

## FEBRUARY 2023 DEER COUNT REPORT

### Background & Purpose

In recent year's urban deer have become a topic of discussion due to safety concerns with vehicles and pedestrians, impacts to vegetation, and the economic implications in managing their populations. The deer counts are completed to monitor their populations and demographics, which will assist the Town in the development of an urban deer action plan.

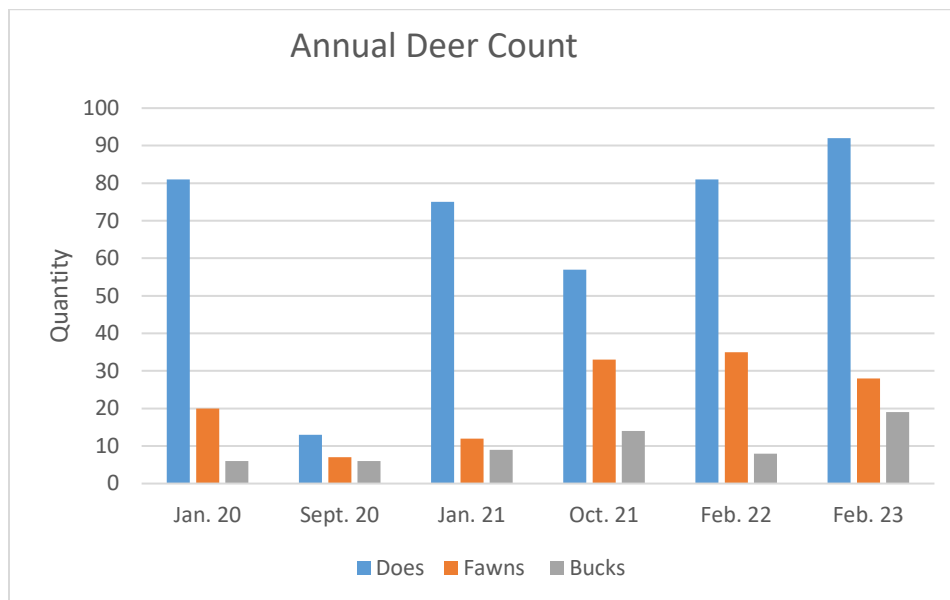
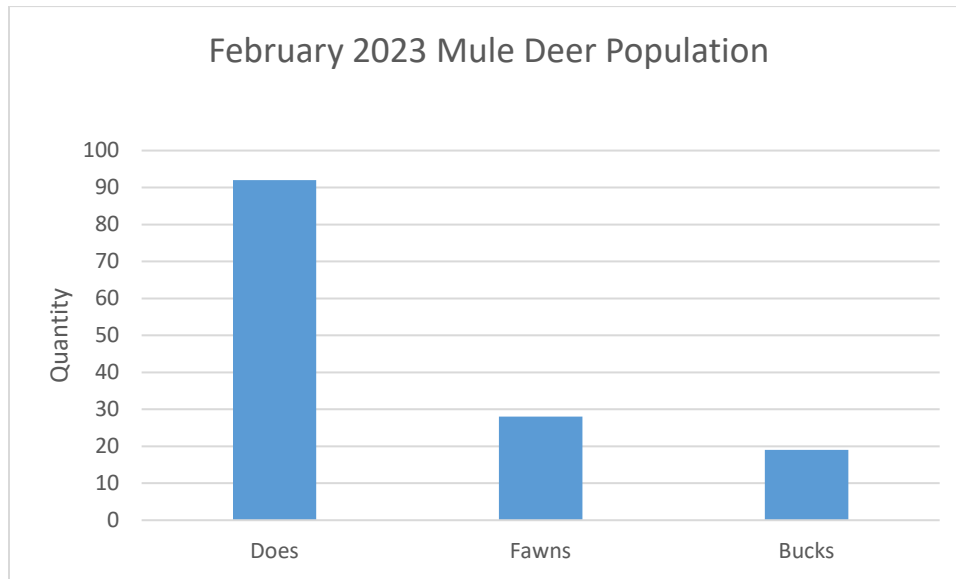
### Methods

