

URBAN DEER SURVEY

WHAT WE HEARD
REPORT | APRIL 2023



BACKGROUND

Deer are part of the biodiversity landscape in Okotoks

Since the last citizen survey on urban deer in 2018, the Town assembled an Urban Deer Task Force (UDTF). The Task Force brought forward several recommendations and the Town has implemented the following short-term recommendations:

- The Deer & Wildlife Feeding & Attractants Bylaw to regulate the intentional and unintentional feeding of deer and other wildlife on private property.
- Enhanced education including a free online course: “Gardening with Urban Deer,” and a consultation service where a Town employee will visit a residence and provide methods and plants to reduce damage and deter deer.
- Working closely with wildlife authorities to connect adjacent agricultural landowners interested in permitting hunting opportunities on their property

The following long-term recommendations have been researched for future implementation:

- Permanent deer deterrent fencing solutions
- Deer Aversion Control Program

Thank you to those who took the opportunity to complete the 2023 Urban Deer Survey. We felt it was important to re-engage with the community on urban deer. By being unified in our behaviours and actions toward deer deterrent strategies, the urban deer population can remain at tolerable levels.

TIMELINE



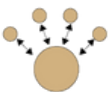


- **SEPT 2018:** Published 2018 Urban Deer Survey results
- **NOV 2019:** Formation of Urban Deer Task Force
- **APR 2021:** Launch of Deer Deterrent Fencing Pilot
- **MAY 2021:** UDTF final report presented to council.
- **JULY 2021:** Implemented Deer & Wildlife Feeding & Attractants Bylaw
- **OCT 2022:** Deer Aversion & Control Program Report presented to Council
- **FEB 2023:** Public engagement survey
- **APR 2023:** Publish What We Heard Report
- **APR 2023:** Deer Deterrent Fencing Pilot closes
- **MAY 2023:** Amendment to Land Use Bylaw presented to Council

Scan to read the 2022-2025 Urban Deer Action Plan



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

We are committed (through the Town's Public Participation Policy) to giving the community an opportunity for input into decisions that will have an impact on residents and businesses.

					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
GOAL	To provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner.	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives, and decisions.	To work with public to make sure concerns and aspirations are considered and understood.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE	"We will keep you informed."	"We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns."	"We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the decisions made."	"We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible."	"We will implement what you decide."
	input zone		engagement zone		

WHAT STAGE?

