014 at 08:04 PM  
@Janet Lapey You don't present any credentials nor authorities, yet you are absolutely certain that you are 100% right and the opponents of the LI Farm Bureau / USDA WS / Southold Town deer cull are 100% wrong. Why are YOU lying?  
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 **D L F** February 19, 2014 at 08:35 PM  
Janet there is a growing army rising up and opposing this atrocious plan. There are non-lethal ways to reduce populations, but you refuse to acknowledge them as you are steadfast on kill, kill, kill. Even more appalling, Supervisor Russell has publicly stated that he would like to kill ALL deer. The public health scare propaganda and lies will not sway those who oppose. Thousands and thousands have signed the petition in protest and will continue to fight for what we believe is right. We are the compassionate who not only care about other people, but other living creatures. We support life, not take it away. The public outcry against this slaughter will continue and I am hopeful legal action will stop this slaughter.  
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 **Frank T** February 19, 2014 at 08:37 PM  
Good news, North Haven is hiring a wildlife management company to cull half of the deer in their community.  
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 **Benja Schwartz** February 19, 2014 at 10:05 pm  
Thanx Frank, you are the first person in Southold to mention that there are real alternatives to hiring USDA WS. Why didn't Southold consider funding a cull by White Buffalo, Inc. ( <http://www.whitebuffaloinc.org/> ) ? I would like to hear an answer to that question by Southold Town Board.  
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