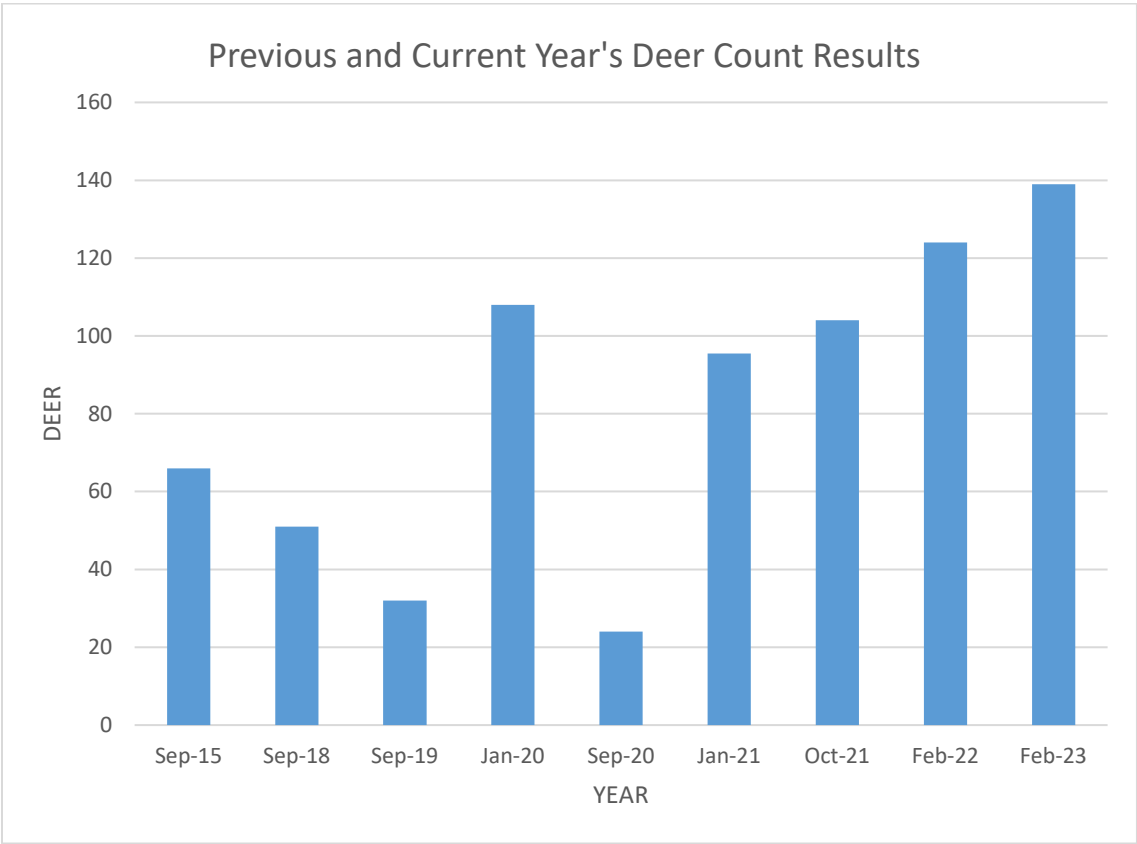
Between 2015 and 2018, different approaches to the deer count were taken. In 2015, a large-scale count with 100 volunteers took place in September. This was refined in 2018 by the app 'NatureLynx', which supports paper methods by collecting the data online including geotags and photographs. Nature Lynx has since been dissolved and is no longer in use; and therefore, was not used in 2023. In 2020, the main intent was to ensure full coverage in town while being efficient with resources. The second count of 2021 was changed from previous year's daytime count in September. Performing the count at the same time of year and same time of day is important to bring more meaning to the comparison from year to year. However, the fall count was moved to October for two main reasons. Firstly, there is less foliage on trees and shrubs which aids in sightings. Secondly, the time of the count is at dawn, which is a more active period of day for deer. Therefore, comparisons from previous fall counts are quite lower due to the timing of the count. Since 2020 the count was conducted at dawn in the months of January and February because male deer still have antlers and the lack of foliage with typically a snow back drop makes spotting deer more favourable. Going forward the Town will be conducting one count in the month of February at approximately the same date each year. Twenty four people, Town staff and volunteers, were given specific routes in town to cover as much area as possible while collecting data. The deer count was conducted within the urban footprint of the town, but deer were also counted on the edge of this footprint in adjacent agricultural areas. This is consistent with previous counts; however, it will be necessary to expand the number of routes in the future as the Town expands in area. One more driving route was added in 2023 to ensure there was coverage in newly developed areas. The total count was adjusted due to duplicate reporting which was determined by sightings in the same proximate location within a close timeframe. There were 13 duplicate sightings in this February 2023 count.