The Urban Deer Survey is at a **CONSULT** level



2591 survey responses

COMPARED TO:
380 survey responses in 2018



1452 comments



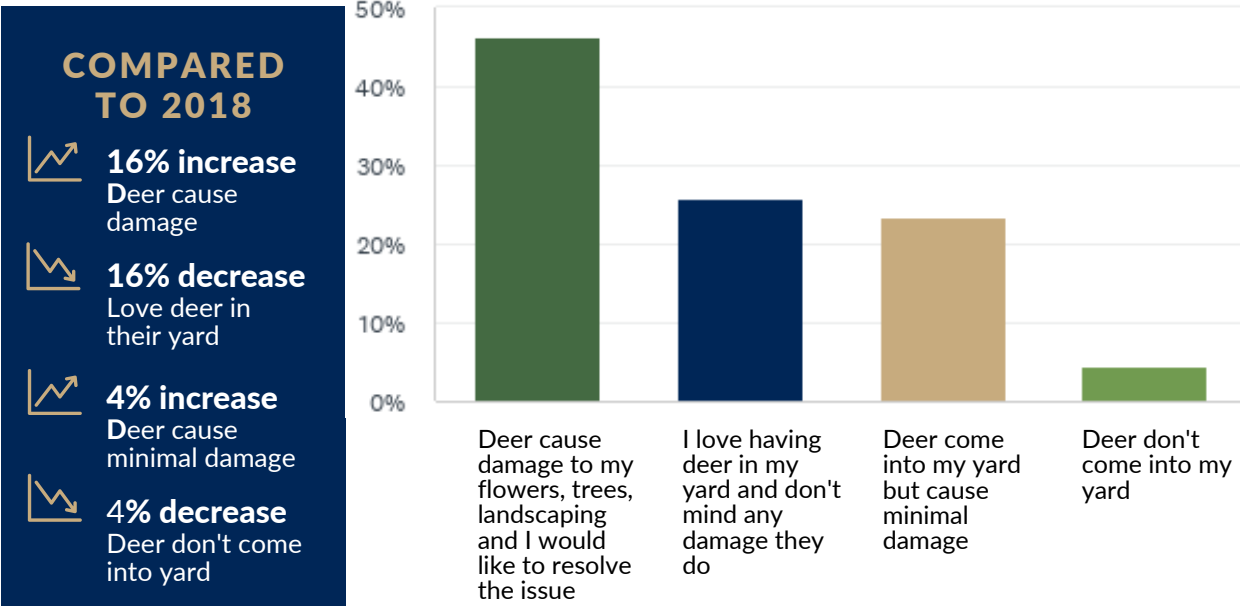
46%

Have problems with deer causing damage and would like to resolve the issue

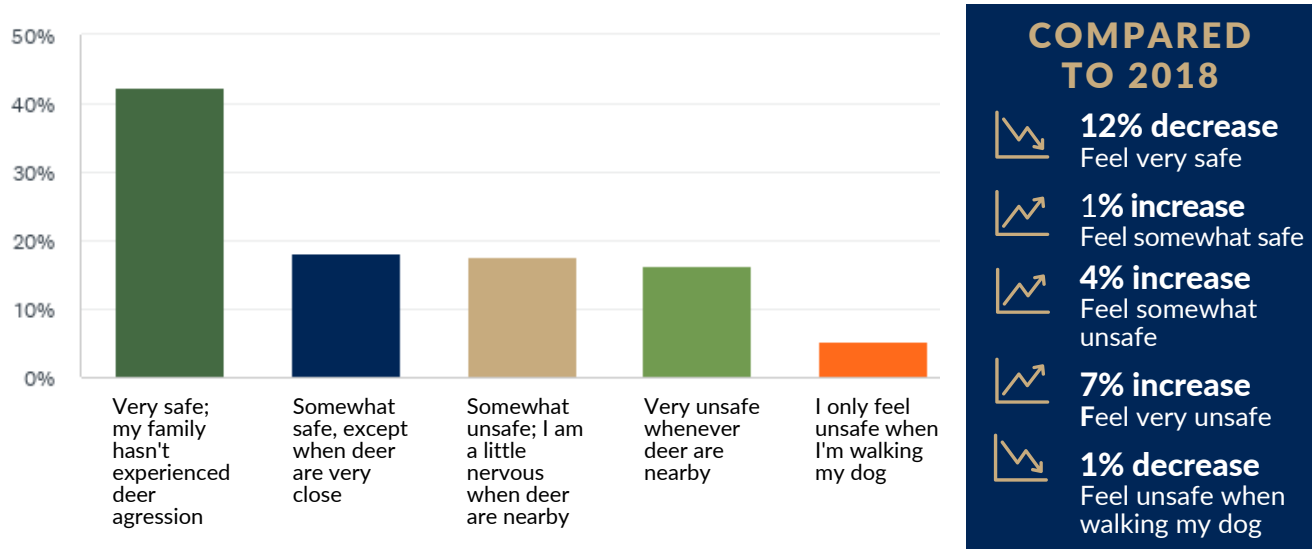
42%

Feel very safe in the presence of deer

Q1: Do you have a problem with deer damaging your yard and/or garden?



