

## Deer sterilization effort stirs ire in Hamptons

BY FRANK ELTMAN THE ASSOCIATED PRESS | Posted: Wednesday, November 25, 2015 12:00 am

EAST HAMPTON, N.Y. -- The Hamptons might be the land of big bucks, but some say the deer situation is getting out of hand.

A program to curb the deer population in this eastern Long Island enclave for the haves and the have-mores has set off a legal battle involving two groups, both of which believe they have the best interests of the deer at heart.

One backs an ongoing program to perform sterilization operations on deer rather than kill them. And one is trying to shut it down, believing the surgeries are carried out in such a sloppy manner that they end up killing deer anyway.

In this tiny oceanfront village of 1,400 -- including such luminaries as Steven Spielberg and Martha Stewart -- tensions on the topic are running nearly as high as the protective fencing around some of the sprawling mansions to defend against a deer onslaught. The debate has gotten so contentious some residents are reluctant to even speak about what side they're on for fear of harassment.

Earlier this month, the East Hampton Group for Wildlife filed a lawsuit in state Supreme Court seeking to halt a sterilization program. The suit claims the village's contractors performed surgeries in an unsanitary shed, didn't wear proper protective gear and used veterinarians not licensed in New York. The parties are due in court next month.

Bill Crain, founder of the wildlife group, argues the village has yet to establish a need to cull the deer population on eastern Long Island. Estimates on the number of deer in the area vary widely; some say there are fewer than 1,000, while others have pegged the number at 3,000 or more.

Village Administrator Becky Molinaro and others insist the deer are causing motor vehicle accidents, especially now when they act less cautiously because it's mating season. She added their voracious appetites cause them to obliterate vast areas of plant life.

The village began to sterilize the deer in January, seeking to address the growing numbers in a humane way; other municipalities have been criticized for supporting culling programs that had



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A pack of deer grazes in a field in East Hampton, N.Y.

hunters shooting the animals. Sterilization programs also have been conducted at Cornell University and the village of Cayuga Heights, in upstate New York.

"There are problems but people are scapegoating deer," said Crain, a part-time resident of nearby Montauk. "If people drove more slowly there might be fewer accidents. People could learn to live in peace with the deer -- they were here first."

The village hired Connecticut nonprofit White Buffalo Inc. to conduct the sterilization program; about 160 does and 50 bucks were treated since January, White Buffalo founder Anthony DeNicola said.

Six does died last spring and summer, months after their ovaries were removed. The DEC said it was unable to determine a cause of deaths on two of the six (the only ones that had necropsies performed), but said it was unlikely the sterilization surgery caused infections leading to their deaths.

DeNicola said the Hamptons controversy is hardly unique. "I deal with same absurdity everywhere I go," said DiNicola, who added he has conducted sterilization programs in six states. "If we saw animals dying of infections I would have stopped doing this a long time ago."