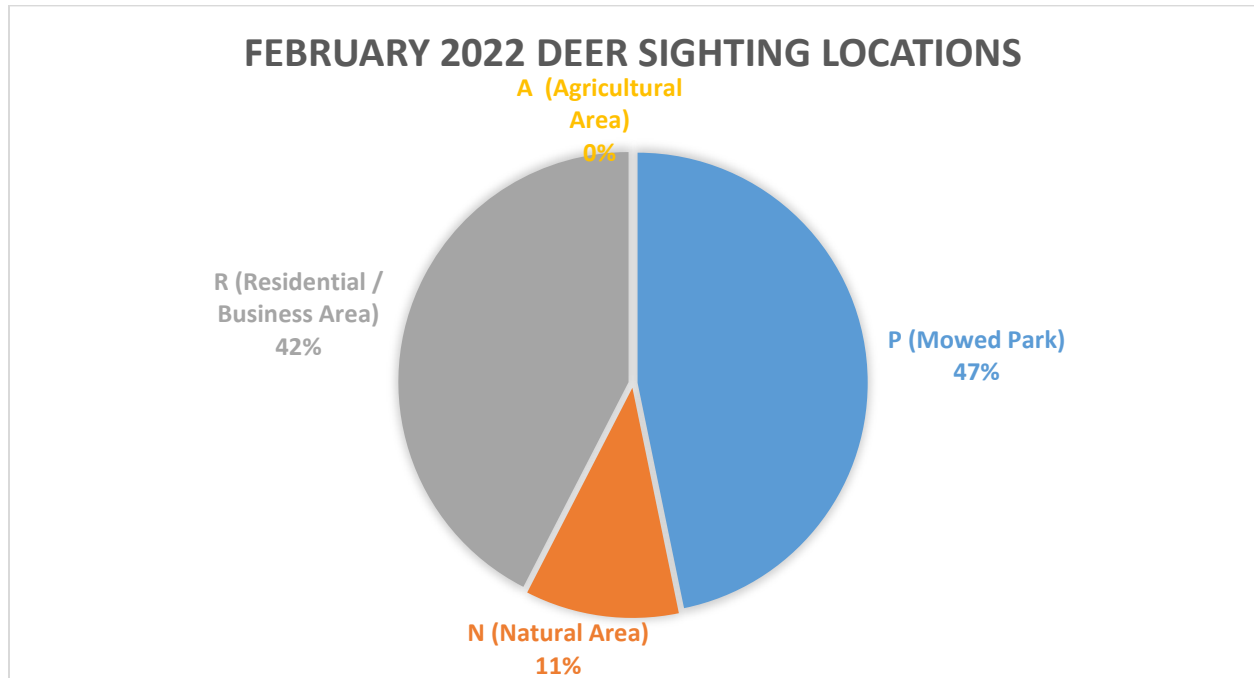
### RESULTS

- The total count on February 8<sup>th</sup> was **139 deer**. This a bit higher than previous counts done at this time of year (January 2021 – 96 and January 2020 – 108).
- There were 92 does, 28 fawns and 19 bucks.
- Mule deer was the only species identified.

- The ratio of does to fawns and bucks fluctuates between counts but visually there does not appear to be a significant statistical difference.







- Residential areas and manicured parks were the major areas deer were located in February 2023 count. Results were similar in 2022. Natural areas was the third highest area occupied. More deer in residential areas and parks during dawn may suggest these areas are a good food source as this is when deer tend to feed more actively. This data varies from previous years fall counts, where the majority of deer were sited in the natural areas. This could reflect the time of day previous counts were done. Deer may be more likely to be bedded down in natural areas during the day, which is when our fall counts took place in previous years.

### Discussion & Recommendations

As discussed by the Urban Deer Task Force members who have expertise in wildlife, deer are more active at dawn and dusk; therefore, it was decided that a count at these times would be beneficial and future counts should replicate this for data comparability. To help establish deer population data please also consider the following recommendations for future counts:

- Continue to complete a winter count in February for comparisons from previous years
- Complete the counts at dawn when deer are more active and staff are available during normal working hours.

3. Based on our hazard assessment it was decided that two people per vehicle is required to avoid distracted driving.

Since 2020 we have been conducting counts in the winter to try and get a better representation of the population within town limits. Total deer count numbers showed an increase of 15 deer and since 2020, the numbers have been relatively the same and the differences do not seem statistically significant. Therefore, numbers appear to be reasonably stable and not showing a significant increase or decrease.

## **Resources**

- Town of Okotoks – Parks, Town staff, Mayor, Counsellors and volunteers.