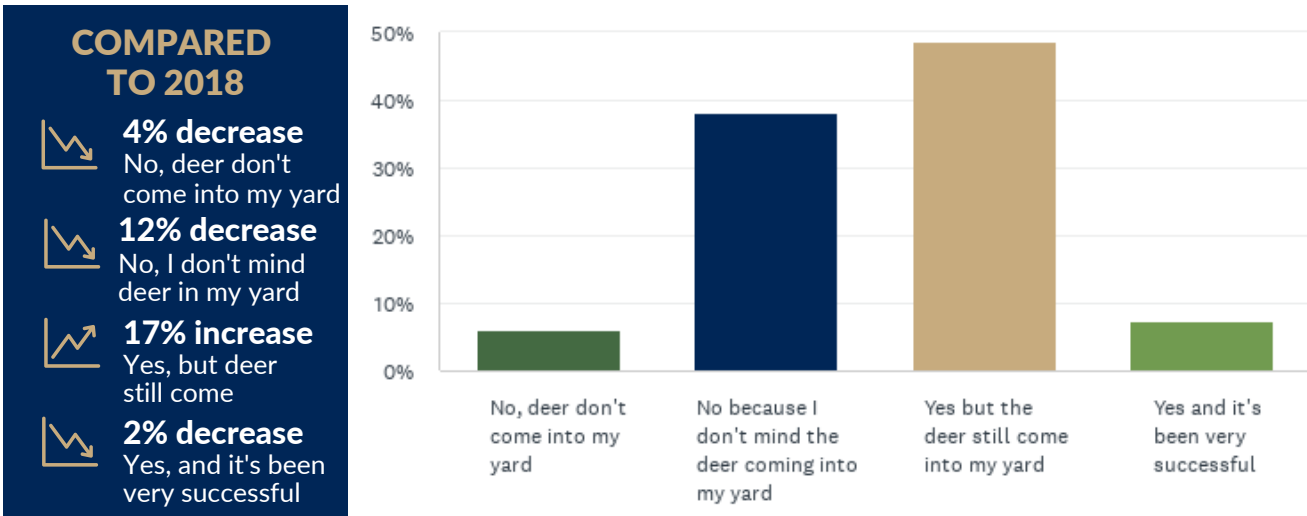
Q2: How safe do you feel in the presence of deer?



49%

Use deer deterrent strategies, but deer still come into their yards.

Q3: Have you used deer deterrent strategies in your yard such as chemical repellents, fencing, deer-resistant plants, motion sprinklers, etc.?

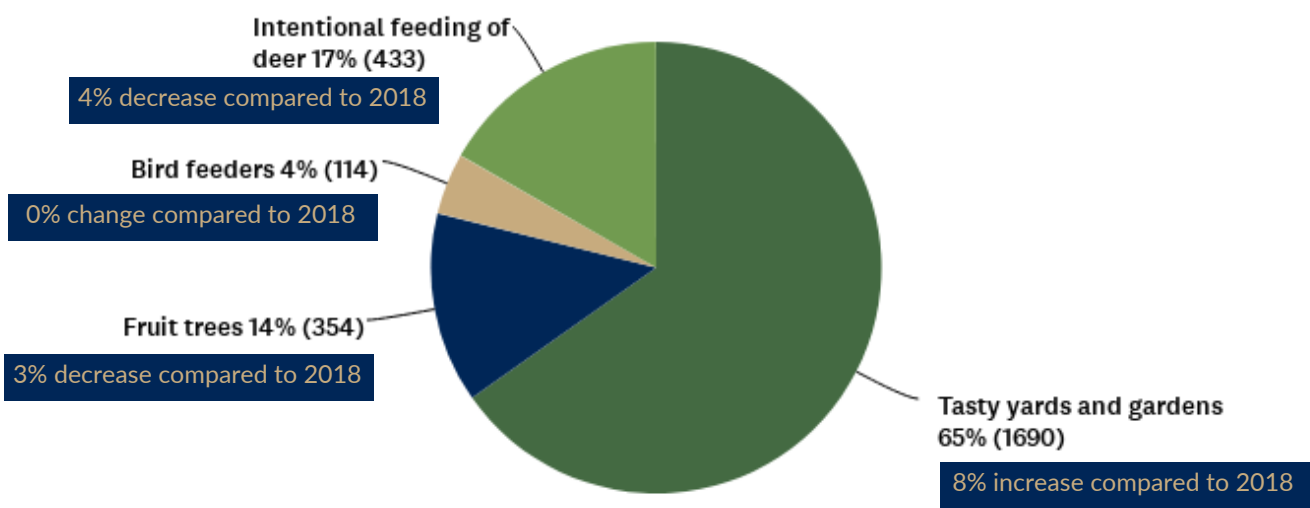


Q4: If you have used deer deterrent strategies, which ones have been most successful?

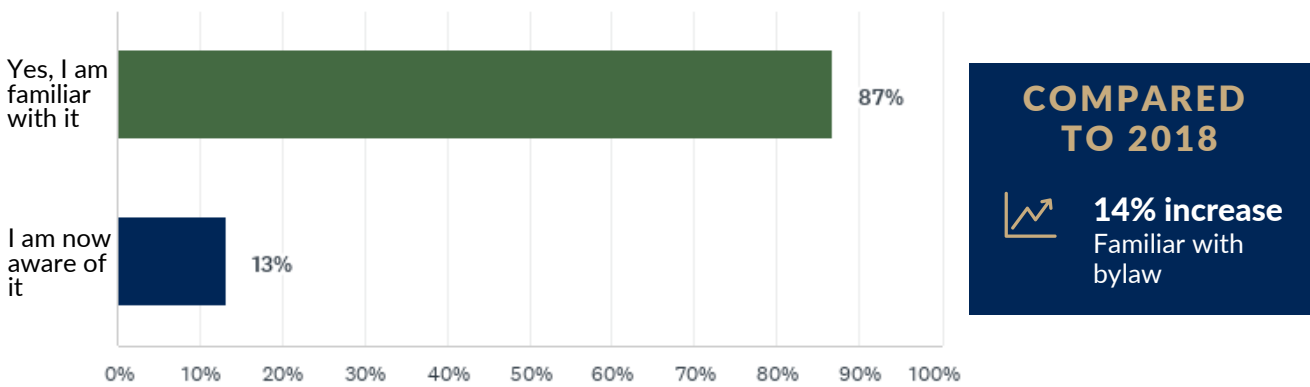




Q5: What do you think is the main feeding attractant for deer in Okotoks?



Q6: Are you aware of the Town's Deer and Wildlife Feeding and Attractants Bylaw?



DEER AVERSION PROGRAM

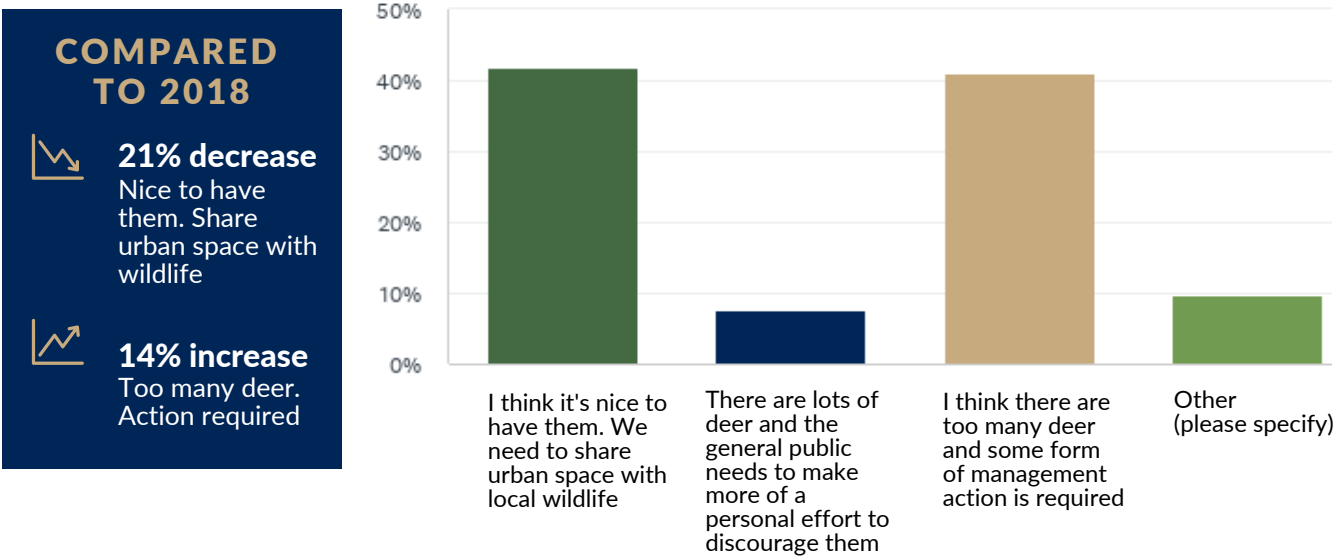
A deer aversion program report was recently presented to Council. This program involves a "gentle stressing by canine" approach. A handler with a dog on-leash presents a "stalking" scenario which elicits a mild stress response by maintaining an uncomfortable distance to the deer; no chasing is involved. The stress is constant so the deer cannot rest and eventually moves away from the area and/or no longer behaves aggressively.

Q7: Would you be in favour of this type of program being considered in future years if short-term measures lack effectiveness in reducing deer conflict?

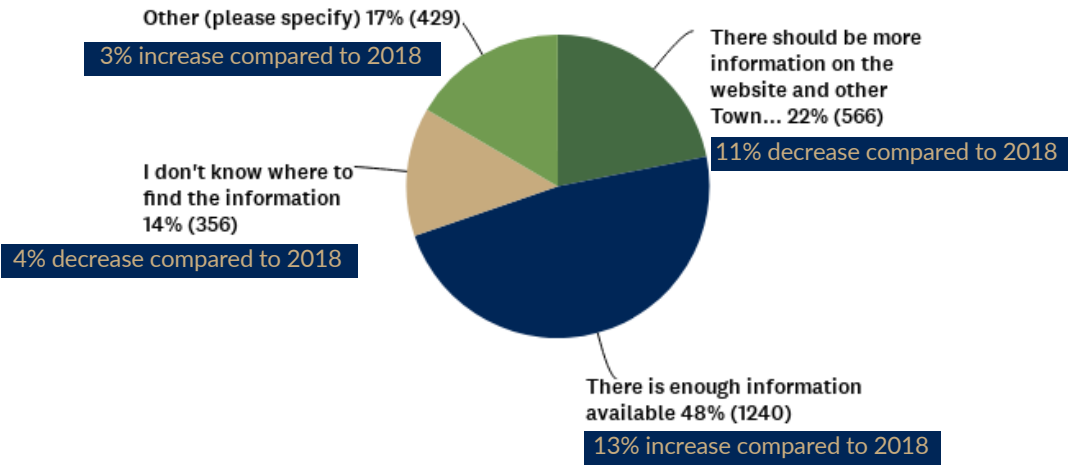




Q8: What is your overall impression of deer in Okotoks?



Q9: Has the Town provided enough information and education about how residents can use deer deterrent strategies and minimize interactions with deer?



DEER DETERRENT FENCING PROJECT

Since the 1990s, the Town has required 1.2 metre (±4.0 ft) high black chain-link fences to be installed on properties that back onto public open spaces. This design is largely to achieve an aesthetically pleasing appearance to open spaces but, consequently, it has allowed deer entry to backyards.

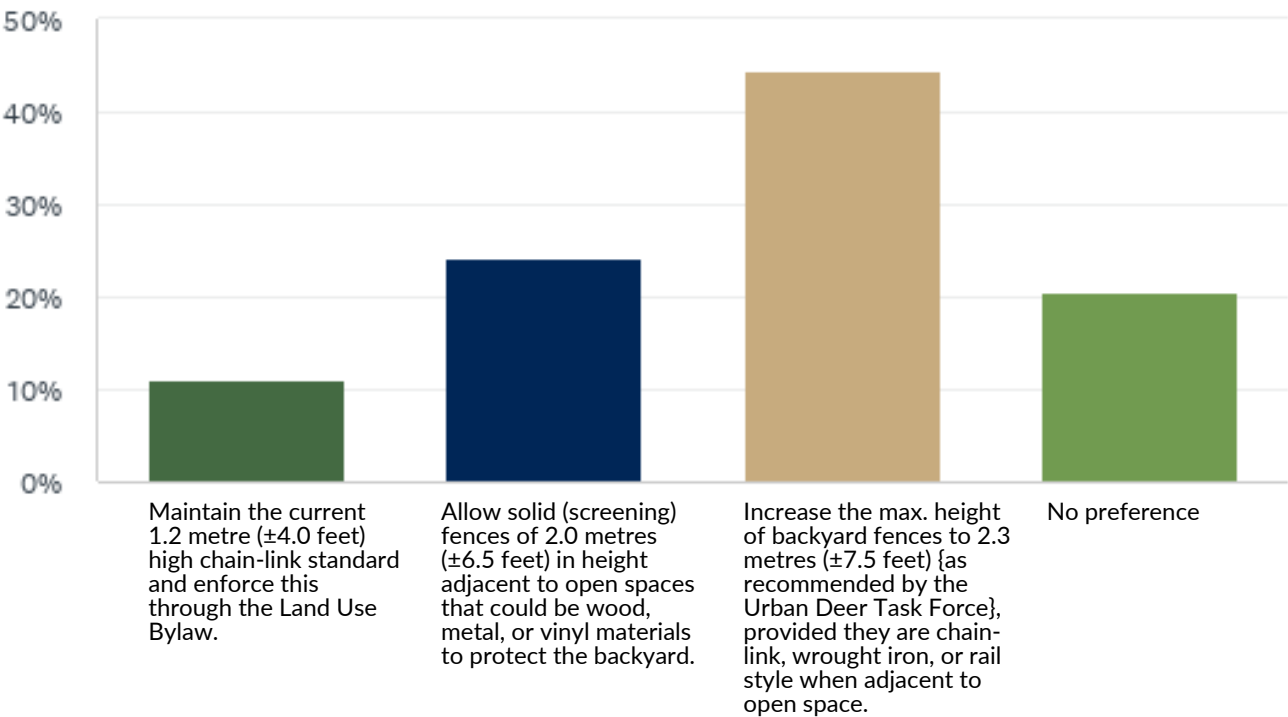
The Deer Deterrent Fencing Pilot Project was introduced in April 2021 to allow for temporary extensions to these types of fences to deter deer from entering private yards. In anticipation of the extended pilot project drawing to a close in April 2023, we are reviewing options to allow different styles or heights of permanent fences along properties that back onto or border open spaces.

44%

Increase the maximum height of backyard fences to 2.3 metres (±7.5 feet)



Q10: What permanent fence option for properties backing onto, or bordering, open spaces do you most agree with?



ANNUAL DEER COUNT

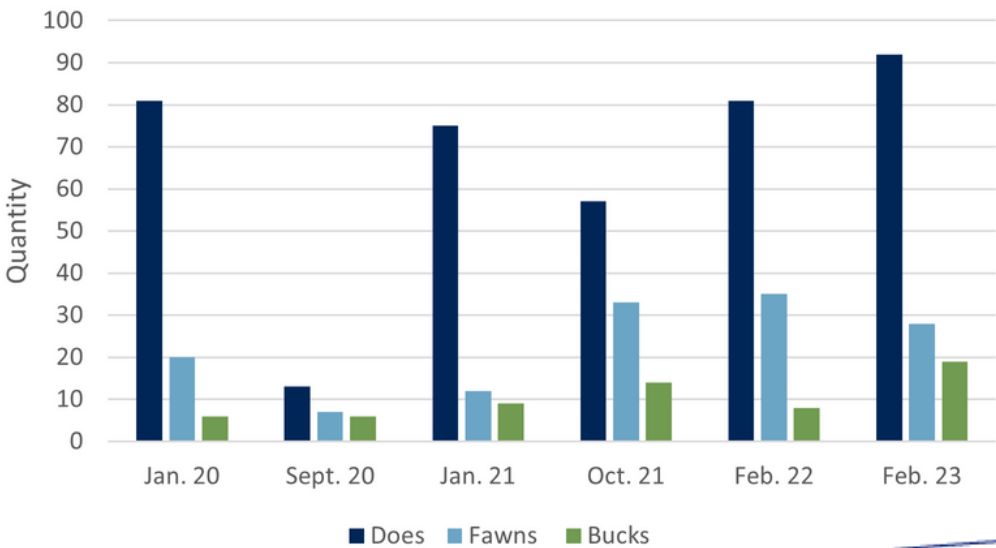
BACKGROUND

Deer counts are completed to monitor deer populations and demographics, which will assist the Town in the development of an urban deer action plan. 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. Since 2020, the count has been 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 time each year.

METHOD*

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. Mule deer was the only species identified.

**Not a statistically defensible methodology*



2023 TOTALS




139 Deer



92 does



28 fawns



19 bucks

Scan to
read 2023
Deer Count
Report



NEXT STEPS

okotoks.ca/urban-deer

1 Continue to increase awareness of the Town's Deer and Wildlife Feeding and Attractants Bylaw.

At the regular meeting July 19, 2021, Town Council approved the Deer and Wildlife Feeding and Attractants Bylaw (28-21) to regulate the intentional and unintentional feeding of deer and other wildlife on private property.

2 If approved by Council, educate residents about changes to fencing height on private property.

Town Council will consider amendments to the Land Use Bylaw to align with the survey responses, which include increasing the maximum height of back yard fencing to 2.3 m.

3 Promote the Steer Deer Clear yard visit program.

The Town offers home visits to provide customized recommendations to improve deer resistance to yards and gardens. Call Parks to book an appointment: 403.938.8958

4 Launch NEW fruit tree replacement rebate.

As part of the Water Conservation Rebate Program, the Town will offer rebates of 100% up to \$500 to replace fruit trees in your yard with deer resistant options. Further details coming soon! To learn more, visit okotoks.ca/water-rebate.